

Shrines in *Ecclesia in Asia* and in Canon Law: Their Contribution to the Evangelization in Asia

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“Throughout Asia there are hundreds of Marian sanctuaries and shrines where not only the Catholic faithful gather, but also believers of other religions too.” (*Ecclesia in Asia*, 51)

The words “sanctuary” and “shrine” appear only once in *Ecclesia in Asia*, in a Marian [and ecumenical] context. But the implications are very broad since there is a direct reference to the “challenging mission” the Church has in Asia.¹

What is exactly that “challenging mission”? Answering this question may lead us eventually to address the main issue of our title, namely, the contribution of shrines to the evangelization in Asia.

We need to have a look first to the Apostolic Exhortation *Ecclesia in Asia*, promulgated by John Paul II on November 6, 1999.

I. THE POST-SYNODAL EXHORTATION *ECCLESIA IN ASIA*

Through this Post-Synodal Exhortation, Pope John Paul II shared with the Church in Asia and throughout the world the fruits

¹ The previous sentence to the one quoted above refers expressly to Mary and to the challenging mission of Asia: “Faced with such a challenging mission, we turn to Mary, for whom, as the Synod Fathers said, Asian Christians have a great love and affection, revering her as their own Mother and the Mother of Christ.” (*Ecclesia in Asia*, 51)

of the Special Assembly for Asia of the Synod of Bishops that took place from 18 April to 14 May 1998 in the Vatican.

1. *The Fruits of the Synod for Asia*

The Special Assembly for Asia of the Synod of Bishops was a moment of grace. Its actual celebration, apart from confirming the importance of "dialogue as a characteristic mode of the church's life in Asia,"² strengthened the brothers "in their faith and mission," thus becoming "a great spiritual event of communion and Episcopal collegiality."³ The Synod was:

a) *A celebratory remembrance.* A remembrance of the Asian roots of Christianity, as well as a recognition of the ancient religious traditions and civilizations which have made Asia what it is today. Above all, a remembrance of the peoples of Asia themselves as the continent's true wealth and hope for the future.⁴

b) *A call to conversion.* "In recalling the Catholic community's humble condition, as well as the weaknesses of its members, the Synod was also *a call to conversion*, so that the Church in Asia might become ever more worthy of the graces continually being offered by God."⁵

c) *An ardent affirmation of faith.* This faith is "in Jesus Christ the Saviour." "Grateful for the gift of faith, the Synod Fathers found no better way to celebrate the faith than to affirm it in its integrity, and to reflect on it in relation to the context in which it has to be proclaimed and professed in Asia today."⁶

² *Ecclesia in Asia*, 3.

³ *Ibidem*, 4.

⁴ "The Synod was a *celebratory remembering* of the Asian roots of Christianity... The Synod was also an occasion to recognize the ancient religious traditions and civilizations, the profound philosophies and the wisdom which have made Asia what it is today. Above all, the peoples of Asia themselves were remembered as the continent's true wealth and hope for the future... This celebration was not one motivated by pride in human achievements, but one conscious of what the Almighty has done for the Church in Asia (cf. *Lk* 1:49). (*Ecclesia in Asia*, 4)

⁵ *Ibidem*.

⁶ *Ibidem*. The Synod Fathers emphasized that "the faith is already being proclaimed with trust and courage on the continent, even amid great difficulties.

d) *A commitment to mission.* "During the Synod Assembly, the Bishops and participants bore witness to the character, spiritual fire and zeal which will assuredly make Asia the land of a bountiful harvest in the coming millennium."⁷

2. *The Asian Context*

A critical awareness of the diverse and complex realities of Asia is essential if the People of God on the continent are to respond to God's will for them in the new evangelization. The Synod Fathers insisted that "the Church's mission of love and service in Asia is conditioned by two factors: on the one hand, her self-understanding as a community of disciples of Jesus Christ gathered around her Pastors, and on the other hand, the social, political, religious, cultural and economic realities of Asia."⁸

a) *Religious and Cultural Realities*

Asia is the earth's largest continent and is home to nearly two-thirds of the world's population, with China and India accounting for almost half the total population of the globe. The most striking feature of the continent is the variety of its peoples who are "heirs to ancient cultures, religions and traditions."

Asia is not only "the birthplace of Jesus and of the Church," but also the cradle of the world's major religions – Judaism, Christianity, Islam and Hinduism. It is also the birthplace of many other spiritual traditions such as Buddhism, Taoism, Confucianism, Zoro-

In the name of so many millions of men and women in Asia who put their trust in no one other than the Lord, the Synod Fathers confessed: "We have believed and come to know that you are the Holy One of God" (*Jn* 6:69). In the face of the many painful questions posed by the suffering, violence, discrimination and poverty to which the majority of Asian peoples are subjected, they prayed: "I believe, help my unbelief" (*Mk* 9:24).

⁷ Ibidem. On this regard, John Paul recalls that, in 1995, during his visit to Manila he invited the Bishops of Asia gathered there to "open wide to Christ the doors of Asia." (Address to the Sixth Plenary Assembly of the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conference (FABC), Manila [15 January 1995], 10: *Insegnamenti* XVIII, 1 [1995], 159. Now the Synod Fathers courageously call all Christ's disciples in Asia to a new *commitment to mission*.

⁸ Ibidem, no. 5.

astrianism, Jainism, Sikhism and Shintoism. Millions also espouse traditional or tribal religions. The Church has the deepest respect for these traditions and seeks to engage in sincere dialogue with their followers. *The religious values they teach await their fulfillment in Jesus Christ.*⁹

The people of Asia take pride in their religious and cultural values.¹⁰ In particular they hold the family to be a vital source of strength, a closely knit community with a powerful sense of solidarity. Many people experience a deep thirst for spiritual values, as the rise of new religious movements clearly demonstrates.

b) Economic and Social Realities

On the subject of economic development, situations on the Asian continent are very diverse, defying any simple classification. Some countries are highly developed, others are developing through effective economic policies, and others still find themselves in abject poverty, indeed among the poorest nations on earth. In the process of development, materialism and secularism are also gaining ground, especially in urban areas. These ideologies, which undermine traditional, social and religious values, threaten Asia's cultures with incalculable damage.¹¹

The Synod Fathers spoke of the rapid changes taking place within Asian societies and of the positive and negative aspects of these changes: urbanization, migration, tourism, population growth, new forms of behavior, poverty, abortion.

c) Political Realities

In Asia today the political panorama is highly complex, displaying an array of ideologies ranging from democratic forms of

⁹ Ibidem, no. 6.

¹⁰ Among these religious and cultural values *Ecclesia in Asia* (no. 6) mentions the following: "love of silence and contemplation, simplicity, harmony, detachment, non-violence, the spirit of hard work, discipline, frugal living, the thirst for learning and philosophical enquiry..." "...The values of respect for life, compassion for all beings, closeness to nature, filial piety towards parents, elders and ancestors, and a highly developed sense of community..." "...The spirit of religious tolerance and peaceful co-existence."

¹¹ Ibidem, 7.

government to theocratic ones. Military dictatorships and atheistic ideologies are very much present. Some countries recognize an official state religion that allows little or no religious freedom to minorities and the followers of other religions. Other States, though not explicitly theocratic, reduce minorities to second-class citizens with little safeguard for their fundamental human rights. In some places Christians are not allowed to practice their faith freely and proclaim Jesus Christ to others. They are persecuted and denied their rightful place in society.¹²

While appreciating the progress which many Asian countries are making under their different forms of government, the Synod Fathers also drew attention to the widespread corruption existing at various levels of both government and society. However, there is a growing awareness throughout Asia of people's capacity to change unjust structures.

d) *The Church in Asia*

"The history of the Church in Asia is as old as the Church herself, for it was in Asia that Jesus breathed the Holy Spirit upon his disciples and sent them to the ends of the earth to proclaim the Good News and gather communities of believers..."¹³

While some particular Churches carry out their mission in peace and freedom, others find themselves in situations of violence and conflict, or feel threatened by other groups, for religious or other reasons.¹⁴

Whatever the circumstances, the Church in Asia finds herself among peoples who *display an intense yearning for God*. The Church knows that this yearning can only be fully satisfied by Jesus Christ, the Good News of God for all the nations.¹⁵

¹² Ibidem, 8.

¹³ Ibidem, 9.

¹⁴ Ibidem. "In the vastly diversified cultural world of Asia, the Church faces multiple philosophical, theological and pastoral challenges. Her task is made more difficult by the fact of her being a minority, with the only exception the Philippines, where Catholics are in the majority."

¹⁵ The Synod Fathers were very keen that this Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation should focus attention on this yearning and encourage the Church in Asia to proclaim with vigor in word and deed that *Jesus Christ is the Savior*.

There are some positive elements found in the local churches that strengthen our expectation of a new springtime of Christian life." One solid cause of hope is the increasing number of better-trained, enthusiastic and Spirit-filled *lay people*, who are more and more aware of their specific vocation within the ecclesial community. Among them the *lay catechists* deserve special recognition and praise. The *apostolic and charismatic movements* too are a gift of the Spirit, bringing new life and vigor to the formation of lay men and women, families and the young. *Associations and ecclesial movements* devoted to the promotion of human dignity and justice make accessible and tangible the universality of the evangelical message of our adoption as children of God.

At the same time, there are Churches in very difficult circumstances, "experiencing intense trials in the practice of their faith," as for instance in China, North Korea, Vietnam, Laos, Myanmar and in some predominantly Islamic states.

Finally, worth mentioning are the Saints and Martyrs of Asia, both those who have been recognized and those known only to God, whose example is a source of "spiritual richness and a great means of evangelization."

3. *Proclamation of Jesus the Savior: Challenges*

A survey of the Catholic communities in Asia shows a splendid variety by reason of their origin and historical development, and the diverse spiritual and liturgical traditions of the various Rites. Yet all are united in proclaiming the Good News of Jesus Christ, through Christian witness, works of charity and human solidarity.

The Church's unique contribution to the peoples of the continent is the proclamation of Jesus Christ, true God and true man, the one and only Savior for all peoples.¹⁶ What distinguishes the Church from other religious communities is her faith in Jesus Christ; and she cannot keep this precious light of faith under a bushel (cf. *Mt* 5:15), for her mission is to share that light with everyone.

However, in carrying out such proclamation, some challenges have to be faced. We need to confront the dark realities in the heart

¹⁶ Ibidem, 10.

of Asia, not in order to moan and wail in despair, but in order that we may be challenged by the magnitude of the task and thus place our hope in the Lord who remains, despite our valiant efforts, the ultimate builder of the Kingdom (cf. Ps 127).¹⁷

a) The challenge of bringing back Jesus to Asia

The Church's faith in Jesus is a gift received and a gift to be shared; it is the greatest gift which the Church can offer to Asia. Sharing the truth of Jesus Christ with others is the solemn duty of all who have received the gift of faith.¹⁸ "To bear witness to Jesus Christ is the supreme service which the Church can offer to the peoples of Asia."¹⁹

How can the Church proclaim the Good News given the complexity of so many different situations in Asia? First, by showing *loving respect and esteem for her listeners*, for a proclamation which respects the rights of consciences does not violate freedom, since faith always demands a free response on the part of the individual.²⁰ Second, by *explicitly proclaiming the Gospel in its fullness*, for "neither respect and esteem for these religions nor the complexity of the questions raised are an invitation to the Church to withhold from these non-Christians the proclamation of Jesus Christ."²¹

The difficulty in proclaiming Jesus as the *only* Savior comes from the fact that the followers of the great religions of Asia, even if they have no problem in accepting Jesus as a manifestation of the Divine, however, it is difficult for them to see Him as the only

¹⁷ Cf. FABC, *Final Statement*, 3.0.1. Forth Plenary Assembly, Tokyo, Japan, September 16-25, 1986.

¹⁸ "The Church, and every individual Christian within her, may not keep hidden or monopolize this newness and richness which has been received from God's bounty in order to be communicated to all mankind." (John Paul II, *Redemptoris Missio*, 11: AAS 83 [1991], 260).

¹⁹ *Ecclesia in Asia*, 20. Such witnessing is the supreme service to Asia "for it responds to their profound longing for the Absolute, and it unveils the truths and values which will ensure their integral human development." (Ib.)

²⁰ Cf. Declaration on Religious Freedom *Dignitatis Humanae*, 3-4; John Paul II, *Redemptoris Missio*, 39: AAS 83 [1991], 287.

²¹ Paul VI, *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, 53; cf. *Ecclesia in Asia*, 20.

manifestation of the Divine.²² This difficulty is compounded by the fact that Jesus is often perceived as foreign to Asia.²³

Be what it may, there can be no true evangelization without the explicit proclamation of Jesus as Lord. "There is no true evangelization if the name, the teaching, the life, the promises, the Kingdom and the mystery of Jesus of Nazareth, the Son of God, are not proclaimed," wrote Paul VI²⁴ and the Church's magisterium has repeatedly stressed. This is what generations of Christians have done down the centuries, following the example and experience of Paul.²⁵ Certainly, the presentation of Jesus Christ as the only Savior needs to follow "an evocative pedagogy, using stories, parables and symbols so characteristic of Asian methodology in teaching."²⁶

b) *The Challenge of Inculturation*

The faith which the Church offers as a gift to her Asian sons and daughters cannot be confined within the limits of understanding and expression of any single human culture, for it transcends these limits and indeed challenges all cultures to rise to new heights of understanding and expression. Yet at the same time the Synod Fathers were well aware of the pressing need of the local Churches in Asia to present the mystery of Christ to their peoples according to their cultural patterns and ways of thinking.

Culture is the vital space within which the human person comes face to face with the Gospel that is why evangelization and inculturation are naturally and intimately related to each other. The Gospel and evangelization are certainly not identical with culture;

²² Cf. Special Assembly for Asia of the Synod of Bishops, *Relatio ante disceptationem: L'Osservatore Romano* 22 April 1998, 5.

²³ "It is paradoxical that most Asians tend to regard Jesus – born on Asian soil – as a Western rather than an Asian figure. It was inevitable that the proclamation of the Gospel by Western missionaries would be influenced by the cultures from which they came..." *Ecclesia in Asia*, 20.

²⁴ *Evangelii Nuntiandi* (8 December 1975), 22: AAS 68 [1976], 20.

²⁵ On this regard, the Synod Fathers expressed "their gratitude to all the missionaries, men and women, religious and lay, foreign and local, who brought the message of Jesus Christ and the gift of faith." Also to all the particular Churches which have sent and still send missionaries to Asia. (*Ecclesia in Asia*, 20).

²⁶ *Ibidem*.

they are independent of it. Yet the Kingdom of God comes to people who are profoundly linked to a culture, and the building of the Kingdom cannot avoid borrowing elements from human cultures.²⁷

"In the process of encountering the world's different cultures, the Church not only transmits her truths and values and renews cultures from within, but she also takes from the various cultures the positive elements already found in them. This is the obligatory path for evangelizers in presenting the Christian faith and making it part of a people's cultural heritage. Conversely, the various cultures, when refined and renewed in the light of the Gospel, can become true expressions of the one Christian faith... This engagement with cultures has always been part of the Church's pilgrimage through history. But it has a special urgency today in the multi-ethnic, multi-religious and multi-cultural situation of Asia, where Christianity is still too often seen as foreign."²⁸

Worth remembering at this point is one thing said repeatedly during the Synod: that the Holy Spirit is the prime agent of the inculturation of the Christian faith in Asia. We could add with John Paul II that "a faith, which has not become inculturated is a faith which has not been fully received, which has not been completely thought through, which has not been faithfully lived."²⁹

What would be the key areas of inculturation? Expressly mentioned³⁰ are the following: An inculturated *theology* especially in the area of Christology; the *Liturgy*, as the source and summit of

²⁷ Thus Paul VI called the split between the Gospel and culture the drama of our time, with a profound impact upon both evangelization and culture. Cf. *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, 20: AAS 68 [1976], 18ff.

²⁸ *Ecclesia in Asia*, 21.

²⁹ John Paul II, Letter to Cardinal Secretary of State, 20 May 1982. International Theological Commission, Christianity and the World Religions, Libreria Editrice Vaticana, Citta del Vaticano, 1997, n.26, p.19. Referring to this quotation, the FABC pointed out that "the last part of the sentence, 'faith... which has not been fully lived', draws our urgent attention to the link between the life of the Church and the Asian image of Christ in our life-style and mission. It should serve as a motto, a constant reminder for the Church in the task of total or all-round inculturation." (FABC, Seventh Plenary Assembly, Samphran, Bangkok, January 3-12, 2000. FABC Paper No. 92q).

³⁰ Cf. *Ibidem*, 22.

all Christian life and mission; and *the formation of evangelizers* (seminarians, religious, and laity), which will benefit from contact with Asian philosophical and religious traditions.

c) *The challenge of Interreligious/Ecumenical Dialogue*

Ecumenical dialogue is a challenge and a call to conversion for the whole Church, especially for the Church in Asia where people expect from Christians a clearer sign of unity. For all peoples to come together in the grace of God, communion needs to be restored among those who in faith have accepted Jesus Christ as Lord. Jesus himself prayed and does not cease to call for the visible unity of his disciples, so that the world may believe that the Father has sent him (cf. *Jn* 17:21).

In Asia, precisely where the number of Christians is proportionately small, division makes missionary work still more difficult. The Synod Fathers acknowledged that "the scandal of a divided Christianity is a great obstacle for evangelization in Asia." Therefore the Catholic Church in Asia feels especially impelled to work for unity with other Christians, realizing that the search for full communion demands from everyone *charity, fidelity, discernment*, and a *sincere desire for purification and renewal*.³¹

Some practical suggestions on this regard: Episcopal Conferences joining in a process of prayer and consultation; celebration of the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity; bishops are encouraged to set up and oversee ecumenical centers of prayer and dialogue; adequate formation for ecumenical dialogue in the curriculum of seminaries and houses of formation.³²

Communion and dialogue are two essential aspects of the Church's mission, which have their infinitely transcendent exemplar

³¹ Ibidem, 30. "In order to be authentic and bear fruit, ecumenism requires certain fundamental dispositions on the part of the Catholic faithful: in the first place, *charity* that shows itself in goodness and a lively desire to cooperate wherever possible with the faithful of other Churches and Ecclesial Communities; secondly, *fidelity* towards the Catholic Church, without however ignoring or denying the shortcomings manifested by some of her members; thirdly, a spirit of *discernment* in order to appreciate all that is good and worthy of praise. Finally, a *sincere desire for purification and renewal* is also needed." (John Paul II, Address at the General Audience of 26 July 1995, 4: *Insegnamenti* XVIII, 2 [1995], 138. Italics are mine.

³² *Ecclesia in Asia*, 30.

in the mystery of the Trinity, from whom all mission comes and to whom it must be directed.

d) The challenge of witnessing to the Gospel

"The more the Christian community is rooted in the experience of God which flows from a living faith, the more credibly it will be able to proclaim to others the fulfillment of God's Kingdom in Jesus Christ. This will result from faithfully listening to the word of God, from prayer and contemplation, from celebrating the mystery of Jesus in the sacraments, above all in the Eucharist, and from giving example of true communion of life and integrity of love."³³

A genuinely religious person readily wins respect and a following in Asia. Prayer, fasting and various forms of asceticism are held in high regard. Renunciation, detachment, humility, simplicity and silence are considered great values by the followers of all religions.

Prayer and human promotion must go together: "The work of justice, charity and compassion is interrelated with a genuine life of prayer and contemplation, and indeed it is this same spirituality that will be the wellspring of all our evangelizing work."³⁴

Likewise, *authentic witnesses* are needed, for "the Good News of Jesus Christ can only be proclaimed by those who are taken up and inspired by the love of the Father for his children, manifested in the person of Jesus Christ. This proclamation is a mission needing holy men and women who will make the Savior known and loved through their lives. A fire can only be lit by something that is itself on fire."³⁵

³³ Ibidem, 23.

³⁴ Ibidem. An entire chapter of *Ecclesia in Asia* (chapter VI) is devoted to the service of human promotion. Departing from the social doctrine of the Church (n.32), the document mentions expressly: the dignity of the human person (n. 33); the preferential love of the poor (n.34); the gospel of life (n.35); health care (n.36); education (n.37); peacemaking (n.38); globalization (n.39); and the environment (n.41).

³⁵ Ibidem. In places where explicit proclamation is forbidden and religious freedom is denied or systematically restricted, the *silent witness of life* still remains a valid way of proclaiming God's Kingdom.

Evangelization is everyone's right and duty. The entire Church is missionary, and that the work of *evangelization is the duty of the whole People of God*.³⁶

Now, since the whole People of God is sent forth to preach the Gospel, evangelization is never an individual and isolated act; it is always *an ecclesial task* which has to be carried out in communion with the whole community of faith. The mission is one and indivisible, having one origin and one final purpose; but within it there are different responsibilities and different kinds of activity.³⁷

In every case it is clear that there can be no true proclamation of the Gospel unless Christians also offer the witness of lives in harmony with the message they preach: "The first form of witness is the very life of the missionary, of the Christian family, and of the ecclesial community, which reveal a new way of living... Everyone in the Church, striving to imitate the Divine Master, can and must bear this kind of witness; in many cases it is the only possible way of being a missionary."³⁸

"People today put more trust in witnesses than in teachers, in experience than in teaching, and in life and action than in theories."³⁹ This is certainly true in the Asian context, where people are more persuaded by holiness of life than by intellectual argument. The experience of faith and of the gifts of the Holy Spirit thus becomes *the basis of all missionary work*, in towns or villages, in schools or hospitals, among the handicapped, migrants or tribal peoples, or in the pursuit of justice and human rights. Every situation is an opportunity for Christians to show forth the power which the truth of Christ has become in their lives.

Therefore, inspired by the many missionaries who bore heroic witness to God's love among the peoples of the continent in the past, the Church in Asia strives now to witness with no less zeal to Jesus Christ and his Gospel. Christian mission demands no less.⁴⁰

³⁶ Cf. Decree on the Church's Missionary Activity *Ad Gentes*, 2 and 35.

³⁷ Cf. John Paul II, *Redemptoris Mission*, 31: AAS 83 [1991], 277.

³⁸ Ibidem, 42: *loc. cit.*, 289.

³⁹ Ibidem.

⁴⁰ *Ecclesia in Asia*, 42.

II. WHAT DOES THE CODE OF CANON LAW SAY ABOUT SHRINES?

The regulation of shrines is a new element, not found in the 1917 Code of Canon Law. In contrast, the 1983 Code included for the first time some provisions related to shrines: definition, kinds, statutes, privileges, and pastoral services, giving expression to Paul VI's wish that shrines be centers for an intense Christian life. In fact, the Code deals with shrines in chapter III of part III (*Sacred Times and Places*) of the IV book (*The Sanctifying Function of the Church*). The five canons (cc. 1230-1234) mention specifically: a definition of shrines (c. 1230), national and international shrines (c. 1231), shrine statutes (1232), privileges of shrines (c.1233), and religious services and votive offerings of art and piety at shrines (c. 1234).

1. *Definition of Shrine (c. 1230)*

*"The term shrine means a church or other sacred place which, with the approval of the local Ordinary, is by reason of special devotion frequented by the faithful as pilgrims."*⁴¹

The canonical concept of a shrine had been most recently defined by Pope Pius XII in 1956.⁴² This canon provides its definitive definition: A shrine is constituted by three elements:

- 1) The sacred *place*, which is normally a church;
- 2) The *pilgrimage* of numerous members of the faithful for a special reason of piety: the veneration of a relic or of a sacred image object of private cult (Lisieux, Pompei), the remembrance of a miraculous fact (Lourdes, Fatima), etc.⁴³

⁴¹ Can. 1230.

⁴² Cf. Resp. S. Congregation for Studies, February 8, 1956: X. Ochoa, *Leges Ecclesiae*, II, 2558-3455.

⁴³ Before the 1983 Code, an official definition of shrine, approved by Pius XII, read: "Sanctuarii nomine intelligitur ecclesia seu aedes sacra divino cultui publice exercenda dicata, quae ob peculiarem pietatis causam (ex.gr. ob imaginem sacram ibi veneratam, ob reliquiam ibi conditam, ob miraculum quod Deus ibi operatus est, ob peculiarem indulgentiam ibi lucranda), a fidelibus constituitur meta peregrinationum ad gratias impetrandas vel vota solvenda" (X. Ochoa, *Leges Ecclesiae*, II, n.2558, col. 3455). This definition is found in the doctrine and also in an official document of the Apostolic See, a "Responsum" of the Congregation for the Studies, dated February 8, 1956.

3) The *approval* of the local Ordinary.

Sacred places are those which are designated for divine worship or for the burial of the faithful by the dedication or a blessing which the liturgical books prescribe for this purpose.⁴⁴

It is necessary that the sacred place and the devotion that is fostered be approved by the local ordinary so that the faithful may go there on pilgrimage.⁴⁵

This section on shrines is new to the 1983 Code and is not retroactive. In the case of new shrines established since the 1983 Code, the local Ordinary's approval must be expressed.⁴⁶ This approval is rightly required since divine worship and popular piety are areas subject to regulation by and the vigilance of the diocesan bishop or other local ordinary.⁴⁷

All through the history of the Church shrines have come into being, as it were, precisely by reason of popular devotion. It is only latter, after a careful and often prolonged investigation, that they receive, or do not receive as the case may be, the official approval of the Church – normally, at least in the first place, that of the diocesan Bishop.⁴⁸

⁴⁴ Can. 1205. Churches, oratories, private chapels, shrines, and altars are dedicated or blessed according to the *Rite of Dedication of a Church and an Altar*. Cemeteries are blessed according to the *Rite of Blessing a Cemetery*. *Rituale Romanum: De Benedictionibus*. (Typis Polyglottis Vaticanis, 1984).

⁴⁵ It is not juridically necessary that a shrine arise out of the people's devotion or even that they actually frequent it; a shrine could be approved with the hope or expectation that this would occur after the shrine is built. (John M. Huels, OSM, 'Commentary to canon 1230', in Beal, J. – Coriden, J. – Green, T. (ed), *New Commentary on the Code of Canon Law*, Canon Law Society of America, Paulist Press, New York, N.Y./Mahwah, NJ, 2000, p. 1437.

⁴⁶ Prior to the 1983 Code, religious institutes or other juridical persons could establish shrines without the express approval of the local ordinary. In fact, the official definition of a shrine made no mention of the local ordinary's permission being necessary for a shrine's erection. Local ecclesiastical authority did, however, have competence over pious pilgrimages. Cf. Sacred Congregation for the Council, decree, February 11, 1936, AAS 28 [1936] 167; CLD 2, 573-575.

⁴⁷ Cf. cc. 392; 397; 678 §1; 838 §4; 839 §2.

⁴⁸ The Canon Law Society of Great Britain and Ireland, *The Canon Law: Letter and Spirit*, (London: 1995), [Commentary to can. 1230], p. 693. For the general background of this matter as discussed by the Revision Commission, cf. *Communicationes* 12 [1980] 341 ff.

Shrines, therefore, are not ordinary churches where the faithful gather regularly to offer God public worship. A church could *de iure* be declared a shrine, but only when the place is acknowledged a *de facto* center of popular devotion and pilgrimage and not vice-versa. The recognition of the proper authority should prevent the proliferation of shrines in the same region.

Shrines that have the title of "minor basilica" are also subject to a 1989 Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments decree.⁴⁹

2. *Kinds of Shrines (c. 1231)*

*"For a shrine to be described as national, the approval of the Episcopal Conference is necessary. For it to be described as international, the approval of the Holy See is required."*⁵⁰

Shrines can be *diocesan*, *national* and *international*. Diocesan shrines need the approval of the local Ordinary; national shrines, of the Episcopal Conference;⁵¹ and international shrines, of the Holy See.

The classification of a shrine should take into account, among other things, the place of origin of the faithful who frequent the

⁴⁹ Decree *Domus Ecclesiae*, November 9, 1989, 26 (1990) 13-17. This decree lays down the conditions for obtaining the title of minor basilica, the liturgical and pastoral offices and works that are to be provided at basilicas, and special concessions granted to them. Cf. J. Evenou, "Pastor Bonus art. 69: Basiliche Minori," 25 [1989] 234-236.

⁵⁰ Can. 1231.

⁵¹ The Catholic Bishops Conference of the Philippines (CBCP) issued in 1984 some norms on National Shrines. "For a shrine to be described as national, the approval of the Episcopal Conference is necessary and this title is to be given under any of the following conditions: (1) If the shrine is truly regarded by many faithful of the neighboring regions as a congenial center of devotion or pilgrimage; (2) If the shrine is the regarded site of a significant religious event affecting the life of the nation; (3) If the shrine is the site of apparition or miracles recognized as authentic by the Church's competent authorities; (4) If the shrine is requested by a big number of the faithful to be declared as a national shrine because there is a sound and popular devotion, in order to promote and preserve its growth." CB, Prot. N. 35/84. Testera, F., OP, "Shrines" in *Canon Law Digest of the Philippine Catholic Church. A Text and Commentary*. (Manila: University of Santo Tomas, 1995, 3rd edition), 148-149.

center of devotion and the influence the shrine has over the region, the country or the world at large.

Shrines may continue using the title they had (i.e. national or international) before the 1983 Code, even without the approval of the competent authority. In the case of competing claims to the title of national or international shrine, the ecclesiastical authorities mentioned in this canon 1231 may decide the issue in keeping with the law as well as customs, privileges, acquired rights, the patrimony of institutes of consecrated life, and other pertinent facts. In a case of recourse the Congregation for the Clergy has competence.⁵²

3. *Statutes (c. 1232)*

*"The local Ordinary is competent to approve the statutes of a diocesan shrine; the Episcopal Conference, those of a national shrine; the Holy See alone, those of an international shrine."*⁵³

*"The statutes of a shrine are to determine principally its purpose, the authority of the rector, and the ownership and administration of its property."*⁵⁴

Each shrine is to have its own statutes duly approved by the competent authority wherein, in a special manner, (a) the purpose of the shrine; (b) the authority and appointment of the rector; and (c) the ownership and administration of its property, are clearly determined.

The law does not require that every shrine have its own statutes, but simply points out who is competent to approve such statutes when they are drawn up. However, the competent authority could require such statutes before granting the approval.

The statutes, normally drafted by the persons or community that have care of the shrine, must be approved by the competent authority: the local Ordinary, for the diocesan shrines; the Episcopal

⁵² Cf. John M. Huels, OSM, 'Commentary to canon 1231', *loc. cit.*, p. 1437.

⁵³ Can. 1232 §1.

⁵⁴ Can. 1232 §2.

Conference, for the national ones;⁵⁵ and the Holy See, for the international shrines.

4. *Privileges (c. 1233)*

*"Certain privileges may be granted to shrines when the local circumstances, the number of pilgrims and especially the good of the faithful would seem to make this advisable."*⁵⁶

Privileges may be granted by a legislator, namely, the diocesan bishop, a particular council, the Pope, an ecumenical council, or by an executive authority who has delegation (cf. c.76). Privileges for a shrine might include the absolution of censures, special indulgences, the celebration of specified parochial functions, etc.

5. *Shrine Services (c. 1234 §1)*

*§1. At shrines the means of salvation are to be more abundantly made available to the faithful: by sedulous proclamation of the word of God, by suitable encouragement of liturgical life, especially by the celebration of the Eucharist and penance, and by the fostering of approved forms of popular devotion.*⁵⁷

⁵⁵ Concerning the statutes of a national shrine, the Episcopal Conference of the Philippines has issued the following provisions: "The Episcopal Conference is competent to approve the statutes of a national shrine with the following stipulations: (1) Its church must have the arrangement conforming with liturgical laws; (2) The liturgy and above all the celebration of the Eucharist must be carried out in an exemplary manner inspiring imitation in other churches on account of faithful observance of liturgical laws and the faithful's active participation; (3) There is to be a choir, if possible, and a director of music to ensure the faithful's participation; (4) Priests are to be assigned to the church in sufficient numbers and confessors are to be available at set times to meet the needs of the penitents; (5) Preaching is to be frequent and not just limited to the homily of Sundays and Holidays; (6) There must be facilities for planning and holding special courses of instruction, series of conferences and other such programs to further the religious formation of the faithful; (7) The authority of the rector is to be determined to specify his rank and competence; (8) The ownership and administration of its site, building and other properties are to be clearly arranged in accordance with ecclesiastical and civil laws; (9) All shrines, including those under institutes of consecrated life, are to follow these regulations." (CB, Prot. N. 35/84. Testera, F., OP, "Shrines" in *Canon Law Digest of the Philippine Catholic Church. A Text and Commentary*. (Manila: University of Santo Tomas, 1995, 3rd edition), 149.

⁵⁶ Can. 1233.

⁵⁷ Can. 1234 §1.

The *essential significance and pastoral role of shrines in the life of the Church* is aptly summed up in §1 of this canon: their purpose is above all that of promoting the good of souls, offering them with abundance the means of sanctification and salvation, principally by:

- a) the preaching of the Word of God;
- b) the liturgical celebrations, especially the Eucharist;
- c) the hearing of sacramental confessions;
- d) the fostering of approved forms of popular devotion

Shrines have been defined by John Paul II, as “*places of conversion, of penance and reconciliation with God.*”⁵⁸ He added on another occasion, “Above all, let the life of shrines favor as much as possible personal and community prayer, joy and retreat, the listening and meditation of the Word of God, the worthy celebration of the Eucharist and the reception of the Sacrament of Reconciliation.”⁵⁹

Closely connected with shrines is the practice of *popular devotion*. Pope Paul VI wrote that “when it is wisely dedicated, popular piety... can make a constantly increasing contribution towards bringing the masses of our people into contact with God in Jesus Christ.”⁶⁰

6. Votive Offerings: Security Precautions (c. 1234 §2)

§2. *In shrines or in places adjacent to them, votive offerings of popular art and devotion are to be displayed and carefully safeguarded.*⁶¹

⁵⁸ John Paul II, Address at Zapatán (Zapopan) Shrine, Mexico, January 30, 1979: AAS 71 [1979] 230, n. 3.

⁵⁹ John Paul II, Homily of January 22, 1981 addressed to Rectors of French shrines. On the pastoral life of shrines, cf. P. Llabrés, “De los lugares y tiempos sagrados,” *Phase*, 142 (1984), 331-346; J. Molsas: “La renovación pastoral de los santuarios,” *Phase*, 132 (1982), 473-484ñ J. Urdeix, “Los santuarios y su pastoral en el magisterio contemporáneo,” *Phase* 132 [1982] 485-492.

⁶⁰ *Evangelii nuntiandi*, December 8, 1985, no. 48: AAS 68 [1976] 38.

⁶¹ Can. 1234 §2.

The Church cares not only for the upkeep and safety of precious images⁶² as well as of sacred relics,⁶³ particularly of those of great significance, but also for *votive offerings*⁶⁴ of art and of popular devotion. This canon prescribes that, either at the shrines themselves or in places adjacent to them, they be put on public display and in such manner that their security is assured.⁶⁵

III. SHRINES' CONTRIBUTION TO THE EVANGELIZATION IN ASIA

Evangelization is not an option for the Church – it is its most profound duty and the very reason for its existence: “Evangelizing is in fact the grace and vocation proper to the Church, her deepest identity. She exists in order to evangelize, that is to say in order to preach and teach.”⁶⁶

Shrines, in their own way and especially Marian shrines, have contributed greatly to the fulfillment of this task entrusted by Christ to the Church. The following are some of the most salient

⁶² Cf. Can. 1189; 1190 §3). Precious images are those that have special historical, artistic, cultural, or monetary value, distinguished by age, art, or veneration. Regarding their restoration canon 1189 states that “they are never to be restored without the written permission of the ordinary; he is to consult experts before he grants permission.”

⁶³ Canon 1190 treats two kinds of relics. One refers to all authentic relics of the saints and the blessed; another, other relics which are significant (*insignes*) or relics which are honored with great veneration by the people.

⁶⁴ Very often pilgrims donate gifts, known as ‘votive offerings’, in thanksgiving for blessings or favors received. These may at times be of little or no monetary or artistic value; equally however, they may have particular merit or personal value (expensive watches, jewelry, paintings, sculptures, etc.). It is to these that can 1234 §2 refers.

⁶⁵ According to can. 1292 §2, some at least of these votive offerings may require the permission of the Holy See for their valid alienation. The main norms and guidelines concerning the artistic and historic patrimony of the Church are: Second Vatican Council, “Sacrosanctum Concilium” December 4, 1963, art. 122ss.; Pontificia Commissione di Arte Sacra. Circolare del 6 giugno 1961 (X. Ochoa, *Leges Ecclesiae*, III, n. 2989, col. 4216-4217; Congregation for the Clergy, Circolare dell’ 11 aprile 1971 (Enchir. Vat., vol. 4, pp. 400-405); John Paul II, Apostolic Const. “Pastor Bonus,” June 28, 1988, art. 99-104.

⁶⁶ Paul VI, *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, 14.

aspects that mark the important role shrines play in the work of evangelization.⁶⁷

1. *Shrines: "Theological places"*⁶⁸ *of encounter with God*

Shrines are not merely geographical places or simply the work of human hands, but witnesses to God's initiative in revealing himself to humankind. Shrines are not only "nostalgic" places of solace, but are true "theological places" where the people of God are nurtured and formed, where they develop and realize themselves, mature and grow up in their faith. They are places of the experience of and the encounter with the sacred.

Shrines reveal themselves not only as "Memory" but also as "Presence" and as "Signs of Hope."⁶⁹ They are reminders of the salvific work of the Lord and of our own baptism. In Asia, with her rich tradition of spirituality, shrines are genuine places of encounter with Christ, where the Good News is truly proclaimed, shared and lived. This encounter engenders an experience of openness, and the pilgrim feels the sense of being accompanied towards new being, towards conversion or renewal. It is a "meeting with the Living God."⁷⁰

At a shrine, God's pilgrim people gather in the Lord's presence. Similar to a church, a shrine is a type of icon of God's dwelling with his people, with the Church, with the individual believer.

⁶⁷ Some of these thoughts are taken from the discussions during the 35th Congress of Rectors and Pastoral workers of shrines. Rome, November 23, 1999.

⁶⁸ A "theological place" is an expression used in contemporary theology to describe mainly the ecclesial or social place from which the theologian makes his theological reflection. (Cf. F. Martínez, *Teología fundamental. Dar razón de la fe cristiana*, Salamanca-Madrid, 1997, pp. 131-132). In this expression the term 'place' [*locus*] is not taken in its material acceptance of 'place where something is located', but it rather means the *humus*, the fertile soil where Christian faith is planted, grows up and matures. That is why shrines, given the role they have in the faith of the pilgrims, can be properly called "theological places."

⁶⁹ Manuel Vergara, OSA, "Shrines: In the service of incarnating Christ in Asia today." Pontifical Council for the Pastoral Care of Migrants and Itinerant People. *People on the Move* 88-89 [April-December, 2002].

⁷⁰ Ibidem.

A Marian shrine is a place for an encounter with God. There, as in the mystery of the Incarnation, Mary is present. She is the dwelling place of God, the throne of Wisdom, the living temple of the Holy Spirit, the one who encountered the Lord in a unique way.

2. *Shrines: Centers of inculturated liturgies*

The liturgy, which is the principal goal of pilgrimage to a Marian shrine, should be exemplary for the quality of the participation, the fidelity to the rite, the richness of the content, and the beauty of the ceremonies. Pilgrims to Marian shrines should participate in a full program of liturgical celebrations and devotions.

Christian tradition brings Marian devotion and the Eucharist together; this connection is based on "the reality itself of the incarnation of the Word of God and the unique role exercised by Mary in the economy of salvation, by Mary who conceived the Lord and gave Him as gift to all people." Every Eucharist is celebrated within the communion of the saints, in which Mary occupies the principal role.

Eucharistic celebrations at Marian shrines should reveal the fullness of the paschal mystery, communion with the universal Church, and the presence of Mary in word and symbol.

The relational character of a shrine leads one to experience the joy of gathering and the building-up of a faith community. The "meeting with the Living God" can take place through the life-giving experience of the mystery which is proclaimed, celebrated and lived."

However, "a faith, which has not become inculturated is a faith which has not been fully received, which has not been completely thought through, which has not been faithfully lived."⁷¹ *Ecclesia in Asia* speaks of the urgency of inculturation from the perspective of the "evangelizing power of the liturgy," and adds that recently established churches "need to ensure that the liturgy becomes an ever-greater source of nourishment for the people of God through a wise and effective use of elements drawn from local cultures."

⁷¹ John Paul II, Letter to Cardinal Secretary of State, 20 May 1982. International Theological Commission, *Christianity and the World Religions*, Libreria Editrice Vaticana, Citta del Vaticano, 1997, n.26, p. 19.

Furthermore, in order that the specific needs of the poor, migrants, refugees, youth and women are be overlooked in any genuine liturgical inculturation in Asia, the document urges Episcopal Conferences to search "for effective ways of fostering appropriate forms of worship in the Asian context."⁷²

Liturgical inculturation means diversity in cultural expressions and unity in Christian faith and tradition. Pluralism in cultural expressions should not be pursued at the expense of unity in essential matters. In this sense, inculturation does not produce a liturgy that is so localized that it becomes unrecognizable to other local churches in the world.⁷³ An inculturated liturgy is the liturgy of the local church, but it always maintains a universal dimension because of its essential content or meaning.

Liturgy is the epiphany of the Church. Liturgy expresses the faith of the Church and manifests the very being and mission of the Church. Liturgy must be the outcome of the faith-experience of the Lord and the emergence in a particular cultural environment of a genuinely local church. In turn, such experience of the transforming presence of the Lord in history should flower in a Christian life that is fully inculturated. "We Christians must use the language, the idiom, the media, the signs and symbols of all the people around us who have a right to understand what we celebrate in the liturgy; namely the Reign of God as announced by Jesus' words, as illustrated in his life and as demonstrated by his death and rising."⁷⁴ A traditional saying goes like this: "As the Church, so the liturgy. Show me how you celebrate your Eucharist, and I shall tell what kind of church you are."⁷⁵ Initiatives of Marian shrines have enriched the liturgy of the whole Church.

⁷² *Ecclesia in Asia*, 22.

⁷³ Inculturation brings to the shape of the liturgy a degree of pluralism based on cultural diversity; and pluralism implies that each cultural group is able to claim the liturgy as a properly its own, that is, as a celebration that resonates and evokes the people's history, culture, and traditions. Inculturation, however, safeguards those basic tenets of Christian faith and tradition that unite local churches throughout the world.

⁷⁴ Aloysius Pieris, SJ, "Inculturation: Some Critical Reflections," in *Yearbook of Contextual Theologies*, Missionswissenschaftliches Institut Missio e.V., IKO-Verlag für Interkulturelle Kommunikation, 1993, p. 137.

⁷⁵ *Ibidem*.

Taking into account that the purpose of shrines is “above all that of promoting the good of souls, offering them with abundance the means of sanctification and salvation, principally by the preaching of the Word of God and the liturgical celebrations, especially the Eucharist...”⁷⁶ this poses a great challenge to shrines’ Rectors or those directly in charged of their pastoral activities.

3. Shrines: Seats of Ecumenical and Interreligious Dialogue

“We are committed to bring Jesus’ message to all nations of Asia. Our contribution lies in the witnessing to our faith and facilitating a dialogue of Faith and Life, Gospel and Culture, Church and Society.”⁷⁷

In Christian history, Mary’s role and Marian devotion have caused much controversy and have been cited as reasons for the division of the churches. Marian shrines should courageously assume a role of promoting ecumenical prayer, meeting, and discussion. They should be attentive to the ecumenical dialogue and aware of the complexity of the issues. Rightly understood, Christ’s mother, the mother of all people, the first disciple of Christ, is a motive for union of all Christians.

That “Marian shrines should foster and encourage ecumenical prayer, encounters, and dialogues” was also one of the suggestions during the Marian Year, 1987-1988. *Ecclesia in Asia* sees them as places “where not only the Catholic faithful gather, but also believers of other religions too.”⁷⁸ Marian sanctuaries are to be indeed places of prayer for the unity of all peoples.

4. Shrines: Hearths of Charity

Works of charity which give expression to the Lord’s concern for the poor, as recalled in Mary’s *Magnificat*, should be part of a Marian shrine. The mother of Jesus was always attentive to those in need (John 2, 2-10).

⁷⁶ The Code of Canon Law, can. 1234 §1.

⁷⁷ Consultation on “Evangelization and Social Communication,” FABC Offices of Evangelization and of Social Communication, Chennai, India, 4-8 July, 1999.

⁷⁸ *Ecclesia in Asia*, 51.

Everywhere in the world, shrines – specially Marian shrines – have established and maintained hospitals, schools for the poor, homes for the aged... The sick should be welcomed at a Marian shrine, and special services and assistance provided for them. Shrines should contribute to seeking solutions to problems of contemporary society and to alleviating suffering caused by chemical dependency, AIDS, homeless-ness, old age.

During the Marian Year, 1987-1988, a number of suggestions were given to Marian shrines by the Central Committee for the Celebration of the Marian Year. One of them was precisely related to charity, namely, that Marian shrines should be associated with some works of charity: hospitals, schools for the disadvantaged, homes for the sick.

5. *Shrines: Places of advocacy for Human and Christian Renewal*

Shrines were defined by John Paul II as “*places of conversion, of penance and reconciliation with God*” during his trip to Mexico, in 1979. Twenty years later (23 November 1999), the Pope spoke in a similar way: “[Shrines] offer, to the faithful and to pilgrims, precious moments of contemplation, of verification, of vital interior renewal, they [also] constitute, for the less assiduous, or those in difficulty, or those who are searching, a providential chance to meet with God and a potent call to the sources of faith.”⁷⁹

“In the modern socio-religious context, shrines function ever more as places where fundamental values are preserved, where one goes to obtain grace, even before (seeking) divine favor. The more widespread secularized culture becomes, the more these places acquire an intrinsic evangelizing significance, in the original sense of a strong call to conversion.”⁸⁰

The Pope in *Ecclesia in Asia* outlines a program through which one could be assisted to achieve holiness of life. His program consists of the “fruitful listening to the word of God... prayer and contem-

⁷⁹ John Paul II, *Address to the participants in the 35th Congress of Rectors and Pastoral workers of shrines*. Rome, November 23, 1999.

⁸⁰ *Ibidem*.

plation... celebrating the mystery of Jesus in the Sacraments, above all in the Eucharist, and... giving example of true communion of life and integrity of love.”⁸¹

I believe that the shepherds in the first place ought to make it their first responsibility to work out such a program, see to its implementation in every diocese and parish, and encourage a pastoral and missionary concern to emerge among all ecclesial personnel so that communities served by them become lively and evangelizing communities.⁸²

6. *Shrines: Agents to foster Popular Devotion*

In the context of shrines, the Code of Canon Law contains an exhortation to foster “approved forms of popular devotion.”⁸³ Regarding the importance of such devotion, Paul VI insisted it is an aspect of evangelization which cannot leave us insensitive:

“One finds among the people particular expressions of the search for God and for faith... Popular religiosity, of course, certainly has its limits. It is often subject to penetration by many distortions of religion and even superstitions. It frequently remains at the level of forms of worship not involving a true acceptance by faith. It can even lead to the creation of sects and endanger the true ecclesial community... But if it is well oriented, above all by a pedagogy of evangelization, it is rich in values. It manifests a thirst for God which only the simple and poor can know. It makes people capable of generosity and sacrifice even to the point of heroism, when it is a question of manifesting belief. It involves an acute awareness of profound attributes of God: fatherhood, providence, loving and constant presence. It engenders interior attitudes rarely observed to the same degree elsewhere: patience, the sense of the cross in daily life, detachment, openness to others, devotion. By reason of these

⁸¹ *Ecclesia in Asia*, 23.

⁸² Cf. Malcolm Ranjit, “Evangelization in the light of *Ecclesia in Asia*.” FABC Symposium, Pattaya, Thailand, 3-8 September, 2002. Cfr. [http://www.catholicmission.org/MissionNews-091302 How to Evangelize in Asia.html](http://www.catholicmission.org/MissionNews-091302%20How%20to%20Evangelize%20in%20Asia.html).

⁸³ Cf. canon 1234.

aspects, we readily call it “popular piety,” that is, religion of the people, rather than religiosity.”⁸⁴

Marian shrines are natural centers for explaining the conciliar teachings, particularly on Mary, and for demonstrating the Marian dimension of the life of faith.

In addition, Marian shrines are centers to foster cultural development. The history, tradition, and art of a shrine contribute to the *via pulchritudinis* and to the contemplation of God’s beauty revealed in Mary.⁸⁵

Pastoral charity must dictate to all those whom the Lord has placed as leaders of the ecclesial communities the proper attitude in regard to this reality, which is at the same time so rich and so vulnerable... When it is well oriented, this popular religiosity call be more and more for multitudes of our people a true encounter with God in Jesus Christ.”

7. Shrines: Reminders of Mary’s motherly concern

Closely connected with the shrines as centers of popular devotion, we can see shrines as reminders of Mary’s motherly concern for all “exiled children of Eve.”

The reasons for the present popularity of Marian devotions are many. There is a Marian thread that runs through the life of the Church and of history. However, the great attraction of these places of faith cannot be seen solely in terms of devotion and piety; there is something deeper. Surveys among pilgrims reveal that even though they go to different shrines, all are conscious of a relation with the Mother of Christ. She is also the mother of the Church. The need for healing, advocacy, and consummated reliance is expressed in a prayer from the depths of the human heart: “To you do we send up our sighs, mourning and weeping in this vale of tears! Turn then, most gracious advocate, your eyes of mercy

⁸⁴ *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, 48.

⁸⁵ Pilgrims should be provided with materials on the historical, artistic, and pastoral significance of the shrine.

towards us; and after this, our exile, show unto us the blessed fruit of your womb, Jesus!" Shrines are interesting examples of places which make it possible for the faith to reach the masses. Mary is a model of inculturation and mediation in the relationship with God.⁸⁶

8. *Shrines: Signs of hope and of the pilgrim Church...*

Pilgrimage to a place where a significant event has occurred marks a destination point in the life of a person and can be both a profoundly human and a religious experience. Pilgrimage is part of the major religions of the world: Christian, Jewish, Muslim, Hindu, Buddhist.

In the early and medieval Church, people spontaneously traveled to Bethlehem and Jerusalem, to the tombs of the apostles and martyrs at Rome, and to the churches and shrines containing relics of saints. During the middle ages, Santiago de Compostela in north-western Spain and Canterbury in England were well-known places of pilgrimage.

In the 19th and 20th, the Marian apparitions of Lourdes, Knock, La Salette and Fatima gave rise to area centers for prayer. Although people came to find healing and strength, and to experience for themselves the miraculous event which had occurred, these Marian shrines contributed to renewing the sense of pilgrimage in the Church. Today, about 80% of the shrines in the Catholic world are dedicated to Mary. Each year, millions of pilgrims set out on route to Marian shrines: 10 million to the shrine of Our Lady of Guadalupe (Mexico), 6 million to Lourdes (France), 5 million to Czestochowa (Poland), and 4 million to Aparecida (Brazil).⁸⁷

Marian shrines are best thought of as places of pilgrimage, not as sights to see or stops on a vacation trip. Pilgrimage is "a symbol

⁸⁶ Cf. Norberto Gonzalez, *Address to the Congress on "Communication and Places of Faith,"* Rome, 28 april, 1999, before the official promoters of Lourdes, Fatima, Loreto, Jasna Gora, Guadalupe, Compostela and other important places of worship like the Holy Land.

⁸⁷ Cf. Data taken from *Marian Library Newsletter* (Spring, 1996).

of the great journey of human life towards God." *The life of the individual is a pilgrimage, and the Church itself is in pilgrimage.* Pilgrims endure privations to join with others journeying together towards a common goal. They join past generations in the prayer of gratitude for a miraculous event and a hallowed place.

All "the times and rhythms" of the pilgrimage are symbolic and instructive: the preparation, the coming together and meeting other pilgrims, the welcome to the shrine, the visit to the sanctuary and the celebration of the Eucharist, the return home. The purpose of pilgrimage is to guide the pilgrim "to the essential: Jesus Christ, the Savior, the end of every journey and the source of all holiness."

Vatican Council II spoke of Mary's "pilgrimage of faith." She precedes and encourages the members of the Church in their own pilgrimage of faith. Marian shrines are one expression of Mary's presence to the Church. There is a "geography" of faith and Marian devotion," which includes all those special places of pilgrimage where God's people find, within the radius of Mary's faith, a strengthening of their own faith.⁸⁸

Closing Words

Pope Paul VI played no small role in starting the movement of ecclesial reflection on the role of shrines within the life of the Church. In the 1960s, at the meetings of Rectors of Marian Shrines in Italy, he urged them to "lift their voice and let their existence be known in the Church." In annual addresses to those responsible for Marian shrines, he was concerned with the role of shrines in the liturgical and pastoral life of the Church. Shrines, he said, were "spiritual clinics" (1965), "testimonies of miraculous deeds and of a continual wave of devotion" (1966), "luminous stars in the Church's sky... centers of devotion, prayer, recollection, prayer, and spiritual refreshment" (1970).

These words seem particularly true in the Philippines, the *pueblo amante de María*, where so many shrines are dedicated to the mother of God. These shrines are well known because they serve

⁸⁸ Cf. *Mother of the Redeemer*, 28.

as centers of devotion or focal points of pilgrimages. To mention a few among the better known are: Our Lady of Charity and Our Lady of Badoc, in Ilocos; Our Lady of Piat, in Cagayan Valley; Nuestra Señora de *La Naval* de Manila, in Quezon City; Our Lady of the Holy Rosary of Manaoag, in Pangasinan; Our Lady of Salambao, in Obando, Bulacan; Our Lady of Peace and Good Voyage, in Antipolo, Rizal; the Purification of Our Lady (*La Candelaria*), in Mabitac, Laguna; Our Lady of Casaysay, in Taal, Batangas; Our Lady of Peñafrancia, in Naga City; Nuestra Señora Virgen de la Regla, in Lapu-Lapu City; Our Lady of the Pillar, in Zamboanga, etc.

True devotion to Mary shows itself in works. Works of justice that free the poor from oppression. The 1971 Synod of Bishops clearly pointed the Church's mission: "To be present in the heart of the world proclaiming the good News to the poor, freedom to the oppressed, and joy to the afflicted."

A new role for shrines was highlighted in the First World Congress on Shrines and Pilgrimages (1992) sponsored by the Pontifical Council on Migrants and Itinerant People: In a world with millions of refugees, shrines are to become welcoming places for "people [whom] life has treated harshly, the poor, the people who have been uprooted from their homes and churches," said Pope John Paul II in his address to the Congress. By extending hospitality to refugees and pilgrims, shrines reflect Mary's generous welcoming of God's word and her gathering all people into the Body of Christ. Mary precedes God's people in their own pilgrimage of faith. □