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VISITA "AD LIMINA APOSTOLORUM" DEI PRESULI DELLA CONFERENZA EPISCOPALE DELL'INDONESIA

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Pubblichiamo di seguito il discorso che il Santo Padre ha rivolto agli Ecc.mi Presuli della Conferenza Episcopale dell'Indonesia, incontrati questa mattina e ricevuti in questi giorni, in separate udienze, in occasione della Visita "ad Limina Apostolorum":

• DISCORSO DEL SANTO PADRE

Dear Brother Bishops,

1. "Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ" (1 *Cor* 1:3)! With these words of Saint Paul and with affection in the Lord, I welcome you the Bishops of Indonesia on the occasion of your visit *ad Limina Apostolorum*. Through you I also embrace in spirit the clergy, religious and laity of your particular Churches. Your travelling such a great distance to kneel at the tombs of the Apostles, to join in prayer and to meet with the Successor of Peter bears witness to the universal character of the Church. As Successors of the Apostles, whose witness to Christ Crucified and Risen is the sure foundation of the Church's proclamation of the Gospel in every time and place, you have come to confirm your communion in faith and charity. I give thanks that during these trying times you were able to make this pilgrimage to share the faith, experiences and insights of your local communities, as well as the challenges you face. May the fruits of our meetings enrich the Church in Indonesia and enhance your own pastoral ministry.

2. Your leadership helps to ensure that the Church is at the forefront of fostering peace and harmony in a country composed of so many various groups. Indeed, your Conference seeks to reflect the motto *Bihneka Tunggal Ika*, "unity in diversity", found on your national coat-of-arms. Your differing ethnic and cultural backgrounds, brought together in an atmosphere of faith, dialogue and mutual trust, can offer a model of hope for all of Indonesia. At the opening of a new era, Indonesia faces the challenge of building a society based on the democratic principles of the freedom and equality of its citizens, regardless of language, race, ethnic background, cultural heritage or religion. I have no doubt that the Church will remain actively involved in this endeavour by encouraging all peoples to continue to join with one another in exercising their civic responsibilities through dialogue and openness, avoiding every type of prejudice or bigotry. The development of a society that

embodies these democratic ideals will help to curb the disturbing violence which has sadly plagued your country over the last few years.

Religious freedom, which has been one of the traditional characteristics of Indonesian Society, is guaranteed by the Nation's Constitution. The Church must at all times remain vigilant to ensure that this principle is respected on both the federal and local levels. It is my hope that such efforts will help to create a climate where respect for the rule of law becomes the new mind-set for a democratic society which is tolerant and non-violent. This important first step begins with suitable human formation. As I said in my Encyclical Letter *Centesimus Annus*, assisting "the individual through education and formation in true ideals" is a necessary element for the creation of a civic order marked by genuine concern for the common good (cf. 46).

Particular attention in this regard must be given to the poor. The Church is concerned that "the advancement of the poor constitutes a great opportunity for the moral and cultural growth of all humanity" (*ibid.*, 28). Since Christ's message is one of hope, his followers must always ensure that the less fortunate among us, regardless of religion or ethnic background, are treated with the dignity and respect demanded by the Gospel. Promoting the fundamental rights of the weak is a proven path towards a stable and productive society. The Church is called to "take her stand beside the poor, to discern the justice of their requests and to help satisfy them" (cf. *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis*, 39).

3. One of the most effective ways for the Christian community to help the poor is through education. In this area, as well as in its impressive system of charitable agencies, the Church in Indonesia is to be commended. Although Catholics account for only a very small part of the total population, they have developed a large and respected school system. The Church's work in the field of education is recognized as one of your greatest contributions to Indonesian society, and it certainly remains an effective means for the transmission of Gospel values. Catholic education, as an important part of the Church's catechetical and evangelizing mission, must be based on a philosophy in which faith and culture are brought together in harmonic unity (cf. Congregation for Catholic Education, *The Religious Dimension of Education in a Catholic School*, 34). Your efforts to preserve Catholic schools, especially in impoverished non-Catholic areas and in the wake of financial hardship, demonstrate your firm commitment to multicultural solidarity and to the requirement of evangelical love for all. While it is encouraging to note the high literacy rate within the population, one cannot fail to be alarmed by the number of young people who do not go on to secondary school. Your youth should be encouraged not to forego their education for the lure of shallow and fleeting materialism. In this regard, I would also like to highlight the essential work of catechists in countries like Indonesia where the faithful are such a small minority. The lack of access to Catholic education in some impoverished areas, coupled with an environment at times in conflict with or even hostile to Christianity, brings out the need to provide serious programmes of catechetical formation for young and old alike. The ecclesial community has a responsibility to ensure that its members are welcomed into an "environment where they can live as fully as possible what they have learned" (*Catechesi Tradendae*, 24). Catechesis is the task of the entire faith community and an extension of the ministry of the word entrusted to the Bishop and his clergy. It is an ecclesiastical responsibility which requires adequate doctrinal and pedagogical formation. I encourage you to give all possible support to those who have willingly undertaken the difficult and demanding task of providing this essential service, for which the entire Church is grateful.

4. For some time your Bishops' Conference has recognized that evangelization goes hand in hand with the profound, gradual and exacting work of inculturation. The truth of the Gospel should always be proclaimed in a way that is persuasive and relevant. This is especially important in a complex society such as your own where, in some areas and among certain groups, Catholicism is at times viewed with suspicion. Yours is the delicate task of seeing that the Gospel maintains its fundamental meaning, valid for all people and cultures, while also communicating it in a way that is attentive to traditional values and the family. As I said during my Pastoral Visit to Indonesia in 1989, "the example of Christ and the power of his Paschal Mystery penetrate, purify and elevate all culture, every culture" (*Homily at Yogyakarta*, 10 October 1989).

Successful inculturation depends on couples and families who embody the Christian vision of their vocation and responsibility. I encourage you, therefore, to continue to promote the traditional values of the family so closely tied with Asian culture (cf. *Ecclesia in Asia*, 6), infusing them with the new life that comes from the Gospel. The serious concerns about growing threats to family life which you have voiced on many occasions must not be

overlooked. A true "conspiracy against life" (cf. *Evangelium Vitae*, 17) and the family is appearing in many forms: abortion, sexual permissiveness, pornography, drug abuse and pressures to adopt morally unacceptable methods of population control. Notwithstanding the difficulties involved in countering these tendencies in a non-Christian society, you as Bishops are "the first ones called to be untiring teachers of the Gospel of life" (*ibid.*, 82). At all times, the Church's prophetic voice must loudly proclaim the need to respect and promote the divine law written on every heart (cf. *Rom* 2:15). By listening, dialogue and discernment, Bishops must assist their flocks in living the Gospel in a way that is fully compatible with the deposit of faith and the bonds of ecclesial communion (cf. *Redemptoris Missio*, 54).

5. As some of you have mentioned, the Church in Indonesia is one that lives and suffers with the people, confronting the challenges arising from daily contact with a non-Christian society. It is a community that seeks a path of integral human development in the context of religious harmony and tolerance, offering and receiving much within a complex cultural milieu. There already exists a commendable level of interreligious dialogue in your country on an institutional level. This mutual exchange of religious experiences has found practical expression in the interreligious charity projects and collaboration which have been undertaken, particularly following natural disasters. Even in predominantly Muslim areas, the Church is actively present in orphanages, clinics and institutions dedicated to helping the downtrodden. This is a wonderful expression of the boundless nature of Christ's love; a love not for a few but for all.

Here, I wish to assure you of my deep concern for the beloved Indonesian people at this moment of heightened tension in the entire world community. War must never be allowed to divide world religions. I encourage you to take this unsettling moment as an occasion to work together, as brothers committed to peace, with your own people, with those of other religious beliefs and with all men and women of good will in order to ensure understanding, cooperation and solidarity. Let us not permit a human tragedy also to become a religious catastrophe (cf. *Address to the Interreligious Delegation from Indonesia*, 20 February 2003).

At the same time, I am well aware that certain portions of the Christian community in your nation have suffered from discrimination and prejudice, while others have been victimized by acts of destruction and vandalism. In some areas Christian communities have been denied the permission to build places of worship and prayer. Indonesia, together with the international community, was recently stunned at the terrible loss of life due to the terrorist bombing in Bali. In all of this, however, one must be careful not to yield to the temptation to define groups of people by the actions of an extremist minority. Authentic religion does not advocate terrorism or violence, but seeks to promote in every way the unity and peace of the whole human family.

6. Since Christians constitute a very small minority in your country, they are especially called to be "leaven in the dough" (cf. *Mt* 13:33). Despite hardship and sacrifice, your priests and religious continue to bear daily witness to the Good News of Jesus Christ, bringing many to the Gospel. Because "the Church in Asia finds herself among people who display an intense yearning for God" (*Ecclesia in Asia*, 9), you are challenged to find concrete ways of meeting that need. Indeed, your efforts to promote vocations to the priesthood and the religious life reflect your awareness of this duty. I commend you for your insistence on maintaining high standards of education and formation in seminaries and religious houses. Concern and attention shown in selecting and training candidates for the priesthood and religious life always redound to the benefit of the local Church.

Since formation and spiritual development are life-long processes, Bishops have an essential responsibility to assist their priests by making available to them programmes of continuing formation, retreats and time for prayer and fellowship. An important element in this formation, both initial and continuing, is an adequate training in the theology and spirituality of the liturgy. "The liturgy is the source and summit of all Christian life and mission. It is also a decisive means of evangelization, especially in Asia where the followers of different religions are so drawn to worship, religious festivals and popular devotions" (cf. *Ecclesia in Asia*, 22). Your priests need to be given opportunities to be both nourished by that liturgy and to become experts in bringing its richness to others, so that its depth, beauty and mystery will always shine forth. The spiritual and moral support which you give to the men and women Religious in your Dioceses is also a significant part of your episcopal ministry. Members of Religious Institutes have played an indispensable role in bringing the Good News to the men and women of Indonesia and in a special way to the poor and the outcast. In this important work, they must always be helped to strengthen their consecration to the Lord through their daily living of the evangelical counsels. "All who have embraced the

consecrated life are called to become leaders in the search for God, a search which has always stirred the human heart and which is particularly visible in Asia's many forms of spirituality and asceticism" (*Ecclesia in Asia*, 44). For this reason, Religious can have an essential role in the Church's overall commitment to evangelization.

7. Dear Bishops, it is in a spirit of faith and communion that I have shared with you these reflections on certain aspects of the care of God's beloved people in Indonesia. Through your presence, I feel very close to the Indonesian faithful, and in this moment of uncertainty it is my fervent prayer that they will be strengthened in Christ. I commend all of you to the intercession of Mary, Queen of the Rosary, who embraces all who call on her in distress and never fails to ask for their deliverance from evil. In the love of Jesus Christ, I impart to you and the faithful of your Dioceses my Apostolic Blessing.

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