



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF PAUL VI
TO THE FIRST AMBASSADOR OF ETHIOPIA
TO THE HOLY SEE***

Tuesday, 8 July 1969

Mr. Ambassador.

We thank you for the noble words with which you have begun your mission as diplomatic representative of the Emperor of Ethiopia to the Apostolic See.

You are the first Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of Ethiopia since the recent elevation of the Legation to the rank of Embassy. We are therefore glad to receive you in this new capacity and give you Our welcome. The occasion is an exceptionally happy one, and at this moment takes on a quite particular significance, because We see your worthy Sovereign and his country in Our mind's eye.

This present meeting in fact reminds Us of that evening of June 10th, when at Geneva We had the opportunity of a conversation with His Majesty Hailé Selassié I, during a short pause in that intense and for Us, unforgettable day. In him We saw a good and noble person who is concerned for the good of his people and for ordered and peaceful progress in the continent of Africa. We know that his mind and his work as a statesman are guided by humane and religious sentiments: by a secure trust in God, without whose aid it is in vain that we build the house and watch over the city (cf. Ps. 126, 1), and a concrete desire for peace. We gave homage to this trust and this will in the words which We addressed to him on that occasion, and We would here repeat to him Our esteem because “he has earned the regard of all by following in all his works the higher nature of Man, and by showing an example of personal spiritual courage in a life not without suffering”. (Cf. *L'Osservatore Romano*, English ed., June 19th, p. 9).

At that meeting, as at this happy meeting today, Our mind was filled with the image of a country of

many and varied historical vicissitudes, above all with an ancient Christian tradition, which undoubtedly goes back to the first decades of the IV century and perhaps very much further. As historians have pointed out, it was Christianity that gave Ethiopia its historical individuality, and has marked the stages of its millenary history. And Ethiopia has remained faithful to that Christian character; it has lived and suffered. The fact of being still profoundly rooted in the past does not prevent that noble nation from turning with persevering strength to modern progress. The synthesis which your country, therefore, presents to the world today is one of a religious and historical fidelity joined with a strong desire for development and a praiseworthy determination to maintain broad and peaceful relations with the nations of the world, especially those of Africa.

We are consequently happy to tell the Emperor and the whole Ethiopian people, through you, that We are glad to foster friendly relations with them. Such relations, facilitated as if by a mysterious and premonitory will for mutual knowledge and understanding, have not begun only today. Over the centuries legations have come from the Negus to Our Predecessors, and were marked by reciprocal respect and cordiality. There is singular evidence of this in the Vatican. The ancient church of St. Stephen behind St. Peter's, which used to be a monastery, and where the Roman patrician Galla, daughter of the Consul Symmachus, lived in the VI century, passed into the hands of Religious, and in 1481 was entrusted by Pope Sixtus IV to Ethiopian monks, on the occasion of the arrival of an Ethiopian mission in Rome. Hence its name of St. Stephen of the Moors, or Abyssinians. It was honoured by the presence and the virtues of Thespa Sion (cf. Mauro da Leonese. *S. Stefano Maggiore degli Abissini e le relazioni romano-etioptiche*, Vatican City, 1929; G. Giovannoni, "La chiesa vaticana di S. Stefano Maggiore", in *Mem. Pont. Acad. rom. di Arch.* 4, 1934). Further, the Pontifical Ethiopian College for Secular Clergy developed out of that ancient monastery, and was later transferred to a new and more airy building in the Vatican Gardens.

All this tells us that Ethiopia is at home in the Vatican, and has lived and still lives side by side with the Church's life. This is why the Apostolic See feels particularly disposed, as We said, to maintain good relationships, both because of the close kinship which Catholics of the Ethiopian rite have with the Coptic Church of Ethiopia, which We hope one day to see in full communion with us, and because of the testimony which that same Church offers to Christ and the Most Holy Virgin; again, because of the loyal and active presence of the Latin Catholic Church in Ethiopia, which is nowadays also represented by efficacious and valued work by Catholic schools in education and culture, and the new Catholic university of Asinara.

We hope and pray that these valuable contacts will become ever more fruitful for the Church and for Ethiopia. We renew Our prayers for the civil progress, social increase and spiritual advance of that beloved nation; at the same time We invoke a continuing outpouring of divine graces upon the Emperor Hailé Selassié and upon all Ethiopia, which is so dear to Us.

Copyright © Dicastero per la Comunicazione - Libreria Editrice Vaticana