



The Holy See

EUCCHARISTIC CELEBRATION AT THE CONCLUSION OF THE SYMPOSIUM ORGANIZED BY THE BISHOPS OF AFRICA

HOMILY OF PAUL VI

Kampala (Uganda), 31 July 1969

*Lords Cardinals,
Venerable Brothers,
members of the Faithful,
and Sons of Africa present here today:*

To all of you, Our reverent and affectionate greeting! Our greeting is that of a Brother, a Father, a Friend, a Servant, and at this moment of your Guest. To you We express Our greeting as Bishop of Rome, as Successor of Saint Peter, as Vicar of Christ, as Pontiff of the Catholic Church-as, finally, We have the good fortune to be on African soil, the first Pope to do so. And in Our greeting is also included that of the entire Catholic fraternity; with Saint Paul We can say: "All the Churches of Christ greet you" (*Rom 16, 16*)!

To you, first of all, Lords Cardinals of this Continent, this greeting is addressed. We are happy and honoured to have you as members of the Sacred College, as Our personal counselors and collaborators, as authoritative representatives of the African Church in the Offices of the Apostolic See. We thank you for the demonstration of fealty which your presence here gives Us. Our gratitude also to you, most beloved Brothers in the Episcopate! We know well your pastoral labours and your great merits - We embrace and bless you, each and every one. To the Priests, also, to the Men and Women Religious, to the Catechists, to the Teachers, to all collaborators in the Catholic Laity, to all of the Faithful-Our thanks, Our best wishes, and Our Blessings.

At this moment, two sentiments fill Our heart. First, a sentiment of communion. We give thanks to the Lord Who grants Us this ineffable experience. And We must tell you that it was with the desire

for this spiritual experience that We undertook this voyage so that We could be with you, could rejoice in our common faith and charity, which unite us in such a way as to demonstrate, even visibly, that we are all one family, in the Mystical Body of Christ in His Church!

We must tell you also how happy We are to repeat here the words of the Apostle of the Gentiles: We are “one body and one spirit . . . called to the one hope . . . One Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of us all” (*Eph. 4, 4-6*). If this sentiment of communion is shared by you, as We confidently hope, and if it endures as the memory of this our meeting, then We can say that Our journey has already achieved a most satisfactory and consoling result.

A second sentiment fills Our heart, beloved Brothers and sons, and it is that of profound respect for your persons, for your land, for your culture. We are filled with admiration and devotion for your Martyrs, whom We have come here to honour and invoke. We have no other desire than to foster what you already are: Christians and Africans. Hence We wish Our presence among you to have the significance of a recognition of your maturity, and of a desire to show you how that communion, which unites us does not suffocate, but rather nourishes the originality of your personal, ecclesial and even civil personality. From the Lord We implore the grace of contributing to your growth, by fertilizing the good seed and stirring up the human and Christian energies inherent in the genius of your vocation to spiritual and temporal fulfilment. Not Our interests, but yours, are the object of Our apostolic ministry.

This consideration prompts Us to take a rapid and summary glance at the questions characteristic of the African Church. We know that many of these questions have been discussed by you, the Bishops of this Continent; so that, in their regard, it remains only for Us to appreciate your studies and encourage your zeal. You have clear and concordant ideas; so, now, go forward methodically and courageously in the awareness of your great task: that of building up the Church!

For now, We shall limit Ourselves to mentioning some general aspects of African Catholic life at this particular moment of history.

1. The first of these aspects seems to Us to be this: By now, you Africans are missionaries to yourselves. The Church of Christ is well and truly planted in this blessed soil (cf. *Ad Gentes*, No. 6). One duty, however, remains to be fulfilled: we must remember those who, before you, and even today with you, have preached the Gospel; for Sacred Scripture admonishes us to “Remember your leaders, those who spoke to you the word of God; consider the outcome of their life; and imitate their faith” (*Hebr. 13, 7*). That is a history which we must not forget; it confers on the local Church the mark of its authenticity and nobility, its mark as “apostolic”. That history is a drama of charity, heroism and sacrifice, which makes the African Church great and holy from its very origins. It is a history which still continues, and must continue for a long time to come, even though you Africans are now assuming its direction. The help of collaborators coming here from other Churches is still necessary to you today; cherish that help, honour it, and unite it wisely with

your own pastoral labours.

“Missionaries to yourselves” : in other words, you Africans must now continue, upon this Continent, the building up of the Church. The two great forces-and how different and unequal they are!-which Christ established to build up His Church, must work together (cf. *Ad Gentes*, No. 4) with great intensity. They are: The Hierarchy (by which name We mean the entire social, canonical, responsible, human and visible structure of the Church, with the Bishops in the front line); and then the Holy Spirit (that is, grace with all its charisms: cf. CONGAR: *Esquisses du mystère de l’Eglise*, pp. 129 seqq.). Both must be at work in the dynamic form which is precisely that suitable to a young Church, called upon to offer itself to a culture responsive to the Gospel, such as is your African Church. There must now be associated to and following upon the impulse given to the Faith by the missionary action of foreign countries, an impulse arising from the heart of Africa itself. The Church, by her very nature, is always a missionary Church. But, one day, we shall no longer call your apostolate a “missionary” apostolate in the technical sense, but rather a native, indigenous apostolate, all your own.

An immense task awaits your pastoral efforts, in particular the work of training those Christians called to the apostolate-the Clergy, the Men and Women Religious, the Catechists, the active Lay Men and Women. For, on the training and preparation of these local elements, these choice workers of the People of God, will depend the vitality, the development, and the future of the African Church. This is quite clear. It is the plan selected by Christ, that brother must save brother. But to achieve this evangelical purpose, may truly qualified brothers be the ministers, the servants, the spreaders of the good news and of grace and charity, in favour of their other brothers, who will themselves be called in turn to co-operate in the common work of building up the Church. All of this you know. We have therefore only to encourage and bless your resolution.

2. A burning and much-discussed question arises concerning your evangelizing work, and it is that of the adaptation of the Gospel and of the Church to African culture. Must the Church be European, Latin, Oriental . . . or must she be African? This seems a difficult problem, and in practice may be so, indeed. But the solution is rapid, with two replies. First, your Church must be first of all Catholic. That is, it must be entirely founded upon the identical, essential, constitutional patrimony of the self-same teaching of Christ, as professed by the authentic and authoritative tradition of the one true Church. This condition is fundamental and indisputable. We must, all of us, be both jealous and proud of that Faith of which the Apostles were the heralds, of which the Martyrs, that is, the Witnesses, were the champions, of which the Missionaries were scrupulous teachers. You know that the Church is particularly tenacious, we may even say conservative, in this regard. To make sure that the message of revealed doctrine cannot be altered, the Church has even set down her treasure of truth in certain conceptual and verbal formulas. Even when these formulas are difficult, at times, she obliges us to preserve them textually. We are not the inventors of our Faith; we are its custodians. Not every religious feeling is good; but only that religious sentiment which interprets the thought of God, according to the apostolic teaching

authority established by the sole Master, Jesus Christ.

Granted this first reply, however, we now come to the second. The expression, that is, the language and mode of manifesting this one Faith, may be manifold; hence, it may be original, suited to the tongue, the style, the character, the genius, and the culture, of the one who professes this one Faith. From this point of view, a certain pluralism is not only legitimate, but desirable. An adaptation of the Christian life in the fields of pastoral, ritual, didactic and spiritual activities is not only possible, it is even favoured by the Church. The liturgical renewal is a living example of this. And in this sense you may, and you must, have an African Christianity. Indeed, you possess human values and characteristic forms of culture which can rise up to perfection such as to find in Christianity, and for Christianity, a true superior fulness, and prove to be capable of a richness of expression all its own, and genuinely African. This may take time. It will require that your African soul become imbued to its depths with the secret charisms of Christianity, so that these charisms may then overflow freely, in beauty and wisdom, in the true African manner. It will require from your culture that it should not refuse, but rather eagerly desire, to draw, from the patrimony of the patristic, exegetical, and theological tradition of the Catholic Church, those treasures of wisdom which can rightly be considered universal, above all, those which can be most easily assimilated by the African mind. The Church of the West did not hesitate to make use of the resources of African writers, such as Tertullian, Optatus of Milevis, Origen, Cyprian and Augustine (cf. *Optatam totius*, No. 16). Such an exchange of the highest expressions of Christian thought nourishes, without altering the originality, of any particular culture. It will require an incubation of the Christian “mystery” in the genius of your people in order that its native voice, more clearly and frankly, may then be raised harmoniously in the chorus of the other voices in the Universal Church. Do We need to remind you, in this regard, how useful it will be for the African Church to possess centres of contemplative and monastic life, centres of religious studies, centres of pastoral training? If you are able to avoid the possible dangers of religious pluralism, the danger of making your Christian profession into a kind of local folklore, or into exclusivist racism, or into egoistic tribalism or arbitrary separatism, then you will be able to remain sincerely African even in your own interpretation of the Christian life; you will be able to formulate Catholicism in terms congenial to your own culture; you will be capable of bringing to the Catholic Church the precious and original contribution of “negritude”, which she needs particularly in this historic hour.

The African Church is confronted with an immense and original undertaking; like a “mother and teacher” she must approach all the sons of this land of the sun; she must offer them a traditional and modern interpretation of life; she must educate the people in the new forms of civil organization; while purifying and preserving the forms of family and community; she must give an educative impulse to your individual and social virtues: those of honesty, of sobriety, of loyalty; she must help develop every activity that promotes the public good, especially the schools and the assistance of the poor and sick; she must help Africa towards development, towards concord, towards peace.

Indeed, these duties are great and always new. We shall speak of them again; but for now We tell you, in the Name of the Lord, Whom we all love and follow together, that you have the strength and the grace necessary for this, because you are living members of the Catholic Church, because you are Christian and you are Africans.

To assist you, We impart to you all Our Apostolic Blessing.