



The Holy See

APOSTOLIC JOURNEY TO ZIMBABWE, BOTSWANA, LESOTHO, SWAZILAND AND MOZAMBIQUE

ADDRESS OF JOHN PAUL II TO THE BISHOPS OF ZIMBABWE

*Apostolic Nunciature, Harare
Sunday, 11 September 1988*

Dear brother Bishops,

1. It is my joy to address you, the pastors of the Church in Zimbabwe, at the beginning of my visit to your country and after our meeting last night with all the bishops of Southern Africa, gathered for the Second Plenary Assembly of the Inter-Regional Meeting of Bishops of Southern Africa.

This encounter constitutes as it were *a continuation of the conversations* we had several weeks ago on the occasion of your *“ad limina”* visit. Now I am enabled to experience firsthand the vitality and aspirations of your particular Churches. May this visit help to confirm and strengthen the communion of faith and love which unites us in the Body of Christ (Cfr. *Lumen Gentium*, 7).

You tend the flock of God that is in your charge in the knowledge that Jesus Christ the Chief Shepherd is your strength (Cfr. *1Petr.* 5, 2-4).

You “govern the house of the living God” (*Lumen Gentium*, 18) after the example of the Good Shepherd who came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life for his sheep (Cfr. *Matth.* 20, 28; *Io.* 10, 11). In the footsteps of the intrepid heralds of the Gospel who established the Church in this land over a hundred years ago, *you are the ones now sent to proclaim the Good News* in obedience to Christ’s explicit command (Cfr. *Matth.* 28, 19).

2. Your pastoral zeal was particularly evident when your people were caught up in the struggle for independence and suffered the terrible effects of armed conflict. Now, eight years after the end of

hostilities and the subsequent proclamation of the Republic of Zimbabwe, we cannot but give thanks to God for what the Church, under your guidance, did to accompany and assist the population in those circumstances. Catholic missions and institutions became places of refuge for the persecuted, centres of care for the wounded, hungry and homeless. All of this was done with evangelical courage and love, without discrimination due to race, creed or political allegiance. On resuming your normal pastoral activities at the dawn of the new Republic, *you immediately offered your support in the task of reconstruction and the building up of a new society*. In this you were partners with a people proud of their new-found dignity and conscious of having acquired a national identity among the other nations of Africa and of the world.

In all such historical processes there are varying degrees of light and darkness. Undoubtedly, *you have made and are continuing to make an indispensable contribution to the process of national reconciliation* between the various parties to the conflict and among the racial and tribal groups making up the new nation.

3. As pastors of the Church you have taught that reconciliation, if it is to be true and lasting, must come through forgiveness and repentance, that is, from a conversion of the heart. The Church, which is “the *sacrament...* the sign and the means of reconciliation” (Ioannis Pauli PP. II *Reconciliatio et Paenitentia*, 11), is bound not only to be reconciled within, namely in her members who belong to different ethnic and social groups, but also to be at the service of reconciliation in society. *The return to God is the path of man’s return to man*, since it restores brotherhood, solidarity and peace among individuals and groups.

4. In the years since independence you have made many efforts to improve and update the instruments and methods of evangelization. New structures have been created. But it is always important to ensure that the weight of such organizational structures does not diminish *the evangelizing zeal and dynamism of former times*.

Through your collaboration in the Zimbabwe Bishops’ Conference, you have experienced how important it is to have a concerted *national programme of evangelization and ecclesial growth*. The example of united action by the bishops is very important for the way the priests and religious work together in harmony and share the burdens of the various forms of apostolate in each diocese.

Your partnership with the other Bishops’ Conferences of Southern Africa through IMBISA leads you to overcome the tendency to limit yourselves to the concerns of the Church in your own country. It is a very real expression of what the Council requires of the members of the Episcopal College, *that they be “solicitous for the whole Church”* (*Lumen Gentium*, 23).

5. And yet, *a bishop’s most pressing task is the pastoral care and leadership of his own diocese*. His first occupation is his ministry to his own priests and religious, to his own faithful. Your priests should feel themselves fully understood and supported by you in their life and apostolate. Men and

women religious should find in you intelligent and spiritually sensitive guides who know how to encourage the charism of each Congregation while coordinating a united programme of diocesan pastoral activities.

As I already mentioned during your *ad limina* visit, it is truly heartening that the number of vocations to the priesthood and to the religious life is increasing. This very fact makes even greater the responsibility of all concerned to give these candidates the best and most complete formation possible. I likewise encourage and exhort you to continue your efforts to implement the guidelines which the recent Synod of Bishops offered *in relation to the role and mission of the laity in the Church and in society*.

More and more the Church in Zimbabwe will come to depend on her own resources. In a sense *the ecclesial community is being challenged to reach its full maturity in a brief period of time*. Furthermore, the Church here, as everywhere, is *a missionary Church* and should do whatever it can to offer trained personnel to meet the needs of other places, especially in Africa.

6. *Education forms a pastoral priority in all of your dioceses*. You are rightly convinced that the Church should continue her activities in this field as an important contribution to building up the national community, accompanying the Government's efforts to provide quality education for all Zimbabwe's youth.

If you have expressed some concern regarding aspects of recent legislation, you have done so in a spirit of dialogue and collaboration, desiring to *guarantee the Catholic identity of your schools*. Affirming that parents are the first and foremost educators of their children who should therefore enjoy true freedom in their choice of schools, the Second Vatican Council calls on public authorities to create conditions in which parents can provide for the education of their children according to their moral and religious principles (Cfr. *Gravissimum Educationis*, 3 et 6). The Council reaffirms the Church's right freely to establish and to run schools so that Catholic parents can fulfil their obligations regarding their children's education (Cfr. *ibid.* 8). This implies that civil law should respect the right of the responsible Catholic authorities to select the heads and the teachers of these institutions, so that their Catholic character can be maintained. I encourage you to continue in your contacts with the public authorities concerning this matter which is of such importance in the life of the country.

7. Dear brother bishops, your work on behalf of greater justice and correctness in human affairs is well known. To this must be added *your concern for the poor and most vulnerable members of society*. In recent times you have been especially concerned with the question of the great numbers of refugees located near the border with Mozambique. *The plight of millions of refugees in different continents is a festering wound which typifies and reveals the imbalances and conflicts of the modern world* (Cfr. Ioannis Pauli PP. II *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis*, 24). I shall continue to appeal to the international community to come to the aid of these groups and to seek solutions to

the underlying causes of so much suffering. In the meantime you are called to emulate the actions of the Good Samaritan, with evangelical compassion and love.

8. Brother bishops, to conclude these brief remarks, *I turn to Mary Most Holy, Mother of God and our Mother*. The whole Church has honoured her and earnestly prayed to her during the Marian Year which we recently brought to a close. May her maternal love accompany my pastoral visit in this land. And may she protect you and your priests, religious and laity as you respond to your ecclesial vocation in the new Zimbabwe as we approach the Third Millennium. *May she, who is all powerful in her intercession, call down God's abundant blessings on your country and on the other nations of Southern Africa.*

God's peace be upon the Church in Zimbabwe!

May his love shine on all the inhabitants of this promising land!

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