



ZIMBABWE CATHOLIC BISHOPS' CONFERENCE



**A Pastoral Letter of the
Zimbabwe Catholic Bishops' Conference
14 January 2011**

***“Glory to God in the highest
heaven, and on earth peace
among those whom he
favours!”***

1. Introduction

As we begin the new year 2011 we, the Zimbabwe Catholic Bishops' Conference, address this pastoral letter to Catholics and to all people of good will. We invite you in this new year to work for the Common Good and to save our nation. The theme of this pastoral letter arises from recent and current experiences within our country. We continue to hope for a time when we can genuinely make the song of the heavenly host our own, "Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace among those whom he favours!" (Lk. 2:14). However, the evolving trends in our country are worrying and, if not corrected, can lead to our loss of nationhood, the disintegration of our society and to the forming of degenerate militias with opposing loyalties. The Social Teaching of the Catholic Church urges us to 'Work for the Common Good'. Indeed, "How very good and pleasant it is when kindred live together in unity!" (Psalm 133:1)

2. The Social Teaching of the Church

"The joys and the hopes, the griefs and the anxieties of the men of this age, especially those who are poor or in any way afflicted, these are the joys and hopes, the griefs and anxieties of the followers of Christ" (Vatican II, The Church in the Modern World, *Gaudium et spes*, no. 1). To this end the Catholic Church has over the years developed ten principles that form the pillars of its social teaching. The ten principles provide criteria for judgment and directives for action in matters of justice, integrity, truth and social well being. They are, the Dignity of the Human Person; the Common Good; Option for the Poor; Human Rights and Responsibilities; Participation; Subsidiarity; Solidarity; Economic Justice; Stewardship of God's Creation; and Promotion of Peace.

It is clear that all the ten principles are relevant to our situation but for the present we have chosen to dwell on the second principle as we invite you to work for the Common Good and save our Nation.

3. The Common Good

Everyone has a responsibility to contribute to the Common Good of all members of society. A better society is not for the benefit of an elite but for all. The way in which we organize our society directly affects human dignity and the capacity of individuals to grow together in community and contribute to the Common Good.

The Common Good is the sum total of social conditions which allow people, either as groups or as individuals, to reach their fulfillment more fully and more easily. The Common Good concerns the life of all and consists of three essential elements: respect for the person; the Social Well Being and Development of the Group; and Peace, which gives stability and is the source of security for a just order.

4. Signs of Hope in our Nation

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ, we, your Shepherds, congratulate you for your patience over the many years of suffering and hardship. You have proved to be very innovative in overcoming or at least alleviating economic hardships and working for the survival of your families, dependents, the Church and our country. To fight misery and to struggle against injustice is to promote the human and spiritual progress of all people and, therefore, the

Common Good of Humanity. Peace is something that is built up day by day, in the pursuit of an order intended by God, which implies a more perfect form of justice among men (Paul VI, *Populorum Progressio*, On the Development of Peoples, no. 76).

The signing of the Global Political Agreement in September 2008 and the forming of the Government of National Unity in February 2009 bore signs of hope for the restoration of our nation, notwithstanding the worrying and tragic circumstances which gave rise to those developments. These were positive steps whose value have been eroded by lack of collective commitment and political will.

5. Our Concerns

We are concerned that not all the tenets of the Global Political Agreement have been implemented, leading to the continued isolation of the country by most of the international community and the postponement of national healing, recovery, restoration and the enjoyment of fundamental human rights by all.

Given our situation it is important that we express openly and strongly our concern that every political party should engage in serious discussion about the Common Good. Without this sincere engagement we will continue to be dogged by violence, political intolerance, hate language in the public media, injustice, rigging of elections, fear, deception, etc. It is disheartening that State media never really went out of its way to promote COPAC and its quest for a people-driven constitution. So too, national healing, reconciliation and integration, which are so vital for national well-being, never seem to be given much serious media coverage.

We are concerned about incidences of politically motivated violence in some provinces. The liberation of Zimbabwe was achieved through the efforts of those who were inside the country (both armed and unarmed), outside the country and by the international community. The claim to have monopoly in the liberation struggle by any single sector or party, is therefore, false and may be the misconception solely responsible for the abuse of human rights and the erosion of the sovereignty of the citizens in Zimbabwe.

6.A Spiritual And Moral Crisis

In our Pastoral Letter for Easter 2007, we insisted that “the crisis (in our Country) is not merely political and economic but first and foremost a spiritual and moral crisis. As the young independent nation struggles to find its common national spirit , the people of Zimbabwe are reacting against the ‘*structures of sin*’ in our society. Pope John Paul II said that the ‘*structures of sin*’ are rooted in personal sin, and thus always linked to the concrete acts of individuals who introduce these structures, consolidate them and make them difficult to remove. And thus they grow stronger, spread and become the source of other sins, and so influence people’s behavior.’ The Holy Father stressed that in order to understand the reality that confronts us, we must ‘*give a name to the evils which afflict us.*’ (*God Hears the Cry of the Oppressed*, Pastoral Letter, Zimbabwe Catholic Bishops’ Conference, Holy Thursday 2007, No 16.)

7. Save Our Nation: Our Recommendations:

In its final message, the Second Special Assembly for Africa of the Synod of Bishops held in

Rome in October 2009, had a word for African Catholics in public life saying, 'We commend the many of you who, not minding all the dangers and uncertainties of politics in Africa, have generously offered yourselves for the public service of your people, as an apostolate to promote the common good and God's kingdom of justice, love and peace, in line with the teachings of the Church (cf. *Gaudium et spes*, 75). You can always count on the encouragement and support of the Church. EIA (the Church document *Ecclesia in Africa*) expressed the hope that saintly politicians and heads of state would emerge in Africa. This is by no means a futile wish. It is heartening that the cause of the Beatification of Julius Nyerere of Tanzania is already on course. Africa needs saints in high political office: saintly politicians who will clean the continent of corruption, work for the good of the people, and know how to galvanize other men and women of good will from outside the Church to join hands against the common evils that beset our nations.' (no. 23).

7.1 We urge our political leaders to:

i) Prioritize poverty eradication by using proceeds from natural resources like diamonds, land, etc., for the development of the whole nation and all its citizens. In its final message, the Second Special Assembly for Africa of the Synod of Bishops noted that Africa is rich in human and natural resources but 'many of our people are still left to wallow in poverty and misery, wars and conflicts, crisis and chaos. These are very rarely caused by natural disasters. They are largely due to human decisions and activities by people who have no regard for the common good ...' (No. 5).

ii) Stop the active and tacit collusion of those undermining the fight against corruption. Corruption is a cancer destroying our nation.

iii) Prosecute wrong doers and widely publicize any disciplinary action so that no one is seen to commit crime with impunity.

iv) Desist from intimidating and mistreating members of the public, the media, civic communities, etc. Uphold human rights.

v) Uniformed forces should maintain peace and security for all citizens at all times and especially before, during and after elections, and do so impartially.

vi) We implore our political leadership in the coalition government to reflect deeply on the timing of elections bearing in mind the unhealed state of the nation and the fragile state of the economy. They shoulder a heavy responsibility to serve and save Zimbabwe. They must think and act in pursuit of the Common Good. In the event of elections, implement the SADC guidelines in full.

vii) We expect our members of Parliament to make an effort to spearhead the mitigation of the pressing needs of the people they represent and desist from being preoccupied with enriching themselves.

7.2 All Catholics and People of Good Will:

i) We can be confident that God is with us, loves us and will save us. We, your Shepherds, therefore, urge you to be more faithful in your prayers. We need to pray as a nation without

ceasing, for the restoration of our country.

ii) As citizens we must put into action the tenets of our faith and beliefs. In its final message, the Second Special Assembly for Africa of the Synod of Bishops reminds all lay faithful that you 'share in the mandate of the Church to be ambassadors of Christ, working for reconciliation of people to God and among themselves. This requires of you to allow your Christian faith to permeate every aspect and facet of your lives; in the family, at work, in the professions, in politics and public life. This is no easy task. That is why you must assiduously access the means of grace, through prayer and the sacraments. The scripture text of the theme of our Synod, addressed to all followers of Christ, refers in a special way to you: "You are the salt of the earth ... You are the light of the world" (Mt. 5:13-14).' (no.22). Never as citizens must we lose respect for the dignity of another by being involved in violence, corruption, etc. God commands us to love Him and our neighbour always (Lk. 10:27), that is, even during heated elections. One cannot be a true Christian and a perpetrator of violence at the same time. Having different political views is normal and healthy in building our nation. We do not have to fight over our different views.

iii) It is not enough to recall principles, state intentions, point to crying injustice and utter prophetic denunciations; these words will lack real weight unless they are accompanied for each individual by a livelier awareness of personal responsibility and by effective action. It is too easy to throw back on others responsibility for injustice, if at the same time one does not realize how each one shares in it personally and how personal conversion is needed first. The Christian's hope comes primarily from the fact that he knows that the Lord Jesus Christ is working with us in the world (Paul VI, Octogesima Adveniens, A Call to Action, no. 48).

8. Conclusion

Many of you, who have endured much, are beginning to show signs of losing hope as the political, economic and social hardships, which should have disappeared by now, still persist. This is especially true of most people in rural areas who can hardly access foreign currency. Our situation is volatile. We can still move forward but can also just as easily return to our difficult past. Let us be exemplary so that we set the pattern for moving forward in faith. "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied" (Mt. 5:6). When we work together for the Common Good we succeed in building a Kingdom of justice, respect for the dignity of persons and their rights, truth, unity, forgiveness, political tolerance, service, free and fair elections, good national ethics, good media, solidarity, peace and good stewardship of God's creation.

A bare reading of this pastoral letter may have limited impact on the reader. Discussing with others will be beneficial. Bringing the fruit of one's discussion before God in personal prayer will lead one to seek the Holy Spirit's gifts of wisdom and courage. Strengthened by these gifts, we can strive to apply the Social Teaching of the Church to our daily lives for the promotion of a more just Zimbabwe, which upholds the Common Good. Let us all say the prayer at the end of this Pastoral Letter for our country, Zimbabwe.

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Prayer for Zimbabwe

*God our Father, true source of our human family,
you have destined us for the fullness of life in you,
and it is your will to gather us as one family in yourself.
We pray for our nation.*

*May our leaders be God-fearing;
may they respect and promote human dignity
and lead the nation to love and not hatred,
life and not death,
justice and not oppression,
peace and not violence,
prosperity and not poverty.*

*Grant to all citizens integrity and solidarity.
May each one be responsible and accountable
for all the good you have blessed us with.*

*Heal the wounds of our nation.
With the power of your Spirit,
may we, your children,
work fearlessly for true reconciliation, justice and peace,
that being the salt of the earth and the light of the world,
we may overcome
the problems weighing us down
and transform our society into one family of God.*

*We ask this through Christ our Lord.
Amen.*

Our Father.....; Hail Mary.....; Glory be.....Amen.



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