

“BE MESSENGERS OF PEACE”

**PASTORAL LETTER OF THE SUDAN CATHOLIC BISHOPS
TO ALL CHRIST'S FAITHFUL AND PEACE-LOVING SUDANESE**

YAMBIO, 15th NOVEMBER 2008

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1. Greetings and Preamble

Dear People of God in the Sudan,

Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ (cf. 1 Cor 1:3). “We give thanks to God always for all of you remembering you in our prayers unceasingly.” (1Thess. 1:2)

We, Bishops of the Sudan, in our annual plenary meeting in Yambio from 5th – 15th November 2008: aware of the political and social situation in our country and cognisant of our obligation as religious leaders, are mindful of the words of St. Paul to Timothy:

I charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who will judge the living and the dead, and by his appearing and his kingly power: proclaim the word; be persistent whether it is convenient or inconvenient; convince, reprimand, encourage through all patience and teaching. For the time will come when people will not tolerate sound doctrine but following their own desires and insatiable curiosity, will accumulate teachers and will stop listening to the truth and will be diverted to myths. But you, be self-possessed in all circumstances; put up with hardship; perform the work of an Apostle; fulfil your ministry. (2 Tim 4: 1-5)

Urged by this mandate, we, Bishops, write to you this message to highlight the situation of our country in the context of the interim period after the signing of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA).

2. The Current Situation

The signing of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement silenced the guns and the violence. It aroused hope and expectation in your hearts for a better future. We noted with great satisfaction and joy the beginning of stability, the beginning of the return of refugees and internally displaced people to their respective homelands, the reunion of families, the organisation of civil administration, the safe, free movement of peoples and the initiation of socio-economic development.

The Government of Sudan (GOS) and the Sudan Peoples’ Liberation Movement / Army (SPLM/A), signed a Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) on 9th January 2005.

For years, the people of the Sudan lived in a situation of fear and hopelessness. However, reason and mutual accommodation prevailed in the end. All the parties realized fully that the road is still a long one, that there would be great difficulties and that the only way forward was to come to peace.

It is our earnest hope that the implementation of the CPA will proceed promptly and without much contention. This of course requires from all Sudanese citizens continuous vigilance, mutual understanding, confidence and good faith. Besides this the Darfur Peace Agreement and the Eastern Sudan Peace Agreement were signed but not honoured. There has to be an end to this abrogation of peace.

The paramount goal is to reach and construct permanent peace in the Sudan once and for all. To realize such a desired end, all Sudanese people, including their friends, must remain actively involved

and engaged in support of the implementation of the CPA. This requires the building of bridges of confidence between them. This is a factor which will serve the rights and interests of all parties. Another important requirement is to create the right atmosphere to achieve meaningful progress, without mental restriction or dubious statements.

We have to look forward to the days of permanent peace with hope and optimism. We must remain confident that both the Southern and the Northern Sudanese people desire to live in justice, peace and dignity. We have suffered long enough from bloodshed and tension. We are entitled to a new era of peaceful co-existence. Let us all vow to turn a new page in the history of our troubled nation.

We wish to call special attention to the issues that we believe are important in the national debate in the future election campaign and in the years to come. These brief summaries do not indicate the depth and details of the positions we have taken in this regard in the documents cited in this pastoral letter

2.1. Government of National Unity

While we commend the efforts of the Government of National Unity and the progress that has been made so far, we caution that the signing of any peace agreement is one aspect and its implementation is another. Due to many key items in the protocols which have not been honoured, we see that the CPA is mid-way progress as there remains great dissatisfaction which causes alarm and may lead to dangerous consequences. This is because of:

Non-implementation of National Reconciliation and healing process

Non-release of the results of the census

Delay in demarcation of North/South borders and the refusal of the National Congress Party to accept the report of the Abyei Boundary Commission (ABC).

Lack of full care, discipline and control of the military armed forces.

Inadequate repatriation process of the displaced persons from northern Sudan and Sudanese refugees from the neighbouring countries to their home areas.

The lack of serious consideration of the aspirations of the Nuba people

The deviation of resources earmarked for peace-building and development.

The deterioration in the political situation in Darfur and Eastern Sudan

2.2. The Government of South Sudan

We appreciate the enormous work the Government of South Sudan has so far done in the field of security, reconstruction and construction. To rebuild a nation in a post-war situation is an enormous task and we encourage all the indigenous people to persevere in all efforts to lead the Sudanese people to a lasting peace.

In South Sudan, the Nuba Mountains and Southern Blue Nile, the experience of the last three years shows serious challenges which include:

Lack of clear vision on fundamental issues, for example: good governance, respect of human rights and the rule of law.

Being far from the people and not listening attentively enough to their voices

Appointments to public offices without giving due consideration to experience and qualifications; tribalism and nepotism in employment and promotion.

Inefficiency, corruption in some public offices and enormous waste of resources.

The Government of South Sudan (GOSS) is not educating people enough to consider the option of self-determination as expressed in the CPA.

The disturbing practice of sidelining and rejection of people who had remained in the Government controlled towns in North Sudan (who are considered somehow in the South as arabaized and collaborators with the Northerners) and those who had left the country for refuge, and yet contributed in various ways to the achievement of the CPA is really a serious issue to consider

Lack of security and killings with impunity continue unabated in some parts of South Sudan, Nuba Mountains and Southern Blue Nile.

Prolonged and ineffective negotiations between the Lord's Resistance Army and the Uganda Government mediated by the Government of South Sudan and the United Nations.

The violation of the sovereignty of the Sudan by the presence of the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) in South Sudan, particularly in Western Equatoria State, is a source of insecurity to the population.

We highlight the insecurity caused by the Ambororo nomadic tribe in Western Equatoria State and Western Bahr El Ghazal State as being destructive to the indigenous people.

Slow development in providing services in Education, Health and other social services is hindering the development of our people.

Aware of these negative aspects which prevail at present, it is difficult to envisage how the elections which are due to be held in July, 2009 and the Referendum scheduled for January, 2011, can take place with fairness and transparency if these issues are not addressed.

3. Exhortation and Message

3.1. To our Leaders

We first address the leaders. Over recent years much has been demanded of the leadership, who showed an exemplary spirit of sacrifice and commitment during wartime. However, the expectations

and hopes placed in you, the leaders after the signing of the CPA, have not been fully met and have even been seriously eroded. A sense of disappointment and dissatisfaction reigns at present.

We therefore call upon you, our leaders, to heed and respond to the cry of your people. The Comprehensive Peace Agreement has provided opportunities to reach a lasting peace in the Sudan. To miss these opportunities of God's gift of peace is a betrayal of the trust of the people in Leadership. Our thoughts and prayers go to the thousands of people who died in the struggle for Justice and Peace. Our hearts ache for the orphaned children, widows, and those maimed. We are preoccupied with the uncertainties of the future of our youth and the direction of our country.

It is on the basis of this trust, that we urge you, the leaders, to give clear answers to current issues, however complex and difficult they may be. You must always keep the human person at the centre of all national decisions. More particularly, St. Paul, the Apostle, cautions those called for service with these words: "For you were called for freedom, brothers. But do not use this freedom as an opportunity for the flesh; rather, serve one another through love. 'You shall love your neighbour as yourself'. But if you go on biting and devouring one another, beware that you are not consumed by one another." (Gal. 5:13-15)

You have been appointed to be the servants of your brothers and sisters. To 'minister' means to serve and those who serve must be endowed with spiritual and moral values, be competent, accountable and transparent in rendering stewardship to the people entrusted to your care. It is important to understand that your example and integrity reflect the way you render your service to your people.

As Government of South Sudan, much is expected to caution and help the people of South Sudan to exercise their rights to self-determination which are very well expressed in the CPA. The right to self-determination should not be condoned at the expense of making the option of unity attractive. The people of South Sudan, Southern Blue Nile and Nuba Mountains must have all the freedom they need to help them make the correct choice in free conscience when the time will be right. We call on the Government of South Sudan to lead the people in having a thorough debate and sincere discussion on the pros and cons of self-determination.

There is greater need to foster the virtue of unity among the people of the Sudan in working for true peace. It is true to say that the CPA was achieved by the collective effort of every Sudanese inside or outside Sudan, including sympathisers and friends. We believe that it is our duty, and the duty of leaders of all parties, especially partners to the CPA, to pave the way and lead our people to the common destination of justice, peace, security and prosperity.

The presence of the LRA, the Ugandan rebels in Western Equatoria State in South Sudan is disastrous in all aspects. The LRA continue to inflict untold atrocities to innocent people, for example: killings, abduction of children and women, rape, sexual enslavement, forced recruitment and large displacement of people. Why do these things continue to happen to our citizens without any effective intervention from the Government of South Sudan?

3.1.1. Darfur and Eastern Sudan Crises

The reluctance of the government to address the Darfur and Eastern Sudan conflicts raises serious concerns in the minds of conscientious Sudanese citizens and tests the credibility of the government and armed groups. "Justice is both the aim and the intrinsic criterion of all politics. Politics is more than a mere mechanism for defining the rules of public life: its origin and its goal are found in justice, which by its very nature has to do with ethics." (Pope Benedict XVI, *Deus Caritas Est*, 2006, N. 28)

Today, in the wake of human rights abuse, the people of Darfur are faced with a humanitarian disaster of truly frightening proportions. However, irrespective of where the balance of blame for the conflict lies, it is of the utmost importance that those, from whatever quarter, who have actively fomented the conflict and who are also guilty of human rights abuses must stop and bid for true peace.

3.2. To all Sudanese citizens

We, your spiritual leaders, wish to address you, brothers and sisters, at this moment. Time is running out. We have a General Election in 2009 and a Referendum at the end of the Interim Period in 2011. Your duty is to be informed and also be prepared about elections in order to be able to make the right choices. "Watch and pray that you may not fall into temptation." (Mt 26.41)

3.2.1. Obligation for Genuine Elections

Elections are a time for debates, reflections and decisions about the leaders, policies, and values that will guide our nation. We urge our fellow citizens "to see beyond party politics, to analyze campaign rhetoric critically, and to choose your political leaders according to principles, not party affiliation or mere self-interest." We do not wish to instruct persons on how they should vote by endorsing or opposing candidates or parties. We hope that citizens will examine the position of parties and candidates on the full range of issues, as well as on their personal integrity and performance. We are convinced that a consistent ethic of life should be the moral guide from which to address issues in the political arena.

As we approach the elections of 2009 and the referendum in 2011, we face difficult challenges for our nation. Since the signing of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement our nation has experienced many positive aspects and many distressing realities of a post-war nature. We have moved from managing through institutions to sharing budgets, resources and power. As Sudanese citizens and believers we need to share our values, raise our voices, and use our votes to shape a society that protects human dignity, promotes family life, pursues social justice, and practices solidarity. These efforts can strengthen our nation and renew our faith.

Our nation has been wounded. The prolonged miserable suffering of our masses and what followed have taught us that no amount of military strength or economic progress can truly guarantee security, prosperity and stability in Sudan. The most important challenges we face are not simply political, economic, or technological, but also ethical, moral and spiritual.

Persons with high academic qualifications but lacking credible spiritual and moral values are dangerous to society. Presently, the election and referendum will test us as citizens. Politics cannot be merely

about ideological differences conflict, the search for partisan advantage, or political contributions. Politics should be about fundamental moral choices. How do we protect human life and dignity? How do we fairly share the blessings and burdens of the challenges we face? What kind of nation do we want to be? What kind of country do we want to shape?

The duty to vote with a well-formed conscience is a civic right and obligation which should never be tampered with through manipulation, bribery or threats, either openly or secretly. The government must ensure that the right mechanisms for running a just and orderly elections are in place.

3.2.2. Human Dignity

For peace to last, it must be based on respect for the dignity and the rights of every person. The parties involved in the implementation of the CPA have to continuously join their efforts to build a Sudan for all Sudanese. It includes the protection of the right to life and the right to religious freedom. Today much is said about human rights, but it is often forgotten that they require a stable, not a relative and doubtful basis. The foundation of human rights should not be “human agreements,” but rather “man’s own nature and his inalienable dignity as a person created by God.” (Gen 2:27)

3.2.3. Family

God created human beings in His own image and likeness (Gen.2:27), calling them to existence through love, calling them at the same time for love. God is love and in Himself He lives a mystery of personal loving communion. Creating the human race in His own image and continually keeping it in being, God inscribed in the humanity of man and woman the vocation, and thus the capacity and responsibility, of love and communion. Love is therefore the fundamental and innate vocation of every human being.

The protracted civil war in the Sudan has undermined our traditional family values. As a result it has caused separation of many families, broken marriages, many street children, emerging of alien cultures contrary to our traditional cultural values, abuse of alcohol, HIV/AIDS pandemic, mental health issues, laziness, too much dependency on family bread winners, lack of parental love for children, disobedience of children to their parents, irresponsible life-style, emergence of youth gangs and many others.

Considering all these challenges in families, we therefore call upon parents to take their parental role seriously, in married life and in the education of their children. Marriage and family should be supported and strengthened, not undermined. The God-given institution of marriage is a life-long commitment between a man and a woman. The family is the foundation of social life. The laws enacted by the government for the welfare of families and the protection of children need to be enforced.

3.2.4. Common Good and Private Property

The political community perceives the common good when it seeks to create a human environment that offers citizens the possibility of truly exercising their human rights. The principle of ‘common

good' has three main components: (1) Respect for persons; (2) social welfare and (3) peace and security. The State, therefore, has to respect the fundamental human rights of each person. Secondly, it is within the demands of the common good that the state provides, institutes and supports infrastructure that promotes the social welfare of every person. This is indeed the real implementation character of the CPA.

As political leaders and representatives of the people, you yourselves can give an important and effective example in this field. Decisive in this perspective is the presence in the heart of each one of us of an intense awareness for the common good. The teaching of the Second Vatican Council in this matter is very clear: "the political community ... exists for the common good: this is its full justification and meaning and the source of its specific and basic right to exist" (Gaudium Et Spes. 74).

The constitution of our country guarantees all citizens the right to own property without discrimination or hindrances. The lack of protection of private properties has caused conflicts within society; as has land grabbing, cattle rustling and forced displacement in the areas of oil fields. The government has a moral obligation to ensure that private properties are respected and, if confiscated, the people need to be compensated.

3.2.5. Call to Justice and Peace

We are called to the service of our fellow men and women through the promotion of Justice and Peace in the Sudan. As Sudanese it is therefore our duty and responsibility to speak out on social justice in public life. It is our moral conviction to share our experience in serving the poor and vulnerable and to participate in the reconstruction of our nation.

Every human person is created in the image and likeness of God. Therefore, each person's life and dignity must be respected. We believe that people are more important than things. The measure of every institution is determined by how it protects and respects the life and dignity of the human person. As a recent Vatican statement points out, "The Church recognizes that while democracy is the best expression of the direct participation of citizens in political choices, it succeeds only to the extent that it is based on a correct understanding of the human person. Catholic involvement in political life cannot compromise on this principle." Non governmental organizations and Democracy Promotion "giving voice to the people" cfr Appendix II, democracy Survey P.42. Pope Paul VI taught that "if you want peace, work for justice". The Gospel calls us to be "peacemakers." (Mt.5:9) Our love for all our brothers and sisters demands that we be "sentinels of peace" in a world wounded by violence and conflict.

It is unjust to have citizens going for months without salaries. The basic rights of workers, owners, and others must be respected. The right to productive work, to decent and fair wages must be respected. These rights must be exercised in ways that advance the common good.

3.2.6. Change of Attitude

The way forward is basically one of a 'change of attitude'. We must move beyond a short-term, crisis orientation towards developing our capacity to think about social change in terms of decades. We must move beyond a hierarchical focus on politics towards the construction of an organic, broad-based approach that creates space for genuine responsibility, ownership, sharing of information and participation in the implementation and building of a culture of peace. We must move beyond a narrow view of a letter by letter implementation of the CPA to a political transition towards the formation of a structure that will comprise the whole body politic.

The change of attitude from the culture of violence to the culture of peace, from idleness to the culture of work, remains a great challenge which needs to be addressed. We have many historical examples out there to help us appreciate our traditional value of hard work. The tradition of Catholic Social Teaching has much to offer in these tough economic times. In the midst of the transformation of society during the Industrial Revolution, Pope Leo XIII gave us enduring principles to deal with "new things" in his prophetic encyclical *Rerum Novarum*, in which Leo XIII calls for some improvement in the "misery of the wretchedness pressing so unjustly on the majority of the working class" He supported the rights of labour to form unions, rejected communism and unrestricted capitalism and affirmed the right to private property. Pope John Paul II and Pope Benedict XVI have made the cause of justice for workers their own, responding to the "new things" in economic life. When Pope John Paul II issued his first "social encyclical," *Laborem Exercens*, in 1981, he invited us to look at these issues from the perennial viewpoint of the value of human work which finds its intrinsic meaning in the dignity of the worker.

3.2.7. Appeal for Reconciliation

Reconciliation implies a complete renewal for those who have received it, and it corresponds to justification (cf. Romans 5:9), to sanctification (cf. Colossians 1:21 f). The Gospel of reconciliation can be seen to correspond to the Gospel of peace. God is the primary and principal author of reconciliation. This is the reason for Saint Paul's urgent appeal: "We implore you in Christ's name: be reconciled to God! He has entrusted to us the message of reconciliation." (2 Cor 5:20).

As messengers of peace and reconciliation, "we" cannot proclaim or bring about peace if peace does not reign within "us." The Gospel of reconciliation and peace, when it is interiorized, changes the impulses of aggression that cause us to increase conflicts; that cause us to believe that nonviolence is impractical; that cause us to think of war as a consequence that cannot be avoided. Christian reconciliation in fact, transforms our inner orientation and overcomes our self-centeredness. It is not merely the elimination of a state of guilt but a transformation that is rooted in our love for Justice and Peace.

Reconciliation, as an inner peace-making, purifies us from the virus of violence. The Church proclaims, with the conviction of her faith in Christ and the awareness of her mission, "that violence is an evil, that violence as a solution to problems is unacceptable, that violence is unworthy of man. Violence is a lie, because it is contrary to the truth of our faith, to the truth of our humanity. Violence destroys what it claims to defend: the dignity, lives and freedom of human beings."

The various initiatives of reconciliation taking place at different levels in our country should be encouraged to pave the way for a lasting peace. Examples of these include North/ South dialogue, North-North dialogue, South-South dialogues, Race and Ethnicity, Ethnic groups or tribalism, Families, Churches with Churches, Inter-religious, Church, Neighbours and individuals.

3.2.8. Duties and Obligations as Believers

The Sudan is blessed with excellent, talented, generous and religious people, and abundant resources. However, our potentialities do not reach far enough. Our culture sometimes does not lift us up but brings us too low. Our nation is wounded by violence, corruption, many evils, torn apart by conflict, and haunted by poverty.

For Christians, civic and political responsibilities are seen through the eyes of faith and our moral convictions are brought to public life. The Catholic Church in the Sudan is a community of faith, and not a mere secular entity with purely social and/or political interests. At this moment in time, we raise a series of questions, seeking to lift up the moral and human dimensions of the choices facing our citizens. How will we protect the weakest in our midst? How will our nation resist what Pope John Paul II calls a "culture of death"? How can our society combat continuing prejudice, overcome tribalism and heal the wounds of racism, slavery, religious bigotry and other forms of discrimination? How can our society defend or support families in their roles and responsibilities, offering them real choices and financial resources to obtain quality education and earn a decent living?

As believers, we are called to be a community of conscience within the larger society and to test public life by the values of Scripture and the principles of Catholic social teaching. Our responsibility is to measure all policies, candidates, parties, and platforms by how they protect or undermine the life, dignity, and rights of the human person and whether they protect the poor, vulnerable and advance the common good!

Act now! You can make a difference in the lives of people who struggle in the midst of poverty, disease, war and injustice. Pray. Learn, discern, Act. Speak out. Get involved as an individual, a family, a school, and a parish or faith community!

As Christians and Moslem intellectuals, youths and elders, make a direct, positive impact on the lives of our brothers and sisters in need of permanent peace. Get involved by:

Bearing witness to the poverty, conflict, injustice — and hope.

Engaging your campus, offices, responsibilities, etc, [involved](#) through education, action and prayer.

Speak out! Bring your faith to bear in the public square. Get involved to bring about changes that can uproot the causes of poverty, conflict and injustice.

We also appeal to Muslim spiritual leaders who believe in the Almighty God, the giver of peace to join hands, minds and hearts with us in the promotion of justice and peace in the Sudan. Such collective effort on behalf of true peace is a national duty for each and every citizen. We believe this is a

beautiful description of one aspect of the task that confronts us, to be prophets of hope and peace for our world, because of our faith. Because we believe in God we can, as servants of God, make the Sudan a better place.

Pope Benedict XVI speaks of religion reminding us of human finitude and weakness, and therefore enjoining us not to place our ultimate hope in this world.

The universality of human experience, which transcends all geographical boundaries and cultural limitations, makes it possible for followers of all religion(s) to engage in dialogue, so as to grapple with the mystery of life's joy and suffering. In this regard, the Church eagerly seeks opportunities to listen to the spiritual experience of other religions. We could say that all religions aim to penetrate the profound meaning of human existence by linking it to an origin or principle outside itself. Religions offer an attempt to understand the cosmos as coming from and returning to this origin or principle.

3.2.9. Priests

Brothers in priesthood, the ordination rite reminds us, you are the first among the collaborators of the bishop in leadership and service. We implore you to take an active part in the living, teaching and dissemination of the message of this pastoral letter to all people of God close to you, using methods available to you.

3.2.10. Religious in the consecrated life

Sisters and Brothers in the religious life, as consecrated persons, you are called to work for the advent of reconciliation, justice and peace by living your charisms and fully embracing the evangelical counsels in your own communities. In fact, through the witness of a life of service, the acceptance of diversity, forgiveness and reconciliation, you will be a "sign" and "instrument" in the world of the Kingdom to come.

The commitment to reconciliation, justice and peace is intrinsic to your vocation. As consecrated persons involved in the apostolate of the people of God in the Sudan, we urge you to seize the opportunity to use this pastoral letter more extensively, by spreading its content, 'true peace' in the Sudan. You ought to be in some way the living memory of the conviction that every Christian does not have "a stable, definitive city" on earth (cf. Heb 13:14), or better, that he does not belong to any tribe, race or people on earth.

3.2.11. Catechists

The mission of the Church is about making disciples and helping people respond to the call of holiness by being part of a faith-filled, worshipping community struggling to be faithful to the Gospel.

We call on all of you our catechists to reach out to both committed Catholics and the people of other denomination to help them grow and develop their faith to be messengers of peace. But we appeal to you to reach out also to fallen-away children of God to embark on wings of prayer, justice, reconciliation and peace in using this pastoral letter in all your daily catechesis and testimonies of life.

3.2.12. To the International Community

It is equally important for the Inter-Governmental Authority on Development (IGAD), together with IGAD friends and the International Community and those who collaborated fully in our collective efforts in achieving the Comprehensive Peace Agreement, to continue to pursue, and to honour their commitment to the full realization of a permanent peace in Sudan.

In this perspective, speaking at the U.N. General Assembly on the 50th anniversary of its foundation, Pope John Paul II recalled, “that there are universal human rights, rooted in the nature of the person, in which are reflected the objective requirements of a universal moral law”. And he added: “these are not abstract points; rather, these rights tell us something important about the actual life of every individual and of every social group. They also remind us that we do not live in an irrational or meaningless world. On the contrary, there is a moral logic which is built into human life and which makes possible dialogue between individuals and peoples”.

It is the duty of the international community to follow up on the General elections and the referendum. It is not enough to be a passive observer as Sudan prepares for these vital elections. We call for a monitored elections by a body proposed to the GoNU and GoSS by the International community. It is a duty for them to engage the two parties to accept monitored elections.

To the NGOs working in the Sudan, we appreciate the great and difficult humanitarian works you are doing to focus on the poverty. We believe also that you have a role to help the Sudanese people to build permanent peace. Another name for peace is development. It affords us an opportunity to highlight how the NGOs and other international donor bodies, in the aftermath of the CPA made key promises, but have yet to fulfill them. We urge you to:

ensure that aid is delivered in a predictable, responsible and transparent manner;

ensure that aid is not conditional on the buying of goods and services from donors;

ensure parliaments and citizens in the Sudan have a say in how aid is spent;

take steps to fight corruption, including: preventing tax havens being used to shelter the proceeds of corruption; and, prosecuting companies from developed countries that engage in corrupt practices in the Sudan.

It is high time we stopped backsliding on commitments, but rather to treat the overwhelming majority of the people of the world as fellow human beings in a shared estate that respects our common humanity.

4. Call to Prayer!

We hope these reflections will contribute to a renewed political vitality in our land. We urge all Christians, our civil leaders, every citizen, to become more involved in public life, to protect human life and dignity, and to advance the common good.

We cannot compromise our basic values or teaching, but we should be open to different ways to advance them. As Sudanese, we have the duty to participate now and in the future, in the debates and choices of the values, vision, and leaders, that will guide our nation. This dual calling of faith and citizenship is at the heart of what it means to be a Christian in the Sudan.

This is an immense undertaking entrusted to people of good will. It is precisely that of establishing truth, justice, charity, liberty and new methods of relationships in human society.

We know and believe that the power of reason cannot resolve and achieve all these issues without personal intimacy with Christ which can only come through prayer. We therefore urge ourselves to be steadfast in fervent prayer which brings inner peace to us all.

Jesus sacrificed his life so that we could experience peace both now and forever. It is impossible to experience interior peace if we fail to pursue peace with God and peace with others. There will be no peace without justice; peace-building will have no success if it only concentrates on peace as an absence of war or on maintaining the status quo. In making this assessment, we are aware that all parties and each one of us, face serious issues, concerns, and dilemmas that need to be addressed and resolved.

In conclusion, we hope and pray that this message will find a place in your hearts. We implore our Mother Mary, the Queen of Peace, St. Josephine Bakhita, model of reconciliation and St. Daniel Comboni, our father in faith, to intercede for us!

We end by sharing with you some thoughts from Holiness Pope Benedict XVI's powerful encyclical *Deus Caritas Est* (God is Love):

Love of God and love of neighbor have become one: In the least of the brethren we find Jesus himself, and in Jesus we find God....Love for widows and orphans, prisoners, and the sick and needy of every kind is as essential to [the Church] as the ministry of the sacraments and preaching of the Gospel.

May God bless you all!

Given in Yambio, November 15, 2008, on the occasion of the 33rd Annual Plenary of the Sudan Catholic Bishops' Conference.