



# The Holy See

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**ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS JOHN PAUL II  
TO THE MEMBERS  
OF THE EPISCOPAL CONFERENCE OF THE PACIFIC  
ON THEIR "AD LIMINA" VISIT**

*Friday, 29 October 1993*

*Your Eminence,  
Brother Bishops,  
Dear Pastors of the Church in the Pacific,*

1. "Wishing you the grace and the peace of God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ" (Phil. 1: 3).

I offer a cordial welcome to you, the members of the *Episcopal Conference of the Pacific*, in Rome for your visit "ad limina Apostolorum". I fondly recall my Pastoral Visit to some of your particular Churches, where the Lord gave me the grace to join in the hymn of praise and thanksgiving which, with such remarkable devotion, rises to God our Father from that strikingly beautiful part of the world. Your visit is marred by the sadness of the sudden death of Bishop Patelisio Finau of Tonga who was called to our Heavenly Father's house while on his way to this meeting. May the God of all mercies grant him the reward which awaits the faithful servants of the Gospel.

The ancient practice of "coming to see Peter" reminds us of the days that Paul spent with Cephas in Jerusalem (Cf. Gal. 1: 18).

In the fraternal embrace of Peter and Paul, the original community acknowledged Paul's converts as true brothers and sisters in the faith. In Paul's account of the abundant outpouring of grace upon the Gentiles, the community found even greater reason to praise the boundless goodness of God (Cf. Acts. 15: 6ss.). Similarly, through our meetings in these days the union of your particular Churches with the Church Universal is reaffirmed, and before the whole world you bear witness to the fact that in Melanesia, Polynesia and Micronesia the words of the Prophet Isaiah have attained

surpassing fulfilment: "In the islands they give glory to the Lord, in the islands of the sea, to the name of the Lord, the God of Israel" (Is. 24: 15).

2. In the near future, a number of your Churches will celebrate the centenary or sesquicentenary of *the arrival of the first Catholic missionaries*. These festivities will show what a bountiful harvest has already been reaped from that first *plantatio Ecclesiae*. To him who gives the increase (Cf. 2Cor. 9: 10) let us offer heartfelt thanks for the countless men and women who left home and family in order to spread the Good News of the salvation won for us by Christ. They were impelled by that same zeal for the Gospel which led Saint Peter Chanel and Blessed Diego de San Vitores to seal their missionary consecration with the shedding of their blood.

At the same time, we are all very much aware that in your lands, as in the other young Churches throughout the world, *the task of evangelization is not yet completed*. As my predecessor Paul VI said when he visited Western Samoa: "Missionary work... is always necessary and urgent", for there are still many people "who have not found the truth" (Paul VI, *Mass in Leulumoega, Western Samoa*, 30 November 1970). It must be our constant prayer that many generous hearts will respond to the call to share with their brothers and sisters the grace of Redemption which God has so generously given (Cf. John Paul II, *Redemptoris Missio*, 65-66). I pray with special fervour that out of the Christian families of your far-flung islands young men and women will come forward in ever greater numbers to fill the ranks of priests and Religious.

You have organized the commemorations of the first evangelization of your communities in such a way that they will be an occasion of *recommitment to the task of spreading the light of the Gospel*. In this way you are calling upon the faithful to keep alive the proud missionary heritage of the Church in the Pacific, even as they grow "fully mature with the fullness of Christ himself" (Eph. 4 : 13; Cf. John Paul II, *Redemptoris Missio*, 65-66). Because evangelization "is not considered a marginal task for the Church but is situated at the centre of her life, as a fundamental commitment of the whole People of God" (John Paul II, *Redemptoris Missio*, 32), dedication to this enterprise is a source of growth in all other aspects of the life of a Christian community; for "missionary activity renews the Church, revitalizes faith and Christian identity, and offers fresh enthusiasm and new incentive. *Faith is strengthened when it is given to others!*" (Ibid. 2).

3. The Fathers of the Second Vatican Council affirmed that the College of Bishops, headed by the Successor of Peter, has the primary responsibility for fulfilling the Lord's command to "proclaim the Good News to all creation" (Mk. 16: 15; cf. *Ad Gentes*, 38). That "holy union of energies" (*Christus Dominus*, 37), which the Council envisaged as the fruit of the exchange of insights and resources within an Episcopal Conference, is of great help to you as you strive to carry out the missionary mandate. During this XXV *anniversary of the founding of your Conference*, it is a pleasure to acknowledge the remarkable unity of vision and action which you have achieved, especially when one considers the great challenges which you face. Not only are your communities widely scattered over vast distances, but they differ in culture, language, history, political life and

ecclesiastical heritage. In the face of these circumstances, which could possibly be pretexts for estrangement and division, your communion is all the more compelling as a witness to the power of God's Spirit, who gathers the one Body of Christ from "every race, language, people and nation" (Rev. 5: 9). For the Church's Pastors, united in the love of the Lord, differences are not barriers obstructing, that "carrying of each others troubles" which fulfils "the law of Christ" (Gal. 6: 2); they are gifts to be shared in mutual solicitude and service, for mutual enrichment and edification.

The duty of Pastors "to promote missionary activity, to direct it, and to coordinate it" (*Ad Gentes*, 3) requires you to pay special attention to the sound formation of the clergy, the fostering of religious life, and the thorough training of catechists (Cf. ibid. 16-18). In preparing these heralds of the Gospel, we must never lose sight of the fact that *without holiness of life whatever talents and accomplishments are devoted to announcing the kingdom of Heaven have little effect*. In this regard the celibacy and virginity of priests and Religious and the chaste married life of deacons and lay leaders is especially significant. Temperance and purity of life are powerful signs that in the Paschal Mystery the old self with its old ways has been stripped off (Cf. Col. 3: 9), and a new way of living has been acquired (Cf. Eph. 4: 24).

4. Si l'on ne peut, certes, faire la même analyse de la situation pour chacune des sociétés dans lesquelles les membres de vos Eglises particulières vivent leur condition de baptisés, c'est un fait que les nations insulaires du Pacifique connaissent une transformation profonde de leur manière de vivre. Au cours des années écoulées depuis l'indépendance, la part plus grande de responsabilité prise par tous dans l'ensemble des activités politiques et économiques a exercé inévitablement une influence sur les structures sociales. Les peuples du Pacifique, comme tant d'autres dans les pays en voie de développement, sont désormais placés devant l'énorme défi de parvenir à un modèle de développement qui *protège et affermisse les meilleures valeurs traditionnelles de leur vie en commun*.

Dans ces domaines, comme dans tous les "divers domaines où les hommes et les femmes déplient leur activité à la recherche du bonheur, toujours relatif, qui est possible en ce monde", l'Eglise "apporte sa première contribution à la solution du problème urgent du développement quand elle proclame la vérité sur le Christ, sur elle-même et sur l'homme, en l'appliquant à une situation concrète" (Jean-Paul II, *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis*, 41). A l'imitation du Christ qui éprouvait de la compassion en voyant les foules (Cf. Mc. 6: 34), il nous faut continuer de proclamer à temps et à contretemps (Cf. 2Tim. 4: 2) que tout le système économique et social doit être mis au service de la personne humaine, en renforçant la solidarité entre les peuples, en assurant une gestion prudente des ressources naturelles et en protégeant l'environnement de toute forme de pollution (cf. Jean-Paul II, *Message pour la célébration de la XXIIIème Journée Mondiale de la Paix 1990*, 12, 8 décembre 1989).

Le progrès véritable des peuples est d'ordre moral: il "ne vient pas d'abord de l'argent, ni des aides matérielles, ni des structures techniques, mais bien plutôt de la formation des consciences,

du mûrissement des mentalités et des comportements" (Jean-Paul II, *Redemptoris Missio*, 58). A cet égard, j'espère que la récente encyclique "Veritatis Splendor", avec sa réflexion sur les principes fondamentaux de la morale, vous aidera, ainsi que tous ceux qui enseignent sous votre autorité, à apporter une contribution significative au renforcement du tissu social de vos nations. L'Eglise donne aux peuples du Pacifique, comme à tous les peuples du monde, la certitude qu'il y a une vérité éternelle en fonction de laquelle tous les actes humains peuvent être jugés. Du moment que cette vérité peut être connue, les personnes et les sociétés sont responsables de leurs actes. L'édification d'une société vraiment digne de la personne humaine ne résulte pas de processus déterministes ou de choix aléatoires, mais des actes libres d'hommes et de femmes qui recherchent ce qui est bon, vrai et juste.

5. The high priority you give to *the pastoral care of families and of youth* demonstrates your solicitude for those who are placed under a particular strain by the cultural transformations occurring in the Pacific. A systematic and complete catechesis about the purpose of human existence, the dignity of life from conception until natural death, the sacredness of sexuality and married love, and the nature of real happiness and fulfilment is a safeguard against the excesses of a materialistic and consumerist culture. As I wrote in the Encyclical "Centesimus Annus": "it is not wrong to want to live better; what is wrong is a style of life... which wants to have more, not in order to be more but in order to spend life in enjoyment as an end in itself. It is therefore necessary to create life-styles in which the quest for truth, beauty, goodness and communion with others for the sake of the common growth" (John Paul II, *Centesimus Annus*, 36) will determine the choices people make. The "shield of faith" in Christ (Eph. 6: 16), who is the "power of God and the wisdom of God" (1Cor. 1: 24), is a sure defence against the forces which produce that spiritual void which pushes men and women, especially the young, to hopelessness and selfdestructive behaviour. In this regard, the success of lay associations and movements in supporting their members in the struggle to be faithful to the way of Christ is a factor to be kept in mind in all pastoral activity, especially in the light of the growing spread of sects in the Pacific region.

6. Beloved Brothers, I pray that your pilgrimage to the tombs of the Apostles Peter and Paul will give you renewed strength for your Apostolic ministry, so that you will never grow weary of preaching God's word, celebrating the sacraments, guiding the flock entrusted to you and seeking the sinner who has strayed. I join with you in interceding for the safety of your people, especially against the tropical storms, earthquakes and other natural disasters which come upon them with such suddenness and frequency. I entrust you and your clergy, along with the Religious and laity, to the loving protection of Our Lady Help of Christians, and I impart my Apostolic Blessing as a pledge of grace and peace in Christ Jesus.

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