



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS JOHN PAUL II
TO THE BISHOPS
OF PAPUA NEW GUINEA AND SOLOMON ISLANDS
ON THEIR "AD LIMINA" VISIT**

Tuesday, 6 July 1993

Dear Brother Bishops,

1. I welcome you, *the Bishops of Papua New Guinea and Solomon Islands*, and in the words of Saint Paul I ask that "the Lord of peace himself may give you peace at all times and in all ways. The Lord be with you all" (2Thess. 3: 16). I am grateful for the devoted sentiments expressed on your behalf today, as well as for the kind message which you sent just a few days ago from the Annual General Meeting of your Episcopal Conference. I call upon the Holy Spirit to sustain and strengthen that unity of heart and mind, spirit and action which links you as the members of the Episcopal College with the Successor of Saint Peter, and I assure you of my prayers that God will bring to a fruitful conclusion your efforts to make your Conference an ever more effective instrument of your pastoral ministry.

To greet you here is to extend my affection to all the beloved priests, men and women Religious, and the lay faithful of your Dioceses. Although it is almost ten years now since I visited your region, I have not forgotten the warmth of the welcome which I received, the ardour of your prayer and the firmness of your determination to be faithful sons and daughters of the Church.

2. The visit "*ad Limina Apostolorum*" is a moment of profound ecclesial communion, a providential opportunity to express and confirm the ties of faith and charity which bind the local Churches with the See of Peter and with the Church Universal. The communion of which we speak extends not only in space but through time. Peter and Paul and the other Apostles are living members of the Body of Christ, and they continue to be active in the Church, for as the Liturgy affirms – "from their place in heaven they guide us still" (Praefatio Apostolorum I).

We share in their mission, entrusted to us through the laying on of hands and the invocation of the Holy Spirit, the same Spirit who led the Apostle to cry out: "Woe is me if I do not preach the gospel" (1Cor. 9: 16). This is no "spirit of timidity, but a spirit of power" (2Tm. 1: 7), of boldness – the boldness of Peter and Paul, who faced with serene confidence the forces of a great empire so hostile to their mission. This is our inheritance, and in the days following the Solemnity of these Holy Apostles we ask for a double share of their spirit (Cf. 2Reg. 2: 9), so that we may faithfully imitate their missionary labours.

3. The local Churches which you govern are among the youngest in the world. In some cases the initial *plantatio ecclesiae* is not yet completed. The *missio ad gentes* in your nations is not finished; the priests and Religious who have gone there from other lands continue to play a vital role and many more are needed. And yet, by God's grace, *a great deal has been accomplished in a very short time*, often in conditions which made the work difficult and even dangerous. Praise and thanks is due first of all to the Lord, who wondrously brings forth from the seed of his word a hundredfold harvest (Cf. Lk. 8: 8). And in the name of the whole People of God I pay tribute to the missionaries of yesterday and to those of today, who selflessly announce the love of God poured forth in Christ his Son and who invite their hearers to accept the incomparable possibility of becoming God's children.

4. In carrying forward the work of evangelization, much depends on the formation of those sons and daughters of Papua New Guinea and Solomon Islands whom God has called to be the *priests and Religious, instruments of salvation* for their fellow-countrymen. Dedicated to sharing the light of truth, these servants of Christ rely on your fatherly support to sustain them in their work of spreading his Kingdom. Among the many qualities to be cultivated as part of their *continuing formation*, I would single out thinking with the Church – *sentire cum ecclesia*. However novel the Gospel message and its demands may sound to some of their hearers, there is never a justification for offering anything but the authentic form of Christian existence found in the Catholic Church and faithfully safeguarded by her Bishops in union with the Successor of Peter. Peoples of mission lands are no less capable of accepting God's demands than were those to whom the word was proclaimed generations earlier. I wish to encourage you all to have great trust – in the Lord and in the power of the Gospel to save (Cf. Rom. 1: 16).

While there is a welcome increase of priestly and religious vocations, I share your concern at the fact that the number of those responding to God's call is not sufficient to give adequate instruction to the catechumens and the baptized. "How are (men) to believe in him of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without a preacher?" (Rom. 10: 14). I encourage you and all our co-workers to make one of your *highest priorities the pastoral care* of those whom the Lord of the harvest invites to enter the *priesthood or religious life*. I invite Catholic families to pray each day for vocations, and especially to pray that God will bestow such a gift on a son or daughter of their own household.

In this regard one of the encouraging signs is the need you have felt to establish two seminaries for teaching philosophy. I understand that this happy development has required a reorganization of your system of seminary formation. I am confident that the latest Post-Synodal Exhortation, "[Pastores Dabo Vobis](#)", taken together with the Conciliar Decree "[Optatam Totius](#)" and other authoritative documents, especially the Congregation for the Evangelization of People's *Guidelines on Formation in Major Seminaries*, will help you complete the Programme for Priestly Formation intended for the running of your seminaries.

5. Among your pastoral initiatives you have given particular attention to the *evangelization of culture*. As the Fathers of the Second Vatican Council remind us, "the term culture in general refers to everything by which man develops his many spiritual and physical endowments" ([Gaudium et Spes](#), 53). It follows that *when a people – or some portion of it – is elevated and transformed by divine grace there will be a renewal* of attitudes and behaviour, in short *a renewal of society* in conformity with the Gospel. Your commitment to evangelization continues an approach which from the first has marked the preaching of Christ in your lands, and has had notable success. The challenge which new religious movements and sects present today to the Church in Papua New Guinea and Solomon Islands is evidence of the pressing need to pursue this course with even greater dedication.

The central place which you gave to discussing *the pastoral care of families* at the recent meeting of your Conference is a clear indication of your concern to evangelize this basic institution of Melanesian culture. The reports which you submitted in anticipation of your quinquennial visit identify a number of ways in which opinion and behaviour in regard to married life and human sexuality, even among the baptized, are sometimes not in accord with God's original plan for married love, what I have called "the truth from the 'beginning'" (John Paul II, [Familiaris Consortio](#), 13; cf. Mt. 19: 5 and Gen. 2: 24). Progress in this matter is often slow, and it is easy to become disheartened, but I am confident that you and your co-workers, especially your priests, will put *full trust in the efficacy of God's word*. You must preach the word in season and out (Cf. 2Tm. 4: 2), certain that God who began this good work in you "will bring it to completion at the day of Christ Jesus" (Phil. 1: 6).

6. An important and indeed *indispensable help to the lay faithful* in their struggle to live married love according to God's will is the *fidelity of priests and Religious in their commitment to celibacy and virginity*. "Marriage and virginity or celibacy are two ways of expressing and living the one mystery of the covenant of God with his people" (John Paul II, [Familiaris Consortio](#), 16), and what is required in a covenant is faithfulness. In our age, so much in need of a profound change of heart about sexual morality and married love, we can be confident that the Lord is even more urgent in calling many of his disciples to be celibate "for the sake of the Kingdom of Heaven" (Mt. 19: 12) and that he is even more generous in strengthening them in their response. The Pastors of the Church are aware of the profound sacrifices demanded by a wholehearted response to the vocation to celibacy or virginity, but we echo the Lord's call without hesitation. The example of

chaste priests and Religious will help the laity to bear the sacrifice, mortification and self-denial demanded by obedience to God's plan for human sexuality. In this way they will lead truly fruitful lives and find lasting happiness (Cf. John Paul II, *Familiaris Consortio*, 16).

7. From the first days of the Church in your lands, Pastors and faithful have sought to give expression to the love of God in works of education, health care and social development. In this matter the Catholics of modern Papua New Guinea and Solomon Islands seek to carry on this worthy tradition. The "Statements Issued for Publication", which have become a regular part of your Conference's Annual Assembly, clearly testify to your resolve to apply the teachings of the Church, especially her *social doctrine*, to the milieux in which the faithful are called to live out their baptismal promises. A climate of moral confusion and the breakdown of the structures and values which traditionally provided for a cohesive communal life make such initiatives all the more necessary.

It is important to support the laity's efforts to live out their specific vocation to be a "light" and "leaven" in their communities. Here special mention should be made of the need to provide the faithful with a *thorough catechesis in preparation for receiving the Sacraments*, the necessary sources of strength for them to fulfil their mission. For this purpose the *"Catechism of the Catholic Church"*, published last year, is a providential help. The current social situation also shows the importance of a renewed dedication to *the pastoral care of young people*, so that the future leaders of the Church and society will be formed in habits of virtue, solidarity and generosity.

8. With regard to the civil order of your nations, I cannot fail to express my continued concern at *the situation in Bougainville*, and especially my anxiety for the personal security of the Bishop of the Diocese and for the clergy and Religious. I pray that the All-Merciful Lord will guard and protect all who have been caught up in this unrest, especially the innocent victims of violence. I join my voice to yours in urging all involved to use every possible means to find a just and peaceful resolution to the conflict. The way of reconciliation is the only path to this goal. May the Prince of Peace strengthen the citizens of your lands and all the peoples of the region and enable them to walk this path and support one another in preserving and spreading a spirit of concord.

9. The Catholics of Papua New Guinea and Solomon Islands are the heirs of a great patrimony, the light of the Gospel, the faith of Peter and Paul, the faith of the Church. One of the first missionaries in your region, Blessed John Mazzucconi, eloquently gave voice to the depth of this faith when he said: "I know that God is good and that he loves me immensely. All the rest, calm and tempest, danger and safety, life and death, are nothing but changing and momentary expressions of the dear, immutable and eternal love" (John Paul II, *Homily for the Beatification of the Martyrs of Angers and Fr Giovanni Mazzucconi in Saint Peter's Basilica*, 2, 19 February 1984). *May the faithful of your Dioceses have this same loving trust in Divine Providence*, and in your own ministry and service which express the love of the Good Shepherd himself. May Saint Michael the Archangel defend you in the struggle against sin and evil. By the invocation of the

Holy Name of Mary and through her intercession may you be led to ever greater service of Christ her Son. To you, my Brothers, and to all your clergy, religious and laity I gladly impart my Apostolic Blessing.

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