



The Holy See

PASTORAL JOURNEY
TO BENIN, UGANDA AND KHARTOUM (SUDAN)

OPENING SESSION OF THE COUNCIL
OF THE GENERAL SECRETARIAT OF THE SYNOD OF BISHOPS
FOR THE SPECIAL ASSEMBLY FOR AFRICA

ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS JOHN PAUL II

*Cathedral of Rubaga
Archdiocese of Kampala (Uganda)
Tuesday, 9 February 1993*

*Dear Brother Bishops,
Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,*

1. It is with "joi inspired by the Holy Spirit" that we gather in this Cathedral of the Archdiocese of Kampala for the opening session of the *Council of the General Secretariat of the Synod of Bishops for the Special Assembly for Africa*. This is the seventh meeting of the Council and the third to take place on this Continent. I offer cordial greetings to all its members and to the other Bishops who have joined us. This occasion has profound significance not only for the local Churches in Africa but also for the People of God throughout the world. Through my presence here I wish to support both what has already been accomplished and what will be achieved in the days ahead.

Praying Vespers together we give visible expression to the bonds of communion which unite the See of Peter and the particular Churches on this Continent, and the reality of that *collegialitas effectiva et affectiva* gives intensity to our prayer for the African Bishops as they prepare with their flocks for the Special Synodal Assembly.

With deep affection in our Lord Jesus Christ, I wish to greet the representatives of the *priests, men*

and women Religious, and seminarians of the Dioceses of Uganda who are with us this evening. Through you, dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ, we are able to pay tribute to all who work to bring the Gospel to those for whom the Good Shepherd laid down his life. It is indeed fitting that you should be here with Bishops from all over Africa, for you remind us of the hopes and expectations that so many people have for this Special Assembly.

I

2. You are the workers whom the Lord is sending into the harvest to make ready the "great springtime of Christianity" (John Paul II, *Redemptoris Missio*, 86) which he is preparing for his Church! The *abundance of vocations* to the priesthood and consecrated life in Uganda reveals the Church's vitality and fervour—a gift for which we must give thanks and praise to God!

This vigorous evangelizing effort would be impossible without the courageous men and women who, impelled by the love of Christ (Cf. 2Cor. 5: 14), have been coming to this land for over a century on the mission *ad gentes*. I make my own the tribute of my beloved predecessor Pope Paul VI, who wrote: "The action of the missionaries was always disinterested and animated by the charity of the Gospel, and... in order to help the African peoples to resolve the complex human and social problems in their countries, they spent themselves generously" (Paul VI, *Africae terrarum*, 24). Esteemed Brothers and Sisters, you are heirs of a great tradition—a heritage shaped by the grace so powerfully at work in the White Fathers, the Mill Hill Fathers, the sons and daughters of Bishop Comboni, and all members of Missionary Congregations. Convinced that the Gospel is "the power of God for salvation" (Rm. 1: 16), these men and women came here out of love for the people of Uganda, a love which has been heroically confirmed in recent years by your standing faithfully with your people in times of trial.

In you we see that the *Church's mission to evangelize is not for a season past but is for ever valid* (John Paul II, *Redemptoris Missio*, 66). Do not count the cost of being servants of Christ and his Gospel (Cf. 1Cor. 4: 1). Never grow weary of extending the boundaries of the Kingdom of God. How blessed you will be to see, as Père Lourdel did, the mystery of Christ's dying and rising lived out in those you bring to the Lord.

3. *Dear Brother Priests:* I address to you a word of heartfelt affection. You are the chief co-workers of your Bishops in fulfilling the apostolic ministry handed on in the Sacrament of Holy Orders (Cf. *Presbyterorum Ordinis*, 2). By your sacramental consecration you have been configured "to Jesus Christ as Head and Shepherd of the Church" (John Paul II, *Pastores Dabo Vobis*, 21). You continue our Saviour's own mission of sacrificial love for his Bride, the Church, for whom he gave up his life (Eph. 5: 25). This *pastoral charity* requires you to make a total gift of yourselves to the Church—a gift which you renew daily in offering the Eucharistic Sacrifice (Cf. John Paul II, *Pastores Dabo Vobis*, 21). And as you well know, your effectiveness as ministers of Christ's reconciling love and as preachers of the Gospel of repentance will be increased by

frequent reception of the Sacrament of Penance.

I urge you, as Saint Paul exhorted Timothy, his beloved son and brother in the faith, "to rekindle the gift of God that is within you" (2Tm, 1: 6). The dynamism of pastoral charity needs to be constantly rejuvenated and nourished by the God who makes all things new (Cf. Rev. 21: 5). Participation in programmes of permanent formation are means by which the Spirit leads you to an "ever deeper knowledge of the mystery of Christ... and of the mystery of Christian priesthood" (John Paul II, *Pastores Dabo Vobis*, 70). In such experiences you will gain the strength to persevere in your service to the flock. In this respect the National Diocesan Clergy Renewal Centre here in Kampala will surely be of great service to the whole Church in Eastern Africa.

4. Dear *Seminarians*: you who are aspiring to take your places alongside the priests as workers in the Lord's vineyard, to you I extend the embrace of a loving father. Prepare yourselves well for the priceless gift that you will receive from God through "the laying on of hands". In order to grow into the "stature of the fullness of Christ" (Eph. 4: 13), you must give yourselves completely to the programme of spiritual, academic and pastoral formation set forth by those entrusted with your education. Do not waste a moment. In the time between now and your ordination day, you must diligently study the faith handed down to us by the Apostles, and allow yourselves to be fashioned by the Holy Spirit into fitting vessels for this treasure (Cf. 2Cor. 4: 7). Through prayer, "form the habit of drawing close to Jesus as a friend" (Cf. *Optatam Totius*, 8), so that God's grace may bear abundant fruit in you (Cf. Jn. 15: 8).

5. Dear *Men and Women Religious*: it is a cause of great joy that this land, made fruitful by the Martyrs' blood, has favoured the growth of Religious Life. In addition to the older Congregations which have found a home here, the establishment of *flourishing new Institutes* is a clear sign of the growing maturity of the Church in Uganda. Indeed, all of you are in some sense "sons and daughters" of Saint Charles Lwanga and his Companions. By the vows of chastity, poverty and obedience, you as Religious, like the Martyrs, bear witness to the truth that "the People of God has no lasting city here below, but looks forward to one which is to come" (*Lumen Gentium*, 44). Called to be signs of the new world of the future Resurrection (Cf. John Paul II, *Familiaris Consortio*, 16), you evangelize above all by offering your lives to Christ as a "gift" (Cf. *Perfectae Caritatis*, 1), and making manifest to all the new life won for us by the Cross.

The witness of self-giving is borne not only by the members of Institutes of active life but also by those whose lives of silent contemplative love burn at the heart of the Church – the Carmelites, Poor Clares, Cistercians, Benedictines and the Sisters of Perpetual Adoration. To all of you, Men and Women Religious, I repeat the invitation which I made in my Apostolic Exhortation "*Redemptionis Donum*": "Renew your religious consecration according to the model of the consecration of the Mother of God" (John Paul II, *Familiaris Consortio*, 17). Like Mary, place all that you are and all that you have in the Father's hands (Lk. 1: 38).

Since Religious Life is a powerful instrument for spreading the light of Gospel truth, I wish to call attention once again to the importance of the example given by *Women Religious*, especially for missionary Churches. In the lives of Religious Sisters, "virginity for the sake of the Kingdom is transformed into a motherhood in the spirit that is rich and fruitful" (John Paul II, *Redemptoris Missio*, 70). They show that the vocation of every woman – not only those in consecrated life, but also those in the married state – is to make a sincere "gift of self" to another. This truth about "the being of woman" – that she is a person created for self-giving to another person – is the basis for the respect rightly accorded her and for the role she is to play in the family and civil society (Cf. John Paul II, *Mulieris Dignitatem*, 7. 21).

In the name of the Bishops gathered here, I wish to thank all the priests, Men and Women Religious and seminarians in Uganda for your selfless commitment in bringing the liberating truth of the Gospel to the people whom you serve. You are chosen instruments of evangelization. With the Lord's help and Mary's prayers, your labours will bear a rich harvest for the Kingdom of God!

II

6. Now I want to draw your attention to the African Synod. When my predecessor Pope Paul VI came to Kampala for the dedication of the Shrine of the Martyrs, whom he himself had canonized, he spoke in this very Cathedral to an assembly very much like the one gathered here now. He spoke of the *Church as a communion*. He encouraged his listeners to bear witness to this mystery by their example, and he placed particular emphasis on the role of the Bishop as the "sign and minister of unity". Is it any wonder that the figure of the Bishop came to his mind as he stood here, close to the tomb of Bishop Joseph Kiwanuka, the first African Bishop of modern times? A Ugandan by origin, Bishop Kiwanuka was indeed a sign of hope as the Church was beginning to become again truly African.

Pope Paul VI saw great prospects for the Church and for the African people deriving from the Church's faithfulness to her vocation to share the gift of God's Trinitarian life. He encouraged all present on that occasion in these words: "Strive truly to live that ecclesial communion which makes us all one in Christ (Cf. Jn. 17: 21-23), all one Mystical Body (Cf. 1Cor. 10: 16-17), for we are the Church, all one thing with Christ and among ourselves" (Paul VI, *Address at the Cathedral of Rubaga in Kampala*, 2 August 1969).

It is very natural, then, that on this occasion our thoughts should turn to the *Synod of Bishops*, as a particularly beneficial *instrument of ecclesial communion*. Established by Pope Paul towards the end of the Second Vatican Council, the Synod strives to express and foster the communion of the Bishops throughout the world with one another, under the leadership of the Successor of Peter. The principle underlying the institution of the Synod of Bishops is simple: the more the communion of the Bishops in the worldwide episcopate is enhanced, the more the communion of the Church as a whole is enriched. In these days, the Church in Africa is seeing at firsthand the truth of these

words, as it experiences the enthusiasm and practical benefits which are accompanying the preparations for the Special Assembly for Africa of the Synod of Bishops.

7. The word "Synod" literally means a walking together: "synodos". It provides a powerful image which can be applied not only to the actual Synod Assembly but also to all the phases of preparation which precede that gathering. All the members of the Church in Africa—clergy, Religious and laity—are making a *common journey*, "walking together", placing their gifts at the service of the Church in Africa, for the sake of the forthcoming Special Assembly. At this moment, the journey has reached a significant point with the publication of the working document, the *Instrumentum Laboris*. The remote preparation for the Special Assembly has come to an end. The phase of immediate preparation has begun.

I am particularly pleased that this *document is being released in Africa itself* at the opening session of this meeting of the Council of the General Secretariat of the Synod. In its own way the publication of the *Instrumentum Laboris* is an expression of the mystery of ecclesial communion which links together the Pastors and people of Africa in their service of God's Kingdom. It is a response to the exchanges begun by the presentation of the earlier Lineamenta document to the Church in Africa. That document was also presented in Africa itself, at a meeting of Bishops on 25 July 1990 at Lomé, Togo, for the Ninth Plenary Session of the Symposium of Episcopal Conferences of Africa and Madagascar (SECAM). A further sign of the communion of life shared by the local Churches in Africa in the various stages of their history is the fact that this synodal document is being released in the very place where almost twenty-five years ago SECAM solemnly concluded its first plenary session, held on the occasion of Pope Paul's historic pilgrimage to Uganda.

8. Assessing the past in the light of the present is always helpful. Looking back today on the work done during the last two years in preparation for the Special Assembly, we can give thanks to God for what he has accomplished on the Continent of Africa. Even in this brief time, *both the Church and society in Africa have been enriched* by the Church's mystery of communion, as manifested in the exchange of gifts which has gone into the preparation of the Synod. There are many positive signs which bring us encouragement and inspiration as the journey reaches its final stage.

These two years of intense communal prayer and reflection on evangelization have brought spiritual renewal, a deeper sense of the Church and her teachings, and a greater awareness of the responsibility of all the People of God to respond in faith to situations which are uniquely African. The understanding gained through dialogue has enabled the clergy, Religious and laity to cooperate more effectively in sharing the faith and in addressing the needs of our times. They have focused on truly important questions and are working together to find appropriate responses.

The energy generated by the preparations for the Synod has also resulted in a greater openness

to ecumenical and interreligious dialogue. It has likewise borne fruit in a renewal of mutual cooperation in programmes promoting the dignity of the person, advancing human development and fostering justice and peace.

9. It seems providential that the announcement of the Special Assembly for Africa of the Synod of Bishops—the first "Special Assembly" announced under the recently revised Code of Canon Law—took place on 6 January 1989, the Feast of the Epiphany. This Feast, while recalling the biblical events which led to the Holy Family's visit to the African Continent, highlights the universal mission of Christ and thus suggests the *Special Assembly's theme: "The Church in Africa and Her Evangelizing Mission Towards the Year 2000: 'You will be my witnesses'"* (Acts. 1: 8). Ultimately, ecclesial communion is both a vocation and a mission to bear witness to Christ, the "Light of all Nations" (Cf. Lk. 2: 32).

On the basis of this theme, the ante-preparatory Commission, and later the expanded Council of the General Secretariat, engaged in the study and discussion which led to the preparatory document or *Lineamenta*. This two-part document began with a general treatment of the *topic of evangelization* and was followed by *five chapters*, each devoted to various aspects of the topic: the proclamation of the Good News of salvation; inculturation; dialogue; justice and peace; and the means of social communication.

The Council's untiring work bore fruit in the *enthusiastic reaction* given to this document on the African continent, both within and outside the Church. A clear expression of this enthusiasm was the *practically unanimous response of the Episcopal Conferences of Africa*, the highest number of replies to date for any synodal assembly. Each of these replies represents in its own way the vital energy and practical results of the communion existing in the Church in Africa. Each reply bespeaks a prayerful dialogue initiated by the Episcopal Conferences with each Bishop and carried on by communities and individuals: a dialogue expanding from local communities to the diocesan, national, international and continental level. From the wealth of information gained in this process, the Episcopal Conferences in turn formulated the official responses sent to the General Secretariat. These were in turn collated with replies and observations from other concerned Church bodies.

10. With the presentation of the *Instrumentum Laboris* or "working paper" of the Special Assembly, the Church in Africa has reached a particularly significant stage in her preparation for the Special Assembly. The *Lineamenta* reports, which expressed the communion experienced at various levels of ecclesial life in Africa, were carefully studied by the Council of the General Secretariat. With the help of theologians from Africa, they were then synthesized and further refined so as to present a composite picture of the present state of affairs and the general views of the Christian community in Africa with regard to the theme of evangelization. This document, following the same two-part structure and five-chapter treatment of the *Lineamenta*, has, therefore, a particular importance. On the one hand, it represents in a certain sense the "first fruits" of communal prayer,

study, and reflection on the theme of the Synodal Assembly. On the other hand, it serves as a broad agenda which will be used in the meeting itself, within the framework of dialogue and communion.

Although the primary purpose of the document is to prepare those who will take part in the Special Assembly, its release to the public represents *a way for the whole Church in Africa to benefit* further from the process of preparing for the Synod. At the same time, the document can serve as a general encouragement to study and a means of generating enthusiasm for this Special Assembly, which, because it takes place at this moment in the history of the Church in Africa, has a crucial role to play in its passage to the Third Christian Millennium. Through the dynamism of communion and through discussion and prayer on the topic of evangelization, the special Synodal Assembly will seek to formulate a pastoral plan of action for the Church, as she seeks to be faithful to her vocation to communion and her mission to preach Christ to all nations.

11. The particular nature of this Assembly has also required certain adaptations of the *Ordo Synodi*, the rules governing the Synod. These adaptations, dealing for the most part with the criteria for the representation and participation of Episcopal Conferences at the General Assembly, have received my approval and are also being issued at this time. Copies are being sent to the Episcopal Conferences so that the process of determining the actual participants at the Synodal Assembly can begin.

Considering the importance of the publication of the *Instrumentum Laboris* and the new stage of immediate preparation for the Synod which it signals, I am pleased to announce, after much consultation, that the Special Assembly for Africa of the Synod of Bishops will begin on Low Sunday, 10 April 1994.

Because the Special Assembly is of keen interest not only to the Church in Africa but to the Church as a whole, the following arrangements have been made concerning its actual celebration. The *working sessions* of the Special Assembly for Africa of the Synod of Bishops will take place *in the Vatican* where all assemblies of the Synod of Bishops have been held, showing as it were the communion of the Bishops with the Successor of Peter. Furthermore, recognizing the intensity of participation, through prayer and study, of people and institutions of the Church across the whole Continent in preparing the Synodal Assembly, and wishing to continue their association with the process of the Synod, I have the intention of coming to *Africa for a celebration phase* to solemnly promulgate the fruits of the Special Assembly. That phase will be an occasion to encourage the Catholics of Africa in the implementation of the Synod's proposals, and to express the solidarity of the universal Church with the particular Churches of Africa in the pastoral tasks to be faced in evangelizing this Continent on the threshold of the Third Millennium.

12. In the mystery of the Church's communion, the Special Assembly for Africa has importance for the universal Church, not only because of the great interest which this event has evoked but

above all because of the very nature of ecclesial communion which transcends all temporal and spatial boundaries. It has inspired many prayers and good works whereby members and communities of the Church on other continents are accompanying the Synod process. Indeed, we may be confident that in the mystery of communion the Synod will be supported by the prayers of the Saints in heaven.

In this regard, I gladly recall the witness to the Gospel of Christ given in this land made precious by the blood of Martyrs, a witness which has brought forth much fruit for the Church in Uganda. Making my own the words of the hymn sung by the Martyrs as they bore supreme testimony to Christ by their death, I commend to their powerful intercession the work of the Council meeting which is about to take place, as well as the Special Assembly itself:

"Grant that our eyes be open,
Here to see Our Saviour King,
And our hearts be ever eager,
Him to hear, his praise to sing".

From Uganda, from the heart of Africa, may this hymn go forth and the chorus swell in every part of the continent in these final phases of preparation for the Special Assembly, which holds so much promise and hope for the Church on the threshold of the Third Millennium.

Maria, Regina Martyrum, Ora Pro Nobis!