



The Holy See

***ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS PAUL VI
TO H.E. Mr ABDEL HALIM MAKHYOUN
AMBASSADOR OF THE UNITED ARAB REPUBLIC****

Saturday, 12 October 1968

We are happy to welcome in your person the representative of a country illustrious since earliest antiquity. The history of ancient Egypt rightly retains the attentive interest of scholars and historians of world civilization and it is not necessary to remind Your Excellency of the great spirit of international solidarity which recently permitted the salvaging of the Nubian monuments. The Holy See, you know, considered it an honour and a duty to take part in the placing in safety of these celebrated temples of the Pharaohs, and entrusted to the Dean of the Sacred College of Cardinals the task of representing it at the ceremonies which marked the happy achievement of this grandiose undertaking.

But there is a portion of the history of your country which engages still more the attention of the Holy See: it is that which is allied to Christian traditions that Your Excellency has just now deservedly brought to mind. Who can be unaware of Egyptian monasticism in the history and the life of the Church? And that contribution to the development of its theology and to the enrichment of its spirituality represented – to cite only some among so many – by the great names of the School of Alexandria: Clement, Origen, Athanasius, Cyril?

Coming from the past to the present, we see the vitality of Catholicism in Egypt affirming itself differently, but in a no less suggestive way, and in two directions. First is the ecumenical orientation, tending to a rapprochement with Christian non-Catholic communities, that of the Copts in particular: the welcome given by your capital to the relics of St. Mark, showed again very recently how profoundly was felt on all sides the participation in a common historic and religious patrimony. On the other hand, the Catholic Church, represented in your country in the variety of its rites, does not expect to remain on the fringe of Arabic-Egyptian national life: she does not wish to be, either in the United Arab Republic or elsewhere, a Church of foreign importation. Essentially

universal, she is indeed at home everywhere, and she desires that her sons remain faithful to good traditions and local cultures; that they bring their contribution to national life and work, beside their compatriots, for the spiritual and material prosperity of their respective countries.

That is what the Egyptian Catholics do, for their part, and We are happy to receive from the lips of Your Excellency the assurance that the authorities of the United Arab Republic appreciate the efforts of the Catholic schools and missions in pedagogical and social matters. These statements of Your Excellency are important in our eyes and we take note of them with the liveliest satisfaction: they allow Us to foresee indeed happy prospects for the future of these institutions.

We believe We can, in turn, assure you of the loyalty of the Catholics living in the United Arab Republic. We are convinced especially that they are concerned, like all their compatriots, by the present drama which, for the whole nation, is constituted by the persistent affronts that disturb the peace of the Middle East. The Holy See itself is not absent from these painful vicissitudes. In conformity with its vocation, it has striven to see to, there as elsewhere, the relief of those who were most tried by the events, and to bring, in the measure of its means, assistance and help to the refugees, and to interest itself actively in the release of prisoners of war. It is occupied above all, and would wish to be so more and more, to encourage a peaceful and honourable solution of the conflict. And in this task, whose difficulty is certainly not underestimated, it will be precious to it to count on the help of a person as qualified and representative as Your Excellency.

It is with the greatest cordiality that We welcome you to the Vatican and that We express good wishes for your person and for your mission, on which We invoke divine assistance.

*ORe n. 30 p. 4, 10.