



The Holy See

APOSTOLIC PILGRIMAGE TO NIGERIA, BENIN

GABON AND EQUATORIAL GUINEA

**ADDRESS OF JOHN PAUL II
TO THE LEADERS OF DIFFERENT
CHRISTIAN RELIGIOUS FAMILIES**

Lagos (Nigeria)

Tuesday, 16 February 1982

Dear friends in our Lord Jesus Christ,

1. It is with great pleasure that I meet you, distinguished and respected bishops and other leaders of the different Christian religious families in Nigeria. My pastoral visit from its very planning was meant to have an important ecumenical dimension, for I see work for the unity of all Christians as an essential element in my own ministry as Bishop of Rome and Pastor of the Catholic Church. This encounter therefore fulfils one of my dearest desires. I am very pleased to greet you in the love of our common Lord: "The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all".

The Catholic Church has much in common with your various ecclesial communities. We are all baptized in Christ, whom we confess as our Lord and Saviour, and whom we acknowledge as the "one Mediator between God and man". The Bible and especially the Gospels are dear to us all, because they are the word of God and the revelation of his saving love. Our fundamental religious orientation is directed by our faith in Christ, our love for him, and our desire to help in the spreading of his Kingdom into the hearts of all, among all peoples, and at all times.

We also share common views on fundamental human rights, on justice and peace, on development, and on the need to live according to one's faith. We believe that there must be no dichotomy between the Gospel message and Christian living.

2. While it is true that, both in Nigeria and in the world at large, the sad phenomenon of Christian disunity is still to be found, it is also true that achievements have been recorded in the field of ecumenism, in this country as well as internationally. The Catholic Church is engaged in a fruitful dialogue at international level with many of the Churches and confessional bodies that you represent; and here in Nigeria there is now much more dialogue, formal and informal,

between yourselves and also between you and the Catholic Church, than in the past. So too there is a growing collaboration at world level in works of Christian service and charity. This also finds its expression in your own country. The Christian Association of Nigeria which was solemnly inaugurated in 1980 is working at national, regional and state levels with appreciable success. The Christian Health Association of Nigeria is a sound association of all Church medical institutions in this vast country. It has done much good, especially in joint approaches to Government and in projects of producing and distributing medical supplies at reduced prices. All of this constitutes a common witness to the charity of Christ.

Moreover, your common efforts with the Catholic Church in the Bible Society of Nigeria has yielded dividends, especially in joint projects of Bible translation into your many languages, and in the subsidizing of Bibles so that the poor can buy them too. These efforts are the expression of true zeal, "that the word of the Lord may speed on and triumph".

You also issue joint statements when the occasion demands it. You show concern for the place of the Church and religion in Nigerian schools. And you promote national unity and understanding in other ways too. May God bless all these efforts.

3. It is my hope that you Nigerian Christians will pray ever more fervently that the Holy Spirit will give you the gift of perfect unity in Christ. Meanwhile, it is necessary to continue your joint projects of Bible translation, dialogue and common witness to Christ in the Christian Association of Nigeria.

Promote more and more the joint study of Christ's teaching and of the moral exigencies of true discipleship in Christian living. Above all, love one another as Christ has loved us. This is his special commandment.

In all these ways we pray and work, hope and wait for the day, known to God alone, when we shall be fully one in Christ, when we shall celebrate the one Holy Eucharist and drink from the same Sacred Chalice.

I thank you. I respect you. I beg God to bless you abundantly. May the peace of Christ reign in your hearts.

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