



The Holy See

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

Monday 20 June, 1988

*Dear Cardinal Nsubuga,
Dear Brother Bishops,*

1. After the private conversations we have had concerning the situation of your Dioceses, I am very happy to have this further moment of fraternal communion with you, the *pastors of the Catholic Church in Uganda*, a country very close to my heart by reason of the glorious memory of its Martyrs and because of your recent sufferings. I welcome you and I join my prayer to yours, asking our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ to send his peace and love and mercy upon your people and your country.

Today you are here, in the City which preserves the tombs of the Blessed Apostles Peter and Paul, to make your *ad limina* visit: *ad limina Apostolorum*. In this way you further bind your people's profession of faith to the apostolic faith handed down from generation to generation within the ecclesial community and guaranteed by the ministry of unity and fellowship which the Lord entrusted to Peter (Cfr. *Lumen Gentium*, 18). I give thanks to God for your fidelity to Jesus Christ, the "chief Shepherd" (1 *Petr.* 5, 4), and I encourage you in your pastoral service of God's people in Uganda.

Moreover, your presence enables me to praise the steadfastness and perseverance of the Churches over which you preside in charity. The thought of your beloved people, so tried by years of strife, becomes a heartfelt prayer to the Prince of Peace, that he may send his gifts of reconciliation and harmony into the hearts of all your fellow citizens: "Peace on earth to those on whom his favour rests" (*Luc.* 2, 14).

2. The Church in Uganda is constantly nourished by the memory of her own Martyrs. *Saint*

Charles Lwanga and his Companions are the special witnesses of your people's calling to share in the redemptive mystery of Christ's Cross and Resurrection. They stand for the essential priority of the truths and demands of the Gospel, over all other interests, in determining Christian behaviour. The memory of the Martyrs serves to assure us in every circumstance that "the sufferings of the present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed". Indeed, "as we share abundantly in Christ's sufferings, so through Christ we share abundantly in comfort too" (2 Cor. 1, 15). The Christians message has its centre in the *Cross and Resurrection of Jesus Christ*. It is therefore a message of hope and courage. In union with Christ, in the strength of God's love which the Spirit pours forth into our hearts (Cfr. Rom. 8, 18), you are never alone as you face the trials and dangers of this earthly pilgrimage. The Lord himself sustains you and your people.

3. As Pastors, you realize that your task is to guide the People of God to acknowledge and welcome their Christian vocation and dignity and to seek "*that holiness without which no one can see the Lord*" (Hebr. 12,14). You are mindful of your obligation "to set a personal example of holiness, in charity, humility and simplicity of life... (and) to make every efforts to promote the holiness of the Christian faithful according to each one's own vocation" (*Codex Iuris Canonici, can 387*). I encourage and support you in this task, and I commend you to the Blessed Virgin Mary, towards whom the whole Church looks with renewed devotion and confidence in the Marian Year.

In your Pastoral Letter, "*With a new Heart and a new Spirit*", you have drawn your people's attention to the imperative of holiness and apostolate to which all are called, and for which the Holy Spirit distributes special graces among the faithful of every rank (Cfr. *Lumen Gentium*, 12). One of the unfortunate consequences of the civil disorder that has afflicted your country has been the disruption of spiritual and catechetical formation. As a result you have noted a moral decline in many aspects of private and public life. The reconstruction of which the nation stands in great need is not only material, but above all spiritual and moral. Consciences need to be awakened to the *ethical values which are essential to the building of a just and humane civilization*. In this enormous task the Bishops, priests, Religious and lay people of Uganda are called to contribute their energies and, above all, the vision of faith and the force of hope that flow from authentic Christian living.

4. The task is not an easy one, especially when a spirit of materialism and selfishness forcefully asserts itself and exercises a particularly strong attraction upon the young. Through small Christian communities and through the *evangelization of families*, you are seeking to offset the negative trends which you recognize in the lives of the faithful. You have taken up the challenge of evangelizing *the youth of your country*. They are the hope of the Church in your land and everywhere. It is good that you insist on bringing them to a personal and prayerful experience of Christ, which is the sure path to spiritual and human development. Only when they realize that the Lord loves them, is calling them and sending them into his vineyard as his loyal collaborators in the work of redemption and authentic liberation will they experience the inner light and courage to give of improving society and of building up the ecclesial community – each according to the grace

received.

Your priests have a unique role to play in evangelizing and catechizing Ugandan youth. They can be particularly close to them as guides and friends, teaching Catholic doctrine in parishes and schools, and stimulating them to take part in cultural, social and charitable activities. In this task you must continue to give encouragement to your priests, and invite them to give the best of themselves, of their time and energies, to the *spiritual and moral formation* of the younger generation. This is a great contribution to the Church and to society.

5. The increased number of vocations which you note in some regions constitutes a sign of hope, and is a further pastoral responsibility for you as Bishops. I know that you are striving to offer to those young people who feel called to the priesthood and to the religious life an appropriate preparation for the life and tasks that await them. *Every effort and sacrifice made in this field is important for the future of the Church in your country.* Your concern to improve the cultural level of priests, Religious and laity, through programmes of continuing education, in order to enable them to face the increasing challenges to Catholic doctrine and moral principles, shows how clearly you perceive that all genuine social progress depends on the awakening of consciences to a sense of responsibility and solidarity in every aspect of life.

The Church's mission embraces the whole human person – body and soul – living in this world but destined for eternal life. Social services and development schemes are a very important aspect of the community's Christian witness, but they cannot take the place of the Church's primary mission to evangelize and to spread Christ's Kingdom. This is especially true for Bishops and priests, whose principal task is to act in persona Christi, in order to communicate the fruits of the Redemption accomplished by the Lord Jesus in his Cross and Resurrection.

6. The Church's is the "sign and means of intimate union with God and of the unity of all mankind" (Cfr. *Lumen Gentium*, 1). The theme of unity in the Church and in the civil society to which you belong is very close to your hearts. In the context of Uganda, and indeed of all Africa, the members of the Church are called to serve the cause of that *unity and harmony between individuals, group and entire nations* which respects differences of origin, language, culture and religious traditions, but which at the same time emphasizes and promotes the more fundamental unity of all men and women in their *common humanity and their dignity as God's beloved children*. You know how much prejudice and opposition has to be overcome. Your experience in Uganda shows that the building up of national unity in freedom and respect for everyone is a delicate and demanding task which requires great wisdom and tact. The ecclesial community has its own special role to play in promoting that unity.

7. In your Pastoral Letters you have given clear and detailed teaching on many important aspects of life. You have repeatedly called for reconciliation and forgiveness among all sectors of the population. You have urged respect for human dignity and for the rights of every man, woman and

child. I pray that your voices will be heard and that the whole country will put aside all selfishness and partisan prejudice and devote itself to a recovery of the moral and spiritual values weakened during the years of strife.

Unity needs an open and respectful attitude of mind and heart. Here the pastoral role of the Church has a vast field of action open before it. Bishops, priests, Religious and laity, in collaboration with other Christians and with all men and women of good will, in every part of the country, must be firm in rejecting divisions and courageous in taking steps to build up the one, peaceful and law-abiding nation that will truly be a home for every Ugandan. I encourage you to continue to call your people to this task.

8. Your own example of mutual understanding, support and collaboration within the framework of the Uganda Episcopal Conference strengthens the force of this call. In the restoration of unity it is also important to continue the policy of integrating young men from different backgrounds into a united and harmonious seminary environment, especially in your major seminaries, so that they may learn to accept each other as brothers in Christ and as heralds of the one Gospel of grace (Cfr. *Act. 20, 24*). The same can be said of religious communities. I note that you have already called for a return to the practice whereby Catholics from different parts of the country meet one another in faith and brotherhood on the occasion of special pilgrimages and celebrations. May these and other initiatives, including the services rendered by the Catholic Secretariat, bear abundant fruit for the Church and for the whole of civil society.

Steps taken to advance ecumenical relations also contribute directly to overcoming long-standing divisions. I am happy to know that the "Joint Christian Council" has resumed its activities and that in several areas collaboration with non-Catholic Christians is progressing steadily.

The unifying action of the Church in Uganda can be further strengthened through the fostering, within each Diocese, of fraternal and friendly relations between the Bishop and his priests, both Ugandan and missionary, and between priests, Religious and laity with themselves and with their Bishop. Underlying the principles and directives contained in the Council documents and in the Code of Canon Law regarding the structures of the local Church there is a call to everyone to *accept a share of responsibility for the life and growth of the Church*. Without any lessening of the specific role and authority of the Ordinary, it is appropriate that the members of the local Church, including the laity, should acquire a sense of their own responsibility for evangelization and for apostolate. Through Baptism and Confirmation the laity are entrusted with a task within the ecclesial community for which it is essential that they be ever more effectively equipped and motivated.

9. Dear brother Bishops: before you lies the challenge of consolidating the Church in your land. While you rely principally on God's grace, for it is God who gives the increase (Cfr. *1 Cor. 3, 7*), you will continue to make every effort to encourage and confirm all sectors of the local Church to

strive earnestly for the holiness of life, the evangelizing zeal and the works of charity that flow from fidelity to the Lord. In many ways you benefit from the fraternal love of other local Churches, from whom you receive missionary personnel and forms of assistance which play an important role in the Church's life in Uganda and which are, in their own right, *an expression of catholicity or universality*. I am happy to know that you respond to this generosity by yourselves seeking to meet the needs of surrounding regions, and that you are sending help to Ethiopia and the Sudan. I pray that you and your priests will always have a spiritual and supra-national outlook on your ecclesial mission and pastoral service.

May Almighty God powerfully assist you, the Bishops of Uganda, as you strive to build up the Church in your land. In conclusion, I repeat to you the words of Saint Paul, with which I wish to express my closeness to you and my fraternal and heartfelt support: "We give thanks to God always for you, constantly mentioning you in our prayers, remembering before our God and Father your work of faith and labour of love and steadfastness of hope" (1 *Thess.* 1, 2-3).

With my Apostolic Blessing.

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