



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS
POPE JOHN PAUL II
TO THE BISHOPS OF UGANDA
ON THEIR "AD LIMINA" VISIT**

13 October 1997

Your Eminence,

Dear Brother Bishops,

1. With fraternal affection I welcome you, the Bishops of Uganda, praying that "the Lord of peace himself give you peace at all times in all ways" (2 Th 3:16). My greetings to you today are greetings also to the beloved priests, religious, and lay faithful of your Dioceses. Four years ago I had the immense joy of visiting Uganda and the memories remain vividly etched in my mind, especially the warmth of your welcome, the ardour of your prayer and the firmness of your determination to be faithful sons and daughters of the Church. I ask you to assure your people of my closeness as they strive to grow in Christ and to put on that "new nature, created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness" (Eph 4:24).

Since your last *ad Limina* visit, the Catholic community in Uganda, amidst continuing trials and challenges, has experienced many blessings. A further gift of God's love has been the creation of three new ecclesiastical jurisdictions: the Diocese of Kasana- Luweero, the Diocese of Lugazi and the Diocese of Nebbi. This is a welcome sign of the vitality of the Church in your land, and I join you in thanking the Lord who has given this growth (cf. 1 Cor 3:7).

2. Christ never ceases to raise up faithful Shepherds for his people, and you have been called to be successors of the Apostles in the weighty office of teaching, governing and sanctifying that part of the Church placed in your care. To you has been entrusted "the ministry of reconciliation" (2 Cor 5:18), a most essential element of the pastoral service which you render to your local Churches. "The Church in Africa is aware that it has to become for all, through the witness borne by its own

sons and daughters, a place of true reconciliation. Forgiven and mutually reconciled, these sons and daughters will thus be able to bring to the world the forgiveness and reconciliation which Christ our Peace (cf. Eph 2:14) offers to humanity through his Church" (*Ecclesia in Africa*, 79).

In your quinquennial reports, you show a marked awareness of this need for reconciliation. While you rightly point out that much progress has been made in advancing the peace and security of your nation as a whole, you do not overlook the tragic fact that violence continues to plague certain parts of your country, with fresh outbreaks of aggression occurring time and again. This is a clear sign that, although Uganda is emerging from the shadows of a past marred by strife, tension and bloodshed, not all threats against peace have passed, and the temptation to keep alive and nurture former grievances is still strong. For this reason it falls to the Church at this moment in Uganda's history to answer with ever greater resolve God's injunction to be a reconciling community.

3. The Catholic lay faithful have a special role to play in this area, for to them in particular are entrusted the affairs of the temporal order: politics, economics, leadership in society (cf. *Lumen Gentium*, 31; *Christifideles Laici*, 15).

In these fields they are called upon "to engage directly in dialogue or to work for dialogue aimed at reconciliation" (*Reconciliatio et Paenitentia*, 25). For this reason it is especially important that you — as Pastors of souls and leaders of God's people — ensure that diocesan and parish programmes are in place which provide for the adequate formation of the laity. Now that the revised General Catechetical Directory has been issued, a National Catechetical Directory could prove most useful in ensuring an even greater assimilation of the Church's teaching by your people.

Catechesis is such an important part of the Church's mission that the continuing and concerted action of your Episcopal Conference is required in meeting the formational needs of the faithful, with special attention to the young people and children who receive no formal education. Catechists should be the object of your special pastoral solicitude. Thanks to their deep faith and devotion, they have played a prominent role from the Church's very beginning in Uganda and are still called upon today to make an exemplary and selfless contribution to the religious instruction of their communities. The various Catechetical Training Centres should be helped to expand and enrich the programmes offered so that catechists will increasingly acquire the skills which they need in order to respond effectively to the demands being made on them.

4. In general the Ugandan laity are taking an ever more active and responsible place in the life of their local Church. In small Christian communities, and in associations and movements, they grow in faith and Christian holiness. Through parish and diocesan pastoral councils and other bodies within the community they help to build up the Church as a communion of all her members. This wealth of commitment and enthusiasm is entrusted to your pastoral leadership as a grace and a

duty. It is the basis on which you can prepare the whole People of God in Uganda to celebrate the forthcoming Great Jubilee of the Year 2000 as a joyful, transforming renewal of faith in Jesus Christ "the one Saviour of the world, yesterday, today and for ever" (cf. Heb 13:8).

In all of this, of course, the parish remains at the very heart of the Christian community and of all pastoral activity. For it is the parish that "has the essential task of providing a more personal and immediate formation of the lay faithful . . . allowing them to grasp and live the immense, extraordinary richness and responsibility received at Baptism" (*Christifideles Laici*, 61). For this reason, efforts should be made to create new parishes, especially where existing ones are extremely large in population or very extensive in territory. Increasing the overall number of parishes and reducing the size and area of the bigger ones will allow for greater attention to be given to the pastoral needs of individuals and families and will facilitate the effective ministry of parish priests.

5. Through your efforts, both individually and jointly, the Church in Uganda plays a very active role in creating and supporting structures and institutions which enable society to respond to people's needs and aspirations. There is a marked Catholic presence in the fields of education, health care and social services, and your leadership strengthens the faithful in dealing with certain very difficult problems. Among these is the scourge of AIDS, which has hit your country particularly hard.

In your Pastoral Letter *Let Your Light Shine*, you remarked that this tragic situation "needs to be confronted in solidarity, with much love and care for the victims, with much generosity towards the orphans and with much commitment to a renewed way of Christian moral living" (No. 28). Thus you have issued a call to reflect on the deeper moral and social issues associated with this disease, and you have invited all to take a firm stand against a dangerous crisis of values, one which is already causing many people to grow weak in spirit, indifferent to virtue and to what constitutes the authentic progress of society.

An adequate response to this challenge requires the effective inculturation of the Christian message, a delicate and difficult task which "raises the question of the Church's fidelity to the Gospel and the Apostolic Tradition amidst the constant evolution of cultures" (*Ecclesia in Africa*, 62). This inculturation faces a number of specific challenges in Uganda, especially in the areas of marriage and family life. Your untiring efforts to guide couples to the discovery of the truth and beauty of the demands of their new life together in Christ are an indispensable part of your ministry. The unit of ecclesial life known as the "domestic Church" must always occupy a special place in the Church's pastoral concern. The Apostolic Exhortation *Familiaris Consortio* provides a framework for effective catechesis, particularly in the vital area of marriage preparation. The faithful must be helped to understand the meaning and sacramental dignity of marriage, and they should be strongly supported by the whole Catholic community in living their commitment to the full.

In the process of the transformation of family life through the grace and light of the Gospel the concept of responsible parenthood calls for particular attention (cf. *loc. cit.*, 28 ff.). Being a parent means sharing in God's work as the Author of life. The proper context for bringing new human life into the world is the permanent and exclusive union which spouses establish by the complete and permanent gift of self to each other. The Church's insistence on monogamous marriage is not the imposition of a foreign ideal displacing local traditions. Rather, in fidelity to her Lord, the Church proclaims that "Christ renews the first plan that the Creator inscribed in the hearts of man and woman . . . Christian couples are called to participate truly in the irrevocable indissolubility which binds Christ to the Church, his Bride, loved by him to the end" (*ibid.*, 20). The same document appeals to each Bishop to "make the diocese ever more truly a 'diocesan family', a model and source of hope for the many families that belong to it" (*ibid.*, 73).

6. An invaluable aid to the lay faithful as they strive to live married love according to God's will is the fidelity of priests and religious in their commitment to celibacy and virginity: "Marriage and virginity or celibacy are two ways of expressing and living the one mystery of the covenant of God with his people" (*ibid.*, 16). What is required in any covenant is faithfulness. In our age, which is so much in need of a profound change of heart about sexual morality and married love, we must be confident that the Lord still calls many of his followers to be celibate "for the sake of the Kingdom of heaven" (Mt 19:22). We must also be convinced that he is even more generous in strengthening those chosen as they seek to answer that call, with all the sacrifices which a wholehearted response to the vocation to celibacy or virginity entails. The example of priests and religious who truly live up to their calling will help the laity to bear the self-denial demanded by obedience to God's plan for human sexuality. In this way God's holy people all together will lead truly fruitful lives and find lasting happiness (cf. *Familiaris Consortio*, 16).

Priestly formation must always be one of your highest priorities. I encourage you to ensure that your seminaries continue to demand high academic achievement, and that the same high quality be required and attained in the spiritual and pastoral formation of your seminarians. It is essential that priestly training should firmly ground candidates in a relationship of deep communion and friendship with Jesus the Good Shepherd (cf. *Pastores Dabo Vobis*, 42). Priests and religious require your fatherly support and guidance, and can greatly benefit from programmes of continuing formation which effectively "rekindle the gift of God that is within them" (cf. 2 Tim 1:6).

It is especially important that women religious should be provided with sufficient and skilled spiritual directors and confessors, priests who are familiar with the consecrated life and are able to strengthen them in their commitment.

7. In Christ all things are made new; in Baptism the faithful have put off their old nature which belonged to their former manner of life (cf. Eph 4:22) so that there is no longer "Jew or Greek, slave or free, male or female, but all are now one in Christ Jesus" (cf. Gal 3:28). Tribal rivalries and ethnic hostility cannot have a place in the Church of God or among his holy people. Rather

the Catholic community in Uganda has the important task of helping your country to build an ever brighter future in which civil society grows to maturity in a climate of respect and harmony. This is your message as you preach the Kingdom of God and invite men and women to the splendour of that truth which "shines forth in all the works of the Creator and . . . enlightens man's intelligence and shapes his freedom, leading him to know and love the Lord" (*Veritatis Splendor*, proem.).

Dear Brothers in the Episcopate, it is my hope that these thoughts which your visit suggests will strengthen you in your ministry of service to those entrusted to your care. Recalling the heroic example of Saint Charles Lwanga and his Companions, I pray that the Holy Martyrs of Uganda will ever be a source of inspiration and renewal as you and your people seek to grow in holiness, truth and the genuine freedom of God's children (cf. Rom 8:21). Commending the Church in Uganda to the protection of Mary, Mother of all believers and Queen of Africa, I cordially impart my Apostolic Blessing.

© Copyright 1997 - Libreria Editrice Vaticana

Copyright © Dicastero per la Comunicazione - Libreria Editrice Vaticana