



The Holy See

VISITA PASTORALE NEI PAESI BASSI

***DISCORSO DI GIOVANNI PAOLO II
AL PRIMO MINISTRO****

L'Aja - Lunedì, 13 maggio 1985

Mr. Prime Minister.

I am truly happy to have the opportunity to greet you, Mr. Prime Minister, along with the eminent members of the Government and of the two Houses of the General States of the Netherlands who have kindly gathered here today in the Catshuis. I very much appreciated your cordial words of welcome which confirm the sentiments I already experience, a feeling of being at ease in your country.

1. My presence in the Low Countries is of course first of all of a pastoral nature, but it would not have been possible to organize this visit of mine without the substantial collaboration of your government and of the various other concerned civil authorities. To you, Mr. Prime Minister, and to all those who have collaborated in this initiative. I express my profound gratitude.

Setting foot on your country's soil last Saturday, I was profoundly aware of the special place which the Netherlands holds in the history of modern civilization. My thoughts went back to those truly courageous men who sailed from these shores in search of new ways towards unknown parts of the world, in order to make contact with peoples and cultures barely known to Europe, and in this way to launch exchanges which would prove to be of immense value for the knowledge of all humanity.

I was also thinking, with a good deal of pride, of that great army of men and women from the Netherlands who settled as missionaries of the Gospel in so many different countries. In the Catholic community spread throughout the world there is hardly a place which has not been

influenced by the presence of priests, religious and laity from the Netherlands. Like the men who crossed the seas, they also often had to overcome enormous obstacles and undergo grave adversities, and they did this to make the love of their Lord Jesus Christ ever better known.

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2. I am pleased by your reference to the great impact which Christianity has had upon the culture of your nation and how it has produced rich fruits of both a religious and social character. The influence of the Gospel message upon Dutch culture has found expression in literature, music and in other artistic creations. It has contributed to a wholesome patriotism counterbalanced by a genuine appreciation of the rights and duties of other peoples. It has entered into your identity as individuals and as a nation, inspiring a lively solicitude for the generous service of others.

The beautiful traditions of the past continue to be reflected in many aspects of Dutch society today. I refer for example to the firm commitment of the government and the people of the Netherlands to European cooperation and unity. The Holy See has always sought to encourage this convergence of European communities, convinced that it will not only contribute to the peace and prosperity of this region but, if pursued in an unselfish way, will benefit mankind in general.

3. I am thinking also of the concern of the Netherlands to promote the cause of human rights and the dignity of every human being. We are unfortunately still far from a world in which these fundamental values are universally respected, but we cannot give up this struggle, because every time the dignity and the rights of an individual are denied, every man, every woman and every child suffers an injustice.

Finally I wish to pay tribute to the generosity of the government and the people of the Netherlands in the assistance given, both on the official and the private levels, to the less fortunate peoples throughout the world. Your example in this area is praiseworthy and will certainly encourage other nations and peoples in a common effort to fill the enormous gap which exists between the industrialized nations and the developing ones.

Mr Prime Minister: the Catholic community of the Netherlands has led the way in sustaining these important initiatives and I am sure that your government and future ones will be able to count on the same support for every valid project that seeks to promote the cause of peace and justice.

I join you in rejoicing over the conquests of an industrious and clever People which, whether in prosperous times or in less happy periods, has not failed to be concerned with those who were in need, both in the homeland and elsewhere throughout the world.

I wish you all the best for the future, and am sure that the Netherlands will maintain and be at the height of its Christian heredity, resisting whatever might try to weaken it, because this will bring true prosperity and security to the society and to the nation. May Almighty God abundantly bless the Low Countries and all its people.

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