



# The Holy See

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**ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS JOHN PAUL II  
TO THE BISHOPS OF THE EPISCOPAL CONFERENCE OF ZIMBABWE  
ON THEIR AD LIMINA VISIT**

*Wednesday, 7 July 1992*

Dear Brother Bishops,<sup>1</sup> I have eagerly looked forward to this meeting with you, the *Bishops of Zimbabwe*, on the occasion of your *ad Limina* visit, and I greet you with the words of Saint Paul: "My love be with you all in Christ Jesus" (1 Cor. 16:24). In welcoming you, I embrace the clergy, the men and women Religious, and the lay faithful of the Archdiocese of Harare and the Dioceses of Bulawayo, Chinhoyi, Gweru, Hwange and Mutare, and in a particular way the new Diocese of Gokwe. Please assure them that the memories of my visit to your country in 1988 have not grown dim. I am grateful to Bishop Reckter for his kind words, and I send a special greeting to Bishop Muchabaiwa and pray for his full recovery. Your presence testifies to the communion in grace which binds you, in the One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church, to the Bishop of Rome, the visible focus of unity in every age. In making your pilgrimage to the tombs of the Apostles you renew your conviction that the concrete historical reality which is the Church traces its origins back to the Twelve and to our Lord Jesus Christ himself, who established this living Body as the channel and instrument of the salvation he won for us in his death and resurrection.<sup>2</sup> This conviction about the Church as the efficacious sign of salvation (Cf. *Lumen Gentium*, 1), is the source of your tireless efforts to carry the Gospel to all those entrusted to your pastoral care. It is the basis of the pressing duty of all the Church's Pastors to inspire and guide the *plantatio Ecclesiae* and the Church's subsequent development in every place and every culture (Cf. *Gaudium et Spes*, 44). My visits to Africa have made me even more clearly aware of the many elements in the social and cultural life of the continent which can be fitting vehicles for the communication of the Gospel and the Church's teaching, just as there are other elements in need of healing through contact with the grace of Christ Jesus. Your desire that all things African should find their true significance in Christ has already led you in your National Episcopal Conference and in the Inter-regional Meeting of Bishops of Southern Africa (IMBISA) to devote much attention to the theme of *inculturation*. Such work by you and your Brother Bishops, in preparation for the

*Synod of Bishops' Special Assembly for Africa*, holds great promise for the future of the People of God. However, in this as in all things, we, the Shepherds of the flock, must always be conscious that we are instruments of the Holy Spirit, who "searches everything, even the depths of God " (1 Cor. 2:10). We need constantly to turn to him and ask him to enlighten our judgment so that we may accurately discern which human realities are in harmony with the truth and grace revealed by Christ Jesus and handed on to us by the Apostles. Inculturation, which is not merely a question of externals, matures when the Good News of Christ's triumph over suffering and death effectively shapes the thinking and everyday life of Christians. It culminates in frequent, joyous and devout participation in the Sacraments of Penance and the Eucharist as central moments of the experience of faith.<sup>3</sup> *The priests* whom God has given you as your co-workers *are consecrated for the building up of the Body of Christ*. How grateful you must be to the many missionary priests who have sown the seed of faith in your part of Africa and have laboured with humble love for the development of its peoples! How great is the challenge faced by your indigenous priests in continuing the same commitment and dedication, and in bringing to maturity the harvest which the Lord awaits among your people! All priests have received a "call" which they and the Church have subjected to testing and discernment during the years of preparation leading to priestly Ordination. After prayer and with trust in God's unfailing grace, they have agreed to renounce home, wife, children, social position and wealth (Cf. Mt.19:29), not grudgingly, but gladly, in order to serve the Kingdom and to devote themselves to their brothers and sisters in Christ. I join you in praying to Jesus the High Priest that he will grant your priests the grace of perseverance and the intimate joy which comes from fidelity to the Redeemer. Since sacramental configuration with Christ the Shepherd and Head of the Church is inseparable from the following of his example of self-giving love, priests must be encouraged to *cultivate genuine asceticism*. In order to remain faithful to the gift of celibacy in perfect continence, it is essential, as the Second Vatican Council says, that they should pray humbly and perseveringly, make use of all the helps available to them for this purpose, and observe the prudent norms of self-discipline tested by the experience of the Church (Cf. *Presbyterorum Ordinis*, 16). With regard to the loneliness which sometimes accompanies the pastoral ministry, it is worth recalling the words of the Encyclical "*Sacerdotalis Caelibatus*" which Paul VI published twenty-five years ago last month: "One cannot sufficiently recommend to priests a life lived in common and directed entirely towards their sacred ministry; the practice of having frequent meetings with a fraternal exchange of ideas, counsel and experience with their brother priests; the movement to form associations which encourage priestly holiness" (Paul VI *Sacerdotalis Caelibatus*, 80; cf. John Paul II, *Pastores Dabo Vobis*, 74).<sup>4</sup> Because the ministry of priests is so essential to the life of the local Church, the *training of your seminarians* should continue to be one of your chief priorities. It is vital that future ministers of the Gospel should be not only well instructed academically but also, at the deepest level, totally dedicated to shepherding their brothers and sisters in the ways of salvation. I am sure that your seminary staff are grateful for the many ways in which you support them in their difficult and demanding task of helping candidates for the priesthood to grow towards the new "identity" conferred at Ordination. They themselves ought to be "convinced" models of priestly life. They must be clear about the behaviour expected from candidates to the priesthood, for it would be an injustice to let

seminarians go forward to Ordination if they have not internally and consciously assimilated the objective demands of the grace which they are to receive. My recent Apostolic Exhortation "Pastores Dabo Vobis" urges the whole Catholic community to have "a correct and in-depth awareness of the nature and mission of the ministerial priesthood" (Cf. John Paul II, Pastores Dabo Vobis, 11). I hope that you and your priests and seminarians will make this document a frequent theme of reading and study.<sup>5</sup> One of the great joys of your ministry is surely the support you receive from the *men and women Religious working in your local Churches*. The whole history of the Church in Zimbabwe is linked to the courageous and generous service of the members of Religious Institutes. Through the testimony of their way of life and their loving service, they have been outstanding heralds of the Gospel, especially in the fields of health-care and education. The recent centenary celebrations of the arrival in the region of the Jesuits and of the Dominican Missionary Sisters of the Sacred Heart were yet another reminder of the power with which God has lovingly been at work, generation after generation, bringing forth from the labours of his zealous servants an abundant harvest for his Kingdom (Cf. 1 Cor. 3:6). I would ask you to convey to the Religious of your Dioceses my gratitude and esteem, and my hope that they will always be faithful witnesses to the Lord in the midst of his people.<sup>6</sup> I wish to refer briefly to another of your weighty responsibilities as Bishops: namely, *Zimbabwe's Catholic schools*. In many ways you are personally involved in guiding and directing the educational apostolate, and in making sure that the necessary means are available (Cf. Code of Canon Law, can. 794, § 2). I have great hope that the forthcoming *Catechism of the Catholic Church* will be a substantial help to all Bishops in ensuring that the fullness of the Church's faith is taught to children and young adults in Catholic schools and religious education programmes. The success of your efforts depends upon stimulating the generous collaboration of all those who work with you in this field, and upon maintaining the high standards of the institutions and organizations through which the work of education is carried out. I am pleased to note that you hope to strengthen even further that cooperation with the civil authorities which will enable the Church's schools to serve the needs of the nation while *maintaining their specific Catholic identity and their rightful autonomy*.<sup>7</sup> Catechists and lay teachers carry on, as the Second Vatican Council reminds us, "a distinguished form of the apostolate of the laity (Apostolicam Actuositatem, 30)", and so they must have the initial and continuous formation they need in order to do this well. They should have a deep awareness of their role within the ecclesial community and of the importance of their contribution to the life of the nation. The laity, because of their vocation to be the salt of the earth and the light of the world (Cf. Mt. 5:13; 13:33), should be well-grounded in the Church's social doctrine and, through their presence in public life, contribute to strengthening the fabric of society through their diligence and industriousness, reliability and fidelity in interpersonal relations, and courage in undertaking responsibilities in the fields of economics and politics (Cf. John Paul II, Centesimus Annus, 32). Words and deeds of justice, peace and solidarity serve your country at a time when it is facing serious challenges. Christian wisdom about the human person and about the way to build a society worthy of man can be a fruitful point of reference for Zimbabwe's efforts to adjust its economic structures, to respond to the grave consequences of the present drought and to raise the ethical climate of business and social life. It is therefore right for you the Pastors to speak out

clearly regarding the moral and ethical implications of policies and actions, and thus to place the insights of *Catholic social doctrine at the service of the wider community*.<sup>8</sup> The laity's task of ordering the temporal sphere according to the law of Christ, as I noted in "Christifideles Laici", "begins in marriage and in the family" (John Paul II, *Christifideles Laici*, 40). Because the integrity and worth of the family are increasingly threatened in our age, your Pastoral Letter of last year, *Save Our Families*, was most timely. I fully share your stated concerns about the way urbanization – which itself is often the result of economic depression – and secularization are corroding the strength of family bonds and replacing many traditional values. The anonymity of the city, the absence of parental control, the often ruthless competitive ethic of the world of work, all contribute to the alienation of many young people from their families. You are rightly concerned at the imposition of demographic control programmes, at the increase of abortion and the spread of AIDS. The initiatives being implemented in your Dioceses to defend and foster marriage and the family—especially providing engaged couples with a sound catechesis in preparation for their new life together—are extremely valuable. They are very helpful for the growth of the Christian community and for a true inculturation of the faith. The strengthening of marriage and the family truly constitutes an important service to the well-being of the whole nation.<sup>9</sup> Dear Brothers, I began these remarks by noting that your visit *ad Limina Apostolorum* is a profession of faith in the Church. It is also an occasion for you to renew your commitment to the great and *urgent task of evangelization*. Through episcopal ordination you are members of the College which Christ established so that until the end of time the Church, his beloved Bride, would never lack an Apostle's care. If we read the Acts of the Apostles attentively, we see that one of the hallmarks of the Apostles' service to the Church was the boldness with which they proclaimed the Gospel. After Pentecost, when the Holy Spirit filled them with light and joy, they tirelessly went forth to proclaim that in Christ Jesus God's Kingdom had come into this world (Cf. Acts 2:28, 30-31). I ask our Saviour to confirm you in that same confidence and sense of urgency. It is my prayer that the Special Assembly for Africa of the Synod of Bishops will do a great deal to enhance missionary zeal throughout your cherished continent. As the whole Church in Zimbabwe prepares for that important event, may the Holy Spirit increase in your hearts that steadfast faith which remains undaunted in the face of every obstacle, a faith based on the unshakable conviction of the power of God's word to save (Cf. Rom. 1:16). I commend you and all those whom you serve to the loving care of the Virgin Mother of God, and I impart my Apostolic Blessing.

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