

**DIGNITY AND IDENTITY:
THE STRUGGLE OF INDIGENOUS PEOPLES IN ASIA
TO PRESERVE, PURIFY AND PROMOTE THEIR CULTURES**

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Introducing The Theme

Many of the numerically large, yet statistically insignificant and widely scattered Churches of Asia, are found among Indigenous and tribal peoples and other minority communities. Christianity is culturally mainstream perhaps only in the Philippines, South Korea and Timor Lorosae. While dialogue with major Confucian, Buddhist, Hindu and Muslim religious cultures is imperative, it is equally important for us to be aware of the ongoing encounter of faith with Indigenous Peoples from which a majority of Asian Christians come. Due to rapid urbanization, an increasing percentage of Asian Indigenous Christians are no longer living in their ancestral homelands. Thus, the dialogue between faith and culture among Indigenous Christian communities is a vital element in the evangelization of culture in our increasingly pluralistic and urban societies. This is of world-wide consequence when we recall that among the approximately 300 million Indigenous Peoples living in more than 70 countries, the majority, that is more than 150 million, live in Asia.¹

In 1995 the Church in Asia opened the *International Decade of the World's Indigenous People* (1995-2004) – among other ways – with a FABC Office of Evangelization colloquium in Hua Hin, Thailand.² As the Decade draws to a close, and during *UN Inter-*

¹ Fourth World Eye (www.cwis.org) state that there are 2165 Indigenous groups in Asia, compared to 1300 in the Pacific, 2011 in Africa, over 1000 in the Americas and 225 in Europe.

² For the author's contribution to the FABC colloquium see, "Towards a New Evangelization Among the Nusa Tenggara Peoples of Eastern Indonesia", *Asia Journal of Theology* 10/2, (1996) 291-315. Also published in *Diva* XX1/2, (1996) 58-80.

national Year of Ecotourism, we reflect upon the role that Indigenous Peoples of Asia must play in "preserving, purifying and promoting" their cultures. Note that the theme I have been asked to explore is not the *evangelization* of Asian Indigenous cultures as such — although this is clearly the context from which I live and work — but the *enhancing* of the cultures themselves. If glorifying God is to become fully alive, then cultures become fully alive where God-experience permeates the whole of life. In what ways is the dialogue between faith and Indigenous culture in Asia life-enhancing?

In the first section I ask the basic — yet complex — question of who the Indigenous Peoples of Asia are, taking up descriptions used by United Nations Agencies and other international bodies. Only then will it be possible to identify key characteristics of Indigenous cultures. In the second section I work with the comprehensive theology of evangelization from Conciliar and post-Conciliar sources and list certain opportunities that need to be taken up and the challenges that need to be faced. At issue are the crucial questions of human dignity and cultural identity.

I. The Indigenous Peoples of Asia: Description and Characteristics

1.1 Towards a Working Description of "Indigenous Peoples"

Interestingly enough, the United Nations Working Group on Indigenous Populations (UN-WGIP), established in 1982, has no fixed, all-encompassing definition of Indigenous People. No definition is either neutral or self-contained, for people regard themselves as Indigenous in relation to wider, dominant groups. And the relationship between the mainstream society with the smaller dominated community is fraught with injustice. Nevertheless, most designations describe Indigenous Peoples as either the first to settle an area/country, or as social groups that clearly distinguish themselves in a socio-cultural context from the surrounding (majority) population. They are characterized by a common culture and language, common spiritual ideas, and by identifiable territory and a certain economic structure.

It is still a matter of controversy to list which groups *regard themselves* as Indigenous, and which groups *succeed in being regarded* as Indigenous by government and international agencies.

In the late 19th and early 20th centuries "Indigenous Peoples" were the subject (object?) of ethnographic studies by Western academics. Since international recognition over the last three decades, the class "Indigenous People" is not so much a cultural, as a political category, whose definition is still in the making.³

The UN-WGIP has been using the 1972 "working definition" of Jose Martinez Cobo, formerly Special Rapporteur on Discrimination against Indigenous Populations. This reads:

"Indigenous populations are composed of the existing descendants of the peoples who inhabited the present territory of a country, wholly or partially, at the time when persons of a different culture or ethnic origin arrived there from other parts of the world, overcame them, by conquest, settlement or other means, reduced them to a non-dominant or colonial condition; who today live more in conformity with their particular social, economic and culture customs and traditions than with the institutions of the country of which they now form part, under a state structure which incorporates mainly national, social and cultural characteristics of other segments of the population which are predominant."

Over the past thirty years many flaws have been found in this definition. Firstly, it seems to freeze the Indigenous identity in a historical-chronological axis, that confines the applicability of this definition mainly to pre-colonial populations, for instance in Central and South America. Thus, it refers to European colonialism, while ignoring the history of Asian and African civilizations. Secondly, this definition is too simplistic. The survival of an In-

³ For author's description of Indigenous religious cultures in Indonesia in terms of the economically powerless, the culturally marginalized and the politically voiceless see, *Asia Journal of Theology* (1996) 291-294 or *Diva* (1996) 58-60. The categories of "centre" and "periphery" were taken from cultural anthropology. See, Ann Lowenhaupt Tsing, : A Rhetoric of Centres in A Religion of the Periphery." Pp. 187-210 in *Indonesian Religions in transition*. Ed. Rita Smith Kipp and Susan Rodgers. Arizona, 1987. While I still use center-periphery as the dominant frame for understanding Indigenous peoples, it is also important to note how (temporary) regional alliances among emboldened minorities can manipulate a weakened centralized State.

digenous identity is explained by its isolation, on the one hand, and its marginalization and discrimination, on the other. It treats Indigenous peoples in terms of an "ethnographic present," as if thousands of years of human history and intermingling had never substantially altered the living cultures of different peoples. Thirdly, Cobo's definition fails to explain the survival of "Indigenous" identity against all the odds. Not all ethnic communities have lived in isolation and many ethnic communities have lost control over their "homeland" or the terrain which nurtured their culture, and become urbanized, and *yet their identities have survived*. And so a more inclusive description was formulated in 1983⁴; while "self-identification" was recognized as a key element in 1986.⁵

The 1995 *Draft Universal Declaration on the Rights of the Indigenous Peoples*, prepared by the UN-WGIP, declines to adopt a definition. This omission has been justified by the Rapporteur of the Working Group, Erica Irene Daes, on the grounds that, "historically, Indigenous Peoples have suffered from definitions imposed by others." Clearly, the self-identification of Indigenous Peoples, and their broad recognition by the wider community, are still in the making.

1.2. A Working Description

Benedict Kingsbury, a specialist in international law, who has been extensively involved with legal aspects of Indigenous

⁴ The scope of Cobo's original definition was enlarged to include marginal and isolated groups existing in many countries, who may not have suffered conquest or direct colonization, as long as they are: "a) descendants of groups, which were in the territory at the time when other groups of different cultures or ethnic origin arrived there; b) precisely because of their isolation from other segments of the country's population, they have almost preserved intact the customs and traditions of their ancestors, which are similar to those characterized as Indigenous; and c) they are, even if only formally, placed under a state structure which incorporates national, social and cultural characteristics alien to their own." See, FICN, 41 Sub. 21/1983/121 Add. Para. 379.

⁵ Any individual who identified him-or herself as Indigenous, and was accepted by the group or the community as one of its members, was to be regarded as an Indigenous person. This preserves for these communities the sovereign right and power to decide who belongs to them, without external interference. See, E/CN.4/Sub.2/1986/7/Add.4.para.381.

Peoples' issues, concludes that, "it does not appear possible, or indeed desirable, to formulate a rigid list of requirements for... determining which groups are Indigenous Peoples."⁶ Instead, he compiles a list of indicators, some required, others simply relevant, factors to be considered in cases of doubt or disagreement. Kingsbury's preliminary list is as follows:

Essential Requirements:

- a) Self-identification as a distinct ethnic group;
- b) Historical experience of, or contingent vulnerability to, serve disruption, dislocation or exploitation;
- c) Long connection with the region;
- d) The wish to retain a distinct identity.

Relevant Indicators:

- a) Non-dominance in the national or regional society;
- b) Close cultural affinity with a particular area of land or territories;
- c) Historic continuity—especially by descent—with prior occupants of land in the region;
- d) Socio-economic and socio-cultural differences from the ambient population;
- e) Distinct objective characteristics: languages, race, material or spiritual culture, and so forth;
- f) Regarded as Indigenous by the ambient population, or treated as such in legal and administrative arrangements.

Three of these criteria need a note of clarification. Firstly, the key essential requirement of *Self-Definition*. Since 1986, the UN-WGIP has insisted on the right of Indigenous Peoples themselves to define what and who is Indigenous, along with the right to determine what or who is not Indigenous. This "right of self-definition" avoids others imposing their definition on Indigenous Peoples; and also avoids treating them as "victims," objects of other peoples' programmes. A correlative right is that of retaining their own customs and institutions, where these are not incompatible with fundamental rights defined by the national legal system.⁷ Secondly, the

⁶ Kingsbury, 1995, 33.

⁷ Perhaps unconsciously, this limited-right parallels *Gaudium et spes*, par. 58 (see below). We might well consider whether this fundamental criterion of self-definition should also be operative in the Church in line with the doctrines of subsidiarity and solidarity.

first of the relevant indicators, namely *Non-Dominance*. This is not primarily a question of numbers — that Indigenous Peoples are minority groups — but more importantly a question of politics — that Indigenous Peoples have little or no voice vis-à-vis the State and the international community; outsiders decide their fate, they have little or no self-determination. Thirdly, *Historical continuity*. This is perhaps the most controversial of the criteria, for it is often impossible to decide which population group predates the others. Nevertheless, it is necessary to decide who has prior claim over land and resources — and this is "dynamite." Indigenous Peoples comprise just 5% of the world's population, yet embody 80% of the world's cultural diversity. They occupy 20% of the world's land surface, yet nurture 80% of the world's biodiversity.

More than 150 million Asians define themselves as Indigenous; and among these 2165 groups we find thriving Christian communities: in Pakistan, Bangladesh and India in South Asia; in Burma/Myanmar, Thailand, Laos, Cambodia, Vietnam, Malaysia, Indonesia and the Philippines in Southeast Asia; and in China, Korea and Japan in Northeast Asia.

1.3. Key Characteristics of Asian Indigenous Cultures

1.3.1 *Politico-Economic Characteristics*

Despite their diversity, Asian Indigenous Peoples are facing *similar political and economic problems*. They are among the most disadvantaged groups on the Asian continent. Some are subjected to slavery and forced labour (e.g., in China and Myanmar/Burma). Almost all face discrimination, poverty, poor health, unemployment and high rates of imprisonment. Artificial colonial borders have separated peoples, or turned them into powerless minorities (e.g., West Papua and PNG, the Dayaks of Kalimantan/Borneo). Indigenous communities are threatened by the destruction of the natural environment that nurtures their culture. Under the name of development, their land and resources — among the richest on earth — are being expropriated or spoiled by activities, such as deforestation, mining, dam and irrigation projects and road construction. Their comparative isolation makes their land prime sites for toxic waste dumping and nuclear testing (China, India, Pakistan).

They suffer *cultural discrimination*. Many Indigenous communities experienced forced assimilation by the prohibition of

their mother tongue and of their religious beliefs and cultural ways. Often there is a blanket denial of the existence of whole peoples in the public life of a state. This process generally happens gradually, largely unnoticed by the wider society.

Asian Indigenous Peoples also suffer *social discrimination*. They are non-dominant, that is, not among the power-brokers of modern nation States. With a different life-way, they are perceived by the dominant society as being inferior (backward, primitive). They are not normally represented in the decision-making elite in their respective nation states. In addition, Indigenous communities are increasingly marginalized by the populations surrounding them, causing the concept of "Indigenous Peoples" to become a political term. These politico-economic issues are the concern of human rights and constitutional law, as well as national, regional and international trade agreements. Since John Paul II has placed human rights and responsibilities at the heart of Petrine social teaching, Christian Indigenous communities can play their full part here precisely as Catholics.⁸

Politically weak, Indigenous Peoples are living among some of the richest natural resources on the entire globe – minerals and forests, drinking water and fish stocks. They have little bargaining power, as super-rich nations exploit the last of the earth's resources that have been preserved for millennia by Indigenous People. This sustainable life-way is due to their Indigenous culture and its core values.

1.3.2. *Socio-Cultural Characteristics*⁹

Indigenous cultures envelop the natural, social and symbolic order into a single system. Their world has no separate religious sphere with its own specialists and institutions – religion and culture are one. In myth and ritual, in life cycles and customary law, Indigenous People make sense of their life. Each activity, every incident, breathes the spirit of the ancestors who make present the transcendent immanent life-force within and yet beyond. Each individual thing, person and incident has meaning within the whole. The whole reflects the particular which needs

⁸ See, inter alia, *Sollicitudo rei socialis*. Vatican, 1987.

⁹ See, "Towards a New Evangelization among the Nusa Tenggara Peoples of Eastern Indonesia", AJT 10, 294-95.

to be understood in terms of the cosmic whole.

Among Indigenous People nurture and nature, culture and cosmos work together. Areas of life that cannot be nurtured or controlled have traditionally been associated with nature spirits who come from the "wild"—from forest, sea or mountain. Uncontrollable events are kept at bay by magic. Meanwhile, the ordered world of village and farm is associated with ancestor spirits, where everything and everyone has a defined place and function. Each one's destiny is found in fulfilling one's set role in society, and thus each person is a creative part of the total cosmos. This cosmic order is not static but renewed by each generation of leaders, who reinterpret the saying of the ancestors for each new case. This "negotiation" with the ancestors is carried out through ritual and ritual language.

Indigenous Peoples are deeply spiritual (sacred), and at the same time deeply material (secular). Material because life is centered upon a life-cycle according to the seasons'; spiritual because everything is a hierophany, an epiphany of the Divine. Each economic activity has comic import. Life is sacramental, a revelation of Spirit. The cosmos embodies the Divine; as the soul is to a human body, so the world is ensouled by Transcendence-Immanence. The sacred dimension of life is expressed in myth and ritual, in agricultural practices and clan law, and in—often fragile—symbolic architecture. Living remnants of Indigenous cultures are the repositories of what is most deeply characteristic, and possibly of what is most genuinely human, in Asian ways of thinking, feeling and acting. As globalization is uprooting local identities, so people are rediscovering and reasserting their Indigenous roots.

1.3.3 *Socio-Cultural Values*

Central to the natural and human seasons is the struggle between harmony and discord. Harmony-in-equilibrium results in fairly equivalent relationships among everybody. Social discord both disrupts this original harmony, but also readjusts it in catering for developments; for out of social conflict a new harmony can be created.

Thus, Indigenous cultures have their own distinctive ways of thinking (*logos*) and giving meaning to life (*ethos*). The Indian artist and cultural philosopher, Jyoti Sahi, pinpoints seven core values among Asian Indigenous Peoples: two are "ecological

values," and five "community/societal values."¹⁰ They are: 1) The *value of the land*. The community belongs to the land; land and people sustain each other. 2) The *value of culture as part of nature*. The community participates in nature's life, where customary law is seen as an extension of natural law. 3) The *value of the group*. The ethnic group ("nation," "tribe," or "clan," or however they define themselves) is the most important unit in society, rather than the family, an administrative unit or the state. The individual tends to merge with the group. 4) The *value of consensus* in government. Decision-making takes place through consultation, deliberation and consensual agreement. 5) The *value of cooperation* over competition. Ideas and activities that unite are given precedence over ideas and activities that divide and separate. 6) The *value of hospitality*. An open welcome to the visitor and the stranger freely acknowledges the "cosmic inter-dependence" of each person and group with each other person and group, and of the human family with the earth. 7) The *value of celebration*. Life is for living, enjoyment and happiness, not just for toil, sweat and tears.

These seven Indigenous values are diametrically opposed to the values that drive the present-day globalizing economy and media. The International Monetary Fund (IMF), World Bank (WB) and World Trade Organization (WTO) are fuelled by the values of 1) The necessity to dominate and exploit the land. 2) The autonomy of the individual (and the nuclear family). 3) The drive to control and exploit nature. 4) A hierarchical and patriarchal order. 5) The drive to compete where the strong win and the weak lose. 6) The right of private and corporate possession of territory; in a market economy everything has been turned into a commodity—even life forms are being patented. 7) The value of hard work which, ironically, leaves little time for enjoyment of the fruits of success (where both parents work long hours—bringing work home for evenings and weekends—leaving a large, unneeded pool of the unemployed at the edge of society).

This clash between Indigenous and market values should not lead us to romanticise the former or demonise the latter. Each Indigenous value—like all human values—is ambivalent in practice. Priority of the clan over the individual gives shape to

¹⁰ See, Jyoti Sahi, "Cultures in Relation to the Mission of the Church." *Mission Today* 1 (1999) 314-23. List of values on 319-20.

an altruistic society. Yet, few would wish to return to the "pre-individuality" days that stunted personal growth. "Harmony" is positive value, yet in Indonesia it is used to justify cultural uniformity and military control. Authoritarian governments use such "Asian values" to justify their non-democratic regimes. Similarly, "co-operation" functions well in a small-scale egalitarian society among persons and families of something like equal strength. Yet lack of competition stifles initiative. The problem is Indigenous Peoples are seeing their values destroyed by the crass and overpowering values of the market, on the one hand; and, on the other, by the co-optation of their values by authoritarian governments.

Experiencing this clash of civilizations, cosmic peoples are unsurprisingly distrustful of rapid social change; they are invariably on the losing side. The social structure and organizations of Indigenous societies have lost much of their former influence, as modern and post-modern cultures have become the dominant "mythos" nationally, regionally and globally. However, the core values of cosmic cultures have proved remarkably resilient. In times of crisis, such as death, natural disaster or social upheaval, the language of the Indigenous cultures speaks out clearly.

1.3.4 *Contemporary Movements*

The ongoing dislocation caused by a globalizing economy and media has led to a resurgence of Indigenous culture. During the past thirty years Indigenous bodies and interregional networks have been established in many parts of Asia. This renaissance has taken either an extremist (fundamentalist) form, that is the idealisation of a dreamed-up past; or, conversely, is part of an open network of truly counter-cultures, prophetic alternatives to the crass values of globalizing capitalism. Christian Indigenous People are taking a full part in the latter.

Through these social movements Asian Indigenous Peoples are working to "preserve, purify and promote" their cultures. This can be accomplished only when they gain control over their land and their lives, and receive recognition of their cultural, economic and political rights. Such concerns have been addressed by the international community only since the 1970s. Interestingly enough, the Second Vatican Council recognised the "right to culture" a decade earlier.¹¹

¹¹ See, *Gaudium et spes*, par. 59.

What does it mean for Christian Indigenous Peoples to "preserve, purify and promote" their cultures? I think, at heart, Christian Indigenous Peoples are helping to give a sense of identity and coherence, dignity and hope to their people. To this I now turn.

2. Integral Evangelisation: Preserving, Purifying, Promoting

"As one who thought his mission was to reap without the need to contemplate how deep the roots of culture ran – there, trellis two, your deeper gaze directed my review."¹²

2.1 From Pagans to Partners¹³

2.1.1 The Vision of Hope from Vatican Two

"The Council, now beginning,
rises in the Church like daybreak,
a forerunner of most splendid light."
(John XXIII)¹⁴

If today we speak of "preserving, purifying and promoting" Indigenous cultures, yesterday we were calling these very same cultures both pagan and primitive.¹⁵ This sea-change in mentality can be traced back to the Second Vatican Council which opened exactly 40 years ago. Undoubtedly, the magna charter of the dialogue between faith and culture is *Gaudium et spes*. This trail-blazing document set the Church upon a new, positive relationship with the cultures of the world. We now acknowledge that Indigenous cultures, though fragile and marginalised, are nurturing seeds that could save the future of the planet – ecologically,

¹² From "Centre-Piece," a poem at the end of Noel McMaster, CSsR, *Locating an Indigenous Church*. Halls Creek, 2001, p.66.

¹³ Such is the title of the book by Leonardo Mercado, SVD, *From Pagans to Partners: The Change in Catholic Attitudes towards Traditional Religion*, Manila: Logos Publications, 2000.

¹⁴ "Opening Speech, Second Vatican Council." 11 October 1962.

¹⁵ The "Rites Controversies" in China and Tamil Nadu, India, certainly influenced our negative attitudes to ancestors in Indigenous cultures. See, Ennio Mantovani, SVD, "Key Issues of a Dialogue between Christianity and Culture in Melanesia." *Sedos* 31 (1999), 35-41.

culturally and spirituality. Indigenous Peoples can teach post-modern humanity how to become truly human again and re-sensitise a secular world to the mystery of transcendence. This recognition of the vital contribution of Indigenous Peoples is one side of the faith—culture dialogue. This other side is the vital contribution that faith in Jesus Christ gives to Indigenous Peoples. Faith in Christ is the living heart of culture:

"The good news of Christ continually *renews* the life and culture of the fallen human race... The Gospel never ceases to *purify* and elevate the morality of peoples. It takes the spiritual qualities and endowments of every age and nation, and with supernatural riches it causes them to *blossom*, as it were, *from within*. The Gospel *fortifies*, *completes* and *restores* them in Christ. In this way the Church carries out its mission; and in that very act it *stimulates* and *advances* human and civil culture, as well as contributing by its activity, including liturgical activity, to a person's interior freedom" (*Gaudium et spes*, par.58). (Italics by the author.)

This holistic vision has inspired and given direction to the Pontifical Council for Culture since its inception in 1982.¹⁶

2.1.2 *The Synod for Asia*

During the Synod for Asia (April-May 1998) a number of bishops spoke out on behalf of Indigenous People—in particular from India and the Philippines.¹⁷ These concerns were taken up by John Paul II in his apostolic exhortation *Ecclesia in Asia* the following year:

"In almost every Asian country, there are large aboriginal populations, some of them on the lowest economic

¹⁶ The Pontifical Council for Culture was created with the aim of "giving the whole Church a common impulse in the continuously renewed encounter between the salvific message of the Gospel and the multiplicity of cultures, in the diversity of cultures to which she must carry her fruits of grace." Letter establishing the new Pontifical Council, 20 May 1982.

¹⁷ Two of these interventions are included in Peter Phan's book *The Asian Synod: Texts and Commentaries*, namely that of Francisco Claver of the Philippines (pp. 100-102) and Telesphore P. Toppo of India (pp. 108-110). Both these bishops are themselves tribals.

rung. The Synod repeatedly noted that Indigenous or tribal people often feel drawn to the person of Jesus Christ and to the Church as a community of love and service. Herein lies an immense field of action in education and health care, as well as in promoting social participation. The Catholic community needs to intensify pastoral work among these people, attending to their concerns and to the *questions of justice* which affect their lives. this implies an attitude of *deep respect for their traditional religion and its values*; it implies as well the need to help them to help themselves so that they can work to improve their situation and *become the evangelizers of their own culture and society*.¹⁸

This short, clear reference hones in upon issues of social justice, respect for Indigenous religions and their cultural values and upon Indigenous Peoples as active agents in evangelization.

2.1.3. *The FABC: A Late Recognition*

At its first Assembly in 1974, the FABC included an indirect reference to Indigenous cultures — to the "cosmic roots" of major Asian cultures. One of its Recommendations reads: "that the FABC, in collaboration with the Sacred Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples and the Pontifical Secretariates.... evolve a working concept of evangelisation that embraces, as integral to that concept, genuine dialogue with the great living religions of Asia *and other deep-rooted forms of belief, such as animism*..."¹⁹

Despite this slight, indirect reference, for twenty-five years Indigenous Peoples went largely unnoticed by Asia's bishops — although the largest single minority of Asia's Christians is Indigenous! Even when issues of ecology and human rights are treated, Indigenous Peoples remain invisible, as also when the FABC took up questions of spirituality, evangelisation and

¹⁸ *Ecclesia in Asia*, par.34. Italics inserted by author. The paragraph is entitled "Preferential Love for the Poor." On the other hand, there is no mention of the contribution of Indigenous peoples in paragraph 41 on "The Environment." It seems Indigenous peoples are still seen as primarily victims and survivors rather than active agents and sources of wisdom.

¹⁹ "Recommendations of the Assembly." Pp. 20-21 in *For All the Peoples of Asia Vol. 1*. Ed. Gaudencio Rosales & C.G. Arevalo, Manila: Claretian, 1987.

dialogue.²⁰ Thus, for all its remarkable work in interfaith and intercultural dialogue, the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences (FABC) has only recently turned its attention to Indigenous Peoples.

In 1995 there was a consultation on Evangelisation and Indigenous Peoples.²¹ This work fed into the 1998 Synod (see above), and into the Seventh Assembly of 2000 to which I now turn my attention. Recommendations from the FABC 1995 Consultation were outlined in a FABC Assembly Workshop Position Paper, and subsequently incorporated into the Workshop report.²² More importantly, perhaps, the question of Indigenous People was taken up as one of five Pastoral Concerns in the Final Statement of the Assembly.²³ This short statement is important for its holistic approach: it acknowledges the exploitation of Indigenous Peoples, while welcoming their spiritual and cultural contribution. It resonates with voices raised during the 1998 Synod, as well as during the Assembly itself:

"Indigenous Peoples form a significant section of Asian society and of the Church in Asia. These communities are ancient and well-knit communities, and have preserved many important human and social values. Today, in many countries of Asia, their right to land is threatened and their fields are laid bare; they themselves are subjected to economic exploitation, excluded from political participation, and reduced to the status of second-class citizens. Detribalization, a process of imposed alienation from their social and cultural roots, is even a hidden policy in several places. Their cultures are under pressure by domi-

²⁰ A comprehensive list of FABC Statement and other documents have been published in two volumes under the title *For All the Peoples of Asia*. Manila 1987 & Manila 1995.

²¹ The Consultation was convened by the FABC Office of Evangelisation at Hua Hin, Thailand.

²² The Position Paper was written up by Sebastian Karotempel, sdb. The Workshop Report has been published in FABC Paper No. 95, pp.33-36. Unlike governments and international political and financial bodies, Church leaders both in Asia and Rome make little distinction between "Indigenous" and "tribal" populations.

²³ The pastoral concerns are 1) Youth. 2) Women. 3) The Family. 4) Indigenous People. 5) Sea-based and Land-based Migrants and Refugees.

nant cultures and "Great Traditions". Mighty projects for the exploitation of mineral, forest and water resources, often in areas which have been the home of the tribal population, have generally worked to the disadvantage of the tribals.

"In our contemporary society, where there is a steady erosion of traditional Asian values, Indigenous Asian communities can play an important role. Close to nature, they retain the values of a cosmic view of life, a casteless sharing, and a democratic society. They have preserved their simplicity and hospitality. Their values and cultures can offer a corrective to the culture of the dominant communities, to the emerging materialistic and consumeristic ethos of our modern societies."²⁴

This major pastoral concern of the FABC for the period 2000-2004 places the Church in solidarity with Indigenous Peoples as they strive for recognition and social justice, while opening up the Church to Indigenous religious and cultural values. Before seeing how we might implement this pastoral concern, I wish to turn briefly to the teaching of John Paul II and the history that has shaped the Asian Churches.

2.1.4. *The Slow Emergence of Indigenous Peoples in Petrine Teaching*

The "invisibility" of Indigenous Peoples in the FABC prior to 1995 is also noticeable in many major Petrine documents, including more recent ones. Indigenous Peoples seem to have made no impact upon the great mission documents of Paul VI (*Evangelii nuntiandi*, 1975), and John Paul II (*Redemptoris missio*, 1990); nor upon the major social encyclical (*Sollicitudo rei socialis*, 1987).²⁵ Even John Paul's pioneering message on ecology ("Peace with God the Creator, Peace with All of Creation", 1989) does not refer to Indigenous Peoples, with their ecological spirituality and earth-sustaining economies.

²⁴ "Final Statement of the Seventh Plenary Assembly of the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences Samphran, Thailand, January 3-12, 2000." P. 11 In *FABC Papers No. 93*.

²⁵ Clearly, key passages of these apostolic exhortations and encyclicals can be applied to Indigenous cultures. For instance, the meaning of inculturation and guidelines for its implementation (RM 52-54).

By way of contrast John Paul II himself has been energetically promoting and deepening a living dialogue between the Gospel and Indigenous culture during his pastoral visits. On virtually every visit to the Churches of Asia, Africa and the Americas, John Paul has met with groups of Indigenous Peoples and delivered a major presentation before each of them. By way of example, I quote from one of the earlier and one of the more recent of these homilies. I restrict myself to phrases directly concerned with the dignity and identity of Indigenous Peoples.

"You, the Indigenous People of this beautiful northern region of Luzon, as well as the other Tribal Filipinos, represent a rich diversity of cultures which have been handed down to you by your parents and grandparents, and which extend back through countless generations. May you always have a deep appreciation of these cultural treasures which divine providence has destined you to inherit. Moreover, may these treasures which are your heritage always be respected by others: *may your land and social structures be protected, preserved and enriched...* you have discovered how the Gospel does not threaten the survival of your cultures or destroy your authentic traditions... as you face the present problems associated with social and economic growth in your country. I assure you that the Church is one with you in your longing to preserve your unique cultures and in your desire to participate in decisions which affect your lives and the lives of your children."²⁶ (The Philippines, February 1981)

"I would like to express my appreciation and closeness to the many Indigenous Peoples . The Pope does not forget you! You deserve all respect and have the right to fulfil yourselves completely in justice, integral development and peace..." (Guatemala, July 2002.)

"The noble task of building a better Mexico with greater justice and solidarity demands the cooperation of all. In particular, it is necessary today to support the Indigenous Peoples in their legitimate aspiration, respecting and de-

²⁶ Homily at Mass with Indigenous Peoples, Baguio City, Philippines, 22nd February 1981. See, Papal Speeches on Social Issues in the Philippines. Manila: FABC Office for Human Development, 1981, pp.43-46. Bold in the original, italics inserted by the author.

fending the values of each ethnic group..."²⁷ (Mexico, July 2002.)

And these are not mere words. Quite dramatically, Indigenous cultures were "preserved, purified and promoted" when they were "preserved, purified and promoted," when they were united with Christ's Paschal mystery by the use of Aztec dancers, conch shells and traditional rattles during the 31st July canonisation of Juan Diego.

These – and numerous similar statement elsewhere – align the Church with the struggle of Indigenous Peoples everywhere (as outlined in Section One above). In acknowledging the dignity of Indigenous Peoples and in boldly stating that the universal Church stands in solidarity with them as they strive for a voice and struggle to protect their land and its resources, John Paul II is taking a stand that is both theological (human dignity) and moral (cultural, economic and political rights.).

These homilies and public liturgical acts – as nothing else – signal a sea-change in the Church's stance: peoples formerly stigmatised as "pagan" and "primitive", they are now welcomed as "partners" and "harbingers of the future". We have, however, still to work through an ambivalent legacy inherited from history.

2.2 A Remarkable, Yet Ambivalent Legacy

2.2.1 The Church brought Modernisation

Virtually everywhere, the modernization process came to Indigenous communities through the Churches with their schools, clinics²⁸ and training centres, often before a Western colonial power or international trading corporation moved in to control these fragile communities. Churches opened orphanages, homes for widows and the aged, leper asylums, schools for the blind and deaf, havens for addicts. Churches ran hostels, technical, agricultural and industrial schools. Languages were written down, dictionaries and grammars

²⁷ The first quote is from a homily in Guatemala City, 30th July 2002, the second from the homily during the Juan Diego canonisation, Basilica of Our Lady of Guadalupe, Mexico, 31st July 2002. See, "Pope's Homily. Ladoc XXXIII/1 (2002) 16-18. For the Mexican Bishops' Statement on Indigenous Peoples see Ladoc XXXIII/1 (2002) 19-23.

²⁸ In 1931 some 90% of nurses in India were Christians (where Christians form less than 3% of the population).

composed. The Churches opened printing presses, radio stations; and used cameras, slides, drama and the cinema.

This modernization brought about an openness to the wider world, with its schooling and technology, its written law and mass media, its market economy and the nation state. Dramatic changes have ensued in just a few generations: polygamy, cannibalism and head-hunting disappeared while the status of women has been enhanced; education has been established and Christian family life has taken root. Underlying these impressive improvements, has been the replacement of fear by trust. Fear of nature spirits dissipated, as faith was placed in Jesus the Nazarene. Jesus Christ has been accepted as the Source of Life and Hope, Fount of Compassion, Elder Brother, Teacher of Wisdom, Healer, Life-giving Shaman, Co-sufferer and Liberator, who identifies with the Poor and Disenfranchised, Source of Unity, Friendship, Simplicity and Identity.²⁹ Each of these Christic experiences reveals Christ as saviour.

2.2.2 *An Ambivalent Legacy*

This encounter between incoming Church and the Indigenous Peoples was never a dialogue between equals. We have to acknowledge that, until recently, Western mission outreach in Asia was not sensitive to the dignity and the rights of Indigenous Peoples. Particularly during the latter part of the 19th century, missionary acquiescence to colonial domination and economic exploitation, together with an innate sense of cultural superiority, led to the devastation of communities and their cultures.³⁰ We were strong and aggressive, they were weak and accommodating; we had the ruth, they were in the wrong; we came to educate and civilize, they were backward and primitive. There is no need to apportion blame.³¹ However, a humble acknowledgement of our complicity

²⁹ See, Synod for Asia "Workshop Report of English Group One" and "Proposition No. 6"; the latter is quoted in *Ecclesia in Asia* No. 20.

³⁰ Benedict XV felt constrained to denounce as "a most deadly plague of the apostolate", efforts of Western missionaries which might be directed to extending the glory and power of his country. See, *Maximum illud*, 11 (1919).

³¹ "It was... mainly ignorance of the part of the Western missionaries. The knowledge we have today about religions in general and about Christianity in particular was simply not available... As much, as one regrets what happened, many things, given the knowledge of the people involved, were unavoidable" Ennio Mantovani, SVD, *op. cit.* p.35.

in the destruction of Indigenous cultures is important in order that we understand why we are where we are today, and in order to move on as partners in the spirit of the Seventh FABC Assembly. For, seemingly, it is difficult to break through our sense of cultural superiority, even today.

Without doubt, modernisation has brought about unprecedented material wealth for the few, while creating poverty to an extent unknown in the past. The Indigenous world has been shattered: a cyclical, relaxed, "natural" sense of time has been replaced with a lineal, "historical" model, which grasps at the future, where the fittest survive and the weak are marginalized. Modernization has given meaning to the individual over the group, while weakening the language and culture of the group itself; thus individuals lose their roots and are losing the language in which to express self-worth. Group norms have given way to individual conscience; yet individual conscience has no clear guidelines on which to reflect. In this situation of "social *anomie*" governments (dominant groups) become ever more authoritarian. Many governments look to Islamic, Hindu or Buddhist extremists for support in controlling minorities, while minorities turn to "cultural fundamentalism" to buttress their identity.³²

2.2.3 A New Beginning

History has woven our ecclesial and apostolic institutions into the fabric of dominant, hegemonic cultures through our schools, hospitals and investments. Meanwhile, the marginalized to whom we are sent, are hanging onto fragments of minority, Indigenous cultures. In theory we stand with the marginalized (see Conciliar, Petrine and FABC teaching above), while our institutions are integrated into the global market. In mission we espouse one set of cultural values, while our institutions depend upon a contrasting set. The challenge then, is to open up our Churches to Indigenous Peoples and their cultural values, while living in solidarity with their struggle for dignity and identity. To do this we shall need a spirituality of dialogue whereby we become inter-cultural and inter-faith pilgrims, listening and learning to God's Word together.³³

³² Globalization is not only buffeting minorities; it is also giving them opportunities to play politics in series of shifting alliances as nation state grow weaker.

³³ See, Prior, "Dialogue and Culture," *Focus* 21 (2001) 113-34. Also published in *East Asian Pastoral Review* 39 (2002) 4.

We are indeed cultural pilgrims. Three decades of living with an Indigenous People has made me somewhat ambivalent towards post-modern culture. On the one hand, I am not content to live enclosed within a pre-modern, conformist, tightly-knit, small-scale, male-centred village society. Yet, I have also become increasingly uncomfortable with the utilitarianism of the global market. Yet again, I happily enjoy some of the privileges and freedoms of the post-modern, high-tech, cyber-instant world. At the same time I am aware that about 80% of the human race is off-line while around 40% is being pushed aside, unwanted and unneeded. Most Indigenous Peoples are simply not necessary for the world economy – while their natural resources are essential to the consumerist life-style of the few.

If, therefore, we are to play an evangelical role in preserving, purifying and promoting Indigenous cultures, we need to focus upon how to welcome the opportunities given by the post-modern world, which place dignity, freedom, participation and social and gender justice, at the centre. Many Indigenous Peoples have become converted to Christ; now it is the turn of the wider Church to allow itself to be converted by wisdom of Indigenous People.

"Truth lives in depths, will rise on crest,
Surround our undulating best.
Here, the scene of all we've been,
Our future is embraced.
We feel the well of grace."³⁴

2.3 Focusing the Dialogue over the Coming Years

2.3.1 *Focusing the Challenges*

"The split between the Gospel and culture is without a doubt the drama of our time... Therefore every effort must be made to ensure a full evangelization of culture, or more correctly of cultures. They have to be regenerated by an encounter with the Gospel..." (EN 20).

To summarise: a) Indigenous Peoples are identifying themselves in their own terms and are no longer passively accepting

³⁴ Last verse of "Mirrilingki Mirage: at the end of Noel McMaster, CSsR, *Locating an Indigenous Church*. Halls Creek, Western Australia, 2001, p.67.

the definition of others. b) Church leadership has accepted the struggle of Indigenous Peoples to preserve and promote their cultures in a globalizing world, seeing this as a matter of human dignity, rights and responsibilities. c) The sustainable economies and cultural values of Indigenous Peoples are needed in the endeavour to work out alternatives to a global economy that is destroying God's earth. d) The Church sees the Gospel and faith in Jesus Christ as the purification and fulfilment of Indigenous cultures. e) In the past mission has been both helpful and destructive of Indigenous cultures. Therefore, the Church needs to reassess its presence among Indigenous Peoples, and to align itself with the prophetic vision of John Paul II on the one hand, and with the struggle of Indigenous Peoples on the other.

We are engaged in a double encounter. In the first place *Indigenous Christians* will intensify the preservation, purification and promotion of their cultures through their ongoing, living encounter with the Gospel of Jesus the Christ. Secondly, both Indigenous Christian Communities, and we in the *wider Church*, will need to open ourselves up for conversion through this very same encounter.

I have outlined the cultural crisis that we are facing in Section One, and our ecclesial vision at the beginning of Section Two. Now I shall draw the two together by focusing upon three major challenges. Firstly, in the face of social anomie, personal anonymity and the virtually collapse of the common good, we need to rediscover *community*. Secondly, in the face of cultural fragmentation and a resurgence of extremism and communal violence, we need to place *compassion* at the heart of our life-style, witness and cultural values. And thirdly, in the face of the rapacious market economy we shall have to work out alternative ways of ordering society while *caring for creation*.³⁵ But first, a note of caution.

2.3.2 A Cautionary Note

It is humbling to recall that virtually none of the well-meaning plans of incoming missionaries have worked out as expected. Schooling has not brought the promised "progress", but has dis-

³⁵ I have taken the focus "community", "compassion" and "care of creation" from an unpublished paper by Philip Gibbs, SVD, "The Transformation of Culture as New Evangelization for the Third Millennium in Oceania." The content is, however, very much my own.

located society.³⁶ Education is a key issue for a Church that places such importance upon the communication of worldview and value from one generation to the next – at the heart of which is the "ultimate datum" that ensouls Christian culture: the life, death and resurrection of Jesus the Nazarene, the Incarnation-Paschal-Pentecost experience. There is an urgent need for Churches to exchange experience of experiments with contextualised education among Indigenous Peoples, and for religious congregations – once pioneers in education – to take up this "mission impossible".

Pastorally, we have built up conventional parishes and dioceses among Indigenous Peoples. A century later, Church structures are still largely supported by outside personnel and finance.³⁷ Meetings of base communities and of pastoral Councils simply do not follow the polite norms of more settled peoples. Glen Lewandowski, OSC, has suggested posting a Dante-like motto outside meetings of Indigenous Peoples: "Abandon all hope, ye who enter here!"³⁸ And yet God has been using these somewhat rough, perhaps even boisterous, cultural languages for millennia; it is a Word that non-Indigenous Christians need to hear today.³⁹ We need to distinguish between faith and religion, between Christian faith and western religious expression. All faith is both revealed and simultaneously distorted through cultural transmission and yet, "the light shines in the darkness, and the darkness does not over-

³⁶ For instance, in Agats Diocese, West Papua, virtually no school is functioning. Sisters from Indonesia try to answer the problem by "containing" students in boarding, which often results in yet further social dislocation.

³⁷ Missioners moved quickly to baptise as many indigenes as possible, often enough beginning with school children, and usually in competition with Protestant Christians, Hindus or Muslims. Unfortunately, as adults, many could not live a regular sacramental life due to the incompatibility of their life-style with Christian ethics. We need to move towards a "consistency in sacramental life," whereby those baptised would have no innate cultural reason for not celebrating marriage and the Eucharist. This topic is beyond the scope of this paper. See, Noel McMaster, CSsR, *Locating an Indigenous Church: Critical Mission in Remote Australia*, Halls Creek, 2001.

³⁸ Glen Lewandowski is a practical theologian who has been teaching at Fajar Timur School of Theology at Abepura, West Papua, since the 1970s. An experience of indigenes "taking over" a diocesan synod is recounted in Prior, "Of Mud and Militias: Pentecost Thoughts from Papua," *East Asian Pastoral Review*, 38 (2001), 238-61.

³⁹ For a well-reasoned theology of revelation in an Indigenous cultural context, see Ennio Mantovani, SVD, *Divine Revelation and Melanesian Religions. A Missiological Manual*, Goroka: The Melanesian Institute, 2000.

come it.... the true light, which enlightens everyone, coming into the world" (Jn 1:5, 9). Any sincere, patient dialogue between faith in Christ and faith in Divinity as lived out by Indigenous Peoples, including those baptised, perhaps for many generations, helps us to recognise distortions in both traditions. Intercultural dialogue purifies not only the Indigenous culture, but also the Non-Indigenous.

In short, we need to listen deeply and systematically to the problems, crises and conflicts of Indigenous Christian communities, and to the continuing re-interpretation of their living cultural traditions, and to their faith in Jesus the Christ. I suggest that this listening be channelled through three crucial issues: community, compassion and creation.

2.3.3. *Rediscovering Community in Society and the Church*

Indigenous Peoples – like everyone else – are undergoing a major cultural upheaval. Social fragmentation easily leads to a weakened sense of identity, to substance dependence and to fanaticism. The answer is community. Thus, in the first place the Indigenous Christian Communities – together with the wider Church – need to build up their common life and identity according to their own values.

The Church itself is nothing, if not communion. The FABC has set forth the vision of "a new way of being Church" – an open, participative Church, a communion of small communities.⁴⁰ For Indigenous Peoples this means committing their Church to the egalitarian values of collegiality and participation, while discarding authoritarian, male-centred remnants from a coercive past. They need the encouragement – and freedom – to build up a poly-cultural, gender-sensitive, attentively-listening Church. Because community is more than the family and the clan; and remembering that treating others, especially the stranger and the little ones, as brother and sister is at the heart of the Gospel (cf. Matt 5:43-48; 25:31-46),⁴¹ we

⁴⁰ "A New Way of Being Church" and the encouragement of small Christian Communities in the Asian Integral Pastoral Approach (ASIPA) were accepted by the FABC in the Fifth General Assembly, Bandung, Indonesia, 1990.

⁴¹ In 2002 West Papua won a "special autonomous" status within Indonesia. The "Papuan Congress" which is being established to preserve, purify and promote Papuan economic, political and cultural interests, will have 30% women members. Nowhere in Indonesia have women won such a remarkable concession in a decision-making body, except in West Papua-the most Indigenous of all regions. Without doubt this is due to Christian influence, in this case, in Cenderawasih University and Papuan women's NGOs. In the 1990s the Women's Desk at the FABC Office for Laity has called for such a 30% platform in pastoral teams from Base Communities to Parish and Diocesan Councils.

need to pay particular attention to networking between the Indigenous Christian Communities themselves, and with the wider Church. Experience shows that when Asian Indigenous Christians are enriched by their own cultural values, they evolve into synodal, participative communities, where Church leadership is exercised as accompaniment and companionship.⁴² Here language and liturgy are multicultural; and Church membership enhances both personal and societal freedom.

As non-Indigenous Christians and Churches, we need to learn to relate not as invaders, but as fellow-seekers. Our social role is one of advocate (Spirit). Indigenous Christian Communities are not powerful but highly vulnerable, and in that weakness shines forth Christ's strength (cf. 2 Cor. 12:10) This "communitarian" Church of Indigenous Peoples brings us back to the most original biblical image of the Trinitarian God: a God of unconditional love and life (cf. Jn. 3:16, 14:15, 16:27), who has become our fellow-pilgrim in Jesus the Nazarene, and who inspires us through the Spirit, and leads us to the unknown future of God's Reign, symbolized in the new Heaven and new Earth. This Trinitarian God is the source, the model and the ultimate goal of our life and mission of dialogue.

2.3.4 Responding to Violence with Cosmic Compassion

Manipulated by outside market and political forces, Indigenous communities have been racked by violence, which is often fuelled by ethnic and religious fanaticism. Many Indigenous cultures do not have a strong non-violent tradition (*ahimsa*), while their Christian faith has not led them to a non-violent stance. One key area for Indigenous Christians to preserve, purify and promote their cultures is through evolving a *culture of cosmic compassion*.⁴³ In some areas this

⁴² For a description of how the Indigenous peoples of Nusa Tenggara, Indonesia, have been moving towards such a Church over the past 30 years see, John Prior, SVD, *Memberdayakan Komunitas Basis Gerejani sebagai Budaya Tandingan* (Empowering Ecclesial base Communities as a Counter-Culture). Supplementary booklet in the Indonesian Lenten Campaign Package of 2001. Also published in a number of other forms including *Kelompok Basis Gerejani* (Ecclesial Base Communities) in Pastoral Series No. 328 of the Pastoral Centre of Yogyakarta.

⁴³ For a detailed treatment, see John Prior, SVD, "The Locus of Mission in Indonesia Today: Birthing Prophetic Communities of Compassion", in *The Church in Mission: Universal Mandate and Local Concerns*, ed. Thomas Malipurathu, SVD. Pune, Ishvani Kendra, 2002.

may take generations to develop — as it has taken centuries to take root in the Western world. In tribal societies male dignity is often identified with the courage of the warrior. My experience is that we need to facilitate long-term, ongoing conversations with the victims and survivors of communal violence (social and cultural analysis springing from social biography). Often enough these conversations begin among women's groups, that have sprung up to break out of a vicious spiral of violence.

This conversation can be done in tandem with regular Bible Sharing. very slowly, Indigenous symbols get reinterpreted non-violently, and the Scriptures become a source of inner strength. The *thought patterns*, that is, the mind-set and symbolic logic of Indigenous cultures, as well as the *meanings and values*, that is, the communitarian ethos of the culture, become more accepting of difference, more supple in accommodating, while retaining their identity. Indigenous identity becomes one key part of a multiple identity — ethnic, religious, regional and global.

Given the fact that the wider society is strong and aggressive, and is encroaching upon Indigenous lands, the discovery of a compassionate heart to Indigenous culture, needs to be worked out as an integral part of the struggle for social justice and cultural recognition. Here, surely, as nowhere else, the Cross of Christ becomes the tree of hope.

2.3.5. *Eco-Theology for the Sake of our Future*

Indigenous cultures have evolved over millennia according to the rhythms of nature. There will be no meaningful preserving, purifying and promoting of Indigenous cultures without the land and its forests, of which they are the custodians. For millennia Indigenous Peoples have preserved the riches of the earth. Many of these riches are now in danger of being completely used up by the rich within two generations. Experience shows that ecological sensitivity and gender justice grow in unison.

Hence, Indigenous Christians are returning us to the ecological doctrine of the Scripture, from creation in *Genesis*, through the prophecies of *Isaiah*, then the fulfilment in the *Sermon on the Mount*, to the revelation of a New Heaven and New Earth in the *Apocalypse*. A New Way of Being Church among Indigenous Peoples implies a new way of running the community and the Church — self-reliance, local cooperatives and an eco-friendly economy, both in society and the Church.

In short, in these three key areas – enhancing community, rooting culture in compassion, and evolving an alternative eco-friendly economy – both society and the Church can support and inspire the struggle of Indigenous Peoples for the recognition of their cultural identities and the enhancement of their human dignity.

2.4. Indicating an Agenda for Non-Indigenous Churches

Throughout this essay, I have insisted that Indigenous Christians themselves preserve, purify and promote their own cultures – together with members of the wider Church. The solidarity of the Church with the cultural aspirations of Indigenous Peoples is certainly controversial, for few Indigenous Peoples are fully acknowledged by nation States. Our solidarity with Indigenous Peoples becomes truly convincing when we accept the richness of their cultures into our own Church – in Church order and leadership, in the apostolate of justice, peace and reconciliation, in doing theology, in spirituality and worship. Thus, we, who are non-Indigenous, also have work to do among our own communities, in order to acknowledge the identity and enhance the dignity of Indigenous People. To conclude I wish to make five brief points.

2.4.1. The Purification of Memory

Firstly, we need to acknowledge our destructive role in the past, and the destructive role of the globalising market and social communications in the present. A new beginning is prefaced by confession and repentance. We experienced a remarkable example of this when, on 12th March 2000, the First Sunday of Lent, John Paul II, seated on his pontifical chair in St. Peter's Basilica, solemnly confessed and repented of the seven major sins of the Church during the Second Millennium. The fifth petition reads: "*Confession of Sins Committed in Actions against Love, Peace, the Rights of Peoples and Respect for Cultures and Religions.*" Archbishop Stephen Fumio Hamao intoned:

"Let us pray that contemplating Jesus, our Lord and our peace, Christians will be able to repent of the words and attitudes caused by pride, by hatred, by the desire to dominate others, by enmity towards members of other religions, and towards the weakest groups in society, such as immigrants and itinerants."

After silent prayer Pope John Paul continued:

"Lord of the world, Father of all, through your Son you asked

us to love our enemies, to do good to those who hate us and to pray for those who persecute us. Yet Christians have often denied the Gospel; yielding to a mentality of power, they have violated the rights of ethnic groups and peoples, and shown contempt for their cultures and religious traditions: Be patient and merciful towards us, and grant us your forgiveness! We ask this through Christ our Lord."

After an "Amen" a cantor, and then the entire assembly, sung the *Kyrie*, and a lamp was lit before the crucifix.⁴⁴

2.4.2 *Solidarity and Networking*

Secondly, we must join with Indigenous networks at grassroots and international levels to preserve the identity and enhance the dignity of Indigenous Peoples. Many institutes of cross-cultural missionaries – Sisters, Priests, Brothers and Lay – work at the margin in the isolated interior and the urban sprawl, while having representatives in New York at the United Nations.⁴⁵ In this way we carry out mission at the periphery and at the centre, each insertion dramatically influencing the other.

2.4.3. *Awareness Building*

Thirdly, through catechetics and education we ensure that awareness of political, economic and cultural dominance by the wider society over Indigenous Peoples is known in Christian communities, especially in our academic and formation centres.

2.4.4. *Integral to Each Dialogue*

Fourthly, we need to ensure that both the human rights' struggle and the cultural contribution of Indigenous Peoples are taken up in our ongoing dialogue with the dominant religious cultures in Asia – Buddhist, Hindu, Muslim. Each major religion is both personally and

⁴⁴ For the full text in English see, "Service Requesting Pardon," *Origins*, 29 (2000) 40, 645-648. This is followed by the text of the Pope's homily, "The Purification of Memory".

⁴⁵ Since John XXIII and the Second Vatican Council, the Holy See has had its representatives at the UN. Now an increasing number of religious orders have also, including the Jesuits and Franciscans. More recently the Society of the Divine Word (SVD) and Sisters Servants of the Holy Spirit (SSpS) have established *Vivat International* as their NGO representation at the UN.

culturally embedded through popular religiosity; each popular religiosity in turn springs from the indigenous roots of religious culture; each "great religious culture" draws its sustenance from the "little religious culture" with which it interacts in an ongoing symbiotic relationship.

2.4.5. *Celebration*

Lastly, it seems entirely appropriate that we celebrate the *International Day of the World's Indigenous People* on 9th August each year, as a time to remember our debt to Indigenes, to recall both their plight and their values. The International Day would be a time to deepen our commitment to discipleship, and to strengthen our efforts to preserve, purify and promote all human culture in the light of Indigenous culture. Bishops' Conferences, for instance through their Commissions for Justice and Peace, Catechetics, Education and Liturgy, could offer a *resource packet* with ideas and examples of prayer, inter-cultural dialogue, witness for justice, practical ways of standing in solidarity with the Indigenes, even — in good Catholic tradition — ideas on fasting and feasting. The 9th August could be celebrated as families, Base Communities, School Communities, Parishes and Dioceses.

Postscript

For forty years *Gaudium et spes* — the crowning achievement of Vatican Two — has guided the Church in its dialog with contemporary culture, both religious and secular. And yet the world of *Gaudium et spes*, that is; the world of the 1960s, the world of newly independent African states; and the United Nations decade of development, has passed away. Today we live in a post-modern world where cultures are in crisis; where a market-driven globalizing economy and a commercially-determined globalized media have turned the world into a very unstable and unjust place. Human ingenuity has never been so keenly applied to scientific and technological achievement; and yet the very ecology of God's world is breaking down. Conventional wars between States have been largely replaced by the continuing irruption of religious and ethnic violence; while the world's one "hyper-power" uses multi-million dollar weapons; (and proposes to militarise space) to enforce its interests around the entire globe.

This leads me to a final comment. It looks evitable that we shall be holding another Ecumenical Council before the end of this first decade of the third millennium. A new world calls for a renewed

response, a revitalized vision and clearer guidelines. *Gaudium et spes* has set the direction and tone for our multi-faceted dialogue between faith and culture for almost forty years; the coming Council will surely set us on a pilgrimage of dialogue for the next half century. We shall bring to the Council the forty-year experience of our ongoing living dialogue between faith and culture. We shall be able to draw from the painstaking research, cross-cultural reflection and pastoral insights of the Pontifical Council for Culture over the past twenty years. This time I am sure that the joy and the hope, the grief and anguish of Indigenous Peoples will be heard. Indeed Indigenous values, at once deeply human and transparently religious, will help all of us in the Church to regain our equilibrium, as we acknowledge cultural identities, purify whatever diminishes the human vocation, and promote what is most deeply human. In the words of Paul:

Now in Christ Jesus, you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. For he is our peace; in his flesh he has made both groups into one and has broken down the dividing wall, that is, the hostility between us. He has abolished the law with its commandments and ordinances, that he might create in himself one new humanity in place of the two, thus making peace, and might reconcile both groups to God in one body through the cross, thus putting to death that hostility through it. So he came and proclaimed peace to you who were far off and peace to those who were near; for through him both of us have access in one Spirit to the Father. So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are citizens with the saints and also members of the household of God, built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the cornerstone. In him the whole structure is joined together and grows into a holy temple in the Lord; in whom you also are built together spiritually into a dwelling place for God." (Eph 2:13-22)

Or more succinctly, in the words of Irenaeus: *Gloria Dei, homo vivens.*

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Summary

DIGNITY AND IDENTITY: THE STRUGGLE OF INDIGENOUS PEOPLES IN ASIA TO PRESERVE, PURIFY AND PROMOTE THEIR CULTURES JOHN MANSFORD PRIOR, SVD

The first section describes key characteristics of Indigenous Peoples. Priority is given to self-identification as Indigenous and as a distinct ethnic group. There also needs to be an historical experience of severe disruption, dislocation or exploitation. Other relevant indicators include a position of non-dominance in national or regional society. After a description of some political, economic, social and cultural characteristics of Indigenous Peoples, the paper outlines seven crucial socio-cultural values found among many of them.

The second section takes us through the positive appreciation of Indigenous Peoples since the Second Vatican Council. Particular attention is paid to the 1998 Synod for Asia, the FABC Consultation of 1995, the FABC Seventh General Assembly of 2000 and Papal teaching. The current situation is understood as the product of history, where the Church and the Western world brought both social progress and cultural dislocation.

The paper concludes by focusing the challenge facing the Church. There are three areas. Firstly, the urgent need to reconstruct community in the face of disintegration. Secondly, the need to evolve a culture of cosmic compassion in the face of communal violence and extremism. Thirdly, the need for an eco-friendly way of believing and living in the face of ecological destruction.

All of the above focuses upon two key issues that are underlined in recent Church teaching: human dignity and cultural identity.

Questions for Group Reflection

- 1) Identify the main Indigenous groups where you live and work. Describe their more important cultural characteristics. Would you describe them as a "culture of the inarticulate," or a "culture of the articulate"?
- 2) Identify key cultural issues that the above Indigenous groups are facing. Also note significant cultural issues that challenge

- the non-Indigenous Church in the same area or diocese in relation to them.
- 3) Name three pastoral policies that could be initiated in order to facilitate the promotion and enhancement of the Indigenous cultures where you live and work.

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- No. 90. Emerging Demands of Mission of the Church at the Turn of the Century; the Church as a Servant of Hope for the Peoples of Asia, by Soosai Arokiasamy. A Position Paper for the Seventh Plenary Assembly of the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences, 2000.
91. The Renewal That Awaits the Church in Asia, by Luis Antonio G. Tagle. A Position Paper for the Seventh Plenary Assembly of the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences, 2000.
92. Seventh Plenary Assembly: Workshop Discussion Guides
- a. Church and Social Communication in Asia, by the FABC Office of Social Communication.
 - b. The Witness of Consecrated Life in Asia Today, by Sr. Julma C. Neo.
 - c. A Renewed Church in Asia: In Solidarity with Women, by Virginia Saldanha.
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- g. A Mission of Love to the Family, with Sister Catherine Bernard Haliburn.

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- 93. A Renewed Church in Asia: A Mission of Love and Service. The Final Statement of the Seventh Plenary Assembly of the Federation of Asian Bishops, 2000.
- 94. Pope John Paul II, *Ecclesia in Asia*. The Church in Asia. The Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation, 1999.
- 95. A Renewed Church in Asia: Pastoral Directions for a New Decade, a Pastoral Report of the FABC Seventh Plenary Assembly, 2000.
- 96. Methodology: Asian Christian Theology. Doing Theology in Asia Today. A Document of the Office of Theological Concerns of the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences, 2000.
- 97. Participation of the Roman Catholic Church in National Councils of Churches, by Thomas Michel, S.J., and by J.M.R. Tillard, O.P., 2001.
- 98. The Church in Asia in the 3rd Millennium, A Guidebook to the Apostolic Exhortation – The Church in Asia, *Ecclesia in Asia*. A Pastoral Study prepared by the FABC Office of Human Development, 2001.
- 99. Asian Movement for Christian Unity III (AMCU), Giving Shape to a New Ecumenical Vision, A Joint CCA-FABC Project, 2001.
- 100. An Index of FABC Papers, 1976-2001, edited by James Kroeger, M.M., 2001.

101. **Church and Social Communication: The Asian Synod – FABC Challenges, A Project of the FABC Office of Social Communication, 2001**
102. **Towards a Culture of Peace in the 21st Century, Our Responses as Christians to Social Advocacy. A Joint Project CCA – FABC – ASPYMCA, 2002.**
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