



The Holy See

APOSTOLIC JOURNEY TO PAKISTAN, PHILIPPINES I, GUAM (UNITED STATES OF AMERICA II), JAPAN, ANCHORAGE (UNITED STATES OF AMERICA II)
(FEBRUARY 16-27, 1981)

**ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS JOHN PAUL II
DURING HIS VISIT TO THE AUDITORIUM OF RADIO VERITAS ASIA**

Manila

Saturday, 21 February 1981

To you the people of Asia,

To you the hundreds of millions of men, women and children living on the immense mainland of this continent and in its archipelagos,

To you especially who are suffering or who are in need,

To all of you I address my heartfelt greetings.

May Almighty God bless you all with lasting peace and harmony.

1. It is with great joy that I have come to Asia for my first visit as Bishop of Rome and Successor of the Apostle Peter. I have come to visit the Catholic communities and to bring a message of fraternal love to all the people of the Philippines and Japan, two countries among the many that make up Asia. My journey is meant to be a journey of brotherhood, in fulfillment of a mission that is entirely religious. But I have also come with the desire of being able in the future to travel to other Asian countries, in order to convey personally to them too my sentiments of deep respect and esteem.

In the meantime, I am happy to send from Manila *a message of hope* to all the peoples of Asia. I do so through Radio Veritas, which for a number of years already has been regularly transmitting the words of the Pope and a wide range of religious information in many languages.

2. My mission is religious and spiritual in nature. In addressing all the people of Asia, I do not do

so as a statesman, but as the *servant and apostle of Jesus Christ*, entrusted with "the mysteries of God"[1]. I have come to Asia to be *a witness to the Spirit* who is active in the history of peoples and of nations, to the Spirit who proceeds from the Father and the Son, about whom it was written : "God loved the world so much that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not be lost but may have eternal life"[2].

In the Holy Spirit, every individual and all people have become, through the Cross and Resurrection of Christ, children of God, partakers in the divine nature and heirs to eternal life. All are redeemed and called to share in glory in Jesus Christ, without any distinction of language, race, nation or culture. The Good News which Christ proclaimed and which the Church continues to proclaim, in accordance with the Lord's will, must be preached "to all creation"[3] and "to the ends of the earth"[4].

From the very beginning, the followers of Christ, the Apostles and their successors, came to the countries of this immense Asian continent : first to India, the land of Saint Thomas the Apostle; later, in the course of the centuries, other lands and archipelagos were visited by Saint Francis Xavier, the Jesuit Matteo Ricci, and many more.

Today I have come to Asia, following the example of Pope Paul VI, *retracing the footsteps of great missionary apostles*. Today I have come with the same truth about the ineffable love of the Father—a love through which every man attains, in Christ, the full measure of his dignity and his final destiny.

3. Coming to the peoples of Asia—just as all those before me who, in different periods of history proclaimed here Jesus Christ—I encounter today, in the same way, the local heritage and the ancient cultures that contain praiseworthy elements of spiritual growth, indicating the paths of life and conduct that are often so near to those found in the Gospel of Christ.

Different religions have tried to respond to man's search for the ultimate explanation of creation and the meaning of man's journey through life. Hinduism uses philosophy to answer man, and Hindus practice asceticism and meditation in their ascent towards God. Buddhism teaches that by devout confidence man ascends to freedom and enlightenment. Other religions follow similar routes. Moslems adore the one God and associate themselves with Abraham, revering Christ and honoring Mary, professing esteem for moral living, prayer and fasting.

The Catholic Church accepts the truth and goodness found in these religions, and she sees reflections there of the truth of Christ, whom she proclaims as "the way and the truth and the life"[5]. She wishes to do everything possible to cooperate with other believers in preserving all that is good in their religions and cultures, stressing the things that are held in common, and helping all people to live as brothers and sisters[6].

4. The Church of Jesus Christ in this age experiences a profound need *to enter into contact and dialogue with all these religions*. She pays homage to the many moral values contained in these religions, as well as to the potential for spiritual living which so deeply marks the traditions and the cultures of whole societies.

What seems to bring together and unite, in a particular way, Christians and the believers of other religions is an acknowledgment of *the need for prayer* as an expression of man's spirituality directed towards the Absolute. Even when, for some, he is the Great Unknown, he nevertheless remains always in reality the same living God. We trust that wherever the human spirit opens itself in prayer to this Unknown God, an echo will be heard of the same Spirit who, knowing the limits and weakness of the human person, himself prays in us and on our behalf, "expressing our plea in a way that could never be put into words"^[7]. The intercession of the Spirit of God who prays in us and for us is the fruit of the mystery of the Redemption of Christ, in which the all-embracing love of the Father has been shown to the world.

5. All Christians must therefore be committed to dialogue with the believers of all religions, so that mutual understanding and collaboration may grow ; so that moral values may be strengthened ; so that God may be praised in all creation. Ways must be developed to make this dialogue become a reality everywhere, but especially in Asia, the continent that is the cradle of ancient cultures and religions.

Likewise the Catholics and the Christians of other Churches must join together in the search for full unity, in order that Christ may become ever more manifest in the love of his followers. The divisions that still exist between those who profess the name of Jesus Christ must be felt as an incentive to fervent prayer and to conversion of heart, so that a more perfect witness to the Gospel may be given.

Christians will, moreover, join hands with all men and women of good will who share a belief in the inestimable dignity of each human person. They will work together in order to bring about a more just and peaceful society in which the poor will be the first to be served. Asia is the continent where the spiritual is held in high esteem and where the religious sense is deep and innate : the preservation of this precious heritage must be the common task of all.

6. In recalling the great spiritual and religious traditions of Asia, and in urging fraternal collaboration among all its inhabitants, I would also address the problems that still face the many nations of Asia and the continent as a whole.

Economic difficulties and the persisting need for more rapid and wholesome development have rightly preoccupied your leaders and your peoples. Poverty still weighs heavily on large groups and classes in many countries. Not only are there wide contrasts in the social and economic situation of different nations, but also within individual countries great numbers of people still lack

the basic minimum that is necessary for human beings to live in dignity and to take part in the advancement of their own community. Hunger is still a tragic reality for many parents and children, as is the lack of decent housing, health care and educational facilities. Great efforts have been made, various models have been applied, new ideologies have been adopted, but the results have not always been satisfactory. In some areas economic progress has not been accompanied by an improvement in the quality of life ; sometimes, in fact, it has unfortunately obscured important and essential values.

7. Many factors have contributed to this state of affairs, factors that operate inside the different communities as well as elements that are imposed from the outside. Today more than ever before, one is aware of the fact that it is not possible to explain the problems of developing countries satisfactorily by merely pointing to insufficient or delayed scientific and technological progress in comparison with the more advanced or industrialized countries.

It must also be acknowledged that the industrialized world has often imposed the force of its own centers of decision or life style, and has thus caused a disorganization of the very structures and possibilities of the less advanced nations.

8. Justice and equity demand that each nation and the international community as a whole assume their part of responsibility for the *development of Asia in true international solidarity*. Such solidarity is based on the fact that all peoples have equal dignity and together constitute a community of worldwide dimensions. In order to respect this solidarity, hard decisions will have to be taken, and the necessary structures will have to be created that will bring about a new order of international relations as a condition for the true development of all nations. All nations have a claim on international solidarity, but the nations whose very dignity and existence is threatened have a special claim and a priority right to international solidarity.

9. Above all, *the true nature of the development process must be understood*. Development is not a state of things achieved once and for all. Development is a long process, difficult and uncertain at times, whereby each nation assumes the management of its own affairs and obtains the means necessary to ensure that all individuals and communities have full chances of existence and growth.

True development depends on the personal commitment of the men and women that compose the community. Structures are certainly important, but they can either support or destroy people. Structures must therefore always be put at the service of man, for they exist only for man, and are in constant need of adaptation in order to serve effectively the cause of human advancement.

10. From the humblest rural laborer to the person in a high position of responsibility, all men and women must be conscious of the common progress in social and economic development. In this context, I would like to insist on the importance of creating worthy employment for all, and likewise

on the importance of fostering a true understanding of the meaning of work. In the agricultural sector, as well as in industry and service-related employment, a man's work enables him to share in the development process, and also enables him to discharge the duties that, out of love, he assumes for the members of his family. Human labor, while promoting social and economic development, must also promote the total well-being and true advancement of the human person.

11. In order to succeed, the development of nations must take place in *an atmosphere of peace*. I cannot address myself to you, peoples of Asia, without touching upon this most important issue, for peace is the necessary condition for every nation and people if they are to live and develop.

My heart is heavy when I think of the many parts of your continent where the sound of war has not yet died down, where the people involved might have changed, but not the reality of war, where weapons alone are thought to provide security, or where brother fights against brother in order to redress real or alleged injustices. Asia has not been spared the lot of many other parts in the world where peace—true peace in freedom, mutual trust and fraternal collaboration—still remains but a dream.

Too many men, women and children on Asian soil suffer and die ; too many families are disrupted or forced to flee their homes and villages ; too much hate still creates sorrow and destruction. I shall not cease to raise my voice to plead for peace. As I have constantly done in public appeals and in private conversations with the leaders of the world, so now again I beseech each and every one to respect the values and rights of peoples and nations.

12. I cannot finish without sending a heartfelt greeting to my brothers and sisters in the Christian faith, *to all those with whom I confess the name of Jesus Christ*, and, in particular, to those whom I love as the members of the Church that I have been called to guide and serve. To all the Catholic Bishops, priests, religious and lay men and women I say : the Lord be with you ! *Pax Domini sit semper vobiscum!*

The Church has been present in Asia from her very beginning, and you are the successors of the early Christians who spread the Gospel message of love and service throughout Asia. In many parts of this continent you are small in number, but in every country the Church has taken root. In the members of his Church—in you—Christ is Asian.

13. *Christ and his Church cannot be alien to any people, nation or culture.* Christ's message belongs to everyone and is addressed to everyone. The Church has no worldly designs, no political or economic ambitions. She wants to be, in Asia as in every other part of the world, the sign of the merciful love of God, our common Father. The Church's mission is to proclaim Jesus Christ, born of the Virgin Mary, as the eternal Son of God and Savior of the world ; to bear witness to his sacrificial love ; to render service in his name.

Like Christ, her Teacher, the Church desires the well-being of all humanity. Wherever she is, the Church must sink her roots deeply into the spiritual and cultural soil of the country, assimilate all genuine values, enriching them also with the insights that she received from Jesus Christ, who is "the way and the truth and the life"[8] for all humanity. The Church's members will be at one and the same time good Christians and good citizens, making their contribution to the building up of the society of which they are full members. They will want to be, in every society, the best sons and daughters of their homeland, working unselfishly in collaboration with the others for the true good of the country.

The Church does not claim any privileges ; she wants only to be free and unimpaired in pursuing her own mission. The principle of freedom of conscience and of religion is enshrined in the laws and customs of most of the nations. May it effectively guarantee to all the sons and daughters of the Catholic Church the free and public profession of their faith and their religious convictions.

This also entails for the Church the possibility of freely establishing educational and charitable programmes and institutions ; moreover, these activities will benefit the interests of society as a whole. Christians see it indeed as their task to contribute to the safeguarding of sound morality in personal, family and social life. They see it as their duty to serve God in their brothers and sisters.

14. As true sons and daughters of their nation, true children of Asia, Christians give an eloquent testimony to the fact that the Gospel of Christ and the teaching of the Church flourish in the hearts and consciences of the people of every nation under the sun.

Many are the men and women who have testified to this *truth by laying down their lives for the sake of Christ* in different places of the Asian continent. They did this in the same way as others before them did, during the first centuries of Christianity in Rome, or in the course of two millennia in different places around the world.

My present pilgrimage in Asia is intimately bound to the Christian witness of faith given by the Japanese martyrs. The Church honors them with the conviction that the sacrifice of their lives will help to obtain salvation and peace, faith and love for all the people of this continent.

15. My final word is a *prayer for Asia*. Upon the Heads of State and the Governments of Asia, I invoke wisdom and strength, that they may lead their nations towards full human well-being and progress. Upon the leaders of the religions in Asia, I invoke assistance from on high, that they may always encourage believers in their quest for the Absolute. I pray that the parents and children of Asia will grow in love for each other and in service to their fellow-citizens.

And I commend to the Almighty and Merciful God the dignity and destiny of every man, woman and child on this continent—the dignity and destiny of all Asia !

[1] Cf. *1 Cor* 4:1.

[2] *Jn* 3:16.

[3] *Mk* 16:16.

[4] *Acts* 1:8.

[5] *Jn* 14:6.

[6] Cf. *Nostra Aetate*, 1-3.

[7] *Rom* 8:26.

[8] *Jn* 14:6.

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