



The Holy See

*Discurso al Embajador de FRANCIA,
Excmo. Sr. Don Jean-Bernard RAIMOND**

23 de septiembre de 1988

Mr. Ambassador,

I thank you sincerely for the kind words which you have addressed to me on the occasion of the inauguration of your mission. In welcoming Your Excellency here, I would like to say how much I appreciate that France is represented by one of its most eminent diplomats who has a remarkable experience in international life and who, I am sure, will contribute to the pursuit of trustworthy relations and mutual esteem which are a very old tradition between France and the Holy See.

Mr. Ambassador, you have called to mind personal memories to which I am particularly sensitive. While you represented France in my native country you showed the continuity of the long friendship which binds your fellow citizens to the Polish people; your participation at the celebrations during my visit there in 1982 is witness to this.

A few days from a new journey which I shall make to a region of your country, you cause me to recall memories of previous pastoral visits: the beauty of places laden with history; moments of shared enthusiasm; personal encounters so precious in their diversity; nor can I forget the great kindness shown me by the highest of the French authorities and their collaborators. It will be a joy for me, on the occasion of my visit to the European Institutions at Strasbourg, to rediscover the people of France in the dioceses of Alsace and Lorraine.

The France which you henceforth represent here, one of the oldest Christian nations, has been a particularly rich terrain, which, throughout the centuries has been well watered by Gospel sources. An incomparable patrimony has thus been formed; I am thinking not only of the monuments and cultural achievements but also of the work of many generations of persons who constitute the vast

and living memory of your nation.

Furthermore, inasmuch as a personality is moulded by trials, your nation has in its history experienced suffering, conflicts, crises and divisions; it has known the exaltation brought about through its achievements and far – reaching influence. A place of exchanges, a land of welcome, this country has known how to assimilate and unite that which was brought to it by cultural movements developed elsewhere. We hope that France, beneficiary today of what its sons and daughters gave it from its past, may continue to play the role that many peoples of the world continue to appreciate.

My thoughts turn particularly to the Catholic Church in France which has always been a source of important initiatives, boldness, missionary generosity, intellectual research, and the flowering of holiness. At Lyon I was able to invoke the most ancient martyrs and, the same day, to inscribe among the number of the Blessed the apostle of the working classes, Antoine Chevrier of the nineteenth century. How could one not recall as well that I was just recently a witness to the veneration of the people of Lesotho for Blessed Joseph Gerard, a missionary from eastern France, who worked for more than fifty years in his untiring and illuminating apostolate. On Sunday I will have the joy of inscribing among the blessed, Father Frédéric Tanssoone, witness of the Gospel in the Holy Land and Canada.

In your country the Church has often been characterized by division and trial. Today, however, the courage of your bishops, priests, religious, and laity is again made manifest. All take their part in responsibility for the internal life and mission of the Church. Signs of hope and renewal are not lacking; I can attest to this also through very diverse meetings with your fellow citizens.

Christians assume their part as well in civic life. Quite often they devote themselves generously towards efforts which lead your country to promote respect for human dignity throughout the world, effective solidarity for the promotion of peace, and the sense of acceptance among peoples. By doing so they contribute to promoting the values which the Gospel inspires and which your people seek to defend.

You have also recalled, Mr. Ambassador, the presence of many French people in Rome; they have been placed at the service of the Curia or the pontifical academic institutions, and many are religious who have a significant role of responsibility in the direction of religious institutes. I can assure you that I often have the occasion of appreciating their competence and devotion. I also think of the seminarians and priests who are pursuing their formation in this city which is a privileged place for intellectual exchanges and mutual understanding where one can acquire useful experience of the universality of the Church.

You have underlined the proximity of viewpoints between France and the Holy See on numerous areas of international life. In a changing world where the conditions of States change as much as

the way of life of peoples, the Holy See seeks to recall continuously the foundations of the common good which belong to the very nature of man. In union with the pastors of local Churches, the Holy See desires to reveal, in the face of appeals it perceives, the necessity of respecting the values and rights which are still all too often compromised. This applies to the solution of tragic situations such as those you mentioned, which affect peoples very near to me, and for which your country and the Holy See agree to promote peace, each acting within the sphere of its competence and its own mission. These are the concerns of the same order which lead the Apostolic See to take a stance in the fact of great economic inequalities or of problems such as those of debt, the gravity of which you yourself have noted.

In this same sense, as you know, the Holy See supports the actions of international organizations according to the measure of their specific possibilities, because the purpose of these institutions is precisely to assure peace, security and freedom, to favour all useful forms of cooperation for the good of all.

The diplomatic relations established by the Apostolic See with numerous countries realize its constant desire to be attentive to the life of all peoples, to their trials as well as their successes. This form of contact offers the Holy See very valuable occasions for dialogue and common reflection. I am pleased by the willingness you have shown to take part in such exchanges in the name of your country.

Mr. Ambassador, I would be pleased if you would express to his Excellency, the President of the French Republic, my gratitude for the interest, of which you are the interpreter, which he shows for the relations of his country with the Holy See, and if you would convey to him my best wishes for the exercise of his high office.

Wishing you, Your Excellency, much joy as you carry out your mission, I can assure you that the Holy See will give you all the support you desire, in the spirit of the cordial relations which bind it to your country.

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