



The Holy See

JOHN PAUL II

ADDRESS TO THE BISHOPS OF ROMANIA

Friday, 7 may 1999

Dear Brothers in the Episcopate of Romania!

Te Deum laudamus, Te Dominum confitemur,

Te aeternum Patrem omnis terra veneratur!

1. I would like to open our meeting at the beginning of my Pastoral Visit to Romania with the words of this ancient hymn, perhaps by St Ambrose but also attributed to St Nicetas, an apostle of this land when it was still Roman Dacia. I have come here to thank with you the Father of all mercies and God of all comfort (2 *Cor* 1:3), who after years of suffering has allowed this noble nation to sing the praises of God in freedom. I ask him to make this visit abundantly fruitful for the Catholic Church in your country, for the Churches and the Christian communities as a whole, and for all the Romanian people.

I am grateful for your warm welcome. I also thank Archbishop Lucian Muresan, President of your Conference, for his address, in which he emphasized your profound communion with the Successor of Peter. I extend a special greeting to Cardinal Alexandru Todea, Archbishop emeritus of Fagaras and Alba Iulia, whom I hope to be able to meet. I would like to tell him of my appreciation of his great witness of Christian fidelity and unfailing unity with the see of Peter in the time of persecution.

Through you I would like to greet the priests, all the religious and the deacons, whose enthusiasm and dedication to the cause of God's kingdom are well known to me.

2. In this final year of preparation for the Great Jubilee, the entire Church is reflecting on the person of *God the Father*. It is a golden opportunity for everyone to rediscover the fatherly face of

God, as Jesus revealed it to us. Calling God by the familiar name of “Abba” (cf. *Mk* 14:36), he revealed the intimate and consubstantial relationship which binds him to the heavenly Father in the unfathomable depths of the Trinitarian mystery. At the same time, by sacrificing himself for us and giving us his Spirit, he enabled us to share in his filial experience and to call God by the sweet name of Father (cf. *Rom* 8:15; *Gal* 4:6). This is the message of grace that you are called to bear as apostles of Christ. “God so loved the world that he gave his only Son” (*Jn* 3:16): may this joyful news echo in your words, shine on your faces and be demonstrated by your works. May it be said of each of you what was said of St Nicetas on the point of returning to Dacia as a herald of the Gospel: “O nimis terra et populi beati, / quos modo a nobis remeans adibis, / quos tuo accedens pede visitabit / Christus et ore” (St Paulinus of Nola, *Carmen XVII*, 13-16).

3. Yes, be the image of Christ for your faithful. Be so especially as *builders of communion*. In this year of God the Father, we must feel Christ's longing for unity more deeply: “Father ... that they may be one even as we are one” (*Jn* 17:22). The Bishop is the guarantor of communion and his fatherly role must help the community to grow as a family, by reflecting in some way the very fatherhood of God (cf. St Ignatius of Antioch, *To the Trallians*, III, 1).

Many are the forms and requirements of the communion that Bishops are called to foster. The communion that joins them to other Bishops and in particular to the Bishop of Rome, the Successor of Peter, is fundamental. This communion should be lived more concretely with the Brother Bishops of their own country, so that it becomes a source of mutual enrichment. This is particularly true when, as is the case with Romania, the Church's tradition is expressed in different rites, each of which contributes its own history, culture and holiness.

Your Conference includes the Bishops of the Latin and Greek-Catholic Churches, while one of you is also the Ordinary for the Armenian Church. It offers you a place for brotherly contact and mutual support, as well as an opportunity to coordinate activities concerning joint issues of evangelization and human advancement. In the light of recent experience, we must acknowledge that this institution has proven its usefulness. It is meant to be a sign of unity for your entire society by showing that legitimate diversity, far from being a factor of division, can contribute to a deeper union because it is enriched by the gifts of each one.

4. It is important to know and appreciate one another, and to bear one another's burdens (cf. *Gal* 6:2). The People of God, and especially future priests, must be taught this attitude of sharing. To this end, the common formation of seminarians is an important instrument, so that they can learn in practice the meaning of respect and the acceptance of others, in esteem renewed each day for the precious deposit of the same faith entrusted to them. May they truly be the apple of your eye.

Communion must mark the relations of the faithful among themselves, with the priests and with the Bishop. It must be promoted in every way by listening to one another and by making good use of the structures of participation. For this witness of unity and for the very vitality of the Church's

mission, the commitment of *priests* is vital as the indispensable co-workers of the episcopal order. If it is the duty of priests to regard their Bishop as a father and to obey him with respect, the Bishop on his part, as the Council recalls, “should treat the priests, his helpers, as his sons and friends” (*Lumen gentium*, n. 28).

Dear friends, be close to your priests. Support them in moments of trial. Be concerned for their continuing formation, planning with them opportunities for prayer, reflection, and pastoral renewal.

5. *Men and women religious* should benefit from similar concern. With respect for their charisms and the characteristics of each institute, it is the Bishop's task to harmonize their activities for the common good of the whole Church.

We must thank the Lord for the many male and female *vocations* that he continues to inspire in Romania. However those who are called to the priesthood and the consecrated life must be given a sound and complete education, doctrinally, pastorally and spiritually. This should preferably take place in your own country, for which professors, teachers and, in particular, spiritual directors should receive good formation. I know that much has been done, but it is necessary to continue in this direction, given the complex and growing needs of our time.

6. Special care should be given to the *advancement of the laity*, which is an urgent need for the whole Church, but particularly for the countries which have emerged from the experience of communism. It is a question of helping them to become aware of their specific vocation, which is “to seek the kingdom of God by engaging in temporal affairs and directing them according to God's will” (*Lumen gentium*, n. 31). Obviously, ample room for service is open to them within the Christian community, but it is the irreplaceable task of the laity to make the Gospel present in those areas of social, economic and political life where the clergy do not usually work. For their important mission they need the support of the entire community, just as lay associations, approved by the Bishops and working in a climate of mutual respect and cooperation with the Pastors, are also called to play a significant role.

7. Following the events of 1989, the democratic system was established in your country too: building it up requires time, patience and perseverance. The Catholic Church, for her part, has been able to reorganize herself and freely undertake her pastoral activity. Despite the problems, we must confidently look to the future and, with the Lord's help, dedicate ourselves with enthusiasm to the work of the new evangelization.

A fundamental challenge is presenting the faith to the *new generation*. Statistically speaking, Romania is a relatively “young” country. Unfortunately, young people today are encountering new problems which hinder and undermine their educational growth. It is important for the Church to support the role of parents, the first teachers of their children, and to make her own specific contribution, especially that of catechesis and religious instruction.

Before the Second World War, the Catholic Church had many *schools* in Romania with a well-developed system for supporting them. With the confiscation of property, this important ecclesial work was discontinued. While acknowledging that it would be difficult to return to the pre-existing situation, it is a duty in justice to return the schools and confiscated property, thereby enabling the Church to carry out her mission also in the area of education. Without doubt this would be a great benefit to society as a whole.

8. The *restitution of property* is an issue that frequently resurfaces, especially for the Catholic Church of the Byzantine-Romanian rite, which is still deprived of many worship sites she had at her disposal before her suppression. Obviously, justice demands that what was taken should be returned as far as possible. I know that the Hierarchs are not requesting the simultaneous restitution of all the property confiscated, but would like to have those which are most needed for liturgical functions: the cathedrals, the deanery churches, etc.

In this regard, I have followed with great interest the work of the Joint Commission of the Romanian Orthodox Church and the Greek-Catholic Church on the above-mentioned questions. Despite the difficulties this Commission has certainly played a positive role. I express my heartfelt wish that both sides will commit themselves to continue addressing this question through sincere and respectful dialogue, and I hope that my visit can make a further contribution to this process of fraternal dialogue in truth and charity.

Moreover, this dialogue is situated in the broader horizon of the *ecumenical commitment* to which the whole Church is called. We must all do what we can with an open heart and perseverance, in both theological and practical dialogue with the other Churches and Christian communities, seeing as our goal the unity of all Christ's disciples. In this regard let us not forget the teaching of the Second Vatican Council, which stressed that conversion of heart, holiness of life and prayer are the soul of the ecumenical movement (cf. *Unitatis redintegratio*, n. 8). I hope that in Romania too, with our Orthodox brothers and sisters and with the other Christian communities, ecumenical initiatives can be organized during the Jubilee Year to implore the Lord together that "unity among all Christians of the various confessions will increase until they reach full communion" (*Tertio millennio adveniente*, n. 16).

9. Along with intra-ecclesial and ecumenical concerns, the Catholic Church's efforts in Romania must respond to precise expectations in the social field. There are so many problems which call for a Christian witness. I would like to point to the special attention that the *family* deserves as the fundamental unit of society. Families must be offered the guidance and support they need in order to base their growth and educational role on authentic moral and spiritual values. It is particularly necessary to stress *respect for the life* of every person, from the moment of conception until natural death.

The Church must foster concrete and generous concern for the *poorest and the most*

marginalized. This is an immense task whose fulfilment requires that the Church's efforts be coordinated with the commitment which must be guaranteed in this area by governmental and non-governmental institutions as well as by all people of good will.

10. Dear friends, the more deeply rooted the reconstruction of Romanian society is in your best traditions, the more solid it will be. Above all, you must rediscover the power of faith of those who preferred to die rather than deny God or the Church.

Every Church and religious community in your country has had its martyrs, even in the 20th century. Today I wish to pay homage to them all. For her part, the Catholic Church is invited to remember all her martyrs, to follow their witness of fidelity and dedication to the Lord.

How could we forget, for example, the late Cardinal Iuliu Hossu (1885-1970), Bishop of Cluj-Gherla? My Predecessor, Paul VI, revealed that one of the Cardinals "in pectore" at the Consistory of 20 April 1969 was in fact Bishop Hossu, and he described him as "a distinguished servant of the Church, highly commendable for his fidelity and for his prolonged sufferings and the deprivations it caused; he himself was a symbol and representative of the fidelity of many Bishops, priests, religious and faithful of the Byzantine-rite Church" (AAS LXV, 165).

The Latin-rite Catholic Church was also the object of persecution, as evidenced by the person of the fearless servant of God Bishop Aaron Marton of Alba Iulia (1896-1980), who was first imprisoned and then forced to live under house arrest. With deep emotion I also remember the heroic Bishop Anton Durcovici of Iasi (1888-1951), who died in prison.

These are only a few of the many illustrious disciples of Christ, victims of a regime which, hostile to God because of its atheism, also trampled on human beings made in the image of God.

11. Now, dear Brothers, a new page has been turned in your history. It is both a gift and a task. Vigorously lead the communities entrusted to you, so that all your people can advance towards a future that conforms every more closely to God's plan. Put your trust in the One who, on sending his Apostles into the world, assured them: "Lo, I am with you always, to the close of the age" (Mt 28:20).

I entrust the commitment of your Churches to the motherly protection of the Blessed Virgin. May she who was your "morning star", whom you looked to during the night of persecution, now be the "star of the new evangelization" and show all Romanian society the way to her Son Jesus Christ, the "way" that leads to the Father's house.

I cordially impart my Blessing to you, to your priests, religious, deacons and all the faithful of this beloved land of Romania.

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