



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS JOHN PAUL II
TO THE BISHOPS FROM THE REGIONS OF TAMIL NADU
AND KARNATAKA, INDIA ON THEIR "AD LIMINA" VISIT**

Tuesday, 16 May 1995

Dear Brother Bishops,

1. With intimate joy I greet each one of you, Pastors of the Church in *India, from the regions of Tamil Nadu and Karnataka*, in the first of this series of *ad Limina* visits by the Bishops of your vast country. In the words of Saint Paul: "I thank my God through Jesus Christ for all of you... I mention you always in my prayers... that we may be mutually encouraged by each other's faith" (Rom. 1:8 ff.). When I visited your country in 1986 I spoke to the Bishops saying that "our joint task is *to enact the mystery of collegiality*" (John Paul II, *Address to the Bishops of India in the Cathedral of the Sacred Heart, (Delhi, India)*, 1, [1 Feb. 1986]). It is this mystery of communion *in the College of Bishops*, which we are here together to profess, celebrate and strengthen. This communion implies that we be of one mind and one heart in loving and obeying our Lord Jesus Christ, the Chief Shepherd of the Church (cf. 1 Pt. 5:4), and that we carry out the ministry entrusted to us in strong and vibrant union of faith and ecclesial order.

2. The Dogmatic Constitution "*Lumen Gentium*", reminds us that God's plan is "to make men holy and save them not merely as individuals without any mutual bonds, but by making them into a single people" (*Lumen Gentium*, 9). The Council text goes on to say that this messianic people "has for its head Christ... the heritage of this people are the dignity and freedom of the sons of God, in whose hearts the Holy Spirit dwells as in his temple... Its law is the new commandment to love as Christ loved us... Its goal is the kingdom of God which is to be extended until it is brought to perfection by him at the end of time" (*Ibid.*). Thus it can never be sufficiently emphasized that *the Church's mission is transcendent and consists first and foremost in giving men a share in the mystery of God's communication of himself through grace.*

Everything else in the Church's life depends on this. No matter how pressing other concerns may be, including the concern for human development, for justice and the defence of human dignity, for the needs of the poor – and no one can deny that your commitment in these fields must be altogether vigorous and consistent – Pastors cannot ignore the invitation of Christ himself, to "seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things shall be yours as well". It would be surprising if precisely in India, the land of *Satyagraha* (the spiritual "truth-force" [Mt. 6:33] which conquers without violence) and of the *Rishis* (holy men), Bishops, priests, Religious and committed lay men and women failed to develop *all the spiritual potential of our Redeemer's saving grace*. Therefore, as Pastors, servants of the mysteries of God, in your own lives, in all your dealings with your priests, with the consecrated men and women who share the burden of the apostolate with you, in all your ministry to the lay faithful, and in your missionary efforts to extend the Gospel, one of the concerns which can never be absent from your heart and action is that of promoting *genuine faith and holiness of life* among the Church's members.

3. To be *the spiritual guides and teachers of your people* is a serious and demanding task. On the personal level it involves on your part a radical response to Christ. Since, as Saint Paul wrote to Timothy, "the aim of our charge is love that issues from a pure heart and a good conscience and sincere faith" (1 Tim. 1:5), it follows that "a Bishop must be above reproach" (*Ibid.*, 3:2). Without *a deep commitment of faith, constant prayer and self-giving "pastoral charity"*, it is not possible to represent the Good Shepherd who lays down his life for the sheep (cf. Jn. 10:11).

At the level of your apostolate you face many challenges, not least that of a growing secularism, a widespread and powerful trend which is undermining even the deeply rooted spiritual traditions characteristic of India's history and culture. The primal Vedic concept of *rita*, order – that which is right and proper in the universe and in human society – directed Indian culture towards the quest for harmony, towards a morality of responsibility for the divine order apparent in all that exists. The *Upanishads* later laid emphasis on the notion of *dharma*, thus placing at the centre of life's endeavours the acquisition of "righteousness" through the observance of religion, law and duty. On the basis of these attitudes, which are fundamental to all religious experience, India became the cradle of a civilization rich in humanitarian and religious values. In this ground the seed of faith was planted from the beginning, giving rise to flourishing communities, sustained through all the vicissitudes of history by their faith in Jesus Christ, the God-Man, Crucified and Risen, the hope of humanity, who alone can fully reveal the ultimate grandeur and dignity of the human person and his destiny (cf. John Paul II, *Address to the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences*, 4, [15 Jan. 1995]).

Now, a certain disregard for religious truths and values, because they are seen as irrelevant to economic and technological progress, is penetrating many consciences, weakening the spiritual and moral basis of society. None of this leaves the Catholic community immune. The Church in India, as in all parts of the world, needs to meet this challenge with a great effort of conversion and spiritual renewal.

4. From a renewed commitment to Christ, the one Mediator between God and man (cf. 1 Tim. 2:5), and from a revitalized spiritual life will come a greater sense of *unity and communion among all the Church's members*. In the subcontinent of India the Catholic community constitutes a tiny minority, though its presence and role go beyond mere statistics thanks to the vitality of its witness and the dimensions of its service. And this religious minority itself is marked by a great variety: a diversity of rites, a different history of evangelization in each region and, on the negative side, the constant threat of fragmentation under the continuing strong influence of ethnic, social and cultural differences. In this respect your mission as Bishops involves a definite and incisive effort to build and strengthen *the bonds of fellowship between the Church's members*.

We are speaking of the *unity which has its source in the Triune God and its dynamism in divine grace*. The *koinonia* which you are called to foster is nothing less than a *sharing in the very communion* which exists between the Father and the Son in the Spirit of Love (cf. 1 Jn. 1:3). It is a unity which transcends all human variety and persists in the face of every difference of outlook or behaviour, for "there is one body and one Spirit... one Lord, one faith, one Baptism, one God and Father of us all" (Eph. 4:4-6). In the Acts of the Apostles we read that the members of the earliest Christian community "devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers" (Acts 2:42). The term "devoted themselves" (*proskarterein*) denotes constant, assiduous fidelity. It evokes the idea of a lively faith, of enthusiasm in living one's life totally in relation to the Risen Lord, and of zeal for spreading the Good News. It is this interior attitude, wholeheartedly assimilated, which enables us to live the *koinonia*, to experience the vital sense of belonging to and being responsible for the community of Christ's followers.

5. *Love is the building-force of communion*. Saint Paul puts the whole "newness" of the Christian approach in this short phrase: "*the love of Christ impels us*" (2 Cor. 5:14). Everything in the life of a Bishop must be guided and inspired by love. To allow your words and actions to be moulded by the all-embracing commandment of evangelical love, by the spirit of the Beatitudes, is the guarantee that your ministry will bear real fruits of evangelization and ecclesial growth.

I encourage you to express that evangelical love *first of all among yourselves*, in the esteem and respect which you have for each other, in the fraternal co-operation essential to the Church's well-being, in the context of your Conference. Only in this way will you be able to evangelize, but above all only in this way will you be able to meet the grave difficulties coming from within the Catholic community when unsound teachings are allowed to spread regarding even the fundamental doctrines of the faith and the moral demands of the Christian life. You must face these difficulties with intelligence and courage, and united among yourselves. May you never let criteria in contrast with the Gospel, such as considerations of caste, ethnic origin or traditional cultures, determine your relations with one another. "*Put on love*" (Col. 3:14) and let your united testimony shine before the whole community as an incentive to priests, Religious and laity.

Be builders of harmony and peace among your priests: give them the attention which they have a

right to expect from you. Listen carefully to their needs and aspirations, be just in dealing with them. If any of them suffer discouragement, be prompt to help them. If ever you have to remind them of their priestly duties, may this be seen as an act of loving fatherly concern. With regard to the men and women Religious whose apostolate is often of decisive relevance in your Dioceses, be guided in all things by profound respect for their consecration and charism, acting towards them in justice and truth, in careful observance of the spirit and letter of the Document "Mutuae Relationes". Finally, may the lay faithful find in their Bishop a man of God, a spiritual guide, a true father and brother who has their good at heart and is ready to pay the price of being the Good Shepherd of his flock.

6. Dear Brother Bishops, your *ad Limina* visit is taking place when the whole Church is beginning to make special preparations for the Great Jubilee of the Year 2000. Precisely in this historic "Advent", as we look forward to commemorating this bi-millenary anniversary of the Birth of our Lord Jesus Christ, he – the Lord – is calling us – in the words of the Council – to "follow in his footsteps and mould ourselves in his image, seeking the will of the Father in all things, devoting ourselves with all our being to the glory of God and the service of our neighbour" (cf. Lumen Gentium, 40). This synthesis of the Christian vocation is the grace I invoke upon you and your Brother Bishops of India.

In addressing you, I cannot but feel close to you and encourage you in all that you do to *build and strengthen the Church in India in the unity of faith and harmony of love* which flow from the fullness of the Christian life lived according to the standards of the Gospel. As Bishops, we must always remember that the Lord taught us to see the essence of true discipleship in effective and humble service to the brethren (cf. Jn. 13:15). I commend you to the intercession of Mary, Mother of the Redeemer. May she accompany each one of you on the pilgrimage of life, in the faithful service of her Divine Son. With my Apostolic Blessing.

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