



The Holy See

APOSTOLIC JOURNEY
TO MADAGASCAR, LA RÉUNION,
ZAMBIA AND MALAWI

MEETING WITH THE CATHOLIC LAY LEADERS OF MALAWI

ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS JOHN PAUL II

*Our Lady of the Wisdom School, Blantyre
Friday, 5 May 1989*

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

1. In your language you have the saying “Dziko ndi anthu”: “it is people who make the world”. The same can be said of the Church: “It is people who make the Church”. *Together with your pastors, you are the Church* here and now in this African land. It is therefore a great joy for me to meet with you – the lay leaders – during this pastoral visit, in order to confirm you in your Catholic faith, to encourage you to share in the Church’s life and mission, and to express my appreciation for all the good things that have been accomplished in Malawi through the *generous response of the laity to the gifts of the Holy Spirit*.

I see before me today *a cross-section of the laity of Malawi*, particularly from among associations and movements. Members of parish and church councils are represented, as well as members of Small Christian Communities. To all of you I wish to apply the words of the Gospel we heard a moment ago: “*You are the salt of the earth... You are the light of the world*” (Matth. 5, 13-14). These images refer in a particular way to you, the lay faithful of Christ’s Church, because it is through you that the Gospel is preached every day *in the ordinary circumstances of social and family life* from which the fabric of human existence is woven (*Lumen Gentium*, 31).

Here in Malawi we see fulfilled the positive and hopeful *vision of renewal described by the Fathers*

of the 1987 Synod of Bishops on the vocation and mission of the laity; we see a new manner of active collaboration between priests, religious and the lay faithful; an active and widespread participation in the liturgy, in the proclamation of the word of God and catechesis; a wide variety of services and tasks entrusted to the lay faithful and fulfilled by them; a flourishing of groups, associations and spiritual movements as well as a lay commitment to the life of the Church; and a fuller participation of women in the development of society (Cfr. Ioannis Pauli PP. II *Christifideles Laici*, 2).

We likewise witness here in Malawi a growing desire on the part of the Church to meet her own needs without relying unduly on support from other particular Churches. The seed which was planted and lovingly tended by others has now taken root and is ready to *bear fruit of its own* within the universal communion of the Church. This too is *a sign of vitality and maturity* after a century of dedicated missionary work by many priests, religious and laity.

2. Dear brothers and sisters, I know that lay involvement has been an important part of the Church's history in Malawi from the very beginning. But the lay apostolate here and throughout the world has been given *fresh vigour and renewed meaning by the Second Vatican Council*. In the spirit of the Council I urge all of you to continue growing in the *knowledge of the new life of grace* that is yours by Baptism, and to let that new life transform your thoughts, words and actions for the glory of God and the salvation of the world *so that you may participate fully* in the Church's life and mission.

The heart and soul of this participation is *the universal call to holiness, the perfection of charity*, which is central to the Council's teaching (Cfr. *Lumen Gentium*, 5). Holiness is our vocation. Holiness is the fulfilment of our dignity as persons created in God's image and likeness and redeemed by the blood of the Lamb. It is the *saints* who are the flowering of the Church and her greatest treasure. In every age God renews the Church "by raising up men and women outstanding in holiness, living witnesses of his unchanging love" (Cfr. Proef. II pro Sanctis).

Holiness is the fruit of "life in the Spirit" (Cfr. *Gal.* 5): *a life which impels the baptized person to follow and imitate Christ* by living the Beatitudes, by heeding God's word, by taking part in the Church's sacramental and liturgical life, as well as by personal prayer, and above all by practising *the commandment of love and service*, especially to the poor and suffering (Cfr. Ioannis Pauli PP. II *Christifideles Laici*, 16). "Life in the Spirit" touches every aspect of human existence, from the inner shrine of personal conscience to the most visible of public acts.

3. For the vast majority of the laity, who are married, *the path of holiness passes above all through the family*, which is the "cradle" of love and life for society. I share your concerns about marriage and family life in Malawi: the serious problems of irregular marriages, divorce, unmarried mothers, polygamy, contraception and abortion. The challenge is to *make your homes schools of love and life*, and to work together in the Church and in society to safeguard the values of marriage and the

family. The *family apostolate* begun by your pastors is of crucial importance for the spiritual good and social welfare not only of Catholics but of all the citizens of your country.

Your representative has also voiced your concerns about the youth of Malawi. We recognize more and more that the task is not simply to minister to young people but also to *invite their participation*, to give them a sense of belonging, to engage their idealism and youthful energy *in the task of transforming the world* with the love of Christ. Yes, dear brothers and sisters, the Church has much to talk about with youth. If the dialogue is marked by cordiality, clarity and courage, then there can be *a real exchange between generations* for the benefit of all and for the building up of the Church and society despite all problems (Cfr. Ioannis Pauli PP. II *Christifideles Laici*, 46).

Christian witness in the family and among youth is part a greater challenge which the Church faces in different ways throughout the world. It is *the challenge to evangelize culture*, “to convert, solely through the divine power of the message she proclaims, both the personal and collective consciences of people, the activities in which they engage, and the lives and environment which are theirs” (Pauli VI *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, 18). I urge you therefore to *let Christ’s word shape your way of life as true Christians and true Malawians*. Let the roots of the Gospel sink ever more deeply into your culture. For it is in and through culture that the Christian faith becomes a part of history and a maker of history.

4. Far from removing you from the world, the secular character of your vocation plunges you into its depths. As lay Christians you have *a right and a duty to participate in public life* – in the social, economic, legal, administrative and cultural areas that serve the common good. You must bear witness there to human and gospel values such as liberty, justice, solidarity, service, simplicity of life and a love of preference for the poor. In the providence of God *every situation*, activity and responsibility becomes an opportunity for you to practise faith, hope and love (Cfr. Ioannis Pauli PP. II *Christifideles Laici*, 42. 59). This challenge also applies to your *daily work, however humble or important* it may be. Ordinary work has great personal and social values. It is part of the path to holiness. Work not only makes it possible for you to provide for yourselves and your loved ones; it also *unites you to other human beings in fellowship and mutual service*, and enables you to participate in God’s work of creating and perfecting the world. What is called for on the part of workers is competence, honesty and a true Christian spirit. In the face of unemployment and similar social problems it is necessary to *ensure that others share in the social and economic life* of their country and thus enjoy a share of this world’s goods as a result of their labour (Cfr. Ioannis Pauli PP. II *Christifideles Laici*, 43).

5. Dear brothers and sisters, your dignity and mission as God’s sons and daughters in Malawi consists in this: *to bring people to God through the attractiveness of your way of life*; to be holy so that others may be inspired to holiness; to follow Christ so that others may seek him. Christian formation is essential for this mission. Since holiness is our rule of life, our *formation consists in*

seeking an ever greater likeness to Christ. This is the true goal of spiritual and doctrinal formation and the reason for cultivating the virtues and skills that make us more effective witnesses to the Gospel. Formation is a lifelong process of discerning God's will in our lives and of opening our hearts to fulfil the vocation entrusted to us. *To discover God's will* we must listen to his word and to the Church; we must rely on prayer and sound spiritual direction; we must acknowledge our God-given talents and apply them *in our concrete situation* (Cfr. *ibid.* 58).

With this in mind, I wish to thank the chaplains present today, and *all those engaged in the formation of the laity*, for the vital service they render to the Church. I particularly wish to mention the catechists, whose work is so important for the Church's growth, and all the bishops, priests, and men and women religious for whom the laity of Malawi are the joy and crown of their labours.

Finally, dear brothers and sisters, I commend all of you to *the intercession of Mary, the Mother of the Church*. In this school dedicated to Our Lady of Wisdom, I pray for all the lay faithful throughout the world:

"O most Blessed Virgin Mary...

With you we give thanks to God...

for the exalted vocation and the many forms of mission entrusted to the lay faithful...

fill their hearts with a gratitude and enthusiasm

for this vocation and mission...

Teach us to treat the affairs of the world

with a real sense of Christian responsibility

and a joyful hope of the coming of God's Kingdom...

O Virgin Mother, guide and sustain us

so that we may always live as true sons and daughters of the Church of your Son.

Enable us to do our part in helping to establish on earth the civilization of truth and love,

as God wills it. for his glory. Amen" (Cfr. Ioannis Pauli PP. II *Christifideles Laici*, 64).