



The Holy See

APOSTOLIC PILGRIMAGE TO INDIA

ADDRESS OF JOHN PAUL II TO THE MEN AND WOMEN RELIGIOUS IN THE SEMINARY OF GOREGOAN

Goregoan (India)

Monday, 10 February 1986

Dear Fathers, Brothers and Sisters,

1. "Peace to all of you who are in Christ" .

I have been greatly looking forward to this meeting with the men and women religious of India. In those of you present here I see the thousands of your brothers and sisters in every corner of India whose life is scaled by a special consecration to Christ. Peace be to you all!

To the Conference of Religious, India, and to the members of every religious congregation, in the variety of different rites and forms of life and apostolate, but united in the reality of the consecrated life in the Church, to each one of you I address a heartfelt word of greeting and encouragement, a word which – as I wrote in the Apostolic Exhortation "[Redemptionis Donum](#)" – is "a word of love spoken by the Church for you. Accept it, wherever you may be: in the cloister of the contemplative communities, or in the commitment to the many different forms of apostolic service: in the mission, in pastoral work, in hospitals or other places where the suffering are taken care of, in educational institutions, schools or universities – in fact in every one of your houses where, 'gathered in the name of Christ', you live in the knowledge that the Lord is 'in your midst'" .

May every religious of India experience this presence, trusting in the truth of God's word through the prophet Isaiah: "I have called you by name, you are mine" .

Your religious consecration is a special gift of God to the Church. It is impossible to think of Christian religious life outside of the context of the Church, the Body of Christ, the community of salvation "built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets". The Church, as the "sign and

instrument of intimate union with God, and of the unity of all mankind", is your true home.

Indeed, religious life is a powerful manifestation of the Church's interior holiness and vitality. This is also very true of the Church in India. Today there are some 50,000 religious sisters, 5,000 religious priests, and 2,800 religious brothers in this country, together with some 1,500 Indian men and women religious working in other parts of the world. For all of this we need to give thanks to the Lord of the harvest who blesses you with more and more vocations. The whole Church rejoices and expresses her gratitude to you for your faith and generosity. With profound love and respect, the Church too repeats the words of the prophet: "I have called you by name, you are mine".

2. My dear brothers and sisters: at the very heart of your religious consecration there lies a preferential love for Christ himself. Your personal history, in which and through which you discovered "the unsearchable riches of Christ" , has led you to commit yourselves to the service of Christ and of the coming of his Kingdom in the world. Even more than your brethren, you must experience the need for spiritual purification. Only when you are free from sin can you really live for God.

If we ask therefore what it is that the Church and the world expect of those who have made profession of the evangelical counsels, the Second Vatican Council responds in these words: "Religious should carefully consider that through them, to believers and non-believers alike, the Church truly wishes to give an increasingly clearer revelation of Christ. Through them Christ should be shown contemplating on the mountain, announcing God's Kingdom to the multitude, healing the sick and the maimed, turning sinners to wholesome fruit, blessing children, doing good to all, and always obeying the will of the Father who sent him" .

This witnessing role of religious has additional significance in this country, precisely because it is a sure and effective form of evangelization in a multi-religious context. India wishes to see the truth of your message in the integrity of your consecration, in the simplicity and humility of your poverty, in the joy and total self-gift of your chastity, in the sacrifice and self-emptying experience of your obedience. It is encouraging to realize that your country respects men and women who are imbued with the spirit of Christ and inspired by the love of God and fellow men.

Furthermore, the Council enjoined on all Christians to become aware of their belonging to a pilgrim Church. More than anyone else it is the vocation of religious to uphold this pilgrim dimension of Christian life. You are living witnesses of the fact that "here we have no lasting city, but we seek the city which is to come" .

The path of chastity, poverty and obedience, lovingly embraced for the sake of the Kingdom of Christ – and this in a permanent way, for all of one's life – is a path which remarkably accords with the spirituality of India's religious traditions where life on earth itself is understood as a "pathway"

to a new freedom and fulfilment.

3. As I look at the great variety of your religious habits and outward signs of your consecration I am reminded of the vast spectrum of activities in which the men and women religious of India are engaged.

In the first place I greet the contemplatives. India has always given respect and importance to those chosen souls who witness to the absolute and transcendent reality of God through prayer and contemplation. I am pleased to know that the contemplative communities among you are thriving. I make my own the sentiments of the Council in your regard: you have a distinguished part to play in Christ's Mystical Body; you brighten God's people with the richest splendours of sanctity; by imparting a hidden apostolic fruitfulness you make this people grow; you are the glory of the Church . On behalf of the whole people of God I encourage you and thank you.

4. Those of you who are engaged in the active apostolate cater to the various needs of the people of India. In doing so in a spirit of love, brotherhood and service, without discrimination, with respect for every human being as a child of God, you show forth the love of Christ himself and continue his mission on earth. This work of love has been consigned to you by the Church and is to be discharged in her name . Yours is not a merely humanitarian service but a specific ecclesial activity and ministry.

Many of you are engaged in education, thus imparting knowledge, both Christian and secular, through the thousands of educational institutions spread throughout the country. You will permit me to underline the great importance of this task, especially when it allows you to give witness to the Church's attachment to truth, goodness and beauty wherever they are found, and even more so when it permits you to lead your students "to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ" . In particular my thoughts go to so many religious who teach in the villages of India. Theirs is an eminent form of service to the well-being of Indian society.

Then there are those engaged in health care, imitating Christ in his solicitude for the poor and the sick. Who can measure the greatness of your lives spent in the daily care of Christ's brothers and sisters? Only God himself can adequately reward you.

There are those engaged in the parochial work of evangelization, proclaiming the word of God and enabling people to experience the power of God's salvific action which transforms their lives and introduces them into the communion of faith and love which is the Church. Others are active in the social apostolate, seeking to help the poor and the exploited to lead a life befitting their inalienable human dignity. Some of you work through the modern mass media and in other specialised areas of pastoral care.

I warmly commend you for your zeal. May Almighty God bless all these activities of yours. And I

appeal to you to continue in your contribution to the good of the Church and to the overall development of your country.

5. The appropriate renewal of religious life desired by the Second Vatican Council has, through God's grace, brought about among you, as among the religious of the whole Church, a further spiritual awakening and an increased dynamism in facing the challenges of the present times. You have understood the need for a continual return to the sources of all Christian life and to the original inspiration behind each institute even as you are adapting to the changed conditions of contemporary society.

In this process the Church reminds you that the fundamental norm of all religious life is the following of Christ as proposed in the Gospel. She reminds you that the all-important law of your consecration is the pursuit of perfect charity through a continuous conversion of heart.

Within this necessary framework each congregation is called to develop its specific character, taking into account the charisms of the founder, in the observance of the approved rule and constitutions, and in the light of the particular goals and wholesome traditions which are the heritage of each institute.

6. In particular I wish to express my appreciation of the efforts to improve the quality of formation given to the young religious. The training of candidates for the religious life is not only a matter of imparting knowledge. It is above all the delicate task of leading them to a profound and personal response to a call from God to conform their lives to the radical demands of the Gospel, in harmony with the life and teachings of the Church and in a generous and sincere love of their own religious family. It is very important to impart to the young religious a deeply human and thoroughly integrated spiritual formation. It should be an essential part of this formation to inculcate a sense of values such as truth, justice, love and respect for the human person. Religious formation can be effective only to the extent that Christ is formed in the candidate and the grace of Baptism is lived to the full.

Be assured that your efforts to impart a suitable formation to the young and to provide an adequate programme of permanent formation for all religious will bear abundant fruit for your communities.

To all the aspirants, postulants and novices of the various congregations I express a special word of blessing and encouragement. I invite you to cherish the gift of a vocation as a sublime expression of God's love for you. To you too are addressed the words of Isaiah already quoted: "I have called you by name, you are mine" . May you grow each day in awareness of the special grace that is yours! Commit all the energies of your young lives to the search for God, to the following of Christ, to the service of the Church and of the world.

7. My dear brothers and sisters, men and women religious of India, Christ has called you to follow him closely along the path of the evangelical counsels. He intends to bless your lives and your work and to enable you to be his privileged witnesses in this country. Through the faithful observance of your vows in humble service to others, especially the poor, you penetrate to the very heart of Indian life, so steeped in religious values. There, in the spiritual heart of your people, you help to promote the Kingdom of God, "a kingdom of truth and life, a kingdom of holiness and grace, a kingdom of justice, love and peace" .

May your enthusiastic love for the Church be a uniting force which will perfect her image before the eyes of the world, for she is "at the same time holy and always in need of being purified" . as she incessantly pursues the path of purification, penance and renewal. And this path of purification, penance and conversion belongs to you in a special way.

I entrust each and every one of you, your communities and your pastoral activities, to the intercession of Mary, Mother of Christ and of the Church. Mary's discipleship shines forth as the foremost example of how your religious consecration is to be lived in faith and love. And my the prayers of the newly beatified Blessed Alphonsa and Blessed Kuriakose, both outstanding examples of religious consecration and love of our Lord Jesus Christ and of his Church, sustain you and fill you with joy, today and always!

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