



The Holy See

APOSTOLIC JOURNEY
TO THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA AND CANADA

MEETING WITH THE BISHOPS OF THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS JOHN PAUL II

Minor Seminary of Our Lady of the Angels (Los Angeles)
Wednesday, 16 September 1987

I

Dear Brothers in our Lord Jesus Christ.

1. Before beginning to respond in the context of our fraternal exchanges, I wish to express to you *my deep gratitude*: gratitude for your many invitations to make this pastoral visit, gratitude for your presence here today, and gratitude for the immense amount of preparation which this visit required. Over and above all this, I thank you for your daily toil, and *your partnership with me in the Gospel*. In a word, I thank you for "your work of faith and labour of love and steadfastness of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ" (*1Thess. 1, 3*).

Cardinal Bernardin has given us an introduction to *the extremely important reality of "communio"*, which is the best framework for our conversation. As bishops, we can never tire of prayerfully reflecting on this subject. Since, as the Extraordinary Session of the Synod of Bishops in 1985 indicated, "the ecclesiology of communion is the central and fundamental idea of the Council's documents" (Synodi Extr. Episc. 1985, *Relatio finalis*, C, 1), it follows that we must return time and again to those same documents in order to be imbued with *the profound theological vision of the Church* which the Holy Spirit has placed before us, and which constitutes *the basis of all pastoral ministry* in the Church's pilgrimage through human history.

The programme of our collegial ministry cannot be other than to release into the lifestream of ecclesial life all the richness of the Church's self-understanding, which was given by the Holy Spirit to the community of faith in the celebration of the Second Vatican Council. *The renewal of Catholic life* which the Council called for *is to be measured* not primarily in terms of external structures, but *in deeper understanding and more effective implementation of the core vision of her true nature and mission* which the Council offered to the Church at the close of the second millennium of the Christian era. That renewal depends on the way the Council's fundamental insights are authentically received in each particular Church and in the universal Church.

At the heart of the Church's self-understanding is the notion of *communio*: primarily, *a sharing through grace in the life of the Father given us through Christ and in the Holy Spirit*. "God chose us in him" - in Christ - "before the world began, to be holy and blameless in his sight, to be full of love" (Eph. 1, 4). This communion has its origin in a divine call, the eternal decree which predestined us to share the image of the Son (Cfr. Rom. 8, 28-30). It is realized through sacramental union with Christ and through organic participation in all that constitutes the divine and human reality of the Church, the Body of Christ, which spans the centuries and is sent into the world to embrace all people without distinction.

2. It is clear that in the decades since the Council this "*vertical dimension*" of ecclesial communion has been less deeply experienced by many who, on the other hand, have a vivid sense of its "*horizontal dimension*". Unless, however, the entire Christian community has a keen awareness of the marvellous and utterly gratuitous outpouring of "the kindness and love of God our Saviour" which saved us "not because of any righteous deeds we had done, but because of his mercy" (Tit. 3, 4-5), the whole ordering of the Church's life and the exercise of her mission of service to the human family will be radically weakened and never reach the level intended by the Council.

The ecclesial body is healthy in the measure in which Christ's grace, poured out through the Holy Spirit, is *accepted* by the members. Our pastoral efforts are fruitful, in the last analysis, when the People of God - we bishops with the clergy, religious and laity - are led to Christ, grow in faith, hope and charity, and become authentic witnesses of God's love in a world in need of transfiguration.

Cardinal Bernardin has stated very well that just as there is but one faith, one Lord, one baptism, so there can be but *one loyalty - to the word of God perennially proclaimed in the Church* entrusted to the Episcopal College with the Roman Pontiff as its visible head and perpetual source of unity. The word of God, which is the power of God leading all who believe to salvation (Cfr. Rom. 1, 16; *Dei Verbum*, 17), is fully revealed in the Paschal Mystery of the Death and Resurrection of Jesus Christ. This Paschal Mystery brings about a salvation that is transcendent and eternal: "He died for us, that all of us . . . together might live with him" (1Thess. 5, 10). It is the Church's task therefore, while she seeks in every way possible to increase her service to the human family in all its needs, *to preach Christ's call to conversion and to proclaim redemption in*

his blood.

3. The "vertical dimension" of ecclesial communion is of profound significance in understanding *the relationship of the particular Churches to the universal Church*. It is important to avoid a merely sociological view of this relationship. "In and from such individual Churches there comes into being the one and only Catholic Church" (*Lumen Gentium*, 23), but this universal Church cannot be conceived as the sum of the particular Churches, or as a federation of particular Churches.

In the celebration of the Eucharist these principles come fully to the fore. For, as the Council document on the Liturgy specifies: "the principal manifestation of the Church consists in the full, active participation of all God's holy people in the same liturgical celebrations, especially in the same Eucharist, in one prayer, at one altar, at which the bishop presides, surrounded by his presbyterate and by his ministers" (*Sacrosanctum Concilium*, 41). Wherever a community gathers around the altar under the ministry of a bishop, there Christ is present and there, because of Christ, the one, holy, Catholic and apostolic Church gathers together (Cfr. *Lumen Gentium*, 26).

The Catholic Church herself subsists in each particular Church, which can be truly complete only through effective communion in faith, sacraments and unity with the whole Body of Christ. Last November, in my letter to you during your meeting in Washington, I dealt at some length with this aspect of communion. At that time I wrote: "The very *mystery of the Church* impels us to recognize that the one, holy, Catholic and apostolic Church is present in each particular Church throughout the world. And since the Successor of Peter has been constituted for the whole Church as Pastor and as Vicar of Christ (Cfr. *ibid.* 22), all the particular Churches - precisely because they are Catholic, precisely because they embody in themselves the mystery of the universal Church - are called to live in communion with him.

"*Our own relationship of ecclesial communion - collegialitas efectiva et affectiva* - is discovered in the same mystery of the Church. It is precisely because you are pastors of particular Churches in which there subsists the fullness of the universal Church that you are, and must always be, in full communion with the Successor of Peter. To recognize your ministry as 'vicars and delegates of Christ' for your particular Churches (Cfr. *Lumen Gentium*, 27) is to understand all the more clearly the ministry of the Chair of Peter, which 'presides over the whole assembly of charity, protects legitimate variety, and at the same time sees to it that differences do not hinder unity but rather contribute to it' (Ibid. 13)" (Ioannis Pauli PP. II, *Epistula ad episcopos Civitatum Foederatarum Americae Septemtrionalis in urbe "Washington" congregatos*, 1, die 4 nov. 1986: *Insegnamenti di Giovanni Paolo II*, IX/2 [1986] 1332).

4. In this perspective too, we must see the ministry of the Successor of Peter, not only as a "global" service, reaching each particular Church from "outside" as it were, but *as belonging already to the essence of each particular Church from "within"*. Precisely because this relationship of ecclesial communion - our *collegialitas efectiva et affaectiva* - is such an intimate part of the

structure of the Church's life, its exercise calls for each and every one of us to be completely one in mind and heart with the will of Christ regarding our different roles in the College of Bishops. The Council took pains not only to formulate these roles but also to place the exercise of authority in the Church in its proper perspective, which is precisely the perspective of *communio*. In this respect also the Council was - in the words of the Extraordinary Synod - "a legitimate and valid expression and interpretation of the deposit of faith as it is found in Sacred Scripture and in the living tradition of the Church".

As I also wrote to you last year, I have endeavoured to fulfill my role as Successor of Peter in a spirit of fraternal solidarity with you. I wish only to be of service to all the bishops of the world, and in obedience to my specific responsibility at the service of the Church's unity and universality-to confirm them in their own collegial ministry. I have always been greatly encouraged in this task by your fraternal support and your partnership in the Gospel, for which I express to you again my profound gratitude. It is of great importance to the Church *that in the full power of the Church's communion we continue to proclaim together Jesus Christ and his Gospel*. In this way we ourselves live fully, as successors of the apostles, the mystery of ecclesial communion. At the same time through our ministry we enable the faithful to enter ever more deeply into the Church's life of communion with the Most Holy Trinity.

II

5. Archbishop Quinn has spoken of the Church as a community that wishes to remain faithful to *the moral teaching of our Lord Jesus Christ*. To proclaim a body of moral teaching is in fact an inseparable part of the Church's mission in the world. From the beginning, the Church, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, has striven to apply God's revelation in Christ to all the many aspects of our living in this world, knowing that we are called to "lead a life worthy of the Lord and pleasing to him in every way" (*Col. 1, 10*).

It is sometimes reported that a large number of Catholics today do not adhere to the teaching of the Church on a number of questions, notably sexual and conjugal morality, divorce and remarriage. Some are reported as not accepting the Church's clear position on abortion. It has also been noted that there is a tendency on the part of some Catholics to be selective in their adherence to the Church's moral teachings. It is sometimes claimed that dissent from the Magisterium is totally compatible with being a "good Catholic" and poses no obstacle to the reception of the sacraments. This is a grave error that challenges the teaching office of the bishops of the United States and elsewhere. I wish to encourage you in the love of Christ to address this situation courageously in your pastoral ministry, *relying on the power of God's truth to attract assent and on the grace of the Holy Spirit* which is given both to those who proclaim the message and to those to whom it is addressed.

We must also constantly recall that the teaching of Christ's Church - like Christ himself - is a "sign

of contradiction". It has never been easy to accept the Gospel teaching in its entirety, and it never will be. The Church is committed, both in faith and morals, to make her teaching as clear and understandable as possible, presenting it in all the attractiveness of divine truth. And yet *the challenge of the Gospel remains inherent in the Christian message* transmitted to each generation. Archbishop Quinn has made reference to a principle with extremely important consequences for every area of the Church's life: "... the revelation of God *par excellence* is found in the Cross of Christ which makes God's folly wiser than human wisdom. Often human wisdom in a given age appears to have the last word. But the Cross brings a perspective that changes judgements radically". Yes, dear brothers, *the Cross - in the very act of revealing mercy, compassion and love - changes judgements radically.*

6. A number of other general points may be made. First, the Church is a community of faith. To accept faith is to give assent to the word of God as transmitted by the Church's authentic *Magisterium*. Such assent constitutes the basic attitude of the believer, and is an act of the will as well as of the mind. It would be altogether out of place to try to model this act of religion on attitudes drawn from secular culture.

Within the ecclesial community, *theological discussion takes place within the framework of faith*. Dissent from Church doctrine remains what it is, dissent; as such it may not be proposed or received on an equal footing with the Church's authentic teaching.

Moreover, as bishops we must be especially responsive to our role as authentic teachers of the faith when opinions at variance with the Church's teaching are proposed *as a basis for pastoral practice*.

I wish to support you as you continue to engage in fruitful dialogue with theologians regarding *the legitimate freedom of inquiry* which is their right. You rightly give them sincere encouragement in their difficult task, and assure them how much the Church needs and deeply appreciates their dedicated and constructive work. They, on their part, will recognize that the title *Catholic* theologian expresses a vocation and a responsibility at the service of the community of faith, and subject to the authority of the pastors of the Church. In particular your dialogue will seek to show the unacceptability of dissent and confrontation as a policy and method in the area of Church teaching.

7. Speaking on your behalf, Archbishop Quinn has shown full awareness of the seriousness of the challenge facing your teaching ministry. He has spoken of the dual task of *the conversion of the mind* and *the conversion of the heart*. The way to the heart very often passes through the mind, and throughout the length and breadth of the Church there is need today for *a new effort of evangelization and catechesis directed to the mind*. Elsewhere I have mentioned the relationship between the Gospel and culture. Here I wish to underline the importance of the formation of the mind at every level of Catholic life.

Catholic children and young people need to be given *an effective opportunity to learn the truths of the faith*, in such a way that they become capable of formulating their Catholic identity in terms of doctrine and thought. *Here the Catholic press can make a magnificent contribution* to raising the general level of Catholic thought and culture. Seminaries, especially, have the responsibility of ensuring that future priests should acquire a high level of intellectual preparation and competence. Continuing education programmes for priests, religious and laity play an important part in stimulating a necessary and serious intellectual approach to the multitude of questions confronting faith in our contemporary world.

A crucial aspect of this "apostolate of the mind" concerns the *duty and right of bishops to be present in an effective way in Catholic colleges and universities and institutes of higher studies in order to safeguard and promote their Catholic character*, especially in what affects the transmission of Catholic doctrine. It is a task which requires personal attention on the part of bishops, since it is a specific responsibility stemming from their teaching office. It implies frequent contacts with teaching and administrative personnel, and calls for providing serious programmes of pastoral care for students and others within the academic community. Much is already being done, and I take the opportunity to encourage you to seek ways of intensifying these apostolates.

One of the greatest services we bishops can render to the Church is to consolidate present and future generations of Catholics in a sound and complete understanding of their faith. The ecclesial community will thus be wonderfully strengthened for all aspects of Christian moral living and for generous service. The intellectual approach that is needed, however, is one intimately linked to faith and prayer. *Our people must be aware of their dependence on Christ's grace* and of the great need to open themselves ever more to its action. Jesus himself wants us all to be convinced of his words: "*Apart from me you can do nothing*" (Jo. 15, 5).

III

8. The Synod to be held this coming month in Rome will undoubtedly deal in further detail with the many important points raised by Archbishop Weakland in his presentation on *the role of the laity*. These remarks, like my own, particularly concern the Catholic laity in the United States.

It has been stated that "the Church in the United States of America can boast of having the largest number of educated faithful in the world". This statement has many implications. The situation which it describes is *cause for humble rejoicing and gratitude* because it represents a major achievement: the sustained educational effort by the Church in this country for many, many decades. At the same time the education of the faithful offers great promise and potential in the years ahead. For "it can be assumed they will continue to take a prominent role in U. S. society and culture in the future".

Primarily through her laity, the Church is in a position to exercise great influence upon *American*

culture. This culture is *a human creation*. It is created through shared insight and communication. It is built by an exchange among the people of a particular society. And culture, while having a certain dynamic endurance, is always changing and developing as a way of life. Thus the American culture of today stands in continuity with your culture of fifty years ago. Yet it has changed; it has been greatly influenced by attitudes and currents of thought.

But *how is the American culture evolving today?* Is this evolution being influenced by the Gospel? Does it clearly reflect Christian inspiration? Your music, your poetry and art, your drama, your painting and sculpture, the literature that you are producing - are all those things which reflect the soul of a nation being influenced by the spirit of Christ for the perfection of humanity?

I realize these are difficult questions to answer, given the complexity and diversity of your culture. But they are relevant to any consideration of the role of the Catholic laity, "the largest number of educated faithful in the world". And it is above all *the laity*, once they have themselves been inspired by the Gospel, who *bring the Gospel's uplifting and purifying influence to the world of culture*, to the whole realm of thought, and artistic creativity, to the various professions and places of work, to family life and to society in general. As bishops with the task of leading the laity and of encouraging them to fulfill their ecclesial mission in the world, we must continue to support them as they endeavour to make their specific contribution to the evolution and development of culture and to its impact on society.

9. With reference to this question, and in such areas as politics, economics, mass media and international life, *the service we bring is primarily a priestly service*: the service of preaching and teaching the word of God with fidelity to the truth, and of drawing the laity ever more into the dialogue of salvation. We are charged to lead our people to holiness, especially through the grace of the Eucharist and the whole sacramental life. The service of our pastoral leadership, purified in personal prayer and penance, far from bearing an authoritarian style in any way, must listen and encourage, challenge and at times correct. Certainly, there is no question of condemning the technological world but rather of urging the laity to transform it from within so that it may receive the imprint of the Gospel.

10. We serve our laity best when we make every effort to provide for them, and in collaboration with them, *a comprehensive and solid programme of catechesis* with the aim of "maturing the initial faith and of educating the true disciple of Christ by means of a deeper and more systematic knowledge of the person and the message of our Lord Jesus Christ" (Ioannis Pauli PP. II *Catechesi Tradendae*, 19). Such a programme will also assist them in developing that habit of discernment which can distinguish the spirit of the world from the Spirit of God, and which can distinguish authentic culture from elements that degrade human dignity. It can provide them a solid basis for growing in their knowledge and love of Jesus Christ through continual conversion and personal commitment to the demands of the Gospel.

11. In speaking of the laity, I feel a particular desire to support you in all you are doing on behalf of *family life*. Archbishop Weakland has mentioned "the large number of divorces and the breakup of so many families" as a special pastoral problem. I know that all of us feel great sadness and deep pastoral concern for all those whose lives are affected in this way.

As you will recall, on the occasion of your *ad limina* visits four years ago, I spoke at some length on the topic of *marriage*. Without repeating all that I said on that occasion, I wish to encourage you to continue in your many zealous and generous efforts to provide *pastoral care of families*. I also urge you in the face of all the trends which threaten the stability of marriage, the dignity of human love, and the dignity of human life, as well as its transmission, never to lose confidence and courage. Through the grace given us as pastors we must endeavour to present as effectively as possible the whole teaching of the Church, including the prophetic message contained in *Humanae Vitae* and in *Familiaris Consortio*.

The faithful teaching of the intrinsic relationship between the unitive and the procreative dimensions of the marriage act is of course only a part of our pastoral responsibility. With pastoral solicitude for couples, *Familiaris Consortio* pointed out that "the ecclesial community at the present time must take on the task of instilling conviction and offering practical help to those who wish to live out their parenthood in a truly responsible way... This implies a broader, more decisive and more systematic effort to make the natural methods of regulating fertility known, respected and applied" (Ioannis Pauli PP. II, *Familiaris Consortio*, 35).

On the occasion of the last *ad limina* visits I stated: "Those couples who choose the natural methods perceive the profound difference - both anthropological and moral - between contraception and natural family planning. Yet they may experience difficulties; indeed they often go through a certain conversion in becoming committed to the use of the natural methods, and they stand in need of competent instruction, encouragement and pastoral counselling and support. We must be sensitive to their struggles and have a feeling for the needs that they experience. We must encourage them to continue their efforts with generosity, confidence and hope. As bishops we have the charism and the pastoral responsibility to make our people aware of *the unique influence that the grace of the Sacrament of Marriage has on every aspect of married life, including sexuality* (Cfr. Ioannis Pauli PP. II, *Familiaris Consortio*, 33). The teaching of Christ's Church is not only light and strength for God's people, but it uplifts their hearts in gladness and hope.

"Your Episcopal Conference has established a special programme to expand and coordinate efforts in the various dioceses. But the success of such an effort requires the abiding pastoral interest and support of each bishop in his own diocese, and I am deeply grateful to you for what you do in this most important apostolate" (Ioannis Pauli PP. II, *Allocutio ad quosdam episcopos Civitatum Foederatarum Americae Septemtrionalis occasione oblata "ad limina" visitationis coram admissos*, 6, die 24 sept. 1983: *Insegnamenti di Giovanni Paolo II*, VI/2 [1983] 621).

12. My profound gratitude to you extends to the many other areas in which, with generous dedication, you have worked *for and with the laity*. These include your persevering efforts at *promoting peace, fostering justice and supporting the missions*. In the area of the defense of human life, you have worked with exceptional commitment and constancy. Already during the *ad limina* visits of 1978, Paul VI drew attention to this activity of yours, assuring you of the appreciation of the Holy See. Because of their exceptional importance, I wish to quote at some length his words of strong support for you and make them my own:

"In the name of Jesus Christ, we thank you for your ministry at the service of life. We know that you have laboured precisely in order that the words of the Good Shepherd would be fulfilled: 'that they may have life and have it to the full'. Under your leadership, so many of the Catholic people - priest, deacons, religious and laity - have joined in numerous initiatives aimed at defending, healing and promoting human life.

"With the enlightenment of faith, the incentive of love and an awareness of your pastoral accountability, you have worked to oppose whatever wounds, weakens or dishonours human life. Your pastoral charity has found a consistent expression in so many ways - all related to the question of life, all aimed at protecting life in its multiple facets. You have endeavoured to proclaim in practice that all aspects of human life are sacred.

"In this regard, *your efforts have been directed to the eradication of hunger, the elimination of subhuman living conditions, and the promotion of programmes on behalf of the poor, the elderly and minorities. You have worked for the improvement of the social order itself*. At the same time, we know that you have held up to your people the goal to which God calls them: the life above, in Christ Jesus (Cfr. *Phil.* 3, 14).

"Among your many activities at the service of life there is one which, especially at this juncture of history, deserves our strongest commendation and our firmest support: it is the continuing struggle against what the Second Vatican Council calls the 'abominable crime' of abortion (*Gaudium et Spes*, 51). Disregard for the sacred character of life in the womb weakens the very fabric of civilization; it prepares a mentality, and even a public attitude, that can lead to the acceptance of other practices that are against the fundamental rights of the individual. This mentality can, for example, completely undermine concern for those in want, manifesting itself in insensitivity to social needs; it can produce contempt for the elderly, to the point of advocating euthanasia; it can prepare the way for those forms of genetic engineering that go against life, the dangers of which are not yet fully known to the general public.

"It is therefore very encouraging to see the great service you render to humanity by constantly holding up to your people the value of human life. We are confident that, relying on the words of the Good Shepherd who inspires your activity, you will continue to exercise leadership in this regard, sustaining the entire ecclesial community in their own vocation at the service of life.

"It is also a source of worldwide honour that, in your country, so many upright men and women of differing religious convictions are united in a profound respect for the laws of the Creator and Lord of life, and that, by every just means at their disposal, they are endeavouring, before the witness of history, to take a definitive stand for human life" (Pauli VI *Ad archiepiscopos et episcopos VI et VIII Regionum pastoralium Civitatum Foederatarum Americae Septemtrionalis, occasione oblata "ad limina" visitationis coram admissos*, die 26 maii 1978: *Insegnamenti di Paolo VI*, XVI (1978) 408).

Nine years have passed since these words were spoken and yet they are *still relevant today* - relevant in their prophetic vision, relevant in the needs they express, relevant in the defense of life.

13. In his Encyclical *Pacem in Terris*, Pope John XXIII placed the question of *the advancement of women* in the context of the characteristics of the present day, "the signs of the times". He made it clear that the cause in question was one of *human dignity*. This is indeed the aim of all the Church's efforts on behalf of women: to promote their human dignity. The Church proclaims *the personal dignity of women as women* - a dignity equal to that of men. This dignity must be affirmed in its ontological character, even before consideration is given to any of the special and exalted roles fulfilled by women as wives, mothers or consecrated women.

There are many other aspects involved in the question of women's equal dignity and responsibility, which will undoubtedly be properly dealt with in the forthcoming Synod of Bishops. At the basis of all considerations are two firm principles: *the equal human dignity of women and their true feminine humanity*. On the basis of these two principles *Familiaris Consortio* has already enunciated much of the Church's attitude towards women, which reflects the "sensitive respect of Jesus towards the women that he called to his following and his friendship" (Ioannis Pauli PP. II, *Familiaris Consortio*, 22). As I have stated and as Archbishop Weakland has pointed out, women are not called to the priesthood. Although the teaching of the Church on this point is quite clear, it in no way alters the fact that women *are indeed an essential part of the Gospel plan to spread the Good News of the Kingdom*. And the Church is irrevocably committed to this truth.

IV

14. My interest in the question of *vocations* is well known to all of you. It is a recurring theme in my conversations with bishops around the world. It is one of the subjects I frequently speak about in my meetings with young people. It is a crucial factor for the future of the Church as we draw near to the beginning of the third millennium. Therefore, I am very pleased that you have chosen this topic as one of those to be emphasized today.

Archbishop Pilarczyk has presented an "overview of the ministerial realities of the Church in this country", mentioning aspects that offer *much consolation* to you as bishops and aspects which are cause for pastoral *concern*. He mentioned that it was important "to speak of some of the very positive implications of lay, religious and clerical vocations in America". In doing this, he rightly

drew attention to the way that *the Holy Spirit is at work in your midst*, something that we must indeed be ever attentive to and grateful for. As *Lumen Gentium* reminds us, "The Spirit guides the Church into the fullness of truth (Cfr. *Jo.* 16, 13) and gives her unity of fellowship and service... By the power of the Gospel the Spirit makes the Church grow, perpetually renews her, and leads her to perfect union with her Spouse" (*Lumen Gentium*, 4).

It is indeed encouraging to note how *lay people*, in ever-increasing numbers, have become involved in the life of the Church, and how this has led to "a depth and variety of ministry far greater than ever before". Certainly, *the more active participation of the laity in the mission of the Church is an eloquent sign of the fruitfulness of the Second Vatican Council*, one for which we all give thanks. And I am confident that the forthcoming Synod of Bishops will give fresh impetus to this participation and solid direction for its continued growth and consolidation.

It is important for our people to see clearly that *the ministry of the ordained priest and the involvement of the laity in the Church's mission* are not all opposed to one another. On the contrary, *the one complements the other*. Just as the priestly ministry is not an end in and of itself, but serves to awaken and unify the various charisms within the Church, so too the involvement of the laity does not replace the priesthood, but supports it, promotes it and offers it space for its own specific service.

At this time, I would like to make a few remarks about *vocations to the priesthood and to the religious life*.

The *insufficient number of seminarians and candidates for religious life is indeed a cause of pastoral concern* for all of us, for we know that their public witness to the Gospel and their specific roles in the Church are irreplaceable. In many parts of the world the Church is experiencing, as Archbishop Filarczyk observed, that "society is becoming increasingly secular and therefore increasingly inhospitable to Christian belief" It is especially difficult today for young people to make the generous sacrifices entailed in accepting God's call. Yet it is possible for them to do so through grace and with the support of the community. And it is precisely in this situation that we are called to bear witness to the hope of the Church.

In our pastoral mission we must often evaluate a situation and decide on a course of action. We must do this with prudence and pastoral realism. At the same time we know that today, as always, there are "prophets of doom". We must resist them in their pessimism, and *continue in our efforts to promote vocations to the priesthood and the religious life*.

Prayer for vocations remains the primary way to success, since Jesus himself left us the commandment: "*Beg the harvest master to send out labourers to gather his harvest*" (*Matth.* 9, 38). I ask you therefore to encourage prayer for vocations among all the people, particularly among priests and religious themselves, but also in families, where the first seeds of vocations are

usually planted, and in schools and religious education programmes. The prayers of the elderly and the sick have an efficacy that must not be forgotten.

In addition to prayer, young people *must be invited*. It was Andrew who brought his brother Peter to the Lord. It was Philip who brought Nathanael. And how many of us and of our priests and religious came to hear the Lord's call through the invitation of someone else? Your own presence among the youth is a blessing and an opportune time to extend this invitation to them and to ask young people themselves to pray for vocations.

Just last Thursday, speaking in Miami about vocations to the priesthood, I emphasized the basis of our hope: " There is still one more factor to be considered in evaluating the future of vocations, and it is *the power of Christ's Paschal Mystery*. As the Church of Christ, we are all called to profess his power before the world; to proclaim that he is able, in virtue of his Death and Resurrection, to draw young people to himself, in this generation as in the past; to declare that he is strong enough to attract young men even today to a life of self-sacrifice, pure love and total dedication to the priesthood. As we profess this truth, as we proclaim with faith the power of the Lord of the harvest, we have a right to expect that he will grant the prayers that he himself has commanded to be offered. *The present hour calls for great trust* in him who has overcome the world".

15. I would like to thank you for all you are doing to ensure *a solid formation for the priesthood* in the United States. The apostolic visitation to the seminaries has been carried out with generous collaboration. And I am grateful for the letters many of you have sent me expressing your appreciation for this initiative and telling me of the many positive effects which have resulted from it.

At the same time, your pastoral interest and personal involvement in seminary training is something that can never end. It is too central a task and too important a priority in the life of the Church. The Church of tomorrow passes through the seminaries of today. With the passing of time, the pastoral responsibility will no longer be ours. But at present the responsibility is ours and it is heavy. Its zealous fulfilment is a great act of love for the flock.

In particular, I ask you to be vigilant that *the dogmatic and moral teaching of the Church* is faithfully and clearly presented to the seminarians, and fully accepted and understood by them. On the opening day of the Second Vatican Council, 11 October 1962, John XXIII told his brother bishops: "The greatest concern of the Ecumenical Council is this: *that the sacred deposit of Christian doctrine should be more effectively guarded and taught*". What Pope John expected of the Council is also a primary concern for priestly formation. We must ensure that our future priests have a solid grasp of the entirety of the Catholic faith, and then we must prepare them to present it in turn to others in ways that are intelligible and pastorally sound.

16. I cannot let this opportunity pass without expressing once again my gratitude for the great interest you have taken in the *religious life*. I am pleased to note, as Archbishop Pilarczyk has said, that there is "an increased understanding of and appreciation for religious life on the part of bishops and priests, thanks, in large part, to the pontifical commission" established in 1983.

In asking the commission to study *the problem of vocations*, I did so "with a view to encouraging a new growth and fresh move forward in this most important sector of the Church's life". The response which you have all made to this request has been most gratifying. And I know you will continue with this important effort. *The religious life is a precious gift from the Lord*, and we must continue to assure religious of the love and esteem of the Church.

17. There are many other issues, dear brother bishops, which come to mind as we reflect together in this extraordinary hour of ecclesial communion. All of them touch us in our role as pastors and challenge our apostolic love and zeal.

Because of its importance in the life of the Church, I spoke to the priests in Miami about *Confession* and our own need to receive the Sacrament regularly. I also expressed my gratitude for their generous ministry in making Confession available to the faithful. In this regard I would ask you as bishops to make every effort to ensure that the important norms of the universal Church with regard to *the use of general absolution* are understood and observed in a spirit of faith. In this regard I would ask that the Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Reconciliatio et Paenitentia* continue to be the object of prayerful reflection.

18. I wish to encourage you also in the pastoral care that you give to *homosexual persons*. This includes a clear explanation of the Church's teaching, which by its nature is unpopular. Nevertheless your own pastoral experience confirms the fact that the truth, howsoever difficult to accept, brings grace and often leads to a deep inner conversion. No matter what problem individual Christians have, and no matter what degree of response to grace they make, they are always worthy of the Church's love and Christ's truth. All homosexual and other persons striving to fulfill the Gospel precept of chastity are worthy of special encouragement and esteem.

19. From time to time the question of *sex education*, especially as regards programmes being used in schools, becomes a matter of concern to Catholic parents. The principles governing this area have been succinctly but clearly enunciated in *Familiaris Consortio*. First among these principles is the need to recognize that sex education is *a basic right and duty of parents themselves*. They have to be helped to become increasingly more effective in fulfilling this task. Other educational agencies have an important role, but always in a subsidiary manner, with due subordination to the rights of parents.

Many parents will undoubtedly be heartened by the reference in the Pastoral Letter of the Bishops of California, *A Call to Compassion*, to an absolutely essential aspect of this whole question: " The

recovery of the virtue of chastity " - they wrote - " may be one of the most urgent needs of contemporary society". We cannot doubt that the Catholic Church in the United States, as elsewhere, is called to make great efforts to assist parents in teaching their children the sublime value of self-giving love; young people need great support in living this fundamental aspect of their human and Christian vocation.

20. Among your many pastoral obligations is *the need to provide for the spiritual care of the military and their dependants*. This you do through the Military Ordinariate. The functioning of this extended archdiocese requires the fraternal and sensitive collaboration of all the bishops in permitting and encouraging priests to commit themselves to this worthy ministry. The Church is grateful to all the chaplains who generously serve God's people in this particular situation with its special needs.

21. I wish at this time to offer you my encouragement as you seek to guide the Church of God in so many areas: as you seek to lead your people *in fulfilling their mission within the United States and well beyond her boundaries*. Everything you do to help your people to look outside themselves to Christ in need is a great ecclesial and apostolic service.

My final word is about *our pastoral identity as bishops of Jesus Christ and his Church*. Because of this identity we are called to holiness and to daily conversion. In speaking to you eight years ago in Chicago I stated: "*The holiness of personal conversion is indeed the condition for our fruitful ministry as bishops of the Church. It is our union with Jesus Christ that determines the credibility of our witness to the Gospel and the supernatural effectiveness of our activity*" (Ioannis Pauli PP. II *Allocutio ad sacros Praesules Conferentiae Episcopalis Civitatum Foederatarum Americae Septemtrionalis, in urbe Chicagiae habita*, 3, die 5 oct. 1979: *Insegnamenti di Giovanni Paolo II*, II, 2 (1979) 631). May God give us all this great gift of *union with Jesus* and allow us to live it together in strength and joy, *in the communion of the Church of God*.

© Copyright 1987 - Libreria Editrice Vaticana

©Copyright - Libreria Editrice Vaticana