

Asian Synod at the Vatican debates evangelization, debt renegotiation

by Liliana Celani

A call for renegotiation of the debts of developing nations, contained in the final message of May 13, in the section entitled "Appeal for Justice and Peace," concluded the Special Assembly of the Synod of Bishops for Asia, which took place in the Vatican on April 19-May 14, under the theme "Jesus Christ the Savior and His Mission of Love and Service in Asia: '... That They May Have Life, and Have It Abundantly' (John 10:10)." As after other such Synods (the most recent ones were on Africa and the United States), Pope John Paul II will visit the region, before the year 2000 (probably next year), to bring to Asia the Apostolic Exhortation he will be writing within the next few months, using the proposals made during the Synod. The Pope attended the afternoon sessions of the Synod, to "express the desire to make a papal visit to Asia to proclaim the results of the Special Assembly of the Synod of Bishops," Synod press bulletin No. 25 reported on May 12.

The month-long Asian Synod was inaugurated by the Pope with a solemn mass at St. Peter's Basilica, attended by 259 Synodal Fathers and collaborators (34 cardinals, 6 patriarchs, 49 archbishops, 78 bishops, and 92 priests) from Russia, the Middle East, and Asia (Bangladesh, China, India, Indonesia, Japan, Korea, Laos, Cambodia, Malaysia, Myanmar, Pakistan, the Philippines, Sri Lanka, Thailand, Vietnam, Siberia, Nepal, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, Syria, Lebanon, and Iraq).

Specific issues

In the first phase of the Synod, the Synodal Fathers from each country outlined the situation in their country. In the second phase, in the workshop sessions, specific issues were addressed, including evangelization, because, with the exception of the Philippines, where Catholics are the majority (83%), the Catholic Church is still a minority in all the countries that were represented; the culture of life, counterposed to the culture of death; and, the urgency to defeat poverty and encourage economic development. In the final phase, concrete proposals were formulated, and 59 were presented to the Pope, and voted on by the Assembly.

The proposals will remain secret until the Pope issues

his Apostolic Exhortation to Asia, but it is clear from the reports on the debate issued daily by the Holy See press office, and from discussions *EIR* had with a number of bishops and archbishops from the Philippines, Japan, Indonesia, and Korea, that the Asian Synodal Fathers called "on the particular churches of the First World to be in solidarity with the poor in Asia," and to intervene against the "negative effects of globalization" and for renegotiating the Third World debt. As Msgr. Arturo Bastes, Bishop of Romblon, the Philippines, put it in the course of the debate, "A concrete issue is the cancellation of the Third World's staggering external debt, a suggestion of the Holy Father himself in his [1994] letter, 'As the Third Millennium Draws Near.'"

During the inaugural mass at St. Peter's, the Pope announced that "the fruit of the Synodal work will ... be compiled in a book, which will be the post-Synodal document for all churches in Asia." He explained the reason for this Synod for Asia: "How can we ignore the fact that more than three-fifths of the world's inhabitants are Asian and that an important part of them are young people? ... At this time all the churches must be mobilized." Again, at the solemn closing of the Synod at St. Peter's on May 14, the Pope said, "How can we forget that Jesus was born at that unique crossroads of the world where Asia meets both Africa and Europe?"

All documents issued at the Synod, including the initial "*Instrumentum Laboris*" ("Work in Progress"), acknowledged the ancient culture of Asia, and the need to take it into consideration in the efforts to evangelize: "The new evangelization is called upon to consider not simply the content of the Gospel message, but those to whom it is directed. This was the conviction of great missionaries like Francis Xavier and Valignano in Japan, Ricci in China, De Nobili and Beschi in India." The initial document set the tone of the debate on the Asian crisis, questioning how injustices could be corrected. "One way," it said, "is to bring attention to the burden of foreign debts accumulated by some countries of Asia."

Some Synodal Fathers were even more specific during

the debate. For example, reporting at a press conference at the Holy See press office on May 8, Msgr. Martinus Situmorang, Bishop of Padang, Indonesia, "emphasized how the stock exchange collapse and Asian economic crisis hit Indonesia very hard," the Italian Catholic daily *Avvenire* reported on May 9.

At the final press conference on May 13, where the results of the Synod and its final message were announced, *EIR* asked about the proposals introduced by a number of Synodal Fathers (from Japan, the Philippines, Indonesia, and India) on the urgent need to reorganize the world financial institutions, such as the International Monetary Fund and World Bank, and for debt reorganization and cancellation on the occasion of the Jubilee, as John Paul II has proposed. Msgr. Orlando B. Quevedo, Archbishop of Nueva Segovia, the Philippines, confirmed that there is a "consensus among Synodal Fathers on the idea of globalization, its negative impact on Third World countries and the poor in those Third World countries," and quoted the final message calling for Third World debt reorganization (see accompanying interview and *Documentation*).

British journalists attending the press conference were less interested in the key issue of economic development, although it will be a fundamental one for the church in Asia in the coming months, but rather, asked whether the church would be more "aggressive" against the Asian governments, as in Indonesia or India. The obvious answer, from the bishops from India, Indonesia, and the Philippines who gave the press conference, was that the situation in these countries is already "overheated," and the role of the church is, rather, that of calming it down, and helping the poor.

Documentation

Church leaders speak out against globalization

The following are excerpts from statements to the Synod.

Pope John Paul II:

God is praised by the lands of Asia and the oceans surrounding them, the Himalayas with the highest peak in the world, and the immense rivers. God is praised by cities rich in millennial traditions, the centuries-old cultures of the continent with civilizations much more ancient than those of Europe. . . . How can we forget that Jesus was born at that unique crossroads of the world where Asia meets both Africa and Europe? He came into the world for all the continents, but for

Asia in a special way; and Asia could therefore claim a certain right to pride of place.

Msgr. Rev. Leonardo Z. Legaspi, OP, Archbishop of Caceres, the Philippines:

The group asks the Synod to call for a discernment in Asia of the phenomenon of globalization. It asks the Synod to call upon sister churches in the First World to join the churches in Asia to appeal to international bodies for justice and equity.

Msgr. Arturo M. Bastes, SVD, Bishop of Romblon, the Philippines:

As church, we Asians should denounce the evils coming from globalization, and we are appealing to our sister churches of the First World to join us in our crusade for justice and solidarity among nations. A concrete issue is the cancellation of the Third World's staggering external debt, a suggestion of the Holy Father himself in his letter, "As the Third Millennium Draws Near."

Msgr. Rev. Peter Remigius, Bishop of Kumbakonam, India:

Globalization erodes the culture and economic values of the poor countries; moneymakers and multinational companies destroy the values of family. As a pastoral response, the church should appeal that the debts of the Third

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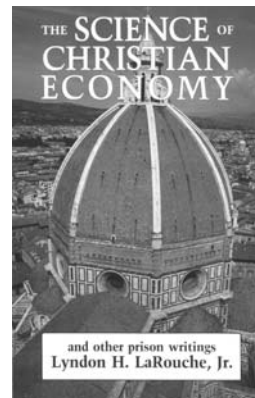
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World countries be cancelled or lightened in the Jubilee Year.

Cardinal Julius Riyadi Darmaatmadja, Indonesia:

We are not experiencing the invasion of a new culture resulting from the globalization of the world economy and the over-saturation of the mass media. We are engulfed by materialist, consumerist, and hedonist attitudes, fierce competitiveness, greed and selfishness in many fields. Many have become totally apathetic to the will of God. . . . Most dangerous of all is when people adopt attitudes of the “survival of the fittest” and *homo homini lupus* [man preying on man] as their guiding principle in the field of politics, religion, trade or work. . . . Protracted poverty does not permit a person to grow as one should in the image of God.

Final message, from the section “Appeal for Justice and Peace”:

We call on the particular churches of the First World to be in solidarity with the poor in Asia and to be their advocates with their own governments and with world economic institutions such as the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund, and the World Trade Organization, so as to bring about what Pope John Paul II called in this year’s World Day of Peace Message: “Globalization without marginalization. Globalization in solidarity.” We strongly recommend that during the Jubilee Year 2000, the Third World debt be renegotiated and its crushing burden alleviated.

Interview: Msgr. Orlando B. Quevedo

A New Bretton Woods is the only solution

Monsignor Quevedo, OMI, is the Archbishop of Nueva Segovia, the Philippines. He gave a press conference at the Holy See Press Office in Rome on May 13, to report on the results of the month-long Synod of Bishops from Asia at the Vatican. In response to a question from Liliana Celani of EIR, he described the “Appeal for Justice and Peace,” contained at the end of the Synod’s final message, which included the recommendation “that during the Jubilee Year 2000, the Third World debt be renegotiated and its crushing burden alleviated,” as Pope John Paul II had previously proposed. Monsignor Quevedo added that there was a “consensus of the Synodal fathers on the idea of globalization, its negative impact on Third World countries and the poor in those Third World

countries.” At the end of the press conference, Celani asked the Archbishop to comment on the proposals to reorganize the financial and economic system raised by a number of Asian bishops and cardinals during the workshop sessions, proposals that the Pope will eventually use to prepare his “Apostolic Exhortation on Asia.”

EIR: Could you add more about the discussion at the Synod on the negative effects of globalization on Asia, and particularly on the situation in your country, the Philippines?

Monsignor Quevedo: We have two groups among economists in the Philippines. The first group supports globalization, liberalization, deregulation. The other is a minority group of economists who think along the lines of Mr. LaRouche, one of whom attended your conference on a New Bretton Woods in Washington [on March 18], which was addressed by Mr. LaRouche. These are people who think of development with a human face, which means to say that the poor have to be looked at; they want an economics that, instead of “trickling down,” trickles up.

My own judgment is that globalization reverses the ethical order of reality and makes the human person subordinate to market forces, which we cannot control. So, it’s a sort of tyranny of the market forces over peoples. Not even governments seem to be able to control them.

EIR: As a matter of fact, U.S. Federal Reserve Chairman Alan Greenspan just admitted this.

Monsignor Quevedo: But unfortunately, this is the thinking of a minority, and it is unfortunately identified with the left, the Marxist left. And that is the problem.

EIR: Do you not have this economic thinking in the Church? Do you not have economists who follow the social doctrine of the Church in your country?

Monsignor Quevedo: I do not think so. We have the idea that the social teachings of the Church generally say that market forces must be controlled.

EIR: From what I have heard, there were a number of concrete proposals to change the policies of the International Monetary Fund at the Synod. I know these proposals are secret until the Pope issues his Apostolic Exhortation, but can you say a bit more about them?

Monsignor Quevedo: There is a general appeal that ethical norms and juridical norms must be pressed upon governments and monetary institutions, and that solidarity among churches will be necessary for this, so that governments and monetary institutions in the First World will see that happen.

EIR: Do you also think that a New Bretton Woods system, as it was proposed by Mr. LaRouche, is the only solution?

Monsignor Quevedo: I think it is the logical conclusion in the economic sphere. The old Bretton Woods is devastated.