



The Holy See

APOSTOLIC PILGRIMAGE TO AFRICA
(MAY 2-12, 1980)

**ADDRESS OF JOHN PAUL II
TO THE DIPLOMATIC COMMUNITY IN NAIROBI***

*Nairobi (Kenya)
Tuesday, 6 May 1980*

*Your Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,*

1. Your visit here this evening gives me great pleasure, for it offers me an opportunity to meet so many distinguished members of the Diplomatic Community. My cordial and respectful welcome goes also to the representatives of regional and international organizations, whose activities enrich this Capital city. I thank all of you for the honour you show me by your courteous presence. I am indeed grateful to the Representative of the Holy See for having taken the initiative to offer you the hospitality of this house, which is also my home during my stay in Nairobi.

I am sure that you are well acquainted with this continent, both by virtue of your office and as a result of the daily contacts that you have with the leaders and the people of Africa. You will therefore not be surprised if *I address my remarks primarily to the African situation* to some of the problems which face this continent.

2. Tonight I wish to recall the prophetic words which Paul VI addressed to the Parliament of Uganda, in which he spoke of Africa as being "emancipated from its past and ripe for a new era".

Standing here in Kenya eleven years later, I dare to say: This new era has begun and Africa is showing itself ready for the challenge! During these years, so much has happened, so many changes have come about, so much progress has been made; and at the same time so many new

problems have arisen. Hence, it seems that this is now an appropriate occasion for me to speak about the new reality of Africa.

Many of the African situations and problems that demand our attention today are no different from those that affect other nations and continents in the world. Others, however, are typically African in the sense that the elements of the problems and the resources available for their solutions - natural and especially human resources - are unique for this continent. In this there is *a paramount factor* that must be kept in mind. It is *the true identity of the African*, the African person, the African man and woman.

3. The path that every human community must walk in its quest to ascertain the deeper meaning of its existence is the path of truth about man in his totality. If we want to understand the situation in Africa, its past and its future, *we must start from the truth of the African person* - the truth of every African in his or her concrete and historical setting. If this truth is not grasped, there can exist neither any understanding among the African peoples themselves nor any just and fraternal relations between Africa and the rest of the world, for the truth about man is a prerequisite for all human achievements.

The truth about the African individual must be seen, first and foremost, *in his or her dignity as a human person*. There are present in the culture of this continent many elements which help one to understand this truth. Is it not refreshing to know that the African accepts, with his whole being, the fact that there is a fundamental relationship between himself and God the Creator? Hence he is prone to consider the reality of himself or of the material world around him within the context of this relationship, thus expressing a fundamental reference to God who "created man in the image of himself, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them"[1]. The unique dignity, and fundamental equality of all human persons must therefore be accepted as the starting point for a true understanding of the identity and the aspirations of the people of this continent.

African society has also - built into its life - *a set of moral values*, and these values shed further light on the true identity of the African. History testifies how the African continent has always known a strong sense of community in the different groups that make up its social structure; this is especially true in the family where there is strong coherence and solidarity. And what better insight can be found into the necessity for the peaceful solution of conflicts and difficulties - a way that is in keeping with human dignity - than that innate propensity for dialogue, that desire to explain differing views in conversation, to which the African turns so easily and which he accomplishes with such natural grace? A sense of celebration expressed in spontaneous joy, a reverence for life and the generous acceptance of new life - these are some more of the elements that are part of the heritage of the African and help define his identity.

4. It is against this background that the Catholic Church, in the light of her own convictions drawn from the Message of Christ, views *the realities of Africa today*, and proclaims her trust in this

continent.

A few days before leaving on this pastoral visit, I expressed my joy in being able to visit the peoples of Africa in their own countries, in their own sovereign states, where they are "the true masters of their own land and the helmsmen of their own destiny"^[2]. In Africa, most of the nations have known colonial administration in the past. While not denying the various achievements of this administration, the world rejoices in the fact that this period is now drawing to a final close. The peoples of Africa, with a few painful exceptions, are assuming *full political responsibility for their own destiny* - and I greet here particularly the recently achieved independence of Zimbabwe. But one cannot ignore the fact that other forms of dependence are still a reality or at least a threat.

Political independence and national sovereignty demand, as a necessary corollary, that there be also *economic independence and freedom from ideological domination*. The situation of some countries can be profoundly conditioned by the decisions of other powers, among which are the major world powers. There can also be the subtle threat of interference of an ideological nature that may produce, in the area of human dignity, effects that are even more deleterious than any other form of subjugation. There are still situations and systems, within individual countries, and in the relationships between States, that are "marked by injustice and social injury"^[3] and that still condemn many people to hunger, disease, unemployment, lack of education and stagnation in their process of achieving development.

5. The State, the justification of which is the sovereignty of society, and to which is entrusted the safeguarding of independence, must never lose sight of its first objective, which is *the common good* of all its citizens - all its citizens without distinction, and not just the welfare of one particular group or category. The State must reject anything unworthy of the freedom: and of the human rights of its people, thus banishing all elements such as abuse of authority, corruption, domination of the weak, the denial to the people of their right share in political life and decisions, tyranny or the use of violence and terrorism. Here again, I do not hesitate to refer to the truth about man. Without the acceptance of the truth about man, of his dignity and eternal destiny, there cannot exist within the nation that fundamental trust which is a basic ingredient of all human achievements. Neither can the public function be seen for what it truly is: a service to the people, which finds its only justification in solicitude for the good of all.

6. In this same context of the respect of the dignity of its citizens by the State, I wish to draw attention to the question of *religious freedom*.

Because she believes that no freedom can exist that no true fraternal love is possible without reference to God, who "created man in the image of himself"^[4], the Catholic Church will never cease to defend, as a fundamental right of every person, freedom of religion and freedom of conscience.

"The curtailment and violation of religious freedom of individuals and communities is not only a painful experience", I stated in my Encyclical, "but it is above all an attack on man's very dignity, independently of the religion professed or of the concept of the world which these individuals and communities have". And I added that, because unbelief, lack of religion and atheism can be understood only in relation to religion and faith, it is difficult to accept "a position that gives only atheism the right of citizenship in public and social life, while believers are, as though by principle, barely tolerated or are treated as second-class citizens or are even - and this has happened - entirely deprived of the rights of citizenship"[5]. For this reason, the Church believes - without hesitation and without doubt - that *an atheistic ideology cannot be the moving and guiding force* for advancing the well-being of individuals or for promoting social justice when it deprives man of his God-given freedom, his spiritual inspiration and the power to love his fellowmen adequately.

7. Another problem on which the truth about man, and about the African in particular, impels me to speak out, is the persistent problem of *racial discrimination*. The aspiration to equal dignity on the part of individuals and peoples, together with its concrete implementation in every aspect of social life, has always been strongly supported and defended by the Church. During his visit to Africa, Paul VI stated: "We deplore the fact that, in certain parts of the world, there persist social situations based upon racial discrimination and often willed and sustained by systems of thought; such situations constitute a manifest and inadmissible affront to the fundamental rights of the human person"[6]. In his last address two years ago to the Diplomatic Corps accredited to the Holy See, he emphasized again that the Church is "concerned by the aggravation of racial and tribal rivalries which instigate division and rancour", and he denounced the "attempt to create juridical and political foundations in violation of the principles of universal suffrage and the self-determination of peoples"[7].

The truth about man in Africa demands from me on this occasion that I should confirm these statements. And this I do with deep and strong conviction. Progress has been made with regard to some situations, and for this we are grateful to God. But there still remain too many instances of institutionalised discrimination on the basis of racial differences, and these I cannot abstain from exposing before world opinion. Nor let us forget in this regard the need to combat racist reactions which may surface in connection with the migration of people from the countryside to the urban centres, or from one country to another. Racial discrimination is evil, no matter how it is practised, no matter who does it or why.

8. Still within the context of the whole African continent, I would like to draw attention to a problem that is of such urgency that it must indeed mobilize the necessary solidarity and compassion for its solution: I refer to *the question of the refugees in many regions of Africa*.

Large numbers of people have been compelled for a variety of reasons to leave the country they love and the place where they have their roots. Sometimes this is for political reasons, at other times it is to escape from violence or war, or as a consequence of natural disasters, or because of

a hostile climate. The African community and the world community must not cease to be concerned about the condition of the refugees and by the terrible sufferings to which they are subjected, many of them for a very long time. These refugees truly have a right to freedom and to lives worthy of their human dignity. They must not be deprived of the enjoyment of their rights, certainly not when factors beyond their own control have forced them to become strangers without a homeland.

I therefore appeal to all the authorities to ensure that in their own nation rightful freedom is always offered to all citizens, so that nobody will have to go looking for it elsewhere. I appeal to the authorities of the nations whose borders the refugees are compelled to cross, to receive them with cordial hospitality. *I appeal to the international community* not to let the burden weigh solely on the countries where the refugees temporarily settle, but to make the necessary aid available to the Governments concerned and to the appropriate international bodies.

9. The presence in this City of Nairobi of such organizations as the United Nations Environment Programme and the United Nations Centre for Human Settlements or Habitat draws our attention to another problem area, that of *the total human environment*. Man, in his aspiration to satisfy his needs and to achieve better living conditions, has created an increasing number of environmental problems. Urban and industrial expansion aggravate these problems, especially when its victims are the very weak often living in "poverty belts", lacking elementary services and normal chances for improvement. I praise the efforts of all those who are trying to increase awareness that rational and honest planning are needed to avoid or redress such situations.

10. The Holy See greets with great satisfaction every effort that is being made to achieve better *collaboration among the African countries* in order to further their development, to promote their dignity and fuller independence, and to secure their rightful share in the management of the world, while at the same time strengthening their commitment to bear their share of collective responsibility for the poor and underprivileged of the planet.

The Organization of African Unity, together with all other bodies which pursue an aim of greater collaboration among the African nations, is deserving of every encouragement. The Holy See was pleased to be invited by the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa to establish closer relations, through the participation of Observers at the meetings of the Commission and its subsidiary bodies. It remains ready to extend to other African organizations similar, collaboration, in accordance with its own nature and universal mission, and motivated only by the demands of its evangelical message of peace, justice and service to all humanity and to every human being.

11. It is *my fervent hope that the free and independent nations of Africa will always assume their rightful place in the family of nations*. In the quest for international peace, justice and unity, Africa has an important role to play. Africa constitutes a real treasure-house of so many authentic human values. It is called upon to share these values with other peoples and nations, and so to enrich the

whole human family and all other cultures. But in order to be able to do so, Africa must remain deeply faithful to itself; day after day it must become ever more faithful to its own heritage, not because of opposition and antagonism towards others, but because it believes in the truth about itself.

This same truth about Africa must enlighten the whole international community, so that every nation and Government will see more clearly the rights and the needs of this continent, and assume a more determined political will towards enabling the African nations not only to satisfy the basic needs of their people, but also to advance effectively towards their full share of human well-being, without having to accept new forms of dependence linked to the aid they receive.

12. It will be to the glory of this continent and this nation to create *a form of progress* for all its inhabitants that is fully *in harmony with the whole human being*. The true model for progress is not one that extols material values only, but one that recognizes *the priority of the spiritual*. Great and rapid changes are taking place in the social fabric of many nations working towards a better future for their citizens. But no social change will constitute a true and lasting enrichment of the people if it sacrifices or loses the supreme values of the spirit.

Development will be one-sided and lacking in humanity if materialism, the profit motive or the selfish pursuit of wealth or of power takes the place of the values that are so highly practised in African society - values such as mutual concern, solidarity, and the recognition of God's presence in all life.

A growing sense of brotherhood, of social love, of justice, the banishing of every form of discrimination and oppression, the fostering of individual and collective responsibility, respect for the sanctity of human life from its very conception, the preservation of a strong family spirit - these will be the hallmarks of successful development and the strength of the people as they move towards the third millennium.

13. Ladies and Gentlemen, in the pursuit of the well-being of peoples and nations, choices have to be made constantly. There are choices to be made on the basis of political principles and priorities, on the basis of economic laws, or in the light of practical necessities. But there is one choice that must always be made, whatever the context or the field: it is *a fundamental choice - the choice for or against humanity*. Whatever his or her responsibility or authority is, nobody escapes this choice: Shall we work for the good of man or against it? Will the total good of the human person be the ultimate criterion for our actions and our programmes? *Will the African in his human dignity be the path towards a just and peaceful future of this continent?*

It is my hope that he will.

Long live Africa!

[1] *Gen. 1, 27.*

[2] Ioannis Pauli PP. II *Allocutio ad "Regina Caeli"*, die 27 apr. 1980: vide *supra* p.1000.

[3] Ioannis Pauli PP. II *Allocutio ad Nationum Unitarum Legatos*, 17, die 2 oct. 1979: *Insegnamenti di Giovanni Paolo II*, II, 2 (1979) 535.

[4] *Gen. 1, 27.*

[5] Ioannis Pauli PP. II *Redemptor Hominis*, 17.

[6] Pauli VI *Allocutio ad honorabiles Viros e publico Legumlatorum Coetu Reipublicae Ugandensis*, die 1 aug. 1969: AAS 61 (1969) 580-586.

[7] Eiusdem *Ad Nationum apud Sedem Apostolicam Legatos, ineunte anno 1978, coram admissos*, die 14 ian. 1978: AAS 70 (1978) 168-174.

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