



# The Holy See

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**ADDRESS OF JOHN PAUL II  
TO THE BISHOPS OF CHINA  
ON THEIR "AD LIMINA" VISIT**

*Tuesday, 11 November 1980*

*Venerable and dear Brothers in Christ,*

1. I am very happy to have this meeting with you, the Bishops of Taiwan, in order to speak with about the progress being made in your dioceses, about the problems which as Pastors you have to face daily in the evangelisation of the flock that you have been called to shepherd, and about your present anxieties and your hopes for the future. As you know, this forms part of the specific mission entrusted by Jesus to Peter and his successors: the care for all the Churches: "Feed my lambs... Tend my sheep"[1], and the task of strengthening his brethren[2].

2. The visit *ad limina Apostolorum* is an expression of that bond which links the Bishops, individually and as a body, to the Bishop of Rome, who, by the will of Christ, is also the Pastor of the universal Church.

In fact, the Second Vatican Council clearly reaffirms the constant and unchanging doctrine of the Catholic Church: "The Roman Pontiff, as the Successor of Peter, is the perpetual and visible source and foundation of the unity of the Bishops and of the multitude of the faithful. The individual Bishop, however, is the visible principle and foundation of unity in his particular Church, fashioned after the model of the universal Church. In and from such individual Churches there comes into being the one and only Catholic Church. For this reason each individual Bishop represents his own Church, but all of them together in union with the Pope represent the entire Church joined in the bond of peace, love and unity"[3].

3. The Chinese people, scattered throughout the Continent, in Taiwan, Hong Kong and Macau, and in the diaspora, is a great people, formed by a culture that is thousands of years old, formed

by the thoughts of great and wise philosophers of ancient times, and by family traditions, such as that relating to the cult of ancestors. And well-known to all is the profound sense of kindness and urbanity that distinguishes it.

The Church, according to the different ways of thinking of the times, has sought to respect these traditions and cultural values, in the spirit of the Gospel, in the line of thought expressed by Saint Paul when he exhorts the Philippians to prize: “whatever is true, whatever is honourable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is gracious, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise”<sup>[4]</sup>.

The Christian message therefore highlights and enriches the positive spiritual and human values existing in every culture and tradition; the Church seeks to attain a harmonious accord between the culture and traditions of a people on the one hand and faith in Christ on the other<sup>[5]</sup>. This is a constant challenge for the Church, which must find in the culture and traditions of the people to be evangelised an important and indeed essential point for framing the method of proclaiming the Gospel message, according to the needs of every moment. The example of the great missionaries and apostles of China - as for example the Jesuit Matteo Ricci - should serve as a guide and inspiration for everyone.

A Christian is not just a person of faith, but one who is also called to be the leaven and salt in the civil and political society that he or she lives in. The Church therefore inculcates in her faithful a deep sense of love and duty towards their fellow-countrymen and towards their native land. She encourages them to live as upright and exemplary citizens and to work loyally for the all-round progress of the nation of which they are proud to be members.

4. I know that you, the Bishops of Taiwan, are deeply involved not only in the task of evangelisation but also in works of education and social welfare. This, on the one hand, shows the pastoral zeal that animates you and your collaborators: the diocesan clergy, the men and women Religious, and the laity. On the other hand it honours the religious freedom that the Church in your territory enjoys.

The Holy See appreciates this attitude, and encourages all the members of the Church in Taiwan to make good use of the situation of freedom and respect that it enjoys, in order to devote itself with ever greater fervour to the evangelisation of the Chinese people and to those other good works that depend upon the local Churches.

On my part I hope for an ever greater increase of Chinese ecclesiastical and lay workers in the Lord’s vineyard, an increase that will be the fruit mainly of a healthy Christian upbringing received in the family and in Catholic educational institutions. At the same time I express the earnest desire that these workers be given a solid and well-rooted formation both in the branches of knowledge necessary or useful for their future pastoral work, and also in the discipline of the Christian virtues,

so that they will be effective collaborators of the Holy Spirit in building up that chosen portion of the Kingdom of God that is in China.

5. Among the preoccupations that you have manifested to me, the present religious situation of the Catholic Church on the Continent occupies a special place. I assure you that these preoccupations are also very much my own. From various parts of that immense territory I receive information that attests to the perseverance of wary many Catholics in the faith, in prayer and in religious practice, and that shows their firm attachment to the See of Peter. This news has moved me deeply, and it impels me to offer up a prayer, together with you my brother Bishops, for that heroic Church, that the Lord may pour out upon those brave brethren and upon the faithful people the gifts of fortitude and perseverance, maintaining in them the ardent flame of hope that does not disappoint<sup>[6]</sup>.

And finally, beloved Brothers, I entrust the evangelisation of China to the maternal protection of Mary, Queen of China. I pray for the prosperity and progress of the whole Chinese people, whom I affectionately remember every day in my prayers and in my pastoral concerns. With immense confidence in the power of the death and Resurrection of the Lord Jesus, I repeat with the Apostle Peter: "Peace to all of you who are in Christ"<sup>[7]</sup>.

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[1] *Io.* 21, 15-17.

[2] Cfr. *Luc.* 22, 32.

[3] *Lumen Gentium*, 23.

[4] *Phil.* 4, 8.

[5] Cfr. *Gaudium et Spes*, 57-62.

[6] Cfr. *Rom.* 5, 5.

[7] *1 Petr.* 5, 14.

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