



The Holy See

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

Monday, 11 May 1992

Dear Brothers in the Episcopate,

1. With intense joy I welcome you, *the Bishops of Uganda*, on the occasion of your visit *ad Limina Apostolorum*. I have looked forward to this meeting, for you and the Churches entrusted to your care are frequently in my prayer.

I am grateful to you, Archbishop Wamala, for the kind words offered in the name of all. In being with you today, I draw ever closer in bonds of affection to the priests, men and women religious, and lay faithful of your Dioceses. Assure them that the sufferings of their nation are close to the heart of the Successor of Peter, and that *he is one with them in the peace of Christ*, whose victory over sin and death the Church solemnly celebrates during this Easter season.

Since your Conference's last visit in 1988, the new Dioceses of Kasese and Kotido have been established, and this is a sign that the Church of God is taking ever firmer root among you. For this we give thanks to our heavenly Father who cares lovingly for all his children.

Your visit brings to mind Cardinal Nsubuga and the others of our brethren who have completed their pilgrim journey on earth. I also remember the missionaries and your own Ugandan faithful who have lost their lives in the violence which has beset your nation.

I join with you in praying that the Good Shepherd will welcome them all into his glorious peace.

2. In considering your weighty responsibilities for the care of God's people, I am particularly aware of the trials and hardships which have hindered your episcopal ministry. The restoration of civic

order to many parts of Uganda has not yet led to a full healing of the *painful memories of strife and violence*. And in some areas the people have not yet been able to put behind them the suffering and insecurity resulting from the activities of hostile forces.

I know that you and your predecessors have made it your concern *to call to account those who violate the human dignity* of their fellow citizens. In this way the Church shows the depths of her evangelical fidelity to Christ, the Prince of Peace, who taught us to love both friend and foe. You have shown love for those who are innocent victims by speaking in their defence. Those who have sinned against justice you have called back to the path which will lead to reconciliation with God and neighbour. Zeal for teaching and defending the moral order established by the Creator has been the foundation of all your efforts to educate your flock about the rights of all persons, especially women, children, refugees and the disadvantaged.

Given your role as authentic teachers of the Church's social doctrine, particular mention should be made of your contribution to the *process of preparing a new Constitution* for your country. In your Collective Pastoral Letter and your lengthy Memorandum on this matter, you rightly seek to illuminate the contemporary realities of Ugandan society by the wisdom of God, and you call upon the faithful to play an active and responsible part in bringing this important undertaking to completion. Here, as in all phases of civic life, it belongs specifically to the laity to direct the course of events in the temporal order through political action. Bishops and priests are always ready to assist them in this task, especially through the formation of Christian consciences, but Pastors will never want to usurp the *role of the lay faithful to work for the common good in a spirit of service* (Cf. *Gaudium et Spes*, 76; John Paul II, *Christifideles Laici*, 42).

3. In reviewing your quinquennial reports, I note that initiatives for social and economic development have not been able to keep pace with the needs of the Ugandan people. While the greatest responsibility for improving this situation lies with Ugandans themselves, I have often appealed to the international community to give effective help. I will continue to insist on the claim which the peoples of Africa make upon the solidarity of their more fortunate brothers and sisters, so that every human being will gain a proper share in the benefits of creation.

The Uganda Episcopal Conference has indicated that one of the pressing social concerns requiring a concerted response from the Christian community is *the assistance needed by refugees* in the North and in the South of your country. I encourage you to seek ways of providing pastoral care to these brothers and sisters crying out for human and spiritual solidarity. Generosity to strangers who find themselves homeless in a foreign land is always a remarkable expression of authentic Christian love, for charity which reaches out beyond the bounds of one's own family or race, tribe or nation—until it even encompasses one's enemies (Cf. Matt. 5:44) – is the law of the New Covenant and the sign of the new creation.

4. A second and even more *dramatic challenge* facing the Church in Uganda is the *AIDS*

epidemic. The data clearly indicate the gravity of the crisis, a crisis touching not only those individuals who are bearers of the virus but also the communities to which they belong.

Here one must keep foremost in mind the children, spouses and other family members of those affected. Everything that the Church in Uganda has already done and is pledged to do in response, as you outlined in your Pastoral Letter on this matter, is a means for the Spirit of Christ to make present in the world the victory over sin and death won for us by the Cross.

In the struggle against this disease it is the special duty of the Church's Bishops to point out that every act aimed at prevention or care must be based on *a clear understanding of man's true dignity and transcendent destiny*. On the one hand, you must encourage a way of life imbued with a love which transcends self and is capable of much self-sacrifice. On the other hand, the care to be given to those suffering from AIDS and HIV is an expression of the solidarity which binds the members of God's family to the sick (Cf. John Paul II, *Address at the International Conference of the Pontifical Council for the Pastoral Assistance to Health Care Workers*, 15 November 1989). Just as Mary stood at the foot of the Cross to share in her Son's agony, so the Church stands with those who are affected by AIDS. In the loving solicitude of the Pastors and lay faithful who care for the sick and visit them, the Church breaks through the isolation so often experienced by those who suffer. In the *Gospel of hope and love* which Christians proclaim by their words and even more eloquently by their deeds, the sick are enabled to discover the deepest meaning of their sufferings in union with the mystery of Calvary and to recognize that in the Risen Christ they are led to be no longer "victims" but rather victors over the forces of sin and evil.

5. The interval since your last ad Limina visit has seen the publication of my Encyclical Letter "[Redemptoris Missio](#)", in which I invite the Church *to renew her missionary commitment* (Cf. John Paul II, [Redemptoris Missio](#), 2). It is my hope that you and your co-workers have found in this reflection on the Church's mission *ad gentes* a confirmation of your many efforts to answer the call of the Second Vatican Council to "spread to all parts of the world the kingdom of Christ... and... prepare the way for his coming" ([Ad Gentes](#), 1). The fact that a significant portion of the Ugandan population has not yet heard the Gospel, and the rapid increase in the number of young people, are indications that the Lord's injunction to go and preach (Cf. Mk.16:15) has lost none of its urgency in your land.

Six years ago in your Pastoral Letter entitled *With a New Heart and a New Spirit*, you noted the urgency of missionary activity aimed at young people and the religious formation of children and young adults. I earnestly pray that God will strengthen you in this important service. The religious instruction of children and young people in the schools and in the parishes is a crucial element of the pastoral care which they receive from the Church, and so every effort which you make to ensure the completeness and effectiveness of catechesis by improving the quality of instruction and the training of teachers is to be commended. I ask you to give the assurance of my gratitude to the Religious and catechists engaged in this vital task.

Another great area of concern for the Church in Uganda is *the pastoral care of families*. I share your distress when you see how many of your flock are prevented from full participation in the Eucharist because their marital situation falls short of Christ's expectations for his followers, and when you observe how deficiencies in family life harm both the Church and society. I am confident that you will continue to do all in your power to promote initiatives which support Christian husbands and wives in their vocation and which uphold faithful and permanent monogamous marriage as the foundation of family life.

6. God has given you the *members of your presbyterate* to be your chief co-workers in fulfilling your duties as Pastors. The strong commitment of the Uganda Episcopal Conference to the permanent formation of priests is a clear recognition of this fact. Institutions such as the *National Diocesan Clergy Renewal Centre* are meant to help priests "rekindle the gift of God which is within them" (Cf. 2 Tim.1:6) and sustain them in a process of continual conversion. In this deepening of the priests' identification with Christ the High Priest, nothing can ever replace the personal role which you play. May you always communicate to your priests a share of your own zeal for bringing hearts to Christ. Support your priests in their resolve to be faithful. Bind them ever closer to yourselves by the fraternal and fatherly solicitude which you show for them, especially in the first years after ordination.

You have been particularly blessed by God with an abundance of *candidates for the priesthood and for the religious life*. As a result, the rapid increase in the number of seminarians is straining the seminary resources currently available. In any project for expanding facilities a major concern must be to ensure that there will be a sufficient number of exemplary priests, well prepared for their responsibilities in priestly formation, to staff these institutions. The fact that the Uganda Episcopal Conference holds a second Plenary Assembly each year especially for the purpose of reviewing your seminaries speaks eloquently of your serious concern to improve these programmes of priestly training. I entrust to you the latest Post-Synodal Exhortation, "[Pastores Dabo Vobis](#)". I hope that, together with the Congregation for Evangelization's "Guidelines on Formation in Major Seminaries" and all the other relevant conciliar and post-conciliar documents, it will help you to achieve this goal.

Men and women religious, whose witness and activities are so significant in your Dioceses, likewise have a special claim on your pastoral care. The voice of the shepherd should encourage them to lead exemplary lives of chastity, poverty and obedience, all signs of the supernatural charity which binds them in communities which should transcend any factionalism and be marked by integrity of life. The Superiors of these Religious Communities especially need the Bishop's support in developing sound formation programmes and in providing their members with the assistance – both material and spiritual – which they need in order to remain faithful to their call from Christ.

7. Dear Brothers: it is my hope that during this pilgrimage to Rome the Holy Spirit will stir up in you

the grace which you received through the laying on of hands. God has made you fellow workers with Peter and has sent you to preach like Paul. At the altars built upon their tombs you present your good works and your resolutions to serve Christ's family faithfully. Have no fear, for from all your endeavours God will bring forth abundant fruit. For my part I commend you and all those entrusted to your pastoral care to the loving protection of Mary, Mother of the Church, and to the intercession of your Martyrs Saint Charles Lwanga and his Companions. In the love of Christ I impart my Apostolic Blessing.

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