



The Holy See

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

Saturday 2 July, 1988

Dear brothers Bishops,

1. It gives me great joy to welcome you today during the course of your *ad Limina* visit. Your presence here in the city of the martyrdom of the Apostles Peter and Paul is a tangible expression of the faith of your local Churches. It manifests *the sense of ecclesial communion* which unites you and your priests, religious and laity in the one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church, which the Lord himself fills with his divine gifts (Cfr. *Eph.* 1, 22-23) so that she may grow and reach all the fullness of God (*Ibid.* 3, 19).

In you I embrace the entire Church in Zimbabwe: the household of God in Harare, Bulawayo, Chinhoyi, Gweru, Mutare and Wankie. "I thank my God always when I remember you in my prayers because I hear of your love and of the faith which you have towards the Lord Jesus and all the saints" (*Philem.* 1, 4-5).

We are meeting within a few weeks of *my forthcoming visit* to your country. I look forward very much to that opportunity which Christ, the Good Shepherd, gives me of having a firsthand experience of the vitality and steadfastness of your local Churches. It will also be an opportunity for reaffirming the Catholic Church's desire for increasing understanding and collaboration with our non-Catholic brothers and sisters in Christ and with all men and women of good will. At the same time it will give concrete expression to the Church's interest in and support for the growth and development of Zimbabwe in these still early stages of its independence and national consolidation. I am pleased to know that the spiritual preparation for my visit has involved your local communities in many activities directed to a renewal of Christian life and service.

Above all, my visit will be a *proclamation and a celebration of our faith in Jesus Christ, our Lord and Redeemer*. At Harare and Bulawayo, in meetings with the faithful and with specific groups I look forward to addressing a number of topics relevant to your ministry. Today I wish to encourage you and exhort you, as men of God, to place your trust in the power of the Lord Jesus, the chief Shepherd of your flocks. Indeed, in the words of the First Letter of Peter, I urge you to “cast all your anxieties on him, for he cares about you” (1 *Petr.* 5, 7).

2. The Church, after a sporadic presence in previous centuries, has been permanently established in Zimbabwe since 1879, when the Jesuit missionaries under the direction of Father Henry Delpechin arrived. From the beginning she has sought to manifest and implement *the mystery of God’s eternal love and his plan* to gather the entire human family into a “people made one with the unity of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit” (Cfr. *Lumen Gentium*, 4). This she accomplishes by introducing the baptized into communion: *communion with God* through sharing in the life of the Spirit which Christ pours forth in our hearts, and communion in the ecclesial body, the sacrament of union and of reconciliation of people with God and with one another.

The ecclesiology of communion, which the Second Vatican Council did so much to revitalize, provides the theological and pastoral framework for the Church’s life and activity at every level. Much serious reflection is required, especially on the part of the pastors of the Church, to ensure that the reality of *communion* penetrates ever more deeply into the lived experience of the people of God. In its most profound sense this communion is a sharing in the election, the mercy, the charity of God, made manifest in salvation history through Jesus Christ, the Redeemer (Cfr. SYNODI EXTR. EPISCOPORUM 1985 *Relatio finalis*, II, A, 2). Its highest means and expression are found when the Christian community gathers around the Bishop in the *Eucharistic Sacrifice*, partaking in the mystery of faith with awareness and hope: “the communion of the Eucharistic Body of Christ signifies and produces, that is, builds up, the intimate communion of all the faithful in the body of Christ which is the Church” (*Ibid.*, C, 1; *Cor.* 10, 16).

3. Communion in the Church means sharing in divine life through grace and bearing witness to that grace in personal and community life. Every aspect of the Church’s life must be understood in relation to the profound and mysterious communion which animates and sustains the ecclesial body.

The “collegial spirit” which is the soul of the *collaboration between Bishops*, on the regional, national and international levels, and the soul of their union with the Successor of Peter, springs directly from each Bishop’s willingness to respond to the requirements of communion. The unity of the presbyterate, the mutual esteem, support and collaboration between priests, religious and laity, bear witness to the vitality of that communion in the local Church. Sharing in communion means giving priority in our thoughts and actions to that love which Christ commanded (Cfr. *Jo.* 13, 34) and which constitutes the most authentic testimony of our fidelity to the Lord: “Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brethren, you did it to me” (*Matth.* 25, 40).

Dear Brothers: I wish to encourage you in your continuing efforts to promote a dynamic sense of *participation and co-responsibility at all levels of the Church in Zimbabwe*. Such a spirit requires an increase of personal and collective maturity on the part of all concerned. With no weakening of the principle of authority properly exercised, it requires teamwork involving self-giving and joyful collaboration in responding to the urgent challenges of evangelization. It should never be used to justify individualism or lack of discipline or of coordination in pastoral activities.

4. In your daily ministry, you feel that so much more could be done if only there were many more agents of the Church's mission to evangelize and build up Christ's kingdom.

The promotion of vocations to the priesthood and the religious life is a responsibility of the whole Christian community, and especially of families. After the difficulties of the years of struggle for independence, the number of those following Christ's call is steadily growing. I am greatly encouraged to learn that the number of major seminarians has almost doubled within the past three years. I would ask you to provide in the best way possible for the appropriate formation of these generous young men, and for the candidates entering your minor seminaries. However, even in the face of very pressing needs, what counts is the quality and commitment of your priests. Therefore, as the Council reminds us, the supreme law in this matter is the solid formation of seminarians (Cfr. *Optatam Totius*, 7).

In the same way, your generous efforts in encouraging vocations to the *religious and consecrated life* are an excellent form of service to the Church in your country. Men and women religious not only provide valuable and absolutely necessary help for missionary activity, but through their more inward consecration to God in the Church they clearly show and signify the inner nature of the Christian calling (Cfr. *Ad Gentes*, 18). They make a specific and essential contribution to the growth and consolidation of your local Churches, a contribution which should always be recognized and respected. May Almighty God continue to raise up abundant vocations among you as a pledge of his love and protection.

5. You are keenly aware of your responsibilities in another field of pastoral activity: *the evangelization and pastoral care of youth*, in a country where most of the population is under twenty years of age. I am looking forward to meeting representatives of the youth of Zimbabwe in the course of my visit. I wish to remind them that *Jesus Christ offers the truth* that will truly make them free and the life that is more than food and clothing (Cfr. *Matth.* 6, 25-33). In the youth lies the whole future of the Church and of civil society. Unfortunately, very many of your young people are burdened with the grave moral and social problems consequent on widespread unemployment. And many are alienated from the faith because of the experiences of war and of political and ideological indoctrination, or because of the increasing attraction of a materialistic approach to life which is altogether alien to authentic African culture. On the other hand, it is consoling to know that the *National Catholic Youth Council* is working hard to meet these challenges. I can only encourage the Catholic community in Zimbabwe to continue and extend its

efforts and to seek better understanding and collaboration with governmental and other religious agencies active in this area of concern.

6. To speak of youth is to think also of the Church's role in the *present and future development of your country*. Of its very nature, the community of faith and love is open to the world in mission and service. You have made it clear that in independent Zimbabwe the Catholic community is fully committed to building up the national community in truth and justice, and you have a particular concern for the poorest and weakest. Your pastoral statements on aspects of national life bear witness to the reflection in the light of God's word which guides your action and your contribution to national reconciliation and to the improvement of living conditions. Though you are happy at the progress made since independence and the end of hostilities, you are also convinced that only in a climate of understanding and cooperation between the State and the various religious bodies can a proper solution be sought to the forms of moral and material poverty which hinder the course of peace and progress.

The Church has been very close to the people in their aspirations to freedom, dignity and progress, and she desires to serve the genuine well-being of all, through her religious mission and through education, health and social activities. To be effective, she must enjoy the *freedom to develop these services according to her own specific vocation and in fidelity to her own doctrine*.

7. One final word concerning evangelization and inculturation. Recently, the *Secretariat for Non-Christians* has drawn the attention of the Episcopal Conferences of Africa and Madagascar to the importance of adopting an appropriate pastoral approach to African Traditional Religion, to which also the majority of Zimbabweans adhere. From your own pastoral experience you are aware of the very delicate nature of this aspect of the Church's apostolate. Evangelization and inculturation are intimately related. Much serious theological reflection is required to determine which values and factors of a particular culture are compatible with life in the new kingdom, the kingdom established by Christ and guided by the Spirit of truth towards fulfilment when Christ who is our life will appear in glory (Cfr. *Col.* 3, 4) On a practical level, the adaptation of the burial and marriage rites in use in your local Churches, for example, shows how the Christian faith can be *truly universal and at the same time close to the culture and way of life of each group*.

It would be difficult to find better words to describe the dynamic relationship between the Gospel message of salvation in Jesus Christ and the various expressions of human culture than those of the Council's *Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World*: "The good news of Christ... takes the spiritual qualities and endowments of every age and nation, and with supernatural riches it causes them to blossom, as it were, from within; it fortifies, completes and restores them in Christ" (*Gaudium et Spes*, 58). A genuine inculturation of faith cannot be reduced to merely adopting the externals of a given culture. True inculturation is *from within*: it consists, ultimately, in a renewal of life under the influence of grace.

The evangelization of your culture is one of the great tasks which confront you in your ministry. I pray that the Marian Year, through the intercession of the Mother of the Redeemer, will bring to you, the Bishops, and to all the priests, religious and laity of the Church in Zimbabwe, a confirmation in faith and love, and *a new outpouring of the gifts of the Holy Spirit* from which the whole apostolic work of evangelization proceeds (Cfr. *Luc.* 24, 49). Until we meet again in your homeland, I ask you to take my cordial greetings to your brothers and sisters of the household of God in the Spirit (Cfr. *Eph.* 2, 19-22). May God's peace be with you!

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