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# ON AFRICA

**Pope Paul VI**

**October 29, 1967**







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# MESSAGE

To the Hierarchy and People of Africa  
on the promotion of the religious,  
civil and social welfare of Africa

October 29, 1967

POPE PAUL VI

## INTRODUCTION

1. It is still a source of joy for us to recall the visit we made to some parts of Africa before we were raised to the supreme pontificate. We were deeply impressed and moved to admiration by what we saw of the face of the new Africa, as we witnessed at close quarters the beginnings of Christian life in those countries, the peoples' eagerness to learn, their desire for renewal and their anxiety to find a solution to the complex problems arising from their newly attained political independence. The fervor and vitality of the new Christian communities, in particular, showed us clearly that Africa was opening itself to the Kingdom of God.

Ever since that visit, we have been conscious of the voice of the peoples of Africa calling out to us, as the voice called out to St. Paul in his dream at Troas: <sup>1</sup> *Come to our aid. Now is the time. Do not delay, for we are ready to receive you.*<sup>2</sup>

2. Now that we have been raised to the Chair of St. Peter, we regard Africa, among the other fields of apostolate entrusted to us, as having a more prominent place than ever in our pastoral solicitude. And as our prayer has become more intense, so also has our interest in the progress in that continent and in the development of its religious life.

Because of this, we are moved to speak this present message to Africa from the same Chair of Peter from which, ten years ago, our predecessor Pius XII promulgated his Encyclical *Fidei Donum*.<sup>3</sup> We desire our message to be, as it were, the continuation of that great Pope's discourse, a document which marked an important stage in the history of the evangelization of that land. May our words be to everyone in Africa a clear sign of our hopes and the ardent desire we have for the future religious and civil prosperity of their countries.

## ANCIENT HERITAGE AND PRESENT SITUATION

3. In conveying our greetings to Africa we cannot but recall the glories of her Christian past.

We think of the Christian churches of Africa whose origins go back to the times of the Apostles and are traditionally associated with the name and teaching of Mark the Evangelist. We think of their countless saints, martyrs, confessors and virgins, and recall the fact that from the second to the fourth century Christian life in the north of Africa was vigorous and had a leading place in theological study and literary production.

The names of the great doctors and writers come at once to mind, men like Origen, St. Athanasius, and St. Cyril, leaders of the Alexandrian school, and at the other end of the north African coastline, Tertullian, St. Cyprian and above all St. Augustine, one of the most brilliant lights of the Christian world. We shall mention the great saints of the desert, Paul, Anthony, and Pachomius, the first founders of monastic life, which later spread through their example in both the East and the West. And among many others we want also to mention St. Frumentius, known by the name of Abba Salama, who was consecrated bishop by St. Athanasius and became the Apostle of Ethiopia.

These noble examples, as also the saintly African Popes, Victor I, Melchiades and Gelasius I, belong to the common heritage of the Church, and the Christian writers of Africa remain today a basic source for deepening our knowledge of the history of salvation in the light of the Word of God.

4. In recalling the ancient glories of Christian Africa we wish to express our profound respect for the Churches with which we are not in full communion: the Greek Church of the Patriarchate of Alexandria, the Coptic Church of Egypt and the Church of

Ethiopia, which share with the Catholic Church a common origin and the doctrinal and spiritual heritage of the great Fathers and saints, not only of their own land, but of all the early Church. They have labored much and suffered much to keep the Christian name alive in Africa through all the vicissitudes of history.

From the time of the Second Ecumenical Vatican Council, when fraternal relations with their Patriarchs were resumed, we have been longing and praying to hasten the day of union, and we hope that from now on there will be a deepening of knowledge and understanding of one another, which are the necessary preliminaries to union.

5. We also wish to express our esteem for all the followers of Islam living in Africa, who have principles in common with Christianity, which give us glad hopes of an effective dialogue. Meanwhile we express our wish that where Moslems and Christians live as neighbors mutual respect will be constantly present in social life also, and common action to promote the acceptance and the defense of man's fundamental rights.

6. And now we turn to the new nations of Africa. Although they have only recently become nations, they have immediately taken their place with the most ancient nations of the world in the great international assemblies, to cooperate in maintaining and consolidating the peace of humanity.

Nevertheless the present period of Africa's history is one of great delicacy. The first phase of independence is now successfully completed and the new states have entered upon a period of adjustment and consolidation.

The transition to independence was made almost universally in an orderly and peaceful manner. This does honor to all, both the governing and governed, who contributed to it and continues to give grounds for good hopes. In some countries the internal situation has, unfortunately, not yet been consolidated, and violence has had, or in some cases still has, the upper hand. But this does not justify a general condemnation involving a whole people or a whole nation or, even worse, a whole continent.



## TRADITIONAL AFRICAN VALUES

7. We have always been glad to see the flourishing state of African studies, and we see with satisfaction that the knowledge of her history and tradition is spreading. This, if done with openness and objectivity, cannot fail to lead to a more exact evaluation of Africa's past and present.

Thus, the more recent ethnic history of the peoples of Africa, though lacking in written documents, is seen to be very complex, yet rich in individuality and spiritual and social experiences, to which specialists are fruitfully directing their analysis and further research. Many customs and rites, once considered to be strange, are seen today, in the light of ethnological science, as integral parts of various social systems, worthy of study and commanding respect.

In this regard, we think it profitable to dwell on some general ideas which typify ancient African religious cultures because we think their moral and religious values deserving of attentive consideration.

8. The constant and general foundation of African tradition is the spiritual view of life. Here we have more than the so-called "animistic" concept, in the sense given to this term in the history of religions at the end of the last century. We have a deeper, broader and more universal concept which considers all living beings and visible nature itself as linked with the world of the invisible and the spirit. In particular it has never considered man as mere matter limited to earthly life, but recognizes in him the presence and power of another spiritual element, in virtue of which human life is always related to the after-life.

In this spiritual concept, the most important element generally found is the idea of God, as the first or ultimate cause of all things. This concept, perceived rather than analyzed, lived rather than reflected on, is expressed in very different ways from culture to

culture, but the fact remains that the presence of God permeates African life, as the presence of a higher being, personal and mysterious.

People have recourse to Him at solemn and more critical moments of life, when they consider the intercession of every other intermediary unavailing. Nearly always fear of God's omnipotence is set aside and He is invoked as Father. Prayers made to Him, whether by individuals or by groups, are spontaneous, at times moving, while among the forms of sacrifice the sacrifice of first fruits stands out because of what it plainly signifies.

9. Another characteristic common to African tradition is respect for the dignity of man.

It is true that there have been aberrations and also ceremonial rites which are seen to be in violent contrast with the respect due to the human person. But these are aberrations which have brought suffering to the very people who have gone astray, and which, thank God, as in the case of slavery, have completely disappeared or soon will.

Respect for man is seen conspicuously, if not systematically, in the traditional ways of educating within the family, in initiations into society, and in participation in social and political life in accordance with the traditional pattern of individual nations.

10. Another characteristic element of African tradition is the sense of family. On this it is significant to note the moral and also the religious value seen in attachment to the family, evidenced further by the bond with ancestors, which finds expression in so many widespread forms of worship.

For Africans the family thus comes to be the natural environment in which man is born and acts, in which he finds the necessary protection and security, and eventually through union with his ancestors has his continuity beyond earthly life.

11. Then in the family one should note the respect for the part played by the father of the family and the authority he has. Recognition of this is not found everywhere in the same degree

but is so extraordinarily widespread and deeply rooted that it is rightly to be considered as a mark of African tradition in general.

*Patria potestas* is profoundly respected even in the African societies which are governed by matriarchy. There, although ownership of goods and the social status of children follow from the mother's family, the father's moral authority in the household remains undiminished.

By reason of the same concept the father of the family in some African cultures has a typically priestly function assigned to him whereby he acts as a mediator not only between the ancestors and his family, but also between God and his family, performing acts of worship established by custom.

12. As regards community life—which in African tradition was family life writ large—we note that participation in the life of the community whether in the circle of one's kinfolk or in public life, is considered a precious duty and the right of all. But exercise of this right is conceded only after progressive preparation through a series of initiations whose aim is to form the character of the young candidates and to instruct them in the traditions, rules and customs of society.

13. Today, Africa has met with progress which is taking her onwards to new forms of life made available by science and technology. All this is not in contradiction with the essential values of the moral and religious tradition of the past, which we have briefly described, the values that belong in a way to the natural law which is implanted in the heart of every man and is the foundation for a well-ordered life with his fellow men in every generation.

For this reason, while these values which have been handed down ought to be respected as a cultural legacy from the past, there is no less a duty to give them new meaning and new expression. In the face of modern civilization, however, it is sometimes necessary to "know how to discriminate: to assess critically, and eliminate those deceptive goods which would bring about a lowering of the human ideal, and to accept those values that are sound and beneficial, in order to develop them alongside their own, in

accordance with their own genius.”<sup>4</sup> New forms of life will thus spring from what is good in the old and the new alike, and will be seen by younger generations as a solid and real inheritance.

14. The Church views with great respect the moral and religious values of the African tradition, not only because of their meaning, but also because she sees them as providential, as the basis for spreading the Gospel message and beginning the establishment of the new society in Christ. This we ourselves pointed out at the canonization of the martyrs of Uganda, who were the first flowering of Christian holiness in the new Africa, sprung from the most vigorous stock of ancient tradition.<sup>5</sup>

The teaching of Jesus Christ and His redemption are, in fact, the complement, the renewal, and the bringing to perfection, of all that is good in human tradition. And that is why the African who becomes a Christian does not disown himself, but takes up the age-old values of tradition “in spirit and in truth.”<sup>6</sup>

## COUNSELS AND HOPES

15. But this very positive consideration of the moral and religious values in African tradition does not prevent us from seeing also the shadows in Africa today which cause us great grief and concern. We mean the disorders and the violence which have continued to trouble various African countries, causing sufferings and miseries especially to unarmed peoples, as they go peacefully about their occupations. What are we to say, then, when violence, as has unfortunately happened, assumes almost the proportions of genocide, when within the boundaries of the same country different racial groups are pitted against one another? We cannot forget the humiliations, the sufferings and death which have fallen also upon bishops, priests, Religious men and women, and lay people, Catholics and non-Catholics, Africans and non-Africans, who were working for no other end than the spiritual welfare of the local peoples.

Fervent communities of Christians were all of a sudden abandoned and isolated by the forced departure of their priests, and found themselves in a fearful situation.

Yet, in spite of these grave disturbances, hope prevails. With greater confidence our prayer goes to God, our Father, to give rest to the victims, to pardon the guilty, to give all a horror of violence and of war, to strengthen their desire for peace, and open the hearts of those who rule to an understanding of the just aspirations of peoples.

16. What has been achieved with the proclamation of independence requires consolidation by well-ordered legislation and its peaceful implementation. It is therefore necessary both to resist the temptation to violence and to avoid and check the abuse of power.<sup>7</sup>

Peaceful development and stability of institutions are prerequisites for progress in the new African states today, so that all citizens may take an active part in building up the new society, in public bodies and in private associations and enterprises.

This cooperation in the life of the community is now being increased by social planning, the study and implementation of which is the noble task of present-day African governments. In this way, by social and economic development which transcends the old, narrow tribal limits, a civic sense is being fostered in all, which puts the common good before restricted sectional interests. If this is to develop, however, everything possible must be done to ensure peace between different states, for this is the indispensable requirement for all progress.

17. Among the obstacles that impede the full development of the new African states there is also that of racial discrimination. Alas, in Africa too there are serious manifestations of it on one side and another.

The Second Vatican Council clearly and repeatedly condemned racism in its various forms as being an offense to human dignity, "foreign to the mind of Christ"<sup>8</sup> and "contrary to God's intent."<sup>9</sup> We ourselves have deplored it in *Populorum Progressio* as an obstacle "to the building up of a more just world, more soundly constructed on the plan of universal solidarity."<sup>10</sup> We draw attention also to the fact that the Catholic bishops have not failed, as recent events have shown, to raise their voices where necessary in the defense of violated rights.

The equality of all men is based, as is well known, on their common origin and destiny as members of the human family: "Since all men possess a rational soul and are created in God's likeness, since they have the same nature and origin, have been redeemed by Christ and enjoy the same divine calling and destiny, the basic equality of all must receive increasingly greater recognition."<sup>11</sup> This equality demands an ever more explicit recognition in civil society of every human being's essential rights, even though this equality does not cancel but rather acknowledges and brings

into harmony personal differences and the diversity of function in the community. Consequently, the aspirations of men desiring to enjoy those rights which flow from their dignity as human persons are wholly legitimate.

18. It is only right to acknowledge here the important contribution made by communities from other continents, especially in certain regions of Africa where for centuries they have made their home. Their labors have borne fruit and by their efforts and their skill they have created great wealth and the means of production from which the African peoples themselves have reaped considerable advantages. But it is also true that the whole community has contributed to this work of construction in varying degrees, and this fact calls for an equitable share for all in civil life, a more just division of the national wealth and the recognition of those fundamental rights denied by measures taken to maintain artificial barriers of an economic, social, political and psychological nature.

The forces of an expanding economy have brought about in Africa as elsewhere an increasing and necessary interdependence between different ethnic groups, which indicates that one group cannot progress without the help of the others. This need for general cooperation is a summons to lay the specter of mutual fear and to examine ways which, without harmful upheavals, will change conditions that bring in their train injustices, humiliations and offenses against human dignity and set up barriers to mutual understanding and sincere cooperation for the common good.

19. This state of affairs is an invitation to Christians to meditate on the love which we should have for our neighbor: "*For all of you are brothers.*"<sup>12</sup> The genuine progress of Christianity, both in the individual and in society at large, goes hand in hand with an ever more courageous exercise of the love of one's neighbor, which obliges the Christian to promote wherever possible the material, spiritual and intellectual welfare of his brothers.

The road is not an easy one and the obstacles are many. But resoluteness which makes great enterprises possible must not falter;

and to ensure this, we believe that everyone will find it advantageous to bring to fruition in his own spirit the message of charity in the Gospel, creating an atmosphere of understanding and dialogue in place of mistrust and fear, and thus laying a solid and lasting foundation for the future of his own country.



## DEVELOPMENT AND AID

20. The majority of African states are faced with the difficult problems connected with development. In our recent appeal to the world, we asked that man's integral development be looked upon by all as an urgent problem of world proportions. In the vast planning entailed Africa will have to take an important place. But to carry out programs of development both material resources and men with technical training are required.

Here two main problems come to mind, because they seem to us particularly pressing in the present situation in Africa. The first is the need for an all-out struggle against illiteracy and continued expansion of school education. "Basic education," we said in our appeal, "is the primary object of any plan of development. Hunger for education is no less depressing than hunger for food."<sup>13</sup> Also curricula will have to correspond to the actual needs of Africa today, assigning due importance to professional technical training and giving special consideration to the needs of the rural population, which is the most important sector.

The second problem in fact has to do with the agricultural situation, where methods and ways of thinking are often no longer adequate. We fervently hope that this urgent problem will be resolved quickly, along wise lines pointed out by our predecessor, John XXIII, in his Encyclical, *Mater et Magistra*,<sup>14</sup> repeated and expanded by us on various occasions.<sup>15</sup>

21. The mere declaration of independence by the new states has not changed the general conditions for Africa's economic development. Independence has however sometimes led to strained relations with prosperous nations, through fear that financial and technical aid would restrict the liberty and autonomy gained with independence. The African nations, like every other state in the

same situation, are conscious of their needs, but they are also justly and proudly aware of their independence.

To overcome these misgivings and their causes, which come under the heading of neo-colonialism, we appealed for the establishment of a world fund as a manifestation and an instrument of worldwide cooperation.<sup>16</sup>

The dignity of peoples receiving aid must be respected absolutely. They must feel, as our predecessor, John XXIII, already declared, "that they are primarily responsible and the principal artisans in the promotion of their economic development and social progress;"<sup>17</sup> they should in a word, "become artisans of their own destiny."<sup>18</sup>

When this legitimate need for human worth and responsibility is respected, gratitude and the renewal of friendship will spontaneously follow and, most important, the right use and proper appreciation of aid received.

22. We have hope and confidence of a well-ordered future for Africa provided it can be faithful to its ancient traditions and at the same time renew itself by its contact with Christianity and modern civilization. In particular, we are confident that Christians, worthy of the name and convinced of the dignity of labor and of the needs of the common good, will not fail to make a significant contribution to the civic development of their nations.

For this reason we wish to address to all sons of Africa and to all men of good will who will live and work there our words of greeting, advice and encouragement.

## TO BISHOPS, PRIESTS AND RELIGIOUS

23. And, first of all, we speak to you, Venerable Brothers, and your immediate collaborators, priests, Religious men and women, lay helpers both men and women. To you is entrusted "the service of the community, presiding in the place of God over the flock, whose shepherds you are, as teachers of doctrine, priests of sacred worship, officers of the Church's government."<sup>19</sup> It is, then, your concern to make alive and efficacious the meeting of Christianity with the ancient tradition of Africa.

Actually, the progress of the Church in Africa is unquestionably heartening. Almost everywhere the local hierarchy is established. Indeed the Church did not wait upon national progress to appoint Africans to posts of responsibility in the priesthood and the episcopate, thanks to the wise guidance of the Roman Pontiffs, particularly of our immediate predecessors.

We must acknowledge with sincere gratitude that the first missionaries have worked well to sow the seed of the Kingdom of God, and recognize that the soil of Africa has been favorable to its growth and fruitfulness.

24. Sometimes, the missionaries of the past are said to have lacked an understanding of the positive value of customs and ancient traditions, and we must frankly admit that, although they were inspired and guided by the highest motives in their unselfish and heroic labors, they could not be wholly free of the attitudes of their time. However, although they were not always able in the past to understand the full significance of the customs and unwritten traditions of the peoples they evangelized, many of these missionaries were those who gave the first steps in education, the first medical help, the first friendly contact with the rest of hu-

manity, the first defense of personal rights, the beginning and the deepening of those areas of knowledge which today are considered parts of general culture. Many of them also became famous for their original and important contributions to the anthropological sciences. But, above all, it should be recognized that the action of the missionaries was always disinterested and animated by the charity of the Gospel, and that to help the African peoples to resolve the complex human and social problems in their countries, they spent themselves generously.

The true and the only reason that missionaries were in Africa was, as we have said, the desire to share with the African peoples the message of peace and redemption entrusted to the Church by her Divine Founder. For love of Him, they left their country and family, and very many of them gave their very lives for the welfare of Africa.

You, Venerable Brothers, are valiantly continuing what they began. You know well how they labored and what they aspired to do, and they have your gratitude.

25. If much has been accomplished, much still remains to be done. It is not only a question of persevering and bringing to completion the work already begun—developing and spreading at an amazing speed—but there are still so many peoples waiting and begging to know the Gospel. The words of Our Lord have a very timely ring: “The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few. Pray, therefore, the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest.”<sup>20</sup>

We make a special recommendation to you, Venerable Brothers, who preside over the Church in Africa: while you give pastoral assistance to the Christian community, omit no effort to make Christ known to the very many who do not yet know him.<sup>21</sup>

And while you labor for an increase in priestly and religious vocations in the heart of your own communities, see that their education is based on a deeply spiritual life and is really apostolic. Make it also your particular care to form the laity for the apostolate according to the wise directives of Vatican Council II.<sup>22</sup>

26. We wish also to extend our exhortation to our brethren and yours in the episcopate who have charge of the older and more prosperous Churches of the other continents, asking them to continue to give you generous assistance. This Apostolic See has appealed, especially through the Encyclical *Fidei Donum*,<sup>23</sup> for priests, Religious and laity to offer themselves to work and collaborate in the young Churches of Africa. We renew this appeal with even greater earnestness. It should not be thought that past achievements and technical facilities have done away with the difficulties of the missions. Missionaries continue to have need of help and understanding because of the enormous sacrifices which are asked of them. The Churches in Africa need the constant and generous help of all Christians.

27. The contemporary situation in Africa demands an open spirit of cooperation. Individual efforts must be coordinated. For this reason the organization of missionary institutes already so well deserving for spreading the Gospel in Africa, still remain the most effective way, though some renewal and alteration in methods be required to meet the changes in the structure of the hierarchy and in the cultural conditions of former mission territories. Hence, cooperative works of individual Churches, at diocesan or parish level, such as taking on the responsibility for some mission, should be at the disposal of the local bishop and be supported, if need be, by missionary institutes to guarantee coordination and continuity in the apostolate.

It is a comfort for us to know that non-African priests are at work in the service of African bishops and do their pastoral work in union with African priests. We recommend them to give themselves generously to their apostolic mission, adapting themselves to new political and social conditions and considering the land of their apostolate as their second country. To the African priests we recall the words of the Council which invite them to consider themselves and every other fellow priest as "*a single body of priests*,"<sup>24</sup> working together, in mutual understanding and generosity to bring unity to the People of God.

We regard as praiseworthy and opportune the cooperation of several institutes in the same territory.

In addition professional work by lay auxiliaries is a providential means of collaboration, and it becomes fully effective when coordinated under the guidance of the bishop.

28. And we wish you, Venerable Brothers, especially those of you who are bishops of Catholic communities of the Oriental rite, to promote earnestly a useful understanding and collaboration with other Christian communities, taking the practical steps that circumstances and opportunity offer, "to remove, as far as possible, the scandal of division."<sup>25</sup> We are happy to know that in some places, following out the Council's directives, there have been meetings for prayer, study and action, and that concrete means of collaboration have been agreed upon for the translation and publishing of the Word of God in local languages.

We wish to make a similar recommendation regarding relations with members of other religions and with every person of good will which aim particularly at furthering civil and social well-being of peoples in a spirit of respect for one another's traditions.

## TO RULERS

29. At the close of the Second Vatican Council the Council Fathers, in union with us, sent a special message to men of the modern world: first of all, to rulers. It seems good to quote the following two excerpts: "We proclaim publicly: we do honor to your authority and your sovereignty, we respect your office, we recognize your just laws, we esteem those who make them and those who apply them. But we have a sacrosanct word to speak to you and it is this: Only God is great. God alone is the beginning and the end. God alone is the source of your authority and the foundation of your laws."

And again: The Church asks of you "the liberty to believe and to preach her faith, the freedom to love her God and serve Him, the freedom to live and to bring to men her message of life. Do not fear her. She is made after the image of her Master, whose mysterious action does not interfere with your prerogatives but heals everything human of its fatal weakness, transfigures it, and fills it with hope, truth and beauty." <sup>26</sup>

30. Yours, rulers of Africa, is the solemn responsibility to work to consolidate the institutions that have emerged with the independence of your countries; to renew and interpret, in contemporary fashion, the ancient values of African tradition. On you depends the formulation, the improvement and the execution of legislation for directing Africa's life today. We are confident that the desire for the true welfare of your people will always guide you.

Look for peace, be quick to dialogue and to negotiate rather than break off relations and resort to force, remembering that discussion was ancient Africa's most authentic tradition.

Foster understanding of the peoples who dwell in your territory, respect their religious liberty <sup>27</sup> and take pains to ensure that

differences and racial controversies are overcome and never permitted to grow in intensity. The prosperity of your new states requires, in fact, a cooperative marshalling of all endeavors.

We pay tribute to your good will and bless your work. May God bestow on you a correct view of reality; may He give you uprightness of intention and readiness to take action; wisdom in your legislative norms and promptness to undergo sacrifice; may He crown with success your aspirations and efforts.



## TO INTELLECTUALS

31. Today more than ever, the motive force of new Africa comes from its own sons, in particular from that increasing company who occupy positions as instructors in schools and universities, or who take active part in the cultural movements that give expression to the spirit and the personality of modern Africa.

As our venerated predecessor John XXIII did in a memorable audience held on April 1, 1959,<sup>28</sup> we desire to address our greeting and an expression of our best wishes to representatives of the arts and those who devote themselves to creative thinking, encouraging them to continue in their investigation of truth, without ever falling prey to weariness.<sup>29</sup>

32. Africa needs you, your study, your research, your art and your teaching, not only that her history may be appreciated, but also that her new culture may grow to maturity from roots in her past and develop in fruitful research for truth.

In the face of the industrial and technological development that has come to your continent, it is your special task to keep alive the values of the spirit and of the human intelligence.

You are the prism through which the new ideas and cultural changes can be interpreted and explained to all. Be sincere, faithful to truth and loyal.

The Church expects much from your cooperation in the work of renewing and giving value to African cultures, whether this be in the reform of the liturgy, or in teaching her doctrine in terms suited to African peoples.

## TO FAMILIES

33. The cultural and social changes in Africa today bear closely on concepts and customs concerning the family.

In the past the social structure of kinship and descent played the major role, and marriage was considered a matter of common interest for the whole family of relatives. All of this is now undergoing profound change. In certain nations of Africa, laws have been promulgated, which give a new juridical status to the family, and there are opportune reforms in ancient institutions of the tribe: in particular in the so-called "dowry," which in recent times was open to abuses detrimental to the peaceful orderly development of both the natural and the Christian family. Even the system of polygamy, widespread in pre-Christian and non-Christian societies, is no longer linked, as it was in the past, with social structure today; and fortunately it is no longer in harmony with the prevailing attitude of African peoples. In short, there is now in the African family a much larger area of freedom and autonomy for the individual spouses.

34. All of this should be looked at as highly positive. However, in the affirmation of personal responsibility also, respect for God's law is necessary, for this law may never be made void by any cultural or social change.

Consequently, the family should be jealous in defending and affirming the fundamental properties of marriage: that it is monogamous and indissoluble. There is the further sacred duty, sanctioned by the Fourth Commandment, to honor father and mother. So while it is just that the young should have the freedom of choice inherent in their marriage, this should not become a reason for them to loosen their family ties. They should consider it a precious heritage to be able to share in the common fortunes of their families; with love and generosity they should be ready to give aid to their

parents, and if necessity requires, even to other relations, according to their means.

35. Moreover, for Christian spouses the unity that is the family takes on greater proportions, since the faithful form the family of God. Their union with one another in prayer and the service of God becomes sacred. In the words of the Second Vatican Council, "married couples and Christian parents should follow their own proper path to holiness by faithful love, sustaining one another in grace throughout the entire length of their lives. They should imbue their offspring, lovingly welcomed from God, with Christian truths and evangelical virtues. For thus they can offer all men an example of unwearying and generous love, build up the brotherhood of charity, and stand as witnesses to and cooperators in the fruitfulness of Holy Mother Church. By such lives, they signify and share in that very love with which Christ loved His Bride and because of which He delivered Himself up on her behalf." <sup>30</sup>

The Lord Jesus Christ has presented Himself to mankind as teacher, as one who reformed and imparted new character to the family. Not only has He restored the family to its original purity,<sup>31</sup> but He has made of marriage a sacrament, a means of grace.

It is our prayerful wish that all Africans may learn to understand the message of the Divine Teacher and, guided by His light, may be shown how to apply it to their own laws and personal life. It has value for all, rooted as it is in human nature; it exalts married love, makes of the family a wholesome and suitable instrument for the proper education of its children, with incalculable benefits for society and the state.

## TO WOMEN

36. In the realm of the family the position of the woman is brought into greater prominence and is also radically changed, in that there lie open to her new fields of activity in the school room, the hospitals and in the various forms of political and administrative life of the modern state. The reason for this development is to be sought in the Christian teaching and spirit. Hence, "the Church is proud to have glorified and liberated woman, and in the course of centuries, in diversity of characters, to have brought into relief her basic equality with man." <sup>32</sup>

The African woman is asked today to become ever more vividly aware of her dignity as a woman, of her mission as a mother, of her rights to participate in the social life and the progress of the new Africa.

The African woman asks in the first place never to be considered or treated as an instrument. Her dignity is respected in the liberty due to her as a person, whether she enters the married state, in which case she has the right to choose her own partner freely,<sup>33</sup> or whether she prefers to preserve her virginity, consecrating herself to God and devoting her work to the welfare of all.

In fulfilling her principal mission, as a mother, the African woman will give help and affection to her children by being with them as they develop, bringing them to self-awareness and preparing them for their future responsibilities. In professional activities, too, and in all social relationships, she must bring devotion, sweetness and refinement, which are typically feminine and keep alive the proper sense of human proportions in a world dominated by technology.

Women also have the right and the duty to take part in the political and administrative work of society. This participation offers them the possibility of making a direct contribution to the

renewal of social institutions, in particular where marriage, the family and the education of children are concerned.

The Church, remaining faithful to her work of education, invites the women of Africa, as she invites women always and everywhere, to imitate Mary, the Mother of God, "whose life," as St. Ambrose says, "was such that it can be a pattern for all."<sup>34</sup>

## TO YOUTH

37. We turn now to you, the youth, the hope of the future. Africa needs you, needs your preparation, your studies, your dedication, your energy. You are the first to want to know the precise meaning and value of ancient African traditions, and you are also the first to want their renewal and transformation. The fact is that it is your task to overcome the opposition between what is past and the new forms of life and structure of the present. But be on your guard against the easy attraction of materialistic theories which can, unfortunately, lead to erroneous or inadequate conception of humanism and even to the denial of God.

You, in particular, Christian youth, should be conscious of the dignity and of the responsibility that derive from the Christian faith. Live your faith. Give yourselves with enthusiasm to study and to work. Exercise restraint even in your aspirations to do great things for the welfare and progress of your people.

38. With special affection we next address ourselves to you, the students, and remind you that the instruction you receive in school should prepare you effectively for your chosen profession, and the tasks which Africa expects of you for its future development. Around you, in your native Africa, there are still those multitudes of people for whom schooling and study are an impossibility. Be prepared and glad to become ministers of learning, by passing on to your brothers, as teachers in schools, the gift which has been given you.

Learn, then, to train yourselves in the spirit of sacrifice and dedication. Henceforth, the greatest good that you can render to your countries is to prepare yourselves and practice your profession unselfishly and in the spirit of Christian charity.

To those of you who are completing your studies in countries outside of Africa, we say: stay attached to your country; once your preparation is completed, be ready to return to be at the disposal of your countries, making your profession one of service for the progress and welfare of Africa.

## CONCLUSION

39. Despite some shadows we have already alluded to, we trust that Africa will know how to consolidate its civil institutions and move along the road of progress with full respect for the rights of God and the dignity of man.

In bringing our message to a close we cannot help recalling that on the soil of Africa the very Son of God and His Holy Family found refuge in a moment of persecution and exile. To the redemptive mediation of Christ, to the intercession of His Blessed Mother and St. Joseph, we entrust the future of the youth and the families of Africa.

To the great African saints—those who flourished in the first centuries of the Church and those who, like the martyrs of Uganda, were cut down by persecution at the dawn of the new springtime of Christianity—to these we raise our fervent prayer that they may continue to intercede for their brethren of today, and hasten the hour when over all Africa, renewed both in outward life and principally in the grace of the Spirit, there will be seen shining the light of Christ.

40. We wish to assure all Africa of our affection and esteem. In the midst of the People of God as the Vicar of Christ, we convey His greeting to you: Peace be among you. Love one another as brothers.

With this greeting and expression of good wishes, we call upon all of you the choicest graces and blessings of the living God.



## FOOTNOTES

- <sup>1</sup> Cf. Acts 16: 9.  
<sup>2</sup> Cf. *Atti della III Settimana Studi Missionari*, Milan, 1962, pp. 2-12.  
<sup>3</sup> Cf. AAS 49, 1957, pp. 225-250.  
<sup>4</sup> Encyclical *Populorum Progressio*, n. 41; AAS 59, 1967, p. 278.  
<sup>5</sup> Cf. Homily of Oct. 18, 1964: AAS 56, 1964, p. 907 ff.  
<sup>6</sup> John 4: 24.  
<sup>7</sup> Cf. Encyclical *Populorum Progressio*, nn. 30-32: AAS 59, 1967, pp. 272 ff.  
<sup>8</sup> Vatican Council II, *Nostra Aetate*, n. 5: AAS 58, 1966, p. 744; cf. *Ad gentes*, n. 15: AAS 58, 1966, p. 964.  
<sup>9</sup> Vatican Council II, *Gaudium et Spes*, n. 29: AAS 58, 1966, p. 1049.  
<sup>10</sup> N. 62: AAS 59, 1967, p. 287; cf. *ibid.* n. 63, p. 288.  
<sup>11</sup> Vatican Council II, *Gaudium et Spes*, n. 29: AAS 58, 1966, pp. 1048-1049.  
<sup>12</sup> Matt. 23: 8.  
<sup>13</sup> Cf. Encyclical *Populorum Progressio*, n. 35: AAS 59, 1967, p. 274.  
<sup>14</sup> Cf. AAS 53, 1961, pp. 431-451.  
<sup>15</sup> Cf. Encyclical *Populorum Progressio*, n. 29: AAS 59, 1967, p. 272.  
<sup>16</sup> Cf. *ibid.*, nn. 51-54: AAS 59, 1967, pp. 282-284.  
<sup>17</sup> Encyclical *Pacem in Terris*: AAS 55, 1963, p. 290.  
<sup>18</sup> Encyclical *Populorum Progressio*, n. 65: AAS 59, 1967, p. 289.  
<sup>19</sup> Vatican Council II, *Lumen gentium*, n. 20: AAS 57, 1965, pp. 23-24.  
<sup>20</sup> Matt. 9: 37-38.  
<sup>21</sup> Cf. Vatican Council II, *Ad gentes divinitus*, n. 20: AAS 58, 1966, p. 970.  
<sup>22</sup> Cf. *ibid.*, n. 21: AAS 58, 1966, p. 272.  
<sup>23</sup> Cf. AAS 49, 1957, pp. 238-246.  
<sup>24</sup> Conc. Vat. II, Decr. *Ad gentes divinitus*, n. 20: AAS 58, 1966, p. 971.  
<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.* n. 29: AAS 58, 1966, p. 980; cf. also n. 15, p. 963.  
<sup>26</sup> AAS 58, 1965, pp. 10-11.  
<sup>27</sup> Vatican Council II, *Dignitatis Humanae*, n. 1: AAS 58, 1966, p. 930.  
<sup>28</sup> Cf. AAS 51, 1959, pp. 259-260.  
<sup>29</sup> Cf. *Message to Men of Thought and Science*, Dec. 8, 1965: AAS 58, 1966, p. 12.  
<sup>30</sup> *Lumen gentium*, n. 41: AAS 57, 1965, p. 47.  
<sup>31</sup> Matt. 19: 8.  
<sup>32</sup> Vatican Council II, *Message to Women*, Dec. 8, 1965: AAS 58, 1966, p. 13.  
<sup>33</sup> Vatican Council II, *Gaudium et Spes*, n. 29: AAS 58, 1966, p. 1049.  
<sup>34</sup> *De Virginitibus*, lib. II, cap. II, n. 15: PL. 16, 22.





