



The Holy See

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

***ADDRESS OF JOHN PAUL II
TO THE DIPLOMATIC CORPS****

*Accra (Ghana)
Friday, 9 May 1980*

Your Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

1. Meeting the Heads of Mission and the Diplomatic Corps in this capital City of Accra gives me great pleasure. I feel honoured by the courtesy which you extend to me by your presence here, and I wish to thank His Excellency the Dean and the Diplomatic Corps for the kindness shown me.

After a week in Africa - such a short time yet one filled with indelible memories - I wish to share with you a few of the impressions and concerns which I have experienced in my first contact with the African continent.

When I came to Africa at the invitation of the civil authorities and of my brother Bishops, I did so as the Head of the Catholic Church. But I also came as a humble servant entrusted by God's providence with a mission to all mankind: *The mission of proclaiming the dignity and fundamental equality of all human beings* and their right to live in a world of justice and peace, of brotherhood and solidarity.

2. The purpose of my journey is, in the first place, *religious and spiritual*. I wish to confirm my brother Bishops, the clergy, religious and laity in their faith in God the Creator and Father, and in the one Lord Jesus Christ. I wish also to celebrate the common faith and charity that unites us, to rejoice with them in the communion that binds us all together in one family, in the Mystical Body of Christ. I bring to them the greeting of the Apostle Paul: "All the Churches of Christ greet you"^[1].

My coming to the Church in Africa is meant to be a witnessing to the universality of the Church and a rejoicing in the richness of its various expressions. For "in the mind of the Lord the Church is universal by vocation and mission, but when she puts down her roots in a variety of cultural, social and human terrains, she takes on different external expressions and appearances in each part of the world"[2].

By virtue of her mission and nature, the Church is not tied to any given form of culture, or to any political, economic, or social system. By her very universality, she can enter into communion with various cultures and realities, creating a mutual enrichment[3]. By virtue of that same universality she can also create a very close bond between diverse human communities and nations, provided that they acknowledge and respect her right to freedom in the carrying out of her specific mission.

3. Here I feel that we have *a common mission*. As individual diplomats you are mandated to represent and foster the interests of your respective States. As a group, you are also bearers of a mission that transcends regional and national boundaries, for it is also part of your mission to foster better understanding among people, closer collaboration on a worldwide scale - in a word, to be the promoters of the unity of the whole world. It is the greatness of your task to be the builders of international peace and justice in an age that is a witness at the same time to growing interdependence and to the stronger affirmation of each nation's own identity and dignity.

Yours is a noble even if difficult task: while serving your own nation, you are also the artisans of the common good of the whole human family, working together to save the earth for humanity, to ensure that the world's riches reach all human beings, including our brothers and sisters who are now excluded by social injustice. As diplomats, you are involved in the establishing of a new order of international relations based on the fundamental and inescapable demands of justice and peace. And those of you here present who represent international or regional organizations are also engaged - though by different methods and means - in the process of concentrating the efforts of all nations on building a just and fraternal world.

4. I am sure that your experience in different parts of the world as diplomats or international servants, together with the familiarity that you have acquired of the African scene, has created in you a keen awareness of the major problems that face humanity today - especially *the global issues arising from the economic and social disparities that exist in the world community*. When I spoke to the Thirty-fourth General Assembly of the United Nations Organization, I was able to draw attention to this fundamental problem when I said: "It is no secret that the abyss separating the minority of the excessively rich from the multitude of the destitute is a very grave symptom in the life of any society. This must also be said with even greater insistence with regard to the abyss separating countries and regions of the earth"[4].

It is a great contradiction of our day and age that these glaring disparities can exist, and that the gap which separates rich and poor countries, or rich and poor continents, is still widening rather

than decreasing, at a time when peoples have become more aware than ever before of their interdependence. Is it not a sad fact that the efforts - so worthwhile in themselves - of the international organizations and of the different nations in bilateral and multilateral initiatives have not been able to draw the poorer countries out of the vicious circle of poverty and underdevelopment?

Why is it then that these efforts have not produced better and more lasting results? Why have they not given hope to the developing countries - the hope that their own resources, fraternal aid, and especially the hard work of their people would enable them to chart their own development course and satisfy their essential needs?

5. I am convinced that we all agree that the only way to eliminate inequalities is through the *coordinated cooperation* of all the countries *in a spirit of true partnership*. In this context, much has been said and written about the importance of revitalizing what has been called the North-South dialogue. Without accepting an oversimplified view of a world divided into a rich North and a poor South, one must concede that this distinction has a certain foundation in fact, since Northern countries generally control the world's industry and economy. The Holy See cannot but encourage every initiative that aims at looking honestly at this situation, and at achieving an agreement among all parties on the necessary action to be taken. But at the same time, I would ask the question: Why is it that such initiatives encounter such difficulty and fail to achieve tangible and lasting results? The answer is to be found primarily, not in the economic or monetary spheres, but in an area of much deeper dimensions - in the domain of moral and spiritual imperatives. New insights and a fundamental change in attitude are called for.

The difficult and controversial subjects which divide richer and poorer nations cannot be faced as long as an attitude of prejudice persists; these subjects must be approached in a spirit of trust and mutual openness, in a spirit of honest evaluation of reality and in a generous willingness to share.

Above all, the examination of the North-South problems must be made with a renewed conviction that no solution can be found unless it is rooted in the truth about man. The complete truth about man is the necessary condition for people to live together harmoniously and to come to an agreement on solutions that fully respect the dignity of all human beings.

6. Your presence here in an African capital, Ladies and Gentlemen, is of great significance for your countries and for the organizations that you represent. But it is also very meaningful for the country that offers you its hospitality, for all Africa, and for the whole world. This is a lofty vision but it is also the necessary condition for success in your endeavours to bring about better and more just relations between peoples and nations. Each diplomatic community is in a way a proving ground where you test your own attitudes and insights against *a vision of the world where man is central to all history and to all progress*. My message to you therefore - the message of one who is aware of his mission as a servant of God and a defender of man - is this: only a world that is truly

human can be a world that is peaceful and strong.

Thank you.

[1] *Rom.* 16, 16.

[2] Pauli VI *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, 62.

[3] Cfr. *Gaudium et Spes*, 58.

[4] Ioannis Pauli PP. II *Allocutio ad Nationem Unitarum Legatos*, 18, die 2 oct. 1979:
Insegnamenti di Giovanni Paolo II, II, 2 (1979) 535-536.

*AAS 72 (1980), p. 520-523.

Insegnamenti III, 1 pp. 1277-1281.

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