



The Holy See

PASTORAL VISIT IN NEW ZEALAND

**ADDRESS OF JOHN PAUL II
TO THE BISHOPS**

Wellington (New Zealand), 23 November 1986

Dear Cardinal Williams, dear brother Bishops,

1. My meeting with you, the bishops of the Church in New Zealand, represents a very significant moment of my visit to your country. This time of fraternal exchange gives us the opportunity to experience anew, with joy and gratitude, the bonds that unite us in Christ and in his Church: the bond of full ecclesial communion, the bond of episcopal consecration, the bond of hierarchical and collegial responsibility for the Church entrusted to our respective ministries. We are together in "the bonds of unity, charity and peace", which have characterized the relationship of the bishops of the world among themselves and with the Bishop of Rome since apostolic times.

I wish to assure you of my deep sentiments of esteem and respect in the Lord for each one of you, and I know that I can count on your prayerful support and "your partnership in the Gospel".

Through the grace of Christ we have been called to mirror in our own ministry that harmony of life and ministry to which the Apostles gave expression together with Peter and under his guidance. This they did as we also do, in response to the Lord himself, "the chief Shepherd" of the Church.

2. My first thought in relation to the Church in New Zealand is to "give thanks to God for you... remembering before our God and Father your work of faith and labour of love and steadfastness of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ". The Church in your country goes back a hundred and fifty years. We rejoice in the fact that in each generation dedicated lay men and women, and generous priests and religious, have borne witness, together with their bishops to the saving mystery of Redemption in Jesus Christ and to the evangelical law of love. They nurtured the seed of God's word and cared for its growth. Now you have "entered into their labour". You have received the light of the Gospel, which you are called to hand on in all its brightness to the present and future generations

of New Zealanders. I know with what love and care, with what compassion and pastoral concern you are ministering to your people. In the name of the whole Church I thank you and offer you my fraternal encouragement.

3. Each generation has had to face its own challenges. Today the Church in New Zealand, as in the rest of the world, is living a particularly intense moment of its earthly pilgrimage. I am fully convinced, as I have said before, that the Second Vatican Council remains "the fundamental fact in the life of the modern Church". In complete accord with the Church's bimillenary tradition, the Council called for a genuine renewal of the Christian community in ever greater fidelity to the Gospel of grace and peace. In the Message to the World which the Council Fathers issued at the beginning of the first session they declared their intention to renew themselves, so that they might be found increasingly faithful to the Gospel of Christ and "to present to the people of this age God's truth in its integrity and purity, so that they may understand it and gladly assent to it". We all recognize that the Council made available to the entire ecclesial body the teachings, guidelines and motivations needed for just such a renewal. Therein lies the special challenge that has fallen to the Church in New Zealand in these decades leading to the beginning of the Third Millennium of Christian history.

4. Your particular Churches in New Zealand are deeply involved in the work of implementing the Council. You are rightly proud of the increased awareness of belonging to the Church which has taken root in the minds and hearts of many Catholics. You have worked diligently to make the Liturgy a living experience of prayer and worship for the whole community, providing for a wider participation of the laity in its preparation and celebration. You have sought to convey more clearly to the consciences of the faithful and to public opinion the teaching of the Church regarding life in society: the family, culture, questions regarding social justice, the problems of youth. I encourage you to continue, with respect for all persons and with great love for the whole of the People of God entrusted to your care to incorporate into the life of your communities the Council's directives and the subsequent guidelines issued by the Magisterium in the light of new needs. We cannot doubt but that the Holy Spirit is eager to bring forth in your people, in you the bishops, in the priests, religious and laity of New Zealand, the full potential of holiness and discipleship which the Council called for.

5. All this is taking place against the background of increasing secularization in the world. The sense of God and of his loving Providence has diminished for many individuals and even for whole sectors of society. Practical indifferentism to religious truth and values clouds the face of Divine Love. Christians are sometimes less fervent in faith and less zealous in practice than before. You are rightly concerned about the decline of participation at Sunday Mass and in the other Sacraments. The Christian experience can sometimes be reduced to a too inward-looking attitude of personal well-being and to the assimilation of a set of vague principles which are insufficiently clear or strong in the face of the present challenge to faith.

A secularized society needs to be confronted again by the entire Gospel of salvation in Jesus Christ. As shepherds of God's people we are sent to the contemporary world, to the men and women of our time, "to preach the gospel... lest the cross of Christ be emptied of its power. For the word of the cross... is the power of God". And this in turn is the challenge that stands before all the pastors of the Church. The loss of a truly religious perspective in society is a serious challenge to the faith and zeal of the entire ecclesial community, but especially of the shepherds of the Church.

In spite of the enormity of the task we are filled with hope and trust. We count on Christ who "has given us of his own Spirit". And you can count on God's holy people in New Zealand who believe in the word, nourish their Christian life in the Sacraments and enjoy special gifts for the renewal and upbuilding of the Church and of the world. One of the principal aspects of the response to the spiritual condition of our time is in fact the Council's prophetic call of the whole Church to holiness. Genuine holiness is not a turning away from the world and the needs of the human family. Rather, as the Council states: "By this holiness a more human way of life is promoted even in this earthly society". An important aspect of life and commitment to the well-being and progress of the human family are not mutually exclusive. They are both necessary parts of the one Christian discipleship.

6. The renewal envisioned by the Council, and the return to authentic religious values of which modern society has need, are a work of the whole community of Christ's followers. In this task the bishops have their specific part to play. Yours is the teaching office, the governing responsibility and the priestly ministry of the Christian community – in a word, the fullness of Christ's pastoral service to his people. In a specific way each one of you is the source and foundation of the unity of the local Church entrusted to you, just as you are the promoter of the unity of the local Churches among themselves and with the universal Church.

In practice your mission requires you to work wisely and untiringly for a unity of purpose and collaboration among all the members of the community, always with respect for the different vocations and gifts received. By word and example you seek to encourage each one to take part actively and effectively in the building up of Christ's Kingdom of truth and life, of holiness and grace, of justice, love and peace.

7. Diocesan and religious priests, as sharers with you in the one priesthood of Jesus Christ, are not only your closest collaborators but also the privileged recipients of your pastoral care. In New Zealand there is a tradition of harmony and fraternity among all the members of the clergy. Thus you and your priests sustain each other and share each other's joys and sorrows.

How important for the Church in New Zealand is the attention and love you have for candidates to the priesthood and to the religious life! In particular, my thoughts go to the seminarians of Mosgiel and Greenmeadows. They are a special gift of God to your country. May they find in you the example and inspiring leadership that will help them to be worthy ministers of Christ, men of prayer formed in the word of God and the full teaching of the Church.

The past and present life of the Church in New Zealand cannot be described without abundant reference to the apostolate of the various congregations of religious sisters and brothers. The entire national community has benefited from their exemplary dedication. I know that your pastoral service in their regard will be directed to strengthening them in their specific ecclesial charism with respect for their diverse ministry, in the unity of the mission which is the common task of all in each local Church. Religious consecration presents the Church and society with a decisive testimony to God's love working through the redemptive Death and Resurrection of Jesus Christ. It speaks to the world of the eschatological Kingdom towards which we journey in faith and hope. Thus, the witness of religious life constitutes a much needed and effective defence of the spiritual and human values which are essential for man's integral well-being. Through you I offer to the men and women religious of New Zealand the assurance of the Church's gratitude and profound esteem. They are never alone or forgotten, no matter how silent and unassuming their contribution to the welfare of God's people.

8. The theme of the forthcoming Synod of Bishops – "The vocation and mission of the laity in the Church and the world twenty years after the Second Vatican Council" – has already stimulated reflection and study on how the faithful can take an ever more active and responsible part in the Church's mission of service. With a deepened sense of discipleship, lay men and women in New Zealand are increasingly present in liturgical roles, in programmes of Christian formation, education and service, in reaching the unchurched or those in difficult situations. In response to their distinctive lay condition, they are engaged in bringing the Gospel to the market-place, that is, to the world of social, economic, cultural and political activity.

The laity are endowed with God's gifts for this mission. Their charisms however become fully operative after they have listened to the word of God and accepted it in their hearts. The Council has insisted that the success of the lay apostolate depends on the laity's living union with Christ. And because this union with Christ cannot be sustained without prayer, the very apostolate of the laity must be built on prayer. Indeed, their call to action and service in the Church is also a call to prayer.

The laity likewise need a profound sense of "belonging" in the Church – the one, holy, Catholic and apostolic community of Christ's followers. The role of the bishop as the source and foundation of unity who leads his people to the wider unity around Peter is therefore essential for the authenticity and vitality of the role of the laity. Every mission and pastoral service in the Church is rooted in Baptism, which is itself the object of the original mission received by the Apostles: "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit".

9. The teaching office of bishops is not exclusively directed to the service of the Catholic community. In many societies, as in New Zealand, it also constitutes an important factor in the formation of public opinion. The bishops, individually and through the episcopal conference, are

called upon to communicate the teaching of the Church to the wider audience of general public opinion. You are called upon to present the word of God with its many applications to life in society. It is an act of justice towards society to speak the Church's teaching with sureness and clarity. As humble servants of the Gospel we must follow the example of Paul and Barnabas at Iconium, "speaking boldly for the Lord".

Social and moral values are not irrelevant to public policy, nor can public policy prescind from these values. Hence when you teach the Church's doctrine regarding marriage and the family, and when you sustain and strengthen these institutions through your pastoral care, you are strengthening the whole fabric of social life. When you speak about issues of peace and human rights, and when you work for justice, you are contributing to the well-being of all society.

When you speak about reconciliation you are touching one of humanity's deepest needs. What is at stake is true reconciliation with God, with one's fellow human beings and with oneself. In the Catholic view reconciliation and peace ultimately are God's gifts, and they come through repentance and conversion. Here it is important for us to reflect on the fact that Christ wills the Sacrament of Penance to be the source and sign of radical mercy, reconciliation and peace. The Church serves the world best when she is precisely what she is meant to be: a reconciled and reconciling community of Christ's disciples. To fulfil this role she must be conscious of being entrusted with "the ministry of reconciliation". The Church is never more herself than when she mediates and reconciles, in the love and power of Jesus Christ, through the Sacrament of Penance. As bishops of the Church of God we have a very serious responsibility in this moment of history to be sure that we do everything possible – and omit nothing – so that the People of God will truly understand the value of this Sacrament and its place in their lives. It is important that we encourage our brother priests to give great priority to this sacramental ministry of reconciliation and to present it to the faithful as a great gift of Christ's love and mercy.

10. I wish to express my joy at the fact that in New Zealand the various Christian Churches and Ecclesial Communities are solidly committed to the ecumenical task. True ecumenism is not afraid to acknowledge the differences and divisions that still exist among Christians. The pain present in this situation is a constant reminder of the urgency of Christ's will regarding the unity of his followers. From the point of view of the bishops' responsibility, ecumenical initiative and activities have to be judged not only in the light of their immediate results but also in the light of their goal, which is full ecclesial communion. It is also essential that in ecumenical association and collaboration the bishops preserve the fullness of their apostolic freedom and responsibility with regard to the faith and life of the Catholic community. The ecumenical task truly makes great demands on your love and hope: "And hope does not disappoint, because the charity of God is poured forth in our hearts by the Holy Spirit who has been given to us".

11. Dear brother bishops: the Lord has called you to a weighty task. But that task is a burden of love, to be exercised in a spirit of service. "Ready for every good work", you take courage from

your daily prayer and the celebration of the Liturgy, especially the Eucharist, the bread of life and the cup of eternal salvation.

You are supported by the communion of love of the whole Christian community, especially the priests, religious and laity of your own dioceses!

You are supported by the intercession of the Queen of Heaven, Mary, Mother of the Church, who is Mother also of the Church in New Zealand!

Dear brothers: "The grace of the Lord Jesus be with you. My love be with you all in Christ Jesus. Amen".

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