



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS JOHN PAUL II
TO THE BISHOPS OF ALBERTA,
BRITISH COLUMBIA, MANITOBA, THE NORTHWEST TERRITORIES,
SASKATCHEWAN AND THE YUKON (CANADA)
ON THEIR "AD LIMINA" VISIT**

Thursday, 16 September 1993

Dear Brother Bishops,

"Behold how good and pleasant it is when brothers dwell in unity!" (Ps. 133(132), 1).

1. To you – the *Bishops of Alberta, British Columbia, Manitoba, the Northwest Territories, Saskatchewan and the Yukon* – allow me to express my gratitude for our communion in the College of Bishops and, in the words of Saint Paul, for "the joy and comfort of your love" (Philem. 1: 7). Your visit comes at a significant moment. The Fiftieth Anniversary of the *Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops* is a fitting time for us to give thanks together to the Most Blessed Trinity, from whom all grace descends, for the life of the Church in Canada, which you have been called to serve in the Lord's name as successors of the Apostles.

Your "*ad Limina* visits", as well as the more frequent meetings of the leaders of your Conference with the Roman Curia, provide opportunities for fraternal dialogue and increased unity among us. In this way the bonds of faith and communion linking your particular Churches with the Apostolic See are strengthened.

The Second Vatican Council reminded us that in each particular Church, "the one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church of Christ is truly present and active" (*Christus Dominus*, 11). The universal ministry of the Successor of Peter therefore assists the People of God entrusted to your pastoral care "from within", as a divine gift integral to the life of your dioceses (Cf. Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, *Communio Notio*, 13). This is especially so in safeguarding the *depositum*

fidei which must be preserved intact and untarnished until the Lord returns. *Truth is itself a unifying force*. Signs of division dull the power of the Church's witness, whereas *harmony increases her credibility* (Cf. Paul VI, *Paterna Cum Benevolentia*, 3). It is incumbent upon Bishops, in communion with the Successor of Peter, to show that in their teaching they are "of one heart and soul" (Acts. 4: 32), "united in the same mind and the same judgment" (1Cor. 1: 10).

2. I was especially moved at the recent "World Youth Day" celebration in Denver to see so many young people – including thousands from Canada – earnestly seeking to love and serve Christ in his Church. These men and women of the third millennium expect their Bishops and priests to help them to *live according to that truth which is Christ's precious gift to them* (Cf. Gal. 5: 1). True pastoral charity requires that nothing be omitted in preaching the saving word of Christ. The success of the new evangelization in Canada will depend in no small measure on *your effective and unified proclamation of all the Gospel's demands*.

The faithful look to the Bishops of the Church to be "authentic teachers, that is, teachers endowed with the authority of Christ, who preach the faith to the people assigned them" (*Lumen Gentium*, 25). In this respect we must continually renew in ourselves *the charism of vigilance*. Like good sentinels, devoted to the Apostles' teaching (Cf. Acts. 2: 42) and entrusted with the task of preserving, explaining and spreading "the heritage of the faith" (Cf. *Dei Verbum*, 10), we must never cease to preach *the fulness of the knowledge of Christ and of his Church*. We are all aware of how truly difficult it is to be a watchful guardian and zealous proclaimer of "the truth of the Gospel" (Gal. 2: 5). Saint Augustine reminds us of the seriousness of our responsibilities when he says: "Besides being a Christian... I am a leader also, and for this shall render to God an account of my ministry" (Saint Augustine, *Sermon 46: De Pastoribus*, 2).

3. Canada, like so many countries, is influenced by the many positive aspects but also by the moral ills of contemporary culture. Many of your fellow citizens *are suffering from a loss of the moral sense*. This frequently leads to a systematic calling into question of Catholic teaching in matters of faith and morals. As Pastors who are to "expound the mystery of Christ in its entirety" (*Christus Dominus*, 12), we can meet this challenge if our teaching is clear, unambiguous and united. Only then will it rise above the confusion of conflicting opinions with the forcefulness and power of the Truth.

In our concern to meet the faithful's right to hear the fulness of Catholic teaching, we – with humility, courage and charity – should be vigilant lest anyone be led into error by those who would trouble them and "want to pervert the gospel of Christ" (Gal. 1: 6). This is particularly so with regard to teachings which the Magisterium proposes as "definitively to be held" by all the faithful. These call for a response of firm assent. As stated in "Donum Veritatis": "When the Magisterium proposes 'in a definitive way' truths concerning faith and morals, which, even if not divinely revealed, are nevertheless strictly and intimately connected with Revelation, these must be firmly accepted and held" (Congr. for the Doctrine of the Faith *Donum Veritatis*, 23; cf. *Eiusdem*

Professio Fidei et Iusiurandum Fidelitatis). With great love and patience – and looking constantly to Christ, the "light of the world" (Jn. 8: 12). – we have the serious obligation *to guide the faithful in forming a moral conscience that will judge and act in accordance with the truth* – to teach "those acts which in themselves conform to the demands of faith and foster their expression in life, and those which, on the contrary, because intrinsically evil, are incompatible with such demands" (Congr. for the Doctrine of the Faith *Donum Veritatis*, 16). As the word of life, the Gospel includes universal and unchanging moral norms, which need to be taught with new ardour and conviction. I encourage each of you *to persevere in bearing the burden of this prophetic role of vigilant love*, ensuring in every possible way that the "sound doctrine" (1Tm. 1: 10) of faith and morals is taught throughout your Dioceses – consistently and at every level.

4. To assist us all in our ministry at this time, as heralds of the truth which sets us free (Cf. Jn. 8: 32), the Lord has given us a precious instrument and gift: the "[Catechism of the Catholic Church](#)". In your hands *this mature outcome of the Second Vatican Council will be an apt instrument by which the authentic teaching of the Council – itself a witness to the Church's great Tradition – can faithfully enter preaching and catechesis*. Stating the message of faith serenely and systematically, the *Catechism* reveals the unity, coherence, beauty and relevance of the Catholic faith.

It is not just for Pastors and specialists – as has been shown by its enthusiastic reception by the laity in many countries – but is destined for all sectors of the Church. I know that the Church in Canada will welcome the "Catechism of the Catholic Church" and that, in a spirit of universal communion, you will make its treasures available in every possible way to all the faithful.

5. Your country is blessed in having one of the most extensive Catholic educational systems in the world – one of which you are justly proud. Together with the numerous Catholic colleges and universities, your schools have made *an immense contribution in forming young men and women as devout and learned Catholics and as responsible and generous citizens*. In this way Catholic education has prepared generations of lay men and women in whom a profound harmony between their being *members of the Church* and *members of civil society* has enabled them to overcome the tragic separation of faith from life and of the Gospel from culture (Cf. John Paul II, [Christifideles Laici](#), 59).

Now, however, you are facing new problems: these include the need to protect the *Catholic identity* of your schools and the challenge presented by the increasing *religious and moral relativism* present in public opinion. *Catholic educational institutions need to reaffirm their responsibility to evangelize and catechize*, fully meeting the demanding task of presenting the word of God in all its strength.

In some Provinces the right to publicly funded independent Catholic school boards – important to the survival of Catholic education – has recently come into question. Your determined efforts to govern your own schools, in harmony with Catholic faith and practice, is founded on *the Church's*

inalienable right to establish and conduct schools freely and in accordance with her needs (Cf. *Gravissimum Educationis*, 8). May you be wise and provident Shepherds in this important aspect of the Church's life in your nation. I likewise wish to encourage you to continue supporting efforts to provide a sound formation in Catholic tradition, doctrine and life for all those involved in the Church's educational, catechetical or social apostolates.

6. Je sais avec quelle profonde sollicitude pastorale vous désirez travailler à bâtir l'unité que le Christ a voulue pour son Eglise, l'unité authentique qui, par nature, est la pleine communion visible de tous les chrétiens dans la vérité et la charité. Le "Directoire pour l'Application des Principes et des Normes sur l'Œcuménisme", publié récemment par le Conseil pontifical pour la Promotion de l'Unité des Chrétiens, a pour but de stimuler les activités œcuméniques et de souligner l'urgence de développer la formation dans ce domaine. En entretenant la "pauvreté d'esprit" spirituelle qui invite à surmonter la défiance et l'ignorance, l'Eglise au Canada peut apporter une contribution significative au mouvement œcuménique dans son ensemble. Chacun doit garder présentes à l'esprit la nécessité de sauvegarder la priorité de la vérité dans le dialogue et en même temps l'ouverture à l'enrichissement mutuel qui caractérise l'œcuménisme authentique. Par - dessus tout, aucun de nous ne doit oublier que l'objectif du mouvement œcuménique "dépasse les forces et les capacités humaines" (*Unitatis Redintegratio*, 24) et qu'il s'appuiera essentiellement sur la "conversion du cœur et la sainteté de vie, unies aux prières publiques et privées pour l'unité des chrétiens" (Ibid. 8).

7. Chers Frères dans l'épiscopat, votre ministère doit répondre à beaucoup d'exigences! Par mes paroles, je désire sincèrement vous affermir dans le Seigneur. D'une manière toute spéciale, je voudrais assurer ceux d'entre vous qui travaillent dans le Grand Nord de ma prière et de mes encouragements pour leur ministère auprès des peuples autochtones qui tient compte de leurs conditions et de leurs nécessités particulières. Je souscris volontiers au rappel fait par le message pastoral de votre Conférence, à l'occasion du Vème centenaire de l'évangélisation des Amériques, quand vous écrivez que la qualité de solidarité vécue dans la société canadienne est à estimer en fonction des mesures prises pour améliorer la situation économique, politique et sociale des peuples autochtones (Cf. CECC, *Vers une nouvelle évangélisation*, 23 septembre 1992, n. 19).

En exprimant ma confiance dans le Seigneur, qui continuera à accroître la ferveur et la fidélité des prêtres, des religieux et religieuses et des laïques de vos diocèses – car "Celui qui a commencé en vous cette œuvre excellente en poursuivra l'accomplissement" (Phil. 1, 6) –, je vous recommande, vous-mêmes et vos communautés diocésaines, à la sollicitude aimante de Marie, Mère de l'Eglise, et à la protection de saint Joseph, patron du Canada. Avec ma Bénédiction Apostolique.

