



The Holy See

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

Thursday, 21 October 1993

*Your Eminence,
Dear brother Bishops,*

1. With fraternal affection I greet you, *the Bishops of New Zealand*, on the occasion of your visit "*ad Limina Apostolorum*". Your prayer at the tombs of the Apostles Peter and Paul, and your fraternal meeting with the Successor of Peter, are the expression of the communion which binds us together in the one Body of Christ, in which we are "ministers of the evangelical truth which is to be received and shown forth through the whole life and activity of the Church" (Cf. Episcopal Conference of New Zealand, *Pastoral Letter "In the Service of Unity"*, 7).

In your reports on the state of your Dioceses, many of you have pointed to the importance of a more effective proclamation of the word of God in today's society. This then is the theme of our reflection: *our mission as preachers and teachers of the faith*. It falls to you, as the primary evangelizers of God's people in New Zealand, to stimulate, encourage and lead the ever-pressing task of evangelization, which remains the central priority of the Church's mission in every age and her primary service to humanity (Cf. John Paul II, *Redemptoris Missio*, 44).

2. In the Church, all pastoral action has its origin in the mystery of *communion*, that divine life which the Son shares with the Father in the Holy Spirit, and which he communicates through the ministry of his Church. Through Baptism, the faithful enter this communion, and are called to manifest it in their lives and communicate it to others by taking an active part in the Church's saving mission (Cf. John Paul II, *Christifideles Laici*, 8). This transcendent aspect of discipleship must always be distinguishable in the life and activity of the faithful. The Bishops for their part "should constantly exert themselves to have the faithful know and live the paschal mystery more

deeply through the Eucharist and thus become a firmly knit body in the solidarity of Christ's love" (*Christus Dominus*, 15).

You and the priests who are your co-workers in the service of the Gospel are called to be the active *builders of ecclesial communion*, strengthening the unity of the Church in the harmony of diverse vocations, charisms and ministries (Cf. John Paul II, *Pastores Dabo Vobis*, 16). I encourage your efforts to provide for the permanent spiritual and theological formation of the clergy, so that, by participating in the "anointing" and "mission" of Christ, your priests "can continue Christ's prayer, word, sacrifice and salvific action in the Church" (Ibid.). Amid the often confusing din of ideas and opinions about ecclesial life and renewal, it is essential that priests should be equipped to discern, in fidelity to the apostolic faith, what is truly valuable for the growth of God's people.

Likewise, the good of the Church requires that the whole community – families, schools and Catholic youth groups – should *encourage and foster vocations to the priesthood*. But it is above all the Bishop's duty to give the closest attention to the training of future priests in seminaries and houses of formation. A Bishop must be able to accompany his seminarians with personal interest and paternal affection, ensuring that they are given the spiritual, intellectual and human formation needed to make them men of communion, possessing mature faith and true apostolic zeal.

The relatively *large number of men and women religious in New Zealand* is a source of special grace and strength for the Christian community. Through their specific way of witnessing to the kingdom of God already present in the midst of human realities, Religious exemplify the transcendent and eschatological nature of the Christian life. As the whole Church prepares for the forthcoming Assembly of the Synod of Bishops on Religious Life, I am confident that you will be close to the communities in your Dioceses as they seek to discern before God the appropriate path of renewal and reform, leading to ever greater harmony with the true nature of their calling and the original charism of their Founders. Religious living and working in your Dioceses will appreciate this pastoral concern and guidance from those to whom the care of the particular Churches has been entrusted (Cf. *Christus Dominus*, 11). I ask you to take my greetings and prayerful support to all the members of Religious Institutes and Societies of Apostolic Life in New Zealand, and to the many who are missionaries, especially in the Pacific region.

3. No commitment to evangelization can overlook the need to promote *the continuing formation of the laity*. This spiritual and doctrinal formation should aim at helping them to carry out their prophetic office in a society which does not always recognize the truth and the humanizing force of the Gospel, or the values which spring from it. As indicated in the Apostolic Exhortation "*Christifideles Laici*", if the laity are to carry out effectively their important role in the new evangelization they must be helped to overcome any separation between the Gospel and life, by *learning to see and judge all things in the light of Christ* (Cf. *Christifideles Laici*, 34).

Conversion to Christ involves a conversion of the intellect as well as the heart, and in bringing this about, lay people rightly expect both wise spiritual guidance and authentic teaching from their pastors.

In fact, your apostolic responsibility for handing down the deposit of faith (Cf. 2Tim. 1: 14) finds concrete expression in your concern for the *integrity of the catechetical and theological doctrine* imparted in your Dioceses. This of course demands a critical discernment with regard to all that threatens the fullness of the Catholic faith. We cannot ignore the disturbing tendencies seen in certain currents of spirituality, theology and pastoral practice, tendencies which call into question the Church's identity as the only ordinary means of salvation for all mankind, or which – obscure the truth that the Sacraments remain the definitive and essential *locus* of our encounter with Christ.

In the face of the many different challenges to our pastoral ministry, we cannot lose confidence in the power of the Gospel to transform people's minds and hearts! By remaining faithful to our charge to proclaim the word unflinchingly, in season and out of season (Cf. *ibid.* 4: 2), we are doing no more than what is required of us! (Cf. Lk. 17: 10) Among God's many gifts to the Church in these times, the "*Catechism of the Catholic Church*" will assist greatly in providing a solid and sustained catechesis for children, young people and adults. At the same time your pastoral efforts cannot afford to ignore those baptized Catholics who do not practise their faith. This preoccupying phenomenon calls for intensified pastoral action, and a coordinated response by parishes and dioceses.

4. Today, the exercise of our apostolic ministry often requires us to address difficult and complex issues in *the field of morality*. The Gospel contains not only the truths to be believed but also those to be applied to life (Cf. *Lumen Gentium*, 25). As the Encyclical "*Veritatis Splendor*" indicates: "the unity of the Church is damaged not only by those who distort the truths of faith, but also by those who disregard the moral obligations to which they are called by the Gospel" (John Paul II, *Veritatis Splendor*, 26). The truth about moral action, which the Church teaches, is a necessary and sublime service to the human family, for it sheds light on the lives of individuals and of society, indicating the path of true interior freedom, namely, *ransom from sin and the capacity to choose what effectively leads to fulfilling our God-given destiny*. In this light too a renewed, more positive catechesis regarding the Sacrament of Reconciliation will be the source of a deeper-experience of God and a more generous self-giving love.

Conscious of your praiseworthy tradition of intervening as a respected voice in favour of the poor and in defence of human rights, I encourage your efforts to make known the Church's teaching on the moral issues raised by the advances of science and technology, and by the utilitarian outlook which often dominates public discussion and legislation. Because they are so fundamental to human life and fulfilment, sexual morality and family life must be illuminated by the light of Christ's teaching. The Church cannot remain silent in the face of widespread divorce and the break-up of

the family. Today more than ever, those preparing for marriage need solid religious instruction on the implications of that Sacrament, while young married couples need help and support in living their union in respect for God's plan for marriage and the family. In the face of attempts to give other forms of cohabitation legal equality with the family, *the nature role and rights of the family must be strenuously defended*. In supporting this fundamental institution, the active involvement of the laity themselves, especially through associations of families and professional people, is needed.

5. In New Zealand, the work of evangelization must take into consideration the demands of your multi-cultural society, whereby the Church is enriched in her catholicity by the presence of various social and cultural groups. *The spiritual care of Maori Catholics, and the effective pastoral care of the growing numbers of Samoans, Cook Islanders, Tokelauans and Tongans* immigrating to urban areas, require a sensitive and committed pastoral response.

Practical attempts to promote the inculturation of the faith require a patient and rigorous reflection grounded in a genuine theology inspired by Catholic principles on inculturation, – principles which are indissolubly rooted in the mystery of the Incarnation and authentic Christian anthropology (Cf. John Paul II, *Pastores Dabo Vobis*, 55). *A truly critical and genuinely evangelical discernment of cultural realities can only be undertaken in the light of the saving death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.*

A sound theology of inculturation cannot overlook the Church's unequivocal conviction that culture, as a human creation, is inevitably marked by sin and needs to be healed, ennobled and perfected by the Gospel (Cf. *Lumen Gentium*, 17). The contact of cultures with God's saving word will naturally bring about a profound transformation as these cultures *find their deepest meaning and the fulfilment of their aspirations in the knowledge and love of the person of the Word Incarnate*. The Gospel penetrates the very life of cultures, and becomes incarnate in them, precisely by "overcoming those cultural elements that are incompatible with the faith and Christian living and by raising their values to the mystery of salvation which comes from Christ" (John Paul II, *Pastores Dabo Vobis*, 55). The challenge before every group and people is to let the Gospel of Christ continue to penetrate and permeate their way of life, shaping their sense of identity as a unique part of God's household.

6. Dear brother Bishops: the tasks facing the Church as the third millennium approaches are immense and arduous. But they do not diminish our zeal and commitment, for our trust is in the sustaining grace of Christ. Divine providence has shown itself at work in the growth of the Church in your country, reflected in so many lives of radiant holiness and devoted service to the common good, especially in the untiring service of the needy, the sick and the neglected. Today, amid new challenges, you are called to build upon this foundation, by cooperating with "him who by the power at work within us is able to do far more abundantly than all we ask or think" (Eph. 3: 20). I commend you and the clergy, religious and laity of your Dioceses to the maternal care of Mary,

Mother of the Church, and I cordially impart my Apostolic Blessing.

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