



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF JOHN PAUL II
TO THE MALABAR AND MALANKAR BISHOPS
IN THEIR "AD LIMINA" VISIT**

Castelgandolfo

Friday, 29 August 1980

Venerable and dear Brothers in our Lord Jesus Christ,

1. I am very grateful to you for your visit today; it is indeed with great joy that I address my affectionate greeting to all of you who, together with Cardinal Joseph Parecattil, Archbishop of Ernakulam and President of the Pontifical Commission for the Revision of the Eastern Code of Canon Law, have come from different parts of India for this *ad limina* visit and for your collegial meeting.

2. In you I sense the presence here of the *whole Syro-Malabar Church*, this Eastern and authentically Indian Church which for centuries has been a marvel of Christian witness in fidelity to its primitive faith and to its legitimate traditions. And hence my greeting goes today to your entire Church: to the priests, to the men and women Religious, to the members of Secular institutes, to the young, to the old, to the fathers and mothers of families, to the workers, to the children and to all the faithful, especially those who are in sickness and in pain.

My greeting and good wishes go also to the faithful and Pastors of the other Churches who live alongside of you in the different parts of Kerala and in the rest of India, as well as to the brethren of the Christian communities which are not yet in full communion with us. They go likewise to all the members of the non-Christian religions.

3. In this collegial visit, I wish officially to express my gratitude for the diligent reports which you have placed at my disposal and at the disposal of my collaborators in the Apostolic See, for a greater knowledge of your Eparchies with their many clergy and religious. These Eparchies are teeming with pastoral and missionary activity; their activities are also manifested in the field of culture through colleges and schools, in the field of charitable and social assistance through hospitals and dispensaries, and wherever there is need to work for the human, social and spiritual advancement of your communities or of anyone without distinction of belief, race or rite. I have noted your commitment, full of dedication and of

love for all. This is an honour and a duty for the whole Catholic Church, and this is also the task of your Church. It has always been so, and today especially this commitment shines with new lustre. I am happy to render testimony to your zeal.

4. This perspective of openness to all people without any distinction is a challenge to my own apostolic service, which is described by "*Lumen Gentium*" in these words: "universo caritatis coetui praesidet, legitimas varietates tuetur et simul invigilet ut particularia, nedum unitati noceant, ei potius inserviant"[1].

I have desired this encounter with you and I wish to thank you for the praiseworthy responsibility with which you have accepted the invitation of the Sacred Congregation to participate in a study meeting on the reform of the Sacred Liturgy of your own Church. This is a meeting from which it seems right to expect the happiest of results with respect to a clear liturgical discipline and a liturgical renewal according to the directives and spirit of the Second Vatican Council. You may be sure that the Successor of Peter, on every occasion, as in this fraternal encounter, has only one desire and proposal, that of being what the Council has called: "unitatis tum Episcoporum tum fidelium multitudinis, perpetuum ac visibile principium et fundamentum"[2].

5. What fundamentally does this encounter of ours and your collegial meeting with the competent Congregation of the Holy See look to if not to the realization of perfect communion *in vinculo pacis*? The Liturgy manifests and effects unity in an altogether special way. "Liturgical actions are not private functions, but are celebrations of the Church, which is the 'sacrament of unity', namely, a holy people united and organized under their bishops. Therefore liturgical actions pertain to the whole body of the Church; they manifest it and have effects upon it"[3].

Besides setting forth with such vigour this general fundamental theological concept, the Council draws attention to other principles of the greatest importance: the Church desires to respect and foster in a special way "the spiritual adornments and gifts of the various races and peoples.

Anything in their way of life that is not indissolubly bound up with superstition and error she studies with sympathy and, if possible, preserves intact. Sometimes, in fact she admits such things into the liturgy itself, as long as they harmonize with the true and authentic liturgical spirit"[4]. Moreover "*Lumen Gentium*" states: "By divine providence it has come about that various churches established in diverse places by the apostles and their successors have in the course of time coalesced into several groups, organically united, which, preserving the unity of faith and the unique divine constitution of the universal Church, enjoy their own discipline, their own theological and spiritual heritage... This variety of local Churches with one common aspiration is particularly splendid evidence of the catholicity of the undivided Church"[5].

But at the same time the Council wishes these Churches to be faithful to their traditions: "For it is the mind of the Catholic Church that each individual Church or rite should retain its traditions whole and entire, while adjusting its way of life to the various needs of time and place"[6]. This same Decree also proclaims: "All Eastern rite members should know and be convinced that they can and should always preserve their lawful liturgical rites and their established way of life, and that these should not be altered except by way of an appropriate and organic development"[7].

To attain their aim it is necessary to have a rigorous and severe application of the conciliar directives on fidelity to the

traditions of one's own rite: "Easterners themselves should honour all these things with the greatest fidelity. Besides, they should acquire an ever greater knowledge and a more exact use of them. If they have improperly fallen away from them because of circumstances of time or persons, let them take pains to return to their ancestral ways"[8]. Difficulties will not be lacking in the field of returning to the genuine sources of one's own rite. It is a question, nevertheless, of difficulties which must be faced *viribus unitis* and *Deo adiuvante*.

The liturgical renewal is hence the fundamental element for the ever fruitful life of your Church: a renewal founded on fidelity to your own genuine ecclesial traditions and open to the needs of your people, to your culture and to possible changes owing to your own organic progress. You will be usefully guided by the fundamental principles which are set out in the letter "*Dominicae Cenae*", and which will assist you not to err in a matter that is so important and so delicate.

6. After these reflection on the Liturgy, I am pleased to speak about the Memorandum that you wished to make known to me through the Sacred Congregation for the Eastern Churches. The content of this document, despite the brevity imposed on it by reason of circumstances, invites me to reflect on the history of your glorious Church, which in the free world is the Eastern Church that is most numerous and flourishing, the one with the greatest number of priests, men and women religious, seminarians and laity.

How can we fail to emphasize with joy and with true satisfaction the contribution of your Church to the cause of the missions, not only in India but also elsewhere, to the promotion of priestly and religious vocations, to the activities of teaching and of charitable assistance, etc.? There is no question of underestimating the many human factors that have their own influence in these phenomena, but rather of noting how these factors are also indebted to the Christian faith of your Syro-Malabar families, who are always open to giving their children to the cause of the universal Church even beyond the boundaries of your particular Church.

I wish to express my heartfelt thanks to you the Bishops, to your priests, to the Religious, the members of Secular Institutes, the seminarians and the generous families, for what you have done and continue to do for the universal Church. What at one time the missionaries of Europe and America did and are still doing *in auxilium Orientalium*, you have done and are doing *in auxilium Ecclesiae Latinae*.

I sincerely thank you. All of this is in perfect harmony with the spirit of the Council which wants the particular Churches to feel in their heart responsibility for the other Churches and for the universal Church.

7. After a glance at your Church, my thought turns to the *desiderata* that you have presented. The importance of what you set forth, as well as the canonical, ecclesiological, pastoral, doctrinal and practical implications thereof, explain why it is not possible on this occasion to give an immediate and complete response to your proposals.

When there is a question of matters that concern the whole Church, and the creation of supra-episcopal structures in which the interests of different Bishops and particular Churches are involved, the Holy See adopts serious and wise procedures that are sanctioned by the practice of many centuries. I wish to assure you how happy I am to see that you are endeavouring to affirm and deepen your identity as a particular Eastern Church.

I am pleased to quote here the thought of my great predecessor Paul VI in his concluding discourse at the 1974 Synod of Bishops: "Eodem tamen tempore exoptamus, ut sedulo caveatur ne altior pervestigatio essentialis huius aspectus rerum, quae Ecclesiae sunt, ullo modo noceant firmitati 'communiois' cum ceteris particularibus Ecclesiis et Petri successore, cui Christus Dominus, grave, perenne atque amoris plenum hoc officium commisit, *ut agnos et oves pasceret*[9], *ut fratres confirmaret*[10] *ut fundamentum esset et signum unitatis Ecclesiae*"[11].

With reference to some phrases of your Memorandum, I would like to recall an aspect to the collegial teaching of the Second Vatican Council: "Romanus enim Pontifex habet in Ecclesiam, vi muneris sui, Vicarii scilicet Christi et totius Ecclesiae Pastoris, plenam, supremam et universalem potestatem, quam semper libere exercere valet"[12]. On the occasion of the above-mentioned Synod, Paul VI added: "unum potius adest propositum, quo videlicet omnes - pro suo quisque munere suscepto fideliterque impleto - Dei voluntati respondeant, maxima impulsu dilectione"[13]. I wish however to assure you that everything will be done, compatibly with the good of the universal Church and with the necessary gradualness.

8. In the same order of ideas there is also the problem of the assistance to your faithful outside your Eparchies. On the one hand by unforgettable predecessor John Paul I, in his brief pontificate, had the opportunity and joy of being able to appoint Archbishop Antony Padiyara as Apostolic Visitor for the Malabar faithful living in different regions of India outside the territories of Eastern jurisdiction. The Archbishop has striven with exemplary solicitude to fulfil the task entrusted to him, and I wish to express my gratitude to him *coram vobis*.

Also involved, on the other hand, in this question are the Papal Representative in India and the Latin Ordinaries of those places where these Malabar faithful are living. I can assure you that there will be rendered accessible to these faithful all the helps which the laws of the Church foresee, particularly by the prescriptions, which you yourselves have cited, of the Decree "*Christus Dominus*". It is well known how, after the Council, the Church wished to revise the Apostolic Constitution "*Exul Familia*", and my predecessor Paul VI in "*Pastoralis Migratorum Cura*" did not omit any effort to place every spiritual help at the disposal of emigrants. The common concern of the Bishops of the emigrants' places of origin and the Bishops of their new homes requires a harmony of relationships and a spirit of fraternal collaboration. It is my most earnest desire, and my conviction, that the Episcopal Conferences, whether of India or the regional ones, will find a way to develop a just manner of providing for this need.

In this effort to help the most needy faithful, either spiritually or materially, the Malabar Bishops will find in the Holy See a sincere support and an animating force, which, in an ecclesial perspective that embraces the needs of the individual particular Churches and the common good of the whole Church, seeks to create a climate of mutual knowledge and esteem among all people, especially among the faithful of different races, nations and rites.

9. I would like to add yet a word about your Eparchies. I am not only thinking of your Church in terms of numbers, statistics and the outstanding activities of each of your Eparchies, but I am contemplating the rich spiritual life that exists therein.

I am thinking of your priests, so numerous and generous. I am thinking of the men Religious who are members of Eastern Institutes, as well as Orders and Congregations of Latin origin, and who are docile to the call of Christ and in the

vanguard of the Church's life. I am thinking of the great numbers of women Religious of contemplative and active life, whose consecrated oblation reflects that of Mary, and becomes the basis for a selfless service that mirrors the maternal care of the whole Church, especially for the little ones, for the weak, the poor and the suffering.

I am thinking of the young people, and particularly of the seminarians: each of you has a minor seminary for candidates for the priesthood, and there are two major seminaries - the Pontifical Seminary of Alwaye and the Apostolic Seminary of Kottayam - besides the Scholasticate of the Carmelites of Mary Immaculate, with two theological faculties and a third one already envisioned.

In this regard it is worthwhile to call attention to the following exhortation: "The formation of future priests should be considered as one of the most important ministries in a diocese and, in some ways, the most demanding. In fact, the work of teaching unites the professor very closely to the work of Our Lord and Master, who prepared his Apostles to be witnesses of the Gospel and dispensers of the mysteries of God"^[14].

In conclusion, I present to your reflection a profound desire of my heart: You are here united with Peter "communione fraternae caritatis atque studio permoti universalis missionis Apostolis traditae"^[15]. This is a propitious occasion for recalling the supreme theme of unity: fraternal unity among Bishops, unity between the different rites, unity between the Bishop and the priests, between the Bishop and Religious, between the Bishop, priests and laity, between the poor and the well-to-do. The unity which in these days of grace you have sought in the liturgical and pastoral fields must be the first fruit of this particular experience of harmony and collaboration.

My thoughts go to the Bishops of the other rites who work in the same territory and who must be not only brothers who coexist with you but who live alongside of you in profound ecclesial communion with you and with the whole Church. My thoughts go also to the various groups and communities of separated brethren who look with sincere admiration to your bond with the Successor of Peter.

My last word is one of hope and prayer to Mary Mother of the Church. May she protect you always and through her intercession may your Eparchies continue to have a great flowering of vocations and great holiness of life. May she enable all of us to fix our gaze constantly on her Son, Jesus Christ, the great High Priest and chief Shepherd of the Church of God.

And now a word to the Malankar Bishops, who are associated in a fraternal way with the group of Malabar Prelates.

I wish to extend a very special greeting to you, since this year is the anniversary of an extraordinary event in your Church. You are celebrating the Golden Jubilee of that spiritual movement of which the late and esteemed Mar Ivanios was a pioneer and which brought into full communion with Rome himself, other Prelates, and the communities which he founded: the Brothers of the Imitation of Christ and the Sisters of Bethany.

As a sign of my own sharing in this Golden Jubilee, I am happy to announce my decision to send as my Representative and as the bearer of my message Cardinal Wladislaw Rubin, Prefect of the Sacred Congregation for the Eastern Churches, who will be present for the solemn celebrations that are scheduled for 26-28 December next.

I assure you of my prayers, my blessing and my fraternal affection in Christ Jesus our Lord.

[1] No. 13

[2] *Lumen Gentium*, 23.

[3] *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, 26.

[4] *Ibid.*, 37.

[5] No. 23.

[6] *Orientalium Ecclesiarum*, 2.

[7] *Ibid.*, 6.

[8] *Ibid.*, 6.

[9] *Jn* 21:13-17.

[10] *Lk* 22:32.

[11] 26 October 1974: AAS 66 (1974), p. 636.

[12] *Lumen Gentium*, 22.

[13] *Ibid.*

[14] Sacred Congregation for Catholic Education, "The Theological Formation of Future Priests", IV, 1, 3.

[15] *Christus Dominus*, 36.

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