



The Holy See

**DISCOURS DU PAPE PAUL VI
À L'AMBASSADEUR DE LA RÉPUBLIQUE DÉMOCRATIQUE
DU CONGO PRÈS LE SAINT-SIÈGE***

Lundi 14 octobre 1968

Mr. Ambassador,

The establishment of regular diplomatic relations between a nation and the Holy See is always a reason for deep satisfaction to the Holy See. It is plain that no consideration of temporal interest enters into account, but only concern for moral and spiritual values, and this is to the honour of those who manifest the desire to establish these regular relations.

The satisfaction is even greater when it is a young and fine nation of the African continent which has recently gained independence and possesses, like the young Democratic Republic of the Congo, an already rich heritage of Christian life and experience.

We could not pass over in silence – and your Excellency has himself mentioned it – the tremendous work accomplished by the Church in his country. She has not only firmly established the Catholic faith, but it may be said that her action has had the effect of greatly facilitating the Congolese people's access to the most developed forms of modern world civilisation. This is seen particularly in the field of education, and the name of Lovanium alone is enough to call to mind the degree of culture which your country has attained through institutions initiated by the Church.

It would give an incomplete picture, however, to focus attention exclusively on what the Church has brought to the Congo, and it is only fair to mention also what the Congo brings to the Church. We said this recently in Our Message to the Episcopate and all the Peoples of Africa: "The Church regards the moral and religious values of African tradition with great respect" (No. 14). She highly appreciates, in fact, the richness and variety of the cultural expressions of the various ethnic groups of your great continent, their wisdom, their art of dialogue, their concern for the family, their

sense of humanity and above all their spiritual vision of life. These are all positive values, so characteristic of your civilisation, and which the Church has no other ambition than to assume and to vivify by the higher light of Christian Revelation. This is to say, Mr. Ambassador, that what is fine and noble in Congolese traditions, far from being set aside or neutralised by the Church, will always be accepted and given value by her; she considers them an enrichment, thanks to which she acquires, in a way, citizenship papers in your country and can be truly Congolese.

The universal Church is at home everywhere. She does not come from outside. And when she takes root in a country, it is not in order to pursue designs of domination or temporal interests; she has only the true good of peoples in view; her aims are of a religious and not a political order. With regard to the Congo, We assure you that the Church desires nothing so much as to preserve, consolidate and develop, through the instrumentality of the Congolese people themselves, the great missionary work accomplished in the past, the beneficial results of which are there for all to see.

This can only be done, obviously, in an atmosphere of social peace, and this presupposes in the Governors, besides concern to persevere without respite in raising the people's standard of life, also great broadness of outlook and magnanimity. In past years the Congo has been through very painful ordeals which may have left in people's hearts traces of bitterness and resentment. But it will gain honour in the eyes of the world and history by generously practising Christian pardon, so noble in itself, and so in conformity, besides, with the convictions of the best of its sons. A Congo faithful to its best traditions, anxious to let itself be imbued more with the Gospel spirit, seems to Us to have, in the designs of Providence, a wonderful mission, whose radiance could prove to be salutary not only for each of its sons but for the whole of Africa and for the world.

The Holy See will be the first to rejoice in the growing spiritual and material prosperity of the Congolese people. And in the office which you inaugurate today as first Ambassador from your country to the Holy See, you may be assured of always finding here understanding, good will and support. We gladly invoke on your person, your mission, your family, on the President of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, and on all the dear Congolese peoples, abundant divine blessings.

*ORa n.30 p.4.