



The Holy See

**LETTER OF HIS HOLINESS JOHN PAUL II
TO THE BISHOPS FROM NORTH AND CENTRAL AMERICA,
THE CARIBBEAN AND THE PHILIPPINES TAKING PART
IN THE NINTH WORKSHOP ORGANIZED BY THE POPE JOHN XXIII
MEDICAL-MORE RESEARCH AND EDUCATION CENTER**

*To my brother Bishops from North and Central America
The Caribbean and the Philippines*

1. I greet you with great joy in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. You have come from the widely scattered dioceses of Canada, the Caribbean, Central America, Mexico, the Philippines and the United States for the ninth Workshop organized by the Pope John XXIII Medical-More Research and Education Center. I join you once again this year in thanking the Knights of Columbus for their generous assistance in making possible these days of study and prayer.

The general theme of this year's gathering makes reference to the Holy Spirit's extraordinary gift to the Church that was the Second Vatican Council. Your reflections on "The Twenty-fifth Anniversary of Vatican II: A Look Back and a Look Ahead" offer you the opportunity to underline the past, present and future fruitfulness of the Council in the Church's life and mission. Truly, the Council constituted a great outpouring of the Holy Spirit upon the People of God. As I stated in the Encyclical Letter "[Dominum et Vivificantem](#)": "Following the guidance of the Spirit of truth and bearing witness together with him, the Council has given a special confirmation of the presence of the Holy Spirit the Counsellor. In a certain sense, the Council has made the Spirit newly 'present' in our difficult age. In the light of this conviction one grasps more clearly the great importance of all the initiatives aimed at implementing the Second Vatican Council, its teaching and its pastoral and ecumenical thrust" (Ioannis Pauli PP. II [Dominum et vivificantem](#), 26).

2. Drawing from the richness of the conciliar teaching, your Workshop will focus on three specific themes of the Church's magisterium which deeply affect her mission: the dignity of the human person, the objective moral law, and the relationship between the Church and the world.

The Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World "*Gaudium et Spes*" includes an entire chapter on *the dignity of the human person* (Cfr. *Gaudium et Spes*, 12-22). It teaches that man's inalienable dignity stems from the fact that he is created in the image of God, that he is capable of knowing and loving his Creator, and that he has received dominion over all other earthly creatures, which are to be responsibly used for the glory of God (Cfr, *ibid.* 12). In a word, the human person is the one creature, on earth that God willed for its own sake (Cfr, *ibid.* 24).

These principles are the foundations of Christian anthropology, which, based on the Gospel, leads man to discover the full truth about himself, namely, his belonging to Christ. Everyone who is in Christ is raised to the status of a child of God, the object of divine condescension. This mystery of God's life-giving love for his children foreshadows and is the very source of our definitive glorification: "the glory of God is the living man, yet man's life is the vision of God" (Cfr. S. Irenaei, *Adversus haereses*, IV, 20, 7; cfr. Ioannis Pauli PP. II, *Dominum et vivificantem*, 59). Herein lies our greatest dignity and highest destiny.

3. Moreover, as your reflections will indicate, a constitutive factor of the human person's dignity as a creature redeemed by Christ is the capacity to know and observe the *objective moral law*. When speaking of the responsible transmission of life, the Council Fathers clearly taught that in making moral choices, "the morality of one's actions does not depend solely on the sincerity of the intention or the evaluation of motives, but it must be determined according to objective criteria drawn from the nature of the person and his acts" (*Gaudium et Spes*, 51). In the heart of the human person is a law inscribed by God, a law which man "does not impose upon himself" (*Ibid*,16; cfr. etiam 51 et *Rom* 2, 15-16). Thus, the person's innate dignity is safeguarded and affirmed through loving obedience to God's law, the rule of all moral activity.

4. Finally, your discussions will center on *the Church's relationship to the world*. In fact, the leaven of the Gospel enriches the world in so far as the Christian faithful bear effective witness in their lives and work to the truth about man's dignity and direct their actions according to the moral law. "In their pilgrimage to the heavenly city", the Council Fathers taught, "Christians are to seek and savor the things that are above. Yet this does not lessen, but increases the weight of their obligation to work with all people for the building up of a world that is more human. Indeed, the mystery of the Christian faith provides them with outstanding incentives and encouragement to fulfill this task with even greater energy" (*Gaudium et Spes*, 57; cfr. etiam 23-32, 40-45, 53-90).

5. Dear brothers, I wish to express my fraternal encouragement for your attention to the important themes of your meeting. May your discussions serve to renew your sense of pastoral responsibility, faced as you are by the profound confusion regarding fundamental principles of life and action affecting many people today. As man develops an ever greater knowledge and control of the world around him, he is often increasingly less able to understand himself and the purpose of his life. Your people look to the Church for wise and truthful guidance that will help them discover their human and Christian vocation and response to it with confidence.

May the Holy Spirit inspire and enlighten you so that, as faithful and zealous pastors of the Church, you may explain the truths of faith and apply them with courage and compassion. May Mary, Seat of Wisdom and Mother of the Church, intercede for you in your service to her Divine Son and his Gospel. To all of you I willingly impart my Apostolic Blessing.

From the Vatican, January 20, 1990.

IOANNES PAULUS PP. II

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