

THE PASTORAL LETTER

Issued by the House of Bishops, September 15, 1955

DEARLY BELOVED BRETHREN :

For the first time in our history we, your Bishops, are meeting outside the continental United States. By plane and ship we have travelled 2,400 miles across the Pacific to these beautiful Islands. Here our faces are inevitably turned towards the farther islands of the Pacific and towards Asia. There have come to meet with us not only our own missionary bishops from the Philippines, but also the Supreme Bishop of the Philippine Independent Church and Bishops of our sister Churches in Japan, Australia, New Zealand, and Polynesia. On these Hawaiian Islands we are in the midst of a happy community where people of many races live and work together with a measure of mutual acceptance that is rare in our divided world.

Since God always speaks to us where we are He speaks to us here of His Lordship over this great area of His one world, of His Lordship over East and West; of our inescapable human oneness with all the peoples of the Pacific area and of Asia; of His will for His Church in the fulfillment of her mission in the islands of the Pacific and in the vast continent of Asia.

The God whom we confess and worship is not our possession. We are His possession. It is His doing that we share our common nature with our fellows of the lands towards which we look, and that we shall rise or fall with them. In Christ He claims us and them for Himself and gives Himself to us and to them. And we can accept His claiming of us as His own and receive His offered life only as we permit Him to break down the barriers our human sin has erected between us and our brethren.

To all who accept Him He gives the command to go into all the world and stake out the claim for the reconciling Lordship of Christ in all places of His rightful dominion, not in complacent pride of our human superiority, but in humble witness and service. Standing where we do God speaks to us of His will for His Church in Asia. If we stood in some other place He would speak to us of our mission there.

Despite the feebleness of our response to the loving outreach to us of God in Christ, we can rejoice that there have been those who have gone out into all the lands to witness and to serve in His name. By waves of heroic witness and missionary zeal, by the migrations of peoples, by colonization and by empire God has so used the dedication of His servants and overruled the corrupt purposes of men that He has planted His Church in all the earth. The new light and life and love that entered our world at so great cost in Christ have been carried to all these lands. And God has kept His promise that He would go with His witnesses and that their labors would bear fruit. Wherever the seed of the Kingdom has been sown, wherever the ministry of the Word and the Sacraments has been established, the Lord Christ has done His work in the power of His spirit. There are coming back to us witnesses to Christ of many races and lands who strengthen us in the faith and whose fellowship in the Gospel enriches ours.

We cannot boast of our human success, but we give thanks for the work of God and of its promise of greater works to come. Even in a land such as

China we are confident that Christ is at work behind barriers we cannot penetrate. Testimony comes to us of new churches being built, new bishops being consecrated, of witness faithfully and even heroically borne.

As we face westward to the islands of the Pacific and to Asia, seeking to look upon them in the light of our faith, we see much that to our human gaze is disturbing, even frightening, yet under God full of promise.

Half of the population of God's world is crowded into the lands towards which we look. In all these lands, save those populated by white men migrated from the West, there is a tidal upheaval of deprived, hungry peoples struggling for food and nationhood and full human status and acceptance, and resentful towards the West and towards the white man in his pride and power. Humanly speaking, there are good grounds for saying that the fate of the world will be in large measure the fate of Asia. There are the greatest masses of uncommitted peoples in the basic conflict between the total views of life and ways of life which struggle for the allegiance of men.

These people are in full revolt against foreign political and economic control, against colonialism and imperialism. They are in revolt against age-old poverty and misery, no longer willing to accept passively gross inequalities of fortune. The earthly fate of hundreds of millions is at stake in their desperate efforts to conquer intolerable physical poverty. Their humanity is asserting itself against all that destroys humanity. They are in revolt against the western white man's assumption of his permanent superiority. All these peoples have experienced in some form the sting of contempt. Along with their divisions among themselves and their fears of one another, these peoples are drawn together by a pervasive anti-western bias and a suspicion of the motives of the peoples and nations on the side of the world which most of us inhabit and represent. Ancient religions which we were inclined to write off as decadent are showing many signs of vigorous revival in association with the nationalism of Asia: Islam, Buddhism, Hinduism.

Since our particular branch of the Anglican Communion is centered in North America and most of us are citizens of the United States, we are called to look with open eyes at what this means for our nation. We in the United States, whatever our protestations of superior virtue, just because we are the most powerful and prosperous nation in the western world, have inherited in great measure the fears and resentments of Asia towards the West.

In all this we are summoned as Christians to recognize the judgments of God, which are the disclosures of the contradictions between our human ways and His design for His people. We can make a case for the very mixed benefits of empire and of economic penetration motivated by the desire for gain. Before God and men we can make no case for contempt and assumptions of racial superiority. These are the deepest roots of our alienation from Asia. For these there is no answer but repentance.

Those of us who are American are tempted to look upon the revolutionary upheavals of Asia with fear, wondering what all this means for *our* security, and whether or not these peoples will align themselves on *our* side. As Christians we need to remember that God is the God of Asia, the Lord of Asia's history today. The awakening of whole peoples from listless fatalism to self-awareness and self-determination, and even to self-assertion, should be for us a ground of hope. For the Christ whom we confess seeks

the allegiance of free men and would lead them into the service in which alone they can find their perfect freedom.

All that we see when we look across the Pacific to Asia profoundly conditions our Christian mission in Asia and the Pacific area. Little "colonies of the Kingdom" have been planted in nearly all these lands. Rightly we have a first concern for the missions for which our Episcopal Church has full responsibility, a major mission in the Philippines and the small beginnings of missions in Formosa and in Okinawa. In Japan we have a Sister Church which we helped to establish. It is rising with courage out of the devastation wrought by war. Next to our own missions we have a direct concern for the congregations of Christ's flock established in Asia by our sister Churches of the Anglican Communion, in India and Pakistan and Ceylon and Burma, and in the other Asian lands and Pacific islands. But we cannot forget that other companies of Christ's people have shared in the mission to Asia and that God has greatly blessed and used their labors for Him.

As a result of the mission of all the Churches in Asia there are still only small Christian minorities in nearly all these lands. Only in the Philippines is there a Christian majority, predominantly Roman Catholic. In most of the countries of Asia Christians are only from one-half of one per cent to three per cent of the population. In Japan there are some four hundred thousand Christians in a population of eighty-five millions. In West Pakistan Christians are one-half of one per cent of the population, although this is the largest Christian body in any Moslem State.

These little companies of our brethren in Christ are feeling heavily the weight of nationalist fears and resentments towards the West. They are caught up in the revolutionary upheavals and dislocations of the nations of which they are a part. They have pitifully small resources in manpower, leadership, and this-world wealth. They are in great need of help, which can only be given effectively with rare humility and understanding and uncalculating love. Whatever our commitments in other parts of God's one-world, how can we fail to ask God to show us the ways in which we can help them? What happens to them is so crucial for our world and for Christ's cause.

Plainly a deep-going reorientation in the method and spirit of our mission is called for. Only Asians can carry the main weight in witnessing for Christ to Asians. We cannot plant *our* Church and *our* institutions in Asia and then take pride because they are *ours*. We can only hope to plant Christ's Church in Asia with the full understanding that it will be *theirs* under Him.

When God entered our world redemptively in Christ He identified Himself with our humanity. He put Himself at our mercy; and when we had done our worst was raised up in power. He is calling us who are His people so to identify ourselves with our brethren that we put ourselves at their mercy, offering our gifts and our service to them without the will to control or take credit. Only through death can we share in the resurrection power. We are moving into the era of inter-Church aid, the sharing of resources and special skills by a stronger Church with a younger Church, in order that the native indigenous Church may become not an outpost of *our* Church, but a dynamic, self-governing, witnessing organ of the one body of Christ. Only in some such way can we undercut radically the Asian charge that Christian missions are a part of the imperialist aggression

of the West. The motive of our missions must be cleansed of all prudential desire to make Asia safe for America, and be rooted in our concern under God for the hungers and needs of the peoples of Asia.

By bringing us here to the mid-Pacific God has called us to open our ears to the cries for help that come to us from the Churches of Asia. If we hear those calls we will be greatly concerned that the actions of our nation and the attitudes of our American people shall be guided and overruled by the purpose of God for the peoples of Asia, and not simply by our short-sighted judgments of what will be to our immediate political, military, or economic advantage. For nation and Church alike His will is our peace.

We have painted with a large brush what God has enabled us to see here. We beseech you, brethren, to share our thankfulness to God for what He has done with the too-little offerings of self and substance we have given. Join your prayers with ours that God will open to us the ways in which we can fulfill more worthily our Church's Mission in Asia. Stand ready to offer your gifts and yourselves. Search your hearts for whatever blocks the way between us and our brethren.

For we put our trust in One who was slain, and has redeemed us to God by His blood out of every kindred, and tongue, and people, and nation.