



The Holy See

APOSTOLIC JOURNEY
TO MADAGASCAR, LA RÉUNION,
ZAMBIA AND MALAWI

MEETING WITH THE BISHOPS OF MALAWI

ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS JOHN PAUL II

Archbishopric of Blantyre
Friday, 5 May 1989

Dear Brother Bishops,

1. I give thanks to God for the grace which has made possible this visit to Malawi. I pray for you, the bishops, in the words of Saint Paul that "God may make you worthy of his call, and may fulfil every good resolve and work of faith by his power, so that *the name of our Lord Jesus Christ may be glorified in you, and you in him*" (2Thess. 1, 11-12).

It is a great joy for me to be here during this year in which you commemorate the hundredth anniversary of the arrival of the first Catholic missionaries at Mponda. We can look back at a *century of remarkable growth* from the implantation of the Church in Malawi, thanks to the zeal and self-sacrifice of many missionaries. Truly, "the name of our Lord Jesus Christ" has been "glorified" among the people of Malawi, and they in him.

Today the presence of missionaries from abroad remains an important part of the Church's life here and throughout Africa. What they have done and continue to do is a sign that *faith in Christ transcends the divisions* of race, nation and culture. At the same time, in Malawi the phase of intense missionary activity from abroad is gradually giving way to another phase. The Catholics of Malawi are assuming an ever greater responsibility for their own local Churches and are *seeking a deeper appreciation of what it means to be both Catholic and African*. It is my hope that the

Special Assembly for Africa of the Synod of Bishops, now in the pre-preparatory stage, will provide an opportunity to examine in depth the various challenges facing the Church on this vast continent, and under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit discern the response that is called for.

2. While we give thanks to God for the freedom with which the Church in Malawi is able to carry out her mission, we also recognize that, as in every country, she sometimes experiences *difficulties and problems* both from within and from without in evangelizing herself and others. This is especially true because she preaches *a Gospel of repentance*. Saint Paul writes: “We are the aroma of Christ to God among those who are being saved and among those who are perishing; to one a fragrance from death to death, to the other a fragrance from life to life. Who is sufficient for these things?” (2Cor. 2, 15-16). And Paul’s answer to this question also applies to us: “*Our sufficiency is from God*” (*Ibid.* 3, 5).

Archbishop Chiona, as part of his kind welcome, has alluded to some of the difficulties and problems that you face. The concerns that we share were also mentioned during your *ad limina* visit to Rome last year. On that occasion I spoke to you about some aspects of the Church in order to confirm you in your mission as pastors and thus give a fresh impetus to evangelization in Malawi (Cfr. Ioannis Pauli PP. II *Allocutio ad Malaviae episcopos in visitatione sacrorum limirum*, die 23 aug. 1988: *Insegnamenti di Giovanni Paolo II*, XI, 3 [1988] 436).

3. Among these aspects, dear brothers, the religious situation in which evangelization takes place here should be given careful consideration. We note first of all that you preach the Gospel in *a society which includes Christians of other Churches and Ecclesial Communities*. As I mentioned during the *ad limina* visit, the common bonds which unite Christians need to be more fully appreciated. These bonds can be strengthened by *common prayer, joint social action and informed theological discussion*.

There is also a significant number of people in Malawi who are followers of Islam. What is required is *mutual respect*, as well as mutual recognition of those things that we share in common. As I said to the young Muslims whom I met in Morocco in 1985: “Christians and Muslims, in general... have badly understood each other, and sometimes, in the past, have opposed and even exhausted each other in polemics and in wars. I believe that today, God invites us to *change our old practices*. We must respect each other, and also we must stimulate each other in good works on the path to God” (Eiusdem *Allocutio Albae domi, in Marochio, ad iuvenes muslimos, die 19 aug. 1985*: *Insegnamenti di Giovanni Paolo II*, VIII, 2 [1985] 497 ss.).

Both among Christians working for unity in obedience to Christ and among believers of different religions, there is no place for *aggressive proselytism which disturbs and hurts*, still less for the use of unworthy methods. For our part we uphold our principles and beliefs, respect for the human person, respect for religious freedom, and faith in the action of the Holy Spirit who works in inscrutable ways to accomplish God’s loving plan for humanity. As “*Evangelii Nuntiandi*” reminds

us: “The Church seeks to convert *solely through the divine power of the message she proclaims*” (Pauli VI *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, 18). Entrusted by her Lord with the fullness of revelation, she bears faithful witness to it in Malawi before other Christians, the members of other world religions, and those who follow the traditional religious practices inherited from their ancestors.

4. The variety of religions in Malawi makes it all the more important that *Catholics should be well informed* about the teachings of their faith and well formed in putting that faith into practice. Through membership in *Small Christian Communities* and in *lay movements and associations*, as well as through the apostolate of catechists, teachers and lay leaders, people can derive a greater sense of belonging and of participating in the Church’s life and mission. In all these many ways the laity are confirmed in their Catholic faith. They are challenged to *grow in holiness*. They are motivated and effectively prepared for the work of evangelization. I encourage you to continue your efforts to ensure adequate religious and moral training for all the faithful, especially the young. By growing in the new life of grace, they will be able to make *an important contribution to your society* through their good example and leadership.

The well-being of Christ’s flock depends in large measure on *the care it receives from its shepherds*, and therefore the formation of the clergy is always of the utmost importance. During your *ad limina* visit I encouraged you to provide suitable priests as instructors and role models for the growing number of seminarians.

After ordination *every priest must continue his spiritual and intellectual formation* if he is to grow in the service of God’s people in union with his bishop. My predecessor Pope Paul VI made mention of this with reference to priestly celibacy: “The priest”, he wrote, “should apply himself above all else to developing, with all the love which grace inspires within him, a close relationship with Christ, exploring its inexhaustible and enriching mystery; he should also acquire an ever deeper sense of the mystery of the Church, apart from which his state of life might run the risk of seeming to be unfounded and incongruous” (Eiusdem *Sacerdotalis Caelibatus*, 75). Bishops have a special responsibility to provide opportunities for this renewal and growth to take place among their priests (Cfr. *Optatam Totius*, 22).

The need for lifelong formation applies to religious *Sisters and Brothers too*. Their special consecration also needs to be deepened so that they will remain deeply rooted in Christ and so that the high ideals of their vocation will continue undimmed in their own hearts and before the people to whom they are a special sign of God’s Kingdom. As bishops you have the role of *leading, challenging and uniting* all those working in the Lord’s vineyard, in a true spirit of ecclesial love and service. May you always rely on God’s power to sustain you in all these tasks (Cfr. *2Thess.* 1, 11).

5. Within the context of evangelization and formation, the Church is deeply committed to the promotion of the dignity of the human person and the good of society through *authentic human*

development. Within the plurality of religious confessions in Malawi this means a commitment to justice and peace in collaboration with all who have true human values at heart. As I stated in my Encyclical Letter “*Sollicitudo Rei Socialis*”: “The condemnation of evils and injustices is also a part of that ministry of evangelization in the social field which is an aspect of the Church’s *prophetic role*. But it should be made clear that proclamation is always more important than condemnation, and the latter cannot ignore the former, which gives it true solidity and the force of higher motivation” (Ioannis Pauli PP. II *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis*, 41). As you rightly pointed out in your letter to Catholics in preparation for my visit, the Kingdom of God means working for *justice, peace and reconciliation* in this world, as well as proclaiming their full realization in the next.

6. My brothers: in ministering to the flock entrusted to your care you have sought to *imitate Christ*, the Good Shepherd, who “lays down his life for the sheep” (*Io.* 10, 11). I commend you as teachers who have given *firm witness to the truths of the Catholic faith*. I also gladly reciprocate the love and affection you show for the Successor of Peter within the universal communion of the Church.

May my visit to Malawi *strengthen your faith and increase your trust* in the Lord. The words of Christ to the first disciples are also addressed to you: “*Fear not, little flock*, for it is your Father’s good pleasure to give you the Kingdom” (*Luc.* 12, 32). And again: “In the world you have tribulation; but be of good cheer, *I have overcome the world*” (*Io.* 16, 33).

For a hundred years, the *Blessed Virgin Mary* has interceded for the Church in this land in answer to the prayers of the first missionaries at Mponda and those who followed them. She watches over each of you, her beloved sons, and all your people. Today I wish to *commend you to her once again*, so that in the midst of every joy and sorrow she may be for you “a sign of sure hope and comfort... until all families of people, whether they are honoured with the name of Christian or whether they still do not know the Saviour, may be happily gathered together in peace and harmony into *one People of God*, for the glory of the Most Holy and Undivided Trinity” (*Lumen Gentium*, 68-69). To all of you I cordially impart my Apostolic Blessing.