



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF JOHN PAUL II
TO THE MEMBERS OF THE KENYA EPISCOPAL CONFERENCE
ON THEIR "AD LIMINA" VISIT**

Thursday, 20 May 1999

Dear Brother Bishops,

1. With affection in the risen Lord I greet you, *the members of the Kenya Episcopal Conference*, and just as you graciously welcomed me to Kenya four years ago so I welcome you to the Vatican today. It is indeed a great joy for me to meet you once again, and on the occasion of your visit *ad limina Apostolorum* I give heartfelt thanks to our God and Father for the "partnership in the Gospel" (Phil 1:5) which is ours in the service of God's people. I ask you to assure the clergy, religious and laity of your Dioceses that they remain ever in my heart: I do not cease to pray for their continued growth in grace and holiness.

It is with gratitude to the Lord of the harvest that I note the *vigour and vitality of the Church in Kenya* as she continues to increase, "adding day by day to the number of those who are being saved" (cf. Acts 2:47). Since your last visit to the tombs of the Apostles, two new Dioceses have been established and an Apostolic Vicariate erected. I am very pleased to greet the Bishop of Kericho, the Bishop of Kitale and the Vicar Apostolic of Isiolo on the occasion of their first *ad limina* visit. In like manner I greet those among you who, in the last five years, have been ordained to the episcopate: the Bishops of Kissi, Kitui, Bungoma and of the Military Ordinariate. "The God of peace be with you all. Amen" (Rom 15:33).

2. In the pastoral letters which you have published in these last few years you have shown praiseworthy concern for *the spiritual and religious welfare of your people in the context of the overall political, social and economic situation* of your country. This context has immediate repercussions in the lives of the faithful, indeed of all Kenyans, and initiatives at the parish and diocesan levels to address the situations involved not only respond to a very real need on the part of the nation but also provide effective forums for presenting *the Church's social teaching*. In fact,

the healthy social order to which the citizens of Kenya aspire calls for a *renewed moral and political culture of responsibility*, the sound democratic system which they desire is dependent on a widespread positive response to the summons for ethical renewal. A fundamental requirement here, as I noted in the Encyclical Letter *Centesimus annus*, is "the advancement both of the individual through education and formation in true ideals, and of the 'subjectivity' of society through the creation of structures of participation and shared responsibility" (n. 46). *Without a solid moral formation no citizenry would be capable of properly exercising its political functions*. Only in prudence, justice, temperance and courage (cf. Wis 8:7) can the choices be made - whether in regard to the leaders selected or the policies chosen - which are truly conducive to the well-being of the nation.

As many of you have pointed out in your quinquennial reports, changes in the economy and in other aspects of the social milieu present Catholics with challenges for the living out of their Christian commitment, especially in the area of *family life*. Economic difficulties coupled with the rapid and intense urbanization of society give rise to situations in which the temptation of making immoral responses to the resulting pressures exerts a powerful influence. It is therefore imperative that in your service as shepherds and spiritual guides you should place a high priority on *the pastoral care of families*. I encourage you never to grow weary of exhorting and encouraging the faithful to strive always to be steadfast in embracing the ideals of Christian marriage and family life. It is also appropriate to seek greater dialogue and cooperation in these same areas with other Christian Churches and Ecclesial Communion: for these are matters which affect the lives of all Kenyans, and such joint efforts and collaboration will offer a clearer witness to Christ and the Gospel.

Since the values of which we are speaking here are first transmitted in the family and then reinforced in school, both *the family and education should be objects of your constant pastoral concern*. The family itself must be safeguarded and promoted, for it remains "the basic cell of society" (*Familiaris consortio*, n. 46; cf. *ibid.*, n. 42); and "in the sphere of education the Church has a specific role to play ... [which] is not only a matter of entrusting the Church with the person's religious and moral education, but of promoting the entire process of the person's education 'together with' the Church" (*Letter to Families*, n. 16). The Church's role in education - especially through Catholic schools and programmes of religious education - must therefore be defended and enhanced.

3. It is in this very context that a significant image which was highlighted in the work of the Special Assembly for Africa of the Synod of Bishops takes on ever greater importance: the concept of the Church as God's family. This expression of the Church's nature is particularly appropriate for your continent, for it "emphasizes care for others, solidarity, warmth in human relationships, acceptance, dialogue and trust" (*Ecclesia in Africa*, n. 63). Thus, the new evangelization, which is such an integral part of the Church's mission in preparing for the third Christian millennium, will aim at "building up the Church as Family, avoiding all ethnocentrism and excessive particularism,

trying instead to encourage reconciliation between different ethnic groups, favouring solidarity and the sharing of personnel and resources among the particular Churches, without undue ethnic considerations" (ibid.).

This concept must be an integral part of all formation within the Church, especially of *the lay faithful*: you must help the laity to see themselves as active *members of the family that is the Church*, and to come to understand that in a very real way they belong to the Church and the Church belongs to them; *they share responsibility for her!* This understanding and commitment will help Catholics to avoid being lured away from the practice of their faith by other religious traditions and by the sects which are becoming ever more numerous in Kenya. It will also prove invaluable in programmes aimed at *the formation of youth*, for there is perhaps no other group in Kenyan society which is more susceptible to the materialistic, consumeristic and otherwise spiritnumbing attitudes which are so prevalent today and often promoted by the mass media.

4. The *formation* which takes place *in your seminaries and in institutes of consecrated life* must also be among your chief concerns as Pastors. The increase in the number of candidates to the priesthood and religious life is a great gift, and calls for careful discernment in the selection and training of those preparing for a life of service in the Church. Moreover, in light of the need to form an ever more active laity, care must be taken to avoid imparting models of the priesthood which are too clerical or authoritarian in nature, with the result that future priests find it difficult to work closely with lay people and to acknowledge their role and talents. Rather, *your priestly co-workers must be encouraged to involve as many of the lay faithful as possible in a shared responsibility for parish life*: the parish priest remains the leader, but he cannot - and should not - do everything himself. As I noted in my Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Pastores dabo vobis*: "It is particularly important to prepare future priests for cooperation with the laity ... they should be willing to listen to lay people, give brotherly consideration to their wishes and recognize their experience and competence" (n. 59).

You can be sure that if your seminaries conform to the fundamental requirements of *the Church's programme of priestly formation*, especially as presented in the conciliar Decree *Optatam totius* and in the Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Pastores dabo vobis*, they will bear much fruit for generations to come. Among the more important attitudes and dispositions to be cultivated in seminarians, the documents single out *the loving acceptance of the celibate life, a spirit of poverty and simplicity, and an unfailing solicitude and zeal for the "salus animarum"*, particularly for the salvation of those who have strayed or are ensnared by sin. In the advancement of candidates to Holy Orders, the Bishop has a responsibility which he must exercise personally. For the good of the Church, he should not admit candidates to ordination without being morally certain of their mature commitment to the priestly ideal.

Your concern for priestly formation does not cease on the day you ordain your spiritual sons. Rather, you must continue to seek ways to foster their *continuing formation*, as a means of

ensuring that your priests are "generously faithful to the gift and ministry received, that they are priests such as the People of God wishes and has a 'right' to" (*Pastores dabo vobis*, n. 79). You should be particularly close to those priests who may be faltering in fidelity to their vocation, and you must never tire of insisting that *ministerial priesthood is not a profession or a means of social advancement*. Rather, *it is a sacred ministry*. The Gospel demands that Bishops should deal promptly, frankly and resolutely with any situation which scandalizes the flock or weakens the credibility of the Church's witness. Following the example of Christ the Good Shepherd, you are to seek out those in difficulty and gently "admonish them as beloved children" (cf. 1 Cor 4:14). Above all, you must pray without ceasing for your priests, that the gift of God which they have received through the laying on of hands may be constantly rekindled.

5. Likewise, while respecting the legitimate autonomy of *institutes of religious and apostolic life*, a Bishop has precise pastoral responsibilities for the care of those who belong to these communities. You should always be willing to support young Kenyans who aspire to consecrate their whole lives to the service of their brothers and sisters through the observance of the evangelical counsels. Of particular value is the support you offer Superiors in the delicate task of prudently discerning the fitness of candidates to religious life. I join you in expressing appreciation to the generous *missionary priests, brothers, sisters and lay men and women* who, receptive to the promptings of the Spirit, have come to Kenya, bearing witness to that exchange of spiritual gifts between the particular Churches which is a natural fruit of ecclesial communion. In like manner, and with equal satisfaction, I note that many Kenyan priests and religious have also heeded the Spirit's lead and are now serving as missionaries outside their Dioceses of origin and even outside the country.

Nor can we fail to recognize with keen gratitude the *indispensable role of catechists* in transmitting the truths of the faith and in bringing others to the Lord. I am mindful of the important witness they bear and of the selflessness with which they devote themselves to Christ and his Church in their work of making the Gospel ever better known and accepted. No effort should be spared in ensuring that they receive the proper *training and formation* required for the fulfilment of their duties; nor should they lack *support and encouragement*, either material or spiritual.

6. Beloved Brothers in the Episcopate, I am consoled by the wisdom and zeal with which you shepherd God's people in Kenya. I pray that your pilgrimage to the city where the Apostles Peter and Paul shed their blood in testimony to the Gospel will fill you with renewed strength for the apostolic ministry which has been entrusted to you, so that you will never grow weary of preaching the word of God, celebrating the sacraments and guiding the flock given to your care. It is a particular joy to learn of the establishment in Subukia of a *national shrine dedicated to Mary, the Mother of God*, and to learn of the programme of Marian pilgrimages which will take place throughout the Jubilee Year in each Diocese. Commending you and your clergy, together with the religious and laity of your local Churches, to the loving protection of the Blessed Virgin Mary, Mother of Christ and our Mother, I impart my Apostolic Blessing as a pledge of grace and peace in

her Son, our risen Saviour.

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