

1999

Apostolic Exhortation

Ecclesia In Asia

John Paul II

(Excerpts)

6 November 1999

Economic and Social Realities

[1423]

7. On the subject of economic development, situations on the Asian continent are very diverse, defying any simple classification. Some countries are highly developed, others are developing through effective economic policies, and others still find themselves in abject poverty, indeed among the poorest nations on earth. In the process of development, materialism and secularism are also gaining ground, especially in urban areas. These ideologies, which undermine traditional, social and religious values, threaten Asia's cultures with incalculable damage.

The Synod Fathers spoke of the rapid changes taking place within Asian societies and of the positive and negative aspects of these changes. Among them are the phenomenon of urbanization and the emergence of huge urban conglomerations, often with large depressed areas where organized crime, terrorism, prostitution, and the exploitation of the weaker sectors of society thrive. Migration too is a major social phenomenon, exposing millions of people to situations which are difficult economically, culturally and morally. People migrate within Asia and from Asia to other continents for many reasons, among them poverty, war and ethnic conflicts, the denial of their human rights and fundamental freedoms. The establishment of giant industrial complexes is another cause of internal and external migration, with accompanying destructive effects on family life and values. Mention was also made of the construction of nuclear power plants with an eye to cost and efficiency but with little regard for the safety of people and the integrity of the environment. [1424]

Tourism also warrants special attention. Though a legitimate industry with its own cultural and educational values, tourism has in some cases a devastating influence upon the moral and physical landscape of many Asian countries, manifested in the degradation of young women and even children through prostitution.¹³ The pastoral care of migrants, as well as that of tourists, is difficult and complex, especially in Asia where basic structures for this may not exist. Pastoral planning at all levels needs to take these realities into account. In this context we should not forget the migrants from Catholic Eastern Churches who need pastoral care according to their own ecclesiastical traditions.¹⁴ [1425]

Jesus Christ, the God-Man who saves

[1426]

11. The Scriptures attest that Jesus lived an authentically human life. The Jesus whom we proclaim as the only Saviour walked the earth as the God-Man in full possession of a human nature. He was like us in all things except sin. Born of a

Virgin Mother in humble surroundings at Bethlehem, he was as helpless as any other infant, and even suffered the fate of a refugee fleeing the wrath of a ruthless leader (cf. Mt 2:13-15). He was subject to human parents who did not always understand his ways, but in whom he trusted and whom he lovingly obeyed (cf. Lk 2:41-52). Constantly at prayer, he was in intimate relationship with God whom he addressed as Abba, "Father", to the dismay of his listeners (cf. Jn 8:34-59).

Key Areas of Inculturation

[1427]

22. The Liturgy is the source and summit of all Christian life and mission.⁹⁵ It is a decisive means of evangelization, especially in Asia, where the followers of different religions are so drawn to worship, religious festivals and popular devotions.⁹⁶ The liturgy of the Oriental Churches has for the most part been successfully inculturated through centuries of interaction with the surrounding culture, but the more recently established Churches need to ensure that the liturgy becomes an ever greater source of nourishment for their peoples through a wise and effective use of elements drawn from the local cultures. Yet liturgical inculturation requires more than a focus upon traditional cultural values, symbols and rituals. There is also a need to take account of the shifts in consciousness and attitudes caused by the emerging secularist and consumer cultures which are affecting the Asian sense of worship and prayer. Nor can the specific needs of the poor, migrants, refugees, youth and women be overlooked in any genuine liturgical inculturation in Asia.

Communion and Mission go Hand in Hand

[1428]

24. Using the theology of communion, the Second Vatican Council could describe the Church as the pilgrim People of God to whom all peoples are in some way related.¹²¹ On this basis the Synod Fathers stressed the mysterious link between the Church and the followers of other Asian religions, noting that they are "related to [the Church] in varying degrees and ways".¹²² In the midst of so many different peoples, cultures and religions "the life of the Church as communion assumes greater importance."¹²³ In effect, the Church's service of unity has a specific relevance in Asia where there are so many tensions, divisions and conflicts, caused by ethnic, social, cultural, linguistic, economic and religious differences. It is in this context that the local Churches in Asia, in communion with the Successor of Peter, need to foster greater communion of mind and heart through close cooperation among themselves. Vital also to their evangelizing mission are their relations with other Christian Churches and ecclesial communities, and with the followers of other religions.¹²⁴ The Synod therefore renewed the commitment of the Church in Asia to the task of improving both ecumenical relations and interreligious dialogue, recognizing that building unity, working for reconciliation, forging bonds of solidarity, promoting dialogue among religions and cultures, eradicating prejudices and engendering trust among peoples are all essential to the Church's evangelizing mission on the continent. All this demands of the Catholic community a sincere examination of conscience, the courage to seek reconciliation and a renewed commitment to dialogue. At the threshold of the Third Millennium it is clear that the Church's ability to evangelize requires that she strive earnestly to serve the cause of unity in all its dimensions. Communion and mission go hand in hand.

Preferential Love of the Poor

[1429]

34. In seeking to promote human dignity, the Church shows a preferential love of the poor and the voiceless, because the Lord has identified himself with them in a special way (cf. Mt 25:40). This love excludes no one, but simply embodies a priority of service to which the whole Christian tradition bears witness. “This love of preference for the poor, and the decisions which it inspires in us, cannot but embrace the immense multitudes of the hungry, the needy, the homeless, those without medical care and, above all, those without hope of a better future. It is impossible not to take account of the existence of these realities. To ignore them would mean becoming like the ‘rich man’ who pretended not to know the beggar Lazarus lying at his gate (cf. Lk 16:19-31).”¹⁷¹ This is especially so with regard to Asia, a continent of plentiful resources and great civilizations, but where some of the poorest nations on earth are to be found, and where more than half the population suffers deprivation, poverty and exploitation.¹⁷² The poor of Asia and of the world will always find their best reason for hope in the Gospel command to love one another as Christ has loved us (cf. Jn 13:34); and the Church in Asia cannot but strive earnestly to fulfil that command towards the poor, in word and in deed.

Solidarity with the poor becomes more credible if Christians themselves live simply, following the example of Jesus. Simplicity of life, deep faith and unfeigned love for all, especially the poor and the outcast, are luminous signs of the Gospel in action. The Synod Fathers called on Asian Catholics to adopt a lifestyle consonant with the teachings of the Gospel, so that they may better serve the Church’s mission and so that the Church herself may become a Church of the poor and for the poor.¹⁷³ [1430]

In her love for the poor of Asia, the Church concerns herself especially with migrants, with indigenous and tribal peoples, with women and with children, since they are often the victims of the worst forms of exploitation. In addition, untold numbers of people suffer discrimination because of their culture, colour, race, caste, economic status, or because of their way of thinking. They include those who are victimized on the basis of their conversion to Christianity.¹⁷⁴ I join the Synod Fathers in appealing to all nations to recognize the right to freedom of conscience and religion and the other basic human rights.¹⁷⁵ [1431]

At the present time Asia is experiencing an unprecedented flow of refugees, asylum seekers, immigrants and overseas workers. In the countries to which they come, these people often find themselves friendless, culturally estranged, linguistically disadvantaged and economically vulnerable. They need support and care in order to preserve their human dignity and their cultural and religious heritage.¹⁷⁶ Despite limited resources, the Church in Asia generously seeks to be a welcoming home to the weary and heavy-burdened, knowing that in the Heart of Jesus, where no one is a stranger, they will find rest (cf. Mt 11:28-29). [1432]

A Witnessing Church [1433]

42. The Second Vatican Council taught clearly that the entire Church is missionary, and that the work of evangelization is the duty of the whole People of God.²⁰⁴ Since the whole People of God is sent forth to preach the Gospel, evangelization is never an individual and isolated act; it is always an ecclesial task which has to be carried out in communion with the whole community of faith. The mission is one and

indivisible, having one origin and one final purpose; but within it there are different responsibilities and different kinds of activity.²⁰⁵ In every case it is clear that there can be no true proclamation of the Gospel unless Christians also offer the witness of lives in harmony with the message they preach: “The first form of witness is the very life of the missionary, of the Christian family, and of the ecclesial community, which reveal a new way of living... Everyone in the Church, striving to imitate the Divine Master, can and must bear this kind of witness; in many cases it is the only possible way of being a missionary.”²⁰⁶ Genuine Christian witness is needed especially now, because “people today put more trust in witnesses than in teachers, in experience than in teaching, and in life and action than in theories.”²⁰⁷ This is certainly true in the Asian context, where people are more persuaded by holiness of life than by intellectual argument. The experience of faith and of the gifts of the Holy Spirit thus becomes the basis of all missionary work, in towns or villages, in schools or hospitals, among the handicapped, migrants or tribal peoples, or in the pursuit of justice and human rights. Every situation is an opportunity for Christians to show forth the power which the truth of Christ has become in their lives. Therefore, inspired by the many missionaries who bore heroic witness to God’s love among the peoples of the continent in the past, the Church in Asia strives now to witness with no less zeal to Jesus Christ and his Gospel. Christian mission demands no less.

Conscious of the Church’s essentially missionary character and looking to a new outpouring of the dynamism of the Holy Spirit as the Church enters the new millennium, the Synod Fathers asked that this Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation should offer some directives and guidelines to those working in the vast field of evangelization in Asia. [1434]

¹³ Cf. Special Assembly for Asia of the Synod of Bishops, *Instrumentum Laboris*, 9.

¹⁴ Cf. Propositiones 36 and 50.

⁹⁵ Cf. Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, 10; Special Assembly for Asia of the Synod of Bishops, *Relatio post disceptationem*, 14.

⁹⁶ Cf. Special Assembly for Asia of the Synod of Bishops, *Relatio post disceptationem*, 14; *Propositio* 43.

¹²¹ Cf. Dogmatic Constitution on the Church *Lumen Gentium*, 16.

¹²² *Propositio* 13.

¹²³ *Ibid.*

¹²⁴ Cf. Special Assembly for Asia of the Synod of Bishops, *Relatio ante disceptationem*: *L’Osservatore Romano* (22 April 1998), 6.

¹⁷¹ John Paul II, Encyclical Letter *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis* (30 December 1987), 42: AAS 80 (1988), 573; cf. Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, Instruction on Christian Freedom and Liberation *Libertatis Conscientia* (22 March 1986), 68: AAS 79 (1987), 583.

¹⁷² Cf. *Propositio* 44.

¹⁷³ Cf. *ibid.*

¹⁷⁴ Cf. Propositio 39.

¹⁷⁵ Cf. Propositio 22.

¹⁷⁶ Cf. Propositio 36.

204 Cf. Decree on the Church's Missionary Activity *Ad Gentes*, 2 and 35.

²⁰⁵ Cf. John Paul II, Encyclical Letter *Redemptoris Missio* (7 December 1990), 31: AAS 83 (1991), 277.

²⁰⁶ *Ibid.* 42: loc. cit., 289.

²⁰⁷ *Ibid.*

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(John Paul II). Available from Vatican's website:
[http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/john_paul_ii/
apost_exhortations/documents/hf_jp-ii_exh_06111999_ecclesia-in-asia_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/john_paul_ii/apost_exhortations/documents/hf_jp-ii_exh_06111999_ecclesia-in-asia_en.html).
