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THE CHURCH AND PLURALISM IN THE ASIA OF THE 1990s

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When we think of pluralism from the point view of the Church we may be tempted to think only of the pluralism of religions. Religious pluralism, however, is only only one among the many pluralisms that are a source both of enrichment and of tension, even of conflict, in the countries of Asia. The Church, both in its life and in its praxis, has to take serious account of these pluralisms and become aware of its mission in this situation. Before spelling out the concrete tasks of this mission, we shall first of all try to understand analytically the reality and the problems of pluralism in contemporary Asia. We shall then see how we can look at it from the point of view of our faith. Such a faith perspective will point to the challenges that the Church faces in this situation. We can then discern the pastoral approaches and projects that the Church will have to commit itself to.

I. The Phenomenon of Pluralism in Asia

The fact of pluralism in Asia hardly needs any demonstration; what is necessary is how we understand it and the problems it raises. The pluralisms that I shall evoke in this section are true not only of Asia as a whole, but largely of each country in Asia. I shall refrain from giving examples, though I could, so as to avoid the risk of embarrassing any one.

At the *economic* level, there are not only the rich and the poor in each country. There are also rich and poor countries. Economic ideologies cover a whole spectrum from liberal capitalism to marxist socialism, passing through various forms of mixed economies that seek to balance the public and private sectors in production.

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At the *social* level, we have a variety of ethnic groups in every country. Every ethnic group has normally its own linguistic and cultural identity. Sometimes this differentiation may have racial roots also. Ethnic pluralism becomes more pronounced when the different groups are at various levels of social development. This is true, for instance, of various tribal, or on the contrary, elite groups in many countries. Cultural differences would mean various ways of looking at the world, of relating to others, of finding meaning in life and of constructing community.

At the *political* level, we have various forms of political structures, outlined by various national Constitutions. More important than these structural variations may be the different and often difficult relations of power that exist within a country between various majority and minority groups. Politics then becomes the art of keeping a balance between them.

At the *religious* level, we have all the great religions of Asia, present in various countries in varying proportions. But we should not forget the numerous popular and tribal religions, as well as new religious movements. We have also to take into account non-religious meaning systems or ideologies that may actually animate different groups of people.

Between Tradition and Modernity

This evident pluralism merely at the factual level is made more complex by the process of modernity which is having its impact at various levels on Asian societies. The growth of science and the harnessing of technology leads to industrialization, urbanization and commercialization. Among the various results of this phenomenon, two are of particular concern to our understanding of pluralism, namely, secularization and individualism.

Secularization refers to the growing differentiation between the various institutions of a society. In traditional cultures, economics, politics, society and religion are seen in an integrated way. Religion provides the overall meaning system for everything. The King may also be the religious head of the community. Economics and politics are controlled by and are at the service of social goals laid down by religion. In modern society, economics, politics and culture become autonomous social institutions with their own structures and goals. Religion loses its role as the provider of the overall meaning system. At its extreme, this tendency may lead to the privatization of religion. The result of this differentiation is a pluralism of meaning systems that are not unified at any structural level. Both this differentiation and the means taken by particular societies to counter such fragmentation, either by the imposition of a totalitarian system or by seeking the basis of unity in a particular religious system give

rise to a lot of tensions.

Another consequence of modernity is the loosening of social control and the emergence of the individual. Industrialization and urbanization break up families and social groups. Consumerism and competition favor the growth of *individualism.* It might break up the unity even of the family, dividing husband from wife, and children from parents. Divorce is only one aspect of this. The emergence of individualism and the breaking down of social norms introduce a radical type of pluralism, in which the individual feels free to choose his/her own meaning system. The mass media, the availability of information and financial independence give one a sense of autonomy and freedom to shape one's own destiny.

The situation is made more complex by the fact that most Asian societies are still in a process between tradition and modernity and this period of transition brings its own tensions between two stages of social development. Secondly, Asian traditions are reacting to and integrating science and technology and the consequent industrialization and urbanization in their own way. This means that what we are witnessing is not merely a superficial uniformity because every one is using the same type of machines, but an underlying cultural diversity in the way the machines are used and integrated. That is why we should not conclude too quickly that the growing impact of science and technology will lead to a reduction in pluralism. On the contrary, a growing superficial sameness seems to drive people to search for their "roots" as a source of special identity.

Tensions of Pluralism

Our analysis of the pluralistic situation of Asia will not be complete without a brief evocation of at least some of the ways in which people try to meet it and which seem to give rise to further tensions. Obviously, my interest here concerns only what is relevant to religion.

One answer to pluralism of ideologies, cultures and religions is to focus on the process of economic growth and development. Everything else becomes secondary. Economic well-being becomes the goal of government and shapes the policies also at other levels like society and culture. Pluralisms at all levels will be tolerated provided they do not interfere with the over-riding economic goals of the Community/State. Religion, of course, becomes a strictly private affair. Any attempts on its part to play a prophetic role in public life will be suppressed. Human rights and values systems also become subservient to the dominant interests of the Community/State. This practical atheism may be further strengthened by an atheistic ideology. Religion then will not only be private, but controlled and even opposed as contrary to the official ideology of the State.

Another answer to religious pluralism is to build the community on the basis of the religion of the majority of the population. This seems to be a frequent temptation. Other religions and ideologies are reduced to second-class status. Even democracy, in itself, is not a protection against such domination. A majority can impose itself democratically on the whole population, unless the Constitution itself has provisions to protect and defend the minorities. This tendency may be further strengthened by communalism. Communalism believes that people who share a common religion also share common political and economic interests that are opposed to those of the people who believe differently. Thus, religious difference is reduced to an object of political conflict. Such communalism can also animate minorities when they see in religion a means of defining and defending their identity, rights and freedoms. Communalism can also be based on language or ethnic origins. Such phenomena show, not that the differentiation that I indicated above as a consequence of secularization is not taking effect, but that communalism may be a defensive reaction, especially when it is seen also as an easy tool for reaching out to economic and political power.

Another defensive reaction to secularization, which also feeds communalism, is religious fundamentalism. In the face of modernity that threatens their meaning system, religious groups not only hold on to them, but do so exclusively, denying legitimacy not only to other secular meaning systems, but also to other religious systems. Milder forms of fundamentalism focus narrowly on religion and personal morality, while consciously ignoring its impact on public life.

Such is the complex picture of pluralism that faces the Asian Churches today. It is with reference to it that the Churches have to become aware of their challenges in mission. But this awareness will depend on how we look at this situation and evaluate it from the point of view of our faith.

II. Theological Perspective on Pluralism

Pluralism always seems to be a threat to us and we are tempted to reduce it to a unity. This reduction is often done with reference to our own limited and narrow identities. We tend to marginalize, if not condemn, what we cannot comprehend. On the contrary, our starting point when faced with pluralism should be a positive view of it as an expression of the infinite richness of God reflected in the limited images of God that we ourselves are. We can point to three sources for this pluralism.

Acceptance of Pluralism: God's Gift

The first source of pluralism is God's self. God is the creator of the infinite variety of gifts through which God has manifested God's love to the world. The variety is the measure of God's infinity. The people are in God's image. But their expression of it is so limited and conditioned by their creatureliness that a multiplicity and variety become inevitable. It is not a pluralism of numbers that comes out of a mechanical assembly line. It is the pluralism of the human faces that come out of the hand of an artist with infinite imagination and resources. Thus, pluralism is the manifestation of the richness and creativity of God. The only possible attitude before it is one of wonder and admiration and gratitude. Among the many pluralisms that we have spoken of above, ethnic pluralism is certainly God's gift, while all other pluralisms have their roots in his gifts in various ways.

Peoples' Creativity

If nature is God's gift to people, they create culture on the basis of nature. Here human freedom and creativity come into play. Human groups create language and other symbol systems that enable them to communicate and celebrate. Looking at the world and themselves that God has created and facing the mysteries of life, they evolve various meaning systems in terms of myths, world views and philosophies. Through ritual and relationship they construct community. To help achieve their goals in life they evolve ideologies and political systems. There is variety here because there is no blueprint that they have to imitate. They may learn from other cultures, but what they do is the fruit of their imagination and initiative. As different from animal instinct, they do so freely: not only free from innate constraint, but free to choose from various possible options. It is like art or play: fittingness or harmony may be a more convincing reason than necessity. The pluralism of cultures have their roots in the freedom and creativity of individuals and groups.

Human freedom and creativity, however, are not as unconditioned as God's. Without detriment to their freedom the material circumstances of their work do condition their creativity. History and geography thus become factors of pluralism too. An artist is conditioned by the materials he is working on — color, stone or sound — though he is free to impose his forms on them. People's attitudes and reaction to life and reality seem to be conditioned by the circumstances of nature they live in: mountain, forest, sea shore, field. The work they do, the tools they use, the techniques they develop and the community of helpers they create are dependent on the conditions of their life and production. Similarly, every human group lives in a tradition. A child is born into a family and is socialized in a com-

munity. Its decisions are conditioned by the tradition it has inherited. Thus, factors of space and time, while they are conditioning factors, are responsible for diversity and continuity.

Pluralism of Religions

Such pluralism reaches its peak in the pluralism of religions. Today we accept religious pluralism as legitimate, though there may be various ways of explaining it. There has been and still is a tendency in some parts of the Church to deny a real pluralism at this level by considering other religions as merely natural and human efforts to reach God, whereas Christianity represents God's supernatural answer to human desire. Religions, then, do not have the same significance and it is no longer meaningful to speak of religious pluralism except at a phenomenological level. But the bishops of Asia, from their very first meeting in Taipei, have acknowledged that through the other religions "God has drawn the people to himself."[1] This legitimacy conferred on other religions was confirmed by the symbolic event of Assisi when the Pope came together with the leaders of other religions to pray for peace.[2] In his talk to the Roman Curia explaining this gesture John Paul II refers positively to "the genius and the spiritual 'riches' which God has given to the people."[3]

Divisive Pluralism

Pluralism therefore is something positive. But it has also negative aspects that we must not ignore. Pluralism of expressions supposes that each expression is limited. Pluralism of relationships supposes that, while each relationship may be unique, none is total and holistic embracing all possible aspects. Apart from these natural limitations, sinful human beings are quite capable of creating things and structures that not only differentiate, but separate, divide and oppose. Besides, as we have seen above with reference to communalism and fundamentalism, even what is positive in pluralism may be abused and instrumentalized to support division and domination. Religion itself does not escape both the limitations and the negative uses to which it can be put. This is true also of Christianity. Though the mystery it carries is infinite, its own comprehension and expression of it is limited. In history, it is not only divided but also has been a divisive force.

A Call to Unity

The Christian faith does not see this pluralism as ultimate, but as ordained to a unity — not a uniformity, but a unity that includes and transcends the diversity. This is the vision of St. Paul.

> He has made known to us in all wisdom and insight the mystery of his will, according to his purpose which he set forth in Christ as a plan for the fulness of time, to unite all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth (Eph 1:9-10).

Paul comes back on this vision in Col 1:15-20 and in 1 Cor 15:28. St. John also foresees such unification in the "new heaven and the new earth" (Rev 21:1-5).

This unity at the end is founded on the reality of unity at the beginning when everything is created in and through the Word (Jn 1:3). Pope John Paul II underlines strongly this unity in the plan of God.

> This radical unity, which belongs to the very identity of the human being, is based on the mystery of the divine creation. The one God in whom we believe, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, the Most Holy Trinity, created man and woman with a particular attention, according to the narrative in Genesis (cf. Gen 1:26ff; 2:7, 18-24). This affirmation contains and communicates a profound truth: the unity of the divine origin of all the human family, of every man and woman, which is reflected in the unity of the divine image which each one bears in himself (cf. Gen 1:26), and *per se* gives the orientation to a common goal (cf. *Nostra Aetate,* 1).
>
> There is *only one* divine plan for every human being who comes into this world (cf. Jn 1:9), one single origin and goal, whatever may be the color of his skin, the historical and geographical framework within which he happens to live and act, or the culture in which he grows up and expresses himself. The differences are a less important element when confronted with the unity which is radical, fundamental and decisive.[4]

The requirement of this unity, however, will be seen differently according to the manner in which pluralism is perceived. When the limiting and negative aspects of pluralism are seen, unity will be seen as a reconciliation (cf. Col 1:20). When pluralism is seen positively, then unity will be seen as an integration (cf. 1 Cor 12).

Of this plan of God for the unity of the human kind, the Church sees itself as the sacrament: "a sign and instrument of intimate union with God and of the unity of the whole human race."[5] John Paul II spells out the implications of this for the Church.

> This means that the Church is called to work with all her energies (evangelization, prayer, dialogue) so that the wounds and divisions

> of men — which separate them from their Origin and Goal, and make them hostile to one another — may be healed; it means also that the entire human race, in the infinite complexity of its history, with its different cultures, is "called to form the new people of God" (*Lumen Gentium,* 13) in which the blessed union of God with man and the unity of the human family are healed, consolidated, and raised up.[6]

It is significant that John Paul II speaks in this passage about unity both as reconciliation and as integration. He also stresses the religious dimension of this unity with reference to God or the Absolute, rising beyond merely social and political levels.

The One and the Many

Looking at the prospect of unity in a world that is pluralistic, one could think of the final result in various ways. It is the problem of the one and the many, and the search for unification may stress one or the other pole. One could think of one element among the many as being more central, and group the others around it, subordinating them to it. This does not take the pluralism seriously. We have seen above that even at the religious level we have moved beyond this by recognizing the legitimacy of other religions. I shall come back to this point later. Another point of view takes pluralism seriously and sees them as parts of one totality. One speaks then of complementarity. One could imagine the "whole" as a big puzzle. Ideally the various elements should fall neatly in place, once the artificial divisions that keep them apart are overcome. Such unity is rather static.

I think that we should imagine rather a unity that is dynamic and creative. The elements that we wish to unify are not parts of one whole, but persons and social groups with creative freedoms and absolute commitments. A unity among them can only be something dynamic, involving a mutual challenge and collaboration, creating something new. It is precisely the vision of the "new heaven and the new earth" (Rev 21:1). Such unity involves a dynamic process that might imply not only creative tension, but also conflict, in so far as limitations and negativities have to be overcome and reconciled. The unity is not something given, rediscovered or restored, but newly created, in the power of the Spirit (cf. Rom 8).

In theological terms the goal of this process of unification can be spelt out as the Reign of God that is the transcendent goal of history, though it has to be built up in and through history, through the ministry of the Church, which is its sacrament.[7]

An Asian Vision: The Theology of Harmony

This way of looking at pluralism moving towards unity will find a suitable ground for growth in Asia. Asian philosophic and religious traditions have a holistic view of reality. Whether the *Atman-Brahman* of the Indian tradition or the *Tao* of the Chinese tradition stress the englobing unity of all reality founded on an Absolute that is at once immanent and transcendent, this unity is seen in terms, not of uniformity, but of cosmic order based on right relationships. The process of unity is inclusive in an ongoing dynamic movement of the *yin* and the *yang,* where differences are seen not as oppositions to be suppressed but as creative complementarities to be integrated. This englobing vision gives rise to a logic that does not operate on the principle of contradiction and exclusion (either/or), but of identity and inclusion (both/and). One finds one's identity in self-discovery and affirmation through a process of interiorization rather than in distinguishing oneself from the other seen as different and opposed.

This holistic perspective is seen in practice in an attitude of tolerance and compassion, in a search for consensus, in attempts at persuasion rather than imposition, in a strategy of non-violence rather than violence, in the pursuit of peace and harmony. Whatever may be our lack of fidelity to these ideals in practice, they remain as sources of inspiration and challenge. The emergence, therefore, of a *theology of harmony* is a welcome development.[8]

III. The Challenges to the Churches

In the context of the pluralistic situation of Asia and in the light of the vision of harmony that we have indicated above, what are the challenges that the Churches face today? For the sake of greater clarity, I would like to look at the challenges with reference to three areas. First of all, the Church contains in itself elements of ethnic, cultural, social and economic pluralism. The Church can hardly meet creatively pluralism in society if it cannot come to terms with the pluralism within itself. It can be an effective witness as an agent of unity in the world only in so far as it can itself be a living symbol of unity. Secondly, the Church is one among the many religions in Asia. It has to develop an equilibrium between its ministries of evangelization and dialogue in the context of its pursuit of the Reign of God. Thirdly, in collaboration with other religions and ideologies, the Church has to play its prophetic role in civil society. A particular aspect of this will be its relationship to the State. Let us now look at these areas in some detail.

The Horizon: The Reign of God

The overall horizon of this discussion will be the Church's mission to evangelize. The goal of this mission is the building up of the Reign of God and, in its service, the building up of the Church as a prophetic community.[9] What are the implications of building up the Reign of God in contemporary Asia? I would like to mention here very briefly some of the concerns that seem imperative in a rapidly modernizing Asia. The process of modernity is said to be one of progressive secularization. While this is welcome in so far as it is a growing differentiation among the various institutions of society,[10] it is not welcome if it is seen as the privatization and eventual atrophy of religion. I think that the real danger is not the disappearance of religious sense,[11] but its becoming a personal affair that has no impact on secular and public life, which then claims an absolute autonomy in its own sphere. Religion then ceases to be a prophetic force. While pluralism is a fact of life, it cannot be allowed to reduce religion to just one among the many elements. Hence, the role of religion in life, private and public, has to be rediscoverd and affirmed.

Another major result of scientific and technological development is the spirit of consumerism, the pursuit of plenty and the consequent competition and individual and collective selfishness. It is the task of religion to keep alive the sense of the other and of love as self-gift and even sacrifice. This sense of the other will eventually develop into an attitude of *solidarity*. John Paul II has described solidarity as follows:

> This is not a feeling of vague compassion or shallow distress at the misfortunes of so many people, both near and far. On the contrary, it is a *firm and persevering determination* to commit oneself to the *common good;* that is to say, to the good of all and of each individual, because we are *all* really responsible *for all.*[12]

Such an attitude of solidarity is possible only if we can respect the dignity and freedom of every human person, irrespective of his/her caste, ethnic origin, economic status, religion, ideology or political orientation. To respect another person is to eschew violence in dealing with their person, but rather count on dialogue and persuasion.

Our commitment to the Reign of God is a special commitment to the poor and the oppressed. This is not only because the poor are the object of God's special concern (cf. Lk 1:52-53) and the good news of the Reign of God is proclaimed particularly to them (cf. Lk 4:18), but because our concern for the poorest is an indication of our concern for the promotion of the Reign. The strength of a chain is its weakest link. The real test of our concern for human dignity and solidarity is how that con-

cern affects the poorest in the community. The poor thus become the criterion of the authenticity and effectiveness of our concern. That is why one speaks today of the *preferential love for the poor.*

It is important to explore the challenges of pluralism to the Churches within the horizon of the Reign of God, because we are not interested in unity and harmony for their own sake. As an Indian (Tamil) poet has said: "Even if a single person lacks food, we will destroy the universe," because the universe has failed in its responsibility.

The Church as Community

The principle of unity within the Church is its catholicity. This unity is celebrated symbolically in the Eucharist. But the challenge is really to translate this vision and celebration in practical life. The faith is above all divisions and pluralisms. It must be able to include, integrate and transcend all such pluralisms. One could speak of two levels in this process.

There is one level in which the difference is really richness and has to be respected and integrated. Such are, for instance, ethnic and cultural pluralisms. At this level we have to promote a unity in diversity, which could be quite complex even within one local Church. One could also wonder about the boundaries of a local Church: whether it is a nation or a cultural region? But even within a single cultural region, given the mobility of populations, there may be cultural minorities that will have to be respected. Such a unity can be promoted only through freedom in creativity, ongoing dialogue in mutual respect, and participation and collaboration in common action and celebration.

Another level of this process concerns the pluralism of ideologies. An ideology is a framework of principles geared to concrete choices and action.[13] Capitalism and Socialism are, for instance, ideologies. Faith (religion) is not an ideology, but provides general moral and spiritual perspectives and values that ideologies seek to translate into action. People with the same faith may choose different ideologies. The unity of the faith in a diversity of ideologies can be preserved only if every one is devoted to the common good and committed to the perspectives and values proposed by faith, and is open to mutual challenge, correction and collaboration in view of a common project. Ideally, community would be expressed in a consensus concerning a common course of action to be discerned in a concrete situation. The catholic community can certainly speak of it in terms of seeking and finding the will of God through a process of communal discernment. But in practice, consensus on values and goals with differences in the choice of means may be a more normal situation.

I think that such an authentic community can be promoted in the Church only if the Church as a whole is not turned inward, but is oriented to its mission in the world.[14] Only such a common project can bring about a convergence of ideologies and perspectives. A Church that cannot achieve such a measure of unity cannot claim to be a symbol, much less an agent, of the unity of the Reign of God in the world.

The Church in Dialogue

Such an involvement in the world brings the Church necessarily into contact with other religions (or quasi-religions). Here again the challenges can be spelt out at two different levels. First of all, the Church as a religion encounters other religions. It is necessary to see this not as a clash between different and competing meaning systems, each claiming to an absolute validity, but as an encounter between two communities of believers. This change in viewpoint assures that the basis of unity in pluralism is the common vocation that all people have from God their Creator, and the common goal, again God, to whom they all tend. As the Asian bishops have said:

> Our Christian communities in Asia must listen to the Spirit at work in the many communities of believers who live and experience their own faith, who share and celebrate it in their own social, cultural and religious history, and that they (as communities of the Gospel) must accompany these others "in a common pilgrimage toward the ultimate goal, in relentless quest for the Absolute," and that thus they are to be "sensitively attuned to the work of the Spirit in the resounding symphony of Asian communion."[15]

Correspondingly, the principle of pluralism in unity is not simply differing doctrines and world views that may eventually have cultural and historical roots, but the freedom and dignity of the persons and their commitment to values and perspectives that they see as absolute. Interreligious dialogue becomes mutual witness and proclamation, the realization of the community underlying the diversity of commitments as well as of the common goal. People then learn to relativise their own belief systems without in any way relativizing the Absolute to which they are committed and which they witness to and proclaim.[16]

Such interreligious dialogue should take into account not only the Great Religions, but also the Tribal and Popular religions,[17] as well as quasi-religious ideologies. It will be helpful to remember that the majority of our Christians too are at popular religious levels.

Interreligious dialogue, however, is not an end in itself. It is only a

preparation for the religions to play their prophetic role in society in collaboration with each other. This supposes that religions, while differing in their vision of the Ultimate, can agree in the promotion of common human and spiritual values. John Paul II has repeatedly affirmed this possibility. Speaking before leaders of other religions in Madras, India, he said:

> As followers of different religions we should join together in promoting and defending common ideals in the spheres of religious liberty, human brotherhood, education, culture, social welfare and civic order.[18]

It is interesting to note the Pope's insistence on the respect for human dignity, the need for religious freedom and the prophetic role of religion in society.

The Church as Prophet

This leads us to the third area of challenges in a pluralistic society, namely, the role of the Church in public life. First of all, the Church must be aware of its prophetic role in public life, challenging all that is divisive and promoting unity and peace. This means on the one hand that it must not agree to become simply a private affair of some citizens. It must affirm its right to be the conscience of society. On the other hand it must avoid any trace of communalism which confuses religion and politics and exploits religious sentiments for political ends. In the case of a highly institutionalized organization like the Church, this might mean that the institution remains a-political, while the Christians are encouraged to take active part in public life, not only as citizens, but as Christians.[19]

In playing this prophetic role in society the Church is called to collaborate with other religions which also have a similar prophetic role, and also with other men of good will who may be committed to other absolutes. Such collaboration is one sure way of avoiding communalism. The Church must do this whether it is a majority or a minority in a society. Doing this, it would not really matter if the Church is a small minority, because in fighting for spiritual and human values it is not alone but is in the company of all the people of other religions and ideologies who are committed to the same goals and are conscious of the same prophetic role.

When we think of the Church in relation to politics, we tend to think of it in terms of the Church-institution and the State. The interrelation of these two institutions have had a complex history in Europe.[20] But it will not be helpful to extrapolate this history or this experience outside Europe. I think it would be more helpful to think in terms of people's involvement in public life — people who have different faith convictions,

but who have to live and work together in pursuit of common goals. This would be particularly indicated in Asia, because the other religions in Asia are not institutionalized in the way as is Christianity. We can thus prescind from institutional and structural problems.

Interreligious collaboration at this level means that the common goals and values that have to be defended and promoted emerge out of consensus.[21] It is not enough to call upon reason as the basis of such values. We know the vast cultural and religious variations with regard to values systems. Therefore it is much better and more authentic if each religious group finds roots in its own faith conviction for the values that it wants to defend and a consensus around certain values develops among the religious groups through dialogue and discussion.[22] A certain differentiation between religion and other social institutions would make it easier to understand that commitment to certain basic values may coexist with differences of opinion with regard to the ways and means of affirming and promoting them. In any case, a pluralist society supposes that we have to arrive at a consensus at the secular, public level through mutual persuasion and conversation, and not through imposition of one's own ideas, however much one may be convinced about one's being right.[23] This is the price one has to pay for living in a pluralist society.

But conversation supposes that one is true to one's convictions and bold and free in sharing and even arguing them, even when one is ready to listen and is open to compromise where possible. That is why dialogue and proclamation are two sides of one coin.

It is in this context that many Asian theologians today speak of the need to promote basic human communities of people belonging to various religions and ideologies who are, however, committed to the defence and promotion of common human and spiritual values. Such communities will really be the symbols and the beginnings of unity in pluralist societies.

Such an awareness of the limited nature of any consensus that we can arrive at in a pluralistic society will enable us to distinguish between the legal and the moral. Moral obligation is much wider than legal obligation. The laws can only protect public order and a certain consensus that make common life possible. They cannot impose all that a moral conscience may rightfully demand from a particular group of believers. Thus, we have a unity at the level of law and order, while there may be a real diversity at the level of moral choice and behavior.

This does not mean that we should not seek to persuade, where we cannot impose by law. We need not opt for a superficial unity that simply

pretends that no differences exist. We need not promote a facade of peace that hides deep tensions. But through mutual prophecy, dialogue and conversation the tensions can be made creative and lead to a progressive convergence. This can happen not only within a society among religions, but also between societies.[24]

The authenticity of prophecy will be obvious when we prefer to raise our voice in criticism without fear, and particularly when we become the voice of the voiceless poor and oppressed.

IV. Pastoral Suggestions

What are the ways in which the Church can promote such unity-in-pluralism in society? I shall be satisfied with indicating four broad areas in which action can be taken, leaving for further discussion the task of discerning concrete projects, according to possibilities of time, place and history.

Formation

The task of building a unity in pluralism will have to be carried not by institutions and structures but by people. Therefore people have to be prepared to participate in such a process. Such preparation would involve a deep and experiential rootedness in one's own faith and identity; an openness to other people and their experiences and convictions; an attitude of harmony that is aware not only of the basic unity, but also of the common goal that all people share; and a commitment to shape this unity in life and history through struggling against all that divides. I think that, going beyond communication of ideas, we have to educate them through participative experience which alone can lead to conversion, conviction and commitment. Given the network of schools and similar training institutions that the Church has in Asia, I think that we have to provide such a formation not only to the Christians but to all who come under our educational influence in some way. We have to educate people to live creatively in a pluralist society, to be free, to be open to the other, to be ready for dialogue and collaboration.[25]

The Church as Community

Secondly, we have build up the Church — People of God — as a community that lives its eucharistic experience in daily life and action. We have to take a positive view of differences, but at the same time seek to integrate them into a community. People must be able to go beyond tolerance and mutual respect to mutual challenge and growth. Participation and creativity must be encouraged. The Church must become a people's

movement from below, with the institution at the service of the people. People must discover their community in their common inspiration and commitment and not in their common belongingness to a structure. The special Synod of 1985 highlighted the idea of communion to describe the deeper reality of the Church. The implications of this must be seriously explored.

A Common Mission of Service

The Church will certainly find a model of this communion in the Trinity. But the Trinity must not remain an exterior model that one seeks to imitate moralistically, but a movement of life between Father, Son and Spirit, which becomes one's own, thus uniting each one in the cosmic mystery of the plan of God for the world. The communion of the Church should be built around its mission to the world, so that it is not only a community in being, but a collaboration in action. Such collaboration is possible only in a common listening to the Spirit leading to communal discernment. We often speak of parish councils, priests' synods, etc. How many of them can claim to be participating in the life of the Trinity, discerning their mission in common? In other words, the community of the Church must not be seen in structural terms, but in personal terms. An over-hierarchical view of the Church may tend to see unity in terms of the unifying head, rather than make the head the expressive symbol of the unity of the community. Unity will be the result, not of a balance of power, but of mutuality in service. Similarly, at least in this context we must focus more on the Church as the people (of God) who are simultaneously Christians and citizens, and have to integrate these two aspects in their life and action in a pluralist society.

A Church in Dialogue

Dialogue with other religions and ideologies, of course, will be indispensable. Going beyond the dialogue of life, passing through mutual understanding, appreciation and challenge, it must move to collaboration in the defence and promotion of common human and spiritual values.[26] Such interreligious community will be realized, not at national and institutional levels, but at the grass-roots, in the construction of common human communities that are committed to the poor and to prophecy in society.

Such common human communities can be built through common listening to God in prayer, through mutually enriching and challenging conversation and argument that leads to common perspectives,[27] and through common projects. It is of course necessary that the conversation does not remain at the religious level, but through the mediation of

human and social sciences, focuses on concrete issues and problems. Such mediation supposes that the same consensus that may be available at the level of perpectives, values and goals, may not be available at the level of concrete action plans. Creativity and freedom of choice, besides ideological differences, will result in pluralism. This means that openness, tolerance and collaboration are part of the spirit of dialogue at this level. It is obviously necessary to create forums for such ongoing dialogue and collaboration. It may be helpful if they are not linked to the institutional Church.

V. Conclusion

It is a real challenge to the Church, not only to protest against every form of discrimination, but to promote positively reconciliation and community. The Church can play sometimes a mediating and catalytic role in promoting peace. But beyond this, faced with fundamentalism and communalism, the Church should resist the temptation to withdraw and become self-defensive or to become itself communalistic, if not openly, then in subtle ways, but rather contribute to the building up of a public consensus, by joining a national debate, that will form the basis of a community of freedom, equality, fraternity and justice. The Church does not have to deny its proper mission in doing so, precisely because it is thus building up the Reign of God.

VI. Questions for Discussion

I. Becoming Aware of the Situation

1. How do you experience pluralism? Share experiences.

2. What has been the impact of modernity on the pluralistic situation in your country?

3. In what ways is pluralism being a source of tension in your area? What are the factors and causes?

4. What are the challenges of pluralism:
   — for the Church-community?
   — for the Church's mission?

5. How do you evaluate the opportunities and challenges of pluralism in the light of an Asian faith perspective?

II. Pastoral Strategies

6. How can we form people — Christians and other believers — for

their life and mission in a pluralistic world?

7. What concrete steps can we take to promote the experience of the Church as communion?

8. How can we encourage collaboration with other believers in fulfilling our common prophetic mission in society?

9. Specify one project that your Church could take up to actualize its unifying mission in your country or area?

10. How do you see role of the Church-community in public life in a world of many religions and ideologies?

Footnotes:

1. "Evangelization in Modern-day Asia," No. 15, in *For All the Peoples of Asia* (Manila, IMC, 1984), p. 30.
2. Cf. Marcello Zago, "Day of Prayer for Peace," in *Bulletin* 22 (1987), p. 150.
3. Ibid., p. 57.
4. Ibid., pp. 55-56.
5. *Lumen Gentium*, 1.
6. Ibid., p. 57.
7. Cf. Gerhard Lohfink, "The Exegetical Predicament Concerning Jesus' Kingdom of God Proclamation," *Theology Digest* 36 (1989) 103-110.
8. Cf., FABC, BIRA IV/11 (Sukabumi, July 1988), *Statement.*
9. Cf. M. Amaladoss, "Evangelization in Asia: A New Focus," *East Asian Pastoral Review* 23 (1986) 440-461. Also in *Vidyajyoti* 51 (1987) 7-28.
10. Cf. Paul Valadier, *L'église en procès* (Paris, Calmann-Levy, 1987).
11. Cf. Philip E. Hammond (ed), *The Sacred in a Secular Age* (Berkley, University of California, 1985); Thomas Luckmann, *Life-World and Social Realities* (London, Heinmann, 1983).
12. *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis*, 38.
13. Cf. Clifford Geertz, "Ideology as a Cultural System," in *The Interpretation of Cultures* (New York, Basic, 1973), pp. 193-233.
14. Cf. FABC, "The Church — A Community of Faith in Asia," No. 8, in *For All the Peoples of Asia*, pp. 94-95.
15. Ibid., pp. 94-95.

16. Cf. Theses on Interreligious Dialogue, especially Thesis 6 and Commentary in *FABC Papers* 48 (Hongkong, FABC, 1988).

17. Cf. M. Amaladoss, "Popular Religion: Some Questions," *Vidyajyoti* 53 (1989) 357-368.

18. Feb. 5, 1986. Text in *Origins* 15 (1986), p. 598. See also his more recent speech in Jakarta, Indonesia, Oct. 10, 1989.

19. Cf. Paul Valadier, *Agir en politique* (Paris, Cerf, 1980).

20. Cf. Robert E. Webber, *The Church in the World: Opposition, Tension or Transformation?* (Grand Rapids, Zondervan, 1986). See Peter H. Merkl and Ninian Smart (eds.), *Religion and Politics in the Modern World* (New York, New York University Press, 1985).

21. Cf. David Hollenbach, *Justice, Peace, and Human Rights. American Catholic Social Ethics in a Pluralistic Context.* (New York, Crossroad, 1988).

22. Cf. M. Amaladoss, "Liberation as an Interreligious Project," in Felix Wilfred (ed), *Verlass den Tempel* (Herder, Freiburg, 1988) 146-178.

23. Cf. John Courtney Murray, *We Hold These Truths* (New York, Sheed and Ward, 1960), especially the introduction: "The Civilization of the Pluralist Society," pp. 5-26.

24. Cf. R. Panikkar, "The Myth of Pluralism: The Tower of Babel — A Meditation on Non-violence," *Cross Currents* (Summer, 1979) 197-230.

25. Cf. M. Amaladoss, *Educating for the Faith in a Multireligious Context* (New Delhi, JEA, 1988).

26. A careful study and implementation of the recommendations of the various Bishops' Institutes for Interreligious Affairs are very much indicated.

27. Cf. M. Amaladoss, *Faith, Culture and Interreligious Dialogue* (New Delhi, Indian Social Institute, 1985).