ON BEING HUMAN IN THE CHANGING
REALITIES OF ASIA

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INTRODUCTION

Experts tell us that the world in which we live is changing at a rate which it has never known before. Science, technology, education, and most of all, the phenomenon of globalization coupled with electronic communications have been among those factors which have contributed to such unprecedented rapid changes. Of course, throughout world's history, change and evolution have been not only an essential part of life as such but they have also been the very signs of life, and different generations of human beings have always experienced them. However, the changes that we humans are experiencing in the contemporary world can be bewildering, and at times, they can even make humans wonder what humanity itself means, after all. The teeming multitudes of Asia are no exception to this.

Keeping such a reality in mind, a couple of years ago, the Office of Theological Concerns (OTC) of the FABC undertook to reflect on what it means to be human in Asia in our contemporary world. As usual, various sections under this main topic were assigned to various members of the OTC. Later, their written reflections were read together in OTC meetings, commented upon, and re-written. A two-member team gave the final redaction to the paper. That is to say that this OTC paper has almost all the hands of its members, in various parts of it, and in

various ways. As such, while reading this paper, one needs to keep in mind that at times, one may meet with different genres of writing, and at other times, one may even notice that a smooth flow of thought, as such, is lacking. This, obviously is the price one has to pay when a joint effort is undertaken wherein all opinions are accommodated as much as possible, and also when so many complex areas are covered. Nevertheless, we in the OTC believe that there is in general a basic coherence of the paper.

This paper is divided into four main parts: realities, challenges, resources and responses. In other words, it is an effort to show and also inspire our fellow Asian pilgrims that in spite of the multiple and ever-changing realities in Asia, and the never-ending challenges which ensue from those realities, we in Asia, have our own traditional resources, resources that are peculiar to Asia (and also other contemporary resources which are common to all of humanity) which if harnessed properly and discreetly would enable us to face those challenges well, and still continue in our vocation of being human on this vast continent.

As usual, our aim is to stimulate thinking of the readers, especially those of the Churches in Asia, rather than giving definitive, final words about the diverse, often complex issues discussed. If the thoughts expressed in this paper would lead our readers to further reflections, and thereupon to actions which would make Asians realize that their life is worth living and that even in this changing Asian realities they can still be human as God wants them to be, then, we have achieved our goals.

Finally, I wish to thank each and every OTC member for his/her contribution in making this paper a reality. A special word of thanks to Fr.Soosai Arokiasamy, sj, who assisted us in the final redaction.

May the God who embraced our humanity in the person of Jesus of Nazareth lead us in the ever-changing Asian realities to appreciate and live our vocation to be human in Asia, fully!

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PROLOGUE

This paper intends to reflect on the Asian understanding of being human in the rapidly changing contextual realities that shape the lives of the peoples of the continent and relate it to the Gospel of God's reign and the mission of the Church in Asia. The purpose of this paper can be stated as follows: Inspired by the mandate of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, the Church in Asia on mission of service to the peoples of Asia is called to a deeper understanding of the humanity of the peoples in its concrete historical diversity and complexity. It is a demand of the evangelizing mission of the Church. Hence the paper is a tentative exploration and articulation of what it means to be human in a relational perspective with a view to mission in the context of Asia. As Pope John Paul II would insist, the way of the Church is the way of man (human person). Hence the need to know and understand the human person and humanity of people in the concrete. We have also an understanding of being human or humanity inherited as part of our faith which the Church has to relate with the humanism of Asian peoples in its mission.

While we are faithful to our faith tradition, the Church in Asia has to reckon with the concrete humanity of Asian peoples rooted in their own socio-cultural and religious traditions. Their understanding of humanity becomes the path of our journey on mission. In the changing contextual realities of Asia, we encounter God who has called us to mission. This is the purpose of the paper. Let us not forget that we as Christians in Asia are part of the humanity of the peoples of Asia.

The paper has four parts:
- I. Contextual Realities as we encounter them
- II. The Challenges they raise
- III. The resources of Asian peoples in their socio-cultural and religious traditions and worldviews
- IV. Responses by way of Mission.

I. THE CONTEXTUAL REALITIES

a) Religious Realities

Asia is known as the cradle of the major religions of the world for it is in Asia that all of them were born. We can mention some of them: the Indic Religions: Hinduism, Buddhism, Jainism and Sikhism; Religions of East Asia: Confucianism, Taoism and Shintoism; Religions which originated in West Asia: Islam and Christianity. Besides these major religions, Asia also has a multitude of Tribal Traditions.

1. Indic Religions

Hinduism

Hinduism is a complex of traditions and considered a way of life. It can be considered a view of life. The earliest sources of Hinduism are the Vedas and Upanishads called *sruti* (revelatory texts) and a vast source of *smrti* texts of epics like *Ramayana, Mahabharata* which include one of the most famous religious books called *Bhagavat Gita* besides *puranas, Niti sastras* and *dharma sastras* (which summarize the Hindu code of life and ethics), *Bhakti* movements (of devotion) and its scriptural texts as in those of *Saivism* and *Vaisnavism* which consider faith in the Deity in terms of piety and devotion and promote egalitarianism before God, that is, equality of all before God. Moreover, various customs, rituals and practices embracing different stages and phases of life do contribute to human life and being human. Some of the doctrinal points and beliefs concerning human life, society, nature and environment would significantly contribute to our being human. The Vedas, Upanishads and the *smrti* traditions in the epics, *Gita*, and later *Bhakti* movements, contain views and systems of thought concerning human life.

Hindu Reformers like Rajaram Mohan Roy, Vivekananda, Swami Narayana Guru even persons like Mahatma Gandhi also contemporary persons like Swami Agnivesh all of whom have contributed to building religious and civil communities based on justice, non-discrimination and solidarity of all in the human family.
We can mention also the Hindu monastic traditions of *mut* and ashram which promote spirituality of silence, peace and harmony

and friendliness to nature and other living beings and service to people, especially the poor.

We also reckon with the negative aspects like caste-varna-jati divisions, patriarchy shown in exaggerated desire for sons which will diminish being human, exaggerated respect for cow worship and its protection often ignoring greater and due respect for human dignity and respect for human life are on the negative side. Reformers have done their part to correct some these negative aspects of Hinduism.

Buddhism

Scriptures of Buddhism, especially those containing the teachings of Buddha(*Dhammapada*) point to way of life directed towards liberation.: We need to appreciate, the ideals of monasticism, the importance of community, that is *sangam*, eight fold paths and fourfold truths , the concept of liberation as nirvana. All of then contain a discipline for liberation. Buddhist profession of faith: *Buddham gachami, dammam gachami* and *sangam gachami* contain a way of life for harmonious and liberated life. The virtues taught and the doctrine of ahimsa promote wellbeing of people and shape being human. Buddhism emphasizes interrelatedness of all beings.

Jainism

Scriptures of Jainism, its doctrines: It stresses unity of all life, teaches respect for all life and hence it upholds the doctrine of non-injury to life – *ahimsa* (non-violence) as the all-embracing supreme *dharma*. All these teachings do contribute to being human and to life in harmony.

Sikhism

The scripture of Sikhism called Guru Granth Sahib and its Gurus, their teachings, the goal of casteless society are strong teachings of Sikhism. It s religion-based humanism can be a positive force for social harmony. Religion and service go together. In all the Sikh temples called *gurudwaras*, the practice of community

kitchen feeding all those who come to the temple embodies community's care and its socialism.

2. Religions of East Asia

Confucianism

Confucianism has largely influenced Chinese and Korean cultures, and also quite a number of cultures of their neighbours. Confucianism is more a philosophical tradition rich in social and ethical wisdom that has shaped life of Chinese and Korean peoples. Confucius teaches absolute solidarity within the family. He speaks of life in harmony in the following way: "When brothers live in concord and at peace, the strain of harmony shall never cease" (Doctrine of the Mean 15.2-3). Chinese society down the ages upheld and cultivated the following values: filial piety, care of the elderly persons, joint ownership. It is recognized that Confucianism has contributed to a communitarian culture in Korean and Vietnamese societies. They lay stress on social morality, communal harmony and state benevolence.

Confucius emphasizes moral cultivation which means cultivation of humanity, sense of fellowship and social values. The Confucian emphasis is on moral cultivation: cultivate humanity, sense of fellowship and social values. It is recognized that Confucianism with its liberal and humanistic approach to the life of society and human community has contributed to fairly egalitarian forms of development in East Asia.

Taoism

So too Taoism in China and Korea influenced by Buddhism and Shintoism in Japan is rich in values that shape the way of life in harmony and peace. Taoism teaches: "The best man, in his heart he loves what is profound. In his associations, he loves humanity. In his words, he loves faithfulness. In government, he loves order. In handling affairs, he loves competence. In his activities, he loves timeliness" (Lao Tzu).
Just as Confucius taught that one should pursue justice, not profit, Taoism teaches "Be honest like Heaven in conducting your affairs" (Taoism, Tract of the Quiet Way). "There is no misfortune

greater than being covetous" (Tao). The wisdom of Confucius and Taoism are important sources for understanding being human and being communitarian in the Chinese world.

3. Religions which originated in West Asia

Islam

How Islam with Qur'an and the noble teachings of the Prophet has and do contribute to being human must be considered seriously, especially in view of the overwhelmingly negative image the media have given to this great religion (mainly due to some extremist Islamic militants' involvement in violence). The Qur'an speaks of all human beings as brothers from God's point of view. The Koran echoes the unity of human beings in terms of believers: "The believers indeed are brothers; so set things right between your two brothers, and fear God; happily you will find mercy" (Qur'an 49.10). Islam is essentially a message of peace, righteousness and love. We are also aware of the wrong interpretations of Islam and practice by extremists with distorted approach to the Islamic concept of *Jihad*. But basically as the term Islam itself signifies, Islam promotes faith and peace. Its practices include care for the poor as part of religious duty.

Christianity

Christianity is not only an Asian religion in its origin but also ancient in India going back to the very first century (the Thomas Christians). We have to consider the tremendous contribution of Christian faith, the Bible with its two testaments, the theology of creation and redemption, the prophets of the First Testament, Jesus, the Gospel of God's Reign he proclaimed and the two thousand years of Christianity in Asia, the different church communities and their spirituality and service in love have made and are still making a big contribution to being human, life in fullness and the fundamental civilization and culture of humanity they have promoted among the peoples of Asia.

We are aware of some of the weaknesses of the Churches and Christian communities as manifested in their history, not so much of Christian faith itself. Here we mention the divisions

among Christians as an obstacle to their generous and selfless service of the people of Asia apart from being a counter-witness. Moreover, Churches in Asia are not fully inculturated and carry still the trappings of Western culture and signs of the colonial era.

4. Tribal Religious Traditions of Asia

Tribal communities, also referred to as indigenous peoples, may not have written scriptures but have dynamic oral traditions that contain their rich worldviews touching culture , religion, social mores, their myths of creation rich in a theology of creation so valuable in the present moment of ecological crisis, their relationship to nature and God and to one another in community. All the values of tribal culture and religion are characterized by a strong communitarian ethos, hence a strong sense of community. The beauty of tribal world view is the fine harmony between people, God, the Supreme Spirit and nature and cosmos. Ecological balance is a special feature of harmony of life of Indigenous peoples. Tribal worldview is rich in eco-wisdom or ecosophy. Being stewards of creation is part of their worldview and way of life. We need to appreciate the rich contribution tribal traditions have made and still can make to being human and human living.

b) Political Realities

One of the prominent facts of Asia from time immemorial is plurality. It is a plurality of cultures, religions, social organisations, politics and economics. All of them are marked by their internal heterogeneity and their distinctiveness from each other. Asia like other continents is marked by and divided along the lines of race, ethnicity, class, gender, religion, culture, tribe, tradition, etc. Yet, despite all this diversity, there is an increasing interest to give political and institutional expression to a distinct Asia region, even if its precise borders remain contested and uncertain. This plurality of the continent becomes the foundation of each group to arrange and determine how to achieve the common good. Certainly, plurality seen in terms of pluralism has its limits. Indifferent or neutral pluralism would destroy the character of community of believers. Pluralism may be accepted,

but if it leads to promiscuity and syncretism, and if it leads to separation and isolation, then, it is to be rejected.

The Cold War between the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) and Communist blocks is over and the world after the destruction of Berlin Wall changed rapidly. In these decades many projects have been opened to the East Asia. Now Asia stands on the new situation, on account of the new international system. Technology in fact influences political situation. From this point of view, many problems in Asia can only be solved at the international level. The United Nations Declaration of Human Rights, for instance, which includes civilian, political, and socio-economic rights, has provided the rationale for intervention in the internal politics of offending countries. Through this point, we could underline the existence of the rapid internationalization of the world order. In this situation, however, we in Asia feel the increased interdependence, which enables international influences to penetrate and permeate the internal political and economic structures of the modern nation-states in Asia.

The Changing Asia

Some gigantic powers in Asia suffer from a kind of friction, which cannot be understood without the relationship being placed in its unique historical and strategic context. Security however also spills over into political, and even economic, issues. For that reason, understanding Asia at either the level of the individual nation, or as a potential regional actor, involves looking at conventional political and economic factors and at the overall geopolitical context in which they have emerged.

Ideologically speaking, a very small number of States in Asia was influenced also by the fall of Marxist regimes. It has been followed by the rekindling of ethnic nationalism and the difficulties of a transition to political democracy and the free market. We could say that the destruction of the Berlin Wall constitutes an apt symbol for the beginning of the new international system, more than that the event of September 11th and the aggressions of certain countries changed the global situation.

Many countries in Asia indicate that violence, poverty, corruption, injustice and discrimination are not a monopoly of a particular ideological system. The Third World, also called the 'South' in fact does contain competing non-Marxist ideologies. Some of the strongest alternatives are based on religion, and Catholicism is increasingly a faith of the South in both population and hierarchy. The basic structure seems to be the economic and political hegemony with each centre having its periphery. Asia in front of a united post-industrial North, has an allied poverty-stricken South whose ideology would ally with fundamentalism, Third World religiosity, and Maoist populism. It is doubtful whether either liberalism or socialism will play a strong positive or negative ideological role.

Democracy in Asia as the last and best hope for the peoples of Asia.

Today religious people too stress more than they did in the past the need for the unity of all people in the face of so many attempts to further particular interest. Many countries in Asia are 'young' in the sense of independent political praxis. For that reason, they are looking for adequate models suited to developing countries. Many had taken the First World as a primary model of modernization.

The paradigm of political option in many countries was reduced to Right and Left: liberalism and socialism. What is the common ground? Does it mean moving to higher ground? Politics is a kind of discourse of the public life which correlates with the common good. Poverty, injustice, discrimination are not the real political issues for both conservative and liberal politicians who merely compete for the votes of middle-class, suburban dwellers. Asia stands at a critical juncture of history.

Many, especially Christians, erroneously consider that the separation of religious affairs from the State means exclusion of all religious matters from the political process. People often consider that politics is 'dirty', 'corrupt', 'unfriendly' on account of the vested interest, i.e. the power. Asia needs a renewal of citizen politics to fashion a new political future. To shape a new future, however, Asia has to first find the moral foundations and

resources for a new social vision. Many in modern circumstances consider that being democratic calls them to political activity for justice and the common good. And to involve in politics today is a real and common human vocation because the moral principles flowing from humanity point to democracy as a form of political rule and thus democratic citizenship as a general form of human witness.

Asia is still on the move to build a different future not with a negative message, but rather with demonstrations of what a morally based politics looks like. Here Asia invites and invokes the values of a new political vision that will make practical solutions possible. One could confidently say that a prophetic politics rooted in moral principles could again spark people's imagination and involvement.

Ideology and Political Power in Asia

When we talk about ideology, it means that we put into the centre of discourse a kind of belief systems with implications for social interactions. And this ideology correlates with power. Power in the context of politics is the high possibility that one actor within a social relationship will be in a position to carry out his own will despite resistance, regardless of the basis on which this probability rests. Meanwhile an ideology is a form of social structure. An ideology is not simply a list of beliefs. It is more a hierarchy of issues which is enforced through the exercise of power, but it always includes various spaces of autonomy and is always potentially an object of political struggle.

Power also means the ability to control the agenda and prevent undesirable issues and prevent undesirable problems from arising in the first place. The social change will be based upon reclaiming the moral values of personal responsibility, social, compassion, and economic justice. And being faithful to a moral vision of politics in the life of communities, Asians will make the best contribution and offer the most profound participation. In this way, Asians learn to judge social and economic choices as to whether they empower the powerless protect the earth, and further true democracy in which Asians involve themselves seriously.

Asians are in a better position to make sense of the political situation here. Our tradition of Asianness would affirm that the relationship between politics and humanity is absolutely vital to the future. Politics should begin to address human values and do so from all points of view on the political spectrum. And more than that, in most of the religious traditions, justice is best understood as the establishment of right relationship between people, communities, groups of people, and the earth itself. It is time to reclaim these traditions. Our consideration of Asianness in political perspective is part of being human in the context of Asia.

c) Social Realities

With deep concern for the authentic development of the human person and society, the Church teaches respect and promotion of all the dimensions of the human persons (JP II, *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis*, n.1). The human person does not live in isolation but in a complex network of relationships. Full human development takes place in relationship with others. A person lives in interrelationships in many levels: family, kinship, neighborhood communities, Church and State, and varied social groupings and affiliations. At the very heart of social life is the inestimable dignity and value of the human person. This truth needs to be affirmed as globalisation sweeps across Asia with advanced technologies and developments in communication that bring both positive and negative influences on Asian social life. The changes and the responses to them may vary from country to country but people living in urban centers and semi-urban settings are particularly affected. Traditional positive human values enshrined in the cultures and traditions of Asian societies are in danger of being eroded, lost or rendered ambivalent in the process of globalisation. We notice that globalisation focuses on individualness of persons, not on person being social and related. On the other hand, the uncertainties of social change may lead to an indiscriminate revival of traditional values that may not fully support authentic human development.

Family

The family is the first basic cell of community and society. Family, as defined by the anthropologist George Murdock, is "a social group characterized by common residence, economic cooperation, and reproduction. It includes adults of both sexes, at least two of whom maintain a socially approved sexual relationship, and one or more children, own or adopted, of the sexually cohabiting adults." A shorter and more general definition of family as "two or more persons related by birth, marriage, or adoption, who reside together" applies also to relationships such as two or more adult siblings living together, a parent and child or children, two adults who are related by marriage or have no children, or adults who adopt a child. The two basic kinds of families are nuclear family and extended family.

The nuclear family is the simplest type of family. "The family—based on marriage between a man and a woman—is the first and fundamental unit of society and is a sanctuary for the creation and nurturing of children" (JP II, *Ecclesia in America*, 1999, n.55). In the family new human life is generated, welcomed and cared for. Within and through the family a child is initiated into life in community. He/she learns the culture and language of the society in which he/she lives. Family experiences influence the child's growth in awareness of self, God and others. Loving each other as they care for their children, husband and wife grow together towards human and Christian maturity. The family is thus the "primary place of humanization" for the person and society (John Paul II, Apostolic Exhortation <u>Christifideles Laici</u>, n.40).

Extended family is a complex family consisting of parents and their children's families living under the same roof or two or more nuclear families interconnected either by blood relation or marital relation residing under the same roof. Common in Asian societies are extended families in which the elderly, retired members of the family, parents and grandparents still receive great respect and care within the family setting. They are listened to, honored and loved.

In Asia where family occupies a central place in the network of relationships, children learn very early in life the value of family and family structures. Their relational needs are met in the family which provides them security and sense of belonging. They learn in the family the values of unity, brother/sisterhood (*kapatiran*), cooperation, collaboration (*bayanihan*), and sympathy (*damayan*).

Where great importance is placed on the family, individual goals are considered subordinate to the welfare and integrity of the family especially in some Asian societies where filial piety defines specific rules of conduct in social relationships. Negatively inordinate concern for family or desire to serve the interests of the family, of kin and cronies at the expense of common good has led to corruption, nepotism, political and economic cronyism in Asia.

The traditional roles of Asian fathers and mothers, where the father is seen as the primary breadwinner and the mother as the caregiver and nurturer of values, may not have changed significantly despite modernization and changes in family structure. In rural or urban setting, women are expected to care for the children and the home even as they do a great deal of agricultural work, pursue their career or engage in paid work. This situation often causes tension in the family and puts greater burden on women. Women are often blamed for neglecting their primary role and responsibility to care for the home and children when they find work outside the home or find employment abroad in order to support the family financially. Whether driven by economic pressure or motivated by career or self-fulfillment, prioritizing work or education to the neglect of their responsibility for child-rearing would eventually lead to family breakdown, devaluing of family life and parental role and responsibility.

Where shifts in traditional roles occur, probably due to the gradual weakening of patriarchy, husband and wife share in caring for the children, running the household and financing the family. Nonetheless, even with this slow shift toward equality and partnership in husband-wife relationships, wife-battering and other forms of discrimination, oppression of and violence

against wives and girl children persist. Patriarchy remains the determining factor in the roles of women and men in the Asian family. Patriarchy which defines man in terms of prowess, brawn, authority and domination and woman in terms of meekness, submissiveness and subordination is at the basis of men's authoritarianism in the family, subordination of women and double standard governing the behavior of men, women, boys and girls. Patriarchy also reveals its evil features in countries where pre-natal sex identification and preference for the male child lead to abortion of female fetuses (cf. Final Document, 8th FABC Plenary Assembly, nos. 27-28).

Globalisation and technological advancement bring about social changes that have serious impact on family unity and cohesion. The new culture of communication has enabled families to communicate and maintain contact across great distances; on the other hand, generation gap widens between the youth who are at home in the digital world and adults of older generations who find it foreign. Parents are often clueless as to what their children see and experience in cyberspace. The gap between parents and children grows as the youth tend to believe less in traditional authority represented by family, school and religious authorities than what they see and hear from mass media. Nowadays, mass media have become the new authority and expert for the youth.

As family life is threatened by situations of wars, conflicts, migration, death, separation, dual-income households, parental absenteeism, the value and meaning of human life is also challenged. There is a need for discernment and renewed understanding of Christian view of human life and dignity as breakdown of families and new forms of families become more frequent. There are now families of single parents, families of separated or divorced parents, step families, families of parents at least one of whom is absent for a prolonged period of time, families of unwed parents, husbands and wives with no children by deliberate planning and unions of persons of the same sex, even though these unions are still morally, legally and socially condemned. Family laws (arranged marriages) and inter-religious families and inter-cultural families are also to be

reckoned with. Strangely though, these changes have heightened people's awareness of the significance of family.

"Together families form communities, communities a state and together all across the world each human is part of the human family. How these communities organize themselves politically, economically and socially is thus of the highest importance. Each institution must be judged by how much it enhances, or is a detriment to, the life and dignity of human persons" (JP II, *Ecclesia in America*, n.55).

Youth and Media

The Church attributes "special importance to the period of youth as a key stage in the life of every human being" (JP II, *Dilecti Amici*, #1). The period of youth is an important phase in the development of the human personality. It is the "time of a particularly intense discovery of the human "I" and of the properties and capacities connected with it" (op. cit., #3). The youth ask questions about the value and meaning of human life and manifest their search for truth, goodness and happiness in many different ways.

A study in 2002 noted that the "current cohort of youth was the largest ever" in Asia. The study focused on youth transition and defines the youth age range to be ages 15-24. That governments, international agencies and NGOs recognized the youth to be a considerable resource for national development is shown in the shift in policy focus to youth and youth problems. The study also noted the rising numbers and proportions of youth in national populations, rising percentages of youth remaining single until well into adulthood, and rising proportions of youth enrolled in school. Some concerns have been expressed that with declining fertility rate in some parts of Asia, the youth bulge may eventually lead to a decline in the work force in the future.

Youth is associated with positive values such as dynamism, courage, bravery and hope. A sense of community, interest in politics and youthful idealism characterize the Asian youth today. They are given opportunities to participate in

society and in the work force. Their desire for self-expression and preferences are being recognized. Faces of young people dominate the TV screen as more and more children and youth are recruited and enter into the entertainment industry. The youth also participate in conceptualizing and creating animation and comics. Some images reflect the new and emerging youth subcultures expressed through music and characterized by certain behaviors, fashion imperatives and identity traits. Youth who are searching for their self-identity are attracted to these subcultures that facilitate their identity formation, social interactions and emotional involvement. Through these many adolescents are able to express their feelings about life through music and share their experiences about the world.

"The development of the new technologies and the larger digital world represents a great resource for humanity as a whole and for every individual, and it can act as a stimulus to encounter and dialogue" (Benedict XVI, Message, 44th World Communications Day, 16 May 2010). "Internet generation" could be a collective description for the current generation of Asian youth. Media and Technology played its role in shrinking the world into a global village through means of communication and connections. Asian youth in different countries, though still divided to some extent by language, culture and politics, are able through the internet to experience being in the same transnational space and time. The mobile phone is said to be the most ubiquitous internet platform for Asian youth. The youth in Asia are able to form transnational ties through online social networking and other types of internet sites. Access to online information resources and communities offers some benefits to the Asian youth. Through internet the youth forge new forms of relationships which sometimes make up for what they fail to experience in their families. Web bulletin board and blogs are avenues for the youth's self-expression even for what could be too sensitive or unconventional to be allowed for mainstream media. What is becoming a transnational pastime is multiplayer online game playing. Computer, video and online games are part of daily life of some youth. Paradoxically, even as media and technology promote communication and can be at the service of communion and human solidarity, they can also lead to alienation and destruction of human capacity to relate meaningfully at the personal level. One of the negative results is a

digital divide, a gap between information-rich and information-poor, those who can have access and those who have no means to access technology.

In some parts of Asia, engaging in internet is not just a pastime among the youth but an addiction. Some may satisfy their desire for contact with others and for friendships by virtual connectedness and find difficulty in personal relationship with families, neighbours, and people they encounter daily in places of work, education and recreation. When virtual connectedness becomes obsessive, it can isolate the youth "from real social interaction disrupting patterns of rest, silence and reflection necessary for healthy human development" (Benedict XVI, Message, 43rd World Communications Day, 24 May 2009).

The Asian youth are perceived to be the big beneficiaries of globalisation and regional integration. Global and trans-Asian cultural flows are bringing Asian youth closer together. At the same time the youth are most susceptible to the negative impact of globalization and most vulnerable to secular and hedonistic values promoted by the media. As more and more mixed race children return to their Asian home countries, personal success and style are being re-conceived to include cultural hybridity, bilingualism and biculturalism. Even sexual lifestyles, fashion trends and hobbies continue to converge. Inter-marriage is also becoming a common feature of sexual and social life in many Asian societies.

Communication and interaction patterns are affected by the globalization of technology. A new culture called 'the digital age culture' has emerged. Communication gap may widen between digital age youth and adults who are considered digital natives. Mass media has created an alternative expert system that competes with traditional authority figures. When youth no longer find guidance and security at home and with their families, they can tend to resort to drugs and other means of escapism to deal with their own problems and cope with their pains, anxieties and sufferings. At times, youth also become easy prey to fundamentalism in their search for identity, belongingness and security.

While the youth enjoy the benefits of internet, they are likewise exposed to changing views of human person and human life through it. Issues and problems associated with internet, such as privacy, security, confidentialities of data, copyright and intellectual property law, pornography, hate sites, dissemination of rumor and character assassination among others can lead the youth to crisis of values as they get more and more confused about what is right and wrong, about what is true and good.

The effect of images of violence, hedonism, unbridled individualism and materialism "is striking at the heart of Asian cultures, at the religious character of the people, families and whole societies" (Special Assembly for Asia of the Synod of Bishops, *Instrumentum Laboris*, n.9).

Women and Gender relationships

Significant developments have happened in the area of women empowerment. The role and participation of women is generally recognized and accepted in the Church and society. Government, non-government agencies and Church organizations continue to work for empowerment of women in their personal and work lives through training and opportunities for professional development. Improved female literacy, reduced infant and child mortality rates, declining maternal mortality rates, greater access to health services and improved gender equality in education and in the workplace are seen as indicators of success in addressing women's concerns.

Education and employment have, to some extent, expanded women's horizons and provided them with previously unavailable opportunities and lifestyles. A contributory factor towards the economic and social empowerment of women is their participation in paid employment. Women's position in the household is noted to have improved substantially because of their access to earned income. This has likewise contributed to growth in their self-esteem, status and strength in society. Gender gaps in wage and employment are being addressed. Gender-fair attitudes, language and behavior are being promoted at different levels in society. The use of inclusive language is also making inroads in Church worship.

It cannot be denied, however, that women's rights and dignity, greater participation of women in decision-making and empowerment of women especially those in the low-income groups have not been fully addressed. Women in various settings still experience vulnerability in the workplace where they are exposed to sexual harassment and abuse. Working mothers continue to bear the burden of balancing work demands and family needs. Female migrant workers are exposed to the anxiety of lay-offs and unemployment. Women continue to struggle against sexual exploitation, forced labor, female infanticide and violence.

Development, Work and Play

Efforts towards development are continuously being pursued by different groups at different levels. Networking and linkages are being done by countries in the region as well as government and non-governmental agencies to consolidate actions for growth, employment and decent work. The observation of the Asian Employment Forum that "Asia-Pacific economies are surging ahead, providing significant scope for improving living standards, reducing poverty and generating decent employment" gives reason for optimism and hope. With under-utilization of labour as a topic of interest, Asian countries are looking into possibilities of bringing women, young people, older workers, and differently-abled people into productive work. Needless to say, work is a humanizing reality as it enables people to achieve a sense of achievement and to express human creativity while it provides for livelihood and the satisfaction of human needs. Thus, unemployment is a scourge to human dignity. Nonetheless, when people, especially the poor and marginalized, take on any work just to be able to survive, they make themselves vulnerable to exploitation. Work can be dehumanizing when the workers are considered mere means to an end. Sometimes, profit-oriented companies employ women, children and youth, older workers and differently-abled people to maximize their returns and profits since they are considered cheap labour.

In agricultural societies where the fruits of human labour are dependent also on the forces of nature and seasons, people tend

to develop the value of dependence and trust. In industrialized settings, people benefit from technological advances and, as they learn to manage technology, are able to produce more with less effort and less time. Both settings provide time for other things besides work.

Hand in hand with work is the importance of leisure and play in human life and society. Social interaction and collaboration are experienced and learned in work and play. Human development is fostered by the varieties of play in Asian societies. Different forms of social play promote cooperation and help in the socialization process. The spirit of play in some Asian cultures balances the burden of work and enables people to survive with hope the most difficult challenges of survival and existence.

However, in some societies where girls and women are expected and trained to be responsible while the boys and men are allowed freedom and leisure, the tendency is for girls and women to take on more work while the boys and men play or entertain themselves.

Migration

The UN World Migration Report 2000 makes a distinction between voluntary and forced migrants. "Voluntary migrants include people who move abroad for employment, study, family reunification, or other personal factors. Forced migrants leave their countries to escape persecution, conflict, repression, natural and human-made disasters, ecological degradation or other situations that endanger their lives, freedom or livelihood." Poverty, war and ethnic conflicts, the denial of their human rights and fundamental freedom cause people to migrate within the country, within Asia and from Asia to other continents. Migration exposes millions of people to difficult situations and can bring about destructive effects on family life and values.

Studies on migration and its impact on family and society are being conducted to address pressing issues of migrant workers especially female migrants. Some agencies have coordinated and implemented programs to prepare workers for

overseas and to help them in their return and reintegration in their home countries.

Migration promotes cross-cultural understanding and offers hope of freedom and opportunities. Migrants bring to receiving countries customs, practices and behaviour patterns from their home country; at the same time, their knowledge and experience are broadened by exposure to different cultures. Standards of living of families of overseas workers have improved considerably.

Migration is an important component of Asia's urbanization. Paradoxically, the process of urbanization has been accompanied by the spread of poverty and deprivation. Migrants do not necessarily find decent and productive work in the new setting. Skilled labour groups and unskilled labour groups receive differential treatment in receiving countries. Unskilled migrant workers, female domestic workers and entertainers, trafficked persons and irregular migrant workers suffer dehumanizing conditions of work and shelter. Domestic workers face the problems of being confined to private homes as workplace, working long hours for low pay, abuse, exploitation and lack of protection and security. In Asia, trafficking involves serious violation of human rights of the victims. Trafficked persons experience virtual slavery, perpetual debt-bondage, health hazards, lack of access to legal provisions and support structures.

d) Economic Realities

Some of our Asian countries are the emerging economic powers of the world. However, as statistics clearly indicate the ubiquitous phenomenon of Globalization while it gives many benefits, is also responsible for creating an ever-growing gap between the rich and the poor, among the nations and within the nations all over the world. Almost all Asian societies are seeing also a widening rift between professional and business elites and the lower middle classes. The poor in Asia form the bulk of our peoples. In some countries, the majority of the people suffer want and go hungry while the nation's resources are controlled by a

few families and the politically influential. The middle-income groups either move up the economic ladder or are sliding down.

Consequently, the 'haves' and the 'have nots' are getting isolated, even to the extent of becoming widely separate classes with their own cultures ["ways of acting"]. While the former often relishes in excessive consumption the latter struggles daily to make their ends meet – both these tendencies are against the basic human dignity. But quite a number of our Asians take such situations as part of *karma* or inevitable fate.

The concept of "worker", too, is radically changing today all over Asia, due to globalization of market economies all over Asia. As in the late 19th century Europe, profit seems to be now replacing the inherent dignity of the human person, and thus, the dignity of work. Often, the work hours are not only against the accepted norms and laws of a given country, but they seem to be the order of the day. Consequently, due to extended night-shifts, call-centres,…etc., a new culture is emerging wherein night has become day, and vice-versa, so to say, especially for our Asian youth many of whom have become blind followers of this new culture of consumerism that has no place for the human person, as such. Ironically, human productivity, creativity, …. etc. do not have their due place in a socio-economic context of this nature.

The concept of "competition" in markets while it has its positive values, has also contributed to creating a consumer mentality which creates "wants" instead of respecting the "needs" of human beings, especially of those who are marginalized and most vulnerable in our societies.

The recent financial crisis though is a clear pointer to the serious flaws of the contemporary market economy, continues to be followed in our Asian countries. In fact, as a result of the recent financial crisis, many companies, factories, … etc., have been abruptly closed down in various parts of Asia, thus, aggravating further the problem of unemployment.

In many of our Asian countries, corruption and bribery are today taken for granted. As a result, conscientious persons have become victims of corrupt, anti-social, unjust structures. Cherished Asian

values seem to be giving way nowadays to possessing more and more wealth, since in the contemporary popular culture, a person's worth is often perceived not according to the human values he/she has, but according to the wealth / money he / she possesses. Thus, in an unprecedented way, 'having' seems to have re-placed 'being'.

The ever-rising cost of living, unemployment, corruption and bribery, …. etc. have now aggravated our Asian poverty. Lack of just socio-political structures to ensure a just distribution of rich Asian natural resources has also added to the miseries of multitudes of Asians, such as hunger and malnutrition. According to the latest FAO (Food and Agriculture Organization of the UN) reports, one sixth of our world's 6.5 billion population are hungry and starving, and the majority of them live in our Asia continent.

Quite a number of Asian farmers and blue-collar workers are forced to debts which they cannot pay back. Eventually, they are pushed to an existence not worthy of human beings. In many of our Asian societies, there is no social security projects that ought to benefit the most marginalized of our societies, such as the sick and the elderly.

e) Ecological Realities

In traditional Asian societies people have striven to live in harmony with natural environment. Coexistence with nature is part of their life in community. This quality of human life has been disrupted in the modern city life. In modern societies, nature is considered a thing or an object to be used for maximum of production of material goods without harmonious coexistence human life with nature. This leads to a utilitarian approach to nature and human beings that is alien to the traditional Asian ethos.

It is estimated that 60% of world's population live in Asia, where we find economically few rich countries and many poor countries. Consequently, there is not only a multitude of poor, but also of unemployed in our continent. After 1980 we find in many developing countries the birth of many factories, especially

in south East Asia where it is now known as "factory Zone" of the world. In this rapid change of the industrial and economic development which has provided employment to many, we see that there are also many problems emerging regarding ecology. We enumerate a few of them as follows:

Water

Water is indispensable for life. Still out of the whole population, 1100 million people in the world have no access to clean water. Most of them live in Asia. Polluted and contaminated water cause many water-related diseases and increase infant mortality. We find measures taken to provide clean drinking water in many big cities. But in the surrounding areas, especially in rural areas access to clean drinking water is very limited. In the context of many migrants flocking to big cities, the need for clean drinking water has become an urgent necessity.

While speaking of the problem of water we recognise two problems: First the need to provide access to clean drinking water, and second, the problem of proper drainage for disposal of used water. Without proper drainage of unclean water, polluted water can cause many diseases and infections. This can also lead to polluting of rivers and underground water.

In Asia, the percentage of sewerage is the lowest in the world. Half of the population in Asia has no access to sewerage. Therefore it is very important to build proper systems of sewerage with a view to guaranteeing availability of clean water. When we speak of the use of clean drinking water, it means we are using fresh water taken from rivers or from underground. But availability of clean fresh water is very limited in the world. We even use this fresh water for our industry, agriculture and daily life. In order to secure this fresh water, we build dams. But dams, especially huge ones cause massive environmental damages and disrupt ecological balance besides the inevitable displacement of people who live around those sites. They prevent the natural flow of rivers necessary for the rich bio-diversity.

Therefore in order to protect water resources and to control pollution, every country in Asia has to avoid water wastage and

there is a need to introduce the recycle system of water. Ecological responsibility is a necessary burden on all people and governments.

The Air

At present in every country in Asia cities are growing. Many of them are becoming huge metropolises. Due to problems of agricultural farming, more and more people are abandoning agriculture and migrating to cities, searching for better life. For the emerging big cities, there is no proper and sufficient economical base for their development. Hence governments are forced to invest huge resources to bring up the economy of the cities. At the same time many foreign companies are coming in to big cities to open new factories. Thus industrial development grows leading to huge trade and sale of goods in the market. Because of this, consumption is growing leading to a consumer society. Due to the fast growing industries in Asia, there is the proportionately growing pollution of air. In order to protect the life of the city and the health of the people, it is necessary on the part of governments to have strict legislation to prevent pollution of air. It is well-known that air pollution of cities is linked to the green house gas emissions from industries which contribute to global warming. This affects not only the cities but the whole earth. This affects also agriculture and its products and thus adversely affects the economy of countries.

The principal causes of pollution are discharge of polluted materials from the factories and emission of gas from the motor vehicles. Emission of gas from millions of automobiles has increased enormously during the last ten years. So far this has not been sufficiently controlled. There is no legal and efficient control of vehicle pollution. Hence air pollution is on the increase.

Garbage and Waste Materials

The economic system of mass production and mass consumption has caused the problem of garbage and waste materials. The fast economic development, population increase and city developments in Asia have caused this problem. More than one kilogram of garbage is dumped by a person, per day, in the highly developed countries. In medium profit-making countries, dumped garbage is less. But in the big cities the amount of

garbage dumped is the same as in highly developed countries. Paper and plastic materials are more in this garbage. If governments do not take sufficient steps to control this, we will be facing a huge problem of garbage disposal.

Collection of garbage and disposal of garbage are two factors of the garbage problem. If garbage is not properly collected then it can force people to dump it illegally. Because of this people choose open space, drainage, and rivers to dump garbage causing sanitary problem and environmental pollution. In poor countries, throwing of garbage into the drainage and burning the garbage in the open space, can cause air and water pollution. Because of this, drainage system can be blocked and bring about big disasters like floods. Highly developed countries collect more than 90% of their garbage, but in the less developed countries it is less than 50%. Therefore in many places in Asia garbage is not properly collected and disposed of.

Collected garbage can be reclaimed or burnt. Burning of garbage produces dioxin and air pollution which can cause harm to human beings. This calls for solutions for garbage disposal. To construct a garbage burning centre can cost enormous amounts of money. If the cities have not enough money or an economic base it will be very difficult to implement this system. In spite of lack of money, most of the countries in Asia feel the urgent need for systems of proper garbage disposal. In many places reclaiming of garbage is not taking place due to the lack of adequate space. Therefore it is very necessary to think of new ways of reducing garbage and its disposal.

Heat Islands

Development of cities can cause high temperature in the area. Such heat adversely affects the health of the people, living creatures and the plants. In many countries in Asia because of the developments of the cities natural environment, such as trees, small parks/forests and wooded areas, has disappeared. For example big buildings have replaced greenery and natural soil. These buildings stop the process of evaporation. Evaporation is necessary for the environment to cool down. Of late concrete

buildings and asphalt have increased. Because of this the environment is becoming warmer.

The problem of high temperature is also aggravated due to the use of energy, for example air conditioners and automobile gas. There is also high temperature problem due to the change of the wind stopped by buildings which prevent free circulation of air. Moreover, construction of factories around the coastal area can bring further hot winds to the cities.

Deforestation

Deforestation is increasing in Asia. One of the causes is *climate fluctuation.* Forests cannot adapt themselves to such sudden changes in environment caused by global warming. Because of severe and prolonged droughts, scorched land and forest fires, more and more trees and vegetation are disappearing. Moreover, haphazard development of land adds to the disappearance of forests and greenery. This poses threats to various life forms caught up in the vicious cycle of climate fluctuation.

Earth resources are not infinite. Statistics tell us that some 20% of developed nations in the world are using 80% of its resources. This means that the rich developed peoples threaten (consciously or unconsciously) the lives of the poor developing peoples (most of whom live in Asia) and their environment. For instance, increasing deforestation that is going on points to the uncontrolled use of forests by rich, developed countries. Forests have deep relationships to people's lives particularly in poor countries. People depend on forests for various life-sources, for food, water, fire, home, etc.

In fact, there are people who were forced to emigrate because of land pollution brought about by the haphazard land development or to move their houses because of dam constructions or other such development projects. Many of them tend to move from farm areas in the countryside to cities where the poor struggle to find jobs. Thus, environmental problems threaten directly people's life and their livelihood especially of the poor in Asia. Harmonious co-existence of humans and nature has of late been disrupted and destroyed by haphazard

commercial land developments and technologies that are not environment-friendly.

II.   THE CHALLENGES

After having surveyed some of the main Asian realities (i.e., the 'Asianness') of the continent in their multiple and complex variety, now we need to look at the challenges that the same Asian realities raise with regard to being human.

a) Challenges to being a Human Person

The Diverse Understandings of what it means to be Human

With the dawn of the third millennium, humankind has to make many changes in order to adapt to this fast changing world. From the way we communicate with one another to making choices in our daily lives, we are constantly evolving. With all these changes, we recognize that we live in a complex world - a world that is beset with many different realities that are constantly evolving. In this evolving world, not only the human species becomes more complex, the other realities in whose midst humans live are also involved in this process of change. In the light of the changes then, one can notice that even concepts are not left behind in this evolution. With evolution, concepts often have to be defined and re-defined from time to time. If concepts and perceptions are changing, then one may ask if there is any possibility of discovering fundamental truths - truths that never change with time? If such is the case, the question is: what makes us human? Can we actually define what makes us human and discover an answer that does not change with time? This is the main challenge of being human for human beings in a changing world.

There are many ways in defining the human person. One way is to see the human person as different from other created beings. In other words, to describe what the human person is not. On the other hand, the human person can also be defined by what is unique to the human person. Over the centuries, many have tried to define the human person based on certain criteria. Many definitions have risen out of a particular historical context. In

trying to meet the new challenges of new historical contexts, the human person has been defined in a particular way. However, one can realize that even these have gone through a process of evolution. Given below are some of the ways in which the human person has been defined:

- The Dictionary defines the human person as "a legal concept both permitting rights to and imposing duties on one by law. In the fields of law, philosophy, medicine, and others, the term has specialised context-specific meanings. In many jurisdictions, for example, a corporation is considered a legal person with standing to sue or be sued in court. In philosophy, 'person' may apply to any human or non-human actor who is regarded as self-conscious and capable of certain kinds of thought; for example, individuals who have the power to reflect upon and choose their actions. This could also extend to late foetuses and neonates, dependent on what level of thought is required."

- Many years ago, Joseph Fletcher in his book *Situation Ethics* used the *cognitive criteria* to define the human person. He believes that personhood must be defined based on a tentative list of 20 criteria that describes, "What it means to be a truly human being." Included among these, in no particular order, were minimal intelligence, self-awareness, self-control, a sense of time, communication, curiosity, and neocortical function. He later condensed these to four: self-consciousness, potential for relationships, happiness, and neocortical function, concluding that "neocortical function" is the key to humanness, the essential trait, the human *sine qua non*.

- Then, there are those who make use of the *physical criteria* to define the human person. In other words, one must have the usual physical features such as fingers, eyes, arms, hands, feet, etc.

- The *sensorial criteria* state that it is possible that there are many characteristics that make a human, but only six define the true, ideal human. First, one must have the five senses; taste, smell, hear, see, and feel. Yes, these are physical aspects; however, these senses are what any human needs to be, human. For example, the human body needs to be able to taste. It must ingest food, and the food must appeal to a decent taste. A human must also be able to smell, so one may

smell a poisonous gas, delicious food, or any other stench that may linger in the air. To be able to hear enables the human to hear danger or a noise that appeals to them.

- Also, there have been attempts to define the human person based on need (*need criteria*). The assumption here is that the human person has needs and it is said that there are five needs that define the human person: biological needs, psychological needs, spiritual needs, social needs, transcendental need.

- It must also be said that there are some who define the human person based on relationships (*relational criteria*). In other words, the human person is seen from the perspective of their place within a community. There are times that this is seen also in terms of one's relation to nature and the environment.

Despite all the attempts of defining the human person, there is still the ultimate question that stems from the above criteria, namely, "Are we human because of unique traits and attributes not shared with either animal or machine?" It cannot be as simplistic as it seems. The broad criteria that have been described above bring with them many challenges.

b) Challenges to the Human Person in Contemporary Society

According to the classical Catholic Social Doctrine (which is based on the traditional Aristotelian-Thomistic understanding), by their very nature, humans are political beings, and so, are social. That is to say that humans live together in society/community with other fellow humans. One's understanding of the human person influences and directs one's understanding of how human society should function. That is why in his encyclical, *Centesimus Annus* (1991) Pope John Paul II says: "[T]he main thread, and in a certain sense, the guiding principle of Pope Leo's encyclical, and of all the church's social doctrine, is a correct view of the human person and of the person's unique value…" [No:11]. In fact, the same *Centesimus Annus* later insists that the human person is "the principle which inspires the church's social doctrine….Her sole purpose has been care and responsibility for the human person who has been entrusted to her by Christ himself…" [No:53]. Much earlier, in his

Quadragesimo Anno (1931), Pope Pius XI makes the same basic point when he says: "But reason itself clearly deduces from the nature of things and from the individual and social character of human beings what is the end and object of the whole economic order assigned by God the Creator" [No:42]. The whole structure of *Gaudium et Spes* (1965) shows that such an understanding of the human person is the key to understanding Catholic social teaching. Thus, in GS we see how the more theoretical first part of the document first considers the human persons, followed by human society/community, and then, finally, human action [Cfr., Nos:12-39]. Only then, does the second part of the document discuss five problems or issues of special urgency. It should be also noted that in the official Catholic understanding of the human person and society, there is a balance or an equilibrium that is not detrimental to the individual person or to the society in which he/she lives. As such, to us, this Catholic social understanding of the human person seems to be the ideal one that expresses well the relationship between persons and society.

Unfortunately, extreme views either on the individual human person or on the society/community in which he/she lives, always leads to extreme ideologies not only with regard to social living but also with regard to other aspects of human living, such as economic aspects. Thus, history has shown us how an over-emphasis on the isolated human individual (at the expense of the society/community in which he/she lives) leads us to extreme individualistic Capitalism while an over-emphasis on society/community (at the expense of the human person) leads us to extreme Collectivism. With the collapse of the ex-Soviet Union and her Communist allies (who stressed an extreme view of Collectivism at the expense of the individual human person), today, the world is overwhelmingly dominated by the extreme individualistic Capitalistic ideology that stresses the individual person as if he/she is fully cut off from the rest of the human beings or society. Such a basic but erroneous view of human beings, and the corresponding view of society has given rise not only to a "new culture" of humanity, but also to many challenges to both human persons and society. Thanks to the predominant role of the modern media (which are dominated by the Western agendas) in human lives, this "new culture" has also its serious influences on our Asian societies. This "new culture" hardly

draws from tradition nor does it look towards the future for direction. Among the many challenges posed to the community and society, in general, and to human persons, in particular, today, one can enumerate briefly the following as the most serious:

- A human being's worth is often perceived by the possessions he/she has. 'Having' is more stressed than 'Being'. Consequently, the crave to have more and more, to possess material goods, even by unethical means, even at the expense of the rest of the fellow-human beings with whom one lives, has become a prime 'value'. Paradoxically, the moral character of a person, character-building, acting according to one's conscience, ….. etc., have become secondary, if at all. Thus, those who 'have' do exercise an undue power over others, in our contemporary societies.
- Moreover, due to the now popular free market economy, human beings are today considered as a 'commodity'. Our humanity, accordingly, is defined by materialistic values and attitudes. In work places, often, people have become a mechanical part of the production process. Thus, workers are often treated as objects which are to be used exclusively for profit-making. Often, some of them are made to over-work. This is very true in the cases of migrant workers and overseas contract workers, and many Asians belong to such categories. To a large extent, such victims are often, women and children (minors) whose basic dignity is often not respected. They are not only treated as cheap labour, but also as sexual objects.
- Another common area where this use of humans as objects is manifested is in the advertising industry. Again, women are the main victims in this regard. There is also a common social trend that is slowly setting in, according to which 'others exist for my use'. Here, too, we see how human persons are used as commodities or objects.
- The globalization of the free market economies has also infused into our people a mentality that says: "one has to become rich at any cost". Still worse, the highlighting and the partial portrayal by mass media of some Asian countries as successful in their economic growth rates, has tended to instill in our peoples a mentality that says: "one has to get rich as fast as possible". Such attitudes have easily paved the

way for earning money fast, for making profits at any cost. Consequently, they have paved the way for corruption, bribery and malpractices at all levels in many of our Asian societies, today.

- In contemporary society, the differently-abled, the weak, the poor….etc. are often marginalized. Although a society has its real meaning only when all its members do participate in its decision-making and conducting of day-to-day affairs (i.e., participation in the political process of a given society), today, many societies are prone to excluding vast majorities, simply because they belong to the above mentioned marginalized groups. Even in many so-called 'democracies', ethnic and religious minorities are often excluded, as if they are not human persons.

- Consequently, those who are thus excluded or marginalized have become 'nobodies' simply because they are denied the opportunities to be 'somebodies' within a society. The access to equal opportunities which is the due of every human being is not there in many of our Asian societies.

- In modern societies, often there is that misconception that one's dignity has to be earned as if every human being does not have an inherent dignity.

- Moreover, some societies behave as if it is they (or their governments) who confer dignity on human persons.

- At the same time, there is also an erroneous opinion that freedom means one's ability or the 'space' to do whatever one wishes, irrespective of whether such 'doing' would offend others in a given society or not. This liberal, individualistic view of freedom, in other words, has no social sense or social responsibility, as such. Consequently, 'rights' and 'freedoms' are over-emphasized at the expense of the ensuing 'duties' and 'obligations'. In fact, in many societies, as a result, some, especially those who have access to economic resources and political authority, seem to have become "more equal" than others!

- An excessive and erroneous concept of 'freedom' has also led many in modern-day societies to subjectively change the meanings of certain basic social concepts, such as marriage. Thus, often, there are efforts to equate such contemporary phenomena as living-together, gay-marriages,…etc., to the traditional concept of 'marriage', even in some of our modern

Asian societies. Concepts like 'compassion' have been distorted to justify social and moral evils like Euthanasia and Abortion.

- Some of the traditional Asian values that are unique to Asia have been blindly substituted by Western values in the name of modernity or progress. There seems to be an uncritical, undiscerning rush to embrace anything and everything Western, mainly due to the erroneous presumption that what is Western is always superior and/or the in-thing. While it is a fact that no society can remain immune to contemporary world-wide rapid social change as such [especially today with globalization, mass communication and mass immigration], it is also true that we Asians have certain traditional values that need to be safeguarded simply because they go on to re-enforce who we are, our particular Asian identities. A sense of the sacred, close family ties, respecting the elders, a sense of self-respect, hospitality, harmony, a sense of sin, …. etc. are some such values that seem to be slowly getting eroded. What the OTC document "Asian Theological Perspectives on the Church and Politics" said in 1992 is still valid in our contemporary society:

The religio-cultural values that once saturated our social fabric and strengthened a stable form of social life are weakening, if not fast disappearing, in our day. Family relationships are weakened by the replacement of human communications by mass media. Traditional forms of respect, reverence and relationships between elders and youngsters, between teachers and students, between leaders and people, are reduced to the minimum or to mere externals. This is further aggravated by the separation of children from their parents who for economic reasons are forced to be migrant workers.

- Although we Asians, are still said to be very religious, one can notice a gradual erosion of the sense of the sacred, especially, in our younger generations. One of the immediate negative effects is the erosion of character-building and social consciousness, and consequently, even a civic-sense, i.e., a sense that we live in society with others.
- Various types of ethnic and religious fundamentalisms, too, seem to be having their claim on our Asian societies. Such fundamentalisms not only rob the individual persons of their freedom to be themselves by prompting them into a mob-mentality or a herd-mentality, but they also threaten the

traditional harmony which existed for ages in our Asian societies. They deny the other people's right to be themselves. As a result, violent ethnic and religious conflicts have become common in many parts of Asia, thus, shattering the harmony that customarily existed among different ethnic groups and religions in Asia. Of course, there may be solid reasons and causes for giving birth to such fundamentalist movements and their violence against others, but no such reason or cause could ever justify the loss of innocent lives and property. Thousands of human persons have become innocent victims of violence unleashed in the name of the so-called 'just causes' of such ethnic and religious fundamentalists, in many of our Asian societies.

- Today, our societies also seem to suffer with a bad scarcity of role-models, people who give good example to others, people who could be looked up to. This has become detrimental to the character formation of our youth, and in this sense, our societies have failed our youth. Consequently, most of our youth turn to Television, the Inter-net,…etc., and tend to choose their own 'heroes' and role models, and thus, follow some fictitious personalities or even notorious characters that are depicted there. This eventually leads them to be unrealistic or even badly warped in their character as social beings.

- In many of our Asian countries, political leaders, who ought to be role-models, unfortunately are saturated with corruption, bribery and malpractices. As a result they have not only lost their credibility in the eyes of the ordinary citizens, but many of our peoples have even lost their faith in democracy as it is practiced in some parts of Asia. As the OTC document "Asian Theological Perspectives on the Church and Politics" said in 1992:

The overriding greed for power, the unrealistic, if not false, promises made to deceive the poor masses at election times, the abuse of state-machinery (media, favouritism), the cheap blowing up of caste and communal issues, and the recourse to racism, black propaganda and vote-buying as vote-catching tactics – these are foul, if not abominable, practices that alienate the majority of our people from political life.

- In spite of the conscious efforts made in many of our Asian countries to eliminate poverty and move towards greater economic prosperity, here in Asia, we have situations of

growing misery and impoverishment; millions continue to be denied of their basic human needs. Genuine political refugees (and some others pretending to be "Political Refugees" in order to get better opportunities elsewhere) flee their countries. Thousands of others migrate to foreign lands hoping to raise their living standards. All these, have their negative and lasting effects on many of our Asian societies.

In view of such challenges to the individual person in today's society, we can conclude that the main challenge seems to be to find the common ground that will bind humanity rather than divide humanity any further, especially within our Asian societies. If we are challenged to find what binds human beings rather than divide, then, we have to consider the challenge of building togetherness of human persons and their common relational solidarity. In the Asian situation, it is the challenge of building up human communities of peace and harmony in multidimensional Asia.

c) Challenges to the human person in a multi-religious/multi-cultural Milieu

Paradoxically, three of the features which characterize Asia, viz., religious and cultural plurality, ethnic diversity and economic disparity are also the wellsprings of many of the problems that beset it, and consequently they pose a series of challenges to the Asian Christians.

In the first place, there is the fact of Religious Pluralism. Far from being merely an object of speculation, this reality cuts deeply into the lives and attitudes of the peoples of the continent. As mentioned earlier, Asia is the birthplace of several religions: Buddhism, Christianity, Confucianism, Hinduism, Islam, Jainism, Judaism, Taoism, Shintoism, Taoism, Sikhism and Zoroastrianism; in addition, there are the tribal religions which also abound. These religions propose themselves (and at times oppose one another!) diverse ways of experiencing and living reality according to a variety of different anthropological and soteriological paradigms.

This multi-religious reality of Asia demands that Asian Christians (as well as those of other religions) existentially live their identity taking into account this specific context. True, the Asian genius and ethos have long been characterized by an attitude of holism, which has manifested itself in the traditional coexistence of religions. This was a way of life, a praxis expressed in commitment and devotion. There was a *mythos* which sustained this acceptance, *mythos*, as the collectivity of symbols presupposed and lived by a people. The *mythos* situated in reality, offers a framework of reference; the *logos*, instead, tends to demythologise reality. While the *mythos* furnishes a margin of tolerance, the *logos* does not tolerate dialectical incompatibility.

Keeping all this in mind, we may be able here to enumerate a few specific challenges faced by an Asian Christian today, as follows:

(i) *The Challenge of Religious Fundamentalism*

The transition from *mythos* to *logos*, to some extent inevitable, has had its impact on the traditional coexistence of religions. One of the negative expressions of this transition has been the rise of religious fundamentalism in the continent. This poses daunting challenges for the Asian Christian because, on the one hand, an Asian Christian living in such a context is called to have both an awareness of one's Christian identity and its implications and a due respect for the faith of others at the same time. This balance has certainly not been always easy to articulate or achieve, given the fact that it seemingly involves two apparently contrasting stances viz., "the need to proclaim Jesus Christ in keeping with the Gospel mandate" and "the need to dialogue with other religions". This requires that the Asian Christian understands, clarifies and adequately expresses on an existential level the all-important distinction between pluralism, relatedness and relativism and its implications. Speaking in general terms, pluralism is intrinsic to the multi-dimensionality of human experience; Relationality, on the other hand, refers to the "relatedness" of reality; Relativism, instead, maintains that the human being can only attain approximations, not the truth. In its core, this latter tends to be a negation of all realism.

(ii) *The Challenge arising from the Wayfaring Dimension of Asian Theology*

There is a sense in which every Asian Christian can be called a "theologian", inasmuch as s/he factually adopts what is an implicitly theological stance on the major issues confronting him/her. From a theoretical standpoint, this entire realm falls under the purview of the discipline called Pastoral Theology, which focuses on the principles that, as it were, guide the practical details of ecclesial action in mission – it involves both the community and the individual. Its thrust, concerns neither the purely speculative field, nor on the other hand, the nitty-gritty of concrete pastoral praxis, but the sphere called: "speculative-practical". Inter-religious Dialogical Existence straddles this divide. In living and assimilating this speculative-practical thrust of the issue of the inter-religious dialogical existence, certain challenges need to be faced by the Asian Christian.

In a general sense, all Catholic articulation of the faith can be basically called a "Wayfaring Theology", inasmuch as it is the ongoing articulation of the faith of the Christian disciple, who seeks understanding within the journeying Christian community. As such, it involves constantly confronting the Word of God which addresses human beings; and likewise, constantly confronting the words of human beings about God, attempting to understand, and realize the implications of the self-communication of God is part of the wayfaring theology. This "wayfaring" dimension is significantly present in Asian theology. This process accompanies Asian Catholic believers during their pilgrimage here on earth, helping them decipher the significance of God's presence in their midst. By that very token, it also has a dialogical dimension, since it involves a continuous interaction which the committed Catholic believer has with God on the one hand, and with human beings and the world, on the other. However, it is also true that these articulations have also been in the past and also in the present subject to human weaknesses, mistaken priorities, and incomplete theological and methodological emphases.

(iii) *The Challenge posed by the Quest for New Theological Paradigms*

Another challenge arising from the same core problem is that new theoretical paradigms articulated to help the Asian Christian understand and confront the multi-religious reality which are articulated present both possibilities and frequently involve certain tentativeness. Often what are involved are issues of pre-comprehension, perspective, method and hermeneutics, and not merely specific points of theological interpretation and application of an existing paradigm. New paradigms are as yet untested and cannot be automatically endorsed. It is to be remembered that what are often at stake here are not merely truths peripheral to the Catholic self-understanding, but rather truths which pertain to the core of the faith, as for example, the universal salvific will of God, the unique mediation of Jesus Christ, the action of the Holy Spirit and the instrumentality of the Church as the universal sacrament of salvation. On the other hand, it would not be fair to reject a new paradigm, unless it is alien to the community experience and its articulation. The evaluation then, in its turn, will be based on the inner coherence and adequacy of the particular paradigm to reflect in its own categories the experience which the old paradigm had striven to understand and formulate. This testing, refinement and authentication obviously has to be an ecclesial task in which the Magisterium plays an essential role.

(iv) *The Challenge involved in the Discernment of Culture from Religion*

On the cultural front, Asia can be characterized as having a society which is the result of the confluence of many streams and influences. A major strength of this multi-culturalism is precisely its composite character which has developed through interaction and synthesis. However, ethnocentrism has become another crucial issue for Asia. Ethnic groups that during the colonial period, enjoyed a high measure of autonomy, have begun to resent and resist the new situation in which they found themselves, often as part of a newly-independent nation. At times, these groups tend to feel that their freedom and cultural autonomy have been curbed and undue demands are being made on them to share their natural resources. In some cases, intruding groups have not only exploited them in various ways, but have also threatened their traditional identity, the fabric of their social

structure, their values and way of life. In short, some feel that the reality of the Nation-State has not acknowledged or respected the experiences or self-perceptions of the various ethnic groups and what they consider to be their legitimate due.

This poses another challenge to the Asian Christian in a realm which straddles the religio-cultural divide. Since Asian culture is, by and large, either embodied in, or closely linked to religion; and furthermore, since there are several religions in question, the process of inculturation in Asia, generally speaking, has had a chequered history. One of the prominent problems is the fact that the theology of religions as yet lacks a clearly defined theological and epistemological status and as yet involves a certain tentativeness and provisionality. This fact constitutes one of the reasons governing the current discussion. One challenge issuing from the above is the problem and quest of the criterion (or criteria) to be used in distinguishing culture from religion – a sensitive issue, further complicated by the fact that involves plurality of religions with a multiplicity of underpinning theological and soteriological paradigms. The basic point at issue has been succinctly expressed in the query: What is the existential criterion for selecting a criterion to distinguish a religion from culture? Where does inculturation end and syncretism begin? In Asia, we can say that religion is not culture and culture is not religion but both are intimately related.

(v) *The Challenge involved in Articulating a New Mindset for the Asian Christian*

All these challenges point to the need of articulating a new mindset for the Asian Christian which will have its implications for the way the Asian Christian approaches those challenges which characterize the Asian milieu, viz. the plurality of religions, inculturation and the abysmal poverty and oppression.

a. As far as the plurality of religions is concerned, the changed mindset will involve BOTH *Loyalty to One's Own Experience as a Christian* AND *Respect for the Faith of Another*. Loyalty without respect would amount to religious fanaticism, whereas respect for another without being loyal to one's own faith commitment

would be compromise. Respect for other faiths will also involve different forms of expression.

b. *With respect to the cultural plurality, given the composite culture of the Asian continent, what is called for is* BOTH Rootedness in One's Own Culture (which is a God-given gift) AND an Openness towards the Culture of Another without any Taint of Superiority or Discrimination.

c. The Christian presence and mission in Asia call for a mode of existence which is able simultaneously BOTH *to maintain a Stance of Prophetic Critique in the Face of Anything which goes counter to the Good News;* AND *yet to Somehow love the "Enemy"* – the one responsible for this state of affairs; that is, to maintain dissent and still, somehow embrace the perpetrators of evil.

(vi) *The Challenge of Involvement*

The Synod for Asia refers to the "dialogue of life", which has characterized the relationship of the peoples of Asia who belong to different cultures and different faiths. When we, Christians, relate to people, especially people of other faiths, with basic confidence in our fellow humanity, we discover people's concerns, values, pains, agonies, their love of peace and harmony of life and aspirations which they spontaneously share. It is here we discover their search for meaning, faith, their values and yearnings. In this dialogue of life, we discern what the Spirit of God has been doing in them for ages before we encounter them. Hence in Asia, we need to begin with a discerned spiritual knowledge of what the Spirit of God has been doing. This we do in a "dialogue of life".

(vii) *The Challenge of Living a New Lifestyle*

The mission of doing theology or "theologizing" calls for a transformed life-style. People in Asia, the home of the great contemplative traditions, want to see Christians as disciples of Jesus who respond, (not react) to the context, since reactions tend to assume the character of ideologies. In other words, the mission in all its implications has then to crystallize in a life-style both for the individual and the community. A theory which deals only

with structures, theories and ideas ignoring persons and community would tend to be unduly one-sided

Every pilgrimage involves a certain amount of risk; at times one is challenged to venture along on the roads of the life journeys of Asian people, confident in the abiding presence of the Spirit of God, and in communion with the Universal Church, and called to creatively continue its journey with a little of that trust which has so insightfully been described by the Spanish poet Antonio Machado in his poem: *Caminos*: "Wayfarer! There is no way. The way is made by walking".

III. RESOURCES

In order to respond to the challenges of Part II above, we have to take stock of the resources of Asian peoples, especially the resources of Asian cultural and religious traditions. In this Part of the paper, we survey in a summary form the resources of cultural and religious traditions of Asia including those of indigenous peoples and tribal communities.

a) Cultural and Religious Resources

Here, we will follow a double-faced approach to identify first the positive value perspectives for which we check some selected texts, rituals, customs and other significant elements embodied in cultural and religious traditions. Ecclesia in Asia in n. 6 mentions many positive qualities and virtues of Asian cultural and religious traditions: "The people of Asia take pride in their religious and cultural values, such as love of silence and contemplation, simplicity, harmony, detachment, nonviolence, the spirit of hard work, discipline, frugal living, the thirst for learning and philosophical enquiry. They hold dear the values of respect for life, compassion for all beings, closeness to nature, filial piety towards parents, elders and ancestors, and a highly developed sense of community In particular, they hold the family to be a vital source of strength, a closely knit community with a powerful sense of solidarity. Asian peoples are known for their spirit of religious tolerance and peaceful co-existence. … Asia has often demonstrated a remarkable capacity for accommodation and a natural openness to the mutual enrichment of peoples in the midst of plurality of religions and cultures… Asian religions

are showing signs of great vitality and a capacity for renewal, as seen in reform movements within the various religious groups. Many people, especially the young, experience a deep thirst for spiritual values".

All of this indicates an innate spiritual insight and moral wisdom in the Asian soul, and it is the core around which a growing sense of "being Asian" is built. This "being Asian" is best discovered and affirmed not in confrontation and opposition, but in the spirit of complementarity and harmony. In this framework of complementarity and harmony, the Church can communicate the Gospel in a way which is faithful both to her own tradition and to the Asian soul."

At the same time, in this methodology, we do not ignore the negative elements that have historically entered into them needing purification.

When we reflect on the cultural dimension of Asian realties we can affirm that Asia is a continent of cultural pluralism in which people feel at home i.e. people have learnt peaceful and harmonious co-existence in their own respective regions for centuries. Under "culture" many dimensions of lived realties are included, such as:

1. Ways of thinking. In Asia strong emphasis is placed on an inclusive approach expressed by the phrase "both and", and not so much on an "either or" approach which is Western. The integration of "Yin" and "Yang" in the East Asian cultural makeup is typical of the Asian approach. We are reminded of Nicolas de Cusa's principle of "co-incidentia oppositorum". Greater emphasis is placed on the principle of inclusion, not on the principle of contradiction, though the latter is not rejected.
2. In Asia symbolic communication is more emphasized rather than rational and speculative discourse. Hence communication is more often done through stories, symbols, myths, proverbs, etc. Telling stories is an important expression of Asian manner of communication (cf., the extensive use of parables and proverbs in almost all the Asian languages). In this connection we cannot ignore the wealth of

languages and their genius which are major expressions of the culture of the Asian people.

3. People's wisdom is accepted as an important source of knowledge e.g. knowledge regarding herbal medicines, agriculture, meaning of life, and other various aspects of life. This knowledge is considered a great asset to the community and not just to the individual. Knowledge belongs to the community. It enjoys the dignity of the human person which is relational. Therefore knowledge cannot be used as a commodity for commercial purposes. Neither does it depend on the individual.

4. Popular piety is filled with symbols such as flowers, diyas (little lamps), incense etc. In Asia though religion is distinct from culture, yet they cannot be separated from each other. Religion is the depth-dimension of culture. We see this manifested in concrete forms in the area of worship, festivals, funerals, other celebrations.

5. Customs which look like superstitions are in fact evidence of the need to emphasize the harmony of nature and its seasons, or other lived aspects of life.

6. There is diversity of forms of greeting in Asia but the general tendency inclines towards less of touching and more of bowing, joining hands, … etc.

7. Religious beliefs are very closely related to nature and cosmos, therefore all cultural symbols also reflect that same ethos.

b) Some of the Characteristics of the Cultural Reality of Asia

A. Positive

1. **Acceptance of diversity.** Diversity is not considered a threat rather there is an innate appreciation of differences. We also appreciate the value dimension of people's co-existence.

2. **Courtesy**. Spontaneously a stranger is respected. Respect for elders, respect and reverence for things sacred is natural to the Asian ethos. For example, as soon as an Asian enters a sacred place he/she removes the footwear. Respectful titles to elders under the model of family relationships is very common in Asia. Elders will never be called by name in Asia.

3. **Hospitality.** This is a strong characteristic of Asian culture. Poems and literature celebrate this quality.
4. **Sense of community.** This is an over-all characteristic of the Asian culture. An overall relational ethos marks the life of people. Asians attach great importance to relationships of community and solidarity. Individualism is not native to Asian culture. Life-style of individualism is alien to Asian people's way of life. For example, when people travel in a train in India they immediately begin conversing with each other as if they have known each other for a long time, even if they are total strangers to each other. Some people even begin to almost "interview" the others without any hesitation by asking many details of family and job,…etc. which belong to the private domain. Nobody considers this objectionable. Relational ethos promotes inclusion. Feeling at home with each other is spontaneous. There is also a tradition of dialogue that promotes building interhuman, intercultural and interreligious relations, a quality that is fitting for multicultural and multireligious Asia. This relational ethos contributes to harmony and peaceful coexistence.
5. The whole world is considered one family (Vasudaivakutumbakam). A saying in the Sangam Literature (more than 2000 years old) of Tamilnadu in South India goes like this: "Every human is my relative; every village is my home town". In somewhat philosophical language, it can be spoken of as *humanum relationale* or *humanitas relationalis.*
6. There is a long tradition of non-violence (*ahimsa*) taught and supported by Asian religions - Buddhist, Jainist and Hindu traditions and Asian cultures require harmonious living and resolution of conflicts. Nonviolence called "ahimsa" is considered as supreme *dharma* in Indic traditions.
7. There has been a tradition of participatory polity at the level of village communities as revived by Gandhi in the case of India (participatory democracy of villages, called "village swaraj" or "Panchayat Raj").

B. Negative

1. Caste hierarchy affecting social relations, mainly in some parts of Asia. This is the drawback of South Asian culture coming from the Hindu philosophy of society.

2. Some of the cultural aspects reflect patriarchy i.e. the domination of the male especially with regard to the place of women in Islamic societies, and also, in varying degrees in communities of Hindu social background. In the latter, desire for sons is valued more than desire for girl child.
3. Slavery to customs and traditions. Some customs and traditions pertaining to marriage, biased expectations of gender behaviour, etc. are sometimes straight-jacketed, rigidly followed and are oppressive.
4. The religious practice of worship of creatures, such as that of cow and monkey (deity called Hanuman) as in Hinduism does sometimes distort respect for human dignity leading to regarding these animals, especially the cow, as superior to human beings.
5. The customs looked at from the perspective of values that affirm the wellbeing of people are appreciated but once they become fixated "laws", they can be oppressive, enslaving and can be used to exploit people.

c) Asian Religions as Sources of Harmony and Peaceful Co-Existence

In a religiously plural Asia, religions do not exist as isolated entities but have influenced and enriched each other. Inculturation of Christianity in different countries testify to this mutual influence. For example Buddhism has influenced Christianity in Sri Lanka. Hinduism has influenced Christianity in India and to some extent even Islam in India and South Asia. In Pakistan and Bangladesh, Islam has influenced Christianity. So too in Indonesia. All these religions together with their respective cultural traditions have contributed to our life in common and to human living. Being human in Asia means life in just peace and dynamic harmony. The plural character of Asian cultural and religious traditions are rich resources for human living marked by peace and harmony.

Asian pluralism of religions has been marked by harmony in dialogue. In Asia, religious pluralism has been on the whole a positive reality contributing to peace and harmony of life. The various religions have learnt not only co-existence and tolerance but also pro-existence marked by hospitality, welcome and

friendliness and less by hostility and conquest. When Emperor Asoka embraced Buddhism, he did not impose Buddhism on his people but supported all religions, cultural traditions and propagated all the positive values of Buddhism for the wellbeing of all people. Matteo Ricci learnt Chinese language, Confucian writings and entered into a harmonious dialogue with Chinese people. He was well accepted by the Chinese people and leaders.

Asian Religious Traditions have imparted a deep sense of the sacred among peoples. It has served to cultivate appreciation of the holy, gratitude and reverence together with a sense of community and respect for all life in contrast to alienation, fear and superstition.

In Asia, there is a fine sense of courtesy and hospitality. This goes with respect for religious teachers and gurus together with respect for elders. We could mention here respect for holy places, sacred books and sacred texts. All these values are reflected in the written traditions and oral traditions of the people of Asia. All these values of the cultural and religious traditions of Asia have been accepted by the Church in Asia and Asian Christians who are part of the Asian reality and its value heritage

The history of religiously pluralistic Asia has been on the whole a testimony to harmonious living of peoples in their cultural and religious diversity. We are also aware of the negative manifestations of cultural nationalism promoted ideologically by some groups or movements and religious fundamentalism often linked to majority religion. The confidence of Asian peoples in general is that such negative forces will not have the last word on our life in common and the characteristic of the life-style of Asian peoples is just and peaceful harmony. We could affirm that the bottom-line of Asian cultural and religious traditions is harmony of life marked by compassionate solidarity and a style of pro-existence with strong desire to building human communities of peace and harmony, a way of life that is robustly inclusive and holistic. Indeed Asian realities, especially the cultural and religious   traditions are the great resources for being human and building a civilisation that is deeply humanised rejecting all forms of exclusion.

IV. RESPONSES

In the light of the resources of religions and cultures of the peoples of Asia, now we consider as to how we can respond to the challenges of our humanity and strengthen our ways of being human and inter-human and build a civilisation of love.

First we consider spiritual/transcendent aspect of Asian people. An innate spiritual insight and moral wisdom in the Asian soul is the core around which "being Asian" is built. We begin with consideration of spirituality and prayer life.

1. Spirituality and prayer life in Asia today

Asia is a continent of ancient world religions which have a mass following. As such, religious practices and prayer are very common. Asia is also known for the primacy of spiritual values, relentless seeking after God, an unbroken tradition of contemplative prayer and mysticism, and also for a variety of means to realize people's deepest aspirations for full communion with God. The mentality and outlook of Asians are markedly other-worldly, spiritual, intuitive and mystical, rather than simply intellectual. Asians, in general, love the habit of silence, interiority, and passivity, rather than noise, action, and production. In today's globalization and fierce international competition, we witness a thirst of people for contemplation, simplicity of life, and communion with nature. Despite the influence of modernization and secularization, Asian religions are in fact showing signs of great vitality and a capacity for renewal, as seen in reform movements within the various religious groups. Many people, especially the young, experience a deep thirst for spiritual values, as shown clearly by the rise of new religious movements. The people of Asia take pride in their human values, such as love of simplicity, harmony, detachment, non-violence, the spirit of hard work, discipline, frugal living, thirst for learning and philosophical enquiry. They hold dear the values of respect for life, compassion for all beings, closeness to nature, filial piety towards parents, elders and ancestors, and a highly developed sense of community. In particular, they hold the family to be a vital source of strength, a closely knit community with a powerful sense of solidarity.

In the plurality of living faiths and numerous religious beliefs we find embodied, though imperfectly and somewhat confused by current secularizing trends, God's self-revelation and human's inborn desire for God, for "the Divine", for eternal salvation. These religions represent human being's deepest aspirations, revealing God's calling, which at times may be more or less veiled under human desire for tranquility of mind, peace with fellow human beings and harmony within the social order.

Prayer in its various forms expresses the encounter between the Transcendent and humans. It sustains Asians' awareness of the all-encompassing presence of the Transcendent. In prayer, both personal and communal, they recognize their life to be totally dependent on the Transcendent, before Whom they stand in the deepest and the most human way.

In this Asian religious context meditation and contemplation are highly appreciated as a raising up of our minds and hearts to attain a personal dialogue with God, as our spiritual "breathing place," helping us better to commit our lives to God's love and God's plan of salvation. Within this perception of religious experience of Reality as a whole, we can be helped to situate the realities of our earthly life in our relation to the Absolute. In Asia, recollection of mind and contemplation are being recognized as the wellspring of the "wisdom of life." Men and women of prayer and meditation are highly esteemed and often called upon to give their advice in difficult situations. In some regions, schools of prayer and meditation still make their strong impact on society.

On the other hand, although Asia is reputed to be a continent of prayer, contemplation, and mystical experience and tradition, this may not equally be true of all regions and countries. Even in those countries where people still continue to pray, not everyone is praying. Some people of Asia are abandoning prayer and contemplation as irrelevant. Even if they do pray, it may be merely a routine and superstitious practice, or mechanical recitation. Hence it is true to say that Asia itself is in need of prayer, and it is part of the Church's mission to respond to this need by her witness of prayer. Moreover, the spirituality of the Asian people should lead them to social awareness since

religions and beliefs in certain areas are prone to move away from the harsh realities of life into a somewhat unrealistic mystical "beyond." If the everyday life of the peoples of Asia is one permeated with poverty and malnutrition, illiteracy and dependency, exploitation and injustice, and if prayer has to be an authentic and meaningful witness in life, prayer has to lead, Christian or otherwise, to serve one's fellow men and women and to commit oneself to struggle for social justice and integral human liberation. Do the Asian people see the connection between prayer and "political" life? Does prayer life enable one to exercise the function of critique towards all political systems? Our prayer has to combine the immanent and incarnational dimension with the transcendent and ultimate dimension.

We are to take into consideration to what extent practices of prayer and spirituality have lost some, or even a good deal, of their meaning, and have become mere formalities, without a deep personal commitment on the part of those praying. Wherever the accent has shifted from the innermost attitude of faith to the level of external rituals, these practices may even lose their sense as faith expressions, and in the worst case, even become tools of exploitation and dominance to people of other faiths.

There are some milieus where "religious" beliefs are even obscured by magical tendencies. Hence, we are dealing with the opposite of the authentically religious attitude. It should be made clear that prayer may never be considered a means of putting the power of God at man's disposal.

2. Some implications for the Church's responses

While prayer and spirituality are apparently of paramount importance in the lives of Asian people, we must show that in Christian spirituality and prayer they can fully find the answer to their deepest longings for salvation through union with the Lord of all creation.

It seems important in the Asian context to show that even in prayer we take our stand within the reality of earthly life: simply to start with accepting this earthly life as reality; to acknowledge this life of ours as the one way towards personal

fulfillment in God; to place ourselves in God's saving presence, and to pray that we be able to face this reality; and even to recognize in it God's personal loving guidance. For a Christian prayer is in no way an abdication of this life but a personal commitment to God's salvation, which embraces human existence on earth.

On the other hand, we may ask ourselves whether even Christian prayer at times has not lost some of its vitality and its relevance; whether even the rites of the sacraments may not have been affected, for example, by unnecessary, inappropriate or excessive liturgical practices. According to Vatican II's Constitution on Liturgy it is to be ensured "that the faithful take part knowingly, actively, and fruitfully." Perhaps, as a side effect of post-Vatican II liturgical renewal, the congregation has become overactive in taking part; and we at times have lost sight of the importance of prayerful silence, so highly appreciated in many traditions of worship in our countries, and strongly recommended by the Constitution on Liturgy itself.

Experience of methods of praying other than those of the "Western" churches may help us to the ever deeper inculturation of Christian prayer, and ultimately of Christian faith itself. Vatican II spells out the norms for adapting the Liturgy to the genius and traditions of people, acknowledging that in some places and circumstances an even more radical adaptation of the liturgy (than that which concerns liturgical books) is needed. In fact, the Church admits local spiritual adornments and gifts of the peoples into the liturgy, as long as they harmonize with its true and authentic spirit.

In the young Churches (in "mission countries"), it seems appropriate that Christian contemplatives live in a way adapted to the genuine Asian religious traditions of the people. They can bear splendid witness there among non-Christians to the majesty and love of God, as well as to human being's brotherhood and sisterhood in Christ. Thus, the decree of Vatican II on the Church's missionary activity exhorts religious to reflect attentively on how Christian religious life may be able to assimilate the ascetic and contemplative traditions, whose seeds

were sometimes already planted by God in ancient cultures prior to the preaching of the Gospel.

3. Spirituality as witness and service as well as way of existence

Human beings and the human society, in order to realize themselves and reach their destiny, need to transcend the present and themselves, and go beyond and become something more. This is wholeness, or humanization, or self-realization, or the new society, or the new heaven and new earth.

Of all forms of slavery and oppression, the greatest that the human being finds is his or her personal alienation: lack of awareness of self, not being self, and hence not capable of being and acting as a human person. A spirituality, based on prayer liberates us from all forms of personal alienation by giving us awareness. This awareness is constitutive of our person and humanity, and it is the core of prayer. Thus, prayer humanizes and personalizes human person. Growth in this awareness is the fulfillment of one of our human aspirations. It is also a service to be rendered to and by society.

Alienation is also from the other; hence there are divisions, rivalry, hatred, fighting, and estrangement among individuals, families, and nations. Spirituality, properly understood, should realize our integrity and wholeness. One cannot pray and commune with God unless one becomes oneself; his or her integral personality is determined by his or her relationship. Prayer creates an attitude of self-gift to others in various forms, self-sacrifice as indispensable; and this spirit and life of self-gift to others is capable of creating a society of justice and love.

Finally, the ultimate goal of human person and the fullest dimension of his or her humanity is communion with God. Any one who has experienced this Presence in prayer should be a witness to the Beyond.

4. Asceticism

Asceticism or renunciation is a "must" in spiritual life in Asia. Thus a spiritual person is also a person of asceticism and renunciation. Indeed, for Christians, spirituality leads to asceticism. But asceticism is never an end in itself, but leads to charity and service. He or she is a seeker. Asia is always in quest; has always to leave behind many things. Asia will not see anyone to be a spiritual person if this person is addicted to acquisition and possession, and prone to an attitude of self-sufficiency. What Asia needs and wants is not a person of having but of "being". The only meaningful way of enjoying all is by renouncing all, for the sake of others. We need the inspiration of persons of minimum needs in the pilgrimage of the Beyond. In this regard, Jesus Christ who empties himself is a man of asceticism and renunciation and therefore an inspiration *par excellence*. In the vast continent of Asia, even today, we do not lack persons with very inspiring ascetic lives.

It should be emphasized that this ascetic kind of attitude does not prevent an active life of engagement in the world. On the contrary, the more one lives from this inner center of one's being, from a presence of God within, the more one is open to the service of others. But the service is no longer external but recognition of the inner person, a presence of God in others. This being so, we Christians have the urgency of presenting to the Asian people the contemplative face of Christ, of the Church, with which many Asians are not sufficiently familiar. It is regrettable that the only aspect of the Church which Asia has come into contact with seems to be the active one. Her contemplative side is little known. In comparison with the many "active" Religious Orders and Congregations, there are few monastic and contemplative religious Institutes in Asia. And yet their contribution is essential, as the recent Popes have often stressed. At the same time, the Asian Christians also have to learn a lot from monastic lives of other religions.

Our reflection on spirituality has an important lesson for the inculturation of the Church in a deeper Asian sense. All that we have seen above indicates an innate spiritual insight and moral wisdom in the Asian soul, and it is the core around which

a growing sense of "being Asian" is built. This quality of "being Asian" is best discovered and affirmed not in confrontation and opposition, but in the spirit of complementarity and harmony. This is the rich resource of spirituality the Church taps and draws on through participation and immersion to build human communities of love, peace and harmony in the light of the vision of the Gospel and God's reign.

5. Inter-religious Dialogue

Asians, by their nature, are religious. But unfortunately, in Asia very often, religion has more often been used, misused, abused and manipulated in partisan, divisive politics, greed, selfishness and other less than noble causes. In the age of globalised human community and a shrinking world, inter-religious dialogue and cooperation is no longer just a commendable endeavour but a necessity, particularly in multi-religious Asia. Dialogue in Asia is not mere communication of words, but a new way of understanding, thinking, reflecting and living with the religious belief of others and their meaning and building relations among peoples.

The Church in Asia envisions itself as a Church in dialogue with peoples of other faiths and religions, journeying towards the common hope of all humankind, which is to satisfy the deepest aspirations, especially spiritual, of the human heart and soul. Vatican II, and later, Pope John Paul II, view the religions and beliefs of humankind not as rivals or as historical movements wholly alien to Christianity, but as the possessors of values intimately related to the divine mystery, of which the Church is the depository. However limited they may be, for most peoples in Asia it is through them that God to a certain extent reveals the path of salvation. Time and again, Pope John Paul II reminded us how God has spoken even outside the visible Church, in the histories, philosophies, cultures, religions, movements for human welfare,….etc., and so, in inter-religious dialogue we are to harness (through sharing with one another) the great riches which God has deposited in our humanity ever since the world began. In Asia, this is true more than anywhere else. That is why the FABC from its very inception has endeavoured to promote inter-religious dialogue as part of its very evangelizing mission.

In Asian way of theologizing inter-religious dialogue is integral to the New Way of Being Church. It is important to see how best we can be engaged in inter-religious dialogue in our own little way in our work places and neighbourhoods, that is, in our lived reality. In the changing realities of Asia, the Church underlines the vital importance of understanding, tolerance and respect for religious, non-religious and cultural diversity as integral to our very Asian well-being, stability, prosperity and peace. We should be determined to fulfill our responsibility to contribute to global efforts in promoting interfaith and intercultural understanding, in rejecting stereotyping and the use of violence in the name of religions, faiths or ideologies, in opposing extremism, and in preventing and combating terrorism in the context of Asia.

As a matter of fact, in Asia, inter-religious dialogue has improved awareness and understanding of common ethical standards and values shared by all humankind, in promoting and protecting human rights and fundamental freedoms, in encouraging social inclusion, equity, (gender) equality, justice, and tolerance in human interactions, in guaranteeing respect for faith heritage and diversity, in reducing the potential for antagonism, clashes, and violence, and in promoting the peaceful resolution of conflicts.

6. Ecumenical Movements

The Ecumenical Movements are the effort, under God, to bring the whole Christian world visibly and convincingly into one community, one Church. The ecumenical movement understands the unity of the Church as a gift from God that we seek to manifest more fully and faithfully, not as something we humanly create. The movement brings together unity and justice, calling the Churches to greater unity in matters of faith and to new insight and action in matters of justice. It thus enables the vocation to be human in Asia.

In Asia Ecumenical collaboration is a privileged instrument which ensures the coherence of the ecumenical movement. As a fellowship of churches it has an important prophetic role. Considering the Asian situation especially in the area of being human in the changing realities of the continent we are called to form a common ecumenical vision.

In the changing realities of Asia we are called to involve in the work of Christian unity, and strengthen fellowship among the churches, and thus, form a common platform. This will embrace the marginalized and excluded ones to build inclusive and loving communities. In such communities, relationships will be built on mutual trust and each Christian can be supported in practicing responsible stewardship and where churches and Christian organizations can be mutually accountable to each other. By working together we will be enabled to be prophetic in confronting the injustices and violence in Asia and to take bold risks in our commitment to justice and peace in the strength of our faith in Christ who continually calls us to mission in the Spirit.

7. Playing A Prophetic Role

In a continent marked by alienations and divisions, there is an urgent need for a prophetic approach to struggles against divisive forces and promote an ambience conducive to building a civilisation of love. In Asia we have to seek and find new ways of preaching and witnessing to the Gospel of truth, love, justice, freedom and peace. For this the prophetic role of the Church, built on the foundations of tradition and continuity is essential. The prophetic role demands that we identify the spiritual and cultural issues both inside and outside the Church.

By a prophetic role of the Church in Asia we mean a role by which the Church engages herself in socio, economic and political life of Asian societies guided by its understanding of the Kingdom of God, and emulate values of the Kingdom as its vision and mission to the world.

It is in the Gospel of St. Luke that Jesus identified himself as a prophet. Speaking in the synagogue at his home town of Nazareth, Jesus said, "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me because he hath anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor; he hath sent me to heal the broken-hearted, to preach deliverance to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised, to preach the acceptable year of the Lord." (Luke 4:18-19)

In this age more than ever before, being human in Asia presents significant challenges – continuously changing sets of beliefs and traditions and societies becoming more modernized. The changing realities of Asia have brought about new challenges of what is right and wrong, new social problems, new forms of poverty, injustice, exploitation, discrimination, lack of freedom and absence of peace.

Christianity in Asia continues to be prominent in many areas of the life of the people. The Church in Asia is contributing in sociological and ideological changes taking place in many nations. She takes the forefront in safeguarding the rights of the poor and oppressed and challenges society to protect them. The importance of this role is that the Church sees itself as called by God to demonstrate how things should be.

In Asia, the Church is experienced as a community of believers, the people of God at worship, fellowship and service in their local communities. The Church supports initiatives which promote justice, peace, democracy, protecting the interest of the vulnerable and minority groups, and this unique mission becomes more effective and credible when we join hands with people of other faiths in Asia. The prophetic voice of the Church is to be heard in every generation and even to the ends of the earth, ant it should never be muted. Let the Church in Asia speak out in every diocese and parish in the land, in every chapel and religious house, in every school, in every social service agency, and in every institution that bears the name Catholic. Hence, being a prophetic Church in Asia would mean that the Church listens to those prophetic voices within the church itself, and also outside, and then, challenge its own ethos and rules. Such a prophetic role would surely enable our Asian people to be really human in this contemporary world.

To sum up behind any prophetic role of the Church in Asia is a passionate God of justice and love. It is God's commitment to justice, his hatred of abuse, his grief over sin, and his passion for his people that guides the Church to play her role for the betterment of human beings. The Church has to herald and uphold the ethical values that enrich nations and humanity of peoples. The Church in Asia has to be bold and forthright,

constructive and innovative. She has to be 'the salt and the light' in the changing realities of Asia and leaven for the liberated humanity of Asian peoples.

8. The Vital Role of the FABC

In the changing realities of Asia, *the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences* (FABC) has become a prophetic voice for justice, equality and rights of women as well as for tribal peoples for protection of their identity and cultural heritage. Moreover, in these days, we are called to play a prophetic role in supporting the ecological and environmental movements, for which our present Pope Benedict XVI himself has given the lead. The prophetic role of the Church would also involve that the faithful should promote dignity of life and integral development of the poor.

Being a prophetic voice, the FABC, has called the Church of Asia to a "new way of being Church", especially, through the promotion and formation of BECs (Basic Ecclesial Communities) and the promotion and formation of the laity.

FABC has been a prophetic voice for advocacy for interreligious dialogue as much deeper than sharing of ideas; it endeavours to strengthen mutual enrichment of all peoples of Asia. This kind of prophetic role has been stressed by the Asian bishops who also affirm that dialogue should be in total harmony with one's culture and religious beliefs. (FABC- Theses on Inter religious Dialogue Art. 6.4). It is through these values that the person of Christ can be credibly made known among the communities of Asia.

In the context of changing realities of Asia, the FABC continues to promote a triple dialogue with other religions, cultures and the vast multitudes of the poor. We in Asia, being a 'small flock' are called to collaborate with people of other faiths in our collective efforts of working for justice, peace and harmony. "Christian communities in Asia must listen to the Spirit at work in the many communities of believers who live and experience their own faith, who share and celebrate it in their own social, cultural and religious history and that they (as a community of the Gospel)

must accompany these others "in a common pilgrimage towards the ultimate goal, in relentless quest for the absolute," and that thus they are to be "sensitively attuned to the work of the Spirit in the resounding symphony of Asian communion" (FABC 111 art. 8.2).

Hence the Church is called to contribute to the building-up of peace. This is a central area for dialogue with religions and cultures leading to reconciliation (cf 7th Plenary Assembly of FABC, Final Statement, II, B, D, E).

FABC stresses the need to raise prophetic voices against the whole self-centred value system prevalent in politics which currently exists within the male dominated system. In the present political system, women's role, honesty, acceptance, tolerance, inclusiveness and respect for democracy should be promoted as values.

9. **The Crucial Role of the Media**

The media is a unique feature of modern society. Its development has accompanied an increase in the magnitude and complexity of societal actions and engagements, rapid social change, technological innovation, rising personal income and standard of life and the decline of some traditional forms of control and authority. Many of the consequences, either detrimental or beneficial, which have been attributed to the media, are almost undoubtedly due to other tendencies within society. Few sociologists would deny the importance of the media, and social communications as a whole, as being a major factor in the construction and circulation of social understanding and social imagery in modern societies. Therefore it is argued that the media has become both more powerful and more flexible than anything in previous times for influencing people into certain modes of belief and understanding within society.

There is no doubt that the media revolution has changed the way the Asians see the world. It has also changed the very existence of many Asians. Moreover, it has had remarkable success in linking up Asian communities across the globe. Therefore, there is a great deal of media comment, political argument and sociological

analysis in all countries. In the changing realties of Asia media can be effectively used to promote respect for human dignity, and thus, for the defence of human rights. In terms of basic human rights, the media transforms the ideas of freedom of opinion and expression into a reality.

10. Participation in Political Processes

By 'politics' we mean all activities relating to governing, guiding or building civil society. Church in Asia has a role to play in the political life of a country in order to promote good governance and democracy in society and the common good.

One of the painful facts in Asia about politics is that often people get the leaders they deserve. If people are enlightened and know what they are looking for in a leader of their country, they choose a leader who fits their expectations with traits such as good governance abilities, high moral conduct, leadership qualities etc. But if people do not know what type of leader their society needs they elect using all the wrong criteria such as ethnicity, charisma, popularity etc. The Church in Asia needs to recognize that it does have a vital role to play in this regard because many Christians struggle with the Church's involvement in socio-political-economic issues.

The Church in Asia, of course with prudence, must encourage Christian candidates to engage in the political life with an honest, direct and coherent way. They must share what they believe drawing from their resources such as the Bible, doctrines, traditions and Catholic social teaching. The Church also needs to extend her support to those conscientious candidates who are outside her fold, especially those who strive to build just societies in Asia. The prophetic role of the Church in the political life in Asia is to support to build equality, justice, peace and human dignity. Therefore Church in Asia cannot ignore politics.

The key role the Church could play in politics is through its prophetic ministry. Prophetic here means speaking into policy, structure, or issues in the name of God and Christ, or on behalf of humanity in general or of a community in particular. Everyone has a part to play in the political realm. It should be clear that the

Church's role in politics is an ethical one. Such a role enriches a nation. The church has to be bold and forthright, constructive and innovative. The church has to be "salt and light" in what is so often a corrupt environment, to bring light and health.

In order to be a prophetic voice in Asia the Church has to exhibit in herself values of democracy and good governance. For example, regarding gender and democracy many churches and faith communities lag behind society in general in addressing patriarchal traditions and the transformation of their own undemocratic structures, policies, and practices. Unfortunately, women and youth are under-represented in positions of leadership in the Church's governance structures.

11. Christian Advocacy

The Church in Asia is called to do advocacy on behalf of the poor. The Bible is full of verses that attest to God's concern for the poor and needy. There are more than 200 references in the Bible to God's love and concern for the poor, the afflicted and the homeless, and directions to God's people to help them. But Scripture does more than display God's concern for the poor. As word of God, it calls the Church to take up the cause of the poor and to seek justice on their behalf.

The Scripture calls the Church to advocacy for the poor. We are not just to feed the hungry, but also to defend them. We are not just to clothe the destitute, but also to speak up for them and uphold their rights. In other words, the call on the Church in Asia is to render aid for the physical needs of the poor, as well as their need for justice for which advocacy is necessary.

12. Non-violence Movements

Asia is afflicted by various kinds of violence. In most Asian countries, violence ranges from terrorism, rape, body mutilation, dismemberment, and many other cruelties. The most difficult one is the violence against minorities of all kinds. The rise in fundamentalism has posed a serious threat to peace in this region. It has spread even to those areas which are historically known for religious tolerance. The roots of violence in Asia are

more often related to political, economic and social factors though often religion is used as a façade to incite peoples to violence.

In such a context, peace, justice and goodwill among people are only possible if the positive streams of all religious thought are highlighted and consolidated. Most Asian churches exist primarily as minority communities, as "little flocks" in predominantly multi-religious contexts, and these churches envision the possibility of building peace based on justice and forgiveness, in dialogue and partnership with people of other faiths.

In the Asian ethos there is a long tradition of non-violence movements. The Church in Asia needs to commit herself to such movements and to the goal of creating conditions for building structures of human relationships which do not violate or diminish the life of the other. Violence, in whichever form it exists, is an assault on life. Opting to overcome violence, therefore, is an option for life. It is an act of choosing life instead of death. In affirming life, we affirm our faith in the God of life. Violence is not the way forward. Changing realities in Asia demand that all religious communities in Asia join hands to make our region one in which our shared religious values of peace, compassion, justice and harmony truly come to shape and characterize our societies in the continent.

Thus in Asia the challenge for the churches is to work together with non-violence movements to build a culture of peace, to witness to hope amidst death and destruction. It has the potential to give new meaning, purpose and direction to people of Asia. To put it plainly, the vocation of safeguarding life becomes the reason behind our quest for Inter-religious Dialogue and Christian Unity in Asia. The Church in Asia has to engage in historical discernment of and constant reformation of the social order. Public witness is not mere political activism but an attempt to penetrate into the public life of our communities, analyzing, critiquing and proposing alternatives to the social, cultural, economic and political realities of our world and communities.

EPILOGUE

The paper has endeavoured to reflect on the challenge of being human in the changing realities of Asia. It is also an attempt to re-discover humanism that is truly Asian and which can truly contribute to humanism that belongs to all peoples, religions and cultures. This humanism is close to that of the Gospel of God's reign proclaimed by Jesus. It is in the context of such a fine humanism of Asian peoples, the Church in Asia learns appropriate ways and paths of sharing the deepest and fully liberative meaning of being human that the Gospel brings to the Asian continent. The Gospel of life in abundance when it is properly inserted in the Asian realities though they are ever changing, has the power to make every human person and community of persons fully human and fully alive to the glory of God.

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