

THIRD PLENARY ASSEMBLY: WORKSHOP DISCUSSION GUIDE**TOTAL HUMAN DEVELOPMENT AND THE CHURCH AS A
COMMUNITY OF FAITH IN ASIA****I. INTRODUCTION**

Papal teachings, Roman Synods and our own FABC statements clearly state that work for development and justice is an essential aspect of evangelization. This truth is accepted by Asian bishops and many are doing their best to bring about a more humane and just world. It is not a question, therefore, of repeating past statements, but of looking more closely into the vision, priorities and methodology of the Church when she works for development and justice, and in this way helping our fellow bishops and our people to make further advances in the work.

We received many suggestions on the content of this paper from the bishops of the OHD Committee, other bishops, priests in social action work, religious and lay people. In general the consensus was that we present a summary of the Church teachings on total human development, justice and peace and then try to analyze the specific questions posed by the bishops and others. We looked for a text or texts that would summarize these Church teachings and provide a basis for answering the questions. After many efforts we think we found an appropriate text. It is the speech of Pope John Paul II given in the Philippines last year to the sugar workers and planters of Negros.

Below are three excerpts from the speech. After each excerpt there will be brief summary remarks. After the third excerpt we will present the questions asked by the bishops and others and attempt tentative answers that can start the workshop discussion.

This discussion guide has been prepared for the workshop sessions of the Third Plenary Assembly of the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences (FABC), held at the Lux Mundi Seminary, in Sampran, Thailand, near Bangkok, 20th-27th October, 1982. The theme of the Plenary Assembly is: "The Church — a Community of Faith in Asia."

II. THE HOLY FATHER'S TEACHING

- A. To you people of Bacolod, and through you to all the people of the Philippines, who are sons and daughters of a nation engaged in the search for a better life for all its citizens, I repeat what I said once before: that "the world willed by God is a world of justice. That this order must be continually realized in the world, and even that it must always be realized anew, as situations and social systems grow and develop, in proportion to new conditions and economic possibilities, new possibilities and necessities of distributing goods" (Discourse at Saint-Denis, France, 31 May 1980, no. 5). The dignity of man and the common good of society demand that society be based on justice.

There are in today's world too many situations of injustice. Injustice reigns when some nations accumulate riches and live in abundance while other nations cannot offer the majority of people the basic necessities. Injustice reigns when within the same society some groups hold most of the wealth and power while strata of the population cannot decently provide for the livelihoods of their families even through long hours of backbreaking labor in factories or in the fields. Injustice reigns when the laws of economic growth and ever greater profit determine social relations, leaving in poverty and destitution those who have only the work of their hands to offer. Being aware of such situations, the Church will not hesitate to take up the cause of the poor and to become the voice of those who are not listened to when they speak up, not to demand charity, but to ask for justice.

Yes, the preference for the poor is a Christian preference! It is a preference that expresses the concern of Christ who came to proclaim a message of salvation to the poor, for the poor are indeed loved by God, and God it is who guarantees their rights. The Church proclaims her preference for the poor within the totality of her mission of evangelization that is directed to all people so that all may come to know Christ and find in the love of God and of neighbor their highest fulfillment. The Church wants to be of service to all people, in whatever special condition they may be; she wants to be close to all human beings, since all are poor and in need of salvation and all ought to be "poor in spirit." But she shows a special solidarity with those that are suffering and in need, with those that weep and are humiliated, with those that have been left at the margin of society and of life; she does this so that they may

be helped to become aware of their dignity as human beings and as children of God. No area of her pastoral mission will be omitted in her concern for the poor: she will preach to them the Gospel, she will invite them to the sacramental life of the Church and to prayer, she will speak to them about sacrifice and resurrection, she will include them in her social apostolate.

SUMMARY REMARKS

1. The vision of the Church in social matters is justice in the world, the theme of the 1971 Synod. The Church's modern social teaching began with Leo XIII as a call for justice for industrial workers. Justice has been the major emphasis since, culminating in *Laborem Exercens*.

2. Work for justice is part of evangelization. In this work the preference is for the socioeconomically poor.

B. A truly Christian challenge is therefore presented to *those that own or control the land*. I know that many of you who are plantation-owners or who are planters are truly concerned with the welfare of your workers, but the Church, aware of her responsibilities, feels impelled to hold up before you again and again the ideal of love and justice, and to encourage you to compare constantly your actions and attitudes with the ethical principles regarding the priority of the common good regarding the social purpose of economic activity. The right of ownership is legitimate in itself but it cannot be separated from its wider social dimension. In his Encyclical *Populorum Progressio*, Paul VI, echoing the teaching of the Second Vatican Council, stated this principle very clearly when he wrote: "God intended the earth and all its contains for the use of every human being and people. Thus, as all people follow justice and unite in charity, created goods should abound for them on a reasonable basis (*Gaudium et Spes*, 69.) All other rights whatsoever, including those of property and of free commerce, are to be subordinated to this principle. They should not hinder but on the contrary favor its application. It is a grave and urgent social duty to redirect them to their primary finality" No. 22. The landowners and the planters should therefore not let themselves be guided in the first place by the economic laws of growth and gain, but by the demands of justice and by the moral imperative of contributing to a decent standard of living and to working conditions which make it possible for the workers and for the rural society to live a life that is truly human and to see all their fundamental rights respected.

Likewise, the *workers*, either *duma-ans*, *sacadas* or industrial workers, must be guided by a truly human and Christian concept of their task. Human labor remains the superior element in the economic enterprise, for through it man exerts his dominion over the material world for the building of his own human dignity (cf. *Gaudium et Spes*, 67). The man or the woman who works becomes a cooperator of God. Made to the image of God, man received the mission of governing the universe so that its riches can be developed and used for the benefit of all, in order to grant every human person the possibility to live according to his own dignity and thus give the glory to God. To all the sugar cane workers I say, as I say to all workers everywhere: never forget the great dignity that God has granted you, never let your work degrade you but remember always the mission that God has entrusted to you: to be by the work of your hands, his collaborators in the continuation of the work of creation.

SUMMARY REMARKS

1. The rights of private property are limited by the needs of the common good.
2. Human labor remains the superior element in the economic enterprise. This is the central thought of *Laborem Exercens*.
- C. Wherever people work together, inspired by the aim of securing the dignity of every human being and of building a society based on justice, the hope for a better future will be kept alive, and ways and means will be found to share the fruits of progress with all in the community. When the legitimate rights of every category are respected, peaceful ways will be devised to achieve the common good and no one will hesitate to put the full wealth of his talents, skills and influence at the service of his brothers and sisters in the common pursuit of a just society. *Government agencies* that are guided by a true concern for the dignity of the human person will not become instruments of oppression or powertools for one class category. *Free associations of workers* that base their action on the peerless dignity of man will inspire confidence as partners in the search for just solutions. *Workers and employers* who learn to see each other as brothers will not get locked in bitter disputes that leave problems unsolved and human solidarity weakened or in ruins. When man himself, man with his unsurpassed dignity, is the measure that is applied to the special problems, then there will be no room for violence in the struggle for justice. To adopt man as the criterion

of all social activity means committing oneself to the transformation of every unjust situation without destroying what one seeks to protect: a society based on brotherhood, justice and love. Violence can never be a means of solving social conflict, and class struggle which opposes one group to another cannot create justice since its premise is destruction and contempt for man. To construct a truly human society in the Philippines, every man and woman must make a choice for justice and love, for solidarity and brotherhood against selfishness and hatred. Choose human dignity and a better future will be yours.

SUMMARY REMARKS

1. Free labor unions are needed.
2. A solution to the economic problem will come about when men and women work together as brothers and sisters recognizing one another's human dignity and seeking a society based on justice. Where there is justice there will be peace.
3. The steps taken should be non-violent.

III. SOME QUESTIONS POSED BY THE BISHOPS OF THE OFFICE OF HUMAN DEVELOPMENT AND OTHER BISHOPS

A. What Gospel values are stressed in social action work?

From the Pope's talk at Negros these values surely include concern for justice and human dignity, preferential love for the poor, solidarity with poor, willingness to take up the cause of the poor and to become their voice, willingness to share wealth, respect for dignity of work, ability to see all as brothers and sisters.

Do we agree these are the values stressed by social action?

Can we add to them?

Can we prioritize these Gospel values?

B. What type of social action should we favor?

The first preference, judging by the speech and other social speeches that the Pope gave in the Philippines would seem to be work with the very poor that helps secure justice, such as, labor unions, farmer associations, squatter organizations, etc.

As was said above, the major emphasis of the Church's social teaching is justice. Realistically, the very poor can only secure justice through strong organizations. We can, as the Popes do, appeal to the powerful for justice, but without pressure from below, is there much hope they will respond?

The trend among the Asian bishops who last year helped evaluate the series of bishops' institutes for social action was toward such work.

How best can we appeal to the powerful?

C. What is our stand on ideology?

The Pope is clearly against any ideology that relies on violence to attain its goals. Would it be fair to say that the Church can accept any ideology which stresses equality and people's participation? Are there other characteristics that must be present in an ideology if it is to be accepted by the Church?

Is such an ideology existing? Can the Church cooperate in specific actions with groups whose ideology she does not completely accept?

D. What is the relationship between the Church and politics?

As the Pope shows in this speech it is clearly within the proper scope of the Church to criticize injustice publicly and to support labor union activity.

What would be improper activity?

E. What is the role of social action in this community of faith we are discussing?

Perhaps the best contribution to true community the social action makes is to help bring equality and participation into society (cf. *Octagesima Adveniens*, 22). There can be no true community where some are rich and others very poor, where some have all the power and others none. Social action helps narrow these gaps and thus allows all people to function as brothers and sisters. Social action highlights the truth that Christianity is not just a concern for individual salvation but for all people and for all dimensions of a person's life.

What else is the role of social action in the community of faith?

F. What is our attitude to the development efforts of other faiths?

It may be that the area of social action and work for human rights provides the best hope for interreligious cooperation. Poor people of different religions do work together on social problems that affect each of them. This work, being non-sectarian, helps them to unite, whereas other, more specially religious actions, tend to divide.

The very Gospel values mentioned above as those stressed in social action are really common to all faiths: human dignity, concern for the poor and justice, etc. and can provide a solid philosophical basis for interreligious social action.

It is the experience of some countries, for example Korea, that when the Church speaks for justice it wins the good will of many non-Christians.

G. What is the relationship between human development work and redemption?

Work for justice brings or hopes to bring men and women to work and live together as brothers and sisters. The rich will not oppress, they will live more simply, they will be concerned about the poor, they will be less arrogant. The poor will make sacrifices for the common good (for example, the efforts to build a good trade union); they will as result of good conscientization (social education) programs drink less, gamble less, treat their family members more kindly, etc. Both rich and poor will be better people.

H. What about justice within the Church, for example, caste considerations, marginalization of women and lay people, unnecessarily low salaries, absence of human rights and due process?

I. What priority do we give to our work for justice? How do we rank it in comparison with our other works? Must we do justice work in the same way as we must teach catechism, say Mass, etc.?

J. Everyone has certain fears about basic justice work. Some bishops have listed them. In doing social action are we neglecting matters of greater priority, for example, traditional pastoral work? Can the Church when it is a tiny minority speak and act for justice without risking its very existence? Will work with mass-based groups such as labor unions and peasant organizations lead to chaos? Are we liable to be infiltrated by Marxists? Will criticism of our governments embarrass them in the face of traditional enemies? What will higher-ups say? Can we live without our power, prestige and privileges?

As some bishops have said, the deep basis of uncertainty and fear is the necessarily dim, "seen darkly in a glass" vision of what God intends in Asia. What is the role of our tiny Church in establishing God's Kingdom here? What is the "community of faith" in the theme of this meeting? Does it include all Asians or just Catholics? What is the role of the other Asian religions and the human but non-religious efforts in building up that Kingdom?

Fears differ from person to person and country to country. Fears are real whether they are objectively justified or not. Are our fears justified? Are they rationalizations?

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