



# The Holy See

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**ADDRESS OF POPE JOHN PAUL II  
TO THE BISHOPS OF THE PHILIPPINES  
(NORTHERN LUZON AND BIKOL)  
ON THEIR «AD LIMINA» VISIT**

*Friday, 25 October 1985*

*Dear Brother Bishops,*

Today I have the pleasure of meeting you, the Bishops of the Northern Luzon and Bikol regions of the Philippines. I greet you with fraternal esteem and affection, in the love of our Lord Jesus Christ.

1. The underlying theme of the talks I have had with the groups of Philippine Bishops during their “ad Limina” visits has been - as is to be expected - *the Bishop’s pastoral mission to the Church entrusted to his care*. Perhaps one of the best syntheses of this mission is expressed in the words of the Council: “In exercising his office of father and pastor, a Bishop should stand in the midst of his people as one who serves. Let him be a good shepherd . . . a true father . . . Let him so gather and mold the whole family of his flock that everyone, conscious of his own duties, may live and work in the communion of love” (*Christus Dominus*, 16).

In this way the Council laid before us bishops a program of life and pastoral activity wholly centered on the person and work of our Lord Jesus Christ, the “great shepherd of the sheep” (*Hebr.* 13, 20). It is Jesus himself who is our model and the measure of our commitment and pastoral solicitude. Because of our sacramental configuration with him, he is our example in a close and *intimately personal way*. In the multiple actions of our ministry of teaching, sanctifying and governing God’s people, Christ himself is present and operative. “Unless the Lord builds the house, those who build it labor in vain” (*Ps.* 127, 1). Indeed, through the ministry of the Bishop, as the Council states, the Lord himself “directs and guides the people of the New Testament in their pilgrimage towards eternal happiness” (*Lumen Gentium*, 21).

Such a consideration reminds us that the success of the apostolate cannot be gauged in terms of bureaucratic organization or statistical data. Rather, the ultimate criterion of the value of our ministry is the realization of what we petition in the Lord's prayer: "Thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth" (*Matth.* 6, 10).

The pastor's aim is to hasten the coming of God's kingdom by leading his people "to live and work in the communion of love" (*Christus Dominus*, 16). In the sharing of Christ's gifts to the Church and the world through the profession of faith, the sacramental economy and participation in the ordered life of the community under the leadership of the legitimate pastors, there arises that profound unity which necessarily characterizes "the whole assembly of charity" (Cfr. S. Ignatii Antiocheni *Ad Romanos*, praef.). In each local Church the realization of that communion of Christian love and unity is brought about primarily by the Holy Spirit "who is the principle of our coming together and remaining together in the teaching of the apostles and in fellowship, in the breaking of bread and of prayers". For this reason I wish to invite you and your brother Bishops of the Philippines not to cease from ardent prayer for the Church in your country that it may be each day more truly a communion of love and unity, in the strength of the Holy Spirit and in the concrete witness of brotherhood and solidarity at every level.

2. A practical consequence of the nature of the Church as a communion of faith and love is the need to discover, foster and coordinate with pastoral effectiveness the various ministries and charisms which the Holy Spirit distributes among God's people. A fundamental support of this task of coordination and unity of purpose is the developed sense of collegial responsibility and teamwork which you, the Bishops, exercise through the meetings and activities of your Episcopal Conference. In fact, when you speak with one voice in obedience to the Gospel and when *in its light* you read the "signs of the times" and are seen to sustain each other through effective forms of ecclesial cooperation, then society will receive the message of peace and reconciliation which the Church in the Philippines continues to proclaim notwithstanding difficulties and contrary impulses.

3. One aspect among others deserves consideration. I refer to the task of fostering and coordinating for the good of the whole Church in the Philippines *the fruitful cooperation between the Bishops and Religious, both at the diocesan and national levels.*

The contribution of men and women Religious to the life of the Church in your country constitutes a glorious history of enlightened service and dedicated evangelization. Today men and women Religious play a very significant part in the overall life of the Church in the Philippines. Worthy of special merit are those who give themselves to God alone in the prayerful solitude and silence of contemplative life. They are "the glory of the Church and an overflowing fountain of heavenly graces" (*Perfectae Caritatis*, 7). Then again, the activities of Institutes engaged in the active apostolate respond to a specific mission which is theirs in the Church. In the words of the Council's Decree on the Appropriate Renewal of the Religious Life, "a sacred ministry and a

special work of charity has been consigned to them by the Church and must be discharged in her name” (*Ibid.* 8). As a result, Religious, and similarly members of Societies of apostolic life for their part, realize that their pastoral activities are inseparable from the Church’s evangelizing and sanctifying mission. The special charism and character of each community enriches the life of the local Churches where they operate with a dynamism and organizational ability which permits the Church to respond to the challenges and needs of each place.

Fully conscious of the ecclesiological vision which the Council proposes, Religious should always see their work as organically bound to the life and mission of the local Church in which *the Bishop is “the visible principle and foundation of unity” (Lumen Gentium, 23)*. Thus the relationship between the Bishops and members of Religious Institutes and Societies of apostolic life should be marked by cordial understanding, organic unity and a willingness to work together in a programmed way for the good of the entire community. The same Holy Spirit who sustains the Church on the foundation of the Apostles, brings forth in the body of the Church the charism of the evangelical counsels and missionary zeal to be a valid sign of the holiness to which God’s people are called and a prophetic testimony of the values of the kingdom. As a result there cannot be a separation or contradictory parallelism between Religious and Bishops. Rather, there should be a *complementarity* which is not a mere accommodation, but a living exemplification of what Saint Paul teaches about the parts of the body as applied to the Church: “The eye cannot say to the hand, ‘I have no need of you’ (1 Cor. 12, 21), nor again the head to the feet, ‘I have no need of you’”. All must work together in obedience to the one Lord.

4. As Bishops you will find essential guidelines for the fulfilment of your responsibilities towards the men and women Religious present in your dioceses in the document “*Mutuae Relationes*”. There you will read that the Bishop’s specific office is “to defend consecrated life, to foster and animate the fidelity and authenticity of Religious and to help them become part of the communion and of the evangelizing action of his Church according to their distinctive nature” (*Mutuae Relationes*, c. VII). All this requires regular contact between Bishops and Religious Superiors in order to maintain a spirit of openness and understanding with regard to pastoral objectives. Men and women Religious should be adequately represented in the various diocesan councils, especially pastoral councils. They can also usefully form associations of Religious which will serve as “organism for the discussion of *mixed problems* between Bishops and Superiors, as well as for coordinating the activities of religious families with the pastoral action of the diocese under the direction of the Bishop” (*Ibid.*). I know that you are already following this path and I encourage you to go forward with confidence and trust.

On the national level too the Church in the Philippines can only benefit from the consolidation of procedures of dialogue and collaboration between the Bishops and major Religious Superiors. In this respect it is always important that the diversity of Institutes be respected both by the Bishops and by the officials of such associations themselves. It is also important that regional and national associations of Religious give proper weight to the inalienable responsibility of the Bishops to

oversee the development of pastoral activities in his diocese, as corresponds to the evangelical spirit of service which men and women Religious seek to embody and exemplify.

5. One particular area of collaboration between Bishops and Religious which requires much spiritual discernment in the present circumstances concerns the role of priests and of men and women Religious in the process of social development. In this respect I mention briefly two aspects of the Church's service of your people, a service which implies a preferential, though not exclusive or restrictive option for the least of Christ's brothers and sisters, the poor, the defenseless, the weak and those who excluded from the benefits of progress, especially from education, employment and the full achievement of their human and civil rights.

Firstly this service is a *response to the word of God*. In the poor and suffering the Church strives to *serve Christ* (Cfr. *Lumen Gentium*, 8). She approaches each child, each man and woman with a vivid sense of the unique personal dignity of each one. Following the example of her Founder, she refuses to see any group of human beings - much less the poor - as a mere socio-political or economic category and factor in a theory of social development. The Church serves human beings as persons, in full respect of their dignity and in support of each individual's pursuit of his or her integral human and eternal destiny. This is the Church's mission, which cannot be subordinated or postponed in favor of other economic, social or political finalities.

A second aspect to which I refer briefly concerns the *role of leadership of priests and Religious* in development. It is clear that this role does not consist in espousing particular political programs or ideologies. Priests and Religious certainly proclaim the Gospel message of liberation and they accompany their people in the quest for dignity and justice; but they must be careful not to subvert the message by imposing on it a reductive interpretation, or by putting it at the service of a particular form of political involvement, or by taking part in activities that do not appear in consonance with their ecclesial status.

I take this opportunity to express my spiritual closeness to the Filipino priests and Religious as well as to all missionary personnel who share the burdens of their people in poverty and simplicity, seeking justice and truth without violence, giving witness to Christ who "carried out the work of redemption in poverty and under oppression" (*Lumen Gentium*, 8).

6. I also wish to encourage you, dear brother Bishops, in another matter, namely the *programs of catechesis* and theological formation of the laity which are being undertaken *according to the guidelines of your National Catechetical Directory*.

Each local Church is born from the proclamation of the "Good News" of salvation in Christ Jesus, and grows and develops in the measure in which that message is welcomed with love and practised in effective works of holiness and justice and charity. The strength of each Church is closely connected with the degree in which the faith is nourished and enlightened by an adequate

program of catechesis, the purpose of which is “to make disciples, to help people to believe that Jesus is the Son of God, so that believing they might have life in his name, and to educate and instruct them in this life and thus build up the Body of Christ” (Ioannis Pauli PP. II *Catechesi Tradendae*, 1).

I simply wish to recall the importance of this task for the Christian life of your people. As you face the immense challenge of responding to the need and the thirst of your people for the word of God and for the teaching of the Church, I pray that you will continue with renewed energy and courage *to give priority to catechesis*. It is not exaggerated to say that the entire future of the Church in your country will depend on your success in the catechetical instruction of the faithful. May the Spirit of truth endow you and your collaborators with ever greater enthusiasm for this work!

7. Finally, in connection with the theme of catechesis, I mention the *enormous value of the apostolate of Catholic education* for the Church and for the Philippine nation. The sublime scope of Catholic education at all levels is to enable the faithful “to relate human affairs and activities with religious values in a single living synthesis” (Ioannis Pauli PP. II *Sapientia Christiana*, 1). Therefore I feel a great need to draw attention before you and the entire Church to the special merits of the Bishops and priests, of the teachers, and in a very particular way of the men and women Religious who have been and continue to be responsible for Catholic education in the Philippines in numerous schools of every level, including a large number of Catholic Universities. Let no one doubt the relevance of this work. On the contrary, it should be promoted and further extended. The financial and personnel problems involved are certainly very serious, especially if we consider the need to extend Catholic schools to areas in which this has not yet been possible. But with God’s help and with a sense of responsibility and collaboration on the part of the ecclesial and civil authorities concerned, the right of parents, as stated in the Code of Canon Law, “to make use of those aids to be furnished by civil society which they need in order to obtain Catholic education for their children” (*Codex Iuris Canonici, can. 793, § 2*), will be ensured.

8. In the course of the “ad Limina” visits of the Philippine Episcopate we have touched upon many subjects of importance for the life of your Churches. The vastness of your pastoral duties is thus made evident. As we conclude this series of visits I wish to assure you again that you and your people are truly close to my heart and very present in my prayer. Your joys and sorrows, and the aspirations and anxieties of the Filipino people are my own. I commend you all to the motherly care of Mary, Mother of the Church, and to the intercession of the saintly men and women who have graced your homeland, especially Blessed Lorenzo Ruiz who was beatified during my visit to Manila in 1981.

“May the Lord of peace himself give you peace at all times in all ways” (2 Thess. 3, 16).

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