



The Holy See

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

Saturday, 13 February, 1988

Dear Brothers in our Lord Jesus Christ,

1. I am pleased to welcome you, the members of the Sudan Episcopal Conference, on the occasion of your *ad limina* visit. We are gathered here today in the fellowship of the Holy Spirit and in the love of Christ who forever remains the chief cornerstone (Cfr. *Eph.* 2, 20) and shepherd of our souls (Cfr. *1 Petr.* 2, 25). Our meeting is for us a special moment of ecclesial communion and offers us the opportunity to strengthen the bonds of unity, charity and peace which unite us in the College of Bishops (*Lumen Gentium*, 22).

Each of you represents a local Church in the Sudan and brings the hopes, joys, sufferings and difficulties of the priests, Religious and laity entrusted to your pastoral care. You are witnesses too of the *sufferings of your peoples*. As "servants of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God" (*1 Cor.* 4, 1), you are especially concerned by the serious consequences of a breakdown of moral values resulting from situations of insecurity and from the lack of opportunities for education and development.

Among the manifestations of this crisis are the destruction of family bonds, the loss of the sense of the value and dignity of human life, the growth – in other words – of a *mentality of violence*, and the spectacle of youth in disarray and confusion. This difficult situation bears upon your pastoral responsibility and upon the response of the Church as a whole.

I wish to encourage the ecclesial community in the Sudan to be united in facing the challenges of the present, in order effectively to bear witness to the presence of God's kingdom among his

people. As we meet today it is my heartfelt desire to *confirm you in that living hope* to which we have been born anew through the Resurrection of Jesus (*Cfr. 1 Petr. 1, 27*). As I said on the occasion of your last *ad limina* visit: “My message is a message of hope motivated by love... Through you and through all your people, united by word and sacrament as a community, the Lord Jesus wishes to keep alive the invincible hope of his Gospel. And at this juncture of history, you yourselves are called to shepherd your people, to lead them to place their hope in the merciful Saviour of the world, in the Redeemer of man” (Ioannis Pauli PP. II *Allocutio ad sudaniae Episcopos occasione oblata "ad limina" visitationis coram admissos*, 6, die 30 oct. 1981: AAS 73 (1981) 725 s).

2. I am gratefully aware of the *courageous initiatives* which you have undertaken for proclaiming the Gospel in the face of great difficulties. You have ordered your pastoral activity in two basic directions. On the one hand, together with your priests, religious and catechists, you have dedicated yourselves to the Church's great task of announcing the Good News of salvation to the many who have not heard of or accepted Christ. On the other hand, with great solicitude you have given yourselves to your own Catholic faithful, sustaining them by word and sacrament, exercising in their midst the role of the Good Shepherd.

I take this opportunity to encourage your endeavours in the *work of evangelization* which is “the grace and vocation proper to the Church, her deepest identity” (Pauli VI *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, 14). In your particular cultural setting the Gospel message must be spread above all by the witness of an exemplary Christian life. Such a dedicated witness is already an initial act of evangelization.

3. I know that as bishops you deeply appreciate the invaluable contribution which *your brother priests*, both diocesan and Religious, Sudanese and missionaries, are making to the evangelization and social development of your country. Their splendid pastoral work and charitable concern, despite great personal sacrifice and in the face of many obstacles, are an integral part of the Church's service to the People of God in the Sudan. An essential aspect of your apostolic charge is to *confirm your brothers priests* in their identity as ministers of word and sacrament. Always strive to help them by your understanding and compassion. It is important that you and your priests should be closely united and that the *presbyterium* of each local Church should gather around the Bishop in one heart and one mind. In this way the intimate nature of the Church as a communion of faith and love is shown forth more clearly.

I have noted with satisfaction that even in spite of difficulties *vocations to the priesthood and the religious life* are increasing in the Sudan. I wish to assure you of my prayerful support for all your endeavours directed to the selection of worthy candidates for the priestly ministry. Moreover, I share with you the important concern that *your seminarians* should receive an adequate spiritual, academic and pastoral preparation for their future service as priests of Jesus Christ. May you always be true fathers in Christ to all of your seminarians.

The Church's presence and involvement in the spheres of health care, social welfare and education depend largely on the members of the Institutes of consecrated life at work in your country. And I gladly join you in giving thanks to Almighty God for all those *men and women religious* who through their tireless labours at the service of the Gospel in the fields of human advancement have enabled your local Churches to exert an influence far beyond their limited numbers.

4. In your local Churches lay catechists play a fundamental role in the education of children and adults in the faith. Catechesis is one of the essential moments of the whole process of evangelization, especially when it involves the teaching of Christian doctrine imparted in an organic and systematic way, with a view to initiating the hearers into the fullness of Christian life (Cfr. Ioannis Pauli PP. II *Catechesi Tradendae*, 18).

As for the religious formation of the faithful, I encourage you to direct your attention to the establishment and promotion of continuing educational programmes, giving special emphasis to the preparation of the laity for various roles of service and leadership in the civil and ecclesial communities. This more complete formation is especially important for those Catholics who have responsibilities in public life. These men and women are indeed to be encouraged and supported in their service of the common good of their fellow-citizens.

5. You and those entrusted to your pastoral care are called to bear *daily witness to Christ* in a multi-religious society. In this setting, it is your task to reaffirm the commitment of the Catholic Church both to dialogue and to the proclamation of the Gospel. As I have remarked on another occasion: "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" *Eiusdem Allocutio ad eos qui plenario coetui Secretariatus pro non Christianis interfuerunt coram admissos*, 3, die 28 apr. 1987: *Insegnamenti di Giovanni Paolo II*, X, 1 (19879 1450).

The Church has a *deep respect for all non-Christians* because she believes that the plan of salvation includes all those who acknowledge the Creator. Thus there exists a solid basis for mutual dialogue and peaceful coexistence with the Moslems. It is the specific teaching of the Second Vatican Council that Christians and Moslems are "to strive sincerely for mutual understanding. On behalf of all mankind let them make common cause of safeguarding and fostering social justice, moral values, peace and freedom" (*Nostra Aetate*, 3). On our part dialogue means a readiness to cooperate with others for the betterment of humanity, and a commitment to search together for true peace and justice.

In this regard, the right to religious freedom is a master on which the followers of all religious traditions should be willing to collaborate, since *religious freedom is a measure of all other fundamental rights* in so far as it touches the most intimate sphere of the human spirit. No

individual or group, nor the State, can claim authority in the sphere of religious convictions. Where the State grants a special status to one particular religion, as representing the belief of a majority of its citizens, it cannot claim to impose that religion on all its people or restrict the religious freedom of other citizens or of foreigners living within its territory. As I wrote in this year's message for the World Day of Peace: "In no case may the civil organization set itself up as the substitute for the conscience of the citizens, nor may it remove or take the place of the freedom of action of religious associations. A social order requires that all – as individuals and in groups – should be able to profess their religious convictions with full respect for others" (Ioannis Pauli PP. II *Nuntius ob diem ad pacem fovendam dicatum pro a. D.* 1988, pars I, die 8 dec. 1987. *Insegnamenti di Giovanni Paolo II*, X, 3 (1987) 1334 s).

6. I cannot fail to mention *my concern at the armed conflict* currently taking place in the Southern Sudan and in the Southern Kordofan area, marked as it is by loss of life, serious injury to civilians, destruction of property and widespread famine. In addition, the continued fighting has rendered relief efforts nearly impossible. I pray that a negotiated solution to the hostilities will soon be found, in respect for the just aspirations of the people involved. With the wellbeing of the Sudanese people at heart I appeal to all parties to pursue the path of a *negotiated settlement*.

I also wish to express my concern for the hundreds of thousands of refugees and displaced persons who live concentrated in the principal cities of the South and of the North. While I encourage you to continue your *efforts to provide relief* for these poor and homeless people, I renew the hope I expressed on the occasion of the presentation of the Letters of Credence of the Sudanese Ambassador that "the worldwide community will answer the Sudan's appeal for humanitarian assistance in confronting this difficult problem" (Ioannis Pauli PP. II *Allocutio ad exc.mum virum awad Elkarim Fadulalla, Sudaniae apud Sanctam Sedem constitutum Legatum*, die 7 ian. 1988: vide *supra*, p. 49 ss.). This whole question manifests the serious imbalance existing within the international community, where it is sometimes difficult or impossible to organize or deliver needed emergency food assistance and set up the educational and health programmes which should be an important and integral part of relief services, and yet the trade and shipment of arms knows no frontiers and goes on without limitations.

7. I thank all of you, beloved Brothers, for *your generous dedication as pastors* to the flock that has been entrusted to your care. In your daily labours I am close to you in the love of Jesus. May the Blessed Virgin Mary, to whom you recently consecrated the Sudan, intercede for you and strengthen you in your pastoral labours. Recently you have had the joy of consecrating your homeland to the Blessed Virgin Mary. By this solemn act of filial love and devotion, you have followed the example of Christ who, as he was dying on the Cross, entrusted the beloved disciple to the care of his Blessed Mother. "Woman, behold your son!", Christ said to her. And you in turn have said: "Mary, behold your sons and daughters in the Sudan; behold all those who have recourse to you". And indeed we can be sure that the Virgin Mother hears this prayer. For she always sees the Church as the Mystical Body of her Son. She shows a Mother's tender care to the

needy and the weak, to those who are most loved by her Son.

In the name of Jesus, peace to you and to all your clergy, Religious and faithful. With my Apostolic Blessing.

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