



# The Holy See

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## APOSTOLIC PILGRIMAGE TO INDIA **ADDRESS OF JOHN PAUL II**

### **ON OCCASION OF THE WELCOME CEREMONY**

#### **AT THE AIRPORT OF DELHI** *Delhi (India)*

*Saturday, 1st February 1986 Mr President*

*Mr Prime Minister*

*Distinguished Officials of the Government of India,*

*Ladies and Gentlemen,*

*To all of you: "Namaskar"!* It gives me great joy to be in India. I thank you for your words of welcome, Mr President, and in particular I thank you for the invitation to come to this great nation, so ancient and yet so young. I wish also to express my gratitude for your presence, Mr Prime Minister. I am honoured that you join the President in this official ceremony of welcome. I deeply appreciate everything that has been done to prepare for this visit. I am grateful for the generous efforts on the part of so many which will make it possible for me to travel to different parts of this vast and varied Republic of India, to meet as many of the beloved Indian people as possible, and to come to a deeper understanding of the rich cultures of your country. I pray that my visit will serve and support the good of your nation and the well-being of all the Indian people.

2. Your invitation, Mr President, and this meeting upon my arrival in Delhi, stand in faithful continuity with the good official relations which have existed for many years between India and the Holy See. Other particularly significant moments of this history have been the visit of your first Prime Minister, Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru, to Pope Pius XII in 1955; the visit of Pope Paul VI to Bombay in 1964, on which occasion he met your highest civil authorities; and the visit of Prime Minister Indira Gandhi to the Vatican less than five years ago. These good relations, to which this visit gives further expression, reflect at the same time the overall cordial relationship which exists between Church and State in India. I am very pleased to know of the esteem which the Catholic Church in your country enjoys, and I am well aware of the important contribution which she seeks to make through her dedicated involvement in various fields of human advancement, such as education, health care and development. Since the beginning of Christianity the Church has been present in India. Thus for nearly two thousand years she has formed an integral part of the development and life of your people. And I can assure you that the Church is always desirous of offering her loyal and generous contribution to the unity and brotherhood of the nation, to the promotion of justice, love and peace, and to the authentic general progress of your country in the many aspects of her life.

3. My purpose in coming to India has both a religious and human dimension. I come to pay a pastoral visit to the Catholics of India, and I come in friendship with a deep desire to pay honour to all your people and to your different cultures. As I begin, I take this occasion to express my sincere interest in all the religions of India – an interest marked by genuine respect, by attention to what we have in common, by a desire to promote interreligious dialogue and fruitful collaboration between people of different faiths. In this regard, I note with admiration how the Indian constitution, through its official recognition of religious liberty, honours the dignity of each

person in his or her most sacred dimension, and at the same time allows the promotion of genuine spiritual values, which are so fundamental for all social living.<sup>4</sup> It is with sentiments of fraternal love and respect for all the Indian people that I begin this visit. Through you, Mr President, I greet the men and women of every region, the children and their parents, the aged and the young people. I am interested in meeting as many of you as possible, eager to learn from you and from your experience of life. At the same time, I am deeply interested in the various cultures of India: in the many ancient cultural expressions contained in your art and architecture, in your literature and customs; and in those of modern India which reflect a fine blending of the old and the new, and those which have resulted in part from the inevitable and often needed social changes and in response to the challenges of modern industry and technology. All of this is a sign of a society that is living and dynamic.<sup>5</sup> The many activities which characterise the internal and international life of India have for a long time attracted the deep interest of the world. These include your sustained effort to promote the practical recognition of the equality and identical human dignity of every person in society, your quest for social harmony and for unity in diversity, your various initiatives to further the social-economic development of your country, especially for the sake of those most in need, and your attempts to foster an atmosphere of trust and dialogue both within and beyond the borders of your land. It was in reference to your land and his that Tagore wrote: "Where the mind is without fear and the head is held high;

Where knowledge is free;

Where the world has not been broken up into fragments by narrow domestic walls;

Where words come out from the depth of truth;

Where tireless striving stretches its arms towards perfection;

Where the clear stream of reason has not lost its way into the dreary desert sand of dead habits;

Where the mind is led forward by Thee into ever-widening thought and action;

Into that heaven of freedom, my Father, let my country awake". These many aspects of modern India are all significantly linked to the cause of peace in the international community, particularly since India is the largest democracy in the world.

As I said in my 1986 World Day of Peace message: "The right path to a world community in which justice and peace will reign without frontiers among all peoples and on all continents is the path of solidarity, dialogue and universal brotherhood". I come to India as a servant of unity and peace. And I desire to listen and learn from the men and women of this noble nation. I look forward to deepening the admiration and friendship which I already have for the Indian people. You shall be in my prayers each day. May God bless you all!" Jai Hind"! © Copyright 1986 - Libreria Editrice Vaticana