



The Holy See

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

Friday, 19 November 1993

Dear Brother Bishops,

1. I gladly welcome you – *the Bishops of Ontario* – and rejoice "when I remember you in my prayers, because I hear of your love and of the faith which you have" (Philem. 4-5). Your "*ad limina*" visit affords us the opportunity to meditate together on "the joys and hopes, the griefs and anxieties" (Cf. *Gaudium et Spes*, 1) of the faithful for whom you are vicars of the Chief Shepherd (Cf. 1Pt. 5: 4).

When the Lord challenges us with the question which one day he addressed to Peter: "Do you love me?" (Cf. Jn. 21: 15-17), he makes an almost overpowering demand on us. He calls us to an inexpressible union of love with himself. Having first loved us, he asks of us – his "stewards" and "friends" – *a steady, ardent and heroic heart from the depths of which we can respond: "Yes, Lord, you know that I love you"* (Jn. 21: 15-17). Our fidelity to "the Shepherd and Guardian" of our souls (1Pt. 2: 25) will then be displayed in a profound and self-giving love for the Church, for which Christ "gave himself up... that he might sanctify her" (Eph. 5: 25-26). This evangelical love, which the Holy Spirit pours into our hearts (Cf. Rom. 5: 5), must be the force animating all our pastoral activity on behalf of God's people. I pray that your visit to the tombs of the Apostles Peter and Paul will strengthen and encourage you in your ministry, and that you will return to your Dioceses renewed in pastoral charity.

2. Having spoken with previous groups of Canadian Bishops about holding firm to the sure word of truth (Cf. Titus 1: 9) and nourishing the people of God with the life of divine grace through the sacraments, our thoughts turn today to *our duty to teach "the faithful the things which lead them to God, just as the Lord Jesus did"* (John Paul II, *Veritatis Splendor*, 114). At a time when the ethical

roots of grave social problems are not always evident, it is more essential than ever that we, the Church's Pastors, should zealously support and guide the laity's efforts to play an active part in the harmonious and integral development of a just and caring society. When the Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World speaks of the faithful's duties towards society, it exhorts Christians to give a conspicuous example of service to the advancement of the common good: "Prudently and honourably let them fight against injustice and oppression... and lack of tolerance. Let them devote themselves to the welfare of all sincerely and fairly, indeed with charity and political courage" (*Gaudium et Spes*, 75).

The diffusion of the Church's social doctrine is therefore "part of the Church's evangelizing mission", which should result in all the Church's members having a deep "commitment to justice" (John Paul II, *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis*, 41). Bishops have a duty not only to speak out against injustice, but above all to bring to bear the principles of the Church's social teaching on the problems confronting their people, with particular attention to the poor and the victims of society's imbalances. This you have in fact done recently in the document *Widespread Unemployment: A Call To Mobilize*, in which you remind your fellow-citizens that unemployment, because it undermines human dignity and stability, cries out for a just solution. Justice in this case involves humanizing the economy and rebuilding it in such a way that the social and moral disorder of unemployment can be overcome (Cf. *Widespread Unemployment: A Call To Mobilize*, n. 20, 14 April 1993).

3. Inspired and motivated by living faith, the laity should assume responsibility for making the Church's social teaching their own and for implementing it in everyday life. In a recent Pastoral Message you asked your people to discern in what concrete way God calls them to show solidarity with all the members of the human family residing in Canada, as well as with those in other countries where individuals or groups are unable to meet their most basic needs (Cf. *A Prophetic Mission for the Church*, n. 2, 16 March 1993). Living in a nation richly blessed in human and natural resources, Canadians have generally taken to heart their responsibilities to the less fortunate, especially the poor, the homeless, *immigrants and refugees*. This tradition of solidarity, generosity and Christian hospitality now needs to be consciously nourished, taught and spread, so that Canada may continue to be a voice for justice and solidarity in the international community, and so that Canadian Catholics will continue to be deeply concerned about the needs of the disadvantaged. Your Conference deserves recognition for the ways in which it *fosters ecclesial communion and solidarity*: through the generosity of the Canadian Catholic Organization for Development and Peace, which recently celebrated its XXV anniversary; through your commitment to the Church in Central and Eastern Europe; and through your constant teaching, particularly in your recent pastoral Letter *Toward a New Evangelization*, which affirms that the creation of a truly just society in your country requires that more efforts be made to transform the economic, political and social situation of the Native Peoples (CCCB, *Toward a New Evangelization*, n. 19, 23 September 1992).

4. The Church is well aware that the longed – for renewal of social and political life *has its foundation in the moral order* revealed through creation (Cf. Rom. 2: 15) and illuminated by the mystery of Christ, in whom "all things hold together" (Col. 1: 17). The dechristianization of society involves not only an increasing indifference to religion, a loss of faith, but also an *obscuring of the moral sense*. As Pastors, we have a duty – a task integral to the new evangelization – to *rekindle awareness of fundamental moral truths* as the necessary ethical foundation for a society worthy of man. By reaffirming the universality and immutability of those truths, you render a vital service to the community, for whenever there is confusion about what is good and evil it is impossible to preserve and build up the moral order (CCCB, *Toward a New Evangelization*, n. 93, 23 September 1992).

Yours is a country which for over 125 years has prized its nationhood and respected the enriching diversity of its cultural, ethnic and linguistic traditions. The continuing search for *what is true, good and just for every person and group* always involves an honest and respectful dialogue, and an overriding concern for the common good. Because the Church respects the legitimate autonomy of the political community (Cf. *Gaudium et Spes*, 76), she does not identify herself with any particular political theory or solution: "Her contribution to the political order is precisely her vision of the dignity of the person revealed in its fullness in the mystery of the Incarnate Word" (John Paul II, *Centesimus Annus*, 47).

Pastors contribute to national and social life by helping the faithful to understand that their debates and decisions should be illumined by "the word of the truth, the Gospel" (Col. 1: 5). A grave risk for modern democracies is the raising of *ethical relativism* to the level of a governing principle. Both reason and experience show that the idea of a "social consensus" which ignores the underlying objective truth about man and his transcendent destiny is insufficient as a basis for an honest and just social order. "In every sphere of personal, family, social and political life, morality – founded upon truth and open in truth to authentic freedom – renders a primordial, indispensable and immensely valuable service not only for the individual person and his growth in the good, but also for society and its genuine development" (John Paul II, *Veritatis Splendor*, 101). The teaching of objective, binding and concrete moral demands should be a central part of all education, catechesis and preaching in your Dioceses.

Likewise, *the moral principles guiding the laity's activity in public life should be entirely in harmony with those governing their private lives*. The Second Vatican Council emphasized the need for consistency between public and private morality: "The layman, at one and the same time a believer and a citizen of the world, has only a single conscience; it is by this that he must be guided continually in both domains" (*Apostolicam Actuositatem*, 5). Catholics in public life should be helped to work out the relationship between their faith and their political commitment. I encourage you to provide appropriate leadership in this important area.

5. Parmi les signes de réel déséquilibre qui apparaissent dans la société – et que la communauté

ecclésiale devrait s'attacher à corriger –, on relève l'incapacité d'apprécier la vie humaine comme “un magnifique don du Dieu de bonté” (Jean-Paul II, *Familiaris Consortio*, 30). Devant certains événements récents au Canada, vous avez courageusement dénoncé les tentatives pour convaincre les gens que, dans le cas des malades en phase terminale qui le demandent, *l'aide au suicide ou l'euthanasie* sont moralement acceptables. En tant qu'Evêques, vous ne pouvez manquer d'enseigner qu'une attitude responsable devant la vie exclut qu'aucune personne puisse jamais avoir l'intention explicite de provoquer sa propre mort ou la mort d'une autre personne innocente, par action ou par omission (Cf. *Catéchisme de l'Église Catholique*, n. 2276-2279). Effacer la distinction entre guérir – en faisant appel à tous les moyens ordinaires disponibles – et tuer constitue une grave menace pour la santé morale et spirituelle d'une nation, et cela expose les plus faibles et les plus vulnérables à des risques inacceptables. Il est nécessaire de rappeler à ceux qui demandent la légalisation du soi-disant “droit à mourir dans la dignité” qu'*aucune autorité ne peut légitimement recommander ou permettre une telle offense à la dignité de la personne humaine* (Cf. Congrégation pour la Doctrine de la Foi, *Déclaration sur l'Euthanasie*, II). Une législation qui contredit des vérités morales essentielles au sujet du don suprême de la vie ouvre la voie à ces formes modernes du totalitarisme qui, par la négation de la vérité transcendante, détruisent la dignité humaine authentique (Cf. Jean-Paul II, *Centesimus Annus*, 44).

6. L'Église au Canada est justement fière de ses très nombreux établissements hospitaliers. Fondés pour la plupart par des communautés religieuses, ils rendent un témoignage exemplaire par la défense du respect de la vie, depuis la conception jusqu'à la mort naturelle, et par le soutien apporté dans la foi aux personnes qui connaissent toutes sortes d'épreuves (Cf. Mt. 25, 40). Dans votre pays, vous avez connu une longue et fructueuse coopération de l'Église et du gouvernement pour organiser les services de santé. Ce partenariat suppose que *l'Église conserve le droit exercé ordinairement par l'action des instituts religieux, d'administrer librement les hôpitaux en accord avec son enseignement moral*. Il importe que vous poursuiviez inlassablement vos efforts pour maintenir l'identité catholique de toutes les institutions ecclésiales, afin que leur fidélité au Christ et aux enseignements du Magistère soit assurée.

7. Tandis que ce millénaire approche de son terme, l'Église avance dans son pèlerinage; elle veille et elle attend son Seigneur, l'Alpha et l'Oméga, Lui qui fait toutes choses nouvelles (Cf. Ap. 21, 5). En achevant nos entretiens à l'occasion des visites “*ad limina*”, je voudrais inviter toute l'Église au Canada à demander au “Père des miséricordes” (2Co. 1, 3) la grâce de l'Esprit, afin de “ne pas se modeler sur le monde présent” (Cf. Rm. 12, 2) mais d'être de plus en plus “l'image de son Fils” (Cf. ibid. 8, 29). Que la Croix de Jésus-Christ, plantée en terre canadienne par Jacques Cartier il y a plus de 450 ans, déploie dans une lumière toujours plus vive sa puissance de salut auprès des prêtres, des religieux, des religieuses et des laïcs de votre pays! En confiant chacun des diocèses canadiens à l'intercession de votre patron saint Joseph et à la bienveillance aimante de Marie, Mère de Dieu et Mère de l'Église, je vous accorde cordialement ma Bénédiction Apostolique.

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