



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS JOHN PAUL II
TO THE BISHOPS OF BANGLADESH
ON THEIR "AD LIMINA" VISIT**

Saturday, 11 February 1989

Dear Brothers Bishops,

1. It gives me great pleasure to meet you today, precisely when many of the Catholic faithful of Bangladesh are taking part in the *National Pilgrimage to the Miriam Ashram at Diang*. As they honour the Mother of God under the title of Our Lady of Lourdes, the priests, religious and laity of your local Churches implore her maternal care and protection for the "little flock" that is the Church in Bangladesh. United as we are in the fullness of ecclesial communion, on the occasion of your *ad Limina* visit we too pray for the growth and vitality of your communities and for the peace and development of your country.

The special circumstances of your ministry in Bangladesh are well known. The Nation is still in the early stages of its independence. Economic and social development are often hampered by repeated *natural disasters* affecting that area of the world. I refer in particular to the suffering and *grave loss of life* caused by the floods last September and the devastating cyclone in November. On various occasions I have appealed for assistance for your country and people, and I am happy that *Caritas Internationalis* has been able to provide some immediate help. In this way you have had a practical experience of the universal solidarity which should always characterize the life of the Church, the Body of Christ in which we are all members one of another (Cfr. *Eph. 4, 25*). Naturally, the needs of your people go far beyond the relief provided, and I am sure that the Nation will search for ways to meet the challenges of widespread poverty and illiteracy which hinder progress and the promotion of human dignity.

2. From the religious point of view, *you constitute a small minority among people of other religious traditions*, even though the Church has been present since the sixteenth century. The question of

minorities, including religious minorities, is “one of the most delicate questions affecting contemporary society, a question which, with the passing of time, has become even more pressing since it is related to the organization of social and civil life within each country, as well to the life of the international community” (Ioannis Pauli PP. II *Nuntius ob diem ad pacem favendam dicatum pro a. D. 1989*, 1, die 8 dec. 1988: *Insegnamenti di Giovanni Paolo II*, XI, 3 [1988] 1738).

There are two fundamental principles involved in a proper approach to minorities. The unity of the human family created by God calls for the formation of a world community radically open to solidarity across all borders and free from discrimination. Likewise, within the one human family all individuals are to be respected in the inalienable human dignity that is their birthright, irrespective of racial, ethnic, cultural or national origin (*Ibid.*, 3: *loc. cit.*, p. 1738). Differences between the members of the human family are legitimate and must be respected. The State in particular has a duty to safeguard the dignity and freedom of all its citizens, ensuring the existence of the legislative and juridical instruments, as well as the cultural and educational means, which promote understanding, banish prejudice and create effective harmony between all sectors of society.

In the case of Bangladesh the Holy See has been encouraged by the message to Christians issued at Christmas by his Excellency President Ershad, and by the words of the new Bangladesh Ambassador on the occasion of the presentation of his Letters of Credence. It is my fervent hope that the Catholic community will, as much as it can, continue to contribute to the progress and well-being of the Bangladeshi people in a climate of trust and freedom.

3. Dear Brothers in Christ, the local Churches over which you preside in love have been the subject of our private conversations. With God’s grace and through the generous efforts of your priests, religious men and women, both local and missionary, and of the catechists and lay community leaders who sustain and encourage your scattered communities, *the redeeming love of Jesus Christ is proclaimed and made present* in the lives of many. Since your last *ad Limina* visit the new Diocese of Mymensingh has been erected. The seed sown is indeed bearing fruit (*Luc.* 8, 11ss.) and will continue to do so in a further consolidation of ecclesiastical structures. As Pastors you know that it is not the structures themselves that are paramount, but rather the grace and virtue from which they proceed and the ecclesial life to which they contribute. The principal object of your ministry is always the Christian holiness of your faithful, “who by God’s power are guarded through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed” (*1Petr.* 1, 5).

In this perspective the *Pastoral Plan for the Church in Bangladesh*, while open to constant renewal and adaptation, continues to offer valid guidelines for your apostolate and service. May the life-giving gifts of the Holy Spirit accompany you and your fellow-workers, so that the implementation of the plan may strengthen the proclamation of the Good News and inspire ever more generous service to the needy: the poor, the weak and those without voice.

4. Your closest fellow-workers are your beloved *priests*. As Bishops, endowed with the fullness of

the priesthood, you understand very well the essential part your priests play in the life of your local Churches. "By the power of the sacrament of orders, and in the image of Christ the eternal High Priest they are consecrated to preach the Gospel, shepherd the faithful and celebrate divine worship as true priests of the New Testament" (*Lumen Gentium*, 28). Through their ministry priests make Christ visible among men, and all the more when they are profoundly moved by a love that is pure and self-giving. Awareness of their sacramental brotherhood leads them to a lively sense of collaboration with each other and with their Bishop, in an attitude of service and respect towards lay people, promoting their spiritual growth and sharing pastoral tasks and responsibilities with them (Cfr. *Presbyterorum Ordinis*, 8-9). In all of this, your attention and support is of particular value to your clergy.

In the special circumstances of your local Churches it may not as yet be possible to put into effect all the juridical and organizational structures foreseen in ecclesiastical law. But I am heartened to know that you are proceeding in that direction and that there is an ever greater confidence and solidarity between you and the priests, both diocesan and religious, who form the presbyterium of each local Church. A true sharing of the tasks connected with evangelization and with the building up of the ecclesial body, while leaving undiminished the responsibility and authority of the Bishop, can only have a positive effect on the morale and spiritual life of your priests.

5. A source of well-founded hope for the future of the Church in Bangladesh is the *National Major Seminary* in Dhaka, serving the five Dioceses and the Religious communities. I send affectionate greetings to the Staff, and assure them of my prayers for the success of the delicate task in which they are engaged. I also encourage those Bangladeshi priests doing further studies in preparation for the training of future priests. With their assistance the seminary curriculum will be strengthened, to the great benefit of the whole Church in your country.

I especially invite all the major and minor seminarians to reflect on the importance of a solid spiritual formation. Let us give thanks to the Most Blessed Trinity for the increase in the number of vocations to the priesthood and to the religious life which you are experiencing. This is a sign of the dynamism of the Catholic community and is a primary responsibility for you, the Pastors.

6. I can only briefly mention the *life and work of the men and women religious of Bangladesh*, who "adorn the Bride of Christ" (*Lumen Gentium*, 46) and through their consecration make the truths and values of his Kingdom more visible in the Church and in society. To each of them I send a word of greeting and support as they spend themselves generously and without discrimination in catechesis, education, health-care and charitable activities.

I also ask you to assure your catechists and lay community leaders that they have a special place in my prayers, and that their work in union with the priests and with you, the Bishops, is vital for the Church's presence in your country. The *National Social and Catechetical Centre at Jessore* offers a means which can be further developed for continuing reflection on the major moral and

ethical problems of today, and for providing an effective training of zealous Catholic leaders in these matters.

7. My brother Bishops, the tasks before you are many and formidable. They will continue to demand zeal and energy on your part. I know that you seek the courage and motivation for your pastoral endeavours in a close and personal relationship with our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. In administering the Sacraments, in preaching the word and shepherding the portion of God's people entrusted to you, you "seek first the kingdom of God" (*Matth.* 6, 33) so that you may be found faithful, "like the householder who brings out of his treasure what is new and what is old" (*Ibid.* 13, 52).

May God bless Bangladesh, and may his grace flow abundantly through the Church in your land.

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