



The Holy See

APOSTOLIC JOURNEY TO TANZANIA, BURUNDI,
RWANDA, AND THE IVORY COAST

**ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS JOHN PAUL II
TO THE LEADERS OF OTHER CONFESSIONS AND RELIGIONS**

*Msimbazi Centre, Dar-es-Salaam
Sunday, 2 September 1990*

Ndugu zangu viongozi wa dini,
(Distinguished Religious Representatives),
Ndugu nyote mliopo hapa,
(Dear Brethren),

1. I wish to extend a very cordial greeting to all of you and to thank you for your presence here today. My Pastoral Visit would be incomplete if I failed to take the opportunity to meet the *representatives of the various religious bodies* of Tanzania. Indeed, for me this is not only a happy occasion, but also a duty laid upon me as the Catholic Church's Universal Pastor. It is a duty because *the Church is committed to pursuing a dialogue of truth and love* with all of humanity, and in a special way with other Christians and with the followers of other religions.

In 1964, during the Second Vatican Council, in his first Encyclical Letter "*Ecclesiam Suam*", my predecessor Pope Paul VI described the path of dialogue which the Church was to follow. That same Ecumenical Council developed this programme in its teaching and gave rise to structures adapted to the pursuit of this goal. The Catholic Church feels herself duty-bound to enter into dialogue with other Christians in obedience to Christ's will that "all may be one" (*Jo. 17, 21*), and with other religions as part of *her mission to further the "dialogue of salvation"* (Cfr. Pauli VI *Ecclesiam Suam*), *initiated by God* and brought to fulfilment in the Death and Resurrection of His Son.

2. It is important to know what we mean when we say that we intend to follow the path of dialogue. In general, dialogue means reciprocal communication, mutual friendship and respect, as well as joint effort for the sake of shared goals, all in the service of a common search for truth. In the context of religious pluralism, "dialogue is *a complex of human activities, all founded upon respect and esteem* for people of different religions. It includes the daily living together in peace and mutual help, with each bearing witness to the values learned through the experience of faith. It means a readiness to cooperate with others for the betterment of humanity, and a commitment to search together for true peace. It means the encounter of theologians and other religious specialists to explore, with their counterparts from other religions, areas of convergence and divergence. Where circumstances permit, it means a sharing of spiritual experiences and insights" (Ioannis Pauli PP. II *Allocutio iis qui coetui Secretariatus pro non christianis interfuerunt*, 4, die 28 apr. 1987: *Insegnamenti di Giovanni Paolo II*, X, 1 [1987] 1451).

As regards the goals of interreligious dialogue, improved mutual understanding can lead to new attitudes of respect and the promotion of common ideals in the sphere of religious freedom, human brotherhood and social progress (Cfr. Pauli VI *Ecclesiam Suam*). This in itself would be no small achievement in a world that rightly looks to *religion as an agent of harmony and peace, and is scandalized when religion is used to justify or promote division and hatred, or even violence*.

3. To all *my Christian brothers and sisters* who are here today, I wish to say that there can be no going back from the task of attaining the fullness of unity which Jesus Christ desires for His disciples. Under the inspiring grace of the Holy Spirit, the progress of ecumenism constitutes an important "sign of the times" (*Unitatis Redintegratio*, 4), calling all Christians to prayerful reflection and to further efforts towards greater agreement and cooperation. It is my fervent prayer that, in the words of the Second Vatican Council, one day "all Christians will be gathered into that unity of the one and only Church, which Christ bestowed on His Church from the beginning" (*Ibid*).

Although after centuries there are still serious obstacles to overcome, let us together give thanks to God that in Tanzania a healthy ecumenical spirit is making headway and that there already exist many instances of ecumenical cooperation. Before you lies an immense field of collaboration in the defence of the dignity and rights of the human person, the application of Gospel principles to social life, and the relief of afflictions such as hunger, disease, illiteracy and the terrible burden of poverty (Cfr. *ibid*. 12).

But there is also another dimension to Christian ecumenism. The dialogue of Christian unity is also at the service of the wider "dialogue of salvation" with people of every religion. *Faith in Jesus Christ, "the Way, the Truth and the Life"* (Jo. 14, 6), "the only name by which we can be saved" (Act. 4, 12), *compels us to proclaim Him* before the world. How much more credible and effective would our common witness to the Saviour be *if it were a fully united witness!* Even now, however, that witness is strengthened by every effort on our part to walk the path of greater harmony and love. I know that the Catholic Church in Tanzania is committed to this path along with you, and I

am confident that in the inscrutable providence of God *your ecumenical efforts will be fruitful "so that the world may believe" (Jo. 17, 21).*

4. I extend warm greetings and good wishes to *the members of other religions, Hindus, Buddhists and especially to the followers of Islam.* I pray that this encounter will serve to strengthen the good relations which exist in Tanzania between the religious groups represented here. May our faith in One God be the very source of our love and esteem for each other!

It must be acknowledged that dialogue between Christians and Muslims is increasingly important in today's world. It is also a very delicate question, since both religions are deeply committed to the spread of their respective faiths. But, objectively speaking, there is a firm foundation on which mutual respect and cooperation can be built. It is *the recognition that every person has an inalienable right and a solemn duty to follow his or her upright conscience* in seeking and obeying the truth. The Lord of heaven and earth cannot be pleased with a religious observance that is somehow imposed from without. *What would then become of the wonderful gifts of reason and free will* which make individuals privileged to bear personal responsibility and which constitute the worth and glory of the Creator's beloved sons and daughters (Cfr. *Dignitatis Humanae*)?

Dialogue, as I described it a moment ago, does not attempt to produce an artificial consensus with regard to our faith convictions, but rather helps to ensure that in our zeal to proclaim our beliefs, and in the methods used, *we respect every person's right to religious freedom.* By cultivating positive and constructive relations between our communities and their individual members, we can arrive at a mutual understanding and respect which guarantees the exercise of this fundamental human right and opens the way to building a society in which all can contribute to the common good.

Christians and Muslims can live in harmony and show their *solidarity with one another in all the joys, sorrows and challenges that mark the life of a local community.* As experience in many parts of the world shows, religious differences of themselves do not necessarily disrupt life together. Indeed, Christians and Muslims in Tanzania can be partners in building a society shaped by the values taught by God: tolerance, justice, peace, and concern for the poorest and weakest. May both religions work closely to ensure that these values and the right to religious freedom be enshrined in civil law, thus safeguarding a true equality among all Tanzania's citizens.

5. To all who are present here today, I express the heartfelt wish, accompanied by an ardent prayer, that the future of Tanzania and of all Africa may be *shaped by faith in God, not unbelief.* Many in the modern world choose to ignore, to the peril of humanity, the power of religious faith to determine history and culture. May we, dear friends, who know otherwise, always seek *peace not conflict, mutual respect and understanding not polemics,* as we strive to bear witness to the transcendent mystery that conscience tells us is the only answer to the deepest longings of the human heart.

Mungu awabariki nyote.
(May God bless you all).

©Copyright - Libreria Editrice Vaticana