



The Holy See

APOSTOLIC PILGRIMAGE TO AFRICA

(MAY 2-12, 1980)

ADDRESS OF JOHN PAUL II TO THE BISHOPS OF GHANA

Kumasi

Friday, 9 May 1980

Venerable and dear Brothers in our Lord Jesus Christ,

1. My coming among you today is intimately linked to Christ and his Gospel. I have come to share with you and the whole Catholic Church in Ghana *the joy of your centenary celebrations*. Together we praise the grace of God that initiated and sustained *the full process of evangelisation* in your midst: missionaries were sent to preach the word of God to your ancestors; these people heard the message of salvation; they believed and called upon him in whom they put their faith, confessing with their lips that Jesus is Lord and believing in their hearts that God raised him from the dead^[1].

Through the sacraments your people came to share in the death and Resurrection of Christ and were grafted into the vital organic unity of the Church. Generous missionary Congregations realized the need for workers in the vineyard of the Lord, and conversions were made through divine grace.

In 1935 the first two Ghanaian priests were ordained, and in 1950 the Hierarchy was established.

And today there are two Metropolitan Sees and seven dioceses. The Church is thus fully implanted in Ghana, but her mission is not yet complete. By reason of their full membership in the Body of Christ, Ghanaian Catholics are called to be workers for evangelisation, in a Church that is, by her nature, missionary in her totality^[2]. Only in accepting their own responsibility for the spread

of the Gospel do the Catholic people fulfil the vocation to which they are called.

2. This great ecclesial reality of an evangelised and evangelising Church in Ghana, which explains the depth of our joy today, is celebrated *in a spirit of Catholic unity*. It is a unity that belongs to your individual local Churches: priests, religious and laity united with the Bishop, who presides in love and service, and who is called to be an example to everyone in humility and holiness of life.

This Catholic unity is further manifested in the solidarity of the sons and daughters of this country with the missionaries, who continue to give their fraternal service - deeply appreciated and very necessary - for the benefit of each local Church, under the direction of an autochthonous pastor.

The unity of this centenary celebration is likewise the unity of all the Bishops of this country with the entire College of Bishops united with the Successor of Peter, and intent on proclaiming the one Gospel of Christ and ensuring the enactment of Catholic unity in the Eucharistic Sacrifice, which is at one and the same time the expression of the worship of an individual community and of the universal Church. This is a special motive of joy for me as I celebrate with you your centenary celebrations. I wish to assure you of my gratitude for everything you have done, as pastors of local Churches, to preserve unity, you who likewise share responsibility for the Church throughout the world. Your fidelity and zeal are themselves an effective contribution to the spread of the Kingdom.

3. Be assured that all your efforts to proclaim the Gospel directly and indirectly are a great credit to the Church. On my part I am close to you in all the joys and disappointments, the challenges and hopes of your ministry of the word, and in your sacramental ministry. I am close to you in all your concrete pastoral initiatives, in everything that brings the message of salvation into the lives of the people.

A reflection on the essential and constitutional patrimony of the Catholic faith, which is identical for all people of all places and times, is a great help to the pastors of the Church as they ponder *the requirements of the "inculturation" of the Gospel in the life of the people*. You are familiar with what Paul VI called the "task of assimilating the essence of the Gospel message and of transposing it, without the slightest betrayal of its essential truth, into the language that these particular people understand"^[3].

He singled out as subject to certain adaptations the areas of liturgical expression, catechesis, theological formulation, secondary ecclesial structures, and ministries. As local pastors you are eminently fitted for this work, because you are sons of the people to whom you are sent with the message of faith; in addition, in your episcopal ordination you have received the same "governing Spirit" who was communicated to Jesus and by him to his Apostles for the building up of his Church. This work is of God; it is an activity of the living Body of Christ; it is a requirement of the Church as a truly universal means of salvation.

And so with serenity and confidence and with profound openness towards the universal Church, the Bishops must carry on the task of inculturation of the Gospel for the good of each people, *precisely so that Christ may be communicated to every man, woman and child.*

In this process, cultures themselves must be uplifted, transformed and permeated by Christ's original message of divine truth, without harming what is noble in them. Hence worthy African traditions are to be preserved. Moreover, in accordance with the full truth of the Gospels and in harmony with the Magisterium of the Church, living and dynamic African Christian traditions are to be consolidated.

As you pursue this work in close union with the Apostolic See and the entire Church, you are strengthened in knowing that the responsibility for this activity is shared also by your brother Bishops throughout the world. This is an important consequence of the doctrine of collegiality, in which every Bishop shares responsibility for the rest of the Church; by the same token, his own Church in which by divine right he exercises ordinary jurisdiction is also the object of a common episcopal responsibility in the two dimensions of making the Gospel incarnate in the local Church: 1) *preserving unaltered the content of the Catholic faith and maintaining ecclesial unity throughout the world;* and 2) *bringing forth from cultures original expressions of Christian life, celebration and thought,* whereby the Gospel is brought into the heart of peoples and their cultures.

Venerable Brothers, your people are called to the highest ideals and to the most lofty virtues. In this saving power Christ is present in the humanity of Africa, or as I have already said during my visit to this continent: "Christ, in the members of his Body, is himself African".

4. There are many individual aspects of your apostolate that are worthy of special mention and support. Of particular importance for the future of your local Churches is every effort that is made to *foster vocations to the priesthood and religious life.*

The faithful are called to share responsibility for this dimension of the Church; they exercise this responsibility by esteem and respect for these vocations and by helping to create the sound spiritual atmosphere of Christian families and other communities in which a vocation can develop and can persevere. Vigilance is needed on the part of priests to detect the signs of a vocation. Above all, the effectiveness of all these human efforts is linked to the prayer of the Church and to the witness of priests and religious.

When your people see priests and religious living a life of authentic celibacy in intimacy with Christ, when they perceive the human fulfilment that comes from the total giving of oneself in the service of the Gospel, when they observe the joy that comes from bearing witness to Christ - then the priesthood and the religious life are attractive vocations for youth, who will then more easily hear Christ's personal invitation to them: Come, follow me!

Another dimension that I would like to stress in this regard is the missionary dimension of your Church with regard to the needs of sister Churches on the African continent and beyond. I understand your concern about the need of your own Christian communities to be guided by priests chosen by God from among their own people. But the Church is missionary by nature. And let us always remember that God will never fail to bless those who give with generosity. The promotion of missionary vocations - either in the framework of the *Fidei Donum* formula or through membership in international missionary societies - will in its turn incite the local community to greater confidence in God's grace and to a deeper awareness of faith. It will open hearts to God's love.

5. I know that you are committed to the advancement of the role of women in the Church and in society. It is an expression of this same concern to promote women's vocations to the religious life.

African women have willingly been bearers of life and guardians of family values. Similarly, the consecration of women in radical self-giving to the Lord in chastity, obedience, and poverty constitutes an important way of bringing to your local Churches the life of Christ and an awareness of a larger human community and a divine communion. This requires of course that they be carefully formed, theologically and spiritually, so that they can assume their rightful place as workers for evangelisation, exemplifying the true meaning of religious life in an African context, and thus enriching the whole Church.

6. In the beautiful celebration in the stadium and by honouring the catechists, I have already expressed my esteem for them, as well as my thoughts on the value of this institution for the Church - its value for the future as for the past. I shall not expand this point further except to repeat the words I addressed to the Bishops in my Apostolic Exhortation: "Dearly beloved Brothers, you have here a special mission within your Churches: you are beyond all others the ones primarily responsible, for catechises. ...You can be sure that if catechesis is done well in your local Churches, everything else will be easier to do"[4].

7. In this context I would draw attention to a special aspect of the apostolate: the question of the media. All over the world *the communications media offer special opportunities for the spread of the Gospel and for the useful presentation of information from the viewpoint of charity and truth.*

Ghana and all Africa are no exception. Through your interest and collaboration may the mass media truly perform their providential role at the service of humanity. For the Church these are splendid instruments to preach the message of Christ, as from the housetops[5]. Be assured of my admiration for your efforts to utilize these means as often as possible. In this regard, you deserve great praise for setting up *The Standard*, which I pray will ever assist you in the task of evangelisation.

8. Linked with evangelisation is the work of development, which must continue to go on in Africa.

In imitation of Christ, who was sensitive to the uplifting of humanity in all its aspects, the Church works for the total well-being of man. The laity have a distinctive part to play in the area of development; they have also been given a special charisma in order to bring the presence of the serving Christ into all areas of human affairs.

The human being asking to be uplifted from poverty and want is the same person in need of redemption and eternal life. Likewise the entire Church must serve development by offering to the world her total vision of man, and by proclaiming ceaselessly the preminence of spiritual values^[6].

Providence has endowed your people with an innate understanding of this fact. Only by being sensitive to every need can the Church continue to render her many services, but one of her most effective contributions to progress will be to point out that *the goal of personal development is found only in a transcendent humanism*, which is attained by union with Christ .

9. There are many other aspects to our pastoral ministry and we cannot now speak about all of them. But *as Bishops let us call our people constantly to conversion of life, and by our example let us lead the way*. The importance of the Sacrament of Penance or Reconciliation and of the Eucharist cannot be overemphasized. In both of these we are the ministers of God's mercy and his love.

At the same time, as Bishops we are called to bear a consistent witness to Christ the High Priest and Pontiff of salvation by being signs of holiness in his Church. A difficult task? Yes, Brothers. But this is our vocation, and the Holy Spirit is upon us. Moreover, the effectiveness of our pastoral ministry depends on our holiness of life. Let us not be afraid, for the Mother of Jesus is with us. She is in our midst today and always. And we are strong through her prayers and safe in her care. Regina Caeli, laetare, alleluia!

[1] Cf. *Rom* 10:9.

[2] Cf. *Ad Gentes*, 35.

[3] *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, 63.

[4] *Catechesi Tradendae*, 63.

[5] Cf. *Mt* 10:27.

[6] Address to the United Nations, 2 October 1979, no. 14.

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