



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS JOHN PAUL II
TO THE BISHOPS OF INDIA
ON THEIR "AD LIMINA" VISIT**

Monday, 4 September 1989

Dear Brother Bishops,

1. During the course of this year I have already had the pleasure on two occasions of meeting groups of Bishops from the various regions of India. Today I am glad to welcome you, *the pastors of the Church in the Ecclesiastical Provinces of Ranchi and Hyderabad*, together with some Bishops from other jurisdictions who have arranged to make their *ad Limina* visit at this time. I greet you with Saint Paul's wish for the Ephesians: "Grace be with all who love our Lord Jesus Christ with love undying" (*Eph. 6, 24*).

2. The general theme of my conversations with the Bishops of India has been that of the Church, the sacrament of our union with God and of the unity and peace of the whole human family. As Bishops you are fully consecrated, especially by reason of the sacramental grace received through the laying on of hands, to loving service of the Body of Christ, the household of the faith, a part of which has been entrusted to your daily care and toil. In speaking to a previous group of Indian Bishops, I already mentioned the need for explicit reference to Christ and to the Church in all pastoral ministry. There can be no ecclesial life or service that is not clearly founded on *the supreme grace of Redemption* realized in the Saviour's Paschal Mystery and made present and celebrated in the "sacraments of faith" by which individuals are led to holiness, the Church is built up and God is duly worshipped (Cfr. *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, 59).

If today there are those who would restrict or limit the Gospel message to a merely humanitarian action of good neighbourliness or to a work of social "progress", however necessary and worthy of our concern, it is the Bishops' task to recall the cry of the great Apostle Paul: "I did not come proclaiming to you the testimony of God in lofty words or wisdom. For I decided to know nothing

among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified" (1Cor. 2, 1-2). The life of the Church in each of its members and in every community is *life in Christ through the Spirit*, a life of grace and holiness, nourished by the word of God and sustained by assiduous participation in the sacraments and untiring struggle against temptation and sin, in order that love may prevail. The primary objective of your pastoral ministry as Bishops in each particular Church must be to foster the communion of the faithful with the Most Blessed Trinity.

3. It is clear that the ecclesial community will be better equipped to fulfil the mission which springs from Baptism when its members display a deep and abiding concern for holiness of life and obedience to God. The mystery of communion which makes the Church "a people made one with the unity of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit" (Cfr. *Lumen Gentium*, 4) is the source of a dynamic activity which receives its impulse and direction from the Spirit whom Christ sent to guide and sanctify his followers until the end of time. Your evangelizing and missionary activity aims to communicate knowledge and experience of the salvation and freedom brought by Jesus Christ. The words of the First Letter of Saint John are worthy of constant meditation on the part of Bishops and their collaborators: "That which we have seen and heard we proclaim also to you, so that you may have fellowship with us" (1Jo. 1, 3). The whole history of the Church from the beginning bears witness to the fact that the Christian presence is above all an unfolding of holiness and virtue, of generous fidelity to God, often to the point of martyrdom.

In order for the Church to exercise her evangelizing role it is necessary for each particular Church to be strengthened and endowed for this task *by being herself constantly evangelized*. From the inner life of faith, hope and love flow all other aspects of the Church's life in your country, such as activity in the fields of education and health-care, and service to the poorest as the great sign of Christ's presence and the authentic expression of the vitality of your Christian communities. In the multicultural and multireligious environment of your country, the ecclesial community has a special calling to promote reconciliation and understanding among people of different backgrounds and to encourage an open and serious reflection on the fundamental ethical and moral issues, old and new, which lie at the heart of society's duty to identify and serve the common good of all its members. All of this requires a clear sense of our Christian vocation and mission.

4. Today I wish to refer also to *the special pastoral responsibility of Bishops for the growth and development of the consecrated life of Religious*. "By the charity to which they lead, the evangelical counsels join their followers to the Church and her mystery in a special way" (*Lumen Gentium*, 44). For this reason your pastoral service to Religious is an essential component of your ministry as Bishops. Your first obligation in this regard is of course to love and defend this "divine gift which the Church has received from her Lord and which she ever preserves with the help of his grace" (*Ibid.* 43). The pastors of the Church in India cannot but be *filled with gratitude for what religious life has meant and now means for the life of the ecclesial community in your country*. You cannot but be inspired and edified by the dedication and self-giving of the multitude of men and women religious who bear witness to evangelical living in your midst.

I have been pleased to note that the *Conference of Religious of India (CRI)* has decided that the theme of its National Assembly to be held in December 1989 is precisely “The role of Religious in Evangelization in the Indian Context”. To the discussion of this theme, Religious will bring the rich heritage of their centuries-old experience of evangelizing in every part of India, among all sectors of the population. In this field men and women religious know that they are not working for themselves, that the ultimate responsibility for the Church’s life and mission rests with the Bishops in union with the Successor of Peter, and that therefore their concern must be to integrate and coordinate their apostolate with that of the Dioceses in which they operate. They know that it is not a question of constantly re-inventing the task of evangelization or of always changing goals and methods, but of wisely and courageously persevering in essentials, while adapting those aspects which, if improved, offer hope of greater benefits.

5. The Bishop’s ministry to the Religious present in his Diocese is of the same nature as his ministry to all God’s people. It is to fulfil *the priestly, prophetic and pastoral mission entrusted to him by Christ* as a member of the episcopal order. Because Religious belong inseparably to the life and holiness of the Church (Cfr. *Lumen Gentium*, 44), he must *exhort them by word and example* to remain steadfast in the path of the *sequela Christi* to which their vows radically commit them. He should find opportunities to break the Eucharistic bread and the bread of the word of life with them, and share moments of their community life in fraternal and ecclesial communion, with respect for the internal life of each community according to its charism and the relevant canonical norms.

A Bishop has a grave responsibility *to preach the Gospel and to teach the Catholic way of life* to all his people, including men and women religious. He has a right and obligation to ensure that correct doctrine is taught and presented in his Diocese. This involves, where appropriate, the task of presenting a correct theological exposition of Religious Life itself. In this he does not take the place of those responsible for formation in religious communities, but his task is to bear authoritative witness to divine and catholic truth (Cfr. *Lumen Gentium*, 25), and in this way to become a secure point of reference for all the members of the Church as they seek to be identified with Jesus Christ who is the Way, the Truth and the Life.

As pastor, it is the Bishop’s duty to lead the particular Church to the fullness of Christian life. This duty is especially urgent in liturgical matters, in the care of souls and in safeguarding the public good of the Church. In all of these areas communication and dialogue with the Religious who serve in your Dioceses are important for the well-being of the ecclesial community and for the unity of pastoral action. In this respect, meetings with the Major Superiors of Religious are a necessary condition of understanding and collaboration, and consequently, the work of the CBCI - CRI Joint Committee deserves your support and encouragement.

6. Dear Brothers: In dealing briefly with the Bishop’s role in relation to Religious Life, my intention is above all to *exhort you to make the development of Religious Life one of the great concerns of*

your individual and collective ministry. In doing so, you will join your Religious in addressing some specific questions such as the importance of promoting an ever greater sense of community and vowed life among Religious themselves, the selection and formation of candidates to the Religious Life, tensions which may sometimes exist between men and women religious and diocesan clergy, a proper inculturation of Religious Life which also purifies aspects of local cultures, especially as regards the dignity and role of women in society.

As you prepare to return to your Dioceses I ask you to take my greetings and blessings to your priests, religious and laity. Each day in prayer I remember you and your fellow-workers in the Lord's harvest, invoking upon you the spiritual closeness and maternal care of Mary, our Mother in the faith. I would ask you to be true friends and fathers to your people, offering them always the example of the Good Shepherd who laid down his life for his flock.

"Thankful for your partnership in the Gospel from the first day until now... I am sure that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ" (*Phil.* 1, 5-6). With my Apostolic Blessing.

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