

## **Pastoral Letter of the Episcopal Conference of Malawi**

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ and all people of good will, we greet you in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.

### **Introduction**

Considering that the forthcoming Tripartite Election will be conducted at the threshold of both the fiftieth anniversary (Golden Jubilee) of our country's independence and the twentieth anniversary of the reintroduction of multiparty democracy in 1993, we, Catholic Bishops, cordially invite our fellow Catholics and all people of good will, to make the best of the said elections as they provide us with a golden opportunity to rediscover our national destiny. Like Joshua and his compatriots, we see Malawi to be at a crossroad: "If you will not serve the Lord, choose today whom you wish to serve . . . As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord" (Joshua 24:15). We are urged to rediscover our national destiny and commit ourselves to it following the footprints of our founding fathers and not opt for self-destruction. We are called to rediscover and build the Malawi our forefathers envisioned and not continue creating a Malawi that betrays what our forefathers fought and died for.

To underline the gravity of the forthcoming elections we present before you a brief assessment of our achievements and failures since independence. While we have made some progress in achieving our destiny it is evident from the brief assessment that follows that we are very far from achieving the Malawi our forefathers wanted. The forthcoming Tripartite Elections provide us with the best opportunity for strengthening the vision of our destiny. Essentially this entails conducting elections that are free, fair and credible and electing leaders that have the desire, commitment and capability of turning our country around. It also entails that the electorate can get out of the chronic abject poverty by electing leaders who can enable them to do so. Not holding such kind of elections, not voting and not electing this kind of leaders is in our case similar to opting to choose death instead of life.

This is the message of our letter which we present to our fellow Catholics and all people of good will. This is our appeal to all stakeholders in the forthcoming elections.

### **The Malawi we envisioned at independence**

When we began the journey towards our independence, we dreamt of ushering in an era of an inclusive, human rights respecting, politically and legally enabling and economically developed society. Fighting against the "thangata system", the imposition of the Federation and the social injustices, Malawians envisioned a country emancipated politically and economically. This is the vision that found its way and is clearly expressed in the National Anthem:

O God bless our land of Malawi,  
Keep it a land of peace.  
Put down each and every enemy,  
Hunger, disease, envy.  
Join together all our hearts as one,  
That we be free from fear.  
Bless our Leader, each and everyone,  
And Mother Malawi

This vision, as is expressed in the National Anthem, was also clearly anchored on faith in God's

assistance. Our forefathers stressed that we are a God-fearing nation. Therefore our aspirations, ideals, dreams of the future and motivation for nationhood are all hinged on faith in God and inspired by the vision of God for a more humane society.

This vision and the wishes of the people resonated well with the vision of the Catholic Church at that time. In a Statement issued on 29 October 1960, the Episcopal Conference of Malawi said: Having so much at heart that this country of Nyasaland and its people be free, enlightened, prosperous and great, we fully encourage and support their legitimate desires for independence. However, we do not enter the field of mere politics. The Catholic Church should not be identified with any political party or type of Government but is willing to cooperate with any, provided it adheres to principles of charity and justice. But it is definitely our obligation to make known to all laws of God upon which every society must be built and to safeguard the human rights that have been given to all by God and which no ruler can take away from his people. Not only are we bound to advise on these laws and rights but we are also obliged to oppose any action contrary to them.

Therefore, while sharing and echoing the vision and wishes of the people and encouraging Catholics to take part in politics, our predecessors remained on a neutral and non-partisan path, only preferring that which adheres to principles of charity and justice. Continuing this same line of thought and advice, our predecessors published a Pastoral Letter, the first one of its kind, on 20th March, 1961, "How to Build a Happy Nation", desiring that the country and its people should be free, enlightened, prosperous, great and happy. They outlined principles guiding people for the elections and towards the building of a happy nation. In the letter, among other things, the Bishops outlined the following principles:

- True happiness is found in always acknowledging that we are created in the image of God and in acting as God's children;
- The family, the state and the Church are designed to work together in harmony for the full development and happiness of the people;
- Honest difference of opinion is welcome but intolerance, hatred or violence is not;
- The movement for national independence is welcome but the means to obtain it are in the hands of the citizens;
- Lay Catholics may be members of any political party that is not anti-Christian.

So it was that at the dawn of independence, we dreamed of a politically and legally enabling country which was also economically emancipated.

The sense of patriotism was strong and so was the unique role given to God to bring to completion our dreams and aspirations. It is also gratifying to note that the Church shared the dream of the people and guided this dream on the level of principles. The vision of democracy was obscured for some time and it took the bold step of our predecessors with the Pastoral letter of 1992, entitled Living our faith, to remind the nation of the need to stay on the right course. This Pastoral Letter reminded the nation of the need to uphold basic human rights.

The vision of our founding fathers is part of the story of the making of Malawi and will forcefully remain to challenge all of us to play our rightful roles.

## Malawi Today: Achievements and Challenges

While we thank God for our independence and the strides made so far in the democratization and emancipation project for Malawi, we realistically note that there is still a long way to go for this project to reach maturation. This project has been nurtured by the tireless efforts of many stakeholders and leaders that include: state and non-state actors, local and international non-governmental organizations, political parties, the private sector, development cooperating partners and of course the general citizenry.

In this regard, with guarded appreciation, we note in particular that:

- We emerged into the independence era with multiparty politics and although this dream was eclipsed soon after independence, it resurfaced in 1993 ushering in the possibility of various political parties competing periodically for the leadership of the nation;
- Within the laws of the land, there is separation of powers and roles between the executive, the legislature and the judiciary thereby ensuring that there are checks and balances in the functions of the state;
- Our political and civic culture is being propelled, to an extent, by a constitution anchoring the ideals of democracy and respect of people's rights;
- With the establishment of the office of the Ombudsman, the Human Rights Commission and the Anti-Corruption Bureau, Malawi is putting into practice the demanded good governance and human rights ideals of the constitution;
- The freedoms and corresponding responsibilities recognised in the Constitution such as those of association, assembly, speech, religion and political expression have progressively continued to anchor our journey in the democratization process;
- The emergence of meaningful and active citizen participation in the democratization and socio-economic development of our country, amplified by the ever-increasing rightful space for the participation of women and the youth, with the recognition of their human dignity and leadership skills continues to inspire many well-meaning Malawians;
- Development initiatives that have been undertaken over the years in such key areas as agriculture and infrastructure making strides in the improvement of the country.

However, as we have consistently highlighted in our previous pastoral letters, statements and guidelines, there are some worrisome trends in our democratization and emancipation project. To this extent, it is not surprising that we are hearing of voices labelling our democratization project as a change without transformation and a democracy without democrats.

For the sake of stock-taking and motivated by the desire to see a better Malawi for all whilst we are pulling our efforts together to make the democratization and emancipation project more meaningful and more people-centred, we note the following:

- Limited adherence to the rule of law and limited compliance to the practice of the separation of powers and lapses in the promotion and safeguarding of people's rights;

- The continued occurrences of witch-hunting and arbitrary arrests of government critics without thorough investigation or recourse to natural justice and efforts to side-line and remove political competitors from the electoral race;
- The abuse of power by parties in government with much interest in centralized power than in creating an enabling environment for citizen participation in governance and development processes that affect the future and destiny of our nation;
- Limited responsiveness, accountability and weak public goods delivery by government systems and structures;
- A growing culture of hand-clapping and praise-singing even when the ones being praised have merely done their duty;
- A weakening spirit of patriotism in the leadership, in most of our governance structures and in the citizens themselves;
- A growing spirit of fatalism coupled with a laid back attitude leading to failure by citizens to hold leaders to account for their actions and choices;
- The continued and systematic abuse and looting of public resources for selfish party and personal benefit to the detriment of the national good;
- The entrenchment of politics of poverty and exploitation where the poor are more and more lured into a culture of hand-outs than being empowered to become self-reliant;
- Political parties showing and practicing little intra-party democracy and minimizing the scope and space of genuine democratization of the nation;
- The enactment of repressive and immoral laws that legalise what is otherwise immoral, shrink the space for citizens' voices and frustrate the ideals of an open, free and accountable society compounded further by a deliberate manipulation of the laws of the land to suit narrow partisan interests;
- Politicization of development initiatives and business opportunities coupled with seemingly lack of an agreed national vision and development agenda that cuts across the political divide;
- Failure to continue with best practices of preceding administrations worsened by limited consistency in quality and visionary leadership of the country;
- While the country has opportunities to move towards economic independence, Malawi sadly continues to over-depend on international donors and other multilateral development cooperating partners who are allowed to control the national development agenda;
- The social norms that ought to anchor the national development agenda seem to be overtaken and overrun by emerging cultural and religious trends that overemphasize the individualistic and materialistic gains at the expense of community and national concerns;
- There are worrisome tendencies amongst us that push for a worldview independent of and sidelining God and making human beings dependent on their own intellect and determining for

themselves what is right and what is wrong. In spite of all these grey areas in our social, economic and political life, as people of faith, we have every reason to live in hope and trust in God's providential care. The forthcoming Tripartite Elections provide us the opportune occasion to strengthen the vision of our destiny.

### Strengthening Our Destiny

As we have mentioned above, we are not where we should be as a nation and, let us admit it, we are even lagging behind most African countries. We are far from achieving the vision that we conceived fifty years ago.

With the Golden Jubilee Celebrations and Tripartite Elections just around the corner, we have a golden opportunity to re-examine our national conscience, recover our original vision, re-define our destiny and forge ahead. Of paramount importance in this strengthening of our destiny are the issues of quality leadership, citizen participation, national development agenda and national values. It is to these that we now focus our attention.

#### 3.1 Quality Leadership

Any leadership impacts on and determines the nature of a group, community and even the nation you have. In giving us the compelling figure of the good shepherd in the Bible, God is proposing to us a transformative leadership. A good Jewish shepherd led the sheep to good pasture, water and shelter and protected them against beasts of prey and bandits (Ps 23). A good shepherd was so caring of the sheep that he would do anything to look for even one lost sheep (Lk. 15: 3-7). The shepherd knew his flock and the latter knew even his voice.

Bad shepherds, however, failed to meet their responsibilities for they scattered and led the sheep astray and took advantage of them. They used the sheep to fatten themselves for they forgot that they were only custodians and the sheep were not theirs (Ezek 34:2-10). God, therefore, recommends leadership that is visionary, transformative, empowering, caring, serving, protective, people-centred and obedient to Him. Leadership among God's people is service and not lordship (Mk 10:35-45).

#### 3.2 National Development Agenda

It is not enough to have quality leadership if this is not inspired and anchored by a national development agenda. Some development initiatives and strategies are clearly national in form and transformative in nature and, therefore, need to be depoliticized and continued irrespective of whichever government is in place.

This calls for quality leadership that is capable of sacrificing self-interests for the common good.

#### 3.3 Citizen Participation and a spirit of patriotism

We, Bishops, believe that "every institution is inspired, at least implicitly, by a vision of man and his destiny, from which it derives the point of reference for its judgement, its hierarchy of values and its line of conduct."

Active participation in the building up of the nation is the responsibility of every citizen. We strongly believe that our nation today needs to rediscover the spirit of patriotism and active participation in

the national development and emancipation agenda.

Today's rampant plundering of the country's resources and the growing trends of corruption reflect poorly on the quality of our love for the Motherland. Patriotism in our present circumstances also entails: exercising our democratic right to register and vote for quality leadership; actively taking part in shaping and implementing the developmental agenda of our country; and holding accountable the people we elect and put in positions of power.

### 3.4 National Values

If we want to build a nation that is prosperous, we propose that our national agenda should be inspired by values that are anchored by four key principles: the dignity of the human person; the common good; option for the poor; and empowerment.

#### 3.4.1 The dignity of the human person

As we, observed recently, "the dignity of the human person is a fundamental value, always recognised as such by those who sincerely search for the truth."<sup>2</sup> The very first pages of the Scriptures in the story of creation point to humanity's transcendental origin: 'So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them'" (Gen. 1:27). Human beings are God's creation. He created them in his own image. In that lies their incomparable value.

The environment, structures and conditions surrounding every human being must therefore be such that they serve and promote this dignity.

#### 3.4.2 The Common Good

Every human person is, we believe, a social being and therefore connected to others. Though every person is entitled to enjoy his/her individuality, he/she is also to be constantly sensitive to other people's equal entitlements. Each person is in solidarity and is bound to be committed to that which connects them to others. Societal arrangements should be evaluated and inspired by how much they serve the common good to the extent that they enable men and women, families, and associations more adequately (to) attain their perfection.<sup>3</sup> So, all that happens in this country, whether trade or bilateral agreements, must be for the good of all Malawians and not only some individuals or some leaders.

#### 3.4.3 Preferential Option for the Poor

Our independence and emancipation project will make sense if the poor and vulnerable are given special and preferential attention. In the Bible, God frequently reminded the Israelites about their duty to the alien, widows and orphans (Exod. 22:20-22). The prophetic tradition condemns fraud, usury, exploitation and gross injustice, especially when directed against the poor (cf. Is. 58:3-11).

Even today, people who are poor and vulnerable deserve special and preferential attention, for indeed, "How can it be that even today there are still people dying of hunger? Condemned to illiteracy? Lacking the most basic medical care? Without a roof over their head?"<sup>4</sup> Public policies should be pro-poor and should guard against the concentration of resources in the hands of a few.

#### 3.4.4 Empowerment

Empowering people requires letting them do what they can do by themselves and helping them only for the things they cannot do on their own (principle of subsidiarity). No matter how poor people are, there are lots of things that they can do on their own. We need to encourage, support and supplement people's initiatives without underrating their capabilities. All development efforts should start from and be directed towards people if they are to be sustainable.

By way of conclusion in this chapter, we your Bishops, call upon the nation to renew our original vision and re-discover our destiny. At the dawn of independence, we dreamed of quality leadership, a unifying national development agenda, full citizen participation, strong sense of patriotism anchored by God-given guiding principles. If we want to successfully meet the challenges that face us during the forthcoming Tripartite Elections next May and create the Malawi we need, we should honestly re-examine our national conscience and make some bold decisions.

#### 2014 Tripartite Elections: an Opportunity and a Challenge

The forthcoming tripartite elections present to us Malawians, a critical moment. Depending on our seriousness and the commitment of those to be elected, we will either miss the opportunity to rediscover and shape our destiny or we will make the most of it. Elections offer us a unique opportunity to choose and confirm good leaders and replace those that have failed us. It is therefore imperative that we take time to examine what it will take to have successful elections.

##### 4.1 Good Leaders

As we prepare for the presidential, parliamentary and local government elections in 2014, it is our view that we need to reflect deeply on leadership itself and how each one of us can play a part in creating and the kind of leadership worth our aspiration and trust.

In deciding who to vote for, we would like that every Malawian takes into account the leadership qualities we outlined in a number of pastoral letters<sup>5</sup> on elections:

**A Person of Vision:** A leader must, together with the community, be able to set goals and objectives that are specific, achievable, and measurable reflecting people's aspirations, hopes and dreams;

**A Good Steward:** Leadership is about good governance of the nation as well as the generation, use and custody of the resources therein;

**Exemplary:** A good leader leads by example and uses words that unite and heal and those that promote peaceful coexistence

**Respect for the Constitution and Rule of Law:** A good leader is supposed to be a role model, respecting the laws of the land and capable of creating legislation based on sound policies;

**Accountability:** As in the parable of the talents (Lk. 19:11-27, Mt. 25:14-30), good leaders must account for the resources and talents at their disposal and also for the exercise of their powers and duties as people's representatives;

**Democratic Person:** A good leader must believe in the fundamental goodness, freedom and dignity of all people and each person. Genuine democratic leaders will consult and listen to others, will appropriately delegate, share power, make corporate decisions and give credit where

it belongs;

God-fearing Person: Being a God-fearing nation, Malawi needs leaders who are genuinely God-fearing respecting human and faith values including those of a moral order of the people they serve. Leaders should be honest, trustworthy, fair, truthful, with a good reputation and integrity;

In addition to these qualities, in our own times, good leaders must also

- Have clear ideas on how to respond to issues of contraception, population control, homosexual unions, abortion and secularism as Malawi is a God-fearing nation;
- Be transformative: A leader should be ready to make things new, bringing about changes with a positive difference not just for the sake of change;

## 4.2 Electoral Processes

Election of leaders should be done according to true democratic processes and institutions that are directly linked with these processes have a lot of responsibility in this regard.

### 4.2.1 The Electoral Commission

We believe that credible elections which are free and fair start with good preparations. It is with this in mind that we wish to ask the Malawi Electoral Commission to ensure that all processes from registration to the day of actual voting and beyond are properly and diligently managed in an open, transparent and fair manner. We urge all interested parties to monitor the processes and to ensure that the elections are done to the highest standard possible.

### 4.2.2 The Role of the Media

The media in whatever form is very important in the electoral processes. The media needs to take great care to relay the truth in a non-partisan way. Use of divisive, abusive and violent language should be discouraged. We invite all citizens to be more alert with regard to all that comes through the media.

Let the Gospel values and the Church teaching guide all in weighing what is written, spoken and seen in the media. We expect that all parties involved will be given adequate space and coverage so that a level platform is given to reach out to the people.

### 4.2.3 Campaigns and Manifestos

We advise political parties and candidates who wish to contest for various posts to hold clean campaigns and desist from making statements that may instigate their supporters to be involved in violent acts.

We urge political parties to base their campaigns on their manifestos. We expect that political parties will come up with manifestos that are realistic, capture national aspirations in setting up long term national development agenda and continue to build and sustain democratic principles.

### 4.2.4 Individual Electoral Responsibility



We would also like to remind Malawians to take their responsibility seriously before, during and after the elections. Both men and women candidates need equal and unbiased support from all the electorate.

We urge every Malawian legible to vote to exercise his or her democratic right to vote. The voter registration cards are important in this regard and the responsibility to take care of them lies with each individual; they should not be sold. This will ensure that right candidates who are the people's own choice are elected to positions.

The choices and voting to be done should not be aligned to party, regional, ethnic or religious affiliation just for their sake but rather should be determined by the quality of the candidates and the good of the country.

We would like to remind all Catholic Clergy and Religious of their obligation not to engage and take part in party politics.

As we have said a number of times before, the role of the Catholic Church is not to make particular political choices for the people but to draw their attention towards what is compatible with Gospel values and the dignity of the human person.

While individual members of the clergy and religious have the right to hold their own personal political preferences, they should ensure that such preferences are in line with what respects their faith and what will ensure the dignity of the human person and especially that of the poor and the marginalised.

We exhort religious leaders as well as traditional leaders to desist from the temptation of succumbing to hand-outs and publicly aligning themselves with a particular party or a particular candidate.

#### 4.2.5 Post-Election Responsibility

We would like to remind those that will emerge victorious after the elections of their enormous responsibility to turn around our national woes and take this nation forward. As such, they will celebrate their victory with a sense of humility.

They will do this nation a lot of good if they exercise servant leadership, being "last of all and servant of all" (Mk. 9:35, Mat. 20:24 -28), and not narrowly interested in serving people their own party or region or ethnicity.

Those who lose the elections should accept the results gracefully and quickly turn their energies towards building this country.

The Golden Jubilee celebration will challenge Malawians to earnestly reflect whether indeed what the nation has achieved so far tallies with the age 50. It is imperative that at 50, every Malawian should be enjoying the conditions of social life that are brought about by the quest for the common good. The challenge before us is to see how much we have cooperated with God in realizing our dreams. We began with a dream of a politically and economically independent Malawi with God's help, we should not attempt to realize this dream independently from God himself.

It is with this in mind, that we expect that the coming tripartite elections be a moment of great

reflection and an opportunity for every Malawian citizen to recommit oneself to the ideals of the country.

We urge all Malawians to exercise their democratic right by coming out in large numbers to vote.

Remember that 'bad leaders are elected by good citizens who do not vote.' The penalty that good people pay for not being interested in electoral processes is to be governed by people worse than themselves.

You must choose who is to govern you.

Consider the power of your vote.

We need to pray earnestly: before we vote, as we vote, and after we vote! Our prayers should be accompanied and fasting and abstinence.

May the Blessed Mary the Queen of Peace intercede for us and our Nation that in the coming months all electoral activities may be conducted peacefully for the betterment of people's lives. May the Spirit of Christ our Redeemer guide and inspire us always.

Peace be with you all as we prepare for the elections and the Golden Jubilee.

Right Reverend Joseph M. Zuza Chairman and Bishop of Mzuzu

Most Reverend Thomas Msusa Vice-Chairman and Archbishop-designate of Blantyre

Most Reverend Tarcisius G. Ziyaye Archbishop of Lilongwe

Right Reverend Peter Musikuwa Bishop of Chikwawa

Right Reverend Emmanuel Kanyama Bishop of Dedza

Right Reverend Alessandro Pagani Bishop of Mangochi

Right Reverend Martin Mtumbuka Bishop of Karonga

Right Reverend Montfort Stima Auxiliary Bishop of Blantyre and Diocesan Administrator

Dated: First Sunday of Advent, 1 December, 2013