



The Holy See

***LETTER OF HIS HOLINESS JOHN PAUL II
TO CARDINAL JAMES KNOX,
THE POPE'S SPECIAL REPRESENTATIVE IN UGANDA
FOR THE CELEBRATION OF THE FIRST
CENTENARY OF EVANGELIZATION IN UGANDA***

*To Our Esteemed Brother
Card. James Robert Knox
Health and Apostolic Blessing*

We turn our thoughts to Africa, so ready to hear the Gospel; in particular to Uganda, which for the past hundred years has eagerly accepted the truth of Christianity; it has also produced splendid fruits of sanctity. For there, as is well known, a considerable number of witnesses for the faith preferred to die rather than to dishonour it, and by the shedding of their blood they affirmed their observance of the divine law. Of their number, Pope Paul VI, our predecessor, canonised in 1964 Charles Lwanga, Matthias Kalemba Murumba (or Mulumba) and their twenty companions. During the solemn rite he spoke as follows: "These African martyrs add a new page to that list of victorious persons which we call the martyrology, and in which we find the most magnificent as well as the most tragic of stories. We consider it a page which is worthy to be added to those wonderful accounts of ancient Africa, which we who live today, being men of little faith, thought would never be repeated. We think, for example, of those moving accounts of the Scillitan martyrs, of the martyrs of Carthage, of the martyrs of Utica, that "Massa Candida" of whom Saint Augustine and Prudentius tell us, of the Egyptian martyrs of whom Saint John Chrysostom writes with such admiration, and of the martyrs of the persecution by the Vandals. Who could ever have thought that in our times new accounts would be added to these which would be no less heroic and no less glamorous?" (A.A.S., LVI, 1964, p.905). Indeed, we must state that this martyrdom took place just a few years after the Catholic religion had been brought to Uganda. Therefore we rightly feel that this land was in some way already disposed to receive the Christian religion; namely, it was waiting, as it were, for the seed of the Gospel and once this was sown, in a short time an abundant harvest of fruits resulted. Therefore, the decision of the Hierarchy of Uganda to celebrate with festive ceremonies the completion of the hundred years since the first missionaries came to that

land and to hold a National Eucharistic Congress, is to be praised. We know that our esteemed Brother, Cardinal Emmanuel Nsubuga, Archbishop of Kampala, and his assistants have worked very hard to prepare for these solemn celebrations, and that the Bishops of Uganda in a joint pastoral letter have fittingly exhorted the clergy, the religious, and the faithful to prepare for them. Moreover, we recall that our predecessor Paul VI in the year 1969 was the first of the supreme pastors of the Church to go to Africa, and indeed to Uganda, to attend the episcopal conference of that Continent, to honour the above-mentioned martyrs in their own country, and to attend to other matters relating to religion. We, too, desire to take part, at least through the Cardinal who will be our personal representative, in these celebrations which will soon take place there. Wherefore, by this letter we appoint and nominate you, our esteemed brother, as our extraordinary envoy, instructing you to preside in our name at the official celebrations. Since we know the qualities of mind and heart with which you are endowed, we are sure that you will carry out this duty for the greater increase of the glory of God, so that not a few and no small benefits will result to the Church in that region. "How beautiful are the feet of those who preach good news!" (Rom. 10:15.) The first men to announce Christ to the Ugandans were Simeon Lourdel, a priest, and brother Amans Delmas, members of the Society of Missionaries of Africa or "The White Fathers", who on the seventeenth of February 1879, after crossing Lake Victoria, landed at Entebbe. Some months later, three other members of the same religious family joined them. They settled at Nabulagala where they celebrated the Eucharistic Sacrifice for the first time in Uganda; and in the following year their first baptism was that of four aborigines. The cross of Christ then was set up in this place from which its light went forth. Although more than once serious difficulties arose, the Catholic faith enjoyed a happy and strong increase, especially because new labourers came into that vineyard. Also, care was taken to see that sacred ministers were recruited from the Ugandans themselves. This happened in such a way that in the year 1953, by the farsightedness of Pius XII likewise our predecessor, the sacred hierarchy was able to be established in that region. Thus looking back over the hundred years which have been marked by such a happy progress, we paternally exhort all our sons living there, whom we hold very dear, steadfastly to preserve the precious gift of the faith and, encouraged by this jubilee, to strive to live by it more diligently every day; remembering that it is nourished by the word of duly appointed preachers and by the liturgical life by which "minds are raised to God, so that they may offer him the worship which reason requires and more copiously receive his grace" (*Sacrosanctum Concilium*, 33). But even more must be done. One must strive to spread the Gospel more widely, because "the obligation of spreading the faith is imposed on every disciple of Christ according to his ability" (*Lumen Gentium*, 17); namely, it is necessary that the Church in Uganda, founded by missionaries, should now itself be missionary. By a praiseworthy decision, as we have said above, a Eucharistic Congress is being held on the occasion of the solemn celebrations of the centenary. Rightly indeed is this august sacrament honoured by social worship. In it, not only divine grace but the Author himself of grace, Christ the Lord, is contained. The Eucharist is the bond of charity, indeed, "because there is one bread, we who are many are one body, for we all partake of the one bread" (1 Cor. 10:17). Therefore Saint John Chrysostom aptly adds: "But if from the same bread we all become also the very same thing, why do we not show towards each other the same love

and for that reason become one?" (In Epist. 1 ad Cor., Hom. 24,2, PG 61, 200.) Certainly it is to be greatly desired that in this Eucharistic Congress the flame of true brotherhood may be enkindled, by which Christians are inspired to heal others' wounds, whether of mind or body, to help those in trouble, to refresh those in need. But to put all these noble and lofty things into practice one must also ask the help of the Blessed Virgin Mary, who is the Mother of the Church. We confidently commit to her care the present life and the future fortunes of the whole of the Catholic community in Uganda. Motivated by pastoral love and zeal, we have decided to write these things to you on the occasion of the forthcoming solemn celebrations. Moreover, may the Apostolic Blessing which we willingly impart to you in the Lord, our esteemed brother, to the above-mentioned Cardinal Archbishop of Kampala, to the other bishops, to the civil authorities, to the priests, to the religious, and to all the faithful who will come together for the same jubilee, confirm the wish we make that from these solemn celebrations as much fruit as possible may be reaped. *Given at St Peter's, Rome on the seventeenth day of January, in the Year 1979, the first of our Pontificate.* IOANNES PAULUS PP. II

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