



The Holy See

APOSTOLIC JOURNEY TO ZIMBABWE, BOTSWANA, LESOTHO, SWAZILAND AND MOZAMBIQUE

ADDRESS OF JOHN PAUL II TO THE REPRESENTATIVES OF THE LAITY OF ZIMBABWE

*Cathedral of Harare
Sunday, 11 September 1988*

“You are the salt of the earth... the light of the world” (*Matth. 5, 13-14*).

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

1. I am very happy to greet all of you present here, the *representatives of the laity of Zimbabwe*.
“My love is with you all in Christ Jesus” (*1Cor. 16, 24*).

Through you I greet your families, your parishes, your organizations and movements, and all in Zimbabwe who seek salvation in the grace and peace of our Lord Jesus Christ.

We are gathered in this Cathedral of the Sacred Heart entrusted to the Jesuit Fathers, whom I greet and congratulate for the notable contribution which the Society of Jesus has made to the life of the Church in Zimbabwe over the past century. This cathedral stands as a material sign of the collaboration between the early Jesuit missionaries and local craftsmen and labourers. To the eyes of faith, it is a reminder that in Christ Jesus, the eternal Word made flesh, the saving love of God has appeared in the world: “God in Christ was reconciling the world to himself” (*2Cor. 5, 19*).

To be a Christian is to have been touched and transformed, in baptism, by that love; it is to have been spiritually reborn as God’s adopted children and to be thus incorporated into the community of faith, the Mystical Body of Christ, “of which we are its living parts” and “all parts of one another” (*Eph. 5, 30; 4, 25*).

We are gathered then by reason of our baptismal consecration and our membership of the Church. Our assembly is a living expression of the *theme of my visit to Zimbabwe: "Coming together in Christ"*.

What greater joy for me than to share this moment of communion with you, in the awareness of our sublime calling! Together we rejoice in the dignity that is ours as sons and daughters of God the Father, brothers and sisters in Christ, a people sealed with the Holy Spirit.

2. Our reflection today concerns *your role – as lay men and women – in the Church and in society*. What does it mean to be a lay Christian in contemporary society? Here, in Zimbabwe?

At a time of profound and worldwide changes the Second Vatican Council helped the whole ecclesial body to become more aware that *the laity have a specific vocation and responsibility* that is essential to the Church's life and mission. As the Council teaches, that vocation is fulfilled through "living in the ordinary circumstances of family and social life", and "by engaging in temporal affairs and ordering them according to God's plan". In a word, by "*working for the sanctification of the world from within*" (*Lumen Gentium*, 31).

The laity are sometimes referred to as "ordinary Christians" or as the faithful who "live in the world". There is nothing demeaning in these terms. It is true that there are other members of the Church who are marked by a special sacramental character in Holy Orders, or who live a special consecration by giving public witness to the evangelical counsels of chastity, poverty and obedience. Priests and religious occupy a very special and important place in the Church's life. They are committed to building up the community of faith by a service that is above all, though not exclusively, spiritual and sacramental. They deserve and need your respect, support and friendship.

But the laity should not consider themselves less a part of the Church. In the one community of faith *all have an equal Christian "dignity"*. All the People of God are called to holiness in faith, hope and charity. All have a share in building up the kingdom of Christ in the world. See how Saint Paul compares the Church to the human body: "together you are Christ's body: but each of you is a different part of it" (*1Cor. 12, 27*). There are many different ministries and services in the Church, and a multitude of special gifts for building up and enriching the entire community. Whatever your state in life, whatever your occupation or profession, you, the members of the laity in Zimbabwe, have your own real and vital Christian task to perform.

3. "You are the light of the world... the salt of the earth".

Your families and your economic, social and cultural life are the natural horizon of your Christian endeavours. *Family life and the world of work* are the special areas of the laity's commitment to Christian living and witness!

The Scriptures have many beautiful and profound things to say about family life, about the love of husband and wife, about harmony between parents and children, about the support that all members of the family owe to one another, about prayerful trust in God in the great and small affairs of family life. The Book of Genesis describes the effect of man's first encounter with woman: "This at last is bone from my bones and flesh from my flesh!" (*Gen. 2, 23*). Adam's exclamation discloses the underlying motive of the permanent and faithful marriage covenant between husband and wife: "they become one body" (*Ibid. 2, 24*). Children are the fruit of their love. "Truly", say the Psalm, "children are a gift from the Lord, a blessing, the fruit of the womb" (*Ps. 127, 3*). And children and grandchildren in their turn – according to Saint Paul's teaching – "are to learn first of all to do their duty to their own families and repay their debt to their parents because that is what pleases God" (*1Tim. 5, 4*).

4. Today, *the moral bases of marriage and family life must be defended* against the stress and confusion resulting from changing social circumstances and the spreading of ideologies that undermine Christian ethical values.

One of the Church's main tasks is to speak the "truths" that inspire and foster the values on which a just and peaceful society can be built. It is important for the Church to teach – especially through her bishops, priests, religious and catechists – that *the human person*, in the full truth of his or her personal and social being – and not any institution, neither the State nor a party nor a business enterprise – *is the measure of true progress*. For this reason the Church insists on the inviolability and dignity of the human person from the moment of conception until natural death.

African traditional culture is centred on the family. Africa cannot flourish unless its families survive present social upheavals. The African family must find new strength, reaffirm the positive values contained in tradition and assimilate a more personal dimension of understanding, commitment and love.

5. The respect for life of which we are speaking includes *offering refuge to people* who are fleeing famine or civil war, oppression or terror. Those of you who remember the difficult years leading up to independence understand well the biblical command from the Book of Leviticus: "If a stranger lives with you in your land, do not molest him. You must count him as one of your own countrymen and love him as yourself – for you were once strangers yourselves" (*Lev. 19, 34*).

Unfortunately, in much of this Southern African region violence is an all too frequent occurrence. It is my ardent prayer for Zimbabwe that, through a successful process of national reconciliation, through her humanitarian approach to the problems of refugees in her territory, and through the legal and practical affirmation of human rights, she will be an example and a positive influence on others in the urgent task of establishing a civilization of peace and justice, a civilization of love.

6. You have been blessed with this beautiful country, fertile and full of resources which, in the

mind of the Creator, are meant to be used for the common good. As Christians, you know that to work for your country's development is to share in God's creative work. Your Christian calling is *to weave the truth* revealed by God and inscribed in human nature – regarding life and love and human solidarity – *into the very fabric of Zimbabwean society*. I invite you to accept that calling and accept it generously.

Development is more than a technical, economic or financial problem. It is above all a human effort requiring enormous resources of intelligence, compassion, a sense of fairness and justice, selflessness and love. It *“is not a straightforward process, as it were automatic and in itself limitless”* (Ioannis Pauli PP. II *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis*, 27). Even when material resources and technical expertise are available, work for genuine progress demands the wisdom and the moral energy to mould God's creation with respect for its internal laws, so that it provides abundantly for the common good, as God intended from the beginning (Cfr. *Gen. 1, 28*). Development is only possible as a great moral effort of intelligent collaboration and solidarity on the part of all sectors of the community.

The integral development of a people must be inspired by a spirit similar to what the Gospel calls “conversion – metánoia”, that is, “the urgent need to *change the spiritual attitudes* which define each individual's relationship with self, with neighbour... and with nature itself” (Ioannis Pauli PP. II *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis*, 38). What Africa needs is to be true to its own traditions of shared responsibility for common tasks in the community. Zimbabwe needs that social and moral attitude called solidarity, which must motivate your commitment as laity “to the good of one's neighbour with the readiness, in the Gospel sense, to ‘lose oneself’ for the sake of the other instead of exploiting him, and to ‘serve him’ instead of oppressing him” (*Ibid.*). Solidarity is the “*firm and persevering determination* to commit oneself to the common good; that is to say, to the good of all and of each individual, because we are all really responsible *for all*” (*Ibid.*).

7. This is where Christian lay men and women come into their own. This is where you prove yourselves “the salt of the earth” and “the light of the world”. If you are filled with the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of love and compassion and justice, which enables you to act in solidarity with all – especially the poorest and most neglected – you can *renew the face of the earth, you can work effectively for the new Zimbabwe that you hope for*.

The Church in Zimbabwe is deeply involved in developing your newly independent country. Catholic educational institutions, hospitals and health-care centres, and programmes of social assistance – in which many of you are generously engaged – make *a notable contribution to the well-being of the country*. In rural areas the Catholic Development Commission in particular is hard at work to bring about change for the better.

Likewise, you Catholic lay men and women are called *to work for development* not only in institutions and organizations currently run by the Church but *in every walk of life*, wherever in your

professional and social life you bear witness to Gospel values and apply the Church's social teachings. As farmers, factory workers and miners, teachers, health-care workers, housewives and mothers as well as working women, social workers, trade unionists, business men, politicians and professionals of all kinds you must be fully convinced that your efforts and toil, your skill and concrete achievements, exercised with respect for the moral order and in a spirit of service, are *the building-blocks of a better nation*, a better homeland for yourselves, your families and your fellow citizens.

In a word, you seek to order all things according to God's will: all things are yours, but you belong to Christ (Cfr. *1Cor.* 3, 23). This is the *transformation of the world from within*, of which the Council speaks. Certainly, a fitting result of our meeting would be a resolve on your part to study carefully the social and moral doctrine of the Church and to promote its implementation. At every level in your schools and religious education programmes, the Church's teaching on social and moral questions should have a prominent place.

8. Brothers and sisters, members of the laity of the Church in Zimbabwe: great tasks await you. An immense weight of moral responsibility rests on your shoulders. But the source of your strength is Christ himself, in whom is realized the description of the suffering servant of Isaiah: "he took our sicknesses away and carried our diseases for us" (*Is.* 53, 4). By overcoming sin and death, he opened to us the way of definitive freedom. In him our human activities and our efforts to solve society's problems become the path of our personal and collective redemption (Cfr. *Luc.* 21, 19).

Christ is reached through his Church, built on the foundations of the Apostles. Many of you experience the Church in small Christian communities, where you listen to the Gospel and learn to apply the Gospel message to the concrete circumstances of your lives. These communities, as living cells of the Church, in union and harmony with your priests and bishops, your parishes and dioceses should help you to serve the entire community through dedicated collaboration in building up your families, your institutions, your country, and the whole Church.

You are the "light of the world", especially the light of Zimbabwe and of Southern Africa. Always have the courage to accept the demands of this vocation! "Your light must shine in the sight of men, so that, seeing your good works, they may give the praise to your Father in heaven" (*Matth.* 5, 16). May God strengthen you in this task!

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