



The Holy See

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

Friday, 2 October 1992

*Dear Brother Bishops,*1. I extend a cordial welcome to you, *the Bishops of the Sudan*, who have come to Rome for your quinquennial visit *ad Limina Apostolorum*. I am grateful to you, Archbishop Zubeir, for the kind words you have spoken on behalf of your brothers in the Episcopal Conference, of which you have just been elected President. I have looked forward to our meeting with an eager anticipation made all the sharper by my daily prayer for you and for your clergy, religious and lay faithful. Because of the trials which beset the Church in the Sudan and the courageous fidelity with which she responds, all of you have a particular place in my heart. In greeting you, dear Brothers, I warmly embrace the people of your dioceses and all the beloved Sudanese people. Please assure them all of my love and prayerful affection. This meeting is a source of great gladness for me, because it is the first time I have been with you since God in his goodness gave me the joy of raising to the ranks of the Blessed your heroic countrywoman, Josephine Bakhita. How truly relevant she is to the Church in the Sudan today! "*Hers is a message of heroic goodness modelled on the goodness of the heavenly Father. She has left us a witness of evangelical reconciliation and forgiveness, which will surely bring consolation to the Christians of her homeland... At this time of great trial, Sister Bakhita goes before (you) on the path of the imitation of Christ, of the deepening of Christian life and of unshakable attachment to the Church*" (John Paul II, *Homily for the Beatification of Josemaría Escrivá de Balaguer and Josephine Bakhita*, 17 May 1992). One of your own, a sister of the Sudanese people, she intercedes for you before God. May her memory sustain you and the faithful in your present sufferings.2. The sad fact is that the whole life of the Church in your country is profoundly affected by the socio-political events taking place there. The civil war and the restriction of fundamental liberties have a negative effect on society, and particularly on the activities of the Catholic community. In these difficult conditions the Church is called by her Lord to carry on her mission with undiminished courage and an ever greater reliance upon him. The Holy See and the entire Catholic community around the world follow with apprehension and concern all that you are going through. The terrible devastation caused by war is compounded by drought, famine and disease.

Millions of Southern Sudanese have been displaced and are living in precarious conditions in camps either in neighbouring countries or in the desert. Hundreds of thousands of civilians are trapped while the battle rages around them. In this situation the Church in the Sudan seeks to alleviate as much suffering as possible, especially through the remarkable work of SUDANAID. The universal Church appreciates how much it costs the Catholics of the Sudan to persevere in obeying the Lord's command to love one's neighbour as oneself, (Cf. Mt. 19:19) and she recognizes that this offering is made willingly in imitation of him who first loved us (Cf. 1 Jn. 4:19). Not only do you receive, but you are also called to give in a most eminent way. In the life of your communities we catch a glimpse of the Church's "truest self": the Bride totally dedicated to proclaiming the resplendent name of her Bridegroom and counting herself privileged to be able to sacrifice all for his Kingdom (Cf. Rev. 19:7). My heart, like yours, is deeply distressed by so much suffering. Once more, and with undiminished insistence, I appeal to those in whose hands lies the fate of the Sudan to put aside the arms of war and pursue the path of peace, and *to make the eternal law of the all-just God the inspiration of their actions*. The Almighty commands his children to respect the dignity and rights of every human person, especially the weak and the powerless. The roots of war lie in hearts which refuse to submit with docility to this demand of the divine will. I join my voice to yours in beseeching all concerned to embark on a sincere and truthful dialogue of peace. I appeal once more to the international community, and to those who direct international organizations, to make it their highest priority to aid the innocent victims of this terrible conflict.³ Respect for the individual's freedom to seek what is true and to respond to the moral imperatives of conscience is the "cornerstone of the structure of human rights" and "a point of reference of the other fundamental rights... inasmuch as it touches the most intimate sphere of the spirit" (John Paul II, *Message for the World Day of Peace 1988*). Any hindrance of *the exercise of religious freedom*, in that it calls into question the inviolable transcendence of the human subject, injures the cause of peace. There can be peace only where the social and political order is entirely committed to the good of the human person. Hence, any curbing of religious liberty in your country at this time is all the more troubling, since it results in the undermining of the very possibility of dialogue and peace. In your defence of religious freedom, you have rightly pointed out the dangers to your country posed by the attempt to build the unity of the nation on one religion and one culture. This aim, along with the application of the Shariah to non-Muslims, has set the stage for the loss of many civil liberties. This is especially evident wherever there is discrimination in education, the harassment of priests, religious and catechists, the expulsion of missionaries, the obstruction of the legitimate expression of the faith, the lack of true freedom in conversions, and where the baptized are characterized as "foreigners" in their own ancestral homeland.⁴ In keeping with the teachings of Jesus Christ, the Catholics of the Sudan are endeavouring to respond to these injustices in the spirit of the Beatitudes: "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God" (Mt. 5:9). God's gifts of peace and reconciliation are, without any doubt, the spiritual goods which your nation most sorely needs after years of bitter violence. Your Pastoral Letter of last year, *A Call to Reconciliation and Peace*, rightly points out that in the grievous trials to which the Sudanese people are being subjected, *the Church seeks above all to be an instrument for building up a society which is truly worthy of the human person*. This does not

mean that in the face of injustice you should not forthrightly speak the truth and claim your legitimate rights, as you did in the Pastoral Letter *The Truth—Shall Make You Free*. Your invitation to all men and women of good will to walk the path of mutual respect and reconciliation is a statement of your desire and commitment to join with all your Muslim fellow—citizens in building a society with the energy which flows from the worship of God.⁵ The fact that your little flock has been able to face so many arduous challenges is a tribute to those who over the years have laboured to build up the Body of Christ in the Sudan. The zeal of so many priests and religious — those who are children of the Sudan and those who have come as missionaries — and the devotion of the catechists who work so generously beside them, show the force of God’s grace, which, as Saint Paul wrote, "is able to do far more abundantly than all we ask or think" (Eph. 3:20). I wish to pay tribute to the missionary priests, and the Religious Sisters and Brothers, who share with you the pastoral burdens of your Dioceses. Their presence and generous dedication is surely a great source of encouragement to the faithful. They are a living sign of the Church’s universality and of the solidarity which characterizes the communion of the particular Churches. It is especially heartening that in the midst of so many difficulties you try to give close attention to the formation of those who work in the Lord’s vineyard. I wish to encourage you to continue *fostering vocations and training seminarians, in spite of so many difficulties*. I recommend to your attention the recent Post—Synodal Exhortation, "[Pastores Dabo Vobis](#)". It is my hope that this latest document about priestly life and formation will help you and your priests and, seminarians to conform your hearts and minds ever more to the model of the Good Shepherd. May constant prayer, the worthy reception and celebration of the sacraments, and all manner of, good works be the mark of your priests’ life and ministry. The most senior priest no less than the youngest seminarian is called to strive every day to put on the Lord’s own pastoral charity (John Paul II, [Pastores Dabo Vobis](#), 57), the measure of which is a zeal that dedicates everything, even one’s life—blood, to the salvation of the flock. A Bishop’s role in all of this is not merely a matter of administration. It stems from his very consecration as a successor of the Apostles. "With his presence and by his sharing with candidates for the priesthood all that has to do with the pastoral progress of the particular Church, the Bishop offers a fundamental contribution to formation in the ‘sensus Ecclesiae’ " ([Ibid.](#), 65). I am confident that you will not neglect this vital aspect of ecclesial life.⁶ Finally, I urge you *to make your Episcopal Conference the useful instrument envisioned by the Fathers of the Second Vatican Council*: one wherein the sharing of ideas and the exchange of opinions leads to "a holy consortium of resources for the common good of the churches" ([Christus Dominus](#), 37). The growth of a true spirit of collegial cooperation and solidarity will strengthen each one of you for the tasks to which you are called in the service of the Church. In working together in mutual trust and fraternal love you can receive from one another the support you need in order to develop a common plan of pastoral initiatives to deal with the current grave challenges which are the responsibility of all: challenges such as that of—providing pastoral care in areas which have long been deprived of priests, of evangelizing and offering adequate catechesis and Christian formation, of promoting the celebration of the sacrament of matrimony among Christians and of strengthening family life. The Conference should effectively serve to coordinate efforts and to ensure a responsible administration of your own resources and of the help which comes from

others.7. Dear Brothers, your pilgrimage to Rome indicates that the bonds of communion in the Church transcend every regional or national boundary, and that the Bishop of Rome is the guarantor of her unity and the authentic interpreter of its demands. In this light certain practical aspects of your episcopal ministry find their fuller meaning. Your prompt and willing cooperation with the Holy See through the Apostolic Nunciature, despite pressing local concerns, will eloquently proclaim your faithfulness to the "rock" upon which Christ willed to build his Church (Cf. Mt. 16:18). I am confident that your *ad Limina* visit will result in a renewed sense of communion with the universal Church, built on the sure foundation which is Christ (Cf. 1 Cor. 3:11), nourished by the testimony of the Apostles and sustained in every age and place by the action of the Holy Spirit. The faithful in the Sudan are fully a part of the *Ecclesia Dei* which, even from the first days after her birth at Pentecost, has faced opposition and hostility. Yet, "by the power of the risen Lord, she is given strength to overcome patiently and lovingly the afflictions and hardships which assail her from within and without" (*Lumen Gentium*, 8). I pray that at the tomb of the Prince of the Apostles you yourselves will have experienced the confirmation of your fellowship with Peter, who, as the Acts of the Apostles tell us, rejoiced that he was "counted worthy to suffer dishonour for the name" (Acts 5:41). May God make your hearts ever bolder as you echo the words of Saint Paul: "For the sake of Christ, then, I am content with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions and calamities; for when I am weak, then I am strong" (2 Cor. 12:10). With the assurance of my heartfelt affection, I entrust you and your beloved priests, religious and lay faithful to the unfailing protection of Mary Help of Christians, and as a pledge of peace and charity in her divine Son I impart my Apostolic Blessing.

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