



The Holy See

ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS JOHN PAUL II TO THE Bishops of Romania on their "ad limina" visit

7 December 1996

Dear Brothers in the Episcopate,

1. I am pleased to welcome you during your *ad limina* visit. I am moved at the memory of our meeting in 1991, which was your first pilgrimage to the tomb of the Apostles Peter and Paul in 43 years. I greet very particularly the Bishops of the Greek Catholic Church, whom I had the opportunity to meet last year when they came to Rome to prepare the reorganization of their communities. I thank the President of your Inter-rite Conference, Archbishop Ioan Robu of Bucharest, for his cordial words to me just now.

2. You are the Pastors of *communities of different rites*. Together you must proclaim the Gospel and build up the Catholic Church in Romania. My prayers go with you in the ministry you are carrying out, sometimes in conditions that are still difficult. *The different rites cannot be considered as rivalling one another in the heart of the one Catholic Church, but as different spiritual journeys, each in its own way, contributing to the riches of a long tradition and bearing fruit for the good of all and the service of communion.*

A more intense fraternal life between the communities of the different rites will call all our Christian brothers and sisters to unite around their Lord; it will also be a Gospel witness for all your compatriots. I therefore rejoice at the increasingly important collaboration you seek and the fraternal help you continue to provide, particularly in the area of liturgical reform, and in welcoming communities which do not yet have suitable places for worship and meetings, and in the formation of the clergy.

3. In view of the congress on *The Priesthood and Consecrated Life in Europe* which will take place in Rome from 5-10 May 1997, you have noted the negative effects on Christian spiritual life and on vocations due to the lack of religious formation in recent years. But at the same time, you rejoice at your communities' new enthusiasm and the increase in the number of young people who desire to consecrate their life to the Lord. For this renewal we can give thanks to God, who ceaselessly continues to call men and women to his service, even in difficult situations marked by poverty of means.

4. Among the preoccupations you expressed in your reports, your concern about the true *discernment of vocations and the reorganization of your seminaries* must be noted. It is your task, Pastors of the Church, to help young people to develop their vocations, to have an ever more intimate relationship with Christ and to become servants of the Lord and his Church. In particular, attentive reading of the teachings of the Second Vatican Council makes it possible to recognize the place of all vocations in the history of salvation, to revive the special call to holiness on the part of those who have chosen to consecrate their life to the Lord and to show that the priestly ministry is a specific service of Christ and the Church. I encourage you to mobilize all available energies in your communities for the formation of educators of the clergy and future priests.

You are preoccupied about updating the “*ratio studiorum*” of the seminaries, according to the norms currently in force in the Church. Of course, in the present situation where personnel, housing accommodation for the seminarians, libraries and equipment are still lacking, not every Diocese has the possibility to set up its own seminary. It is therefore important to see among yourselves and with the heads of the religious congregations based in your country how best to prepare secular and regular seminarians, whose numbers continue to grow significantly. Do not hesitate to send some of the priests in formation to foreign universities, especially to Rome, so that they may become future teachers of the clergy and have contact with other ecclesial realities; through meetings they will acquire greater awareness of the Church’s universality; they will deepen their theological research and discover different forms of pastoral life. These initiatives testify to the importance you give to the education of seminarians, at intellectual, spiritual and pastoral levels, in order to form priests to be enlightened witnesses to the faith and good teachers.

5. You feel the need to develop the *ongoing formation of the clergy* who are called to discover the great documents that have marked the doctrine, thought and life of the Church, and those of the Second Vatican Council in particular. Throughout their ministry, priests are invited to deepen their knowledge. This helps to revive God’s gift within them (cf. 2 Tm 1:6), with a definite influence on their spiritual life and pastoral dynamism. In fact, the deep nature of this formation is to be an eminent form of “faithfulness’ to the priestly ministry” and a “process of continual conversion”. It involves *an act of love both for Christ and “for the People of God, at whose service the priest is placed”* (*Pastores dabo vobis*, 70). In this spirit I am pleased with the efforts to translate, spread and explain the texts of the Magisterium, as well as to organize formation sessions and spiritual retreats.

6. You also perceive the importance of *the human and religious formation of the lay faithful*, who must accept their responsibilities in the Christian communities. I encourage you to continue in this direction and to form lay people for the Church of the future, for they will have an important role in the spiritual, moral, intellectual and civic education of their brothers and sisters, and will have to participate more and more actively in ecclesial life.

Several of you have made *the education of young people* one of your priorities. I urge you to do all

you can see that this pastoral dimension is widely borne in mind, for it is the future of the Church and of society which is at stake. From the outset it is important to develop *the catechesis of children and young people*, despite the difficulties you may encounter, especially with regard to religion programmes in schools. Do not let this discourage you! After the painful years you have been through it is urgent that you find the appropriate means for young people again to learn the words of the faith and the words of prayer; they will then be able to enter into intimate communion with God and fully participate in the Church's growth. To do this you must be attentive to developing *the sacramental ministry*.

You have also informed me of the *moral issues* which today's youth and all Romanians have to face. Certain behaviour, such as the abuse of alcohol, drug use and abortion, are serious threats to people whose individual dignity and that of the group as a whole is undermined, for they destroy the bonds of marriage, family and society. To restrain these scourges of modern times, you are anxious to develop an appropriate family apostolate, and in particular preparation for marriage, a sense of responsibility in interpersonal relations and the pastoral care of adolescents and students. It is necessary *to offer children, adolescents and young adults reasons to believe and to hope*, as well as to give them spiritual and moral reference points that will enable them to make free and responsible choices in conformity with God's law. A society's future very largely depends on the education of those who will be tomorrow's decision-makers.

7. It is with the desire to rekindle the life of the Christian communities, their ecumenical commitment and their missionary sense that I have invited Catholics to *prepare intensely for the Great Jubilee of the Year 2000*. I hope that in your country, Pastors and faithful will prepare for this meeting by conversion of heart and renewed involvement in the Church and in society. In this perspective, it is incumbent on you to *continue to work out and implement pastoral plans* which will see the blossoming of "that new springtime of Christian life which will be revealed by the Great Jubilee, if Christians are docile to the action of the Holy Spirit" (*Tertio millennio adveniente*, 18).

With the new-found freedom, you have been careful to undertake a *thorough reorganization of the Dioceses, diocesan services and parishes*, for an ever more appropriate response to the new living conditions and the urgent need for evangelization. I encourage you to pursue this task, because good management of diocesan affairs, at all levels, encourages a community's dynamism. In your quinquennial reports, you stressed the lack of personnel and your scanty resources. You must acknowledge *the substantial aid contributed by some Churches* in Europe and North America, as well as by charitable associations, to support you materially and spiritually. This solidarity between ecclesial communities is in direct line with what happened in apostolic times when "all who believed were together and had all things in common" (Acts 2:44). For true religious freedom, ministers of Church must be free to act

8. Among your pressing problems, you have told me that you meet *obstacles in your dialogue with the authorities on the question of the restoration of goods* which belonged to the Catholic Church

before 1948 and which were unjustly confiscated. For a true practice of religious freedom and a true democratic life, the Second Vatican Council stressed the need for ministers of the Church to be free to act, for “religious communities have the further right not to be prevented from publicly teaching and bearing witness to their beliefs ... and not to be prevented from freely demonstrating the special value of their teaching” (*Dignitatis humanae*, 4). In fact, it is the task of the leaders of nations to permit the faithful of different religious families to develop the spiritual dimension of their daily life and their family and social commitments.

9. Your quinquennial reports have also informed me of *your steps in favour of ecumenical relations*, particularly with the Romanian Orthodox Church to which the majority of the people belongs. I am pleased with this renewed attention on your part. I hope you can continue the education of the faithful in this area, for they are called under your guidance to commit themselves to the way of full unity. Concerning yourselves, I invite you to pursue and to intensify your fraternal ties with our separated brothers and sisters, who are also committed to the path of dialogue and reconciliation. For the Catholic Church, *ecumenism is henceforth an urgent and irreversible task*, a witness to fraternal love lived with patience, “a duty of the Christian conscience enlightened by faith and guided by love” (*Ut unum sint*, 8). This implies concrete achievements. For example, it is important that the different Christian Churches join together for prayer and charitable work, for poverty knows no bounds and our love as brothers and sisters must be creative. Collaboration in social activities will help Christians in your country to understand that they are called to act with one another as disciples of Christ whom all proclaim Lord. Let us recall the exhortations of the Apostle of the Gentiles: “Through love be servants of one another” (Gal 5:13), for “love builds up” (1 Cor 8:1).

10. At the end of our meeting, my thoughts turn towards the faithful of your communities. Please convey to the priests, the religious and Catholics of Romania the Pope's cordial greetings and encouragement, assuring them of my prayers that in the current problems, they will not lack hope and that the Spirit will inspire all with sentiments of unity and peace! I ask you to convey my affectionate greetings to Cardinal Alexandru Todea, Archbishop emeritus of Făgăraș and Alba Julia, assuring him of my brotherly support in his poor state of health, as well as to the Archbishops and Bishops emeritus of your country.

Through the intercession of the saints of your land, I cordially impart my Apostolic Blessing to you and to all the members of the People of God entrusted to your pastoral care.

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