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Pontiff

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is put at risk today by those who see majority rule as the answer to all questions.

The proselytizing success of religious sects challenges pastors to ask why Catholics are leaving the church and to renew parish life to favor a more spiritual, person-centered approach.

The church must also reinvigorate the sacramental and prayer life of its members, so that the gap between faith and daily life can be bridged.

"Where this gap exists, Christians are such only in name," he said.

The most detailed section of the letter tackled the issue of poverty and social suffering throughout the Americas, especially as a result of economic globalization. These are "social sins which cry to heaven," too often the consequence of an "unbridled greed for wealth and power," it said.

The pope, responding to a synod request, sharply criticized forms of economic "neoliberalism," in which the profit motive and market mechanisms are exalted to the point that society's weakest are pushed further to the margins.

"Indeed, the poor are becoming more numerous" in the Americas, he said. Yet the church cannot be exclusively occupied with the poor, the pope added.

He said that "the pastoral care for the leading sectors of society has been neglected" in key areas such as politics, the military, unions and other social environments; evangelization of these leaders is the best antidote to corruption, he said.

The pope repeated his call for the easing or outright cancellation of foreign debt, saying the burden was "suffocating" many countries. At the same time, he said, corruption in borrowing countries has also helped fuel the debt crisis.

The letter condemned discrimination against indigenous peoples in the Americas and called for respect for their territories and any agreements made with such native groups. The church must also be sen-

sitive to ongoing ethnic prejudice against African-Americans, it said.

It said there must be no unjust restriction on the natural right of people to move freely in their own country or from one nation to another. Even illegal immigrants share such basic rights, it said.

A strongly worded section on the environment said believers have a responsibility to protect God's creation from increasing abuse and destruction in the Americas, including harmful gas emissions, and the deliberate burning of forests, especially in the Amazon region.

The pope highlighted the plight of many women in the Americas, repeating the synod's description of a "feminine side of poverty" and denouncing "discrimination, sexual abuse and male domination as actions contrary to God's plan." He also deplored the sterilization of women, which he said was carried out in some countries with-

out women realizing it, as part of government programs to meet conditions for economic aid.

In discussing threats to the family, the pope assailed divorce, abortion, infanticide and the "contraceptive mentality." The church should promote adoption and offer pastoral help to women in pregnancy and those who have had abortions, he said. The responsibilities of men as husbands and child-raisers need reinforcement, he added.

He also echoed synod concern about the many children who face violence, homelessness, neglect and abuse, particularly sexual abuse and child prostitution.

In key passages of the letter, the pope praised church efforts in the Americas to assist the poor, but said these activities need to be "increasingly directed to an encounter with Christ." In this way, evangelization can be more clearly present in the church's social justice programs, he said.

The pope's letter said priests should stay out of party politics. That role belongs to Catholic lay people, who should proclaim the church's social teaching in the political sphere, he said.

In calling for better education of Catholics in the church's teachings, the pope endorsed the idea of preparing a "Catechism of Catholic Social Doctrine" for use around the world.

The papal letter paid relatively little attention to the question of the lay role in the church. The synod had asked for recognition of new lay ministries; the pope called it a complex issue, said he had appointed a commission to study it years ago, and stressed the need to avoid confusion between the roles of laity and ordained ministers.

He said the clergy shortage illustrated the urgent need to promote priestly vocations.

Priest

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world. That's encouraging."

In the exhortation, the pope, for example, called for respect for the rights of indigenous peoples such as those caught up in the fighting in Chiapas.

"He is telling the Mexican government that it needs to take a close look at negotiations, that the situation is really volatile," Father Cadorette said. He predicted the pope's remarks will spur renewed talks.

Moreover, the pope criticized the "neoliberal" economic policies that help to worsen the situation of the poor and emphasized again the "preferential option" for the poor, while at the same time pointing out that the wealthy need to be evangelized as well, the priest observed.

"One of the things that needs to be said, the preferential option for the poor was never meant to be exclusive," Father Cadorette said. "You don't judge or anathematize people because they are affluent."

Father Cadorette acknowledged that he

had not expected much in the pope's synod exhortation due to the poor regard many of the people he knew in Latin America had for the synod itself, which took place in November and December of 1997.

Many of those people felt that trying to pull together North and South America as one entity was too much, he noted.

"I think it (was) an inchoate attempt to attempt to deal with the diversity of Catholicism in the Americas," Father Cadorette said. In fact, he reported, when speaking with people in Latin America in the year after the actual synod sessions, "it simply (didn't) come up. It (was) seen as, by and large, an inconsequential event."

That view was echoed by Sister Maureen Finn, SSJ, who has served in Brazil as part of her congregation's mission team there for 15 years, and who is currently back in Rochester for a one-year sabbatical.

Sister Finn pointed out that the very name of the synod — "for America" instead of "of America" — helped to suggest the remoteness of the synod discussions from the issues that people face, such as extreme poverty and indigenous people's rights.

"It was kind of distant, taking place in Rome, and in the synod format," she said. "What I felt didn't come out would be concrete discussion of practical issues."

Father Cadorette said that while the document the pope signed Jan. 22 was not concrete enough on some issues, the pope tried to be. Thus while the document criticized some kinds of capitalism, "he points to what it's doing to the poor in Mexico."

He acknowledged that the pope did not go as far as he would like in the exhortation. "What he's not dealing with are the structural issues in the church," he noted.

Thus, for example, while the pope called for increased vocations and respect for the rights of indigenous peoples, the pontiff did not address the church rules that set up barriers that work to prevent indigenous people from seeking careers in the church.

Despite such reservations, however, Father Cadorette said that overall the exhortation — and the pope's activities in Mexico — helped to show that the pontiff may be ailing physically, but not mentally.

"His body is dying, but his mind is as vital as ever," Father Cadorette said.

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