

Fifth Plenary Assembly: Workshop Discussion Guide

**THE CHURCH AND THE QUEST FOR PEACE
IN THE ASIA OF THE 1990s**

by

the Catholic Bishops' Conference of Japan

PART ONE

1) INTRODUCTION

This workshop guide is developed within the background of Pope John Paul's *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis*, and the Final Document of the European Ecumenical Assembly, "Peace with Justice for the Whole Creation," May 1989. The Final Document is published in FABC Paper No. 54. The present paper proposes a set of questions which the Church in Asia will have to answer in the 1990s, in view of the emerging trends in the region, which can be interpreted as a *spiritual quest in an uncertain world*.

The meaning of what will be the main characteristics of Asia in 1990s will be explained in the following sections. The analysis of the state of affairs in Asia will lead to a third section which will deal with the questions the Church will have to answer in view of these regional realities.

2) THE MAIN CHARACTERISTICS OF ASIA IN THE 1990s

Asia in the 1990s will be the arena of a number of contradictory global trends which must be first analyzed here, if only briefly. The trends originate from the global process where three major crises influence each other and create a highly uncertain global situation.

a) The first crisis is a *political/military* one. The recent events in Eastern Europe create new trends which make unsustainable the world order built in the 1950s on a nuclear balance between two superpowers representing two systems: capitalism and socialism.

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b) A second crisis is an *economic/ecological* one. The illusion of a limitless economic growth had been replaced already in the 1970s by a demand coming from the Third World for a new international economic order. The deepening of the crisis in the 1980s has left this demand unanswered, and the gaps between rich and poor countries have continued to broaden. The global impoverishment has been accompanied by an impoverishment of nature. This makes the world of the 1990s doubly unsustainable, economically and ecologically.

c) A third crisis is *cultural and spiritual*. The political and economic inability to sustain what has been for a few decades accepted as the basic principles according to which the world operates has led people in different social conditions to put into question the basic values on which the modern world is built: power and wealth. Different religious and intellectual movements in search of fundamental value-transformations compete with each other. The present orders, political, economic and social, are delegitimized, while new legitimate orders are yet to come.

In face of the triple crisis, the different sectors of the societies in the industrial as well as developing regions react in different ways.

a) One of the most common reactions is to *reject any attempt to change*, on the ground that the status quo is the safest, and that those who want change are the enemies of society. Different pretexts legitimizing this attitude exist. The easiest argumentation, of putting blame for any change on the shoulders of the communists, does not hold anymore. Law and order, morality, dedication to the society are used, sometimes combined with religious fundamentalism, to keep the good old ways. The resistance to change, in most cases, is based on vested interests in the status quo. From semi-feudal landlords' reaction to land reform to bureaucratic resistance to popular demands for democratization, all these reactions to change are bound to fail in this age of global transformation. The irony of history is that, in the short run, the reactionary forces appear to be strong, since they held real power, even while they begin to lose legitimacy.

b) More subtle and flexible reactions to change are now becoming more and more powerful around the world. There is now a global attempt by the global elite to give a global answer to the three crises. The solution is based on what may be called *reformist global technocracy*. In answer to political confusions, the reconciliation between the two superpowers and their agreement to put an end to East-West conflicts make it possible for the North to strengthen its control over the turbulent South. No more Soviet obstructions to U.S.A. interventions.

Conflicts in the South must not have a negative global impact, now

not in increasing the danger of an escalation into nuclear war, but rather in disturbing the world economy, e.g., in such a way as the debt problem does. Structural adjustments disregarding domestic problems are imposed by the North. Disturbances arising from such measures will have to be dealt with by military and political means, now called by the strategic experts "LIC" (low intensity conflicts) strategy.

The reformist technocratic managers in the North do not, however, lack realism. They are ready to extend not only military but also political and economic support to their allies in the South. Authoritarian regimes, often under military rule, are encouraged to reduce "country risks" and introduce transnational capital to conduct a policy of accelerated industrialization. Government aid and private investment are bestowed on such regimes. They are invited to become more humane, more democratic, provided that they do not reject transnational inputs, nor reject foreign presence, like the military bases.

The globalism of the technocrats is also actively engaged in global cooperation to cope with environmental degradation. They are ready to link aid to ecology, and force the Third World governments to become more attentive to global ecology. They even develop projects where a large sum of money is spent on ecology, for example, on reforestation. Their ecological concern is genuine, but is based on the interest of the North in sustaining industrial growth. It is not in any way related to the local impacts of ecological destruction, such as the destruction of the life environment of the indigenous peoples caused by deforestation. The technocratic approach to deforestation is not to reduce industrial activities leading to deforestation, but to add other industrial activities, promoting eco-industries in such a way that industries would benefit from both deforestation and reforestation.

Global concern for cultural change tolerates spiritual revivals provided that their globalistic orientation does not put into question the fundamental values of power and wealth, and accepts the world as it is. It is not very difficult for the different established religions to coexist or cooperate with the globalists of a technocratic creed. These understand the role of religious institutions, the importance to guard orthodoxy, and the educational role religions play in forming responsible and uncritical members of the civil society.

c) Another type of social force actively involved in coping with the threefold global crisis is composed of a *variety of popular movements*. In opposition to the technocratic globalists, the movements are in search of a more humane alternative society. They take the form of issue-related movements, the anti-nuclear, the greens, the women's lib, the student

movements in the North. In Asia, and more generally in the Third World, they take the form of self-organizing efforts of different communities, village-change actors, minority-group movements, religious fundamentalism, etc. In view of the lack of interest for the weak, the poor and the discriminated-against by the technocratic globalists and the conservatives, the different movements fill the gaps created by the states unable to reach the people, being led by a coalition of the technocrats and the conservatives. It is these movements which have achieved such fundamental changes in Eastern Europe.

The impact on Asia of the world crises differs from country to country, but public and private policies are all influenced by the global technocratic projects and strategies supported by the conservatives, who find it a lesser evil to cooperate with these globalists rather than to accept changes under the leadership of the social movements.

Let us review briefly the state of affairs in the different sub-regions. There is, to begin with, the JapaNIES (Newly Industrialized Economies) Asia, i.e., Japan, South Korea, Hongkong and Taiwan, Singapore, and the would-be NIEs of the ASEAN region where the global technocratic approach is itself the orthodoxy and the cause of national pride of the self-made societies. Japan plays the dangerous role of a would-be regional hegemony. Its technological power seems to give the solution to all development issues, since the NIEs emulating Japan prove the power of the Japanese development model based on collectivism and hard-working Confucian values. The major weak point of this approach is its dedication to competition in search of power and wealth, forgetting the weak, the poor and the deprived, who are treated as a liability for society, to be gotten rid of, if possible. It is, however, in many of these countries that there are found prophetic Christian movements aiming at a more humane, a more democratic, and a more spiritual alternative society.

There are, however, more positive situations, such as the group of countries where trends towards democracy and human rights have now acquired legitimacy. In most of them, the fact must be recognized that they have not (yet) succeeded in overcoming the resistance of the social forces interested in the maintenance of the status quo, especially the military. In spite of all kinds of difficulties, ambiguities and concessions to the forces of status quo, it is a heartening fact that in a number of Asian countries governments interested in democratization are in power, including India and Pakistan in South Asia, and the Philippines in Southeast Asia. It is even more crucial for the future of Asia to find popular movements trying to find a solution to the threefold crisis, taking into consideration the rights and needs of the weak and the oppressed, as is the case in Hong Kong and Taiwan, South Korea, Burma, and several microstates of the Pacific.

The impact of the Asian crises on many of the Asian peoples is most serious in the case of native peoples, ethnic minorities and other peoples which do not benefit from the "development" policies of their governments.

It is often the case that the indigenous peoples have a more positive approach to life, economics and politics than do the ruling majorities. The world view of many of them presupposes a respect for all living beings, an attitude indispensable to cope with ecological problems. The cultural identity of many minorities is not only to be respected as a basic human right; the preservation of their identity is essential to preserve also the pluralism of human civilization, a condition *sine qua non* for the solution of the present cultural and spiritual crisis.

The pluralism of popular traditions is indeed an asset of human civilization. This plurality, however, has its negative aspects too. In contrast to the technocratic globalists, the different trends and movements, basing their position on a respect of the human dignity of the weak and oppressed peoples, tend to be local-specific. It is even often the case that in face of a total rejection by the political and economic elite, the oppressed social groups fight among themselves, because they find no other outlets for their frustrated sense of identity. In fact, the problem is that they do not share a global universal creed. It is, of course, different in the case of those sharing a common transcendental faith, be it Christian, Muslim, Buddhist, Hindu, or other. It is a true tragedy that among such religions the very universal claim of each of them complicates further the conflicts among oppressed groups. So many examples can be cited from South and Southeast Asia, as well as from the Pacific. This is where a peacemaking and prophetic role of religions becomes extremely important in providing a common ground for the diverse trends and movements in Asia, aiming at a constructive solution to the global crisis truly beneficial to *the smallest child*, in the Gandhian sense of this metaphor.

3) THE QUESTIONS AWAITING AN ANSWER BY THE CHURCH IN ASIA

The above description of the threefold global crisis and its diverse impacts on Asia has not sufficiently stressed the importance of the spiritual potential of the movements aiming at a bottom-upwards solution to the crisis. Many of the popular movements are animated by a spiritual vision; many of them are inspired by Christian theologies, including liberation theology.

In face of the dissolution of technocratic socialism in East Europe, the magic influence of Marxism is losing legitimacy. *Who are able to represent the needs and aspirations of the oppressed except the prophetic*

actors of the different religious families?

The role of the Church in Asia is clear and unambiguous in this respect. It is to play a prophetic role, taking stock of and supporting the emerging trends and forces which have a part in this spiritual awakening, all around the world, beginning with Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union, but more particularly in the Third World, especially in Asia. It is a heartening reality that this quest for the transcendent coincides with an emerging of popular movements associating themselves in different ways with the oppressed and the poor. This is exactly where the Church wants to be.

However, things are not that simple. There is, probably, a "rear-guard fight," but still a decisive competition, especially in Asia, between the forces of status quo, in terms of feudalistic and colonial past interests and the technocratic globalists, who want change to the extent that transnational economic cooperation can work in a stable environment. In South Africa, it is they who help the more liberal white elite. Similar situations exist in Asia, as in the case of the American unwillingness to support military coups. The situation is therefore not so clearcut, and in different cases, the technocrats have a positive role to play.

The movements have, therefore, to find ways to cooperate with this global force wherever it is playing a positive role. It should also be courageous enough to denounce the hidden interests of the globalists who do not care for the people, especially for the "unproductive" poor, indigenous peoples, etc.

This is where we come to the questions the Church in Asia has to answer. *Before anything else, the Church has to determine how it can support best the prophetic actions emerging from within and/or from without.* The institutional Church is a pluralistic community of believers. It has an avant-garde and a rear guard. It has access to the powerful; it can exercise its power of persuasion on the technocratic globalists. It can even negotiate, as equal to equal, with the autocratic governments through its diplomatic channels. It can educate through its educational institutions.

The prophetic action of its avant-garde is often cut off from the rear-guard support which may be of considerable help, especially in the Asian societies where, as we saw above, legitimacy is in the hands of the movements but power is with the status quo forces. This is where a pluralistic division of labor and cooperation has to be created within the Church. *How to develop such pluralism is perhaps the most difficult question at the pastoral level of the Church in Asia.*

The above question is closely related to the question of the way different trends and movements, within and without the Church, receive an appropriate interpretation in terms of their role, aim and vision. In the present crisis where the state and other conventional institutions fail to operate, or operate for the interests of the powerful, the external interests and the technocratic globalists, *the Church must develop a deep understanding of the different popular movements, and of their unexpressed spiritual potentiality*. If the present global crisis has an outcome with true relevance to the weak and the poor, it is through the combined action of the different trends and movements.

A corollary to the above question regards interreligious cooperation. Such dialogue can easily become a means to support the technocratic globalism of the establishments of the different Asian societies. *How can the institutional Churches and religious bodies cooperate among themselves in support of their respective avant-garde? How can they respond to the deep quest for a genuine Asian identity, with the necessary pluralism among the different creeds? How can the basic values of human dignity, of respect for all living beings expressed by the different spiritual trends be best put into a constructive dialogue, avoiding a shallow and trivial agreement about the fact that peace, development and ecology are "good?"*

All the above questions have to be answered in full realization of the contemporary development of the global crises, and of their impact on Asia. As the Chinese character meaning crisis combines "danger" and "opportunity," the Church has to read the signs of the time which are expressed in the opportunity for alternative visions more spiritual and transcendent to lead the popular trends and movements. This is what is happening in East Europe. This is also what is taking place in many Asian societies. Even if interreligious conflicts are also part of the picture, and religious fundamentalisms tend to obstruct the possibilities of a pluralistic cooperation among those who care for the weak and the oppressed, the world, and especially Asia, is experiencing a spiritual adventure. The Church has to be courageous enough to take part in this adventure.

PART TWO

THE ROLE OF THE ASIAN CHURCH AS AN INSTRUMENT OF HARMONY

In this part we want to propose several practical ideas in the context of the Church as an instrument of harmony.

In addition to those questions raised previously in our analysis of regional realities, we have singled out some very common sources of disharmony today in regard to Justice, Peace and Integrity of Creation.

1) Harmony Through Justice

“This is what Yahweh asks of you, that you act justly ... Micah 6:8

a) Sources of Disharmony Today

Loss of land rights	Refugee situation
Unjust economic systems	Permanent poverty
Loss of human and ethnic rights	Underemployment
Foreign debts	Discrimination
Loss of national resources	Trafficking of women and children
Controlled mass media	Over-affluence

b) Injustice is a Violence against Society

Most injustices and unjust structures are caused by greed and the drive for power. These take the form of insatiable accumulation of wealth and power by individuals, families, corporations, organizations and states. These are permitted and assisted by social acceptance and by law. Even though their destruction of social harmony is obvious, the respect given to the established structures of greed cause submission, in some cases, even by the Church. The greatest injustice occurs when those who suffer from these injustices are blamed for the disharmony of society. A controlled mass media adds to this injustice.

c) God's Covenant of Justice – Building Harmony through a Just Economic Order

In order to restore or to create social harmony, the Church in Asia is called in a special way to take a leading role by:

- seriously studying the mandates of the papal encyclicals and its own past statements, and developing a spirituality and values that will enable peoples to build and live out a just economic order;
- changing the Church's economic policies to match the encyclicals;
- and investing their own assets, land and wealth in just economic initiatives;
- granting opportunity for the poor to participate in Church decision-making councils;
- learning from local peoples how to empower them and share resources with them;
- encouraging efforts to develop economic initiatives that are people-centered rather than solely profit-motivated;

- using the Church’s good offices to work towards freeing their nations from the bondage of foreign debt;
- encouraging their charitable organizations to give priority to programs of economic renewal and self-sufficiency.

In the Church’s attempts to bring Gospel harmony to areas of injustice, like Christ it must, when all else fails, continue its prophetic role of denouncing injustices and promoting just alternatives.

2) Harmony Through Peace

“This is what God asks of you ... that you love mercifully ...”

a) Sources of Disharmony Today

Conventional wars	National Security policies
“Low Intensity Warfare”	Internal militarization
Indiscriminate killing	Foreign/national military bases
Weapons of mass destruction	Vast monies budgeted for military and warfare
Power of military class	Emerging paramilitary groups
Use of torture	Suppression of human rights/freedom by force or law

b) Armed Conflicts and Force are Violence against Humankind

They are also acts of despair. The greatest cause of conflict and violence is a fear which focuses on the “other” as an enemy creating divisions. Discrimination plays a big part in this process. The social nature of this disharmony is seen in the religious, political and economic conflicts so prevalent in Asia today. This fear takes concrete form in the escalating military budgets, promoting warfare as conflict solutions, and the storing of mass-destruction weapons.

c) God’s Promise of Peace — Harmony Through Building a Just Peace

It must first be recognized that many of the situations of conflict would disappear if the situations of injustice were resolved. In order to permit this to happen the Church in Asia is called to be a leader in building peace by:

- creating “Peace Zones” in the middle of war areas;
- setting up “Communication Zones,” when there is a breakdown between disputing parties;

- presenting unbiased truth in cases of misinformation and committing itself to checking into the truth of rumors;
- mediating cooperation between people and groups with differing ideologies, nationalities, beliefs, racial backgrounds or status;
- offering sanctuary and working for the resettlement of refugees;
- challenging the use of monies for militarization;
- calling for the dismantling of all foreign military bases;
- urging the replacing of violent confrontation by non-violent peace talks;
- encouraging new concepts for the role of military in the future;
- by living out these concepts within Church structures.

If the Church is to take a leading role in working for harmony through peace initiatives where there are none, it is necessary to deepen the Gospel spirituality of fellowship and solidarity, of respect for truth, of making peace a value worth working for, by encouraging reconciliation and the active concern of all.

3) Harmony Through Integrity of Creation

“This is what God asks of you ... that you walk humbly with your God.”

a) Sources of Environmental Disharmony Today

Rain forest depletion	Pollution of oceans	Disruption of the chain of life
Destruction of Mangrove	Pollution of air	Destruction of chromosomes through radiation
Destruction of water sheds	Dangerous chemicals	Depletion of non-renewable resources
Destruction of marine life	Nuclear radiation	Non-replacement of renewable resources
Dangerous wastes	Poverty	Soil breakdown through overuse of chemical farming

b) Our Ego-centered Poisoning of the Earth is Violence against Nature and our Creator

The greatest obstacle to harmony with nature is man's drive to conquer the earth and "subdue" it in order to use it for his own convenience. *Unbalanced* technological growth and consumerism have exacerbated this selfish destruction of the earth. It has also contributed to the displacement and impoverishment of many. Forgetting that we are only one part of God's creation, humankind has become a parasite on the earth. In Genesis each part of creation received the Creator's blessing, with humankind being mandated to "care for this garden." Only by learning once more how to walk humbly with God in this creation will we be able to save not just the earth, but humankind.

c) God's Mandate to Care for His Earth — Living in Harmony with Nature

The destruction of the ecosystems of this earth is coming to a point of irreversible change. There is an immediate urgency to the challenge and the responsibility which faces the Church. The desperateness of the situation leaves no choice. The Church in Asia can participate in that call by the Creator by:

- prioritizing a biblical and theological awareness of our responsibility for God's creation — a creation spirituality;
- stressing this creation-centered spirituality and asceticism that will be needed to save the earth, to help people to do more with less so all can live;
- involving Christians and Church personnel in studying local ecological destruction;
- working with and sharing knowledge with groups already involved in efforts to protect or revitalize nature;
- starting programs to educate people to the present environmental crisis, and the causes of ecological destruction;
- encouraging efforts to restore the balance of nature by restoration of marine life, reforestation, replacing monocropping with diversification, etc;
- using its influence to establish or activate laws that control dangerous wastes;
- encouraging indigenous peoples to share their insights of living in harmony with nature.

PART THREE

Initial Pastoral Questions

1. Has the Church formulated a “theology of peace?”
2. Has the Church in Asia formulated a “theology of harmony” in the context of religious and political pluralism?
3. While there are national and diocesan structures in place for human development (the *basis* of peace), do we have similar structures to promote the desire for peace and harmony, as a specific goal of Asian society?
4. What concrete instrumentalities exist for the ecumenical and inter-religious cooperation and advocacy for peace?
5. What can the Church(es) do in responding to the threefold challenges to peace in Asia? Within these four years before the next FABC Plenary Assembly?
6. What is the challenge of religious fundamentalism to peace in Asia? Is this a threat also in the Church? And how can we respond to such fundamentalism?
7. How can the Church respond to racism of every kind within and without the Church? To communalism?

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