



The Holy See

APOSTOLIC JOURNEY TO BANGLADESH

ADDRESS OF JOHN PAUL II TO THE REPRESENTATIVES OF THE CATHOLIC CHURCH

Dacca (Bangladesh), 19 November 1986

Dear Friends,

Distinguished representatives of the religious and public life of Bangladesh,

1. During this brief visit that God is enabling me to make to your country, I am particularly happy to have the opportunity to speak to this gathering of representatives of many different sectors of life in Bangladesh. With profound joy and sentiments of good will I greet each one of you. I truly hope by our meeting to confirm you in the spirit of "Communion and Brotherhood", which you have chosen as the theme of this visit. "Communion and Brotherhood " expresses my own feelings towards the people of Bangladesh.

The journey which is beginning here in Bangladesh will take me to Singapore, Fiji, New Zealand, Australia and the Seychelles. What is my purpose in making these visits? In the first place they have a profound ecclesial meaning for the Catholic communities throughout the world. Secondly, they are meant to carry forward the Catholic Church's commitment to sincere and loyal dialogue with other religious traditions concerning the common spiritual and human destiny which we all share. Thirdly, by visiting the different parts of the world I wish to alert men and women of good will to the grave challenges that the human family faces in the final years of the twentieth century.

2. First of all, then, my visit is to the Catholic community. The Church is a community of faith and Christian life in fidelity to the teachings of our Lord Jesus Christ. Her members belong to every race and nation, and they reflect every social condition. Without abandoning or weakening their membership of a particular nation and culture, they are united with one another by a universal spiritual bond. This "koinonia" or communion of the members of the Church is not just an attitude of spiritual solidarity; it is primarily a sharing in certain gifts with which Christ has endowed the Church through the Spirit which he pours out into our hearts.

The Second Vatican Council lists some of these gifts: Sacred Scripture, our Trinitarian belief, the Sacraments, the life of grace, faith, hope and charity, and other charisms. Through these gifts we enter into union with the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, and into communion with one another. This communion has a "permanent and visible source and foundation of unity" in the Successor of Peter. Today the Lord has enabled me, the latest in the long line of Popes, to be present among you in person, in order to confirm your faith and fellowship. Herein lies the deepest meaning of my visit to the Catholic community of Bangladesh.

To you, then, bishops, priests, men and women religious, seminarians and representatives of the laity of Bangladesh I wish to repeat the words of Saint Paul: "We give thanks to God for you, constantly mentioning you in our prayers, remembering before our God and Father your work of faith and labour of love and steadfastness of hope".

In speaking to the members of the Catholic Church in Bangladesh I am conscious of the spiritual, cultural and social setting in which you live and work. For a number of years you have been examining your pastoral and charitable activities in relation to the needs of the Church and the nation. In this respects the teachings and guidelines of the Second Vatican Council constitute an essential point of reference for the entire Church in fulfilling her mission in the present circumstances of history and of the world.

The proper application of the Council's directives, many of which have been supplemented by later documents of the Holy See, requires much courage and planning on the part of the whole ecclesial community.

3. The "Pastoral Plan for the Church in Bangladesh", published by your Bishops' Conference at Pentecost 1985, identifies a number of challenges that the Church faces. Each of you has a distinctive contribution to make in responding to them. You feel a need for greater coordination at the local, diocesan and national levels in programmes of formation and pastoral action. This is a requirement not only of external organization but also and especially of the spiritual communion which unites you in the Lord.

In particular you feel a need for the specific role of the laity in the life and work of the Church to be fully recognized and put into practice. You also desire to be ever closer to all the people of Bangladesh, to the cultural and social conditions of your fellow citizens. You are concerned, and rightly so, to be present among them in all their strivings.

4. To all the priests, I wish to offer a special word of encouragement. You have been configured to Christ in a particular way by the grace of ordination, and you must try each day to reflect more and more the meekness and love of that Heart which was moved to compassion by the multitudes. Support one another through prayer and through the example of your generous priestly life and ministry. Heed the words of the Apostle: "Do not be conformed to the spirit of this world". As true

pastors of the people entrusted to you, teach them to assume their proper role in the ecclesial and civil communities. For my part each day I will pray for you to Mary, Mother of the Church and our Mother, and our companion on the path of discipleship.

5. In the words of the Apostle I would exhort the men and women religious of Bangladesh always to "walk in newness of life" according to their special charism within the ecclesial community. With hearts filled with joy, you must continue to serve the Church in this country with generosity and self-sacrifice. Be mindful always of your identity and of your dignity. All that you do in the service of others assumes a special meaning because of what you are: people who have left all in order to make the unfathomable love of Christ the whole substance of your lives.

6. I extend a special greeting also to the seminarians of Bangladesh. May you experience in the depths of your hearts the attractiveness and power of Christ's call: "If you would be perfect... come, follow me". Prepare yourselves carefully for the priestly tasks that await you. And know that the Pope loves you and prays for you.

7. Dear lay people of Bangladesh: you will not be surprised that the first thought of the Pope in your regard is one of solidarity in the love of our Lord Jesus Christ. It is a joy for me to know of your enthusiasm to grow in faith and love so as better to fulfil your role in the Church and the world.

You are a "little flock" and many of you are poor. You struggle with the natural limitations and manmade difficulties of your existence in this land. You know that in spite of these circumstances the Lord calls you to lives of holiness and peace.

Holiness of life means giving God first place in your thoughts and actions; it means respecting his will for your family life and being truthful and just in your dealings with each other. Holiness means taking time to pray; it means love of neighbour, forgiveness of those who offend you, and patience in the trials of life. It means growing in the knowledge of the faith, in piety and in obedience to the eternal Father.

Peace means that you will live in brotherhood with all; that you will try to share each other's burdens, that you will collaborate in the work of progress and development, that you will seek to promote harmony and mutual respect among all members of the nation.

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ: I urge you to stand firm in the hope to which you have been called. Remember that the whole Church looks to you with love and supports you in a prayerful union of hearts.

8. Young people of Bangladesh: you more than anyone else are called to help shape the world in which you live. The future belongs to you. And yet you can often feel frustrated or disillusioned.

You long for a better world, yet age-old selfishness continues to prevail. Sometimes you do not know where to begin to change things for the better. But if you were to lose heart, however enormous the tasks before you, you would be condemning yourselves and your generation to perpetuate the very situation that demands improvement.

I would like to remind you of the young man in the Gospel, full of good will, who approached Jesus and asked: "Good Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?". Good Teacher! You too need good teachers who will lead you to what is good, along the paths of truth, life and love, away from every form of deceit, hatred or violence; teachers who will lead you to God. And Jesus replies to the young man: "No one is good but God alone". In fact, as I wrote concerning this very passage on the occasion of the International Youth Year: "Without reference to God, the whole world of created values remains as it were suspended in an absolute vacuum. It also loses its transparency, its expressiveness. Evil is put forward as a good and good itself is rejected. Are we not shown this by the experience of our own time...?".

The final part of this Gospel narrative shows how much depends on your own willingness to do your part. The young man went away sad. He did not have the courage to commit himself to Christ's work. You, though, must be willing to serve the well-being of your brothers and sisters in this land, by using your youthful energies to the full. In this way you will be expressing the authenticity of your faith and you will set a noble goal to your endeavours.

In the great enterprise of seeking just solutions of the sufferings and needs of your fellow citizens, young people of all faiths should be open to each other in a spirit of collaboration and mutual esteem. Young people of Bangladesh, assume your role in the development of your country. Prepare yourselves diligently for the challenges that call you to contribute the best of yourselves to the service of your people and of your homeland.

9. Distinguished representatives of all religious beliefs, men and women of Bangladesh: my message concerns the sublime dignity of every human being in God's plan for the human family. There is a growing conviction that something must urgently be done to secure the peace and development that are the conditions for a better future for the whole human race. We are painfully aware that man's God given dignity, and even survival itself, are gravely threatened. The political and ideological tensions between East and West, and the economic and social tensions between North and South, as well as the many forms of violence, injustice and inequality, are a present and growing threat to human rights and human dignity.

It is my constant prayer that the harmony of mind demonstrated at the recent meeting of prayer at Assisi – where the leaders of the Churches and Christian Communion and the other religions of the world gathered to implore the gift of peace from God – will grow from day to day until all individuals and all peoples are reconciled in love. We who believe in the almighty power of the Most High God must be convinced that with his help peace and reconciliation are possible. Indeed

it is his will that we work together to bring these about.

10. With particular respect I greet the sick and the poor, those here present and those who were unable to come. In you I see the face of suffering humanity. I think of those many people, young and old, in every land, whose lives are marked by pain and want. In you I see the face of the suffering Christ, the "man of sorrows", who offers to the Father his suffering and death as "the cup of salvation". Often, through your pain you have learned to be more human and more sensitive to the needs of others. In this way you have grown in dignity. That is why Jesus could say "Blessed are you poor, for yours is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are you who hunger now, for you shall be satisfied". This does not mean that you should not seek genuine liberation from life's sorrows. Nor does it mean that society can forget its very strict obligations in your regard. Rather, it means that your needs are not your concern alone; they are the very voice of God telling the world that it will be judged on the way it meets these needs on the justice, mercy and love that it shows to you. I pray that you will indeed experience the effective solidarity of which you stand in need. Above all I hope that the citizens of this land will not rest until the values of justice, mercy and love prevail. May the Most High God sustain and strengthen you all.

11. Dear friends: my brief stay among you is coming to an end. I therefore wish to express once more my gratitude to the Government and to the Church in Bangladesh for everything that has been done to make this visit possible. It was my wish to know your country more closely. I shall take away with me the memory of a people seeking to honour the Creator and to attain a better future for themselves and their children. May you all be united in working for this goal. May Almighty God bless each one of you!

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