



The Holy See

PASTORAL JOURNEY
TO BENIN, UGANDA AND KHARTOUM (SUDAN)

MEETING WITH THE BISHOPS
OF THE UGANDA EPISCOPAL CONFERENCE

ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS JOHN PAUL II

Kampala (Uganda)
Sunday, 7 February 1993

Dear Brother Bishops,

1. This Pastoral Visit to Uganda, which I have looked forward to so eagerly, can in some way be said to reciprocate your *ad Limina* visit to Rome last May. I thank you once again for your invitation and for the careful preparations you have made in order that this pilgrimage may strengthen the faith of the Church in Uganda. For the kind words of welcome that Archbishop Wamala spoke on your behalf, I am also very grateful.

It has been a joy for me to spend this Sunday in offering Christ's love to his people in Uganda—and in receiving such love in return. Like all Bishops, I too must preach the Gospel, "for necessity is laid upon me" (1 Cor. 9:16). As Pastors, our supreme duty is to make known "the unsearchable riches of Christ" (Eph. 3:8) on every occasion the Lord gives us, and today in our offering of the Holy Eucharist at the Martyrs' Shrine we have fulfilled this obligation, for through our priestly service the Lord himself has spoken to his people and has nourished them with the Bread of Heaven (cf. *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, 7). Celebrating the Saviour's Death and Resurrection, as well as meeting our brothers and sisters of other Christian denominations, and comforting the sick, in imitation of the Good Samaritan, were truly ways to be about the work of the Father.

Yet even in the midst of much activity, the Lord invites us to moments such as this, moments of

reflection and fraternal communion, so that we can praise the Father for what he is accomplishing through us and rekindle that pastoral charity appropriate to our Episcopal ministry.

2. My presence in Uganda evokes the memory of the Pastoral Visit of *another pilgrim Pope*, my beloved predecessor Paul VI, who was the first Successor of Peter in modern times to set foot on African soil. The four of you whom he ordained Bishop in 1969 are a living link between that historic Visit and this evening's meeting. At that ordination ceremony Pope Paul spoke of the sacred duties of Bishops, who receive "an extraordinary outpouring of the Holy Spirit" so that they may be "vehicles and instruments of the love of Christ for men". "Bishops are ministers", the Pope observed, "they are servants; they are not for themselves but for others.... They are for the Church, and to the Church they offer all their life (cf. 2 Cor. 12:15)... For it is of you, Beloved Brothers, Bishops of newborn or very young Churches, that pastoral love is required in a superior degree" (Paul VI, *Homily on the occasion of the episcopal ordinations in Kampala*, 1 August 1969). This *pastoral* love, which the Pope spoke of with such feeling, is a sharing in the love of the Son of God himself (Cf. John Paul II *Pastores Dabo Vobis*, 23). The gift of self which the Holy Spirit enables those who receive Holy Orders to make is a participation in the self-giving of the Good Shepherd in laying down his life for his flock (Cf. Jn. 10: 11). This pastoral charity is the foundation for any good we are able to accomplish in the Church, because the communion of love which binds together the members of Christ's Body can only be built up in love.

3. My visit to Uganda is an opportunity to experience in a particularly vivid way our communion in the Holy Trinity. It is likewise, as you indicate in the *Pastoral Letter* published in preparation for my visit, an opportunity for recommitment to the deeds of faith, hope and love, which bear witness to the Risen Saviour. Your identification of the specific areas in which the faithful of Uganda are being challenged to live up to their Christian vocation is a true reading of "the signs of the times" in your Nation. In this you are continuing the renewal set in progress by the Fathers of the Second Vatican Council. This initiative of your Episcopal Conference seems to me of such importance for the life of the Church in Uganda that I would like to *draw from that Pastoral Letter some points* for my remarks this evening, reflections which are intended to complement or expand upon the matters discussed during your recent visit *ad Limina*.

4. Your *Pastoral Letter* deals at length with the many ways in which the *Catholics of Uganda* can make their contribution to the civil order. Your call for renewed vigour in building up the Nation comes at a crucial point in its history. As the people of Uganda emerge from a period of violence and social upheaval, they are seeking *to reconstruct the Nation*, and so there is a pressing need for the members of the Catholic community to give themselves generously to deeds of solidarity.

Here, as in every land or nation, the most significant goods to be reinforced in the life of the people are the spiritual and moral ones. Without these they will not experience a "development" worthy of the name. Among the essential components of a sound civic life are such things as the recognition of the dignity of every human person, respect for the rights which are rooted in that dignity –

especially the right to life and the right to religious liberty – and an effective commitment to secure the well-being of the poor, the weak and the defenceless (Cf. John Paul II *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis*, 33. 42). To build a society which treats these realities as a treasured patrimony is to build the culture of peace, a milieu in which citizens will find it all the easier to achieve the ends for which they were created.

For most of the period since Uganda's independence, these spiritual goods have been—sad to say—under assault by reason of the strife which often pitted those in power against the people and which set citizen against citizen. The fact that the Nation is emerging from the shadows of those years does not mean that all dangers to the culture of peace have passed. Even now the temptation to keep alive and nurture past grievances can pose a threat to society's well-being. At this moment in Uganda's history, therefore, it falls to the *Church* to answer with ever greater fidelity God's injunction to be a *reconciling community* (Cf. John Paul II *Reconciliatio et Paenitentia*, 8). The members of the People of God live with a profound sense that they have been forgiven much and that they should forgive generously in return (Cf. Mt. 18: 23-35). This awareness should bear fruit in a readiness on the part of all the faithful of Uganda to put aside hatred and thus testify to the truth that the spirit of mercy is stronger than the spirit of revenge. In this regard we cannot fail to mention the specific role of Catholic lay leaders. To them are entrusted the affairs of the temporal order: politics, economics, the direction of society (Cf. *Lumen Gentium*, 31; John Paul II *Christifideles Laici*, 15). In these fields they "are called upon to engage directly in dialogue or to work for dialogue aimed at reconciliation" (Cf. John Paul II *Reconciliatio et Paenitentia*, 25), and in Uganda the need for these steps towards restoring harmony is indeed pressing.

No one, of course, should imagine that by inviting the Catholic citizens of Uganda to work for community renewal you are implying that this duty is theirs alone. No, the cooperation of Christians of all Churches and Ecclesial Communities with one another, as well as with followers of other religions, is not only welcome, but indispensable (Cf. John Paul II *Message for the World Day of Peace, 1992*, 6-7).

5. *Bringing the light of the Gospel* to all men and women is the fundamental obligation placed by Christ upon his disciples (Cf. Mt 28, 19; John Paul II *Redemptoris missio*, 71). Saint Paul's words in the Second Letter to the Corinthians, "We... believe, so we speak" (2Cor. 4, 13), point to the fact that *spreading the word of God is an essential part of the act of faith in that word*. Under the direction of the Bishops, the whole People of God shares in the work of proclaiming that his Kingdom has come. As indicated in your Pastoral Letter, there is a wide scope for this work of proclaiming the Gospel here in Uganda. A sizeable portion of the population has not yet received the light of Christ. At the same time there is a need to confirm in their Catholic faith those who are tempted to drift away from the Church and abandon the demands of a sound spirituality in an unproductive search for "visions" and "cures" or by joining newly-established sects. With a renewed commitment on the part of all the faithful in this Nation, the seed will be sown in

abundance and will grow in the soil of Uganda, and from the sowing God will produce an abundant harvest (Cf. Mt. 13: 8; 1Cor. 3: 7).

6. Regarding what you wrote in your *Pastoral Letter* about a *recommitment* to continuing the *inculturation* of the Christian faith, I am very hopeful the work of the Special Assembly for Africa of the Synod of Bishops will throw new light on this difficult and delicate task. Wisely, you echo the Fathers of the Council in pointing out that the origin and exemplar for this inculturation is the mystery of the Incarnation (Cf. *Ad Gentes*, 22). In the union of God and man in Christ, nothing of the Divine Truth was lost, and Christ's every utterance and every action were nothing less than manifestations of the Only-begotten Son (Cf. Council of Ephesus, Denz.-Schönm. 255; *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, n. 468). All attempts in our day to express this ineffable Word in the cultural realities of a people or race must likewise ensure that nothing is lost from or added to the revelation of God in Jesus Christ. Only those who truly know Christ, and truly know their own cultural inheritance, can discern how the Divine Word may be fittingly presented through the medium of that culture. It follows that there can be no authentic inculturation which does not proceed from contemplating the Word of God and from growing in likeness to him through holiness of life. And in the end, it is for the Magisterium of the Church to judge which new voices have succeeded in expressing the timeless mystery of the Triune God and his love for us.

Because the recently-published *Catechism of the Catholic Church* offers a complete and systematic presentation of the riches of the Good News kept "for ever whole and alive within the Church" (*Dei Verbum*, 7), it represents a *providential support in the task of inculturation*. The Catechism is "a sure norm for teaching the faith" (John Paul II, *Fidei Depositum*, 4), and so I am confident that you and all who labour with you will find it a clear and reliable guide in preaching that Jesus is our one and only Mediator with the Father, in teaching about the Church's role as sign and instrument of salvation for all mankind, in expounding the moral demands of the life of grace, and in explaining the relation of non-Christian religions to Revelation.

7. I fully agree with the emphasis you have placed in your *Pastoral Letter* on the need to strengthen family life. Indeed, the strengthening of *family life* is an essential step in renewing society, for it is in the home that a society's culture is transmitted and nurtured and its future determined. The State as well as the Church must make the protection and advancement of the family one of its highest priorities.

The Christian *families* of this Nation have a crucial role to play in civil society, yet their task is likewise an *essentially ecclesial one*. It is helpful to remember that the Christian family is rightly called a "Church in miniature (*Ecclesia domestica*)", for it is "grafted into the mystery of the Church to such a degree as to become a sharer, in its own way, in the saving mission proper to the Church" (John Paul II, *Familiaris Consortio*, 49). In this communion established by the Sacrament of Matrimony, spouses become like the Church – a saved community which is also called to be a saving community through sharing Christ's love with others, first and foremost with the sons and

daughters given them by God (Cf. *ibid.*). The Church's pastoral action must be specifically directed to helping Christian parents fulfil this noble vocation. At times it may be necessary to remind your co-workers that the pastoral care of families is not a question of new and sometimes superficial programmes, but is the result of a penetrating catechesis which leads couples and their children to a deeper faith, to a more wholehearted participation in the sacraments – especially Penance and the Holy Eucharist – to a more fervent life of prayer and to a more generous service of each other.

By *praying together* the members of a Christian family clearly express that their communion is not limited to this world but is a sharing in the eternal communion of the Holy Trinity. Such prayer likewise teaches children the ways of discipleship. When parents and children join together in praising and thanking God every day—in times of joy as well as in moments of anxiety and grief, the young learn to entrust their whole lives to the Heavenly Father (Cf. *ibid.*, 60). No pastor of souls can fail to insist on the importance of prayer in the Christian life of the faithful.

8. Your *Pastoral Letter* gives special prominence to the role which the youth of Uganda can play in *proclaiming the Good News of Salvation*. There is in this an echo of the sentiments of the Fathers of the Second Vatican Council: "Young people should become the primary and direct apostles to the young...; children also have an apostolic activity proper to them" (Cf. *Apostolicam Actuositatem*, 12). Since "even before activity, mission means witness and a way of life that shines out to others" (John Paul II, *Redemptoris Missio*, 26), those who have yet to reach maturity are nonetheless very capable of showing the beauty of a genuinely Christian approach to life. Insofar as they are helped to respond to the grace of Baptism, young people's enthusiasm for the future makes them effective witnesses to the truth that "in everything God works for good with those who love him" (Rom. 8: 28). Similarly, that youthful energy for helping others becomes a reflection of the Lord's own example of being the servant of all (Cf. Mt. 20: 28). Such a testimony to the love of Christ will not fail to attract others to him.

The missionary apostolate of Uganda's young Catholics needs to be channelled through parish groups and youth movements and associations. Here you will need to discern what is sound and useful, and what forms of association truly reflect your people's character. Elsewhere I have expressed my conviction that the Holy Spirit is preparing a "new springtime for the Gospel" (Cf. John Paul II, *Redemptoris Missio*, 86). We should not be surprised if he uses those who are "little" (Cf. 1Cor. 1: 26, 29), those in the springtime of their lives, to accomplish his purpose.

9. Dear Brothers, today I rejoice as a pilgrim who has reached the goal of his journey to Uganda: the Holy Shrine of the Martyrs, the very ground made sacred by their deaths. To have offered the Holy Eucharist there with you and your people is a consummate joy, for it is truly right and just for us to make present the Sacrifice of Calvary on the spot where the glory of our Saviour's Passion shone out in the members of his Mystical Body (Cf. Phil. 3: 10). I will remember the experiences of this day, and that recollection will often become a prayer to Saint Charles Lwanga and his Companions for the beloved people of Uganda. "Indeed, the Lord is good" (Cf. Ps. 34(33): 8) to

have brought me to Uganda.

Commending you and all your priests, Religious and lay faithful to the loving intercession of Our Lady of Hope, I impart my Apostolic Blessing as a pledge of love and peace in Christ her Son.