



The Holy See

APOSTOLIC JOURNEY TO THE PHILIPPINES,
PAPUA NEW GUINEA, AUSTRALIA AND SRI LANKA

10th WORLD YOUTH DAY

**ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS JOHN PAUL II
TO THE FEDERATION OF ASIAN BISHOPS' CONFERENCES**

*San Carlos Seminary of Manila
Sunday, 15 January 1995*

Dear Brother Bishops, ,

1. In preparing for this meeting with the Pastors of the Church in Asia I have prayed to be an apt instrument of the Holy Spirit who at all times and in every place gives life to the Church and, according to Christ's promise, leads her into all the truth (cf. Jn. 16:13). I have prayed to be able – in the words of the Psalm – to sing "his praise in the assembly of the faithful" (Ps. 149 [148]:1). It is certainly with a song of praise and thanksgiving to God in my heart that I join you in marking the happy occasion of the *Silver Jubilee of the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences*.

I have been deeply touched by Archbishop Rozario's warm words of welcome and I also wish to thank the other Bishops for their thoughtful remarks on the vital questions of proclamation, life and ecology, which form the subject of your reflections during these days.

2. The Assemblies of your Federation – of which this is the Sixth – not only provide a forum for exchanging pastoral experiences and discussing issues of common interest. More significantly, they give expression to the profound *ecclesial communion and affective collegiality* which unite the Bishops of South, Southeast and East Asia with one another and with the See of Peter. Together with our brother Bishops throughout the world we feed the one flock which Christ has redeemed with his precious blood (cf. 1 Pt. 1:19). With one accord therefore, let us give thanks to God for the

"bonds of unity, charity and peace" which link us with each other under "the chief Shepherd" (*Ibid.*, 5.4), whose servants we are.

Our meeting is taking place against the background of the *Tenth World Youth Day* which has just concluded. We are all witnesses of the generous response of the young to the Church's summons to take up the pilgrim Cross of Christ. In this case, tribute must be given to the Filipino Bishops who gave close attention to the spiritual preparation of the young people taking part. Yet, in a real sense it is these young people, and others like them all over the world, who are calling the Church – inviting the Pastors of the Church – to ever greater efforts to present Christ to them in the fulness of his grace and truth. My words therefore are meant to be a fraternal encouragement, exhorting you as Saint Paul exhorted Titus: that as he had already made a beginning, he should also complete the gracious work of his ministry (cf. 2 Cor. 8:6). It is your ministry as Bishops, and the situation in which it is exercised, that is the underlying theme of these thoughts which I share with you.

3. Since the establishment of your Federation 25 years ago, rapid technological progress and economic growth have *revolutionized the face of Asia*. While affirming the benefits of this development, the Church must nevertheless make a realistic assessment of the price paid for this modernization and confront those aspects which pose "an immense threat to life: not only to the life of individuals but also to that of civilization itself" (John Paul II, *Letter to Families*, 21). Even more striking than Asia's recent material progress has been the *transformation of the spiritual landscape* of the Continent. Religious indifferentism and exaggerated individualism now threaten the traditional values which, generally speaking, bestowed meaning and harmony on the life of individuals and on the communities they composed. The forces of secularization tend to undermine your rich religious and cultural heritage. *This great Continent is at a spiritual crossroads*.

Such a moment can only confirm the Church's resolve to carry out her *primary mission*: the proclamation of Jesus Christ, and the promotion of the values of God's Kingdom (cf. John Paul II, *Redemptoris Missio*, 34). And in co-operation with every force for good, Catholics on this continent should feel the urgency of building up "the civilization of love, founded on the universal values of peace, solidarity, justice and liberty, which find their full attainment in Christ" (John Paul II, *Tertio Millennio Adveniente*, 52).

4. Jesus Christ, the God-Man, Crucified and Risen, is the hope of humanity. He is the foundation of our faith, the reason for our hope and the source of our love. The Incarnate Word, the *Savior and Mediator* between God and man (cf. 1 Tim. 2:5), is "the only one able to reveal God and lead to God" (John Paul II, *Redemptoris Missio*, 5). And Christ alone can fully reveal the ultimate grandeur and dignity of the human person and his destiny (cf. *Gaudium et Spes*, 22). The mystery of God's saving love revealed in Jesus Christ is a doctrine of faith, not a theological opinion. *And this Good News impels the Church to evangelize!* It impels Bishops to foster evangelization as a

primary task and responsibility of their ministry.

The *magna charta* of evangelization remains the Apostolic Exhortation "*Evangelii Nuntiandi*" of Pope Paul VI, with the complement of the Encyclical "*Redemptoris Missio*" which I wrote in 1990 in order to defend and promote the concept of "missionary evangelization" (John Paul II, *Redemptoris Missio*, 2) or the mission *ad gentes*, which seemed to have lost appeal and even validity in the eyes of some.

Paul VI's notion of evangelization faithfully restates Christ's teaching, the Church's tradition, and the insights of the Second Vatican Council. It is a comprehensive notion which avoids the pitfall of overemphasis on one or other aspect of this complex reality, to the detriment of others. In Pope Paul's view, evangelization includes *those activities which dispose people to listen to the Christian message, the proclamation of the message itself, and the catechesis which unfolds the riches of truth and grace* contained in the kerygma. Moreover, evangelization is directed not only to individuals but also to cultures, which need to be regenerated by contact with the Gospel. Human development and liberation are integral parts of this evangelizing mission, but they are not identical with it, and they are not the end of evangelization. Paul VI was clear about the fact that evangelization cannot be reduced to a merely temporal project of human betterment. It must always include a clear and unambiguous proclamation of Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior who brings that "abundant life" (Jn. 10:10) which is no less than eternal life in God.

5. Allow me to make some general remarks about evangelizing this continent. A first requirement of this ecclesial task is *the renewal of the Catholic community at every level* – Bishops, priests, Religious and laity – so that all may contribute to spreading the faith in which we stand. Our prayer must be that the priests, Religious and laity in your pastoral care will never lose heart in accomplishing the *prophetic mission entrusted to each one*. "Every disciple is personally called by name; no disciple can withhold making a response: 'Woe to me if I do not preach the Gospel' (1 Cor. 9:16)" (John Paul II, *Christifideles Laici*, 33). Indeed, to repeat something I once said to the Italian Bishops, the new evangelization "is not born of the will of those who decide to become propagators of their faith. It is born of the Spirit, who moves the Church to expand" (John Paul II, *Address to the Bishops taking part in a Liturgical Course*, 4 [12 Feb. 1988]). Everyone who has received the Spirit, every person who is baptized and confirmed, is called to be an evangelizer.

Without forgetting other important components of this renewal, "the signs of the times" urgently call for *enabling the laity to assume their specific role* in bringing the truths and values of the Gospel to bear on the realities of the temporal sphere. In fact, when we try to imagine the future of evangelization on this continent, do we not see it as the *irradiation of a vibrant, living faith* practised and declared by individual Christians and Christian communities, big or small, which, with few exceptions, form a *pusillus grex* in the midst of numerically superior "hearers" of the word?

To "irradiate" the faith implies the highest standards of Christian living – a rich life of prayer and sacramental practice, and moral integrity – on the part of everyone. To proclaim to others "eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Rom. 6:23) demands of each member of the Church the holiness and integrity of one for whom "to live is Christ" (Phil. 1:21). Proclamation becomes credible when it is accompanied by *sanctity of life*, sincerity of purpose and respect for others and for the whole of creation. The Encyclical "Redemptoris Missio" exhorts the Church's members: "You must be like the first Christians and radiate enthusiasm and courage, in generous devotion to God and neighbour. In a word, you must set yourselves on the path of holiness. Only thus can you... re-live in your own countries the missionary epic of the early Church" (John Paul II, *Redemptoris Missio*, 91).

Herein lies a great challenge which confronts each Bishop, as the principal teacher and guide of the faithful in truth and holiness of life. But here too we have the source of our certain hope and of our optimism. The Church's future will not be solely the result of our human efforts but, more fundamentally, the result of the workings of the Divine Spirit, whom we must not impede but assist.

6. A further consideration is the cultural framework in which evangelization in Asia has to be carried out. The religious traditions of very ancient cultures remain powerful forces in the East, and present you with particular challenges. The Church esteems these spiritual traditions as "living expressions of the soul of vast groups of people. They carry within them the *echo of thousands of years of searching for God*, a quest which is incomplete but often made with great sincerity and righteousness of heart" (Paul VI, *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, 53). While the Church rejects nothing of what is true and holy in the great religions (*Nostra Aetate*, 2), she can only hope that one day this preparation for the Gospel will come to maturity in ways which are fully Christian and fully Asian. As Bishops of the Churches in Asia, part of your concern must be to stimulate the growth of the seeds of truth and goodness found in those religions.

Under your pastoral supervision efforts are being made to increase understanding, respect and cooperation between Christians and followers of other religious traditions, and in many cases, in collaboration with the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue, various forms of dialogue are now taking place and bearing fruit. *Interreligious dialogue* should not remain only a matter of theological discussion. Where possible, it must reach to the grass-roots, correcting misunderstandings which communities have of one another, and fostering solidarity in the building of a more just and human society. This "dialogue of life" must go forward with balance, sincerity and openness (cf. John Paul II, *Redemptoris Missio*, 57), always in the conviction that authentic dialogue is achieved only by "speaking the truth in love" (Eph. 4:15).

7. Furthermore, as Bishops you have the demanding task of accepting Saint Paul's invitation to become "all things to all men" (1 Cor. 9:22), identifying yourselves with the life and traditions of your people so that *the perennial truth of Revelation can be expressed in ways that are meaningful and convincing*. On you rests responsibility for fostering with wisdom and fidelity the most suitable

means for communicating the Gospel to the various Asian cultures. The more you take into account the questions, religious formation, language, signs and symbols of those whom you wish to lead to Christ, the more effectively you will serve the cause of evangelization (cf. Paul VI, *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, 63).

However arduous this task of authentic inculturation, we can take consolation from the experience of the early Church. Although the preaching of Christ Crucified and Risen ran counter to the religious culture of those to whom the Gospel was first preached, the Holy Spirit guided the Church's growth. Beginning at Pentecost and continuing from generation to generation, the *Spirit of Truth has ever accompanied the Church's proclamation*, leading its hearers to the "obedience of faith" (Rom. 1:6) which has then purified and elevated their way of life, imbuing customs and behaviour with a Christian outlook and spirit.

8. Another recurring aspect of your pastoral activity is *the relationship between proclamation and human development*. Briefly, let us acknowledge that no human need, no human suffering can leave Christ's disciples indifferent or insensitive. Yet, the Church does not have and cannot claim to have a "technical" solution to all the ills which afflict humanity. Rather the Church herself, like a pilgrim in a foreign land, presses forward amid the difficulties and even persecutions of the world, strong only in the consolations of God (cf. *Lumen Gentium*, 8). At the same time it is her duty always to seek to make her voice heard in the conscience of individuals and the consciousness of society, defending the dignity of every human person, created in the image and likeness of God, and upholding the principles and values of faith, truth, freedom, justice and solidarity. She knows that the terrible evils which affect humanity have their source not only in man's injustice towards man but in man's radical injustice in the sight of God. In fulfilling her evangelizing mission therefore, the Church cannot neglect the needs of the poor, the hungry, the defenceless, the oppressed and the culturally deprived. But those involved in that mission must know that their responsibility goes far beyond healing the wounds of this life. They must also communicate the "new life" which comes through the grace of Jesus Christ. The Church's mission and destiny is to save man, the whole man. At this level there is no distinction of persons, neither Jew nor Greek (cf. Rom. 10:12), neither rich nor poor. All are offered God's word and the grace of redemption, because all are sinners (cf. *ibid.*, 5:12).

9. Dear Brother Bishops, if ever you feel discouraged by the seemingly impossible task of a more effective evangelization – perhaps due to the fact that some Asian cultures seem disinclined to listen to the Gospel message – I urge you to remember that, when you proclaim "Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God" (1 Cor. 1:24), "it is not you who speak, but the Spirit of your Father speaking through you" (Mt. 10:20).

At the same time, you have to make it clear that the act of faith, and reception into the communion of the Church through Baptism, must always be entirely free (cf. *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, n. 160). *Evangelization must never be imposed*. It involves love and respect for those

being evangelized. While ever insisting on the Church's right and duty to proclaim with joy the Good News of God's mercy, Catholics must carefully avoid any suspicion of coercion or devious persuasion (cf. *Dignitatis Humanae*, 4). On the other hand, accusations of proselytism – which is far from the Church's genuine missionary spirit – and a one-sided understanding of religious pluralism and tolerance should not be allowed to stifle your mission to the peoples of Asia.

10. Before I end, I wish to appeal to you to do all you can to foster what is generally called the mission *ad gentes*. Despite the fact that some try to minimize this holy duty, the Church cannot renounce her vocation to "make disciples of all nations" (Mt. 28:19).

She can never be content as a small minority or an inward-looking community. Indeed, the Church firmly believes that every person has "the right to know the riches of the mystery of Christ – riches in which we believe that the whole of humanity can find, in unsuspected fulness, everything that it is gropingly searching for concerning God, man and his destiny, life and death, and truth" (Paul VI, *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, 53). As the dawn of the Third Millennium draws near, it is "particularly in Asia, towards which the Church's mission *ad gentes* ought to be chiefly directed" (John Paul II, *Redemptoris Missio*, 37).

The mission *ad gentes*, which often implies the idea of setting out towards new lands and new peoples, today implies above all setting out towards new areas of *Asia's human geography*: towards those sectors of society made up of the urban poor, migrants and their often abandoned families, refugees, young people, and the modern areopagus of the media of social communication.

I ask you to pay careful attention to missionary evangelization in all your pastoral planning: in catechesis, preaching, priestly formation, the training of Religious, the apostolate to families and youth, the allocation of personnel, the sharing of resources, and in the prayer which Christians must always offer for the propagation of the faith. All individuals, associations and communities should ask themselves if there is more that they could do in order to open wide to Christ the doors of Asia.

11. In these years of preparation for the Great Jubilee of the Year 2000, your particular Churches are fully committed to giving a *fresh impulse to the evangelization of Asia*. Just as in the first millennium the Cross was planted on the soil of Europe, and in the second on that of the Americas and Africa, we can pray that in the Third Christian Millennium a *great harvest of faith* will be reaped in this vast and vital Continent. If the Church in Asia is to fulfil its providential destiny, evangelization as the joyful, patient and progressive preaching of the saving Death and Resurrection of Jesus Christ must be your absolute priority.

The Church must face all these tasks with the means which the Second Vatican Council has given us, one of which is the Synod of Bishops. In the Apostolic Letter "*Tertio Millennio Adveniente*" I

have mentioned also a "plan for a continent-wide Synod" for Asia. I urge you to give serious consideration to such an event which could greatly help to lead the Church in Asia more firmly into the next Millennium.

In your work you are strengthened by the example and intercession of the *great host of Martyrs* who have given life to the Church in Asia through the shedding of their blood. Ablaze with love of Christ and his Church, those great men and women – from China, Japan, Korea, the Philippines, Vietnam and elsewhere – were baptized "with the Holy Spirit and with fire" (Lk. 3:16). With your missionaries and the Saints who have borne witness to the Gospel, they became the seed of Christianity in your lands.

In closing, I make my own the memorable words spoken by Pope Paul VI twenty-five years ago here in Manila: "Jesus Christ is our constant preaching; it is his name that we proclaim to the ends of the earth (cf. Rom. 10:18) and throughout all ages (*Ibid.*, 9:5). Remember this and ponder on it: the Pope has come among you and has proclaimed Jesus Christ" (*Insegnamenti di Paolo VI*, VIII [1970] 1237 ff.).

To you, dear Brothers, this grace has been given in South, Southeast and East Asia: "to preach to the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ" (Eph. 3:8). I entrust you, your pastoral endeavours and all your people to Mary, Mother of the Redeemer and Star of the New Evangelization, and I gladly impart my Apostolic Blessing.