

Vatican by Augustinus

A dialogue to extirpate evil

In Calcutta, the Pope evoked a new solidarity to non-Catholic leaders: "A new civilization is struggling to be born."

Let those who have no voice finally speak! Let India speak! Let the poor of Mother Teresa and all the poor of the world speak! Their voice is the voice of Christ!" cried the Pope, concluding the homily of the mass in the Brigade Parade Grounds Park of Calcutta on his fourth day in India. "Who are the poor of our time?" John Paul II asked. "The poor include all those who live without the indispensable basis for physical or spiritual life. In the world of today, millions of refugees have had to leave their country, and more millions of people, sometimes entire tribes or populations, are exposed to the threat of total extinction because of drought and famine. And who could fail to recognize the poverty and the ignorance of those who have never had the chance to study? or the absolute impotence of innumerable persons in the face of injustice and underdevelopment? And many people have been deprived of their right to religious freedom and suffer immensely because they cannot worship God according to the dictates of a righteous conscience."

The denunciation of poverty was the thread running through the many speeches of the Pope who chose, like his predecessor Paul VI, the great Indian continent to reaffirm the cause of justice. "Here in India and in other places of the world," the Pope said to the thousands who gathered in New Delhi's Indira Gandhi stadium, "there are millions of poor, and they share the Cross of Christ because Christ on the Cross has taken upon himself all

the crosses of the world. There is the cross of hunger by which women and children are deprived of their 'daily bread,' and the heart of many a parent is filled with anguish in seeing their children malnourished or even dying already in their infancy. So many others live in poverty and suffering, where they are victims of disease and prey to desperation."

"The Church's mission," added John Paul II, "includes an energetic action in favor of justice, peace, and integral human development. Not to fulfill these tasks would be to betray the example of Jesus, who came to announce to the poor a joyful message."

"Liberation demands a struggle against poverty," said the Pope, and in the basilica of Bom Jesus in Goa he added: "In recent years, the Church has become ever more conscious of the invitation of the Lord to concern itself with the poor. The Holy Scriptures manifest clearly the particular love of God for the poor, the oppressed, the disinherited, the indigent."

The Pope's speeches in India anticipate the content of the second document on the Theology of Liberation, which has already been drafted. In the first document, published on Sept. 3, 1984, Cardinal Ratzinger, Prefect of the Holy Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, had unmasked the false ideologies and doctrinal errors inherent in Liberation Theology.

Another theme touched by John Paul II in India is ecumenism. "I want

to encourage the dialogue with the other great religions," the Pope said during the trip between Calcutta and Madras, "not a dialogue toward a superficial syncretism but one on the great and concrete themes of man and humanity." Echoing the great ecumenical teacher of the 15th century, Nicolaus of Cusa, the Pope compared the various religions at the highest level. At Mangalore airport he said: "I am happy to see many friends here belonging to other religious confessions. Your presence means that you realize the need for all religious traditions to join hands to oppose the forces militating against the human and spiritual dignity of human beings. Let us pray together for a world in which every individual will be considered the son of the living God! And let us all work together for a civilization of peace and love."

The next day, meeting in Madras with spokesmen for the traditional religions, the Pope compared the inner spirituality preached by Mahatma Gandhi to the inner spirituality of Christianity, and added: "Authentic spirituality is seriously committed to giving succor to all those who suffer or are in need. The abolition of inhuman conditions is an authentic spiritual victory, since it gives freedom, dignity, and the possibility of a spiritual life to man, it makes him capable of elevating himself above matter." Turning to the religious leaders he had said, "The Catholic Church has often expressed the conviction that all believing and non-believing men must unite and collaborate in the mission of improving the world where they all live together. Dialogue is a powerful instrument of collaboration among men in extirpating evil from human life and the life of the community, by establishing a just order in human society and thus contributing to the commonweal of all men of all conditions."