



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS
POPE JOHN PAUL II
TO H.E. Mr. CORNEILLE MEHISSOU
NEW AMBASSADOR OF BENIN TO THE HOLY SEE***

Thursday, 18 December 1997

Mr Ambassador,

1. I am pleased to receive Your Excellency in this house and to welcome you on the occasion of the presentation of the Letters accrediting you as Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of Benin to the Holy See.

I am touched by your friendly words. They attest to your country's esteem for the spiritual and religious dimension of national life. I thank you for the respectful greetings you have brought me from H.E. Mr Mathieu Kérékou, President of the Republic of Benin. Kindly convey my cordial greetings to him in return. I also offer my affectionate best wishes to all the people of Benin for their courageous efforts to build a nation that is ever more united and just. May God grant prosperity and happiness to everyone!

2. In your address you emphasized that your country is resolutely committed to the process of building a democratic society. On this difficult path, the establishment of a State ruled by law is a priority that must permit everyone to enjoy all his prerogatives as a citizen, with freedom and respect for legitimate pluralism. One of your essential concerns remains the satisfaction of each individual's basic needs and the encouragement of an honest and equitable division of benefits and responsibilities. To this end, it is important that justice govern the use and distribution of national resources.

3. I am pleased to know that in Benin relations between the Catholic community and the followers of Islam are usually peaceful. In fact, God "wants us to bear witness to him through our respect for the values and religious traditions of each person, working together for human progress and development at all levels" (*Ecclesia in Africa*, n. 66). To build up the nation, it is essential that believers, and on a wider scale, all people of goodwill, join forces in the service of the common good, thereby showing that God has made them members of one human family and all are marked with equal dignity. I

keenly hope that these good relations will help preserve the nation's unity, so indispensable for maintaining and strengthening peace and harmony between citizens.

4. In a spirit of dialogue and fraternal co-operation, the Catholic Church in your country, through the commitment of her members, has a legitimate role in national life. In fact, she intends to participate actively, in her own place and according to her own vocation, in the human and spiritual development of individuals. By putting herself at everyone's service in many areas, including those of education, health, welfare and charitable assistance, she helps to improve the people's living conditions and fosters the progress of justice and harmony. By her Gospel witness in word and deed, by her respect for the freedom and beliefs of each individual as well as of the human and religious communities, the Church carries out the mission she received from Christ, which it is her urgent duty to fulfil. She rejects all divisions and opposition that might threaten the pursuit of the common good and is conscious that she is called to work ardently to establish a true "civilization of love".

5. Mr Ambassador, allow me through you to extend my warm greetings to the Catholic community of Benin and to its Bishops. The recent creation of several new Dioceses and the erection of a second Ecclesiastical Province in the country testify to the Gospel energy of the Church in Benin. I invite the faithful, in close union with their Pastors, to be nourished by the universal love of Christ, in an attitude of mutual respect and dialogue with everyone. Thus, as we approach the third millennium, they will help build a nation of solidarity and brotherhood!

6. As you begin your mission, I offer you my cordial wishes for the noble task that awaits you. Be assured that my co-workers will offer you the attentive and understanding welcome you may need.

On your Excellency, on the people of Benin and on the leaders of the nation, I wholeheartedly invoke an abundance of divine Blessings.

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