



The Holy See

Discurso al Embajador de RUANDA,

*Excmo. Sr. Don Ildephonse MUNYESHYAKA*22 de marzo de 1986*

1. It is a great joy for me to receive you here in this house, and I am very happy to see that Rwanda is once again represented at the Holy See by an Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary. I wish you every success in the important mission that you are undertaking and to which you bring a rich experience. Compared with the important diplomatic posts you have previously occupied, this is a different mission, *sui generis*.

I have listened with great care to the statements that Your Excellency as just made about the role of the Holy See and about the plans and concerns of Rwanda. I thank you warmly for all that you have said. I thank also His Excellency General Juvénal Habyarimana, President of the Republic, for his greetings. Please assure him that I remember with great pleasure his visit of last year, and convey my cordial good wishes for himself and for the success of his very important task.

2. As you have said, Rwanda and the Holy See have indeed established diplomatic relations that remain excellent and fruitful. I am very happy to hear of your intention to strengthen and develop further these relations. I believe that their soundness comes from feelings of mutual appreciation. The Holy See has great respect for the people of Rwanda. We admire the human qualities bravely expressed in a difficult atmosphere, and the way they have welcomed the Christian faith; we consider with sympathy their needs and their projects. For its part, Rwanda has understood the importance and the benefits of the Catholic religion; Catholicism has become the faith of many of your fellow citizens. With extraordinary vitality, the local Church has taken an important place in Africa and in the universal Church.

Of course, as Pope Paul VI said to your predecessor in 1978. The Church's mission must always remain separate from that of the State, for its object is the spreading of the Gospel and the participation of man in the divine life. She must remain independent of essentially political options so that she can be open to all and maintain her prophetic, eschatological role. Yet, no one more than the Church has at heart the future destiny of peoples, not only with respect to their eternal salvation but also with respect to their human, moral and spiritual progress. We can speak here of convergences for the total well-being of man and society; and the Holy See notes with joy that the

civil authorities whom you represent fully share this perspective.

3. We can therefore say that the Church in Rwanda, in communion with the Apostolic See, is deeply interested in the development problems stressed by Your Excellency, and wishes to continue cooperating in the search for solutions. It is keenly aware of the difficulties to which you have alluded: the landlocked position of the country, its limited area, the few natural resources available to it, both above ground and underground, the difficulties in finding food and work for the many children of Rwanda. It knows also the courage with which the people of Rwanda and their leaders are facing these problems, taking initiatives such as those that you have mentioned (communal work) centred on what is essential for the present and the future of the country. Yes, the Church is indeed happy to see the active participation of the citizens in that which ensures the common good of all.

And the Church is very willing to participate, not only by providing numerous services in the areas of education, health and hygiene, but also in contributing to form the consciences of the people in a way that is in harmony with the Christian faith and extremely useful to all. You have stressed the tremendous importance that your Government attaches to the family. It is indeed one of the aims of the Church to promote the family's stability, its unity, its generosity, and its educational role, in accordance with God's plan. I am thinking also of moral and spiritual values: respect for the person who is never a means and whose inviolable dignity must be preserved; the meaning of justice, of integrity that banishes all corruption; courage in work; equality in social relationships; the spirit of service and of the common good; concern for the poor and for less favoured groups; brotherhood among ethnic groups; peace; forgiveness; love, which, as you have correctly noted, is indeed the leitmotif of our spiritual mission. These are values that are dear to all who hold responsibilities in the country, both civil and ecclesiastical.

4. Your Excellency has also spoken of the international situation. This is where the competence of the Holy See comes more particularly into play. When I heard you speak of the desire of the Rwandan Government for genuine and trusting cooperation with the countries of the world, and of its will to promote good relations with its neighbours, regional cooperation and international assistance, I felt that you are following in the realistic and productive paths of solidarity. As I said last 11 January to the diplomatic corps accredited to the Holy See, solidarity has to begin at the regional level and the continental level while remaining open to the world community of nations.

I hope that Rwanda will find the support that it has a right to expect, as in turn it will provide support to others, in the search for enduring peace, for a greater assurance of respect for the rights of men, whatever their social rank, nationality or race, and for more equitable political and economic relations between North and South. Indeed, and you have noted this yourself, your national efforts are obstructed by international trade conditions that unbalance the economies of developing countries. As you well know, the Holy See fully supports the search for a new international economic order that would make possible, in all equality, the development of each

country's resources in order to attain a better life for all its people. On this matter, you know that you have here an ally.

5. In concluding, Your Excellency, I cannot refrain from mentioning once more the extraordinary situation of the Church in your country. Christianity has set deep, strong and fast growing roots there. It has been assimilated by the people and by an intellectual élite that has taken in hand the destiny of the Rwandan Church with continuing help from foreign priests, religious and lay persons. Furthermore, Rwandan Catholics are themselves becoming missionaries abroad.

In your country, as in all parts of the world, under the influence of various modern theories - be they rationalistic critiques or movements of secularization or laicism or even atheism - or perhaps in search of an African authenticity, some may be tempted to distance themselves from the Christian faith. In reality, far from being a foreign body, the Christian faith has taken into itself most of the traditional values of your country that had very positive aspects, both ethical and religious. Indeed, Christianity has saved these values, by purifying them: it has renewed them, elevated them, thanks to the Good News of the love of God offered to all, and thanks to the charity that this implies for all human beings. Christianity has so to speak, touched the Rwandan man and Rwandan culture at their very roots. And although African inculturation is an ongoing process that must always continue in harmony with the doctrine of the universal Church, it is already producing authentically African and Rwandan fruits. Christian faith has a special place in the Rwandan soul and continues to work at the evangelization and deepening of the hearts and of the customs – with respect for the beliefs and the responsibilities of all the inhabitants of the country. At the same time, the Rwandan Church has itself acquired a special place in Africa and in the universal Church. This is yet another reason for the special bonds that exist between the Holy See and Rwanda.

I pray the Lord that he may shower his gifts on the people of Rwanda and on their leaders, that he may inspire them and help them in their noble task. And to you, Your Excellency, once again my wishes for a happy and productive mission. May God bless

Rwanda!

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