



The Holy See

APOSTOLIC JOURNEY
TO MADAGASCAR, LA RÉUNION,
ZAMBIA AND MALAWI

MEETING WITH THE REPRESENTATIVES AND LEADERS
OF CHRISTIAN CHURCHES AND ECCLESIAL COMMUNITIES
AND LEADERS OF OTHER RELIGIONS

ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS JOHN PAUL II

Our Lady of the Wisdom School, Blantyre
Friday, 5 May 1989

Dear Friends,

1. It is a great joy for me to meet you, *the representatives and leaders of Christian Churches and Ecclesial Communities, as well as the leaders of other Religions*. This meeting gives me an opportunity to express my appreciation for the efforts you have made together with the leaders of the Catholic Church in promoting a spirit of understanding and brotherhood.

One of the reasons for my pastoral visit to this country is to celebrate *the centenary of the coming of the first Catholic Missionaries to Malawi*. I am fully aware that other ambassadors of Christ had already arrived in the region, and had begun the work of spreading the Gospel of salvation in Jesus Christ. They preached and served the people with love and affection. Let us give thanks together for all that has been done in the time since then.

2. In recent years much progress has been made in the area of *ecumenical collaboration*. In particular, I am happy to note the cooperation in many areas of religious and social life *between the Christian Council of Malawi and the Episcopal Conference*. The joint initiatives which you implement, for example, through the Christian Service Committee and the Private Hospital

Association, bear witness to your shared desire to manifest God's love for your people. In all forms of ecumenical cooperation it is important for Christians not to forget the ultimate goal of their joint activity, namely, the search for full Christian unity, "*that they may be one*" (Io. 17, 21).

The basis of our unity is already laid in our common Baptism. "For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ... for you are all one in Christ Jesus" (Gal. 3, 27-28). *Our Baptism therefore urges us to do all we can to remove the divisions* that still exist between us, in order to respond fully to the will of Christ for the unity of faith of those he has called to be his followers.

3. As you are well aware, there is an essential relationship between the promotion of Christian unity and the proclamation of the Gospel. Divisions between Christians are an obstacle to the effective preaching of the Gospel and a scandal to the world, particularly when we appear to proclaim a "kingdom divided against itself" (Luc. 11, 17).

But despite those divisions it is still possible and necessary to *offer a sincere though limited witness together*, for the sake of the Gospel and in obedience to Christ's will. In this sense I pray that our meeting will further encourage ecumenical relations among the Christians of Malawi.

4. We are all convinced that *common prayer* is not only fundamental to the search for Christian unity, but also *important in nourishing the very ecumenical activity* in which we engage. In prayer we learn to open ourselves to God and to others. In common prayer for Christian unity we experience the Christian identity arising from our common Baptism, but at the same time we experience the pain of division. In that very prayer, however, we are encouraged by the Spirit of Christ, who prays within us (Cfr. Rom. 8, 26), to go forth and work together for the unity of all his followers. The Week of Prayer for Christian Unity and other occasions during the year offer wonderful opportunities for prayer leading to greater mutual understanding, esteem and love.

5. To *the leaders of other Religions* I wish to say how grateful I am for your presence and for this opportunity to meet you. I would assure you that the Catholic Church is committed to promoting unity and love among all peoples by giving priority "*to what human beings have in common and to what promotes fellowship among them*" (*Nostra Aetate*, 1). The Church is deeply interested in pursuing a dialogue of mind and heart with the members of other religious traditions for greater collaboration in the service of the human family. The meeting of many leaders of the world's religions at Assisi in October 1986 not only showed the sensitivity of men and women of religion to the need to work together for peace, justice and progress in the world; it also showed the role of religion itself in creating a climate of peace and dialogue. Indeed, we are convinced that peace and human fulfilment are ultimately *a gift from God*, the Father of all, a gift which we must humbly implore from his loving mercy.

It is my hope that between you and Christians there will always be a strong bond of friendship and

trust. There is so much that can be done in harmony *for the growth and well-being of Malawi!*

6. To all here present, both Christian leaders and the representatives of other Religions, I wish to express encouragement for your *solidarity* in promoting the dignity and rights of every person in this country, in caring for the sick and suffering, in supporting family life, in bringing about reconciliation and peace. It is my hope and prayer that your efforts to work together will continue to grow and prosper. I greet you with the words of the Apostle Paul: “Brethren, farewell... agree with one another, live in peace, and the God of love and peace will be with you” (2Cor. 13, 11).