SUNSET IN THE EAST?

THE ASIAN REALITIES CHALLENGING THE CHURCH AND ITS LAITY TODAY

by
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A mighty wind of change sweeps through Asia. Changes are not new in this ancient continent. Empires and kingdoms, invasions and migrations of peoples, religions and cultures have in the past changed the Asian scene over and over again. And yet there is something unique about the mutation which Asia is undergoing today: It is the complexity of a change in which more than ever before politics, economy, society and religion interact to determine the destiny of the teeming millions of Asians living in poverty, misery, bondage and oppression. The situation is pregnant with possibilities for bounteous life but also contains seeds of destruction and death.

Christianity cannot afford to be a mere spectator or uninvolved observer in this "Asian Drama."[1] The whole situation is a tremendous challenge to the Church and an opportunity to unleash the inner potencies of its message and bring them to bear upon the present scenario. It is at this juncture that the commitment and involvement of all Christian believers, particularly the laity, assume great significance. The laity are called today by God, who lets himself be encountered in history and through the signs of the times, to live their Christian faith and manifest it through their action, and witness its transforming power in every sphere of Asian life.

What these challenges are and what demands they make on the Church and its laity is the object of our consideration in the following pages.

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PART I: THE SPECTRUM OF ASIAN CHALLENGES

A. FROM DEMOCRACY TO AUTHORITARIANISM

a) Emergence of a New Consciousness

In Asia we are living through a period of serious conflicts and contradictions. They are provoked by an unprecedented awakening to human dignity and rights, on the one hand, and domination and oppression of every kind, on the other. The rise of nationalism among the Asian nations freed the people from the yoke of colonial powers and gave birth to new nation-states during the years 1940-1960.[2] The aspirations of the people were not over with decolonization. Asians began to realize painfully not only how they continued to be dominated through a subtle neo-colonialism, but also within the nations were controlled by powerful groups. This led to the rise of regionalism all over Asia and to the awakening of minority groups. It has become clear that people do not want to be dominated and they resist any unwarranted imposition. And yet what we experience today is authoritarianism and totalitarianism, evident particularly in the political field.

b. Democracy in Jeopardy

The political freedom from the colonial powers was followed by the introduction of the Western parliamentary system in most Asian nations. The newly-gained freedom and the democratic system augured an auspicious future for the millions of Asians. And yet the developments within the space of a few years proved how freedom, democratic values and human rights are still a very distant dream. It also revealed the complexity of the Asian political reality very much conditioned by religion, economy, the traditional values and organization, social divisions like caste, the presence of minority groups, etc., and, last but not least, the interference of imperialist powers. Today the overall political climate of Asia can be characterized as authoritarianism.[3] This one single factor of power being concentrated in one individual or in one party to the suppression of others seems to be common to most Asian countries. We have martial law, or for all practical purposes, martial governments, in Pakistan, Bangladesh, Korea, Singapore, etc., with lip service being paid to democracy. Promises of democratic elections are never realized, and where they are conducted, they are manipulated through cheating and fraud, as can be seen in the recent elections in the Philippines.

c. Reasons for the Decline

There are various reasons which account for the decline of democracy and democratic values in Asia, reasons which should be seriously

taken into account if we want to meet the challenges of the present-day Asian political scene. Unlike in Europe, where democracy became a political system after a long drawn-out struggle and experimentation, passing through various stages of development (democracy reserved to the propertied, the educated, upper class, etc.) to reach the system of universal franchise,[4] in Asia democracy was something ready-made and offered immediately after the colonial period. Democracy was thus something almost taken for granted and not the fruit of peoples' achievements and their participation.[5] Given the illiteracy of the masses and the traditional feudal organizations still exerting its influence on Asian societies, it was easy for the elites and the powerful to undermine the whole democratic system or bend it to suit their vested interests. Even in countries like India, where the totalitarian and authoritarian regime is absent, the masses of people are progressively marginalised and left out of the effective participation in the democratic process.[6] People are often converted into mere vote banks to be exploited at the time of elections by the politicians. Democracy in effect seems to be a sham.

Another reason for the eclipse of democracy in Asia is the present-day economic order. The young nation-states of Asia, in their efforts for developing the overall economic situation, found it necessary that there be, in the midst of rising opposition and protest of people, political stability. Since in the present international world order, dominated by imperialist powers vying with each other to win the allegiance of more and more poor nations and to control technological and scientific means, it being impossible for the poor Asian nations to develop their own resources and attain a certain amount of economic strength and independence, they tend to invite foreign investments and industrial establishments.[7] In order to allure foreign investments the new nations should offer some measure of political stability. It is easily understood then that the first casualty in this is the democratic system within the frame of which people could assert their rights and pose their demands. On the other hand, the powerful and affluent nations of the West, which were very much for the democratic system in their nations, were encouraging, in general, dictatorial and authoritarian regimes in Asian countries for the sake of a *pax economica* in defence of their investments in the poor Asian countries.

Yet another factor which contributed to the decline of democracy in Asia is the presence of various minority groups. In most of the Asian countries there are today multinational, multilingual and multiracial groups.[8] South Asia is a mosaic of cultures and races. Malaysia has along with its seven million Malays also five million Chinese and at least one million Indians and Pakistanis. Similarly Indonesia, though predominantly Muslim, has various groupings as the *Santri* or orthodox Muslims and the *Abangan*, whose religion is a mixture of Islam, animism, Hin-

duism, etc. In South Asian countries, in Thailand, Taiwan, the Philippines, we have several tribal groups. It took several centuries and needed many wars for the West to consolidate its political unity and weld the various groups and peoples to form the modern European nation-states. Similarly, the presence of minority groups and communities, whether they are tribals, Harijans in India, the Muslims in the Philippines or the Chinese and Indians in Malaysia, the Chinese in Thailand, etc., has created many communal conflicts in the course of the last few decades. With the manifest purpose of maintaining peace and harmony, the leaders of many Asian nations assumed dictatorial powers.

d) Efforts to Legitimize Authoritarianism

The authoritarian governments justify their existence very often in the name of national unity and national security, against the forces of disruption from within the country and possible dangers to its security from beyond its borders.[9] A very convenient justification for assuming extraordinary constitutional powers by the authoritarian governments is the threat of Communism. On this pretext many leaders legitimatize the investing of special powers on the government.

e) Guns Ahead of Rice

All this goes to explain the horrendous violation of human rights, tortures and massacres, and the suppression of various sections of people — the minorities clamouring for their legitimate autonomy, the workers demanding their rights, the youth frustrated about their future, etc. The oppressed groups and sections of the people in an effort to assert their legitimate claims resort to armed struggles. We have thus many militant tribal movements in various countries, the National Peoples' Army in the Philippines and the Tamil Eelam Liberation Movement in Sri Lanka.

In this context, it is not difficult to explain the progressive militarization in Asia. Enormous amounts of money are being spent by these governments for arms and arsenals which contrast with the relatively smaller amounts spent on other important issues like health and education. South Korea, for example, spends 6% of its GNP for military expenditure, while only 2.2% is spent for education and 0.9% for health. The military expenditure of Taiwan amounts to 7.7% of the GNP, whereas it spends only 0.9% and 0.2% for education and health respectively.[10]

f) A Global Crisis

Under these circumstances the question being raised often is whether democracy is suitable for Asia. In fact, many heads of states in Asia accept as a foregone conclusion that the Western type of democracy

is not fit for Asia. They feel it has to be modified. In effect this means people have to accept an authoritarian and a militarist pattern of government for their own development.

We face today a global crisis of democracy. Even in the West, democracy does not have a long tradition. Franco of Spain, and Salazar of Portugal — not to speak of Hitler and Mussolini — belong to our contemporary history. In Latin America and Africa too there is a serious crisis in democracy. Asia has few models of democracy to look up to in the rest of the world. Every nation and people has to discover by itself its own particular, specific mode of democracy best adopted to its culture and tradition.[11] Only in this way could democratic ideals be sustained in the concrete. What is central in the democratic conception is that the dignity, freedom, rights and equality of persons and groups be safeguarded. This is the core of the democratic ideal, which should find its concrete translation in various ways. In the realization of true democratic ideals the religions too should play a vital role, since the dignity of man, his freedom and rights touch upon religion.

g. A Question of Power

From what has been outlined above it should be clear how power constitutes a fundamental challenge in Asia. This is true not only in the political realm but, as will be clear in the following pages, in every realm of life — social, economic cultural and religious. The concentration of power in the hands of a few leaves the staggering millions of Asia a mass of powerless people. They are not the subjects of their history, but people whose life, whose destinies, are determined by powers over which they have no control. The structures, like democracy, which in principle contain the possibility of people freely and jointly determining the course of their lives, have been done away with by the violence of authoritarianism and militarism.

The imposition of the whims and fancies of one single individual or group over the overwhelming majority of people and the growing military power by which the dissidents are stifled constitute a situation of violence and leads to a chain of violence. This whole state of things poses a lot of questions to the Church and its laity. In the face of this challenge of power what should be the attitude of the Church? What should be the attitude of the laity living in the midst of the world? Should the Church in Asia and its laity join hands with the powers that be in the name of a misconstrued maintenance of law and order which often conceals institutionalized disorder and creates a congenial environment for the exploitation of the masses? The situation, it would seem, can be remedied and the violence put to an end only by people regaining their legitimate power and effectively exercising it. What concrete steps, actions and in-

itiatives could be taken by the Church and its laity so as to empower the powerless?

B. THE PROCESS OF MODERNIZATION

Asia stands in need of undergoing a process of modernization in all spheres of its life — political, social, religious, etc. In fact, this process is underway. The understanding and interpretation of this process should not only be in terms of economic development or new political forms and social changes, but also should take into account the whole conflict and struggle that are going on in this process.[12]

a) Clarifying the Concept

The concept of modernization is open to misunderstanding, and therefore it is important at the very outset to define its nature and scope. Generally one takes it for granted that the Asian complex of social realities is traditional and so the modernization would be the change over from this situation to new values, cultures and ideals under the "impact" of the Western culture which is supposed to bring about the collapse of the old and the traditional. This way of looking at the present realities is too simplistic. It can neither be justified in principle, nor does it correspond to actual reality.

We should make a clear distinction between modernity and Western culture. In the words of Wilfred Cantwell Smith the process of modernization is

> that process by which a country becomes conscious of itself and of
> its processes and of the kind of country that it is possible for it to be-
> come, and by which it finds or constructs the technical means for
> executing such choices as it consciously or unconsciously makes.
> Modernity in the world at large is the process of rendering feasible
> the gradual transformation of human life from what it has been into
> what we choose to make it. Our awareness that this is so, our choos-
> ing that we will strive for one thing rather than another (whatever
> the choice be; but it has to be made) and our ability to implement
> our decisions technically — these are the measure of our being mod-
> ern.[13]

b. People Forging Ahead

Modernization, then, is not primarily a matter of changing things; nor is it a question of adopting what is being done elsewhere (mostly in the West) but above all, a matter of *people* consciously participating in a process of change whose direction and nature cannot be dictated a priori or substituted by other models but has to emerge in relation to the encounter

with new means and forces. In this sense, the contemporary Western culture is not the modernization of Asia but this culture itself is the fruit of European process of modernization from a feudal society of Middle Ages through the industrial revolution to contemporary science and technology. Such an encounter and process of modernization produced a particular type of culture which is secularistic in nature with the demise of religion and morality in public life, and with the production of consumer goods with the aid of science and technology. But the West will cease to be modern the moment it moves along this same path and neglects a much needed serious encounter with other cultural and religious forces of Asia and other Third World countries.

As as the process of modernization in Asia is concerned, the people of Asia have already come into contact with the realities of science and technology which, though they had their initial impetus in the West, cannot be identified with it, but belong today to the whole of humanity as a common heritage. There should be a distinctively Asian way of being modern, a way of making use of the discoveries, inventions and the possibilities offered by science and technology. Science and technology are wonderful means of expanding the human and freeing it from many limitations and shackles. The harnessing of the power of these new instruments to transform the material world brings along with it also a transformation in the consciousness of the human person and a change in his or her self-understanding.[14] They introduce changes in the life of the individual and in the way relationships are structured in society. We should note here that the interaction of the Asian societies with science and technology does not happen in a neutral field. The transformation which was effected in the Western society by industrialization, science and technology to create a secular and liberal tradition is also simultaneously present, and both science and technology exercise their influence on the present-day Asian societies. We have to wait and see the shape of Asia that will emerge out of this interaction with modernity. However, in this process of modernization certain elements are clearly observable, elements which constitute the present situation of the Asian society.

c. Some of the Changes Underway

Rapid urbanization is a crisis into which the process of modernization has led the Asian countries. The demographic map of Asian nations, with villages as the fulcrum of life, is fast changing. There is mass exodus of peasants, the landless, destitutes and the youth towards the city in the hope of getting at least some fringe benefits from the colossal industrialization taking place in the cities.[15] The situation of insecurity in the villages and the greater opportunities offered by the urban life attract various groups to the cities. A simple glance at the percentage of those who were not born in cities but have made these their homes would give us an idea

of the magnitude of urbanization taking place in Asia. Of the present inhabitants of the city of Djakarta 74% was not born there, and the percentage of non-city-born dwellers in the Philippines is 46.9%, 47.7% in Kampuchea and 26.6% in Thailand.[16]

The fast urbanization of Asia has created innumerable slums and squatters' colonies which present a pathetic sight of misery and squalor. It is estimated that about 37% of the urban population of Asia lives in slums, and in certain cities, like Bombay, the percentage is alarmingly high. Apart from the insecurities of daily life, lack of clean water, sanitation, etc., the slum dwellers live constantly with the Damocles' sword of evacuation hanging over their heads.[17] The city life with its highly competitive spirit in every sphere of life does not permit the poor slum dwellers to give any higher education to their children, and generations of poor are thus consigned to their lot of the slum life.

Since the Asian countries are composed of different linguistic, ethnic and cultural groups, urbanization affects deeply the pattern of this composition. The sudden concentration of certain groups in certain areas foment communal conflicts and tensions as the Malays-Chinese riots in Kula Lampur in 1969, the frequent diatribe of Shiva Shena in Bombay against the immigration of South Indians, etc.[18] Furthermore, with focus on industry and an export-oriented economy, many states tend to neglect the rural areas and the agriculture often receives only a stepmotherly treatment from the government and its administrative machinery concentrated in the cities. This situation causes frequent peasant revolts and rural insurgencies. In many countries the rural economy is very much ruined and the peasants have been forced to give up agriculture as they are not able to make both ends meet, due to the low pricing of agricultural goods. Even in a country like Japan where farming is done with modern equipments, the peasants are more and more forced to undertake some part-time jobs in industrial sectors.[19]

The process of modernization turns out to be an enormous task when we consider the whole demographic sphere in Asia. India has according to the 1981 census 684 million people, which makes it that one out of every seven in the world is an Indian.[20] The projected population for the end of the century is 1000 million. China has today a population of 889 million, Indonesia 155 million, followed by Japan with 118 million. These figures, though they are impressive, are nothing strange when compared to the geographic area covered by Asia. Excepting a few countries like Japan and Singapore, the density of population per square kilometre in Asia is still smaller than it is in some of the Western countries. West Germany, for example, has 246 inhabitants per square km. and U.K. 228, while India has 200 and China 101.[21] The European nations at the wake of the industrial revolution had the whole continent of North America,

South America, Australia and South Africa too expand into, and when there was a great population explosion in Europe, it was absorbed by these new continents. Asia was left without such options and today the huge population still continues to grow, with serious problems such as the food, shelter, health, education, etc. Despite all modern means of education, it is striking that 64% of the Indian population is illiterate.

One of the characteristics of Asian societies is the close humanities, with emphasis on collective responsibility and interdependence in the family and in the village. The identity of the individual and the roles to be played by each one are defined by the group. This characteristic stands in direct contrast with the values of individualism as developed and practised in the liberal tradition of the West.

This characteristic tradition in interaction with the liberal tradition and technological and scientific progress undergoes certain changes. Similarly, the traditional Asian society, with agriculture as the main occupation of the people, the inequality of status between man and woman, and the hierarchical organization supported by the spirit of unreserved obedience and conformity, experiences challenges stemming from the present-day Western economic system and culture. What had once been provided by the small village community or by the group is today more and more being taken over by the state, causing an identity crisis of small communities, a break in the traditional village or group-solidarity and an imbalance in the whole process of adaptation to the new situation.[22]

Modernization in Asia has not only affected very much the traditional loyalties, but also the relationship to language, culture, caste, group, etc., which are "primordial sentiments."[23] Instead of tending towards unification of the nation-state composed of various peoples, races, etc., modernization has also caused the divisive forces to affirm themselves even more strongly. But that is not reason enough to give up the process of modernization which, after the crisis of unity which Asia is experiencing today, will ultimately lead towards a reinformed unity.

A real challenge which faces Asia in this respect is to enter deeply into the process of modernization, without compromising the values of its social cultural and religious traditions — values which stand in danger of being swept away by some of the worst elements of the Western culture trying to make inroads into Asia. There is also another challenge to Asia, namely, to contribute to the West and the rest of the world certain remedies for the many evils that have been caused by the misuse of science and technology and the adaptation of a liberal and individualistic tradition.

d) The Way of Yin-Yang and the Vision of Harmony

It is vital today for Asia and for the world at large to have a certain harmonious vision of life. The Asian vision of reality is inclusive with pluralism as its natural ally. While the Western thinking, at least from the time of Descartes, tends to vivisect reality and see it in terms of either ... or — choosing one and rejecting the other — the Asian way is the way of *yin-yang*,[24] where things which appear contrary as opposites are seen as complementary — *contraria sunt complementa*.

Though science and technology can and should lead towards augmenting the quality of human life, yet a fragmentary vision of reality enveloping them today in the West has caused also profound divisions and conflicts in human and societal living. The individual and technocratic culture as it has developed in the West has made human persons subservient to the machine and has constricted human freedom instead of creating further space for its expressions. As a result, human thought and action have progressively become, to quote the title of a book of Herbert Marcuse, "one dimensional."[25] Furthermore, the relationship of human persons to nature has been vitiated through ruthless exploitation of nature and its resources. The sophisticatedly-organized industrial and technocratic society, on whose altar the dignity of persons and their freedom are sacrificed to create a smoke of ever new consumer goods and services, cannot constitute a paradigm for Asia. In the West, new ideologues, like H. Marcuse, Theodore Roszak, Erich Fromm, Alvin Toffler and Schumacher, have strongly denounced the evils of this advanced industrial society and have laid the foundation for a counter-cultural movement.[26] It has been suggested, for example, that one should recapture the spirit of the Englightenment (which was at the origin of the modern industrial revolution), its spirit of freedom, fraternity, equality, etc. But unfortunately all these efforts have proved to be nothing more than water off a duck's back.

It is at this juncture the holistic and organic vision characteristic of Asia assumes great importance. This vision in encounter with science and technology can take Asia to new heights of integral human development and improve the quality of human life and action.

A vision of unity and harmony is the basic intuition of Asian religions. This is particularly true of Taoism and Hinduism. The very opening words of *Tao Te Ching* expresses this profound unity in mysterious terms:

> The Tao that can be expressed is not the eternal Tao;
> The name that can be defined is not the unchanging name.
> Non-existence is called the antecedent of heaven and earth;

Existence is the mother of all things.
From eternal non-existence, therefore, we serenely observe the mysterious beginning of the universe.
From eternal existence we clearly see the apparent distinctions.
These two are the same in source and become different when manifested. This sameness is called profundity. Infinite profoundity is the gate where comes the beginning of part of the universe.[27]

e) The Human and the Nature

Hinduism unfolds this intuition in the whole of its scriptures, whether they be the Vedic hymns or philosophical expositions. This unity with the entire universe is deep-rooted because it goes back to the very origins of the human race. In Rig Veda we have a hymn that portrays the coming into existence of the cosmos from the primordial man — the *purusha*. It is from the various parts of his body that the universe, the *prakrti*, takes its origin.

The Moon was gendered from his mind, and
from his eye the Sun had birth;
Indra and Agni from his mouth were born, and
Vayu from his breath.
Forth from his navel came mid-air; the sky
was fashioned from his head
Earth from his feet, and from his ear the regions.
Thus they formed the worlds.[28]

While the Bible presents man and woman as the culmination of creation after the earth, the moon and the stars were brought into existence, Hinduism sees the whole universe as deriving from the human. That is why the nature and the universe too have a personalistic dimension. Reversely, the human person reflects the nature of nature. Therefore, no one can relinquish nature and proceed in total contrast with it, but has to conform to it in a harmonious unity.[29] This is something that belongs to the very being and well-being of the humans. The intimate relationship between the humans and the nature can be seen also in the doctrine of *karma*, according to which every action of a person causes its effects, good and bad, over the whole universe and these endure. Nothing that is done by man or woman goes without its reverberation on the cosmos in terms of its preservation or its destruction.

This conception differs profoundly from the way the relationship between humankind and nature has been viewed in the modern Western thought, especially since Descartes and Bacon. The nature is seen here as

the object of the human person's domination, ruling and governance.[30] We should add also another important reason that accounts for this view of nature: it is the historical phenomenon of the colonial expansion of European countries which related themselves to other peoples, their land and its natural resources as objects and raw materials for the promotion of industry in their home countries. The exploitation of nature as a quarry has been the obnoxious consequence of this vision and practice. In recent times some have tried to correct this view by presenting the idea of stewardship, namely, that the vocation of man and woman is to cultivate and preserve the earth. But even this conception remains basically at the level of management, at the level of considering the earth, the nature and the universe as objects.

The earth, the nature, the land are more than objects. In the Hindu view, the earth is part of the human, and one cannot get rid of it as much as one cannot get rid of one's body and be alive. The earth is in a way the flesh of his/her flesh, the bone of his/her bone. The relationship to nature is neither one of domination nor of mere stewardship but one of collaboration.

The intimate bond which unites the humans and the nature at the level of being is sometimes expressed when the earth is referred to as a mother, and as such she is praised in several hymns of the Veda. For example in a hymn of Atharva Veda we read:

Impart to us those vitalizing forces
that come, O Earth, from deep within your body,
your central point, your navel; purify us wholly.
The Earth is mother; I am son of Earth.
The Rain-giver is my father; may he shower on
us his blessings!
All creatures, born from you, move round upon you
you carry all that has two legs, three, or four.
To you, O Earth, belong the five human races,
those mortals upon whom the rising sun
sheds the immortal splendour of his rays.
Mother of plants and begetter of all things,
firm far-flung earth, sustained by Heavenly Law,
kindly and pleasant is she. May we ever
dwell on her bosom, passing to and from.[31]

It is to this mother earth that human beings "creep back"[32] when they die. The earth which sustains the humans and receives them back into her bosom is also sometimes seen as the spouse to whom fidelity and care are due. In short, the nature, the earth, the land is more than an object of economic exploitation or political configuration.

The intimate bond between humankind and the earth which the Vedas present was further strengthened in the Upanishads, by grounding this relationship in *Brahman*, the one ultimate and all-pervading reality. It is the same Brahman who is intimately present in every human being (*atman*) and in the nature. The inner essence of a person, as well as the soul of the nature, the universe, is the Brahman. The ultimate reality is not multiplicity but one, one without a second. Hence, the process of integration, wholeness, which is salvation, consists in man's realizing within his self the Brahman who is the soul of everything, and finding in everyone and everything one's very self. In this way the mysteries of human beings and the universe are bound together with nothing less than the cords of "being." The welfare of the one is the welfare of the other.

The whole universe is bound together in unity and harmony when the cosmic order, or *rta*, is maintained. Similarly, with the world of human beings, society lives in justice and concord when the order of righteousness or *dharma* is preserved. The word *dharma* derives from the root *dhr*, which means to support, hold fast, etc.[33] The humanity is supported and held fast through righteousness. Every human person stands firm and becomes genuine when his/her whole being is based on *satya*, truth. *Rta*, *dharma* and *satya* are principles of integration which make whole and harmonious the cosmic order, the human world and the personal self respectively, and they are so mutually interlinked that the attainment of any one of them is not possible without the other two and the deficiency in one is automatically the deficiency in the other two.

f) Support from the New Physics

One may wonder whether this holistic and organic vision characteristic of Asia is not something of a bygone age and incompatible with modern scientific outlook. But strikingly the contemporary new science, from a strictly scientific point of view, confirms the truth of this vision. Contrary to what one generally imagines, the new science is akin to the Asian organic vision of reality and not to the mechanistic conception of the world. In fact, the new science, with the theory of relativity and quantum physics, has superseded the Newtonian mechanistic conception of the universe that was the underlying principle of science for a few centuries. Fritjof Capra, a reputable physicist, has clearly shown in two of his significant works — *The Tao of Physics* and *The Turning Point* — the convergence of the Eastern vision and the new physics.[34] This should be again a serious motive why in the process of modernization Asians should take seriously the organic and holistic vision underlying Asian life and culture.

g) Modernization without Cultural Alienation

The considerations above should lead us to reflect on the nature of the challenge of modernization Asia is facing and the issues involved. The real question here is how Asia can find its own model of modernization in such a way that it does not turn out to be an alienation of the Asians from their cultural values and traditional vision of the world, society and man. Genuine modernization and growth in Asia should be endogenous, namely, it should flow from the heart of Asia itself, stimulated though by new forces with which it comes into contact. Adapting the Western paradigm of modernization would inevitably land Asia in a lot of contradictions in various spheres of life and cause a situation of dependence. If the Church is an ally of human progress and development and if its laity are called upon to play their role in the cultural life of the world, in what ways could both the Church and its laity contribute to meet the challenges of modernization in Asia? The question is not simply what the Church and its laity could *do* for the development and modernization of Asia. It is important to take note of the whole context of the crisis and the whole dynamic process of change Asia is undergoing. And it is at this juncture that the Church and its laity are called upon to play their role.

C. A COSTLY IDEOLOGICAL DIVIDE IN A CONTINENT OF POVERTY

Asia, the continent in which some of the poorest of the poor of the world live, needs to move on the path of progress and material welfare, availing itself of the possibilities opened up by science and technology. From the time of decolonization of the Asian countries, however, there have been different ideologies as to how and through what means the development and social change should take place. The peoples of Asia have become divided by the two opposing giant ideologies — capitalism and socialism — both of which originated in Europe and which today split the world, from UNO to the village, over every issue. Asia is part of this global situation of the ideological division of the world, and that is how we have in Asia today socialistic countries — China, North Korea, Kampuchea, Vietnam — and non-socialist countries.

a) Whither Development?

Both these ideologies promise to the teeming millions of Asia a brighter future, free from hunger and disease. Capitalism places its price on the economic development to be achieved, and until it is achieved people may have to be in a situation of want, while they can enjoy certain political freedom. Communist ideology instead curbs the civil liberties, while offering a certain amount of equitable distribution of goods by preventing the accumulation of wealth in the hands of a few. The price of freedom is to be paid, according to the Communists, so that the revolu-

tion may take place and a new society may be established.[35] The Asian experience shows how these two ideologies have not really succeeded but have betrayed the interests of millions of Asian and have aggravated their situation of oppression.

In non-socialist countries the model adopted for development has been Western. The ideology of capitalist development concentrates on economic progress, and its principles of rugged individualism, profit and money create in Asia affluence for an elite class, misery and desperation for the overwhelming majority of its peoples. The economic development and planning envisioned by capitalism have increased incredibly the GNP, (the Gross National Product), but the benefits of growth have not trickled down as expected to the poor masses. The measurement of a country's growth, therefore, by GNP can be very misleading. Besides, in some of the advanced non-socialist countries of Asia, such as Japan and Hong-Kong, the economic growth has not been matched by the improvement in the social condition, so that many people have to live in small and crowded spaces and in shanty homes with little privacy and with lack of other basic facilities. In less developed non-socialist countries, the capitalist system was superimposed on a long-standing feudal, semi-feudal or tribal society,[36] with the result that powerful traditional elites have taken into their hands the course of development and draw benefits for themselves from the introduction of science and technology. This has happened both in the agricultural and industrial sectors of the Asian economy. In the 1960's there took place an accelerated modernization in the agricultural field in order to increase production. In India, for example, the Green Revolution transformed a situation where there was starvation and death due to lack of food materials to a situation of such a growth that India is today exporting grains. And yet, if today there are millions of poor people living below the poverty line, this is evidence enough to show how mere economic development envisaged by capitalism does not deliver the goods. This notion of development has not paid attention to other basic questions like land reform, the traditional structure of the society and its organization, etc. Kusum Nair, in her well-known *Blossoms in the Dust*, writing of her experiences in many villages in India, has shown that true development does not take place where social and cultural conditions of people and their attitudes and values are ignored.[37]

Though on principle many of the non-socialist Asian governments would not dispute the need to take into account social and cultural factors in development strategy and speak of the equitable distribution of the fruits of development, yet in practice it is the GNP'ism, or the drive for increasing gross national product and augmenting foreign exchange, which determines the concrete economic policies and planning.

b) Adding Insult to Injury — the Multinationals

It is in this context that we have to understand the proliferation of multinational corporations in many Asian countries. In the years following independence many countries tried to produce for themselves the goods needed instead of importing them (import-substitution), a policy which in the course of years proved unsustainable due to various factors which are global and beyond the control of the individual countries. Subsequently, they went in for an economy oriented to the manufacturing of export-goods. Investments from foreign governments and multinational companies are being more and more encouraged in several Asian countries which are already under the grip of neo-colonialism, and they vie with each other in offering the cheapest labour force and protection against strikes, worker-problems, etc. In countries like Sri Lanka and Malaysia the so-called Free Trade Zones are offered to allure foreign investments.[38]

A host of evils has been generated by the multinationals, not only in the economic, medical and social fields but also in the environment.[39] They drain the natural resources and pollute the atmosphere with great health hazards to the population of the locality, who often are powerless to take retaliatory steps. The tragedy that struck Bhopal on the night of December 3, 1984, with a death toll of over 2500 people and many more thousands debilitated for life through gas leakage, is only a symbol of the many not so well-known but equally lethal effects of multinational establishments.

In the agricultural sector, too, the policies and practices of multinational firms have been very damaging. The so-called "agribusiness," that is, "a series of closely related activities that together enable agricultural product to flow from the market place,"[40] in which multinationals are involved, deprive the poor peasants of their land and their market. Since the multinationals conducting agribusiness cultivate on their large holdings certain crops needed for industry and force the local peasants to cultivate the same crops, they impinge upon the production of the staple food of the people, which often runs into short supply leading to the starvation of the poor masses. The goal underlying this kind of capitalist food production is not feeding people but acquiring more profit. The effects of agribusiness in traditional rural society, in the words of Susan George, "may be nothing short of catastrophic. There is already plenty of evidence to suggest that agribusiness is capable of destroying everything it touches: local employment, patterns of local food crop production, consumer tastes, even village and traditional family structures."[41]

c) The Worlds in Collaboration for One Model?

As far as the socialist ideology of development is concerned, the data are so sparse and uncertain that an unambiguous evaluation does not seem possible. Though it is doubtful whether the picture presented by the socialist countries of the situation in their respective countries correspond to reality, yet there is undoubtedly in these countries a greater sense of equitable distribution of goods, a concern to stabilize prices so as to alleviate the condition of the poor, care to improve the condition of the workers, etc. This contrasts with the growth in unemployment, escalating prices, growing disparity between the rich and the poor experienced in non-socialist countries.

The totalitarian tendencies inherent in socialism both in the political and economic fields make out that planning and execution are concentrated in the hands of a strong party bureaucracy which indulges in many kinds of political repression. In any case, the experiences of Vietnam, Kampuchea and Laos do not seem to offer any convincing alternative to capitalism.

It is interesting to note that recent trends in the relationship between socialist and capitalist countries are reflected also in Asia. In fact, the capitalist world and the socialist world are no more the two opposing blocks they are made out to be, at least as far as the problem of development is concerned. The socialist countries have opened up to the capitalist world, forced as they are to acquire modern technology and to find a market for their products.[42] Besides, the antagonism within the socialist world has driven some of them to seek alliances with capitalist countries. A typical example is China whose bamboo curtain is being lifted and whose anti-Soviet and anti-Vietnam policies and sympathetic political overtones with the United States of America are well-known. The crisis and recession in the capitalist world since 1973 had also their sinister effects on socialist countries and, ironically, the socialist countries are interested in helping capitalist countries out of this crisis.

All this shows us that there is evolving a global model of development in which both capitalist and socialist countries are involved. But the real question is whether this model of development really improves the socioeconomic condition of the people and heightens their quality of life. Both socialist and non-socialist countries of Asia are still among the poorest in the world, and all its teeming millions have more or less the same problems, the solutions for which are not yet in sight.

Though the socialist countries of Asia may not basically give up their ideology, yet in recent years there has been a growing realization among them that Marxism does not contain solutions for all their prob-

lems. We are reminded of an article to this effect in the *Peoples Daily* of December, 1984, and the economic decisions by the Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Party in October of the same year.[43] There is a search for greater clarity in the Asian context of the meaning of socialism. In his speech of June 30, 1984 on "Building Socialism with Chinese character," Den Xiaoping asked: "What is socialism? What is Marxism? Our understanding of these questions in the past was not completely clear."[44]

d) Indigenous Ideologies

We are at a time when Asia is challenged to evolve its own ideologies, which will keep its various ethnic and linguistic groups in unity and take the people on the road of an integral development in justice and equality. Capitalism was developed in modern Europe and got established in the period of industrialization at the cost of millions of human lives. Marx was a European of the 19th century, and though prophetic, was nevertheless in many ways a son of his times and soil. And yet given the economic and political power enveloping these ideologies, they exercise hegemony over the Asian nations.

It is not easy for Asia to withstand the weight of these ideologies imposed on her. Besides developing politically a non-aligned movement from the 1950's, in which many Asian countries are members, thus breaking the political strength of the capitalist world, there have been, however, efforts to develop indigenous ideologies. Some have tried to modify the two giant ideologies with indigenous characteristics and others have ventured new ones. We think of Mao Zedong's call to create a "socialism with Chinese characteristics," the Burmese socialism advocated by U Nu, Sihanouk's Royal Buddhist socialism, Sukarno's Naskom ideology, etc. Indonesia has today as its national ideology the famous *Pancasila*, or the five principles; and Malaysia has given to itself the ideology of *Rukenegra*. In India, from the time of Gandhi, in opposition to the pernicious effects of the capitalist model of development concentrated in cities, the *Sarvodya* (welfare of all) ideology, with villages as centres, has been developed. In the Gandhian vision the new society should be based on freedom, justice and fellowship, and can be reached only by sacrificial suffering. This new society is not projected as a large structure which in the way of its functioning may easily deny freedom and justice to the poor, but as small town and village communities functioning in a spirit of trusteeship and self-reliance.

e) Developing a New Political Conciousness

When the house is on fire one cannot indulge in conflicts over what should be saved. The critical Asian situation warrants that we fix on

people, their human dignity, their real welfare as the most precious thing to be salvaged. The importation of ideologies and development models, worked out from without have already cost very much in terms of human lives. The permeation of forensic ideologies has divided Asia and turned its people into warring camps. Underlying the situation of ideologies is a question of domination and manipulation. Asia has become a battlefield where outside powers play their power games at the cost of Asians. A new approach to and interpretation of reality and political action need to be developed from the concrete Asian experiences. By the imposition of ideologies people are instrumentalized for political purposes and made to serve others' vested interests, because the political consciousness of the people has not been awakened; it is still at a very low ebb. What is the responsibility of the Church and its laity in this situation? Can Christians sit back quietly while people are being used, manipulated? What role could the laity play in shaping a new political consciousness, a new political culture among the people? How do they relate to various ideologies prevailing in their respective countries? These are questions which we must realistically face if the Church is to grapple with the existing situation.

D. THE CHALLENGE OF JUSTICE AND HUMAN RIGHTS

From what we have said so far it should be clear how justice and human rights constitute a serious problem in the Asia of today. Asia is the home of 75% of the poor of the world and millions of undernourished children and unemployed youth. It would be fallacious to continue to believe that all this is a matter of simple lack of development. The number of poor, despite all development programmes and industrialization drives, has steadily increased; and the capacity of the people to buy the commodities essential for their livelihood has diminished in the past two or three decades. The Asian situation of poverty has to be understood as a situation of injustice consequent upon many factors: political, social, cultural, and at different levels, global, national and regional.

a) Jointly Exercised Oppression

At the root of the overall injustice is the subservient dependence of Asia politically and economically on the outside powers. Asia is not the subject of her own history and destiny but is made more and more the object of the penetration of the imperial and totalitarian powers, with their political and economic interests. The countries of Asia are, so to say, made to hang on to the aprons of these outside political and economic forces, which dictate to and control them in subtle ways, perpetuating a situation of neo-colonialism. There is a politically well-controlled system of world economy and trade of which the Asian nations are unequal partners. This system controls also the aids and loans given by the international organizations, like the International Monetary Fund, World Bank, etc.

These imperial powers, with their economic interests, operate in close collaboration with the local elites and dominant sections to aggravate the oppression of the masses. At the time of independence, power was practically transferred to the dominant and educated section of these countries to the advantage of the erstwhile colonial powers. The resultant situation is an unprecedented affluence for a section of Asians, in stark contrast to the widespread poverty, hunger, misery and deprivation experienced by the overwhelming majority. As long as this situation continues, injustice, far from being eradicated, will get rooted even more deeply. One is at a loss today to discover how to get out of this situation of oppression jointly brought about by internal and external forces.

This type of injustice of a great disparity in economic conditions is coupled with the many political injustices and repressions of the authoritarian Asian regimes acting often as stooges of outside powers. Gross violations of human rights and dignity are being perpetrated by the Asian regimes functioning with military might. If the socialist world is totalitarian, no less are the non-socialist countries of Asia functioning as national security states with the support of outside powers. The non-socialist countries with authoritarian regimes are not that "free world" of which capitalist countries take pride. The violation of human dignity and rights has been intensified in several Asian countries. Amnesty International, from time to time, brings out cases of political detainees subjected to inhuman tortures and condemned to death. Any criticism of the regime and its unjust policies in labeled "subversion" and camouflaged as "communist insurgency." The suppression of political rights covers almost all Asian countries, ranging from Pakistan through Sri Lanka, India, Thailand to Taiwan and Korea. Not only political opponents but also intellectuals, poets and workers court arrest and are forced to serve long years in prison for raising their voice against injustice. One thinks of people like Edicio de la Torre and Kim Chi Ha. The general oppressive mechanism is vehemently directed against the ethnic minorities, e.g., the Tamils of Sri Lanka and the Moros of Southern Philippines.

b) The Hold of the Past

There are certain traditional structures in Asian society which nurture the present situation of injustice. Overbearing traditional landlords and rapacious moneylenders suck out the little posessions and the fruits of the labour of the poor, who are thrown on their mercy in times of need only to enmesh themselves in indebtedness and bonded labour. Corruption and bribery have become part of the political and bureaucratic culture in almost all Asian countries.[45] Employment, higher education, a court verdict, have become commodities obtainable only to those who have money and who control the levers of power and their attendants.

In South Asian countries caste is a potent factor of political, economic and social discrimination and injustice.[46] The plight of over a hundred and fifty million Harijans, and the innumerable injustices heaped upon them present a sordid picture of the violation of human dignity.[47] Despite much economic and scientific progress, Japanese society continues to discriminate against its *Eta*, proving thereby how deeply ingrained in the psyche are certain traditional sources of oppression and injustice.[48]

c) Aliens in Their Own Land — the Tribals of Asia

Though injustice is widespread among Asian peoples, still it is important to take note of some of the groups and sections which are most vulnerable and easy prey to the systems of domination and injustice. Among them, we wish to name in the first place the tribals of Asia.[49] They are people who have for long centuries lived in the mountains and forests of Asia, leading a close community life and enjoying the bounteous gifts of nature. Today the rich and powerful with political support drive them all out of their natural habitat and usurp their lands, using all kinds of intrigues. Profit motives of these aggressors lead to wanton destruction and denudation of forests. Government projects of irrigation and the economic interests of multinationals unsettle entire communities of tribals who have become expendable. The tribals of Asia look back at their lost lands and wonder whether they would ever get them back. Little care has been taken to improve the plight of the tribals and to offer them opportunities for education and employment.

d) The Unsung Heroines

Another group against whom injustice is perpetrated is the poor women of Asia, the unsung heroines. The injustice begins from birth onwards, when female babies are discriminated against and given less nutritious food and medical care than male babies. Precisely for this reason, in certain countries like India, there is a growing disproportion in the number of men and women.[50] The lower social position accorded to them prevents many Asian women from being educated; there are twice as many illiterate women as men in Asia.

It is true that the role a woman plays in Asian families cannot be compared with her counterpart in the West, and as a mother she does have a certain power in family affairs, distinct from the authority of the father. Yet many of them, especially from among the poor, undergo a lot of sufferings, through wife-beating, the alcoholism of the husband, the dowry system, etc.[51] The duties of the wife and mother at home, and the necessity to work as day labourers, weigh heavily upon the women. In several regions women are forced to undertake tasks beyond their physical

capacity. In the industrial sector, the women employed in the multinational companies — in textile, garment, fibre, etc., factories — are forced to subject themselves to rigorous conditions and night work. The situation of poverty and misery drives many young Asian girls to seek work as domestic servants and as "hospitality girls" in other countries, at the price of their human dignity and self-respect.[52] A case in point is the Philippine girls working in Japan and in some West Asian countries.

A word must be said about another form of growing injustice to women's dignity in Asia — the sex-tourism. Many Asian governments, in an effort to increase foreign exchange, are deeply interested in attracting more and more tourists to their countries, and in this process unsettle many poor settlers, like the fishermen, in order to make room for "posh" hotels, beach resorts, etc.[53] The poor girls from the villages are recruited to satisfy the sexual passion of the tourists in hotels and in "massage parlours." There are many sex tours arranged in Asian cities by the tour agents of the affluent countries. Though many governments prohibit prostitution by law, they encourage it in practice for the sake of tourism. Cities, like Colombo, Bangkok, with its "pot pong" area, and Manila, have become havens of the flesh trade and tourist sexual exploitation of women.[54] What is important to note is that many girls involved in this sex-tourism are from the villages. They are brought to the cities with the promise of work and finally drawn into prostitution as their work for their own survival and that of their families.

e) Children and Youth

Yet another group which is the victim of the present systems of injustice consists of the children of Asia. Of the world's children 56% are Asians and of all the starving people of Asia 50% are children below five years of age.[55] The injustice operating at various levels of Asian society takes a heavy toll of innocent children and deprives many of them of the bare minimum of food from their very birth. Famished children with protruding stomachs and a prematurely old look are quite common sights in the villages and cities of Asia. Injustice is practiced against the poor children when they are debarred from access to elementary education, not to speak of higher education and training. In many parts of Asia children are a work force, and as such are forced to discontinue their schooling to help their families.[56] Asia has the highest percentage of child labourers.

Though not to the same extent, yet in many ways vulnerable too, are the youth who constitute a very high percentage of the Asian population. Millions of them are faced with the problem of employment and many are forced by their situation of poverty to accept to be underpaid. The situation of the rural youth is deteriorating day by day. Both the urban and the rural youth are manipulated and instrumentalized by political parties.[57]

f) Exploited Workers

Asia being traditionally an agrarian society, the bulk of the population are workers employed in farming and in other occupations offered by the rural setup. In recent years, due to rapid industrialization, the number of workers in the industrial sector has been on the increase. But the situation both in the cities and in the rural areas presents a picture of many injustices. In some countries there are no proper laws ensuring minimum wages, compensation in case of accidents, proper sanitary and hygenic conditions; and where laws exist, they are not enforced or are contravened. The landless labourers in the rural areas are exploited of their wages, and the industrial workers are often employed as "permanent casual labourers" to escape the application of labour laws and the payment of wages due to permanent workers.[58] The wages in general are so low and the inflation so high that an average Asian worker could meet only 50% of the normal needs of a family, while the profits of the big landlords and industry owners are constantly on the increase. In many families this situation forces the mother and children to work as labourers, to the detriment of their health.

In many countries labour unions do not really function, and they are so much politicized as finally to betray the real interests of the workers they are supposed to protect and defend. Some Asian governments do not allow strikes, especially against the multinational companies operating in their countries, or frame the laws in such a way as to make strikes a practical impossibility.[59] We should add a word about the injustices to which the defenceless migrant workers are subjected. The migrant workers move not only from one part of the country to another but also from country to country to seek employment.[60] In recent years people from several countries have migrated to the oil-rich West Asia. Many of them come from the lower strata of society. Poor and uneducated as they usually are, they are easily cheated by contractors in their own country and by employers in the country of migration.

g) A Force to Reckon With

Long and painful experiences of injustice and oppression have awakened many individuals and groups to this harsh situation and have kindled in them a sense of justice and a determination to fight against oppression. In the past few years many movements and groups have sprung up all over Asia in the cause of establishing justice and alleviating the miseries of the downtrodden. The nature and scope of these groups and movements differ according to the type of oppression suffered. Faced with the suppression of legitimate protest, many groups got radicalized and became militant.[61] The rural masses of Asia are no longer the same. They are today much more politicized and have acquired a sharper sense

of justice. Their cries and aspirations, articulated through various movements and groups are oriented towards an alternative model of development, with justice and peoples' participation as cardinal principles. Such movements and groups are gathering momentum and are becoming a great force to reckon with in the defence of human rights.[62]

h) The Wasteland of Dehumanization

The considerations above make one thing clear. There is a process of dehumanization at work in Asia. The political, economic, cultural and ideological domination of outside powers, in close collaboration with local oppressive forces, have turned people into *objects*, commodities. This is a great tragedy. As there is a mobility of goods and commercialization of products, so too people are transported from one place to another, separated from their kith and kin, exported to other countries and their labour commercialized. Money has become the highest value and it commands the greatest respect in society. Since those who control the economy create more needs among the masses through mass media, advertisements, etc., to keep up the market, an easy way of getting money through bribery and corruption thrives. The process of dehumanization is so pervasive that it has left no sphere of human life untouched. People cannot compete sometimes with the value of things. Is not in many of our Asian countries a car, a tape-recorder, a refrigerator more valuable than a domestic maid, or a peon? Is not this an indicator of the degree of dehumanization taking place in our societies? The relevance and validity of religion in this whole context will depend very much on the contribution it makes towards humanization. At the root of Christian faith is the mystery of God who became man and assumed thereby the whole of humanity into the sphere of the divine. In what ways should the Church and its laity respond to this challenge of Asian dehumanization from the point of faith? How do the laity relate the message of the Kingdom of God to this experience of dehumanization?

E. RELIGION IN THE TEXTURE OF THE ASIAN LIFE

a) A Perennial Fascination

Practically all the great religions of the world today can claim Asia as their homeland. The epoch of colonization was not only a time when deep prejudices were built up against the people of Asia, their way of ife and culture but also a period when the tenets of the non-semitic Asian religions were misinterpreted and misrepresented. A negative attitude to the culture of Asia was in effect a negative attitude to their religions. It is undeniable that Christian theology and practice, with rare exceptions, did play a supportive role in all this. Several factors in the secular world and developments within Christian theology have awakened the West to the fact of religious pluralism, though its implications for the life and growth of humanity are yet to be explored and accepted.

But the values of the great non-semitic Asian religions do not depend on the evaluation and approval of the West for their inner power to work. Independently of all such evaluations, Buddhism, Confucianism, Taoism, etc., have been a permanent source of spiritual energy down through millenia and centuries. There is practically no realm of life on which the vision and principles of these religions did not make a dent. These religions have been so much intertwined with the culture, art, music and politics, in short, with the spirit of the people, that they have withstood the tide of time and history with all its vicissitudes. These religions have survived the great Genghis Khan Empire, the Mogul invasion and Eastern expansion and the Chinese cultural revolution to narrate their stories still today.

Some of the basic intuitions of the religions into human life and the world and the ultimate mystery underlying all existence exercise a perennial fascination on the minds of the Asians in every generation, and supply fresh and unsuspected energies to meet the challenges of life. It is this which has given the lie to all predictions that with the advancement of materialism, secularism, science and technology, the Asian religions will disintegrate and be swept away. On the contrary, the fruits of modern technology have been availed of by the traditional religions to get even more re-invigorated and to exert their influence beyond their traditional boundaries, if the penetration by Hinduism, Buddhism, Zen and Yoga of some European and American countries with new followers is an indication.

b) Tolerant Religious and Pluralistic Cultures

If religiosity is characteristic of Asia today, as at all times, no less characteristic is the intimate link between religion and culture. This fact is

very vital for understanding the complex situation of Asia today and the challenges it presents to the mission of the Church. In Christianity one could easily draw a distinction between religion and culture, for histori- cally the religion originated in Palestine and the culture, in the main, de- rived from the Greco-Roman world.[63] With Hinduism, Confucianism and Taoism both the religion and the culture have historically the same root. Therefore, traditional religion in Asia is much more deeply rooted in the life of the people and closely interwoven with the fabric of the society. Even when Buddhism left India's shores to reach the whole of East, it was transformed by the culture, ethics and ethos of the people of the East to become part and parcel of their social, cultural and political life.

Culture in the words of Clifford Geertz "denotes an historically transmitted pattern of meanings embodied in symbols, a system of inher- ited conceptions, expressed in symbolic forms by and of which human be- ings communicate, perpetuate and develop their develop their knowledge about and attitude towards life."[64] Religion among the Asian people is part and parcel of their culture and reversely Asian culture has shaped and continues to give a distinctive character to peoples and nations.

These traditional religions in principle, and, by and large, as a matter of fact, exhibit a spirit of tolerance and peaceful co-existence. Given the intimate link between religion and culture, this tolerance in effect means acceptance of a diversity of culture too. Christianity in the West for many centuries was identified with one culture and expressed itself as Christen- dom. In the whole of the Middle Ages there never arose any serious ques- tion of religious pluralism and diversity, and for the first time, with the Reformation taking a separate course, Christendom was faced with the question of finding a framework to accommodate this diversity. The solu- tion was not in terms of tolerance and co-existence but by assigning ter- ritories for each religion — *cujus regio ejus religio*.

It was not until the process of secularization set in that these frameworks for pluralism were broken up and new foundations were laid for religious diversity, though it took many more years to make it a con- sciously accepted reality. In Asia, on the other hand, religious pluralism existed as part of life without needing a secularizing process. This latter point is very important for a proper understanding of the encounter bet- ween the traditional religions and liberal values.

c) Encounter with New Forces

Another characteristic of Asian religiosity is its tremendous capacity to adapt itself. Though there have been here and there reactionary ten- dencies vis-à-vis the modern scientific and technological outlook and lib- eral ideals, by and large Asian religions have reacted positively to the

values they contain. Through this encounter religions have been led to a fresh understanding of themselves and a re-interpretation of their tenets in keeping with the wider exigencies and the demands of the time. As for Hinduism, this process initiated in the 19th century is still underway.[65] As a result, the democratic values have been undergirded, as Radhakrishnan has tried to do, through Hindu understanding of freedom, search for truth, etc.[66] Similarly, it has been shown by modern interpreters of traditional Hindu scriptures that the way of action and involvement (*karma marga*) is a way to liberation.

All this has not remained at the level of mere religious interpretation of doctrines but has inspired social reforms, a self-critique of Hindu practices, and has lent support to social transformations. The words of the poet Tagore in his *Gitanjali* are reminiscent of the words of Isaiah, in chapter one, and an invitation to meet God in history:

> Leave this chanting and singing and telling of beads
> Whom dost thou worship in this lonely corner
> of a temple with doors all shut?
> Open thine eyes and see thy God is not before thee!
> He is there where the tiller is tilling
> the hard ground
> And where the pathmaker is breaking stones
> He is with them in sun and in shower,
> And his garment is covered with dust.
> Put off thy holy mantle and even like him
> come down
> On the dusty soil.[67]

Similar developments are evident in Buddhism too, at the historical root of which was the experience of the Gautama of the realities of human suffering. No wonder then that Buddhism has developed in relation to today's experience of injustices and inequalities a great social thrust.[68] Traditional Buddhist institutions are undergoing change and the monks and *Sangha* play important role in social development. Noteworthy in this respect are the new Buddhist ways of life heralded in Thailand by the prominent monk Buddhadasa Bhiku in response to the process of modernization.[69] In Korea the efforts to reinterpret Confucianism, Shamanism and Buddhism have given birth to popular liberative movements and *minjung* theology — peoples' theology.

Contrary to what one generally imagines, the non-semitic religions of Asia are now much more open to change, transformation, and can fruitfully encounter the new forces of history. One of the reasons for this is to be sought in the deep sense of mystery these religions cherish. The mystery of God, world and human beings and the whole universe, accord-

ing to the vision of these religions, far surpasses what any single individual or group can comprehend and express. Because of the sense of mystery, there is no rigidity but a tolerance towards other religions and an acceptance of diverse experiences, without undue attachment to fixed formulations of orthodoxy.

d) Antidote to Pragmatism and Utilitarianism

Religions and religious traditions can be enslaving as well as liberating. Religions can and do play a legitimizing role of the *status quo*, but also can be the mainspring of a revolutionary upsurge leading to transformation of the sociopolitical realities. The process of modernization gave birth to a critical attitude vis-à-vis certain traditional institutions and have made people aware of their enslaving nature. At thhe same time, the traditional Asian religions have also adopted a critical attitude to the conception, nature and scope of the development imported from without and put into practice in Asia. Against a development in terms of production, quantity, economic growth, profit, which could all undermine the quality of human life, Hinduism and Buddhism, Confucianism and Taoism offer another model of development that will make people more human, create a spirit of loving kindness and compassion (*karuna*). True development will take place when one renounces his or her cravings to accumulate goods, money and profit. The more such desires are reduced, the greater will be the development of society and the world. It is a development that forges ahead, relying on the Four Wheels of Buddhist teaching — sharing (*dana*), pleasant speech (*piyaraca*), constructive action (*attacariya*) and equality (*samanatata*).[70]

Progress, social justice and social transformation, to the benefit of all humans, can be achieved only when development is dissociated from pragmatism and utilitarianism.

The Vedas and Upanishads, but specially the Bhagavat Gita, present us with the ideal of *nishkama karma*. It is a way to detoxicate the venom inherent in our human activities, namely, the desire for fruits. *Nishkama karma* is the ideal of committing oneself to action without being attached to its fruits. Such actions are verily a sacrifice. All this may sound anathema in a society whose driving force is the profit motive and competition.

The society of today is not called upon to relinquish economic pursuits. What is imperative is that the progress of the society be based on nobler motivations than profit and egotism. *Nishkama karma* is action, involvement, decision and planning done not on the basis of the pleasure and displeasure they bring, but simply because they ought to be done.[71] Only in this way the overall welfare of the human community as well as of

the entire cosmos can be preserved. In acting, one should not betray his humanity; actions should be performed in conformity with one's *dharma*, which is not possible without being faithful to the universal *dharma*.

The *nishkama karma* is not to be viewed as a deterrent to initiatives; it is not anti-growth. It is meant to make the action free and forceful through disengagement from the fruits. It is a way to be master of one's own actions and not be their slave. Only when a person is master of his actions through disinterestedness will he or she be able also to contribute to the well-being of the world or world solidarity — *lokasamgraha*.

According to Gita, every action performed in the spirit of detachment from its fruits and disinterestedness (*a-sakta*) is a sacrifice or *yajna*. And it is this action-sacrifice which will help to uphold the whole world and universe in harmony. On the other hand, any activity which is not sacrifice, therefore not done in the spirit of freedom from its fruits, harms the welfare of all, including the doer. In this sense, Gita has deepened the Vedic conception of sacrifice considered as an exterior ritual action for sustaining the universe.

The way the Asian religions today try to meet the challenges of development is by combining economic and social growth with a vision "from within" of reality. Human progress cannot take place where one leaves aside the religious dimension, for the concern with the ultimate realities, or the interior of the reality, is that which should direct the goal of development as the welfare, growth of all and not of a few. We could draw a certain parallel between development in the biological sphere and in the human sphere. As biological evolution surges forward through the impulse of nature to reach its climax in the human, so too the further evolution of the human in freedom, fellowship, justice, equality and participation can take place only when the religion, the "spirit" within, is operative in the various realisms of human life.[72]

e) Religion and Nationalist Movements

The perennial power of religions in Asian life is exemplified by the great inspirational role they played in the various nationalist and independent movements of Asia.[73] While in the West the nationalist movements came into conflict with religion and entered into alliance with secular movements, in Asia they have been sustained by religious values and ideas. In Burma Buddhist monks (*pongyis*) played an important role in support of U Nu's campaign of 1960,[74] and in Indonesia Islamic revivalism coincided with the beginning of the nationalist movement. As

for India, though the Indian National Congress, which was started in 1885, had at its inception a secular ideology for its inspiration, it remained a very modest and quite insignificant one until Hindu religious values, ideals and symbols were associated with it to make it really a nationwide movement and power with a strong popular base. In keeping with their long tradition Buddhist monks of Sri Lanka even today seem to determine very much the political destiny of the country. They were a strong force behind the overthrow of the Kotelwala regime, and young monks were very much in the picture in the insurrection of 1975.[75] One cannot forget the leading role played by Islam in the anti-Sukarno movement of 1965-1967. In Vietnam during the Diem regime the bonzes were in the forefront of the political arena and were the determining force in the overthrow of Diem's government in 1963.

f) The Crescent on the Asian Horizon — The Growing Power of Islam

The close relationship between politics and religion, which is characteristic of Asia, is exemplified very clearly in the instance of Islam. Today we assist at a world-wide resurgence of Islam and its great political power.[76] The reasons for this are many, and they range from past history to the present economic control of oil resources. We can list among the reasons the resentment harboured from the time of the Crusades against the West, reaction to Western expansionism, reaction to Zionism supported by the rich and powerful nations. The general and world-wide resurgence of Islam in the second half of this century has its echo in the political and social life of the Asian nations where Muslims are a significant group.

Islam in the Asian setting of today is a very potent factor, and no one can afford to disregard it. In Indonesia Muslims constitute an overwhelming majority, though as to the exact percentage there is dispute between the official figure and the reality. In Malaysia most of the Malays belong to Islam and it gives them also, so to say, an ethnic identity. Pakistan and Bangladesh are Islamic states with 80 million and 73 million Muslims each, that is 96.8% and 85.9% respectively of the total population of the countries. The Muslim presence in India too is very significant. There are as many Muslims in India as in the entire Pakistan, that is, about 11.6% of the Indian population. In Thailand and on the Mindanao island of the Philippines Islam is a minority but very active group of Muslims fight for their rights in these two countries with a predominatedly Buddhist and Roman Catholic population.

Anyone who thinks of Islam as a religion in the Western meaning of religion would be mistaken. Islam is a comprehensive way of life and it is organically and intrinsically related to politics. There is a whole Islamic conception of state, a legal system, social living and economic pursuits, education, etc. Therefore, it is understandable why Islam refuses to be consigned to a private realm as a religion or to coexist with a secular conception of the world.[77] It is interesting to note in this connection how the "secular" ideal of the Indian constitution, understood as non-discriminatory policies towards religions, was accepted by the Muslim community in terms of a religious interpretation of the same, namely, that it is a "covenant" among Muslims and non-Muslims for the sake of peace and coexistence.[78]

The world-wide staunch Islamic opposition to Western secularistic tendencies and to the decline of public morals (night clubs, bars, massage parlours, sexual promiscuity, obscene motion pictures, etc.) has found expression also in many Asian states where Islamic radical groups exercise pressure on the governments to remedy the situation.[79] According to the testimony of a Muslim scholar,

> secularism is a very sensitive issue to the Muslims. The present educational system tends to perpetuate secular values. All branches of knowledge are for the Muslims religious in nature. The real dilemma for the Muslim is that we cannot separate religion from other subjects. The dualistic view of life — sacred and secular — is a problem for the Muslims, because the Islamic world view embraces all of life.[80]

That is why the Muslims want also schools (*madrasah*) run in the Islamic tradition and the application of *shariah*, Islamic laws, in the countries where they are the majority; and where they are a minority, they want these laws and traditions to be applied at least to the Muslim community. Islamic religious ideals are spread by the *dak'wah* missionary movement, and there are also several militant groups who react violently when other religions or the state impinge upon the rights and distinctive Islamic identity. We can name the theocratic organization of *Darul'l-Islam* in Indonesia, *Angkatan Jihad* (Holy War League) *Pertubuhan Angkatan Sabillulah* (organization of Holy Fighters) of Malaysia, *Jamat-e-Islami* in Pakistan and India. The upsurge of these groups often lead to bloody communal tensions and conflicts.

While mentioning all this, we should not forget that in certain countries Islam plays a unificatory role, holding together various cultures and peoples. A typical example is Pakistan where five different groups — Sarhad, Punjab, Baluchistan, Sind and the immigrants from India — are held together by a common Islamic identity.[81] In such states Islam also be-

comes a political goal. We should note further that, despite the traditional theocratic thrust of Islam in South and South East Asia, Islam has tried to accommodate itself to the political and cultural situation of the region. There are several groups which give a modern and more open interpretation to Islam, without renouncing its central tenets and ideals. In the countries where Muslims are the majority, though the whole state and public life are run with a Islamic thrust and often conflicts between the state and other religious minorities occur, still the intimate link between political life and religion is manifest in the fact that the same governments sometime support other religions in celebrating their religious functions.

g) The Challenge of a Saint in Politics

How politics should be permeated by religious and ethical values if it is really to serve the public good can be seen in the views and way of life of Gandhi. The intimate link between religion and political practice in the life of Gandhi was in keeping with the Asian tradition, which does not vivisect the life and its organic unity into different compartments. It is important to note that, far from making him shy away from politics, it was precisely his deep religiosity which led him into politics. He could declare out of his personal experience: "I can say without the slightest hesitation and yet in all humility, that those who say that religion has nothing to do with politics do not know what religion means."[82]

The religion which permeated the whole political life and career of Gandhi was not a mere sectarian religion. It was not as a Hindu that he entered the political arena; this would have already introduced a communal element and could have become a source of division and a detriment to public good. The political realm is not aseptic to religion and religious realities. Since politics concerns the welfare of man, and the welfare of the people and nations, and indeed determines very much the lives of millions of people, no religiously committed person can remain indifferent to it. Gandhi saw the end and criterion of religiosity in ethics and in morality. The organizing and governance of the interrelationship of a group through politics in order to serve the public good would need to be guided by ethical and moral principles bound up with the religious experience of human beings.

For Gandhi the substance and core of morality was truth. Though the ultimate truth remains beyond our attainment as an ideal towards which we should move, we participate in truth when we act morally and ethically in a correct way in every sphere of life. Therefore, the political activity and involvement which are permeated by morality are a way of experiencing truth, of growing individually and collectively. In a world which in all realms, and particularly in politics, is driven by achievement and success, in the process of which the whole question of means is disregarded,

Gandhi underscored the importance of means in political activity. Politics can be redeemed only if we are ready to follow the right means for which we are responsible and which lie in our power. By following *ahimsa* (non-violence) and the goal of *satyagraha* (truth) in politics, he set a high standard in the political field. If people follow the right means in political action, the end will take care of itself. He often compared the means and end in politics to the seed and tree. The means contain in themselves the end, or in other words, the means is the goal in its making. "They say means are after all means. I would say means are after all everything. As the means so the end ... Realization of the goal is in exact proportion to that of the means. This is a proposition that admits no exception."[83]

The kind of resolute and uncompromising political action through *ahimsa* and *satyagraha*, no wonder, became for him a religious experience, just as religion drove him to enter into politicas. Rightly then did C.F. Andrews remark, "Gandhi became a saint in politics." Politics was for him a mission, the path of whose realization is also the way to self-realization. The Sermon on the Mount which he loved so much, the Bhagavad Gita, Koran, etc. were not for him teachings without direct relevance on politics; he showed how they could be brought to bear upon politics for the public good.[84]

The religious and spiritual roots of politics made Gandhi understand even an important institution like democracy in a different way from that of the secular and liberal tradition. Democracy is not merely an affirmation of humanism, the liberty of all. The deeper reason for democracy lies in the fact that the perception and practice of truth which should be the goal of politics is not the possession of one single individual or group in politics.[85] No one individual or group in politics has the right to impose his/her perception of truth on others. The will of all must be taken into account, and democracy serves this goal.

h) The Ambivalent Role of Religion

The considerations above show the pervasive influence of religions in Asian societies, politics, culture etc. The point to note here is that religions can be ambivalent as regards their influence; they can be a very strong force of legitimation of the situation of oppression, as well as a powerful force for change and transformation. There is also another ambivalence. Religions can exercise a critique on the ways politics, economy and society operate, and inspire these with ethical and moral ideals. But they can also be made into political tools to suppress the poor, the weak and minority groups.

The question today is whether these Asian religions, which once played an important part in the nationalistic movements leading to inde-

pendence, could play today a similar role in liberating the poor and oppressed, the weak and the minorities, and in defending human dignity and rights. This challenge applies to Christianity as well. Because they are involved in public and societal life, this challenge is to be met especially by the Christian laity. Can the laity manifest the prophetic power of their faith in today's Asian situation?

PART II: TOWARDS MEETING THE CHALLENGES

From what we have said up to now, it should be clear with what pressing problems and challenges the Asian continent is faced. We can single out certain areas.

1. There is a whole cluster of problems centred on the question of *power* and its abuse experienced under dictatorial and authoritarian regimes, militarization, etc. This wielding of power is extending its tentacles from top to bottom in political, economic and cultural spheres, supported by feudal and semi-feudal systems.

2. The whole process of *modernization*, in which the traditional Asian society and culture react to the "new" realities, and in this process produce a certain crisis of values the way of life, etc. As with all crises, this too is a challenge to create something better, by taking what is best in the "new." The basic challenge is not how we are going to bring development *into* Asia but how we can pave the way for a truly *Asian development*.

3. A further challenge is posed by *conflicting conceptions and ideologies*, which determine how and along what lines development should take place. Little has been achieved in terms of change in the quality of life and welfare of all. In the name of development the profit motive and egoism continue to squeeze out of the poor their lands and their labour and leave them even poorer.

4. There is another series of challenges deriving from the situation of *inequality* in which some continue to profit by the current economic system, to enrich themselves with wealth and luxury goods, while the overwhelming majority of the Asians are consigned to live below the poverty line, and eke out a miserable existence in the absence of a basic minimum to meet the necessities of life. The injustice of this situation weighs heavily on the weakest sections — women, children labourers, tribals, etc.

5. Finally, the *Asian religions*, while containing many enslaving elements, do nevertheless possess valuable liberative forces. They wield tremendous power over the life of Asians. Any change in the present order of things has to take into account the religions and the religiosity of the Asian masses.

How seriously do the Church and its laity take these problems and questions into consideration in understanding their mission and vocation? Are the Church and its laity really prepared to grapple with these issues? In the face of all these challenges what role can they play today? We do not pretend to provide answers or ready-made solutions to these questions. The following are a few reflections and some suggestions offered towards meeting the present Asian situation.

A. A DECLERICALIZED ASIAN CHURCH

In the first place we musts admit that there are certain hurdles and obstacles which impede the Church as a whole, and its laity in particular, from coping with the Asian situation and its challenges.

a) The Scars of the Past

The missionary expansion of colonial times has left deep marks on the vision and understanding of the task of evangelization and on the shape of the Church in Asia. It is understandable that some feel uncomfortable when we speak about the colonial times. But we cannot conceal the facts. The purpose of alluding to these facts is not to offend anyone but only to understand better the present plight of the Church in Asia and its conditionings. Historically there may not be much sense in speaking about Asian local Churches that sprouted from the word of God on Asian soil. The shape of the Church, its organization, laws, regulation, etc., were by and large transported from the West. What we should particularly note is that among other things the rift between the clergy and the laity which was becoming wider in Europe was also transferred to various parts of Asia and it has persisted until today. The dominant role played by clergy and religious in the times of missionary expansion has continued today, even when local Churches are established. The organization and conduct of Christian life is for all practical purposes in the hands of the clergy.[86]

Two important factors need to be singled out which led to a widening of the gap between clergy and laity and to reinforcing clerical domination. First of all, the period missionary expansion in Asia coincided with the time of the Counter Reformation. The reformers, among other things, questioned seriously the distinction between clergy and laity, and, as a reaction to it, the Catholic anti-Reformation underscored the distinction between clergy and laity, and highlighted the privileges and prerogatives which marked the clergy off from the simple laity. Secondly, mission expansion in Asia was also the period when strong anti-clericalism, secularization and laicism emerged in Europe, particularly starting from the Enlightenment and the French Revolution (17th-18th centuries).[87] The political vicissitudes, in which the Church was locked with secular

powers during this period, the power conflicts and the fear of laicism, led to greater clericalization of the Church. Under these circumstances, facing the problems and challenges of the sociopolitical realm of the time became the work of the institutional Church, which in practice came to be identified with the clergy. The laity on their part needed a special mandate from the hierarchy to act in the world and in the secular realm. The whole situation of conflicts, in which the Christianity of Europe found itself, was mirrored in the attitudes, organizations and way of life of the Asian missionary Churches.

b) Disciples of Jesus in Asia

Today, therefore, when we speak about the challenges to the laity, we should not forget the fact that we are very much in the grip of the past. We start from a Church which is already very much clerically dominated. The cleric was and is still the symbol and embodiment of the Church in Asia, and the Church itself is considered present where the priest is. The clerical domination has certainly affected very much the nature of the work of evangelization, in that only those aspects have been attended to which were more or less of interest to the clergy, with the result that many areas of human life in its complexity have been left out of consideration in the work of evangelization. Besides, as in the times of colonial and missionary expansion, it is the clergy and the religious who continue to be the agents of evangelization work and interpreters of its meaning.

All this explains why the presence and action of the Church in Asia has been and still continues to be basically an *institutional* presence.[88] Now, as long as the presence of the Church is institutional, with clerical domination, the Church is bound to be seen by the rest of Asians as a heritage of the colonial times.

For the Church to be able to encounter the challenges of the complex Asian situation, the first and foremost prerequisite is that it become truly declericalized. By declericalization is not meant that the ordained ministries should be abolished, so as to make everyone's role the same. What is meant is that the social status, i.e., the character of the ordained minister as a clerical, social class, domineering over others through the legitimization of faith, must come to an end. This does not preclude a legitimate diversity of ministries.

In other words, the first demand which the Asian challenges make on the Church in Asia is that it become truly a community, a community of the disciples of Jesus rooted in the soil. Only such a community can be open to the multifaceted realities of the present Asian experience, perceive in the present moment the action of God who continues to act in history, and respond to the situation from the dynamism of faith. The

primary preoccupation of this community is not the distinction of clergy and laity, not the domination of one group over the other, but a common mission in Asia to which all believers are called.

B. SENSE OF THE FAITHFUL IN ASIAN PUBLIC LIFE

a) Faith and Concrete Options

It is fundamental that we start from two unassailable facts: 1) God acts today in the history of Asia and its peoples; he is present and operative in the longings and aspirations, pains and groanings of a major portion of humanity that occupies this continent. 2) The Christian believers who try to answer God's speaking and call in and through history are led by the sense of faith.[89] It should be pointed out that the sense of faith is not merely a question of the believers' inherent ability (which itself is a gift of the same Spirit who evokes faith) to express their consent as regards the orthodoxy of the articles of faith, independent of all concrete situations. The sense of faith is manifest above all in the capacity to express from within the lived experience and concrete situations the genuiness of one's faith (or the community's faith) in terms of life, definite choices and actions that are at once faithful to the way of Jesus and transformative of the community. For the Christians in Asia growth in faith should happen through the constant exercise of this sense of faith in relation to life in Asia and its challenges.

Faith is the work of the Spirit who operates in man, eliciting his response and surrender to God.[90] This faith should find its embodiment in concrete deeds and options, in which too the Spirit is at work. When a community of believers wants to give expression to its faith in the political and social realms, as warranted by the various challenges, when it discerns the attitudes and actions to adopt, there is a dialogue taking place between the Spirit and the community, and this should be respected. As a fruit of the discernment, the faithful come out with solutions inspired by faith. The sense of faith sustained by the Spirit is at work also in concrete choices, options and decisions when the community discerns (the sense of the faithful). Therefore, imposing imported and ready-made solutions, or acting on the basis of preconceived and biased ideological positions, whether left or right, amount to stifling the dialogue of life of the people with the Spirit.

b) Pluralism in Practice

The process of discernment entails pluralism in principle and in practice. This is an important requirement today for effective lay involvement. Pluralism is not simply a theoretical admission of diversity of opinions and views. What is meant is primarily the possibility of diverse ways

of being Christian and responding to the vital issues steming from concrete experiences. It should be possible that in similar circumstances Christian communities could act differently and arrive at solutions which are different, and yet all of them flowing from the sense of faith. The real validity of the decisions and actions have to be derived through dialogue in the community and discernment of God's work in the present history.

It is by giving expression to the sense of faith in the present historical, sociopolitical and religiocultural context that Christian believers in Asia will evolve into authentic local Churches. Being a local Church evidently is not simply a matter of the Church being present in new territories with the same institutional and hierarchical means and with the faithful professing the same formulae of faith. Nor is it a matter of adopting, accommodating or "inculturating" in new territories the same formulae of faith, worship and other means. The local Church is the creation of the Spirit, who by evoking in the hearts of believers the sense of faith which impels them to respond to the challenges of a particular situation and among a people, constitutes them as the instrument of God's Kingdom. In other words, local Churches emerge when believers in Asia respond to their historical vocation and discharge their mission.

Now, the role of the laity has to be seen in the context of the *local* Church, the foundations for which have been laid by Vatican II. When future generations look back at Vatican II and try to assess it against the background of the whole history of Christianity, probably the most striking thing about this council will be the transition it has managed to effect from a basically European Christianity to a world-wide Church. The permanent significance of Vatican II consists in the fact that through its impulse the Church has begun to exist, as a matter of fact, as a world Church for the first time, a significance that can be compared perhaps only with what happened only once before, namely, when the Church, from its immediate Judeo-Christian surroundings and context, became an ecumenical Church by reaching out to the Gentiles.[91]

c) How Secular is the 'Secular' in Asia?

Asia, after centuries of colonization, is today at the threshold of a new era with tremendous challenges ahead. It is also the time for the Asian Churches to work towards a new era of Christian presence and involvement.[92] What the role is of the laity in these Asian Churches cannot be outlined from a general and ready-made definition of who is a layman. For example, Vatican II sees the layman's specific place and vocation in the secular realm. But it is undeniable that this kind of understanding has been very much linked with the experience of Christianity in the West. After some centuries of conflict with the political powers, during which the sociopolitical and cultural functions of the Church were very much

undermined while secular forces gathered momentum and became independent of the Church's traditional control, a rupture between the secular realm and the ambit of the Church's activities came to be established. It was the merit of Vatican II to have affirmed the autonomy of the world and the independence of secular realities from the traditional control of the Church. And yet the Church and the world are intimately linked. It is against this background that the laity were assigned the role of involvement in the secular realm. This helped clearly to demarcate the roles of the clergy and the laity, and also to ward off the danger of integralism, namely, the interference of the clergy in politics.[93] In this whole context Vatican II also recuperated, belatedly though, some of the ideals of the liberal traditions and reconciled them with the Church in a new synthesis.

For Asia and its history the whole concept of secular in contradistinction to sacred or religious is quite alien. Earlier we remarked how in Asia there has always been and even today persists an osmosis between the religious, political, cultural and social realms. They are all part of an inseparable whole. Further, we should note that, while in the West the question of the place of the laity is centered around who in the Church is called through specific vocation to act in the secular field, in Asia the central question is how can the laity living as a small minority in the midst of a vast ocean of Asian humanity professing different faiths and ideologies fulfil his or her Christian vocation and mission. Because of the whole range of historical background, the place of the laity is negatively defined as non-clergy, as non-religious, and therefore from an intra-ecclesial perspective. The role of the laity in Asia has to be seen starting from the tremendous problems and challenges which provoke a response of faith from the small minority of Christian believers. The internal question of the clergy versus laity should not be allowed to dominate the scene but should lapse into the background in front of God's call in Asia today.

d) A Lamp under the Bushel?

We do not want thereby to ignore or cover up certain serious problems existing in Asian Churches in the clergy-laity relationship. Our contention is that these questions should be tackled not independently but in the light of the mission and challenges facing the Church at the micro- and macro-level in Asia. Often clergy-laity conflicts, as this can be verified in history, is a sign of the loss of the sense of mission. The Churches in Asia today cannot continue to be basically an institutional and clerically-dominated Church, while making it clear to the laity that they have to concern themselves with the secular realm. The social, political, cultural and religious realities of Asia claim the attention of the whole Church as a community of believers. Communion, dialogue, participation and a sharing of responsibility in a spirit of love and freedom among all the believers, clergy, religious and laity, are then a necessity which the evangelizing

mission imposes itself on all the local Churches of Asia. There are evidently various ministries in the Church, ordained and non-ordained. By the fact that a believer is ordained he does not renounce his basic Christian vocation of responding to situations of injustice, whose roots cut across the political, social and economic fields. It is quite another thing if an ordained minister representing, as today, the institutional Church makes use of his position to drag the whole community to his political options, without this having undergone a process of discernment with the community.

In the Asian Churches today, given the historical antecedent of clericalism, every interference of the clergy representing the institutional Church in even manifestly unjust things happening in political and social realms will be interpreted as a perpetuation of colonial times. On the other hand, if the Churches in Asia act as true communities of faith rooted in the soil and without clerical domination, with each believer respecting the charism of others (in which is included also the charism of leadership of the community), then their actions can be very effective, be transforming, and can become a true proclamation of the Gospel.

In the face of gross injustices and flagrant violations of human rights and oppression of the poor, the Christian faith of the laity should express itself in the public life of the locality, region or country. Historically, the privatization of faith has been a consequence of clericalism in the Church.[94] Privatization of faith in Asia would amount to a betrayal of Jesus's Good News to the poor. Privatization in effect meant also the dissociation of ethics and morality from public life, absence of justice and fairness in public dealings. This is something very regretable. The global context indicates the nefarious effects of this dissociation. Far from being a private affair, Christian faith in Asia should be alive right in the midst of the life of the society. We saw how in the Asian traditions religion is indissociably linked to political, social and economic life. Privatizing Christian faith and reducing it to ritual acts would be putting the light under the bushel and allowing the powers and principalities of darkness to preside over the destinies of people.

e) Facing the Beast of Power

For the laity to be faithful to their baptismal calling and to announce the Good News to the poor in the present context of Asia would entail their facing the powers and principalities in their various manifestations.[95] What is required of them is not submissiveness and resignation. It is certainly not Christian to reconcile the evil and the good. Far from compromising with the evil, the laity are to confront it. We have the example of the early Christian community. Though politically and socially the Christians were powerless, they, however, resisted courageously the

great Roman Empire and refused to worship the Emperor.[96] The sheer powerlessness of the group of disciples who followed the suffering of the crucified Master marked also their victory over the Roman state, which according to the Book of Revelation had become through its ruthless power the servant of the dragon and a beast.

A prophetic resistance to the powers of darkness, to all forms of oppression and domination, exploitation and injustice, is a fundamental Christian responsibility flowing from the reality of baptism.[97] Precisely because various forms of iniquitous powers hold sway over the lives of the Asian masses today, we need Churches that will renounce power and divest themselves of all pomp and pageantry. The laity can develop their prophetic role today only if they act as believers of a servant Church, a Church that is engaged in confronting the powers that be as a powerless Church with the powerless Asian masses, sharing their suffering and pain, sorrow and anguish. It is all, so to say, a "package deal." The role of the Asian laity vis-à-vis the Asian challenges is not something independent of the shape of the Church; it is determined by whether the Asian Churches are truly servant and prophetic communities. It is the same demand of Christian prophetic action and witness in the face of Asian challenges that calls for a Church in which power does not become the monopoly of a few — bishops, priests and religious, but that there be genuine communities based on the reality of communion and fellowship and guided by dialogue and participation.

There will be no room for undue clerical domination if the leaders of the Church in Asia, its priests and religious, follow the Asian heritage. The place of a spiritual leader in Asian tradition is not justified by simply invoking the formal authority and juridical power invested in him. The leadership has to be authenticated by the moral authority of the person, the sign of which is precisely detachment from power in the spirit of true renunciation. This spiritual leadership is required of the bishops and priests of Asia at a time when there is the whole challenge of power and its abuse to be faced in the society.

When there is clerical domination and authoritarianism in the Church, and when the sense of participation, dialogue, legitimate freedom, respect for the rights of others and their charisms are absent from its life, it will tend covertly or overtly to ally itself with authoritarian regimes and powers. The participation of the laity in the life and mission of the Church and the recognition of the charisms and rights of the laity would appear then as essential prerequisites for the local Churches in Asia to play their prophetic task of confronting the powers afflicting the people.

C. A Deaf Ear to the Cry of the Poor?

It is urgent that the laity stand up for justice, freedom and truth in the public life of their nations. They ought to resist and oppose unjust laws and ordinances, intrigues and manipulations, bribery and corruption victimizing the people, especially the poor. The distinction between religion and secular life worked out in the West has been a subtle way of banishing justice from the public life. This has also made inroads into the Asian societies. As Asians we cannot subscribe to these dangerous conceptions.

a) Beyond Legitimation and Compromise

One of the reasons often adduced to support not being critical vis-à-vis unjust government policies and measures is that Christians being a minority cannot afford to enter into confrontation with the governments. Such arguments were widely heard during the Emergency Rule in India from 1975 to 1977, when serious violations of human rights occurred in the country.[98] It is true that the Church cannot afford such confrontation if it wants to continue as an institution and preserve its institutional interests.

The institutional Church with its rigid structures and clerical domination is exposed to becoming a legitimizing factor of the status quo and hence there is the need of the initiatives of the laity living in the world to bring to bear upon the affairs of their countries the prophetic criticism flowing from their faith. The will to bring all the initiatives of the laity under the control of the institutional Church, and worse still, if this will is animated by some vested interest, could deprive the laity of the necessary and legitimate freedom which the exercise of their prophetic role requires today.

The credibility of the Church should derive from its unflinching commitment to the issue of justice and human rights.[99] That the minority situation need not be a motive for compromises and lack of resolute actions is proved by the case of Christianity in South Korea. Though only an insignificant minority of 4.5% of the total population of the country, the clear stand of the Church on many issues of justice, upholding the rights of workers and the persecution suffered under the Park regime–and now being continued under the new government — have all catapulted the Korean Church to the centre of national life as the guardian of justice, defender of the poor and the oppressed. Young men and women, clergy and religious have suffered for righteousness' sake, been harassed and imprisioned. In Korea we have also the case of a bishop who served a prison sentence for the cause of justice. More than any other Church in the Asian continent, the Korean Church has merited the greatest credibility among its countrymen and women, primarily because of its clear stand against

injustice and the abuse of power.[100] It may not be an insignificant fact in this connection that the Church in Korea does not trace back its origin, unlike many other Churches, to the time of colonial expansion, or to the clergy and religious preaching Christianity, but to a group of laity who by their word, life and witness transmitted the faith to the people of that country.

b) The Rights of the Poor

The preferential option for the poor is not only to be practised by clergy and religious but by the laity as well. Such a preferential option for the poor by the laity in public life is bound to have a great impact for social transformation. This option should take on the concrete form of the defence of their human rights. Speaking of human rights, we should distinguish two trends. First of all there is an understanding of human rights which originates from the liberal tradition with its focus on civil liberties, the right to speak, to move about, to form associations, etc. There is another understanding of human rights which is very close to the Bible and very significant for us in Asia.[101] According to it, human rights are the rights of the poor to have food, shelter, medical care and other amenities of life.[102]

The Asian scene presents a situation in which both these forms of human rights are suppressed. Under authoritarian regimes political freedom is curbed and the participation of the people in the political process is denied. So too, through an unjust system of economy and other social factors, the rights of the poor are violated. We should note that these two are very closely interlinked. Liberating the poor and oppressed from their shackles would call also for action in defence of civil liberties and, reversely, a defence of civil liberties will have its echo also in the matter of the rights of the poor. Be that as it may, as a matter of strategy it is important for the Church and its laity to focus attention on the rights of the poor and in this context also enter into the field of civil liberties.

It is also important that the spirit of what is known as human rights be practiced in the Asian way. From the Asian point of view human rights is not a question of humanism but is part of the religious quest. Human rights would correspond to the Asian thinking on *dharma* or *dhamma* (righteousness) or the Tao (The Way) advocated by the religions. The dignity and rights of human persons and the well-being of the poor are guaranteed when the *dharma* is maintained, for in the dharmic order everything must have its proper place. The deprivation of human rights and dignity is a serious disturbance of the dharmic order and therefore a reordering of society is called for. Seen in this way, the whole question of human dignity and rights will have deeper cultural and religious roots.

We saw that one of the characteristic of the Asian situation is the presence of minority groups who are powerless and marginalized, such as the Harijans, tribals, the Eta, etc. Now, it is these groups, their dignity and human rights that should become special object of concern on the part of the Christian laity. The institutional presence of the Church with its in-built clerical domination tends to adopt the culture of the dominant and elite section in the society, though it may also be working for the poor through charitable institutions. A preferential option for the poor should be also an option for the culture of the poor, the weak and powerless groups.

c) Starting from Experience

How are the laity to be trained for the great tasks ahead? Commitment to the poor may not come about simply by conducting training programmes for the laity or by making them acquainted with the social teachings of the Church. Though it is not impossible, it is generally rare that a person engages in the upliftment of the poor and the protection of their rights on the basis of notional knowledge and theological motivations about justice.[103] In that sense, commitment to the poor is an experience similar to the God-experience, which appeals to the whole person, his or her heart, mind, emotions, etc., and is not a mere theoretical knowledge. Therefore, in motivating the laity one should pay attention to training them to reflect on their experiences, on the events and happenings in society and the world around them. The role experience can play in transforming a person, calling for conversion and commitment, can be clearly seen in the life of Gandhi. If he turned his back on his youthful dream of becoming the perfect English gentleman and became a half-naked fakir constantly seeing God in the suffering masses and defending their right, this all goes back to almost a root experience when on the night of April 4, 1894, he was thrown out of a first-class compartment, humiliated and left in the cold at the Maritzburg railway station in South Africa, just because he was an Indian.

D. INTERRELIGIOUS INVOLVEMENT

a) A Turning Point

Ours is a very significant period in the entire history of Christianity insofar as the encounter with other religions is concerned. There have been evidently encounters of Christianity with the Greco-Roman and the Franco-Germanic religions. These religions, to employ a distinction made by Aloysius Pieris, are "cosmic" religions, namely, related to the experience of the forces of nature and the spirits operating in the world.[104] Christianity belongs to the "meta-cosmic" religions, namely, religions which lead men to a salvation beyond the cosmic, to be reached through

love, knowledge and committed action, with varying emphasis on each of these. Christianity in encounter with the cosmic religions could absorb them within its own fold since its own symbol systems and sacraments are also related to cosmic and material elements. During the missionary expansion in Asian lands, unlike the period of mission expansion in Europe, Christianity could not absorb these into its own framework precisely because these religions — Hinduism, Buddhism, Taoism, etc., are meta-cosmic religions like Christianity itself.

After many centuries of neglect and denigration of Asian religions, Christianity has entered into a period of dialogue. We should note that this dialogue is difficult, difficult not only because of many years of suspicion and estrangement but also because we do not have any paradigms from past history for this new venture. Peter and Paul, John and Mark, did not know the Hindu, Buddhist and Taoist religious traditions and scriptures; nor were the fathers of the Church familiar with the experiences of these great religious traditions of humanity. Their knowledge and evaluation of religions were limited to those of the Mediterranean and European world. That is why the present period of Christianity's encounter with other great Asian religious traditions represents a very significant turning point.[105]

b) From Religions to Peoples

Following the teachings of Vatican II and the positive evaluation of other religious experiences, there have been a spurt of initiatives in inter-religious dialogue in several Asian countries. Now, dialogue with other religions has been by and large done by the clergy and the religious and there seems to be little participation of the laity, the majority of whom are still left with those attitudes towards non-Christian religions that prevailed in 16th and 17th centuries. Further, the dialogue promoted by the clergy and the religious tends to centre around the doctrinal and ritual aspects of these religions.

The tremendous force which these religions represent in the life of Asia, and their capacity to effect changes in the prevailing situation, call for a dialogue not only among religions but among peoples of various religious traditions. Two reasons could be adduced in favour of this. First of all, Asian religions are not a mere set of doctrines, a code of morality or a series of ritual actions. Religions are something embodied in the spirit of the people, their culture, their way of life. In fact the various -isms with which these realities have been labelled — Hinduism, Buddhism, Taoism, etc. — are of a relatively recent origin and coined by Westerners in the 19th century. Secondly, what affects the people is not the difference in doctrines and rituals, to which they are accustomed as a legitimate diversity, but the way they relate to each other in day-to-day life, and the

way each religious group asserts its power in the socioeconomic and political fields. The slaughter of a cow near a Hindu temple or the playing of music near a Mosque can cause riots and brutal killings. It has been shown by many studies that economic disparities and social inequalities lie at the root of religious tensions and clashes.[106]

It is here that the laity have a great role to play in creating understanding among members of various religions and entering into a dialogue of life. They should not only promote harmony in day-to-day life but also jointly collaborate with followers of other faiths in facing the challenges posed by the Asian situation at the macro- and micro-levels.

c) A Common Project

The entire humanity has the same origin and the same goal, and therefore the Christian laity are fellow pilgrims with people of other religions towards truth, fulness of life, the Kingdom of God. This ultimate goal and the spirit of search, coupled with the recognition of the limitations of one's own traditions, should foster common initiatives and projects. The building-up of a human community in equality, justice and freedom is a concern which the laity can share with people of other religions. Life is a network of human relations and to the extent the Christian laity contribute in day-to-day living to enhance life, they bear witness to God, the source of all life. Given the gross violation of human rights and oppression of various kinds under which the poor suffer, the Christian laity, together with Hindus, Buddhists, Taoists, Confucianists and others can direct their joint attention and initatives to these issues.

Fruitful dialogue has to take place in the present political, and social texture of Asia. As Pope John Paul observed in his address at the inter-religious prayer service held in Madras during his visit of February, 1986:

> the abolition of inhuman living conditions is an authentic spiritual victory ... The task of bettering the world could not be achieved without the united efforts of both believers and non-believers. This could not be done without a sincere and prudent dialogue as dialogue is a powerful means of collaboration between peoples in eradicating evil from human life, from the life of the community.[107]

The nature and scope of dialogue cannot be fixed by religious experts, and that is why the role of the laity becomes indispensable. Through the active practice of dialogue our theological understanding and vision will deepen. Further, it is in actually facing together and not so much talking about it that the followers of various faiths in Asia will discover the complementarity of each religion. As in a community there is diversity of charisms and services, so too the various religions in Asia

have their own specific and inalienable contribution to make to the welfare and progress of the human family.[108] Therefore, in dialoguing with others the Christian laity have to bring out the characteristic love of neighbour, its incarnational aspect, the social dimension of religious faith, the dignity of each human person, etc. At the same time they could learn from the followers of other religions and grow deeply as human beings and as Christians, for whom nothing that is good and beautiful should be alien.

All this calls for greater openness towards the followers of other religions and much more serious preparation on the part of the laity. It is regretable that bishops, priests and religious often keep the laity in the dark and deprive them — often for fear of scandalizing them — of the knowledge about other religions and the positive approach given by Vatican II. It is important that in every training programme for laity this dimension of interreligious dialogue find an important place. So too, the preparation of catechism books in Asian Churches should contain lessons on other faiths and develop a positive outlook on them.

d) Culture and Catholicity

Closely connected with the interreligious dialogue is the issue of culture.[109] The Asian laity need to rediscover their cultural roots. Asian Christians have been subjected to a twofold alienation from their culture: one, through a Christianity that was presented in Medieval, Western cultural garb; and the other — an alienation common to all Asian — caused by contemporary Western industrial capitalist and technocratic culture. The Church in Asia and its laity can meet the challenges of the times only if they have their roots firmly in the soil. This getting rooted in the cultural soil cannot be substituted for by any artificial process of inculturation but should be the natural fruit of an interaction with the realities constituting the soil.

In recent years so-called "inculturation" has been mainly centered on the adaptation of symbols and signs from other religious traditions into Asian liturgy. Liturgy being predominantly an area of the clergy, the use of these symbols has been very much related to them. The question of culture is not exhausted, evidently, by these attempts. The whole Church and its laity are called upon to relate their Asian culture and tradition with their faith. In this effort they are today faced with many problems. First of all, the culture of various Asian countries is undergoing a great deal of change through the impact of the West and is in danger of being swallowed up by a monolithic cultural imperialism. Since Christian faith is not opposed to any culture, but every culture is an enrichment of it, the laity have, in the name of their faith, the duty also to preserve and promote their cultural heritage. It would be a great loss if, for example, the Chinese

were to loose their traditional sense of strong family ties and kinship, the sense of harmony in relationships which Chinese culture values so much. That the Church is really universal will be clear not in that certain general things overarching and transcending the particularities are affirmed, but in that the Church is present among each people and groups of Asia in the most concrete way.[110] The promotion of culture is then for the laity also a living in practice the true catholicity and universality of their faith.

E. NEW SPIRITUALITY FROM ANCIENT ROOTS

One of the great challenges before Christianity in Asia and one of the great demands on the Asian laity is to live their Christianity as a spiritual experience amidst the religious and cultural traditions of this continent. The message of Jesus and the ideals he has given to his disciples need to become a reality in Asia today. How can the Gospel and Jesus' ideals be lived and witnessed to through the God-experience of our laity? Here is the real test of Christianity in Asia. And only this will bring Christianity in Asia closer to other religions and cultures, which all place such a great emphasis on experience. Consequently, the Church should invest its energy and time not so much in organizing the laity, as in leading them to a spiritual, religious experience. All the works and enterprises of the laity in the field of justice should be an outflow of this deep experience.

Often the great Asian religions have been characterized by the Westerners as otherwordly or world-denying. A closer study of these religions and their history will reveal how strongly world-affirming they have been, as well as how much support and motivation they have supplied to many liberative movements in various countries of Asia.

But what is characteristic of these non-semitic religions of Asia is the way that the two polarities of earthly and heavenly, material and spiritual, are dialectically interlinked. If the semitic religious genius sees history as the meeting point of the divine and the human, the earthly and the heavenly, the non-semitic religious experience, while fully affirming the earthly realities and the meaning of involvement, sees the transcendent, the divine, the heavenly, in the whole attitude of renunciation of the fruits, attitude of disinterested involvement devoid of greed and acquisitiveness, or in other words, in a real attitude of poverty. It is in this way in the midst of secular realities and pursuits that the dimension of transcendence is preserved and a dangerous immanentism averted. Here the Asian laity have a rich source to draw on for their spirituality, while being engaged in the temporalities.

This whole experience of poverty in the world disposes the laity to follow Jesus and absorb his spirit of sacrifice and abnegation. In the past it has been customary to associate poverty in general and the poverty of Jesus' lifestyle in particular and his call to renounce riches as a call addressed only to the religious section within the Church. We must note that the

call of Jesus is addressed to anyone who wants to follow him. The following of Jesus is often misrepresented in spiritual literature offered to the perusal of the laity. It does not require the renunciation of temporalities, but the real renunciation and the discipleship of Jesus does require a non-attachment to riches. This has to be constantly manifested in a readiness to share, to sacrifice what one has in order to be able to create a new humanity, and a fraternal world after the model of early Christian community.

The same spirit of poverty as a spiritual experience, as a non-attachment and as an antidote to greed and accumulation, etc., should be a great potential in Asia to combat the economic poverty, want and misery of the poor of Asia created through human sinfulness and structural injustices. To be able to do this, the Asian laity can look to a person like Mahatma Gandhi who waged relentless war against the evils oppressing the poor by freeing himself from vested interests, greed and covetousness. He was motivated and inspired by the Christian spirituality of the Sermon on the Mount, as well as by the Hindu ideal of a combat against evil without attachment to fruits, as exemplified in Bhagavat Gita.

Similarly, in the spirituality of the Asian laity the streams of Christian spirituality and the spirituality of non-Christian religious traditions can merge so as to make them experience the power of love and poverty in the fight against injustice. Christian love, when interpreted rightly and not as mere interpersonal love, or in a puritan way, is a transforming force capable of challenging the present order and all man-made injustices. So too poverty, when accepted consciously and lived as a spiritual experience of non-acquisitiveness, can challenge the whole "culture" of a consumerism which deprives millions of their basic necessities of life. But both love and poverty are also susceptible to being interpreted in other-worldly ways. Lay spirituality in Asia would require a deepening of the meaning of Christian love and poverty in the world.

F. SEARCH FOR NEW MODELS

The new challenges and tasks which face the Church in Asia and its laity need also suitable structural means with the aid of which they can meet these situations. For various reasons, the traditional parish structure does not seem to respond to these new demands. Therefore, the response of the laity has found spontaneous expression in grassroots communities which offer them wider scope and freedom to act effectively in their environment.[111]

These communities, among other things, have shifted the emphasis from the clergy, as was the case in the traditional parish structure, to the laity. This, however, should not be interpreted as a repudiation or undermining of the role of the ordained minister. The concept of ordained minister

is a theological concept and reality, while clergy is loaded with sociological meaning as a class or status. In the functioning of parish structures often it is this social status which is predominant, with the result that the theological reality of the laity is pushed to the periphery. The basic ecclesial communities offer the opportunity to redeem both the legitimate place of the laity in the Church and the role of the ordained minister in its theological import.

The basic communities which we envisage should be pluriform and diverse. Even in this, simply reproducing the models tried in other countries and continents should be avoided. Our context in Asia is basically a multireligious one, and it is in this particular context we are called to be the disciples of Jesus. We should think of a model with certain specific Asian characteristics deriving from Asia's religious traditions and cultures. As a community of equals sharing the goods and looking after the needs of the poor, the Asian model of basic community can draw inspiration from the monastic tradition of Asia. Monasteries in Asia, in general, are close to the people and the lifestyle of the monk is not very different from that of the rural population.[112] The Buddhist monasteries, unlike the monasteries of recent times in the West, are not secluded from the world and the people, but are centres of social life breathing the life-rhythm of the people among whom they are situated.[113] It is not rare that the laity spend sometime in the *viharas* to receive instructions on religion.[114]

The primary value in the basic community is not the accumulation and pursuit of consumer goods but the fulfilling of the basic needs of one and all. It is possible to create in Asian villages still imbued with the sense of sharing basic communities of this type which could be also a counter-culture movement against the values of competition and profit eroding the lives of the people. In this way they will not be communities constituted strictly around religious rituals and celebrations, and will have a great social impact. These communities then will have to be also inter-religious. Such interreligious basic communities will bear witness to the truth that the Church exists not for its members alone but that its mission and scope extend to the unity of the whole of humankind. Through this kind of communities at the gressroots level, embracing in one unity men and women of various religious affiliations, the Church in Asia will be able slowly to transform itself into a really incarnate Church. The religious experience of the followers of various religions will go to reinforcing the bond of unity and lead to concrete projects for transforming society. Common readings from the Koran, Gita, Bible, Dharmapata, Buddha, etc., will form a regular feature of these communities. One should not think of these communities as merely experimental or exceptional; they should become widespread and common in Asia.

David Bell describes a person who runs down the street crying, "I've got an answer, who's got a question?" Such would be every attempt to define the laity in Asia independently of the challenges, questions and problems this continent presents. The life and task of the laity need to undergo a redefinition in the light of the Asian challenges. Mere applications and readjustments of already well-defined concepts of laity are quite inadequate, and could become irrelevant too, since they remain at the surface of the problems. We have tried to present some of these challenges and to reflect on the demands they make on the Church and its laity.

The challenges are stupendous and therefore the temptations too are great. There are two serious temptations that can divert the attention of the Church and its laity from fulfilling their evangelizing and prophetic mission. One is a feeling of helplessness and resignation; and the other, postponement. In the face of the magnitude of the problems one can become fainthearted and wonder whether any significant change could ever be brought about by the microscopic minority the Christians are among the vast ocean of humanity in Asia. When one does not know where to begin and when the feeling of helplessness takes over, the easiest thing is to succumb to resignation and conformity. Equally serious would be postponement, which results from the failure to perceive the urgency of the situation.

The complexity of the entire situation makes it necessary that the local Churches in Asia discern the concrete forms of responses to the various challenges with confidence and with a sense of urgency. Towards this goal we wish to make a few suggestions.

1. Pastoral Research Centres

Since the fulfilling of the mission of the Church and its laity calls for a constant study of the various processes and changes Asian societies are undergoing, it is highly desirable that pastoral research centres be established at provincial, regional and national levels. A few things need to be clarified in regard to this suggestion.

By pastoral is not meant simply what pertains to the parish, the diocese, etc., within the traditional framework of operation. Pastoral is the whole way of the Church's being present in the world, as a sign and instrument of unity with God and the whole of humankind.[115] We think of the pastoral Constitution of the Church in the Modern World. — *Gaudium et Spes* — of Vatican II. Even pastoral questions and issues within the Church community should be permeated by the wider concerns and challenges of the society at large. Such a pastoral research centre will

offer a broad scope to bring together the expertise and experience of the laity, to study the various issues, questions, events (which should be approached in an interdisciplinary way) and to plan suitable actions. The contribution of the laity would then be very indispensable. Enthusiasm and zeal, though important, are not a substitute for the serious study and reflection that are necessary to cope with the complexity of the problems.

Both the formation of the laity and the future priests could be very profitably related to the continuing study and research done by these centres. Mere doctrinal formation of the laity and renewal courses on the teachings of Vatican II are inadequate to help them fulfill their mission and vocation. So that their faith may be translated into action, it is important that their formation be related to what happens to the people around them. The formation of priests and the theological curriculum in our present seminary system suffer seriously from a lack of vital contact with the concrete realities of life.[116] The formation both of laity and seminarians should be worked out in close collaboration with the study, research and experiments promoted by the research centres. These centres could function under the leadership of the laity. All these could help to narrow the wide gap separating the laity and the clergy through a convergence of concerns in a common pastoral action towards the world.

2. Facilitating the Emergence of Indigenous Lay Movements

The response of the Church and the laity to the various challenges, to be effective, would obviously require concrete articulations through the support of certain structural means. Such structural forms should correspond to the demands of the situation and nature of the problems faced by each local community.

There are several lay associations and apostolic movements engaged in diverse activities in the Asian Churches. While not denying the merit of the work done by these movements and associations, we cannot but pose a few questions regarding their relevance and effectiveness in Asia today.

It is a fact that many of these associations and movements had their origin in the West in particular times and circumstances. They activated the laity and called forth their response to various situations in the West. We do not need to elaborate this point here. A brief study of the origin and background of these associations would amply prove this point. It is true that most of these movements have tried to make adaptations and adjustments according to time and place. Even then, they are far from being able to come to grips with the complex Asian situation. Some of these movements and associations are but a spent force. Despite the efforts to reanimate them by their zealous advocates — convinced as they are that their

movements should be valid universally — the divisions and controversies surrounding many of them are proving their irrelevance to Asia. By and large, imported lay associations and movements have an individualistic approach and do not take into sufficient account the fact that Christians have to respond with imagination and originality to a challenging situation in which evil is embodied in structures and injustice is institutionalized. Therefore, there is an urgent need of facilitating the emergence of indigenous lay movements in Asia, movements that will have as their context the Asian experience, and so act creatively. Such movements should be oriented to collective action. These movements could develop, both within the Christian communities and without, their own specific approaches and actions in the light of the Christian faith and Asian tradition. Without the emergence of the indigenous lay movements, structures like parish councils and pastoral councils would remain intermediary service bodies within the traditional framework and conception of the pastoral, and lend themselves to being used as instruments for the administration of the parish, the diocese etc. Lay movements concerned with various vital issues and questions affecting the life of the people would be indispensable towards widening the perspective of Christian communities in evangelization and inspiring them with a vision for action and involvement.

3. Interfaith Action Groups

Given the tremendous influence of religions in political life of Asia and their ability to contribute to the process of humanization, it is not only desirable but even necessary today to form, besides Asian models of basic communities of which we spoke earlier, interfaith groups with specific goals and action programmes. The approach of these groups will not be at the level of doctrines but at the level of day-to-day life and on the basis of common experience of a particular issue. We can think of interfaith action groups, with the active participation of Christian laity, operating for the cause of workers, peasants, especially of the unorganized sector, for the defence of the dignity and rights of women, tribals, etc. The spirit and tradition of each religion on these questsions could be brought to bear for joint action and furnish deeper motivations. Such groups and their experiences could become a wellspring for the development of a proper theology of religions in Asia.

This paper is being written during the tumultuous days following the elections in one Asian country — the Philippines. Twenty long years of Marcos' regime in that country, with so much ruination of its economy, the suppression of human rights and the pauperization of the masses, has now come to an end. There is still a long way to go in rebuilding the country and setting many things in order. A new beginning has been made, and it augurs well for the future of many other Asian countries.

The overthrow of an authoritarian government, though only in a matter of days, was in fact the fruit of long years of active participation by the mass of believers — men and women in that country who responded to unjust situations and paid the price of the courage of their convictions. Over the years, within Christian communities, the laity learned through their faith-actions what it is to be a Christian in the face of challenges of every kind. The courageous action of the hundred and four bishops who discerned in the Spirit and declared invalid the election was no small encouragement to the laity.

The clouds may conceal the rising sun. But we know that the sun rises in the East and it will never set there. Behind the clouds of darkness, conflicts, contradictions, and turmoils a new Asia is rising on the horizon of the world, a new Asia is being moulded and shaped.

It is in this process that the Church and its laity are called to participate and fulfil their mission of announcing the message of hope and witnessing to the Good News of the Kingdom of God. By facing with a resolute will and determined actions the challenges of the present moment, the Church and its laity will lay the foundations for a new era of Christian presence in this great continent of Asia.

<div align="center">FOOTNOTES</div>

1. Our analysis and reflection will cover the regions of Asia that come within FABC. West Asia (the Near East), therefore, does not come under the purview of this paper.

2. Cf. D.G.E. Hall, *A History of South East Asia*, Macmillan, London 1970; J.M. Romein — J.E. Romein, *The Asian Century: A History of Modern Nationalism in Asia*, University of California, Berkeley 1962; G.M. Kahin (ed.), *Governments and Politics in South East Asia*, Cornell University Press, Ithaca-London 1964[2]; J.S. Bastin — H.J. Benda, *A History of Modern South East Asia: Colonialism, Nationalism and Decolonization*, Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey 1968; F.R. Von Der Mehden, *South East Asia, 1930-1970 The Legacy of Colonialism and Nationalism*, New York 1974; C. Geertz (ed.), *Old Societies and New States: The Quest for Modernity in Asia, and Africa*, Amerind Pub., New Delhi 1963.

3. Cf. Ralph Buultjens, *Rebuilding the Temple. Tradition and Change in Modern Asia*, Orbis Books, New York 1974; Felix Casalmo, *The Vision of a New Society*, Manila 1980; K. Mathew Kurian, "Socio-economic and Political Reality in Asia," *Asia's Struggle for Full Humanity*, ed. by Virginia Fabella, Orbis Books, New York 1980, pp. 59-74.
Cf. Mil Roekaerts, *Authoritarianism and Development. The Decline of Democracy in South and South East Asia*, Pro Mundi Vita, Brussels 1982; Sulak Sivaraksa, "Asia in the World: Trends in the Eighties." *Impact*, vol. 18 (1983) pp. 230-233; Parig Digan, *South Korea under Emergency*, Pro Mundi Vita, Brussels 1975.

4. Cf. A.F.K. Organski, *The Stages of Political Development*, New York 1965, pp. 20-185; O.F. Von Gierke, *The Development of Political Theory*, New York 1939; Carl J.

Friedrich, *Constitutional Government and Democracy: Theory and Practice in Europe and America*, Boston 1950; Arne Naes, *Democracy, Ideology and Objectivity*, Oxford 1956; Joseph A. Schumpeter, *Capitalism, Socialism and Democracy*, New York 1950³; George Weill, *L'Europe du XIXᵉ siècle et l'idée du nationalité*, Paris 1938; R.E.M. Irving, *Christian Democracy in France*, London 1973; Jean-Marie Mayeur, *Des Partis Catholiques à la Democratie Chrètienne*, Paris 1980

5. Cf. Gunnar Myrdal, *Asian Drama: An Inquiry into the Poverty of Nations*, 3 vols., Pantheon, New York 1968. This is a monumental work. Though the situation in Asia has changed very much since the publication of this work, yet in some respects the book is still quite valid and relevant.

6. Cf. Felix Wilfred, "Harbingers of Hope: Action Groups in India Today," *Vidyajyoti* vol. 49 (1985) pp. 539-563; FABC Papers, No. 39.

7. Cf. Mil Roekaerts — Edmond Tang — Kris Savat, *Economic Patterns and Social Justice in Non-Socialist Countries of Asia*, Pro Mundi Vita, Brussels 1979.

8. Edmund Leach, "Minority Groups in Asia," *Asia Handbook*, Penguin Books, Harmondsworth 1969, pp. 497-503. *No Place in the Inn. Voices of Minority Peoples in Asia*, Urban Rural Mission — Christian Conference of Asia (CCA), Singapore 1979. On the Malayan situation of minorities cf. Mil Roekerts, *The Malay Dilemma*, Pro Mundi Vita, Brussels 1984; a book under the same title was published in Kuala Lumpur in 1970 by the present Prime Minister of Malaysia, Maharthir Bin Mohamad; cf. also Rodney Tasker, "The Roots of the Problem," *Far Eastern Economic Review*, May 5, 1983, pp. 21ff; on the situation of Philippines' Muslim minority, cf. Peter G. Gowing — Robert D. McAmis (ed.), *The Muslim Filipinos. Their History, Society and Contemporary Problems*, Manila 1974.

9. Most Asian nations have some or other border dispute with their neighbours. This is a legacy of colonialism for which Asia is paying dearly. Cf. R. Buultjens, *op. cit.*, pp. 27ff (enumeration of cases); see also p. 54, footnote 13, on the death toll in Asian wars.

10. Mil Roekaerts, *Authoritarianism and Development, op. cit.*, p. 25. Cf. also David Jenkins, "All the President's Men," *Far Eastern Economic Review*, March 10, 1983, pp. 15-22.

11. Though democracy in its present political form may have derived from the developments in the West, yet, it is undeniable that there are certain traditional systems and values in the Asian cultures that are very democratic in nature.

12. Cf. Saral K. Chatterji (ed.), *The Asian Meaning of Modernization*, ISPCK, Delhi 1972.

13. Wilfred Cantwell Smith, *Religious Diversity*, Crossroad, New York 1982, p. 95.

14. Cf. Peter L. Berger, *The Homeless Mind — Modernization and Consciousness*, Random House, New York 1973; cf. also Marcello De Carvalho Azevedo, *Inculturation and the Challenges of Modernity*, Rome 1982.

15. A typical case is the situation in India. Cf. Andreas Menefee Sing — Alfred De Souza, *The Urban Poor, Slum and Pavement Dwellers in the Major Cities of India*, Manohar, Delhi 1980; Alfred De Souza, *The Indian City, Poverty, Ecology and Urban Development*, Manohar, Delhi 1983.

16. A. Aprodicio Laquian, "Urban Tensions in South-East Asia in the 1970's," *Population Politics and the Future of Southern Asia*, ed by W.H. Weinggins — J. Guyot, Colombia University Press, New York — London 1973, p. 132.

17. Cf. *No Space in the City. Urban Problems*, Human Development Research and Documentation, Metro-Manila 1982. (This is a reprint from Witness and Concerned Citizens for the Urban Poor, Series No. 2, 1982).

18. "Two distinct lifestyles, rural and urban, exist in most countries of South-East Asia and generate tensions as they interact. A large part of the city dwelling population is usually concentrated in one or two major cities. The hope that urbanization will have a leveling or 'melting-pot' effect on multi-racial or multi-ethnic societies in South-East Asia has not been fulfilled ... Prior to their trek to the city, most residents of South-East Asian cities lived in cohesive villages separate from each other by considerable distances. The identity of people from the same village was clear; the bonds that held them together were strong. These centrifugal forces persist in the city ..." A. Aprodicio Laquian, *op. cit.*, p. 122, p. 141.

19. Cf. Tadashi Fukutake, *Japanese Society Today*, University of Tokyo Press, Tokyo, 1981.[2]

20. For statistical figures cf. "A Nation of Seventy Crores," *Commerce*, March 28, 1981; cf. also V. Ramalingaswami, "Human Numbers and Human Needs," *Mainstream*, April 18, 1981.

21. K.P.M. Sundaram, *Indian Economy* 1984, p. 62 (compiled from World Development Report).

22. Cf. M.M. Thomas, "Modernization of Traditional Societies and the Struggle for a New Cultural Ethos," S.K. Chatterji (ed.), *The Asian Meaning of Modernization, op. cit.* Cf. also M.N. Srinivas, *Social Change in Modern India*, University of California Press, Berkely 1971; John S. Augustine (ed.), *The Indian Family in Transition*, Vikas Publishing House, New Delhi 1982; Cora Du Bois, *Social Forces in South-East Asia*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge 1949.

23. Clifford Geertz, "Primoridal Sentiment and Civil Politics in the New States," *Old Societies and New States, op. cit.*, pp. 105-157.

24. Jung Young Lee, "The Yin-Yang Way of Thinking. A Possible Method for Ecumenical Theology," *International Review of Missions*, 1971, pp. 363-370. (This noteworthy article has been reprinted in several places).

25. H. Marcuse, *One Dimensional Man. Studies in the Ideology of Advanced Industrial Society*, Beacon Press, Boston 1968.

26. Besides the above cited work of H. Marcuse, cf. also T. Roszak, *Where the Wasteland Ends: Politics and Transcendence in Post-Industrial Society*, Doubleday & Co, Garden City, New York 1972; T. Roszak, *The Making of a Counter-Culture*, Doubleday & Co, Garden City, New York 1969; Erich Fromm, *The Revolution of Hope. Toward a Humanized Technology*, New York 1968; A. Toffler, *Future Shock*, Random House, New York 1970; E. Schumacher, *Small is Beautiful*, London 1974; cf. also L. Kolakowski, *Main Currents of Marxism* vol. 3: The Breakdown, Oxford University Press 1978, especially chapter X on The Frankfurt School and "Critical Theory," and chapter XI on H. Marcuse.

27. Text as quoted in Ninian Smart, *The Religious Experience of Mankind*, New York 1969, pp. 157-158.

28. *Rig Veda* X, 90.

29. Raimundo Panikkar, *The Vedic Experience*. An Anthology of the Vedas for Modern Man and Contemporary Celebration, Darton, Longman & Todd, London 1977; M. Von Bruck: "Holistic Vision in Eastern Religions," *Indian Theological Studies*, vol. 22 (1985), pp. 28-61; Subash Anand, in *Vidyajyoti*, vol. 50 (1986) pp. 7-30.

30. This conception goes back to two champions of modern European thought — Descartes and Francis Bacon, cf. J. Moltmann, *The Future of Creation*, SCM Press, London 1979.

31. *Atharva Veda* XII.1.

32. *Rig Veda* X.18.

33. Cf. K. Luke, "Righteousness, Dharma," in *Biblebahsyam*, vol. VI (1980) pp. 331-334; F.D'Sa, "Dharma as Delight in Cosmic Welfare," *ibid.*, pp. 335-357.

34. Fritjof Capra, *The Tao of Physics*, Shambhala, Boulder 1975, The other book of Capra was not available to me for consultation. I could get only a summary presentation of it. Cf. also Wayne Teasdale, "Epistemology for an Inter-Cultural Contemplative Theology, *Jeevadhara*, vol. 15 (1985) pp. 410-422. The author presents the thought of Capra as well as that of Bede Griffiths.

35. Cf. Peter L. Berger, *Pyramids of Sacrifice. Political Ethics and Social Change*, Anchor Books, Garden City, New York 1974. Cf. also Antonio Lambino, "Ideology, Social Change and the Christian Conscience," *Faith, Ideologies and Christian Options*, Loyola Papers 7/8, Manila 1982 (5th printing), pp. 10-32.

36. Cf. M. Mathew Kurian, Socio-Economic and Political Reality in Asia., *art. cit.*

37. Kusum Nair, *Blossoms in the Dust*. The Human Factor in India's Development, Allied Publishers, Praeger Paperbacks, New York 1969.

38. Cf. Mil Roekaerts — Edmond Tang — Kris Savat, Economic Patterns and Social Justice in Non-Socialist Countries of Asia, *op. cit.*

39. Cf. G. Bertin. *Transnational Corporations*. Pro Mundi Vita, Brussels 1978; B.I. Cohen, *Multinational Firms and Asian Exports*, Yale University Press, 1975. Through the pharmaceutical industry the multinationals, rather than contributing to the health of the people in Asia, are posing a serious threat to it.

40. The word "agribusiness" was coined by Ray Goldberg. The definition is his as quoted in André Gunder Frank, *Crisis in the Third World*, Heinemann, London 1981, p. 78.

41. Susan Georg, *How the Other Half Dies. The Real Reasons for World Hunger*, Penguin Books, Harmondsworth 1976, p. 159.

42. André Gunder Frank, *op. cit.*

43. Cf. *Far Eastern Economic Review*, March 21, 1985, p. 88.

44. *Ibid.*, p. 88. Cf. also *Impact*, vol. 16 (1983), pp. 223 ff.

45. As for India, cf. Dalip S. Thakur, *Poverty, Inequality and Unemployment in Rural India*, Delhi 1985.

46. Cf. André Beteille (ed.), *Equality and Inequality. Theory and Practice*, Oxford University Press, Delhi 1983; Idem., *The Idea of Natural Inequality*, Oxford University Press, Delhi 1983; cf. also Walter Fernandes, *Inequality. Its Bases and Search for Solutions*, Indian Social Institute, Delhi 1985.

47. Jose Kananaikal, (ed.), *Scheduled Castes and the Struggle against Inequality*, Indian Social Institute, New Delhi 1983.

48. Cf. Tadashi Fukutake, *Japanese Society Today.*, *op. cit.*

49. On the situation of the tribals of the Philippines, cf. *Tribal Peoples in the Philippines*, Human Development Research and Documentation, Metro-Manila 1984 (reprint from ECTF Tribal Forum).

50. On the situation of women in India and South Asia, cf. Neera Desai — Vibhuti Patel, *Indian Women. Change and Challenge in International Decade 1975-1985*, Bombay 1985: Alfred De Souza (ed.), *Women in Contemporary India and South Asia*, Manohar, Delhi 1980; S.K.F. Ghosh, *Women in a Changing Society*, Ashish Publishing House, New Delhi 1984; Gail Minault (ed.), *Women and Political Participation in India and Pakistan*, Chanakya Publications, Delhi 1981; Madhu Kishar — R. Vanita (ed.), *In Search of Answers. Indian Women's Voices from Manushi*, London 1984; Jessie Tellis-Nayak, (ed.), *Indian Womanhood: Then and Now*, Indore 1983. Gail Omvedt, *We Will Smash this Prison. Indian Women in Struggle*, London 1980.

51. For a short and insightful presentation of the overall condition of women in Asia, cf. Mary John Mananzan (ed.), *Women in Asia. Status and Images*, CCA, Singapore 1979.

52. Cf. L.A. Neumann, "Hospitality Girls in the Philippines," *South-East Asian Chronicles*, Berkeley, January-February 1976.

53. Cf. R. O'Grady (ed.), *Third World Tourism*. CCA, Singapore 1980. (This is a report of a workshop in tourism held in Manila in the same year). Felix Wilfred, "Striking at the Root. A Holistic Vision for Today's Tourism," a paper presented at the Theological Workshop on Tourism held in Khonkaen, Thailand in December 1985 (Shortly to be published by Ecumenical Coalition on Third World Tourism, Bangkok). Mil Roekaerts — K. Savat, *Mass Tourism in South and South-East Asia. A Challenge to Christians and the Churches*, Pro Mundi Vita, Brussels 1983. "Tourism's Ugly Face," *CCA News*, vol. 16, No. 10, October 15, 1981, pp. 11-12.

54. Cf. *Tourism, Prostitution, Development*, (Documentation) Ecumenical Coalition on Third World Tourism, Bangkok 1985.

55. Cf. Tosh Arai (ed.), *Children of Asia*, CCA, Singapore 1979, p. 10.

56. For the situation in India, cf. Alfred De Souza (ed.), *Children in India. Critical Issues in Human Development*, Manohar, Delhi 1979.

57. Cf. Chris Tremenwan (ed.), *Out of Control*. Official Report of the Asian Youth Assembly, Delhi 1984, CCA, Singapore 1985; cf. also W.H. Wriggins — C.H.S. Jayawardene, "Youth Protest in Sri Lanka," *Population, Politics and the Future of Southern Asia*, New York — London 1973, pp. 318-350.

58. Cf. Filo Hirota, et al., *The Situation of Industrial Workers in Asia and the Church's Response*, Pro Mundi Vita, Brussels 1983; J. Clancey, et. al., *Labour and the Church in Asia*, Manila 1983.

59. For the overall situation in Korea, cf. South Korea '83, *Far Eastern Economic Review*, June 2, 1983, pp. 51ff.

60. Cf. Jack Walsh, *Asian Industrialization and the Uprooting of Local Asian Communities*, Pro Mundi Vita, Brussels 1981; N.D. Kamble, *Labour Migration in Indian States*, New Delhi 1983.

61. This is true also of certain Church groups. Cf. Karl Gaspar, *The Local Church and Militant Lay Participation*. The MSPC Experience (Mindanao-Sulu Pastoral Council), Pro Mundi Vita, Brussels, 1985.

62. Cf. Felix Wilfred, "Harbingers of Hope," *art. cit.*

63. Cf. Wilfred Cantwell Smith, *Religious Diversity, op. cit.*, p. 63ff.

64. Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Culture*, London 1975, p. 89.

65. A classical work is that of J.N. Farquahar, *Modern Religious Movements*, Munshiram Manoharlal Publishers Pvt Ltd., New Delhi 1977 (original edition 1914). A very important role was played by Brahmo Samaj. Cf. Swami Bhudananda, *The Saving Challenges of Religion*, Sri Ramakrishna Math, Madras 1980; Ralph Buultjens, *Traditional Faiths and Asian Development*, New York 1971; see also Kanak Dwivedi, "The Concept of Social Justice in Traditional Hindu Thought," *Religion and Society*, vol. 27 (1980), pp. 5-12; Yvon Ambroise, "Hindu Religious Movements. A Sociological Perspective," *Dharma* 7 (1982), pp. 358-373.

66. S. Radharkrishnan, *Religion and Society*, George Allen & Unwin Ltd., London 1947, p. 42.

67. Rabindranath Tagore, *Gitanjali* XI.

68. Buddhism represented at the time of its emergence a great revolutionary force and a protest against the religious, casteist and cultural oppressions by the traditional Hindu society. Down through the centuries Buddhism has drawn strength from its origins. Cf. Sanet Chamarik, "The Place of Human Rights in Buddhist Tradition," *Impact*, vol. 16 (1981), pp. 88-102; Sulak Sivaraksa, "Buddhism and Development: Is Small Beautiful?," *Impact*, vol. 15 (1980) pp. 230-240. This is a very noteworthy contribution.

69. Seri Phongphit, *Theravada Buddhism and its Role in the Changing Thai Society Today*. This article in manuscript form was passed on to me by my friend, Seri, of Thammasat University.

70. Cf. Sulak Sivaraksa, "Buddhism and Development," *art. cit.*, p. 240.,

71. This is not the same as the ethics of Kant. While both Kant and Gita are anti-utilitarian, yet Gita does not found ethics on the autonomy of the moral law, rather on *ontonomy*, that is to say, ethics is not separated from God and the ontological goal of man. Cf. Raimundo Panikkar, *Spiritualita Indu*, Lineamenti, Morecelliana, Brescia 1975, p. 73.

72. Cf. Aloysius Pieris, "The Place of Non-Christian Religions and Cultures in the Evolution of a Third World Theology," *Irruption of the Third World*, ed. by Virginia Fabella — Emilio Torres, Orbis Books, New York 1983, p. 134.

73. Cf. Donal E. Smith (ed.), *South Asian Politics and Religion*, Princeton University Press, Princeton 1966; Donal E. Smith, "The Political Implications of Asian Religions," *South Asian Politics and Religion*, Princeton 1966, pp. 3-20; Fred R. von der Mehden, *Religion and Nationalism in South-East Asia*, Milwaukee 1963.

74. Donal E. Smith, *Religion and Politics in Burma*, Princeton University Press, Princeton 1965.

75. Cf. Heine Bechert, "Buddhism and Mass Politics in Burma and Ceylon," Religion and Political Modernization, Haven-London 1974, pp. 147-167.

76. The literature on Islamic resurgence is very abundant. We refer here to a few works which have bearing on the Asian situation. Very useful is the booklet published by CCA entitled: *The Islamic Impact*. Report of a Consultation on the Islamic resurgence in countries within the CCA Region, Singapore 1979; Raphael Israeli (ed.), *The Crescent in the East: Islam in Asia Major*, Cruzon Press, London 1982; Ronald Provencher, "Islam in Malaysia and Thailand," *ibid.*, pp. 140-210; Fred R. von der Mehden," Islamic Resurgence in Malaysia," J.L. Esposto, *Islam and Development*, Syracuse University Press, Syracuse, New York 1980, pp. 163-180; M.B. Hooker (ed.), *Islam in South East Asia*, Leiden 1983; Osman Bakar, "The Muslim Revival," *Islam's Challenge for Asian Churches*, ed. by Yap Kim Ho, CCA Singapore 1980, pp. 13-16. Cf. also the interreligious discussions that took place in Malaysia: *Contemporary Issues on Malaysian Religions*, Selangor 1985[2.]

77. This does not mean that Islam is closed to modern developments. Cf. J.T. Cummings, et. al., "Islam and Modern Economic Change," *Islam and Development, op. cit.*, pp. 25-47; John Obert Voll, *Islam. Continuity and Change in the Modern World*, Westview Press, Colorado, 1982; R. Maxime Rodinson in an excellent study has shown the compatibility of Islam with certain values of capitalism: *Islam and Capitalism*, Penguin Books, Harmondsworth; cf. also Tahir Mahmood, *Human Rights in Islam* (FABC Programme for Bishops). Varanasi Nov. 26–Dec. 4, 1983.

78. Cf. Donald E. Smith (ed.), *South Asian Politics and Religion, op. cit.*, pp. 138ff.

79. Cf. "Why Islam Says No to Secularism," *Far Eastern Economic Review*, April 14, 1983, pp. 38-39 (with reference to Malaysia).

80. Osman Bakar, *art. cit.*, p. 15.

81. Cf. Asaf Hussahin, "Islam and Political Integration in Pakistan," *The Crescent in the East*, ed. by Raphael Israeli, Cruzon Press, London 1982, pp. 62-78. J.L. Esposto, "Pakistan Quest for Identity," J.L. Esposto (ed.), *Islam and Development, op. cit.*, pp. 139-162.

82. M.K. Gandhi, *My Experiments with Truth* (autobiography), Navajivan, Ahmedabad 1948, p. 615.

83. N.K. Bose, *Selections from Gandhi*, Ahmedabad 1948, p. 37.

84. Gandhi wrote in 1935:
"For me politics bereft of religion are absolute dirt, even to be shunned. Politics concern nations and that which concerns the welfare of nations must be one of the concerns of a man who is religiously inclined, in other words, a seeker of God and Truth ... Therefore in politics also we have to establish the Kingdom of Heaven." *Young India*, 1 June 18, 1925, p. 214.

85. Cf. Margaret Chatterjee, *Gandhi's Religious Thought*, MacMillan Company, London 1983, p. 154.

86. Cf. H.R. Weber (ed.), *The Layman in Christian History*, Philadelphia 1963. Cf. also C.R. Boxer, *Four Centuries of Portuguese Expansion 1415-1825*, Johannesburg 1963. For an Asian non-Christian point of view of colonialism, cf. K.M. Panikkar, *Asia and Western Dominance*, London 1959; for European reactions to colonialism cf. Marcel Merley — Roberto Mesa, *El anticolonialismo europeo desde Las Casas a Marx*, Madrid 1972.

87. Cf. Owen Chadwick, *The Secularization of the European Mind in the Nineteenth Century*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 1975 (Reprinted 1977, 1979). Chadwick dedicates one entire chapter to the question of anti-clericalism. J. Salwyn Schapiro, *Anticlericalism: Conflict between Church and State in France, Italy and Spain*, Princeton 1967; Georges Weill, *Historie de l'idée laique en France au XIXe siècle*, Paris 1929; G. De Lagarde, *La Naissance de l'esprit laique au declin du moyen age*, 5 vols., Louvain 1956-1963.

88. As for the case of the Indian Church cf. Walter Fernandes, *The Indian Catholic Community*, Pro Mundi Vita Dossiers, Brussels 1980. F. Houtart — G. Lemercinier, *Genesis* and *Institutionalization of the Indian Catholicism*, Louvain 1981.

89. Cf. *Lumen Gentium* 11.

90. *Dei Verbum* 5.

91. Cf. Karl Rahner, "Towards a Fundamental Interpretation of Vatican II," *Theological Studies*, vol. 40 (1979), pp. 716-727; Walbert Bühlmann, *The Coming of the Third Church*, Orbis Books, New York 1976.

92. We wish to underline especially the case of the Chinese Church which presents a great challenge. All the Churches of Asia should be deeply concerned about this question. Cf. Edmond Tang, *The Church in China after two Revolutions*, Pro Mundi Vita, Brussels 1982. "China As a Challenge to the Church," *Concilium*, No. 126 (1979). The entire issue is dedicated to this question.

93. Cf. Theodore Steeman, "Political Relevance of the Christian communities between Integralism and critical committment," *Concilium*, vol. 4, No. 9 (1973), pp. 40-47; cf. also Angelo Fernandes, "Prospering God's Rule on Earth," *Vidyajyoti*, vol. 50 (1986) pp. 122-138. "It is not enough to say and teach 'Jesus is Lord': it must be added that Jesus is not really acknowledged here and now if there is a gap between the values of the Gospel and the human situation we have created. In the current situation, at local and global level, the long-drawn-out merciless exploitation of the weak and the poor by the powerful and rich demands that we work for the liberation of the oppressed as an essential and indispensable dimension of the furtherance of the Kingdom of God within each person and in society as a whole." (p. 131)

94. Cf. Christian Duquoc, "Spirituality: A Private or Public Phenomenon," *Concilium* Vol. 9, No. 7 (1971), pp. 13-28, p. 23.

95. For the Biblical perspective cf. Heinrich Schlier, *Principalities and Powers in the New Testament*, Herder and Herder, New York 1961. Cf. also Karl Rahner, "The Theology of Power," *Theological Investigations*, vol. IV, Darton, Longman & Todd, London 1966, pp. 391-409.

96. Cf. Robert M. Grant, *Early Christianity and Society: Seven Studies*, Harper and Row, New York 1977.

97. Cf. José Miguez Bonino, *Towards A Christian Political Ethics*, SCM Press, London 1983; Koson Srisang (ed.), *Perspectives on Political Ethics*, WCC, Geneva 1983. Christopher Duraisingh, "Christian Involvement in Politics and Presuppositions and Resources," *Dharma*, vol. VII (1982), pp. 73-88. Cf. also Francis Claver, "Prophecy or Accommodation? Dilemma of a Discerning Church," *The Month*, March 1980.

98. Cf. Saral K. Chatterji (ed.), *The Meaning of the Indian Experience. The Emergency*, Christian Literature Society, Madras, 1978; Mil Roekaerts, *Christians and Emergency in India*, Pro Mundi Vita, Brussels, 1980.

99. Cf. *Reflections on the Philippine Church*, Human Development Research and Documentation, Metro-Manila 1983; *Three Bishops Speak*, Metro-Manila 1983, (This booklet contains contributions from Bishops Francis Claver, Julio X. Labayen, Federico Escaler). Cf. also C. Arevalo, "Notes for a Theology of Development," *What Asian Christians are Thinking*, ed. by D.J. Elwood, Quezon City, 1976, pp. 398-424. Cf. *For All the Peoples of Asia. The Church in Asia: Asian Bishop's Statements on Mission, Community and Ministry 1970-1983*. IMC Publications, Manila 1984.

100. Cf. Parig Digan, *Churches in Contestation*, Orbis Books, New York 1984. William Biernatzki, et al., *Korean Catholicism in the 1970's: A Christian Community Comes of Age*, Orbis Books, New York 1975.

101. Cf. S.S. Harakas, "Human Rights, An Eastern Orthodox Perspective," *Journal of Ecumenical Studies*, vol 19 (1982). Cf. also Julio De Santa Ana, *Good News to the Poor. The Challenge of the Poor in the History of the Church*, CLS, Madras 1978 (originally published by WCC, Geneva).

102. Cf. D.L. Sheth, "Human Rights. New Approaches, New Definitions," *Illustrated Weekly of India*, June 3, 1984.

103. A survey conducted by FABC Office of Human Development on the motivations that lead people to commitment to the poor goes to confirm this point. Most of the respondents replied that it was the direct experience with the suffering, with the poor, which provided the motivation. *CCA News*, vol. 19, No. 1, January 15, 1984, p. 12.

104. Aloysius Pieris, "Towards an Asian Theology of Liberation: Some Religio-Cultural Guidelines," *Asia's Struggle for Full Humanity*, ed. by Virginia Fabella, Orbis Books, 1980, pp. 75-95; A. Pieris, "The Place of Non-Christian Religions and Cultures in the Evolution of Third World Theology," *Irruption of the Third World*, ed. by Virginia Fabella — Sergio Torres, Orbis Books, New York 1983, pp. 113-139.

105. A review article by George Gispert-Sauch presents the position of the most important contributions made to the theology of religions in recent years. Cf. *Vidyajyoti*, vol. 49 (1985) pp. 465-474. A more recent book is that of Paul F. Knitter, *No Other Name?* SCM Press Ltd., London 1985. Cf. also M. Amaladass, *Faith, Culture and Inter-Religious Dialogue*, Indian Social Institute, Delhi 1985.

106. *Social Action*, vol. 33 (1983) No. 4. The whole issue is dedicated to the study of social and economic bases of communalism.

107. At the time of writing this paper, the speech of the Pope is available to me only as reported in a daily newspaper, *Indian Express*, Madurai, February 6, 1986.

108. Cf. M. Amalodass, *op. cit.*

109. Ary A. Roest Crollius, "What is New about Inculturation," *Gregorianum,* 59 (1978) pp. 721-732; *Idem.,* "Inculturation and the Meaning of Culture," *Gregorianum,* 61 (1980) pp. 253-274; Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Culture, op. cit.*

110. Samuel Rayan, "Flesh of India's Flesh," *Jeevadhara,* vol. 6 (1976), pp. 259-267. Cf. also Robert Hardawiryana, "Asia and Indonesia," *Mission in Dialogue* ed. by Mary M. Motte — Joseph R. Lang, Orbis Books, New York 1982, pp. 34-72; Cf. also Pearl Drego, *ibid.,* pp. 515-536; Patrick D'Souza, *ibid.,* pp. 22-33.

111. *Priestless Parishes in Western Europe: Situation and Search for Solutions,* Pro Mundi Vita, Brussels 1979. There is abundant literature on Basic Christian Communities. With the Asian situation in mind, we refer here to a selected few: Carlos Abesamis, "Faith and Life Reflections from the Grassroots in the Philippines," *Asia's Struggle for Full Humanity, op. cit.* pp. 123-139, Karl Gaspar, "The Local Church and Militant Lay Participation," op. cit; Joseph Prasad Pinto, *Inculturation through Basic Christian Communities. An Indian Perspective,* Asian Trading Corporation, Bangalore 1985; Cf. also Sergio Torres — John Eagleson, *The Challenge of Basic Christian Communities,* Orbis Books, New York 1981; David Clarke, *Basic Communities. Towards an Alternative Society.,* SPCK, London 1977.

112. Cf. Sukumar Datta, *Buddhist Monks and Monasteries in India,* Allen and Unwin, London 1962; Nalinaksha Dutt, *Early Monastic Buddhism,* vol. 1, Calcutta 1941.

113. Monasteries in the early centuries in the West too were much closer to the people than now. Cf. E.C. Butler, *Benedictine Monasticism,* London 1962[2]; cf. also Adolf von Harnack, *Monasticism: Its Ideals and History,* London 1901.

114. Cf. Donald E. Smith, *India as a Secular State:* Chapter 2: "The Problems in Asian Setting," p. 34.

115. Cf. "The Contribution of K. Rahner," *Handbuch der Pastoral–Theologie,* vol. 1, Herder, Freiburg 1970[2], pp. 121ff.

116. Cf. Felix Wilfred, (ed.), *Theological Education in India Today,* Asian Trading Corporation, Bangalore 1985.