



The Holy See

APOSTOLIC PILGRIMAGE TO INDIA

**ADDRESS OF JOHN PAUL II
ON OCCASION OF THE MEETING WITH THE BISHOPS
IN THE CATHEDRAL OF THE SACRED HEART**

Delhi (India)

Saturday, 1st February 1986

Dear Brothers in the Episcopate,

"Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ".

1. With great joy I greet you, my brother bishops, on this first day of my visit to India. I have come as a pilgrim to the shrine of the People of God in this great land. As an apostle of Jesus Christ I have come in order to speak about love, to bear witness to the Gospel of love, the Gospel of him who characterised himself as a loving shepherd, "the Good Shepherd". My message is the message of God's love: "In this the love of God was made manifest among us, that God sent his only Son into the world, so that we might live through him". And on the basis of this love, I have come here in order to proclaim for the Church in India the unity which Christ wills for all his followers – a unity modelled on the unity of life and love that exists in the Most Holy Trinity.

I have come from Rome in order to be able to spend these days in unity and love with you, the bishops of India – with all of you who together with me have the pastoral charge of the flock of Christ. This is therefore an hour of ecclesial communion – communion in the love of Christ, in the unity of his Church and in the oneness of our pastoral mission.

As Pastor of the universal Church I must perform my own duty in the service of the Church's unity. For this reason I wish to support you in your responsibility as pastors of the local Churches.

Moreover, our joint task is to enact the mystery of collegiality in its universal dimensions. As Successor of Peter I have come in order to confirm you and your local Churches in the faith. I am

here to confirm you in all the aspects of your arduous apostolic ministry. Dear brother bishops: I have come to benefit from your spiritual contribution to the life of the Church, in order to carry it back to the universal Church.

2. Your episcopal ministry as it is exercised today in India involves a great privilege and a great duty. For you are called to the apostolic task of bearing witness to the Gospel of Christ among your people. You are called to proclaim salvation, mercy and compassion in the name of God who "so loved the world that he gave his only Son" .

You have a direct sharing with Christ in bringing the Good News to the poor. You are servants of mankind, messengers of God's love. And all of this is centred around that mystery whereby Jesus Christ " though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that by his poverty you might become rich" . You bear witness to the reality of the Incarnation, in which God identifies himself with the poverty of humanity in order to lift humanity up to himself.

Day after day your ministry is exercised by proclaiming God's revelation: God's love for man, God's solicitude for the well-being of man, God's care for the whole man made up of body and soul. Everything you do is done in the name of Jesus Christ – true God and true man. Everything you do is done for God – for his glory; and everything you do is done for man – for man's wellbeing and salvation. Your preaching necessarily means bearing witness to " the name, the teaching, the life, the promises, the Kingdom and the mystery of Jesus of Nazareth, the Son of God" . At the same time it means presenting to the world the tender love of Christ for man – man created in the image and likeness of God, man elevated in the mystery of the Incarnation and brought into greater union with God, man destined for eternal life.

3. Your proclamation of God's love for man takes into account also man's temporal needs. As the Church proclaims the transient character of this world, she likewise proclaims the will of God to transform the world in every respect, so that it may be a worthy foreshadowing of the next. The Church teaches that " earthly progress is of vital concern to the Kingdom of God to the extent that it can contribute to the better ordering of human society" .

Day after day in your ministry of service you are aware of the profound reality which Paul VI described when he wrote: " Between evangelization and human advancement – development and liberation – there are in fact profound links" . He spoke of the needs of peoples "engaged with all their energy in the effort and struggle to overcome everything which condemns them to remain on the margin of life: famine, chronic disease, illiteracy, poverty, injustices in international relations and especially in commercial exchanges" . In all these efforts, in the name of bearing witness to the Gospel, the Church endeavours to ensure the true development and liberation of millions of human beings. Over and over again the Church proclaims her conviction that the core of the Gospel is fraternal love springing from the love of God. The proclamation of the new commandment of love can never be separated from efforts to promote the integral advancement

of man in justice and peace. As your brother in Christ I wish to assure you of my closeness to you in all the efforts that you are making in this important aspect of your ministry.

4. Another matter that occupies your zeal is interreligious dialogue. This too is a serious part of your apostolic ministry. The Lord calls you, especially in the particular circumstances in which you are placed, to do everything possible to promote this dialogue according to the commitment of the Church. It was Paul VI who dedicated a great part of his first Encyclical to the subject of dialogue.

He spelled out the need for dialogue, its conditions, its content, its characteristics and its spirit. In describing dialogue, Paul VI stated: "Before speaking, it is necessary to listen not only to a man's voice, but to his heart... The spirit of dialogue is friendship and, even more, is service" .

As Bishops, you personify the loving Church of Christ that wishes to be open to the whole world, in order to listen and to offer friendship and service. The dialogue that you are called to is one of courteous respect, meekness and trust, from which all rivalry and polemics are excluded. It is a dialogue that springs from faith and is conducted in humble love. At the same time "the Church has something to say; the Church has a message to deliver; the Church has a communication to offer".

She truly wishes to speak about the transcendent destiny of man, about truth, justice, freedom, progress, harmony, peace and civilisation. And this dialogue is of its nature directed towards collaboration on behalf of man and his spiritual and material well-being.

As bishops, you personify the India, you have the task of expressing the Church's respect and esteem for all your brethren and for the spiritual, moral and cultural values enshrined in their different religious traditions. In doing so you have to bear witness to your own convictions of faith, and offer the Gospel of Christ's love and peace and its spirit of service to the consideration of all those who freely wish to reflect on it, just as you yourselves freely reflect on the values of other religious traditions. In this interreligious dialogue, which of its nature involves collaboration, the supreme criterion is charity and truth. You yourselves will always bear in mind the exhortation of Saint Paul: "Speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ"

5. Your pastoral efforts to bear witness to the Gospel of Christ must include "a clear proclamation that in Jesus Christ, the Son of God made man, who died and rose from the dead, salvation is offered to all people as a gift of God's grace and mercy" . This must be done with due regard for the great challenge of "inculturation". God's Revelation took place in a specific culture, but from the very beginning it was destined for all cultures. It is the Church's task to bring the Good News of salvation to all cultures and to present it in a way that corresponds to the genius of each people. The task at hand is the task of translating the treasure of the faith, in the originality of its content, into the legitimate variety of expressions of all the peoples of the world. The core of the challenge

was expressed in the Synod of Bishops of 1974 and it was subsequently formulated in this way: "The individual Churches, intimately built up not only of people but also of aspirations, of riches and limitations, of ways of praying, of loving, of looking at life and the world... have the task of assimilating the essence of the Gospel message and of translating it, without the slightest betrayal of its essential truth" .

In the task of ensuring genuine and faithful adaptation, the bishops of the local Churches have a specific responsibility. This is exercised in close collaboration with the Holy See and in communion with the whole Church. It involves discernment, which in turn requires prayer, study and consultation – a discernment supported by a pastoral charism.

The bishops have a particular responsibility with regard to liturgical inculturation, which aims at bringing "the unsearchable riches of Christ" ever more effectively into the Church's life of worship.

Here further reflection and study is necessary. Here also it is important that doctrinal verification and pastoral preparation of the faithful should always precede the implementation of liturgical norms. This implementation must show due respect for the different religious sensitivities of people within the ecclesial community, while the preference of individuals and groups must be subordinated to the requirements of ecclesial unity in worship. Moreover, all liturgical inculturation must be effected with pastoral charity and understanding.

6. The above-mentioned topics – the proclamation of the Gospel, interreligious dialogue and inculturation – are truly matters that concern the well-being of the whole Church and therefore require the collaboration of all sectors of the ecclesial community. Nevertheless, it is important to emphasise the specific contribution of the clergy to these areas of life, under the leadership of the bishops. The priestly ministry is at the direct service of the word of God. The priest is a herald and servant of the Gospel, called ill to the dialogue of salvation with his brethren.

The effectiveness of the ministry of priests will depend to a large extent on their preparation. This generation, both in its spiritual and intellectual dimensions, is linked to the word of God – to the understanding and acceptance and application of the word of God. Priests are called to communicate to the faithful the word of God in all its purity and integrity. The Church in order to be able to transmit the word of God faithfully and live it fully, enjoys a special apostolic and pastoral charism which benefits the entire community of the faithful. This charism is the Magisterium of the Church – a gift of the Holy Spirit and one that is totally at the service of God's word. Complete fidelity to this Magisterium is an essential mark of all effective seminary training and of all programmes for the permanent formation of the clergy. This fidelity is a guarantee of the supernatural effectiveness of the clergy's life and ministry. It is cultivated through humility of heart and in prayer.

7. At the very centre of all your pastoral solicitude, dear brothers, is the Church's unity In her unity

we recognise the greatest of blessings, the desire of the Heart of Jesus, the expression of fidelity to the Lord, the sign of the credibility of his Church and the sign of the credibility of the very mission of Christ. In the unity of the Church we see the reason why Jesus died: "To gather into one the scattered children of God".

The Second Vatican Council emphasised not only the Church's unity but also her vocation to be a sign of the unity of mankind, so often divided by ethnic, political, cultural and linguistic rivalries and oppressed by all sorts of tension. Called to fulfil her mission in the modern world, the Church knows that she must live the mystery of unity in herself. This vocation of hers brings with it a need for reconciliation where unity has been impaired, damaged or broken.

We know that unity is the will of God. The Church is called upon to live by grace in the unity of the Most Holy Trinity. Christ's prayer for unity applies to every situation in the Church: "that they may all be one; even as you, Father, are in me, and I in you" . The local Churches are called upon to reflect this unity in all their internal relationships – between the bishop, the clergy, the religious and the laity. In each local Church there subsists the unity of the Catholic Church. The communion between the local Churches is also an expression of the mystery of the unity which the universal Church receives from the Holy Spirit. Communion with the Bishop of Rome ensures the Catholicity of the individual Churches and enables the bishops to share in the mystery of episcopal collegiality.

The individual bishop is the visible principle and foundation of unity in his particular Church, just as the Successor of Peter is the perpetual and visible source and foundation of unity for the bishops and all the faithful .

As we meditate on the mystery of ecclesial unity and of communion between the Churches, we come to understand the immense importance that the whole Patristic tradition attached to this element of the Church's life. We come to understand how important it is to solve any problems that arise within the Church, as well as problems with separated Churches and Ecclesial Communions.

In this regard it is also necessary to encourage close communion and collaboration between the different rites of the Church, so that in their relationship the Churches may live unity according to the will of Christ.

I know that sincere efforts are being made here in India to do this. As far as the still unresolved interritual issues are concerned, the Holy See is striving to be of assistance. A study of the question has been going on for a long time. The various viewpoints have been presented with sincerity and deep conviction. The final stage of this study will be carried out as soon as possible. Be assured that I shall do everything possible to ensure a just and fair settlement of the issue that will take into account all the pastoral exigencies of unity and truth. I have great confidence that the decision of the Holy See will be given the full support of all the bishops.

8. Dear brother bishops: there are many aspects of your sacred ministry that I would like to reflect on with you, but it is impossible to include all of them. I would however like to emphasise once again the extreme importance of the Sacrament of Penance in accomplishing the renewal of the Church that was willed by the Second Vatican Council. The Church has always proclaimed the need for penance and repentance for a full partaking in the redeeming effectiveness of the Eucharist, which is the very centre and summit of all sacramental life. From the beginning of my Pontificate I have emphasised the need to stress the importance of individual Confession. In my first Encyclical I stated: "In faithfully observing the centuries-old practice of the Sacrament of Penance – the practice of individual confession with a personal act of sorrow and the intention to amend and make satisfaction – the Church is therefore defending the human soul's individual right: man's right to a more personal encounter with the crucified forgiving Christ" . I am happy to note the great fidelity of the Church in India in this regard, and I am sure that, with your continued encouragement the clergy, religious and laity will avail themselves ever more of the great treasure of love, forgiveness and reconciliation that Christ has left to his Church in the Sacrament of Penance.

9. In a particular way the laity are called to collaborate in the aspects of the Church's life that concern the temporal order. Their fields of activity include politics, social issues, economics, culture, the sciences, the arts, international life and the mass media . The Church, in her service to the world, must count ever more on the contribution of the laity. The laity, in matters of assisting the poor, eradicating hunger and promoting human development, social reforms and peace, are in a special position to assume roles of service and leadership. The full implementation of the Second Vatican Council calls for an ever greater awareness of the laity's role in renewing the temporal order in justice and charity. "Wherever there are people in need of food and drink, clothing, housing medicine, employment, education; wherever people lack the facilities necessary of living a truly human life or tormented by hardships or poor health, or suffer exile or imprisonment, there Christian charity should seek them out and find them, console them with eager care and relieve them with the gift of help" . It goes without saying that "the demands of justice should first be satisfied, lest the giving of what is due in justice be represented as the offering of a charitable gift" . In pursuing this course of charity and justice at every level, the Church seeks simply to be faithful to her vocation of rendering loving service to the world in the name of Jesus.

10. On the occasion of this my pilgrimage to India, I wish to express the Church's profound admiration for all who have borne witness to the Gospel in this land, for all who have gone before you "marked with the sign of faith". With sentiments of deep gratitude the Church pays homage to the generations of missionaries who have made heroic sacrifices to come to this land of yours. They have generously given their lives for the Gospel and in dedicated service to the poor and needy. The Church offers praise and adoration to the Most Holy Trinity for the marvels accomplished by God's revealed word in the hearts of millions of your fellow countrymen.

My last word of gratitude is to you, the shepherds of the flock. In the name of Jesus, "the Chief Shepherd" and "Bishop of your souls" , I thank you for your proclamation of God's saving love. I also thank all your collaborators in the partnership of the Gospel: those who with you are heralds of the Good News of salvation, servants of the poor, messengers of peace, witnesses of love, builders of unity and disciples of Jesus Christ the Son of God and Saviour of the world.

I commend you and your ministry to the loving care of Mary the Mother of the Church, and I pray that she will sustain you all in joy until the day of Christ Jesus.

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