



The Holy See

APOSTOLIC JOURNEY
OF HIS HOLINESS JOHN PAUL II
TO CAMEROON, SOUTH AFRICA AND KENYA

THIRD SESSION OF THE SPECIAL ASSEMBLY FOR AFRICA
OF THE SYNOD OF BISHOPS

ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS JOHN PAUL II

"Resurrection Garden" of Nairobi (Kenya)

Tuesday, 19 September 1995

"The Bishops of Africa confirmed their steadfast belief that the greatness and mercy of the one God were manifested above all in the Redemptive Incarnation of the Son of God, the Son who is consubstantial with the Father in the unity of the Holy Spirit. This – the Fathers affirmed – is our faith; this is the faith of the Church; this is the faith of all the local Churches which everywhere in Africa are on pilgrimage towards the House of God" (John Paul II, *Ecclesia in Africa*, 10).

In this same faith, I greet you, dear Cardinal Otunga,
Pastor of the Church in Nairobi;
and you Brother Bishops of Kenya, of Africa
and from other parts of the world;
and you Brother Priests, Deacons, Seminarians,
Women and Men Religious, and Lay Faithful
of the Family of God in Africa.

I greet our Friends from the other Christian communities
and from other religious traditions.

1. The Church, by means of which we have access to the Father through Christ in the one Spirit (cf. Eph. 2:18), comes from the Father and *is making her pilgrim way back to him, through the*

world, and therefore through Africa. To this world, the Church must speak "the things that are above" (Col. 3:1). As the Third Christian Millennium approaches, the Spirit is calling the Church to proclaim, with ever more urgency and with an increased awareness of what is at stake for the well-being of the human family, the full and genuine liberation which comes through Jesus Christ.

The Church in Africa has heard this call of the Spirit during the *Special Session for Africa of the Synod of Bishops*. In union with their Pastors, the whole Catholic community has committed itself to be renewed in holiness, to be in a permanent state of mission and, with courage and steadfast hope, to walk with the men and women of this Continent the hard way of the Cross. What the Spirit wants of the Church in Africa will come about as the mature fruit of the dedicated involvement of all the Church's members: Bishops, clergy, religious and laity in fulfilling the pastoral programme elaborated by the Synod Fathers and now set out in the Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation "Ecclesia in Africa".

The Exhortation recalls that at a crucial moment of Jesus' public life, the Apostle Peter professed his faith and that of the other Apostles in these significant words: "Lord, who shall we go to? You have the message of eternal life, and we believe; we know that you are the Holy One of God" (Jn. 6:68). As the Successor of Peter I have ardently looked forward to coming once more to Africa to encourage you *to make the Synod's findings the goal and direction of your ecclesial life towards the Great Jubilee of the Year 2000.*

2. The Document itself, however, is only an instrument and a beginning. What counts is the effective renewal of the Church's members and their ever more generous ministry and service. The Church exists to continue the mission of the Son in the power of the Holy Spirit, and *to bring the Good News of salvation to the human family.* But the Church herself, the community of her members, must be thoroughly evangelized, in order to possess the grace and vitality to proclaim and bear witness to the Gospel of the Crucified and Risen Lord.

In God's plan, the Church is not a means to be used for some human enterprise, no matter how noble and useful. Rather, the Church as she comes to us from the loving hand of the Father, is the sign and instrument of the human family's communion with God himself and of its own deepest unity. If Africa is fragmented and divided, the Church as the Family of God must be a model of unity for society. If Africa is hurt by poverty, corruption, injustice and violence, the Church must be a healing, reconciling, forgiving and supporting community. Love is the binding force of this community, in which none are so poor that they have nothing to give, and none are so rich that they have nothing to receive. Love of God and love for every human being, especially the poor and defenceless, is the motivating force of the evangelizing mission to which you are being called. *Love impels Christ's followers to carry his light and his healing to the ends of the earth: and therefore to every corner of Africa.*

3. At the beginning of this year I had the wonderful privilege of celebrating the World Youth Day

with millions of young people in Manila in the Philippines. On that occasion I was able to meet the Bishops taking part in the Plenary Assembly of the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences. What I said to them about the great task of evangelization is equally applicable to Africa: "When we try to imagine the future of evangelization on this Continent, do we not see it as the *irradiation of a vibrant, living faith* practised and declared by individual Christians and Christian communities?... To irradiate the faith implies the highest standards of Christian living – a rich life of prayer and sacramental practice, and moral integrity – on the part of everyone. To proclaim to others 'eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord' (Rom. 6:23) demands of each member of the Church the holiness and integrity of one for whom 'to live is Christ' (Phil. 1:21). Proclamation becomes credible when it is accompanied by *sanctity of life*, sincerity of purpose and respect for others and for the whole of creation" (John Paul II, *Address to the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conference*, 5 [15 Jan. 1995]).

4. With what resources will the Church in Africa succeed in meeting these enormous challenges? The Synod says: "The most important [resource], after the grace of Christ, is the people. The whole People of God in the theological understanding of "*Lumen Gentium*" – this People, which comprises the members of the Body of Christ in its entirety – has received the mandate, which is both an honour and a duty, to proclaim the Gospel... The whole community needs to be trained, motivated and empowered for evangelization, each according to his or her specific role within the Church" (*Lumen Gentium*, 53).

It is therefore with immense joy and hope that I entrust the Apostolic Exhortation "Ecclesia in Africa" to each segment of the People of God in Africa, to the agents of evangelization.

In the first place to the laity.

The maturing of the Catholic community in Africa will consist to a great extent in *empowering the laity to exercise with responsibility their full Christian vocation and dignity*. Lay men and women, and especially young people, are sometimes disappointed at the space given them in the Church, and at the fact that they are not helped to develop to the full their specific charisms.

The Synod Fathers acknowledged the need for a dynamic laity: parents who are deeply believing people, educators who are conscious of their responsibilities, political leaders who have a profound sense of morality (cf. John Paul II, *Ecclesia in Africa*, 22).

Les fruits du Synode sont confiés tout particulièrement aux familles, *aux familles qui s'efforcent de vivre pleinement leur vocation chrétienne*, car "le foyer est la première école de vie chrétienne et "une école d'enrichissement humain" (*Ibid.*, 92). C'est justement à cause de la vigueur des traditions familiales africaines que les Pères du Synode ont considéré *l'Eglise Famille de Dieu* comme l'idée – force de l'évangélisation de ce continent (cf. *ibid.*, 63). Et c'est précisément dans la famille et par la famille que la *l'inculturation de la foi* peut être bien posée, en fonction de

l'expérience de la réalité quotidienne. Les relations chaleureuses de la famille africaine, l'attention que ses membres portent les uns aux autres, surtout aux enfants et aux anciens, la solidarité qui lie la famille à la communauté plus large, son amour et son respect intenses pour la vie qui est conçue et qui naît, tout cela constitue un riche terrain dans lequel l'esprit de l'Évangile peut faire s'épanouir une splendide floraison de l'esprit des béatitudes. Quand les valeurs traditionnelles de la famille sont purifiées, élevées et transformées par leur rencontre avec l'Évangile de la vie, la communauté catholique redécouvre les dimensions essentielles de la fraternité et de l'amour chrétiens, que compromet l'individualisme excessif des sociétés sécularisées (cf. *ibid.*, 43).

Le Synode ne pouvait pas ignorer les défis nouveaux auxquels la famille africaine doit faire face, à cause de l'adoption parfois imposée de modèles de développement économique et social qui ne reflètent pas le génie de l'Afrique. C'est ainsi que, dans tous les pays africains, on connaît "les phénomènes de déracinement familial, d'urbanisation, de désœuvrement, avec les séductions matérialistes de toute sorte et un ébranlement intellectuel accentué par l'avalanche d'idées insuffisamment critiquées et par l'influence des médias" (*ibid.*, 92). L'Afrique a certainement en elle les ressources humaines et spirituelles nécessaires pour trouver sa propre voie vers un meilleur développement matériel et plus de bien-être, sans importer chez elle ce que les sociétés de consommation ont de moins bon! Dans l'Exhortation apostolique, j'ai voulu reprendre ce que j'ai dit au cours de ma visite au Malawi en 1988: "*Je vous lance un défi aujourd'hui, un défi qui consiste à rejeter un mode de vie qui ne correspond pas au meilleur de vos traditions locales et de votre foi chrétienne.*"

Beaucoup de personnes en Afrique portent leur regard, au-delà de l'Afrique, vers la soi-disant "liberté du mode de vie moderne". Aujourd'hui je vous recommande vivement *de regarder en vous-mêmes. Regardez les richesses de vos propres traditions, regardez la foi que nous célébrons dans cette assemblée. Vous trouverez ici la véritable liberté, vous trouverez ici le Christ qui vous conduira à la vérité*" (*ibid.*, 48).

5. I entrust the results of the Synod *to the youth of Africa*, for young people constitute the largest portion of the population and the hope of your future. Young Africans are often caught up in a crisis of identity: between contrasting models of life which leave them confused and without ideals. The Church must find suitable ways of being close to them, with special attention to out-of-schoolers, street children, children migrants and refugees.

The Synod calls young people to be apostles to their own generation, transmitting to others the light of Christ which illumines their own interior (*ibid.*, 93)

The fruits of the Synod are entrusted in a special way to catechists, who have always been and are today "*a determinative force in the implantation and expansion of the Church in Africa*" (*ibid.*, 91) In the name of the whole Church I say thanks to all catechists for the indispensable work you do in the service of the Gospel. Often you work in a quiet, hidden way. The Lord, who sees in the

secret of your hearts, will not fail to reward you!

6. With particular confidence I entrust the implementation of the Synod to the consecrated witness and action of *women and men Religious*, whether Africans or missionaries from abroad. You are the living signs of undivided love for God and absolute dedication to the growth of his Kingdom. The Apostolic Exhortation encourages you to seek ways to grow and expand by fostering new vocations, and to continue to bring the richness of your charisms to the Churches and the peoples you serve, just as you have done since the beginning of the *plantatio Ecclesiae* on this Continent.

I appeal in a special way to *the contemplative Religious communities*, to continue to bring the needs of the Church and the peoples of Africa before the throne of God's grace. By the example of your adoration and sacrifice, go on teaching that God is the true centre and goal of human life, and bring upon God's People the supernatural fruitfulness which will make the coming years a new springtime for the Church in Africa.

7. In union with our Brother Bishops, I solemnly entrust the Apostolic Exhortation *to the priests and deacons of Africa*.

It will depend above all on you and your Bishops whether your parishes, communities and organizations will undergo the renewal which the Spirit is offering and which the Catholic peoples of Africa need in order to enter the Third Christian Millennium with "a firm commitment to implement with great fidelity the decisions and orientations which, with the Apostolic authority of the Successor of Peter, I present in this Exhortation. They are decisions and orientations which can be traced back to the genuine heritage of the Church's teaching and discipline and in particular to the Second Vatican Council, the main source of inspiration for the Special Assembly for Africa" (*Ibid.*, 141) With ardent love in the Lord for each one of you, I encourage you to be servants and leaders through fidelity to the Eucharist and to God's word. You are in the forefront of the great enterprise of the new evangelization, which must give flesh to the truths and values of the Gospel in the language, history, and social, political and economic life of your peoples (*Ibid.*, 59)

8. *The Synod is over. The Synod has just begun.* The road ahead will not be easy, but every member of the Family of God in Africa – *Bishops, priests, deacons, seminarians, Religious and lay women and men* – must all trust in the Lord's promise: "I am always with you, yes, to the end of time!" (Mt. 28:20). To him be glory and honour, for ever and ever.

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