

BE CONVERTED AND LIVE

Pastoral Letter of the Uganda Catholic Hierarchy

Ash Wednesday, 4 March 1981

**To Our Clergy and Religious, to all the
Faithful Catholic Laity and to all Ugandans of good will,**

PEACE AND GOD'S BLESSINGS!

1. The brotherly concern that has brought us to address ourselves to you in the past, urges us to speak to you again. The period of Lent is a most fitting time that can help us to embrace the only solution to the present evils: conversion of hearts and reconciliation. This period, spent according to the best tradition of the Church, is the "favourable time" to make us realise our constant need for the mercy and forgiveness of God, because of our sinfulness.

2. Having before our eyes the picture of our beloved country of today, we share the uneasiness of so many Ugandans. Such a situation concerns us as religious leaders and asks for our intervention. Let the words of the Apostle Paul speak for us: 'It was God who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the work of handing on this reconciliation ... So WE ARE AMBASSADORS FOR CHRIST; it is as though God were appealing through us, and the appeal that we make in Christ's name is: BE RECONCILED TO GOD'. (2 Cor. 5: 18-20).

3. This period of Lent will be only the beginning of a full year of Penance and Reconciliation. We have already spoken of this in our previous letter to you, "I have heard the Cry of My People". Now we wish to detail to you the path to forgiveness and reconciliation. In an even earlier letter, 'Re-shaping Our Nation', we outlined the basic requirements for reconstruction and rehabilitation. In the light of recent events and of our own history, we now realize better than ever that Uganda as a nation has not yet been fully shaped. It is our duty therefore to call on all Ugandans of good will, irrespective of their beliefs, their social position or political situation to REPENT, to be RECONCILED and to live.

CHRISTIANITY AND UGANDA

4. In the past we have all lamented the sad state of our country, we have detailed all the material and spiritual evils that have kept it divided and in shambles. No material amount of reconstruction will succeed to raise us up unless we first acknowledge that we are sinners, no one excluded. Party politics, tribal and religious differences, social inequalities have kept us divided. The sinfulness in which we were born, however, knows no such divisions. We all share it in equal parts. But God sent his own Son to save us from sin and death. The love of God, manifested through Christ is therefore the new factor that has entered our lives and the sole factor that can heal our personal and collective wounds.

5. Honest political aims, just social action, striving for true unity, cannot but be in full accord with Christian ideals. Even more, these aims and activities will blossom and have success only in as much as they are the secular expression of God's eternal plan of Salvation.

6. We make our own the words of Pope Paul VI to the Executive and Parliamentary branches of the Uganda Government, spoken during his unforgettable visit in July / August 1969: "Do not be afraid of the Church". These words are still true today: the aims of the Catholic Church and of all Christians of good will go hand in hand with all honest aims of peace, justice and unity in today's Uganda. A just government has nothing to fear and all to gain by accepting the cooperation of the Church.

7. For the past 18 years Ugandans have aimed in vain at building a united nation. Even a superficial look at today's Uganda will elicit the conclusion that these efforts have not met with much success. Of course, building a nation takes decades and even centuries of work, suffering and experience. As we build it we can learn from many sources- even from our own mistakes. We must be willing to take risks and to try all possible ways. Has the Christian way been tried in Uganda's post-independence history? Not sufficiently.

8. Christianity has been in Uganda for slightly over 100 years. It has spread far and wide so that we pride ourselves in stating that broadly speaking Uganda is a 'Christian country'. For the most part the evils of Uganda since Independence have been the work of Ugandans. They have not been perpetrated by aliens, or by 'pagans', but rather by Christians who make up the majority of the population. We ask other Christian denominations in the country to join us in admitting honestly before God that we have failed to put a significant imprint in our Nation, because Christians have not been true to their name. The presence of Christians as 'Ambassadors of Christ' has been rather weak. At times by our silence we have condoned evil deeds. We have failed to form strong family structures that could be the basis of a healthy nation. We have fallen short in the practice of the Gospel.

9. Faced with this sad realization of our collective weakness as Christians, we realize that, before even thinking of building a nation, we must acknowledge our sins and ask forgiveness from God and from one another. We intend to call for a year of Penance and Reconciliation. This is not a novelty both in the tradition of God's Chosen People and in the history of the Church.

10. Examples from the Old Testament abound. Nineveh was spared God's wrath when its king and its people made amends for their sins in sackcloth and ashes. The remnant of Israel was called to penance before setting about to rebuild Jerusalem. King David, called to task by the prophet Nathan, repented for his sin of lust and murder.

11. Jesus Christ cried over the fate of the holy city defiled by hypocrisy, injustice and corruption and also warned the unrepentant Jewish nation: "On judgement's day the men of Nineveh will stand up with this generation and condemn it, because when Jonah preached they repented." (Mat. 12: 41) And again: "Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you that kill the prophets and stone those who are sent to you How often have I longed to gather your children, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, and you refused! So be it! Your house will be left to you desolate, for I promise, you shall not see me any more until you say: Blessings on *him* who comes in the name of the Lord'." (Mat. 23: 37-39).

12. The Israelites called a Jubilee Year every fifty years to restore the proper relations between the people and God, and -among themselves: it was a year of forgiveness and reconciliation. The Church, borrowing from the Old Testament tradition, has made its own the practice of calling for a Holy Year, also known as Jubilee, at stated intervals in its history. At such a time millions of faithful flock to Rome and other holy places to obtain God's forgiveness. It is not a sterile practice, because the faithful around the world are asked to celebrate the Holy Year with works of charity, mutual forgiveness and a change of heart.

A COMMON RESPONSIBILITY

13. Having stated that we are all sinners and in need of forgiveness and reconciliation, it follows that we all have a share in the task of bringing about this forgiveness and reconciliation: Christians and non-Christians, the powerful and the powerless, clergy and laity, must place themselves face to face with God and carry out his merciful plan.

PITFALLS

14. In this respect we must all be aware of certain pitfalls that have greatly hindered the task of reconciliation in our country. One of them is the temptation to blame God for the sad state of affairs we are in. The second one is the temptation to shift the blame on others.

To Blame God

15. "God has forgotten us and punished us", we hear people say. Such a statement is very close to blasphemy. God does not want the death of the sinner, we read in Scripture, "but rather that he be converted and live". The punishment God gives out to his children is not a curse. God punishes us like a loving father may punish an erring child, that he may learn to walk along the right path in life. Let us consider one example where God himself tells his people what course of action they should take in order to live: "Repent, renounce all your sins, avoid all occasions of sin! Shake off all the sins you have committed against me, and make yourselves a new heart and a new spirit! Why are you so anxious to die, House of Israel? I take no pleasure in the death of anyone- it is the Lord Yahweh who speaks. Repent and live!" (Ezk 18: 30-32).

16. The Word of God also gives us many examples of how the chosen people reconciled themselves with God: "Give thanks to Yahweh for he is good, his love is everlasting! Who can count all Yahweh's triumphs? Who can praise him enough? ... We have sinned quite as much as our fathers, we have been wicked, we are guilty... They failed to appreciate your great love, they defied the Most High at the Sea of Reeds, but for the sake of his name, he saved them to demonstrate his power. ... Time and again he rescued them, but they went on defying him deliberately and plunging deeper into wickedness; even so, he took pity on their distress each time he heard them calling... Yahweh, our God and Saviour, gather us from among the pagans, to give thanks to your holy name and to find happiness in praising you." (From Ps. 106)

17. This is exactly what God expects from us. We must acknowledge that God is right and all loving; we must confess that the evils that surround us are of our own doing; we must realize that we ourselves have brought punishment over our heads, while God uses even our own sinfulness and misery to cure and to save us. At this point we must be honest enough to realize that we can live again in righteousness only if we beg God's pardon and throw ourselves without reserve to his infinite mercy.

To Blame Others

18. There are those among us who would like to make us believe that our present and past evils are not really our doing and, therefore, we bear no responsibility. The custom of blaming others for our misery is a childish lie. Children caught red-handed always point an accusing finger to someone else: "He did it". We blame everybody but ourselves. It is time for Ugandans to grow out of this attitude and face the future with honesty. We are now reaping what we have sown. Evils from the outside have prospered in Uganda because they have found fertile and receptive soil. This is what we mean by conversion and reconciliation: let us recognize what is lacking within us, accept the blame for our choices and vow never to go back to them again.

19. No Ugandan can exempt himself or herself from this painful task. The media- daily fill our eyes and our ears with 'stern warnings' from assorted leaders. These warnings are nothing but cheap rhetoric a gimmicks unless the people who deliver them, first of all, and the people who listen to them, back them up with swift and concrete actions. Do we want honesty? Let us be honest ourselves. Do we want reconciliation? Let us be first converted ourselves. Do we want peace? Let us first practise the love of neighbour ourselves.

CAPITAL SINS

20. Even before we begin to reconcile ourselves with God and with one another, we must have clear in our minds the basic faults that we must root out from our souls and our lives. What are the basic sins that stunt the growth of our Christian life and of our nation? What are the social evils that poison the very soul of our country and divide it rather than uniting it? We single out *Indifference* and *Selfishness*.

Indifference

21. It is no secret that Ugandans do not yet feel as members of the same family. Examples abound, both in rural areas and in the towns and cities. In town the good rules of neighbourliness are often unknown. So it happens all too often, that people in need face life totally alone and neglected, even if they live in crowded flats. Why? Because perhaps- they belong to a tribe that is 'unacceptable', or practice the 'wrong religion', or belong to a 'different party'. Recent events have brought out in the open the cancer of indifference. In a country potentially rich, people starve to death. All across the world, young people of all descriptions crowded the offices of voluntary agencies, begging for a chance to come to our country and help solve our human tragedies; men and women of all ages responded generously by giving their hard-earned money to help us *but* of our present distress. What did Christian Ugandans *do*? We do not wish to overlook the efforts made by many of you to bring some relief to our brothers in need. In particular we thank all those who have responded to our urgent appeal for Karamoja last August. It has been an encouraging beginning which, hopefully, will be followed by an increasing awareness of our common bond as human beings, as Ugandans and as Christians. At the same time we must ask ourselves whether what we are willing to give compares favourably with what we have.

22. Christian charity and nation building go hand in hand. Lack of charity and deadly divisions also go hand in hand. The sooner we realize this, the sooner shall we build our nation. Indifference, namely the 'hardness of heart' that God so often chastised in the people he had chosen for Himself, is directly against God's plan for the world in general and for Uganda in particular. Why?

23. First of all, because from the beginning of time God created mankind to be a loving family. He did not create a church, a club, a committee, a party. He created a family to be the basic cell of mankind and the model for any future grouping of people. The binding element of a family is selfless love. Unfortunately for mankind, it did not take long to destroy such a beautiful plan. A look at the world scene bears out the fact that mankind is not yet a family.

24. But what is God's plan for Uganda? We may uncover it by looking at creation around us. Why was Uganda called 'The Pearl of Africa'? Because of its share in the natural gifts of creation: fertile soil, incomparable beauty, a people by and large mild, friendly and ingenious. These are the signs that God wants Ugandans to lead peaceful, loving, comfortable lives. He wants us to share equally in the gifts and opportunities that surround us. Even the variety of tribal groups is a potential blessing inasmuch as it can contribute a variety of gifts to the development of the nation. These natural and human gifts should be used to build a strong and prosperous country. Unfortunately we have turned them into instruments of destruction by our lack of interest, by our indifference to the common good.

25. To restore God's will for mankind Jesus Christ came into the world to "make all things new". He restored concern for others by his life and by his death: "I came not to be served but to serve". By his Blood he united into one family both Jews and Gentiles, namely, all of us. Christians are meant to be images of Christ. Theirs is the mission of uniting today's world in one family. More particularly, Christians in Uganda are called by vocation to unite Uganda into a loving family.

26. The main consequence of indifference is a total lack of concern for what happens around us and all around the country. Because of our fallen nature, this lack of concern is a temptation that we must fight even under the most favourable conditions. Unfortunately in Uganda this natural inclination to indifference is fostered and even exploited by the very people who should be entrusted with nation building. The tool of this exploitation is the criminal silence of the mass media regarding the state of the country. The crime is even worse when silence goes hand in hand with misinformation.

27. We have already exposed this evil in our previous letter to you. We feel it is our duty to repeat in the strongest terms our disapproval for this sad fact of our national life. How can people, even honest and willing people, be concerned about what they do not know? What do people know -about West Nile, Karamoja, Luzira, political decisions, army activities, the state of the economy. Why should honest people

still have to rely on short wave radios, marketplace rumours and the world press for information? We want to state clearly again that this silence is against nation building, and it is not worthy of a democracy, because a nation cannot be built without truth.

28. Faced with the task of drawing millions of Christians out of the capital sin of indifference, we encourage those brave individuals and groups who keep us informed through the press. We urge all Christians and people of good will continue to speak out for what is right and proper. We, your shepherds, have already shown that we are not afraid to speak. We hope that our example, based on the will of God and the light of the Spirit, will be followed by a courageous laity. We pledge to use all means at our disposal to fill the gap of information and awake the consciences of those who are too ignorant or too lazy to care for the good of all. We do this, not because we are against anyone in particular, but because we love Uganda and its people. *It is a risky path that we are walking, but for a Christian there is no other choice.*

Selfishness

29. "Leading him (Jesus) to a height, the devil showed him in a moment of time all the kingdoms of the world and said to him, 'I will give you all this power and the glory of these kingdoms, for it has been committed to me and I give it to anyone I choose. Worship me, then, and it shall be yours.' But Jesus answered him 'Scripture says: You must worship the Lord your God, and serve him alone.' (Lk. 4: 5-8) Jesus who came to 'reconcile us to the Father' had to choose a method in order to fulfil his mission. In his divine wisdom he was not spared the greatest temptation that, at one time or another, we all face: the use of power coupled to the use of people, as tools to reach power and keep it.

30. In one way or another we all yearn for power. We enjoy giving orders, we like to see people bowing before us, we like to think that when we speak the world around us listens. This temptation is just as collective as it is individual. Political parties may fall prey to the thirst for power. When power becomes an obsession, then political parties engage in politicization, which is just another word for brainwashing. When persuasion fails, intimidation and deceit take over the people who refused to believe in promises, must bow in front of the gun. The good of the people becomes the 'good of some people'. This kind of selfishness can only bring out division, further revenge and rebellion.

31. Human organisations and businesses are just as likely to be tempted by an inordinate thirst for power. While Uganda still waits to be 'flooded' with even the bare necessities, we must denounce all those selfish profiteers who have grown richer at the expenses of the poor since the 'flood' of goods was first promised after 'Liberation'. People who speculate on the hungry to gain political and personal advantages, exhibit a selfishness that can only be despised by *all* honest citizens.

32. The privileged position we share as leaders of God's people is not free of dangers: we can all be tempted to rule rather than to serve our people. We know that, in a Christian country such as ours, we exercise a great influence on the population. People look to us for guidance and comfort. We want to use our authority to foster unity, to stand in front of the mighty, to uphold the rights and the dignity of our flock.

33. Christ, whom we profess to imitate, came as a servant: He is the first and only Liberator. He came to set us free from our selfishness, so that we may serve. Public servants must know that they are exactly that: servants of the people. Anyone in any position of authority, be it in business, in Government, in the Church, in one's home, must allow Christ and his Spirit to take over. Service is our Christian vocation.

34. True Christianity and true political and social life go hand in hand. Uganda will rise again when all political powers will recognize that the law of Christ is the key to national unity. At the same time national unity needs the active participation of Christians from all denominations. As brothers and sisters in Christ, they must be convinced that only by being good Christians they can hope to be good citizens.

35. The constant companion of selfishness is FEAR. All human beings are bound to experience a certain amount of fear in their lifetime; it is normal. But the fear that is born of selfishness is deadly. This kind of fear has several faces. We shall point out to you two of these faces:

1) is the fear that grips those who hold power by violence and deceit since these individuals take power by stepping on the people they use as tools, they are in turn afraid that power will be taken from them in the same fashion. Power grabbers soon become suspicious of anyone who does not agree with them totally. Suspicion in the end brings out violence. It is the 'law of the jungle', the instinctive battle for survival, where might makes right. Because we are all sinners, we can see this development of selfishness at all levels: powerful leaders and common villagers can be equally tempted by suspicion, fear and violence. A father can easily become the despot in his family; so can a supervisor in his office and a manager in his business. Our eyes are sick of the sight of weapons and sterile shows of power. We have not yet seen a power that heals, builds and reconciles. Too often power is used to protect its user from fear and suspicion. Only the honest and the just can sleep peacefully at night and walk free in the sunlight by day. Their good conscience is their strength and their protection.

2) But another dangerous type of fear is the one that grips too many honest people who would otherwise be able to face life with their heads high. This is the fear that comes from a selfish desire to avoid trouble and work. It should not be confused with prudence, which dictates when and how it is right and just to speak or to keep silence; for the sake of the common good.

36. Unfortunately this fear is very common among otherwise good Christians. Honest Christians see injustice, deception, theft, corruption. The sight of these evils saddens: them deeply. But sometimes they are afraid to speak up. They fear for their own personal safety, the future of their families, their job and 'good name'. The timid Christian will choose neutrality, but in doing so he fosters the growth of selfishness, indifference and dishonesty. Christians are called to witness the dignity of man. They are the heralds of the Good News of Christ to mankind: this Good News embraces not only the pious practices, the Sacraments, religious work, but all spheres of human activity, including the social and political fields.

37. We must break up this 'conspiracy of silence' this 'bond of fear'. We, your bishops, wish to offer you an example by speaking boldly on vital issues. As bishops we willingly accept the burden and privilege of speaking the truth by word and deeds. We hope that dedicated lay people will follow our examples and speak up for the truth. Jesus Christ reconciled us by his blood. We know from the past and the present history of Uganda, that, Christians who witness to the truth will meet with many hardships and even with violent death.

38. The word 'witness' is translated from the Greek as 'Martyr'. In Christian tradition in fact, those who witness to the Truth of God by their lives, are called Martyrs. Modern history has given us shining examples of martyrdom for a cause: Uganda has also been blessed with modern martyrs. It would be too long to list all the dedicated Christians who have died a violent death since Independence, witnesses to the Truth. Their names are written in Heaven and in our hearts.

39. At this particular time in the history of our country, as we labour to bring about forgiveness and reconciliation, we must face the fact that God might want us to pay the price. If the gift of our blood is asked, God will also give us the strength to endure the trial. Uganda needs this kind of witness, so that blood may no longer call for more blood, but for a new life of unity and reconciliation. As we enter into a holy year of collective and personal penance, let us banish from our hearts indifference, selfishness and fear. We shall then be ready for the task of reconciliation.

RECONCILIATION

40. Reconciliation is one of those words, such as 'liberation' and 'reconstruction' that are beginning to suffer from excessive use. Not a speaker can be found who will omit them from his vocabulary. But if we are all so convinced of the necessity of reconciliation, why are so many people still the victims of bloody

revenge? If we really treasure 'liberation'/ why then do so many still live in fear and oppression, especially the poor? If we want 'reconstruction' so badly, why is it that Uganda is still in shambles? Perhaps 'reconciliation' should be more properly defined and explained.

41. We believe that without reconciliation in truth there is no salvation in order to bring about reconciliation, therefore it is necessary that we know the truth about ourselves, our neighbour and God. The truth is that, face to face with God, we are all sinners. A further truth is that reconciliation among men is a two way street. Without these truths there is no reconciliation. Without reconciliation there is no salvation. Without salvation there is no life.

42. We, Christians of Uganda, must realize that we do not live on separate levels. Too many Christians still believe that their religion is to be practiced in church or with private prayers, without any bearing on the social life of the country. Christians are, at the same time, members of the Church and citizens of their own country. Once again we must remind ourselves that the way we live our faith has a great bearing on the state of our nation. Therefore, lack of true reconciliation and lack of true salvation also mean lack of unity, progress and peace in civil society.

43. What are the fundamental aspects of true reconciliation? When, therefore, can we say that the word 'reconciliation' is not just a puff of wind used to cloud the minds of the people?

1) Reconciliation among men is a two way street, we have said. It means that no human being can play God without being a total hypocrite. No one can say: 'I forgive you' without saying at the same time: 'I beg you to forgive me'. Lately there have been many calls for forgiveness and reconciliation to political, tribal and social 'enemies'. They will remain empty words unless those who speak them fall, in turn, on their knees and beg for forgiveness themselves. It is dangerous and risky to attempt to take God's place.

2) Reconciliation must be total. Selective reconciliation does not deserve the name; it should rather be called political convenience. While we rejoice with some public figures who have found forgiveness, we also greatly sympathise with those who have not been so fortunate. We are thinking in a special way of those Ugandans who are still detained without trial. Our hearts go to entire sections of the country where promises of national unity and reconciliation have only been followed by destruction and killings.

3) One of the few prayers that all Christians have in common is the Lord's Prayer. "Forgive us our sins as we forgive ..." Most Christians say it daily, but how many actually put it into practice?

44. Too many divisive words are still spoken in our country. We read them in the daily press, we hear them on radio and television. Any word that does not lead to healing and forgiveness, any action that still divides us, is a nail hammered in the coffin where the last shreds of dignity and brotherhood in Uganda are buried.

45. In short, Uganda will begin to be a nation rather than a jungle when the powerful and the powerless, the rich and the poor, the people from the North, the South, the East and the West, the learned and the ignorant, the members of this or that party, church leaders and political leaders, will have learned that, before God, we are all sinners, redeemed by the same Saviour, loved by the same Father, inspired by the same Spirit. In such a family of reconciled sinners only words and acts of forgiveness will be accepted.

DIRECTIVES

46. We have seen so far the ravages that our sinfulness has brought to our beloved Uganda. We have also meditated on the need for Penance and for reconciliation so that Uganda may be once more what God meant it to be - the Pearl of Africa. What is needed now is a concrete course of action that will make us turn, from thoughts of death and destruction, to life, unity and peace. With this in mind we, the Catholic

Bishops of Uganda, proclaim the *Year of Our Lord One Thousand Nine Hundred Eighty, One* to be a *Year of Penance and Reconciliation*. We call upon our faithful people and all Ugandans of good will to join us in acknowledging our sinfulness, our need for mercy, our thirst for reconciliation.

47. No one is excluded from our pastoral concern for the well-being of our nation. In time of danger the whole family of God's children is called to share the burden and the privilege of bringing about salvation - this is such a time; We therefore, call upon this entire family, which from an African as well as a Christian point of view includes both the living and the dead.

The Dead

48. We ask the dead, especially those who have been the victims of violence, to forgive us and to intercede before God for their country. We pray that their sufferings may not have been in vain. As Christian leaders we ask the faithful to acquire during this year a renewed reverence for the dead, because they are a constant reminder of our final destiny. Christian belief in this matter goes hand in hand with our common African heritage: the dead are still part of our people. They remind us of our roots and our former dignity. We urge all Christians to hold special celebrations for the dead during this Year of Penance and Reconciliation. Funerals and other burial services should be celebrated with renewed faith in our religion and in our heritage: stress being placed on the continuity of life and on forgiveness. Since independence many Ugandans have died as a consequence of unjust arrest and detention, torture, persecution, murder. The places where such abominations have taken place should be regarded as holy grounds made sacred by innocent blood. Wherever possible, Penance services should be held in those places or nearby. We want to single out in particular: military prisons and civilian prisons, the State Research Centre, the Park Hotel, Karuma bridge, the shores of Lake Victoria, Nnammanve Forest and other unmarked places where the remains of innocent victims were found.

49. May the blessings God granted to Tobit for his reverence towards the dead, be upon you all: "You must know that when you and Sarah were at prayer, it was I who offered your supplications before the glory of the Lord; so too when you were burying the dead. When you did not hesitate to get up from your table to go and bury a dead man, I was sent to test your faith, and at the same time God sent me to heal you and your daughter-in-law, Sarah." (Tobit 12: 12-14)

The Suffering

50. Jesus Christ chose the mystery of suffering to bring about our full reconciliation with the Father. He did so because suffering is an integral part of our human condition and sinfulness. By dying on the Cross, Christ sanctified human suffering while at the same time giving us the assurance that at the 'appointed time, every tear will be wiped away'.

51. We want to assure all those Ugandans who are suffering that they have our unconditional sympathy. We urge the suffering to do everything in their power to break out of the bonds of sorrow and pain. But while suffering endures, we urge them to offer the pain and the sorrow to God as a clean offering for the good of Uganda. We ask the sick, the refugees, those who are still persecuted and intimidated, those whose lives have been unjustly shattered by political intrigue, the hungry, the prisoners, the handicapped, to forgive our selfishness and our indifference as individuals, as religious and political leaders, and as a nation. Let the suffering of the just rise to God as pure incense to intercede for us all.

The Faithful

52. We make a special appeal to our Catholic Faithful. Wake up from your indifference, break out of your selfishness! Come alive by receiving God's life through the Sacraments. If anything holds you back from Christ's gift of the Eucharist, remove the obstacle. Only then can you claim to be a child of God: living member of the Church and of a builder of your country's future. In your living faith you will find the courage to destroy the 'conspiracy of silence' that is choking Uganda. Be bold in upholding the cause of

truth and justice. Above all, practise forgiveness and reconciliation, lest the Blood of Christ that is offered to you in Communion turn into a curse upon your head.

Leaders

53. Political leaders claim to be God fearing people. We cannot, nor do we want to, impose on them rules that do not come from the heart. But we implore them as brothers and co-workers in the well-being of the people: remember that you are only men, needing forgiveness even as you outwardly profess to offer it to others; free yourselves from the callous indifference, the inborn selfishness, the irrational fears, the greed and hypocrisy that for too many years have prevented you from building the nation that God has blessed in so many ways. Certainly you have much to forgive, but just as certainly, you have just as much to be forgiven. Be converted and live, because Uganda has already known too much misery and death.

PROGRAMME

54. We come now to some practical directives so that the Year of Penance and Reconciliation may not remain a wishful thought, but may be a concrete turning point in our troubled history. In the daily readings of the Liturgy of Lent we find the true meaning of Penance: "Is not this the sort of fast that pleases me - it is the Lord who speaks- to break the unjust fetters and undo the thongs of the yoke, to let the oppressed go free, and break every yoke, to share your bread with the hungry, and shelter the homeless poor, to clothe the man who is naked and not turn from your own kin? Then will your light shine like the dawn and your wound be quickly healed over. Your integrity will go before you and the glory of the Lord behind you. Cry, and the Lord will answer; call and He will say, 'I am here'." (Is. 58: 6-9)

55. We strongly enjoin our priests and religious, together with religion teachers and catechists, to read and explain to the people the Word of God which the Church offers to us during Lent: the teaching will stress the redeeming love of God as it took shape *in* the sacrifice of His Son; you will point out the path of conversion as seen in the Law of Christ, in the teaching and activities of the Apostles Peter and Paul; the courageous example of the first Martyr, Stephen, and of our own Uganda Martyrs. The faithful cannot willingly and knowledgeably walk on the path of true Penance and Reconciliation unless we, their spiritual leaders, make it known to them by word and example.

56. What we are about to ask of the faithful and of ourselves as their guides, is fully in time with the dictates of the Gospel and of our Christian Tradition. From the words of our Saviour we know that conversion of the heart is obtained by penance and reconciliation through the practise of Prayer, Fasting and Good Works. Therefore let the following practices be performed by one and all: by dioceses, parishes and small Christian Communities, by religious houses, by families and individuals.

Prayer

57. Each diocese in Uganda, and each parish within the diocese, shall decide on what prayers will be offered publicly during this year, to beg for God's mercy on our nation. Pastoral Coordinators will communicate their decision to the National Pastoral Coordinator. Each bishop will see to it that all parishes under his jurisdiction will take part in this vital task. Within the parishes, family groups shall be encouraged to hold special prayers in their own homes.

Fasting

58: Fasting is unfortunately an undesired daily practice in too many Ugandan homes. While we all pray and work for better economic conditions, we urge the faithful people to accept their daily hardship in a spirit of faith and in reparation for their sins, our sins, and the sins of the nation. Let the spirit of Fasting be kept at least by the practice of Moderation: moderation in fixing prices, moderation in enjoying comforts that may be denied to the majority of Ugandans. Dioceses and parishes will find ways of practising the

spirit of fasting by offering their facilities, their funds, time and human resources to people engaged in good works and worthy causes.

Good Works

59. Families are urged to look out for the needy and the sorrowful around them, especially those who are abandoned and lonely such as orphans, the handicapped, disabled old people, 'foreigners'. We further ask that, as a concrete sign of sharing with the needy, a special Lenten Collection be taken up throughout the country between now and Easter Sunday. The proceeds shall be sent to the Social Services Office of the Catholic Secretariat for disposition to our fellow Ugandans in need, irrespective of their tribal origin or religious allegiance. This collection must serve a catechetical purpose among our religious and laity. Christians around the world practise this form of charity as an act of Lenten Penance: we ourselves, when in need, have often benefited from their voluntary offerings. It would be a shame, if we were not able to do the same for our fellow countrymen.

Penitential Day

60. In addition to what we have stated above, each diocese will proclaim a special Penitential Day during Lent 1981. The date and the programme shall be communicated to the Pastoral Coordinator's Office of the Catholic Secretariat. On that day the faithful from across the diocese will gather at a chosen location for a full day of prayer and fasting. Parishes, sub-parishes, Christian communities, convents shall prepare for such a day by holding one of their own. Among the places most suited for this penitential pilgrimage we wish to suggest the various Cathedral churches, locations where Christians have paid with their blood their loyalty to God, places traditionally held in respect and veneration.

CONCLUSION

61. We have traced for you the outlines of a programme that can turn Uganda around and make us once again proud of our country. We have spoken clearly and without reservations, because we strongly believe that the time has come when Ugandans can no longer be fed empty words, aimless warnings and pious exhortations. It is now time to act in God's name and restore what was lost: our peace, our unity, our dignity. We shall leave no stone unturned in our effort to bring about unity and reconciliation in Uganda. We hope and pray that Ugandans of good will shall join us in this effort. Uganda must live; true religion must live. Let the Blood of Christ, the wisdom of his Word and the strength of his Spirit be with you all. Be CONVERTED AND LIVE.

62. We close with a fervent prayer to our Uganda Martyrs, who died forgiving their persecutors. May their example be an inspiration to us all:

Holy Martyrs of Uganda, you were the first from among our people to freely offer your lives for the sake of your Christian faith and of your moral principles. By your sacrifice, not unlike the Apostle Peter, you showed that, when the choice has to be made, "It is better to obey God rather than men." Even as you were dying a cruel and unjust death, your love for God made you forgive your murderers. Your blood did not call for more blood, but became the seed from which generations of Christians have drawn life and inspiration.

Most of you were young in age, but the ageless wisdom and courage that come from the Spirit of God made you endure all things for the sake of Christ, who died for us all. Because of this, we, Ugandans of today, look at you as our fathers in faith. As you stand in glory before the throne of God the Most High, we beseech you to intercede for us.

The people you have generated with your blood, is in deep sorrow: divisions, selfishness, indifference, fear hatred, dishonesty and violence are destroying us. From your heavenly home

inspire us to practice unity, generosity, love, honesty and forgiveness. May the blood which is being shed today' be, like yours, a channel of conversion and reconciliation. Be at our side as we humbly atone for our own personal sins and the sins of the nation.

May the loving hands of our Blessed Mother offer your petitions on our behalf to the God of Love and Mercy. This is the pleas that we, your brothers and sisters, offer to Him in the name of our Redeemer and Saviour, Jesus Christ Our Lord. Amen.

*The Catholic Bishops of Uganda
Kampala, 4 March 1981; Ash Wednesday*