

TEST THE SPIRIT
Pastoral Letter of
Catholic Bishops of Uganda
to the faithful on
Cults, Sects and "Religious" groups
15th June 2000

To the Priests, the Religious and the Lay faithful and all People of God,
May the Peace and love of God be with you all!

In our Plenary Meeting of the Catholic Bishops of Uganda which ran from 5th to 14th June 2000, we have among other things discussed the issue of Religious groups and cults, which have attracted and misled many people.

As Bishops, it is our duty to guide and direct the Catholic faithful, as well as to advise all God's People, especially on religious matters. We therefore wish to offer our guide lines to our people while at the same time discerning the Spirit in the "religious phenomenon", evident in many groupings claiming direct divine authority.

Since the event of the Second Vatican Council, the event of the Holy Spirit, a new Pentecostal phenomenon has downed everywhere. It is advocated by and manifested in popular missions, renewal of devotions, organizations, groups, communities, movements and associations (Cfr Tertio Millenio Adveniente no. 36; Christifideles Laici no. 29).

Along with this Spirit, there has emerged a proliferation or mushrooming of "Religious groups", (sects) cults; some of which are either started or led by Catholics and, as said, have attracted and misled many people.

St John warns us against the false prophets thus:

"Dear Friends, do not believe every Spirit, but test the spirits, to see whether they are from God because many false prophets have gone out into the world" (Cfr I John 4: 1).

ASSOCIATIONS OR MOVEMENTS IN THE CATHOLIC CHURCH

When we mention Associations, we also include movements whose mission is to foster Communion and the Mission of the Church, which is evangelization.

There are, in the Church, Public and Private Associations:

1. PUBLIC ASSOCIATIONS:

The authority competent to erect public association is as follows:

- a. The Holy See for universal and international associations;
- b. The Conference of Bishops in its own territory, for national associations, that is those which are directed by their founding purpose toward action in the whole nation;
- c. The diocesan bishop in his own territory for diocesan associations (Cfr Can. 312).

2. PRIVATE ASSOCIATIONS:

By virtue of Baptism, every baptised Christian has a right to found and run groups or associations for charitable and religious purposes or for promotion of the Christian vocation in the world. They do so in accordance with the prescriptions of the Church.

Such associations have to fulfil the following requirements:

- a. Although they are private and enjoy autonomy, associations of the Christian faithful, are subject to vigilance and direction of appropriate ecclesiastical authority, (Cfr Can. 322).
- b. They can only acquire status of juridic personality by means of a formal decree of the competent ecclesiastical authority (Can. 322.1).
- c. Such associations cannot acquire juridic personality status unless its statutes have been approved by the competent ecclesiastical authority.

Whether public or private, it remains a prerogative of the competent ecclesiastical authority to supervise, direct and guide the Association for proper discernment (Cfr LG 12).

Unfortunately, the following associations or movements in Uganda fall short of the mentioned requirements. Hence they do not belong to the Catholic Church:

1. The Movement for the Restoration of the Ten Commandments of God / Kanungu,
2. The Group of Mr Anatoli Ssentamu, Byana, Villa- Maria, Masaka,
3. The Group of Ow'Obusobozi D Bisaka found in Bunyoro, Tooro and parts of Buganda,
4. The Butebenkevu - Buteefu, Sserulanda -Nsulo ya Bulamu Group with its headquarters in Kyotera, Rakai District,
5. The Marian Workers of the Laity.

PASTORAL GUIDANCE:

As Pastors of the People of God, we have constantly reminded the faithful to avoid "religious" groups, which do not conform to the teaching of the Church.

In Mbarara Archdiocese when the "visionaries" were warned about their doctrinal errors, they refused to heed the warning. They continued to spread their errors, then they were interdicted. They are the founders of the Kanungu cult.

In Masaka diocese, the "visionaries" of Anatoli Ssentamu of Byaana, have ignored the constant appeals and advice from their Bishops to abandon their false teachings and to return to the Church. Pastoral letters warning the faithful against this dangerous cult have been subsequently issued.

The Marian workers of the Laity is a group which has never received approval in any diocese in Uganda, but which claims to work for the Church. Its doctrines are based on messages from "visionaries" and "seers". It has been very active in Nebbi diocese. The Bishop of Nebbi has warned the faithful against this group. He has also banned it from the diocese, after refusal to submit to Church's teachings.

We continue to advise our people to be careful and to watch out for these groups which pose as religious and others which do not claim church affiliation (like Ow'obusobozi D Bisaka who puts himself in the place of Jesus or Butebenkevu Buteefu and others similar to them).

These are false prophets who may claim to see visions or to receive messages directly from God about secrets known to God alone. Some of them preach the end of the world. Do not believe them for no one knows about that day or hour, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son but only the Father. Cf. Mt. 24,36.

Our Lord Jesus warned us about false prophets when he said, **"False Christs and false prophets will appear and perform great signs and miracles to deceive even the elect - if that were possible. See I have told you ahead of time"** (Mt. 24, 24-25).

St Paul in his letter to the Galatians also warns us strongly against false prophets in these words. **"I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting the one who called you by the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel - which is really no gospel at all. Evidently some people are throwing you into confusion and are trying to pervert the gospel of Christ. But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach a gospel other than the one we preached to you, let him be eternally condemned!"** (Gal. 1:6-8).

We, on our part, pledge to intensify our work by providing effective initial and, on-going catechesis, planning for various forms of on-going formation for all the categories of People of God, and paying more attention to integral evangelisation. This will ensure deepening of the faith, profound personal commitment to Christ and holistic growth for all the faithful (EA no. 76, 77)

God has never ceased to call us back to Himself. We welcome back those who may have been misled while seeking God where He is not.

Dated 15th June, 2000, at the end of the Plenary Conference.