



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS
POPE JOHN PAUL II
TO H.E. Mr. ELLIOT LATÉVI-ATCHO LAWSON
AMBASSADOR OF TOGO TO THE HOLY SEE***

Thursday, 18 December 1997

Mr Ambassador,

1. Welcome to this house where I have the pleasure of receiving Your Excellency on the occasion of the presentation of the Letters accrediting you as Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of Togo to the Holy See.

Thank you for the greetings you have conveyed to me from H.E. Mr Gnassingbé Eyadéma, President of the Republic of Togo. I would be grateful if you would express my respectful wishes to him in return. I hope the people of Togo, to whom I am close in mind and heart, will enjoy prosperity and happiness in an ever more fraternal society, based on justice and solidarity.

2. I am pleased to hear what you have said about Togo's commitment to reinforce relations of co-operation and friendship among the people. While Africa still has too many areas of tension in addition to serious fratricidal conflicts, it is necessary to persevere with conviction in the common efforts that have already been made to ensure that a true culture of solidarity also prevails within nations as well as between them. The quest for appropriate solutions to people's vital problems, so that each one may enjoy peaceful and decent living conditions, is a priority for the establishment of lasting peace.

3. In your address you also emphasized that your country is aiming to establish a State of law. Indeed, its establishment is indispensable to enabling an authentic democracy to take root. To work effectively for the nation's progress and development, it is the duty of the State's leaders to see that in political and social life all citizens can exercise their legitimate rights and benefit from the freedoms indispensable for doing so. The opportunity for everyone to choose their leaders freely and to participate in the political decisions that govern the life of the community are an essential prerogative which does not allow what belongs to all to be confiscated for the benefit of a few.

Freedom itself is ordered to the truth, especially when it involves the understanding of human nature and the correct perception of man's role in social life. In fact, the human person's transcendent dignity must guide political activity, in order to guarantee freedom in the future. As I have emphasized several times, "freedom attains its full development only by accepting the truth. In a world without truth, freedom loses its foundation and man is exposed to the violence of passion and to manipulation, both open and hidden" (*Centesimus annus*, n. 46).

4. The Catholic Church, for her part, intends to collaborate loyally in seeking the common good. Naturally, the administration of public affairs is not her vocation. She recognizes the legitimate autonomy of political institutions as well as her own freedom in their regard so that she may proclaim the Good News without hindrance and call attention to its demands. She makes a specific contribution to promoting the good of the national community by discerning and encouraging what enables man to live and grow in conformity with his vocation, while combatting all that is opposed to Gospel values and thus becomes unacceptable in certain circumstances.

In fact, if she is to be faithful to her mission of service to the Gospel, the Church cannot ignore concrete human problems. Participating through her members in the life of society, she is not indifferent to the lot of persons and human communities, nor to the dangers that threaten them. It is therefore her task to propose clearly values which must be guaranteed if human dignity and individual and collective rights are to be respected. In many situations, it is her duty to become the voice of those who have no voice. For her proper vocation is to help build a just and reconciled society, in which each individual can achieve his full human and spiritual potential.

Mr Ambassador, I take this solemn occasion to greet affectionately all the Bishops and members of Togo's Catholic community: I know their Gospel zeal. I warmly encourage them to work, in harmony with all people of goodwill in their country, to build a renewed and fraternal society, where each individual will find his place and develop the gifts he has received from God. As we prepare to celebrate the Great Jubilee of the Year 2000, I invite them to renew their hope, and to bear witness to it among their brothers and sisters.

5. As you begin your mission, I offer you my best wishes for the noble task that awaits you. Be assured that those who work with me will always show you the attention and understanding you may need.

I invoke an abundance of divine Blessings on Your Excellency, on the people of Togo and on those responsible its destiny.

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