

[Pope: 'Convert all Hindus'](#)

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INTERFAITH

Pope: 'Convert all Hindus'

The pope really did Hindus a favor with his November visit to India. He united Hindus and Buddhists in opposition to conversion, he put Indian Christians in India on the defensive (especially Catholics), and he galvanized the world press in sympathy for Hinduism, giving rise to some clear explanations in the media as to why missionaries are held in suspect by Hindus. CNN/Time said the pope's conversion call was "appalling manners."

The visit went well enough until the end, when the pope officially closed the three-year Asian Synod of Bishops, one of several convened by the church internationally according to region. He issued the "Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation Ecclesia in Asia of the Holy Father John Paul II to The Bishops, Priests and Deacons, Men and Women in the Consecrated Life and All the Lay Faithful on Jesus Christ the Saviour and His Mission of Love and Service in Asia." You can find the full text at: http://seraphin.vatican.va/holy_father_john_paul_ii/apost_exhortations/documents/hf_jp-ii_exh_06111999_ecclesia-in-asia_en.html --just don't make any typing mistakes [excerpts below tell the story]. The language is much more sophisticated, but the message is the same as the Baptists' Diwali pamphlet [see January, 2000 issue]: There is one true

religion (ours); all others are false, lesser, incomplete; we are divinely ordered to convert non-Christians; etc., etc.

The declaration provided unexpected fodder for a previously scheduled meeting of Hindus and Buddhists at Lumbini, Nepal (the birthplace of Buddha). Speaker after speaker denounced the pope's call for his bishops to make ever greater efforts to spread Christianity in Asia. They called it "a war against Hindus and Buddhists" and "a spiritual crime." One Hindu leader from Nepal admitted, "Such a statement was not expected from the pope. It is timely that we Hindus and Buddhists have come together to save our peaceful civilization from the aggressive threat of conversion."

Asiaweek magazine, out of Hong Kong, summed up the matter in an editorial, "The pope's message threatens to alienate liberal Indians who previously dismissed the warnings of Hindu chauvinists as fanatical paranoia. But the pope's statements make clear the Vatican's expansionist agenda. And they lend credence to the longstanding complaint that Christianity's many

good works in India are meant to give it a foothold on the nation's soul."

The Catholic Asian Plan

The Catholic scheme to evangelize Asia is less confrontational and more diplomatic than the Baptists', but no less sweeping. Excerpts:

"Just as in the first millennium the Cross was planted on the soil of Europe, and in the second on that of the Americas and Africa, we can pray that in the Third Christian Millennium a great harvest of faith will be reaped in this vast and vital continent [of Asia]."

"If the Church in Asia is to fulfill its providential destiny, evangelization must be your absolute priority."

"Christ is the one Mediator between God and man and the sole Redeemer of the world, to be clearly distinguished from the founders of other great

religions."

"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."

"The Church has the deepest respect for these traditions [in Asia] and seeks to engage in sincere dialogue with their followers. The religious values they teach await their fulfillment in Jesus Christ."

"I [the pope] pray to the Lord to send many more committed laborers to reap the harvest of souls which I see as ready and plentiful [in Asia]."

"The universal presence of the Holy Spirit cannot serve as an excuse for a failure to proclaim Jesus Christ explicitly as the one and only Saviour."

"Some of the followers of the great religions of

Asia have no problem in accepting Jesus as a manifestation of the Divine or the Absolute, or as an 'enlightened one'. But it is difficult for them to see Him as the only manifestation of the Divine".

"Vatican II taught clearly that the entire Church is missionary, and that the work of evangelization is the duty of the whole People of God."

"Jesus Christ [is] the fulfillment of the yearnings expressed in the mythologies and folklore of the Asian peoples."

"The Synod therefore renewed the commitment of the Church in Asia to the task of improving both ecumenical relations and interreligious dialogue [as] essential to the Church's evangelizing mission on the continent."

"From the Christian point of view, interreligious dialogue is more than a way of fostering mutual knowledge and enrichment; it is a part of the

Church's evangelizing mission."

"In many countries, Catholic schools play an important role in evangelization."

"Asia is thirsting for the living water that Jesus alone can give."