



The Holy See

*Discurso al Embajador de SENEGAL,
Excmo. Sr. Don André J. COULBARY*19 de junio de 1986*

1. It is a joy for me to welcome the new representative of Senegal, and I thank Your Excellency for the profound and noble words with which you have inaugurated your mission as Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary to the Holy See.

You interpret for us here the feelings of His Excellency Abdou Diouf, President of the Republic, whose greetings I receive gratefully, and to whom I present, through you, my best wishes both for him personally and for the country over whose destiny he presides.

2. It is true indeed that there is by now a long tradition of diplomatic relations between Senegal and the Holy See, both useful and significant.

On the one hand, we must find ways to help the Catholic community find or maintain a *modus vivendi* that is consistent with its faith, allowing it to provide for the religious formation of its faithful, to worship God, and to bring original witness of its members' beliefs, with complete respect for other religious communities. I would like to add immediately that the Senegalese government has distinguished itself by the concern it has shown for the respect of this faith. It is true, Catholics are a minority, but you have pointed out yourself, Your Excellency, their active and disinterested participation in the cultural and social development of their country through their schools, their centres for the education of women, their health care centres and other services. Since these are services which benefit a large portion of the Senegalese population, the Church hopes that it can always depend, not only on the benevolence of the Government, but also on its regular assistance.

Moreover, the diplomatic relationship between the Holy See and the Senegalese Government has a further objective: to contribute to the strengthening and the implementation of ideals of peace and progress that inspire the political leaders of the nation, with respect to the common good that they wish to guarantee within the country to all its people, and even more importantly, on the outside, in international relations where Senegal plays a very active role.

3. Concerning social conditions in Senegal, the Holy See – with due respect for the competence of the public authorities in charge of temporal affairs and of the cultural development of the nation – notes with interest that the Government seems anxious to maintain a spirit of tolerance, harmony and cooperation among the various religious and ethnic groups within the nation. The Holy See hopes that the desire to promote a human formation that is respectful of the pluralism of religious beliefs will always remain alive, especially in the all-important field of education. The Holy See also understands and fully appreciates the emphasis placed by the Government on democracy, on the expression of opinions, on freedom, on participation by all citizens. Finally, the Holy See is ready, in collaboration with the Church in Senegal, to encourage responsible participation in particular by promoting the acquisition of cultural and technical skills, of a sense of loyalty and a spirit of service, by encouraging the search for development and justice for all, in order that the common good may be assured and promoted with a view to the human and spiritual progress of all citizens, and especially of the least favoured groups.

4. Your Excellency, you have underlined the international role of the Holy See, which does indeed correspond to its universal mission. In this area, the concepts of dignity, freedom, justice, brotherhood, and peace are to the Holy See as to Senegal not only prestigious ideals, but daily necessities inspiring to concrete action.

The Church bases her action first of all on the inviolable dignity of every person in the eyes of God and in the eyes of his brothers, with the rights and obligations that this entails, but also, on the dignity of peoples and nations who have the right to live a life that is faithful to their own history and culture, with a reasonable openness to others and to the universal. Finally, the Church's action is based on the solidarity that unites the entire human family and forbids us to be indifferent to the destruction of entire peoples by war and by famine. The John Paul II Foundation for the Sahel, which is intended to assist in repairing and preventing the effects of drought, is an example of this solidarity.

Not only must we do all we can to ensure that nations resolve their differences through negotiations and loyal and just agreements rather than armed conflict, but we must also create the conditions that will allow each country to flourish and to meet basic needs in the areas of nutrition and hygiene. For this it is essential to establish effective bonds of solidarity between North and South and, to the extent that this is possible, to put an end to all the obstacles that stand in the way of dignified life and of progress. In my speech to the diplomatic corps in Yaoundé on 12 August last year, I listed some of Africa's problems.

5. We all know how seriously concerned Senegal has been with respect to all of these issues, in the service of the African nations. As President of the Organization of African Unity, His Excellency Abdou Diouf has proved this yet again quite recently in New York at the special session on the African economy. The Holy See is also observing closely the situation, and searching for solutions

to the problem of the debts incurred by African States who are now justifiably asking for a moratorium. We are aware of the low level of agricultural production and, in general, of those resources which are most essential to the African population; of the urgent need to invest in development and not in an increase of useless and dangerous weapons; in brief, of the will for an economic renewal of the continent which should become a reality in the coming years.

We must all evaluate our responsibilities in this area, in all loyalty: the more favoured countries on other continents, who may not be sufficiently responsive to the need for fairness in trade; but also African countries who must come together more strongly, avoid wasting their energies on fratricidal conflicts and guerrilla warfare, confront the problem of the large numbers of refugees, eliminate the threats to human rights, overcome racial discrimination – to which your country is so properly sensitive – understand that violent solutions conceived in hatred or fear lead to disaster and are simply unworthy of man. But I am convinced that the African soul, to which religion and a sense of solidarity are familiar, will have the resources of human, moral and spiritual wisdom to overcome these difficulties. It is important that each country, despite any handicaps and weaknesses it might have, should be encouraged in this direction, with both confidence and firmness, so that it may assume or resume with honour its place at the table of solidarity. Blessed are the nations that dedicate themselves to this labour of peace!

6. Peace is a gift from God, as Your Excellency has correctly pointed out. The Catholic Church, Christians in general, and I may say all real believers, all those who sincerely and humbly search for the will of God, are in a position to find the best solution, the most profitable, the most human, the most enduring one, to their difficult problems, even to those which appear to be insoluble. Father Daniel Brottier, who so loved your country and was unable to pursue his ministry there far as long as he would have liked to, used to say: «Spiritual value is what sets man apart. Our financial and social conditions may change; but our personal, intellectual and moral value endures and shall endure». God deserves to be adored and loved first of all for his own sake; it is he who guarantees our human rights, who awakens our conscience to all its obligations, who gives it the desire for good and the strength of goodness. We cannot invoke him without being directed towards respect and love for our neighbour, without trying to see in others our brothers, without respecting and promoting the place that each one of us occupies in God's plan.

For her part, the Church wishes to contribute to this spiritual growth of conscience. The Holy See is inspired by this in its actions. I know that while you are here the relationship between the Holy See and Senegal will be extremely productive. You shall find here all the support you could wish for in this quest for peace. Personally, I shall pray to the Lord to extend his every blessing on you, on the leaders of your country and on all the Senegalese people.

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