



The Holy See

APOSTOLIC PILGRIMAGE TO AFRICA (MAY 2-12 1980)

**MEETING OF JOHN PAUL II
WITH THE PRESIDENT OF GHANA***

Accra

Thursday, 8 May 1980

Mr President,

1. I express my sincere thanks for the words which you have addressed to me on this occasion of our meeting here in the capital City of Accra. I feel deeply honoured by the sentiments of esteem which you have manifested towards my person. I accept them gratefully, for I know that they are meant to honour not my person but the Head of the Catholic Church coming to the beloved nation of Ghana as a pilgrim of peace. I wish to renew once more my appreciation for the invitation which you so kindly extended to me - as did also my brother Bishops - to visit your country and your people.

As I had the occasion to say when I officially announced my visit to Africa, the purpose of this journey is *to perform my universal ministry* and to honour personally the Church in Africa. With regard to Ghana I also noted that this is the year in which the Catholic Church celebrates the centenary of her implantation in this part of the great African continent. It was therefore important for me to express in a special way the joy of the whole Church on this happy occasion. I also hope that my visit will contribute to the promotion of authentic human progress in Ghana and in all Africa, at the service of universal brotherhood and peace. Since my arrival this morning, I have already received many kindnesses from the people of the capital City; I wish to take this opportunity to express, through your person, my joyful gratitude to everyone.

2. By my presence here today, Mr President, I desire *to honour the whole Ghanaian Nation*, with the wealth of its history, people, culture and achievements - in a word, with its own authentically

African and Ghanaian heritage and genius, and in its own rightful place among the nations of this continent and of the world. The history of my own native country, a history made up of moments of great achievement and joy but also of periods of suffering and sadness, has made me acutely aware of how necessary it is to respect the specific values of each people and of each nation: its traditions, its aspirations and its rights among all the member nations of the world community. Africa - and each of the nations that form part of it - has so much to offer to the common endeavours of all peace-loving people.

Too often relations between States and Governments, especially when viewed in the context of political and economic development, are seen in terms of mere self-interest, of strengthening already dominant positions, and of pressure applied through aid, with the result that older and economically more advanced nations fail to see that the young countries have much more to offer than simply a share of their natural resources or being a market for the products of the industrialized nations.

3. So many of the values that are embodied in the culture of the African nations not only contribute to the building of each nation, but can add to the enrichment of other nations and peoples as well.

For Africa has *something distinctive to offer to the world*. One of the original aspects of this continent is its diversity, but a diversity that is bound together by the undeniable unity of its culture: a vision of the world where the sacred is central; a deep awareness of the link between Creator and nature; a great respect for all life; a sense of family and of community that blossoms into an open and joyful hospitality; reverence for dialogue as a means of settling differences and sharing insights; spontaneity and the joy of living expressed in poetic language, song and dance. All these aspects manifest a culture with an all encompassing spiritual dimension. This is what makes the African culture unique. This is what binds the many people of Africa together without hampering in the least that immense richness of local expressions or the heritage of single groups and regions.

By my own origin, education and history, I have learned to value highly the power that culture has for every people. During my visit to my native Poland, I stated this conviction as follows: "Culture is an expression of man, a confirmation of humanity. Man creates culture and through culture creates himself. He creates himself with the inward effort of the spirit, of thought, will and heart. At the same time he creates culture in communion with others. Culture is an expression of communication, of shared thought and collaboration by human beings. It is born of service of the common good and becomes as essential good of human communities"^[1]. I therefore say to Ghana and all Africa: Preserve your culture. Let it become enriched through exchange with other cultures, but do not let your own culture die. Keep it alive, and offer it as your contribution to the world community.

Each nation brings to the family of nations its own cultural contribution, and through the legitimate expression of values and traditions there is possible a harmony among peoples that transcends

partisan differences, prejudices and rivalries. Such a harmony, built on respect for and openness towards the values of others, in particular their moral and spiritual values, facilitates the possibility of concerted action on problems that extend beyond the borders of individual nations. Africa is called to bring fresh ideals and insights to a world that shows signs of fatigue and selfishness. I am convinced that you Africans can do this.

4. In stressing respect for moral and spiritual values in the sphere of international collaboration, I have touched on what I consider to be basic in all relationships in society. All structures that are created as expressions of needs and aspirations relate to the human person, for they are meant to serve each human person and the whole human community. This holds true especially of *political structures and activities*.

In my address to the General Assembly of the United Nations last October, I said that all political activity "... comes from man, is exercised by man and is for man. And if political activity is cut off from this fundamental relationship and finality, if it becomes in a way its own end, it loses much of its reason to exist. Even more, it can also give rise to a specific alienation; it can become extraneous to man; it can come to contradict humanity itself. In reality, what justifies the existence of any political activity is service to man, concerned and responsible attention to the essential problems and duties of his earthly existence in its social dimension and significance, on which also the good of each person depends".

If I have stressed this point once more, Mr President, I have done so out of deep conviction, and because such is the teaching of the church which God has called me to lead, namely that no effort to achieve human advancement can succeed if the lofty dignity of every human being is not respected, defended and promoted in every situation. Such must be the motivation not only of the authorities but also of every single citizen, of all the men and women of this beautiful land who are called to work together so that every one may be given the possibility to live a life in keeping with human dignity.

5. Yes, Mr President, Ghana is a beautiful country, rich in cultural traditions and in the potential of its people, endowed also with natural resources, especially in the agricultural domain. It is my hope that, under the guidance of the authorities, all the citizens will *loyally work together*, without having to give up any of their own cultural values, but also without letting barriers arise between individuals and groups; that they will wholeheartedly and industriously work together to make the earth yield bountiful fruit. You have your cities, with ever larger concentrations of people, where problems of housing, education and employment may arise and demand bold action to ensure that nobody is excluded from the benefits of progress.

But there are also the rural areas, where most of the people still live, and where there exists a real potential for contributing to the national effort for development. Since justice demands that nobody should go hungry or lack the opportunity to achieve his or her full potential, both spiritually and

materially, then society should also regard agricultural labour as ennobling, and the status and dignity of the rural population should be constantly improved.

6. I can assure you, Mr President, that the Catholic Church stands always ready to offer her specific contribution, through the collaboration of her leaders and all her members. The Church has no political or economic designs or projects. The most efficient longterm contribution that she can make to the development of a nation is in raising *the moral and ethical awareness of people with regard to the demands of justice, social love and fraternal collaboration*; and in stressing the development of the whole person, to ensure that this development is not understood in the materialistic sense; in making each person aware of his or her dignity as given by God.

It is also well known that, right from the beginning, the Church in Africa has encouraged and participated in concrete efforts in education, health care, literacy and many other fields. She is prepared to continue this collaboration and this commitment in accordance with her own mission and nature, while fully respecting the lawful role and authority of the State.

Mr President, the dynamism and the virtues of its people can ensure a great future for Africa. That Ghana may fulfil her role of destiny in this continent is my fervent wish and prayer today.

[1] Ioannis Pauli PP. II *Allocutio ex externo archiepiscopatum aedium podio ad iuvenes habita in urbe "Gniezno"*, 2 die 3 iun. 1979: *Insegnamenti di Giovanni Paolo II*, II (1979) 1408.

*AAS 72 (1980) p.502-506.

Insegnamenti di Giovanni Paolo II, vol. III, 1 pp. 1238-1242.

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