



The Holy See

ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS JOHN PAUL II

TO THE BISHOPS OF THE EPISCOPAL CONFERENCE OF PAKISTAN ON THEIR "AD LIMINA"

VISIT Friday, 21 October 1994 Dear Brother Bishops, 1. With the words of the Apostle Paul I greet you, *beloved Pastors of the Church in Pakistan*: "May the God of steadfastness and encouragement grant you to live in such harmony with one another, in accord with Christ Jesus, that together you may with one voice glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ" (Rom. 15:5-6). Your visit to the tombs of the "glorious Apostles" who founded the Church in Rome through the joint witness of their martyrdom *is a treasured moment of collegial communion*. As Pastors of particular Churches in communion with this See which divine Providence has ordained to be "the source and principle of unity" (Saint Cyprian, *De Unitate Ecclesiae*, 4) you bring the burdens, sorrows, hopes and aspirations of your people to the heart of the universal Church. It is a joy to receive the assurance of the prayers of the faithful of Pakistan, whom I remember with affection from my brief visit to Karachi in 1981. Through you I embrace them, praying that by the power of the Holy Spirit they may abound in hope (cf. Rom. 15:13)! Your presence brings to mind our departed brother *Cardinal Joseph Cordeiro*, whose unaffected fidelity to the Gospel and love of his people made him *a gift to the Church and to your Nation*. 2. Our ministry - rooted in the Lord who, from the throne of the Cross (cf. Jn. 12:32), draws all humanity to himself - is placed at the service of man's deepest vocation: that of knowing "the one true God, and Jesus Christ" whom he has sent (*Ibid.*, 17:3). We pray and work for no less a goal than *communion with the Triune God*. As the Church approaches the Third Millennium, our common and individual responsibility before the Lord, "the righteous judge" (2 Tim. 4:8), for the stewardship placed in our hands takes on an urgency which must challenge and stimulate us in our own lives of prayer and in our ministry to the People of God entrusted to us. *What does the Year 2000 mean for the Church in Pakistan?* It means that the Lord is calling you - as he is calling the Church throughout the world - *to be rejuvenated with the perennial freshness of the Word of Life*. He is beckoning his virginal Bride (cf. Eph. 5:27) to a renewed fidelity to the Gospel, to a more radiant holiness and to a more serene courage in the apostolate. With the help of your firm but gentle guidance, the whole Church in Pakistan is called to strengthen the "living sense of the faith", which is the heart of the new evangelization (cf. John Paul II, *Redemptoris Missio*, 33). 3. The heartfelt fervour and creative methods which the new evangelization calls for demand above all "*priests who are deeply and fully immersed in the mystery of Christ* and capable of embodying a new style of pastoral life, marked by a profound communion with the Pope, the Bishops and other priests, and a fruitful cooperation with the lay faithful" (John Paul II, *Pastores Dabo Vobis*, 18). At the core of the priestly ministry is *the celebration of the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass and the other Sacraments according to the mind and discipline of the Church*. No effort should be spared in encouraging your priests to offer the Eucharist daily, to receive the grace of the Sacrament of Penance frequently and to pray the Liturgy of the Hours in unison of intentions with the Bride of Christ. The vigour of the Church's mission depends on priests who are nourished by prayer and who are aflame with love for the Living God (cf. Congregation for the Clergy, *Directorium pro presbyterorum ministerio et vita*, 38-42). The

love, the time, the energies you spend in caring for the spiritual and material well-being of your priests cannot but bring excellent results for the Churches over which you preside. I join you in thanking God for the increased number of vocations to the priesthood that the Church in Pakistan is experiencing. The Seminary - both the Theologate in Karachi and the Philosophy House about to be inaugurated in Lahore - *is a vital factor in promoting the new evangelization*. During their formation, candidates should be carefully guided to "putting on the Lord Jesus Christ" (cf. Rom. 13:14) who "emptied himself, taking the form of a servant" (Phil. 2:7). *Seminarians should be formed in the pastoral charity of the Good Shepherd*, whose power was expressed as service and whose honour was the ignominy of the Cross. It is the Bishop's personal responsibility to select candidates for Holy Orders who are motivated by a genuine desire to serve God's people with humility and simplicity. The Bishop, as the "first representative of Christ in priestly formation" (John Paul II, *Pastores Dabo Vobis*, 65), should likewise ensure an effective continuing education of the members of the presbyterate. Even taking into account the enormous needs of the apostolate in your country, priests too need time to implement Saint Paul's exhortation: "I remind you to rekindle the gift of God that is within you" (2 Tim. 2:6). Continuing formation will help the priests, whose spiritual fathers you are, *to overcome the temptation to reduce the ministerial priesthood to a merely external activism* or the provision of services. When you provide the clergy with opportunities for maturing in Christ (cf. Col. 1:28), you enable each fellow-worker "to safeguard with vigilant love the 'mystery' which he bears within his heart for the good of the Church and of mankind" (John Paul II, *Pastores Dabo Vobis*, 72).⁴

Fervent Christian life and effective evangelization require that Catholic communities, gathered in parishes or, as is often the case in your country, in small communities guided by generous Religious, lay leaders or catechists, should be well grounded in the fundamentals of the faith. The recently published "Catechism of the Catholic Church" will assist you in opening the treasure of the Gospel to your people. Initiatives which seek to make the Catechism available and known deserve your enthusiastic support. In this *Year of the Family*, we must not overlook the fact that the faith is transmitted in the first place in the home, where "Christian parents are the primary and irreplaceable catechists of their children, a task for which they are given the grace by the Sacrament of Matrimony" (John Paul II, *Christifideles Laici*, 34). Priests, Religious and catechists have the noble task of guiding and sustaining *the family as it grows to its full stature as a "domestic church"*. There is ample room for a more active and visible presence of all the laity in the Church's life. You and your priests should seek ways to make their collaboration more general and more effective.⁵

An inestimable gift which the Catholic Church can offer to society is the *Gospel message concerning the dignity and vocation of women*. The inner eye of faith recognizes that the way to promote the role of women and to overcome forms of discrimination in their regard is to make known the profound "*truth about woman*" which "she received on the day of creation and which she inherits as an expression of the 'image and likeness of God' that is specifically hers" (John Paul II, *Mulieris Dignitatem*, 10). I urge you to persevere in your *firm opposition to anything which compromises the dignity and lofty vocation of women* - particularly, programmes of family planning which do not respect their ethical and religious convictions, discriminatory laws and the practice of forced conversion. Within the Christian community, the Church should insist that women "ought to be recognized as co-operators in the mission of the Church, in the family, in professional life and in the civil community" (John Paul II, *Christifideles Laici*, 51).⁶

The value of Catholic schools, not only in the academic field but also as focal-points of dialogue and tolerance in Pakistani society, is well known and constitutes a great responsibility for the whole Catholic community. For these schools to fulfil their role, they must continue *to defend and strengthen their Catholic institutional identity*. Not only should they provide the high quality education so necessary for genuine human promotion: they should be vibrant communities in which educators and students are animated by the highest ideals of faith and religious practice, by a profound sense of solidarity, by insistence on the primacy of the person over material possessions. In this way they will lead students - regardless of their religious or cultural background - to the renewal of

their minds through what is good and acceptable and perfect (cf. Rom. 12:2). *Because you are a "little flock"* (Lk. 12:32) *ecumenical co-operation with other Christians in social, cultural and civic life is ever more imperative*. The Second Vatican Council foresaw that joint efforts among Christians would contribute to "a just appreciation of the dignity of the human person, the promotion of the blessings of peace, [and] the application of Gospel principles to social life" (*Unitatis Redintegratio*, 12). Likewise, for such collaboration to be a true instrument of ecclesial fellowship, it should be "accompanied by other forms of ecumenism, especially by prayer and spiritual sharing" (Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity, *Directory for the Application of Principles and Norms for Ecumenism*, 212). I am aware that in union with the members of other Christian Churches and communities you seek to give a united witness against injustices and in promoting the common good. I shall continue to pray for the success of these efforts.⁷ In the situation of your country, *the promotion of inter-religious dialogue is an integral part of your pastoral mission*. With God's grace, your efforts to foster greater understanding between Christians and Muslims will lead to the overcoming of attitudes of distrust and mutual rejection. Fruitful inter-religious exchanges - those which will break down barriers of hostility - require a careful study of the religious values and traditions of Islam. Even when such dialogue is difficult or even unwelcome, the Catholic Church cannot forsake it. From experience you know that the moral concerns affecting the future of the human family are a most fertile ground for common discussion with your Muslim brothers and sisters. In the Encyclical "Veritatis Splendor" I expressed my firm conviction that the universal and unchanging moral norms which derive from the order of creation are "the unshakable foundation and solid guarantee of a just and peaceful human coexistence, and hence of a genuine democracy, which can come into being and develop only on the basis of the equality of all its members, who possess common rights and duties" (John Paul II, *Veritatis Splendor*, 96). *The holiness of God's law inscribed in our hearts* (cf. Rom. 2:15) is humanity's common treasure and a fundamental meeting point between people of different cultures and religious traditions. *It establishes the best foundation for co-operation* in promoting authentic social and political development. It demands that all believers in the God of Abraham "bear witness before each other in daily life to their own human and spiritual values, and help each other to live according to those values in order to build a more just and fraternal society" (John Paul II, *Redemptoris Missio*, 57). In this regard I urge the Church in Pakistan to proclaim vigorously *the Church's social doctrine*. It can be a *bridge linking Christians and Muslims* in a shared commitment to promoting the dignity of the human person and the inestimable value of the family in conformity with God's plan, in a just and equitable society.⁸ Dear Brothers: I cannot pass over in silence the anxiety which you have expressed during your visit to the See of Peter regarding the hardships which many of your people are enduring for their fidelity to Christ. Sometimes they are treated with suspicion and have a painful feeling of being second-class citizens in their own country. On occasion, this injustice and intolerance are abetted by *laws showing insufficient respect for the religious freedom of minorities*. The Church in Pakistan has taken a courageous and effective stand in deploring actions which compromise the fundamental truth that religious freedom is the cornerstone of the entire structure of human rights. With profound respect my thoughts turn to all *Pakistani Christians who are in any way suffering for their faith*: I wish them to experience the spiritual closeness, the solidarity, and the comfort of the prayer which the Pope offers on their behalf to "the Father of mercies and the God of all comfort" (2 Cor. 1:3). In the mysterious and loving design of divine Providence *trials are a rich source of grace and blessing for the Body of Christ*. Brother Bishops, these are some of the reflections which your visit suggests. *Your particular Churches are indeed close to my heart*. I have every confidence that you will continue to preach the word boldly and shepherd your people zealously. Entrusting you, with all the priests, Religious and laity of your Dioceses, to Mary, Star of the New Evangelization, I affectionately impart my Apostolic Blessing. © Copyright 1994 - Libreria Editrice Vaticana

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