



# The Holy See

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**ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS JOHN PAUL II  
TO THE MEMBERS OF THE EPISCOPAL CONFERENCE OF GHANA  
ON THEIR "AD LIMINA" VISIT**

*Friday, 6 November 1987*

*Dear Brothers in our Lord Jesus Christ,*

1. It is a joy for me to welcome you, members of the Episcopal Conference of Ghana, on the occasion of your *ad limina* visits. Our collegial assembly bears witness to the unity of the Church. "As servants of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God" (1Cor. 4, 1), you represent in a special way your local Churches, and together with the Successor of Peter and the other Bishops throughout the world you represent "the entire Church joined in the bond of peace, love and unity" (*Lumen Gentium*, 23).

My dear Brothers: our unity is fellowship in the Holy Spirit and in the love of Christ, who for ever remains the chief cornerstone (Cfr. *Eph.* 2, 20) and the shepherd of our souls (Cfr. *1Petr.* 2, 25). Together we profess "one Lord, one faith, one baptism" (*Eph.* 4, 5) and assist each other on our pilgrim way towards our heavenly homeland, always mindful that our unity in the Church finds its origin in the unity of the Holy Trinity. For as the Second Vatican Council states "The Church shines forth as a people made one with the unity of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit" (*Lumen Gentium*, 4).

Your *ad limina* visits offer an inspiring testimony to the truth of our faith that Christ chose Peter on whom to build his Church, promising him the keys of the kingdom of heaven (Cfr. *Matth.* 16, 19). Your visit also underlines the fact that Christ entrusted the whole flock to Peter, commissioning him both to confirm his brethren in faith (Cfr. *Luc.* 22, 32) and to shepherd them in perfect unity (Cfr. *Io.* 21, 15-17). These responsibilities constitute Peter's essential role in the Church. And each of you is called to fulfil in communion with Peter and under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, whom you have received through the sacramental imposition of hands, your ministry of preaching the

Gospel, administering the sacraments and serving in love the People of God entrusted to your pastoral care.

2. In the statement which you issued at the end of your annual meeting last July, you expressed well your episcopal ministry of loving service to the People of God in Ghana. You wrote: “we the Catholic bishops of Ghana render thanks to the almighty and eternal God, the loving Father of all mercies and our Father for his ineffable goodness to us. Under the inspiration and guidance of his Spirit, we have been able humbly to renew our commitment to him and to his service as his prophets and to examine a few issues of importance to us both as Ghanaians and as Christians, under the light of the Gospel of his Son, our Lord Jesus Christ. We have done this in the full conviction that we have been chosen to be leaders, to love our brothers and sisters, to intercede for them before the eternal and ever-loving Father, and to lay down our lives for them” (*Statement by the Bishops of Ghana*, die 11 iul. 1987).

In thanking you for your pastoral zeal, I also thank you for the devoted sentiments which you have expressed to me on behalf of all your priests, Religious, seminarians and lay people. I send my heartfelt greetings of grace and peace in our Lord Jesus Christ to all those entrusted to your care. Mindful of the joys and hopes, the griefs and anxieties of the People of God in Ghana, especially of those who are poor and afflicted, and sharing spiritually in the concerns of their daily existence, I would ask you to convey to all the faithful my encouragement and the assurance of my prayers. In the words of the Apostle Paul: We have not ceased to pray for you asking that you may be filled with the knowledge of his will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding, to lead a life worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing to him, bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God” (*Col. 1, 9-10*).

3. My dear Brothers: as the pastors of the nine local Churches of Ghana, you are responsible for the care of all the Ghanaian Catholic faithful. You bring with you today their strong and enthusiastic faith, first brought to your land over a century ago.

It is a joy for me at this time to recall my Pastoral Visit to Ghana in 1980 for the Centenary of your country’s evangelization. During that visit I was able to witness the great love of your people for Christ and his Church. As I said in my address to you at the time of your last *ad limina* visit: Indeed, the purpose of my visit to Ghana was to proclaim with you Jesus Christ and his Gospel. It was my hope to give, by God’s grace, a new impetus to evangelization and to confirm you in your own mission as pastors of the flock” (Ioannis Pauli PP. II, *Ad Ganae episcopos occasione oblata «ad limina» visitationis coram admissos*, 2, die 12 nov. 1981, *Insegnamenti di Giovanni Paolo II*, IV/2 [1981] 614).

My presence in the midst of your clergy, Religious, seminarians and laity filled me with a deep and abiding hope for the future of the Church in your country. I praise the many courageous initiatives that you continue to undertake for the proclamation of the Gospel in your multi-religious society.

As pastors of the Church in Ghana you have, together with your clergy, Religious and lay catechists, dedicated yourselves to the Church's mission of evangelization, announcing the Good News of salvation to the many who have not yet heard of or accepted Christ. With great solicitude you have also given yourselves to your own Catholic faithful, and have engaged in ecumenical dialogue with the various groups of non-Catholic Christians. You have likewise engaged in concrete works of human advancement with our Christian brethren, in both the educational and medical fields.

4. I encourage you in the great task of evangelization which is "the grace and vocation proper to the Church, her deepest identity (Pauli VI, *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, 14). In this regard you are familiar with the often repeated words of Pope Paul VI: "To reveal Jesus Christ and his Gospel to those who do not know them has been, ever since the morning of Pentecost, the fundamental programme which the Church has taken on as received from her Founder" (*Ibid.* 51).

In practice, the Church's vocation to evangelize means above all living the Gospel more deeply. In your own particular cultural setting the Gospel message must be spread above all by the witness of an exemplary Christian life. Such a dedicated daily witness is an initial act of evangelization. I hasten to add that Christian witness through personal example also needs to be accompanied by the proclamation of Jesus Christ, who by his Death and Resurrection has won us our salvation. This clear message of salvation in Christ as a free gift of God's grace and mercy is at the heart of all the Church's efforts at evangelization.

As concerns the weighty responsibility of ensuring the "inculturation" of the Gospel in the customs and life of the Ghanaian people, permit me to recall the words that I spoke to you during our meeting at the Minor Seminary at Kumasi: "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" (Ioannis Pauli PP. II, *Allocutio ad Ganae episcopos in Seminario Minore in loco v.d. "Kumasi"*, 3, die 9 maii 1980, *Insegnamenti di Giovanni Paolo II*, III, 1(1980) 1266).

5. My dear Brothers: in your labours to adopt the means most appropriate for proclaiming the Gospel in your multi-religious cultural setting, I wish to emphasize the Church's deep respect for non-Christian religions. For "they are the living expression of the soul of vast groups of people. They carry within them the echo of thousands of years of searching for God, a quest which is incomplete but often made with great sincerity and righteousness of heart" (Pauli VI, *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, 53). Moreover, since the plan of salvation encompasses all those who acknowledge the

Creator, there exists between Christians and non-Christians a basis for fraternal dialogue and harmonious exchange. I thus encourage you to “reaffirm the commitment of the Catholic Church both to dialogue and to the proclamation of the Gospel. There can be no question of choosing one and ignoring or rejecting the other. Even in situations where the proclamation of our faith is difficult, we must have the courage to speak of God who is the foundation of that faith, the reason of our hope, and the source of our love” (Ioannis Pauli PP. II, *Allocutio ad Secretariatum pro non-Christianis*, die 28 apr. 1987: *Insegnamenti di Giovanni Paolo II*, X/1 [1987] 1450).

6. I cannot fail to mention at this time the important contribution that your brother priests, both diocesan and Religious, together with the assistance of expatriate and Ghanaian missionaries, are making to the evangelization and social development of your country. They are dosely associated with you in proclaiming the word of God and presiding over the assembly of the faithful for the celebration of the Sacraments. It is through their obedience to you in all the aspects of their priestly ministry that their dedicated lives of service can bear fruit and build up God’s people in unity.

I am pleased to learn that the number of diocesan priests continues to grow each year. This is truly a great blessing for the Church in Ghana. It is the careful attention which you yourselves give to each of your seminarians and to their programmes of priestly formation in your local Minor Seminaries and two Major Seminaries at Pedu and Tamale which will ensure the solid spiritual, academic and pastoral training of your future priests. I wish to assure you of my solidarity in this endeavour, and may each of you with active and loving concern be a true father in Christ to each of your seminarians (Cfr. *Optatam Totius*, 5).

Also worthy of note is the important contribution which the members of the Institutes of consecrated life are making towards the whole work of evangelization in your country, especially in the spheres of health care and teaching. Their public witness to the evangelical counsels of chastity, poverty and obedience and their example of community life enables the Christian Gospel to be better known and accepted. On this occasion I give thanks to Almighty God for all those men and women Religious who laboured as missionaries for many years despite great difficulties in order to establish the Church in Ghana. I also praise all those Religious who at the present time are devoting their lives in the various apostolates of Christian service.

7. My dear Brothers: as I reflect upon the sacramental life of the Church in Ghana I wish to direct my attention in particular to the Sacrament of Christian marriage. We read in the documents of the Second Vatican Council that marriage is “a mutual gift of two persons”, and that “this intimate union, as well as the good of children, imposes total fidelity on the spouses and argues for an unbreakable oneness between them” (*Gaudium et Spes*, 48). Thus we need to insist that the conjugal communion of marriage is characterized by its unity and also by its indissolubility.

The Church clearly teaches that the communion of love constituted by marriage is contradicted by

polygamy. Let us with great pastoral love explain to the faithful that the practice of polygamy“ directly negates the plan of God which was revealed from the beginning, because it is contrary to the equal personal dignity of men and women who in matrimony give themselves with a love that is total and therefore unique and exclusive" (Ioannis Pauli PP. II, *Familiaris Consortio*, 19). The love of husband and wife in the conjugal communion of marriage is a sharing in the mystery of the life and love of God himself. With this in mind the Church devotes herself to the special mission of protecting the sacredness and dignity of marriage in every place.

I take this occasion to express my solidarity with all the Ghanaian people in their aspirations for peace, justice, harmony and social progress. The Church is always open to dialogue with the civil authorities, precisely because she desires the true well-being of all the people of Ghana.

Dear Brothers: it is my prayer that these reflections which I have proposed for your *ad limina* visits will serve to renew you in faith, strengthen you in hope and confirm you in the love of God and humanity.

Commending you to Mary, the Queen of the Apostles, and in the love of Jesus her Son, I impart my Apostolic Blessing to you and to all the clergy, Religious and faithful of the Church in Ghana.

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