



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF PAUL VI
TO THE ARCHBISHOPS AND BISHOPS OF THE
ECCLESIASTICAL PROVINCES OF LAGOS, KADUNA AND ONITSHA**

Friday, 7 February 1969

*Venerable Brothers in the Episcopate,
Archbishops and Bishops
of the Ecclesiastical Provinces of Lagos,
Kaduna and Onitsha*

We are happy to receive you and to greet you in the Lord Christ, Venerable Brothers. Indeed, We say with sincerity that We are grateful for your visit, since it offers Us the opportunity to open Our heart to you, as We have already opened Our home.

We know that in these past days you have met together, to discuss with Our assistants your pastoral and religious problems, which have been made still more difficult because of the abnormal situation - abnormal, because it is a situation of war - which has too long endured. We have followed and are familiar with the situation in which so many people in your regions find themselves - We think especially of the children.

Several times, as you well know, We have expressed Our anxiety, Our desires and Our hopes for an end to such a state of affairs. Before God and Our conscience We feel that We have left undone no action or undertaking that was in Our power in order to bring any person in authority to find a peaceful solution which would silence the sound of arms.

Unfortunately, until now all attempts, those also springing from other authoritative sources, have failed to bring the wished-for success. Must We therefore yield to a sense of discouragement and resign Our-self to the inevitability of hatred between brothers and of mutual destruction? Must We perhaps say that there is no longer hope that the good sentiments of brotherhood and love can

finally prevail, that above disagreements the voice of concord and charity can find victory? Christian conscience can in no way accept these hypotheses.

You have just performed the sacred rite of Concelebration, united around a single altar, the image of Christ, together with Our Cardinal Secretary of State. The prayer in common, with tears and trust, was for peace: that God would restore peace to those regions so dear to Us, to those sons so close to Us, closest to Our heart because the most severely suffering.

In you, worthy representatives of the Bishops of the three Ecclesiastical Provinces of Lagos, Kaduna and Onitsha, We see the image of Our other Venerable Brothers in the Episcopate, of the priests and religious, of the Sisters, and of all the Catholics of all regions of Nigeria. In them We find a single aspiration, which reflects both the conscience and the good will of all the people of those noble regions, the aspiration for peace. From Our brotherly meeting there arises a single cry, that for peace, and a single petition for peace: "Domine, dona nobis pacem".

The Church is one, above every conflict; the Church loves and is loved, above every division; the Church wishes to bring peace and love where there is war and hatred; the Church wishes to aid the suffering; the Church wishes to exercise her witness especially in the most tragic moments of the history of peoples. That is what the Church is doing in your regions. Your presence and your fraternal embrace would point out to all in authority the way to reconciliation, and would affirm that it is possible and that it is one's duty to find a solution. It is not for Us or for you to suggest a concrete political plan, but it is Our duty and yours to declare solemnly that it is not by war, but by sincere negotiations, not in an atmosphere of opposition, but in one of open cooperation, that the wished-for solution of the baneful controversy will be found.

Let those in authority know that the Holy See follows with lively anxiety and disinterested impartiality the sorrowful happenings, and that it dares to call on them to exert a supreme effort in a dedicated search for peace, Let them be assured that in doing so they will also render a valuable service to humanity, which will act as a model and will win the highest esteem.

We would wish you, Venerable Brothers, to take back to your own dioceses, and to those which you represent, the assurance that the Pope loves all without distinction with the same intensity of affection; that for all He would wish to be the good Samaritan who pours oil on their wounds; that the Pope would like to be able to give even greater assistance without any discrimination whatever: that His love is extended spontaneously to all, especially to the most grievously suffering, because they are living images of Christ.

The fervent message which We entrust to you is suggested by the Apostle Paul: "Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts" (*Col. 3: 15*), because "He is our peace, who has made us both one" (*Eph. 2: 14*). May the Blessing which We from Our heart bestow on you, make this Our wish effective and lasting.

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