



The Holy See

ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS JOHN PAUL II

TO THE BISHOPS OF INDIA ON THEIR "AD LIMINA" VISIT Thursday, 13 April 1989 Cardinal Pimenta,

Dear brother Bishops, 1. Today I have great pleasure of welcoming the second group of *Bishops from India, from the Ecclesiastical Provinces of Bombay, Nagpur, Goa and Calcutta.* In speaking recently to the Bishops of the Agra, Bhopal and Delhi Provinces, I referred to basic aspects of our understanding of the Church and of our role as Bishops, especially in relation to the urgent task of evangelization. Everyone in fact who has been given a mission in the Church needs to grow constantly in the knowledge and love of the great mystery of God's love made manifest in the world through the Incarnation of the Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, and continued through time in the mystery of the Church, his Body. It is *the proclamation of God's saving love*, realized in the Paschal Mystery of our Redemption and made effective in the ecclesial community's dedicated service to the human family, which we Bishops, successors of the Apostles, are called to foster and promote in all ways possible. I wish to encourage you in your daily commitment to this task and I invoke *the gifts of faith, hope and love* upon your priests, religious and lay faithful, as you all work together to proclaim the Good News and build up the Church. Your regions have been blessed by the presence of two saints: Saint Francis Xavier, the Apostle of India, whose body is in Goa, and Saint Gonsalo Garcia, born at Vasi in Bombay, the first Indian Saint, who was martyred for the faith in Japan. I was honoured to visit the places connected with these Saints in February 1986. May the intercession of these heavenly patrons assist you and your particular Churches in the task of holding firm to the faith and of bearing witness to it in the society in which you live. May their example teach you to go about doing good, as Jesus also did, so that the Church in India may announce Jesus' Cross and Resurrection until he comes (Cfr. *1Cor.* 11, 26). 2. The inner richness of the Church's life is visibly represented in India by *the presence and vitality of various Rites*, namely the Latin Rite, to which you belong, and the Syro-Malabar and the Syro-Malankara Rites. The history of relations between the various Rites, as in most things human, offers examples both of loyal collaboration and of unfortunate rivalry. I am happily aware that today a profound sense of ecclesial and fraternal communion animates the Bishops of the various Rites in their shared pastoral solicitude for God's people in India. I take this opportunity to encourage you all to continue to seek ways to implement the contents of my letter of 28th May 1987 in relation to the pastoral care of Eastern-Rite faithful within Latin-Rite jurisdictions. In particular I thank the Ordinaries of Bombay, Pune and Nashik for what has been done to give birth to the new Syro-Malabar Eparchy of Kalyan. I am convinced that inter-ritual collaboration will grow and bear excellent fruits when priests, religious and laity are *educated and formed to understand the true nature of the Church and the significance of her diversity in unity* (Cfr. *Ioannis Pauli PP. II Epistula ad Episcopos Indiae*, 6, die 28 maii 1987). 3. In different parts of the country there are Christian communities at various stages of growth and development. There are Christian communities which have had the faith for centuries and there are recent Christians. The latter are still in the process of building an ecclesial identity and Christian traditions. The former can count on an exemplary history and the resources of a deeply assimilated spirituality. Yet not all are always fully aware of the life of

faith and the evangelical call to holiness and justice in daily living. We sometimes see a dichotomy between faith and life. Rightly therefore, the Magna Charta of evangelization in our times, the Apostolic Exhortation "[Evangelii Nuntiandi](#)" of Pope Paul VI, recalls that *the Church is an evangelizer, but that she begins by being evangelized herself*, by listening unceasingly to what she must believe, to her reasons for hoping, to the new commandment of love (Cfr. Pauli VI [Evangelii Nuntiandi](#), 15). As pastor, father and guide of a Diocese, each Bishop must work wisely and unceasingly to ensure that God's people entrusted to him are taught the true faith and are led to the fullness of life which the Spirit breathes into Christ's followers. The above-mentioned Apostolic Exhortation calls on Bishops "to proclaim with authority the word of God, to assemble the scattered People of God, to feed this people with the signs of the action of Christ which are the sacraments, to set this people on the road to salvation, to maintain it in that unity of which we are, at different levels, active and living instruments, and unceasingly to keep this community gathered around Christ faithful to its deepest vocation" (*Ibid.* 68). No other concern or work can take the place of this daily toil. The Lord's injunction to work while it is day (Cfr. *Jo.* 9, 4) can well be extended to the importance and urgency of our pastoral ministry. But all of this needs to be expressed in each situation through the presence of the Christian community, especially priests and religious *in close contact with the local culture*. In the past, missionaries made praiseworthy efforts to learn the languages of the peoples they served and to understand their customs and mentality. Today, the means are available to facilitate this process and, while this effort is always necessary, it has special relevance where there are distinct ethnic groups which are coming to the faith for the first time.⁴ In her outward service to a society in distress, the Church in your regions is called to realize her role *in a multicultural, multireligious environment* by joining hands with all people of good will in a loyal interreligious dialogue and in effort to raise the social and cultural levels, and to improve the conditions of those in need. As the sacrament of the unity of the whole human family, *the Church cannot but be an ardent promoter of human solidarity*. She fosters attitudes of brotherhood and friendship. So many of her works and institutions are open to all. In India the Church has a special vocation to teach and foster *reconciliation between individuals and groups*, between people of different ethnic, social or cultural origins. This she can do only if she herself is a reconciled community, if her members reject in practice every form of discrimination and demonstrate in word and deed that they truly regard all men and women as brothers and sisters, children of the same Father and heirs to the same kingdom. Immediately there comes to mind the example of the many people in your particular Churches, in particular the many *women religious*, who are close to the poorest and the most destitute, who lovingly care for the sick and share the lot of villagers and slum-dwellers for the sake of the Gospel. How many examples of heroic evangelical love might we recall? And is not this love *the great sign of Christ's presence and the authentic expression of the vitality of your Christian communities*?⁵ There is one other theme that I wish to touch upon in speaking to you, Bishops of the Church in India. It is the question of *Respect for Life* and the need for a serious dialogue with society as a whole on *the ethical and moral implications of public policies in this field*. Two events prompt this reflection. One was my visit to *Nirmal Hriday Ashram* in Calcutta on 3rd February 1986. There, in the midst of so much suffering and death, one is struck not by hopelessness but by hope, and by the power of love which succeeds in transforming pain into a marvellous lesson on the full truth of the worth of every human life. My reflection is also inspired by the *Festival of Life* organized in Bombay in December 1988 by the International Federation of Catholic Medical Guilds, with the collaboration of people of other religious traditions. As Bishops you have frequently spoken out on the sacredness of all human life. In your regions this sacredness is often denied through abortion, female foeticide or infanticide, attempts to introduce legalized euthanasia, dowry deaths, bonded labour, terrorism and other forms of violence. In a country like India where philosophy and religion are closely connected, priests and seminarians should be well trained in moral philosophy and medical ethics, so that they can take part in interreligious dialogue on questions related to the natural transmission of life and the value and inalienable dignity of every human life

from the moment of conception to natural death. Where there are natural family planning and pro-life associations and movements, inspired by Catholic doctrine or in full harmony with it, the Catholic laity should be encouraged to work with them; where these groups do not exist, they should be established so that the Church's position on these important matters may be better known and seen to be in perfect harmony with the true wellbeing and development of society.⁶ The *family* is the primary unit of society, and it must be remembered that the educative influence of the home on individuals is much greater than that of any other group. Moral and religious influences and the social virtues which every society needs are first learnt in this basic community. Nowhere else is the power and intimacy of love so universally experienced. It is at this starting point that the individual and communitarian dimensions of life are strengthened. It is in the family that people learn healthy self-esteem. It is in the home that the art of communication begins and has to be fostered. It is above all in the home that religious truths are assimilated and a personal relationship with God developed. No pastoral plan can overlook the *priority that should be given to the family* as the basic unity of society and the Church herself.⁷ My dear Brothers: be assured of my constant prayer for you and for God's people in India. The universal Church looks to you with admiration for the growth and vitality of your communities, for the abundance of vocations to the priesthood and religious life. The fruitfulness of God's grace in your midst is at the same time a challenge to your pastoral responsibility. May the Blessed Virgin Mary, Mother of the Church, intercede for you in all your needs, and may her example of faith and discipleship continue to inspire in you and your people an ever closer fidelity to her Son, our Lord Jesus Christ. I ask you to take by blessing to the priests and religious, the seminarians and catechists of your Dioceses. *"May the Lord increase you and make you overflow with love for one another"* (1Thess. 3, 12). © Copyright 1989 - Libreria Editrice Vaticana