



The Holy See

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

Saturday, 9 October 1993

*Your Eminence,
Dear Brother Bishops,*

1. With "the affection of Christ Jesus" (Phil. 1: 8), I greet you, the second group of *Australian Bishops* in Rome this year for your visit "*ad Limina Apostolorum*". I give heartfelt thanks to our Heavenly Father for our "partnership in the gospel" (Ibid. 1: 5) and for the communion of faith and charity which binds us together in the service of God's people. I ask you to express to all the clergy, religious and laity of your Dioceses my solicitude for their continuing growth in grace and holiness of life.

My meeting with the Bishops from Australia who were here in May was an opportunity to consider the nature of the threefold Episcopal Office and some practical consequences for its exercise in contemporary society. The Bishop's identity as priest, teacher and shepherd of Christ's flock is a gift which we hold in common, for the Episcopal Order is collegial in nature and meaning (Cf. *Lumen Gentium*, 22). It is in the context of our shared responsibility to fulfil the Lord's mandate for the universal preaching of the Good News (Cf. Mk. 16: 15) that I make the following reflections, in order to encourage you in your pastoral ministry.

2. I remember my conversation with young people via radio during the flight to Darwin in the course of my Pastoral Visit to your country in 1986. One of the children asked, "What is the hardest thing about being Pope?", and I answered: "To see that many people do not accept the love of Jesus, do not know who he really is and how much he loves them" (John Paul II, *Address to the students of the "Katherine School of Air" in Melbourne*, 3, 29 November 1986). Although formulated to be understood by a child, this reply goes to the very centre of what is involved in our

call to evangelize. *We exist to preach Christ.*

All the strength of our hearts and minds must be dedicated to making him known – to sharing with others "the word of life... the eternal life which was with the Father and was made manifest to us" (1Jn. 1: 2). The person and message of Jesus are the form and substance, the source and goal, the inspiration and the reward of our whole ministry.

Pastors need to be able to understand *in the light of faith* the cultural context within which they serve, so that they can judge correctly the most effective ways to present the Gospel message to their hearers. "Reading the signs of the times" means identifying the values and currents within society which positively conform to the spirit of the Gospel and those which, on the contrary, are in contrast with the teaching given by Christ, and which form barriers to the assent of faith. Fidelity to baptismal grace demands that the members of the Church should avoid assimilating from their social milieu values, opinions or patterns of behaviour in conflict with the Christian life. As Saint Paul reminds us, Christians ought not to be "conformed to this world" (Rom. 12: 2). Rather it is the world that needs to be conformed to Christ. As Bishops, your discernment and leadership is essential.

3. One of the clearest manifestations of the "newness" of life in Christ is *family life* lived in accordance with the Saviour's call for the restoration of God's original plan for this fundamental human reality (Cf. Mk. 10: 6-9). The renewed dedication of yourselves and your priests to the zealous pastoral care of young people and of engaged and married couples – especially by means of sound and thorough catechesis – will help the People of God in Australia to bear this much needed witness. The Apostolic Exhortation "[Familiaris Consortio](#)" invites every Bishop to devote to the pastoral care of the family "personal interest, care, time, personnel and resources, but above all personal support for the families and for all those who, in the various diocesan structures, assist him in the pastoral care of the family" (John Paul II, [Familiaris Consortio](#), 73). I wish to encourage you and your brother Bishops to continue your efforts in this field, realizing the importance of a strong family life for the future of the Church, as also for the future of society itself.

4. At a time when powerful forces are working to advance a "culture of death", it is incumbent upon the Pastors and the faithful of the Church to proclaim boldly and unambiguously the *sanctity of human life from conception to the moment of natural death*. No human life is ever without meaning. The unborn must be guaranteed the right to live; the physical and mental integrity of the incurably sick and the severely handicapped must be inviolable; and the terminally ill must be supported and cared for with full respect for their dignity.

The recent "[World Youth Day](#)" in Denver showed how deeply young people feel about the value of life and the defence of the right to life. They have a spontaneous perception of the fact that manifestations of the "culture of death" are not the progressive steps towards a better world and a more dignified life for people that they are often made out to be. Rather, they are the product of

the darkening of the moral conscience which occurs when certain anthropological and ethical theories of human behaviour or the exaggeration of freedom distort the true light of conscience: the light by which the individual perceives – in words of the recent Encyclical "Veritatis Splendor" – "that primordial insight about good and evil, that reflection of God's creative wisdom which, like an imperishable spark (*scintilla animae*), shines in the heart of every man" (John Paul II, Veritatis Splendor, 59). One of the principal services which the Church can offer to humanity at this time is to teach the true nature of conscience, to defend the universality and permanent validity of moral norms, and to foster a genuine sense of human freedom. The precise purpose of the new Encyclical is to present the Church's teaching on these fundamental matters which are at the heart of the *moral crisis* affecting contemporary society.

5. In a highly secularized environment, the proclamation of the Kingdom of God through *the witness of men and women religious takes on heightened importance*, and I wish to invite you to pay renewed attention to the promotion and care of religious life in your country. The practice of the evangelical counsels testifies "to the fact of a new and eternal life acquired by the redemption of Christ. It foretells the resurrected state and the glory of the heavenly Kingdom" (Lumen Gentium, 44). The distinctive role of religious in announcing these fundamental elements of the Gospel message fully justifies your expanding of initiatives, both in your Dioceses and through your Episcopal Conference, to *encourage more young men and women to respond generously to the vocation to Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life*.

This is the appropriate moment to express once again the Church's appreciation of all that the zealous religious in Australia have accomplished through schools, hospitals and other works and institutions. This vast service to God's people has been strengthened where religious communities have appropriately answered the Council's call for renewal through greater fidelity to the Gospel, the reappropriation of their founding charism, and a recommitment to the essential elements of religious life. Your confirmation of these good fruits, as well as your assistance to individuals and communities in difficult situations of discernment, is a necessary and significant part of your episcopal ministry to the religious of your Dioceses.

6. *The essential nature of the priestly ministry in the life of the Church* calls the whole Catholic community to be concerned about a decline in the number of those answering God's call to become priests. As you have already shown, your serious efforts at recruitment, complemented by a commitment to rigorous screening, do bring results. You must sow and plant: *the Lord will give the increase* (Cf. 1Cor. 3: 7). As indicated in the reports prepared for this quinquennial visit, you are aware of the need for careful attention to all aspects of vocational recruitment, including the increased number of candidates to the priesthood entering formation after being established in secular professions and the training of students in seminaries which have ties with other educational institutions.

Pressures to place older candidates in an accelerated programme must take account of the fact

that priests need those experiences of spiritual, intellectual, human and pastoral formation which the Church has directed to be spread over a full course of philosophical and theological studies (Cf. *Code of Canon Law, can. 250*). To abbreviate or curtail any essential aspect of priestly training is to put the future priest in the position of not being fully able to respond to the heavy demands of priestly life and ministry. Moreover, when a seminary is affiliated with another post-secondary institution, especially one of an ecumenical character, the Bishop has a particular obligation to ensure that the course of studies is *suitable to the specific nature of the priestly ministry in the Catholic Church*. At stake is the candidate's very understanding of the priesthood and his assimilation of the convictions, attitudes and behaviour required for a worthy and virtuous priestly life.

The experience of past generations, confirmed by empirical evidence, indicates that the grace of a priestly vocation is often manifested early in a boy's life, in ways that are appropriate to his age. This fact indicates the need to provide pastoral care for those who show the first stirrings of a vocation – a pastoral care which will help them to identify its signs and support them in seeking to follow it (Cf. John Paul II, *Pastores Dabo Vobis*, 8-9. 40). Consequently, various forms of pastoral work on behalf of vocations should be an integral part of the catechesis of children and adolescents.

7. In your efforts to strengthen the Church for her mission of evangelization, many of you – like Bishops in other parts of the world – are taking advantage of processes for assessing resources and planning for the future. Such procedures and strategies, often borrowed from secular institutions, can help, insofar as they take on a new purpose and a new internal principle within the context of the Church's life. Because the Church is the efficacious sign of – man's communion with the Holy Trinity, such procedures, like all the consultative structures we use, must serve to strengthen the bonds of ecclesial fellowship.

While consulting with others in all good faith and listening to them in a spirit of true dialogue, *a Bishop can never set his magisterial office to one side*. As "the visible principle and foundation of unity in his particular Church" (*Lumen Gentium*, 23), he, like Christ, speaks with authority (Cf. Mt. 7: 29), and this grace is given to him so that he can confirm the faith of the disciples and correct their errors "in season and out of season" (2Tim. 4: 2).

8. Dear Brothers, the Third Millennium is fast approaching. We should remember the Lord's words about the abundance of the harvest to be reaped through our service of the Gospel (Cf. Mt. 9: 37). We are being called to dedicate ourselves with fresh vigour to the work of sharing the light of truth with all men and women. I pray that through your pilgrimage to the tombs of the Holy Apostles Peter and Paul the Spirit of God will strengthen you for the work of the new evangelization. I entrust you, your priests, religious and lay faithful to the loving intercession of Mary, Mother of the Incarnate Word, and I impart my Apostolic Blessing as a pledge of grace and peace in her Divine Son.

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