



The Holy See

ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS JOHN PAUL II TO THE BISHOPS OF THE LATIN RITE DIOCESES OF KERALA

ON THEIR "AD LIMINA" VISIT Tuesday, 21 August 1990 Dear Brother Bishops, 1. I am pleased to welcome you, the Bishops of the Latin Rite Dioceses of Kerala, on the occasion of your quinquennial pilgrimage to the tombs of the Apostles Peter and Paul. Your visit today is a visible sign of your communion in the apostolic faith with the Successor of Peter, who has a special mandate from the Lord to confirm his brothers (Cfr. *Luc.* 22, 32), and to exercise a particular concern for all the Churches (Cfr. *2 Cor.* 11, 28). Your presence brings to mind the whole household of God in the Spirit (Cfr. *Eph.* 2, 19), which is in Kerala and for which we must never cease to give thanks to the Father who "planned to assemble in the Church all those who would believe in Christ" (*Lumen Gentium*, 2). With affection in the Lord I ask you to convey my greetings to all the clergy, religious and laity entrusted to your pastoral care. In the fulfilment of your ministry, you are united with each other and all the members of the Episcopal College in a bond of hierarchical communion. In Kerala, *this communion is lived amid a diversity of Rites*, a diversity which enriches God's people but also calls them to a particular form of charity so beautifully described by Saint Paul when he wrote "outdo one another in showing honour" (*Rom.* 12, 10), "be united in the same mind and the same judgment" (*1 Cor.* 1, 10). As Bishops you will want to do everything possible to strengthen unity, charity and peace, which are the signs of that ecclesial communion without which our witness to the truth of the Gospel would be weak and ineffective. 2. During my Pastoral Visit to India four years ago I was able to observe at first hand the vitality of Kerala's Catholic community. Now, your *ad Limina* visit has offered us the occasion to pray together again for the needs of your Dioceses, thanking God for his gifts and imploring from his mercy *an increase of the sense of commitment to holiness of life* on the part of the whole Catholic community. As Bishops you are fully aware of your own personal responsibility to be "salt" and "light" in the midst of God's family. In our day when so many people show signs of a loss of genuine spirituality, the pastors of the Church must energetically promote the sense of prayer and adoration, penance, sacrifice, selfgiving, charity and justice. It is through the life of grace in souls that God's plan for the human family is effectively realized and his kingdom of truth and love is established (Cfr. *Lumen Gentium*, 8). Even the difficult social and political circumstances in which you carry out your pastoral ministry do not change the fact that you and your priests are called to be above all *heralds of God's word, ministers of his sacraments and sure guides on the path of Christian living*. Your configuration to Christ in the priesthood - the very source of your mission in the Church - impels you to look to him for inspiration and example. Like Saint Paul, your message is not one of worldly wisdom (Cfr. *1 Cor.* 3, 19), but the proclamation of the Saviour, and indeed of the paradox of the Cross (Cfr. *ibid.* 1, 18-25). I wish to encourage you therefore to continue to foster in every way the spiritual life of your communities, including the proper practice of popular devotion. 3. Only if each particular Church and local community is strong in faith and filled with evangelical love can it respond to *a basic requirement of its very nature, the challenge of evangelization* from which no individual and no group in the Church is exempt. My recent Letter to the Fifth Plenary Assembly of Asian Bishops'

Conferences, held last month in Indonesia, sought to draw attention to the need for first evangelization. In gratefully acknowledging all the praiseworthy efforts that you are making in this respect, I would ask you to ensure that the whole Catholic community be clear about the fact that "it is a contradiction of the Gospel and of the Church's very nature to assert, as some do, that the Church is only one way of salvation among many, and that her mission towards the followers of other religions should be nothing more than to help them be better followers of those religions" (Ioannis Pauli PP. II *Nuntius scripto datus Praesulibus qui interfuerunt V plenario coetui conferentiarum episcoporum ab omni Asia missus*, 4, die 23 iun. 1990: *Insegnamenti di Giovanni Paolo II*, XIII, 1 [1990] 1654). Naturally, the Church's proclamation of Christ must be made with *respect for the freedom of conscience of all*. The norms of dialogue must be observed, wherein prudence and charity reign, and the spiritual, moral and cultural values present in other traditions are recognized, preserved and promoted (Cfr. *Nostra Aetate*, 2). I can only encourage you, the Bishops, to continue to offer your wise guidance and leadership in these matters.⁴ In your reports on the state of your Dioceses many questions have been touched upon which will continue to occupy your attention. There is however one important aspect of the Church's mission to which some reference is suitable here, namely, her social teaching. Over the years, the faith of Kerala's Catholics has borne rich fruit in a lively concern for the well-being of others, especially the sick and those whom society relegates to unspeakable poverty and indignity. Both in her institutions and in the lives of individual believers, "the Church in Kerala with her tradition of service in the educational, medical, social, developmental and charitable fields, gives a bright witness to the Gospel message" (Ioannis Pauli PP. II *Homilia in loco v.d. "Cochin" habita*, 3, die 7 febr. 1986: *Insegnamenti di Giovanni Paolo II*, IX, 1 [1986] 362). At the same time it is very important that *proper training in the social doctrine of the Church* be an integral part of the catechesis that I know you are striving to impart in Kerala, especially to the young and to families. I wish to commend you for your vigilant support of catechists, as well as family groups and parish associations involved in efforts to spread knowledge of the faith among Catholics themselves as well as outside of the Catholic community. *The Church's social teaching emphasizes the inseparable bond that exists between the faith as it is professed and as it is lived*. In the formation of Christian consciences, social doctrine "gives rise to a 'commitment to justice' according to each individual's role, vocation and circumstances" (Eiusdem *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis*, 41). Formation in the Church's social teaching is especially important for *the laity of your Dioceses*, since they have a specific calling to *transform temporal realities from within*. A solid knowledge of social doctrine will assist them in penetrating and perfecting the temporal sphere through the spirit of the Gospel (Cfr. *Apostolicam Actuositatem*, 2), and bearing witness to "those human and Gospel values that are intimately connected with political activity itself, such as liberty and justice, solidarity, faithful and unselfish dedication for the good of all, a simple life-style and a preferential love for the poor and the least" (Ioannis Pauli PP. II *Christifideles Laici*, 42). Drawing upon their faith in Christ as they confront the ills plaguing society, Kerala's lay faithful will also be able to offer responsible alternatives to political theories and programmes inspired by ideologies of class struggle or by an insufficient respect for the human dignity of all citizens, regardless of their religion or social condition. A proper initiation in the Church's social teaching must also be part of the formation of *candidates for the priesthood and the religious life*. I am pleased to note the progress of the *Pontifical Inter-ritual Seminary of St. Joseph at Alwaye*, which has rendered an excellent service to the sense of communion and mission among Kerala's future priests, and I urge you to ensure that sound instruction in the Church's social teaching be an integral part of the Seminary's curriculum. The large number of vocations in Kerala has made it possible for priests and religious from your region to work throughout India. You are aware from experience that for such collaboration with the Church in other regions to be truly fruitful these priests and religious need to be well grounded in the universality and openness characteristic of successful missionaries in every age of the Church's life.⁵ Dear brothers, in concluding, I wish to join you in giving thanks to God for his many graces and blessings, notwithstanding the many challenges and difficulties that are part of

your ministry in Kerala. I am confident that your witness to the hope and consolation offered by the Gospel will always find expression in a selfless desire to promote the common good and practical solidarity with the needy. The example of your concern for the least of your brothers and sisters will greatly advance the Church's continuing mission of evangelization among the peoples of India. I commend you and your clergy, religious and laity to the loving protection of Mary, Mother of the Church, praying that, "being rooted and grounded in love" (*Eph. 3, 17*), you will be ever strengthened in "the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit" (*2 Cor. 13, 14*). ©

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