



The Holy See

APOSTOLIC JOURNEY TO THE PHILIPPINES,
PAPUA NEW GUINEA, AUSTRALIA AND SRI LANKA

10th WORLD YOUTH DAY

***ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS JOHN PAUL II
TO THE EPISCOPAL CONFERENCE OF THE PHILIPPINES***

*Dominigo Salazar Hall
Curia of the Archdiocese of Manila
Saturday, 14 January 1995*

Dear Brothers in our Lord Jesus Christ,

1. My wish to celebrate the Tenth World Youth Day in Manila at the same time that the Filipino Catholic community commemorates the Fourth Centenary of the Archdioceses of Manila, Cebu, Caceres and Nueva Segovia, could not fail to include a desire to have this special meeting with you – the *Pastors of the Church of God in the Philippines*. Gathered together in his name (cf. Mt. 18:20), we are a living icon of the communion which gives life to the Church. Every meeting of the Bishop of Rome with members of the College of Bishops recalls the joy and evangelical enthusiasm of Pentecost when "Peter, standing with the Eleven" (Acts 2:14), fearlessly proclaimed the Good News of salvation through the Death and Resurrection of the Lord. Today in Manila, in this Hall dedicated to Domingo Salazar – the first Bishop of the Philippines – we experience anew the same bond of charity and affection which united the Apostles in Jerusalem.

2. Down the centuries, *the Christian message* has become deeply rooted in the Filipino soul and *remains the animating force of your society*. More than four and a half centuries after the Catholic faith was first preached here, the Spirit who led the peoples of this Archipelago to embrace the Gospel without forsaking the many positive elements of their cultural heritage is now calling the Church to bear a renewed witness to the power of the Gospel to transform human life and culture

(cf. *Gaudium et Spes*, 58).

In order to further the "great springtime for Christianity" (John Paul II, *Redemptoris Missio*, 86) which God is preparing as the Third Millennium draws near, your particular Churches have wholeheartedly committed their spiritual and pastoral energies to the *new evangelization*. The *Second Plenary Council of the Philippines* (PCP-II), celebrated in accordance with the directives of the Second Vatican Council, is a decisive landmark in your journey to the Great Jubilee of the Year 2000. I urge everyone – Pastors, priests, Religious and laity: make the implementation of the Acts and Decrees of the Plenary Council and the National Pastoral Plan the fulcrum of your lives and apostolate. 3. As you acknowledged in your *Conciliar Document*, *attention to catechesis* is "the first element of a renewed evangelization" (Second Plenary Council of the Philippines, *Conciliar Document*, n. 156). The catechesis of the new evangelization is meant to call people, as a first step, to a more profound *conversion of heart*. This *metànoia*, the path of conversion leading to the Great Jubilee of the Year 2000, involves a "commitment to walk the hard way of the Cross" (*Ibid.*, n. 669). Pastors must be vigilant to ensure that preaching and catechesis will present the Good News fully and systematically, without distortion (cf. John Paul II, *Catechesi Tradendae*, 30), especially as regards the Sacraments, by which your people's faith is sustained and nourished. You are wisely developing a thorough and sustained catechesis in this regard, aimed at leading the faithful to a more prayerful celebration of these "masterworks of God" (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, n. 1116). In this way, the specifically supernatural nature of the Church's mission will be safeguarded and abundant spiritual energies will be activated in the lives of the faithful.

4. The Church's pilgrimage to the Kingdom passes through the world which she strives to serve. In order to be God's instrument of redemptive love amidst the social crises of our day, *the Church must be a convincing sign of her Lord*, who "emptied himself, taking the form of a servant" (Phil. 2:7). She is called to exercise "a truly prophetic role, condemning the evils of man in their infected source, showing the root of divisions and bringing hope in the possibility of overcoming tensions and conflicts and reaching brotherhood, concord and peace at all levels and in all sections of human society" (John Paul II, *Reconciliatio et Paenitentia*, 4). You know well the enormous challenges presented to you as Bishops: the loss of noble ideals, confusion of the moral conscience regarding good and evil, growing materialism and religious indifference, the injustices inherent in certain economic and political policies, the increasing gap between rich and poor. By addressing these and other questions with the liberating power of the Gospel your pastoral mission goes to the heart of Filipino society. Integral evangelization must aim at generating and nourishing a faith which brings about a genuine transformation of individuals and of society.

A situation where economic wealth and political power are concentrated in the hands of a few is, as you have written, "an affront to human dignity and solidarity" (Second Plenary Council of the Philippines, *Conciliar Document*, n. 296). Too many families remain without land to till or a home to live in, and too many people are without employment and basic services. Your task must be to help create *a new attitude, a conviction shaped by the principle of the social purpose of power and wealth*, which can lead to appropriate changes in the prevailing order. The riches of creation are a

common good of all humanity, and those who possess the various forms of "wealth" in a given society are meant to regard themselves as "stewards, ministers charged with working in the name of God" (cf. John Paul II, *Tertio Millennio Adveniente*, 13).

5. Fulfilling your role as Pastors, you have committed the Church in the Philippines to be a "*Church of the Poor*". You have called on Catholics to embrace "the evangelical spirit of poverty, which combines detachment from possessions with a profound trust in the Lord as the source of salvation" (Second Plenary Council of the Philippines, *Conciliar Document*, n. 125). This is the way of the Lord Jesus, with his special love for the suffering, the marginalized, the little ones and sinners. You have not remained silent before injustices committed against the poor but have energetically defended their rights. In the Philippines the poor are called to be the vigorous agents of evangelization and not merely its objects.

You have strongly defended the truth about man in your teaching on the *value of human life and the sanctity of procreation*. Last year in my "Letter to Families" I wrote that "we are facing an immense threat to life; not only to the life of individuals but also to that of civilization itself" (John Paul II, *Letter to Families*, 21) When powerful interests promote policies which are against the moral law inscribed on the human heart (cf. Rom. 2:15), they offend the dignity of man who is made in the image and likeness of God, and in doing so they undermine the foundations of society itself. Because the Church treasures the divine gifts of human life and its inalienable dignity, she cannot but strenuously oppose all measures which are in any way directed at promoting abortion, sterilization and also contraception. Your firm stand against the pessimism and selfishness of those who plot against the splendor of human sexuality and human life (Second Plenary Council of the Philippines, *Conciliar Document*, n. 585) is an essential demand of your pastoral ministry and of your service to the Filipino people.

6. Since "to each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good", the "varieties of gifts" and the "varieties of service" present in the Christian community must all be channelled to build up the one body of Christ (cf. 1 Cor. 12:4-7). As your "helpers, sons and friends" (*Lumen Gentium*, 28), priests have the first claim to your guidance, encouragement and inspiration so that they can carry out their ministry faithfully and fruitfully. Your efforts to give a fresh impulse to evangelization will depend greatly on your careful attention to the *spiritual development of priests and seminarians*. I am pleased to note that your Conference is preparing an updated Philippine Program for Priestly Formation which will be based on the "Ratio Fundamentalis" and "Pastores Dabo Vobis", emphasizing sound formation in the spiritual life and the theology of the ministerial priesthood (cf. *National Pastoral Plan*, 75, 77.1). The entire community should feel the need to promote *priestly vocations*, and it falls to you to ensure that "the vocational dimension is always present in the whole range of ordinary pastoral work, and that it is fully integrated and practically identified with it" (John Paul II, *Pastores Dabo Vobis*, 41).

It goes without saying that *men and women religious* have a major role to play in the new evangelization of the Philippines, just as they have had since the beginning of the Church's

presence here. Each Institute is called to examine its particular charism in the light of the signs of the times, placing its communal gifts at the service of the Church (cf. *Perfectae Caritatis*, 20). The regular consultation through open channels of communication between Bishops and Major Superiors which you recommend in the *National Pastoral Plan* (cf. *National Pastoral Plan*, 89.1) cannot but make more effective that "work" in the vineyard from which the Lord will reap his harvest. The Second Vatican Council – which must be regarded as the "great gift of the Spirit to the Church at the end of the second millennium" (John Paul II, *Tertio Millennio Adveniente*, 36)– opened the doors for the laity to develop a spirituality proper to their state in life. It urged them to participate more broadly in the areas of the Church's life which rightly belong to them. Filipino lay Catholics must be encouraged to assume their full responsibility for the Church's mission in the world. Since their specific vocation is to order temporal affairs "according to the plan of God" (*Lumen Gentium*, 31), the challenge before them is to be "holy in all conduct" (cf. 1 Pt. 1:15), drawing others to Christ by the convincing witness of their lives in the daily forum of human activities. For this they expect from you the resources for a spiritual and doctrinal formation capable of meeting the demands of an increasingly complex world.

7. A particular challenge facing your ministry is that of defending *the family and strengthening family life*. Filipino society still has a strong tradition in this regard, but increasingly – as you are well aware – families need help to offset the negative social and cultural effects accompanying the rapid and profound economic transformations taking place throughout Asia. I wish to thank you for all that your Conference, and in particular your Commission on Family Life, has done to focus attention on the family's needs during the past *Year of the Family*.

Likewise, the special gifts and needs of young people deserve careful pastoral attention. Young people are the source of hope for the future, as we have seen during the *Tenth "World Youth Day"* right here in Manila. With their enthusiasm and energy, they must be encouraged and trained to become "*leading characters in evangelization and participants in the renewal of society*" (John Paul II, *Christifideles Laici*, 46). They are evangelizers who bring the Gospel to their peers, especially those alienated from the Church who often cannot be reached by normal pastoral activities. While the ordinary means of youth work in parishes should continue and be developed, in order to ensure that the young are not isolated from the broader community, equally helpful are associations, movements, special centers and groups which meet their particular needs (cf. John Paul II, *Redemptoris Missio*, 37). The Church, which is ever young, constantly follows the paths of the world *to meet the members of a younger generation*, drawing inspiration from their sincere idealism, their searching minds and generous hearts.

8. Dear Brother Bishops: these are some of the thoughts which I wished to share with you who shepherd God's flock in the one nation of Asia in which the majority of the people are members of the Church. In the Lord's name I encourage you to respond to the *special grace of your vocation* to carry the Gospel beyond the shores of this beautiful Archipelago to the other peoples of this vast continent. A great harvest is awaiting those who will lead these ancient and noble civilizations to the discovery of Christ, who alone is "the way, and the truth, and the life" (Jn. 14:3). *Asia needs*

your help if it is to hear the Good News of Christ crucified and risen.

You are Pastors of *a people in love with Mary*. May the Mother of the Redeemer guide your episcopal ministry so that, gathered in Christ, the people of this beloved Nation "may be filled with all the fullness of God" (Eph. 3:19). With my Apostolic Blessing.