



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS JOHN PAUL II
TO THE BISHOPS OF MALAYSIA, SINGAPORE, AND BRUNEI
ON THEIR "AD LIMINA" VISIT**

Saturday, 16 June 1990

My dear Brothers in Christ,

1. Once again, five years after your last *ad Limina* visit, we are gathered together in God's love, which has been poured forth into our hearts through the Holy Spirit (Cfr. *Rom.* 5, 5). It is that transcendent love which generates and sustains our consecration and dedication to the service of the Church, the Body of Christ. As Bishops of the Church in *Malaysia, Singapore and Brunei*, you have come to the tombs of the Apostles Peter and Paul in order to bear witness to your faith and the faith of your peoples in the one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church founded on the Apostles and obedient to the one Lord, our Saviour Jesus Christ. "Now may our Lord Jesus Christ himself, and God our Father, who loved us and gave us eternal comfort and good hope through grace, comfort your hearts and establish them in every good work and word" (*2 Thess.* 2, 16).

2. The particular Churches over which you preside in the service of the Gospel share many of the same spiritual joys and trials, and yet they differ from one another in the ethnic variety of your people, in the religious traditions they follow, and in significant aspects of the political and social circumstances in which they live. Some of the faithful have recently come into the Church, while others have a long tradition of Catholic life behind them. In the midst of this diversity, you, the Pastors, have a specific vocation to unity and an essential part in building up the unity of the Body, for "God has gathered together as one all those who in faith look upon Jesus as the author of salvation and the source of unity and peace... that for each and all the Church may be the visible sacrament of this saving unity" (*Lumen Gentium*, 9).

As successors of the Apostles you are bound to one another, to the other members of the College spread throughout the world and to the Successor of Peter, in a deep and abiding hierarchical

communion that is both an *organic ecclesial reality* and a specific *experience of charity* (Cfr. *ibid.*, nota praevia explicat). Thus, your pastoral action in word and deed ought to be so marked by unity and love that the faithful will more easily sense their belonging to a Church that is a universal family, "the household of God in the Spirit... a holy temple in the Lord... a dwelling place of God" (Cfr. *Eph. 2*, 19-22).

To work at building up this unity and mutual solidarity between yourselves as Bishops and between your communities is to go to the very heart of the Christian mystery, to hear the prayer of Christ himself and to give it concrete expression in your lives and ministry: "that they also may be one in us, so that the world may believe" (*Io. 17*, 21). In the final analysis, this is the call which Christ addresses to the Bishops, priests, religious and laity of Malaysia, Singapore and Brunei; this is the programme of pastoral ministry to which your endeavours must tend; this is the motive behind your efforts to help and encourage one another, and to foster concrete forms of solidarity and cooperation between your particular Churches, "so that the world may believe".

3. One of our principal tasks during this *ad Limina* visit must be to give thanks to God for the vitality and growth of the Church in your region. You are a *pusillus grex* and you have many difficulties to face, but you are also witnesses of the working of grace in the hearts of your people. You see the laity's thirst for the word of God, for an increased knowledge of the faith, for greater responsibility in the daily life of their communities and in the Church's mission, and you can testify to a new growth of prayergroups and movements capable of helping the faithful to deepen their spiritual life and the Christian witness. Groups such as the Saint Vincent de Paul Society, the Legion of Mary, Renewal in the Spirit and many others, as well as "basic communities", in so far as they are in genuine communion with the Church, are a source of present strength and a great hope for the future.

One of the main challenges of the present hour in your ecclesial communities is how to offer lay men and women the formation they need in order to take an ever more effective part in the task of evangelization and of inculturating the Gospel. Together with their generous and devoted Christian living, they also need a "totally integrated formation" in the faith and in the Church's social doctrine (Cfr. Ioannis Pauli PP. II *Christifideles Laici*, 60), in order to avoid a separation of the Gospel from daily life. This "vital synthesis" of Gospel and life should be evident in the convincing testimony which the lay faithful give in every sphere of their activity, "where, not fear but the loving pursuit of Christ and adherence to him will be the factors determining how a person is to live and grow, and these will lead to new ways of living more in conformity with human dignity" (*Ibid.* 34).

4. The priests are your closest, cooperators in the ministry, and their daily labours reflect the compassionate love of the Good Shepherd for the flock. Engaged as they are in widespread and intensive pastoral activities, the members of the *presbyterium* need your encouragement and guidance in order to maintain a proper balance between spirituality and action, between their specific priestly ministry aimed at building up God's kingdom and the many other related aspects

of their service to their brothers and sisters. All that you do to promote a cordial personal relationship with your priests, as well as harmony and mutual assistance among the priests themselves, will undoubtedly be of advantage to your Dioceses, not only because all of this produces a positive environment for the ministry, but above all because the *presbyterium* should be a particular reflection of the "intimate sacramental brotherhood" that unites all who have received priestly consecration (Cfr. *Presbyterorum Ordinis*, 8). In fact, the great sign of fidelity to Christ is the exercise of an effective and universal love without discrimination of persons, which, following the example of Jesus himself, entails at the same time a love of preference for the least of our brothers and sisters, the poor and the defenceless. I ask you to take my greetings to your priests and to assure them of my prayer that the Holy Spirit will fill their hearts with just such an evangelical love.

5. Ever since the Second Vatican Council a new emphasis has been given to the ecclesial nature of Religious life and to the strengthening of mutual relations between Bishops and the Religious Institutes and their members present in each Diocese. Each of you has much to be grateful for with regard to the life and work of the men and women Religious who are a "sign" in your particular Churches of the holiness of God and a "prophetic testimony" which calls to conversion and to the values of the kingdom (Cfr. *Lumen Gentium*, 44). The increasing numbers of vocations, especially among Women Religious, and the attention being given to formation, not only brings encouragement and solidity to the Catholic community, but also makes the Church's presence more widely felt in the community at large through the social, educational and health-care activities in which Religious are engaged, and which constitute "an increasingly clearer revelation of Christ" (*Ibid.* 46). In particular, the prayer and penance, solitude and silence of contemplative Religious "impart a hidden, apostolic fruitfulness" that plays an important part in making God's people grow (Cfr. *Perfectae Caritatis*, 7).

It is your pastoral task to support Religious in their persevering pursuit of a deeper configuration with the Death and Resurrection of Christ for the glory of the Father. With understanding of the nature of Religious life and with respect for the charism proper to each Institute, you are called to foster the growth of these communities and, as those responsible for the well-being of your Dioceses, to coordinate their pastoral action through dialogue and mutual agreement.

6. Dear Brother Bishops, I am aware of the special and not easy circumstances in which you exercise your ministry, and I share your concern at the problems confronting you in relation to the Church's full freedom to carry out her religious mission. In Malaysia, the increasing Islamization of social and civic life has at times appeared to you and to other non-Muslim communities to encroach upon the fundamental right of individuals and groups to practise their faith without interference. This of course is a cause of deep concern to you. I am pleased to note that in a recent meeting between the Prime Minister and non-Muslim religious leaders assurances were given in this respect and I express the hope that all will work together in harmony in order to ensure their practical implementation.

I am also aware of the concerns which Archbishop Yong has opportunely expressed regarding the proposed "Maintenance of Religious Harmony Bill". I am confident that friendly discussions about these matters will benefit everyone. Experience shows that the honest confrontation of ideas and convictions among citizens has been an indispensable condition for maintaining harmony within society and for the development of civilization. At the same time, religious conviction cannot be separated from moral judgement, and morality applies not only to private and personal matters but to all that constitutes the structure and course of public life in society.

The right of individuals and communities to social and civil freedom in matters of religion is one of the pillars which support the edifice of human rights. Fortunately, throughout the world there is a growing awareness of the importance of fundamental rights in building just and stable societies capable of expressing the aspirations of peoples to live in dignity and freedom. Moreover, citizens who fear undue adverse reactions when they express their convictions cannot share fully in the construction of the society in which they live. The Second Vatican Council enunciated the principles which ought to govern cooperation between the public authorities and the Church: "In their proper spheres the political community and the Church are independent and self-governing, although, by a different title, each serves the personal and social vocation of the same human beings. This service can be more effectively rendered for the good of all if each works better for wholesome mutual cooperation... For man is not restricted to the temporal sphere. While living in history he fully maintains his eternal vocation" (*Gaudium et Spes*, 76).

7. These are some of the thoughts which your visit suggests. They are meant above all to express my own concern for all the Churches and my desire to encourage you in your delicate task as Shepherds of the Lord's flock. I commend you and your Dioceses to the intercession of Mary, Mother of the Church, that her protection may accompany the steps you take in order to preach the word of Truth and to gather together the whole People of God in faith and holiness of life. May the Lord Jesus Christ help you to be faithful stewards of the mysteries of God (Cfr. *1 Cor.* 4, 1), and courageous witnesses to the Gospel of grace (Cfr. *Rom.* 15, 16), and to God's glorious power to make men just (Cfr. *2 Cor.* 3, 8-9). The peace of God be ever with you!

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