



NATIONAL CATHOLIC SECRETARIAT

OFFICE OF THE PRESIDENT

CENTENARY HOUSE, NEAR TETTEH QUARSHIE INTERCHANGE

Tel: +233-0302-500491/0302-976222

E-mail: president@cbcgha.org/
secretarygeneral@cbcgha.org

P. O. Box KA 9712
Airport - Accra
Ghana/West Africa

PASTORAL LETTER FROM THE GHANA CATHOLIC BISHOPS' CONFERENCE (GCBC) FOR CHRISTMAS 2021 & NEW YEAR 2022

Preamble

The joy of the Christmas Season is here with us again. As we continue to prepare our minds and our hearts to celebrate the birth of our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ and look forward to the New Year, 2022, we, the Catholic Bishops of Ghana, send you, our dear Ghanaian brothers and sisters and all people of good will, our fraternal greetings of peace and blessings. We take this opportunity to address to you all, this *Pastoral Letter*, which is under the theme, *Peace with God, Peace Among Humanity, Peace with All Creation*.

Peace With God: Reliving Isaiah's Messianic Peace Message

Several centuries before the birth of Christ (the Messiah), the prophet Isaiah referred to Him as the "Prince of Peace" (*Isa. 9:6*). Painting a vivid picture of His Kingdom of Peace (*Isa. 11:6-9*), Isaiah the prophet described the reign of the Messiah in the following words:

⁶ The wolf shall dwell with the lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with the kid, and the calf and the lion and the steer together, and a little child shall lead them. ⁷ The cow and the bear shall feed; their young shall lie down together; and the lion shall eat straw like the ox. ⁸ The sucking child shall play over the hole of the asp, and the weaned child shall put his hand on the adder's den. ⁹ They shall not hurt or destroy in all my holy mountain; for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the LORD as the waters cover the sea. (Isa 11:6-9)

About the above passage, we wish to make three observations. The first one is the clear and vivid allusion of this passage to the story of the Garden of Eden found in the first chapter of the Book of Genesis. Here, the prophet seems to suggest that the coming of the Messiah would return the whole earth to the Edenic paradise. This vision is supported by the passage in Genesis 1:29-30 in the first creation account where YHWH says that,

²⁹ Behold, I have given you every plant yielding seed which is upon the face of all the earth, and every tree with seed in its fruit; you shall have them for food.

³⁰ And to every beast of the earth, and to every bird of the air, and to everything that creeps on the earth, everything that has the breath of life, I have given every green plant for food." And it was so (Gen. 1:29-30)

The above passage suggests that the original food that was given to every beast of the earth, to the lion, the leopard, the wolf and the bear, was green plants. Every animal was an herbivore. No animal created in Eden was meant to hunt another animal as prey for God's creation was a non-violent peaceful paradise. The passage from the prophet Isaiah would then be suggesting that the coming of the Messiah would make creation return to its original primordial state, with every creature living at peace with each other.

The second observation is about the role of the Messiah, the *Immanuel*, which according to Isaiah, was to bring to an end all cosmic violence and strife. This is the role of the infant, the human species alluded to in Isaiah 11:6, "The wolf shall dwell with the lamb... and **a little child shall lead them**". The Hebrew term, *nahag*, which is used for the little child leading these animals, both wild and tame, is the term used for pasturing cattle. The infant of Isaiah 11 is thus the shepherd, the new David, whose role it is to unite the people of Israel and to lead them in the ways of peace, a clear allusion to the coming of Jesus Christ himself.

The third observation is what the prophet says in Isaiah 11: 9: ***They shall not hurt or destroy in all my holy mountain; for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the LORD as the waters cover the sea.*** This verse is best understood when it is read in the light of the beginning of the Book of Isaiah where the prophet says,

² Hear, O heavens, and give ear, O earth; for the LORD has spoken: "Sons have I reared and brought up, but they have rebelled against me. ³ The ox knows its owner, and the ass its master's manger; but Israel does not know, my people does not understand" (Isa. 1:2-3).

The entire Book of Isaiah opens with the dearth of the knowledge of God by God's people. Even though the ox and the ass know God their owner, Israel by contrast does not know her God neither does she recognise Him. Nonetheless, Isaiah remains optimistic in his teaching that when the Messiah comes, not only the domestic animals, but ox and ass will also recognize him, even the lion and the leopard, the bear and the cobra will know him and submit to him, the child who leads all these animals. Thus, the earth shall indeed be filled with the knowledge of God as the waters cover the sea. The passage from Isaiah therefore teaches us that peace comes from God and to know God is to live in God's peace, and that the closer we draw to God, the more we come to enjoy His peace (cf. *Rom. 10:9-10. 13*).

Peace Among all Humanity

Within the vision of the prophet Isaiah also, we get to know that it is the human child who leads all the animals (cf. *Isa. 11:6*). This means that the human person is the center of creation as well as its steward. The passage alludes unmistakably to the inherent inviolable and inalienable dignity of every human person in the world, a dignity which must be upheld always and at all times. Simply put, there can be no peace anywhere in the world if the dignity of the human person is disrespected and or violated.

In the light of the above teaching then, we your shepherds are alarmed by the unfortunate growing culture of disrespect and insults in Ghana, especially in our nation's political arena and so wish to call on all our politicians and indeed, all citizens, to endeavour to put an end to this rising phenomenon. We are also gravely disturbed about the resurgence of the age-old Bawku conflict, which resurfaces at every least instance of disagreement. We call on the fomenters of this conflict and others such as the Doba-Kandiga conflict, also in the Upper East Region to stop their machinations and desist from such actions in the future.

We are equally distressed by some of the recent happenings in our House of Parliament, in particular, events which have occurred in the aftermath of the presentation of the Government Budget and Financial Statement for next year, 2022, events which run contrary to the peace that Christ brings to all humanity and to our nation. We are, however, pleased to note that conscious efforts are being made by the leadership of the august House to find amicable and lasting solution to the impasse that has been occasioned by entrenched positions on our nation's Budget for next year.

In the coming year (s), we humbly plead and urge that in discussing and debating issues of national importance in Parliament, both sides of the House would always strive to put the interest of Ghana first above all other individual and parochial interests. Both sides must work together to advance the supreme interest of the nation. Besides, we wish to encourage our Government always to seek stakeholder engagements on all important national issues so that in implementing national policies and programmes, the Government can carry the aspirations of all Ghanaians along so that we can all help build together one united, peaceful and prosperous Ghana.

Peace in Ghana and Prophetic Utterances

The peace which Christ brings to us and which all of us desire cannot be experienced if false prophecies and prophetic utterances continue to be entertained in our country as the new norm. In recent years, especially during the season of Christmas leading into the new year, there have been too many false prophecies made of which some have created fear, panic and tensions in our society. As another Christmas approaches ushering us into the new year, we wish to encourage all Christian ministers to desist from giving false prophecies and from other such practices which only tend to discredit the Christian church and the Gospel of Christ.

We also encourage Christians and indeed, all Ghanaians to cherish the values of hard work, patient endurance, perseverance, moderation and contentment, and not allow themselves to be led astray by false prophecies and prophetic utterances.

Peace in Ghana and Safety on our Roads

Another very worrying phenomenon which is of great concern to us and to all well-meaning Ghanaians is the spate of accidents in our country and its resultant carnage on our roads.

For example, at the end of November this year alone, statistics show that over 2,600 lives were lost through road traffic accidents. Every human life is precious and an invaluable asset to the person, the society and to humanity as a whole. Besides, the best and most valuable asset of any nation is its human capital. The loss of a single life on our roads causes so much pain to families and communities, and this takes away the peace we all cherish.

Therefore, during this yuletide and the new year, we appeal to all drivers, travelers, pedestrians and indeed, all road users, to observe all road traffic rules and regulations to ensure safety on our roads and thereby avoid unnecessary accidents and carnage.

Peace With all Creation: Caring for our Environment

Borrowing once again from Isaiah's messianic vision which we have been dealing with all this while, we wish also to draw the attention of all Ghanaians to the fact that peace is not only about tranquility among humans, but also the harmony that exists between humans and all non-human creatures of God which equally have a right to the environment as a home. Unfortunately, for a very long time now, our nation has been confronted with massive environmental degradation and ecological crisis. Our natural resources have continuously and carelessly been exploited for economic gains, leading to the current unacceptable levels of pollution and destruction of our arable farmlands and water bodies. As we look forward to the peaceful Kingdom of the Messiah at Christmas wherein creation returns to its original harmonious state, we wish once again to appeal to all Ghanaians as we have done several times in the past, to eschew all selfish, indifferent and irresponsible ways and actions by which we continue to destroy Ghana's environment. In place of these negative attitudes, we must all adopt an attitude of care and responsible stewardship towards our environment by living a new ecological lifestyle characterized by simplicity, moderation and sobriety in order to save our country's environment for today and the future.

Towards the New Year, 2022: Living in Peace and Love amidst the COVID-19 Pandemic

Since the beginning of last year and throughout this year which is now ending, we have tried to cope with the COVID-19 pandemic which has ravaged us and our global world. No one can overlook the negative impact which the pandemic has wrecked on our religious, social and economic lives in Ghana as elsewhere in the world. Yet, as of today, we do not know when this pandemic is coming to an end.

Therefore, we wish to remind all that existing regulations and protocols meant to contain and minimize the impact of the COVID-19 are still pertinent and ought to be followed religiously even if these tend to limit some of our rights and freedoms.

Conscious that Christmas is an important time for reunions and gatherings of families and friends, as well as religious and social celebrations and other such festivities, we earnestly implore all to continue to exercise utmost precautions to protect themselves and others during such celebrations within the festive season, always bearing in mind that “protection is better than cure,” and that “it pays to be safe than to be sorry.”

Moreover, in our celebrations during this Christmas period and beyond, we encourage all Ghanaians to learn to share the little we have with one another. In particular, we encourage all citizens to extend deeds of care and love to the most unfortunate ones in our midst – the poor and the needy, the marginalized and the less privileged, including prisoners, street children, mentally handicapped people, widows, orphans, etc. We believe that by so doing, the peace, joy and love which the birth of Jesus Christ brings to the whole world would also be felt by our unfortunate brothers and sisters in Ghana for whom life becomes even more unbearable during these festive occasions.

Conclusion

It is the fervent prayer and hope of all of us, members of the Ghana Catholic Bishops’ Conference, that the New Year, 2022, would be a year of new beginnings for our dear country, Ghana, and for each and every individual citizen of our blessed land. Our hope and prayer are also that all of us will strive to live in peace with God, with one another and with the natural environment around us. As we enter into the new year, 2022, we pray that the maternal intercession of the Blessed Virgin Mary, Mother of the Church and Help of Christians, will continue to accompany us and sustain us.

May God bless us all and bless our homeland Ghana and make our nation great and strong.

On behalf of the Ghana Catholic Bishops’ Conference, I wish you all a Merry Christmas and a Happy and Prosperous New Year.



MOST REV. PHILIP NAAMEH
METROPOLITAN ARCHBISHOP OF TAMALE &
PRESIDENT, GHANA CATHOLIC BISHOPS’ CONFERENCE

Friday, December 17, 2021