

**ASIAN THEOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVES
ON CHURCH AND POLITICS**

A Document of the Theological Advisory Commission
of the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences

INTRODUCTION

Asia is pulsating with life; but it is also a continent where seemingly interminable social conflicts are taking place. The political systems and processes differ from country to country, region to region. But on the whole, the situation is marked by great complexity and fluidity, characteristic of societies in transition. The political situation Asia lives through today is inextricably bound up with many contradictions. If, on the one hand, new political alliances are being nurtured, and former enemies are learning to live together, on the other hand, new social and ethnic conflicts are erupting and escalating. Side by side with attempts made to eliminate poverty and move towards greater economic prosperity, we have the situation of growing misery and impoverishment; millions continue to be denied their basic needs. Political refugees flee their countries; thousands of others migrate to foreign lands; thousands more have recourse to armed struggle — all this in a common search for a better life which continues to evade the overwhelming majority of Asians.

This theological pastoral reflection has been prepared by the Theological Advisory Commission of the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences (FABC). The Commission is composed of members from all the bishops' conferences of FABC. This third joint presentation represents the work of study and consultation of the members of the Commission and of other theologians over a period of three years, finally approved in their meeting in Hong Kong, April 1992. The document is offered solely as a basis of a continuing discussion with the wider community of pastors and professional scholars. The members of the Theological Advisory Commission earnestly invite their readers to share with them their observations and criticisms in the interest of advancing the concerns of theological and pastoral reflection. Comments can be sent to FABC, 16 Caine Road, Hong Kong.

The Church lives in the midst of these political realities that shape and control the lives of the Asian people. How can the Church respond to Asian political situations? What can the Church say to the people who experience suffering, and to those who inflict suffering? What should it do to foster life, unity and peace among the peoples of Asia?

At first sight, it might seem that the Church should have nothing to do with socio-political realities. For Jesus, who founded the Church as a community of disciples moving towards God's Kingdom, upon being questioned by Pilate, said that his Kingdom was not of this world (Jn 18:36).

But on the other hand, Jesus did state that he came so that we might have life, and life in abundance (Jn 10:10). He died in order to gather together all the children of God scattered by sin (Jn 11:51-52). But today millions die or are torn apart, and many find it hard even to survive, because of reasons that depend on political decisions. We have only to think, for example, of the consequences of the political decision of a nation's leader to invade another country. We may also consider the repercussions in the lives of millions of their political decision to abandon totalitarian socialism. Even in our daily routine politics plays a vital role — from food to jobs to justice. Politics conditions the whole of human life, and touches every human being and the community.

Thus, since the Church must concern itself with concrete human beings and communities, it cannot be unconcerned with politics. Its mission does not allow the Church to be uninvolved in the organization of society towards the common good, which should be the task of politics. It cannot be indifferent to political decisions and arrangements which have such a far-reaching and lasting impact on the people to whom Christ came to give life. The Church as a community of Christ's disciples must become more and more politically conscious in order to infuse more life and grace into human and societal life.

The Church needs to enter the political field, not to gain temporal advantage, but to be a servant ready to make its unique contribution, together with others, to a wounded humanity that needs the service of healing and promotion of life. It comes as no surprise, then, that the FABC and its member conferences have treated various aspects of the subject of our study.

The Theological Advisory Commission (TAC) of the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences engaged itself in the study of this very important theme as a continuation of its previous concerns. The central focus of our discussions to date has been the local Church. This was the explicit theme of our "Theses on the Local Church. A Theological Reflection in the Asian Context" (*FABC Papers* No. 60). The local Church, we pointed

out, "lives in an ongoing process of inculturation" (Thesis 6). This process does not come about only through the adoption of appropriate theological or liturgical language and symbols, but through the interaction of the Church with the historical forces operative in a given culture, chief among which are political forces. Hence, the present study on Church and politics is integral to the theology of the local Church in Asia.

This document is also closely linked to the first theme we dealt with, i.e., dialogue with other religious traditions. For the relationship with politics is not the concern of the Church alone. It is the concern of all other religious traditions. Hence, this is an area where the Church can meet, dialogue and collaborate with sisters and brothers of other faiths.

We wish to share the fruits of our study and reflection with the Christian communities in Asia and their leaders, especially bishops and priests. We hope that what is presented here will help to evoke and sharpen political consciousness and lead to involvement. But we also wish to dialogue, through this study, with all persons of good will who have the good of our Asian peoples at heart.

We have undertaken this study in conscious solidarity with Third World Churches in other parts of the globe, which have also often passionately dealt with this same theme. We, likewise, are conscious that in this search we are in solidarity with other Christian churches and communities, Asian religious traditions and cultures.

Our study deals with Church and politics in Asia. The Church we are referring to is the whole people of God — laity, religious and clergy — organized as a community of Christ's disciples.

Politics, as we understand it here, means either or both of the following: 1) The dynamic organization of society towards the common good, or the activities done to achieve that common good. This is politics in the broad sense; 2) The activities carried out by persons, groups or parties in order to attain and preserve the power of governing in a given society. This is party politics. This kind of politics can be consonant with or detrimental to the common good.

Our study will first focus on the positive and negative aspects of the socio-political situation in Asia. We shall then study the various ways in which the Church has responded to different socio-political situations; the human and Christian motivations for its response; the hindrances, as well as the resources, for making this response; the spirituality that inspires it, and the kind of response the Church must make if it is to be faithful to the Lord. We shall conclude our study with some pastoral recommendations to help the Church concretize its response to the situation it finds itself in.

We hope that our study will contribute towards a better Church response to the political realities of today.

A. THE SOCIO-POLITICAL SITUATION

1. Aspirations, Hopes, Strivings

1.1 Equality and Participation

We are witnesses to a surging consciousness among our people about their dignity and rights as human persons. They, as individuals and groups, do not like to be treated as objects in the political game, but as active subjects and agents of their own history. This new awareness manifests itself in innumerable ways and forms, most significant among which is the yearning for equality and participation. There is a growing and persistent demand for equitable sharing in the world's natural resources, material goods and services. The satisfaction of this demand is inextricably bound up with the question of political power and its exercise. The poor, in particular, rightfully demand greater participation in the political process so as to put an end to the negations and deprivations they continue to experience.

1.2 Concrete Struggles and Actions

The aspirations and hopes of our poor and oppressed sisters and brothers do not remain simply a pious wish or a pie in the sky, but are embodied in concrete struggles and political actions to overcome the situations and structures that dehumanize them by undercutting their legitimate share and participation. They defiantly refuse to conform to anything that dehumanizes — whether it derives from the traditional roots of oppression or from modern forms of exploitation, such as neo-colonialism. These aspirations have mobilized organized efforts, often of a political nature, for their attainment. There is a general disaffection with the present mode of governance and the prevailing political culture, which has set in motion a serious search for alternatives which will respond to the yearnings of the people for equality and participation. Difficulties and reverses have in most cases intensified rather than attenuated these aspirations. In the undaunting struggle of the poor, we are able to experience the power of life, pulsating through the whole universe and revealing to us the power of God and his Spirit.

1.3 The Recovery of Liberating Core-Experience and Insights

Among other things, this awakening and struggle of the poor is due to a recovery of the liberating core-experience and insights of religions and cultures. This has led to a positive and hopeful turning towards religious

resources for liberation, though the religions themselves have often been oppressive and have served to legitimize unjust structures. This new attitude of the poor towards religion is also a sign of hope, and at the same time a reminder of our grave responsibility as believers, religious leaders and pastoral workers.

1.4 The Search for Group Identity

We find yet another intense search among our Asian peoples. It is a positive search for their identity as groups — ethnic, religious, linguistic, etc. In the period immediately following decolonization, our eyes were fixed on welding into one nation, one overarching national entity, the people of different regional, linguistic, ethnic groups. This effort at integration and the model of development pursued overlooked the existence of a rich variety and diversity of cultures and within cultures. In many Asian countries, we are today at a critical stage of growth with a lot of opportunities. There is not only the emerging realization that in case of conflict the basic and legitimate rights of the human person should precede those of the State, but also the consciousness about the rights of various groups subsumed under the same national polity. Diversity and pluralism are a richness and not something to be lamented. In spite of many struggles, we firmly hope that our people are moving towards the ideal of unity in diversity. Pluralism, which is the hallmark of Asian life, ethos and attitudes, should find rightfully its reflection also in the Asian political culture.

1.5 The Readiness to Sacrifice

Another sign of hope is constituted by the readiness of an ever-growing number of women and men in Asia to suffer, sacrifice and even to lay down their lives so that the poor may have life. As we observe a new Asia being shaped through many conflicts, contradictions and upheavals, we also notice how heroically some of our sisters and brothers are committed to the liberation of the poor and the marginalized. They are right in the middle of the Asian political stream trying to empower the hitherto marginalized people and groups. Their deep sense of humanity, dogged perseverance in the pursuit of liberation, readiness to bear loneliness, insecurity — all these are inspiring signs of hope on the Asian horizon.

1.6 The Positive Response of Asian Women

In our Asian societies, women have been subjected to many traditional forms of oppression, and the modern development process, with its focus on the economy, has further aggravated their plight through many forms of exploitation. A positive change in this situation is signaled by the

emerging consciousness among a segment at least of Asian women who have begun to critically respond to the present situation. Powerlessness lies at the root of the many social disabilities and discriminations women experience. Therefore, the awakened Asian women today address themselves to the question of participation in the social and political issues, which is very important for a lasting solution of their present plight. Increasingly, women are taking part at all levels of life in our villages, cities and countries. This adds momentum to the Asian women's movement, and thus to the correction of power imbalance, and the restoration of wholeness to Asian humanity.

1.7 The Integrity of Creation

There is now a fast-growing awareness of the need for preserving and restoring the integrity of creation. God has made the cosmos as an integrated whole. The human being was made the crown of creation, which he/she must use and care for in a spirit of reverence and respect for its proper nature within the overall design of God.

While modern progress has provided the opportunity of mobilizing the secrets of nature for the welfare of human beings, it has also produced an ecological crisis that has threatened not only human beings but the very life-support system of this earth. With the increase of pollution, the disturbance of the delicate balance of nature, the depletion of the ozone layer, the increase of dangerous radiation, the loss of forest cover, and the destruction of species of flora and fauna, the human habitat, so delicately provided for by the Creator, is gravely endangered. Aware of this danger, people have advocated a stop to the mindless exploitation of the environment and are now stressing the need for harmony with the cosmos, which must be cared for if we expect it to continue sustaining human life. Many are protesting against the dumping of wastes and transfer of polluting industries to poorer countries and are advocating a greater simplicity of lifestyle, in order to protect the environment.

2. Threats to Life in Asia

Jesus warns us against a blindness to the signs of the times (Mt 16:2-3), and Vatican II has rightly stressed the need and importance of reading the signs of the times (GS 4). Only if the local Churches do this, can they respond relevantly and meaningfully to the challenges of these realities, and justify their existence as Churches in and for the world.

The increasingly life-threatening character of contemporary events and phenomena in the Asian world must be the urgent concern of all Asians in general and of all the religious bodies in particular. These threats are

directed to the various areas of our life, to human and social life, to the economic order, political stability, and religio-cultural freedom, and are intimidating us at the personal, communitarian and national levels of our life.

2.1 Threats to the Human Person

The human person in Asia stands helplessly at the convergence of many contending, if not destructive, forces. On the one hand, the very entities that should foster life, namely, the family, the community and the State are increasingly encouraged or economically forced to deny the right of life to the unborn child. On the other hand, the traditional concern and care given to the life of the elderly in Asia by the family and the community are decreasing.

In some of our countries there are still naked violations of the dignity of the individual by the stratification of persons according to sex, caste and degrees of nobility, and by the practice of social customs and traditions, especially in marriage and family life, which devalue and dehumanize persons (e.g., the burning of brides and widows, the caste distinction, and the dowry system that denies marriage possibilities to a girl, etc.). Also degrading to Asian humanity is the subhuman instrumentalization of sex (prostitution, pornography, etc.) and of labor (women and children), especially among the weakest and the poorest of our people.

Under the pretext of national security, the restrictions on the freedom of thought, expression, communication, and movement of the people are frequently and ruthlessly enforced in order to silence and curtail all forms of just opposition and dissent.

The modern means of social communication or mass media have themselves been instrumentalized for the benefit of vested interests and to the detriment of the life and dignity of persons and groups.

These forms of violations injure and oftentimes destroy human life, human freedom and human dignity — in short, our very humanity.

2.2 Threats to a Just Economic Order

2.2.1 From the Outside

The present economic and technological dependence of the Asian countries on the West is creating a neo-colonialism, if not a neo-servility, in the economic world. The subjugation of the Asian countries to colonial

powers has ended only partially. The economically powerful nations have discovered a new form of subjugation through the power of money and technology.

Material poverty, such as poverty of needed raw materials, is common to all countries of the world in diverse forms. But the continuing poverty of many countries in Asia can be traced to an unjust division and distribution of wealth largely determined by the powerful. Many of our countries are impoverished and continuously forced to be dependent on a few wealthy nations and their monetary agencies, like the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank. The power to determine the value of all our resources, both natural and human, is still with the First World countries. The money power to buy over our resources, combined with the technological power to determine our development and growth, enables these countries to control still the economic balance in their favor and to the detriment of our weaker nations.

The creditor-debtor dialogue appears to be carried on with an unwillingness to reduce the debt-burden of debtor countries, coupled with the overriding concern to preserve the economic superiority of the highly industrialized creditor countries. Hence, there emerges slowly, but surely, a real danger and threat to the economic survival of our countries. New ways of reducing the determining dominance and interference of the First World countries in the economic affairs of our countries have to be urgently worked out.

2.2.2 From Within

The threat to the survival of our economic life also comes from the various levels of inhuman activity widespread among our people and from the sinful structures operated by the State itself to control economic life. Bribery and corruption, favoritism and nepotism — these are rampant, at the highest as well as at the lower rungs of our societies. The very structures of the State intended to enforce justice and order in the economic life are weakened, if not crippled, by such practices.

A lack of concern for the people, coupled with a greed for profit, makes people unwilling to invest their capital locally for the benefit of the local people. Such investments at the multinational level, especially by the upper classes, result in a further burden on the poor by way of taxes.

2.3 Threats to Social Life

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

The increase of tourism in our countries may bring foreign exchange to pay for our imports. But it has adverse effects on the socio-cultural and moral patterns of the lives of our people.

Instead of social relationships based on mutual trust, respect and benevolence, various institutionalized forms of corruption are showing up in public life, even in the religious sector. Social institutions which profess to help the poor and promote the good of society are losing credibility and effectiveness at the grass-roots levels, especially in the misuse of people and funds.

Many of our Asian countries are blessed with a variety of ethnic groups, races and cultures. Instead of building up a harmonious unity in variety by promoting mutual respect and love for one another's richness, many self-interested leaders, backed by vested interests, play up the communal, racial and linguistic characteristics of any one particular group to the exclusion and even extermination of other groups. For instance, the majority communities tend to discriminate against the minorities. The latter in turn seek to turn in on themselves and strongly assert their identity. This leads to each community seeking its own interest and developing prejudices against the others. Such excessive communal feelings have in recent times given rise to murders, riots and extensive destruction of property. At times, it has led to armed insurrection which is being repressed violently.

2.4 Threats to Religious Life

Though religions as separate institutions profess respect and tolerance for one another, there exist, in fact, sects and groups, often very influential, that foment a growing religious intolerance and non-accommodation. A religious body may be able to control the political machinery of a country and use it to suppress other religious groups. Or the patronage of political powers may be sought by one religious group to the detriment of other groups. This gives the political powers an opportunity to instrumentalize

religion for its own purposes. The freedom of religious leaders who seek the patronage of political powers is bartered away for the privileges and gifts bestowed by the latter. From this point of view, one can see the wisdom of the mutual autonomy of Church and State.

Ideologies can also threaten the religious life of a people. An ideology that is not open to the transcendent can even reach the point of systematically eradicating the practice of religion. However, history has shown that, while religious practices may be suppressed, religion itself continues to survive in the hearts of the people.

2.5 Threats to Political Life

If politics is the way of organizing man's secular life in view of the common good, political life is not to be the preserve of the few power-hungry politicians and the vested interests behind them, but the concern of all who are devoted to that common good. Unfortunately, the degree and quality of political life as witnessed by the politicians in our countries are flawed by numerous malpractices, and the vast majority of the people do not involve themselves sufficiently in the political life of the country.

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

On the other hand, we have inherited from colonial rulers and from the West certain models of government for which the masses are not adequately attuned or prepared. The religious and cultural values that nourish the life of the people do not find a place in these models. Consequently, these models are unable to relate to growing grass-roots aspirations of the people. Hence, these important democratic forms are fast cracking up and yielding to other questionable and undemocratic forms of governance. At this evolutive period in the model of governance, the religions and cultures operative among the people must provide the necessary ethical and cultural values towards arriving at a truly inculturated democratic and participatory form of government.

2.6 Threats to the Human Habitat

Disrespect for the sanctity and order of creation and increasing misuse of the natural resources of Mother Earth, often determined by foreign investors and local capitalists, are threatening the life of our masses. While the poor masses are struggling to survive amidst adverse economic conditions and with a lack of the minimal sanitary facilities, the rich and the powerful are bulldozing through their multinational projects which not only rape and consume the natural resources, but also rob the land of its natural beauty. These are clear instances of how the unlimited greed of the rich can be a direct threat to the survival of the poor.

Given this complex situation with its lights and shadows, how has the Church responded? How should it respond? What are the motivations for its response?

B. THE CHURCH'S RESPONSE

1. How The Local Churches Have Responded

The way the mission of the Church is carried out depends both on the condition of the addressees of the message and on the Church which is sent in mission. In the area of Church and politics, the different Asian Churches have responded according to their own condition and the condition of the peoples among whom they live.

In some Muslim countries, where the freedom of religion of non-Muslims is restricted, the Church has nevertheless carried out its prophetic role in society. In Pakistan and Malaysia, for instance, the bishops through their episcopal conferences have challenged discriminatory laws against minorities.

In Malaysia, the Catholic Church, in collaboration with other Christian Churches and peoples of other faiths, has been vocal in denouncing racial, social and religious disparities in the nation through the Malaysian Consultative Council of Buddhism, Christianity, Hinduism and Sikhism (MCCBCHS). The Christian Federation of Malaysia (CFM) has also sent memoranda to various government departments when either religious rights or social justice have been in question. Furthermore, independent movements like ALIRAN, a movement for social reform initiated by a Muslim activist, also has a significant Christian following. In Singapore, likewise, the courageous witness of some Christians who have spoken up for human rights and social justice continues to be a challenge to those who repress these rights.

In Thailand, the Church enjoys a certain amount of prestige because of its educational and health care institutions. But it is numerically so small, and the environment is so firmly Buddhist, that the influence of the Church in the political sphere is reduced to a minimum. Perhaps also a certain reserve has marked the response of Thai Catholics to the political situation.

In some Asian countries, e.g., the People's Republic of China and Vietnam, the relations between State and religion are strained, because the State wants to control all forms of religious life, and encroaches on the legitimate autonomy of religions.

In Communist China all religions are regarded as civil entities which must be completely controlled by the Party. The Catholic Church as a universal community is viewed with deep suspicion by the regime and is especially discriminated against because of its link with the Pope. So the Church has been forced either to collaborate with the existing regime or to go underground.

It is true that the revised (1978) constitution of the People's Republic of China (art. 35) guarantees religious freedom and restores, after a period of religious persecution, the basic right to engage in "normal religious activities." The actual exercise of religious freedom is, however, jeopardized by certain regulations and measures by the government which determine unilaterally what constitutes "normal religious activities" guaranteed by the constitution. Catholics in China are divided on the question of the scope of their cooperation with the government.

In Japan, the Catholic Church experiences efforts by political groups of the right to exploit Shintoism and the person of the Emperor to regain for Shintoism the place of the national religion of Japan. A few years ago the bishops of Japan raised their voices in protest against plans to make the Yasakuni Shrine the shrine dedicated to the memory of the war dead of Japan, into a national religious institution which members of other religious faiths should also honor and revere.

In Indonesia, the Catholics form a significant minority, and Catholics have even succeeded in being appointed to high government posts. While the people of Indonesia are mostly Muslim, the Church is able to have its voice heard and to influence the political situation.

The Church in Sri Lanka in its multiracial and multireligious context is called to play a vital role, not only vis-à-vis the escalating ethnic war that consumes lives by the thousands, but also against the deteriorating state of political and economic realities. Being present throughout the country, it is

capable of denouncing boldly and effectively violations of human rights and injustices, and also of mediating between the warring factions towards justice and peace. Besides the two pastoral letters from the episcopal conference, lay and religious leaders have also taken bold action. But considering the gravity of the situation of justice and peace, much remains to be done.

In the Philippines, where the majority (83%) is Catholic, the Church is a strong political force. However, in the past it projected the image of a group protecting its own interests rather than working for the good of all citizens irrespective of their religion. A new era began when the Church — clergy, religious and laity — opposed the Marcos regime and together with others brought about its downfall. In the political climate that ensued the Church supported legislation geared toward total human development, and pursued a policy of critical collaboration vis-à-vis the government. A sign that even the laity are asserting themselves more in the political role that is properly theirs is the formation of parish pastoral councils for responsible voting during the 1992 election period. These councils aim at getting the people at the grass-roots mobilized to assure a meaningful, honest and peaceful election. They have also resolved to monitor the performance of those who are elected to office.

We can say in conclusion that the Church has not always lived up to its prophetic role in Asian society. Often enough it has practised an accommodating diplomacy rather than a challenging prophecy. Instead of being content with the freedom to preach the Gospel, and maintaining a critical distance from powers that be, it has often allied itself with these powers in order to gain or preserve favors.

But, by the grace of God, the local Churches have, despite these failings, spoken out and worked for the fuller life of their peoples, sometimes at the cost of suffering. And one thing is certain, the local Churches are becoming increasingly more aware that they cannot live in isolation from the political situation. They know they have to respond to their own situations and to do it in their own way. We must now look at the motivations that will support their response.

2. Motivation for Response

Confronted with the situation of present-day Asia, the Church feels itself bidden by the Lord to make its response. The Lord speaks to us both from the human aspirations, strivings and travails of our peoples and through the Church's faith life.

2.1 Motivation for Response: Human

Christians cannot isolate themselves from the rest of the peoples of Asia — the poverty of the vast majority, the sufferings of the oppressed and of the victims of violence, the silent protest of those who suffer the violation of their human rights, the longing of the multitudes for a just, humane and peaceful society. Those who suffer or are oppressed, the poor, the victims — they are our brothers and sisters in humanity. Even before we are Indians, Chinese, Koreans, Malays, Filipinos, or of any other nationality, we are human beings, social by nature, and we can neither live nor develop our potential unless we relate to one another (cf. GS 12).

The diminution of a single Asian is a diminution of our common humanity. What we do not do for others is negligence towards ourselves. And so, an outraged sense of justice, human compassion, concern for the security of the values we enjoy or uphold — these impel us to decisively respond to the plight and the strivings of our peoples, a response which necessarily includes the area of politics.

Urgency characterizes our human response to the situation of our peoples also because of the accelerating massive destruction and degradation of the natural environment. This destruction and degradation is largely due to the wanton abuse of technology, an abuse tolerated if not abetted by those controlling the political system in most of our countries. This phenomenon radically threatens the very survival of our peoples as well as that of humankind in its entirety. Thus we feel impelled to respond as soon and as vigorously as possible to the socio-political situation of our peoples. Again, this response requires action in the area of politics.

2.2 Motivation for Response: Christian

Apart from our human solidarity, the specific Christian vocation of the members of the Church in Asia calls for a definite stance and committed involvement in politics. The following are some of the biblical and theological baselines for this involvement.

2.2.1 Biblical Baselines

2.2.1.1 The Dignity and Social Nature of Human Beings

The Bible provides a strong basis for the Church's response to the socio-political realities. The dignity of the human person arises from the very fact of creation. "God created humankind in his image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them" (Gen 1:27). It

is God's breath that makes man a living being (Gen 2.7). The whole earth and all that is in it were created for humankind (Gen 1:26-31). In Christ humankind was elevated to the destiny of the children of God which transcends the life of the present world (Eph 1:3-10). From their dignity as the children of God arise all their rights and duties, whether spiritual or political. From the very moment of creation the social nature of man is emphasized and man is called upon to live in communion with God and with one another and in harmony with the created world (Gen 1-2).

Human beings need to love and serve each other in order to grow into the fullness of life and attain their final destiny (Rom 13:8-10). This love and service, however, are not done in a vacuum but within the context of socio-political realities. Thus, the dignity and the social nature of the human person demand a positive response to the socio-political realities on the part of the Church.

2.2.1.2 Jesus and his Gospel to the Poor

The Gospel of Jesus Christ is the Good News of the Kingdom of God (Mk 1:14-15), or of liberation from sin and from everything that prevents man from enjoying the fullness of life according to his human dignity (Lk 4:18-19). In his teaching and ministry, Jesus himself showed a concern for persons and groups of all social levels and backgrounds, especially for the poor and the sick, for women and children, for Jews and gentiles (Lk 4:18-19; 6:20-21, 24-25; 7:22-23; 12:15-21; 16:19-31; 18:24-25). Jesus manifested a consistent concern for the poor. He frequently called upon those with possessions to use them to benefit the poor (Lk 16:19-31; 19:8-10). He asked the disciples to find ways and means to enable the poor to participate fully in the life of the community (Lk 14:12-14).

Jesus was sensitive to the contemporary social and political situation of oppression and injustice. His criticism of those who devour widows' houses (Lk 20:47), and his protest against those who profaned the Temple with religious as well as economic oppression (Lk 20:45-46) are all eloquent examples of this.

Hence, the Church, as the community of those who believe in the Good News of the Kingdom and have the mission to proclaim it (Mk 16:15), cannot be indifferent to the socio-political conditions of human beings. On the contrary, the Church has to be actively involved with socio-political issues since these touch on the Gospel itself. This is especially true in the Asian situation where the great majority of the people live in social conditions not befitting their human dignity.

2.2.1.3 Jesus and the Socio-Political Order

Jesus was not indifferent to the socio-political order of his time. He often taught and acted in such a way as to explicitly or implicitly call for radical modifications in the social and political patterns of the day. His insistence that social relationships be governed by service and humility (Lk 9:47-48; 14:7-11; 17:7-10) constituted a challenge to the existing social order. The existing social order presupposed domination, and violence was central to its effective operation (Mt 20:25-28). Jesus, in contrast, refused the use of violence and criticized the gentile kings for their practice of dominating their subjects. He never used his power to perform miracles solely for his own benefit.

In order to describe the power exercised by the rulers of his time, Jesus used two expressions, namely "lord it over" (*katakurio*) and "exercise authority over" (*katexousiazō*), which mean lack of respect for the freedom of the subjects and using power for one's selfish interests respectively. On the other hand, he demanded that the exercise of authority should have the character of service. Such an exercise of authority called for a radical change in the existing socio-political structures.

The example of Jesus Christ should inspire the local Churches of Asia to be aware of their political responsibility in their countries. The Church should be actively committed to evangelizing the political life of Asia. Christians should themselves be imbued with the spirit of the Gospel and should see to it that the spirit of the Gospel penetrates every sphere and structure of political life in the varying situations of Asia.

2.2.1.4 Jesus and the Political Authority

Jesus himself asserts the duty of paying one's dues to the State, but without in any way reducing the claims of God: "Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's" (Mt 22:17-21). If the State exercises authority by virtue of the divine commission, for the very same reason the exercise of this authority should not be absolute, but should respect God's sovereign power and authority in its various expressions in the society. The statement of Jesus regarding the problem of giving tribute to Caesar could be understood as a statement about the approach one should take towards the political and social structures. Caesar's realm or the social and political order of the Roman empire was in Jesus' view part of the larger order of creation whose only author is God. Therefore, the Roman social patterns were to be evaluated against the social patterns desired by God, and supported or not on that basis.

2.2.1.5 Jesus: Critical towards the Political Authorities

Jesus himself maintained a critical stance with respect to the political authorities and evaluated the social and political patterns under their rule on the basis of how closely they corresponded to the patterns desired by God. In fact, Jesus presented himself in the lineage of the ancient prophets who clearly participated in the political sphere and often took a stand against the politics of the kings of their times. Thus, people saw in Jesus the features of Elijah who came into politico-religious conflict with Ahab and Ahaziah, the kings of Israel (1Kgs 17-2Kgs 1; Mk 8:28; Lk 9:19). Jesus also showed features of Jeremiah (Mt 16:14), who linked the political future of the kingdom of Judah to a liberating change specifically in socio-political structures (Jer 22:3-5). Jesus' confrontation with Herod Antipas (Lk 9:9; 13:31-33) and the chief priests (Lk 19:47) is a clear proof of his prophetic and critical stance towards the political authorities.

2.2.1.6 Confrontation between Jesus and the Political Authorities

Jesus occasionally confronted the authorities of his time. For example, he violently expressed his protest against the corruption of the authorities in the religious and economic establishments associated with the Temple (Mt 21:10-17; Jn 2:13-22). He retorted with scorn to the threat of Herod to kill him, and he did not allow his course of action to be determined by the wishes and policies of the political rulers of his times (Lk 13:31-33). Jesus questioned the legitimacy of the violence used against him during the trial in the house of Annas (Jn 18:22-23). These instances show that Jesus acted against social corruption, and that he did not passively accept the unjust violence exerted on him by the political authorities.

The early Church also had to confront the violent reaction of the political authorities. When Peter and John were arrested and warned by the members of the Sanhedrin against preaching in the name of Jesus, they boldly retorted: "You must judge whether in God's eyes it is right to listen to you and not to God" (Acts 4:18-21). Paul defended his legitimate rights as a Roman citizen when he confronted the Roman tribune (Acts 22:21-29). Hence, the early Church also gives testimony of having taken a bold stand against the unjust and violent use of political authority.

2.2.1.7 The Church and the Political Authority

All authority comes from God. This principle is accepted and held as true throughout the whole of biblical revelation. This is reflected in the various expressions of authority found in the biblical traditions, such as the authority of parents over their children (Lev 19:3), of the government over

the people (1Kgs 19:15; 2Kgs 8:13), etc. Hence, the Church should respect the holders of political authority. The New Testament writers were concerned with the position of Christianity within the Roman empire. They spoke about the attitude that Christians should take regarding the political authority of their times.

Paul explicitly states, while exhorting the faithful to be subject to the governing authorities: "There is no authority except from God, and those that exist have been instituted by God" (Rom 13:1). The State exists for the sake of the good order (Rom 13:4). Paul does not hesitate to call the political ruler "God's servant" (Rom 13:4) and the government officials "ministers of God" (Rom 13:6). Those who resist the governing authorities resist what God has appointed. Therefore, Christians are subject to the State for the sake of conscience. For the same reason, they pay respect and legitimate taxes to the State (Rom 13: 5-7). Prayers and supplications are to be offered for the political rulers (1Tim 2:1-7).

However, in imitation of Jesus, the Church has to take a critical and prophetic stance towards the political authorities, since they are especially responsible for the particular socio-political order on which depends the social welfare of the people. The Church, being the sacrament of the Kingdom of God which is concerned with the integral liberation and development of man, cannot be indifferent in the matter of taking such a political stance. Hence, the local churches of Asia cannot endorse the social and political practices and patterns of the State unconditionally. They have to be evaluated against the standard of the social patterns demanded by the values of the Kingdom of God and must be supported or not on that basis.

2.2.1.8 Confrontation between the Church and State

The political authority can become a tool of the powers of evil. This is illustrated in the fact that the rulers of this world crucified the Lord of glory (1Cor 2: 6-8). In fact, a tension between the political and spiritual powers and the consequent conflict are inevitable. The political authority could become sometimes the expression of the "world" which rejected Jesus and whose prince is the devil (Jn 12: 31; 16:11). In this case, there can take place in the relationship between the State and the Church a confrontation between "the world" that rejected Christ and the Kingdom of God. Despite its attempt at justice, "the world" is incapable of perceiving the truth (Jn 18:37f) and of resisting corruption of the heart (Jn 19:12-15). Thereby, it becomes the devil's servant. Though the power of the devil has been basically destroyed by the glorification of Jesus (Jn 12:31), the struggle between these two powers will continue until the parousia. Therefore, the confrontation between these two powers can be realized in the confrontation

between the Church and the State if the State does not respect the values of the Kingdom of God.

The experience of the Church towards the end of the first century, as described in the Book of Revelation, is a clear illustration of this possible confrontation. In fact, Jesus himself had foretold that his disciples would have the same fate as that of the prophets and of himself (Lk 6:22-23; Mt 5: 11-12). If the Church is really prophetic, it will necessarily come into conflict with the State if the latter does not do justice to its God-given mission. In many Asian countries where Christians are a minority, it is quite possible for the Church to assume an attitude of neutrality at the cost of its prophetic mission. The Church has a definite and prophetic role to play in the socio-political life of the Asian people, not as an outsider or onlooker but as a community of people actively involved in it, and joining forces with the sisters and brothers of other faiths and cultures.

2.2.2 Theological Baselines

2.2.2.1. Christ's Intention for the Church

A great concern of the New Testament was to warn the Church, which was only a tiny minority, against being preoccupied with itself alone. Should that happen, the Church would remain a sect, a closed group, which would have no concern for the welfare of the world.

But this was not Christ's intention for the Church. He wanted his disciples to be "the light of the world" (Mt 5:14), and "the salt of the earth" (Mt 5:13). He commanded them to go forth and "make disciples of all the nations" (Mt 28:19), to preach the Gospel to every creature (Mk 16:15).

The mission of the Church has often been misinterpreted as though it concerned only the souls of persons and their salvation in the afterlife. Today, while insisting on the importance and primacy of the spiritual dimension of human life and on eternal salvation, the Church has repeatedly declared that its mission includes the salvation of the total human person even in his/her temporal dimensions.

... evangelization involves an explicit message, adapted to the different situations constantly being realized, about the rights and duties of every human being, about family life, without which personal growth and development is hardly possible, about life in society, about international life, peace, justice and development — a message especially energetic today about liberation (*Evangelii Nuntiandi*, 29).

2.2.2.2 Concern for the Human Being in All Dimensions

Pope John Paul II, in his first encyclical *Redemptor Hominis*, has pointed out that the concrete human being, living in history, is “the way for the Church, the primary and indispensable way the Church must take, the way which is in a sense the basis of all the other ways” (no. 17). The clear implication of this is that the Church which does not pay attention to the human person in his/her historical concreteness is a Church that has lost its way.

That is why the 1971 Synod of Bishops does not hesitate to declare in the oft-quoted lapidary statement: “Action on behalf of justice and participation in the transformation of the world fully appear to us as a constitutive dimension of the preaching of the Gospel, or, in other words, of the Church’s mission for the redemption of the human race and its liberation from every oppressive situation.”

If the Church must be involved with the human being in his or her concrete historical reality and temporal dimensions, it cannot avoid involvement in political concerns and questions which pervade, influence and sometimes dominate the temporal life of people and affect deeply their salvation. Politics is an inescapable concern of the Church.

There is thus a necessity for the Church to involve itself with political concerns. This necessity is underlined by Pope Paul VI when explaining the links between evangelization and human promotion:

... how in fact can one proclaim the new commandment without promoting in justice and in peace the true, authentic advancement of man? We ourselves have taken care to point this out by recalling that it is impossible to accept “that in evangelization one could or should ignore the importance of the problems so much discussed today, concerning justice, liberation, development and peace in the world. This would be to forget the lesson which comes to us from the Gospel concerning love of our neighbor who is suffering and in need (EN 31).”

Note that the Pope says it is impossible to accept that evangelization could or should ignore problems concerning justice, liberation, development and peace — all of which are political problems. The Church cannot ignore these if it is to be true to the commandment of love which is the characteristic mark of Christ’s disciple.

2.2.2.3 Preferential Love of the Poor

But this evangelical love today demands a love of preference for the poor, deprived and oppressed. This is a demand of the Gospel — not only a love for all but a preferential, though not exclusive, love for the poor. This preferential love calls for more than dole-outs, or even for development efforts with and on behalf of the poor. To be truly effective, this preferential love must seek the transformation of sinful structures or structures of injustice that prevent the poor from achieving their authentic human development. Once the Church, however, exerts efforts to bring about a transformation of social structures, it must enter the field of politics.

For example, in many places in Asia today the Church needs to speak for genuine agrarian reform, for a better distribution of wealth, for more just tax structures. It is called upon to lend its voice for just wages, for social security, speedy justice and genuine guarantees for human rights. Such an advocacy does not make the Church a competitor in the political arena, but makes it a prophetic voice of the voiceless, and an advocate of humanity. The Church must be ready to support such measures even at the risk of incurring the displeasure of vested interests.

In this regard, the mission of the Church implies five concrete tasks: *announcing* the Gospel values upon which every human community needs to be built; *denouncing* all situations of injustice, oppression, exploitation, manipulation and domination; *promoting* whatever helps the person and society to grow, after discerning the action of the Holy Spirit in the socio-political realities; *giving witness* as a community of people who, led by the Holy Spirit, serve their fellow citizens; and *educating* for justice by awakening consciences to a knowledge of the concrete situation, and by forming people to take political action.

2.2.2.4 The Church — Sign and Instrument of God's Kingdom

The Church's involvement in political concerns is rooted in its very being. For the Church is the universal sacrament of salvation both manifesting and exercising God's love for human beings (cf. GS 45).

The Church is the group of believers whom God has called by the Gospel and baptism into Christ to form a community dedicated to the salvation and transformation of the world. It is both the visible community in which the Kingdom of God is already experienced, though imperfectly, and the community which is called to reveal, announce and promote the full realization of the Kingdom. The Church is not an end in itself, but is a community which realizes itself in the measure that it puts itself concretely at the service of the Kingdom in different historical situations.

It is the vocation of the Church to be the sign of the Kingdom which is already operative in the world. This Kingdom is a Kingdom of holiness and grace, yes, — but also a Kingdom of justice and peace. When the Church embodies these values, it stands out as a challenge to the injustices of our Asian world in the midst of which it lives and which it loves. Its very existence will be a question posed to the injustice, the greed for money and power, and the self-centeredness that characterize so much of our Asian societies.

The Church is also the instrument of the Kingdom. It is not the only instrument of the Kingdom, but it serves and promotes the Kingdom together with all the other children of the Kingdom. To promote the Kingdom is to work for the realization of the values of the Kingdom, so that these values may be inscribed deeply in the fabric of Asian society. This is the work of the whole Church, for the values of the Kingdom and of the Gospel cannot be inscribed in Asian society without the active presence and participation of the lay faithful (cf. AG 21).

That is why Vatican II, in speaking of the Church as sacrament of salvation, speaks of it as the People of God. "For every benefit which the People of God during its earthly pilgrimage can offer to the human family stems from the fact that the Church is the universal sacrament of salvation," simultaneously manifesting and exercising the mystery of God's love for man" (GS 45).

Though the whole Church as People of God is called to be the sacrament of salvation, and consequently is charged with the mission of transforming the world, the laity by reason of their specific vocation have a unique role to play in this mission. Their vocation to be Christians in the heart of secularity, and their expertise in secular affairs, capacitate them to be at the service of this transformation. Thus, it is they who must be in the forefront of the Church's involvement in politics.

2.2.2.5 In Christ and Like Christ

The Church is the sacrament of salvation. It is, however, in Christ, and only in Christ, that it is a sign and instrument of salvation (cf. LG 1, 48). When the Church asks itself the reason for its involvement in the political life of the people, it must go back to Jesus Christ, the source of its life, the inspiration for its actions. This Christ "went about doing good works and healing all who were in the grip of the devil" (Acts 10:38). He preached the Kingdom and made it real to people by liberating them from sin, illness and death, and by uniting them in love for each other. He bestowed a salvation which renewed the whole human being and brought justice and

love. The Church, in working for the temporal well-being of people and for the transformation of human relationships, thus makes present Christ's work and grace. It projects the face and heart of Christ.

2.2.2.6 A Program

While "Church as sacrament of salvation" expresses the being of the Church, it is also a programmatic title for the life of the Church itself. The Church must really embody and visibly manifest in itself the values of the Kingdom. It is the Lord's primary exhibit or sample of what he wants done in humanity. That is why the Synod on *Justice in the World*, ch. 3 (1971), warns that those who preach justice must first of all be just themselves. The Church's being and mission make demands on the Church itself. We shall look further into these demands in a later section.

We have just seen the human and Christian reasons that should motivate the Church and its members to respond to the socio-political situation in Asia. But the Church encounters obstacles which hinder it from responding as it should. We shall now look into these hindrances.

3. Hindrances to the Church's Response

We believe that the power of the Spirit of God is not lacking in the people to enable the Churches in Asia to respond adequately to these Asian realities. But the historical forms and present situations of the Churches, as well as their mode of presence and action among the people, contain a number of obstructive and restrictive elements which hinder their proper mission vis-à-vis socio-political realities. Whether they originate from within the Church or from without, the sooner we identify these hindrances and make efforts to reduce or eradicate them, the better will be our contribution to the total life of all our people.

3.1 The Minority Complex of Our Churches

Except in the case of the Philippines, all the Churches of Asia are minorities in their countries. The "little flock" (*pusillus grex*) character of our Churches is often seen only as a weakness and imperfection, especially in politics. Consequently, many Churches become fearfully silent in the face of criminal injustices and violations of human rights. They thus end up tolerating evil and become unwittingly partners of the wrongdoers.

It is time for us to be true to the conviction that a Church may be in the minority, but it can still influence society in the manner of salt and light and, while quantitatively small, can still exert a profound influence on society.

3.2 The Colonial and Foreign Character of our Churches

Most of our Asian Churches have a foreign origin and still continue to live by foreign support and standards. Furthermore, our beginnings are associated with the advent of colonial powers, and the collaboration of our forefathers with the early missionaries is interpreted as a betrayal of the motherland. In spite of our significant contribution in the field of education, social services and charitable works, we are often called upon to prove our genuine allegiance to the lands of our birth.

On our part, we are often unwilling to decolonize or dewesternize ourselves in our lifestyles. Our allegiance to the spiritual leadership of the Church of Rome often degenerates into servility to certain customs and traditions. Our efforts at inculturation and moves towards self-supporting and autonomous local Churches do not come up to the expectations of the universal magisterium and the call of the FABC.

3.3 The Rigidity of Institutions

Although the primacy of the spiritual over the structural, and the openness of the institutional Church to socio-political realities have been underlined in Vatican II (LG 8, GS 76), many of our Churches still remain isolated, closed and rigid in their structures and lifestyles. The Spirit is moving us and the gifts of the Spirit among our people are increasing, but the leaders of the institutional Church often fail to recognize, accept and make use of this torrential grace to build up the Kingdom. The mighty potential of the laity to spread the values of the Kingdom lies largely untapped and undeveloped.

3.4 The Lack of Adequate and Relevant Formation

3.4.1 Clergy and Religious

The teaching of Vatican II that the Church should play its role in the context of socio-political and cultural realities demands that the local Churches grow in their awareness of these realities and form themselves fittingly to play their role (AG 22). But, unfortunately, this formation to meet the challenges of secular realities is lacking in many of our Churches. Although the socio-political realities in most of our countries are teeming with many burning questions, the clergy, the religious and the laity are often at a loss to understand, to take positions and act promptly and meaningfully. In the case of the clergy and religious, this is largely due to a lack of ongoing formation in relation to the new realities crying for their leadership. The views of the Church regarding the political involvement or non-involvement of

the clergy, and the seminary formation of the past, have been inadequate to meet the emerging cultural and socio-political realities of today.

3.4.2 The Lay Faithful

Vatican II made a generous opening to the participation of the lay faithful in the transformation of society. Positive steps have also been taken to help them come alive and resume their due place in the Church of the modern world. But in spite of this and of the regional and local efforts made by the Asian leadership of the Church to encourage lay participation in the life and mission of the Church, much remains to be done to give that enlightenment, confidence, courage and freedom needed by the laity to play their frontline role vis-à-vis the challenges of our times.

Unfortunately, a pessimistic concept of the world has led to the failure of many leaders of the Church to encourage the laity towards active involvement in the socio-political realities in general and in party politics in particular. The local Churches need to liberate themselves from such inhibitions and conscientize themselves for a relevant involvement in these realities.

One sometimes suspects that some members of the clergy do not encourage the lay faithful to participate in political activities for fear that they would ask the same freedom for themselves in the Church which they discover to be theirs in the political world. Politicized followers can become very critical.

The lack of an awareness and of a mature Christian analysis of the socio-economic realities is a handicap to our laity. In their eagerness to form the laity after the pattern of seminary training, some formators produce pseudo-formation programs. This has to be corrected. The goal of formation is to enable the laity to become more mature and responsible Christians in their socio-political context, by enabling them to conscientize themselves deeply about the realities and challenges of their life in the light of the Gospel imperatives.

3.5 The Situation of Women and Youth

In a world where women and youth increasingly assert their rights in family, society and national life, many of our Churches still discriminate against women and youth. The distinctive place of women in our society, and our cultures and traditions which esteem and venerate the elders, should not be discarded. But the human rights and equality due to women and youth have to be respected even in the Church. Women and youth en-

joy the franchise in the political life of our countries, but very often they are not given their due rights in their Churches. This disparity of rights in ecclesial and secular life is a hindrance to the large mass of our Christian women and youth responding to the numerous socio-political challenges thrown at them.

3.6 The Situation of the Hierarchy

The decisive and magisterial power of the Church is exercised by a hierarchy which, because of its lifestyle and lack of sufficient contact with the people, very often fails to appreciate the impact of socio-political realities on their lives. As a result, they are not able to strongly motivate the laity for their mission in the socio-political field.

It must also be admitted that there are cases where the members of the hierarchy fail to respond because of a lack of courage.

The hindrances to the Church's response to the socio-political situation of Asia are many and well-entrenched. But the resources available to the Church to respond as it should are numerous and powerful as well. It is to these resources we now turn.

4. The Resources for Response

4.1 Human Resources

As we strive to bring an effective response to the grave socio-political problems of our Asian countries today, we are heartened at the sight of the tremendous human resources that are available among our people.

4.1.1 There is now a greater awareness of human dignity even among the most depressed sections of the population. The periodic disturbances we are witnessing, even though they have their negative features, are a sign of the massive upsurge of the people for a better life. The rich and the powerful themselves are beginning to recognize the human rights of the poor and the downtrodden.

4.1.2 There is a general revulsion when human rights are violated. The conscience of society is now more easily aroused to defend the human rights of the poor and the weak. Civil rights movements have sprung up in many countries to defend human rights in a systematic and persistent way. They expose the gross violations of human rights and bring relief to the victims.

4.1.3 Legal aid for the poor is now being increasingly made available. Apart from official enactments brought about by the civil rights movements,

some priests, religious and laity, together with other people of good will, are organizing legal education programs and legal services for the poor. "People's courts" are being initiated to resolve the disputes of the people and to bypass the ponderous and time-consuming processes of ordinary litigation. The settlements arrived at by this means need, however, to obtain legal sanction, and such procedures should be extended to other places.

4.1.4 Increasingly, mass movements of liberation among the peasants, workers and students are contributing to bringing about social justice and liberation. It is good to see that by and large they are adopting peaceful means of protest and action, although violence may sometimes take place due to the repressive measures adopted by the authorities. These movements show that the poor are architects of their own destiny, although others can prove to be catalysts of their activity. The movements are springing up because the poor experience the inadequacy of traditional politics and systems of government.

4.1.5 The rapid spread of literacy and education is a strong means for the poor to better their lot and affirm their human dignity and rights. Although it brings new problems, like that of the educated unemployed, it enables people to realize their human potential with suitable help.

4.1.6 New non-formal means of education are being tried out for the enlightenment and conscientization of poor adult women and men. There is scope here for people of different persuasions to cooperate in bringing about social change.

4.1.7 People's organizations, non-governmental organizations and co-operatives have arisen as a result of the realization that government cannot adequately respond to the needs of the people, and that the people themselves acting together are the most potent force for their own development.

4.1.8 The modern media of social communication, though often times misused, are a powerful means of education and humanization. They appeal to the whole person and to every section of society. They also permit rapid communication between different areas and countries. They could be used to bring about greater contact between people of distant countries.

4.1.9 A growing ecological movement has emerged in Asia. The poorer countries have become aware that they have become the dumping grounds of highly polluting industries and of toxic wastes from the richer countries. They have become more sensitive to the ecological damage which is often the price of rapid industrialization. They realize that their valuable natural resources are being destroyed at an inordinate rate, largely for the benefit of

a few in their own countries and for the benefit of the richer countries. Protests have arisen against nuclear bombs' testing or the presence of nuclear weapons.

4.1.10 Likewise, there has been a growing movement for the preservation of the cultural heritage and rights of tribal communities which very often are dislodged from their habitats by the march of technological progress, and for economic and political reasons.

4.1.11 Indeed, we are noticing a transnational solidarity between the nations of Asia and the whole world. There is almost a sense of all peoples belonging to a "global village." The happenings in any one place have instant resonance in other places, so that there is the possibility of joint action to defend human rights and to bring about human solidarity on a vast scale. This is particularly relevant in Asia where different countries have for long lived in relative isolation. Now the Asian cultures, fertilized by the Gospel, can realize greater unity and harmony. Here we may mention that the Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN) and the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) are providing hope of greater cooperation among neighboring Asian countries for the betterment of their peoples.

4.2 Asian Cultural Resources

We have to look for inspiration in our own cultures and histories for such movements. In fact, they are far from being a novelty in Asia. Many national and intercultural movements springing from the heart of the people go back to the distant past. We mention some of these resources that offer political and social motivation.

4.2.1 Confucian Ethics

4.2.1.1 *Jen, Yi, Tao, Te*

In Confucianism, *jen* (仁 = universal love) is the central concept to express the relationship between individuals and their working together to build up the human community. By nature the human person has the capacity to be open to others and to live in fellowship with others. Universal love (仁 = *jen*) has, however, to be structured and shaped by *yi* (義 = righteousness), which stops it from being merely a sentimental affection. As regards the social life in the community, universal love has to follow the norms of *tao* (道 = way). In doing this *te* (德 = virtue) is achieved. Following the way (*tao*) in virtue (*te*), universal love (*jen*) finds its fulfillment in the service of the community.

4.2.1.2 Liu Chung-Yuan and Others

In the Confucian tradition, Liu Chung-Yuan encouraged by his essays and poems the reform movement initiated by Wang Shu-wen at the beginning of the ninth century. This aimed at cleaning up corruption, reducing the accumulated rent debts of the poor, freeing the court prostitutes, etc.

4.2.2 *Pancasila*

The Indonesian state ideology is known as *Pancasila*, or the Five Principles, i.e., 1. belief in the Supreme God, 2. a just and civilized humanity, 3. nationalism, the unity of the nation, 4. democracy guided by the wisdom of unanimity resulting from deliberations, and 5. social justice for all the Indonesian people. *Pancasila* contains human and social values rooted in the religio-cultural heritage of Indonesia's people in the context of the prevailing vision of a fundamental cosmic harmony. It provides a common ground for Indonesia's plurality of interpretation. In *Pancasila* the principle of monotheism, and its position with regard to the other four *silas*, is understood in various ways. It leads Buddhists and Balinese Hindus towards a monotheistic reinterpretation of their religious traditions.

4.2.3 Gandhian Movements

4.2.3.1 *Sarvodaya* (Integral Development)

Mahatma Gandhi conceived an integral program — spiritual, moral, social and economic — for the development of backward and impoverished villagers. His idea was to develop the human potential of the villagers for their own betterment. He wanted them to exploit the natural resources of the area and their traditional skills to obtain food, housing, clothing and other necessities in a disciplined, and cooperative manner.

Spinning yarn and weaving cloth on a handloom were meant to be both a matter of discipline and economic activity. Living a simple lifestyle, with the use of local resources in a judicious manner, was meant also to preserve the ecological balance. One was supposed to give up all forms of greed, exploitation and caste discrimination.

Although the movement has been overshadowed by large-scale industrial projects and competitive economic activity, its inspiration lives on in the minds of the people.

4.2.3.2 *Antyodaya*

More recently Gandhi's plan has received a new development in the form of *antyodaya* (development of the most backward). It is a kind of "preferential option for the poor" by which one seeks the progress of the most underprivileged sections of the population.

4.2.4 Tribal Movements

The Hul movement in the Santal Parganas against the British rulers and the activity of Birsa Munda against the landlords in Chotanagpur, both in 19th-century India, are instances of tribal protests and reform movements. Such examples can be cited from the history of many other countries. They are a sign that the oppressed people are capable of organizing themselves to throw off the yoke under which they have been suffering for so long.

4.2.5 Forms of Decision Making and Cooperation

Asian methods of dialogue and cooperation have a strong potential for community action. We may cite some examples. In Malaysia and Indonesia there is what is called *gotong-royong* (cooperation based on a vision of a wider family). In the Philippines we have the *sangguniang baranggay*, a meeting of the elders of a small community to reach a consensus on a matter affecting everyone; and *bayanihan*, which is spontaneous cooperation in a spirit of reciprocity (as when someone has to transfer his *nipa* hut to a new location). In South Asia, it is common for the village *panchayat* to arrive at a consensus by common deliberation. In Pakistan and North India this takes the form of *biradari* deliberations. To supply *shramdan* or voluntary labor for a public cause is a common practice in several places in India, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka.

4.2.6 Traditional and Modern Cultural Expressions

The traditional forms and modern developments of art, music, drama, storytelling and poetry have contributed to social protest and change, and can still be a powerful means of expressing the liberative aspirations of the people and mobilizing them for social involvement.

4.3 Interreligious Resources

4.3.1 Religious Values That Foster Peace, Justice and Harmony

The religious traditions of Asia constitute a treasure of wisdom, spiritual insights into the transcendent destiny of the human person, and guidance for the life of society. The wealth of ethical teachings contained in the

Asian religions could enable Asian societies to live peacefully with one another, to respect the rights of the other and to be considerate in the use of natural resources. The various religions teach effective methods to control human passion and avarice, and to live in harmony in society. The scriptures of the various Asian religions explain the way (*tao*), teach the eternal law (*dhamma*), expound the essential unity of love of God and man, call to total submission to God's will, and explain the position and duties of the individual in life. All the religious traditions in Asia have developed their own attitudes and teachings to describe the interplay of religion with the various political powers and political systems in Asia.

The great potential of common human concern among the various religions, their common ethical precepts and spiritual motivation to work for justice and peace have not been sufficiently tapped. There is wide room for further exploring the many possibilities that remain hidden or unused until today. This can be done without overlooking or neglecting the many differences among them, and while respecting the individual characteristics and tenets of each religious tradition.

4.3.2 Interreligious Dialogue and Cooperation

The Christian Churches constitute in most of the multireligious societies in Asia a small minority. In their efforts to inculturate the Christian message and to become local Asian Churches, Christians all over Asia have become engaged in dialogue with the other religions (cf. TAC Paper: "Theses on Interreligious Dialogue," *FABC Papers*, No.48).

Asian Christians encounter in the other religious traditions not only other religious tenets and values, but *their own* cultural and religious heritage as well. Interreligious dialogue cannot, however, be practiced without becoming involved in the struggle and difficulties Asia is experiencing. There is an inner relationship between dialogue and the work for justice and peace. The burning issues of Asia — massive poverty, exploitation by multinational companies, discrimination of minorities, oppression of women, etc. — challenge the members of various religions to unite and cooperate in the building up of a more just and humane society.

The Catholic Church enters into this dialogue out of a desire to contribute the riches of the Gospel; to learn from others and to be corrected by others; to search together for a better understanding of the meaning of life; and to work together for a new world which is at once more human and divine (cf. FABC Plenary Assembly V, Bandung, 2.3.3). The Churches in Asia seek through dialogue to serve the cause of unity of the peoples in Asia marked by a great diversity of beliefs, cultures and socio-political structures (cf. FABC Plenary Assembly V, Bandung, 4.2).

4.3.3 Reform/Renewal Movements

In all Asian religions we can detect the potential for reform and protest against the corruption of their original inspirations and teaching, coupled with efforts to remedy injustices and to work for change and renewal. The Asian religions are alive and responding to the changing times, although we can observe the opposite reaction of fundamentalist resistance against any change, as well. In this century we have seen the rise of the ecumenical movement among Christian Churches, and the renewal brought about by Vatican II. There is the phenomenon of the various movements of reformed Hinduism to respond to the changes in modern India. Islam is experiencing a renaissance which had its beginnings mainly in Asia. In India, the protest against caste discrimination led to the neo-Buddhist movement of Bhimrao Ramji Ambedkar. In Malaysia the attempt of the pro-Islamic government to restrict the legitimate rights of religious freedom brought about the cooperation of Sikhs, Buddhists, Hindus and Christians. Confucianism, often considered a rather conservative philosophical religious tradition, has again and again given birth to movements of change and reform. Buddhism in China, Japan and Vietnam has often been the driving force of movements for greater social justice — especially for farmers, fishermen and other weaker groups in their societies.

The various instances of interreligious cooperation in the struggle for the rights of farmers, fishermen, industrial workers (in India, South Korea, Thailand) are special signs of hope. The many injustices and violations of human rights call for the cooperation of all, beyond the boundaries of their religious adherence.

4.4 Ecumenical Resources

4.4.1 Ecumenical Awakening

There is a growing consciousness among Christians of the different Churches and denominations that working for Christian unity goes beyond preoccupation with confessional differences. The urgent problems of our time, like poverty, abuse of power, racism, sexism, political oppression, ecological damage and various forms of violation of basic human rights are challenges for all Christians. The Christian response, however, is greatly hampered and diminished by the lack of unity which leads to unnecessary rivalries and waste of resources. The increasing readiness in the Churches, therefore, to improve ecumenical relations is a genuine sign of hope which opens up new options in the field of social and political activities. The ecumenical movement is bringing together Christians from various traditions. They are now seeking ways both to express and to celebrate their unity,

as well as to give credible and effective witnessing in the areas of justice and peace in solidarity. We see signs of the movements of the Spirit on the national, continental and intercontinental levels of relationship.

4.4.2 New Forms of Ecumenical Cooperation

With Vatican II new forms of ecumenical cooperation have developed. In the field of social concern the formation of SOPEPAX in 1968 initiated the cooperation of the Vatican Commission on Justice and Peace with its counterpart in the World Council of Churches (WCC). Unfortunately, this institutionalized form of cooperation could not be maintained. In various regions ecumenical cooperation in social action and programs, relief measures and other forms of Christian presence in situations of need, etc., have continued. In the field of Christian doctrine there are various joint commissions in different countries. The Catholic Church has become a full member of the Commission on Faith and Order of the WCC.

It is also true that solidarity in the struggle for justice has helped many Christians to overcome traditional obstacles and brought them to a new sense of "koinonia." Twenty years ago Catholic devotion to Mary was a major obstacle for Protestants who are today discovering the Mary of the Magnificat. The role of Mary in the Christian life is more correctly understood, not only in terms of a pious and private devotion, but as an inspiration and challenge to live a life committed to social change.

A new field of ecumenical cooperation is the area of ecology where under the leadership of the WCC the program of "Justice, Peace and the Integrity of Creation" was started. The two conferences, Basel 1989 and Seoul 1990, highlighted this important concern. Important for countries of Africa and Asia became the ecumenical cooperation in fighting racism, sexism, and prostitution. The Ecumenical Coalition for Third World Tourism (ECTWT) has done much to expose the evils of sexual exploitation and to ask for appropriate measures by the governments concerned to stop these practices.

In recent years various forms of cooperation have developed between FABC and the Christian Conference of Asia (CCA), especially in the fields of social activities, theological formation and interreligious dialogue. Catholic and Protestant action groups involved in the struggle for social justice for marginalized groups in several Asian countries have together shared the experience of being suspected and persecuted by their governments as subversive elements. In 1987 the joint conference of the FABC and CCA in Singapore explored the possibilities of "Living and Working Together with Sisters and Brothers of other Faiths."

4.4.3 The Contribution of EATWOT

On the intercontinental level, the formation of the Ecumenical Association of Third World Theologians at Dar-es-Salaam in 1976 inaugurated an important phase of ecumenical cooperation of theologians who consider their being placed in the Third World a common basis to develop a contextualized theology and spirituality from the perspective of the exploited and marginalized masses of Africa, Asia and Latin America. The distinctive theological method of EATWOT theologians — to start from social analysis of a given context, to reflect theologically on it and come up with practical proposals — was used in the three major continental conferences to develop distinctive African, Asian and Latin American forms of EATWOT theology. The general assemblies — Delhi 1981, Oaxtepec 1986 and Nairobi 1992 — tried to coordinate the various programs and to work out the common elements of EATWOT theology. The third general assembly of EATWOT in Nairobi (January 6-13, 1992) dealt with the theme: "A Cry for Life: The Spirituality of the Third World." The ongoing commitment to work for liberation is seen to be in the need of a spirituality based on a Christology enriched by Asian and African religious elements. In view of the fifth centenary of Columbus' "discovery of America," EATWOT sees a special concern to work for safeguarding the rights of the Native Americans, Negritos and other tribal communities.

From South Africa we have *The Kairos Document*, September, 1985, signed by 151 theologians, pronouncing a Christian, biblical and theological judgment on apartheid. Another significant call for urgent action is *The Road to Damascus: Kairos and Conversion*, July 1989, a powerful document drawn up by hundreds of Christians from seven different nations involved in dialogue over two and a half years. Another initiative worthy of recognition is the community of Taizé. It is generating a spirituality among many, especially the young, of a Christian life that is critically sensitive and prophetically committed to socio-political realities.

4.5 Church Resources

The authentic life of Christians and Christian communities is the Church's greatest human resource for the transformation of society. This life finds nourishment in the word of God. Hence, it is not surprising to find today a growing interest in the word of God, read critically and within the context of present-day realities.

We want to point out, however, in this section some other outstanding resources available to the Church.

4.5.1 The Social Teachings of the Church

Vatican II has given a great impetus to the commitment and involvement of the Church in development and liberation. In the papal documents we have a vast corpus of social teaching that provides a strong inspiration and clear direction for the proper engagement of Christians in the temporal sphere. Development and liberation now clearly appear as an integral part of the Church's mission of evangelization (Bishops' Synod 1971, *Justice in the World*).

The Church and individual Christians are called to have a preferential option for the poor. They are to promote vigorously human dignity and human rights and strive to bring about a new and just social order.

Bishops' conferences and many individual bishops have applied the social teachings of the Church to the particular situations of their dioceses. They have issued statements denouncing injustices and calling for action in favor of social justice. Episcopal conferences have issued pastoral letters and guidelines on social involvement. The FABC, through its plenary assemblies, the Bishops' Institutes for Social Action (BISA) and the Office of Human Development, has made a significant contribution to guide the actions of Asian bishops in bringing about justice and upholding human rights, especially in favor of the poor.

4.5.2 A Contextualized Liturgy

Authentic liturgy is the source and apex of the whole Christian life. In many Asian countries experiments in inculturating liturgy have helped very much to encourage fuller participation of the faithful and to make liturgy ever more alive and significant for their daily lives and their involvement in society.

Religious activities, like the reading of the Passion in the Philippines, have inspired even revolutionary fervor for moral and social transformation.

4.5.3 Community Forms

The close-knit family has been an important resource in Asian society. Christian families, with their deep faith and spirit of love, have helped in inculcating the values of solidarity, mutual help and self-sacrifice. They are the cradle from which dedicated people arise. However, the passage from an extended to a nuclear family and the strains arising from urbanization and other modern influences are creating tensions in family relationships. The total education of children is being neglected and the elderly are increas-

ingly uncared for. Family movements and associations have been working for the welfare of the family and for justice and peace. The Church needs to attend more to the family apostolate in order to build up a happy society.

The Basic Christian Communities, now spreading in most Asian countries, have a vast potential to contribute to liberation and social transformation. They are training their members to be participative in society. Where Christians are few in number, many are taking part in community life with other people of good will.

These basic communities must be given much more importance in the development of the parishes. Given the proper formation and guidance, they can effectively contribute to the life of the Church and society.

4.5.4 Personnel

Whereas the whole Christian community is called to become a ferment and leaven for human society, prominent lay people in leadership positions in government, public institutions, politics, business enterprises, the educational field, especially in institutes of higher learning, and, not the least, in mass communications — when enlightened and animated by the Church's social teaching — can have a considerable influence on processes of legislation, on policy and decision making.

There is a growing consciousness among religious of the need for solidarity and for a preferential love of the poor. This is expressed particularly in their spirit of evangelical poverty, in their search for a simple lifestyle, in their educational apostolate, in health services and in other fields of social involvement — generally speaking, in efforts for the human promotion of the marginalized. All this can be highly relevant in societies, where most people still are heavily burdened with their day-to-day struggle for a more humane life.

The clergy, when fully alert to the signs of the times, and conscious of their pastoral responsibility of ministering to the faithful in their commitment to the common welfare, can provide a valuable contribution by fostering the prophetic attitude of Christians with regard to current socio-political trends and major events in the country, and by promoting critical cooperation with other movements for a more humane society.

4.5.5 Formation Programs

In spite of widespread passivity and institutionalization, there has been a marked improvement in the training of the clergy and religious, both male

and female. Now the seminarians and the young religious are provided with a new social vision and are given an exposure to social realities as an important part of their formation. As a result, we have a large number of young dedicated persons who are ready to bear any hardship, to share the life of the poor and to engage themselves in their uplift. A good number have received specialized training to carry out their social apostolate more effectively.

In fast-changing societies those who are already ministering to the people (clergy, religious and pastoral workers) need also to update and upgrade their ability to serve by ongoing formation programs which render them more sensitive to the signs of the times, and more committed to the needs of their brothers and sisters in society.

Various types of ongoing formation programs for the laity, e.g., Bible classes, seminars and workshops, in relation to ecology, family life, political and social problems, have been helpful in promoting Christian awareness and witnessing.

Special care must be taken of youth, who constitute the majority in our societies, and who have the idealism and the energy needed to transform them. In our educational institutions they should not only be taught information and skills for their economic well-being, but should also be motivated and inspired to live their lives for others, even to the point of sacrifice. Suitable young people should already be prepared to participate in political activities.

4.5.6 Institutions

The numerous Catholic educational institutions in most Asian countries have contributed to inspire and enlighten the youth. They are to be further developed as resources for social transformation. Many young people have come out these institution with a spirit of dedication and with Gospel values, determined to bring about social justice. Some are exercising leadership roles in government, politics, trade unions, business and other activities. Others have been able to animate grass-roots and mass movements for peoples' struggles. There is still a wide scope for education to serve as a powerful instrument of justice and social transformation. There is a need to consciously inculcate a spirit of self-sacrifice, dedication and cooperation. Consumerism and unlimited competition have to be confronted from the earliest formative years of the child.

Social action centers have been particular useful in training social workers, conducting surveys, promoting the practice of social analysis, and planning effective strategies. Some of them are having a powerful influence over a wide portion of the population.

We cannot forget the vast network of charitable and relief centers everywhere. They have the potential of training the local people in the areas of development and liberation.

4.5.7 International Links

The Catholic Church, with its international links, has many opportunities to bring about genuine peace and justice. As the Asian Churches are now detaching themselves from their colonial past, they can contribute to a universal solidarity, even while being fully inculturated and immersed in the life of their respective nations. They can contribute ideas and experiences which have been tried out in other countries and adapt them to local needs.

The most necessary and most potent of all the Church's resources is to be found in its response to the Spirit who is the power from on high, and who is the source of its strength and fruitfulness. This response we call the Church's spirituality. What is the spirituality that must animate this response?

5. A Spirituality Animating the Church's Response

5.1 The Church as Servant and Prophet

To enable the Church to carry out effectively its mission in relation to politics, the Lord has been calling it to a new way of being Church. The Church in Asia cannot pretend to be a dominant factor in the socio-political life of the Asian peoples. It must rather take the form of a Church standing in the midst of the Asian peoples as a servant, and walking with them as a fellow pilgrim in the journey towards a full humanity, in communion with God and with all peoples. This servant Church desires not only its own growth as a society or institution, but seeks foremost the growth of the Kingdom and its values among all peoples.

This was, after all, the way of Jesus, who emptied himself and took the form of a servant, and became like us in all things, sin alone excepted. He lived among us as one who served, and went about doing good and preaching the Kingdom. This service led him to deeds that uplifted the condition of his fellow human beings, while freeing them from the things that diminished their humanity and separated them from each other and from God.

He acted and spoke fearlessly on behalf of human beings and, while giving due recognition to political authority, nevertheless showed himself obedient to God first of all and above all. His service of the people brought him into conflict with religious and political authorities of his time, and eventually cost him his life.

He rose from the dead and commissioned his Church to continue his prophetic task, pouring down his Spirit on his disciples to empower them to serve as he did. The Church thus prolongs the service of Christ. To glorify its Lord it must take the form of a servant as he did.

While serving the peoples of Asia, the Church is aware that it does not have the monopoly of Christ's Spirit. This Spirit breathes where he will. Thus, the Church is bidden by its Lord to be willing to collaborate with all human beings and communities for the sake of the full human development, the liberation and unity of all peoples and all creation.

This Church that is both prophet and servant of humanity must be characterized by secularity, compassion, humility, boldness and openness to the Spirit in discernment.

5.2 Some Characteristic Attitudes

For the Church to be leaven and ferment of society, an attitude of "secularity," i.e., of openness to human society at large, is most necessary for all and for each one of its members. This means a spirituality of appreciation of worldly realities, of positive values found in modernization and technological progress; but also of alertness to situations and conditions that could pose obstacles to the realization of Gospel values and, ultimately, to the coming of God's Kingdom. It is a spirituality of commitment to the transformation of this world so that the Kingdom is realized in it already, even if only partially.

Compassion must mark the Church, which is prophet and servant in the midst of Asia's multitudes who suffer and aspire for liberation, fullness of life and peace. FABC V speaks eloquently of this compassion, which is:

... the compassion of Jesus himself who, like the Good Samaritan, came to bind the wounds of humanity. It will be a compassion that makes the Church weak and powerless with those who are weak and powerless. But it will be a compassion that will denounce in deeds, if it is not possible to do so in words, the injustices, oppressions, exploitations and inequalities, resulting in so much of the suffering that is evident in the Asian situation. Such compassion will see as fellow members of the one human family under the Fatherhood of God all exploited women and workers, unwelcomed refugees, victims of violations of human rights, and, in fact, every needy human person. This compassion will see even deeper, and will welcome in each human being — but especially the poor, deprived and oppressed — the very person of Christ who has united himself to every human being, though he/she may be unaware of it (cf. *Redemptor Hominis*, 14).

The humility of the Church needs to be manifested first of all in its leaders, in their simplicity of life, their willingness to render preferential service to the least of the Lord's brethren, their readiness to renounce privileges, and even to suffer humiliation and persecution in the service of the people. They will show themselves followers of the humble Savior by their detachment from material possessions and by their use of power for the up-building of human beings and communities. But all the Church's members should also strive to be imbued with these same characteristics so that the face of Christ may shine out in the whole body of his followers. The Church that will emerge is a Church that "will not boast of human power but will serve with the power of the Lord Jesus who emptied himself and took the form of a servant (Phil 2:7), but is for all who believe, the wisdom and power of God (1 Cor 1:23-24) (FABC Plenary Assembly V, Bandung, II).

This humility must not, however, be translated into timidity. It must be accompanied by a boldness that in the Scriptures is characteristic of the Lord's disciples. Christians must be ready when necessary to say like the apostles, "Better for us to obey God than men!" (Acts 5:29), as they serve others with the assurance that the Lord is with them and that the Spirit does give both word and strength to those who obediently do the bidding of the Lord. And so this boldness is founded ultimately in the presence of the Lord and the guidance of his Spirit. It is thus important that Christians in their service of their fellow human beings should be people attuned to and directed by the Spirit of God. In the truest sense, the best servants and builders of humanity are those who live a profound spiritual life, nourished by prayer and contemplation.

5.3 Communal Discernment

The way to allow these attitudes to be operative when the community confronts the various issues of life is through the process of communal discernment. This spirituality, characterized by an openness to the Spirit, is not individualistic. It is a spirituality that calls for communal discernment in determining what actions to take in order to carry out the Lord's service to the Asian peoples. Our peoples find themselves in very diverse situations, and it is very difficult, if not impossible, to devise a single formula of acting to serve them. To our situations the words of Pope Paul VI apply in a special way:

In the face of such widely varying situations it is difficult for us to utter a unified message and to put forward a solution which has universal validity ... It is up to the Christian communities to analyze with objectivity the situation which is proper to their own country, to shed on it the light of the Gospel's unalterable words and to draw principles of

reflection, norms of judgment and directives for action from the social teaching of the Church (*Octogesima Adveniens*, 4).

Such a spirituality calls for pastors to take special note that this discernment must be the work of the Christian community, and not simply of its leaders. The process of discernment calls for consultation with lay people, especially those most qualified by virtue of their technical competence and spiritual gifts. This is a matter where leaders of the Church exercise the asceticism of dialogue, which oftentimes is more difficult than bodily penances.

Proper catechesis, especially in the field of the Church's social teaching and towards an attitude of openness to collaboration with other people of good will, is necessary for lay people to be able to contribute their due to this process of discernment.

Thus, it becomes clear that the spirituality we speak of will demand not only an openness of the members of the Church to each other, but also their openness to others in the human community as well.

Through communal discernment the Church must discover the way of responding the Lord asks of it at a particular juncture of history. We shall now turn to some considerations to help the Church make this discernment.

6. Kinds of Church Response

There are many ways in which the Church can respond to the socio-political realities it finds itself in. Some are inappropriate and run counter to Gospel values and to human dignity. Others are compatible with the Gospel and even promote the values of the Kingdom. We enumerate here some of the inappropriate responses that are to be avoided or corrected, and then propose some necessary elements of a truly appropriate response.

6.1 Inappropriate Responses

6.1.1 Theocracy

Here the Church seeks some sort of establishment and domination over socio-political life. This shows a lack of respect for the rights of individual consciences, for the rights of other religious groups, and for the rightful autonomy of the secular sphere. The leaders of the Church may adopt the positions of secular rulers and may become worldly in their outlook and behavior. Gradually, the secular sphere may get the Church involved in power politics and prevent it from exercising its proper prophetic role.

6.1.2 Clericalism

In this response, the whole life of the Church is dominated by the clergy, who also seek to interfere even in the technical aspects of the socio-political realm. This error arises from a purely institutional concept of the Church. It may also come from a paternalistic mentality on the part of the clergy who think they must protect their people from all dangers. There is a lack of understanding of the common good which is to be achieved by the concerted efforts of all the sectors of the people, according to each one's particular role and competence. The laity are not allowed to exercise their proper role in an autonomous way. Often the clergy get linked with the powerful and privileged and feel no need for the transformation of unjust structures, and fail to encourage lay initiatives towards salutary change.

6.1.3 Religious Fundamentalism

Neglecting its own experience and the Gospel values, the Church may seek to preserve its identity by overstressing certain secondary features and traditions, perhaps based on a too literal interpretation of the Scriptures, as is done by many fundamentalist sects. The Church would thereby lose all its dynamism for bringing about social change.

6.1.4 Communalism

When there is a conflict between religious groups, as in India, and politicians try to use the religious feelings of the people for narrow political purposes, the Church may be inclined to act just like any one such group. It may be unduly preoccupied with preserving its own interests or allow itself to be used like others in the political game. The Church may hold on to certain alien ways and appear to pose a threat to the socio-political fabric of the nation when the members of the Church increase by conversion and are made to adopt such alien ways. (This is the opposite of inculturation.)

6.1.5 Subordination to the State

Out of an excessive desire for accommodation, or out of fear of losing certain privileges, the Church might, perhaps unwillingly and unknowingly, allow itself to be dominated by state power. This happens when those who wield state power believe that the State is omnipotent and omniscient, as in certain socialist countries or in the phase of excessive nationalism after decolonization. The rulers claim control over all aspects of the life of the people, including religious organizations or movements. In this type of response, the Church virtually acquiesces to the might of the State, in exchange for favors or out of a fear of reprisals. Religion thereby becomes

vulnerable to manipulation by State power. It suffers domestication and is used for the State's own purposes, and thereby loses its prophetic function.

6.1.6 Privatism

Here, the concerns of the Church are confined to the intimate sphere of the relationship of the faithful to God, to the small sphere of the family and the parish, and to an internal consensus of ecclesiastical institutions. The faithful do not bother about socio-political problems that have no bearing on their immediate concerns. Charismatic groups and basic Christian communities must avoid this danger by encouraging their members to have a deep social concern and to be actively involved in socio-political issues.

6.2 Elements of an Adequate Response

The Church does not claim to present any ideal model of responding to socio-political realities. The same faith can be expressed in different political options. Given the complexity of the Asian situation, we can only give some essential elements of a response that is compatible with the Gospel and that is called for in our Asian situation.

A first element of this response is solidarity, as expressed in *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis* of Pope John Paul II, 38-40. It is a human and Christian virtue, calling for a firm and persevering determination to commit oneself to the common good in a spirit of brotherhood.

This solidarity that we speak of is not only that of a brother and sister but that of a prophet. It is a solidarity that does not exclude but rather demands opposition under certain circumstances. It is a critical solidarity that announces and promotes those elements, actions and structures that lead to the common good. But it denounces and counters those that hinder or destroy that common good.

Here, the Church is understood primarily not as an institution but as a community with distinct roles and functions of pastors and laity in the common action of the Church in political affairs. Both the public character and autonomy of the Church, on the one hand, and the legitimate autonomy of the secular realities, on the other, are recognized. This model of response is inspired by evangelical values and is to be implemented by renewed theological reflection and common spiritual discernment.

The upholding of the public character of the Christian faith stems from the recognition of Christ's lordship over all creation, including all aspects of human life, among which is the socio-political aspect. It recognizes the

specificity of the social level of human life and activity. It is convinced that charity is the basic Christian value even at the societal level, that social justice authenticates charity, and that the common good specifies justice at the level of the community. It includes a preferential (though not exclusive) option for the poor. It recognizes that effective political activity is necessary to attain or to secure the common good. It holds that transformation of societal structures is a demand of the common good. It is acutely aware of the international aspects and roots of mass poverty, oppression and injustice. Its attitude is that of evangelical solidarity, which entails effective commitment to the common good. It prefers non-violent means of combating injustice and promoting the common good.

As regards the specific question of the relation between religions and the State, we propose that there be mutual autonomy and cooperation for the common good. This is to be pursued consistently and comprehensively, but with a discerning eye trained at the historical and cultural peculiarities of the situations of the various Asian countries.

Certain variations of this basic orientation may be required by the concrete historical and cultural situation in which the response is made. Concretely, relevant factors include the following: existential gravity of the question or issue involved; culturally accepted ways of settling disputes; the place of confrontation or consensus in the specific culture; and the importance of "saving face."

In some situations, the Church may have to adjust itself to the different degrees of establishment of other religions. One test for the validity of such an adjustment is provided by success in practice. Concretely, this means the preservation of the rights of the Church and the promotion of the common good, in terms especially of respect for fundamental human rights and the advancement of needed societal transformation.

The Church must also adopt a critical attitude towards the various ideologies which have a very strong impact today in Asian politics and draw many adherents. Ideology has a positive aspect inasmuch as it provides cohesion or direction to a society or movement. It arises from the unconscious tendency present in any social group to produce views and values that legitimate and reinforce its order and protect itself against others. It can serve as a bridge or mediation between the Christian faith and the search for solutions to concrete problems.

However, as ideology is always a partial view of reality that tends to absolutize its claims and thus distorts reality, Christianity cannot be looked upon as an ideology, since Christian faith is based on a total vision of re-

ality. There is a need for judging every ideology in the light of faith and the integral welfare of humanity.

Today, there is a particular need to guard against the ideologies of Marxism and Liberal Capitalism, which are both based on a materialistic conception of human life. The Church in Asia should guard against the danger of being drawn into the dialectical opposition between these two ideologies. It should instead promote a holistic vision of solidarity based on the Christian faith and Asian conceptions, like Pancasila and Sarvodaya.

C. PASTORAL RECOMMENDATIONS

We believe that our reflections on the presence and mission of the Asian Church vis-à-vis the socio-political realities of our continent demand urgent response. Granted that the diversity of our situations would necessitate a variety of responses, we nevertheless try to submit the following recommendations to episcopal conferences, individual bishops and all pastoral agents as suggested guidelines for a course of pastoral action.

1. Spirituality and Attitudes

We consider important the development of a spirituality which would sustain and generate attitudes that recognize and promote genuine social involvement and relevant political commitment.

1.1 First among these attitudes would be a realistic recognition of the *competence and responsibility of the laity* in matters social and political. There is still a need to create awareness in both the clergy and laity alike that the “secular” is the laity’s specific field of exercising their Christian vocation.

1.2 This would mean *respecting the freedom of people* in the political options they make. Such a respect would testify to a genuine recognition of lay initiative, competence and autonomy.

1.3 There is a need for a critical but supportive recognition of the increasing number of *mass movements* for social and political reform as a phenomenon of grass-roots initiatives.

1.4 A *communal discernment*, therefore, is called for in the often crucial and complex situations of our nations. Such discernment should include participation from all sectors of the Christian community — religious, clergy and laity, women and men, old and young. There should be no evasion of responsibility in facing difficult problems.

1.5 We urge that a *prophetic spirituality*, taking as its model the spirituality of Jesus, be fostered, which would govern and sustain all commitment to justice. This would be in harmony with a “liberative spirituality” articulated by BISA VII. Such a spirituality would enable the Church to exercise its prophetic vocation by addressing the conscience of people and denouncing the oppressive and dehumanizing structures of society.

2. Formation

If we want to achieve anything tangible, we deem formation essential at all levels and all areas of Church life. This would ensure that the resources of the Church would be made available and accessible to all. Hence, our recommendations:

2.1 That serious attention be paid to the *social teachings of the Church* and that they be studied in a contextualized way in relation to contemporary issues.

2.2 That this attention be concretely realized and exercised through *awareness programs* which would serve to conscientize our people for concrete social involvement and urgent political commitment.

2.3 The laity should be encouraged to participate with competence and integrity in the political life of our countries. Those who have the ability and inclination to engage in party politics should be given pastoral enlightenment, guidance and encouragement to do so.

2.4 In this regard, we deem it important to harness and channel the interests and energies of the *youth of our continent*, who constitute the majority of our population. Special attention should be given to high school and college students in order to answer the need for a genuine Christian formation of our future leaders.

2.5 Specifically, we recommend that special attention be given to students in *seminaries and religious houses of formation*, so that they receive adequate training in a critical analysis of socio-political situations that draws upon human and social sciences, along with the Gospel and Church teachings. Initiating them into concrete action would ensure that the religious and clergy are equipped for relevant and genuine leadership in the Church and the human community.

2.6 *The role of the means of social communication* is vital to provide Christian reflection and Gospel perspectives on current issues. Hence, adequate formation must be given to practitioners in the means of social communication.

3. Special Concerns

We deem it necessary in the context of Asia to address some special areas of concern.

3.1 In a situation of increasing corruption in public life, we are called upon by our witness and activity to foster the *Kingdom values* of justice, equality and preferential love for the poor.

3.2 *Interreligious dialogue and collaboration*, which are already a reality in most of our nations, should be fostered and channeled also along socio-political involvement and commitment.

3.3 "Creation spirituality" which has been much spoken of in recent times should provide the foundation for respect of the environment and greater regard for the integrity of creation. Our common concern for *ecological issues* should claim greater interreligious openness on our part.

3.4 The inculturation process that is slowly taking root in our Churches should be accompanied by a genuine respect for *the autonomy of the cultures* of our people. Without any undue imposition we should actively promote the natural evolution and development of individual cultures, with their variety of music and other art forms, so as to contribute to the authentic social and political life of our people.

3.5 Amidst the situation of large-scale violation of *human rights*, we have the urgent task, together with all people of good will, to promote human dignity and rights, especially of the poor and the weak. We should do everything to denounce the violation of human rights and come to the aid of the victims. Legal aid for the poor would be an important way of achieving this end.

3.6 We must continue to acknowledge the *dignity* and foster the *liberation of women* by recognizing their competence, promoting their active participation in the Church and in society, abolishing all forms of discrimination and addressing the issues of the exploitation and instrumentalization of women.

4. Structures

Since the setting up of certain structures, as experienced and needed, would ensure the organized implementation of proposals and programs, we recommend the following:

4.1 Each episcopal conference should set up a *liaison office* to facilitate dialogue with the government and its offices.

4.2 *National commissions for public affairs* composed of laity, religious and clergy should facilitate the monitoring of all issues of society and politics on a permanent basis. This will obviate the Church's usual practice of being only reactive to certain isolated issues.

CONCLUSION

Reading the signs of the times, we can sense that the present historical conjuncture is a critical one. It presents challenging problems for the integral evangelizing mission of the Church. But it also presents a great opportunity for bearing effective witness to an authentic Christian faith that does justice and helps bring about liberation, development and reconciliation.

In the political field, the Church in Asia is called upon to pursue sincerely a response of critical solidarity in the relationship between Christian faith and politics, of mutual autonomy and cooperation in the question of the relationship between religion and State. Sincere pursuit of this type of response entails deliberate action to remove the remaining elements of inappropriate responses to the current socio-political situation of the peoples of Asia. For such a purifying action, there is urgent need for many changes within the Church in Asia.

God calls the Asian Churches from the socio-political situations of the peoples of Asia to a profound conversion: to incarnate Christian faith and love not only in promoting liturgy and Christian communion, but also, and especially, in prophetic and liberating action. This action takes the trouble to read and analyze the signs of the times in socio-political realities, to interpret them in the light of the Gospel with a view to accomplishing the work of God, who wills all human beings not only to survive but to have life in abundance.

The contemporary task of the Asian Churches in political life is arduous and complex. If carried out successfully, however, the Church will indeed be to the peoples of Asia more of a sacrament of salvation, more of a sacrament of the human race, more of a sacrament of the Kingdom. It will show that the glory of God shines on earth when humankind becomes completely human and fully alive. It will lead people to see the face of God in the face of Asians transformed by the life that is genuinely new.

* * *

Published October 1992

Members of the Theological Advisory Commission (April, 1992)

Bangladesh

Most Rev. Theotonius Gomes, C.S.C.

India

Rev. Matthew Vellanickal

Rev. Felix Wilfred

Indonesia

Rev. Robert Hardawiryana, S.J.

Japan

Rev. Francis A. Kenro Kumaki

Korea

V. Rev. Paul Tseng

Malaysia-Singapore-Brunei

Rev. John Gnanapiragasam

Pakistan

Rev. Evarist Pinto

Philippines

Most Rev. Teodoro Bacani

Rev. Efren O. Rivera, O.P.

Republic of China

Rev. Mark Fang, S.J.

Sri Lanka

Rev. S.J. Emmanuel

Thailand

Rev. Francis Cais, S.D.B.

Invited Experts

India

Rev. George Lobo, S.J.

Germany

Dr. Georg Evers

Rev. Othmar Nöggler, O.F.M. Cap.

TAC Secretary

Rev. Edwin Mercado

FABC Papers:

- No. 51. Science, High Technology and Faith. A Seminar on the Role of the Catholic Scientist in Asia, 1989.
52. Becoming the Church of the Poor: with Industrial Workers. The First Asian Institute for Social Action, 1989.
53. The Impact of Tourism: Its Challenge to the Mission of the Church in Asia, 1989.
54. Peace, Justice and the Integrity of Creation. The Final Statement of the European Ecumenical Assembly. A Foundational Document for Ecumenical Co-operation in Asia, 1989.
55. Asia on the Threshold of the 1990s, by Felix Wilfred. A Position Paper for the Fifth Plenary Assembly of the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences, 1990.
56. Dialogue, Discernment, Deeds: An Approach to Asian Challenges Today, by Antonio B. Lambino. A Position Paper for the Fifth Plenary Assembly of the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences, 1990.
57. Fifth Plenary Assembly: Workshop Discussion Guides
 - a. The Church Before the Changing Asian Societies of the 1990s, by Robert Hardawiryana
 - b. The Church in Asia and Mission in the 1990s, by C.G. Arevalo
 - c. A Spiritual Journey through the Asia of the 1990s, by Adolfo Nicolas
 - d. Alternative Ways of Being Church in the Asia of the 1990s, by Oswald Hirmer
 - e. The Church and Pluralism in the Asia of the 1990s, by Michael Amaladoss
 - f. A Subject of Dignity and Rights: the Emerging Individual in Asia. Papers by Ramon C. Reyes and Michael Masson
 - g. Religious Fundamentalism and Revivalism. Papers by Yvon Ambroise and John K. Locke
 - h. The Church and the Quest for Peace in the Asia of the 1990s, by the Catholic Bishops' Conference of Japan
58. The Church in Asia and Politics. Background Papers of the Fifth Plenary Assembly of the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences, by Bienvenido F. Nebres and Robert Hardawiryana, 1990.
59. The Emerging Challenges to the Church in Asia in the 1990s: A Call to Respond. A Report of the Fifth Plenary Assembly of the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences, 1990.
60. Theses on the Local Church. The Theological Advisory Commission of the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences, 1991.
61. Mission Today. Contemporary Themes in Missiology, by James H. Kroeger, 1991.
62. Another Gospel for Asia?, by Domenico Colombo, 1991.
63. Asian Theological Perspectives on Church and Politics. The Theological Advisory Commission of the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences, 1992.

FABC PAPERS is a project of the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences (FABC), designed to bring the thinking of Asian experts to a wider audience and to develop critical analysis of the problems facing the Church in Asia from people on the scene. The opinions expressed are those of the author(s) alone and do not necessarily represent the official policies of the FABC or its member Episcopal Conferences. Manuscripts are always welcome and may be sent to: 16 Caine Road, Hong Kong.

