IN GOD WE TRUST

Christmas message from the Uganda Catholic Bishops

Christmas 1982

The Lord Jesus and His Church have passed on to us, the Bishops of Uganda, the pastoral care of the Christian people, the task of guiding this people towards love and faithfulness to the Lord and towards the mission of salvation of our brothers and sisters and the nation.

The love we have for Christ, his Church and our people urges us to take up the task of guiding and teaching in the present situation of sorrow in which we all live. Our Message will be one of hope, mutual trust and good will. These are qualities of the spirit that are absolutely necessary if we want to work seriously at the salvation of every individual human being within our nation.

The occasion for this pastoral letter is given by the time of Advent during which we wait for the coming of our Saviour, and by the upcoming Christmas Season when we celebrate the presence among us of the Son of God. He became man in order to give life to the poor and to sinners. We also have in mind the coming of a new year. During this new year the Church will prepare and hold the Synod of Bishops from around the world; this Synod will deal with the timely topics of penance and conversion.

In this letter to you we wish to renew our plea for true reconciliation, just as we have done in our previous addresses to you: "Reshaping Our Nation-(June 1980), "I Have Heard the Cry of My People" (Nov. 1980), "Be Converted and Live" (March 1981), We want to indicate the simple way that every man and woman of good will, indeed all communities of persons, must follow if we want to create a more human way of life for all. To our faithful Catholics we want to show as a simple and efficacious way, the sincere devotion to Mary, Mother of the Church and Mother of our beloved Uganda. We want to consecrate and entrust to her our nation in order that it may be led to a strong faith in her Son and towards the civilization of love. We ask each one of you to join us in this life-giving devotion to Mary, so that through a nationwide movement of love and devotion to Mary, we may obtain the full re-birth

THE WAY TO DEATH AND THE WAY TO LIFE

To each individual and to each community is given the choice of two ways: one is the way of evil, leading to the destruction of happiness; the other is the way of good, the way to life, that builds happiness and life During the Season of Advent the prophets, John the Baptist and the entire Gospel urge us to set aside the way of evil and to walk in the way of goodness.

At the same time we are also invited to mediate on 'God's Judgement'. The whole world and our own personal lives are subject to this judgement. This judgement is a continuing process that will have conclusion at the end of the world. God's judgement separates what is good from what is evil. It burns in its purifying fire all that is evil and brings to perfection all that is good.

In our daily, experience we see how the way of evil leads to the destruction of any dimension both in the individual persons and in human communities the present difficult situation many people are led to use unjust ways of obtaining whatever they survival. From these ways of acting grows the desire for riches which, in turn, leads to greater evils such as robbery, looting, unspeakable corruption both in the private and public sectors. The thief destroys both the happiness of the community and his own. Fear of detection leads necessarily to lying, to false accusations and to a further progress on the way of e wounds of injustice thus become deeper and more widespread. Matual trust is destroyed and we all become suspicious of every other human being.

The thirst for power is even worse than the search for wealth. To acquire and hold on to power people are known to make recourse to deceit, all sorts of falsity, suspicion, and the most inhuman forms of violence. Mutual fear becomes the rule, competition becomes callous and deceitful, violence is exercised with weapons of death, the entire system of justice is set aside to make way for a system of spies, torture and illegal executions. Evil men are bound to take advantage of this situation to settle old personal hatreds and to amass riches through false accusations, that are too

easily believed when justice is not allowed to take its proper course.

This state of fear and suspicion, of lying and of injustice has given rise to the tragic situation in which we all live and suffer.

Families and the youth are among the segments of our population that have more to lose from this decay of moral conscience. Too many families are totally concerned with grave financial problems caused by the absence of men, due to emigration, death, mysterious disappearances and forced exile. Because of this lack of security, the family cannot perform its natural educational role; instead it breeds feelings of hatred, revenge, division, immoral tendencies, and unjust practices. In such an unhealthy environment the young are More inclined to follow the ways of evil rather than the path of godness.

In our previous letters we have already told you of our concern over the deterioration of our social and national conscience; we have also described clearly the root of this great evil and how we can put a stop to it. We know that many people have heeded our call: in places where people of good will, both the powerful and the powerless together, have banded together, the situation has partially improved. The entity of this effort, however, has not been proportionate to the seriousness of the situation, so much so that the general picture seems to have worsened, leading many good people to lose both courage and hope. Many people ask themselves probing questions: How is it possible to forgive when faced with repeated injustices that destroy entire families and villages? How is it possible to build up a life based on honest work when we are engulfed by the ever rising degree of corruption? How is it possible to find a way out from the flood of evil poured upon us from all sides?

SALVATION COMES FROM CHRIST

In the face of the many evils that surround us we experience the weakness of any good intention and good work on our part: our good will is not enough to free us from the divisions that plague us and from the desire for revenge. Our good will alone can no Longer give us any real hope. We absolutely need a greater source of

strength and surer fountain of hope that will give body to our legitimate desire for justice, peace and love.

This strength and this hope can only come from the presence of Jesus Christ among us.

Jesus Christ is known as the Emmanuel, namely, 'God with us'. He came into the world to bring the good news of joy and peace to all mankind, in a special way to the poor and to sinners. All we have to do is to accept Him with all our hearts and follow him in all moments of our lives. When he came into the world, his country, the land of David, was in a worse situation than our own. The Romans had conquered Palestine and were keeping it under their yoke with the help of Roman rulers and Roman armies. A group of Jews, betraying their own countrymen, were oppressing the people with all sorts of tribulations; among them were king Herod and his clique. People were deeply divided and a succession of riots was the excuse for frequent massacres. Many people were poor and corruption rife. The worst evil was visited upon the people by their own religious leaders: the priests of the Temple, the Pharisees and scribes.

Well, the deep love of God, the Father of …… Jesus Christ, showed itself by sending his Son…… salvation of all, right in the context of the material moral misery the Jewish nation and the world experiencing. The Word of God became flesh and to live in our midst. He became one of us, a …… of our family. By doing so he became the …… friend of every man and woman, of every tribe, nation, beginning with his own nation. Many ca find salvation through Him and regained joy and simple people like the shepherds, educated people the wise men, sinners like Zaccheus, Mary Magrane the soldiers who crucified him, even the criminal …… to a cross near him. Through the centuries …… scores of men and women, of people and nations found life through Him, for this is why He came all may have life, and have it in abundance.'

SOME BASIC PRINCIPLES FOR THE LIFE OF INDIVIDUALS AND THE NATION

a) God is to be Recognized and Loved.

The basic root of all evil in individuals and nations is the refusal of God. God constantly gives us life, God created us in his own image and likeness, God takes care of us, the work of his hands, his beloved children. When we abandon God, we cut ourselves off from the source of our own lives. Instead of placing all our hopes in him, we think that we can build our happiness on material goods such as money, power and success. In the words of Jeremiah, instead of drawing from the fountain of living water we build cysterns that cannot hold it. Some individuals and nations explicitly exclude God from their lives: they embrace atheism and fight God, seen as the enemy of mankind. Generally speaking, this does not happen very often in the African context. However, there are other ways of refusing God that are just as sinful and dangerous; this happens, for instance, when we have God on our lips, but not in our hearts and in our lives. Our lips may well pronounce His name, but we follow the ways of the Evil One, rather than His. This happens among us all the time. We have often seen that our national motto, 'For God and My Country', is only lip service, while the hearts and the actions are against both God and the Country. This practical atheism is the root cause of the corruption 'of our individual and national conscience.

In this context we must restate, as the source of any amount of rehabilitation of our national conscience and of our unity, the fundamental principle that has become part and parcel of human life: God must be recognized and loved, because he is here with us as Creator and as the sender of His Son for our salvation. If we recognize this presence, then we are naturally led to live a full life of love towards our neighbour, to use earthly powers for the good of each individual and of the nation. The knowledge and the remembrance of this divine presence, furthermore, can transform our lives and give us sure and total hope.

In our unending fight for the common good we are no longer alone, but God is with us with all his love and his almighty power. He sustains and gives power

to all our manifestations of good will. If God be with us, who shall be against us? Who can stand against our desire for all that, is good?

God has not abandoned our land, but rather we have abandoned Him. We have managed to destroy the marvellous heritage that the Creator has entrusted to us, the Ugandan soil with its beauty found both in nature and in the people that make up the nation. Vie have heavily damaged the Pearl of Africa, but it is not totally dead. We are now asked to recapture our dignity as creatures made in the image of God, as beloved children of the Heavenly Father. If we can do so, then our land will shine again in all its beauty and will repay us abundantly with its fruits. God is ever faithful: he has not left us since we have abandoned him. He is waiting for our return as prodigal sons and daughters after the sad experience of total destitution, the fruit of our sinfulness.

Let us return to God with all our minds, with all our hearts, with all our lives and our nation will flourish again in beauty and joy.

b) The Human Person Must be loved and Respected.

By sending his only begotten Son to be one of us, God the Father showed in full - the love and esteem he has for the human person. God takes a great interest in man and sees his plan damaged when man runs away from the light into the darkness of sin. His plan, however, shows clearly that God still loves man even in his sinfulness, and constantly calls him back to the original dignity and freedom of the sons of God, Therefore Jesus Christ reveals the love of the Father which is shown in a concrete way through the exercise of divine mercy.

This love and respect that. God the Father and his son Jesus Christ show for the human person are the examples we are asked to imitate. Thus the second fundamental principle for a total reconstruction of our individual and national life is the love and respect for all persons. The God we accept .and love leads us necessarily • to accept and love fellow human beings. The human person is respected when its dignity is recognized. The source of this dignity is that man is God's creature: this is true of the newly born baby, of the respected teacher and of the highest authority in the land. It is not possible to find any other source of human rights outside of God, who out of

love, calls us all - to life, to perfection and to holiness

The Church often speaks of the dignity of the human person. This is so, because Jesus Christ, its founder, himself became a member of the human race for our salvation. Any effort towards rehabilitation and renewal of our public and social life depends totally from us, from our style of life and from our faith in Jesus Christ.

At this point we may ask ourselves: what is the meaning of human rights?

First of all it means that the human person can never be used as an object to achieve certain political or economical aims, to draw a personal -The person has an inborn value which is totally independent from any political system, any tribal origin, and social, economic or cultural level. We have already said that the only source of human dignity is God. himself, and therefore we all share it in equal amounts. From this fact it follows that human life, all human life, is sacred; no one, therefore, has the power to take it away, to diminish it, to hurt it with any form of violence. - It also follows that it is the sacred duty of society and of the government to promote with all possible. means the development of human dignity, and the safeguarding of individual and family rights.

It should be evident by now that the human person is the greatest treasure of any nation on earth. It is not possible to build a nation without respecting human rights. To desecrate the human person means to condemn the nation to sure ruin.

At this point we wish to list very briefly some of the fundamental human rights:

— The right to life, which includes ¯tile right to security, the freedom from threat, injury and damage.

— The right to honest work and adequate retribution for the work done.

— The right to justice. All human beings have a right to fair trial. Even the worst criminal, who has violated the common good, is entitled to legal defence and to fair trial. The criminal does not lose that inborn human dignity. A political system that does not respect justice instead, has already abdicated both its dignity and its right to exist.

— The right to freedom of association. Human beings have the right to band

together in defence of their rights and in order to work together to reach common useful goals. Freedom, being God's gift, must be used for the good of the individual and of society.

It is not even enough to grant respect to the human person; this person must also be loved. Without love there cannot be any respect for human rights.

In our Christian way of life each human being is our brother and sister. We have the same Father and the same elder brother, who has united us in one family through his blood and his spirit. The root of all love is to be found in this divine reality. The love one feels for a blood-brother has no end. This love continues to exist even if your blood-brother acts unjustly, or even if he stains his hands with murder; he is still part of your flesh and blood. You will suffer deeply because of the suffering he has caused to other blood brothers and sisters and you will show your sorrow to them, help them in their need; but you will suffer even more because your blood-brother has fallen into the path of evil. You will desire his conversion and you will do your best so that he may be reconciled with the other members of the family and return to them in peace. In the same way, we deeply love our fellow citizens who are being oppressed, but, as Christians, we feel even greater love and compassion for those who have fallen into the clutches of Satan and are the cause of evil. Christ is the elder brother who came into the world not only to free the oppressed, but also to free the oppressors from the slavery of their sins.

Every human being, even the greatest criminal, needs our love and our mercy. Every disciple of Christ loves in a special way those who are steeped in evil, and works and prays for their conversion. Our sinning brothers need to see in the Christian people the signs of goodness and mercy, God-given gifts, as an invitation to them to come out from that state of fear, dishonesty and wickedness to which they have condemned themselves. We know that even in their wicked souls they still preserve their dignity as God's children; it may be reduced to a fire smoldering under the ashes, but it can still come to the surface if fanned by a blow of fresh air. This task of mercy is proper of the Church and, therefore, of each one of us as members. Following in the foot-steps of Jesus Christ it will be easy to care for those who suffer, to forgive those who are in sin, and invite them to a new life.

c) The Land, the Country, Must be Respected and **Loved.**

It is of great significance that the Son of God came on earth as a descendant of David: his birth had to take place in Bethlehem, the land of David. In this way he showed his deep love for his land and his people, who were to be the place and witness of his entire earthly life. This was the will of the Father. Through what he did in his land and among its people, through the love he showed for them, he became the saviour of all lands and all peoples.

Only when people live in their own land are they really in their normal climate of social order. People in fact have an inborn love for their own land: they look after it and venerate it, they yearn for it when they are away as exiles or for reasons of work. For this reason, the father-land, one's own country, is an important element of human life that must be respected. The struggle for independence and the just pride in one's own independence, are an expression of this concept.

One's fatherland must be appreciated, respected and served. This cannot be done without love: love for the land, love for all the fellow-citizens who live in it. We share the sacred duty of serving our land with our work and our unity. Earthly powers find the reason for their existence and usefulness in these values of love and respect for one's land. They have no choice but to use power in a climate of justice, love and truth.

To govern means to serve one and all, from the top to the bottom of the human scale. This again can be done only with love, Power is justified only when it is inspired by love and respect for all citizens, no matter what their political allegiance, religious affiliation, tribal origin may be.

We know fully well how the painful facts of our history, the wars, the murders, the acts of revenge, have seriously weakened our national consciousness. People tend to isolate themselves with[i]n the limits of their tribe, their religion, their political party, looking at others as strangers and possible enemies. The role of the Church in this situation is that of educating the population in the understanding of a national conscience that embraces all citizens within the nation. Without this conscience no nation will ever be born to life and will ever be able to face its problems. Therefore, we call in the name of Christ on all Christians, but especially on those who are educators, such as

parents and teachers, to love their country, to love all its citizens, to pass on this love to the young. We ask all leaders, both religious and political, to become, in the name of Christ, new people, filled with ever greater love for our country and for all its citizens. The true spiritual leaders, are the ones who can found and lead a nation towards national unity, with justice and love. *We,* the Catholic bishops of Uganda, feel it our duty to exercise this paternity towards our country; we wish that all citizens of Uganda may see in •us this love and this fatherly care towards our nation.'

THE NEED FOR RENEWAL

God known and loved, man known and loved, our country served with love and truth: these are essential elements of harmony between God and man in this world and the foundation stones for a balanced development of our nation.

The fundamental task for the renewal of the nation has its beginning in the renewal of conscience, as we have amply stated in our letter of Lent 1981, "Be Converted and Live".

We must not live expecting others to be the first to change; each one of us must begin at once. When all of us will have been reborn, then also the others will have changed. At this moment in our country it is not the question of changing social institutions but rather a question of a renewal of the individuals. Because, if human beings do not change, even the richest system, or the wealthiest country, will not survive, but will rather be weakened and perish.

In the name of God we invite all Christians, indeed all citizens, great and small, good and evil to unite for the good of the nation. This invitation does not exclude anyone. In the name of God and of His Son Jesus Christ we ask you to rise from the present state of discouragement and have hope: victory in the struggle for all that is good is and has always been ours: victory belongs to those who follow the will of God for the common good, and to those who follow Christ, the winner over sin and death.

A SIGN AND SOURCE OF HOPE: MARY MOTHER OF THE CHURCH AND OF UGANDA

In this time of loss and confusion, while we are asked by the Lord to give new life to our country, we want to offer to all the spiritual children of the Church a great light of hope: the Virgin Mary, mother of God and ours, Mother of our faith and of our country. We want to consecrate to her ourselves and the Church in Uganda, that she may lead us to Christ, her son, who is the source of life for all. The worst difficulties will not make us fear if we walk in her company.

Mary is the Mother of the Church, because by the power of the Holy Spirit she gave birth to the Son of God, and because she has the mission of bringing his Son to mankind, as she did when she brought him in the house of Elizabeth, to John the Baptist.

Jesus Christ on the Cross entrusted the Church to her and then entrusted Mary to the Church, particularly to the Apostles. The Gospel of St. John says: "Jesus saw his mother and the disciple he loved, standing there; so he said to his mother, 'He is your son'. Then he said to the disciple 'She is your Mother'. From that time the disciple took her in his home." (Mat 19, 26-27)

Since then the Apostles and their successors took particular care of Mary. She has a great place in the Church, she is in the homes of the Christians. The Shepherds of the Church have been always promoting the love and devotion to Mary. Since the beginning of the evangelization of Uganda the great missionaries who founded the Church among us consecrated our populations to the care of Mary, Queen and Mother of Africa, and they taught their converts to place their trust in her.

We therefore want to renew in the present situation this consecration. We Bishops first of all consecrate and entrust ourselves to Mary, that she may take care of us and of our pastoral mission. With great love and confidence, we entrust to her all our people, so that she may lead them to the love of Christ and to the building of one nation.

As leaders of the people of God, we want to promote the true devotion to the Blessed Virgin and we intend to prepare another instruction on the devotion to the Blessed Virgin

during the coming year.

CONSECRATION TO MARY MOTHER OF THE CHURCH

On Pentecost Sunday 1981 Pope John Paul II con-secreted to the Blessed Mother the whole Church and the world, He further repeated this consecration during his recent Journey to West Africa, in union with the Bishops. We want to make our own this consecration: together with the Pope and our fellow Bishops we entrust to the Blessed Mother in a special way our own country, Uganda:

"Mother of peoples `Wand nations, you who were with the Church at the beginning of its mission, intercede for today's Church, so that, going out into the world, it may teach all nations and bring **the Gospel to every creature.**

We wish to entrust and consecrate to you, Mother of the Church, in a special way the Church which is in Uganda, we wish to include all those who live **and work in our country, all those whom the Father has loved** eternally in Christ Jesus and **whom he wished to save through the Blood shed on the Cross.**

Be mindful, O Mother, of all who make up this-Church in Uganda. Assist the bishops **and their priests that they may be ever faithful to the word of God. Help to sanctify** all religious **and seminarians. Intercede so 'son may penetrate in all the families to console those who suffer, those in need and in dange4 Look** kindly on all catechists and on all those who have **a special role in the evangelization and education of the young for the greater glory of God. Mother of m**ercy, have special care for those in need of divine mercy. Accept our loving consecration and confirm s in the Gospel of your Son,

As we express our deepest gratitude for the protection your motherly care has given us over the past one hundred years, we are firmly convinced that the Holy Spirit is with you so that Christ may be prodaimed in every new generation.

May the Word made flesh in Your womb through the Holy Spirit increase and be shared for the salvation of **Uganda. Amen,**

CONCLUSION

This letter is meant to be a ray of hope for our Christian people. We therefore ask our priests, who are our partners in the pastoral ministry, to explain this letter to the people, particularly during the Seasons of Advent and Christmas, this explanation must be given especially within the small Christian communities that have been formed according to the directives of the AMECEA, within the chapels, sub-parishes and parishes, and all Christian groups in the parishes. We further ask our priests to guide the faithful in such a way that they may feel, in their personal lives and as a community, how beautiful it is to trust totally in the Lord, together they will care for one another and show a special care for the poor and the suffering. Under Mary's protection, may they lead their Christian communities in offering the gift of salvation to those who are in need.

We also turn directly and with great trust to all religious, the catechists and all those who, in a variety of ways, are involved in the Lay Apostolate. We ask all of them to cooperate with their priests and with us in a humble and hopeful work for the greater good and the salvation of our people.

It is our firm intention during the upcoming year to offer directives that will help the journey towards full reconciliation and penance, in unity with all our brother bishops who will celebrate their Synod in Rome exactly on these very topics,

If our directives will be heeded with good will, it will be possible next year to formulate more concrete plans for this movement of renewal at both national and diocesan level.

This work of reconciliation and nation building, if done together, will most certainly be a first and fundamental step towards the celebration of the centenary of our Uganda Martyrs in 1985-1986.

May the Blessing of the Almighty and Merciful God be upon each and every one of you.

The Catholic Bishops of Uganda
Kampala Christmas Season 1982