



The Holy See

ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS BENEDICT XVI TO THE BISHOPS OF CAMEROON ON THEIR "AD LIMINA" VISIT

Saturday, 18 March 2006

Vatican's Clementine Hall

Your Eminence,

Dear Brothers in the Episcopate,

I am pleased to offer a cordial welcome to you as you are making your pilgrimage to the tombs of the Apostles Peter and Paul. I greet in particular those who are making their first *ad limina* visit this year. You have come to meet the Successor of Peter to strengthen the bonds of communion that bind you to him.

At our Meetings, I listened carefully to your joys and anxieties as Pastors of the Church in Cameroon. I assure you of my prayers for your episcopal ministry and for your diocesan Communities. May your visit strengthen your missionary dynamism and increase unity in charity among you, so that you will guide with justice and steadiness the faithful entrusted to your pastoral care!

I thank Archbishop Simon-Victor Tonyé Bakot of Yaoundé, President of your Bishops' Conference, for his cordial words and his presentation of the challenges that confront the Church in Cameroon today. When you return home, take to all the members of your Dioceses an affectionate greeting from the Pope, who asks them to let themselves be renewed within by Christ, to bear a witness of brotherhood and communion that calls contemporary society more and more into question.

The Church's life in Cameroon was marked last year by the 10th anniversary of the Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Ecclesia in Africa*, which Pope John Paul II signed in Yaoundé in September 1995. That moment of grace, lived with faith and hope, revealed a real, organic pastoral solidarity throughout the African Continent. This was displayed in particular by the fruitful and stimulating sessions of the Special Assembly for Africa of the Synod of Bishops.

I hope that the ecclesiological and spiritual insights contained in this text, true antidotes to discouragement and resignation, will inspire in your Communities and in the Bishops' Conference fresh enthusiasm for carrying out the saving mission that the Church has received from Christ. You must make the Gospel penetrate the depths of your peoples' cultures and traditions, characterized by their wealth of human, spiritual and moral values, without ceasing to purify these cultures through a necessary conversion of everything in them opposed to the fullness of truth and life as revealed in Jesus Christ.

This also calls for proclaiming and living the Good News. It means entering undaunted into a critical dialogue with the new cultures linked to the appearance of globalization, so that the Church can bring them an ever more relevant and credible message while staying faithful to the commandment she has received from her Lord (cf. Mt 28: 19).

Your quinquennial reports emphasize the unfavourable financial and social context that increases the number of people who live in a very precarious condition, weakening social ties and bringing the loss of a certain number of traditional values such as the family, sharing, attention to children and young people, the sense of generosity and respect for the elderly.

The invasion of the sects that exploit the gullibility of the faithful to drag them far from Christ and the Church, the different practices of popular religiosity that flourish in the communities which should be continually purified as well as the ravages of AIDS, are so many challenges to which you are asked to give precise theological and pastoral responses in order to evangelize peoples' hearts in depth and reawaken their consciences.

In this perspective, it is right to help all members of the Church without exception to develop ever greater intimacy with Christ, nourished by the Word of God, an intense prayer life and regular reception of the sacraments. May you guide them on the paths of a sounder and more adult faith that can transform hearts and consciences profoundly, giving birth to more and more friendly relations and greater solidarity among all.

It is your task, by your words and your witness of life, to call people to find Christ in the power of the Spirit and to strengthen them in the living faith. I warmly hope that the riches of your preaching, your concern to promote structured catechesis and to guarantee a demanding initial and continuing formation for catechists, your support for theological research and the attention you pay to your ministry of sanctification will give rise to a new impetus of holiness in the Communities.

Christians will then be able to take their place and act competently in social and political milieus and in the economy, proposing to their compatriots an ideal of the person and of society that conforms with basic human values and the teachings of the Church's social doctrine.

The Church is called to become more and more a home and school of communion. From this

perspective the work done together in a spirit of charity, in your Episcopal Conference composed of French-speaking and English-speaking Bishops, is already in itself an eloquent sign of that unity which you experience, and serves to carry forward the evangelization of your people, marked by ethnic differences.

I encourage you to continue in this direction, showing by your words and writings how the Catholic Church takes to heart the promotion of the well-being and dignity of all the People of Cameroon without exception, and the fulfilment of their profound aspirations to unity, peace, justice and fraternity.

I am delighted at the increasing number of priests and seminarians in your Country, and I am also grateful for the patient work of the missionaries who preceded them and gave themselves with generosity and an apostolic spirit to build Communities which can inspire priestly vocations in their midst.

The search for unity at the service of the mission requires you to be attentive to the ties of fraternal communion with your priests. I also encourage your priests to allow themselves to be renewed by the pastoral charity that must guide those who are configured through Ordination to Christ, Head and Pastor.

May each one meditate upon the total gift he has made of himself to God and to the Church in the image of the gift of Christ. May he also meditate upon the demands of pastoral charity and especially upon the need for a chaste life lived in celibacy in conformity with the law of the Church, upon the proper exercise of authority and upon a healthy relationship with material goods.

It is your task to sustain your priests in their priestly life by your closeness and your example, recalling: "Unless the episcopal office is based on the witness of a holiness manifested in pastoral charity, humility and simplicity of life, it ends up being reduced to a solely functional role, and inevitably loses credibility before the clergy and the faithful" (*Pastores Gregis*, n. 11). It is not primarily our pastoral actions but the gift of ourselves and our witness of life that reveal the love of Christ for his flock.

In your quinquennial reports you presented the major challenges that confront the family. The family is suffering the full force of the devastating effects of a society that proposes behaviour which all too often undermines it.

For this reason it is right to encourage a family ministry that offers young people a demanding emotional and moral education, and prepares them to commit themselves to living conjugal love responsibly, a condition that is so important for the stability of families and for the whole of society.

Through an initial and continuing formation, may you enable Christian families to perceive the

greatness and importance of their vocation, calling them ceaselessly to revive their communion through daily fidelity to the promise of the mutual, unique and exclusive gift that marriage entails.

The Church in Cameroon is constantly concerned with expressing specifically and effectively the love of Christ for everyone in the varied contexts of development, human advancement, justice and peace and health care, revealing the close connection between evangelization and social action. I appreciate the initiatives promoted in this perspective and greet the Christians involved in them, especially in the area of pastoral health care, highlighted in particular on the occasion of the *World Day of the Sick* held last year in Yaoundé.

This event will certainly have contributed to making public opinion more aware of the Church's pastoral commitment and her mission to the sick and to teaching basic health care, for fruitful collaboration with partners working in the health-care sector.

Dear Brothers in the Episcopate, at the end of our Meeting I would like to encourage you to pursue the work of evangelization in your Country. I also invite you to continue in a spirit of sincere and patient dialogue, lived in truth and charity, to build up brotherly relations with other Christian confessions and believers of other religions, to express the love of Christ the Saviour which gives rise to the human desire to live in peace and to form a brotherhood of peoples!

The Church in Cameroon, in this part of Central Africa so devastated by war, always remains a tangible sign of the peace that must be built, a peace that surpasses withdrawal into identity or race, banishes the temptation of revenge or resentment and strengthens people in new relations founded on justice and charity!

I entrust you all to the intercession of the Virgin Mary, Star of Evangelization, and willingly grant to you as well as to the priests, deacons, Religious and all the lay faithful of your Dioceses a special Apostolic Blessing.

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