



The Holy See

EPISCOPAL ORDINATION OF TWELVE BISHOPS

HOMILY OF PAUL VI

Kololo (Uganda), 1 August 1969

Venerable Brothers and beloved sons

Our discourse, inserted as it is in this solemn rite after such a full and eloquent Liturgy of the Word, cannot but be very brief. Yet We cannot fail in the duty of addressing to this extraordinary assembly, and especially to the newly consecrated Bishops, these few words which come from Our very heart.

Our word is an extremely simple one; its is the word “conscience”.

The event which has just taken place is so great and so mysterious that it demands a reflex act of our minds, an act enduring well beyond the conclusion of these ceremonies, an act lasting for a lifetime—an act of conscience. In fact, even during the liturgical allocution just read, We exhorted all of you here present to think attentively, to reflect well: “sedulo attendite”.

Desirous now of expressing, as it were in a nut-shell, in concepts as compact and dense as seeds, the immense meaning of the episcopal Ordination, We can repeat the usual two-fold consideration: one of which, in the sacramental, theological, ineffable and interior sense, moves, as We may say, using the modern phraseology, in the vertical direction; while the other operates in the horizontal plane, that is, in the ecclesial, pastoral, exterior and social sense.

What has actually taken place by means of the imposition of hands and the formula of consecration? What has happened is that these newly elected ones have been invested with an extraordinary outpouring of the Holy Spirit. An incomparable dignity much more interior, indeed, than external—has transfigured them. A fearful power has been conferred upon them; a virtue

which comes from on high, and is ratified in heaven, (cf. *Lk.* 24, 49; *Jn.* 20, 23) has been communicated to them; a new and deeper assimilation to Christ has stamped upon them a superior personality (cf. *Lk.* 10, 16; *Gal.* 2, 20; *Lumen Gentium*, No. 21). As we have just read in the Roman Pontifical: in the Bishop, Our Lord Jesus Christ is among us. In a word, it is the communication of the fulness of the one supreme Priesthood of Christ Himself, now appropriated to the Bishop, which must occupy our attention, our admiration, our exultation. This is a grandeur which confounds us, for God alone is its cause (cf. *Lk.* 1, 48), and because God gives it to whom He wills, generally choosing the most humble (cf. *1 Cor.* 1, 27). Yet it is a grandeur which exacts reverence, and which no one can despise with impunity (cf. *Tit.* 2, 1.5; *Lk.* 10, 16). Let us recognize Christ in the Bishop, and let us praise the Lord!

For what reason, however, is this preference given to the Bishop by Christ? We know this (and it is Our second consideration today): Christ has so favoured the Bishop in order to make him an Apostle. The Bishops, you know, are the successors of the Apostles. And who are the Apostles? They are those whom the Lord chose, and separated, and segregated for a mission in favour of the people (cf. *Hebr.* 5, 1). They are those whom He sends forth (cf. *Jn.* 15, 16; *Mt.* 19, 29; *Lk.* 18, 29; *Gal.* 1, 15; *Rom.* 1, 1; *Acts.* 13, 2). Apostle means one sent forth. The Apostles, and hence also the Bishops, their successors, are the representatives, or, rather, the vehicles and instruments of the love of Christ for men. The episcopal ministry is a sign and an instrument of salvation (cf. *Mt.* 9, 38; *Lk.* 6, 13; *Jn.* 20, 21). In the ordinary divine economy of salvation, men do not save themselves by themselves. The Church is the visible sacrament of the saving love of God. (cf. *Lumen Gentium* No. 9). The ministerial Priesthood is indispensable (*ibidem*, No. 10), and finds its full expression in the Episcopate. There must, in fact, be someone who brings men the Word of God (cf. *Dei Verbum*, No. 10); there must be someone who distributes to them the mysteries of grace (cf. *1 Cor.* 4, 1-2); there must be someone who guides them in the paths of the Lord (cf. *Jn.* 21, 15; *Lumen Gentium*, No. 19-20); there must be someone who unites them in Christ through the Gospel (*Rom.* 10, 8; *1 Cor.* 4, 1-2; *Tit.* 1, 7; *1 Pet.* 4, 10; etc.). In a word, the Bishops are ministers, they are servants; they are not for themselves but for others. They are yours; they exist for you, faithful people hearing Our words! (cf. *Lk.* 22, 26; *Rom.* 1, 14; *Lumen Gentium*, No. 20). They exist for the Church. It is for the Church that the Bishops have the right and duty to exercise the functions of Teachers, Priests and Shepherds (cf. *1 Pet.* 4, 11; *Pontificale Romanum*, No. 18; *Christus Dominus*, Nos. 12-16). They are for the Church, and to the Church they offer all their life (*2 Cor.* 12, 15).

This second aspect of the Episcopate, namely, its direction towards the good of others, its pastoral, charitable, community function, has become of great importance today. That is because this particular aspect is visible and social, so that all wish to see and judge it. For it is to you, Beloved Brothers, Bishops of newborn or very young Churches, that pastoral love is imposed in a superior degree, rather than elsewhere. It might be said that you have to found your local Churches; you have to build them up, in a way analogous to that which Christ indicated to Peter (cf. *Mt.* 16, 16). You have to seek out, and call to the Faith, new Christians- a great task, this, and

one which meets with difficulties of every kind, thus demanding from the Bishop and his collaborators self-denial, courage, constancy, wisdom and sacrifice. Moreover, you must work in poverty, and often against opposition. And your hearts are open wide to the children, to youth, to the poor, and to all who suffer.

But it is by means of this pastoral toil that you experience the three phases of the missionary apostolate. Evangelization, or the planting of the seed (cf. *1 Cor.* 3, 6; *Ad Gentes*, No. 6); then Formation, or growth (*ibidem*, Nos. 15, 18, 19); finally, the Development of its native character, of its African-ness (*ibidem*, Nos. 16, 221, with the aspiration, not only towards its own self-sufficiency (*ibidem*, No. 15), but also towards an expansive and missionary ability (*ibidem*, No. 20; cf. article by P. MASSON in *L'Evêque dans l'Eglise du Christ*, p. 173).

Behold, then, set upon your shoulders, the weight of numberless duties, of responsibilities and of sorrows! As We said, you must build up the Church; but We may add that, almost by the very nature of your ministry, you must also lend your service to help build up civil society, while remaining free from political engagements and temporal interests. For you must make generous contribution towards the education of the people, towards the honesty of their customs, towards their progressive instruction, towards their work in accordance with just social rules, towards respect for Authority, towards brotherhood, and towards peace, and finally, as We said yesterday, towards that new civilization: African and Christian.

How great an office this is ! Most beloved and Venerable Confreres, this great charge is yours, and this great cross-but it is the saving Cross of Christ! Carry it, then, with immense confidence and endless courage ! This, your Martyrs teach you. The example is given you by your great and holy African Bishops, such as Cyprian and Augustine! With you are the valiant Missionaries of yesterday and of today, who re-opened Africa to the Gospel, and made it a new fatherland of Christ; and you are assisted by the collegial fellowship of your Brother Bishops on this Continent, and throughout the entire Catholic Church (cf. *1 Pet.* 5, 9)!

And be assured that Our charity is with you, as well as Our Apostolic Blessing.