



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF POPE FRANCIS
TO THE BISHOPS OF THE EPISCOPAL CONFERENCE OF CAMEROON
ON THEIR "AD LIMINA" VISIT**

*Clementine Hall
Saturday, 6 September 2014*

Dear Brothers in the Episcopate,

I welcome you. I am very glad to meet with you on the occasion of your *ad limina* visit! I thank Archbishop Samuel Kleda, President of your Episcopal Conference, for the words he addressed to me on your behalf. I ask you to convey my warm greetings to the faithful of your dioceses, in particular to your priests, the men and women religious and the lay people engaged in pastoral service, as well as to all the inhabitants of Cameroon. Likewise, I address a fraternal greeting to Cardinal Christian Tumi. May your prayer over the Tombs of the Apostles Peter and Paul strengthen you in faith and perseverance in the exercise of your pastoral duty, at the service of the people who have been entrusted to your care. They are for us the models we must follow in the total gift they made of themselves — unto the shedding of their blood — to Christ and to his Gospel.

Your visit offers me the occasion to renew my encouragement to you and my trust, and to emphasize the spirit of communion that you have at heart to maintain with the Apostolic See. For the Gospel to touch and convert hearts in a deep way, we must indeed remember that it is only by being united in love that we can render our testimony authentically and effectively. Unity and diversity are for you realities that must be kept firmly connected in order to uphold the spiritual and human richness of your dioceses, which is expressed in many ways. I also hope that the good cooperation between the Church, the State and society as a whole in Cameroon, recently manifested by the signing of a *Framework Agreement between the Holy See and the Republic of Cameroon*, may bear abundant fruit. I invite you to put this Accord into concrete practice, so that the legal recognition of many ecclesial institutions may give them greater exposure, to the benefit

not only of the Church but of Cameroon's society as a whole.

In this regard, I wish to acknowledge the considerable commitment of your local Churches to charitable works. This commitment in the domain of education, health and charity is recognized and appreciated by the Civil Authorities; it should lead to a fruitful collaboration between State and Church, respecting the full freedom of the latter. Engagement in charitable works is an integral part of evangelization, for there is a profound connection between evangelization and human advancement. This must be expressed and developed throughout the work of evangelization (cf. *Evangelii Gaudium*, n. 178). Therefore, I encourage you, all those who devote themselves to it, especially members of religious institutes and lay associations, to persevere in your attention to the weaker members, by supporting them both materially and spiritually. I thank them with all my heart for their dedication and for their authentic witness to the love Christ bears for all human beings.

Your work of evangelization will be all the more effective if the Gospel is truly lived out by those who have received it and profess it. This is the way to attract to Christ all those who do not yet know him, by showing them the power of his loving capacity to transform and illuminate the lives of men and women. Only in this way can we face, vigilantly yet serenely, the development of multiple new propositions that seduce minds without renewing the depths of their hearts. Moreover, the large number of Muslims in some of your dioceses, is an urgent invitation to witness courageously and joyfully to your faith in the Risen Christ. To develop the dialogue of life with Muslims, in a spirit of mutual trust, is indispensable today in order to maintain a climate of peaceful coexistence, and to discourage the development of violence of which Christians are the victims in certain parts of the continent.

It seems to me essential, then, as a priority, to pursue your action aimed at implanting and strengthening the faith in the hearts of the faithful. Formation is an essential element in the development of the People of God, particularly in these times where relativism and secularization are beginning to take root in Africa. Many lay persons are involved in their parishes and in the movements, and they are indeed vital to the passing on of the faith. Their formation must be solid and ongoing. I ask you to convey to these lay faithful and to all involved in this work of formation my appreciation and my warmest encouragement.

Families, equally, must continue to be the focus of your particular care, especially today as they experience grave hardships — be they poverty, displacement of peoples, lack of security, the temptation to return to ancestral practices incompatible with the Christian faith, or even new lifestyles proposed by a secularized world. I invite you to take full advantage of the Tenth Plenary Assembly of the Association of Episcopal Conferences of Central Africa held in the Congo, in whose work you took part, and which — I have no doubt — will bear abundant fruit.

It is also fundamental that the clergy witness to a way of life which professes the Lord, one

consistent with the exigencies and principles of the Gospel. I want to express to all the priests my gratitude for the apostolic zeal they show, frequently in difficult and dangerous conditions, and I assure them of my closeness and of my prayer. It is nonetheless important to remain vigilant in the discernment and care of priestly vocations — which are, thanks be to God, numerous in Cameroon — and also to support continuing formation and the spiritual life of priests for whom you must be attentive fathers since the temptations of the world are many, especially those of power, prestige and wealth. On this last point, the counter-witness that might be given by the mismanagement of resources, accrual of personal wealth or wastefulness is particularly scandalous in a region where many people lack the bare necessities of life.

On the other hand, unity among the clergy is an indispensable element in witnessing to the Risen Christ: “That they may be one... so that the world may believe” (Jn 17:21); whether it concerns unity among bishops, who frequently face the same difficulties and are called to offer common and concerted solutions of unity in the *presbyterium* — which the Lord calls to be built up of both every day, overcoming prejudice, especially of the ethnic kind.

Lastly, consecrated life also needs to be accompanied so that, rooted in Christ at the service of the Kingdom, it may always remain a prophetic witness and a model of reconciliation, justice and peace (cf. *Evangelii Gaudium*, n. 117). I urge you to lend your support to the religious institutes in their efforts of human and spiritual formation, and to welcome and accompany, with prudent discernment, new initiatives.

Dear brothers, the courageous efforts of evangelization that you carry out in your pastoral ministry will bear abundant fruit in conversion. I invite you to give thanks ceaselessly and to renew the gift of yourselves to Christ and the people entrusted to you. Without worrying about the difficulties, may you go bravely forward with a renewed missionary spirit to bring the Good News to all those who are still waiting for it or are the most in need of it. I entrust each of you and your dioceses to the intercession of St John Paul II who visited your country twice and to the motherly protection of the Virgin Mary. May God bless you!