



The Holy See

APOSTOLIC JOURNEY
OF HIS HOLINESS JOHN PAUL II
TO CAMEROON, SOUTH AFRICA AND KENYA

SECOND SESSION OF THE SPECIAL ASSEMBLY FOR AFRICA
OF THE SYNOD OF BISHOPS

ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS JOHN PAUL II

*Cathedral of Christ the King in Johannesburg (South Africa)
Sunday, 17 September 1995*

*Dear Brother Bishops,
Priests, Deacons and Seminarians,
Dear Religious Sisters and Brothers,
Members of the Laity,
Dear African Friends,*

1. I lift my heart in praise and thanksgiving to God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, for bringing me to Africa in order to celebrate the providential gift that is the Special Assembly for Africa of the Synod of Bishops. Here in Johannesburg in South Africa, in union with the whole Church in this southern part of the Continent, we are meeting to promulgate the Apostolic Exhortation "Ecclesia in Africa" which contains the proposals made by the Synod Fathers at the end of the working session in Rome in April and May 1994. With the apostolic authority which belongs to the Successor of Peter, I present to the whole Church of God in Africa and Madagascar, the insights, reflections and resolutions of the Synod. I do so with the same spiritual joy and trust in the Lord which inspired the Bishops to call it "the Synod of Resurrection, the Synod of Hope" (Synod of Bishops, Special Assembly for Africa, *Nuntius ad Populum Dei*, 2: *L'Osservatore Romano*, 8 May 1994, p. 4). They knew in whom they had placed their trust: "*Christ our Hope is alive; we shall live!*" (*Ibid.*). Yes, *Africa shall live!*

2. After two thousand years, the proclamation of the Gospel of salvation in our Lord Jesus Christ remains the overriding and all-embracing objective of the Church's life and mission. In the changing circumstances of time and place, the Holy Spirit guides and renews the ecclesial community to make known and communicate the newness of life in Christ Jesus (cf. Rom. 6:4). *The inspiration and renewal which the Spirit brought to the whole Church through the Second Vatican Council, he has now further clarified and enhanced for the special circumstances of Africa through the Synod.* The Spirit impels the Church in Africa to be "a Church of mission which itself becomes missionary" (John Paul II, *Ecclesia in Africa*, 8).

In reflecting on the power of the Gospel to save (cf. Rom. 1:16), the Bishops of the Synod for Africa have focused on truly important questions and have worked together to find appropriate responses. In this sense the fruits of the Synod set out in the Apostolic Exhortation constitute a kind of *pastoral plan of action for the Church in Africa* as she seeks to be faithful to her vocation and mission, and as she serves suffering humanity in this fluid and turbulent period of history.

3. At the Synod, the Bishops testified to the resilient faith and steadfast commitment of their communities. They described in vivid terms the conditions in which they and their helpers daily tend to the pastoral care of their people. Often, their personal experience obliged them to speak of the "particularly worrying situations" in which most Africans live: "the widespread deterioration in the standard of living, the insufficiency of means for educating the young, the lack of elementary health and social services with the resulting persistence of endemic diseases, the spread of the terrible scourge of AIDS, the heavy and often unbearable burden of international debt, the horror of fratricidal wars fomented by unscrupulous arms trafficking, the shameful and pitiable spectacle of refugees and displaced persons" (John Paul II, *Ecclesia in Africa*, 114). *The Synod's moral judgment on this situation is both compassionate and severe.* Like Christ who had compassion on the multitudes, the Synod heard the anguished cry of the powerless and defenceless. Like Christ who showed his indignation at the money-changers in the Temple, the Bishops denounced the evil policies and actions which deprive so many of their brothers and sisters of their material and spiritual well-being, of their human dignity and rights, and not infrequently, of life itself.

The Synod Fathers clearly understood that the situation of dehumanization and oppression affecting their peoples presents the ecclesial community with a *crisis* – in the original sense of a "judgment" – and a challenge: *the crisis of conversion, holiness and integrity*, in order to be a credible witness; *the challenge of developing the full potential of the Gospel message of divine adoption* in order to free the men and women of our time from sin and the "structures of sin".

4. It is true that Africa has a long, sad history of exploitation at the hands of others (cf. John Paul II, *Eucharistic Concelebration for the Opening of the Special Assembly of the Synod of Bishops for Africa*, 7 [10 April 1994]). Today this situation continues in new forms, including the crushing burden of debts, unjust trading conditions, the dumping of harmful wastes, and the overly demanding conditions imposed by structural adjustment programmes. Not only the Church, but

also many international bodies, including the United Nations Summit for Social Development held in Copenhagen in March of this year, have called for aid programmes and economic policies to promote real social progress and development, through efforts to eradicate poverty, stimulate employment and help all sectors of society to take a more active part in the public debate on policies.

There is one other factor affecting Africa which needs serious attention: *the international arms trade*. I make my own the recommendations of the Synod, appealing to countries that sell arms to Africa to desist, and asking African governments "to move away from huge military expenditures and put the emphasis on the education, health and well-being of their people" (cf. John Paul II, *Ecclesia in Africa*, 118).

5. Com efeito, é antes de mais aos próprios Africanos que o Sínodo se dirige com a maior urgência e esperança, *porque eles mesmos devem ser os principais arquitectos de um futuro melhor*. Dentre os males que mereceram unânime condenação dos Padres Sinodais, sobressai um pela especial gravidade das suas consequências sobre os Africanos: as *divisões e tensões étnicas*, que, às vezes, levam a crimes nefastos, como aconteceu recentemente em Ruanda e no Burundi.

A Igreja em África está profundamente ciente do desafio de tais divisões, sentindo a premente responsabilidade de ajudar a remediar as suas consequências.

O Sínodo não poderia esquecer os milhões de refugiados, e o número ainda maior de deslocados em terra africana. Catástrofes naturais, carestias, guerras e erros humanos criaram uma multidão de pessoas que perderam tudo na vida, e cujos sofrimentos parecem não ter fim. Não é uma questão de estatísticas. *Eles são nossos irmãos e irmãs*. Eles necessitam da ajuda da comunidade internacional. Eles precisam ajuda da mesma África. E as causas da sua tragédia imensa têm de ser corrigidas.

Merecem toda a nossa gratidão aqueles que cuidam das necessidades dos refugiados. Penso sobretudo em tantos Religiosos e voluntários que, vencendo todas as adversidades, se prodigalizam em socorrer e em valer a essas pessoas infelizes.

Da mesma forma, com a viva consciência de que "muitos problemas do Continente são consequência de um modo de governar frequentemente viciado pela corrupção" (*Ibid.*, 110), o Sínodo incita a Igreja em África a fazer todo o possível para despertar as consciências, e fomentar a determinação de mudar. De facto, o Sínodo elevou ao Céu preces por líderes honestos e capazes, sabendo que, "para conciliar profundas diferenças, superar antigos ressentimentos de natureza étnica e integrar-se numa ordem mundial complexa, se exige grande habilidade na arte de governar" (*Ibid.*). A pergunta que todos os responsáveis pela vida pública em África devem colocar a si próprios, relativamente às políticas por eles adoptadas, é esta: *que*

consequências terão para o povo? E, especialmente, que consequências terão para o pobre? Um modelo de crescimento económico, que não seja capaz de satisfazer as reais e imediatas necessidades do povo directamente implicado, é uma violência contra o respeito devido à dignidade desse mesmo povo.

Uma característica do novo clima político e social, em grande parte da África, é a exigência crescente dos povos de maior respeito pela função da lei, e de maior participação democrática na vida dos seus próprios países. Certamente, isto representa um passo importante no justo caminho. É um processo que deve ser ajudado e estimulado com a educação da opinião pública para as responsabilidades da democracia com o apoio à necessária e pacífica transformação das instituições. Boa parte da esperança por um futuro melhor está pendente do modo como este processo conseguirá comprometer o povo em empenhar-se na edificação do seu destino nacional.

6. Africa challenges the Church, for it is her universal mission to enlighten, accompany and encourage peoples everywhere along the path of their complete liberation, to their salvation in Jesus Christ, the Son of God and Redeemer of Man. Yes, only when the message of salvation – the "power of the Gospel to save" (cf. Rom. 1:16)– takes root, through catechesis, prayer and worship, in the hearts of individuals and in the core of their culture will the ecclesial community effectively render *a truly prophetic service to society*. When the Synod Fathers called the Church in Africa to be ever more actively involved in "the struggle for the defence of personal dignity, for justice and social peace, for human promotion, liberation and integral human development of all people and of every individual" (John Paul II *Ecclesia in Africa*, 69), they were giving voice to the unbreakable link between evangelization and human advancement (cf. *ibid.*, 68). There can be no dichotomy between the commandment to love the Lord God with our whole heart and soul, and the commandment to love our neighbour as ourselves, and therefore to engage in actions on behalf of justice and social transformation.

For the same reason the Special Assembly emphasized the importance of ecumenical dialogue with other Churches and Ecclesial Communities, as well as with African Traditional Religion and Islam (cf. *ibid.*, 49). In this way the Church effectively contributes to promoting the fraternal coexistence of peoples, over and above ethnic, cultural, national, or social divisions.

7. Dear Brother Bishops, and members of the Church, the Family of God: I have wished to hold this celebration phase of the Synod on African soil in order to express *the solidarity of the universal Church with the particular Churches of this Continent* in the great challenges before you. My presence is meant to re-affirm the universal Church's commitment to this Continent. I repeat what I said on a previous visit: "Christianity in some regions goes back to the very dawn of the Christian era. In other places it has arrived more recently. In every case, the Church has been actively involved in educating the young, in caring for the sick, in promoting the human and spiritual development of Africa's peoples. She has done so, not to seek a position for herself, and

much less to impose a foreign way of life on Africans. She continues today in her apostolate and good works *in order to bear witness to the fundamental hope which sustains her: the hope that all mankind will grow in unity and reach an ever greater communion with God*" (John Paul II, *Farewell Ceremony at the International Airport of Khartoum*, 3 [10 Feb. 1993]).

Africa! Giving voice to the Synod, I solemnly assure you that the Church, incarnate in the lives of your own sons and daughters, will continue to share the burden of your problems and the difficulties of your march towards a better future. She will not fail to sustain and encourage you in your search for greater justice, for peace and reconciliation, for an economic, social and political development that corresponds to the dignity of the human person. Above all, she will not fail to offer you the inscrutable riches of Christ, the "Light of the Nations". To him be the honour and the glory and the power, for ever and ever. Amen.