



The Holy See

APOSTOLIC JOURNEY TO TOGO, IVORY COAST, CAMEROON,
CENTRAL AFRICAN REPUBLIC, ZAIRE, KENYA AND MOROCCO

**ADDRESS OF POPE JOHN PAUL II
ON THE OCCASION OF THE OPENING
OF THE CATHOLIC HIGHER INSTITUTE OF EASTERN AFRICA**

*Nairobi (Kenya)
Sunday, 18 August 1985*

Dear Brother Bishops, dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

“The God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory” (*Eph. 1, 17*) in his loving Providence enables us, through this meeting, to give visible expression to *the profound ecclesial communion* in which the faithful are united with the successors of the Apostles, appointed by the Holy Spirit as pastors of souls and sent to continue the work of Christ, the eternal Pastor (*Christus Dominus, 1*).

I am filled with a sense of *gratitude to God* for this gathering to which I have looked forward with great anticipation, and I ask you to join me in praising God who is rich in mercy (*Eph. 2, 4*) for the mutual comfort and confirmation which it brings us. I greet all of you who are members of the Episcopal Conferences of Eastern Africa and those of you from other African countries, and from other continents. I thank you for your presence and for your warm welcome.

My appreciation goes also to the civil authorities and dignitaries who have wished to share this happy moment in the life of the Church in Eastern Africa. I express my cordial esteem and respect for the members of the various Christian Churches and Ecclesial Communities and other religious bodies. May we be united in our sincere desire to serve the cause of peace and progress among all people without exception or distinction, a cause which we hold dear precisely because of *our common faith in God*, the common Father of the human family.

To all of you present here - to the priests, to the men and women Religious, to the members of missionary Congregations and Societies, to the seminarians, to all I say: "Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ" (*Phil.*, 1, 2).

1. The particular purpose of this meeting is *the formal opening of the Catholic Higher Institute of Eastern Africa*.

This magnificent campus represents a project which has as *its objective goal "the building up of the body of Christ"* (*Eph.* 4, 12), as it exists in Eastern Africa. This Institute is a project for which the Bishops of this region have laboured with dedication and love.

Through the Chairman of AMECEA, Bishop Mazombwe, the Hierarchy has expressed its commitment to the Catholic Higher Institute of Eastern Africa as a symbol of the ever more mature presence of the Church in this region, and as a practical response to the pressing need for qualified collaborators in the task of evangelization and catechesis.

You therefore have great hopes for this Theological Faculty. You expect that it will effectively strengthen the spiritual and ecclesial life of your local Churches. I fully share these hopes with you, and I encourage you to pursue the goals of the Institute with wholehearted enthusiasm.

2. The Institute is being inaugurated in the context of the Forty-third Eucharistic Congress. This circumstance immediately raises our thoughts to the sublime reality which constitutes the object of all genuine theological reflection in the Church: *the mystery of Jesus Christ*, the Word made flesh for the Redemption of the human family. In words of the Second Vatican Council, the intention of the sacred sciences is "to unfold ever increasingly . . . the mystery of Christ, that mystery which affects the whole history of the human race, influences the Church continuously, and is mainly exercised by the priestly ministry" (*Optatam Totius*, 14).

The task of proclaiming the Gospel message of the saving mystery of Christ, in its objective conceptual content as well as in the existential dimension in which it unfolds in history, *belongs to the whole community of believers*.

Yet, in a special way, "the word of life" (*1 Jo.* 1, 1) is entrusted to the teaching authority of the Church uniquely invested in the College of Bishops. As successors of the Apostles, Bishops are servants of the "word" and their first duty to that "word" is to assume with responsibility the ministry of preachers and teachers of the Gospel message. The Bishops of the Church are, in fact, as the Council reminds us, "teachers endowed with the authority of Christ, who preach to the people committed to them the faith they must believe and put into practice" (*Lumen Gentium*, 25).

This Catholic Higher Institute is, in a real sense, an *instrument of the particular teaching office (munus docendi)* entrusted to the Bishops of this region. It expresses their collegial desire and

decision to exercise that teaching office in enlightened dialogue with the theological culture of the universal Church as it has developed through the centuries and as it is developing in the present circumstances of the history of God's people.

3. The proclamation of the Gospel is destined for all individuals, and for all peoples. The faith which the Church professes in response to that proclamation belongs to all her members, and all are called to understand and live that faith in as full a way as possible.

While it is true that the teaching office of the Church, through various forms of evangelization and catechesis, reaches vast sectors of God's people, a strictly theological culture, especially at a higher academic level, is available only to a limited number of the faithful. Yet, the deeper understanding of the mystery of Christ which theological reflection provides is a *gift of the Holy Spirit given for the common good of the entire ecclesial community*.

Theologians and those who pursue theological studies in the name of the Church must therefore realize that their activity is not an end in itself, but *a service rendered to the Bride of Christ*. They are called to act, not as a privileged elite, but all the more consciously as the humble administrators of a "talent" entrusted to them (Cfr. *Matth. 25, 14-30*).

The words of Saint Paul to the Ephesians regarding the various charisms are applicable here, and they formulate a programme for those engaged in the field of theological studies: "Some should be . . . teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God" (*Eph. 4, 11-13*). By preserving a *clear vision of its specific "vocation"* within the ecclesial body, and by maintaining an acute sense of service to God's people and of communion with the Bishops, this Faculty can become a source of great creative vitality in your local Churches.

4. In this respect I am pleased to note that, in determining the aims of the Institute, the Bishops have given priority to two aspects of their pastoral responsibility for which they seek the able assistance of those who will teach and study here. The first is *the strengthening and development of the spiritual life* of your communities. The second is *the consolidation of the family*, "the domestic church", and *those other small Christian communities* which as natural groups "spring from the need to live the Church's life more intensely, or from a desire and quest for a more human dimension such as larger ecclesial communities can only offer with difficulty" (PAULI VI *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, 58).

The task of the Institute will be to form the spiritual and intellectual life of the pastoral collaborators - priests, religious and lay men and women - who will serve and animate these communities "which come together within the Church in order to unite themselves to the Church and to cause the Church to grow" (*Ibid.*).

5. Alongside these pastoral concerns, and as a guarantee of effectiveness in responding to them, *the specifically theological function of the Institute* has special significance for your Churches.

In the concrete circumstances of the unfolding of the mystery of salvation in your dioceses and in your countries, it is important for your local Churches to be actively present in the cultural life of society by offering *a properly developed theological presentation of the Gospel message* and of the human problems for which people are seeking an explanation.

The presence of the Church as a community of believers within the social, economic and political realities of life is, to some extent, mediated by theological reflection. In order to be truly Christian, *this theological reflection must be guided by the revealed word of God and by the teaching of the Church* as it has developed from the beginning through the exercise of the prophetic office of Christ, which has been transmitted in a particular way to the Roman Pontiff and to the Bishops in communion with him.

The application of a “scientific” method to this reflection is *the specific task of the theologian*. Theological reflection clarifies the structure of intelligibility of the Christian message, discovers its intrinsic coherence, and illustrates the relationship of the unchanging content of the tenets of faith to the varied and changeable cultural contexts in which the message is proclaimed and preached.

Against the background of the momentous social and cultural transformations taking place throughout the world, including those in your own countries here in Africa, *the challenge facing theologians* is not without great difficulties and risks.

The dangers of a theological study which is divorced from life in the Spirit, and the harm caused by a pseudo-theological culture devoid of a genuine spirit of service to the mystery of the Redemption, are, in a sense, evoked by the solemn words of Saint John: “Every spirit which does not confess Jesus is not of God. This is the spirit of antichrist . . .” (1 Jo. 4, 3).

The “spirit of truth” and the “spirit of error” (Cfr. *ibid.* 4, 6) struggle for the minds of those who would seek the Truth.

While a rightful and necessary freedom of research is essential to the progress of theological science, those engaged in theological investigations should not understand this freedom as a transposition in to the field of theology of the methodological criteria of other sciences. Christian theology has *its specific point of departure in the word of God transmitted in Tradition and in the Scriptures*, and it possesses a constant point of reference in the Church’s Magisterium, the authentic guardian and interpreter of the full doctrine of Christ.

The well-being of the Church in Eastern Africa requires that the Catholic Higher Institute should become not only a centre of study but also *a focal point of prayer and liturgical life*, in which staff

and students will grow to full maturity as men and women of faith and evangelical witness.

May this Institute become not only a part of *the mind* of the Church in Eastern Africa, but also, and principally, an important part of her heart: “He who loves is born of God and knows God” (*Ibid.* 4, 7).

6. The Apostolic Constitution “*Sapientia Christiana*” and the Code of Canon Law explicitly refer to the obligation of Bishops and of Bishops’ Conferences to promote the fidelity of ecclesiastical Faculties to the Church’s doctrine (Cfr. Ioannis Pauli PP. II *Sapientia Christiana*, praef., IV, et [*Codex Iuris Canonici*, can. 810 § 2](#)). The reason behind this vigilance on the part of the Bishops is nothing other than *the inexorable duty incumbent on the entire ecclesial community to persevere in the mission entrusted to the Church by the Lord himself*: “Go therefore and make disciples of all nations . . . teaching them to observe *all that I have commanded you*” .

This supervisory role of the Bishops is especially applicable in the important and delicate area of what has come to be known as “inculturation”.

7. Throughout the course of the Church’s history, teachers and missionaries have engaged in *an apostolic dialogue* between the Christian message of salvation and the cultures in which the various peoples express their characteristic spiritual and human experience. In my recent Encyclical Epistle in commemoration of the Eleventh Centenary of the evangelizing work of Saints Cyril and Methodius among the Slav Peoples, I thought it proper to draw attention to their magnificent example in this regard.

An active dialogue between faith and culture is necessary on all levels of the proclamation of the Christian message: in evangelization, in catechesis, and in theological reflection. As a requirement stemming from faith itself, the supreme criterion of this dialogue - also in the field of theological investigation - must be *the power of the Gospel to transform, elevate and regenerate human life* in every culture and in all circumstances.

The success of the local Churches in *incarnating the Gospel of Jesus Christ in the rich soil of your African cultures* will depend on the extent to which your evangelizing and catechetical labours are solidly grounded in the theological patrimony of the universal Church. It will also depend on the extent to which your pastoral activities are accompanied by a serious reflection on the values which are present in each community and which can usefully be introduced into the life of the Church.

The Institute is called to assist the local Churches in *the challenging dialogue between faith and culture*, between the Church and human society, between the Kingdom of God and the temporal realities through which the human family moves towards its final destiny. The Institute has a role to play in implementing for Eastern Africa the dynamism of the Second Vatican Council. Let us never

forget those words spoken by Pope John XXIII on the opening day of that collegial assembly: “The greatest concern of the Ecumenical Council is this: that the sacred deposit of Christian doctrine should be more effectively guarded and taught” (Ioannis XXIII *Allocutio in sollemni SS. Concilii Vaticani II inauguratione habita*, session I, die 11 oct. 1962). May the Institute always be found worthy of the extremely important responsibility to which it has been called!

8. Brother Bishops, brothers and sisters in Christ: on the occasion of the inauguration of the Catholic Higher Institute of Eastern Africa I wish to express *a warm word of gratitude* to all those who have contributed inspiration, effort and resources to the realization of this important project. Too many to mention by name, I commend all the benefactors of this Centre to the loving care of Mary the Mother of God.

I invoke divine light and wisdom upon those who will teach and study here. In particular I propose to them *the example of discipleship given to us by Mary*. Humbly and assiduously following the unfolding of the history of salvation, “Mary kept all these things, pondering them in her heart” (*Luc.* 2, 19). I pray that, like Mary, they too may respond joyfully to the challenges of their specific role in working for the coming of the Kingdom of Christ.

For the glory of the Most Holy Trinity and for the strengthening of the Church in faith and in the service of all the peoples of the nations which you represent - Ethiopia, Kenya, Malawi, the Sudan, Tanzania, Uganda, Zambia and the Seychelles - I am happy to declare formally open the Catholic Higher Institute of Eastern Africa.

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