

Popular Churches: A Papal Warning

The second of two parts

Following is the conclusion of Pope John Paul's recent letter to the bishops of Nicaragua on the subject of "popular churches."

In its most common acceptance, which appears in the writings of a certain current of theology, "people's church" means a church that arises much more from the presumed values of a portion of the population than from the free and gratuitous initiative of God. It means an initiative of God. It means a church enjoying the autonomy of the so-called bases, without reference to the lawful pastors and teachers. Or it at least means that such a church sets the "rights" of the aforementioned bases over the authority and charisms that faith lets us see in the lawful pastors and teachers. Since the term "people" easily takes on a markedly sociological and political content, it means a church incarnated in the popular organizations, a church marked by ideologies placed at the service of their own causes and programs, and opposed to groups considered not belonging to the people. It is easy to see — and the Puebla document explicitly says so — that the concept of the "popular church" scarcely escapes the infiltration of strongly ideological connotations, along the lines of a certain political radicalization, of the class struggle, of the acceptance of violence for the carrying out of determined ends, etc.



When in my opening speech to the assembly at Puebla, I myself raised serious reservations about the term "church born of the people." I had the perils I have just mentioned in mind. Therefore, I still feel it a duty to repeat the same clear and affectionate pastoral warning by means of your voices. This is a call to your faithful through you.

A "people's church" opposed to the church presided over by the lawful pastors is a grave deviation from the will and plan of salvation of Jesus Christ. It is so from the point of view of the Lord's and the apostles' teaching in the New Testament and in ancient and recent teaching in the church's solemn magisterium. It is also a principle, a beginning of fracture and rupture of that unity which he left as the characteristic sign of the church itself and which he willed to entrust precisely to those whom "the Holy Spirit established to rule the church of God."

So, beloved brothers in the episcopate, I entrust you with the task of making this fundamentally important call to your faithful with patience and firmness.

We all have present in our spirit the dramatic concept uttered by my predecessor Paul VI, when he wrote in his memorable apostolic exhortation Evangelii Nuntiandi that the most insidious perils and the most deadly attacks upon the church are not those which come from outside — they can only affirm her in her mission and labor — but those which come from the inside.

So at this historic moment for Nicaragua and for the church in that country, let all make an effort to contribute to keeping up solid communion around their pastors, and avoid any germ of fracture or division.

Nurses Selected For Work-Scholarships

Hornell — Three coronary care nurses have been selected to participate in St. James Mercy Hospital's first Work-Scholarship program.

The candidates are graduates of either associate degree nursing or diploma programs. According to Eileen Giglio, nursing service director, the program was initiated to alleviate the shortage of coronary care-trained registered nurses to staff the intensive care unit and coronary care unit during the night shift.

Nurses selected for the program agree to work two nights each week in the ICU-CCU during the school term, and full-time nights in the unit when school is not in session. The full year work scholarship program includes payment for

150 worked nights and 110 non-worked days that allow time for school, vacation and holidays. Education expenses will be paid by the hospital, and they nurses will continue to receive full-time salaries.

The three will take courses at Alfred State College and Alfred University toward a bachelor's degree.

Participating in the program will be Raelen Melious, a 1966 St. James Mercy Hospital School of Nursing graduate; Judy L. O'Hern, a 1968 Alfred State College graduate; and Laura DeBarnardo, a 1977 graduate of Farmingdale State University.

The nurses will start their study this fall.

May this appeal above all reach the consciences of priests, whether they are natives of the country, missionaries who have been consecrating their lives to the pastoral ministry in this nation for a number of years or volunteers desirous of making a contribution to their Nicaraguan brothers at an hour of supreme transcendence. Let them understand that if they wish really to serve the people as priests, this people, hungry and thirsty for God and full of love for the church, expects an announcement of the Gospel from them, the proclamation of the fatherhood of God, the dispensing to them of the sacramental mysteries of salvation. It is not through a political role, but through the priestly ministry that the people wish to have them near.

May this call reach the consciences of men and women religious, both those born in the country and those coming from elsewhere. The people of this country wish to see them united with the bishops in unbreakable ecclesial communion as bearers of a message that will not be alongside or even less opposed to, but harmoniously coherent with that of the lawful pastors.

May this call reach those who are by some warrant in sincere service to the church's mission, especially if they are in posts of particular responsibility like at the university, in study and research centers, the social communications media, etc. May they offer their services and be ready to serve in conformity with the equally generous and decided dispositions of their bishops and the very great part of the people, which together with the bishops, wishes the good of the country in the inspirations of the church's orientations.

Finally, beloved brothers, I exhort you to go on still in the midst of heavy difficulties with your untiring labor, so as to ensure the church's active presence in this historic moment that the country is living.

Under the leadership given by you as solicitous pastors, may the Catholic faithful of Nicaragua constantly give clear and convincing testimony of love and capacity for service to the country, not more or less effective than that of others: a testimony of clear-sightedness in face of facts and situations, of full readiness to serve the authentic cause of the people, of skill in putting forward in every situation the thought and orientations of the church — what I have often described as "the way," even when such ways are not in concord with other ways proposed.

I desire, I expect and I pray that you will do everything possible in order that fidelity to Christ and to the church in your peoples, far from diminishing, may confirm and enhance loyalty to the earthly fatherland.

I take the opportunity with pleasure to give you fraternally, and in pledge of abundant divine graces for your persons and your ministry, my heartfelt apostolic blessing, and I extend it to all your faithful.

Unemployed Focus of Ceremony

Elmira — People from the Southern Tier gathered for a special Labor Day Mass Monday in an effort to call attention to the dignity of workers and the tragedy of unemployment.

The Mass was sponsored by the Southern Tier Office of Social Ministry, the Chemung County AFL-CIO Labor Assembly and Our Lady of Lourdes Parish.

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Mt. Saviour Plans Hospitality Day

Pine City — The monks of Mount Saviour Monastery have scheduled their annual Hospitality Day for Sunday, Sept. 19.

Such family type entertainment and activities as food tents, jam and jelly booth, music and dancing are being planned.

The day also will be the occasion for the initial sale of

natural fisherman type yarns from the wool of the monks' flock. Weaving and spinning demonstrations will be presented throughout the day.

An 11 a.m. Sunday Liturgy will open the day.

Friends and neighbors are invited to the festivities at the monastery on Route 225 between Elmira and Corning in the Town of Big Flats.

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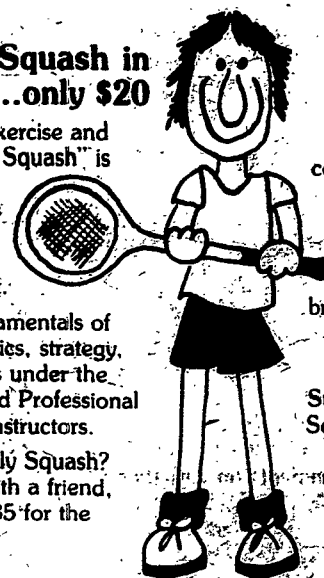
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