



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS JOHN PAUL II
TO THE BISHOPS OF THE ECCLESIASTICAL PROVINCES
OF BOMBAY, GOA, HYDERABAD, NAGPUR AND VERAPOLY
ON THEIR "AD LIMINA" VISIT**

Wednesday, 13 December 1995

Your Eminence,

Dear Brother Bishops,

1. With "the affection of Christ Jesus" (Phil. 1:8), I greet *the Pastors of the Church in the Ecclesiastical Provinces of Bombay, Goa, Hyderabad, Nagpur and Verapoly on the occasion of your visit ad limina Apostolorum*. You have come to pray at the Tombs of the Apostles Peter and Paul in the See where they confirmed the truth and fruitfulness of the Gospel by their martyrdom. Here they preached Christ crucified and risen and "made the good confession" of faith (1 Tim. 6:13). Through the witness of their blood they sanctified this Church, leaving an inheritance to be kept by their Successors, the Bishops of Rome, in whose ministry "all the Bishops recognize that they are united in Christ and all the faithful find confirmation for their faith" (John Paul II, *Ut Unum Sint*, 97).

In unity, charity and peace we are members of the College of Bishops, which Christ established in order to carry forward his saving work through the ages. Each one, according to the measure of God's gift, has the responsibility of tending the sheep entrusted to him in a particular Diocese. At the same time we have a collegial responsibility for the whole Church (cf. *Lumen Gentium*, 22). Like the Apostle Peter, we are aware of our frailty and sinfulness, but like him also we are comforted by the Lord's words: "Do not be afraid!" (Lk. 5:10). Like St Paul, we will "all the more gladly boast of our weaknesses, that the power of Christ may rest upon us" (cf. 2 Cor. 12:9). Through our episcopal ministry the risen Lord, in the power of the Holy Spirit, continues to guide his Church on the way to the Father. Because "we have been approved by God to be entrusted with the Gospel" (1 Thess. 2:4), we are empowered to show *an apostolic daring that knows no*

fear. My fraternal plea to you and all the Bishops of India is this: always have the courage to declare the Gospel of God no matter how great the opposition (cf. *ibid.*, 2:2)!

2. The same Spirit given to the Church "through the wounds of the Crucifixion" (John Paul II, *Dominum et Vivificantem*, 25) accompanies you along the path of your mission as shepherds of God's People and heralds of the Gospel to those who have not yet heard it. He will strengthen you in the bonds of unity and charity, so that *all together the Bishops of India will be of one mind and heart, exercising effective pastoral solidarity*, in order to meet the challenges facing the Catholic community in your country at the approach of the new millennium.

One of these challenges is the resurgence of that mentality which separates people on social and ethnic grounds. With sadness we acknowledge that even in the Christian community such problems persist, in forms of discrimination which go against the very essence of the Gospel message, a message which speaks of God's unbounded love for all his children, making no distinction. We are all bound by the Apostle Paul's exhortation: "To lead a life worthy of the calling to which we have been called... *eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace*" (cf. Eph. 4:1-3). The prayer of Christ in the Upper Room, which is often applied to ecumenical relations with other Christians, must have its first expression in the life of the Catholic community, in each parish, in each local gathering of the faithful: "That they may all be one even as you, Father, are in me and I in you; that they also may be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me" (Jn. 17:21).

3. It was in the Upper Room that the Lord gave his followers the new commandment of mutual love (cf. *ibid.*, 13:34) and instituted the *Eucharist as the sacrament which creates and signifies the unity* of all his disciples. Through the Eucharist, Christ continues to build up his Body, the Church, and the Holy Spirit accomplishes the "strengthening of the inner man" (Eph. 3:16). In India as in Rome and in every other part of the world, the original model of the community of faith is the one described in the Acts of the Apostles: the faithful "devoted themselves to the Apostles' teaching and fellowship, *to the breaking of bread and the prayers*" (Acts 2:42). Bishops must always have that model in mind as they strive to consolidate in the same spirit of unity and harmony that portion of the Church committed to their pastoral care. As the high priests of sacred worship and the principal "stewards of the mysteries of God" (1 Cor. 4:1), Bishops must promote liturgical life in their Dioceses, according to the teaching and discipline of the Universal Church. Because the liturgy expresses the faith of the Church, vigilance over the manner of celebration is a solemn duty. *Bishops are to guarantee that the "lex orandi" of every particular Church reflects the "lex credendi" of the universal "koinonia"*.

4. From the Eucharist comes strength to live the Christian life in all its fullness, and zeal to share that life with others. The Eucharistic Lord sends you into the highways and byways of your nation, to establish for God's glory "the civilization of love, founded on the universal values of peace, solidarity, justice and liberty, which find their full attainment in Christ" (John Paul II, *Tertio Millennio*

Adveniente, 52). For Bishops and their co-workers – priests, religious and committed lay persons – that task includes the teaching of the Church's social doctrine, the proclamation of the Gospel of life, and the fostering of interreligious dialogue and co-operation.

5. "To teach and to spread her social doctrine pertains to the Church's evangelizing mission and is an essential part of the Christian message" (John Paul II, *Centesimus Annus*, 5).

In the circumstances of your apostolate the Church's social teaching calls for a courageous commitment to promoting a more just and equitable society, and for a sincere love of the poor expressed in a solidarity which will help them to become the principal agents of their own human development. In your *ad limina* reports you have drawn attention to certain situations which weigh heavily on your communities. Among these are the old and new *threats to human life* – threats which are sometimes masked as compassion – directed against unborn children, the handicapped, the seriously ill and the dying. Whenever the dignity and rights of individuals or peoples are threatened, *the Church's prophetic voice should ring out in the service of life*.

The "conspiracy against life" (cf. John Paul II, *Evangelium Vitae*, 17) takes on many forms in modern society. These include violence fueled by racial and religious differences, the exploitation of women and children in the workplace, as well as through sexual permissiveness and pornography, pressures to adopt certain methods of population control, and a general weakening of the sense of responsibility for the common good on the part of those who control the economy and public life. The foundations of a just society can only rest on the moral law. The laity in particular should be encouraged and trained to work for a society which will respect and promote the ethical values inscribed in the human heart (cf. Rom. 2:15) and revealed by God's wisdom and love, values which in large part are reflected in the moral codes of the world's great religions. Despite the difficulties involved in a society which is overwhelmingly non-Christian, you as Bishops are "the first ones called to be untiring teachers of the Gospel of life" (John Paul II, *Evangelium Vitae*, 82). I am confident that you will exhort, educate and encourage priests, theologians, teachers, catechists, parents and all believers, that they may be ever more committed to their responsibility to be a *people for life*.

6. Another area of concern and action for the Church in India is the status of women in society and in the ecclesial community. Certainly, the enormous challenge of addressing the problem of the historical oppression of women is a matter for the whole of society. But the Catholic community for its part can do much through its institutions, through the attitudes and behaviour of its members, in particular of the over sixty-five thousand women religious, in order to increase awareness of women's equality in dignity with men, of their fundamental rights and of the complementarity of men and women in God's plan. I am heartened that your Episcopal Conference and many Dioceses are already taking practical steps to respond to the concerns and hopes of women and to find ways to improve their situation. I renew the appeal I made last September, for the whole Church to be willing to foster *feminine participation* in every way in her internal life, with the

exception of those tasks which belong properly to the priest, by making use of the *ample room* for a lay and feminine presence recognized by Church law (cf. John Paul II, *Angelus Address*, 2 [3 Sept. 1995]). By promoting respect for women's true dignity, you will contribute to freeing reserves of wisdom and sensitivity which the Church and society greatly need.

7. In a multi-religious society such as India, Christians need to join hands with other people of good will in *the defence of shared human and spiritual values and in the promotion of integral human development*. The Catholic Church in India must meet the challenge of militant religious fundamentalism by fostering *interreligious dialogue*. From this dialogue will come respect for the "seeds of the Word" sown among the peoples and religions of India, in a sincere recognition of the genuine "spiritual riches" of their "prayer and contemplation, faith and ways of searching for God or the Absolute" (Paul VI, *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, 42). The "dialogue of life" with non-Christians will show that *genuine religious belief is a source of mutual understanding, fraternal solidarity and social peace*.

8. Dear Brothers: with keen expectation the whole Church is getting ready to commemorate the two thousandth anniversary of the Redemptive Incarnation of the Lord in the womb of the Virgin Mary. Besides significant events in preparation for the Jubilee, such as the Special Session for Asia of the Synod of Bishops, Bishops in their own Dioceses – in co-operation with all sectors of the faithful – are called to promote *a profound interior renewal at every level of Church life*. This is the revolution in the Spirit which should inspire your ministry, in obedience to St Paul's exhortation: "Be renewed in the spirit of your minds, and put on the new nature, created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness" (Eph. 4:24). *The years leading up to the Jubilee should become a time of hope for the Church in India!* Hope pierces the darkness of the Passion with the splendour of the Resurrection. Pastors who walk in the footsteps of the "Shepherd and Guardian of our souls" (cf. 1 Pt. 2:25) are icons of this hope for their people. With joyful thanksgiving for the "great things" (cf. Lk. 1:49) that God has done for the Church in India, I entrust you and your priests, religious and laity to Mary, the Virgin of the New Advent and the Morning Star who guides the People of God to her Son, Christ the Redeemer. With my Apostolic Blessing.

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