

POST-SYNODAL
APOSTOLIC EXHORTATION

Ecclesia in Oceania

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OF HIS HOLINESS
POPE JOHN PAUL II
TO THE BISHOPS
PRIESTS AND DEACONS
MEN AND WOMEN
IN THE CONSECRATED LIFE
AND ALL THE LAY FAITHFUL

About this edition

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Introduction

1. The Church in Oceania gives glory to God at the dawn of the Third Millennium and proclaims her hope to the world. Her gratitude to God rises from her contemplation of the many gifts she has received, including the wealth of peoples and cultures and the wonders of creation. But above all there is the immense gift of faith in Jesus Christ, “the firstborn of all creation” (*Col* 1:15). In the past millennium the Church in Oceania has welcomed and treasured this gift of faith, and has passed it on faithfully to newer generations. For this, the whole Church gives praise to the Most Holy Trinity.

From the earliest times, the peoples of Oceania were moved by the divine presence in the riches of nature and culture. But it was not until foreign missionaries came in the latter half of the second millennium that these original inhabitants first heard of Jesus Christ, the Word made flesh. Those who migrated from Europe and other parts of the world brought with them their faith. For all, the Gospel of Jesus Christ, received in faith and lived in the *communio* of the Church, brought fulfilment of the deepest longings of the heart, beyond any human expectation. The Church in Oceania is strong in hope, for she has experienced God’s infinite goodness in Christ. To this day, the treasure of Christian faith is undiminished in its dynamism and promise, for the Spirit of God is always new and surprising. The Church throughout the world shares the hope of the peoples in Oceania

that the future will bring new and even more wonderful gifts of grace to the lands of the Great Ocean.

2. A very particular moment in which the Church in Oceania could speak of her gratitude and hope was the Special Assembly of the Synod of Bishops for Oceania, which was held from 22 November - 12 December 1998. In my Apostolic Letter *Tertio Millennio Adveniente* I had proposed the usefulness of such an Assembly, as one in a series of continental Assemblies intended to prepare the Church for the new millennium.¹ The Bishops of Oceania were joined by Bishops from other continents and heads of dicasteries of the Roman Curia. Other members of the Church were among the participants, including priests, lay people and consecrated religious, as well as fraternal delegates from other Churches and Ecclesial Communities. The Assembly analyzed and discussed the present situation of the Church in Oceania in order to plan more effectively for the future. It also focused the attention of the universal Church on the hopes and challenges, the needs and opportunities, the sorrows and joys of the vast human tapestry which is Oceania.

The meeting in Rome of many Bishops, gathered with and around the Successor of Peter, was a wonderful occasion to celebrate the gifts of grace, which have yielded so abundant a harvest among the peoples of Oceania. Faith in Jesus Christ was the foundation and the focus of the participants in their prayer and discussions. The Bishops and all who were with them were animated by the one faith in Christ. All were inspired and strengthened by the ecclesial *communio* which bound them together and was expressed through the days of the Synod

¹No. 38.

Assembly in a most powerful and moving way as a true unity in diversity.

As Jesus walked by the sea of Galilee, he saw two brothers, Simon who is called Peter and Andrew his brother, casting a net into the sea; for they were fishermen. And he said to them, 'Follow me and I will make you fishers of men'. Immediately they left their nets and followed him

— *Mt* 4:18–20

Chapter 1: Jesus Christ and the Peoples of Oceania

The person of Jesus

The Call

3. During the Synod Assembly, the universal Church came to see more clearly how the Lord Jesus is encountering the many peoples of Oceania in their lands and on their many islands. For it is the Lord himself who looks upon the people with a love which presents itself as both a challenge and a call. Like Simon Peter and his brother Andrew, they are invited to leave all, to turn to him who is the Lord of life, and follow him. They are to leave not only sinful ways, but also sterile ways of a certain manner of thinking and acting, in order to take the path of an ever deeper faith and follow the Lord with ever greater fidelity.

The Lord has called the Church in Oceania to himself: as always the call involves a sending forth on mission. The purpose of being *with* Jesus is to go forth *from* Jesus, in his power and with his grace. Christ is now calling the Church to share in his mission with new energy and creativity. The Synod saw this clearly in the life of the Church in Oceania.

The Bishops rejoiced to see that in Oceania the Lord Jesus has shown himself true to his promise: “I am with you always, to the end of the age” (*Mt 28:20*). The assurance of his presence gives the strength and courage needed for disciples to become “fishers of men”. During the Special Assembly, the Lord’s presence was experienced in prayer, in the sharing of hopes and concerns, and in the bond of ecclesial *communio*. Faith in Jesus’ presence among his people in Oceania will always make possible new and wonderful encounters with him, and these new encounters will become the seeds of new mission.

When we walk with the Lord, we leave with him all our burdens, and this confers the strength to accomplish the mission he gives us. He who takes from us gives to us; he takes upon himself our weakness and gives us his strength. This is the great mystery of the life of the disciple and apostle. It is certain that Christ works with us and within us as we “put out into deeper waters”, as now we must. When times are difficult and unpromising, the Lord himself urges us “to cast our nets once more” (*Lk 5:1-11*).² We must not disobey.

Presenting Jesus Christ

4. The central concern of the Synod Assembly was to find appropriate ways of presenting to the peoples of Oceania today Jesus Christ as Lord and Saviour. But what is this new way to present him, so that many more will meet him and believe in him? The interventions of the Synod Fathers reflected the challenges and difficulties, but also the hopes and possibilities evoked by this question.

²Cf. Special Assembly For Oceania of the Synod of Bishops, *Relatio post disceptationem*, 3.

In the course of history, thanks to the Church's extraordinary missionary and pastoral efforts, the peoples of Oceania have met Jesus Christ who does not cease to call them to faith and give them new life. In colonial times, Catholic clergy and religious quickly established institutions to help the new settlers in Australia and New Zealand to preserve and strengthen their faith. Missionaries brought the Gospel to the original inhabitants of Oceania, inviting them to believe in Christ and find their true home in his Church. The people responded in great numbers to the call, became Christ's followers and began to live according to his word. The Synod left no doubt that the Church, the *communio* of believers, is now a vibrant reality among many peoples in Oceania. Today Jesus is again turning his loving attention to them, calling them to a still deeper faith and a still richer life in him. Therefore, the Bishops could not fail to ask: How can the Church be an effective instrument of Jesus Christ who now wants to meet the peoples of Oceania in new ways?

Jesus Christ: Shepherd, Prophet and Priest

5. In his infinite love for the world, God gave his only Son to be God-with-us. Emptying himself to become like us, Jesus was born of the Virgin Mary in simplicity and poverty. As the one who is totally empty and poor on the Cross, Jesus is the beloved Son of God, the Saviour of the world in all its emptiness and poverty.³ When Christ dwelt among us, he proclaimed the Good News that God's Kingdom has come, a Kingdom of peace, justice and truth. Many people, particularly from among the poor, the needy and the outcast, followed him, but for the most part the powerful of the world turned against him. They condemned him

³Cf. *ibid.*, 4.

and nailed him to the Cross. This shameful death, accepted by the Father as a sacrifice of love for the world's sake, gave way to a glorious Resurrection by the power of the Father's love. Jesus was thus established as King of the universe, Prophet for all people, and High Priest of the eternal sanctuary. He is Prophet, Priest and King not only for those who follow him but for all the peoples of the earth. The Father offers him as the Way, the Truth and the Life to all men and women, to all families and communities, to all nations and to all generations.

As the Son of David, Jesus is not only King but also the Good Shepherd of those who hear his voice. He knows and loves those who follow him.⁴ He is the chief Shepherd of our souls, and the Pastor of all peoples. He guides the Church by the power of the Holy Spirit who dwells fully in him and whom he breathes into his disciples (cf. *Jn* 20:22). The Spirit leads by a force of love, from deep within, touching the hearts and minds of the peoples of Oceania and setting them free to live the abundant life for which they were created.

As the Word of God, Jesus is the universal Prophet, the total revelation of God.⁵ He is the Truth, inviting people to believe in him and share his life. His Spirit leads the baptized on a daily journey into new depths of that truth. Moved by the Holy Spirit, the Synod Fathers discussed many concerns arising from their pastoral experience and their love of God's people. Not all answers could be found in the days of the Synod, for many issues call for more reflection, experience and prayer. However, in their search for enlightenment the Bishops fully shared and professed

⁴Cf. *ibid.*, 1; 5.

⁵Cf. *ibid.*, 19.

the conviction that the truth of salvation can be found only in Jesus Christ, and that his Spirit provides solace and guidance to those who come to him with their problems and burdens.

The Crucified and Risen Lord is the High Priest who offers himself to the Father as an eternal sacrifice for the life of the world. He gave his life for all and continues to fill his followers with his life, most especially through the Sacraments. In his prayer, the prayers of all believers rise to the Father. Through the Holy Spirit, he enables them to live a life of intimate union with God and of more generous charity to their brothers and sisters, particularly the poor and needy. The Synod discussions stressed that, in presenting Jesus, the Church must show his compassionate love to a world in need of healing. All the baptized are called to be God's priestly people in the image of Jesus, the High Priest; and as a priestly people, they are commissioned to reach out in mercy to all, particularly the most deprived, the most distant, the lost. In reaching out and offering life in the name of Jesus, the Church in Oceania today will be a sacrament of divine justice and peace.⁶

The peoples of Oceania

Place and Time

6. The Synod gave recognition not only to a unique area spanning almost one-third of the earth's surface, but also to a large number of indigenous peoples, whose joyful acceptance of the Gospel of Jesus Christ is evident in their enthusiastic

⁶Cf. *ibid.*, 39.

celebration of the message of salvation.⁷ These peoples form a unique part of humanity in a unique region of the world. Geographically, Oceania comprises the continent of Australia, many islands, big and small, and vast expanses of water. The sea and the land, the water and the earth meet in endless ways, often striking the human eye with great splendour and beauty. Although Oceania is geographically very large, its population is relatively small and unevenly distributed, though it comprises a large number of indigenous and migrant peoples. For many of them, land is most important: its fertile soil or its deserts, its variety of plants and animals, its abundance or scarcity. Others, though living on the land, are more dependent on the rivers and the sea. The water allows them to travel from island to island, from shore to shore. The great variety of languages - 700 in Papua New Guinea alone - together with the vast distances between islands and areas make communication across the region a particular challenge. In many parts of Oceania, travelling by sea and air is more important than travelling by land. Communication can still be slow and difficult as in earlier times, though nowadays in many areas information is transmitted instantly thanks to new electronic technology.⁸

The largest country of Oceania in both size and population is Australia, where the Aboriginal people have lived for thousands of years, moving over large tracts of land and living in deep harmony with nature. Discovered and colonized by European people who named it the Southern Land of the Holy Spirit (*Terra Australis de Spiritu Sancto*), Australia has become very Western in its cultural patterns and social structure. Deeply involved in the

⁷Cf. *Propositio* 1.

⁸Cf. *ibid.*

scientific, technological, and social developments of the Western world, Australia is now a largely urban, modern and secularized nation, in which successive immigrations from Europe and Asia have contributed to make it a multicultural society. The Australians are therefore “an original people, the result of the meeting of people of very different nations, languages and civilizations”.⁹

The Christian faith was brought by immigrants who came from Europe. Many priests and religious joined them, and their pastoral dedication and educational work helped the immigrants to live the Christian life in a strange new land. Local priestly and religious vocations and many lay people made their own indispensable contribution in Australia to the growth of the Church and the accomplishment of her mission. Among them was a remarkable woman religious, Blessed Mary MacKillop, who died in 1909 and whom it was my joy to beatify in 1995. On that occasion I recalled that “by declaring her ‘Blessed’ the Church was saying that the holiness demanded by the Gospel is as Australian as she was Australian”.¹⁰ The relationship of the Church to the Aboriginal peoples and the Torres Strait Islanders remains important and difficult because of past and present injustices and cultural differences. Besides this challenge, the Church in Australia now faces many modern “deserts”¹¹ similar to those in other Western countries.

⁹Paul VI, Homily at Randwick Racecourse for the 200th Anniversary of Cook’s Arrival in Australia, Sydney (1 December), 1: AAS 63 (1971), 62.

¹⁰Homily at the Beatification of Mary MacKillop, Sydney (19 January 1995), 2: AAS 87 (1995), 1003.

¹¹*Ibid.*, 5: *loc. cit.*, 1004.

The original inhabitants of New Zealand, an island nation, were the Maori people who called their country *Aotearoa*, “Land of the Great White Cloud”. Colonization and later immigration have shaped the nation into a bi-cultural society, where integration of Maori and Western culture remains a pressing challenge. Foreign missionaries first proclaimed the Gospel to the Maori people. Then when the European settlers came in greater numbers, priests and religious came as well and helped to maintain and develop the Church. Modern developments have made New Zealand a more urban and secularized society, in which the Church faces challenges similar to those in Australia. Though there is among Catholic people an “increased awareness of belonging to the Church”, it is also true that in general “the sense of God and of his loving providence has diminished”. Such “a secularized society needs to be confronted again by the entire Gospel of salvation in Jesus Christ”.¹²

Papua New Guinea is the largest of the Melanesian nations. It is a predominantly Christian society with many different local languages and a great wealth of cultures. Like other smaller Melanesian island nations it has gained political independence in quite recent times, and its history since then has been shaped by struggles for stable democracy, social justice and the balanced and integral development of its people. These struggles in Papua New Guinea and other parts of Melanesia have recently been marked by violence and separatist movements, in which people and institutions have suffered greatly. Church leaders and many Christians have done a great deal to bring peace and

¹²John Paul II, Address to the Bishops of New Zealand, Wellington (23 November 1986), 4–5: *AAS* 79 (1987), 936–937.

reconciliation, and this must clearly continue in a situation which remains very volatile.

The island nations of Polynesia and Micronesia are relatively small, each with its own indigenous language and culture. They too are facing the pressures and challenges of a contemporary world which exerts a powerful influence upon their society. Without losing their identity or abandoning their traditional values, they want to share in the development resulting from more direct and complex interaction with other peoples and cultures. That is proving to be a delicate balance in these small and vulnerable societies, some of which are facing a very uncertain future, not only because of large-scale emigration but also because of rising sea levels caused by global warming. For them, climate change is very much more than a question of economics.

Mission and Culture

7. As early as the sixteenth century, when foreign missionaries first reached Oceania, island peoples heard and accepted the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Among those who began and carried on the missionary work were saints and martyrs; and they are not only the greatest glory of the Church's past in Oceania but also its surest source of hope for the future. Outstanding among these witnesses of faith are Saint Peter Chanel, martyred in 1841 on the island of Futuna, Blessed Diego Luis de San Vitores and Blessed Pedro Calungsod, killed together in 1672 on Guam, Blessed Giovanni Mazzuconi martyred in 1851 on Woodlark Island; and Blessed Peter To Rot, killed on New Britain in 1945, towards the end of the Second World War. With many others, these heroes of the Christian faith contributed, each in his own unique way, to

the implantation of the Church on the islands of Oceania. May their memory never be forgotten! May they never cease to intercede for the beloved peoples for whom they shed their blood!

When the missionaries first brought the Gospel to Aboriginal or Maori people, or to the island nations, they found peoples who already possessed an ancient and profound sense of the sacred. Religious practices and rituals were very much part of their daily lives and thoroughly permeated their cultures. The missionaries brought the truth of the Gospel which is foreign to no one; but at times some sought to impose elements which were culturally alien to the people. There is a need now for careful discernment to see what is of the Gospel and what is not, what is essential and what is less so. Such a task, it must be said, is made more difficult because of the process of colonization and modernization, which has blurred the line between the indigenous and the imported.

The traditional peoples of Oceania make up a mosaic of many different cultures: Aboriginal, Melanesian, Polynesian and Micronesian. Since the time of colonization, Western culture has also shaped the region. In recent years Asian cultures too have been part of the cultural scene, particularly in Australia. Each cultural group, different in size and strength, has its own traditions and its own experience of integration in a new land. They range from societies with strong traditional and communal features, to those which are mainly Western and modern in stamp. In New Zealand, and even more in Australia, the colonial and post-colonial policies of immigration have made the indigenous people a minority in their own land and, in many ways, a dispossessed cultural group.

One of the most notable features of the peoples of Oceania is their powerful sense of community and solidarity in family and tribe, village or neighbourhood. This means that decisions are reached by consensus achieved through an often long and complex process of dialogue. Touched by the grace of God, the peoples' natural sense of community made them receptive to the mystery of *communio* offered in Christ. The Church in Oceania demonstrates a real spirit of cooperation, extending to the various Christian communities and to all people of good will. Deep respect for tradition and authority is also part of the traditional cultures of Oceania. Hence the present generation's sense of solidarity with those who went before them, and the exceptional authority accorded to parents and traditional leaders.

The cultural variety of Oceania is not immune from the worldwide process of modernization which has effects both positive and negative. Certainly modern times have given a new and higher profile to positive human values, such as respect for the inalienable rights of the person, the introduction of democratic procedures in administration and government, the refusal to accept structural poverty as an unchangeable condition, the rejection of terrorism, torture and violence as means of political change, the right to education, health care and housing for all. These values, often rooted in Christianity - even if not explicitly - are exerting a positive influence in Oceania; and the Church cannot but do all in her power to encourage this process.

Yet modernization also has its negative effects in the region, with traditional societies struggling to maintain their identity as they come in contact with secularized and urbanized Western societies and with the growing cultural influence of Asian

immigrants. The Bishops spoke, for example, of a gradual lessening of the natural religious sense which has led to disorientation in people's moral life and conscience. A large part of Oceania, particularly Australia and New Zealand, has entered upon an era marked by increasing secularization. In civic life, religion, and especially Christianity, is moved to the margin and tends to be regarded as a strictly private matter for the individual with little relevance to public life. Religious convictions and the insights of faith are at times denied their due role in forming people's consciences. Likewise, the Church and other religious bodies have a diminished voice in public affairs. In today's world, more advanced technology, greater knowledge of human nature and behaviour, and worldwide political and economic developments pose new and difficult questions for the peoples of Oceania. In presenting Jesus Christ as the Way, the Truth and the Life, the Church must respond in new and effective ways to these moral and social questions without ever allowing her voice to be silenced or her witness to be marginalized.

The special Synod Assembly

The Theme

8. As a result of the suggestions of the Pre-Synod Council, which sought to register the concerns of the Bishops of Oceania, the theme chosen for the Special Assembly for Oceania was: *Jesus Christ and the Peoples of Oceania, Walking His Way, Telling His Truth, Living His Life*. The theme is inspired by the words of John's Gospel where Jesus refers to himself as the Way, the Truth and the Life (14:6), and it recalls the invitation which he extends

to all the peoples of Oceania: they are invited to meet him, to believe in him, and to proclaim him as the Lord of all. It also reminds the Church in Oceania that she gathers together as the People of God journeying on pilgrimage to the Father. Through the Holy Spirit, the Father calls believers - individually and in community - to walk the way that Jesus walked, to tell all nations the truth that Jesus revealed, to live fully the life that Jesus lived and continues to share with us now.

The theme is particularly appropriate for the Church in Oceania today, for the peoples of the Pacific are struggling for unity and identity; among them there is a concern for peace, justice and the integrity of creation; and many people are searching for life's meaning. Only in accepting Jesus Christ as the Way will the peoples of Oceania find that for which they are now searching and struggling. The way of Christ cannot be walked without an ardent sense of mission; and the core of the Church's mission is to proclaim Jesus Christ as the living Truth - a truth revealed, a truth explained, understood and welcomed in faith, a truth passed on to new generations. The truth of Jesus is always greater than ourselves, greater than our heart, because it flows from the depths of the Blessed Trinity; and it is a truth which demands that the Church respond to the problems and challenges of today. In the light of the Gospel, we discover Jesus as the Life. The life of Christ is offered also as a healing grace that makes it possible for humanity to be what the Creator intended it to be. Living the life of Jesus Christ implies a deep respect for all life. It also implies a living spirituality and authentic morality, strengthened by the word of God in Scripture and celebrated in the Sacraments of the Church. When Christians live the life of Christ with deeper faith, their hope grows stronger

and their charity more radiant. That was the goal of the Synod, and it is the goal of the new evangelization to which the Spirit is summoning the whole Church.

The Experience

9. It was fitting that the Synod Assembly began on the Solemnity of Christ the King when the Church celebrates Jesus as the Lord in whom God's Kingdom is established throughout the world and in all of history. During the time of the Assembly, it became increasingly clear that it was Christ who was leading the way, that it was he who reigned in the midst of the Assembly. The opening and closing liturgies incorporated signs and symbols drawn from Pacific island cultures as expressions of faith and reverence. In a unique blend, these ceremonies expressed the unity of faith in diversity of Catholic worship; and they showed quite strikingly how the Catholic faith reaches to the farthest shores of the Great Ocean and that all find their home in the Catholic Church. As a symbolic exchange of gifts, the liturgies expressed the deep *communio* between the Church of Rome and the local Churches of Oceania. The Bishops brought to the Vatican their rich array of experiences and cultural treasures, and they were in turn strengthened in the bond of local and universal *communio*, which was for them a great refreshment and encouragement for the future.

The distinctive features of the Church in Oceania made it important to convoke a separate Synod Assembly. The Bishops of Oceania are organized in four Conferences which come together as the Federation of Catholic Bishops' Conferences of Oceania (F.C.B.C.O.). The total number of Bishops is relatively small, which allowed the Synod to bring together all the active Bishops,

representing all the particular Churches. For many participants it was a real discovery of the religious gifts, the cultures and the histories of the peoples of Oceania. They became more aware of the often hidden or unrecognized graces that the Lord has bestowed on his Church, and this too was a source of great encouragement. The dialogue and discernment of the Synod opened the eyes of heart and soul to discover what can be done to live the Christian faith more fully and effectively. There were many reasons to praise and thank God for treasures discovered or valued anew.

For the Bishops, the Assembly was an experience of brotherhood and *communio* around the See of Peter. Taking place in the Vatican, it enabled all the participants “to feel at home” with the Bishop of Rome. It also allowed the Bishop of Rome “to feel at home” with them and to hear how much they appreciated this unique experience of the universality of the Church. The sense of unity and fidelity overcame the great distances of geography and culture between Rome and Oceania. This experience was one of the many gifts that Christ in his goodness bestowed during the Synod.

Among themselves too the Bishops experienced a new and stronger sense of identity and *communio*. Many of them are often separated by great distances, and regular communication is not easy. For the Church as a whole, the diversity of cultures in Oceania is a constant challenge to work for greater unity. The Bishops want to strengthen their *communio* and help the peoples of Oceania to work together more effectively. The local Churches in this region of the world are a unique part in the universal Church. As such, they realize that they can and must contribute their special gifts to the wider Church. I pray that, through the

Synod, the Bishops of Oceania will feel more than ever that they belong together and that, with their local Churches, they belong fully to the universal Church, to which they bring a special enrichment.¹³

It was significant that the Synod Assembly took place in the time of immediate preparation for the Great Jubilee of the Year 2000. The Bull announcing the Jubilee, *Incarnationis Mysteriorum*, was promulgated during the time of the Synod, and the Assembly itself was an opportunity for the Church in Oceania to prepare for the gift of the Holy Year. Certainly the Assembly helped the Churches of the Pacific to celebrate the Jubilee with fresh attempts to bring reconciliation and peace, more conscious than ever that “the Church, having received from Christ the power to forgive in his name, is in the world the living presence of the love of God who turns to all human weakness to welcome it with the embrace of his mercy”.¹⁴ It would be a wonderful fruit of the Jubilee if the Church in Oceania, strengthened in so many ways by the experience of the Synod, could continue to implement the Jubilee’s insights and appeals along the lines suggested in the Apostolic Letter *Novo Millennio Ineunte*. As the Jubilee proclaimed the infinite depths of God’s mercy revealed in Christ, so it stirred new energies for the task of meeting the challenges which the Synod identified and discussed.¹⁵ “In his forgiving love a new heaven and a new earth are anticipated”:¹⁶ may the vision of the new heaven and the new earth never cease

¹³Cf. Special Assembly For Oceania of the Synod of Bishops, *Relatio post disceptationem*, 2.

¹⁴John Paul II, Bull of Indiction of the Great Jubilee *Incarnationis Mysteriorum* (29 November 1998), 9: AAS 91 (1999), 137.

¹⁵Cf. *Propositio* 15.

¹⁶John Paul II, Bull of Indiction *Incarnationis Mysteriorum* (29 November 1998), 11: AAS 91 (1999), 141.

to draw the peoples of Oceania more deeply into this newness of life!

Going on further Jesus saw two other brothers, James the son of Zebedee and John his brother, in the boat with Zebedee their father, mending their nets, and he called them. Immediately they left the boat and their father, and followed him

— *Mt 4:21–22*

Chapter 2: Walking the Way of Jesus Christ in Oceania

The Church as communio

Mystery and Gift

10. When Jesus walked the shores of the sea of Galilee he called people to take the road of discipleship. He invited them to walk his way, to follow as it were in his footsteps. “Prompted by the Holy Spirit, the Church must walk the same road which Christ walked, and the Church means all of us, joined together like a body receiving its life-giving influence from the Lord Jesus”.¹⁷ The way of Jesus is always the path of mission; and he is now inviting his followers to proclaim the Gospel anew to the peoples of Oceania, so that culture and Gospel proclamation will meet in a mutually enriching way and the Good News will be heard, believed and lived more deeply. This mission is rooted in the mystery of communion.

The Second Vatican Council chose the notion of *communio* as particularly apt to express the profound mystery of the Church;¹⁸

¹⁷Paul VI, Homily for the First Episcopal Ordination of a Priest from Papua New Guinea, Saint Mary’s Cathedral, Sydney (3 December 1970): AAS 63 (1971), 71.

¹⁸Cf. Dogmatic Constitution on the Church *Lumen Gentium*, 4; 8; 13–15; 21; 24–25.

and the Extraordinary Synod Assembly of 1985 has made us more conscious of *communio* as the very heart of the Church. So too the Synod Fathers declared that “the Church is essentially a mystery of communion, a people made one with the unity of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. This sharing of the life of the Blessed Trinity is the source and inspiration of all Christian relationships and every form of Christian community”.¹⁹ This understanding was the spiritual and doctrinal background of all the Synod’s deliberations. It is “complemented and illustrated in the understanding of the Church as the People of God and the community of disciples. Church as communion recognises the basic equality of all Christ’s faithful, lay, religious and ordained. The communion is shaped and enlivened by the Holy Spirit’s gifts of offices and charisms”.²⁰

The *communio* of the Church is a gift of the Blessed Trinity, whose deep inner life is most marvellously shared with humanity. *Communio* is the fruit of God’s loving initiative, fulfilled in the Paschal Mystery of Christ by which the Church shares in the divine *communio* of love between the Father and the Son in the Holy Spirit. “God’s love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us” (*Rom* 5:5). On the day of Pentecost, Christ’s Passover was brought to completion by the outpouring of the Spirit, which gave us the first fruits of our inheritance, a share in the life of the Triune God, which enables us to love “as God loved us” (*1 Jn* 4:11).

¹⁹ *Propositio* 44.

²⁰ *Ibid.*

The Church Particular and Universal

11. During the Synod Assembly, the Bishops took up in a particular way the notion of the Church as *communio*. They emphasized the aspects of belonging and interpersonal relationship found in the understanding of the Church as the People of God. Ecclesial *communio* is expressed and lived in a special way by the local Church gathered around the Bishop, with whom the people are co-workers in the mission.²¹ As Pastor, each Bishop seeks to promote this *communio* through his ministry, which is a sharing in the pastoral, prophetic and priestly office of Christ. The sign and effect of this *communio* is described in the Acts of the Apostles: “The whole group of those who believed were of one heart and one soul” (4:32). The Synod Fathers saw one very practical expression of this spirit in the preparation of a diocesan pastoral plan in conjunction with the faithful and their organizations. This will ensure that the plan flows from the spirituality of *communio* promoted by the Second Vatican Council.²²

The *communio* among the local Churches is based upon unity of faith, Baptism and Eucharist, but also upon the unity of the episcopate. The *communio* of the Church comprises all the local Churches through their Bishops, united with the Bishop of Rome as visible head of the Church. “The College of Bishops united under the Successor of Peter gives an authoritative expression to the *communio* of the Church”.²³ This unity of the episcopate is perpetuated down the centuries through apostolic succession; in

²¹Cf. *Propositio* 44.

²²Cf. *Propositio* 10.

²³*Propositio* 44.

every age it is the ground of the identity of the Church, established by Christ on Peter and the college of the Apostles. The Successor of Peter is indeed “the enduring principle of unity and the visible foundation” of the Church.²⁴ The Lord himself commissioned Peter and his Successors to confirm their brethren in faith (*Lk* 22:32) and to feed the flock of Christ (*Jn* 21:15-17). “There exists between the Bishops a bond which expresses in a personal and collegial way the communion - the *koinonia* - that characterizes the entire life of the Church. Together in the College of Bishops they share the ministry of fostering the unity of God’s people in faith and charity”.²⁵ The Synod expressed the hope that the relationship between the particular Churches and the universal Church, especially the Holy See, reflect and build up *communio*, and that these relationships develop with due regard to the Petrine ministry of unity and due respect for the local Churches.²⁶ The local Churches in Oceania recognize that they share in the *communio* of the universal Church, and they see this as a cause for rejoicing. Despite the vastly diverse cultures and great distances in Oceania, the local Bishops realize that they are united with one another and with the Bishop of Rome, and they see this too as a great gift. “Between the Successor of Peter and the successors of the other Apostles there is indeed that profound spiritual and pastoral bond; it is our *effective and affective collegiality*. May we always find ways to support one another in our united efforts to build up the church and to live

²⁴First Vatican Ecumenical Council, Dogmatic Constitution on the Church of Christ *Pastor Aeternus*, Prologue: DS 3051.

²⁵John Paul II, Address to the Bishops of Australia, Sydney (26 November 1986), 1–2: AAS 79 (1987), 954–955.

²⁶Cf. *Propositio* 44.

out this communion in service and faith”.²⁷ As brothers in the College of Bishops, the Synod Fathers were unequivocal in expressing their desire to strengthen their union with the Bishop of Rome;²⁸ and the Bishop of Rome was himself moved and encouraged by their desire.

Mutual Enrichment

12. A sign and instrument of collegiality and communion among the Bishops is the Bishops’ Conference, a “holy union of energies in the service of the common good of the Churches”,²⁹ which contributes in many ways to the concrete realization of the spirit of collegiality. There are many areas in which the Bishops’ Conferences have established fruitful relationships. The exchange of gifts is characteristic of many parts of Oceania and can serve as a model of positive relations between the Bishops of Oceania and with others. This model encourages an exchange of spiritual gifts which fosters relations of mutual love, respect and trust. These are the basis for open dialogue, participation and consultation as practical expressions of the *communio* that marks the Church.

The Eastern Catholic Churches have arrived in Oceania in comparatively recent times, and they have established themselves as a rich expression of Catholicity in various parts of Oceania, particularly Australia. They bear significant witness to the diversity and unity of the Universal Church with their unique

²⁷ John Paul II, Address to the Bishops’ Conference of the Pacific (C.E.PAC), Suva (21 November 1986), 6: AAS 79 (1987), 934.

²⁸ Cf. *Propositio* 45.

²⁹ Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Decree on the Pastoral Office of Bishops in the Church *Christus Dominus*, 37.

history and traditions.³⁰ At the Synod, it was clear that the Eastern Catholic Churches are conscious of the generosity of the Latin Catholic Church in Oceania. Over the years, often in difficult circumstances, Bishops, priests and parishes have offered the hospitality of their Churches and schools, and the bonds of friendship and cooperation continue at all levels. Yet these Churches are vulnerable because of the relatively small number of their faithful and the great distance separating them from their Mother Churches, and their people can feel pressured or tempted to assimilate themselves into the predominant Latin Church. Yet the Synod also made it clear that the Latin Bishops of Oceania are eager to appreciate, understand and promote the traditions, liturgy, discipline and theology of the Eastern Catholic Churches. Therefore, increased awareness and understanding of the riches of the Eastern Catholic Churches is important among Latin Catholics.

The challenge for the Church in Oceania is to come to a deeper understanding of local and universal *communio* and a more effective implementation of its practical implications. My Predecessor Pope Paul VI summed up the challenge in these terms: “The first communion, the first unity, is that of faith. Unity in faith is necessary and fundamental. The second aspect of Catholic communion is that of charity. We must practise in its ecclesial aspects a more consistent and active charity”.³¹ The peoples of Oceania have an instinctively strong sense of community, but unity in faith is required if reconciliation and love are to replace conflict and hatred. In the more Westernized cultures of the region, social institutions are under strain and

³⁰Cf. *Propositio* 12.

³¹Address to the Bishops of Oceania, Sydney (1 December 1970): AAS 63 (1971), 55–57.

people are hungry for a life more worthy of man. Where individualism threatens to erode the fabric of human society, the Church offers herself as a healing sacrament, a fountain of *communio* responding to the deepest hungers of the heart. Such a gift is clearly needed now among the peoples of Oceania.

Communion and mission

The Call to Mission

13. The Church in Oceania received the Gospel from previous generations of Christians and from missionaries coming from overseas. The Synod paid tribute to the many missionaries - clergy, women and men religious as well as lay people - who have spent themselves in carrying the Gospel to Oceania;³² their sacrifices have, by God's grace, borne much fruit. As the peoples of Oceania came to accept the fullness of redemption in Christ, they found a striking symbol in the night skies, where the Southern Cross stands as a luminous sign of God's overarching grace and blessing.³³ The present generation of Christians is called and sent now to accomplish a new evangelization among the peoples of Oceania, a fresh proclamation of the enduring truth evoked by the symbol of the Southern Cross. This call to mission poses great challenges, but it also opens new horizons, full of hope and even a sense of adventure.

The call to mission is addressed to every member of the Church. "The whole Church is missionary, for her missionary

³²Cf. *Propositio* 1.

³³Cf. *ibid.*

activity...is an essential part of her vocation".³⁴ Some members of the Church are sent to people who have not heard of Jesus Christ, and their mission remains as vital as ever. But many more are sent to the world closer to home, and the Synod Fathers were keen to stress the mission of the lay members of the Church. In the family, in the workplace, in the schools, in community activities, all Christians can help to bring the Good News to the world in which they live.

A Christian community is never meant to be just a comfortable place for its members. The Synod Fathers wanted to encourage the local communities to look beyond their own immediate concerns and reach out to others. The parish as a community cannot insulate itself from the realities of the world around it. The Christian community must be attentive to issues of social justice and spiritual hunger in society. What Jesus offers to his followers must be shared with all the peoples of Oceania, whatever their situation. For in him alone is the fullness of life.

Challenges

14. The Synod Fathers wanted Jesus Christ to be heard and understood by the people entrusted to their care, and by many more. They saw the need to reach out to those who live with unfulfilled hopes and desires, to those who are Christians in name only, and to those who have drifted away from the Church, perhaps because of painful experiences. Every effort should be made to heal such wounds, and to return the lost sheep to the fold.

³⁴Paul VI, Homily for the First Episcopal Ordination of a Priest from Papua New Guinea, Saint Mary's Cathedral, Sydney (3 December 1970): AAS 63 (1971), 72; see also John Paul II, Address to the Bishops of the Bishops' Conference of the Pacific [C.E.PAC], Suva (21 November 1986), 2: AAS 79 (1987), 930–931.

Above all, the Synod Fathers wanted to touch the hearts of young people. Many of them are searching for truth and goodness, and their search can involve experimenting with the appeals and claims of the contemporary world, some of which are clearly destructive. This can create a confusion in the young which leaves them at a loss to know what true values might be and where true happiness might be found. The great challenge and opportunity is to offer them the gifts of Jesus Christ in the Church, for these gifts alone will satisfy their yearning. But Christ must be presented in a way well adapted to the younger generation and the rapidly changing culture in which they live.

At times the Catholic Church is seen as presenting a message which is irrelevant, unattractive or unconvincing; but we can never allow such claims to undermine our confidence, for we have found the pearl of great price (cf. *Mt13:46*). Yet there is no room for complacency. The Church is challenged to interpret the Good News for the peoples of Oceania according to their present needs and circumstances. We must present Christ to our world in a way that brings hope to the many who suffer misery, injustice or poverty. The mystery of Christ is a mystery of new life for all who are in need or in pain, for disrupted families or people who face unemployment, who are marginalized, injured in soul or body, sick or addicted to drugs, and for all who have lost their way. This mystery of grace, the *mysterium pietatis*, is the very heart of the Church and her mission.

A Church of Participation

15. The Catholic communities of Oceania are increasingly confident about what they have to offer to the universal Church and, in turn, the Church rejoices in the special gifts that these

communities contribute. Many of them are engaged in missionary outreach in Oceania and beyond, in the Pacific Islands and Papua New Guinea, and in Southeast Asia and more distant parts of the world. Local Churches, founded by missionaries, are in turn sending out missionaries, and that is an unmistakable sign of maturity. They have understood the missionary message that Pope Paul VI, together with the people of Samoa, sent to the Catholic people of the world: "Listen to the call to become heralds of the good news of salvation".³⁵ What I expressed as a wish to the Bishops of C.E.PAC. in Suva in 1986 has come true: "The Churches which have been established by missionaries will in turn be sending forth missionaries to other nations".³⁶ However, some Dioceses of Oceania still have to depend upon the solidarity of other local Churches, and their lack of resources should not be allowed to restrain their generosity in fulfilling their mission. The sharing of resources for the good of all is a solemn duty of the Christian life and at times an urgent need in Christian mission.

In many islands of Oceania catechists are assisting the ordained ministers in their missionary or pastoral work. In Australia and New Zealand, catechists teach the faith in the local community, especially to children and catechumens. "They all are direct witnesses and irreplaceable evangelizers who... represent the basic strength of Christian communities".³⁷ These

³⁵Homily at Mass on the island of Upolu, Western Samoa (30 November 1970); AAS 63 (1971), 49.

³⁶Address to the Bishops of the Bishops' Conference of the Pacific [C.E.PAC.], Suva (21 November 1986), 3: AAS 79 (1987), 932.

³⁷John Paul II, Encyclical Letter *Redemptoris Missio* (7 December 1990), 73: AAS 83 (1991), 321; see also Homily at the Beatification of Peter To Rot, Port Moresby (17 January 1995), 7: AAS 87 (1995), 994.

lay workers are often effective because they live and work close to the ordinary people. “They have made and continue to make a truly indispensable contribution to the life and mission of the Church”.³⁸ The catechists in many islands are not only trained to teach, but also to lead the community in prayer and to evangelize beyond the bounds of the Catholic community. In the traditional cultures, the faith is often best communicated orally by telling stories, by preaching, by praying in word, song and dance. To guide and develop this kind of activity, special courses, programmes and retreats are needed. The task now is to present Jesus Christ to those whose faith has grown weak under the pressures of secularization and consumerism and who tend to regard the Church as just another of the many institutions of modern society that influence people’s thinking and behaviour. In such a situation, the Church needs well-trained leaders and theologians to present Jesus Christ convincingly to the peoples of Oceania.

It was a joy during the Assembly to hear many Bishops speaking about programmes of Christian renewal in their Dioceses, and about the deepening of faith among their people which these provide. One of the remarkable features of these programmes is the involvement of many lay people. We are all grateful for the various gifts God has given lay men and women to carry out their mission, which is not only a call to action and service but also a call to prayer.³⁹ They and their pastors are encouraged to move forward with fresh energy and to proclaim

³⁸John Paul II, Address to the Bishops of Papua New Guinea and Solomon Islands, Port Moresby (8 May 1984), 6: AAS 76 (1984), 1013.

³⁹Cf. John Paul II, Address to the Bishops of New Zealand, Wellington (23 November 1986), 8: AAS 79 (1987), 939.

Jesus Christ to their people with renewed conviction. Catholic communities in Oceania are already making great efforts to reach out to others in word and deed; and the Synod Fathers expressed both deep appreciation for these efforts and strong support for those prepared to offer themselves for work in the Church's mission. I join in praying that these workers in the vineyard of the Lord will find fulfilment and joy in the work to which God himself has called them.

There are many other challenges facing the Church's members, especially those entrusted with pastoral responsibility. Aware of the limits of all human effort, the Synod Fathers were not discouraged but recalled the simple and strong assurance of the Lord. Sending the Apostles forth to preach the Good News to all the nations, the Risen Lord says: "Know that I am with you always; yes, to the end of time" (*Mt28:20*). This promise of the Lord was a source of fresh hope for the Bishops as they looked to the many challenges they face in the attempt to preach Jesus Christ, the Way, the Truth and the Life; and they called upon all the Catholic people of Oceania to join them in that hope.

The Gospel and culture

Inculturation

16. The Synod Fathers frequently emphasized the importance of inculturation for any authentic Christian life in Oceania. The process of inculturation is the gradual way in which the Gospel is incarnated in the various cultures. On the one hand, certain cultural values must be transformed and purified, if they are to find a place in a genuinely Christian culture. On the other hand,

in various cultures Christian values readily take root. Inculturation is born out of respect for both the Gospel and the culture in which it is proclaimed and welcomed. The process of inculturation began in Oceania as immigrant people brought the Christian faith from their homelands. For the indigenous peoples of Oceania, inculturation meant a new conversation between the world that they had known and the faith to which they had come. As a result, Oceania offers many examples of unique cultural expressions in the areas of theology, liturgy and the use of religious symbols.⁴⁰ The Synod Fathers saw further inculturation of the Christian faith as the way leading to the fullness of ecclesial *communio*.

Authentic inculturation of the Christian faith is grounded in the mystery of the Incarnation.⁴¹ “God loved the world so much that he gave his only Son” (*Jn* 3:16); in a particular time and place, the Son of God took flesh and was “born of a woman” (*Gal* 4:4). To prepare for this momentous event, God chose a people with a distinctive culture, and he guided its history on the path towards the Incarnation. All that God did in the midst of his chosen people revealed what he intended to do for all humanity, for all peoples and cultures. The Scriptures tell us this story of God acting among his people. Above all, they tell the story of Jesus Christ, in whom God himself entered the world and its many cultures. In all that he said and did, but especially in his Death and Resurrection, Jesus revealed the divine love for humanity. From deep within human history, the story of Jesus speaks to the people not only of his time and culture but of every time and culture. He is for ever the Word made flesh for all the

⁴⁰Cf. *Propositio* 1.

⁴¹Cf. *Propositio* 2.

world; he is the Gospel that was brought to Oceania; and he is the Gospel that now must be proclaimed anew.

The Word made flesh is foreign to no culture and must be preached to all cultures. “From the time the Gospel was first preached the Church has known the process of encounter and engagement with culture”.⁴² Just as the Word made flesh entered history and dwelt among us, his Gospel enters deeply into the life and culture of those who hear, listen and believe. Inculturation, the “incarnation” of the Gospel in the various cultures, affects the very way in which the Gospel is preached, understood and lived.⁴³ The Church teaches the unchanging truth of God, addressed to the history and the culture of a particular people. Therefore, in each culture the Christian faith will be lived in a unique way. The Synod Fathers were convinced that the Church, in her efforts to present Jesus Christ effectively to the peoples of Oceania, must respect each culture and never ask the people to renounce it. “The Church invites all people to express the living word of Jesus in ways that speak to their heart and minds”.⁴⁴ “The Gospel is not opposed to any culture, as if engaging a culture the Gospel would seek to strip it of its native riches and force it to adopt forms which are alien to it”.⁴⁵ It is vital that the Church insert herself fully into culture and from within bring about the process of purification and transformation.⁴⁶

⁴²John Paul II, Encyclical Letter *Fides et Ratio* (14 September 1998), 70: AAS 91 (1999), 58.

⁴³Cf. *Propositio* 2.

⁴⁴John Paul II, Address to Aboriginal People, Alice Springs (29 November 1986), 12: AAS 79 (1987), 978; see also Paul VI, Address to Aboriginal People, Sydney (2 December 1970): AAS 63 (1971), 69.

⁴⁵John Paul II, Encyclical Letter *Fides et Ratio* (14 September 1998), 71: AAS 91 (1999), 60.

⁴⁶Cf. *Propositio* 2.

An authentic inculturation of the Gospel has a double aspect. On the one hand, a culture offers positive values and forms which can enrich the way the Gospel is preached, understood and lived. On the other hand, the Gospel challenges cultures and requires that some values and forms change.⁴⁷ Just as the Son of God became like us in all things except sin (cf. *Heb* 4:15), so the Christian faith welcomes and affirms all that is genuinely human, while rejecting whatever is sinful. The process of inculturation engages the Gospel and culture in “a dialogue which includes identifying what is and what is not of Christ”.⁴⁸ Every culture needs to be purified and transformed by the values which are revealed in the Paschal Mystery.⁴⁹ In this way, the positive values and forms found in the cultures of Oceania will enrich the way the Gospel is preached, understood and lived.⁵⁰ The Gospel “is a genuine liberation from all the disorders caused by sin and is, at the same time, a call to the fullness of truth. Cultures are not only not diminished by this encounter; rather they are prompted to open themselves to the newness of the Gospel’s truth and to be stirred by this truth to develop in new ways”.⁵¹ Transformed by the Spirit of Christ, these cultures attain the fullness of life to which their deepest values had always looked and for which their people had always hoped. Indeed, without Christ, no human culture can become what it truly is.

⁴⁷ Cf. *ibid.*

⁴⁸ *Propositio* 4.

⁴⁹ Cf. John Paul II, Post-Synod Apostolic Exhortation *Ecclesia in Africa* (14 September 1995), 61: AAS 88 (1996), 38.

⁵⁰ Cf. *Propositio* 2.

⁵¹ John Paul II, Encyclical Letter *Fides et Ratio* (14 September 1998), 71: AAS 91 (1999), 60.

The Current Situation

17. In recent times the Church has strongly encouraged the inculturation of the Christian faith. In this regard, Pope Paul VI insisted when he visited Oceania that “far from smothering what is good and original in every form of human culture, Catholicism accepts, respects and puts to use the genius of each people, endowing with variety and beauty the one, seamless garment of the Church of Christ”.⁵² These are words which I echoed when I met the Aboriginal people of Australia: “The Gospel of Jesus Christ speaks all languages. It esteems and embraces all cultures. It supports them in everything human, and when necessary, it purifies them. Always and everywhere the Gospel uplifts and enriches cultures with the revealed message of a loving and merciful God”.⁵³ The Synod Fathers asked that the Church in Oceania develop an understanding and presentation of the truth of Christ drawing on the traditions and cultures of the region. In missionary areas, all missionaries are urged to work in harmony with the indigenous Christians to ensure that the faith and life of the Church are expressed in legitimate forms appropriate to each culture.⁵⁴

From the time the first immigrants and missionaries arrived, the Church in Oceania has inevitably been involved in a process of inculturation within the many cultures of the region, which often exist side by side. Attentive to the signs of the times, the Synod Fathers “recognized that the many cultures each in

⁵² Address to the Bishops of Oceania, Sydney (1 December 1970): AAS 63 (1971), 56.

⁵³ Address to Aboriginal Peoples, Alice Springs (29 November 1986), 12: AAS 79 (1987), 977.

⁵⁴ Cf. *Propositio* 2.

different ways, provide insights which help the Church to understand better and express the Gospel of Jesus Christ”.⁵⁵

To guide this process, fidelity to Christ and to the authentic Tradition of the Church is required. Genuine inculturation of the Christian faith must always be done with the guidance of the universal Church. While remaining wholly faithful to the spirit of *communio*, local Churches should seek to express the faith and life of the Church in legitimate forms appropriate to indigenous cultures.⁵⁶ New expressions and forms should be tested and approved by the competent authorities. Once approved, these authentic forms of inculturation will better enable the peoples of Oceania to experience in their own way the abundant life offered by Jesus Christ.⁵⁷

The Synod Fathers expressed the desire that future priests, deacons and catechists be thoroughly familiar with the culture of the people they are to serve. In order to become good Christian leaders they should be trained in ways that do not separate them from the circumstances of ordinary people. They are called to a service of inculturated evangelization, through sensitive pastoral work which allows the Christian community to welcome, live and pass on the faith in its own culture in harmony with the Gospel and the communion of the universal Church.⁵⁸

As their guiding vision, the Synod Fathers evoked the ideal of the many cultures of Oceania forming a rich and distinctive civilization inspired by faith in Jesus Christ. With them, I pray

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

⁵⁶ Cf. *ibid.*

⁵⁷ Cf. Special Assembly For Oceania of the Synod of Bishops, *Relatio post disceptationem*, 12.

⁵⁸ Cf. John Paul II, Encyclical Letter *Redemptoris Missio* (7 December 1990), 54 : AAS 83 (1991), 301.

fervently that all the peoples of Oceania will discover the love of Christ, the Way, the Truth and the Life, so that they will experience and build together the civilization of love and peace for which the world of the Pacific has always longed.

While the people pressed upon him to hear the word of God, he was standing by the lake of Gennesaret. And he saw two boats by the lake; but the fishermen had gone out of them and were washing their nets. Getting into one of the boats which was Simon's, he asked him to put out a little from the land. And he sat down and taught the people from the boat

— *Lk* 5:1–3

Chapter 3: Telling the Truth of Jesus Christ in Oceania

A New Evangelization

Evangelization in Oceania

18. Evangelization is the mission of the Church to tell the world the truth of God revealed in Jesus Christ. The Synod Fathers were eager that *communio* be the theme and aim of all evangelization in Oceania⁵⁹ and the basis for all pastoral planning. In evangelization, the Church expresses her own inner communion and acts as a single body, striving to bring all humanity to unity in God through Christ. All the baptized have the responsibility of proclaiming the Gospel in word and action to the world in which they live.⁶⁰ The Gospel must be heard in Oceania by all people, believers and non-believers, natives and immigrants, rich and poor, young and old. Indeed all these people have a right to hear the Gospel, which means that Christians have a solemn duty to share it with them. A new evangelization

⁵⁹Cf. Special Assembly For Oceania of the Synod of Bishops, *Lineamenta*, 42; *Instrumentum laboris*, 22, 51; *Propositiones* 4, 10 and 44.

⁶⁰Cf. *Propositio* 4.

is needed today so that everyone may hear, understand and believe in God's mercy destined for all people in Jesus Christ.

During the Special Assembly, the Bishops shared their rich store of pastoral experience and that of the people with whom they work most closely; and thus they discerned together new perspectives for the future of the Church in Oceania. Many of them spoke of the hardships of isolation, of the need to travel immense distances and of living in harsh environments. At the same time, they also related very positive experiences of a freshness of faith and *communio*, when people welcome the Gospel and discover the love of God. The Bishops also spoke of the hopes and fears, the achievements and disappointments and the growth and decline of particular Churches in Oceania. Some felt that the Church in Oceania as a whole is at a crossroads, requiring important choices for the future. They were aware that new circumstances in that vast region present great challenges, and that the time is ripe for a re-presentation of the Gospel to the peoples of the Pacific, so that they may hear the word of God with renewed faith and find more abundant life in Christ. But to do this, they agreed, there is a need for new ways and methods of evangelization, inspired by deeper faith, hope and love of the Lord Jesus.

As a first step in the necessary "renewal of mind" (*Rom 12:2*), the Bishops spoke very positively of the many efforts to apply the directives of the Second Vatican Council. They insisted that these must be built upon, and this implies the need for other initiatives to strengthen the faith of those who have grown weak and to present it more convincingly to society at large. The call to renewal is a call to proclaim to the world the truth of Jesus Christ by bearing witness to him, even to the point of the

supreme sacrifice of martyrdom. It is to this that the Church in Oceania is now called; and this was the underlying reason for celebrating the Special Assembly of the Synod of Bishops.⁶¹

Given the situation in Oceania, God's call can easily go unheard, because of the global transformation affecting the region's cultural identity and social institutions. Some fear that these changes might undermine the foundations of the faith, and lead to weariness of spirit and despair. At such times, we need to remind ourselves that the Lord provides the strength to overcome such temptations. Our faith in him is like a house built on rock. "The rains may fall, and the floods come, and the winds blow and beat upon that house, it does not fall, because it is founded on the rock" (*Mt 7:25*). Through the power of the Holy Spirit, the Church in Oceania is preparing for a new evangelization of peoples who today are hungering for Christ. "This is the acceptable time; this is the day of salvation" (*2 Cor 6:2*).

Many Synod Fathers voiced concern about the public standing of the Christian faith in Oceania, noting that it exerts less influence on policies regarding the common good, public morality and the administration of justice, the status of marriage and family, or the right to life itself. Some of the Bishops pointed out that the Church's teaching is at times questioned even by Catholic people. In so far as this is true, it is hardly surprising that the voice of the Church is less influential in public life.

The challenges of modernity and post-modernity are experienced by all the local Churches in Oceania, but with

⁶¹Cf. JohnPaul II, Apostolic Letter *Tertio Millennio Adveniente* (10 November 1994), 21: AAS 87 (1995), 17.

particular force by those in societies most powerfully affected by secularization, individualism and consumerism. Many Bishops identified the signs of a dwindling of Catholic faith and practice in the lives of some people to the point where they accept a completely secular outlook as the norm of judgment and behaviour. In this regard, Pope Paul VI already cautioned Christians, saying that “there is a danger of reducing everything to an earthly humanism, to forget life’s moral and spiritual dimension and to stop caring about our necessary relationship with the Creator”.⁶² The Church has to fulfill her evangelizing mission in an increasingly secularized world. The sense of God and of his loving Providence has diminished for many people and even for whole sections of society. Practical indifference to religious truths and values clouds the face of divine love. Therefore, “among the priorities of a renewed endeavour of evangelization there has to be a return to the sense of the sacred, to an awareness of the centrality of God in the whole of human existence”.⁶³ A new evangelization is the first priority for the Church in Oceania. In one sense, her mission is simple and clear: to propose once again to human society the entire Gospel of salvation in Jesus Christ. She is sent to the contemporary world, to the men and women of our time, “to preach the Gospel...lest the Cross of Christ be emptied of its power. For the word of the Cross... is the power of God” (1 Cor 1:17-18).⁶⁴

⁶²Homily at Randwick Racecourse for the 200th Anniversary of Cook’s Arrival in Australia, Sydney (1 December 1970), 63: AAS 63 (1971), 62.

⁶³JohnPaul II, Address to the Bishops of Australia, Sydney (26 November 1986), 4: AAS 79 (1987), 956.

⁶⁴Cf. JohnPaul II, Address to the Bishops of New Zealand, Wellington (23 November 1986), 5: AAS 79 (1987), 937.

The Agents of Evangelization

19. Like the Apostles, the Bishops are sent to their Dioceses as the prime witnesses to the Risen Christ. United around the Successor of Peter, they form a college responsible for spreading the Gospel throughout the world. During the Special Assembly for Oceania, the Bishops recognized that they are themselves the first called to a renewed Christian life and witness. More prayerful study of the Scriptures and Tradition will lead them to a deeper knowledge and love of the faith. In this way, as Pastors of their people, they will contribute still more effectively to the work of the new evangelization.⁶⁵ As the Acts of the Apostles makes clear, the outstanding characteristic of the apostolic mission inspired by the Holy Spirit is the courage to proclaim “the word of God with boldness” (4:31). This courage was given to them in response to the prayer of the whole community: “Grant to your servants to speak your word with all boldness” (4:29). The same Spirit today too enables the Bishops to speak out clearly and courageously when they face a society that needs to hear the word of Christian truth. The Catholics of Oceania continue to pray fervently that, like the Apostles, their Pastors will be audacious witnesses to Christ; and the Successor of Peter joins them in that prayer.

With the Bishops, all Christ’s faithful - clergy, religious and laity - are called to proclaim the Gospel. Their *communio* expresses itself in a spirit of cooperation, which is itself a powerful witness to the Gospel. Priests are the Bishops’ closest co-workers and greatest support in the work of evangelization,

⁶⁵Cf. *Propositio* 4.

particularly in the parish communities entrusted to their care.⁶⁶ They offer the Sacrifice of Christ for the needs of the community, reconcile sinners to God and to the community, strengthen the sick on their pilgrimage to eternal life,⁶⁷ and thus enable the whole community to bear witness to the Gospel in every moment of life and death. Men and women in the consecrated life are living signs of the Gospel. Their vows of evangelical poverty, chastity and obedience are sure paths to deeper knowledge and love of Christ, and from this intimacy with the Lord comes their consecrated service of the Church, which has proven such a wonderful grace in Oceania.⁶⁸ Lay people also play their part by consecrating the world to God, and many of them are coming to a deeper sense of their indispensable role in the Church's evangelizing mission.⁶⁹ Through the witness of love in the Sacrament of Matrimony or the generous dedication of people called to the single life, through their activity in the world whatever it might be, lay people can and must be a true leaven in every corner of society in Oceania. Upon this, the success of the new evangelization depends in large part.

A new proclamation of Christ must arise from an inner renewal of the Church, and all renewal in the Church must have mission as its goal if it is not to fall prey to a kind of ecclesial introversion. Every aspect of the Church's mission to the world must be born of a renewal which comes from contemplation of

⁶⁶Cf. *Propositio* 4.

⁶⁷Cf. *ibid.*

⁶⁸Cf. *ibid.*

⁶⁹Cf. *ibid.*; cf. Pope John Paul II's plea to them in Sydney in 1986 "Come back! ... Come home!": Homily at Mass for the Dioceses of New South Wales, Randwick Racecourse, Sydney (26 November 1986), 5: *Insegnamenti* IX, 2 (1986), 1678.

the face of Christ.⁷⁰ This renewal in turn gives rise to concrete pastoral strategies; and in this regard, the Special Assembly invited the local communities to contribute to the new evangelization by a spirit of fellowship at their liturgies, in their social and apostolic activities; by reaching out to non-practising and alienated Catholics; by strengthening the identity of Catholic schools; by providing opportunities for adults to grow in their faith through programmes of study and formation; by teaching and explaining Catholic doctrine effectively to those outside the Christian community; and by bringing the social teaching of the Church to bear on civic life in Oceania.⁷¹ As a result of these and allied initiatives, the Gospel will be presented to society more convincingly and influence culture more deeply.

The first Christians were stirred by the Holy Spirit to believe in Christ and to proclaim him as the world's only Saviour, sent by the Father. In every age, the true agent of renewal and evangelization is the Holy Spirit, who surely will not fail to help the Church now to find the evangelizing energies and methods needed in rapidly changing societies. Nor will the new evangelization fail to bring to the peoples of Oceania the wonderful fruits of the Holy Spirit as experienced by the first Christians, when they encountered the Risen Lord and received the gift of his love which is stronger even than death.

The Primacy of Proclamation

20. The kerygma is God's word proclaimed in order to set humanity right with God through faith in Christ. We see the

⁷⁰Cf. John Paul II Apostolic Letter *Novo Millennio Ineunte* (6 January 2001), 16: AAS 93 (2001), 276–277.

⁷¹Cf. *Propositio* 4.

power of the kerygma at work in the first community in Jerusalem. “They devoted themselves to the Apostles’ teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers” (Acts 2:42). This is the essence of the Church’s life, the fruit of the first evangelization. Adherence to Jesus Christ comes through believing his word proclaimed by the Church. Saint Paul asks, “How can people preach unless they are sent?” (Rom 10:15); and indeed Christ sent his Apostles whose “voice went out through all the earth, and their words to the end of the world” (Ps 19:5). As “witnesses of divine and Catholic truth”,⁷² the missionaries in Oceania travelled over land and sea, passed through deserts and floods, and faced great cultural difficulties in accomplishing their remarkable work. Inspired by this story of the Church’s birth in Oceania, the Synod Fathers felt the need for a new and courageous preaching of the Gospel in our own day.

The Church faces a twofold challenge in seeking to proclaim the Gospel in Oceania: on the one hand, the traditional religions and cultures, and on the other, the modern process of secularization. In each case, “the first and most urgent task is the proclamation of the Risen Christ by way of a personal encounter which would bring the listener to conversion of heart and the request for Baptism”.⁷³ Whether faced with traditional religion or refined philosophy, the Church preaches by word and deed that “the truth is in Jesus Christ” (*Eph* 4:21; cf. *Col* 1:15-20). In the light of that truth, she makes her contribution to discussion about the values and ethical principles which make for happiness in human life and peace in society. The faith must always be

⁷²Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Dogmatic Constitution on the Church *Lumen Gentium*, 25.

⁷³John Paul II, Encyclical Letter *Fides et Ratio* (14 September 1998), 38; AAS 91 (1999), 34.

presented in a rationally coherent way, so as to favour its capacity to penetrate into ever wider fields of human experience. Faith in fact has the force to shape culture itself by penetrating it to its very core. Alert to both Christian tradition and contemporary cultural shifts, the word of faith and reason must go hand in hand with the witness of life if evangelization is to bear fruit. Above all, however, what is needed is a fearless proclamation of Christ, “a *parrhesia* of faith”.⁷⁴

Evangelization and the Media

21. In today’s world, the media of social communication are increasingly powerful as agents of modernization, even in the remotest parts of Oceania. The media have a great impact on the lives of people, on their culture, on their moral thinking and on their religious behaviour; and, when used indiscriminately, they can have a harmful effect on traditional cultures. The Synod Fathers called for a greater awareness of the power of the media, which “offer an excellent opportunity for the Church to evangelize, to build community and solidarity”.⁷⁵ Indeed the media often provide the only contact the Church has with non-practising Catholics or the wider community. Therefore, they should be employed in a creative and responsible manner.⁷⁶

Where possible, the Church should devise a pastoral plan for communications at the national, diocesan and parish levels. Coordination of the Church’s efforts is necessary to ensure better preparation of those who represent the Church in the media,⁷⁷

⁷⁴*Ibid*, 48: AAS 91 (1999), 43.

⁷⁵*Propositio* 5.

⁷⁶*Cf. Propositio* 4.

⁷⁷*Cf. Propositio* 6.

and to encourage dedicated lay people to enter the media professionally as a vocation. It is a sign of hope that Christians working in the media are giving evidence of their commitment to Christian values. With their assistance, religious material and programmes reflecting human and moral values can be professionally produced, even if funding is often a problem. A Catholic media centre for the whole of Oceania could be of great help in using the media for the purposes of evangelization. The Bishops also expressed concern about standards of decency in the public media and denounced the level of violence they have reached.⁷⁸ Church leaders need to collaborate when codes of ethics for the media are drawn up;⁷⁹ and families and young people need assistance in critically evaluating the content of programmes. Catholic educational institutions therefore have a vital role in helping people, especially youth, come to a critical appreciation of the media. The Christian faith challenges us all to become discriminating listeners, viewers and readers.⁸⁰

Advertising has great power to encourage both good and evil. The process of globalization and the growing pattern of monopolies in the media give it still greater power over people. By means of image and suggestion, advertising often propagates a culture of consumerism, reducing people to what they have or can acquire. It leads people to believe that there is nothing beyond what a consumer economy can offer. “The greatest concern with this power is that, for the most part, it ceaselessly propagates an ideology that is clearly in conflict with the vision

⁷⁸Cf. *ibid.*

⁷⁹Cf. *Propositio 7.*

⁸⁰Cf. *Propositio 5.*

of the Catholic faith”.⁸¹ It is important therefore that the faithful, especially the young, be equipped to deal critically with the advertising which is an ubiquitous part of life today. This means that they must be given a clear and strong sense of the human and Christian values which are fundamental to the Catholic understanding of human life.

The challenge of faith today

Catechesis

22. The Church’s mission to “tell the truth of Jesus Christ” in Oceania today summons her to renew her catechesis, instruction and formation in the faith. The media’s impact on people’s lives illustrates how strongly a new social reality demands fresh ways of presenting the faith. Catechesis aims to educate children, young people and adults in the faith. It includes especially “the teaching of Christian doctrine imparted in an organic and systematic way with a view of initiating the hearers into the fullness of Christian life”.⁸² The Synod Fathers proposed a greater commitment of both finance and personnel to reach groups that are easily overlooked. The need for comprehensive courses for adults and children with special needs, who do not attend Catholic schools, calls for special care and systematic planning. Basic to all human rights is the freedom of religion, which includes the right to be instructed in the faith.⁸³ “Every baptized

⁸¹*Ibid.*

⁸²John Paul II, Apostolic Exhortation *Catechesi Tradendae* (16 October 1979), 18: AAS 71 (1979), 1292.

⁸³Cf. *ibid.*, 14: AAS, 1288–1289

person, precisely by reason of being baptized, has the right to receive from the Church instruction and education enabling him or her to enter on a truly Christian life”.⁸⁴ This requires that governments and school authorities ensure that this right is effectively respected. “Where there is a genuine partnership between government and Church in the provision and operation of schools, the education of the nation’s children and young people is greatly advanced”.⁸⁵ Men and women religious, lay people and clergy have laboured to achieve this end, often with prodigious effort and many sacrifices. Their work needs to be consolidated and extended to ensure that all the baptized grow in faith and in understanding of the truth of Christ.

Ecumenism

23. The Synod Fathers saw disunity among Christians as a great obstacle to the credibility of the Church’s witness. They expressed their earnest desire that the scandal of disunity not continue and that new efforts of reconciliation and dialogue be made, so that the splendour of the Gospel may shine forth more clearly.

In many missionary areas of Oceania, the differences between Churches and Ecclesial Communities have led in the past to competition and opposition. In recent times, however, relationships have been more positive and fraternal. The Church in Oceania has given ecumenism a high priority and has brought a freshness and openness to ecumenical activities. Opportunities are welcomed for “a dialogue of salvation”⁸⁶ aimed at greater

⁸⁴*Ibid.*, 1: AAS, 1288.

⁸⁵*Propositio* 9.

⁸⁶Paul VI, Encyclical Letter *Ecclesiam Suam* (6 August 1964), III: AAS 56 (1964), 642.

mutual understanding and enrichment. The strong desire for unity in faith and worship is one of the gifts of the Holy Spirit to Oceania;⁸⁷ and cooperation in areas of charity and social justice is a clear sign of Christian fraternity. Ecumenism found fertile soil in which to take root in Oceania, because in many places local communities are closely knit. A still stronger desire for unity in faith will help to keep these communities together. This desire for deeper communion in Christ was symbolized at the Synod by the presence of the fraternal delegates from other Churches and Ecclesial Communities. Their contributions were encouraging and helpful in making progress towards the unity willed by Christ.

In the work of ecumenism, it is essential that Catholics be more knowledgeable about the Church's doctrine, her tradition and history, so that in understanding their faith more deeply they will be better able to engage in ecumenical dialogue and cooperation. There is a need too for "spiritual ecumenism", by which is meant an ecumenism of prayer and conversion of heart. Ecumenical prayer will lead to a sharing of life and service where Christians do as much together as is possible at this time. "Spiritual ecumenism" can also lead to doctrinal dialogue, or its consolidation where it already exists. The Synod Fathers saw it as very useful to have ecumenically accepted texts of the Scriptures and prayers for common use. They wanted to see greater attention given to the pastoral needs of families whose members belong to different Christian communities. They also encouraged the Church's agencies, where possible, to share social services with other Christian communities. It is good that

⁸⁷ Cf. *Propositio* 13.

Christian leaders act in concert and make common declarations on religious or social issues, when such declarations are necessary and opportune.⁸⁸

Fundamentalist Groups

24. Ecumenism needs to be distinguished from the Church's approach to fundamentalist religious groups and movements, some of which are Christian in inspiration. In some missionary areas, the Bishops are concerned about the effect that these religious groups or sects are having on the Catholic community. Some groups base their ideas on a reading of Scripture, often employing apocalyptic images, threats of a dark future for the world, and promises of economic rewards for their followers. While certain of these groups are openly hostile to the Church, others wish to engage in dialogue. In more developed and secularized societies, concern is growing about fundamentalist Christian groups which draw young people away from the Church, and even from their families. Many different movements offer some form of spirituality as a supposed remedy for the harmful effects of an alienating technological culture in which people often feel powerless. The presence and activity of these groups and movements are a challenge to the Church to revitalize her pastoral outreach, and in particular to be more welcoming to young people and to those in grave spiritual or material need.⁸⁹ It is also a situation which calls for better biblical and sacramental catechesis and an appropriate spiritual and liturgical formation. There is a need too for a new apologetics in keeping with the words of Saint Peter: "Be ready to give reasons

⁸⁸Cf. *ibid.*

⁸⁹Cf. *Propositio* 14.

for your hope” (1 Pt 3:15). In this way, the faithful will be more confident in their Catholic faith and less susceptible to the allure of these groups and movements, which often deliver the very opposite of what they promise.

Interreligious Dialogue

25. Greater travel opportunities and easier migration have resulted in unprecedented encounters among the cultures of the world, and hence the presence in Oceania of the great non-Christian religions. Some cities have Jewish communities, made up of a considerable number of survivors of the Holocaust, and these communities can play an important role in Jewish-Christian relations. In some places too there are long established Muslim communities; in others, there are communities of Hindus; and in still others, Buddhist centres are being established. It is important that Catholics better understand these religions, their teachings, way of life and worship. Where parents from these religions enrol their children in Catholic schools, the Church has an especially delicate task.

The Church in Oceania also needs to study more thoroughly the traditional religions of the indigenous populations, in order to enter more effectively into the dialogue which Christian proclamation requires. “Proclamation and dialogue are, each in its own place, component elements and authentic forms of the one evangelizing mission of the Church. They are both oriented toward the communication of salvific truth”.⁹⁰ In order to pursue a fruitful dialogue with these religions, the Church needs experts

⁹⁰Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples and Pontifical Council For Interreligious Dialogue, Instruction *Dialogue and Proclamation* (19 May 1991), 2: AAS 84 (1992), 415.

in philosophy, anthropology, comparative religions, the social sciences and, above all, theology.

Hope for society

The Church's Social Teaching

26. The Church regards the social apostolate as an integral part of her evangelizing mission to speak a word of hope to the world; and her commitment in this regard is seen in her contribution to human development, her promotion of human rights, the defence of human life and dignity, social justice and protection of the environment. The Synod Fathers were one with their people in expressing determination to act against injustices, corruption, threats to life and new forms of poverty.⁹¹

Late in the nineteenth century when an industrial, consumer society was in its early years, the Church in Oceania welcomed papal social teaching on workers' rights to employment and a just wage. In the developing countries of Oceania, the social doctrine of the Church has been well received, especially since the Second Vatican Council, and the Bishops of Oceania have taught this social doctrine effectively and applied it to current social issues. Statements by the Federation of the Bishops' Conferences of Oceania, the Bishops' Conferences and individual Bishops reflect the full range of the Church's social teaching and illustrate how she has attempted to advance the cause of indigenous peoples and the rights of smaller nations, and to strengthen the bonds of international solidarity. The Church has

⁹¹Cf. *Propositio 17*.

also helped to develop democratic forms of government which respect human rights, the rule of law and its just application.

It is certain that commitment to social justice and peace is an integral part of the Church's mission in the world.⁹² Yet her mission does not depend upon political power. "The Church is concerned with the temporal aspects of the common good because they are ordered to the sovereign Good, our ultimate end".⁹³ The Church's social teaching needs to be taught and implemented still more effectively in Oceania, especially through structures such as commissions for justice and peace. This social teaching is to be "clearly presented to the faithful in easily understandable terms and be witnessed to by a simple life style".⁹⁴ A more acute analysis of economic injustice and of corruption needs to be made so that adequate measures can be proposed to overcome them. Catholic organizations involved in action for justice are encouraged to remain attentive to new forms of poverty and injustice and to help eliminate their causes.

Human Rights

27. The Synod Fathers were keen that the people of Oceania become still more conscious of human dignity, which is based on the fact that all are created in God's image (cf. *Gen*1:26). Respect for the human person entails respect for the inviolable rights that flow from a person's dignity. All basic rights are prior to society and must be recognized by it.⁹⁵ Failure to respect the dignity or rights of another person is contrary to the Gospel and destructive

⁹²Cf. *Propositio* 17.

⁹³*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 2420.

⁹⁴*Propositio* 17.

⁹⁵Cf. *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 2273.

of human society. The Church encourages young people and adults to respond effectively to injustice and to the failure to respect human rights, some of which are either under threat in Oceania or need to be more widely respected.

Among these is the right to work and employment, so that people can support themselves and raise and educate a family. Unemployment among youth is a major concern, leading in some countries to a rising incidence of youth suicide. Labour unions can perform a unique role in defending workers' rights. To be faithful to their calling, politicians, government officials and police must be honest and avoid corruption in all its forms, for it is always a serious injustice to citizens. By working together with politicians, business executives and community leaders, Church leaders can offer valuable assistance in establishing ethical guidelines on issues affecting the common good and ensuring that they are put into practice.

Without claiming to be experts in the field, Church leaders need to be well informed about economic affairs and their impact on society. The Synod Fathers reiterated that “a theory that makes profit the exclusive norm and ultimate end of economic activity is morally unacceptable”.⁹⁶ So-called “economic rationalism”⁹⁷ is a tenet which tends increasingly to divide rich and poor nations, communities and individuals. The smaller nations of Oceania are particularly vulnerable to economic policies based on a social philosophy of this kind, because it has a diminished sense of distributive justice, and is too little concerned to ensure that everyone has the necessities of life and

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 2424.

⁹⁷ *Propositio* 17.

an integral human development. The fact that families suffer from such economic policies is particularly worrying. The Bishops pointed out that another destructive phenomenon in Oceania is the spread of gambling, especially in casinos which hold out the promise of a quick and spectacular solution to financial woes, only to lead people into an even more difficult situation.

Indigenous Peoples

28. Unjust economic policies are especially damaging to indigenous peoples, young nations and their traditional cultures; and it is the Church's task to help indigenous cultures preserve their identity and maintain their traditions. The Synod strongly encouraged the Holy See to continue its advocacy of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.⁹⁸

A special case is that of the Australian Aborigines whose culture struggles to survive. For many thousands of years they have sought to live in harmony with the often harsh environment of their "big country"; but now their identity and culture are gravely threatened. In more recent times, however, their joint efforts to ensure survival and gain justice have begun to bear fruit. There was a saying from Australian bush life heard in the Synod Hall: "If you stay closely united, you are like a tree standing in the middle of a bush-fire sweeping through the timber: the leaves are scorched, the tough bark is scarred and burned, but inside the tree the sap still flows, and under the ground the roots are still strong. Like that tree you have survived the flames, and you have still the power to be born. The time for

⁹⁸Cf. *Propositio* 18.

rebirth is now”.⁹⁹ The Church will support the cause of all indigenous peoples who seek a just and equitable recognition of their identity and their rights;¹⁰⁰ and the Synod Fathers expressed support for the aspirations of indigenous people for a just solution to the complex question of the alienation of their lands.¹⁰¹

Whenever the truth has been suppressed by governments and their agencies or even by Christian communities, the wrongs done to the indigenous peoples need to be honestly acknowledged. The Synod supported the establishment of “Truth Commissions”,¹⁰² where these can help resolve historical injustices and bring about reconciliation within the wider community or the nation. The past cannot be undone, but honest recognition of past injustices can lead to measures and attitudes which will help to rectify the damaging effects for both the indigenous community and the wider society. The Church expresses deep regret and asks forgiveness where her children have been or still are party to these wrongs. Aware of the shameful injustices done to indigenous peoples in Oceania, the Synod Fathers apologized unreservedly for the part played in these by members of the Church, especially where children were forcibly separated from their families.¹⁰³ Governments are encouraged to pursue with still greater energy programmes to improve the conditions and the standard of living of indigenous

⁹⁹John Paul II, Address to Aboriginal People, Alice Springs (29 November 1986), 8: AAS 79 (1987), 976; cf. *Propositio* 18.

¹⁰⁰Cf. John Paul II, Address to Aboriginal People, Alice Springs (29 November 1986), 10: AAS 79 (1987), 976–977.

¹⁰¹Cf. *Propositio* 18.

¹⁰²Cf. *Propositio* 17.

¹⁰³Cf. *Propositio* 18.

groups in the vital areas of health, education, employment and housing.

Development Aid

29. Just as in the early Church one Christian community was bound to another by hospitality offered to pilgrims, mutual assistance and the sharing of material resources and personnel, practical solidarity between the local Churches in Oceania makes *communio* visible to the world. Many national economies in Oceania are still dependent on international support and need a continuing supply of development aid. While aid for socio-economic development is generously offered by international agencies, the Church finds it more difficult to obtain direct aid for her pastoral projects, even though many of these reach far beyond the bounds of the Catholic community. Given the situation, the Synod recommended that Church-related funding agencies review their criteria in order to open up their resources to the apostolic works which are a necessary pre-requisite for the social development needed to improve living standards.¹⁰⁴

The Synod Fathers also asked that “the Church in the more wealthy parts of Oceania share her resources with the other local Churches in the Pacific as well as cooperate with them in establishing links with funding agencies”.¹⁰⁵ Nor can the Church in Oceania be indifferent to the fate of the poorer Churches in neighbouring Asia, whenever they stand in need of her help and services. The Synod acknowledges the generous contributions of money and resources made by Catholic people to aid programmes, and especially to the work of lay personnel

¹⁰⁴Cf. *Propositio* 16.

¹⁰⁵*Ibid.*

engaged in often very difficult situations to improve human conditions in Oceania.

The Sanctity of Life

30. In the more secularized and affluent societies of Oceania, the right to life is the one most under threat. There is a profound contradiction in this, for these are often societies which speak insistently about human rights while denying the most basic right of all. Did not Christ himself say “I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly” (*Jn*10:10)? Indeed, “the Gospel of life is at the heart of Jesus’ message”.¹⁰⁶ In the present conflict between a “culture of life” and “a culture of death”, the Church has to defend the right to life from the moment of conception until natural death, at every stage of its development. The moral and social values which should inform society are based on the sacredness of life created by God. Presenting a clear perspective on humanity’s origin from God the Creator and its eternal destiny will help people see life’s true value. It is not a question of the Church seeking to impose her morality on others, but rather of being faithful to her mission to share the full truth about life as taught by Jesus Christ. The promotion of the sacredness of life is a consequence of the Christian understanding of human existence. This message must be taught by the Church not only within the Catholic community but, in a prophetic way, to society as a whole in order to declare the power and beauty of the Gospel of life.

On this point, the witness of Catholic health care institutions is essential, as is the role of the media in promoting the value of

¹⁰⁶John Paul II, Encyclical Letter *Evangelium Vitae* (25 March 1995), 1: AAS 87 (1995), 401.

life. In order to present the Church's position on biomedical and health issues in the public forum clearly and faithfully, Bishops, priests, and experts in law and medicine need to be trained adequately.¹⁰⁷ Life must be promoted and its sanctity defended against every threat of violence in its many forms, especially violence against the weakest - the elderly, the dying, women, children, the disabled and the unborn.

The Environment

31. Oceania is a part of the world of great natural beauty, and it has succeeded in preserving areas that remain unspoiled. The region still offers to indigenous peoples a place to live in harmony with nature and one another.¹⁰⁸ Because creation was entrusted to human stewardship, the natural world is not just a resource to be exploited but also a reality to be respected and even revered as a gift and trust from God. It is the task of human beings to care for, preserve and cultivate the treasures of creation. The Synod Fathers called upon the people of Oceania to rejoice always in the glory of creation in a spirit of thanksgiving to the Creator.

Yet the natural beauty of Oceania has not escaped the ravages of human exploitation. The Synod Fathers called upon the governments and peoples of Oceania to protect this precious environment for present and future generations.¹⁰⁹ It is their special responsibility to assume on behalf of all humanity stewardship of the Pacific Ocean, containing over one half of the earth's total supply of water. The continued health of this and

¹⁰⁷ Cf. *Propositio* 20.

¹⁰⁸ Cf. *Propositio* 19.

¹⁰⁹ Cf. *ibid.*

other oceans is crucial for the welfare of peoples not only in Oceania but in every part of the world.

The natural resources of Oceania need to be protected against the harmful policies of some industrialized nations and increasingly powerful transnational corporations which can lead to deforestation, despoliation of the land, pollution of rivers by mining, over-fishing of profitable species, or fouling the fishing-grounds with industrial and nuclear waste. The dumping of nuclear waste in the area constitutes an added danger to the health of the indigenous population. Yet it is also important to recognize that industry can bring great benefits when undertaken with due respect for the rights and the culture of the local population and for the integrity of the environment.

Charitable works

Catholic Institutions

32. The history of the Church in Oceania cannot be recounted without telling the story of the Church's remarkable contributions in the fields of education, health care and social welfare. Catholic institutions allow the light of the Gospel to penetrate cultures and societies, evangelizing them from within, as it were. Because of the work of Christian missionaries, ancient ways of violence have given way to standards of law and justice. Through education Christian leaders and responsible citizens have been formed and Christian moral values have shaped society. Through her educational programmes, the Church seeks the integral formation of the human person, looking to Christ himself as the fullness of humanity. The apostolate of charity

witnesses to the fullness of Christian love not only in speech but in action. Such love leads people to wonder about its source and makes them ask why Christians are different in their values and behaviour.¹¹⁰ Through apostolic charity such as this, Christ touches the lives of others, and leads them to a greater sense of what it might mean to speak of and build a “civilization of love”.¹¹¹

The Church takes advantage of religious freedom in society to proclaim Christ publicly and to share his love abundantly through institutions inspired by that love. The right of the Church to found educational, health care and social service institutions is based on such freedom. The social apostolate of these institutions can be more effective when governments not only tolerate this work but cooperate in this area with Church authorities, with unequivocal respect for each other’s role and competence.

Catholic Education

33. Parents are the first educators of their children in human values and the Christian faith; and they have the fundamental right to choose the education suitable for their children. Schools assist parents in exercising this right by helping students to develop as they should. In some situations, the Catholic school is the only contact parents have with the community of the Church.

The Catholic school has an ecclesial identity, because it is a

¹¹⁰Cf. Paul VI, Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Nuntiandi* (8 December 1975), 21: AAS 68 (1976), 19.

¹¹¹Homily at Mass for the Close of the Holy Year (25 December 1975): AAS 68 (1976), 145.

part of the evangelizing mission of the Church.¹¹² Yet a distinguishing feature of Catholic education is that it is open to all, especially to the poor and weakest in society.¹¹³ It is vital that school and parish cooperate, and that the school be integrated into the parish's pastoral programme, especially with regard to the Sacraments of Penance, Confirmation and Eucharist.

In the primary school, teachers develop children's capacity for faith and understanding which will blossom fully in later years. Secondary schools provide a privileged means by which "the Catholic community gives the student an academic, vocational, and religious education".¹¹⁴ In these years, students usually come to a greater discernment about their faith and moral life, based on a more personal knowledge of Jesus Christ as the Way, the Truth, and the Life. Such a faith, nourished in the home, school and parish through prayer and the Sacraments, shows itself in a sound and upright moral life. The great challenge for Catholic schools in an increasingly secularized society is to present the Christian message in a convincing and systematic way. Yet "catechesis runs the risk of becoming barren, if no community of faith and Christian life welcomes those being formed".¹¹⁵ Therefore, young people need to be genuinely integrated into the community's life and activity.

The Synod Fathers wished to acknowledge the work of the religious men and women and lay people who have laboured so

¹¹²Cf. Congregation For Catholic Education, Circular Letter *The Catholic School on the Threshold of the Third Millennium* (28 December 1997), 8–11: *L'Osservatore Romano*, English-language edition (22 April 1998), 8.

¹¹³Cf. *ibid.*, 7: *loc. cit.*, 8.

¹¹⁴*Propositio* 9.

¹¹⁵John Paul II, Apostolic Exhortation *Catechesi Tradendae* (16 October 1979), 24: AAS 71 (1979), 1297.

generously in the field of Catholic education,¹¹⁶ establishing and staffing Catholic schools, often in the face of great difficulty and with great personal sacrifice. Their contribution to the Church and civil society in Oceania has been inestimable. In today's educational context, religious congregations, institutes and societies have every reason to cherish their vocation.

Consecrated women and men are needed in educational institutions to bear radical witness to Gospel values and so to inspire them in others. In recent times, the laity's generous response to new needs has opened new vistas for Catholic education. For the lay people involved, teaching is more than a profession; it is a vocation to form students, a widespread and indispensable lay service in the Church. Teaching is always a challenge; but with the cooperation and encouragement of parents, clergy and religious, the laity's involvement in Catholic education can be a precious service of the Gospel, and a way of Christian sanctification for both teacher and students.

The identity and success of Catholic education is linked inseparably to the witness of life given by the teaching staff. Therefore, the Bishops recommended that "those responsible for hiring teachers and administrators in our Catholic schools take into account the faith-life of those they are hiring".¹¹⁷ School staff who truly live their faith will be agents of a new evangelization in creating a positive climate for the Christian faith to grow and in spiritually nourishing the students entrusted to their care. They will be especially effective when they are active practising Catholics, committed to their parish community and loyal to the Church and her teaching.

¹¹⁶Cf. *Propositio* 9.

¹¹⁷*Ibid.*

Today, the Church in Oceania is extending her commitment in education. Professional Catholic lay people are greatly helped by Catholic tertiary institutes, training colleges and universities, which nourish them intellectually, train them professionally and support their faith so that they can take their rightful place in the Church's mission in the world. This adventure in tertiary education is in its early stages in Oceania and calls for special gifts of wisdom and insight in its development. Catholic universities are communities bringing together scholars from the various branches of human knowledge. They are dedicated to research, teaching and other services in keeping with their cultural mission. It is their honour and responsibility to dedicate themselves without reserve to the cause of truth.¹¹⁸ They are called to observe the highest standards of academic research and teaching as a service to the local, national and international communities. In this way, they play a vital part in society and the Church, preparing future professionals and leaders, who will take their Christian responsibility seriously. The Bishops saw it as essential that they maintain personal contact with academics and foster qualities of leadership in those engaged in the field of tertiary education.

Research and teaching in tertiary institutions must bring Christian values to bear on the arts and sciences. The Church needs experts in philosophy, ethics and moral theology so that human values can be properly understood in an increasingly complex technological society; and the unity of knowledge cannot be complete unless theology is allowed to shed its light upon all fields of inquiry. Particular care must be taken in

¹¹⁸Cf. John Paul II, Apostolic Constitution *Ex Corde Ecclesiae* (15 August 1990), 4: AAS 82 (1990), 1478.

choosing and forming scholars to work in the area of theology. The Apostolic Constitution “*Ex Corde Ecclesiae*” indicates that the majority of professors at Catholic universities and other Catholic tertiary institutes should be active Catholics. Those responsible for hiring should carefully choose professors, who are not only competent in their field of expertise but who can serve as role models for our young people”.¹¹⁹ The presence of dedicated Catholics in tertiary institutions is vital and constitutes a true service to the Church and society.

Health Care

34. Jesus came to heal the sick and comfort the afflicted. As the Risen Christ, he continues his ministry of healing and comfort through those who bring God’s compassion to people in their weakness and suffering. This ministry of the Church of Oceania is for many people the most visible and tangible proof of God’s love. The messianic mission of mercy,¹²⁰ of healing and forgiveness, must be continued unstintingly and accomplished in new ways that respond to current needs.

The history of health care in Oceania shows the intimate link between health care and the Church’s mission and how it covers every aspect of healing, including provision of the simplest medical services in remote places. The Church has been among the first to reach out to those abandoned by others, as in the care of lepers and those suffering from HIVAIDS. She also administers training hospitals where health care workers are excellently prepared. Because of the current crisis in providing and financing

¹¹⁹ *Propositio* 8.

¹²⁰ Cf. John Paul II, Encyclical Letter *Dives in Misericordia* (30 November 1980), 13: AAS 72 (1980), 1219.

medical care in Oceania, some institutions are under severe strain; but this cannot be allowed to compromise the Church's fundamental commitment in this area.

The Church's teaching on the dignity of the human person and the sanctity of life needs to be explained to those responsible for legislation and court decisions, especially since their judgements have an impact on medical care, the administration of hospitals and the provision of medical services. Today Catholic hospitals and health care institutions are at the forefront of the Church's promotion of human life from the moment of conception until natural death. The Synod Fathers acknowledged the dedication of the religious congregations which established Catholic health care systems throughout Oceania. The Church and society as a whole owe them an immense debt of gratitude. Their presence in hospitals must continue, together with lay people prepared to work with the different institutes of consecrated life in the spirit of their charism. These people enable the Gospel of life to be proclaimed unambiguously in a society which is often confused about moral values. The Synod Fathers recommended that to counteract the influence of "a culture of death", all Christians be urged to help ensure that the great heritage of Catholic health care not be jeopardized.¹²¹

Catholic universities have a leading role to play in educating medical professionals to apply Catholic teaching to the new challenges constantly arising in the medical field. In every way possible, associations of Catholic doctors, nurses and health care workers are to be fostered and, where they do not exist, they should be established. Administrators and staff in Catholic

¹²¹Cf. *Propositio* 20.

institutions require formation in the application of Catholic moral principles to their professional life. This is a delicate task, since some who are involved in the work of a Catholic hospital are not familiar with these principles or do not agree with them. When Catholic teaching is properly presented, however, such people often experience the peace which comes from living in harmony with truth and cooperate readily.

Faith in the redeeming Cross of Christ gives new meaning to sickness, suffering and death. The Synod Fathers urged support for those who own or sponsor facilities which bring the compassion of Christ to those who suffer, particularly people with disabilities, HIVAIDS, the elderly, the dying, indigenous peoples and those in isolated areas.¹²² They were particularly conscious of those who provide these services in the most remote areas: the jungle, small islands or the Australian “Outback”. Working often with scarce resources and little financial support, their dedication gives powerful testimony to God’s love for the poor, the sick and the deprived. Those working in hospitals, caring for the aged or offering other forms of health care to the least of their brothers and sisters (cf. *Mt 25:40*) should know that the Church highly esteems their dedication and generosity, and thanks them for being in the forefront of Christian charity.

Social Services

35. During his life on earth, Jesus was sensitive to every human weakness and affliction. “At the heart of his teaching are the eight beatitudes, which are addressed to people tried by various sufferings in their temporal life”.¹²³ In the footsteps of the Lord,

¹²²Cf. *ibid.*

¹²³John Paul II, Apostolic Letter *Salvifici Doloris* (11 February 1984), 16: AAS 76 (1984), 217.

the Church's mission of charity reaches out to those most in need: orphans, the poor, the homeless, the abandoned and excluded. It is carried out by all who care for the needy; and as well as personal initiatives, it involves institutions established to meet various needs on the parish, diocesan, national or international level.

This is not the place for an exhaustive listing of the many social services offered by the Church in Oceania; but some were given special mention in the Synod Hall. The Church provides counselling services to people with personal or social difficulties, seeking to strengthen the family, to prevent marriage breakdown and divorce and heal its painful effects. Providing soup kitchens, instituting care centres for various people or working with the homeless and "street children" are only a part of the Church's social apostolate in Oceania. In a quiet and unobtrusive manner, some parish groups and apostolic associations work to remedy the often hidden harm produced by poverty in the suburbs or in rural areas. Other groups help in bringing peace or reconciliation between clans, tribes or other groups in conflict. Women, particularly mothers, can have an extraordinary effect in promoting peaceful ways of resolving conflict.¹²⁴ The Church's care also extends to those who are addicted to alcohol, drugs or gambling, or are victims of sexual abuse. The Synod Fathers also mentioned refugees and asylum seekers, who are increasing in number and whose human dignity demands that they be welcomed and given appropriate care. Since the nations of Oceania are dependent on the oceans and seas, the Synod Fathers

¹²⁴Cf. *Propositio* 17.

also voiced concern for seafarers, who often work under severe conditions and endure many hardships.

Frequently, volunteers give their time, energy and professional services to these apostolates without remuneration. For those who have chosen self-sacrificing love as their way of life, no human acknowledgment or reward is sought, nor would any be adequate. Their overarching concern is to play their part in the Church's mission to tell the truth of Jesus Christ, to walk his way and to live his life. These people are fundamental to any planning for a new evangelization of the peoples of Oceania. Faith is awakened by the preaching of God's word and hope is inspired by the promise of his Kingdom, but charity is infused by the Holy Spirit, "the Lord and Giver of life".

When he had ceased speaking, he said to Simon, 'Put out into deep water and let down your nets for a catch'. And Simon answered, 'Master, we toiled all night and took nothing! But at your word I will let down the nets'. And when they had done this, they made a great catch of fish; and as their nets were breaking, they beckoned to their partners in the other boat to come and help them. And they came and filled both the boats, so they began to sink

— *Lk* 5:4–7

Chapter 4: Living the Life of Jesus Christ in Oceania

Spiritual and Sacramental life

Come Holy Spirit!

36. “God’s love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us” (Rom 5:5). When “the Word was made flesh and dwelt among us” (Jn 1:14), God broke into human history so that we might become “partakers of the divine nature” (2 Pt 1:4). Living in Christ implies a way of life made new by the Spirit. Saint Paul speaks of putting on the new nature “created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness” (Eph 4:24). The Church in Oceania has been endowed by the Holy Spirit with many gifts. For all the great diversity of cultures and traditions, she is one in faith, hope and charity, one in Catholic doctrine and discipline, one in the communion of the Most Holy Trinity.¹²⁵ In this communion, all are called to live the life of Christ in the midst of their daily activities, to show forth the wonderful fruits of the Spirit (cf. Gal

¹²⁵Cf. John Paul II, Homily at the Mass for Evangelization, Mount Hagen (8 May 1984), 5: AAS 76 (1984), 1010.

5:22-23) and to be witnesses to God's love and mercy in the world.

The Spirit of Interiority

37. The Special Assembly emphasized the fundamental importance for the Church in Oceania of prayer and the interior life in union with Christ. Indigenous people have retained their appreciation of silence, contemplation and a sense of mystery in life. The frenetic activity of modern life with all its pressures makes it indispensable that Christians seek prayerful silence and contemplation as both conditions for and expressions of a vibrant faith. When God is no longer at the centre of human life, then life itself becomes empty and meaningless.¹²⁶

The Synod Fathers recognized the need to give fresh impetus and encouragement to the spiritual life of all the faithful. Jesus himself often "went off to a lonely place and prayed there" (*Mk* 1:35). The Evangelist notes: "His reputation continued to grow, and large crowds would gather to hear him and to have their sickness cured; he would always go off to some place where he could be alone and pray" (*Lk* 5:15-16). Jesus' prayer is our example, especially when we are caught up in the tensions and responsibilities of daily life. The Synod Fathers emphasized the importance of the life of prayer, considering the fact that the whole region faces the growing impact of secularization and materialism; and as a stimulus to the interior life, they encouraged visits to the Blessed Sacrament, the Stations of the Cross, the Rosary and other devotional exercises, as well as prayers in the family.¹²⁷ The presence in Oceania of communities

¹²⁶Cf. *Propositio* 21.

¹²⁷Cf. *ibid.*

of contemplative life is an especially powerful reminder of the spirit of interiority which helps us find the presence of God in our hearts. The spirit of interiority is also crucial in inspiring and guiding pastoral initiatives. It offers the strength of a genuinely apostolic love which mirrors the love of God.

“Lectio Divina” and Scripture

38. The Church “forcefully and specially exhorts all the Christian faithful...to learn ‘the surpassing knowledge of Jesus Christ’ (*Phil* 3:8) by frequent reading of the divine Scriptures... Let them remember, however, that prayer should accompany the reading of Sacred Scripture, so that a dialogue takes place between God and the reader. For ‘we speak to him when we pray; we listen to him when we read the divine oracles’”.¹²⁸ The word of God in the Old and New Testament is fundamental for all who believe in Christ, and it is the inexhaustible wellspring of evangelization. Holiness of life and effective apostolic activity are born of constant listening to God’s word. A renewed appreciation of Scripture allows us to return to the sources of our faith and encounter God’s truth in Christ. Acquaintance with the Scriptures is required of all the faithful, but particularly of seminarians, priests and religious. They are to be encouraged to engage in *lectio divina*, that quiet and prayerful meditation on the Scripture that allows the word of God to speak to the human heart. This form of prayer, privately or in groups, will deepen their love for the Bible and make it an essential and life-giving element of their daily lives.¹²⁹

¹²⁸Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation *Dei Verbum*, 25; Saint Ambrose, *De Officiis Ministrorum* 1, 20, 88: PL 16, 50.

¹²⁹Cf. *Propositio* 22.

For this reason, the Scriptures need to be accessible to all in Oceania. They need to be well and faithfully translated into the greatest possible number of vernacular languages. Much highly commendable work of biblical translation has already been done, but more still needs to be done. It is not enough, however, to provide the many linguistic groups with a biblical text which they can read; to help them understand what they read, there is a need for solid and continuing biblical formation for all who are called to proclaim and teach the word of God.¹³⁰

Liturgy

39. The Synod Fathers reflected at length on the importance of the liturgy in the local Churches in Oceania, and they expressed the desire that the local Churches continue to foster their liturgical life so that the faithful can enter more deeply into the mystery of Christ. They recognized greater participation of the People of God in the liturgy as one of the fruits of the Second Vatican Council, which has led in turn to a greater sense of mission, as it was intended to do. Christian life has been invigorated by a renewed understanding and appreciation of the liturgy, especially of the Eucharistic Sacrifice. The Council saw the renewal of the liturgy as a process of coming to an ever deeper understanding of the sacred rites, and in this regard many local Churches are involved in a theoretical reflection and practical actuation of a proper inculturation of the forms of worship, with due regard for the integrity of the Roman Rite. Adequate translations of liturgical texts and appropriate use of symbols drawn from local cultures can avert the cultural alienation of indigenous people when they approach the

¹³⁰Cf. *ibid.*

Church's worship.¹³¹ The words and signs of the liturgy will be the words and signs of their soul.

The Eucharist

40. The Eucharist completes Christian initiation and is the source and summit of the Christian life. Christ is really and fully present in the Sacrament of his Body and Blood, offered in sacrifice for the life of the world and received in communion by the faithful. From the very beginning, the Church has not ceased to obey the Lord's command, "Do this in memory of me" (1 Cor11:24). The Catholics of Oceania understand well the central place of the Eucharist in their lives. They realize that regular and prayerful celebration of the Eucharistic Sacrifice enables them to follow the path of personal holiness and to play their part in the Church's mission. The Synod Fathers were quick to acknowledge this widespread appreciation and intense love of the Church's greatest Sacrament.

They also expressed their concern that many communities throughout Oceania go without the celebration of the Eucharist for long periods.¹³² There are many reasons for this: the growing scarcity of priests available for pastoral ministry; especially in Australia, the growth of rural poverty and the movement to cities, which leads to an ever decreasing population and the isolation of many communities. The vast distances between many islands often mean that it is impossible to have a resident priest. Many communities therefore gather on the Lord's Day for services which are not celebrations of the Eucharist; and there is a need for great wisdom and courage in addressing this most

¹³¹Cf. *Propositio* 47.

¹³²Cf. *Propositio* 39.

regrettable situation. I make my own the Synod's insistence that greater efforts be made to awaken vocations to the priestly life, and to allocate priests throughout the region in a more equitable way.

The Sacrament of Penance

41. "It is important for us to reflect on the fact that Christ wills the Sacrament of Penance to be the source and sign of radical mercy, reconciliation and peace. The Church serves the world best when she is precisely what she is meant to be: a reconciled and reconciling community of Christ's disciples... The Church is never more herself than when she meditates and reconciles, in the love and power of Jesus Christ, through the Sacrament of Penance".¹³³ This is why the Synod Fathers were grateful that in many of the Churches in Oceania the Sacrament of Penance is widely practised and cherished as a source of healing grace.

Yet they also noted that in other local Churches there are serious pastoral challenges with regard to this Sacrament. Especially in developed societies, many of the faithful are confused or indifferent about the reality of sin and the need for forgiveness in the Sacrament of Penance. At times, the true sense of human freedom is not understood. The recovery of the fundamental place of the Sacrament of Penance in the life of the People of God was a deep desire of the Bishops. They urged "that a more extensive catechesis be offered on personal responsibility, the reality of sin and the Sacrament of Reconciliation so as to remind Catholics of the loving mercy of Jesus Christ made available through this Sacrament and of the need for sacramental

¹³³John Paul II, Address to the Bishops of New Zealand, Wellington (23 November 1986), 9: AAS 79 (1987), 940-941.

absolution for serious sin committed after Baptism; that, because of the assistance to spiritual progress provided by this Sacrament, priests are to be encouraged not only to make the Sacrament of Reconciliation an important part of their own lives, but to ensure its availability on a regular basis as a vital part of their ministry to the faithful".¹³⁴ The experience of the Great Jubilee suggests that the time has come for such a renewed catechesis and practice of the great Sacrament of mercy.

Anointing of the Sick

42. Christ's compassionate love is offered in a special way to the sick and suffering. This is reflected in the care which the Church extends to all who are suffering in body and spirit. The renewed Liturgy of the Sick has been a most positive contribution to the life of those who are in situations where life is endangered: serious illness, life-threatening surgery or old age. The elderly often suffer from the pain of isolation and loneliness. Community celebrations of this Sacrament are of great help and consolation to the sick and suffering, and a source of hope for those who accompany them. In a special way, the Synod Fathers wanted to thank all who support the sick and dying. Theirs is a precious witness to the love of Christ himself at a time when the sick and dying can be made to seem a burden.¹³⁵

¹³⁴ *Propositio* 40.

¹³⁵ Cf. *Propositio* 41.

The people of God

The Vocation of the Laity

43. Fundamental to Christian discipleship is the experience of being called like Matthew. “As Jesus was walking on from there he saw a man named Matthew sitting by the customs house, and he said to him, ‘Follow me’. And he got up and followed him” (Mt 9:9). In Baptism, all Christians have received the call to holiness. Each personal vocation is a call to share in the Church’s mission; and, given the needs of the new evangelization, it is especially important now to remind lay people in the Church of their particular call. The Synod Fathers “rejoiced in the work and witness of so many of the lay faithful who have been an integral part of the growth of the Church in Oceania”.¹³⁶ From the very beginning of the Church in this vast region, lay people have contributed to her growth and mission in many different ways; and they continue to do so through their involvement in various forms of service, especially in parishes as catechists, instructors in sacramental preparation, youth work, leadership of small groups and communities.

In a world that needs to see and hear the truth of Christ, lay people in their various professions are living witnesses to the Gospel. It is the fundamental call of lay people to renew the temporal order in all its many elements.¹³⁷ The Synod Fathers “pledged their support for lay men and women who live out their

¹³⁶ *Propositio* 30.

¹³⁷ Cf. Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Decree on the Apostolate of the Laity *Apostolicam Actuositatem*; John Paul II, Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Christifideles Laici* (30 December 1988): AAS 81 (1989), 393 ff.

principal Christian vocation in their daily lives and renew the temporal order through personal and family values, economic interests, the trades and professions, political institutions, international relations, the arts and so on”.¹³⁸ The Church supports and encourages lay people who strive to establish the proper scale of values in the temporal order and thus direct it to God through Christ. In this way, the Church becomes the yeast that leavens the entire loaf of the temporal order.

Young People in the Church

44. In many countries of Oceania, young people form the majority of the population, while in countries like Australia and New Zealand this is not true to the same extent. The Synod Fathers wanted to assure the youth of the Church in Oceania that they are called to be “salt of the earth and the light of the world” (*Mt* 5:13,14). The Bishops wished them to know that they are a vital part of the Church today, and that Church leaders are keen to find ways to involve young people more fully in the Church’s life and mission. Young Catholics are called to follow Jesus: not just in the future as adults, but now as maturing disciples. May they always be drawn to the overwhelmingly attractive figure of Jesus, and stirred by the challenge of the Gospel’s sublime ideals! Then they will be empowered to take up the active apostolate to which the Church is now calling them, and play their part joyfully and energetically in the life of the Church at every level: universal, national, diocesan and local.¹³⁹ Today “youth live in a culture which is uniquely theirs. It is essential that Church leaders study the culture and language of

¹³⁸ *Propositio* 30.

¹³⁹ Cf. *Propositio* 26.

youth, welcome them and incorporate the positive aspects of their culture into the Church's life and mission".¹⁴⁰

Yet this is also a time in which young people face great difficulties. Many are unable to find employment, frequently drifting to the larger cities where the pressures of isolation, loneliness and unemployment lead them into destructive situations. Some are tempted to drug abuse and other forms of addiction, and even to suicide. Yet in these situations too, young people are often searching for the life that only Christ can offer them. It is imperative therefore that the Church proclaim the Gospel to the young in ways that they can understand, ways that can enable them to grasp the hand of Christ who never ceases to reach out to them, especially in their dark times.

The Synod Fathers were convinced of the need for youth-to-youth ministry, and they echoed the plea I made to young people when I visited the region: "Do not be afraid to commit yourselves to the task of making Christ known and loved, especially among the many people of your own age, who make up the largest part of the population".¹⁴¹ With the Synod Fathers, I call on the young people of the Church to give prayerful consideration to the following of Jesus in the priesthood or in the consecrated life, for the need is great. The Bishops were quick to applaud young people for their acute sense of justice, personal integrity and respect for human dignity, for their care for the needy and their concern for the environment. These are signs of a great generosity of spirit which will not fail to bear fruit in the life of the Church now, as it has always done in the past.

¹⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

¹⁴¹ Homily at the Beatification of Peter To Rot, Port Moresby (17 January 1995), 8: AAS 87 (1995), 995.

In many places Youth Pilgrimages are a positive feature of the life of young Catholics.¹⁴² Pilgrimage has long been part of the Christian life, and it can be most helpful in conferring a sense of identity and belonging. The Synod Fathers recognized the importance of the World Youth Day as an opportunity for young people to experience genuine *communio*, as was seen most memorably during the Great Jubilee. There they come together to listen to God's word presented in a language which they understand, to reflect upon it prayerfully and to take part in inspiring liturgies and prayer meetings.¹⁴³ Time and again I have seen how many of them are by nature open to the mystery of God revealed in the Gospel. May the glorious mystery of Jesus Christ bring unending peace and joy to the young people of Oceania!

Marriage and Family Life

45. "The Christian family constitutes a specific revelation and realization of ecclesial communion, and for this reason it can and should be called a domestic church".¹⁴⁴ Ultimately, the family is an image of the ineffable *communio* of the Most Holy Trinity. In the procreation and education of children the family also shares in God's work of creation, and as such it is a great force for evangelization in the Church and beyond. "The Church and society in Oceania depend heavily on the quality of family life".¹⁴⁵ This implies great responsibility for Christians who enter

¹⁴²Cf. *Propositio* 26.

¹⁴³Cf. *ibid.*

¹⁴⁴John Paul II, Apostolic Exhortation *Familiaris Consortio* (22 November 1981), 21: AAS 74 (1982), 105.

¹⁴⁵*Propositio* 23.

the marriage covenant, and “there needs to be suitable pastoral preparation for all couples seeking the Sacrament of Marriage”.¹⁴⁶

As an institution, the family will always need the concerted pastoral care of the Church, and there will be special need to acknowledge the requirements and responsibilities of larger families. Church and civic authorities ought to feel the duty to provide all possible services and support in order to affirm parents and families. The Church is especially conscious of women’s right to freedom in entering marriage and their right to respect within marriage. Polygamy, which still exists in some areas, is a serious cause of exploitation of women. More generally, the Synod Fathers were concerned for the social condition of women in Oceania, insisting that the principle of equal wages for equal work be respected and that women not be excluded from employment. At the same time, it is vital that mothers not be penalized for staying at home to care for their children, for the dignity of parenthood is very great and the care of children is supremely important.

In families where both parents are Catholic, it is easier for them to share their common faith with their children. While acknowledging with gratitude those inter-faith marriages which succeed in nourishing the faith of both spouses and children, the Synod encourages pastoral efforts to promote marriages between people of the same faith.¹⁴⁷

Today in Oceania as elsewhere, marriage and family life are facing many pressures. This can corrode marriage as the basic unit of human society, with the gravest of consequences for

¹⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁷ Cf. *ibid.*

society itself. As I noted when I was in Australia: “The Christian concept of marriage and the family is being opposed by a new secular, pragmatic and individualistic outlook which has gained standing in the area of legislation and which has a certain ‘approval’ in the realm of public opinion”.¹⁴⁸ Recognizing this, the Synod Fathers urged that “pastoral programmes ought to provide support for families that face any of the serious problems of modern society: alcohol, drugs, behavioural addictions, gambling... In view of the difficulties facing marriage and family life today, with the sad reality of marital disharmony, breakdown and divorce, the Synod calls for a renewed catechesis on the ideals of Christian marriage”.¹⁴⁹ The Church has a unique opportunity to present Christian marriage anew as a life-long covenant in Christ, based on generous self-giving and unconditional love. This splendid vision of marriage and the family offers a saving truth not only to individuals but to society as a whole. Therefore, the theological principles underpinning the Church’s teaching on marriage and the family must be carefully and convincingly explained to all.¹⁵⁰

Programmes of marriage-enrichment can help couples confirm their commitment to their vows and deepen their joy in the mutual gift of self through married love. If however the marriage is threatened in any way, pastors are asked to give every care to those caught up in this distress. The Synod was conscious of the great dedication of single parents in the task of raising and educating their children, and it expressed appreciation of them as they live out the Gospel in often difficult circumstances. Special

¹⁴⁸ Address to the Bishops of Australia, Sydney (26 November 1986), 10: AAS 79 (1987), 960.

¹⁴⁹ *Propositio* 23.

¹⁵⁰ Cf. *Propositio* 24.

care needs to be given to these parents and their children by clergy, Catholic schools and catechists.¹⁵¹

Women in the Church

46. The great procession of saints through the ages makes it clear that women have always brought unique and indispensable gifts to the life of the Church, and that without those gifts the Christian community would be hopelessly impoverished.¹⁵² More than ever now, the Church needs the skills and energies, indeed the sanctity of women, if the new evangelization is to bear the fruit so earnestly sought. While some women still feel excluded in the Church as well as in society as a whole, many others find a deep sense of fulfilment in contributing to parish life, participating in the liturgy, the prayer life and the apostolic and charitable works of the Church in Oceania. It is important that the Church at the local level enable women to play their rightful part in the Church's mission; they should never be made to feel alien. Many forms of the lay apostolate and many lay formation programmes are open to women, as are various roles of leadership which allow them to offer their gifts more abundantly in service of the Church's mission.¹⁵³

New Ecclesial Movements

47. One of the "signs of the times" for the Church in Oceania is the emergence of new ecclesial movements, which are another of the fruits of the Second Vatican Council. They offer a powerful

¹⁵¹Cf. *ibid.*

¹⁵²Cf. John Paul II, Apostolic Letter *Mulieris Dignitatem* (15 August 1988): AAS 80 (1988), 1653–1729; *Letter to Women* (29 June 1995): AAS 87 (1995), 803–812.

¹⁵³Cf. *Propositio* 27.

stimulus and support to Catholics of all ages in the attempt to live the life of discipleship more intensely. Some of them are also producing a good number of vocations to the priesthood and consecrated life; and this is cause for great gratitude. Through these ecclesial movements, many Catholics are discovering Christ at a new depth, and this experience enables them to remain faithful in the cultural context of the day, whatever the difficulties. As these movements help people to grow in their Christian life, they bring to the Church many gifts of holiness and service.¹⁵⁴ Welcoming these movements as signs of the Holy Spirit at work in the Church, the Synod Fathers asked that they work within the structures of the local Churches in order to help build up the *communio* of the Diocese in which they find themselves. The local Bishop should “exercise his pastoral judgment in welcoming and guiding them, while asking them to respect the pastoral strategy of the Diocese”.¹⁵⁵

Ordained ministry and the consecrated life

Vocations and Seminaries

48. Given the essential role of the priesthood and the great importance of the consecrated life in the mission of the Church, the Bishops at the Special Assembly affirmed the witness offered by Bishops, priests and those in the consecrated life through their prayer, fidelity, generosity and simplicity of life.¹⁵⁶ The field in which they work is vast and they are relatively few. Yet

¹⁵⁴Cf. *Propositio* 11.

¹⁵⁵*Ibid.*

¹⁵⁶Cf. *Propositio* 29.

Oceania has many young people who are a precious spiritual resource; and among them are undoubtedly many who are called to the priesthood or to the consecrated life. “Would that an ever increasing number might attentively listen to and willingly accept those words of Christ which speak of a special personal choice by God of an apostolic fruitfulness: ‘You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit and that your fruit should abide’ (Jn 15:16).”¹⁵⁷ The Synod Fathers pointed to the serious shortage of priests and consecrated religious in Oceania. The promotion of vocations is an urgent responsibility of every Catholic community. Each Bishop should see to the establishment and implementation of a plan to promote priestly and religious vocations at every level - diocesan, parish, school and family. The Synod Fathers look to the future with hope and trust, praying “the Lord of the harvest to send labourers into the harvest” (Lk 10:2). They are firm in their faith that “God will provide” (Gen 22:8).

In seminaries, the priests of the future are formed in the image of the Good Shepherd, “joining themselves with Christ in the recognition of the Father’s will and in the gift of themselves to the flock entrusted to them”.¹⁵⁸ Each Bishop is responsible for the formation of the local clergy in the context of the local culture and tradition. In this regard, the Synod Fathers asked that “serious consideration be given to more flexible and creative models of formation and learning”¹⁵⁹ which take into account the essential elements of a well integrated formation of candidates

¹⁵⁷ John Paul II, Homily at the Mass for Vocations, Port Moresby (7 May 1984), 4: AAS 76 (1984), 1006.

¹⁵⁸ Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Decree on the Ministry and Life of Priests *Presbyterorum Ordinis*, 14.

¹⁵⁹ *Propositio* 37.

for the priesthood in Oceania: human, intellectual, spiritual and pastoral formation.¹⁶⁰ At the same time, the Bishops expressed “caution concerning extremes of clericalism or secularism and the dangers of inadequate competence, sometimes the result of present-day seminary formation that neglects the real academic and spiritual needs of seminarians”.¹⁶¹

Special attention needs to be given to the situation of some Churches in Oceania. In the particular Churches of Papua New Guinea, Solomon Islands and the other island nations of the Pacific, new seminaries have been opened to cater for an increasing number of seminarians who need to be formed in their own regions and in contact with their own culture. While giving thanks for the precious gift of new vocations, the Synod Fathers also recognized the need for more local staff, adequately trained for both academic and formation purposes. Some proposals were made in order to overcome this now critical situation, including the sharing of personnel within Oceania. Local diocesan priests should be provided with more opportunities for higher studies both within the region and further afield. A mutually agreed exchange programme could be established to meet these various needs. The overriding concern of the Bishops is the integral human and pastoral formation of the seminarians in their own cultural context. Solutions need to be found in order to provide the necessary financial support for seminaries, which is at present a heavy burden on many Dioceses. Where there are insufficient resources in Oceania, appeal should be made to the wider Church, and to religious

¹⁶⁰Cf. John Paul II, Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Pastores Dabo Vobis* (25 March 1992), 43–59; AAS 84 (1992), 731–762.

¹⁶¹*Propositio* 37.

orders, congregations and institutes, to help the young Churches form qualified local personnel.¹⁶² The future of the Church in Oceania depends in large part upon this, for the Church cannot function without the sacramental priesthood, and cannot function well without good priests.

The Life of the Ordained

49. Since the Second Vatican Council, the priest has been confronted with changes, developments and the challenges of contemporary society. The Synod Fathers acknowledged “the ongoing fidelity and commitment of priests in their priestly ministry. This fidelity is all the more impressive as it is lived in a world of uncertainty, isolation, busyness and, at times, indifference and apathy. We acknowledge the fidelity of priests as a powerful witness to Christ’s compassion for all his people, and commend them for it”.¹⁶³

The life of the priest is modelled absolutely on the example of Christ, who gave himself so that all may have life to the full. Through the ordained priesthood, the presence of Christ is made visible in the midst of the community. This does not mean, however, that priests are exempt from human weakness or sin. Therefore, every priest needs unceasing conversion and openness to the Spirit in order to deepen his priestly commitment in fidelity to Christ. “To preserve this fidelity, this Synod urges all clergy to renew their efforts to model their prayer life on that of Christ and to adopt a life-style that reflects Christ’s life of simplicity, trust in the Father, generosity to the

¹⁶²Cf. *Propositio* 38.

¹⁶³*Propositio* 36.

poor and identification with the powerless”.¹⁶⁴

The Synod was conscious of the erosion of priestly identity, in particular the denigration of priestly celibacy in a world influenced by values which are contrary to the demands of the Gospel. Priestly celibacy is a deep mystery grounded in the love of Christ, and it calls for a radical, loving, all-embracing relationship with Christ and his Body the Church. Celibacy is God’s gift to those called to live the Christian life as priests, and it is a great grace for the whole Church, a testimony of the total gift of self for the sake of the Kingdom. The ageless values of evangelical celibacy and chastity should be defended and explained by the Church in cultures that have never known them and in contemporary societies where such values are little understood or appreciated. An ever deeper exploration of the Christian mystery of celibacy will help those who have accepted this gift to live it more faithfully and peacefully.¹⁶⁵

The Second Vatican Council taught that “all priests, who are constituted in the order of priesthood by the Sacrament of Orders, are bound together by an intimate sacramental brotherhood, but in a special way they form one priestly body in the Diocese to which they are attached under their own Bishop”.¹⁶⁶ In fact, priests with their Bishop constitute a unique community, often called the *presbyterium*. In a special way the *communio* of the *presbyterium* finds liturgical expression in the Rite of Priestly Ordination, and in a concelebration of the Eucharist with the Bishop, especially at the Mass of the Chrism

¹⁶⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁶⁵ Cf. *Propositio* 35.

¹⁶⁶ Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Decree on the Ministry and Life of Priests *Presbyterorum Ordinis*, 8.

on Holy Thursday. Priests who are sick, elderly and retired have a special place in the *presbyterium*. As a sign of the Church's recognition of their fidelity, they must always be provided with adequate assistance and sustenance. Clergy who retire from administrative responsibility should be made to feel that they still have a valued place within the *presbyterium*.¹⁶⁷

The *communio* of the *presbyterium* has other practical aspects. "Priests need the company and support of other priests and their Bishop. Bishops are encouraged to make the priests feel that they are indeed co-workers with him in the Lord's vineyard. They should also encourage priests to minister to one another, in a spirit of brotherhood, in order to build a strong local diocesan clergy through mutual support and ongoing renewal".¹⁶⁸ This support in brotherly love is particularly important in island situations where many priests come from societies with strong community bonds, and where they often find themselves given special honour because of their Ordination and rank within society. "Treated in this way by the people they are asked to serve, they need considerable support to establish their own traditions and way of life as diocesan priests".¹⁶⁹

The life of Bishops, priests and deacons requires continuing formation and opportunities to renew their zeal in their divine vocation. The Synod Fathers strongly recommended appropriate spiritual, pastoral, intellectual and recreational opportunities in order to increase the capacity to minister effectively and engage energetically in mission through the years. Certain aspects of

¹⁶⁷ Cf. *Propositio* 36.

¹⁶⁸ *Propositio* 33.

¹⁶⁹ *Ibid.*

continuing formation were highlighted by the Synod: “All ministers are reminded that the fulfilment of their daily tasks provide spiritual enlightenment and refreshment - celebration of the Holy Eucharist, daily reading of Scripture, praying the Liturgy of the Hours, studying the Scriptures and other sources for preaching and teaching, hearing confessions, and reading theological books and journals; personal efforts must be made to take part in retreats, conferences and annual leave, even when this means absenting oneself from pastoral duties. Ongoing formation requires that all continue to develop their ability to proclaim the Gospel message in a way that can be understood by their people; ongoing formation is not only intellectual but also spiritual, human and pastoral. The Bishops are encouraged to organize ongoing formation in their Dioceses along these lines; and provision must be made for study leave and spiritual renewal for all clergy”.¹⁷⁰ The Synod Fathers expressed their desire to offer pastoral care to their priests by being open to their needs in every circumstance. They were also sensitive to the situation of those who have left the priesthood.

In certain parts of Oceania, sexual abuse by some clergy and religious has caused great suffering and spiritual harm to the victims. It has been very damaging in the life of the Church and has become an obstacle to the proclamation of the Gospel. The Synod Fathers condemned all sexual abuse and all forms of abuse of power, both within the Church and in society as a whole. Sexual abuse within the Church is a profound contradiction of the teaching and witness of Jesus Christ. The Synod Fathers wished to apologize unreservedly to the victims for the pain and

¹⁷⁰ *Propositio 34.*

disillusionment caused to them.¹⁷¹ The Church in Oceania is seeking open and just procedures to respond to complaints in this area, and is unequivocally committed to compassionate and effective care for the victims, their families, the whole community, and the offenders themselves.

The Permanent Diaconate

50. The Second Vatican Council decided to restore the permanent diaconate as part of the ordained ministry of the Latin Church. It has been introduced into some Dioceses of Oceania, where it has been well received. A particular advantage of the permanent diaconate is its adaptability to a great variety of local pastoral needs. The Bishops in Synod gave thanks for the untiring work and dedication of the permanent deacons in Oceania, and were conscious of the generosity of the families of married deacons. The proper formation of the deacons is vital, as is a thorough catechesis and preparation throughout the Diocese, especially in the communities where they will serve.¹⁷² It is also important that they receive continuing formation. It is good for priests and deacons, each responding to his particular vocation, to work together closely in preaching the Gospel and administering the Sacraments.¹⁷³

The Consecrated Life

51. The history of the founding of the Church in Oceania is largely the history of the missionary apostolate of countless men

¹⁷¹Cf. *Propositio* 43.

¹⁷²Cf. Congregation For Catholic Education and Congregation For The Clergy, *Ratio fundamentalis institutionis diaconorum permanentium* and *Directorium pro ministerio et vita diaconorum permanentium* (22 February 1998): AAS 90 (1998), 843–926.

¹⁷³Cf. *Propositio* 32.

and women religious, who proclaimed the Gospel with selfless dedication in a wide range of situations and cultures. Their enduring commitment to the work of evangelization remains vitally important and continues to enrich the life of the Church in unique ways. Their vocation makes them experts in the *communio* of the Church. By pursuing the perfection of charity in the service of the Kingdom, they respond to the thirst for spirituality of the peoples of Oceania and are a sign of the holiness of the Church.¹⁷⁴ Pastors should always affirm the unique value of the consecrated life and give thanks to God for the spirit of sacrifice of families willing to give one or more of their children to the Lord in this wonderful way.¹⁷⁵

Faithful to the charisms of the consecrated life, congregations, institutes and societies of apostolic life have courageously adjusted to new circumstances, and have shown forth in new ways the light of the Gospel. Good formation is vital for the future of the consecrated life, and it is essential that aspirants receive the best possible theological, spiritual and human training. In this regard, the young should be accompanied appropriately in the early years of their journey of discipleship. Given the central importance of the consecrated life in the Church in Oceania, it is important that Bishops respect the charisms of the religious institutes and encourage them in every way to share their charisms with the local Church. This can be done through their involvement in planning and decision-making in the Diocese; by the same token, Bishops should encourage religious men and women to join in implementing pastoral plans within the local Church.

¹⁷⁴Cf. *Propositio* 29.

¹⁷⁵Cf. *ibid.*

Contemplative orders have taken root in Oceania, and they attest in a special way to God's transcendence and the supreme value of Christ's love. They witness to the intimacy of communion between the person, the community and God. The Synod Fathers were conscious that the life of prayer in the contemplative vocation is vital for the Church in Oceania. From the very heart of the Church and in mysterious ways, it inspires and influences the faithful to live the life of Christ more radically. Therefore, the Bishops urged that there never cease to be in Oceania a deep appreciation of the contemplative life and a determination to promote it in every way possible.¹⁷⁶

52. Pondering God's generosity in Oceania and his infinite love for its peoples, how can we fail to give thanks to him from whom every good gift comes? And among these many gifts, how can we fail to praise God especially for the unfathomable treasure of faith and the call to mission which it implies? We have put our faith in Christ, and it is the word of Christ that we are summoned to speak in the concrete circumstances of our time and cultures. The Special Assembly for Oceania has offered many directions and suggestions which need to be taken up by the local Churches in Oceania to ensure that they play their part in the work of the new evangelization. In the face of every difficulty, we are all called to this task by the Risen Christ, who commanded his Apostles, "Put out into deep water and pay out your nets for a catch" (*Lk* 5:4). Our faith in Jesus tells us that our hope is not in vain and we can say with Peter: "At your word, I will let down the nets" (*Lk* 5:5). The result is astonishing: "They caught a huge shoal of fish" (*Lk* 5:6). Though the waters of

¹⁷⁶Cf. *ibid.*

Oceania are many, vast and deep, the Church in Oceania has not ceased to walk joyfully and confidently with Christ, telling his truth and living his life. Now is the time for the great catch!

Conclusion

Mary our Mother

53. To conclude this Apostolic Exhortation, I invite you to join me in turning to the Virgin Mary, Mother of Jesus and Mother of the Church, who is so revered throughout Oceania. Missionaries and immigrants alike brought with them a deep devotion to her as an integral part of their Catholic faith; and since that time, the faithful of Oceania have not ceased to show their great love for Mary.¹⁷⁷ She has been a wondrous helper in all the Church's efforts to preach and teach the Gospel in the world of the Pacific. In our time, she is no less present to the Church than she was at Pentecost, gathered with the Apostles in prayer (cf. *Acts*1:14). With her prayer and presence, she will surely support the new evangelization just as she supported the first. In times of difficulty and pain, Mary has been an unfailing refuge for those seeking peace and healing. In churches, chapels and homes, the image of Mary reminds people of her loving presence and her maternal protection. In parts of the Pacific region, she is especially venerated under the title of Help of Christians; and the Bishops have proclaimed her as Patroness of Oceania under the title of Our Lady of Peace.

¹⁷⁷ Cf. *Propositio* 48.

In Jesus Christ, whom she nurtured in her womb, there is born a new world where justice and mercy meet, a world of freedom and peace. Through Christ's Cross and Resurrection, God has reconciled the world to himself, and he has made the Lord Jesus the Prince of Peace for every time and place. May Mary, *Regina Pacis*, help the peoples of Oceania to know this peace, and to share it with others! At the dawn of the Third Christian Millennium, may true justice and harmony be God's gift to Oceania and to all the nations of the world!¹⁷⁸

With gratitude for the grace of this Special Assembly, I commend all the peoples of Oceania to the maternal protection of the Blessed Virgin, trusting absolutely that hers is an ear that always listens, hers a heart that always welcomes, and hers a prayer that never fails.

Prayer

O Mary, Help of Christians,
in our need we turn to you
with eyes of love, with empty hands
and longing hearts.
We look to you that we may see your Son,
our Lord.
We lift our hands that
we may have the Bread of Life.

¹⁷⁸Cf. *ibid.*

We open wide our hearts
to receive the Prince of Peace.
Mother of the Church,
your sons and daughters thank you
for your trusting word that echoes
through the ages,
rising from an empty soul made full of grace,
prepared by God to welcome
the Word to the world
that the world itself might be reborn.
In you, the reign of God has dawned,
a reign of grace and peace, love and justice,
born from the depths of the Word made flesh.
The Church throughout the world joins you
in praising him
whose mercy is from age to age.
O Stella Maris, light of every ocean
and mistress of the deep,
guide the peoples of Oceania
across all dark and stormy seas,
that they may reach the haven of peace and light
prepared in him who calmed the sea.
Keep all your children safe from harm
for the waves are high and we are far from home.
As we set forth upon the oceans of the world,
and cross the deserts of our time,
show us, O Mary, the fruit of your womb,
for without your Son we are lost.
Pray that we will never fail on life's journey,
that in heart and mind, in word and deed,

in days of turmoil and in days of calm,
we will always look to Christ and say,
“Who is this that even wind and sea obey him?”
Our Lady of Peace, in whom all storms grow still,
pray at the dawn of the new millennium
that the Church in Oceania
will not cease to show forth
the glorious face of your Son,
full of grace and truth,
so that God will reign in the hearts
of the Pacific peoples
and they will find peace
in the world’s true Saviour.
Plead for the Church in Oceania
that she may have strength
to follow faithfully the way of Jesus Christ,
to tell courageously the truth of Jesus Christ,
to live joyfully the life of Jesus Christ.
O Help of Christians, protect us!
Bright Star of the Sea, guide us!
Our Lady of Peace, pray for us!

Given in Rome at Saint Peter’s, 22 November 2001, the twenty-fourth of my Pontificate.

JOANNES PAULUS PP. II