



The Holy See

APOSTOLIC PILGRIMAGE TO NIGERIA, BENIN

GABON AND EQUATORIAL GUINEA

**ADDRESS OF JOHN PAUL II
TO THE PRESIDENT AND THE MEMBERS
OF GOVERNMENT OF NIGERIA***

Lagos

Saturday, 12 February 1982

Mr President,

1. I am deeply grateful for the kind words that you have addressed to me and by which you offer, in the name of all the citizens of Nigeria, a warm welcome to your country. You will allow me to express the feelings that fill my heart at this moment by quoting from your own poem "Wakar Nigeriya": "And thank God that he placed us among the people of Nigeria"! These words, which so many of your fellow citizens have recited, can now aptly describe the firm bond between the whole nation and myself. Like you, I want to thank Almighty God for letting me be in Nigeria today and for giving me this longed-for visit to the people of this great nation.

I also thank you, Mr President, for the kind invitation which you extended to me. That, in doing so, you spoke for the whole of Nigeria has already been made manifest by the enthusiastic welcome while I am receiving from the people. I would ask you, today even more than before, to consider me one of your own, for indeed I come to this land as a friend and a brother to all its inhabitants.

2. On this my second visit to Africa, I wish to stress the essentially religious character of my journey, which begins most fittingly in Nigeria. I come to confirm my brother Bishop – who also extended to me a cordial invitation – in their pastoral endeavours; I come to share with my Catholic brethren moments of prayer and of common celebration. I come to confess with other fellow Christians and with my brothers and sisters of other faiths our common belief in the goodness and mercy of Almighty God. My message is one of peace and love, of brotherhood and faith. Of faith in God, certainly, but also of faith in humanity, of confidence in the marvellous possibilities of every man, woman and child.

And so, my meeting here with you, Mr President and Government leaders, is more than the observance of a mere practice of courtesy which makes it possible to thank one's hosts, as they deserve, for their generous hospitality and for the good will shown in the face of the exacting demands of the organization of this visit by all those in authority. I also attach great importance to the opportunity which is offered me for exchanging views with those who hold civil power, on our common concerns for humanity. In their own fields, the political community and the Church are autonomous and independent, but their common concern for man brings them together and invites them to collaboration for the welfare of all.

3. It is therefore fitting for me to express to you, Mr President, and to the Government Leaders, and indeed to all the people of this great country my deep appreciation of what the Nigerian people have achieved, not always without suffering and sacrifice, since their independence over two decades ago. I experience a deep joy in seeing how Nigeria, together with numerous other African nations, has acceded to full national sovereignty and is able to take its future in its own hands, according to the richness of its own genius, in respect for its own culture, and in consonance with its own sense of God and of spiritual values. It is my conviction that all Africa, when allowed to take charge of its own affairs, without being subjected to interference and pressure from any outside powers or groups, will not only astound the rest of the world by its achievements, but will be able to share its wisdom, its sense of life, its reverence for God with other continents and nations, thus establishing that exchange and that partnership in mutual respect that is needed for the true progress of all humanity.

4. I therefore desire to pay homage to the significant contribution which the Nigerian nation has made and is making in the first place to the African continent. You forcefully stand up for political freedom and for the right of all place to the African continent. You spare no efforts to help remove all discrimination against people because of their colour, race, language or social status. You have offered help to countries in greater need and you champion brotherly relations and economic collaboration between African nations. Nigeria is looked to, to lead the way in promoting a magnanimous policy of receiving and assisting refugees and helping them to resettle through humane repatriation or by programmes bettering their lot. And you have given other countries an example of how to reconcile when brothers have had serious misunderstandings. In consolidating national unity within your own nation, you are strengthening the unity of Africa; in turn this activity constitutes the cornerstone of Nigeria's commitment to Africa and to the world. By acting collectively in the framework of an all-African collaboration, you are not only contributing to making Africa's voice increasingly heard in the comity of nations, but you are effectively promoting international solidarity among all the peoples of the world.

5. Nigeria has been blessed by the Creator with a rich human potential and with natural wealth. Such gifts, received in humble gratefulness, are also a constant challenge, for the goods of this world are given by the Creator for the benefit of all. Public authorities are entrusted with the sacred assignment to channel these riches to the best interests of the people, that is, for the betterment of all and for the future of all. There is likewise need to protect the land, sea, water and air from pollution and the ravages of industrial development, precisely in order to protect the dignity and dominion of man. I have also been informed, Mr President, that your Federal Government and the State authorities place high priority on housing, agriculture, education and social services.

May these splendid objectives truly redound to the good of countless individuals and of society as a whole. I wholeheartedly encourage all those entrusted with the well-being of their fellowman to make the human person the true

criterion of all development efforts. Development projects must always have a human face. They cannot be reduced to a purely materialistic or economic endeavour. The human person must always be the ultimate measure of the feasibility and the success of an economic or social programme. Progress can therefore not be separated from the dignity of the human person nor from the respect for his or her fundamental rights. In the pursuit of progress, total progress, anything must be rejected that is unworthy of the freedom and the human rights of the individual and of the people as a whole. Thus are rejected such elements as corruption, bribery, embezzlement of public funds, domination over the weak, callousness towards the poor and handicapped. Participation in the political life of the country, freedom of religion, of speech, of association, the protection of a well functioning judiciary system, respect for and promotion of things spiritual and cultural, love of truth: these are the ingredients for progress that is truly and fully human. I have no doubt that the authorities and the people of Nigeria are fully aware of these challenges and values. I trust that they will always work together in the pursuit of the true economic and social development of the country, intimately linked to the question of human dignity.

6. Mr President, yours is a land of promise, a land of hope. In its efforts to develop, it is bound also to suffer the pressures that so often arise from conflicting demands and from the sheer magnitude of the task. Among the problems that invest the developing world is a disproportionate urbanization that can create slum conditions, place the disinherited and the less fortunate on the margin of society, and link want and poverty to crime and to the loss of moral values. Only the united efforts of all the citizens under enlightened leadership can overcome difficulties such as this. Only the harnessing of all the forces for the common good, in true respect of the supreme values of the spirit, will make a nation great and a happy dwelling place for its people. The glory of the Government is the well-being, the peace and the joy of the governed. This is the vision of hope that I share with you today. This is my wish for you, Mr President, for you, respected Government leaders. This is my prayer for all of you, beloved people of Nigeria. This is my prayer to the Almighty and Merciful God.

*AAS 74 (1982), p. 608-611.

Insegnamenti di Giovanni Palo II, V, 2 p. 371-373.

L'Osservatore Romano 14.2.1982 pp.1, 2.

L'Osservatore Romano. Weekly edition in English n.7 p.3.

