

POST-SYNODAL APOSTOLIC  
EXHORTATION  
**ECCLESIA IN ASIA.**



OF THE HOLY FATHER

***John Paul II.***

TO THE BISHOPS, PRIESTS AND DEACONS,  
MEN AND WOMEN IN THE CONSECRATED  
LIFE AND ALL THE LAY FAITHFUL ON  
JESUS CHRIST THE SAVIOUR AND HIS  
MISSION OF LOVE AND SERVICE IN ASIA :  
"...THAT THEY MAY HAVE LIFE, AND  
HAVE IT ABUNDANTLY" (*jn* 10 :10)

## INTRODUCTION

### ***The Marvel of God's Plan in Asia***

1. The Church in Asia sings the praises of the "God of salvation" (*Ps* 68 :20) for choosing to initiate his saving plan on Asian soil, through men and women of that continent. It was in fact in Asia that God revealed and fulfilled his saving purpose from the beginning. He guided the patriarchs (cf. *Gen* 12) and called Moses to lead his people to freedom (cf. *Ex* 3 :10). He spoke to his chosen people through many prophets, judges, kings and valiant women of faith. In "the fullness of time" (*Gal* 4 :4), he sent his only-begotten Son, Jesus Christ the Saviour, who took flesh as an Asian ! Exulting in the goodness of the continent's peoples, cultures, and religious vitality, and conscious at the same time of the unique gift of faith which she has received for the good of all, the Church in Asia cannot cease to proclaim : "Give thanks to the Lord for he is good, for his love endures for ever" (*Ps* 118 :1).

Because Jesus was born, lived, died and rose from the dead in the Holy Land, that small portion of Western Asia became a land of promise and hope for all mankind. Jesus knew and loved this land. He made his own the history, the sufferings and the hopes of its people. He loved its people and embraced their Jewish traditions and heritage. God in fact had long

before chosen this people and revealed himself to them in preparation for the Saviour's coming. And from this land, through the preaching of the Gospel in the power of the Holy Spirit, the Church went forth to make "disciples of all nations" (*Mt 28 :19*). With the Church throughout the world, the Church in Asia will cross the threshold of the Third Christian Millennium marvelling at all that God has worked from those beginnings until now, and strong in the knowledge that "just as in the first millennium the Cross was planted on the soil of Europe, and in the second on that of the Americas and Africa, we can pray that in the Third Christian Millennium *a great harvest of faith* will be reaped in this vast and vital continent".<sup>1</sup>

### ***Background to the Special Assembly***

2. In my Apostolic Letter *Tertio Millennio Adveniente*, I set out a programme for the Church to welcome the Third Millennium of Christianity, a programme centred on the challenges of the new evangelization. An important feature of that plan was the holding of *continental Synods* so that Bishops could address the question of evangelization according to the particular situation and needs of each continent. This series of Synods, linked by the common theme of the

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<sup>1</sup> John Paul II, Address to the Sixth Plenary Assembly of the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences (FABC), Manila (15 January 1995), 11 : *Insegnamenti* XVIII, 1 (1995), 159.

new evangelization, has proved an important part of the Church's preparation for the Great Jubilee of the Year 2000.

In that same letter, referring to the Special Assembly for Asia of the Synod of Bishops, I noted that in that part of the world "the issue of the encounter of Christianity with ancient local cultures and religions is a pressing one. This is a great challenge for evangelization, since religious systems such as Buddhism or Hinduism have a clearly soteriological character".<sup>2</sup> It is indeed a mystery why the Saviour of the world, born in Asia, has until now remained largely unknown to the people of the continent. The Synod would be a providential opportunity for the Church in Asia to reflect further on this mystery and to make a renewed commitment to the mission of making Jesus Christ better known to all. Two months after the publication of *Tertio Millennio Adveniente*, speaking to the Sixth Plenary Assembly of the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences, in Manila, the Philippines, during the memorable Tenth World Youth Day celebrations, I reminded the Bishops: "If the Church in Asia is to fulfil its providential destiny, evangelization as the joyful, patient and progressive preaching of the saving

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<sup>2</sup> Apostolic Letter *Tertio Millennio Adveniente* (10 November 1994), 38 : *AAS* 87 (1995), 30.

Death and Resurrection of Jesus Christ must be your absolute priority".<sup>3</sup>

The positive response of the Bishops and of the particular Churches to the prospect of a Special Assembly for Asia of the Synod of Bishops was evident throughout the preparatory phase. The Bishops communicated their desires and opinions at every stage with frankness and a penetrating knowledge of the continent. They did so in full awareness of the bond of communion which they share with the universal Church. In line with the original idea of *Tertio Millennio Adveniente* and following the proposals of the Pre-Synodal Council which evaluated the views of the Bishops and the particular Churches on the Asian continent, I chose as the Synod's theme : *Jesus Christ the Saviour and his Mission of Love and Service in Asia :*"That they may have Life and have it abundantly" (Jn 10 :10). Through this particular formulation of the theme, I hoped that the Synod might "illustrate and explain more fully the truth that Christ is the one Mediator between God and man and the sole Redeemer of the world, to be clearly distinguished from the founders of other great religions".<sup>4</sup> As we approach the Great Jubilee, the Church in Asia needs to be able to proclaim with renewed vigour : *Ecce natus est nobis*

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<sup>3</sup> No. 11 : *Insegnamenti* XVIII, 1 (1995), 159.

<sup>4</sup> John Paul II, Apostolic Letter *Tertio Millennio Adveniente* (10 November 1994), 38 : *AAS* 87 (1995), 30.

*Salvator mundi*, "Behold the Saviour of the World is born to us", born in Asia !

***The Celebration of the Special Assembly***

3. By the grace of God, the Special Assembly for Asia of the Synod of Bishops took place from 18 April to 14 May 1998 in the Vatican. It came after the Special Assemblies for Africa (1994) and America (1997), and was followed at the year's end by the Special Assembly for Oceania (1998). For almost a month, the Synod Fathers and other participants, gathered around the Successor of Peter and sharing in the gift of hierarchical communion, gave concrete voice and expression to the Church in Asia. It was indeed a moment of special grace ! <sup>5</sup>Earlier meetings of Asian Bishops had contributed to preparing the Synod and making possible an atmosphere of intense ecclesial and fraternal communion. Of particular relevance in this respect were the past Plenary Assemblies and Seminars sponsored by the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences and its offices, which periodically brought together great numbers of Asian Bishops and fostered personal as well as ministerial bonds between them. I had the privilege of being able to make a visit to some of these meetings, at times presiding at the opening or closing Solemn Eucharistic Celebrations. On those occasions I was able to

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<sup>5</sup> Cf. Special Assembly for Asia of the Synod of Bishops, *Nuntius (Final Message)*, 2.

observe directly the *encounter in dialogue* of the particular Churches, including the Eastern Churches, in the person of their Pastors. These and other regional assemblies of Asia's Bishops served providentially as remote preparation for the Synod Assembly.

The actual celebration of the Synod itself confirmed the importance of dialogue as a *characteristic mode of the Church's life in Asia*. A sincere and honest sharing of experiences, ideas and proposals proved to be the way to a genuine meeting of spirits, a communion of minds and hearts which, in love, respects and transcends differences. Particularly moving was the encounter of the new Churches with the ancient Churches which trace their origins to the Apostles. We experienced the incomparable joy of seeing the Bishops of the particular Churches in Myanmar, Vietnam, Laos, Cambodia, Mongolia, Siberia and the new republics of Central Asia sitting beside their Brothers who had long desired to encounter them and to dialogue with them. Yet there was also a sense of sadness at the fact that Bishops from Mainland China could not be present. Their absence was a constant reminder of the heroic sacrifices and suffering which the Church continues to endure in many parts of Asia.

The encounter in dialogue of the Bishops and the Successor of Peter, entrusted with the

task of strengthening his brothers (cf. *Lk* 22 :32), was truly a confirmation in faith and mission. Day after day the Synod Hall and meeting rooms were filled with accounts of deep faith, self-sacrificing love, unwavering hope, long-suffering commitment, enduring courage and merciful forgiveness, all of which eloquently disclosed the truth of Jesus' words : "I am with you always" (*Mt* 28 :20). The Synod was a moment of grace because it was an encounter with the Saviour who continues to be present in his Church through the power of the Holy Spirit, experienced in a fraternal dialogue of life, communion and mission.

### ***Sharing the Fruits of the Special Assembly***

4. Through this Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation, I wish to share with the Church in Asia and throughout the world the fruits of the Special Assembly. This document seeks to convey the wealth of that great spiritual event of communion and episcopal collegiality. The Synod was a *celebratory remembering* of the Asian roots of Christianity. The Synod Fathers remembered the first Christian community, the early Church, Jesus' little flock on this immense continent (cf. *Lk* 12 :32). They remembered what the Church has received and heard from the beginning (cf. *Rev* 3 :3), and, having remembered, they celebrated God's "abundant goodness" (*Pf* 145 :7)

which never fails. The Synod was also an occasion to recognize the ancient religious traditions and civilizations, the profound philosophies and the wisdom which have made Asia what it is today. Above all, the peoples of Asia themselves were remembered as the continent's true wealth and hope for the future. Throughout the Synod those of us present were witnesses of an extraordinarily fruitful meeting between the old and new cultures and civilizations of Asia, marvellous to behold in their diversity and convergence, especially when symbols, songs, dances and colours came together in harmonious accord around the one Table of the Lord in the opening and closing Eucharistic Liturgies.

This was not a celebration motivated by pride in human achievements, but one conscious of what the Almighty has done for the Church in Asia (cf. *Lk* 1:49). In recalling the Catholic community's humble condition, as well as the weaknesses of its members, the Synod was also *a call to conversion*, so that the Church in Asia might become ever more worthy of the graces continually being offered by God.

As well as a remembrance and a celebration, the Synod was *an ardent affirmation of faith in Jesus Christ the Saviour*. Grateful for the gift of faith, the Synod Fathers found no better way to celebrate the faith than to affirm it in its integrity, and to

reflect on it in relation to the context in which it has to be proclaimed and professed in Asia today. They emphasized frequently that the faith is already being proclaimed with trust and courage on the continent, even amid great difficulties. In the name of so many millions of men and women in Asia who put their trust in no one other than the Lord, the Synod Fathers confessed: "We have believed and come to know that you are the Holy One of God" (*Jn 6:69*). In the face of the many painful questions posed by the suffering, violence, discrimination and poverty to which the majority of Asian peoples are subjected, they prayed: "I believe, help my unbelief" (*Mk 9:24*).

In 1995, I invited the Bishops of Asia gathered in Manila to "open wide to Christ the doors of Asia".<sup>6</sup> Taking strength from the mystery of communion with the countless and often unheralded martyrs of the faith in Asia, and confirmed in hope by the abiding presence of the Holy Spirit, the Synod Fathers courageously called all Christ's disciples in Asia to a new *commitment to mission*. During the Synod Assembly, the Bishops and participants bore witness to the character, spiritual fire and zeal which will assuredly make Asia the land of a bountiful harvest in the coming millennium.

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<sup>6</sup> Address to the Sixth Plenary Assembly of the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences (FABC), Manila (15 January 1995), 10: *Insegnamenti* XVIII, 1 (1995), 159.

## CHAPTER I. THE ASIAN CONTEXT.

### *Asia, the Birthplace of Jesus and of the Church*

5. The Incarnation of the Son of God, which the whole Church will solemnly commemorate in the Great Jubilee of the Year 2000, took place in a definite historical and geographical context. That context exercised an important influence on the life and mission of the Redeemer as man. "In Jesus of Nazareth, God has assumed the features typical of human nature, including a person's belonging to a particular people and a particular land... The physical particularity of the land and its geographical determination are inseparable from the truth of the human flesh assumed by the Word".<sup>7</sup> Consequently, knowledge of the world in which the Saviour "dwelt among us" (*Jn* 1 :14) is an important key to a more precise understanding of the Eternal Father's design and of the immensity of his love for every creature : "For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life" (*Jn* 3 :16).

Likewise, the Church lives and fulfils her mission in the actual circumstances of time and place. A critical awareness of the diverse and complex realities of Asia is essential if the People of God on the continent are to respond to God's

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<sup>7</sup> John Paul II, *Letter Concerning Pilgrimage to the Places Linked to the History of Salvation* (29 June 1999), 3 : *L'Osservatore Romano* (30 June - 1 July 1999), 8.

will for them in the new evangelization. The Synod Fathers insisted that the Church's mission of love and service in Asia is conditioned by two factors : on the one hand, her self-understanding as a community of disciples of Jesus Christ gathered around her Pastors, and on the other hand, the social, political, religious, cultural and economic realities of Asia.<sup>8</sup> The situation of Asia was examined in detail during the Synod by those who have daily contact with the extremely diversified realities of such an immense continent. The following is, in synthesis, the result of the Synod Fathers' reflections.

### ***Religious and Cultural Realities***

6. Asia is the earth's largest continent and is home to nearly two-thirds of the world's population, with China and India accounting for almost half the total population of the globe. The most striking feature of the continent is the variety of its peoples who are "heirs to ancient cultures, religions and traditions".<sup>9</sup> We cannot but be amazed at the sheer size of Asia's population and at the intricate mosaic of its many cultures, languages, beliefs and traditions, which comprise such a substantial part of the history and patrimony of the human family.

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<sup>8</sup> Cf. *Propositio* 3.

<sup>9</sup> *Propositio* 1.

Asia is also the cradle of the world's major religions – Judaism, Christianity, Islam and Hinduism. It is the birthplace of many other spiritual traditions such as Buddhism, Taoism, Confucianism, Zoroastrianism, Jainism, Sikhism and Shintoism. Millions also espouse traditional or tribal religions, with varying degrees of structured ritual and formal religious teaching. The Church has the deepest respect for these traditions and seeks to engage in sincere dialogue with their followers. The religious values they teach await their fulfilment in Jesus Christ.

The people of Asia take pride in their religious and cultural values, such as love of silence and contemplation, simplicity, harmony, detachment, non-violence, the spirit of hard work, discipline, frugal living, the thirst for learning and philosophical enquiry.<sup>10</sup> They hold dear the values of respect for life, compassion for all beings, closeness to nature, filial piety towards parents, elders and ancestors, and a highly developed sense of community.<sup>11</sup> In particular, they hold the family to be a vital source of strength, a closely knit community with a powerful sense of solidarity.<sup>12</sup> Asian peoples are known for their spirit of religious tolerance and peaceful co-existence. Without denying the

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<sup>10</sup> Cf. Special Assembly for Asia of the Synod of Bishops, *Lineamenta*, 3.

<sup>11</sup> Cf. *ibid.*

<sup>12</sup> Cf. *Propositio* 32.

existence of bitter tensions and violent conflicts, it can still be said that Asia has often demonstrated a remarkable capacity for accommodation and a natural openness to the mutual enrichment of peoples in the midst of a plurality of religions and cultures. Moreover, despite the influence of modernization and secularization, Asian religions are showing signs of great vitality and a capacity for renewal, as seen in reform movements within the various religious groups. Many people, especially the young, experience a deep thirst for spiritual values, as the rise of new religious movements clearly demonstrates.

All of this indicates an innate spiritual insight and moral wisdom in the Asian soul, and it is the core around which a growing sense of "being Asian" is built. This "being Asian" is best discovered and affirmed not in confrontation and opposition, but in the spirit of complementarity and harmony. In this framework of complementarity and harmony, the Church can communicate the Gospel in a way which is faithful both to her own Tradition and to the Asian soul.

### ***Economic and Social Realities***

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.

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.<sup>13</sup> 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.<sup>14</sup>

Several Asian countries face difficulties related to population growth, which is "not merely a demographic or economic problem but especially a moral one".<sup>15</sup> Clearly, the question of population is closely linked to that of human promotion, but false solutions that threaten the dignity and inviolability of life abound and present a special challenge to the Church in Asia. It is perhaps appropriate at this point to recall the

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

<sup>14</sup> Cf. *Propositiones* 36 and 50.

<sup>15</sup> *Propositio* 44.

Church's contribution to the defence and promotion of life through health care, social development and education to benefit peoples, especially the poor. It is fitting that the Special Assembly for Asia paid tribute to the late Mother Teresa of Calcutta, "who was known all over the world for her loving and selfless care of the poorest of the poor".<sup>16</sup> She remains an icon of the service to life which the Church is offering in Asia, in courageous contrast to the many dark forces at work in society.

A number of Synod Fathers underlined the external influences being brought to bear on Asian cultures. New forms of behaviour are emerging as a result of over-exposure to the mass media and the kinds of literature, music and films that are proliferating on the continent. Without denying that the means of social communication can be a great force for good,<sup>17</sup> we cannot disregard the negative impact which they often have. Their beneficial effects can at times be outweighed by the way in which they are controlled and used by those with questionable political, economic and ideological interests. As a result, the negative aspects of the media and entertainment industries are threatening traditional values, and in particular the sacredness of marriage and the stability of the family. The

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<sup>16</sup> *Propositio* 27.

<sup>17</sup> Cf. *Propositio* 45.

effect of images of violence, hedonism, unbridled individualism and materialism "is striking at the heart of Asian cultures, at the religious character of the people, families and whole societies".<sup>18</sup> This is a situation which poses a great challenge to the Church and to the proclamation of her message.

The persistent reality of poverty and the exploitation of people are matters of the most urgent concern. In Asia there are millions of oppressed people who for centuries have been kept economically, culturally and politically on the margins of society.<sup>19</sup> Reflecting upon the situation of women in Asian societies, the Synod Fathers noted that "though the awakening of women's consciousness to their dignity and rights is one of the most significant signs of the times, the poverty and exploitation of women remains a serious problem throughout Asia".<sup>20</sup> Female illiteracy is much higher than that of males ; and female children are more likely to be aborted or even killed after birth. There are also millions of indigenous or tribal people throughout Asia living in social, cultural and political isolation from the dominant population.<sup>21</sup> It was reassuring to hear

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<sup>18</sup> Special Assembly for Asia of the Synod of Bishops, *Instrumentum Laboris*, 9.

<sup>19</sup> Cf. *Propositio* 39.

<sup>20</sup> *Propositio* 35.

<sup>21</sup> Cf. *Propositio* 38.

the Bishops at the Synod mention that in some cases these matters are receiving greater attention at the national, regional and international levels, and that the Church is actively seeking to address this serious situation.

The Synod Fathers pointed out that this necessarily brief reflection upon the economic and social realities of Asia would be incomplete if recognition were not also given to the extensive economic growth of many Asian societies in recent decades: a new generation of skilled workers, scientists and technicians is growing daily and their great number augurs well for Asia's development. Still, not all is stable and solid in this progress, as has been made evident by the most recent and far-reaching financial crisis suffered by a number of Asian countries. The future of Asia lies in cooperation, within Asia and with the nations of other continents, but building always on what Asian peoples themselves do with a view to their own development.

### ***Political Realities***

8. The Church always needs to have an exact understanding of the political situation in the different countries where she seeks to fulfil her mission. In Asia today the political panorama is highly complex, displaying an array of ideologies ranging from democratic forms of government to theocratic ones. Military dictatorships and atheistic ideologies are very much present. Some

countries recognize an official state religion that allows little or no religious freedom to minorities and the followers of other religions. Other States, though not explicitly theocratic, reduce minorities to second-class citizens with little safeguard for their fundamental human rights. In some places Christians are not allowed to practise their faith freely and proclaim Jesus Christ to others.<sup>22</sup> They are persecuted and denied their rightful place in society. The Synod Fathers remembered in a special way the people of China and expressed the fervent hope that all their Chinese Catholic brothers and sisters would one day be able to exercise their religion in freedom and visibly profess their full communion with the See of Peter.<sup>23</sup>

While appreciating the progress which many Asian countries are making under their different forms of government, the Synod Fathers also drew attention to the widespread corruption existing at various levels of both government and society.<sup>24</sup> Too often, people seem helpless to defend themselves against corrupt politicians, judiciary officials, administrators and bureaucrats. However, there is a growing awareness throughout Asia of people's capacity to change unjust structures. There are new demands for

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<sup>22</sup> Cf. *Propositio* 22.

<sup>23</sup> Cf. *Propositio* 52.

<sup>24</sup> Cf. Special Assembly for Asia of the Synod of Bishops, *Lineamenta*, 6.

greater social justice, for more participation in government and economic life, for equal opportunities in education and for a just share in the resources of the nation. People are becoming increasingly conscious of their human dignity and rights and more determined to safeguard them. Long dormant ethnic, social and cultural minority groups are seeking ways to become agents of their own social advancement. The Spirit of God helps and sustains people's efforts to transform society so that the human yearning for a more abundant life may be satisfied as God wills (cf. *Jn* 10 :10).

### ***The Church in Asia : Past and Present***

9. The history of the Church in Asia is as old as the Church herself, for it was in Asia that Jesus breathed the Holy Spirit upon his disciples and sent them to the ends of the earth to proclaim the Good News and gather communities of believers. "As the Father has sent me, even so I send you" (*Jn* 20 :21 ; see also *Mt* 28 :18-20 ; *Mk* 16 :15-18 ; *Lk* 24 :47 ; *Acts* 1 :8). Following the Lord's command, the Apostles preached the word and founded Churches. It may help to recall some elements of this fascinating and complex history.

From Jerusalem, the Church spread to Antioch, to Rome and beyond. It reached Ethiopia in the South, Scythia in the North and India in the East, where tradition has it that Saint Thomas the Apostle went in the year 52 A.D. and

founded Churches in South India. The missionary spirit of the East Syrian community in the third and fourth centuries, with its centre at Edessa, was remarkable. The ascetic communities of Syria were a major force of evangelization in Asia from the third century onwards. They provided spiritual energy for the Church, especially during times of persecution. At the end of the third century, Armenia was the first nation as a whole to embrace Christianity, and is now preparing to celebrate the 1700th anniversary of its baptism. By the end of the fifth century, the Christian message had reached the Arab kingdoms, but for many reasons, including the divisions among Christians, the message failed to take root among these peoples.

Persian merchants took the Good News to China in the fifth century. The first Christian Church was built there at the beginning of the seventh century. During the T'ang dynasty (618-907 A.D.), the Church flourished for nearly two centuries. The decline of this vibrant Church in China by the end of the First Millennium is one of the sadder chapters in the history of God's People on the continent.

In the thirteenth century the Good News was announced to the Mongols and the Turks and to the Chinese once more. But Christianity almost vanished in these regions for a number of reasons, among them the rise of Islam,

geographical isolation, the absence of an appropriate adaptation to local cultures, and perhaps above all a lack of preparedness to encounter the great religions of Asia. The end of the fourteenth century saw the drastic diminution of the Church in Asia, except for the isolated community in South India. The Church in Asia had to await a new era of missionary endeavour.

The apostolic labours of Saint Francis Xavier, the founding of the Congregation of *Propaganda Fide* by Pope Gregory XV, and the directives for missionaries to respect and appreciate local cultures all contributed to achieving more positive results in the course of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Again in the nineteenth century there was a revival of missionary activity. Various religious congregations dedicated themselves wholeheartedly to this task. *Propaganda Fide* was reorganized. Greater emphasis was placed upon building up the local Churches. Educational and charitable works went hand in hand with the preaching of the Gospel. Consequently, the Good News continued to reach more people, especially among the poor and the underprivileged, but also here and there among the social and intellectual elite. New attempts were made to inculturate the Good News, although they proved in no way sufficient. Despite her centuries-long presence and her many apostolic endeavours, the Church in many

places was still considered as foreign to Asia, and indeed was often associated in people's minds with the colonial powers.

This was the situation on the eve of the Second Vatican Council ; but thanks to the impetus provided by the Council, a new understanding of mission dawned and with it a great hope. The universality of God's plan of salvation, the missionary nature of the Church and the responsibility of everyone in the Church for this task, so strongly reaffirmed in the Council's Decree on the Church's Missionary Activity *Ad Gentes*, became the framework of a new commitment. During the Special Assembly, the Synod Fathers testified to the recent growth of the ecclesial community among many different peoples in various parts of the continent, and they appealed for further missionary efforts in the years to come, especially as new possibilities for the proclamation of the Gospel emerge in the Siberian region and the Central Asian countries which have recently gained their independence, such as Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Turkmenistan.<sup>25</sup>

A survey of the Catholic communities in Asia shows a splendid variety by reason of their origin and historical development, and the diverse spiritual and liturgical traditions of the various Rites. Yet all are united in proclaiming the Good

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<sup>25</sup> Cf. *Propositio* 56.

News of Jesus Christ, through Christian witness, works of charity and human solidarity. While some particular Churches carry out their mission in peace and freedom, others find themselves in situations of violence and conflict, or feel threatened by other groups, for religious or other reasons. In the vastly diversified cultural world of Asia, the Church faces multiple philosophical, theological and pastoral challenges. Her task is made more difficult by the fact of her being a minority, with the only exception the Philippines, where Catholics are in the majority.

Whatever the circumstances, the Church in Asia finds herself among peoples who display an intense yearning for God. The Church knows that this yearning can only be fully satisfied by Jesus Christ, the Good News of God for all the nations. The Synod Fathers were very keen that this Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation should focus attention on this yearning and encourage the Church in Asia to proclaim with vigour in word and deed that *Jesus Christ is the Saviour*.

The Spirit of God, always at work in the history of the Church in Asia, continues to guide her. The many positive elements found in the local Churches, frequently highlighted in the Synod, strengthen our expectation of a "new springtime of Christian life".<sup>26</sup> One solid cause of

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<sup>26</sup> John Paul II, Apostolic Letter *Tertio Millennio Adveniente* (10 November 1994), 18 : *AAS* 87 (1995), 16.

hope is the increasing number of better trained, enthusiastic and Spirit-filled lay people, who are more and more aware of their specific vocation within the ecclesial community. Among them the lay catechists deserve special recognition and praise.<sup>27</sup> The apostolic and charismatic movements too are a gift of the Spirit, bringing new life and vigour to the formation of lay men and women, families and the young.<sup>28</sup> Associations and ecclesial movements devoted to the promotion of human dignity and justice make accessible and tangible the universality of the evangelical message of our adoption as children of God (cf. *Rom* 8 :15-16).

At the same time, there are Churches in very difficult circumstances, "experiencing intense trials in the practice of their faith".<sup>29</sup> The Synod Fathers were moved by reports of the heroic witness, unshaken perseverance and steady growth of the Catholic Church in China, by the efforts of the Church in South Korea to offer assistance to the people of North Korea, the humble steadfastness of the Catholic community in Vietnam, the isolation of Christians in such places as Laos and Myanmar, the difficult co-existence with the majority in some

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<sup>27</sup> Cf. *Propositio* 29.

<sup>28</sup> Cf. *Propositiones* 29 and 31.

<sup>29</sup> *Propositio* 51.

predominantly Islamic states.<sup>30</sup> The Synod paid special attention to the situation of the Church in the Holy Land and in the Holy City of Jerusalem, "the heart of Christianity",<sup>31</sup> a city dear to all the children of Abraham. The Synod Fathers expressed the belief that the peace of the region, and even the world, depends in large measure on the peace and reconciliation which have eluded Jerusalem for so long.<sup>32</sup>

I cannot bring to an end this brief survey of the situation of the Church in Asia, though far from complete, without mentioning the Saints and Martyrs of Asia, both those who have been recognized and those known only to God, whose example is a source of "spiritual richness and a great means of evangelization".<sup>33</sup> They speak silently but most powerfully of the importance of holiness of life and readiness to offer one's life for the Gospel. They are the teachers and the protectors, the glory of the Church in Asia in her work of evangelization. With the whole Church I pray to the Lord to send many more committed labourers to reap the harvest of souls which I see as ready and plentiful (cf. *Mt* 9 :37-38). At this moment, I call to mind what I wrote in *Redemptoris Missio* : "God is opening before the

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<sup>30</sup> Cf. *Propositiones* 51, 52 and 53.

<sup>31</sup> *Propositio* 57.

<sup>32</sup> Cf. *ibid.*

<sup>33</sup> *Propositio* 54.

Church the horizons of a humanity more fully prepared for the sowing of the Gospel".<sup>34</sup> This vision of a new and promising horizon I see being fulfilled in Asia, where Jesus was born and where Christianity began.

## CHAPTER II. JESUS THE SAVIOUR : A GIFT TO ASIA.

### ***The Gift of Faith***

10. As the Synod discussion of the complex realities of Asia unfolded, it became increasingly obvious to all that the Church's unique contribution to the peoples of the continent is the proclamation of Jesus Christ, true God and true man, the one and only Saviour for all peoples.<sup>35</sup> What distinguishes the Church from other religious communities is her faith in Jesus Christ ; and she cannot keep this precious light of faith under a bushel (cf. *Mt* 5 :15), for her mission is to share that light with everyone. "[The Church] wants to offer the new life she has found in Jesus Christ to all the peoples of Asia as they search for the fullness of life, so that they can have the same fellowship with the Father and his Son Jesus Christ in the power of the Spirit".<sup>36</sup> This faith in Jesus Christ is what inspires the Church's

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<sup>34</sup> No. 3 : *AAS* 83 (1991), 252.

<sup>35</sup> Cf. *Propositio* 5.

<sup>36</sup> Special Assembly for Asia of the Synod of Bishops, *Relatio ante disceptationem* : *L'Osservatore Romano* (22 April 1998), 5.

evangelizing work in Asia, often carried out in difficult and even dangerous circumstances. The Synod Fathers noted that proclaiming Jesus as the only Saviour can present particular difficulties in their cultures, given that many Asian religions teach divine self-manifestations as mediating salvation. Far from discouraging the Synod Fathers, the challenges facing their evangelizing efforts were an even greater incentive in striving to transmit "the faith that the Church in Asia has inherited from the Apostles and holds with the Church of all generations and places".<sup>37</sup> Indeed they expressed the conviction that "the heart of the Church in Asia will be restless until the whole of Asia finds its rest in the peace of Christ, the Risen Lord".<sup>38</sup>

The Church's faith in Jesus is a gift received and a gift to be shared ; it is the greatest gift which the Church can offer to Asia. Sharing the truth of Jesus Christ with others is the solemn duty of all who have received the gift of faith. In my Encyclical Letter *Redemptoris Missio*, I wrote that "the Church, and every individual Christian within her, may not keep hidden or monopolize this newness and richness which has been received from God's bounty in order to be

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<sup>37</sup> Special Assembly for Asia of the Synod of Bishops, *Relatio post disceptationem*, 3.

<sup>38</sup> *Propositio* 8.

communicated to all mankind".<sup>39</sup> In the same Letter I wrote : "Those who are incorporated in the Catholic Church ought to sense their privilege and for that very reason their greater obligation of *bearing witness to the faith and to the Christian life* as a service to their brothers and sisters and as a fitting response to God".<sup>40</sup>

Deeply convinced of this, the Synod Fathers were equally conscious of their personal responsibility to grasp through study, prayer and reflection the timeless truth of Jesus in order to bring its power and vitality to bear on the present and future challenges of evangelization in Asia.

### ***Jesus Christ, the God-Man Who Saves***

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

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<sup>39</sup> No. 11 : *AAS* 83 (1991), 260.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*

*Abba*, "Father", to the dismay of his listeners (cf. *Jn* 8 :34-59).

He was close to the poor, the forgotten and the lowly, declaring that they were truly blessed, for God was with them. He ate with sinners, assuring them that at the Father's table there was a place for them when they turned from their sinful ways and came back to him. Touching the unclean and allowing them to touch him, he let them know the nearness of God. He wept for a dead friend, he restored a dead son to his widowed mother, he welcomed children, and he washed the feet of his disciples. Divine compassion had never been so immediately accessible.

The sick, the lame, the blind, the deaf and the dumb all experienced healing and forgiveness at his touch. As his closest companions and co-workers he chose an unusual group in which fishermen mixed with tax collectors, Zealots with people untrained in the Law, and women also. A new family was being created under the Father's all-embracing and surprising love. Jesus preached simply, using examples from everyday life to speak of God's love and his Kingdom ; and the people recognized that he spoke with authority.

Yet he was accused of being a blasphemer, a violator of the sacred Law, a public nuisance to be eliminated. After a trial based on false testimony (cf. *Mk* 14 :56), he was sentenced to

die as a criminal on the Cross and, forsaken and humiliated, he seemed a failure. He was hastily buried in a borrowed tomb. But on the third day after this death, and despite the vigilance of the guards, the tomb was found empty ! Jesus, risen from the dead, then appeared to his disciples before returning to the Father from whom he had come.

With all Christians, we believe that this particular life, in one sense so ordinary and simple, in another sense so utterly wondrous and shrouded in mystery, ushered into human history the Kingdom of God and "brought its power to bear upon every facet of human life and society beset by sin and death".<sup>41</sup> Through his words and actions, especially in his suffering, death and resurrection, Jesus fulfilled the will of his Father to reconcile all humanity to himself, after original sin had created a rupture in the relationship between the Creator and his creation. On the Cross, he took upon himself the sins of the world – past, present and future. Saint Paul reminds us that we were dead as a result of our sins and his death has brought us to life again : "God made [us] alive together with him, having forgiven us all our trespasses, having cancelled the bond which stood against us with its legal demands ; this he set aside, nailing it to the cross" (*Col 2 :13-14*). In

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<sup>41</sup> Special Assembly for Asia of the Synod of Bishops, *Relatio post disceptationem*, 3.

this way, salvation was sealed once and for all. Jesus is our Saviour in the fullest sense of the word because his words and works, especially his resurrection from the dead, have revealed him to be the Son of God, the pre-existent Word, who reigns for ever as Lord and Messiah.

### ***The Person and Mission of the Son of God***

12. The "scandal" of Christianity is the belief that the all-holy, all-powerful and all-knowing God took upon himself our human nature and endured suffering and death to win salvation for all people (cf. *1 Cor* 1:23). The faith we have received declares that Jesus Christ revealed and accomplished the Father's plan of saving the world and the whole of humanity because of "*who he is*" and "*what he does because of who he is*". "*Who he is*" and "*what he does*" acquire their full meaning only when set within the mystery of the Triune God. It has been a constant concern of my Pontificate to remind the faithful of the communion of life of the Blessed Trinity and the unity of the three Persons in the plan of creation and redemption. My Encyclical Letters *Redemptor Hominis*, *Dives in Misericordia* and *Dominum et Vivificantem* are reflections on the Son, the Father and the Holy Spirit respectively and on their roles in the divine plan of salvation. We cannot however isolate or separate one Person from the others, since each is revealed only within the

communion of life and action of the Trinity. The saving action of Jesus has its origin in the communion of the Godhead, and opens the way for all who believe in him to enter into intimate communion with the Trinity and with one another in the Trinity.

"He who has seen me has seen the Father", Jesus claims (*Jn* 14 :9). In Jesus Christ alone dwells the fullness of God in bodily form (cf. *Col* 2 :9), establishing him as the unique and absolute saving Word of God (cf. *Heb* 1 :1-4). As the Father's definitive Word, Jesus makes God and his saving will known in the fullest way possible. "No one comes to the Father but by me", Jesus says (*Jn* 14 :6). He is "the Way, and the Truth, and the Life" (*Jn* 14 :6), because, as he himself says, "the Father who dwells in me does his works" (*Jn* 14 :10). Only in the person of Jesus does God's word of salvation appear in all its fullness, ushering in the final age (cf. *Heb* 1 :1-2). Thus, in the first days of the Church, Peter could proclaim : "There is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved" (*Acts* 4 :12).

The mission of the Saviour reached its culmination in the Paschal Mystery. On the Cross, when "he stretched out his arms between heaven and earth in the everlasting sign of [the

Father's] covenant",<sup>42</sup> Jesus uttered his final appeal to the Father to forgive the sins of humanity: "Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do" (*Lk* 23:34). Jesus destroyed sin by the power of his love for his Father and for all mankind. He took upon himself the wounds inflicted on humanity by sin, and he offered release through conversion. The first fruits of this are evident in the repentant thief hanging beside him on another cross (cf. *Lk* 23:43). His last utterance was the cry of the faithful Son: "Father, into your hands I commit my spirit" (*Lk* 23:46). In this supreme expression of love he entrusted his whole life and mission into the hands of the Father who had sent him. Thus he handed over to the Father the whole of creation and all humanity, to be accepted finally by him in compassionate love.

Everything that the Son is and has accomplished is accepted by the Father, who then offers this gift to the world in the act of raising Jesus from the dead and setting him at his right hand, where sin and death have power no more. Through Jesus' Paschal Sacrifice *the Father irrevocably offers reconciliation and fullness of life to the world.* This extraordinary gift could only come through the beloved Son, who alone was capable of fully responding to the Father's love, rejected by sin. In Jesus Christ, through the power of the

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<sup>42</sup> *Roman Missal*: Eucharistic Prayer I for Masses of Reconciliation.

Holy Spirit, we come to know that God is not distant, above and apart from man, but is very near, indeed united to every person and all humanity in all of life's situations. This is the message which Christianity offers to the world, and it is a source of incomparable comfort and hope for all believers.

### ***Jesus Christ : the Truth of Humanity***

13. How does the humanity of Jesus and the ineffable mystery of the Incarnation of the Son of the Father shed light on the human condition ? The Incarnate Son of God not only revealed completely the Father and his plan of salvation ; he also "fully reveals man to himself".<sup>43</sup> His words and actions, and above all his Death and Resurrection, reveal the depths of what it means to be human. Through Jesus, man can finally know the truth of himself. Jesus' perfectly human life, devoted wholly to the love and service of the Father and of man, reveals that the vocation of every human being is to receive love and give love in return. In Jesus we marvel at the inexhaustible capacity of the human heart to love God and man, even when this entails great suffering. Above all, it is on the Cross that Jesus breaks the power of the self-destructive resistance to love which sin inflicts upon us. On his part, the Father responds by raising Jesus as the first-

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<sup>43</sup> John Paul II, Encyclical Letter *Redemptor Hominis* (4 March 1979), 10 : *AAS* 71 (1979), 274.

born of all those predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son (cf. *Rom* 8 :29). At that moment, Jesus became once and for all both the revelation and the accomplishment of a humanity re-created and renewed according to the plan of God. In Jesus then, we discover the greatness and dignity of each person in the heart of God who created man in his own image (cf. *Gen* 1 :26), and we find the origin of the new creation which we have become through his grace.

The Second Vatican Council taught that "by his Incarnation, he, the Son of God, in a certain way united himself with each individual".<sup>44</sup> In this profound insight the Synod Fathers saw the ultimate source of hope and strength for the people of Asia in their struggles and uncertainties. When men and women respond with a living faith to God's offer of love, his presence brings love and peace, transforming the human heart from within. In *Redemptor Hominis* I wrote that "the redemption of the world – this tremendous mystery of love in which creation is renewed – is, at its deepest root, the fullness of justice in a human Heart – the Heart of the First-born Son – in order that it may become justice in the hearts of many human beings, predestined from eternity

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<sup>44</sup> Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World *Gaudium et Spes*, 22.

in the First-born Son to be children of God and called to grace, called to love".<sup>45</sup>

Thus, the mission of Jesus not only restored communion between God and humanity ; it also established a new communion between human beings alienated from one another because of sin. Beyond all divisions, Jesus makes it possible for people to live as brothers and sisters, recognizing a single Father who is in heaven (cf. *Mt* 23 :9). In him, a new harmony has emerged, in which "there is neither Jew nor Greek,... neither slave nor free,... neither male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus" (*Gal* 3 :28). Jesus is our peace, "who has made us both one, and has broken down the dividing wall of hostility" (*Eph* 2 :14). In all that he said and did, Jesus was the Father's voice, hands and arms, gathering all God's children into one family of love. He prayed that his disciples might live in communion just as he is in communion with the Father (cf. *Jn* 17 :11). Among his last words we hear him say : "As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you ; abide in my love... This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you" (*Jn* 15 :9, 12). Sent by the God of communion and being truly God and truly man, Jesus established communion between heaven and earth in his very person. It is our faith that "in him all the fullness of God was pleased to

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<sup>45</sup> No. 9 : *AAS* 71 (1979), 272f.

dwelling, and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his Cross" (*Col 1 :19-20*). Salvation can be found in the person of the Son of God made man and the mission entrusted to him alone as the Son, a mission of service and love for the life of all. Together with the Church throughout the world, the Church in Asia proclaims the truth of faith : "There is one God, and there is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus who gave himself as a ransom for all" (*1 Tim 2 :5-6*).

### ***The Uniqueness and Universality of Salvation in Jesus***

14. The Synod Fathers recalled that the pre-existent Word, the eternally begotten Son of God, "was already present in creation, in history and in every human yearning for good".<sup>46</sup> Through the Word, present to the cosmos even before the Incarnation, the world came to be (cf. *Jn 1 :1-4, 10 ; Col 1 :15-20*). But as the incarnate Word who lived, died and rose from the dead, Jesus Christ is now proclaimed as the fulfilment of all creation, of all history, and of all human yearning for fullness of life.<sup>47</sup> Risen from the dead, Jesus Christ "is present to all and to the

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<sup>46</sup> Special Assembly for Asia of the Synod of Bishops, *Relatio post disceptationem*, 3.

<sup>47</sup> Cf. *ibid.*

whole of creation in a new and mysterious way".<sup>48</sup> In him, "authentic values of all religious and cultural traditions, such as mercy and submission to the will of God, compassion and rectitude, non-violence and righteousness, filial piety and harmony with creation find their fullness and realization".<sup>49</sup> From the first moment of time to its end, Jesus is the one universal Mediator. Even for those who do not explicitly profess faith in him as the Saviour, salvation comes as a grace from Jesus Christ through the communication of the Holy Spirit.

We believe that Jesus Christ, true God and true man, is the one Saviour because he alone – the Son – accomplished the Father's universal plan of salvation. As the definitive manifestation of the mystery of the Father's love for all, Jesus is indeed unique, and "it is precisely this uniqueness of Christ which gives him an absolute and universal significance, whereby, while belonging to history, he remains history's centre and goal".<sup>50</sup>

No individual, no nation, no culture is impervious to the appeal of Jesus who speaks from the very heart of the human condition. "It is his life that speaks, his humanity, his fidelity to the truth, his all-embracing love. Furthermore, his

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<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>49</sup> *Propositio* 5.

<sup>50</sup> John Paul II, Encyclical Letter *Redemptoris Missio* (7 December 1990), 6 : *AAS* 83 (1991), 255.

death on the Cross speaks – that is to say the inscrutable depth of his suffering and abandonment".<sup>51</sup> Contemplating Jesus in his human nature, the peoples of Asia find their deepest questions answered, their hopes fulfilled, their dignity uplifted and their despair conquered. Jesus is the Good News for the men and women of every time and place in their search for the meaning of existence and for the truth of their own humanity.

### CHAPTER III. THE HOLY SPIRIT : LORD AND GIVER OF LIFE.

#### *The Spirit of God in Creation and History*

15. If it is true that the saving significance of Jesus can be understood only in the context of his revelation of the Trinity's plan of salvation, then it follows that the Holy Spirit is an absolutely vital part of the mystery of Jesus and of the salvation which he brings. The Synod Fathers made frequent references to the role of the Holy Spirit in the history of salvation, noting that a false separation between the Redeemer and the Holy Spirit would jeopardize the truth of Jesus as the one Saviour of all.

In Christian Tradition, the Holy Spirit has always been associated with life and the giving of

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<sup>51</sup> John Paul II, Encyclical Letter *Redemptor Hominis* (4 March 1979), 7 : *AAS* 71 (1979), 269.

life. The Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed calls the Holy Spirit "the Lord, the Giver of Life". It is not surprising, therefore, that many interpretations of the creation account in Genesis have seen the Holy Spirit in the mighty wind that swept over the waters (cf. *Gen* 1 :2). The Holy Spirit is present from the first moment of creation, the first manifestation of the love of the Triune God, and is always present in the world as its life-giving force.<sup>52</sup> Since creation is the beginning of history, the Spirit is in a certain sense a hidden power at work in history, guiding it in the ways of truth and goodness.

The revelation of the person of the Holy Spirit, the mutual love of the Father and the Son, is proper to the New Testament. In Christian thought he is seen as the wellspring of life for all creatures. Creation is God's free communication of love, a communication which, out of nothing, brings everything into being. There is nothing created that is not filled with the ceaseless exchange of love that marks the innermost life of the Trinity, filled that is with the Holy Spirit : "the Spirit of the Lord has filled the world" (*Wis* 1 :7). The presence of the Spirit in creation generates order, harmony and interdependence in all that exists.

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<sup>52</sup> Cf. John Paul II, Encyclical Letter *Dominum et Vivificantem* (18 May 1986), 54 : *AAS* 78 (1986), 875.

Created in the image of God, human beings become the dwelling-place of the Spirit in a new way when they are raised to the dignity of divine adoption (cf. *Gal* 4 :5). Reborn in Baptism, they experience the presence and power of the Spirit, not just as the Author of Life but as the One who purifies and saves, producing fruits of "love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control" (*Gal* 5 :22-23). These fruits of the Spirit are the sign that "God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us" (*Rom* 5 :5). When accepted in freedom, this love makes men and women visible instruments of the unseen Spirit's ceaseless activity. It is above all this new capacity to give and receive love which testifies to the interior presence and power of the Holy Spirit. As a consequence of the transformation and re-creation which he produces in people's hearts and minds, the Spirit influences human societies and cultures.<sup>53</sup> "Indeed, the Spirit is at the origin of the noble ideals and undertakings which benefit humanity on its journey through history. 'The Spirit of God with marvellous foresight directs the course of the ages and renews the face of the earth'".<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>53</sup> Cf. *ibid.*, 59 : *loc. cit.*, 885.

<sup>54</sup> John Paul II, Encyclical Letter *Redemptoris Missio* (7 December 1990), 28 : *AAS* 83 (1991), 274 ; cf. Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World *Gaudium et Spes*, 26.

Following the lead of the Second Vatican Council, the Synod Fathers drew attention to the multiple and diversified action of the Holy Spirit who continually sows the seeds of truth among all peoples, their religions, cultures and philosophies.<sup>55</sup> This means that these religions, cultures and philosophies are capable of helping people, individually and collectively, to work against evil and to serve life and everything that is good. The forces of death isolate people, societies and religious communities from one another, and generate the suspicion and rivalry that lead to conflict. The Holy Spirit, by contrast, sustains people in their search for mutual understanding and acceptance. The Synod was therefore right to see the Spirit of God as the prime agent of the Church's dialogue with all peoples, cultures and religions.

### ***The Holy Spirit and the Incarnation of the Word***

16. Under the Spirit's guidance, the history of salvation unfolds on the stage of the world, indeed of the cosmos, according to the Father's eternal plan. That plan, initiated by the Spirit at the very beginning of creation, is revealed in the

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<sup>55</sup> Cf. *Propositio* 11 ; Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Decree on the Missionary Activity of the Church *Ad Gentes*, 4 and 15 ; Dogmatic Constitution on the Church *Lumen Gentium*, 17 ; Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World *Gaudium et Spes*, 11, 22 and 38 ; John Paul II, Encyclical Letter *Redemptoris Missio* (7 December 1990), 28 : *AAS* 83 (1991), 273f.

Old Testament, is brought to fulfilment through the grace of Jesus Christ, and is carried on in the new creation by the same Spirit until the Lord comes again in glory at the end of time.<sup>56</sup> The Incarnation of the Son of God is the supreme work of the Holy Spirit: "The conception and birth of Jesus Christ are in fact the greatest work accomplished by the Holy Spirit in the history of creation and salvation: the supreme grace – 'the grace of union', source of every other grace".<sup>57</sup> The Incarnation is the event in which God gathers into a new and definitive union with himself not only man but the whole of creation and all of history.<sup>58</sup>

Having been conceived in the womb of the Virgin Mary by the Spirit's power (cf. *Lk* 1:35; *Mt* 1:20), Jesus of Nazareth, the Messiah and only Saviour, was filled with the Holy Spirit. The Spirit descended upon him at his baptism (cf. *Mk* 1:10) and led him into the wilderness to be strengthened before his public ministry (cf. *Mk* 1:12; *Lk* 4:1; *Mt* 4:1). In the synagogue at Nazareth he began his prophetic ministry by applying to himself Isaiah's vision of the Spirit's

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<sup>56</sup> Cf. Special Assembly for Asia of the Synod of Bishops, *Relatio ante disceptationem*: *L'Osservatore Romano* (22 April 1998), 5.

<sup>57</sup> John Paul II, Encyclical Letter *Dominum et Vivificantem*, (18 May 1986), 50: *AAS* 78 (1986), 870; cf. Saint Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, III, 2, 10-12; 6, 6; 7, 13.

<sup>58</sup> Cf. John Paul II, Encyclical Letter *Dominum et Vivificantem* (18 May 1986), 50: *AAS* 78 (1986), 870.

anointing which leads to the preaching of good news to the poor, freedom to captives and a time acceptable to the Lord (cf. *Lk* 4 :18-19). By the power of the Spirit, Jesus healed the sick and cast out demons as a sign that the Kingdom of God had come (cf. *Mt* 12 :28). After rising from the dead, he imparted to the disciples the Holy Spirit whom he had promised to pour out on the Church when he returned to the Father (cf. *Jn* 20 :22-23).

All of this shows how Jesus' saving mission bears the unmistakable mark of the Spirit's presence : life, *new life*. Between the *sending of the Son* from the Father and the *sending of the Spirit* from the Father and the Son, there is a close and vital link.<sup>59</sup> The action of the Spirit in creation and human history acquires an altogether new significance in his action in the life and mission of Jesus. The "seeds of the Word" sown by the Spirit prepare the whole of creation, history and man for full maturity in Christ.<sup>60</sup>

The Synod Fathers expressed concern about the tendency to separate the activity of the Holy Spirit from that of Jesus the Saviour. Responding to their concern, I repeat here what I wrote in *Redemptoris Missio* : "[The Spirit] is... not an alternative to Christ, nor does he fill a sort of

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<sup>59</sup> Cf. *ibid.*, 24 : *loc. cit.*, 832.

<sup>60</sup> Cf. John Paul II, Encyclical Letter *Redemptoris Missio* (7 December 1990), 28 : *AAS* 83 (1991), 274.

void which is sometimes suggested as existing between Christ and the Logos. Whatever the Spirit brings about in human hearts and in the history of peoples, in cultures and religions serves as a preparation for the Gospel and can only be understood in reference to Christ, the Word who took flesh by the power of the Spirit 'so that as perfectly human he would save all human beings and sum up all things'".<sup>61</sup>

The universal presence of the Holy Spirit therefore cannot serve as an excuse for a failure to proclaim Jesus Christ explicitly as the one and only Saviour. On the contrary, the universal presence of the Holy Spirit is inseparable from universal salvation in Jesus. The presence of the Spirit in creation and history points to Jesus Christ in whom creation and history are redeemed and fulfilled. The presence and action of the Spirit both before the Incarnation and in the climactic moment of Pentecost point always to Jesus and to the salvation he brings. So too the Holy Spirit's universal presence can never be separated from his activity within the Body of Christ, the Church.<sup>62</sup>

### ***The Holy Spirit and the Body of Christ***

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<sup>61</sup> No. 29 : *AAS* 83 (1991), 275 ; cf. Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World *Gaudium et Spes*, 45.

<sup>62</sup> Cf. John Paul II, Encyclical Letter *Redemptoris Missio* (7 December 1990), 29 : *AAS* 83 (1991), 275.

17. The Holy Spirit preserves unfailingly the bond of communion between Jesus and his Church. Dwelling in her as in a temple (cf. *1 Cor* 3 :16), the Spirit guides the Church, first of all, to the fullness of truth about Jesus. Then, it is the Spirit who empowers the Church to continue Jesus' mission, in the first place by witnessing to Jesus himself, thus fulfilling what he had promised before his death and resurrection, that he would send the Spirit to his disciples *so that they might bear witness to him* (cf. *Jn* 15 :26-27). The work of the Spirit in the Church is also to testify that believers are the adopted children of God destined to inherit salvation, the promised fullness of communion with the Father (cf. *Rom* 8 :15-17). Endowing the Church with different charisms and gifts, the Spirit makes the Church grow in communion as one body made up of many different parts (cf. *1 Cor* 12 :4 ; *Eph* 4 :11-16). The Spirit gathers into unity all kinds of people, with their different customs, resources and talents, making the Church a sign of the communion of all humanity under the headship of Christ.<sup>63</sup> The Spirit shapes the Church as a community of witnesses who, through his power, bear testimony to Jesus the Saviour (cf. *Acts* 1 :8). In this sense, the Holy Spirit is the prime agent of evangelization. From this the Synod Fathers

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<sup>63</sup> Cf. Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Dogmatic Constitution on the Church *Lumen Gentium*, 13.

could conclude that, just as the earthly ministry of Jesus was accomplished in the power of the Holy Spirit, "the same Spirit has been given to the Church by the Father and the Son at Pentecost to bring to completion Jesus' mission of love and service in Asia".<sup>64</sup>

The Father's plan for the salvation of man does not end with the death and resurrection of Jesus. By the gift of Christ's Spirit, the fruits of his saving mission are offered through the Church to all peoples of all times through the proclamation of the Gospel and loving service of the human family. As the Second Vatican Council observed, "the Church is driven by the Holy Spirit to do her part for the full realization of the plan of God, who has constituted Christ as the source of salvation for the whole world".<sup>65</sup> Empowered by the Spirit to accomplish Christ's salvation on earth, the Church is the seed of the Kingdom of God and she looks eagerly for its final coming. Her identity and mission are inseparable from the Kingdom of God which Jesus announced and inaugurated in all that he said and did, above all in his death and resurrection. The Spirit reminds the Church that she is not an end unto herself: in all that she is and all that she does, she exists to serve Christ and the salvation of the world. In the present

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<sup>64</sup> *Propositio* 12.

<sup>65</sup> Dogmatic Constitution on the Church *Lumen Gentium*, 17.

economy of salvation the workings of the Holy Spirit in creation, in history and in the Church are all part of the one eternal design of the Trinity over all that is.

### ***The Holy Spirit and the Church's Mission in Asia***

18. The Spirit who moved upon Asia in the time of the patriarchs and prophets, and still more powerfully in the time of Jesus Christ and the early Church, moves now among Asian Christians, strengthening the witness of their faith among the peoples, cultures and religions of the continent. Just as the great dialogue of love between God and man was prepared for by the Spirit and accomplished on Asian soil in the mystery of Christ, so the dialogue between the Saviour and the peoples of the continent continues today by the power of the same Holy Spirit at work in the Church. In this process, Bishops, priests, religious and lay men and women all have an essential role to play, remembering the words of Jesus, which are both a promise and a mandate: "You shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you ; and you shall be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria and to the end of the earth" (*Acts 1 :8*).

The Church is convinced that deep within the people, cultures and religions of Asia there is a thirst for "living water" (cf. *Jn 4 :10-15*), a thirst

which the Spirit himself has created and which Jesus the Saviour alone can fully satisfy. The Church looks to the Holy Spirit to continue to prepare the peoples of Asia for the saving dialogue with the Saviour of all. Led by the Spirit in her mission of service and love, the Church can offer an encounter between Jesus Christ and the peoples of Asia as they search for the fullness of life. In that encounter alone is to be found the living water which springs up to eternal life, namely, the knowledge of the one true God and Jesus Christ whom he has sent (cf. *Jn* 17 :3).

The Church well knows that she can accomplish her mission only in obedience to the promptings of the Holy Spirit. Committed to being a genuine sign and instrument of the Spirit's action in the complex realities of Asia, she must discern, in all the diverse circumstances of the continent, the Spirit's call to witness to Jesus the Saviour in new and effective ways. The full truth of Jesus and the salvation he has won is always a gift, never the result of human effort. "It is the Spirit himself bearing witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs, heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ" (*Rom* 8 :16-17). Therefore the Church ceaselessly cries out, "Come, Holy Spirit ! Fill the hearts of your faithful and enkindle in them the fire of your love !" This is the fire which Jesus casts upon the earth. The Church in Asia shares

his zeal that this fire be re-kindled now (cf. *Lk* 12 :49). With this ardent desire, the Synod Fathers sought to discern the principal areas of mission for the Church in Asia as she crosses the threshold of the new millennium.

#### CHAPTER IV. JESUS THE SAVIOUR : PROCLAIMING THE GIFT.

##### ***The Primacy of Proclamation***

19. On the eve of the Third Millennium, the voice of the Risen Christ echoes anew in the heart of every Christian : "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you ; and lo, I am with you always, to the close of the age" (*Mt* 28 :18-20). Certain of the unfailing help of Jesus himself and the presence and power of his Spirit, the Apostles set out immediately after Pentecost to fulfil this command : "they went forth and preached everywhere, while the Lord worked with them" (*Mk* 16 :20). What they announced can be summed up in the words of Saint Paul : "For what we preach is not ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord, with ourselves as your servants for Jesus' sake" (*2 Cor* 4 :5). Blessed with the gift of faith, the Church, after two thousand years, continues to go out to meet the peoples of the world in

order to share with them the Good News of Jesus Christ. She is a community aflame with missionary zeal to make Jesus known, loved and followed.

There can be no true evangelization without the explicit proclamation of Jesus as Lord. The Second Vatican Council and the Magisterium since then, responding to a certain confusion about the true nature of the Church's mission, have repeatedly stressed the primacy of the proclamation of Jesus Christ in all evangelizing work. Thus Pope Paul VI explicitly wrote that "there is no true evangelization if the name, the teaching, the life, the promises, the Kingdom and the mystery of Jesus of Nazareth, the Son of God, are not proclaimed".<sup>66</sup> This is what generations of Christians have done down the centuries. With understandable pride the Synod Fathers recalled that "many Christian communities in Asia have preserved their faith down the centuries against great odds and have clung to this spiritual heritage with heroic perseverance. For them to share this immense treasure is a matter of great joy and urgency".<sup>67</sup>

At the same time the participants in the Special Assembly testified over and over again to the need for a renewed commitment to the

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<sup>66</sup> Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Nuntiandi* (8 December 1975), 22 : *AAS* 68 (1976), 20.

<sup>67</sup> *Propositio* 8.

proclamation of Jesus Christ precisely on the continent which saw the beginning of that proclamation two thousand years ago. The words of the Apostle Paul become still more pointed, given the many people on that continent who have never encountered the person of Jesus in any clear and conscious way: "Everyone who calls upon the name of the Lord will be saved. But how are they to call upon him in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in him of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without a preacher?" (*Rom* 10:13-14). The great question now facing the Church in Asia is *how* to share with our Asian brothers and sisters what we treasure as the gift containing all gifts, namely, the Good News of Jesus Christ.

### ***Proclaiming Jesus Christ in Asia***

20. The Church in Asia is all the more eager for the task of proclamation knowing that "through the working of the Spirit, there already exists in individuals and peoples an expectation, even if an unconscious one, of knowing the truth about God, about man, and about how we are to be set free from sin and death".<sup>68</sup> This insistence on proclamation is prompted not by sectarian impulse nor the spirit of proselytism nor any sense of superiority. The Church evangelizes in

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<sup>68</sup> John Paul II, Encyclical Letter *Redemptoris Missio* (7 December 1990), 45: *AAS* 83 (1991), 292.

obedience to Christ's command, in the knowledge that every person has the right to hear the Good News of the God who reveals and gives himself in Christ.<sup>69</sup> To bear witness to Jesus Christ is the supreme service which the Church can offer to the peoples of Asia, for it responds to their profound longing for the Absolute, and it unveils the truths and values which will ensure their integral human development.

Deeply aware of the complexity of so many different situations in Asia, and "speaking the truth in love" (*Eph* 4 :15), the Church proclaims the Good News with loving respect and esteem for her listeners. Proclamation which respects the rights of consciences does not violate freedom, since faith always demands a free response on the part of the individual.<sup>70</sup> Respect, however, does not eliminate the need for the explicit proclamation of the Gospel in its fullness. Especially in the context of the rich array of cultures and religions in Asia it must be pointed out that "neither respect and esteem for these religions nor the complexity of the questions raised are an invitation to the Church to withhold from these non-Christians the proclamation of

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<sup>69</sup> Cf. *ibid.*, 46 : *loc. cit.*, 292f.

<sup>70</sup> Cf. Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Declaration on Religious Freedom *Dignitatis Humanae*, 3-4 ; John Paul II, Encyclical Letter *Redemptoris Missio* (7 December 1990), 39 : *AAS* 83 (1991), 287 ; *Propositio* 40.

Jesus Christ".<sup>71</sup> While visiting India in 1986, I stated clearly that "the Church's approach to other religions is one of genuine respect... This respect is twofold : respect for man in his quest for answers to the deepest questions of his life, and respect for the action of the Spirit in man".<sup>72</sup> Indeed, the Synod Fathers readily recognized the Spirit's action in Asian societies, cultures and religions, through which the Father prepares the hearts of Asian peoples for the fullness of life in Christ.<sup>73</sup>

Yet even during the consultations before the Synod many Asian Bishops referred to *difficulties in proclaiming Jesus as the only Saviour*. During the Assembly, the situation was described in this way: "Some of the followers of the great religions of Asia have no problem in accepting Jesus as a manifestation of the Divine or the Absolute, or as an 'enlightened one'. But it is difficult for them to see Him as the only manifestation of the Divine".<sup>74</sup> In fact, the effort to share the gift of faith in Jesus as the only Saviour is fraught with philosophical, cultural and

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<sup>71</sup> Paul VI, Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Nuntiandi* (8 December 1975), 53 : *AAS* 68 (1976), 41f.

<sup>72</sup> Address to Representatives of Non-Christians Religions, Madras (5 February 1986), 2 : *AAS* 78 (1986), 767.

<sup>73</sup> Cf. *Propositiones* 11 and 12 ; John Paul II, Encyclical Letter *Redemptoris Missio* (7 December 1990), 28 : *AAS* 83 (1991), 273f.

<sup>74</sup> Special Assembly for Asia of the Synod of Bishops, *Relatio ante disceptationem* : *L'Osservatore Romano* (22 April 1998), 5.

theological difficulties, especially in light of the beliefs of Asia's great religions, deeply intertwined with cultural values and specific world views.

In the opinion of the Synod Fathers, the difficulty is compounded by the fact that Jesus is often perceived as foreign to Asia. It is paradoxical that most Asians tend to regard Jesus – born on Asian soil – as a Western rather than an Asian figure. It was inevitable that the proclamation of the Gospel by Western missionaries would be influenced by the cultures from which they came. The Synod Fathers recognized this as an unavoidable fact in the history of evangelization. At the same time they took advantage of the occasion "to express in a very special way their gratitude to all the missionaries, men and women, religious and lay, foreign and local, who brought the message of Jesus Christ and the gift of faith. A special word of gratitude again must be expressed to all the particular Churches which have sent and still send missionaries to Asia".<sup>75</sup>

Evangelizers can take heart from the experience of Saint Paul who engaged in dialogue with the philosophical, cultural and religious values of his listeners (cf. *Acts* 14 :13-17 ; 17 :22-31). Even the Ecumenical Councils of the Church which formulated doctrines binding on the Church had to use the linguistic, philosophical

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<sup>75</sup> *Propositio* 58.

and cultural resources available to them. Thus these resources become a shared possession of the whole Church, capable of expressing her Christological doctrine in an appropriate and universal way. They are part of the heritage of faith which must be appropriated and shared again and again in the encounter with the various cultures.<sup>76</sup> Thus the task of proclaiming Jesus in a way which enables the peoples of Asia to identify with him, while remaining faithful both to the Church's theological doctrine and to their own Asian origins is a paramount challenge.

The presentation of Jesus Christ as the only Saviour needs to follow a *pedagogy* which will introduce people step by step to the full appropriation of the mystery. Clearly, the initial evangelization of non-Christians and the continuing proclamation of Jesus to believers will have to be different in their approach. In initial proclamation, for example, "the presentation of Jesus Christ could come as the fulfilment of the yearnings expressed in the mythologies and folklore of the Asian peoples".<sup>77</sup> In general, narrative methods akin to Asian cultural forms are to be preferred. In fact, the proclamation of Jesus Christ can most effectively be made by

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<sup>76</sup> Cf. John Paul II, *Encyclical Letter Fides et Ratio* (14 September 1998), 72 : *AAS* 91 (1999), 61.

<sup>77</sup> Special Assembly for Asia of the Synod of Bishops, *Relatio post disceptationem*, 15.

narrating his story, as the Gospels do. The ontological notions involved, which must always be presupposed and expressed in presenting Jesus, can be complemented by more relational, historical and even cosmic perspectives. The Church, the Synod Fathers noted, must be open to the new and surprising ways in which the face of Jesus might be presented in Asia.<sup>78</sup>

The Synod recommended that subsequent catechesis should follow "an evocative pedagogy, using stories, parables and symbols so characteristic of Asian methodology in teaching".<sup>79</sup> The ministry of Jesus himself shows clearly the value of personal contact, which requires the evangelizer to take the situation of the listener to heart, so as to offer a proclamation adapted to the listener's level of maturity, and in an appropriate form and language. In this perspective, the Synod Fathers stressed many times the need to evangelize in a way that appeals to the sensibilities of Asian peoples, and they suggested images of Jesus which would be intelligible to Asian minds and cultures and, at the same time, faithful to Sacred Scripture and Tradition. Among them were "Jesus Christ as the Teacher of Wisdom, the Healer, the Liberator, the Spiritual Guide, the Enlightened One, the Compassionate Friend of the Poor, the Good

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<sup>78</sup> *Cf. ibid.*

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid.*

Samaritan, the Good Shepherd, the Obedient One".<sup>80</sup> Jesus could be presented as the Incarnate Wisdom of God whose grace brings to fruition the "seeds" of divine Wisdom already present in the lives, religions and peoples of Asia.<sup>81</sup> In the midst of so much suffering among Asian peoples, he might best be proclaimed as the Saviour "who can provide meaning to those undergoing unexplainable pain and suffering".<sup>82</sup>

The faith which the Church offers as a gift to her Asian sons and daughters cannot be confined within the limits of understanding and expression of any single human culture, for it transcends these limits and indeed challenges all cultures to rise to new heights of understanding and expression. Yet at the same time the Synod Fathers were well aware of the pressing need of the local Churches in Asia to present the mystery of Christ to their peoples according to their cultural patterns and ways of thinking. They pointed out that such an inculturation of the faith on their continent involves rediscovering the Asian countenance of Jesus and identifying ways in which the cultures of Asia can grasp the universal saving significance of the mystery of

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<sup>80</sup> *Propositio 6.*

<sup>81</sup> Cf. Special Assembly for Asia of the Synod of Bishops, *Relatio post disceptationem*, 6.

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.*

Jesus and his Church.<sup>83</sup> The penetrating insight into peoples and their cultures, exemplified in such men as Giovanni da Montecorvino, Matteo Ricci and Roberto de Nobili, to mention only a few, needs to be emulated at the present time.

### ***The Challenge of Inculturation***

21. Culture is the vital space within which the human person comes face to face with the Gospel. Just as a culture is the result of the life and activity of a human group, so the persons belonging to that group are shaped to a large extent by the culture in which they live. As persons and societies change, so too does the culture change with them. As a culture is transformed, so too are persons and societies transformed by it. From this perspective, it becomes clearer why evangelization and inculturation are naturally and intimately related to each other. The Gospel and evangelization are certainly not identical with culture ; they are independent of it. Yet the Kingdom of God comes to people who are profoundly linked to a culture, and the building of the Kingdom cannot avoid borrowing elements from human cultures. Thus Paul VI called the split between the Gospel and culture the drama of our time, with a

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<sup>83</sup> Cf. Special Assembly for Asia of the Synod of Bishops, *Relatio ante disceptationem* : *L'Osservatore Romano* (22 April 1998), 5.

profound impact upon both evangelization and culture.<sup>84</sup>

In the process of encountering the world's different cultures, the Church not only transmits her truths and values and renews cultures from within, but she also takes from the various cultures the positive elements already found in them. This is the obligatory path for evangelizers in presenting the Christian faith and making it part of a people's cultural heritage. Conversely, the various cultures, when refined and renewed in the light of the Gospel, can become true expressions of the one Christian faith. "Through inculturation the Church, for her part, becomes a more intelligible sign of what she is, and a more effective instrument of mission".<sup>85</sup> This engagement with cultures has always been part of the Church's pilgrimage through history. But it has a special urgency today in the multi-ethnic, multi-religious and multi-cultural situation of Asia, where Christianity is still too often seen as foreign.

It is good to remember at this point what was said repeatedly during the Synod : that the Holy Spirit is the prime agent of the inculturation of

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<sup>84</sup> Cf. Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Nuntiandi* (8 December 1975), 20 : *AAS* 68 (1976), 18f.

<sup>85</sup> John Paul II, Encyclical Letter *Redemptoris Missio* (7 December 1990), 52 : *AAS* 83 (1991), 300.

the Christian faith in Asia.<sup>86</sup> The same Holy Spirit who leads us into the whole truth makes possible a fruitful dialogue with the cultural and religious values of different peoples, among whom he is present in some measure, giving men and women with a sincere heart the strength to overcome evil and the deceit of the Evil One, and indeed offering everyone the possibility of sharing in the Paschal Mystery in a manner known to God.<sup>87</sup> The Spirit's presence ensures that the dialogue unfolds in truth, honesty, humility and respect.<sup>88</sup> "In offering to others the Good News of the Redemption, the Church strives to understand their culture. She seeks to know the minds and hearts of her hearers, their values and customs, their problems and difficulties, their hopes and dreams. Once she knows and understands these various aspects of culture, then she can begin the dialogue of salvation ; she can offer, respectfully but with clarity and conviction, the Good News of the Redemption to all who freely wish to listen and to respond".<sup>89</sup> Therefore the people of Asia who, as Asians, wish to make the Christian faith

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<sup>86</sup> Cf. Special Assembly for Asia of the Synod of Bishops, *Relatio post disceptationem*, 9.

<sup>87</sup> Cf. Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World *Gaudium et Spes*, 22 ; John Paul II, Encyclical Letter *Redemptoris Missio* (7 December 1990), 28 : *AAS* 83 (1991), 273f.

<sup>88</sup> Cf. John Paul II, Encyclical Letter *Redemptoris Missio* (7 December 1990), 56 : *AAS* 83 (1991), 304.

<sup>89</sup> John Paul II, Homily at the Mass for the Catholics of West Bengal, Calcutta (4 February 1986), 3 : *Insegnamenti IX*, 1 (1986), 314.

their own, can rest assured that their hopes, expectations, anxieties and sufferings are not only embraced by Jesus, but become the very point at which the gift of faith and the power of the Spirit enter the innermost core of their lives.

It is the task of the Pastors, in virtue of their charism, to guide this dialogue with discernment. Likewise, experts in sacred and secular disciplines have important roles to play in the process of inculturation. *But the process must involve the entire People of God*, since the life of the Church as a whole must show forth the faith which is being proclaimed and appropriated. To ensure that this is done soundly, the Synod Fathers identified certain areas for particular attention – theological reflection, liturgy, the formation of priests and religious, catechesis and spirituality.<sup>90</sup>

### ***Key Areas of Inculturation***

22. The Synod expressed encouragement to *theologians* in their delicate work of developing an inculturated theology, especially in the area of Christology.<sup>91</sup> They noted that "this theologizing is to be carried out with courage, in faithfulness to the Scriptures and to the Church's Tradition, in sincere adherence to the Magisterium and with an awareness of pastoral realities".<sup>92</sup> I too urge theologians to work in a spirit of union with the

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<sup>90</sup> Cf. *Propositio* 43.

<sup>91</sup> Cf. *Propositio* 7.

<sup>92</sup> *Ibid.*

Pastors and the people, who – in union with one another and never separated from one another – "reflect the authentic *sensus fidei* which must never be lost sight of".<sup>93</sup> Theological work must always be guided by respect for the sensibilities of Christians, so that by a gradual growth into inculturated forms of expressing the faith people are neither confused nor scandalized. In every case inculturation must be guided by compatibility with the Gospel and communion with the faith of the universal Church, in full compliance with the Church's Tradition and with a view to strengthening people's faith.<sup>94</sup> The test of true inculturation is whether people become more committed to their Christian faith because they perceive it more clearly with the eyes of their own culture.

The *Liturgy* is the source and summit of all Christian life and mission.<sup>95</sup> 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.<sup>96</sup> The liturgy of the Oriental Churches

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<sup>93</sup> John Paul II, *Encyclical Letter Redemptoris Missio* (7 December 1990), 54 : *AAS* 83 (1991), 302.

<sup>94</sup> Cf. *ibid.* : *loc. cit.*, 301.

<sup>95</sup> 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.

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

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.

The national and regional Bishops' Conferences need to work more closely with the Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments in the search for effective ways of fostering appropriate forms of worship in the Asian context.<sup>97</sup> Such cooperation is essential because the Sacred Liturgy expresses and celebrates the one faith professed by all and, being the heritage of the whole Church, cannot be determined by local Churches in isolation from the universal Church.

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<sup>97</sup> Cf. *Propositio* 43.

The Synod Fathers stressed particularly the importance of the biblical word in passing on the message of salvation to the peoples of Asia, where the transmitted word is so important in preserving and communicating religious experience.<sup>98</sup> It follows that an effective biblical apostolate needs to be developed in order to ensure that the sacred text may be more widely diffused and more intensively and prayerfully used among the members of the Church in Asia. The Synod Fathers urged that it be made the basis for all missionary proclamation, catechesis, preaching and styles of spirituality.<sup>99</sup> Efforts to translate the Bible into local languages need to be encouraged and supported. Biblical formation should be considered an important means of educating people in the faith and equipping them for the task of proclamation. Pastorally oriented courses on the Bible, with due emphasis on applying its teachings to the complex realities of Asian life, ought to be incorporated into formation programmes for the clergy, for consecrated persons and for the laity.<sup>100</sup> The Sacred Scriptures should also be made known among the followers of other religions ; the word of God has an inherent power to touch the hearts

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<sup>98</sup> Cf. Special Assembly for Asia of the Synod of Bishops, *Relatio post disceptationem*, 13.

<sup>99</sup> Cf. *Propositio* 17.

<sup>100</sup> Cf. *Propositio* 18.

of people, for through the Scriptures the Holy Spirit reveals God's plan of salvation for the world. Moreover, the narrative styles found in many books of the Bible has an affinity with the religious texts typical of Asia.<sup>101</sup>

Another key aspect of inculturation upon which the future of the process in large part depends is *the formation of evangelizers*. In the past, formation often followed the style, methods and programmes imported from the West, and while appreciating the service rendered by that mode of formation, the Synod Fathers recognized as a positive development the efforts made in recent times to adapt the formation of evangelizers to the cultural contexts of Asia. As well as a solid grounding in biblical and patristic studies, seminarians should acquire a detailed and firm grasp of the Church's theological and philosophical patrimony, as I urged in my Encyclical Letter *Fides et Ratio*.<sup>102</sup> On the basis of this preparation, they will then benefit from contact with Asian philosophical and religious traditions.<sup>103</sup> The Synod Fathers also encouraged seminary professors and staff to seek a profound understanding of the elements of spirituality and prayer akin to the Asian soul, and to involve themselves more deeply in the Asian peoples'

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<sup>101</sup> Cf. *Propositio* 17.

<sup>102</sup> Nos. 60 ; 62 ; 105 : *AAS* 91 (1999), 52f. ; 54 ; 85f.

<sup>103</sup> Cf. *Propositio* 24.

search for a fuller life.<sup>104</sup> To this end, emphasis was placed on the need to ensure the proper formation of seminary staff.<sup>105</sup> The Synod also expressed concern for the formation of men and women in the consecrated life, making it clear that the spirituality and lifestyle of consecrated persons needs to be sensitive to the religious and cultural heritage of the people among whom they live and whom they serve, always presupposing the necessary discernment of what conforms to the Gospel and what does not.<sup>106</sup> Moreover, since the inculturation of the Gospel involves the entire People of God, the role of the laity is of paramount importance. It is they above all who are called to transform society, in collaboration with the Bishops, clergy and religious, by infusing the "mind of Christ" into the mentality, customs, laws and structures of the secular world in which they live.<sup>107</sup> A wider inculturation of the Gospel at every level of society in Asia will depend greatly on the appropriate formation which the local Churches succeed in giving to the laity

### ***Christian Life as Proclamation***

23. The more the Christian community is rooted in the experience of God which flows from a living faith, the more credibly it will be

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<sup>104</sup> Cf. *Propositio* 25.

<sup>105</sup> Cf. *ibid.*

<sup>106</sup> Cf. *Propositio* 27.

<sup>107</sup> Cf. *Propositio* 29.

able to proclaim to others the fulfilment of God's Kingdom in Jesus Christ. This will result from faithfully listening to the word of God, from prayer and contemplation, from celebrating the mystery of Jesus in the sacraments, above all in the Eucharist, and from giving example of true communion of life and integrity of love. The heart of the particular Church must be set on the contemplation of Jesus Christ, God-made-Man, and strive constantly for a more intimate union with him whose mission she continues. *Mission is contemplative action and active contemplation.* Therefore, a missionary who has no deep experience of God in prayer and contemplation will have little spiritual influence or missionary success. This is an insight drawn from my own priestly ministry and, as I have written elsewhere, my contact with representatives of the non-Christian spiritual traditions, particularly those of Asia, has confirmed me in the view that the future of mission depends to a great extent on contemplation.<sup>108</sup> In Asia, home to great religions where individuals and entire peoples are thirsting for the divine, the Church is called to be a praying Church, deeply spiritual even as she engages in immediate human and social concerns. All Christians need a true missionary spirituality of prayer and contemplation.

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<sup>108</sup> Cf. Encyclical Letter *Redemptoris Missio* (7 December 1990), 91 : *AAS* 83 (1991), 338.

A genuinely religious person readily wins respect and a following in Asia. Prayer, fasting and various forms of asceticism are held in high regard. Renunciation, detachment, humility, simplicity and silence are considered great values by the followers of all religions. Lest prayer be divorced from human promotion, the Synod Fathers insisted that "the work of justice, charity and compassion is interrelated with a genuine life of prayer and contemplation, and indeed it is this same spirituality that will be the wellspring of all our evangelizing work".<sup>109</sup> Fully convinced of the importance of authentic witnesses in the evangelization of Asia, the Synod Fathers stated : "The Good News of Jesus Christ can only be proclaimed by those who are taken up and inspired by the love of the Father for his children, manifested in the person of Jesus Christ. This proclamation is a mission needing holy men and women who will make the Saviour known and loved through their lives. A fire can only be lit by something that is itself on fire. So, too, successful proclamation in Asia of the Good News of salvation can only take place if Bishops, clergy, those in the consecrated life and the laity are themselves on fire with the love of Christ and burning with zeal to make him known more widely, loved more deeply and followed more

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<sup>109</sup> *Propositio* 19.

closely".<sup>110</sup> Christians who speak of Christ must embody in their lives the message that they proclaim.

In this regard, however, a particular circumstance in the Asian context demands attention. The Church realizes that *the silent witness of life* still remains the only way of proclaiming God's Kingdom in many places in Asia where explicit proclamation is forbidden and religious freedom is denied or systematically restricted. The Church consciously lives this type of witness, seeing it as the "taking up of her cross" (cf. *Lk* 9:23), all the while calling upon and urging governments to recognize religious freedom as a fundamental human right. The words of the Second Vatican Council are worth repeating here: "the human person has a right to religious freedom. Such freedom consists in this, that all should have such immunity from coercion by individuals, or by social groups, or by any human power, that no one should be forced to act against his conscience in religious matters, nor prevented from acting according to his conscience, whether in private or in public, whether alone or in association with others, within due limits".<sup>111</sup> In some Asian countries, this statement still has to be acknowledged and put into effect.

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<sup>110</sup> *Propositio* 8.

<sup>111</sup> Declaration on Religious Freedom *Dignitatis Humanae*, 2.

Clearly, then, the proclamation of Jesus Christ in Asia presents many complex aspects, both in content and in method. The Synod Fathers were keenly aware of the legitimate variety of approaches to the proclamation of Jesus, provided that the faith itself is respected in all its integrity in the process of appropriating and sharing it. The Synod noted that "evangelization today is a reality that is both rich and dynamic. It has various aspects and elements: witness, dialogue, proclamation, catechesis, conversion, baptism, insertion into the ecclesial community, the implantation of the Church, inculturation and integral human promotion. Some of these elements proceed together, while some others are successive steps or phases of the entire process of evangelization".<sup>112</sup> In all evangelizing work, however, it is the complete truth of Jesus Christ which must be proclaimed. Emphasizing certain aspects of the inexhaustible mystery of Jesus is both legitimate and necessary in gradually introducing Christ to a person, but this cannot be allowed to compromise the integrity of the faith. In the end, a person's acceptance of the faith must be grounded on a sure understanding of the person of Jesus Christ, as presented by the Church in every time and place, the Lord of all who is "the same yesterday, today and for ever" (*Heb 13 :8*).

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<sup>112</sup> *Propositio 6.*

## CHAPTER V. COMMUNION AND DIALOGUE FOR MISSION.

### *Communion and Mission Go Hand in Hand*

24. In accordance with the Father's eternal design, the Church, foreshadowed from the world's beginning, prepared for in the old Covenant, instituted by Christ Jesus and made present to the world by the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost, "progresses on her pilgrimage amid this world's persecutions and God's consolations",<sup>113</sup> as she strives towards her perfection in the glory of heaven. Since God desires "that the whole human race may become one People of God, form one Body of Christ, and be built up into one temple of the Holy Spirit",<sup>114</sup> the Church is in the world "the visible plan of God's love for humanity, the sacrament of salvation".<sup>115</sup> The Church cannot therefore be understood merely as a social organization or agency of human welfare. Despite having sinful men and women in her midst, the Church must be seen as the privileged place of encounter

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<sup>113</sup> Saint Augustine, *De Civitate Dei*, XVIII, 51, 2 : *PL* 41, 614 ; cf. Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Dogmatic Constitution on the Church *Lumen Gentium*, 8.

<sup>114</sup> Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Decree on the Missionary Activity of the Church *Ad Gentes*, 7 ; cf. Dogmatic Constitution on the Church *Lumen Gentium*, 17.

<sup>115</sup> Paul VI, Address to the College of Cardinals (22 June 1973) : *AAS* 65 (1973), 391.

between God and man, in which God chooses to reveal the mystery of his inner life and carry out his plan of salvation for the world.

The mystery of God's loving design is made present and active in the community of the men and women who have been buried with Christ by baptism into death, so that as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, they might walk in newness of life (cf. *Rom* 6 :4). At the heart of the mystery of the Church is the bond of communion which unites Christ the Bridegroom to all the baptized. Through this living and life-giving communion, "Christians no longer belong to themselves but are the Lord's very own".<sup>116</sup> United to the Son in the Spirit's bond of love, Christians are united to the Father, and from this communion flows the communion which Christians share with one another through Christ in the Holy Spirit.<sup>117</sup> The Church's first purpose then is to be the sacrament of *the inner union of the human person with God*, and, because people's communion with one another is rooted in that union with God, the Church is also the sacrament of *the unity of the human race*.<sup>118</sup> In her this unity is already begun ; and at the same time

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<sup>116</sup> John Paul II, Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Christifideles Laici* (30 December 1988), 18 : *AAS* 81 (1989), 421.

<sup>117</sup> Cf. *ibid.* ; Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Dogmatic Constitution on the Church *Lumen Gentium*, 4.

<sup>118</sup> Cf. *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 775.

she is the "sign and instrument" of the full realization of the unity yet to come.<sup>119</sup>

It is an essential demand of life in Christ that whoever enters into communion with the Lord is expected to bear fruit: "He who abides in me, and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit" (*Jn* 15 :5). So true is this that the person who does not bear fruit does not remain in communion: "Each branch of mine that bears no fruit [my Father] takes away" (*Jn* 15 :2). Communion with Jesus, which gives rise to the communion of Christians among themselves, is the indispensable condition for bearing fruit; and communion with others, which is the gift of Christ and his Spirit, is the most magnificent fruit that the branches can give. In this sense, communion and mission are inseparably connected. They interpenetrate and mutually imply each other, so that "communion represents both the source and fruit of mission: communion gives rise to mission and mission is accomplished in communion".<sup>120</sup>

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.<sup>121</sup> On this basis the Synod Fathers stressed the mysterious link

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<sup>119</sup> Cf. *ibid.*

<sup>120</sup> *John Paul II, Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation Christifideles Laici* (30 December 1988), 32 : *AAS* 81 (1989), 451f.

<sup>121</sup> Cf. Dogmatic Constitution on the Church *Lumen Gentium*, 16.

between the Church and the followers of other Asian religions, noting that they are "related to [the Church] in varying degrees and ways".<sup>122</sup> In the midst of so many different peoples, cultures and religions "the life of the Church as communion assumes greater importance".<sup>123</sup> 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.<sup>124</sup> 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

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<sup>122</sup> *Propositio* 13.

<sup>123</sup> *Ibid.*

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

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.

### ***Communion within the Church***

25. Gathered around the Successor of Peter, praying and working together, the Bishops of the Special Assembly for Asia personified as it were the communion of the Church in all the rich diversity of the particular Churches over which they preside in charity. My own presence at the Synod's General Sessions was both a welcome opportunity to share the joys and hopes, the difficulties and anxieties of the Bishops, and an intense and deeply-felt exercise of my own ministry. It is in fact within the perspective of ecclesial communion that the universal authority of the Successor of Peter shines forth more clearly, not primarily as juridical power over the local Churches, but above all as a pastoral primacy at the service of the unity of faith and life of the whole People of God. Fully aware that "the Petrine office has a unique ministry in guaranteeing and promoting the unity of the

Church",<sup>125</sup> the Synod Fathers acknowledged the service which the Dicasteries of the Roman Curia and the Holy See's Diplomatic Service render to the local Churches, in the spirit of communion and collegiality.<sup>126</sup> An essential feature of this service is the respect and sensitivity which these close co-workers of the Successor of Peter show towards the legitimate diversity of the local Churches and the variety of cultures and peoples with which they are in contact.

*Each particular Church* must be grounded in the witness of ecclesial communion which constitutes its very nature as Church. The Synod Fathers chose to describe the Diocese as *a communion of communities* gathered around the Shepherd, where clergy, consecrated persons and the laity are engaged in a "dialogue of life and heart" sustained by the grace of the Holy Spirit.<sup>127</sup> It is primarily in the Diocese that the vision of a communion of communities can be actualized in the midst of the complex social, political, religious, cultural and economic realities of Asia. Ecclesial communion implies that each local Church should become what the Synod Fathers

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<sup>125</sup> *Propositio* 13; cf. Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Dogmatic Constitution on the Church *Lumen Gentium*, 22.

<sup>126</sup> Cf. *Propositio* 13.

<sup>127</sup> Cf. *Propositio* 15; Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, Letter to the Bishops of the Catholic Church on Some Aspects of the Church Understood as Communion *Communio Notio* (28 May 1992), 3-10: *AAS* 85 (1993), 839-844.

called a "participatory Church", a Church, that is, in which all live their proper vocation and perform their proper role. In order to build up the "communion for mission" and the "mission of communion", every member's unique charism needs to be acknowledged, developed and effectively utilized.<sup>128</sup> In particular there is a need to foster greater involvement of the laity and consecrated men and women in pastoral planning and decision-making, through such participatory structures as Pastoral Councils and Parish Assemblies.<sup>129</sup>

In every Diocese, *the parish* remains the ordinary place where the faithful gather to grow in faith, to live the mystery of ecclesial communion and to take part in the Church's mission. Therefore, the Synod Fathers urged Pastors to devise new and effective ways of shepherding the faithful, so that everyone, especially the poor, will feel truly a part of the parish and of God's People as a whole. Pastoral planning with the lay faithful should be a normal feature of all parishes.<sup>130</sup> The Synod singled out young people in particular as those for whom "the parish should provide greater opportunity for fellowship and communion... by means of

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<sup>128</sup> Cf. *Propositio* 15.

<sup>129</sup> Cf. *ibid.*

<sup>130</sup> Cf. *Propositio* 16.

organized youth apostolates and youth clubs".<sup>131</sup> No one should be excluded *a priori* from sharing fully in the life and mission of the parish because of their social, economic, political, cultural or educational background. Just as each follower of Christ has a gift to offer the community, so the community should show a willingness to receive and benefit from the gift of each one.

In this context, and drawing on their pastoral experience, the Synod Fathers underlined the value of *basic ecclesial communities* as an effective way of promoting communion and participation in parishes and Dioceses, and as a genuine force for evangelization.<sup>132</sup> These small groups help the faithful to live as believing, praying and loving communities like the early Christians (cf. *Acts* 2 :44-47 ; 4 :32-35). They aim to help their members to live the Gospel in a spirit of fraternal love and service, and are therefore a solid starting point for building a new society, the expression of *a civilization of love*. With the Synod, I encourage the Church in Asia, where possible, to consider these basic communities as a positive feature of the Church's evangelizing activity. At the same time they will only be truly effective if – as Pope Paul VI wrote – they live in union with the particular and the universal Church, in heartfelt

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<sup>131</sup> *Propositio* 34.

<sup>132</sup> Cf. *Propositio* 30 ; cf. John Paul II, Encyclical Letter *Redemptoris Missio* (7 December 1990), 51 : *AAAS* 83 (1991), 298.

communion with the Church's Pastors and the Magisterium, with a commitment to missionary outreach and without yielding to isolationism or ideological exploitation.<sup>133</sup> The presence of these small communities does not do away with the established institutions and structures, which remain necessary for the Church to fulfil her mission.

The Synod also recognized the role of *renewal movements* in building communion, in providing opportunities for a more intimate experience of God through faith and the sacraments, and in fostering conversion of life.<sup>134</sup> It is the responsibility of Pastors to guide, accompany and encourage these groups so that they may be well integrated into the life and mission of the parish and Diocese. Those involved in associations and movements should offer their support to the local Church and not present themselves as alternatives to Diocesan structures and parish life. Communion grows stronger when the local leaders of these movements work together with the Pastors in a spirit of charity for the good of all (cf. *1 Cor* 1 :13).

### ***Solidarity among the Churches***

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<sup>133</sup> Cf. Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Nuntiandi* (8 December 1975), 58 : *AAS* 68 (1976), 46-49 ; John Paul II, Encyclical Letter *Redemptoris Missio*, 51 : *AAS* 83 (1991), 299.

<sup>134</sup> Cf. *Propositio* 31.

26. This communion *ad intra* contributes to *solidarity among the particular Churches themselves*. Attention to local needs is legitimate and indispensable, but communion requires that the particular Churches remain open to one another and collaborate with one another, so that in their diversity they may preserve and clearly manifest the bond of communion with the universal Church. Communion calls for mutual understanding and a coordinated approach to mission, without prejudice to the autonomy and rights of the Churches according to their respective theological, liturgical and spiritual traditions. History however shows how divisions have often wounded the communion of the Churches in Asia. Down the centuries, relations between particular Churches of different ecclesiastical jurisdictions, liturgical traditions and missionary styles have sometimes been tense and difficult. The Bishops present at the Synod acknowledged that even today within and among the particular Churches in Asia there are sometimes unfortunate divisions, often connected with ritual, linguistic, ethnic, caste and ideological differences. Some wounds have been partially healed, but there is not yet full healing. Recognizing that wherever communion is weakened the Church's witness and missionary work suffer, the Fathers proposed concrete steps to strengthen relations between the particular

Churches in Asia. As well as the necessary spiritual expressions of support and encouragement, they suggested a more equitable distribution of priests, more effective financial solidarity, cultural and theological exchanges, and increased opportunities for partnership between Dioceses.<sup>135</sup>

Regional and continental associations of Bishops, notably the Council of Catholic Patriarchs of the Middle East and the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences have helped to foster union among the local Churches and have provided venues for cooperation in resolving pastoral problems. Similarly, there are many centres of theology, spirituality and pastoral activity across Asia which foster communion and practical cooperation.<sup>136</sup> It must be the concern of all to see these promising initiatives develop further for the good of both the Church and society in Asia.

### ***The Catholic Eastern Churches***

27. The situation of *the Catholic Eastern Churches*, principally of the Middle East and India, merits special attention. From Apostolic times they have been the custodians of a precious spiritual, liturgical and theological heritage. Their traditions and rites, born of a deep inculturation

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<sup>135</sup> Cf. *Propositio* 14.

<sup>136</sup> Cf. Special Assembly for Asia of the Synod of Bishops, *Relatio ante disceptationem* : *L'Osservatore Romano* (22 April 1998), 6.

of the faith in the soil of many Asian countries, deserve the greatest respect. With the Synod Fathers, I call upon everyone to recognize the legitimate customs and the legitimate freedom of these Churches in disciplinary and liturgical matters, as stipulated by the Code of Canons of the Eastern Churches.<sup>137</sup> Following the teaching of the Second Vatican Council, there is an urgent need to overcome the fears and misunderstandings which appear at times between the Catholic Eastern Churches and the Latin Church, and among those Churches themselves, especially with regard to the pastoral care of their people, also outside their own territories.<sup>138</sup> As children of the one Church, reborn into the newness of life in Christ, believers are called to undertake all things in a spirit of common purpose, trust and unfailing charity. Conflicts must not be allowed to create division, but must instead be handled in a spirit of truth and respect, since no good can come except from love.<sup>139</sup>

These venerable Churches are directly involved in ecumenical dialogue with their sister Orthodox Churches, and the Synod Fathers

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<sup>137</sup> Cf. *Propositio* 50.

<sup>138</sup> Cf. *Propositiones* 36 and 50.

<sup>139</sup> Cf. John Paul II, Address to the Synod of Bishops of the Syro-Malabar Church (8 January 1996), 6 : *AAS* 88 (1996), 41.

urged them to pursue this path.<sup>140</sup> They have also had valuable experiences in interreligious dialogue, especially with Islam. This can be helpful to other Churches in Asia and elsewhere. It is clear that the Catholic Eastern Churches possess a great wealth of tradition and experience which can greatly benefit the whole Church.

### ***Sharing Hopes and Sufferings***

28. The Synod Fathers were also aware of the need for effective communion and cooperation with the local Churches present in the ex-Soviet territories of Asia, which are rebuilding in the trying circumstances inherited from a difficult period of history. The Church accompanies them in prayer, sharing their sufferings and their new-found hopes. I encourage the whole Church to lend moral, spiritual and material support, and much needed ordained and non-ordained personnel to help these communities in the task of sharing with the peoples of these lands the love of God revealed in Jesus Christ.<sup>141</sup>

In many parts of Asia, our brothers and sisters continue to live their faith in the midst of restrictions or even the total denial of freedom. For these *suffering members of the Church*, the Synod Fathers expressed special concern and solicitude. With the Bishops of Asia, I urge our brothers and sisters of these Churches in difficult

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<sup>140</sup> Cf. *Propositio* 50.

<sup>141</sup> Cf. *Propositio* 56.

circumstances to join their sufferings to those of the crucified Lord, for we and they know that the Cross alone, when borne in faith and love, is the path to resurrection and new life for humanity. I encourage the various national Episcopal Conferences in Asia to establish an office to help these Churches ; and I pledge the Holy See's continued closeness to and concern for all those who are suffering persecution for their faith in Christ.<sup>142</sup> I appeal to governments and the leaders of nations to adopt and implement policies that guarantee religious freedom for all their citizens.

On many occasions the Synod Fathers turned their thoughts to the Catholic Church in Mainland China and prayed that the day may soon come when our beloved Chinese brothers and sisters will be completely free to practise their faith in full communion with the See of Peter and the universal Church. To you, dear Chinese brothers and sisters, I make this fervent exhortation : never allow hardship and sorrow to diminish your devotion to Christ and your commitment to your great nation.<sup>143</sup> The Synod also expressed a cordial sense of solidarity with the Catholic Church in Korea, and supported "the efforts of Catholics to give assistance to the people of North Korea who are deprived of the minimal means of survival, and to bring

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<sup>142</sup> Cf. *Propositio* 51.

<sup>143</sup> Cf. *Propositio* 52.

reconciliation among two countries of one people, one language and one cultural heritage".<sup>144</sup>

Likewise, the Synod's thoughts frequently returned to the Church in Jerusalem, which has a special place in the hearts of all Christians. Indeed, the words of the Prophet Isaiah find an echo in the hearts of millions of believers throughout the world, for whom Jerusalem occupies a unique and cherished position: "Rejoice with Jerusalem, and be glad for her, all you who love her... that you may drink deeply with delight from the abundance of her glory" (66 :10-11). Jerusalem, the city of reconciliation of men with God and among themselves, has so often been a place of conflict and division. The Synod Fathers called upon the particular Churches to stand in solidarity with the Church in Jerusalem by sharing her sorrows, by praying for her and cooperating with her in serving peace, justice and reconciliation between the two peoples and the three religions present in the Holy City.<sup>145</sup> I renew the appeal which I have often made to political and religious leaders and to all people of good will to search for ways to ensure the peace and integrity of Jerusalem. As I have already written, it is my own fervent wish to go there on a religious pilgrimage, like my predecessor Pope Paul VI, to pray in the Holy

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<sup>144</sup> *Propositio* 53.

<sup>145</sup> Cf. *Propositio* 57.

City where Jesus Christ lived, died and rose again and to visit the place from which, in the power of the Holy Spirit, the Apostles went forth to proclaim the Gospel of Jesus Christ to the world.<sup>146</sup>

### ***A Mission of Dialogue***

29. The common theme of the various "continental" Synods which have helped to prepare the Church for the Great Jubilee of the Year 2000 is that of the *new evangelization*. A new era of proclamation of the Gospel is essential not only because, after two millennia, a major part of the human family still does not acknowledge Christ, but also because the situation in which the Church and the world find themselves at the threshold of the new millennium is particularly challenging for religious belief and the moral truths which spring from it. There is a tendency almost everywhere to build progress and prosperity without reference to God, and to reduce the religious dimension of the human person to the private sphere. Society, separated from the most basic truth about man, namely his relationship to the Creator and to the redemption brought about by Christ in the Holy Spirit, can only stray further and further from the true sources of life, love and happiness. This violent century which is fast coming to a close bears

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<sup>146</sup> Cf. *Letter Concerning Pilgrimage to the Places Linked to the History of Salvation* (29 June 1999), 7 : *L'Osservatore Romano* (30 June - 1 July 1999), 9.

terrifying witness to what can happen when truth and goodness are abandoned in favour of the lust for power and self-aggrandizement. The new evangelization, as a call to conversion, grace and wisdom, is the only genuine hope for a better world and a brighter future. The question is not whether the Church has something essential to say to the men and women of our time, but how she can say it clearly and convincingly !

At the time of the Second Vatican Council, my predecessor Pope Paul VI declared, in his Encyclical Letter *Ecclesiam Suam*, that the question of the relationship between the Church and the modern world was one of the most important concerns of our time. He wrote that "its existence and its urgency are such as to create a burden on our soul, a stimulus, a vocation".<sup>147</sup> Since the Council the Church has consistently shown that she wants to pursue that relationship in a spirit of dialogue. The desire for dialogue, however, is not simply a strategy for peaceful coexistence among peoples ; it is an essential part of the Church's mission because it has its origin in the Father's loving dialogue of salvation with humanity through the Son in the power of the Holy Spirit. The Church can accomplish her mission only in a way that corresponds to the way in which God acted in Jesus Christ : he became man, shared our human life and spoke in a human language to

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<sup>147</sup> *AAS* 56 (1964), 613.

communicate his saving message. The dialogue which the Church proposes is grounded in the logic of the Incarnation. Therefore, nothing but fervent and unselfish solidarity prompts the Church's dialogue with the men and women of Asia who seek the truth in love.

As the sacrament of the unity of all mankind, the Church cannot but enter into dialogue with all peoples, in every time and place. Responding to the mission she has received, she ventures forth to meet the peoples of the world, conscious of being a "little flock" within the vast throng of humanity (cf. *Lk* 12 :32), but also of being leaven in the dough of the world (cf. *Mt* 13 :33). Her efforts to engage in dialogue are directed in the first place to those who share her belief in Jesus Christ the Lord and Saviour. It extends beyond the Christian world to the followers of every other religious tradition, on the basis of the religious yearnings found in every human heart. Ecumenical dialogue and interreligious dialogue constitute a veritable vocation for the Church.

### ***Ecumenical Dialogue***

30. Ecumenical dialogue is a challenge and a call to conversion for the whole Church, especially for the Church in Asia where people expect from Christians a clearer sign of unity. For all peoples to come together in the grace of God, communion needs to be restored among those who in faith have accepted Jesus Christ as Lord.

Jesus himself prayed and does not cease to call for the visible unity of his disciples, so that the world may believe that the Father has sent him (cf. *Jn* 17 :21).<sup>148</sup> But the Lord's will that his Church be one awaits a complete and courageous response from his disciples.

In Asia, precisely where the number of Christians is proportionately small, division makes missionary work still more difficult. The Synod Fathers acknowledged that "the scandal of a divided Christianity is a great obstacle for evangelization in Asia".<sup>149</sup> In fact, the division among Christians is seen as a counter-witness to Jesus Christ by many in Asia who are searching for harmony and unity through their own religions and cultures. Therefore the Catholic Church in Asia feels especially impelled to work for unity with other Christians, realizing that the search for full communion demands from everyone charity, discernment, courage and hope. "In order to be authentic and bear fruit, ecumenism requires certain fundamental dispositions on the part of the Catholic faithful : in the first place, charity that shows itself in goodness and a lively desire to cooperate wherever possible with the faithful of other Churches and Ecclesial Communities ; secondly, fidelity towards the Catholic Church, without

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<sup>148</sup> Cf. *Propositio* 42.

<sup>149</sup> *Ibid.*

however ignoring or denying the shortcomings manifested by some of her members ; thirdly, a spirit of discernment in order to appreciate all that is good and worthy of praise. Finally, a sincere desire for purification and renewal is also needed".<sup>150</sup>

While recognizing the difficulties still existing in the relationships between Christians, which involve not only prejudices inherited from the past but also judgments rooted in profound convictions which involve conscience,<sup>151</sup> the Synod Fathers also pointed to signs of improved relations among some Christian Churches and Ecclesial Communities in Asia. Catholic and Orthodox Christians, for example, often recognize a cultural unity with one another, a sense of sharing important elements of a common ecclesial tradition. This forms a solid basis for a continuing fruitful ecumenical dialogue into the next millennium, which, we must hope and pray, will ultimately bring an end to the divisions of the millennium that is now coming to a close.

On the practical level, the Synod proposed that the national Episcopal Conferences in Asia invite other Christian Churches to join in a

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<sup>150</sup> John Paul II, Address at the General Audience (26 July 1995), 4 : *Insegnamenti* XVIII, 2 (1995), 138.

<sup>151</sup> Cf. John Paul II, Address at the General Audience (20 January 1982), 2 : *Insegnamenti* V, 1 (1982), 162.

process of prayer and consultation in order to explore the possibilities of new ecumenical structures and associations to promote Christian unity. The Synod's suggestion that the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity be celebrated more fruitfully is also helpful. Bishops are encouraged to set up and oversee ecumenical centres of prayer and dialogue ; and adequate formation for ecumenical dialogue needs to be included in the curriculum of seminaries, houses of formation and educational institutions.

### ***Interreligious Dialogue***

31. In my Apostolic Letter *Tertio Millennio Adveniente* I indicated that the advent of a new millennium offers a great opportunity for interreligious dialogue and for meetings with the leaders of the great world religions.<sup>152</sup> Contact, dialogue and cooperation with the followers of other religions is a task which the Second Vatican Council bequeathed to the whole Church as a duty and a challenge. The principles of this search for a positive relationship with other religious traditions are set out in the Council's Declaration *Nostra Aetate*, promulgated on 28 October 1965, the Magna Carta of interreligious dialogue for our times. From the Christian point of view, interreligious dialogue is more than a way of fostering mutual knowledge and enrichment ; it is a part of the Church's evangelizing mission, an

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<sup>152</sup> Cf. No. 53 : *AAS* 87 (1995), 37.

expression of the mission *ad gentes*.<sup>153</sup> Christians bring to interreligious dialogue the firm belief that the fullness of salvation comes from Christ alone and that the Church community to which they belong is the *ordinary means* of salvation.<sup>154</sup> Here I repeat what I wrote to the Fifth Plenary Assembly of the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences: "Although the Church gladly acknowledges whatever is true and holy in the religious traditions of Buddhism, Hinduism and Islam as a reflection of that truth which enlightens all people, this does not lessen her duty and resolve to proclaim without failing Jesus Christ who is 'the way and the truth and the life'... The fact that the followers of other religions can receive God's grace and be saved by Christ apart from the ordinary means which he has established does not thereby cancel the call to faith and baptism which God wills for all people".<sup>155</sup>

In the process of dialogue, as I have already written in my Encyclical Letter *Redemptoris Missio*, "there must be no abandonment of principles nor false irenicism, but instead a witness given and received for mutual advancement on the road of religious inquiry and experience, and at the same

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<sup>153</sup> Cf. John Paul II, Encyclical Letter *Redemptoris Missio* (7 December 1990), 55 : *AAS* 83 (1991), 302.

<sup>154</sup> Cf. *ibid.* : *loc. cit.*, 304.

<sup>155</sup> No. 4 : *AAS* 83 (1991), 101f.

time for the elimination of prejudice, intolerance and misunderstandings".<sup>156</sup> Only those with a mature and convinced Christian faith are qualified to engage in genuine interreligious dialogue. "Only Christians who are deeply immersed in the mystery of Christ and who are happy in their faith community can without undue risk and with hope of positive fruit engage in interreligious dialogue".<sup>157</sup> It is therefore important for the Church in Asia to provide suitable models of interreligious dialogue – evangelization in dialogue and dialogue for evangelization – and suitable training for those involved.

Having stressed the need in interreligious dialogue for firm faith in Christ, the Synod Fathers went on to speak of the need for *a dialogue of life and heart*. The followers of Christ must have the gentle and humble heart of their Master, never proud, never condescending, as they meet their partners in dialogue (cf. *Mt* 11 :29). "Interreligious relations are best developed in a context of openness to other believers, a willingness to listen and the desire to respect and understand others in their differences. For all this, love of others is indispensable. This should result in collaboration, harmony and mutual enrichment".<sup>158</sup>

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<sup>156</sup> No. 56 : *AAS* 83 (1991), 304.

<sup>157</sup> *Propositio* 41.

<sup>158</sup> *Ibid.*

To guide those engaged in the process, the Synod suggested that a directory on interreligious dialogue be drawn up.<sup>159</sup> As the Church explores new ways of encountering other religions, I mention some forms of dialogue already taking place with good results, including scholarly exchanges between experts in the various religious traditions or representatives of those traditions, common action for integral human development and the defence of human and religious values.<sup>160</sup> I repeat how important it is to revitalize prayer and contemplation in the process of dialogue. Men and women in the consecrated life can contribute very significantly to interreligious dialogue by witnessing to the vitality of the great Christian traditions of asceticism and mysticism.<sup>161</sup>

The memorable meeting held in Assisi, the city of Saint Francis, on 27 October 1986, between the Catholic Church and representatives of the other world religions shows that religious men and women, without abandoning their own traditions, can still commit themselves to praying and working for peace and the good of humanity.<sup>162</sup> The Church must continue to strive

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<sup>159</sup> Cf. *ibid.*

<sup>160</sup> Cf. John Paul II, Encyclical Letter *Redemptoris Missio* (7 December 1990), 57 : *AAS* 83 (1991), 305.

<sup>161</sup> Cf. John Paul II, Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Vita Consecrata* (25 March, 1996), 8 : *AAS* 88 (1996), 383.

to preserve and foster at all levels this spirit of encounter and cooperation between religions.

Communion and dialogue are two essential aspects of the Church's mission, which have their infinitely transcendent exemplar in the mystery of the Trinity, from whom all mission comes and to whom it must be directed. One of the great "birthday" gifts which the members of the Church, and especially her Pastors, can offer the Lord of History on the two thousandth anniversary of his Incarnation is a strengthening of the spirit of *unity and communion* at every level of ecclesial life, a renewed "holy pride" in the Church's continuing fidelity to what has been handed down, and a new confidence in the unchanging grace and mission which sends her out among the peoples of the world to witness to God's saving love and mercy. Only if the People of God recognize the gift that is theirs in Christ will they be able to communicate that gift to others through *proclamation* and *dialogue*.

## CHAPTER VI. THE SERVICE OF HUMAN PROMOTION.

### ***The Social Doctrine of the Church***

32. In the service of the human family, the Church reaches out to all men and women without distinction, striving to build with them a

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<sup>162</sup> Cf. John Paul II, Encyclical Letter *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis* (30 December 1987), 47 : *AAS* 80 (1988), 582.

civilization of love, founded upon the universal values of peace, justice, solidarity and freedom, which find their fulfilment in Christ. As the Second Vatican Council said so memorably : "The joys and the hopes, the griefs and the anxieties of the people of this age, especially those who are poor or in any way afflicted, these too are the joys and hopes, the griefs and anxieties of the followers of Christ. Indeed, nothing genuinely human fails to raise an echo in their hearts".<sup>163</sup> The Church in Asia then, with its multitude of poor and oppressed people, is called to live a communion of life which shows itself particularly in loving service to the poor and defenceless.

If in recent times the Church's Magisterium has insisted more and more upon the need to promote the authentic and integral development of the human person,<sup>164</sup> this is in response to the real situation of the world's peoples, as well as to

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<sup>163</sup> Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World *Gaudium et Spes*, 1.

<sup>164</sup> In many ways the point of departure was the Encyclical Letter *Rerum Novarum* of Pope Leo XIII (15 May 1891) which ushered in a series of solemn Church statements on various aspects of the social question. Among these was the Encyclical Letter *Populorum Progressio* (26 March 1967) which Pope Paul VI issued in response to the teachings of the Second Vatican Council and a changed world situation. To commemorate the twentieth anniversary of that Encyclical, I released the Encyclical Letter *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis* (30 December 1987) in which, following the earlier Magisterium, I invited all the faithful to see themselves as called to a mission of service which necessarily includes the promotion of integral human development.

an increased consciousness that not just the actions of individuals but also structures of social, political and economic life are often inimical to human well-being. The imbalances entrenched in the increasing gap between those who benefit from the world's growing capacity to produce wealth and those who are left at the margin of progress call for a radical change of both mentality and structures *in favour of the human person*. The great *moral challenge* facing nations and the international community in relation to development is to have *the courage of a new solidarity*, capable of taking imaginative and effective steps to overcome both dehumanizing underdevelopment and the "overdevelopment" which tends to reduce the person to an economic unit in an ever more oppressive consumer network. In seeking to bring about this change, "the Church does not have technical solutions to offer", but "offers her first contribution to the solution of the urgent problem of development when she proclaims the truth about Christ, about herself and about man, applying this truth to a concrete situation".<sup>165</sup> After all, human development is never a merely technical or economic question ; it is fundamentally *a human and moral question*.

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<sup>165</sup> John Paul II, Encyclical Letter *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis* (30 December 1987), 41 : *AAS* 80 (1988), 570f.

The social doctrine of the Church, which proposes a set of principles for reflection, criteria for judgement and directives for action,<sup>166</sup> is addressed in the first place to the members of the Church. It is essential that the faithful engaged in human promotion should have a firm grasp of this precious body of teaching and make it an integral part of their evangelizing mission. The Synod Fathers therefore stressed the importance of offering the faithful – in all educational activities, and especially in seminaries and houses of formation – a solid training in the social doctrine of the Church.<sup>167</sup> Christian leaders in the Church and society, and especially lay men and women with responsibilities in public life, need to be well formed in this teaching so that they can inspire and vivify civil society and its structures with the leaven of the Gospel.<sup>168</sup> The social doctrine of the Church will not only alert these Christian leaders to their duty, but will also give them guidelines for action in favour of human development, and will free them from false notions of the human person and human activity.

### ***The Dignity of the Human Person***

33. Human beings, not wealth or technology, are the prime agents and destination of

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<sup>166</sup> Cf. Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, Instruction on Christian Freedom and Liberation *Libertatis Conscientia* (22 March 1986), 72 : *AAS* 79 (1987), 586.

<sup>167</sup> Cf. *Propositio* 22.

<sup>168</sup> Cf. *Propositio* 21.

development. Therefore, the kind of development that the Church promotes reaches far beyond questions of economy and technology. It begins and ends with the integrity of the human person created in the image of God and endowed with a God-given dignity and inalienable human rights. The various international declarations on human rights and the many initiatives which these have inspired are a sign of growing attention on a worldwide level to the dignity of the human person. Unfortunately, these declarations are often violated in practice. Fifty years after the solemn proclamation of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, many people are still subjected to the most degrading forms of exploitation and manipulation, which make them veritable slaves to those who are more powerful, to an ideology, economic power, oppressive political systems, scientific technocracy or the intrusiveness of the mass media.<sup>169</sup>

The Synod Fathers were well aware of the persistent violations of human rights in many parts of the world, and particularly in Asia, where "teeming millions are suffering from discrimination, exploitation, poverty and

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<sup>169</sup> Cf. John Paul II, Post Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Christifideles Laici* (30 December 1988), 5: *AAS* 81 (1989), 400-402; Encyclical Letter *Evangelium Vitae* (25 March 1995), 18: *AAS* 87 (1995), 419f.

marginalization".<sup>170</sup> They expressed the need for all God's people in Asia to come to a clear awareness of the inescapable and unrenounceable challenge involved in the defence of human rights and the promotion of justice and peace.

### ***Preferential Love of the Poor***

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*)".<sup>171</sup> 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

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<sup>170</sup> *Propositio 22* ; cf. *Propositio 39*.

<sup>171</sup> 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.

than half the population suffers deprivation, poverty and exploitation.<sup>172</sup> 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.<sup>173</sup>

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

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<sup>172</sup> Cf. *Propositio* 44.

<sup>173</sup> Cf. *ibid.*

on the basis of their conversion to Christianity.<sup>174</sup> 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.<sup>175</sup>

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.<sup>176</sup> 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*).

In almost every Asian country, there are large aboriginal populations, some of them on the lowest economic rung. The Synod repeatedly noted that indigenous or tribal people often feel drawn to the person of Jesus Christ and to the Church as a community of love and service.<sup>177</sup> Herein lies an immense field of action in

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<sup>174</sup> Cf. *Propositio 39*.

<sup>175</sup> Cf. *Propositio 22*.

<sup>176</sup> Cf. *Propositio 36*.

<sup>177</sup> Cf. *Propositio 38*.

education and health care, as well as in promoting social participation. The Catholic community needs to intensify pastoral work among these people, attending to their concerns and to the questions of justice which affect their lives. This implies an attitude of deep respect for their traditional religion and its values ; it implies as well the need to help them to help themselves, so that they can work to improve their situation and become the evangelizers of their own culture and society.<sup>178</sup>

No one can remain indifferent to the suffering of the countless children in Asia who fall victim to intolerable exploitation and violence, not just as the result of the evil perpetrated by individuals but often as a direct consequence of corrupt social structures. The Synod Fathers identified child labour, paedophilia and the drug culture as the social evils which affect children most directly, and they saw clearly that these ills are compounded by others like poverty and ill-conceived programmes of national development.<sup>179</sup> The Church must do all she can to overcome such evils, to act on behalf of those most exploited, and to seek to guide the little ones to the love of Jesus, for to such belongs the Kingdom of God (cf. *Lk* 18 :16).<sup>180</sup>

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<sup>178</sup> Cf. *ibid.*

<sup>179</sup> Cf. *Propositio* 33.

<sup>180</sup> Cf. *ibid.*

The Synod voiced special concern for women, whose situation remains a serious problem in Asia, where discrimination and violence against women is often found in the home, in the workplace and even within the legal system. Illiteracy is most widespread among women, and many are treated simply as commodities in prostitution, tourism and the entertainment industry.<sup>181</sup> In their fight against all forms of injustice and discrimination, women should find an ally in the Christian community, and for this reason the Synod proposed that where possible the local Churches in Asia should promote human rights activities on behalf of women. The aim must be to bring about a change of attitude through a proper understanding of the role of men and women in the family, in society and in the Church, through greater awareness of the original complementarity between men and women, and through clearer appreciation of the importance of the feminine dimension in all things human. The contributions of women have all too often been undervalued or ignored, and this has resulted in a spiritual impoverishment of humanity. The Church in Asia would more visibly and effectively uphold women's dignity and freedom by encouraging their role in the Church's life, including her intellectual life, and by opening to them ever greater opportunities to be present

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<sup>181</sup> Cf. *Propositio* 35.

and active in the Church's mission of love and service.<sup>182</sup>

### ***The Gospel of Life***

35. The service of human development begins with the service of life itself. Life is a great gift entrusted to us by God : he entrusts it to us as a project and a responsibility. We are therefore guardians of life, not its proprietors. We receive the gift freely and, in gratitude, we must never cease to respect and defend it, from its beginning to its natural conclusion. From the moment of conception, human life involves God's creative action and remains forever in a special bond with the Creator, who is life's source and its sole end. There is no true progress, no true civil society, no true human promotion without respect for human life, especially the life of those who have no voice of their own with which to defend themselves. The life of every person, whether of the child in the womb, or of someone who is sick, handicapped or elderly, is a gift for all.

The Synod Fathers wholeheartedly reaffirmed the teaching of the Second Vatican Council and the subsequent Magisterium, including my Encyclical Letter *Evangelium Vitae*, on the sanctity of human life. I join them here in calling upon the faithful in their countries, where the demographic question is often used as an argument for the need to introduce abortion and

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<sup>182</sup> Cf. *ibid.*

artificial population control programmes, to resist "the culture of death".<sup>183</sup> They can show their fidelity to God and their commitment to true human promotion by supporting and participating in programmes which defend the life of those who are powerless to defend themselves.

### ***Health Care***

36. Following in the steps of Jesus Christ who had compassion for all and cured "all kinds of disease and illness" (*Mt* 9 :35), the Church in Asia is committed to becoming still more involved in the care of the sick, since this is a vital part of her mission of offering the saving grace of Christ to the whole person. Like the Good Samaritan of the parable (cf. *Lk* 10 :29-37), the Church wants to care for the sick and disabled in concrete ways,<sup>184</sup> especially where people are deprived of elementary medical care as a result of poverty and marginalization.

On numerous occasions during my visits to the Church in different parts of the world I have been deeply moved by the extraordinary Christian witness borne by religious and consecrated persons, doctors, nurses and other health care workers, especially those working with the handicapped, or in the field of terminal care, or contending with the spread of new diseases such

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<sup>183</sup> *Propositio* 32.

<sup>184</sup> Cf. John Paul II, Apostolic Letter *Salvifici Doloris* (11 February 1984), 28-29 : *AAS* 76 (1984), 242-244.

as AIDS. Increasingly, Christian health care workers are called to be generous and self-giving in tending the victims of drug addiction and AIDS, who are often despised and abandoned by society.<sup>185</sup> Many Catholic medical institutions in Asia are facing pressures from public health care policies not based on Christian principles, and many of them are burdened by ever increasing financial difficulties. In spite of these problems, it is the exemplary self-giving love and dedicated professionalism of those involved that make these facilities an admirable and appreciated service to the community, and a particularly visible and effective sign of God's unfailing love. These health care workers must be encouraged and supported in the good that they do. Their continuing commitment and effectiveness is the best way to ensure that Christian values and ethics enter deeply into the health care systems of the continent and transform them from within.<sup>186</sup>

### ***Education***

37. Throughout Asia, the Church's involvement in education is extensive and highly visible, and is therefore a key element of her presence among the peoples of the continent. In many countries, Catholic schools play an important role in evangelization, inculturating the faith, teaching the ways of openness and respect,

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<sup>185</sup> Cf. *Propositio* 20.

<sup>186</sup> Cf. *ibid.*

and fostering interreligious understanding. The Church's schools often provide the only educational opportunities for girls, tribal minorities, the rural poor and less privileged children. The Synod Fathers were convinced of the need to extend and develop the apostolate of education in Asia, with an eye in particular to the disadvantaged, so that all may be helped to take their rightful place as full citizens in society.<sup>187</sup> As the Synod Fathers noted, this will mean that the system of Catholic education must become still more clearly directed towards human promotion, providing an environment where students receive not only the formal elements of schooling but, more broadly, an integral human formation based upon the teachings of Christ.<sup>188</sup> Catholic schools should continue to be places where the faith can be freely proposed and received. In the same way, Catholic universities, in addition to pursuing the academic excellence for which they are already well known, must retain a clear Christian identity in order to be a Christian leaven in Asian societies.<sup>189</sup>

### ***Peacemaking***

38. At the end of the twentieth century the world is still threatened by forces which generate conflicts and wars, and Asia is certainly not

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<sup>187</sup> Cf. *Propositio* 21.

<sup>188</sup> Cf. *ibid.*

<sup>189</sup> Cf. *ibid.*

exempt from these. Among these forces are intolerance and marginalization of all kinds – social, cultural, political, and even religious. Day by day fresh violence is inflicted upon individuals and entire peoples, and the culture of death takes hold in the unjustifiable recourse to violence to resolve tensions. Given the appalling situation of conflict in so many parts of the world, the Church is called to be deeply involved in international and interreligious efforts to bring about peace, justice and reconciliation. She continues to insist on the negotiated and non-military resolution of conflicts, and she looks to the day when nations will abandon war as a way of vindicating claims or a means of resolving differences. She is convinced that war creates more problems than it ever solves, that dialogue is the only just and noble path to agreement and reconciliation, and that the patient and wise art of peacemaking is especially blessed by God.

Especially troubling in Asia is the continual race to acquire weapons of mass destruction, an immoral and wasteful expenditure in national budgets, which in some cases cannot even satisfy people's basic needs. The Synod Fathers also spoke of the vast number of landmines in Asia, which have maimed or killed hundreds of thousands of innocent people, while despoiling fertile land which could otherwise be used for

food production.<sup>190</sup> It is the responsibility of all, especially of those who govern nations, to work more energetically for disarmament. The Synod called for a stop to the manufacture, sale and use of nuclear, chemical and biological arms and urged those who have set landmines to assist in the work of rehabilitation and restoration.<sup>191</sup> Above all the Synod Fathers prayed to God, who knows the depths of every human conscience, to put sentiments of peace in the hearts of those tempted to follow the ways of violence so that the biblical vision will become a reality: "they shall beat their swords into ploughshares, and their spears into pruning hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more" (*Is* 2:4).

The Synod heard many testimonies concerning the sufferings of the people of Iraq, and about the fact that many Iraqis, especially children, have died because of the lack of medicines and other basic commodities deriving from the continuing embargo. With the Synod Fathers, I wish to express once again my solidarity with the Iraqi people, and I am particularly close in prayer and hope to the sons and daughters of the Church in that country. The Synod prayed that God will enlighten the minds and hearts of all those who bear responsibility for

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<sup>190</sup> Cf. *Propositio* 23.

<sup>191</sup> Cf. *ibid.*

bringing about a just solution to the crisis, in order that an already sorely tried people may be spared further suffering and sorrow.<sup>192</sup>

### ***Globalization***

39. Considering the question of human promotion in Asia, the Synod Fathers recognized the importance of the process of economic globalization. While acknowledging its many positive effects, they pointed out that globalization has also worked to the detriment of the poor,<sup>193</sup> tending to push poorer countries to the margin of international economic and political relations. Many Asian nations are unable to hold their own in a global market economy. And perhaps more significantly, there is also the aspect of a *cultural* globalization, made possible by the modern communications media, which is quickly drawing Asian societies into a global consumer culture that is both secularist and materialistic. The result is an eroding of traditional family and social values which until now had sustained peoples and societies. All of this makes it clear that *the ethical and moral aspects of globalization* need to be more directly addressed by the leaders of nations and by organizations concerned with human promotion.

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<sup>192</sup> Cf. *Propositio* 55.

<sup>193</sup> Cf. *Propositio* 49.

The Church insists upon the need for "globalization without marginalization".<sup>194</sup> With the Synod Fathers, I call upon the particular Churches everywhere, and especially those in the Western countries, to work to ensure that the Church's social doctrine has its due impact upon the formulation of ethical and juridical norms for regulating the world's free markets and for the means of social communication. Catholic leaders and professionals should urge governments and financial and trade institutions to recognize and respect such norms.<sup>195</sup>

### ***Foreign Debt***

40. Furthermore, in her search for justice in a world marred by social and economic inequalities, the Church cannot ignore the heavy burden of debt incurred by many developing nations in Asia, with its consequent impact upon their present and future. In many cases, these countries are forced to cut down spending on the necessities of life such as food, health, housing and education, in order to service their debts to international monetary agencies and banks. This means that many people are trapped in living conditions which are an affront to human dignity. While aware of the technical complexities of this matter, the Synod recognized that this issue tests

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<sup>194</sup> John Paul II, *Message for the World Day of Peace* (1 January 1998), 3 : AAS 90 (1998), 50.

<sup>195</sup> Cf. *Propositio* 49.

the capacity of peoples, societies and governments to value the human person and the lives of millions of human beings more highly than financial and material gain.<sup>196</sup>

The approach of the Great Jubilee of the Year 2000 is an opportune time for the Episcopal Conferences of the world, especially of the wealthier nations, to encourage international monetary agencies and banks to explore ways of easing the international debt situation. Among the more obvious are a renegotiation of debts, with either substantial reduction or outright cancellation, as also business ventures and investments to assist the economies of the poorer countries.<sup>197</sup> At the same time the Synod Fathers also addressed the debtor countries. They emphasized the need to develop a sense of national responsibility, reminding them of the importance of sound economic planning, transparency and good management, and invited them to wage a resolute campaign against corruption.<sup>198</sup> They called upon the Christians of Asia to condemn all forms of corruption and the misappropriation of public funds by those holding political power.<sup>199</sup> The citizens of debtor

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<sup>196</sup> Cf. *Propositio* 48.

<sup>197</sup> Cf. *ibid.*; John Paul II, Apostolic Letter *Tertio Millennio Adveniente* (10 November 1994), 51 : *AAS* 87 (1995), 36.

<sup>198</sup> Cf. *Propositio* 48.

<sup>199</sup> Cf. *Propositio* 22; John Paul II, Encyclical Letter *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis* (30 December 1987), 44 : *AAS* 80 (1988), 576f.

countries have too often been victims of waste and inefficiency at home, before falling victim to the international debt crisis.

### ***The Environment***

41. When concern for economic and technological progress is not accompanied by concern for the balance of the ecosystem, our earth is inevitably exposed to serious environmental damage, with consequent harm to human beings. Blatant disrespect for the environment will continue as long as the earth and its potential are seen merely as objects of immediate use and consumption, to be manipulated by an unbridled desire for profit.<sup>200</sup> It is the duty of Christians and of all who look to God as the Creator to protect the environment by restoring a sense of reverence for the whole of God's creation. It is the Creator's will that man should treat nature not as a ruthless exploiter but as an intelligent and responsible administrator.<sup>201</sup> The Synod Fathers pleaded in a special way for greater responsibility on the part of the leaders of nations, legislators, business people and all who are directly involved in the management of the earth's resources.<sup>202</sup> They underlined the need to educate people, especially the young, in

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<sup>200</sup> Cf. John Paul II, Encyclical Letter *Redemptor Hominis* (4 March 1979), 15 : *AAS* 71 (1979), 287.

<sup>201</sup> Cf. *ibid.*

<sup>202</sup> Cf. *Propositio* 47.

environmental responsibility, training them in the stewardship over creation which God has entrusted to humanity. The protection of the environment is not only a *technical* question ; it is also and above all an *ethical* issue. All have a moral duty to care for the environment, not only for their own good but also for the good of future generations.

In conclusion, it is worth remembering that in calling on Christians to work and sacrifice themselves in the service of human development the Synod Fathers were drawing upon some of the core insights of biblical and ecclesial tradition. Ancient Israel insisted passionately upon the unbreakable bond between worship of God and care for the weak, represented typically in Scripture as "the widow, the stranger and orphan" (cf. *Ex* 22 :21-22 ; *Dt* 10 :18 ; 27 :19), who in the societies of the time were most vulnerable to the threat of injustice. Time and again in the Prophets we hear the cry for justice, for the right ordering of human society, without which there can be no true worship of God (cf. *Is* 1 :10-17 ; *Am* 5 :21-24). In the appeal of the Synod Fathers we thus hear an echo of the Prophets filled with the Spirit of God, who wants "mercy not sacrifice" (*Hos* 6 :6). Jesus made these words his own (cf. *Mt* 9 :13), and the same is true of the Saints in every time and place. Consider the words of Saint John Chrysostom : "Do you wish

to honour the body of Christ? Then do not ignore him when he is naked. Do not pay him silken honours in the temple only then to neglect him when he goes cold and naked outside. He who said ; 'This is my body' is the One who also said, 'You saw me hungry and you gave me no food'... What good is it if the Eucharistic Table groans under the weight of golden chalices, when Christ is dying of hunger? Start by satisfying his hunger, and then with what remains you may adorn the altar as well !".<sup>203</sup> In the Synod's appeal for human development and for justice in human affairs, we hear a voice which is both old and new. It is old because it rises from the depths of our Christian tradition, which looks to that profound harmony which the Creator intends ; it is new because it speaks to the immediate situation of countless people in Asia today.

## CHAPTER VII. WITNESSES TO THE GOSPEL.

### ***A Witnessing Church***

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.<sup>204</sup> 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

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<sup>203</sup> *Homilies on the Gospel of Matthew*, 50, 3-4 : PG 58, 508-509.

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

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.<sup>205</sup> 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".<sup>206</sup> 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".<sup>207</sup> 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

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

<sup>206</sup> *Ibid.* 42 : *loc. cit.*, 289.

<sup>207</sup> *Ibid.*

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.

### ***Pastors***

43. It is the Holy Spirit who enables the Church to accomplish the mission entrusted to her by Christ. Before sending out his disciples as his witnesses, Jesus gave them the Holy Spirit (cf. *Jn* 20 :22), who worked through them and stirred the hearts of those who heard them (cf. *Acts* 2 :37). The same is true of those whom he sends out now. At one level, all the baptized, by the very grace of the Sacrament, are deputed to take part in continuing the saving mission of Christ, and they are capable of this task precisely because

God's love has been poured into their hearts through the Holy Spirit which has been given to them (*Rom* 5 :5). But on another level this common mission is accomplished through a variety of specific functions and charisms in the Church. The principal responsibility for the Church's mission has been entrusted by Christ to the Apostles and their successors. By virtue of episcopal ordination and hierarchical communion with the Head of the Episcopal College, Bishops receive the mandate and authority to teach, govern and sanctify the People of God. By the will of Christ himself, within the College of Bishops, the Successor of Peter – the rock upon which the Church is built (cf. *Mt* 16 :18) – exercises a special ministry of unity. Bishops therefore are to fulfil their ministry in union with the Successor of Peter, the guarantor of the truth of their teaching and of their full communion in the Church.

Associated with the Bishops in the work of proclaiming the Gospel, priests are called upon at ordination to be shepherds of the flock, preachers of the good news of salvation and ministers of the sacraments. To serve the Church as Christ intends, Bishops and priests need a solid and continuing formation, which should provide opportunities for human, spiritual and pastoral renewal, as well as courses on theology,

spirituality and the human sciences.<sup>208</sup> People in Asia need to see the clergy not just as charity workers and institutional administrators but as men whose minds and hearts are set on the deep things of the Spirit (cf. *Rom* 8 :5). The reverence which Asian peoples have for those in authority needs to be matched by a clear moral uprightness on the part of those with ministerial responsibilities in the Church. By their life of prayer, zealous service and exemplary conduct, the clergy witness powerfully to the Gospel in the communities which they shepherd in the name of Christ. It is my fervent prayer that the ordained ministers of the Churches in Asia will live and work in a spirit of communion and cooperation with the Bishops and all the faithful, bearing witness to the love which Jesus declared to be the true mark of his disciples (cf. *Jn* 13 :35).

I particularly wish to underline the Synod's concern for the preparation of those who will staff and teach in seminaries and theological faculties.<sup>209</sup> After a thorough training in the sacred sciences and related subjects, they should receive a specific formation focused on priestly spirituality, the art of spiritual direction, and other aspects of the difficult and delicate task that awaits them in the education of future priests.

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<sup>208</sup> Cf. *Propositio* 25.

<sup>209</sup> Cf. *ibid.*

This is an apostolate second to none for the Church's well-being and vitality.

### ***The Consecrated Life and Missionary Societies***

44. In the Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Vita Consecrata*, I emphasized the intimate connection between the consecrated life and mission. Under its three aspects of *confessio Trinitatis*, *signum fraternitatis* and *servitium caritatis*, the consecrated life shows forth God's love in the world by its specific witness to the saving mission which Jesus accomplished by his total consecration to the Father. Recognizing that all action in the Church has its support in prayer and communion with God, the Church in Asia looks with profound respect and appreciation to the contemplative religious communities as a special source of strength and inspiration. Following the recommendations of the Synod Fathers, I strongly encourage the establishment of monastic and contemplative communities wherever possible. In this way, as the Second Vatican Council reminds us, the work of building up the earthly city can have its foundation in the Lord and can tend towards him, lest those who build labour in vain.<sup>210</sup>

The search for God, a life of fraternal communion, and service to others are the three chief characteristics of the consecrated life which

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<sup>210</sup> Cf. *Dogmatic Constitution on the Church Lumen Gentium*, 46.

can offer an appealing Christian testimony to the peoples of Asia today. The Special Assembly for Asia urged those in the consecrated life to be witnesses to the universal call to holiness and inspiring examples to Christians and non-Christians alike of self-giving love for everyone, especially the least of their brothers and sisters. In a world in which the sense of God's presence is often diminished, consecrated persons need to bear convincing prophetic witness to the primacy of God and to eternal life. Living in community, they attest to the values of Christian fraternity and to the transforming power of the Good News.<sup>211</sup> 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.<sup>212</sup> In the numerous religious traditions of Asia, men and women dedicated to the contemplative and ascetical life enjoy great respect, and their witness has an especially persuasive power. Their lives lived in community, in peaceful and silent testimony, can inspire people to work for greater harmony in society. No less is expected of consecrated men and women in the Christian tradition. Their silent example of poverty and

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<sup>211</sup> Cf. *Propositio* 27.

<sup>212</sup> Cf. John Paul II, Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Vita Consecrata* (25 March 1996), 103 : *AA* 88 (1996), 479.

abnegation, of purity and sincerity, of self-sacrifice in obedience, can become an eloquent witness capable of touching all people of good will and leading to a fruitful dialogue with surrounding cultures and religions, and with the poor and the defenceless. This makes the consecrated life a privileged means of effective evangelization.<sup>213</sup>

The Synod Fathers recognized the vital role played by religious orders and congregations, missionary institutes and societies of apostolic life in the evangelization of Asia in past centuries. For this magnificent contribution, the Synod expressed to them the Church's gratitude and urged them not to waver in their missionary commitment.<sup>214</sup> I join the Synod Fathers in calling on those in the consecrated life to renew their zeal to proclaim the saving truth of Christ. All are to have appropriate formation and training, which should be Christ-centred and faithful to their founding charism, with emphasis on personal sanctity and witness; their spirituality and lifestyle should be sensitive to the religious heritage of the people among whom they live and whom they serve.<sup>215</sup> While maintaining respect for their specific charism, they should integrate

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<sup>213</sup> Cf. Paul VI, Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Nuntiandi* (8 December 1975), 69 : *AAS* 68 (1976), 59.

<sup>214</sup> Cf. *Propositio* 27.

<sup>215</sup> Cf. *ibid.*

themselves into the pastoral plan of the Diocese in which they work. The local Churches, for their part, need to foster awareness of the ideal of the religious and consecrated life, and promote such vocations. This requires that each Diocese should devise a pastoral programme for vocations, including the assignment of priests and religious to full-time work among the young to help them hear and discern the call of God.<sup>216</sup>

In the context of the communion of the universal Church, I cannot fail to urge the Church in Asia to send forth missionaries, even though she herself needs labourers in the vineyard. I am glad to see that in several Asian countries missionary institutes of apostolic life have recently been founded in recognition of the Church's missionary character and of the responsibility of the particular Churches in Asia to preach the Gospel to the whole world.<sup>217</sup> The Synod Fathers recommended "the establishment within each local Church of Asia, where such do not exist, of missionary societies of apostolic life, characterized by their special commitment to the mission *ad gentes, ad exteros* and *ad vitam*".<sup>218</sup> Such an initiative is sure to bear abundant fruit not only in the Churches which receive the

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<sup>216</sup> Cf. *ibid.*

<sup>217</sup> Cf. *Propositio* 28.

<sup>218</sup> *Ibid.*

missionaries but also in the Churches which send them.

### ***The Laity***

45. As the Second Vatican Council clearly indicated, the vocation of lay people sets them firmly in the world to perform the most varied tasks, and it is here that they are called to spread the Gospel of Jesus Christ.<sup>219</sup> By the grace and call of Baptism and Confirmation, all lay people are missionaries; and the arena of their missionary work is the vast and complex worlds of politics, economics, industry, education, the media, science, technology, the arts and sport. In many Asian countries, lay people are already serving as true missionaries, reaching out to fellow Asians who might never have contact with clergy and religious.<sup>220</sup> To them I express the thanks of the whole Church, and I encourage all lay people to assume their proper role in the life and mission of the People of God, as witnesses to Christ wherever they may find themselves.

It is the task of the Pastors to ensure that the laity are formed as evangelizers able to face the challenges of the contemporary world, not just with worldly wisdom and efficiency, but with hearts renewed and strengthened by the truth of Christ.<sup>221</sup> Witnessing to the Gospel in every area

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<sup>219</sup> Cf. Dogmatic Constitution on the Church *Lumen Gentium*, 31.

<sup>220</sup> Cf. *Propositio* 29.

<sup>221</sup> Cf. *ibid.*

of life in society, the lay faithful can play a unique role in rooting out injustice and oppression, and for this too they must be adequately formed. To this end, I join the Synod Fathers in proposing the establishment at the diocesan or national level of lay formation centres to prepare the laity for their missionary work as witnesses to Christ in Asia today.<sup>222</sup>

The Synod Fathers were most concerned that the Church should be a participatory Church in which no one feels excluded, and they judged the wider participation of women in the life and mission of the Church in Asia to be an especially pressing need. "Woman has a quite special aptitude in passing on the faith, so much so that Jesus himself appealed to it in the work of evangelization. That is what happened to the Samaritan woman whom Jesus met at Jacob's well : he chose her for the first expansion of the new faith in non-Jewish territory".<sup>223</sup> To enhance their service in the Church, there should be greater opportunities for women to take courses in theology and other fields of study ; and men in seminaries and houses of formation need to be trained to regard women as co-workers in the apostolate.<sup>224</sup> Women should be more effectively

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<sup>222</sup> Cf. *ibid.*

<sup>223</sup> John Paul II, Address at the General Audience (13 July 1994), 4 : *Insegnamenti* XVII, 2 (1994), 40.

<sup>224</sup> Cf. *Propositio* 35.

involved in pastoral programmes, in diocesan and parish pastoral councils, and in diocesan synods. Their abilities and services should be fully appreciated in health care, in education, in preparing the faithful for the sacraments, in building community and in peacemaking. As the Synod Fathers noted, the presence of women in the Church's mission of love and service contributes greatly to bringing the compassionate Jesus, the healer and reconciler, to Asian people, especially the poor and marginalized.<sup>225</sup>

### ***The Family***

46. The family is the normal place where the young grow to personal and social maturity. It is also the bearer of the heritage of humanity itself, because through the family life is passed on from generation to generation. The family occupies a very important place in Asian cultures ; and, as the Synod Fathers noted, family values like filial respect, love and care for the aged and the sick, love of children and harmony are held in high esteem in all Asian cultures and religious traditions.

Seen through Christian eyes, the family is "the domestic Church" (*ecclesia domestica*).<sup>226</sup> The Christian family, like the Church as a whole, should be a place where the truth of the Gospel is

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<sup>225</sup> Cf. *ibid.*

<sup>226</sup> Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Dogmatic Constitution on the Church *Lumen Gentium*, 11.

the rule of life and the gift which the family members bring to the wider community. The family is not simply the object of the Church's pastoral care ; it is also one of the Church's most effective agents of evangelization. Christian families are today called to witness to the Gospel in difficult times and circumstances, when the family itself is threatened by an array of forces.<sup>227</sup> To be an agent of evangelization in such a time, the Christian family needs to be genuinely "the domestic Church", humbly and lovingly living out the Christian vocation.

As the Synod Fathers pointed out, this means that the family should be active in parish life, partaking of the sacraments, especially the Holy Eucharist and the Sacrament of Penance, and being involved in service to others. It also means that parents should strive to make the moments when the family naturally comes together an opportunity for prayer, for Bible reading and reflection, for appropriate rituals presided over by the parents and for healthy recreation. This will help the Christian family to become a hearth of evangelization, where each member experiences God's love and communicates it to others.<sup>228</sup> The Synod Fathers also acknowledged that children have a role in evangelization, both in their family

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<sup>227</sup> Cf. Special Assembly for Asia of the Synod of Bishops, *Relatio ante disceptationem* : *L'Osservatore Romano* (22 April 1998), 6.

<sup>228</sup> Cf. *Propositio* 32.

and in the wider community.<sup>229</sup> Convinced that "the future of the world and of the Church passes through the family",<sup>230</sup> I once again propose for study and implementation what I wrote on the theme of the family in the Apostolic Exhortation *Familiaris Consortio*, following the Fifth Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops in 1980.

### ***Young People***

47. The Synod Fathers were particularly sensitive to the theme of youth in the Church. The many complex problems which young people now face in the changing world of Asia impel the Church to remind the young of their responsibility for the future of society and the Church, and to encourage and support them at every step to ensure that they are ready to accept that responsibility. To them the Church offers the truth of the Gospel as a joyful and liberating mystery to be known, lived and shared, with conviction and courage.

If young people are to be effective agents of mission, the Church needs to offer them suitable pastoral care.<sup>231</sup> In agreement with the Synod Fathers, I recommend that, where possible, every diocese in Asia should appoint youth chaplains or

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<sup>229</sup> Cf. *Propositio* 33.

<sup>230</sup> John Paul II, Address to the Confederation of Family Advisory Bureaus of Christian Inspiration (29 November 1980), 4 : *Insegnamenti* III, 2 (1980), 1454.

<sup>231</sup> Cf. *Propositio* 34.

directors to promote the spiritual formation and apostolate of young people. Catholic schools and parishes have a vital role in providing all-round formation for the young, by seeking to lead them in the way of true discipleship and developing in them the human qualities that mission requires. Organized youth apostolates and youth clubs can provide the experience of Christian friendship which is so important for the young. The parish, and associations and movements, can help young people to cope better with social pressures by offering them not only a more mature growth in the Christian life but also help in the form of career guidance, vocational training and youth counselling.

The Christian formation of young people in Asia should recognize that they are not only the object of the Church's pastoral care but also "agents and co-workers in the Church's mission in her various apostolic works of love and service".<sup>232</sup> In parishes and dioceses, young men and women should therefore be invited to take part in the organization of activities which concern them. Their freshness and enthusiasm, their spirit of solidarity and hope can make them peacemakers in a divided world ; and, on this score, it is encouraging to see young people involved in exchange programmes between the particular Churches and countries in Asia and

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<sup>232</sup> *Ibid.*

elsewhere fostering interreligious and intercultural dialogue.

### ***Social Communication***

48. In an era of globalization, "the means of social communication have become so important as to be for many the chief means of information and education, of guidance and inspiration in their behaviour as individuals, families and within society at large. In particular, the younger generation is growing up in a world conditioned by the mass media".<sup>233</sup> The world is seeing the emergence of a new culture that "originates not just from whatever content is eventually expressed, but from the very fact that there exist new ways of communicating, with new languages, new techniques and a new psychology".<sup>234</sup> The exceptional role played by the means of social communication in shaping the world, its cultures and ways of thinking has led to rapid and far-reaching changes in Asian societies.

Inevitably, the Church's evangelizing mission too is deeply affected by the impact of the mass media. Since the mass media have an ever increasing influence even in remote areas of Asia, they can assist greatly in the proclamation of the Gospel to every corner of the continent. However, "it is not enough to use the media

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<sup>233</sup> John Paul II, Encyclical Letter *Redemptoris Missio* (7 December 1990), 37 : *AAS* 83 (1991), 285.

<sup>234</sup> *Ibid.*

simply to spread the Christian message and the Church's authentic teaching. It is necessary to integrate that message into the 'new culture' created by modern communications".<sup>235</sup> To this end, the Church needs to explore ways of thoroughly integrating the mass media into her pastoral planning and activity, so that by their effective use the Gospel's power can reach out still further to individuals and entire peoples, and infuse Asian cultures with the values of the Kingdom.

I echo the Synod Fathers' commendation of *Radio Veritas Asia*, the only continent-wide radio station for the Church in Asia, for its almost thirty years of evangelization through broadcasting. Efforts must be made to strengthen this excellent instrument of mission, through appropriate language programming, personnel and financial help from Episcopal Conferences and Dioceses in Asia.<sup>236</sup> In addition to radio, Catholic publications and news agencies can help to disseminate information and offer continuing religious education and formation throughout the continent. In places where Christians are a minority, these can be an important means of sustaining and nurturing a sense of Catholic

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<sup>235</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>236</sup> Cf. *Propositio* 45.

identity and of spreading knowledge of Catholic moral principles.<sup>237</sup>

I take up the recommendations of the Synod Fathers on the point of evangelization through social communications, the "areopagus of the modern age", in the hope that it may serve human promotion and the spreading of the truth of Christ and the teaching of the Church.<sup>238</sup> It would help if each Diocese would establish, where possible, a communications and media office. Media education, including the critical evaluation of media output, needs to be an increasing part of the formation of priests, seminarians, religious, catechists, lay professionals, students in Catholic schools and parish communities. Given the wide influence and extraordinary impact of the mass media, Catholics need to work with the members of other Churches and Ecclesial Communities, and with the followers of other religions to ensure a place for spiritual and moral values in the media. With the Synod Fathers, I encourage the development of pastoral plans for communications at the national and diocesan levels, following the indications of the Pastoral Instruction *Aetatis Novae*, with appropriate attention to the circumstances prevailing in Asia.

### ***The Martyrs***

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<sup>237</sup> Cf. *ibid.*

<sup>238</sup> Cf. *ibid.*

49. However important programmes of formation and strategies for evangelization may be, in the end *it is martyrdom which reveals to the world the very essence of the Christian message*. The word itself, "martyr", means witness, and those who have shed their blood for Christ have borne the ultimate witness to the true value of the Gospel. In the Bull of Indiction of the Great Jubilee of the Year 2000, *Incarnationis Mysterium*, I stressed the vital importance of remembering the martyrs : "From the psychological point of view, martyrdom is the most eloquent proof of the truth of the faith, for faith can give a human face even to the most violent of deaths and show its beauty even in the midst of the most atrocious persecutions".<sup>239</sup> Through the ages, Asia has given the Church and the world a great host of these heroes of the faith, and from the heart of Asia there rises the great song of praise : *Te martyrum candidatus laudat exercitus*. This is the song of those who died for Christ on Asian soil in the first centuries of the Church, and it is also the joyful cry of men and women of more recent times like Saint Paul Miki and his companions, Saint Lorenzo Ruiz and his companions, Saint Andrew Dung Lac and his companions, Saint Andrew Kim Taegon and his companions. May the great host of Asian martyrs, old and new, never cease to teach the Church in Asia what it means to bear

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<sup>239</sup> No. 13 : *AAS* 91 (1999), 142.

witness to the Lamb in whose blood they have washed their shining robes (cf. *Rev* 7 :14) ! May they stand as indomitable witnesses to the truth that Christians are called always and everywhere to proclaim nothing other than *the power of the Lord's Cross* ! And may the blood of Asia's martyrs be now as always the seed of new life for the Church in every corner of the continent !

CONCLUSION.

***Gratitude and Encouragement.***

50. At the end of this Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation which, seeking to discern the Spirit's word to the Churches in Asia (cf. *Rev* 1 :11), has endeavoured to set forth the fruits of the Special Assembly for Asia of the Synod of Bishops, I wish to express the Church's gratitude to all of you, dear Asian brothers and sisters, who have contributed in any way to the success of this important ecclesial event. First and foremost, we again praise God for the wealth of cultures, languages, traditions and religious sensibilities of this great continent. Blessed be God for the peoples of Asia, so rich in their diversity yet one in their yearning for peace and fullness of life. Especially now, in the immediate vicinity of the 2000th anniversary of the Birth of Jesus Christ, we thank God for choosing Asia as the earthly dwelling place of his incarnate Son, the Saviour of the world.

I cannot fail to express my appreciation to the Bishops of Asia for their deep love of Jesus Christ, the Church and the peoples of Asia, and for their testimony of communion and generous dedication to the task of evangelization. I am grateful to all those who form the great family of the Church in Asia: the clergy, the men and women religious and other consecrated persons, the missionaries, the laity, families, the young, indigenous peoples, workers, the poor and afflicted. Deep in my heart there is a special place for those in Asia who are persecuted for their faith in Christ. They are the hidden pillars of the Church, to whom Jesus himself speaks words of comfort: "You are blessed in the Kingdom of heaven" (cf. *Mt* 5 :10).

The words of Jesus reassure the Church in Asia: "Fear not, little flock, for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the Kingdom" (*Lk* 12 :32). Those who believe in Christ are still a small minority in this vast and most populous continent. Yet far from being a timid minority, they are lively in faith, full of the hope and vitality which only love can bring. In their humble and courageous way, they have influenced the cultures and societies of Asia, especially the lives of the poor and the helpless, many of whom do not share the Catholic faith. They are an example to Christians everywhere to be eager to share the treasure of the Good News "in season and out of

season" (2 *Tim* 4 :2). They find strength in the wondrous power of the Holy Spirit who, despite the generally small numbers of the Church in Asia, ensures that the Church's presence is like the yeast which mixes with the flour in a quiet and hidden way till it is all leavened (cf. *Mt* 13 :33).

The peoples of Asia need Jesus Christ and his Gospel. Asia is thirsting for the living water that Jesus alone can give (cf. *Jn* 4 :10-15). The disciples of Christ in Asia must therefore be unstinting in their efforts to fulfil the mission they have received from the Lord, who has promised to be with them to the end of the age (cf. *Mt* 28 :20). Trusting in the Lord who will not fail those whom he has called, the Church in Asia joyfully makes her pilgrim way into the Third Millennium. Her only joy is that which comes from sharing with the multitude of Asia's peoples the immense gift which she herself has received – the love of Jesus the Saviour. Her one ambition is to continue his mission of service and love, so that all Asians "may have life and have it abundantly" (*Jn* 10 :10).

### ***Prayer to the Mother of Christ***

51. Faced with such a challenging mission, we turn to Mary, for whom, as the Synod Fathers said, Asian Christians have a great love and affection, revering her as their own Mother and

the Mother of Christ.<sup>240</sup> Throughout Asia there are hundreds of Marian sanctuaries and shrines where not only the Catholic faithful gather, but also believers of other religions too.

To Mary, model of all disciples and bright Star of Evangelization, I entrust the Church in Asia at the threshold of the Third Millennium of the Christian era, trusting absolutely that hers is an ear that always listens, hers a heart that always welcomes, and hers a prayer that never fails :

O Holy Mary, Daughter of the Most High God,  
Virgin Mother of the Saviour and Mother of us all,  
look tenderly upon the Church of your Son  
planted on Asian soil.

Be her guide and model  
as she continues your Son's mission  
of love and service in Asia.

You fully and freely accepted the Father's call  
to be the Mother of God ;  
teach us to empty our hearts  
of all that is not of God,  
that we too may be filled  
with the Holy Spirit from on high.  
You pondered the mysteries of God's will  
in the silence of your heart ;  
help us on our journey  
to discern the signs of God's powerful hand.  
You went quickly to visit Elizabeth  
and help in her days of waiting ;  
obtain for us the same spirit of zeal and service  
in our evangelizing task.

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<sup>240</sup> Cf. *Propositio* 59.

You sang the praises of the Lord ;  
lead us in joyful proclamation of faith  
in Christ our Saviour.

You had compassion on the needy  
and spoke to your Son on their behalf ;  
teach us never to fear  
to speak of the world to Jesus  
and of Jesus to the world.

You stood at the foot of the Cross  
as your Son breathed his last ;  
be with us as we seek to be one  
in spirit and service with all who suffer.  
You prayed with the disciples in the Upper Room ;  
help us to wait upon the Spirit  
and to go wherever he leads us.

Protect the Church from all the powers  
that threaten her.

Help her to be a true image  
of the Most Holy Trinity.

Pray that through the Church's love and service  
all the peoples of Asia may come  
to know your Son

Jesus Christ, the only Saviour of the world,  
and so taste the joy of life in all its fullness.

O Mary, Mother of the New Creation  
and Mother of Asia,

pray for us, your children, now and always !

*Given at New Delhi, in India, on the sixth day of  
November in the year 1999, the twenty-second of my  
Pontificate.*

JOHN PAUL II

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