



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS JOHN PAUL II
TO THE BISHOPS OF THE EPISCOPAL CONFERENCE OF GHANA
ON THEIR "AD LIMINA" VISIT**

Monday, 22 February 1993

Dear Brother Bishops,

1. "Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ" (1Cor. 1: 3). I make my own these words of Saint Paul in greeting you, my Brother Bishops of Ghana. Even though it is over a decade since my Pastoral Visit to your country, I fondly recall the warm hospitality I received from your people. In welcoming you today I wish once more to embrace in love and communion all the priests, Religious and lay faithful of your Dioceses. I ask you to assure them of my closeness and of my constant prayers as they strive to grow in Christ and to put on that "new man, created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness" (Cf. Eph. 4: 24).

Among the important events in the life of the Church in Ghana since your last *ad Limina* visit has been the elevation of the Diocese of Accra to the status of a Metropolitan See, and the establishment of the new Diocese of Koforidua. These are welcome signs of the vitality of the Church in your land, and I join with you in thanking God, who has given this growth (Cf. 1Cor. 3: 7).

2. Down the centuries the visit *ad Limina Apostolorum* has had one constant aim: to give visible expression to the bonds of ecclesial communion uniting the Successor of Peter and the Bishops throughout the world. In visiting the Vatican and the Ostian Way, you pray at the very places where Peter and Paul completed their apostolic witness, and you strive to understand better the weighty office you have inherited as Successors of the Apostles. To you has been entrusted the mission to preach the word of God, in season and out of season, to convince, rebuke and exhort, and to be unflinching in patience and in teaching (Cf. 2Tm. 4: 2). Yours is the charge to persevere faithfully in the office of sanctifying and leading the people of God in the Christian life, no matter

what the cost. This is what it means to be a Successor of the Apostles, today and always.

Zeal for making known to all the salvation offered in Jesus Christ must thus be the motivating force for all of your pastoral efforts. The Bishop's preaching and teaching of God's word is the clearest way for him to obey the Lord's injunction to give freely what he has received freely (Cf. Mt. 10: 8). Your zeal for the Gospel is ultimately the best expression of your gratitude for the priceless gift you have received in Christ, and there is no more fitting way to discharge the debt you owe to those who at great personal cost brought the Gospel to Ghana in the last century than to take up their work with similar generosity and self-sacrifice.

In the work of evangelization in Ghana, as indeed in all of Africa, the Church faces many obstacles, yet she does not give way to discouragement. She knows that she has received a strength and energy far beyond the sum of her human resources, and so she is confident that from the seeds she scatters God will bring forth an abundant harvest. In truth, the word of God cannot be constrained (Cf. 2Tm. 2: 9) and it will always be clear that it is not to us but to the "Lord of the harvest" (Cf. Mt. 9: 38; Lk. 10: 2) that the glory is due.

3. In these last years leading up to the Third Christian Millennium we are invited to look forward with confidence to the dawning of a new missionary age, consequent upon a renewed zeal on the part of all Christians to share the gift of eternal life in Jesus Christ (Cf. John Paul II, *Redemptoris Missio*, 92). The forthcoming Special Assembly of the Synod of Bishops for Africa is a gift from Providence which will surely result in a heightening of this zeal and its spreading among the members of the Church.

The *Instrumentum laboris* released at Kampala during my Pastoral Visit earlier this month in preparation for the Special Assembly of the Synod reminds us that those who are set apart for the work of preaching (Cf. Acts. 13: 2) must not fail to read the signs of the times, both positive and negative (Special Assembly of the Synod of Bishops for Africa, *Instrumentum Laboris*, 22-23), . Significant among the latter is the growth of sects and other new religious movements, which often appeal to alleged apparitions, prophecies and miraculous cures. The attraction of these movements sometimes lies in their apparent success in responding to the spiritual needs of people—the hunger of their hearts for something deeper, for healing, consolation and contact with the transcendent. We must humbly acknowledge that in certain cases the baptized have not yet, for whatever reason, discovered the fulfilment of these needs in the mystery of the Incarnate Word entrusted to the Church. In your response to this challenge, you will want to foster sound devotion to the Blessed Virgin Mary, who is the "Image and Mother of the Church" (Cf. *Lumen gentium*, 53-63; *Collectio Missarum de Beata Maria Virgine*, 25-27). As the "Health of the Sick" and "Fountain of Salvation" (*Collectio Missarum de Beata Maria Virgine*, 44. 31), she is the exemplar of the Church as the Saviour's chosen means for communicating his gifts of grace and healing. As the "Comforter of the Afflicted" (*Collectio Missarum de Beata Maria Virgine*, 41), she is the model of a Church called to stand in solidarity with all who share Christ's sufferings. As the "Gate of Heaven"

(Ibid. 46), she is the type of the Church, the Body of Christ, in which all men and women are called to become citizens of the heavenly Jerusalem.

4. The inculturation of the Gospel in your country faces a number of particular challenges, *especially in the areas of marriage and family life*. Your unremitting efforts to lead couples to discover the truth and beauty of the demands of their new life in Christ are an essential part of your pastoral responsibilities. The 1980 Synod of Bishops on the Family reflected the concern of the whole Church for that unit of ecclesial life which is the "domestic Church". The doctrine contained in the Post-Synodal Exhortation "Familiaris Consortio" still needs to be more widely disseminated. It provides a suitable framework for an ever more effective catechesis, especially in the urgent area of marriage preparation. An indispensable element of such preparation must be the presentation of the Church's complete teaching on responsible parenthood (Cf. John Paul II, Familiaris Consortio, 28-35). Likewise, I wish to encourage you to do all you can to give special pastoral preparation to Catholics entering marriages with non-Christians, and care to those couples in irregular matrimonial situations.

5. In facing the tasks of evangelization and the building of a solid ecclesial life, the Church in Ghana is blessed by the many missionaries who continue to offer an irreplaceable service to your *local Churches*, often serving God's People in the most difficult and challenging pastoral situations. Their presence is a positive sign of that "exchange of gifts" which so eloquently bespeaks the Church's Catholic unity (Cf. John Paul II, Redemptoris Missio, 85). I rejoice that their example has inspired many Ghanaians to embrace the missionary vocation, thereby manifesting the growing maturity of your communities. The preaching of the word of God remains the primary and vital mission of the Church, and in this task the catechists have played an outstanding role. I encourage your efforts to promote their sound, integral formation, for they are called not only to pass on the truths of the faith but also to be joyful and authentic witnesses to the moral life demanded of Christ's followers. Your efforts to provide this formation will be assisted by the recently issued "Catechism of the Catholic Church", which lays the foundations for a catechesis inspired by the teaching of the Second Vatican Council and renewed at the living sources of the faith (Cf. John Paul II, Fidei Depositum, 1).

The strength of the Church's witness to the Gospel largely depends on the formation of an active laity, able to cooperate with you and your priests in planning and carrying out pastoral initiatives. The lay faithful are increasingly called to become missionaries to themselves, drawing nourishment from the Eucharist, which is the source and summit of the Church's evangelizing mission (Cf. Presbyterorum Ordinis, 5), and leading others in turn to a fruitful participation in the sacred mysteries. Here, as in other areas, your Episcopal Conference is meant to provide a forum for practical cooperation in directing and coordinating the pastoral life of the local Churches (Cf. Code of Canon Law, can. 447; Cf. Christus Dominus, 38). and in supporting the promising spiritual renewal evident in the life and apostolate of lay movements.

6. A special sign of the growing maturity of your particular Churches has been *the increase of vocations to the priesthood*. Since priests are your chief cooperators in carrying out the Church's apostolic mission, it is essential that your relations with them be marked by unity, fraternity and appreciation of their gifts. All who have been configured by Holy Orders to Christ the Head and Shepherd of the Church must share his attitude of complete self-giving for the sake of the flock and the progress of the Gospel. Carrying out the priestly vocation requires permanent formation, and especially a commitment to unceasing personal conversion. Your lives and those of your priests should reflect an authentic evangelical poverty and detachment from the things and attitudes of this world. The sign value of celibacy as a complete gift of self to the Lord and his Church must be carefully guarded, and any behaviour which could give scandal must be carefully avoided or corrected where necessary. You all know how important it is to pay particular attention to seminary formation, for the convictions and practical training imparted to future priests are essential to the success of the Church's mission. A Bishop's pride should be his seminary fully conformed to the Church's expectations as set forth both in the Post-Synodal Exhortation "[Pastores Dabo Vobis](#)" and in the Document *Some Guidelines on Formation in Major Seminaries*, issued by the Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples.

I would also mention as a positive sign the growth of *vocations to the religious life*, and in particular to the contemplative life. Religious have played an essential part in the growth of the Church in Ghana. Intrinsic to that vocation is concern for the ordered growth of the Church, the desire to think with the Church, and to foster her communion and missionary zeal. While the legitimate autonomy granted to religious congregations by the Church's supreme authority is a sign of their commitment to the Church's universal mission, religious—precisely because of their public consecration—are deeply involved in the life and mission of the local Church under the guidance of the legitimate Pastor, whose task it is to respect and foster the orderly cooperation of the variety of charisms in the one Body. Your concern for religious must not only extend to vigilance over those aspects of their ministry involving the care of souls, the liturgy and other works of the apostolate (Cf. *Code of Canon Law*, [can. 678](#)). All pastoral activity in fact must be carried out in a spirit of communion with the local Church and respect for the legitimate pastors (Cf. John Paul II, *Redemptoris Missio*, 66).

7. The Church in Ghana can certainly be proud of her commitment to the good of the Nation, as manifested in the gamut of her social services such as education and work training, health-care and the promotion of agricultural development. Your concern for the common good was especially evident in the Pastoral Letter which you issued in conjunction with the leaders of other Christian Communities before the last elections, calling for prayer and inviting the Christians of your country to a responsible exercise of their citizenship. The challenges involved in the transition to multi-party democracy require of Ghana's Catholics a continued willingness to support and take part in their country's political development. Especially important in this regard is your own role as leaders of the Catholic community, who recognize the desirability and need for a constructive dialogue with all sectors of the population regarding the just and solid bases of life in society. Such

a dialogue, while seeking to keep open all channels of communication in a spirit of patience and good will, will not prevent you from presenting openly and respectfully the Church's convictions, especially regarding such important matters as religious freedom and the objective moral norms which ought to be reflected in civil legislation. I encourage you to continue your dialogue with the authorities regarding the proper place of religious instruction in the schools, in accordance with the Church's teaching (Cf. *Gravissimum Educationis*, 3).

8. Dear Brothers, on the happy occasion of your visit I rejoice with you in the graces which the Lord has lovingly bestowed upon the Catholic people of Ghana. I pray that your pastoral service will be favoured abundantly, so that in unity of mind and heart, you and your people will draw nearer to the sources of God's mercy in the Sacraments and "continue in the faith, stable and steadfast, not shifting from the hope of the Gospel which you have heard, which has been preached to every creature under heaven" (Col. 1: 23). I commend you and your Dioceses to the loving protection of the Mother of God, Mary Most Holy, and to you and all the priests, religious and laity of Ghana I cordially impart my Apostolic Blessing.

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