



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF THE HOLY FATHER
POPE JOHN PAUL II
TO THE CATHOLIC BISHOPS AND LEADERS
OF CHRISTIAN CHURCHES OF SOUTH AFRICA**

Friday 27 May, 1988

Dear Friends,

1. I am happy to welcome you to the Vatican, and I greet you with the words of the Apostle Paul: "Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ" (1 *Cor.* 1,3).

The ecumenical nature of your group brings to mind the words of the Second Vatican Council, that "cooperation among all Christians vividly expresses that *bond which already unites them*, and it sets in clearer relief the features of Christ the Servant" (*Unitatis Redintegratio*, 12). The bond which unites us is nothing less than the pouring into our hearts of the Holy Spirit (Cfr. *Rom.* 5,5), through our baptismal configuration with Christ. It has to be our ardent prayer that an increased awareness of the nature and significance of that bond *will make our witness before the world more authentic and convincing*. Essential to that witness is the spirit of service with which we seek to respond to the needs of our brothers and sisters.

2. I am fully aware of how deeply committed you are, as leaders of the Christian Churches and communities in your country, to proclaiming the Gospel message of salvation and to affirming, in the historical and social circumstances of your peoples, the values intrinsic to that message and inseparable from it, such as peace, solidarity, justice and the equal human dignity of all. In the one "house of God" (Cfr. *Hebr.* 3, 6) there is room for everyone, but above all for the weakest and poorest and most vulnerable of the brethren.

I know the anguish that you experience as you see, day by day, the terrible toll that the system of apartheid continues to take on the lives of individuals and families, and on society itself. You are

aware of the *Holy See's* constantly declared defence of human dignity and human rights, and its *opposition to all forms of racial discrimination*. I do not hesitate to repeat once again that “every form of discrimination based on race, whether occasional or systematically practised, and whether it is aimed at individuals or whole racial groups, is absolutely unacceptable” (IOANNIS PAULI PP. II *Allocutio ad nationum Unitarum Commissionem contra segregationem racialem v. d. "Apartheid"*, die 7 iul. 1984: *Insegnamenti di Giovanni Paolo II*, VII, 2 81984) 35 ss). For we believe that what is taught in Scripture applies to every man and woman, that “God created man in his own image” (*Gen. 1, 27*) and that all of us “were reconciled to God by the death of his Son” (*Rom. 5, 10*).

3. Since reconciliation is at the heart of the Gospel, Christians cannot accept structures of racial discrimination which violate human rights. But they must also realize that *a change of structures is linked to a change of hearts*. The changes they seek are *rooted in the power of love*, the divine love from which every Christian action and transformation springs. Christians in South Africa are called to work together to promote among all peoples in your society a sense of effective solidarity, which I have recently described, in another context, as “a firm and persevering determination to commit oneself to the common good, that is... to the good of all and of each individual because we are all really responsible for all” (*Sollicitudo Rei Socialis*, 38).

I pray that the Christian communities in South Africa will continue to *foster only peaceful means of responding to the difficulties* of the present situation. The admonition contained in the Letter of Saint James is most appropriate: “the harvest of righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace” (*Iac. 3, 18*). Let us share the hope that in the midst of so much suffering in South Africa, of which the whole world is witness, your ecumenical efforts will plant seeds of justice and peace which, by the help of God's grace, will come to fruition soon.

May God bless all his sons and daughters in South Africa.

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