



The Holy See

APOSTOLIC PILGRIMAGE TO AFRICA

(MAY 2-12, 1980)

**MEETING OF JOHN PAUL II
WITH THE OTHER CHRISTIAN CHURCHES
AND COMMUNITIES OF KENYA**

Nairobi

Wednesday, 7 May 1980

*Dear brothers and sisters from the Christian Churches
and Communities of Kenya,*

"Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ"[1].

1. I have come to Kenya to be with the Bishops and people of the Catholic Church, since my task as Bishop of Rome is a fraternal service of unity to support them in their fidelity to the Gospel and in their life in the one Catholic Communion. Humbly I see it as part of this ministry that I should also come to greet you, "holy brethren, who share in a heavenly call"[2], for, despite those factors that still divide us, we are nevertheless linked by a real fellowship that remains true even though it is still imperfect[3].

2. Because of this one Baptism, in which we profess one basic faith that Jesus is Lord and that God raised him from the dead[4], we stand together before the world of today with a common responsibility which stems from obedience to Christ. This common responsibility is so real and so important that it must impel us to do all we can, as a matter of urgency, to resolve the divisions that still exist between us, so that we may fulfil the will of Christ for the perfect unity of his followers.

Without full organic unity, Christians are unable to give a satisfactory witness to Christ, and their

division remains a scandal to the world, and especially to the young Churches in mission lands.

Your presence here testifies to a deep insight: that especially in the young Churches of Africa, in a continent that hungers and thirsts for God - a longing that can be fulfilled only in Christ - the common apostolic faith in Christ the Saviour must be held and manifested, for in Christ there can be no division. Your presence, together with the sincere ecumenical efforts which are developing, show our common desire for full unity. For truly the credibility of the Gospel message and of Christ himself is linked to Christian unity.

3. This is why, at international level, many of your Churches are now engaged in a theological dialogue with the Catholic Church - a dialogue that is already offering new hope for much greater understanding among us. This is also why, here in Kenya, the Christian people are striving to reach one mind in the faith of Christ. For whether they live in Africa or in Europe, in Asia or in America, Christians are the heirs of sad divisions. These divisions have to be first faced in a dialogue of mutual understanding and esteem, "speaking the truth in love"^[5] and then dealt with in accordance with the promptings of the Holy Spirit.

This task is, I repeat, an urgent one. Jesus calls us to bear witness to him and to his saving work.

We can do this adequately only when we are completely united in faith and when we speak his word with one voice, a voice that rings with that warm vitality which characterizes the whole Christian community when it lives together in full communion.

4. Our divisions impair that vitality and prevent our neighbours from hearing the Gospel as they should. And yet, even now, thanks to what we already have in common, it is possible for us, despite those divisions, to give a sincere even if limited witness together before a world that so sorely needs to hear that message of love and hope which is the Good News of the salvation won for all mankind by Jesus Christ, who "was crucified in weakness but lives by the power of God"^[6]. It is possible for us to collaborate frequently in the cause of the Gospel. Although we cannot yet do everything together - especially the fullness of Eucharistic worship - we can still accomplish much together.

Wherever possible, then, let us find ways of engaging in acts of common witness, be it in joint Bible work, in promoting human rights and meeting human needs, in theological dialogue, in praying together when opportunity allows - as it does so beautifully today - or in speaking to others about Jesus Christ and his salvation. As we do these things we must continue to ask the Holy Spirit for light and strength to conform perfectly to God's holy will for his Church.

5. The task that faces Christians as we near the end of the twentieth century is indeed a mighty challenge, and it is good to see how much is already being done by divine grace to respond to it.

May this response grow and develop in every part of the world. It is in this hope that I earnestly pray to God our Father that the Churches and Communities you represent, and the All African Council of Churches and the Christian Council of Kenya, of which so many of you are members, may be ever more faithful servants of Christ's will that all of us who believe in him may be one even as he and his Father are one. May you "stand firm in one spirit, with one mind striving side by side for the faith of the Gospel"^[7] for the glory of the Most Holy Trinity: the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

[1] *Rom.* 1, 7.

[2] *Hebr.* 3, 1.

[3] Cfr. *Unitatis Redintegratio*, 3.

[4] Cfr. *Rom.* 10, 9.

[5] *Eph.* 4, 15.

[6] *2 Cor.* 13, 4.

[7] *Phil.* 1, 27.

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