



The Holy See

DISCOURS DU PAPE JEAN-PAUL II

AU PRÉSIDENT DE LA RÉPUBLIQUE DU CAMEROUN* *Vendredi, 31 octobre 1986.* With great joy I welcome your Excellency. For the Holy See the official visit of a Head of State is always a welcome occasion to show its esteem for the people he or she represents and its encouragement to those who bear the responsibility for the common good. Today, I am even more gladdened by your arrival, which reminds me of the fact that, last year, I myself was received in Cameroon by Your Excellency and by all your fellow citizens, at each of the stops of my pastoral visit in Yaoundé, Garoua, Bamenda, and Douala. I had previously had the opportunity to become familiar with the situations in your country, particularly through the bishops of Cameroon when they came on their «ad limina» visit. However, from that time on I have fixed before my eyes and in my heart all that characterizes your beloved land, thanks to what I saw and experienced in your territory and to the interesting contacts which I have had.² The Successor of Peter, who receives you in the name of the Catholic Church over the unity of which he presides, has as his mission, you know, to foster the spiritual progress of his brothers and sons in fidelity to the faith and in fraternal communion. For this reason he shares their hopes and the difficulties of their daily lives, their life in society, and their concerns about justice, peace – and cultural and moral progress, because all these things play a great part in the fulfilment of God's plan for them and for the spread of the Kingdom of Christ (cf. Constitution Gaudium et Spes, n. 39, 2). It is in this spirit that I have paid great attention to and taken a lively interest in the remarkable efforts that your country is making under various aspects.³ Observers note in the first place that Cameroon has an important position in the centre of the African continent. It enjoys a certain amount of good fortune in its geographic location, with access to the sea, a rich soil, a rather moderate climate in most of its regions, and its pivotal position between the French-speaking and English-speaking areas. Even the multiplicity of its cultures represents an enriching diversity in the measure in which, respectful of their differences, they accept the requirements of the common good and join their efforts in the national interest. The very great number of young people under twenty, even though it currently creates serious problems in providing them with education and employment, may also be considered a promise of vitality for your country.⁴ However, obviously, these possibilities which also involve some risks, will not bring about good results unless on every level from the politically responsible to the common citizens, the necessary efforts are made in a sense of careful work, honesty, and with clear direction, responsible participation, justice which respects fundamental human rights, the rights of minorities, and the common good. to promote and safeguard the ethical quality of the behaviour of both young and adults. It is the task of those who preside over the destiny of the people of Cameroon to help make all these efforts converge towards the good of all and of each person, relying not only upon patriotic sentiment but also on the cooperation of intermediary bodies, the sense of responsibility, on the moral sense that each one should develop, in conscience, in line with the religion he professes. The Holy See is happy to note that this concern inspires the action of your government. It knows of your desire to combat all forms of corruption, to build a true democracy which, on the one hand, preserves liberty, respect for the rights and the

initiative of enterprise while, on the other hand, it promotes a communitarian sense and guarantees of national unity. Without confusing competences and goals, the Church is of the opinion that, on many of these points, there can be a convergence between such a vision and her own field of endeavour.⁵ Considering the means of subsistence of the people of Cameroon, we observe besides that your policy has been directed, with success, agricultural development to achieve nutritional self-sufficiency as much as possible. It seems that this could be an interesting example for Africa, because it corresponds to a basic need of the peoples and assures a solid base for the economy while avoiding the hazards which affect the marketing of certain other resources. You are equally concerned to modernize the rural areas, to control excessive development of certain large cities with their inherent deshumanizing conditions, and to avoid the deterioration of the environment. Sometimes, unfortunately, one is at the mercy of natural ecological disasters, such as the one that recently affected the region of Lake Nyos; we were deeply united in solidarity with you in that time of trial. Your Government is also engaged in the cultural promotion of the people, which raises the mind, develops a sense of relationship, and prepares them for responsibilities. It is certainly aware of the great difficulties of the education and professional training of so many young people, often cut off from their families because of the conditions of school life. The Church shares deeply in this concern, which was the theme of my homily in Douala. The family always remains the basic cell of society. Those who have the responsibility for the common good cannot but have at heart to promote its stability, unity, a welcoming acceptance of life according to a responsible parenthood of the spouses, the natural authority of the parents so as to assure to children the emotional and educational conditions they need. I was able to address the Catholics on the subject of these family values in Bamenda.⁶ As for international relations, I was very happy to use the opportunity of my stay in your capital to speak in the presence of the diplomatic corps about all that the good of Africa requires. Along with you, I hope that the African people will contribute, according to their means, to the solution of the grave problems of the countries of their continent as I listed them on that occasion: national independence in full freedom, economic self-sufficiency, justice in international relations, the problem of famine, the hardship of drought – for which you generously manifested your solidarity – the plight of refugees, the injustice of racial discrimination. the tragedy of civil wars or centres of violence which certain foreign powers stir up, and the various violations of human rights. Yes, if it is true that each country should more and more take charge of its own development with equitable international mutual aid, and solve its own problems without foreign interference, there is also need for the understanding, wisdom and solidarity of others, whether within the framework of the Organization of African Unity or the United Nations Organization and its specialized Institutions, or in bilateral neighbourly relationships. I have no doubt that Cameroon is making a great contribution in this area.⁷ In regard to all of these questions, Your Excellency knows the solicitude of the Church, such as it is exercised by the Holy See, but also through the action of the local Churches, particularly of Cameroon, which includes a notable part of the population. I have seen how your countrymen have been able to accept the Gospel and establish a symbiotic relationship between the Christian faith and the African spirit. My pastoral visit to Cameroon was intended most of all to consolidate that Church which will soon celebrate its centenary and which is progressing within the framework of religious liberty guaranteed to all the citizens. I am also aware, Mr President, how you yourself, in complete respect for the other religious beliefs of your compatriots, have become familiar with the Catholic faith and have at heart its expansion. On her part, the Church gladly makes her specific contribution to meet the human needs which the country must face: the education of children and youth, for which the Catholic schools make a great effort and deserve some support – the further study on the part of students, for whom a Catholic Institute is being prepared: the care of the poor and the sick; the initiation into family values; the formation of consciences in all the virtues which build up society, such as honesty, courage, a sense of responsibility, solidarity and fraternal charity.⁸ I take advantage of our meeting to renew my greeting and blessing for all my brothers and sisters of the Catholic Church in Cameroon, and I hope that their faith

may deepen and their charity shine forth. I also greet all the other citizens of Cameroon who are Christians or who adhere to Islam or to the traditional religions. To all I wish happiness, prosperity, and moral, social and spiritual progress. I pray that your country may develop harmoniously in total growth.

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