



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS JOHN PAUL II
TO THE BISHOPS OF INDIA
ON THEIR "AD LIMINA" VISIT**

Tuesday, 12 September 1989

Dear Brother Bishops,

1. This meeting concludes the present series of *ad Limina* visits of the Bishops of India. Today I am happy to welcome you, *the Bishops of the Ecclesiastical Provinces of Bangalore, Madras-Mylapore, Madurai and Pondicherry* in the States of Karnataka and Tamil Nadu. "Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ" (2Cor. 1, 2). Your presence constitutes an intense moment of the collegial communion which unites us in the service of Christ's Body, the Church. You bring with you – on pilgrimage, as it were, to the tombs of the Apostles Peter and Paul – a testimony of the Christian life and holiness of that part of God's people entrusted to your care. I give thanks to God for the opportunities which he has given me through my meetings with the Bishops of India to exercise in a personal and direct way the universal ministry entrusted to the Successors of Peter.

2. *The Church in India is a vibrant reality* filled with life and evangelizing resources. She is enriched by a diversity of rites and the multiple forms of her presence and action among peoples of different social and cultural background. She has a long and varied history from which to draw lessons for her contemporary life and mission, including the example of great men and women saints to whom she can look for inspiration and encouragement in facing the enormous challenges of evangelization and service.

In conversation with you, the Bishops, I have become more aware of the circumstances of your brothers and sisters in the faith, citizens of a huge country which is struggling to achieve greater development, as well as unity, social harmony and justice for all its people. Through you I wish to send words of encouragement to all the members of the Catholic Church in India. In joyful reception of the Good News announced by the Church in Jesus' name and in generous fidelity to the grace received by each one for building up the Body of Christ, may all the sons and daughters

of the Church in India “stand mature and fully assured in all the will of God” (*Col* 4, 12).

3. One of the many vivid memories which I retain from my visit to your country was the meeting with *priests* at the Basilica of Bom Jesu in Old Goa, where I was able to pray before the remains of Saint Francis Xavier, one of the outstanding figures of the Church’s missionary history. The clergy present on that occasion, in representation of all the priests of India, stood out “*as servants* who spend themselves without counting the cost, *as leaders* who form, inspire and guide the one People of God in the ways of the Lord” (Ioannis Pauli PP. II *Allocutio ad Indiae Presbyteros in Basilica “Boni Jesus” habita, 3, die 6 febr. 1986: Insegnamenti di Giovanni Paolo II, IX, 1 [1986] 350*). Again today, I wish to express my deep affection in the Lord for each one of them and to encourage them, as I said then, *to continue to give Jesus to India*.

Bishops and priests are united in an organic bond springing from the very nature of the Church’s reality as the sacramental sign of Christ’s saving presence in the world, a presence continued through time in a special way through the action of those called to share in the one and eternal priesthood of Jesus Christ. May you who have received the fullness of the priesthood not fail in the important duty of building up and maintaining bonds of deep and abiding brotherhood and friendship with the priests who share with you the daily toil of the pastoral ministry. In each Diocese *the presbyterium should be a striking witness of unity, love and mutual support* among all its members. There should never be signs of discrimination or division. Difficulties are never lacking, but with God’s help and the good will of all concerned the healthy state of the presbyterium will be an important factor in the well-being and perseverance of each of your brother priests.

4. I wish to congratulate the Bishops of India on your manifest concern for the life and ministry of your priests. In particular I am happy to note what is written in the Foreword of the *Charter of Priestly Formation for India*, approved in 1988: “The Catholic Bishops’ Conference of India is more concerned about the formation of our priests than about any other area of its responsibility. The future of the Church in India depends on the quality and calibre of the priests who come out of our Seminaries and Formation Houses”. You are rightly convinced that a careful selection of candidates and their solid and integral formation is of singular importance and benefit to your Dioceses and to the Church as a whole.

Indeed, in view of the 1990 Synod of Bishops, the entire Catholic Church has been called to reflection, meditation, dialogue and prayer on *the formation of priests* in the circumstances of the present day. The theme is most timely since it affords the Bishops of the world an opportunity to examine the state of the renewal intended by the Council in this area, the experiences and achievements obtained since then and the new demands constantly arising in the life of the ecclesial community. It may be said that the forthcoming Synod complements the previous one on the vocation and mission of the lay faithful in the Church and in the world. It was at that Synod that many voices were heard asking that priests receive a solid spiritual formation, that they be

prepared in cooperation with the lay faithful and that this preparation aim at animating the lay state (Cfr. *Lineamenta*, 1).

5. My desire at this time is to *encourage you to involve the whole Church in India in the reflection leading up to the Synod* and to support you in the specific responsibility which is yours as Bishops in the area of priestly formation. The *Lineamenta* make reference to the role of Bishops and Major Superiors of Religious in such concrete aspects as visiting seminaries and being informed of the progress of seminarians, in guiding and supporting the work of those engaged in the work of formation (Cfr. *ibid.* 22). A Bishop ought not to leave the formation of his seminarians to others, to the point of not being personally involved in the process of vocation discernment and progress towards ordination. As the one who has primary responsibility for the well-being of the particular Church over which he presides, he is also primarily responsible for the life and ministry of his priests and for their formation.

6. In the *Charter of Priestly Formation for India* you rightly point out that the nature and mission of the Church as the sacrament of union with God and the unity of all mankind poses a special challenge in India which is a land of many faces and diverse forces. Priestly formation, therefore, in order effectively to serve the needs of your Dioceses, must take into account the culture, language and way of life of the people the seminarian is called to serve in his future ministry. At the same time this *attention to local conditions should in no way weaken the sense of the unity and uniqueness of the Church*. Seminarians should be taught to distinguish between essential unity in faith, sacramental life and hierarchical communion, and the legitimate variety consonant with true catholicity. Undue emphasis on pluralism, whether theological, liturgical or pastoral, can sometimes lead to a “pluralism of fundamentally opposed positions” and hence to a loss of identity (Cfr. Synodi Extr. Episc. 1985, *Relatio finalis*, II, C, 2).

Every aspect of priestly formation must be seen in relation to the Church as the “mystery” of God’s eternal design made present and visible in the course of human history. Those who are called upon to expound this “mystery” – in particular, theologians, professors and seminary personnel charged with priestly formation – should be imbued with an attitude of humble and loving adoration of the “*pietatis sacramentum*” (1Tim. 3, 16) which is the whole source of the Church’s life and mission.

7. As pastors of an ecclesial community in the heart of Asia you are sensitive to the great human hunger which marks the life of your continent, the profound yearning for human dignity, for liberation from the oppression of poverty, prejudice and violence in all its forms. You know how deeply the peoples of Asia feel the aspiration to religious truth and to the fullness of salvation. You know that in this context your principal task – stated in the most simple but also the most truthful of terms – is to lead and encourage your particular Churches to show forth the face of Jesus Christ, to speak his message and to communicate the “new life” which springs from the Paschal Mystery. Your first task as Bishops then is to be *faithful to Jesus Christ*, personally and collectively, and to

reflect as perfectly as possible the figure of the Good Shepherd “the faithful witness” (*Apoc.* 1, 5).

The major chapters of your ministry, such as the proclamation of the gospel, its “inculturation” and presentation in a way that corresponds to the genius of your peoples, and inter-religious dialogue with the followers of other spiritual traditions, engage you in a necessary dialogue of faith and love with the Church universal, and in particular with the Apostolic See. On the occasion of your *ad Limina* visit, I wish to thank you, the Bishops of the Church in India, for the constancy, and seriousness of your commitment to this essential aspect of collegiality.

With deep conviction I recall something I stated during our meeting in New Delhi on 1st February 1986: “At the very centre of your pastoral solicitude, dear Brothers, *is the Church’s unity*. In her unity we recognize the greatest of blessings, the desire of the Heart of Jesus, the expression of fidelity to the Lord, the sign of the credibility of his Church and the sign of the credibility of the very mission of Christ. In the unity of the Church we see the reason why Jesus died: ‘to gather into one the scattered children of God’ (*Jo.* 11, 52)” (Ioannis Pauli PP. II *Delii, allocutio ad Indiae sacros Praesules*, 7, die 1 febr. 1986: *Insegnamenti di Giovanni Paolo II*, IX, 1 [1986] 264). I wish to confide this concern to your prayers, to your study and to the actions which you take for the good of the Church in your land. Unity is not always easy. It often requires great personal sacrifice and suffering. It will only be sustained by God’s grace.

May Mary, Mother of the Word Incarnate, intercede for this gift for the Church in India.

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