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**Address of the Bishops of Chad
To Pope Benedict XVI**

For their "Ad Limina Visit"
September 2006

Bishop Jean-Claude BOUCHARD, OMI
Bishop of Pala
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Most Holy Father,

Greetings

1. We have come to Rome to pray at the tomb of the Apostles Peter and Paul: Peter whose successor you are in your role as Head of the College of Apostles; and Paul, the Apostle of the Nations whose missionary charism we, the bishops of Chad, share as successors of the apostles and charged with the initial proclamation of the Gospel. This meeting with you today has special significance because it is our first visit as an Episcopal Conference with the new pope. We assure you of our gratitude for the fraternal welcome you have given us and we are certain that these moments of intense communion with the one who “presides over the whole assembly of charity” (LG 13c) and who has received the mission to “strengthen his brothers” (Luke 22:32) will give us new hope for our mission which is sometimes difficult to carry out.

On the occasion of this visit, we bring you the filial greetings of all the Christians of Chad, the catechumens, the baptized, the dedicated laity, the religious men and women, and the clergy. We are sure that we truly represent the faithful in assuring you of their sincere affection. And we will report to them what we have done in Rome, what we have seen and heard, but also what we have said. Our young Church in Chad has desired to share with you, Most Holy Father, and with your collaborators, in true dialogue, their human experiences, at times sad indeed, but also a missionary experience. This dialogue, carried out in Christian brotherhood and

apostolic communion, will certainly bear fruit for our Church, but we hope that it will also serve as its own modest contribution to building up the whole Church.

A world to evangelize and the involvement of the Church

2. We said before that sometimes our work is difficult. These difficulties are due first of all to the context in which we live and work. We preach the Gospel in a society that is in the process of losing its points of reference and its values, and sometimes we do not know in which fertile field we should sow the Gospel. It is a society that is also attempting to develop itself politically, without taking seriously in its execution the most elementary human rights, such as the right to security, to justice, to health and to an education. In our country, the rate of infant mortality is 102 per thousand; maternal mortality is 1100 per 100,000 births; 58% of the children under 10 years old do not go to school. In certain regions, hunger is widespread.

According to Transparency International, for several years, our country has been the leading country in corruption, something which does not seem to bother our leaders and all those who profit from corruption, and they are numerous. What we call “corruption” is in danger of becoming a way of managing the country and the way to earn a living. At the same time, doesn’t being “first” in corruption mean being “last” in the sense of having a moral, civic and political conscience? It will be very difficult to repair the damage, especially since there does not

seem to be any real political resolve to fight against this situation.

3. As with any “local” Church, situated in a given place and at a given moment, it is in such a context that the Church in Chad operates at this time. That means that many Christians are also responsible for, or at least accomplices, in this situation which not only threatens the future of the country but is irreconcilable with Christian faith and action. Many of the baptized live permanently a sort of contradiction that they are used to and which threatens to make them lose any moral sense, whether evangelical or simply human.

This degradation of the moral demands of society urgently calls us, the bishops of Chad, to attention and it seems to us that, henceforth, it will be a permanent challenge to face. It is thus that, thanks to the Gospel and the social teaching of the Church, we are becoming the voice of the “voiceless” and of those whom they call “civil society.” Many are counting on that voice today, beginning with the international institutions (which, nevertheless, are not uninvolved in the growth of corruption), a voice which will defend human rights and fight bad government. At Christmas each year, we publish a “Message” on a theme that deals with the social, economic, political and religious situation of the country. These Messages are based on the word of God, but they are addressed to all persons of good will. They are read with great interest, undoubtedly for different reasons, by one and all, of every ethnic and religious background. Our next Message for Christmas 2006 will speak of Justice.

When special circumstances present themselves, we also publish “Declarations.” For example, there was our Declaration of last April 26, published after an April 13 show of force in the capital of the country by an armed rebellion “which failed to plunge our country once again into the infernal cycle of war and especially a bloody urban civil war,” as we wrote at that time. To the government and all the opposition, without excluding anyone, we issued a call to dialogue, a dialogue which would seriously attempt to solve the evils that were infecting the country, and not for a simple cover-up in view of elections. You yourself declared, on May 18, 2006, in your speech

to the new ambassador of Chad, that “in order that true peace might definitively take root,” “dialogue and agreement among all the parties concerned are essential.” You also said then that strengthening the democratic process “particularly calls for the acceptance by everyone of a certain number of values, such as the dignity of the human person, the respect for human rights, and the common good as the end and standard for the management of political and social life.”

4. But if the Messages and Declarations of the bishops are appreciated, nevertheless one must say that the Christian laity and society’s elite in general have great difficulty becoming involved in denouncing injustice, defending human rights, combating poverty and oppression, and building a new society. It should be said, nevertheless, that faced with the shortcomings of the State, the villagers are themselves becoming more and more involved in developing their village, for example, by building schools to educate their children, and even by supervising the teachers whom they hire, most of whom are unfortunately poorly educated themselves. Community life is developing, both in the country and in the towns. All of that is positive, and it is often the Christians who are the most involved in the development of the country, thus putting into practice what Jesus said: “You are the salt of the earth and the light for the world.” (Mt. 5:13-14)

To form Christians in justice and peace, which are basic gospel values, and which correspond to a great need, the Church of Chad has created a “Justice and Peace” Commission in the parishes, in the dioceses and on the national level. But the work of this Commission is still very limited because of the lack of competency and organization of its members, because of fear of the authorities, because of the pressure of the social milieu, but also because of grave deficiencies in the judicial system.

While we can understand the difficulties that Christians must face in order to live their faith, we must, nevertheless, question ourselves on the content of the Gospel that we proclaim to the thousands of catechumens who seek Baptism each year. It is to be feared that they will not see the link between faith in Christ and a Christian life based on

gospel values. While it takes time to bear such fruits, always uncertain, by the way, one must recognize that evangelization was lacking in this regard and it is certainly lacking today as we speak of a “new evangelization.” It is a challenge and our African Churches do not have the right to ignore it. It is a challenge that has to do with catechesis and preaching, but also with the formation of pastoral ministers, laity and priests, and even with theological and philosophical research. For example, we have not fully mined the riches of some of the great documents of Vatican II such as the Constitution, “*Gaudium et Spes*.” Pope John Paul II commented on this in a speech to the International Theological Commission:

“Twenty years have already passed since Vatican Council II presented a magnificent synthesis on the dignity of the human person united in a bond with Christ the creator and redeemer. Perhaps we can regret that this doctrine has not yet been introduced and applied in theology. The theologians of our age must engage in this study and press forward in it as they recognize, with good reason, that the grace of God and the rights and duties of the human person are united by a mutual link.” (CTI pp. 404-405)

5. Besides these troubles and shortcomings in our society, there is still the constant danger of war. This danger of war is due to the internal situation in the country, one that breeds violence, but it is due also to conflicts with neighboring Sudan, because of the war at Darfour. This war, as we know, is being carried on in atrocious circumstances, with no regard for any rules. It has already caused between 200,000 and 300,000 deaths; it has forced millions to become displaced and refugees, of whom more than 200,000 are in Chad, and none of the signed peace accords have been respected. The war continues and the troops who are there, sent from the African Union to maintain the peace, seem reduced to the role of “observers.”

Holy Father, we know that you have not spared your efforts and that you have launched appeals for the end of hostilities at Darfur. We thank you for that. The Holy See intervenes also through its skilled services, such as the Council for Justice and Peace and the different representatives of the Apostolic

See at the United Nations and in our international institutions, in order to challenge those in charge of the world to work for peace, but also to end the exploitation of poor countries and to set up more just commercial relationships. The failure of the recent negotiations of the WTO has been called “catastrophic” by the director of the FAO. This failure also affects Chad whose production of cotton, for example, provides the livelihood for tens of thousands of families.

6. The wars that have lasted for years in the southern Sudan and now at Darfur have causes that are not directly religious, but there is no doubt that they complicate relations among religions too, since Sudan, as well as Chad, are located at the junction of the North, with its Muslim majority, and the South, with a Christian majority. Today these peoples are mixing more and more, and that is not happening without problems because of racial, cultural and religious issues, added to which is the pursuit of power. Among our Muslim brethren, religion is often at the service of power.

The relation between Christians and Muslims in Chad is paradoxical. On the one hand, we are in a country where laicity is officially written into the Constitution. The Church has its civic right to carry out its charitable and cultural activities and its own development, as well as everything related to its organization, its institutions, and freedom of assembly and of worship. We are happy about that. The Apostolic Prefecture of Mongo, whose Prefect, Father Henri Coudray, is making his first *ad limina* visit, was erected without any particular difficulty, even though it covers a territory that is mostly Muslim. The Church has signed and continues to sign some protocols with the State concerning education and health care. Many Muslims were formed, in the past, and continue to be formed today in Catholic schools. The bonds created there certainly contribute to the building of a multiethnic society that is respectful of religions.

But, on the other hand, one cannot but notice the current expansion of Islam in the government, in business, in politics, and by the number of mosques being constructed, even in villages that are not Muslim. There is pressure to convert to Islam,

especially on village and neighborhood leaders, and also on the young by some of their teachers. In such a situation, relations between Christians and Muslims can only limit themselves to neighborly and professional dealings, to frequenting the same schools and cultural centers, to exchanges, without real dialogue, during conferences and reflection groups.

7. One cannot speak of Chad at this time without speaking of oil. More and more, it is said or written that in Africa, oil is a source of grief in the producing countries, with the destruction of the environment, the relocation of people who count on oil as if it were "manna," poor management, and the proliferation of corrupt practices. One also notices that oil producing countries have become poorer because they have neglected other resources. In Chad, the production of oil is still recent and little developed (although drilling for new oil is taking place). Nevertheless, one can still see the devastation of the environment and the social decline. The prime minister of the country, originally from the oil producing region of Doba, said recently that it is in that region that one can see no development and no improvement of lifestyle.

Why? The causes for this are partially the relocation of populations and the wasting of the compensation received from the oil companies; and the government did nothing to forewarn the people. But the cause especially comes down to the mercenary spirit and the lack of ethics of the oil companies. Nothing significant was done for the populations of the region. At Komé itself, where the base camp of the oil company is situated, there are no wells (for water, not oil!) in any of the villages of the region; even worse, in a report from Esso, it is written that a clinic was constructed for \$250,000 (128 million CFA). However, the little health center located there was built, using the services of the diocese of Doba, at a cost of 17 million CFA (\$33,000!).

With this question of oil, the Church has also had to step in because of the absence of organization in society. The Church took part and continues to take part in the reflection and the animation of the populations, especially through the Justice and Peace Commission. A priest, authorized by the

Church, is a member of the College of Control and Watchfulness of Oil Revenues (CCSRP). According to the law, this College has some power, but in practice, it is very limited since it lacks the means it needs to operate and is unable to watch over the realization of programs and projects. But to its credit, the College does exist and it is often presented by the government of Chad and the World Bank as a model for other countries.

Holiness, in concluding this part of our address, we affirm our wish that the Church might always be a prophetic voice for a truly free Africa. Africa needs help in order to make the most of the riches that belong to her for her self, for her sons and daughters, and she needs to be able to play a role in the world, a role worthy of this great continent.

Some aspects of the Church in Chad

8. Even though there is no lack of difficulties and obstacles in the life of the Church and of the country, as we have just seen, one must also say that the Church of Jesus Christ is being built up in Chad. There are sorrows, but there are also joys. We need to accept them both as the fulfillment of the Paschal Mystery. The challenges are numerous and often we feel our limitations. The temptation to become discouraged is sometimes great, but we are encouraged by the faith of the little ones, the desire to be faithful to our mission and the brotherhood that exists with the pastoral ministers and among us bishops. Through the voice of its shepherds, the Church of Chad asks of you, Holy Father, a word and some deeds of support and encouragement.

9. If some aspects of Christian life and the steadfastness of the communities leaves something to be desired, as we have said, we need to highlight the growth and energy of a large number of these communities and the generosity of their leaders. We have already noted that there are many baptisms every year in most of our regions. A large number of the newly baptized are youths, boys and girls. It is a growing phenomenon, due certainly to the number of parents already baptized, but also to the fact that young people no longer find in the quickly fading traditions of their parents a guide for their lives. For many of them, there is modernity which mixes the

ethnic groups and their milieu, triggering a quest for identity and a desire to belong to a community that is larger than the family or the clan. The young people also notice the involvement of the Church in society, for example in education, and are therefore inclined to seek the fulfillment of their needs in the Church.

10. But this growing presence of young people in the Church presents a major challenge, even before baptism, for one must evangelize and catechize them, but also after baptism. It is not at all sure that the response the Church is actually giving to these needs is sufficient. There is a tendency among adults, and perhaps even more among the youngsters, to consider baptism as an end in itself, and not as an involvement in the following of Christ: "This prefigured baptism, which saves you now. It is not a removal of dirt from the body but an appeal to God for a clear conscience, through the resurrection of Jesus Christ..." (1 Peter 3:21) The community first of all has the obligation to engage in discernment before producing children by baptism, and then there is the obligation to accompany these new children after their baptism. All of that demands a renewal of the catechumenate and greater involvement of the community.

The Synod for Africa coined the expression "The Church, God's Family." (EIA 63) But it is necessary to bring into existence this sort of brotherhood. We insist a lot on the Ecclesial Base Communities (CEB): "communities which pray and listen to God's Word, encourage the members themselves to take on responsibility, learn to live an ecclesial life, and reflect on different human problems in the light of the Gospel." (EIA 89) But the task is difficult because of a different model of Church that dominated for a long time: that of large parish communities where one gathered for celebrations. Nevertheless, we believe that the base communities are indispensable for a Church that is alive and active.

In January, 2005, there was a plenary assembly in N'Djamena of the Association of Episcopal Conferences of the Region of Central Africa; its theme was: "The place of youth in society and in the Church." Youth from each of the six countries had been invited to this assembly. We listened to them. What was striking in their presentations was the

feeling that they have been left to themselves, a loss of confidence in their parents and adults in general, and in the leaders of their countries. They asked the Church to become more involved in the service of young people. The African synod also asked that we "restore hope to youth." (EIA 115) We want to do so, but how?

11. Holy Father, one of our great difficulties is, in a word, the lack of personnel: men and women religious, priests. Vocations are not increasing to meet the needs, and one notices even a certain decline of vocations because of the demands of this lifestyle which is not appealing, one must admit, for a young Church (and even for an ancient one, as one sees in the West today) and in face of the difficulties embodied in an authentic religious or priestly life. Furthermore, society is an obstacle rather than a help since it is no longer able to educate its children in coherent values. The level of education in schools is decreasing a great deal because of the lack of structures and a shortage of qualified professors. All of that makes it all the harder for the Church and religious congregations to prepare the personnel they need.

At this time, there are 113 major seminarians in the whole country. Some will become priests, but that will not fill the voids left by the missionaries, while the work has quintupled. Priests are often overwhelmed by the number of communities for which they are responsible, and by the influx of youth that the Church should accompany since they are the future of the Church and of the country. We do not even manage to free up priests for assignments as important as teaching in the major seminaries.

12. As is the case in many countries, Chad has benefited in the past by the significant contribution of religious and Fidei Donum priests coming from Europe and North America. That period of flourishing vocations in the ancient Churches is coming to an end and most bishops consider themselves unable from now on to send new priests or even to maintain the missions they had. Certain countries in Latin America and Asia are beginning to look toward Africa, partially filling the needs. We hope that this momentum will increase since some countries such as India and Mexico have many

vocations. But from now on, it is Africa that must be missionary, as Pope Paul VI said in Kampala in 1969. If it is easy to say that “missionary activity wells up from the Church’s inner nature” (AG 6), nevertheless it is not easy to live this essential aspect of the Church. Indeed, it is a double challenge: to increase the missionary spirit in each Church and in the whole Church, and to form priests destined for the mission.

In saying that, we are convinced that we are touching on an important ecclesial area that might warrant a deeper reflection by the whole Church, especially the Churches of Africa of which we are a part. Given their history, the latter are more accustomed to receiving missionaries than to sending them to other countries. In fact, it is not easy to get missionaries from African countries where the Church is much older; furthermore, missionaries coming from countries on the African continent often have difficulty adapting in other countries such as Chad for example. It is inevitable that these priests come with their personal history and their experience of Church in their own countries. But it would be wrong to think that because they are African, they can adapt just anywhere in Africa. To our mind, it is also bad theology to believe that there is only one model of Church, as some still seem to believe. That corresponds neither to the nature of the Church which is found in the New Testament (Acts 8:1; 14, 22-23) and in apostolic times, nor to the most authentic teaching of the Church (LG 26a).

It seems important to us, Holy Father, to draw the attention of the whole Church, and particularly the Churches of Africa, to the duty and demands of the mission. Isn’t the fiftieth anniversary of the encyclical *Fidei Donum*, which we will celebrate in 2007, a good occasion to renew the spirit and missionary practice of the Church?

13. In order to develop the missionary spirit, it also seems fundamental to us to restore all its importance to the individual Church which sends and welcomes missionaries, and is, therefore, at both limits of the mission. It is, after all, the teaching which we find in the decree *Ad Gentes* of Vatican Council II and in the Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Nuntiandi* which contain most important teachings on the

mission and which are not sufficiently known, or, in any case, not sufficiently used. It is as if evangelization were already accomplished in Africa and the work of the priest missionary were to consist primarily in assuring the “maintenance” of the Christian communities, according to a so-called universal model that came to us from Europe and which is no longer valid.

The individual Church, outcome and source of mission

Already during the Ad Limina visit of 1988, the Bishops’ Conference of Chad had presented to the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, where you were the Prefect, Holiness, a document in which it was stated that “The Church will not be able fully and truly to fulfill its mission of evangelization unless she restores all their importance to individual Churches and local synods.”

As *Evangelii Nuntiandi* states: “Nevertheless this universal Church is in practice incarnate in the individual Churches made up of such or such an actual part of mankind, speaking such and such a language, heirs of a cultural patrimony, of a vision of the world, of an historical past, of a particular human substratum. Receptivity to the wealth of the individual Church corresponds to a special sensitivity of modern man.” (EN 62)

It is individual Churches (LG 13c) which missionary activity must try to build up, Churches that are truly indigenous, with their own characteristics, Churches which are “rooted in the people” (AG 15), they themselves announcing the Gospel to the people by means of an “adequate catechesis”, praying “in a liturgy in harmony with the genius of the people,” directed “by suitable canonical legislation.” (AG 19) It is thus that they will be able to “contribute to the good of the whole Church.” (AG 6)

And it is fitting, again according to the Council, that these new Churches, even though still young, “should participate as soon as possible in the universal missionary work of the Church, and send their own missionaries to proclaim the Gospel all over the world, even though they themselves are suffering from a shortage of clergy. For their communion with

the universal Church will be somehow brought to perfection when they themselves take an active part in missionary zeal toward other nations.” (AG 20) (EIA 130)

Holy Father, with your encouragement, we want to build up such vibrant and missionary Churches, to receive missionaries, but to send them out as well.

The preparation of missionaries.

One is not missionary only by wanting to be; it is still necessary to be capable and prepared “to go on mission.” This preparation, in fact demanded by the Church, seems very important to us. “A serious preparation is needed for all workers for evangelization.” (EN 73) “For such an exalted task, the future missionary is to be prepared by a special spiritual and moral training... he will with a noble spirit adapt himself to the people’s foreign way of doing things and to changing circumstances; while in the spirit of harmony and mutual charity, he will cooperate with his brethren and all who dedicate themselves to the same task, so that together with the faithful, they will be one heart and one soul (cf. Acts 2:42; 4:32)(7) in imitation of the apostolic community.” (AG 25)

It seems to us that such a preparation of missionaries would demand of the African Churches to organize themselves on the level of episcopal conferences such as is done by the Churches in Europe. We would ask of the Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples to support and maintain this organization. Of missionary congregations, we ask that they place at the service of the young Churches their skills and some human resources, including financial, all the while remembering that they themselves need to renew themselves continually since the conditions of the mission are changing, as the Council tells us.

14. A final point that we would want to mention concerning the Church of Chad concerns another of our present priorities: to promote the development of the individual resources of our Churches. Such a “taking charge” is not only necessary but it is an essential condition for building up a Church that is truly “local.” We must admit, nevertheless, that such a task is not easy because of the historical

circumstances that have brought it about that the Christians of Africa, at least the Catholics, have often been accustomed to expect everything from the missionaries. It is difficult now to step backwards, but we are trying as hard as we can.

Having said that, we still greatly need the help of other Churches on the material level and we thank the Pontifical Missionary Works for taking charge of this sharing among the Churches. We also thank all of the benefactors from different countries. We permit ourselves to appeal very humbly to the older Churches who help us by sending missionaries. Let them help us also, according to their means, to take care of these missionaries, for their travel and upkeep are very costly, and we would not want economic factors to keep us from knowing the experience of other Churches, such as Latin America, for example.

Conclusion

In closing, Most Holy Father, we dare to ask something of you: that the next Synod for Africa, called by your predecessor and confirmed by you yourself, be held on African soil, thus re-establishing the great tradition of the regional councils of Africa of the third fourth and fifth centuries. We say to you that Africa needs this event. We believe that this Synod on “The Church in Africa at the service of reconciliation, justice and peace” would have much more impact if it were celebrated in Africa. The whole world would have its eyes fixed on Africa and the African Church itself would feel much more involved.

In the allocution that you pronounced on the occasion of your meeting with the clergy of Rome at St. John Lateran on May 13, 2005 you mentioned Africa several times. This insistence might seem strange since you were speaking to your local clergy. Why Africa? It is certainly a sign of your attachment to this particular continent, abandoned by the world of today. You had some strong words for Europe that shipped overseas its own vices at the same time that it was bringing the faith in Christ. And you encouraged the Christians of Rome to do all that they can for Africa “so that the faith might arrive there, and with the faith, the strength to rebuild a Christian

Africa, a happy Africa, a great continent of the new humanism.” We thank you, Holy Father, for those magnificent words.

Yes, our countries need a new humanism and the Gospel greatly contributes to the creation of this new humanism, as it has done for Europe in its own day. But it is first of all the children of Africa herself who must and can develop this new humanism, allowing the Gospel to take on flesh on African soil. For that,

the children of Africa need to have confidence in themselves and be less dependent on others. The Church must encourage them.

Most Holy Father, may the Lord help you in your weighty task. We assure you of our communion and our prayer, and we ask of you your apostolic blessing.

--The Bishops of Chad

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