

You are the Salt of the Earth, the Light of the World

A Pastoral Letter of His Eminence Emmanuel Cardinal Wamala, Archbishop of Kampala

1 January 2001

In the name of Our Lord Jesus Christ, I greet all of you, my brothers and sisters: priests, religious men and women, lay people in the Catholic Church. I equally greet all peace loving Ugandans with whom we share faith in God, the Creator of us all. May the peace brought by Jesus Christ, King of peace, be with you!

1. A Challenging Moment in the History of Our Country.

We all agree that we are living through a challenging time both in the world and in Uganda. I consider it my responsibility to help the Christian faithful and the people of good will to reflect upon various issues and trends which are relevant to us today as citizens of this country.

Together with the Holy Father and Christians all over the world, we have come to the end of the Jubilee year 2000, whose main message has been an invitation to renewal, be it human, social and spiritual. It has been a time to inspire each one of us, and our society as a whole, to change our ways, and to get a new start according to our vocation and mission of children of God, the Father of all, whose love for us is being revealed through Jesus, His Son, and shared through His Spirit. We are invited to follow Jesus, to imitate him and to have our life transformed by his loving presence in us. When Jesus sent his disciples into the world to be his witnesses, he told them that they were "the salt of the earth and the light of the world » (Mt 5, 13-14), and he invited them to let their light shine before men « that by seeing your good works they may praise your Heavenly Father".

As Ugandans, we are called to prepare for the forthcoming presidential and parliamentary elections. As we may observe, the interest is already rising among the electorate and the candidates. It is an important time for a Nation like ours, as we are supposed to make decisions about our own future, and to give new foundations and adequate instruments to our society, so that all of us may find better opportunities to develop as human beings, in a just and favourable environment. We are all invited to behave responsibly, for the common good of the community, in spite of the strong temptations to resort to exclusion, violence, insults, calumnies and character assassination. It is a time to remember that politics is, in itself a high and noble service, and that all kinds of misleading, mudslinging, bribery and all the like should be avoided and condemned.

2. Recalling Archbishop Joseph Kiwanuka's Pastoral Letter on "Church and State"

In the same way that some people say that our faith has nothing to do with the way we live, many want to keep religion out of politics. They consider political activity as a power game rather than a loyal attempt to strive for a government respectful of values worthy of the human person it is supposed to serve.

This time reminds me of the period preceding our independence, when our first black Archbishop, our great grandparent, Joseph Kiwanuka, wrote a pastoral letter on ,Church and State. It left a deep impression in me, and I think that, even forty years later, it may offer us good guidance.

The Archbishop was a prophet when he announced that our country would go through many types of governments. And indeed, we have witnessed many changes until the present form of government. As we read our history, and as we observe with sadness that we have lost so much time and energies for development, we should ask ourselves why Ugandans have been roaming in darkness: is it not because we have thrown our faith in God and our religious values out of our political endeavours?

Politics should find us responsible, as individuals and as communities, if we want to realise the development of our people and to serve the common good. This cannot be achieved without a deep sense of justice, which is one of the main fruits in our life of our faith in God.

May I invite all of us, in the spirit of conversion and renewal of this Jubilee year, to change our ways, in order to prepare a better society?

2.1. The various actors in political life

2.1.1. The candidates

All Ugandans have experienced times when their efforts to choose good candidates have been frustrated through tricks, manipulations and bribery. Is the main concern of the candidate to show his or her integrity, and are the manifestos the expression of true intentions which will not be forgotten soon after the election? Whom is the politician intending to serve? Is it the good and the progress of the people he is asking to become the leader of, or some other selfish ends? Have the candidates a good program, which everybody can appreciate, and do they show the ability to promote it? Do the candidates want to be part of a team which will work together for the common good and respect the rule of law? Do they show their readiness to stand up for the respect of the legitimate Constitution, and not to manipulate it when it suits some selfish ends? Are the candidates willing to be guided by correct moral principles?

2.1.2 The Electorate

We still have a long way to go in the process of equipping ourselves with the necessary qualities for fulfilling our duties to the nation. Our lack of sufficient and objective civic education leads us to be unaware of our role and power through our vote. We should give our vote to the candidates who we think are serious in their intentions, honest and capable of working for us and with us. *We should denounce such practices as the buying of voter cards from their owners on the eve of the election day* and of all other kinds of manipulations and bribery. The electorate should be educated to be responsible and to ask constantly accountability from their representatives.

2.1.3. Participation of the People

Each voter should remind himself or herself that it is an inalienable right to participate

responsibly in the life of our country. Sadly, we know that so many evil practices have surrounded the elections in Uganda that many among our people have lost interest, considering it as a waste of time. As a result the turn-up has been declining.

May I echo the words of Archbishop Kiwanuka? We should never accept corruption and evil practices. Evil has to be confronted and fought against by people who are ready to give witness to their faith in Christian values. Therefore, I am calling upon Catholics and people of good will to prepare themselves adequately. Indeed, we need good, honest, courageous politicians, as we also need committed people who know their rights and their duty to participate actively in the life of the nation.

May all Christians not be afraid to bear witness to the light they bear in themselves: “You are the light of the world!”

2.2. Relationship between religion and politics, Church and State.

As in the sixties, at the time of Archbishop Kiwanuka's letter, some people keep singing the same song: “keep religion out of politics,,; ,take religion out of our schools,,; ,,religious leaders should leave politicians alone,,; as religion is seen as a factor of division, limit it to the private sphere of the life of people.”

2.2.3. A few guidelines about relationship between religion and politics may help.

The main task of the government is to enable people to live in peace, in harmony and to enjoy their rights. A government is good when it does whatever is needed to build a society where there is peace, where the rights of everyone and of all are respected and promoted, where all are given opportunity to participate and exercise their responsibilities, with an economy serving each person and the whole community, while giving special attention to the poor and the helpless, and respecting the social and physical environment.

What is, then, the role of the Church?

First of all our Constitution guarantees Freedom of Worship. Ugandans should take advantage of this freedom to serve well their God and their fellow men as true believers in God. Faith and the values associated with it are and should be a strong motivation for our commitment in society.

True though it is that the Church must be distinguished from the State, it cannot be ignored or completely separated from it. The Church preaches the Gospel and helps its members and the people of good will to be faithful to the values presented in the Gospel. The true believers will promote these values through their practical contribution to the betterment of the society. Furthermore, the various services offered to society by the Church and its institutions are obvious, everybody can appreciate them. They are integral to her mission in the world.

As a consequence, the relationship between Church and State should be guided by mutual respect and a fruitful collaboration, as both are serving the same human person and society as a whole. This collaboration is the sign that each one values the other while acknowledging its distinct role. Both before and after independence in our efforts to serve the people of this country Government and the Church have worked in partnership. This relationship should always remain.

2.2.4. Civil Rulers

Such a vision should help all civil rulers to have a better appreciation of their own role in serving society. They are bound by the laws of God. Their authority is not above Him, who rules heaven and earth. Like all of us, politicians are invited to relate all their activities to God.

The words of Archbishop Kiwanuka are still of great actuality today:

"Therefore if a ruler, even when engaged in State duties, neglected to concern himself with religion, he would be openly violating God's law, and would thus refuse to achieve the end for which God created him as well as that for which He created the country that the ruler is governing" (Church and State p. 11).

"...If civil authorities behave as if God is not their ruler, they incur the very serious guilt of being a scandal to their country, and such people do not deserve to be elected as rulers. This is not all ; a ruler who is concerned with religion only at home and in church where he is seen worshipping but who, when he is engaged in his political activities, tries to give the impression that he does not worship God is in grave error" (Church and State p. 12).

Faith and religion have an obvious role to play in strengthening good morals among peoples including rulers. This is why no politician should dissociate himself or herself from religion or its principles. Even if the politician is not himself a believer, he may not consider religion as irrelevant to society and its people.

We need to have in our country rulers who listen to God and concern themselves with religion, who set themselves as an example for the people they lead, with the courage to show their faith and to witness to its values without fear.

In the footsteps of my great predecessor Archbishop Joseph Kiwanuka of loving memory, may I call upon Catholics and all people of good will to be consistent with what they believe, and courageous in witnessing to it. Those who chose our motto « For God and my country must have considered the culture or cultures of the peoples of Uganda. They must also have considered the history of our development from the beginning of the last century. For this reason, I believe, Uganda deserves leaders who respect religion and give it its rightful place in education and in private and public life. We deserve leaders who will not condone immorality such as corruption, abortion, homosexuality or any other forms of behaviour which are contrary and offensive both to God's law and to our own culture.

3. The Government We Need Today in Uganda

“You are the salt of the earth, you are the light of the world.” (Mt 5, 13-14)

With these words of Christ, I invite all men and women of good will to rise up and get involved in the determination of the future, of our country. Ugandans should know better about their rights and duties regarding elections, and their responsibility to promote and choose the government they want. I am therefore making an urgent appeal to all to register, and to promote and participate in due civic education, so that every person may go and cast his or her vote being properly enlightened about such responsibility.

Among the many features of such a good government, allow me to mention some which I consider very important:

3.1. Uganda needs a government committed to give exemplary leadership to society. Those in charge should be men and women of integrity. I call upon all leaders, to serve the truth in all circumstances and to offer to their people all relevant information, so that they make a proper choice and are able to participate in the life of the community.

3.2. Uganda needs a government which is committed to the general economic empowerment of the community right from the family unit.

3.3. Uganda needs a government capable of upholding the philosophy of integral development of individuals through ongoing education, training and monitoring.

3.4. Ugandans are looking forward to getting a government which is committed to improve the quality of life of the people of this country through objective conscientisation of equal opportunity and through fair distribution of national wealth.

3.5. Uganda is yearning for a government which is ready and capable of working for justice based on moral attitudes, social equity and harmony.

3.6. Ugandans expect a government which will work effectively towards establishing real and lasting peace both within and outside Uganda's borders.

3.7. Further, Uganda is in need of a government committed to advocate for and put into place laws to advance moral rehabilitation as a foundation for a new kind of society.

3.8. Finally, Uganda requires a government capable of instilling a sense of unity, and of helping the various groups and tribes to live and work together in order to achieve the, Common Good.

4. How should we prepare these elections?

4.1. There is need for proper civic education, to be given by people who are well intentioned, committed and competent.

4.2. Every Ugandan should follow the example of Joseph, the husband of Mary, who, went up from Galilee ... to Judea ... to be enrolled, Luke 2: 4 - 5. It is important to register.

4.3. All of us have the responsibility, individually and collectively, to identify potential leaders and encourage them to offer themselves to stand for election at any level. They should be people who are principled, with signs of leadership qualities, lovers of their country, God-fearing, and with a concern for people.

4.4. Although we have the right to vote for the candidate of our choice, such decision should be guided by principles. Let me remind you of some of them taken from Archbishop Kiwanuka's letter. Look for:

4.4.1 One who is God-fearing

Bear in mind what scripture says: “The beginning of wisdom is the fear of the Lord” (Prov. 9: 10).

A good candidate is a person with such an attitude towards God. He will then strive for good values such as peace, justice, equity, and will care for the real needs of the people.

4.4.2 One with high moral character and record.

A good candidate must be of high moral character, respecting him/herself, sticking to the truth and fighting for the Common Good, and ready to forgo any kind of gain for the sake of what is right.

4.4.3 One who has a good understanding of what is right.

A good candidate should have a good judgment concerning what is right. He must be able to propose laws that reflect the Common Good and justice, and he must show the ability and the courage to defend it.

4.4.4 One who is unselfish and committed to promote the Common Good.

A good candidate should strive always to serve the Common Good of the people. In such a high and responsible service, he should never use his position as a source of profit for him/herself or for a particular group only.

4.4.5 One who is firm and objective.

A good leader will endeavour to assess situations objectively, and judge with the criteria of justice and truth (Church and State p. 24).

Conclusion

On the occasion of the African Synod (Rome, 1994), the Bishops of our Continent identified the urgency to improve the administration of public affairs in the key areas of politics and economy, in order to respond to the challenge of bringing peace and justice to Africa. Such is the responsibility of politicians, at all levels. Let us pray the Lord to give us men and women who are willing to understand this challenge and ready to take it up! Africa in general and Uganda in particular, needs politicians, who are guided by a rightly formed conscience, politicians, who love their country and its people, politicians who, like Christ, are willing to serve rather than to be served.

"You are slaves of no one except God, so behave like free people and never use your freedom as a cover for wickedness." 1 Pet. 2: 16

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