

**ASIAN CHRISTIAN PERSPECTIVES ON HARMONY**

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

**Introduction****1. Challenges to Harmony in Asia**

- 1.1 The Socio-Political Crisis in Asia
  - 1.1.1 Economic Exploitation and Poverty
  - 1.1.2 Oppressive Forms of Government and Social Control
- 1.2 Religious, Cultural and Communal Conflicts
- 1.3 Ecological and Environmental Crisis
- 1.4 Abuse of Science and Technology
- 1.5 The Burden of Christian History
  - 1.5.1 Mission History
  - 1.5.2 Divisions within Christianity

**2. Various Attempts at Promoting Harmony**

- 2.1 Socio-Political Attempts
  - 2.1.1 Political Systems and Ideologies
    - 2.1.1.1 Monarchy
    - 2.1.1.2 Democracy
    - 2.1.1.3 Nationalistic/State Ideology
    - 2.1.1.4 "Pancasila"
    - 2.1.1.5 Non-Violence
    - 2.1.1.6 People Power Non-Violent Revolt

---

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 fourth 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 1995. 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 in Asia. Comments can be sent to FABC, 16 Caine Road, Hong Kong.

- 2.1.1.7 Populist Organizations/Movements
  - 2.1.1.7.1 Trade Unionism
  - 2.1.1.7.2 Community Organizations
- 2.1.2 Social Development
- 2.1.3 Confucian Principles of Management
- 2.2 Economic Attempts and Ecological Care
  - 2.2.1 Cooperatives
  - 2.2.2 Grameen Bank
  - 2.2.3 Ecological Care
  - 2.2.4 ASEAN/AFTA/APEC/SAFTA
- 2.3 Educational and Cultural Attempts
  - 2.3.1 Institutions of Learning
  - 2.3.2 Mass Media and Computer Networks
- 2.4 Religious and Church Attempts

### 3. Harnessing Asian Cultures And Religions

- 3.1 Culture, Religions and Philosophies of Life
  - 3.1.1 The Element of Change
  - 3.1.2 Culture, Change and Harmony
- 3.2 Harmony in Some Asian Religions, Philosophies and Views of Life
  - 3.2.1 Harmony and Primal Religions
  - 3.2.2 Hinduism
  - 3.2.3 Buddhism
  - 3.2.4 Islam
  - 3.2.5 Chinese Traditions
- 3.3 Biblical Perspectives on Harmony
  - 3.3.1 Original Harmony in Creation
    - 3.3.1.1 Disharmony Caused by Sin.
    - 3.3.1.2 From Disharmony to Harmony
  - 3.3.2 Restoration of Harmony in Christ
    - 3.3.2.1 The Reign of God and Harmony
    - 3.3.2.2 Christ the Suffering Servant of Harmony
    - 3.3.2.3 Reconciliation and Recapitulation in Christ
    - 3.3.2.4 Peace and Harmony
    - 3.3.2.5 Life, Communion And Harmony
    - 3.3.2.6 Pentecost and Inauguration of the Redeemed Humanity
  - 3.3.3 Church and Harmony
    - 3.3.3.1 Church as Communion: Sacrament of Harmony
    - 3.3.3.2 Church at the Service of Cosmic Harmony
    - 3.3.3.3 Mission for Harmony
    - 3.3.3.4 Church: Instrument of Dynamic Harmony
- 3.4 Conclusion

#### **4. Orientations of the Churches in Asia**

- 4.1 Introduction: The Asian Churches' Vision of Harmony in the Context of Church Tradition
- 4.2 How is Harmony in General to be Understood?
- 4.3 The Cosmic World-View: Context of the Asian Vision of Harmony
- 4.4 Human Harmony: Pivotal in Cosmic Harmony
- 4.5 Disharmony Brought by Humankind
- 4.6 Restoration of Dynamic Harmony in Jesus Christ
- 4.7 Communion in the Holy Trinity: Source and Summit of Harmony
- 4.8 Dynamic Harmony to be Achieved in Human Society
- 4.9 Harmony to be Restored in the Integrity of Creation
- 4.10 Collaboration in Restoring and Promoting Universal Harmony
- 4.11 Recapitulation: Towards Evolving an Asian Christian Vision of Harmony

#### **5. A Life of Harmony**

- 5.1 The Spirituality of Harmony
  - 5.1.1 The Unfolding of the Spirituality
    - 5.1.1.1 Harmony with Oneself
    - 5.1.1.2 Harmony with Fellow Humans
    - 5.1.1.3 Harmony with Creation
    - 5.1.1.4 Harmony with God
  - 5.1.2 A Spirituality of Communion and Dialogue
  - 5.1.3 Incarnational and Paschal Spirituality as the Way to Harmony
  - 5.1.4 A Prophetic Spirituality in the Service of Harmony
  - 5.1.5 Profound Prayer Life — A Way to Harmony in Spirituality
- 5.2 The Theology of Harmony
  - 5.2.1 A Theology of Harmony as Rationale for Asian Collaboration
  - 5.2.2 Hindrances to the Church as an Agent of Harmony
  - 5.2.3 Call for a New Ethic of Harmony
  - 5.2.4 Rereading of Revelation Towards a Theology of Harmony
  - 5.2.5 Christ as the Sacrament of the New Harmony
  - 5.2.6 Church as the Servant-Sacrament of Harmony
- 5.3 An Active Commitment to Harmony
  - 5.3.1 A Call for Self-Examination
  - 5.3.2 A Need for a New Self-Understanding of the Church
  - 5.3.3 A Focus on the Formation of Christian Community
  - 5.3.4 A Prophetic Leadership of the Community

- 5.3.4.1 Prophetic Leaders
- 5.3.4.2 Formation of the Family
- 5.3.4.3 Training for Conflict

## 6. Conclusion

The following is a list of references for the book "The Way to Harmony in the Church". The list is organized into sections corresponding to the chapters of the book.

**Section 1: Theology of Harmony**

- 1.1 Theology of Harmony
- 1.2 Theology of Harmony as a Response to the World
- 1.3 Theology of Harmony as a Response to the Church
- 1.4 Theology of Harmony as a Response to the Community
- 1.5 Theology of Harmony as a Response to the Individual
- 1.6 Theology of Harmony as a Response to the Future
- 1.7 Theology of Harmony as a Response to the Past
- 1.8 Theology of Harmony as a Response to the Present
- 1.9 Theology of Harmony as a Response to the World
- 1.10 Theology of Harmony as a Response to the Church
- 1.11 Theology of Harmony as a Response to the Community
- 1.12 Theology of Harmony as a Response to the Individual
- 1.13 Theology of Harmony as a Response to the Future
- 1.14 Theology of Harmony as a Response to the Past
- 1.15 Theology of Harmony as a Response to the Present

**Section 2: Prophetic Leadership**

- 2.1 Prophetic Leadership in the Church
- 2.2 Prophetic Leadership in the World
- 2.3 Prophetic Leadership in the Community
- 2.4 Prophetic Leadership in the Individual
- 2.5 Prophetic Leadership in the Future
- 2.6 Prophetic Leadership in the Past
- 2.7 Prophetic Leadership in the Present
- 2.8 Prophetic Leadership in the World
- 2.9 Prophetic Leadership in the Church
- 2.10 Prophetic Leadership in the Community
- 2.11 Prophetic Leadership in the Individual
- 2.12 Prophetic Leadership in the Future
- 2.13 Prophetic Leadership in the Past
- 2.14 Prophetic Leadership in the Present

**Section 3: Formation of the Family**

- 3.1 Formation of the Family in the Church
- 3.2 Formation of the Family in the World
- 3.3 Formation of the Family in the Community
- 3.4 Formation of the Family in the Individual
- 3.5 Formation of the Family in the Future
- 3.6 Formation of the Family in the Past
- 3.7 Formation of the Family in the Present
- 3.8 Formation of the Family in the World
- 3.9 Formation of the Family in the Church
- 3.10 Formation of the Family in the Community
- 3.11 Formation of the Family in the Individual
- 3.12 Formation of the Family in the Future
- 3.13 Formation of the Family in the Past
- 3.14 Formation of the Family in the Present

**Section 4: Training for Conflict**

- 4.1 Training for Conflict in the Church
- 4.2 Training for Conflict in the World
- 4.3 Training for Conflict in the Community
- 4.4 Training for Conflict in the Individual
- 4.5 Training for Conflict in the Future
- 4.6 Training for Conflict in the Past
- 4.7 Training for Conflict in the Present
- 4.8 Training for Conflict in the World
- 4.9 Training for Conflict in the Church
- 4.10 Training for Conflict in the Community
- 4.11 Training for Conflict in the Individual
- 4.12 Training for Conflict in the Future
- 4.13 Training for Conflict in the Past
- 4.14 Training for Conflict in the Present

## Introduction

Young in its zest for life, ancient in its heritage, Asia is like a vast ocean where currents, undercurrents and cross-currents are constantly interacting above depths that remain calm. For in Asia we find a plurality of cultures and religions, churches and sects, types of societies and models of economic practices, variations of technologies, arts, sciences, philosophies and theologies in a diversity of races and languages.

All these have contributed to the complexities of life in Asia, to its agony and ecstasy. Yet, in Asia too, we observe the search for harmony, that vibrant happiness or well-being which the parts of a dynamic totality attained by interacting with other pulsating and maybe conflicting parts. Harmony in a certain sense constitutes "the intellectual and affective, religious and artistic, personal and societal soul of both persons and institutions in Asia" (Fourth Bishops' Institute for Interreligious Dialogue, BIRA IV, 1984).

To define harmony at this point is to run counter to the Asian way of theologizing. However, it may be helpful to realize that the Asian search for harmony proceeds from a world-view that is organic, interactive and cosmic.

The Theological Advisory Commission (TAC), taking a cue from the Fifth Plenary Assembly of the FABC held in Bandung, Indonesia in 1990, believes it is imperative to look into the Asian search for harmony as having the resources that will bring about a distinctive Asian theology. Such a theology must be at the service of life in Asia today. This insight was articulated by the Sixth Plenary Assembly of the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences held in Manila in 1995.

Theology at the service of life in Asia is a search for the Face and Breath and Hand of God, and what God has in store for all creatures, spiritual and material. It is a discernment done individually and collectively while living in faith and prayer, contemplating acting and interacting in all the vicissitudes of life and all the changes of the cosmos.

Our approach will be spiral rather than linear. We shall take a look at the realities of Asia, seeking to understand its socio-political crises, its religious, cultural and communal conflicts, its ecological and environmental problems, and the abuse of science and technology. Then we shall take a second look, observing the attempts to solve the problems or meet the challenges. To arrive at an assessment, it will be necessary to delve into the resources from cultures and religions, including the Judaeo-Christian heritage. This will lead us to an evaluation, with a view to picking up guidelines for innovative actions. The people, particularly local Churches and communities, will adapt the recommendations to their specific life-

circumstances and put them into practice, making room all the while for necessary adaptations as they proceed.

Thus, theology at the service of life has to be open-ended. After a period of actualizing the action plans, theologians immersed in life can again scrutinize the new realities and make their move.

This theology of harmony is far from being ours alone. We invite everyone to contribute to it, not the least the people among whom, we believe, it is already operative. All we want to do is to invite people to become aware of what the Lord of Harmony is doing in Asia. We urge everyone and every community to act and interact more deliberately and lovingly with the Father, the Incarnate Word, and the Holy Spirit, so as to contribute unreservedly to bringing human society and the cosmos with each of us humans and all other beings to Ultimate Harmony.

## **Chapter One**

### **Challenges to Harmony in Asia**

#### **1.1 The Socio-Political Crisis in Asia**

Many situations in the Asian reality threaten and contradict harmony. These negative factors have to be acknowledged and reckoned with. Reflection on harmony and its presentation, as a singularly Asian contribution towards peace and understanding in the world, must not be misunderstood as escapism or wishful thinking. The Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences has always followed the same method and approach in its many conferences and seminars — to start from the analysis of the real situation in its many facets and to base its faith-reflections on the data thus perceived. The Final Statement of the Sixth Plenary Assembly of the FABC in Manila 1995 declared: "We turned our attention to whatever threatens, weakens, diminishes and destroys the life of individuals, groups or peoples; whatever devalues human beings, conceived, born, infant, old; whatever socio-cultural, religious, political, economic, or environmental factor that threatens or destroys life in our countries. We identified some of these forces of death at work in Asia."

##### **1.1.1 Economic Exploitation and Poverty**

The UN economic and social commission for Asia and the Pacific, in its report published in 1991, states that progress in the living conditions and quality of life in the region has not kept pace with the economic growth achieved. Economic development has resulted in "dehumaniza-

tion," manifested in joblessness, hopelessness, violence, street-crime, drug-abuse, prostitution and child labor. Besides disrupting the harmonious integration of the human person, such situations have affected family unity and disrupted national harmony. The meager improvement in living conditions and living standards that has sometimes been achieved, has often been offset by new social problems like urbanization and modernization. Urbanization has resulted in the transfer of rural poverty to the urban setting. Modernization has resulted in social and cultural dislocation, where traditional values and accepted attitudes, like community, simplicity, sincerity, have been questioned and abandoned. Subsequently, secularism, materialism and consumerism and their offshoots, individualism, competition, exploitation, are becoming accepted ideologies of a new middle class indifferent to the marginalized (Cf. FABC Papers, No. 59, p. 27).

In recent years many Asian countries have experienced a marked increase in industrialization, combined with economic growth. This process is linked to and dependent on the phenomenon of an increasing economic globalization. The flow of foreign capital from both the West and the more-developed East Asian countries gives rise to methods of production and the introduction of technologies which are beyond the present capabilities of some of our Asian countries to absorb without trauma.

The fast economic growth in Asia often breeds a mentality of "getting rich fast." The consequence is that corruption at all levels of society increases: in administration, business and educational facilities, down to the private sector. This occurrence of widespread corruption threatens the proper functioning of political life in some Asian countries, and undermines the trust of the people in authority at many levels.

Although the majority of our economies are still rural and agricultural, the gross neglect of this sector has a negative and devastating impact on the lives of individuals and communities. The once self-sustaining economies and rural communities, both traditional and tribal, are the most affected by these trends. The depreciation of the rural economy has depressing implications for the future of rural communities. The process of economic globalization is often not attuned to the patterns of social life in many Asian countries, and thus poses a threat to the traditional cosmic world-view and its value system. The predominance of economic interests leads to a dichotomy between economic concerns and religious values, between pure economic development and the human person.

In spite of the considerable economic growth in many Asian countries, there are multitudes of people excluded from a just share in the profits thus accumulated. The distribution of wealth is not functioning, because the few rich become richer, whereas millions are kept in poverty

and destitution. Linked to this disparity between the poor and the rich is the problem of large-scale migrations of younger people to the cities, where most of the developments are taking place, for better job opportunities, education and entertainment. The growing urbanization leads to over-crowded cities and to social ills like drug-trafficking, prostitution and gambling.

Fundamental changes in work-patterns, in the basic structure of our economies, and in the very nature of relationships among individuals, are rife. People become a mechanical part of the production process and, as a result, work becomes exploitative and dehumanizing. This becomes strikingly clear in the phenomenon of migrant workers or overseas contract workers. There are three million Asians working in other Asian countries, not counting the number of those working elsewhere overseas. To a great extent the migrant workers consist of women whose basic human dignity is often not respected. They are not only considered to be cheap laborers, but many are sexually harassed and abused.

In some countries the laws of the land have little concern for foreigners, and especially for women. Often the migrant workers are denied the right to practice their religion freely. This is the case in nearly all the Arab Muslim countries in West Asia. Their home countries, on the other side, expect from them foreign exchange, but do little to safeguard their rights as human beings. The problem of migrant workers is acute for countries like the Philippines, which has an exceptionally high number of overseas workers, mostly women, but also for India, Pakistan, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka.

The breakdown of the extended family, which has traditionally provided economic, social and physical security to its members, is endangering the very roots of the social fabric in Asian societies. "We realized how the forces of death undermine the family, the basic cell of society and the Church, through liberal, anti-life, anti-child, anti-woman, anti-family policies and values and pose many threats to wholeness of life in the area of health care, especially of the poor" (FABC VI, Manila, 1995, no. 7).

### 1.1.2 Oppressive Forms of Government and Social Control.

Across the vast continent of Asia we can observe many forms of governments which have developed after the end of the colonial era and during the period of resistance to neo-colonialism. As for political regimes, we have a totalitarian military junta in Myanmar, a hardline communist system in North Korea, a pragmatic communism with emphasis on economic progress in China and Vietnam, a constitutional monarchy in Thailand, an English-type parliamentary democracy in India and Malaysia, and still a colonial system in Hong Kong and Macao. The nation-



state is being increasingly replaced by “statism,” that is, the imposition of an artificial harmony through oppressive state power, especially in China, Vietnam and North Korea. Militant fundamentalism and religious fundamentalism are motivated by political power, social control or economic greed which has further resulted in division rather than unity.

Asia is home to over sixty percent of humanity. In many Asian countries, the escalating rate of population increase and its accompanying pressure on Asian resources are seen as problems ranking high on the agenda of government control. The administrative measures taken by several Asian governments to control population growth are running counter to basic human rights and ethical norms. The insistence of religious groups, including the Christian Churches, on the defense of the rights of families to have children and the personal dignity and inviolability of women, are seen by governments, often, as interference in purely secular matters not belonging to the religious realm.

Governments in various Asian states are suspicious of all forms of contextual theologies which empower people to analyze their situation and to take action to remedy it, because they seem to threaten the much-valued internal security by introducing political ideology in the guise of religious teachings. The call for social change and justice, for respect of human rights and democratic representation, is declared to be no business at all for religious persons and institutions. Governments in various Asian states have accused and continue to accuse, for example, liberation theologians of abusing religion for political purposes. The prophetic critical function these theologians claim to exercise is seen by the governments as disturbing the peaceful and harmonious relationship between the government and institutionalized religions. In their view, the task of religions and Churches is to strengthen the existing social order and to concentrate on fulfilling their religious duties of worshipping God and praying for the welfare of the community.

## **1.2 Religious, Cultural and Communal Conflicts**

Asia is the womb of ancient cultures and civilizations, and this is reflected in its cultural diversity. However, this richness of the diverse cultures has not always been positively appreciated, and this has led to cultural disharmony. The Asian peoples have seen the emergence of cultural imperialism, imposing the values of a domineering majority or of an assertive minority on the rest of society. Such a move, far from serving the cause of unity, has given rise to division and conflict. Asia is also the birthplace of the world's great religions: Buddhism, Christianity, Confucianism, Hinduism, Islam, Jainism, Shintoism, Sikhism and Taoism.

In spite of the common Asian world-view which perceives reality as “one,” and in spite of a widespread tolerance which subscribes to a

basic equality among all religious convictions, Asian religious pluralism remains a problem. The problem is acute, because Asian religions still constitute a powerful force controlling the consciences of people and influencing every area of their social life. As such, they can serve to bring together peoples and nations in unity and harmony, or cause division and fragmentation. Sadly, to a large extent, the latter has been the experience of the Asian peoples.

As there is a strong bond between religion and culture, fundamentalism and communalism have given rise to numerous conflicts and bloody violence. Such conflicts and violence, besides having disrupted harmony, have also resulted in the loss of human lives and the destruction of sacred temples, especially in India, Pakistan and Bangladesh, all in the name of religious affiliation and cultural patrimony. In Sri Lanka, conflicts between ethnic and linguistic groups have been a cause of continual violence and bloodshed. The events surrounding the razing of the Babri Masjid in Ayodhya in December, 1992 have demonstrated how devastating the forces of religious fundamentalism can become. In the whole of the Indian subcontinent, there have been clashes between Muslims and Hindus, during which Hindus were chasing the Muslims in Bombay, and Muslims retaliating by persecuting Hindus and destroying their temples in Pakistan and Bangladesh.

### **1.3 Ecological and Environmental Crisis**

As a result of the earth summit in Brazil in 1992, the magnitude of the environmental-degradation problem has been perceived and recognized as a threat to the survival of the entire human race. Many of the issues raised on the global level and in the "South" are particularly relevant for Asia, namely, sustainable agriculture, deforestation, pollution, protection of oceans and coastal areas, population control, and environmentally-sound management of biotechnology and hazardous wastes. It is only the most shocking examples of environmental breakdown which fully engage the public. Full-blown disasters, such as the poisoning of slum-dwellers at Bhopal in India, or the fatal spills of toxic gases and wastes in South Korea or Thailand generally elicit an immediate government response. There are, however, other kinds of ecological problems less well known to people. These include soil erosion, the despoiling of watershed areas, wetlands and fishing zones, loss or ruin of farmland due to industrial expansion, and increased disease and morbidity caused by air pollution.

One of the most trying issues in Asia is the harmful use of pesticides, insecticides and fertilizers. The chemicals used have had adverse effects on the yield of crops, on health and on the ecosystem. Millions of farmers throughout Asia are painfully discovering that the expensive pesticides they have been using, hoping to increase farm-yields, have not only

left them poorer, but have also made the crops more vulnerable to disease. The chemicals used have also eliminated the enemies of the rice pest.

One major problem is the pollution of the atmosphere due to the increased concentration of "greenhouse" gases, mainly from fuel combustion. Deforestation and logging further exacerbate the problem by reducing the capacity of the forests to function as "sinks" for the carbon dioxide emissions that contribute to global warming. Furthermore, deforestation destroys the ecosystem functions of the forest, thus depriving major sectors of the rural population, especially the poor, of their resources of food, water and livelihood.

The increased depletion of marine resources and the use of coastal waters as a dumping ground for wastes create another serious problem. While countries with no natural coral reefs are creating artificial ones to attract marine life and protect their coastal waters, natural coral reefs in other countries are being threatened by megatourism projects, pollution, and destructive fishing methods.

#### **1.4 Abuse of Science and Technology**

It is becoming increasingly evident that science and technology as taught and practiced today have acquired an elitist character totally alien to the needs of the masses of the people. Furthermore, scientific progress and technological development, imported and practiced by the Third World elite, are mainly profit-oriented and not person-oriented. The credibility of modern science has been seriously brought into question with the startling rise in the occurrence of major high-tech disasters. Once again, the victims are the poor masses of the developing countries, whose needs are often neglected or overlooked, and consequently their lives are disrupted and fragmented.

Looking at the scientific progress with regard to birth and the transplanting of organs, we see the need for a human and global ethic and morality. Just as we are concerned about the conservation of the human habitat, in alignment with the goal of creation, there should be a concern for an ethic of harmony. Biotechnology, with all the blessings that it has to offer, is not without its adverse effects. Related to these effects are the myths about biotechnology, that it is ecologically safe and that it will launch a period of chemical-free agriculture. Moreover, as regulations and bans delay tests and marketing in the North, biotechnology products will be increasingly tested in the South to bypass regulations and public control. Here again, Third World countries used as guinea pigs will be the ones who suffer the consequences. Genetic engineering, geared towards better quality or higher productivity with its known and unknown risks, health hazards and side-effects, is still indiscriminately used, affecting the lives of individuals, families and peoples.

The creation and production of weapons of catastrophic powers that could destroy the planet or parts of it are another horrendous consequence of the distorted use of technology. A good part of Third World resources has been directed at producing and sustaining armaments, thus involving Asia in the nuclear weapons industry and nuclear arms-race. Even if these weapons have not been used, the intensity of violence inherent in this enterprise discloses how modern science has become a major source of active violence against human beings and living organisms, thereby becoming an agent of disruption and disharmony. Asia is one of the most militarized zones in the world. Military budgets have increased in nearly all Asian countries. There is a process whereby military values, ideology, and patterns of behavior continue to seep not only into the political life but also into the structures of social, cultural and educational life of Asian countries.

The phenomenal progress in the technology of mass communications has truly made the world a global village, but a global village where the voices of a few dominate. Ninety percent of the news articles, radio broadcasts, films and television programs circulating in the world come from the United States, Japan or a handful of European countries. In this way, they have exerted immense control and influence over the culture and way of life of our Asian people, thereby creating the transnationalization of culture of the developed world. These imbalances in the flow of information are further aggravated by local government censorship and control. Local governments often tend to allow a free flow to the international media, but control and curtail the local media.

## **1.5 The Burden of Christian History**

As Christians we see our past as “a history of salvation,” a history graced by the touch and guidance of the Holy Spirit. Yet, it is also a human history, a record of human failings, prejudice, bias and infidelity to the promptings of the Spirit. From the wellsprings of the past we draw faith and hope, but the past is also a burden we carry. To be unaware of this burden is to run the risk of repeating the mistakes of the past and increasing the burden.

### **1.5.1 Mission History**

From the Asian perspective, mission history from the sixteenth to the nineteenth century presents Christianity as intruding on Asian harmony or as the “period of Christianity conquering all the other religions and cultures for Christ” (A. Pieris). There was an alternative approach advanced by Jesuit missionaries in India and China which advocated adapting Christianity to local culture and religions; but this was cut short by the so-called “rites controversy” and the subsequent condemnation of the

methods employed. This put an end to a promising episode in the history of Christian mission in Asia. But it also posed, for the first time, the problem of the inculturation of Christianity in Asian cultures and religious traditions.

It took the Church a long time to face the problem and to correct the harsh condemnation of the past, by allowing Christians to participate in the veneration of ancestors, declaring in the 1930s that the old condemnations no longer applied. Finally, in 1970 at Manila, we find an acknowledgement of faults and mistakes made at the time of the rites controversy. In the final declaration of their conference, the Asian bishops said: "In the inculturation of the life and message of the Gospel in Asia there have been hesitations and mistakes in the past" (*For All the Peoples of Asia*, G. B. Rosales & C. G. Arevalo eds, Claretian Publications-Orbis Books, Quezon City-New York, 1992.)

This basic negative attitude of the Church and Christian theology towards other Asian cultures and religions accounts for much of the failure of the Christian mission to strike roots in Asia and to come to a genuine encounter with the religious traditions of Buddhism, Confucianism, Hinduism, Islam and the many other Asian religions.

### 1.5.2 Divisions Within Christianity

Another burden of history is the fragmentation of Christianity. Beginning with the Great Schism of 1054 and culminating in the fateful disputes caused by the Reformation, Western Christianity split into bickering sects. The missionary enterprise of Western Christian Churches has been marred by these divisions, which often had, in addition to theological roots, European national, ethnic, social or economic roots. The missionary effort has been seen as an attempt to export to Asia enmities and divisions which have no roots in Asian soil. The spectacle of missionary societies bickering over territories and denouncing their rivals as false Christians has truly been a stumbling block to Asia.

## Chapter Two

### Various Attempts at Promoting Harmony

Given the picture of the Asian situation we have just reviewed, there is not an altogether "doom and gloom" outlook on Asian life. In Indic civilization, we observe how the "coincidence of opposites" has been all along a characteristic way of life and thought. In ancient Chinese thought, harmony requires the interplay of seemingly-antithetical elements such as

human person and nature, *yin and yang*, benevolence and autocracy. The two components are regarded as mutually necessary, rather than irreconcilable; the antagonistic elements are interdependent partners without whose joint activities an harmonious society would be impossible. Harmony is not the attainment of an absolute standard, but the happy outcome that can be achieved when one takes account of all circumstances.

Obviously, this raises a challenge to traditional Christian ethics, which judges something as good or bad in relation to a norm. It is beyond the scope of this document to tackle this issue. Without attempting to give the final word, we can set forth here what is perceived as hindering harmony and what is promoting it, although in some cases there can be ethical reservations.

Several values and conceptual issues confront people working for the promotion of peace and harmony. A fundamental value-issue concerns the relative importance of avoiding violence and war versus ending injustice. Some people give the highest priority to advancing freedom, justice and equality — even if that means waging wars. Others, however, give the highest priority to preventing the destruction of peoples' lives and property — even at the price of accepting a social order that is not optimal. From the harmonic viewpoint, however, peace and justice are mutually dependent rather than contradictory, and we can seek ways to maximize both. Moreover, since conflict is endemic in social life and is conducted in a variety of forms, harmony does not mean the absence of conflict and the threat of violence, but a continuously-adjusting consensus in a process of give-and-take.

The world political system is generally viewed as consisting of sovereign countries, with independent governments. But there are many other units in the system: international governmental organizations, such as the United Nations; multinational corporations; social movements and organizations based on ethnicity, religion and political ideology; and non-governmental international organizations related to professions, trade unions, cooperatives, etc. One also has to study cooperative and complementary interactions across national borders, such as student exchange, postal trade, and other communications like "internet," investments, travel, immigration. A common assumption — for which there is supporting empirical evidence — is that high rates of these interactions promote the growth of an harmonious international community, and that conflicts are not likely to escalate into armed violence when they are embedded within a dense network of cooperative and complementary relations.

At the 1995 Sixth Plenary Assembly of FABC in Manila, the bishops of Asia affirmed the presence and activity of life-giving elements in

Asia. They attested to “the growing consciousness regarding human dignity and the empowerment of the poor, the growing voices of groups and peoples for humanized development, and the cries of the marginalized groups for participatory and democratic governance . . . the movements for the protection of the environment and ecosystem linked to justice, and the solidarity of committed groups and people in the struggle for the rights of women, children, especially the girl child, and those of indigenous peoples . . . the increasing number of young people moving toward solidarity and community, and seeking deeper spirituality . . . and the efforts of many groups to foster dialogue with peoples of other faiths . . . the discovery of mass media for the promotion of value and support of people’s movements and rights” (FABC VI, Manila, 1995, no.8).

Without being exhaustive, a list of various institutions and forces working for harmony, and initiatives being undertaken for furthering harmony, are presented here. This presentation is meant to highlight the rays of hope for a better quality of life, both materially and spiritually.

## **2.1 Socio-Political Attempts**

### **2.1.1 Political Systems and Ideologies**

#### **2.1.1.1 Monarchy**

Constitutional monarchies exist in Japan, Thailand, Malaysia and Brunei. In these countries, kings continue to be the crowning symbol of people’s aspirations for national unity and for their place in the society of nations. They serve as a visible and highly-regarded link with the past and the ancestral heritage in a fast-changing world. Although they rarely intervene in political affairs, the kings provide an anchor of stability in times of political turmoil. There is always the lurking danger of this institution reverting to old abusive ways, but in general, not only the king but often the queen and other members of the royal family, render invaluable social service to the people.

#### **2.1.1.2 Democracy**

Democracy as a form of government came to Asia at the end of the colonial period. It is therefore perceived as almost synonymous with self-rule. Indeed, democracy is based on the realization of the dignity of every person and every citizen’s responsibility to build the nation. It presupposes an insight into personhood as essentially relational and social. Expressed basically in the right to vote its leaders into office, a democratic form of government attempts to promote harmony not only on the political level, but even on the economic level. It aims to defend the rights of every citizen, regardless of color, sex, social status or creed.

There are two forms of democracy in Asia: the parliamentary and the presidential, depending on whether the prime minister or the president is the chief executive of the government. As Asians gain experience in living as citizens of democracies, they are understandably adapting the system to their ancient cultures. Sometimes the ideals of democracy are not fully upheld. Still, the present-day alternative to it in Asia is military rule or communist party rule. As people develop, the option is more and more on the side of democracy.

### 2.1.1.3 Nationalistic/State Ideology

As Asian peoples struggled against colonialism, or resisted the incursion of neo-colonialism, some found it necessary to establish a common ideology that would unite the people, assure victory over the enemy, and attain prosperity for all. The common ideology aims at establishing national unity by resolving cultural differences. In Asia, where most countries are marked by the presence of multifarious cultural groups, this political step attempts to maximize the unity of cultures, while preserving a minimum of their plurality. The success of this strategy depends on massive education and campaigns to gain popular support.

However, this approach can easily become detrimental to the authentic human development of the people involved. While there could be seeming harmony, there could also be repression of human rights by an overbearing state power. It seems that some Asian countries have fallen into this quandary, like China, Vietnam, North Korea and Sri Lanka, which are mentioned here for the sake of illustration. However, the danger is present everywhere, though perhaps in a milder form in some countries. Some governments are so intent on preserving a much-valued internal security or political stability, that they become over-suspicious of calls for social change and social justice, respect for human rights and democratic representations. When such calls are made by Church-affiliated groups, like those espousing liberation theology, a crack down by the government on the Church is a predictable result.

A particularly-touchy issue is population control. Some governments take it as their prerogative to set the limits of population growth, to be achieved by means imposed by the government.

As both sides, the governments and particular groups, especially those promoting human rights, gain experience in resolving their conflicts, it is hoped that state ideologies will be made responsive to deeper human aspirations, and thereby become authentically constructive forces for attaining harmony.



#### 2.1.1.4 “Pancasila” (Indonesia)

Known as the “Five Principles” of (1) belief in one Supreme God, (2) sovereignty of the people, (3) deliberation to arrive at consensus, (4) humanitarianism, and (5) social justice, this ideology is based on the cultural heritage of the Indonesian cosmic world-view, and is influential in the ancient Hindu kingdoms of Sriwijaya in Sumatra and Majapahit in Java.

This cosmic world-view has an impact on the Indonesian way of life among various sectors of society. It serves as an “instrument” in human efforts to successfully cope with the problems of life. Reality is described as a universe out of which a meaningful structure is derived for the realm of human experiences. The world, human society and nature are seen as interrelated, and they make up one single field of experiences. The meaningfulness of this interrelationship is expressed in the psychological state of tranquility, peacefulness and interior equilibrium. Social interactions express attitudes towards nature, and the attitudes to nature are seen as socially relevant too.

Three main aspects can be clearly distinguished: (1) the extrovert aspect, common among the illiterate and those in rural areas, focuses on the outer world consisting of nature, society and the sacred or the supernatural; this aspect is celebrated in the rites; (2) the exercise of political power or authority as expression of the numinous or the “divine” reality; (3) the focus on the experience of one’s self as a path towards unity with the numinous — a path culminating in mystical experience.

#### 2.1.1.5 Non-Violence

Non-violence, is an approximate rendering of the Sanskrit term *ahimsa* (lit. “no harm”), and it was coined as an English word under the influence of Mohandas Gandhi (1869-1948), and his approach to political conflict. It is this particular aspect of non-violence that will be treated here. Gandhi initially achieved public notice as a leader of India’s national struggle for independence, and as a champion of non-violent techniques for resolving political conflicts. Gandhi broadened the ancient Jain and Hindu concept prohibiting physical violence. For him, non-violence was a moral stance involving love for and affirmation of all life. By combining the notion of non-violence with traditional means of protest, Gandhi made movements of non-violent non-cooperation into instruments of significant political power.

By employing non-violence as an essential element of the consensus style of decision-making, traditionally practiced by India’s village councils (*panchayat*), Gandhi developed a novel method of conflict resolution which he called *satyagraha* (“truth force”). He applied this term to his campaigns for India’s independence and to his way of dealing with

differences of opinion in everyday life. Gandhi regarded non-violence as the litmus test that would reveal where truth is to be found. In Gandhi's view, any form of coercion or intimidation was violent and to be abhorred.

Since Gandhi's death, unfortunately, neither Indian society nor Hindu belief has been restructured along Gandhian lines. But the Gandhian approach has been kept alive in India through the *Sarvodaya* movement, for which Vinobha Bhave has provided the spiritual leadership and Jayaprakash Narayan the political. Gandhi has provided the inspiration for religious and social activists in other parts of the world as well. These include Martin Luther King, Jr., and Joan Baez in the United States. E.M.Schumacher in England, Danilo Dolci in Sicily, Albert Luthuli in South Africa, Lanza del Vasto in France, and A.T. Ariyaratna in Sri Lanka.

#### 2.1.1.6 People Power Non-Violent Revolt

The "People Power" non-violent revolt of 1986 in the Philippines is noted here, although there is no proof of direct Gandhian influence in the Philippines. It is rather a phenomenal outcome of a series of events connected with the bloodless overthrow of the dictatorship imposed by President Ferdinand Marcos that had already lasted fourteen years (1972-1986).

The catalyst of the revolt was a failed coup d'état of reformist military officers, backed by high-ranking allies of the president who had withdrawn their support from him in spite of his claim that he won the "snap" presidential election against Cory Aquino. When the plot of the reformists was discovered, they faced the prospect of swift punishment from a vindictive strongman. The beleaguered putschists broadcast an appeal to the people to protect them by assembling on the streets and rallying to their cause. The Archbishop of Manila, Cardinal Jaime L. Sin, repeatedly put on the air by Radio Veritas, urged the people to respond; and they did so, turning out unarmed not only in the hundreds of thousands but in the millions.

The revolt lasted only 77 hours. Marcos and his family fled and Corazon Aquino was sworn in as the president of the Republic of the Philippines on February 25, 1986, by virtue of the ratification of her election through the popular uprising. The live TV coverage made it possible for people all over the world to see the dramatic images of the peaceful revolt as it was happening. It is possible to argue that the phenomenon conditioned the minds and hearts of people in diverse parts of the globe, who later staged, not in such massive numbers nor always successfully, similar unarmed revolts against impossible odds.

## 2.1.1.7 Populist Organizations/Movements

### 2.1.1.7.1 Trade Unionism

The British brought trade unions to their colonies in Asia, and soon they proliferated in the whole region, adapting to local conditions. Basically, a trade union is an association of wage earners for the purpose of maintaining or improving the conditions of their employment. The power of trade unions depends on the solidarity of the workers. This is seen in the strong bonds of fellowship among members, their dependence on one another, their readiness to support one another in adverse times of life. Because of membership in a trade union, laborers are no longer just supplicants pleading for justice, but strong people presenting demands which they have the power to enforce. For some employers this is a frightening thing; but most people would admit that trade unions are a salutary feature of modern industrial life. Before trade unions came on the scene, workers had to labor under unparalleled servitude, poverty and degradation, while the governing elite failed to realize their plight.

Charges of tyranny, intimidation and violence have sometimes been brought against trade unions. In the course of time, however, abuses have been minimized by wise legislation and appropriate legal actions.

### 2.1.1.7.2 Community Organizations

For lack of a better term, "community organizations" is used to designate Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs), Peoples' Organizations (POs) and Cause-Oriented Groups (COGs). These have proliferated in the democratic societies of Asia. Their phenomenal expansion is a response to a number of social stimuli. These include the economics of professional resources, increasing problem complexity (which diminishes the credibility of professional expertise), increased capabilities among local populations, and the growth of an ideology that is distrustful of government and favorable to indigenous initiatives.

## 2.1.2 Social Development

In many countries of Asia, a small elite class controls most of the country's resources. This is the single greatest barrier to solving the problems of widespread poverty and inequality. Past efforts at dealing with poverty have focused primarily on the psychological deficiencies of the poor (lack of motivation, cognitive skill, beliefs, job skills, etc.), and on their immediate social conditions (ghetto life and the associated lack of community agencies, medical care, proper diets, etc.). It had been assumed that by changing the attitudes of the poor and their immediate environment one will provide them with a greater opportunity for upward mobility into the blue- and white-collar classes.

The major deficiency in these efforts is that they tend to ignore the overall structure of socio-economic inequality, as well as the political and cultural conditions supporting this inequality. This structure and its socio-cultural supports affect not just the poor, but all segments of society. The rich and affluent are able to transmit their privileges, whereas the less affluent will have great difficulty becoming socially mobile.

How are income and wealth to be re-distributed? How are well-entrenched cultural beliefs favoring the rich and discriminating against the poor to be changed? How are opportunities to be made more equal? Such questions are not easily answered. More importantly, any proposed answer will encounter severe resistance from those who believe that their benefits from the current system are threatened. In addition, any innovative program will always have unanticipated consequences that will create new problems and subvert the goals of the system.

The good news is that all over Asia, drawing from their cultural and religious sources, people are looking ways and means to eradicate poverty. In this search, one must acknowledge the contributions of social scientists who have banded together in some of the social institutes and centers in different parts of Asia.

### 2.1.3 Confucian Principles of Management

Taking their cue from Confucius (born in 550 B.C.), many East Asian managers use two mechanisms in resolving conflicts and maintaining social order in East Asian societies.

**In-group/out-group:** The family — the most basic political, economic and social unit in Confucianism — served as a model for structuring almost every form of secondary group, including the largest and most extensive — the nation-state. To attain the goals of the collectivity, interpersonal conflicts had to be avoided at all costs. This resulted in highly regulated patterns of interpersonal relationships — deference to authority, responsibility in leadership, self-abnegation, emotional restraint and a cooperative spirit. The motivation behind the willing and voluntary compliance to such a rigid code of conduct was the hope of direct rewards from group membership.

On the practical level, the “in-group” distinction is simply a necessary means to a desirable end — goal attainment. However, this distinction is not sufficient to create the commonality of interests among widely divergent groups needed to achieve an integrated and harmonious society. To accomplish this an equally-important East-Asian institution was necessary — the “private/public” mechanism.

Public/Private: Socially “public” refers to public appearance, or rather, the behavioral manifestation of the inner self; “private” refers to the emotions. East-Asians perceive the line between public and private to be arbitrary. In the innermost circle of social relationships, individuals do not have to suppress their emotions. Nevertheless, private feelings are subordinate to formal duties and obligations. Thus, one has to be highly sensitive to the emotions of group-members, without negating the inevitability of responsibility. The leader must carefully balance his use of authority as mediator and arbitrator with a readiness to extend his understanding. As a result, leaders often find themselves engineering consent to ensure that good feelings are maintained, rather than implementing decisions. Maintaining the public appearance of in-group harmony sometimes is an end itself, occasionally overshadowing goal attainment.

If the in-group/ out-group distinction determines the legitimacy of conflict, the public/private dimension, in the sense of subordination of self-interest to the common good, imposes a superordinate goal for conflict resolution. It is this justification that has been so noteworthy in the encouragement of active collaboration of conflictual groups. Since social order and stability are highly desired by all but cannot be attained by groups that have clashes and disagreements, it is primarily the responsibility of those who enjoy the position of superiority in any given relationship to draw effectively upon the superordinate goal to provide a sense of purpose and direction (Theodora Tin Chao).

## **2.2 Economic Attempts and Ecological Care**

### **2.2.1 Cooperatives**

Economic cooperation in one form or another has been, from time immemorial, an essential element of village life everywhere. However, cooperatives as a world-wide movement based on mutual aid in the conduct of economic enterprises, and on a social theory which finds expression in these enterprises, began in Britain and in France in the 1820s. In particular, the world-wide cooperative movement has acknowledged its origins in the “Pioneers Equitable Society,” founded in Rochdale, England, in 1844. By 1937 Asia had 167,554 formally organized cooperatives with close to fifteen million members; and in 1948 they had grown to 322,549 cooperative societies with close to twenty-nine million members.

The cooperative form of organization has long been recognized as an instrument for self-help and for social and economic reconstruction. It is fundamentally a way of organizing people to achieve some mutually desired end. It has therefore been used by leaders in depressed areas to revitalize a stagnant economy. Cooperatives have from the beginning helped to educate people to conduct their affairs on a formal plane, and

to acquire habits of dealing with others in a responsible manner. Active participation in cooperatives or credit unions, which are organizations typically by and for the common people, gives them experience in handling affairs, and self-confidence in dealing with others; and thus trains them to take part effectively in other realms of social and political life.

### 2.2.2 Grameen Bank

The Grameen Bank of Bangladesh, distinct from cooperative banks, deserves special mention because of its great success in encouraging small entrepreneurs who are given loans without a collateral. "Grameen" in the Bengali language means "village." The "Village or Rural Bank" was the fruit of a research done by Prof. Muhammad Yunus, professor of economics at Chittagong University, in 1976, after a severe famine in Bangladesh. His hypothesis was: If financial resources could be made available to the rural poor on reasonable terms and conditions, then they could generate productive self-employment and will need no further assistance. His project became a full-fledged bank in September 1983. His efforts have been replicated since then in other countries, notably in the Philippines.

### 2.2.3 Ecological Care

It is an imperative need that humankind maintain a healthy relationship with the earth, and with all nature. As a result of not usually recognizing that need, human societies have an inherent tendency to overshoot the limits that should be set by their resources, and to discount the cumulative but delayed consequences of environmental damage. From the beginning of civilization in Mesopotamia until the present, human societies have time and again altered the ecosystem by technological and organizational means, thereby making available increased human sustenance at first, but eventually bending the system beyond its sustainable limits and reducing its human carrying capacity.

By the time the United Nations convened its Stockholm Conference on the Human Environment in 1972, three important conclusions about humankind's relationship to the biosphere had become apparent to researchers: (1) Within the next century, present trends of industrialization, pollution, resource depletion, food production and population growth would reach the limits of our planetary environment, and these limits would turn the trends around resulting in a sudden and uncontrollable decline in human numbers and industrialization; (2) It is still possible to opt for a state of sustainable equilibrium instead of continuing these environment-damaging trends; (3) The sooner the world begins to pursue this alternative, the greater the chance of success (Meadows, et al., 1972).

In the final analysis, the problem of environmental protection is this: How to induce members of human societies to opt for a state of sustainable equilibrium, instead of continuing environment-damaging trends in ecosystem exploitation. Asian societies, due to their cultural and religious heritage of communion with nature and love for "mother earth," are better equipped than Western societies to cope with this problem.

#### 2.2.4 ASEAN/AFTA/APEC/SAFTA

Although they had common problems of socio-economic development, the countries of East Asia, because of their different colonial histories, pursued their own paths after World War II. Then, in 1955, mutual attempts to come together and work out solutions to common problems gave birth to the Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN). In 1967 East-Asian countries agreed (1) to promote economic, social and cultural development, (2) maintain political and economic stability within the region, and (3) provide a forum for the resolution of intra-regional differences. Although loosely banded together, ASEAN members were able to significantly maintain a Zone of Peace, Freedom and Neutrality (ZPFN) in this part of the world. Moreover, East Asia is now a leading economic block and a center of economic growth and industrialization. This is due, in part, to its sharing of technological information and trained human resources.

As a boost to the regional economy, intra-ASEAN travel and tourism was stimulated by a limited waiver of visa requirements among members. As a further step, an ASEAN Free Trade Area (AFTA) is being planned.

A more recent regional grouping is the expanded membership of ASEAN, which already has seven members and may soon include ten. There now exists the Asian Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC). Formed in 1989, APEC aims at reducing trade barriers among member countries of the Pacific Rim, harmonizing domestic regulations for safety, quality and environmental standards, building a sense of trust and mutually beneficial interdependence. Being a much bigger block, APEC will prepare its members for the globalization of trade, and at the same time, provide greater protection and leverage for its members against the exploitative designs of the more developed countries of the world.

As for the South Asian Association of Regional Cooperation (SAARC) though, there has not been any significant economic cooperation similar to that of the ASEAN countries. Nevertheless, this body of South Asian nations is intent today on moving in the direction of greater economic exchange and cooperation. A sign of this resolve is the recent floating of the project of SAFTA (South Asian Free Trade Area), to be realized within a decade.

## **2.3 Educational and Cultural Efforts**

### **2.3.1 Institutions of Learning**

Formal education is a continuation of the socialization process begun in the family. As societies become more complex, family members are less able to teach their children all that is necessary to be an adult in society. The functions of education include the transmission of the culture to children; the acculturation of immigrants; training for adult status in the community, the workplace and the family ; maintenance of the education system and the development of new knowledge.

Schooling in Asia, as in other parts of the world, is both an avenue of upward mobility and a support of the status quo. The educational system is itself a stratified hierarchy of private and public schools, elite universities and community colleges, vocational schools and research centers.

Schools also constitute a microsystem of a society's goals, values, rules, roles and expectations. Students in both urban and suburban schools learn about competition, success and failure, as they interact among themselves and with their teachers.

Educational systems are linked to other social institutions, and have become a major arena in the socio-political and economic struggles for progress, justice, peace and harmony. Changes are taking place at all levels of the educational systems in practically all Asian countries to make them more responsive to the fast-growing pace of modern life.

### **2.3.2 Mass Media and Computer Networks**

Traditional religious communities have shaped personal and social ethics for their members. Yet television in the late twentieth century also offers a far-reaching and powerful medium through which persons, directly or indirectly, derive information about right and fitting actions. Video-evangelists are quite explicit in advocating and attempting to organize support for or resistance to certain policies. But the medium can be used by so-called liberal or conservative, reactionary or progressive, individuals or groups, to champion their causes.

From one perspective, television appears to be neutral and so can be used for a variety of causes. To some extent this is correct. However, the production and management of television communication involve such large financial investments that there are many segments of Asian peoples, and indeed of the world population, who do not have the means to enter telecommunications as producers.



For this reason, radio has begun to re-emerge as an important source for communication and social orientation in poorer, less-developed countries. The rural and urban poor are making greater use of this and other less expensive and more easily managed media. Simple audiovisual materials, newspapers, and radio systems have been developed through Church, labor and grassroots groups.

For those who can afford them, computers have made information accessible with an ease previously undreamt of, for example, through linkages like "internet." Computer network use actually travels on a communication highway at more than the speed of light. This, too, is a neutral ground. It can be used for many excellent pursuits, but it can also open the floodgates for such things as pornography at the click of a button.

## 2.4 Religion and Church Efforts

Religion is found: 1) where there is an awareness of and an interest in the permanent and recurring problems of human existence; 2) where rites and shared beliefs relevant to that awareness exist; and 3) where there are groups organized to heighten that awareness and to teach and maintain those rites and beliefs. Religion thus fulfills both individual and group needs. Many religions also serve a "cooling-out" function: their beliefs and rituals can soften anger at injustice.

Most belief systems assume that one and only one creed reflects the truth. If each belief system is the Word, then others must be false. Moreover, those who possess the one and only truth feel obliged to spread it. Thus, there is always potential conflict among those who hold different beliefs. Because there is little room for compromise, religious wars have often been among the most bloody and long-lasting.

As for Christianity, it should be admitted that, for centuries, missionaries and colonial administrators in Asia have tried to "convert" "the heathen" by imposing Western ways of life and thought, barring some laudable exceptions. Missionaries converted the indigenous people, but in so doing, have often seriously undermined the value and dignity of these cultures, if not completely destroyed them.

The Second Vatican Council did a great service for harmony in Asia and the world through its documents that touched upon religion: *Ad Gentes*, or the Decree on the Church's Missionary Activity, *Unitatis Redintegratio*, or the Decree on Ecumenism, *Nostra Aetate*, or the Declaration on the Relationship of the Church to Non-Christian Religions, and *Dignitatis Humanae*, or the Declaration on Religious Liberty. Because of new orientations in these and subsequent documents from the Vatican on

interreligious and ecumenical matters, there is now greater hope that religions in Asia will be a resource for promoting harmony.

The Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences (FABC), organized 25 years ago as part of the renewal desired by the Second Vatican Council, has resolutely urged the Catholic Churches of Asia to be committed to a triple dialogue: with people of other faiths, with the cultures of Asia and the with the poor. We also find the Christian Conference of Asia (CCA) working assiduously to create a more fraternal climate for religions and Churches in Asia.

## Chapter Three

### Harnessing Asian Cultures and Religions

#### 3.1 Culture, Religions and Philosophies of Life

However, one may define culture, it is safe to say that it contains two basic aspects: an immanent in-depth aspect and the external manifestations of this immanent aspect. The immanent aspect can be seen as the inner formation of the mind, a way of experiencing, thinking and feeling. The external manifestations of culture have their roots in this bedrock, manifesting it in mental and physical reactions and activities that shape human behavior. There is an intimate link between the two aspects, one is not simply a layer on the top of the other. Furthermore, neither is static. Both are subject to modification, partly resulting from the continual exchange between the two levels. However, changes in the immanent aspect take place at a much slower rate than on the external level, resulting in a sense of stability and continuity which give the person a stable cultural identity. People take their culture for granted and always see themselves as members of a specific community, sharing a common language, a set of customs and a way of life. Hence, one tends to measure everything by the standards of one's own culture or ethos. Ethnocentrism is a characteristic of all human beings.

At the same time, it is impossible to speak of ethnocentrism without pointing to cultural relativity. There exist many cultural forms through which ethnocentrism expresses and opposes itself to other cultures. Hence, ethnocentrism is a very natural phenomenon and is not *per se* negative. By the same token, a world culture shared by everyone is an impossibility.

Sensitivity to the sacred is something that belongs to the immanent aspect of culture and results in what can be called "religious experience."

It is profoundly subjective, and insofar as it manifests itself in structured ways results in a religion or a philosophy of life. Both are objectifications of the subjective religious experience. The structures may be of various types: myths, creeds, theologies, philosophical systems, rituals, festivals, etc. They reflect the experience of the sacred from within the many different cultural contexts, and this explains the multiplicity of religions and philosophies that try to explain notions such as “being,” “meaning” and “truth.” When saying that religions and philosophies of life are objectifications, one should remember that they are not totally an objectification, because the practitioner is the subjective individual or social group. It is also clear that they are not only one segment of a culture but pervade it. Hence, religious experience, religion and a philosophy of life are inherently and integrally human.

### 3.1.1 The Element of Change

Changes in either the external manifestations of culture or its immanent core have repercussions on religious experience and, hence, on religions and philosophies of life. Moreover, since all the aspects of culture are interrelated, any change in religious experience, religions and views of life and the world have an effect on the total culture. A good example of this is provided by Buddhism. The experience and the teaching of the historical Buddha and his followers gradually affected the existing cultures so that the final result was the creation of what we call today the Buddhist culture of South East Asia, China, Korea and Japan. At the same time, the immanent aspect of these cultures spontaneously transformed Buddhism itself into South East Asian, Korean, Chinese and Japanese Buddhism. On the other hand, a culture can become disoriented or simply refuse a religion other than its own, especially if this incoming religion presents itself as extremely complex or inflexible, i.e., unwilling to be influenced by the culture.

### 3.1.2 Culture, Change and Harmony

Cultures have many interacting dimensions. Each has its own role in producing a harmonious whole, much like the various petals of a multi-colored flower. Certain dimensions or aspects lie on the exterior and are more easily affected by change, but a change that is rather superficial. Others lie more closely to the core, or the immanent aspect of culture, and are more impervious to change. If they do change, they have a more profound influence on the whole culture. Technology, for example, is not the deepest element of a culture, and its influence, when introduced from outside does not necessarily destroy or even profoundly affect a culture. This is perhaps more true in Asia which is a continent with extremely strong and highly developed cultures. Japan, which has felt the strong impact of modern technology for nearly a hundred years, maintains a

marvelous cultural continuity, linking its centuries-old tradition with modernity. Something similar has happened in India, and is being repeated today in other countries of Asia. In the whole of the Far East where Western democratic ideas have been introduced, the backbone of public and private life remains, consciously or unconsciously, deeply colored by Confucianism or other similar traditions.

At the very core of these cultures lies a basic component that ensures ongoing cultural integrity or harmony. This core is composed of the religious experience of the people and the corresponding religions and philosophies resulting from these experiences.

### **3.2 Harmony in Some Asian Religions, Philosophies and Views of Life**

#### **3.2.1 Harmony and "Primal Religions"\***

Although there are countless primal religions, they share quite similar world-views, value systems, social, political and cultural structures, beliefs and taboos, which enable us to speak to some degree of the universal characteristics of the primal religions.

Primal religions have a great sensitivity to the fundamental harmony that makes no distinction between the Sacred and the profane, between matter and spirit. They speak in myths and are very receptive to symbols that for them reveal the deepest and total reality. Myths and symbols are the bearers of messages from a trans-historical world and reveal salvation. They turn the cosmos into one great revelation of the Sacred. Primal religions are the religions of the transparently sacred. The creative acts of the gods and their works are the foundation of all life and truth. The ancestors have been appointed by the gods to be the custodians of the way life should be lived. Therefore, harmony among the gods, ancestors and the living ones is the guarantee of society. The beginning of all disharmony is to be found in not doing what the gods have been doing from the very beginning. The order created by them has to be respected. This is valid for the life of the individual, the nuclear family, the extended

---

\* The term "primal" is not used here in a pejorative or negative sense; it has a temporal meaning and should not be understood as religions or societies believed to be behind in development and modernity. The term simply refers to the fact that these religions are still nearer to the beginning of the religious vision of humanity. It refers to people who are still sensitive and open to the manifestation of the Sacred, and whose total existence is religiously colored from the beginning to the end.

family and the clan. The supreme law is to do what is decreed and what was done by the gods and ancestors. Only then can society prosper. The sanction for not following the laws, the deeds and the customs of the gods and ancestors is that everything and everybody is brought to the brink of chaos — the reverse of harmony.

Many of these concepts of the primal religions are also basic to the great traditions which merely present them in a more academic or abstract form. Furthermore, many people who identify themselves as members of a so-called Great Tradition in fact live their lives at the level of a modified primal religion. Moreover, there also exist *modern* primal religions, such as Shinto, or “the way of the gods.” From early times the Japanese attitude towards nature and the universe has been shaped by its understanding that all beings, plants, animals and man, even inanimate things like rocks, rivers and man-made utensils, are endowed with spiritual powers which have to be respected and honored. To be in harmony with the various spiritual powers is a basic obligation. Shintoism is a continuation in modern form of what it means to be Japanese in terms of tradition, mentality, belonging and identity.

Though there is a certain universality of primal religion throughout Asia, a given primary religion is, by its very nature, limited to those who belong to the ethnic or cultural group.

### 3.2.2 Hinduism

Harmonious integration of the whole and the parts at all levels (cosmic, social and individual) marks the quintessence of the Hindu quest. The Hindu way and view of life, its ethos, values, goals, etc., are all permeated, colored and governed by this ideal. At the cosmic level, the world is sustained by *rta* — a harmonious order which is necessary to maintain the general well-being of the entire reality (*lokasamgraha*).

Society is upheld by the order of *dharma*\* through which its various constituent parts are “held together.” An individual person on his/her part is maintained in proper order by truth (*satya*). All three orders (cosmic, social, individual) are mutually interdependent, in such a way that the disruption of cosmic order would spell doom, not only for the cosmos but for society and individuals, as well. It is to be noted here that the ethical or moral order is not something independent of this inner order of reality with its various levels and constituent parts. In fact, *dharma* means order as well as righteousness and justice. In the popular Hindu

---

\* *Dharma* derives from the root *dhr*, which means “to support, uphold.”

belief, if *dharma* is upheld, then nature will continue to flourish and yield fruits, whereas violating it (*a-dharma*) will bring the age of darkness (*kaliyuga*), with natural calamities and cataclysms.

Hinduism leads us then to the realization that the cosmic, social and moral order meet, blend and flow one into the other. For Hinduism, the harmonious order in which unity and plurality are blended together is not only inextricably bound to the ethical realm of justice, but in a way is its very source. Harmony is justice; even more, it is the source of justice. The Third FABC Bishops' Institute for Interreligious Dialogue (BIRA III), held in Madras, November 20, 1982, explains harmony as follows:

Wholeness and order may be said to characterize Hindu culture, especially in the various arts, in the *raga* (melody) and *tala* (rhythm), in the *karanas* (postures) and *mudras* (gestures and dance), and in the micro-cosmic profusion of temple architecture. This integral humanism goes beyond all dualism between body and soul, sacred and secular, person and world. The concept of *dharma* seeks to recreate this wholeness, tarnished by various alienations caused by *avidya* (ignorance), *anawa* (egoism) and *kama* (attachment). Contemporary socio-cultural and economic realities have strengthened this alienation (n. 14).

### 3.2.3 Buddhism

According to the historical Buddha the major characteristic of human life is suffering. The Buddha taught that we are but bundles of continuously changing elements, without being supported by a central, permanent core or self. In our ignorance we imagine that we are a self. This is an illusion and the cause of all suffering in the world. The ultimate goal is to reach the state where we have extinguished all desire to be a self (*nirvana*). The Buddha's teaching is contained in the Four Noble Truths: there is suffering; there is a cause or origin of suffering; there is an end of suffering, and there is a path out of suffering. This is his *Dharma*: the ultimate truth towards which his life and experience point. Enlightenment consists in a direct, dynamic experience of this *dharma* brought about by following the "Eight-Fold Path," which culminates in intense meditation and contemplation.

In the Mahayana tradition the historical Buddha becomes identified with the goal he reached: the Ultimate No-Self, or Absolute Emptiness. He becomes transformed into the absolute principle, called the Buddha-nature. The human task is to follow the example of the historical Buddha and to reach this ultimate state of emptiness, which is stillness, quietness and limitless rest, but a dynamic stillness which reaches out in compassion to all living beings still in the throes of suffering.

At the core of Buddhism is the internal and external balance which should be a way of life. Isolated materialistic development is disastrous. Human development has to come first. *Dharma* is to be spread in all its aspects, and a holistic approach to development is needed.

### 3.2.4 Islam

“Islam” comprises a fourteen-century-old religious, political, cultural and economic “system,” with almost one billion adherents, covering the enormous area from West Africa to Indonesia in the East, from Central Asia in the North, down to the south of East Africa. It is a complex amalgam of religious and cultural entities, with a large variety, at times, of conflicting aspects.

Today, we are aware that we live in a pluralistic world and we try to understand other religions and traditions. Like the Bible, the Qur’an states that God has created many nations and tribes: “We have created you from one male and female, and made you into different nations and tribes that you may know one another.”

“Harmony” in the Muslim community appears in the deliberation called *Shura*, deliberation or consultation, in which no one may impose his or her will on others, and which is to be protected until in one way or another those involved arrive at a decision agreed upon by all. The principle of a majority overruling opinions of minorities is rejected by many Muslims. In this common agreement, within the ideal of unity of the entire Muslim community, the opinion of the majority has to take account of that of the minority.

Another expression of “harmony” is found where religious plurality is recognized; where Muslims manifest desire for dialogue with people of other religious convictions, for a common forum in order to search together for the solution of common problems or to strive for common goals; or solidarity within humanity (*Ukhuwah basyariah*), based on common needs and responsibility for universal well-being and for human dignity in general, the “environmental” aspect of religiosity. (See the oft-quoted Qur’an verse: “To you your religion and to me my religion,” (*Al-Kafirun*, v.6).

In our search for understanding of each other, we emphasize what we Muslims and Christians hold in common. We believe that God has spoken to humankind. The two traditions give prominence to community. Islam acknowledges Christians as *Ahl alKitab*, people of the Book.

Above all, Islam presents itself as inner submission to God. Islam recognizes that Christians too believe in God and give themselves to the

service of God. The two religions come together in their understanding of the love and service of the neighbor. Islam and Christianity, therefore, find themselves on the road to reconciliation when they acknowledge that they are different and respect each other's differences. They may not be able to accept each other's doctrines and ways of worshipping and devotion, but the greatest thing is to have humility before God. We share a common humanity and our common search for God and his holy will. This was recognized at the end of the fifth series of FABC Bishops' Institutes for Interreligious Dialogue (BIRA V/1), when it was stated that harmony would come when Muslims and Christians remain united to the will of God for humankind and creation as found in the Qur'an and the New Testament (Final Statement: "Working Together for Harmony in God's World," *Asia Focus*, November 13th, 1992, p.8).

With regard to forgiveness and reconciliation at the grass-roots level there is the common custom of making peace in a public rite of reconciliation. As the Gospel preaches forgiveness and love of enemies (Mt 5:44-45), the Qur'an too urges forgiveness and reconciliation: "The recompense for an injury is an injury equal thereto; but if a person forgives and makes reconciliation, his reward is due from Allah . . ." (Surah XLII:40). Although the past has been marked by misunderstanding and hurts, and even at present there are conflicts and fights, Muslims and Christians can come together in good will and mutual forgiveness and reconciliation.

### 3.2.5 Chinese Traditions

#### 3.2.5.1 Harmony as Means and Ideal in Chinese Life.

In the ancient Chinese military strategy there was a saying known by everyone and still used today which means: to achieve a victory there are three factors listed in an ascendant way: *Tien-shih, Dili, Jenhe* — "good weather, advantageous locality, *human harmony*." The message of the phrase is: the harmony among ourselves is decisive in a war. In family life the Chinese say: *Jia he wang shi hen* — "when there is harmony in a family, every thing will prosper." And in personal relationships it is said: *he wei gwei* — "harmony is the most precious thing." The shortcomings caused by this mentality of preserving harmony at all costs are: lack of a critical spirit, unwillingness to accept realities full of tensions and contrasts, resignation to the factual situation in order to save the minimal level of life. All this points to a much-needed correction to the concept of harmony, without renouncing its vitality which has served the vast Chinese population so well for so many centuries.

Above and beyond the ordinary folk, who constitute the great majority of the Chinese people, there are several philosophical and religious



currents which articulate the people's feelings and thoughts. All Chinese have these philosophical and religious currents in their blood, even today at the end of the 20th century. Within these currents harmony is coupled with "joy."

### 3.2.5.2 The Spirit of Joy

The sense of harmony and joy towards life expresses well Chinese optimism towards life. Here again, "life" itself needs to be described and evaluated in all its degrees or scale of values.

There are three main currents in Chinese philosophy: Confucianism, Taoism and Zen Buddhism. The spirit of joy runs through them all, although each has its own mode of joy. Generally speaking, the Confucian joy springs from the love of learning, the harmony of human relations, and the realization of one's humanity. The Taoist joy consists in untrammelled freedom and detachment from things mundane, in keeping oneself in tune and harmony with nature, in self-realization through self-loss. The joy of Zen is found in seeing one's true nature and thereby attaining enlightenment, in the pleasant surprise of self-discovery, in the harmonization of the this-worldly with the other-worldly. The idea of harmony is the keynote of all three types of joy. Where there is harmony, there is joy. Nothing can be more delightful than to study different philosophies of joy, to rejoice with each of them and finally try to harmonize them all.

### 3.2.5.3 Confucian Joy

The very beginning of the *Analects of Confucius* radiates an atmosphere of joy. It sets the tone to the whole Confucian philosophy of life. It opens like this:

The Master said: Is it not a true delight to learn and to practice constantly what one has learned? Is it not a real joy to see friends coming from different places? Is it not characteristic of the gentleman not to be saddened, even when his qualities are not recognized by the world?

Here we find the joy of learning, the joy of fellowship, and the joy of the perfect development of one's personality without regard to recognition by the world.

Our highest joy consists in the fulfillment of our nature as a human being. Mencius said:

What belongs to the essential nature of man cannot be increased by the largeness of his sphere of action, nor diminished by the poverty and obscurity of his condition. For external things do not belong

to his essential nature, which consists in humanity, justice, propriety and wisdom. These are rooted in his very heart; they manifest themselves as a mild harmony and radiant cheerfulness in the countenance, and a rich fullness in the back.

Confucianism seeks harmony in human relations; and when it expresses itself in poetry, it sheds a certain fragrance of sympathy that warms the human heart.

In its highest reaches, Confucianism attains the vision of oneness of humankind, so that it sees "the whole world as one family with China as a member." In this state, the walls between the self and others crumble, and one becomes so big-hearted as "to regard the talents of others as his own and rejoice in the wisdom of others as if his own mouth had uttered."

#### 3.2.5.4 The Taoist Joy

The Taoist vision is even more far-reaching than that of the Confucian. If the Confucian sees the oneness of the human family, the Taoist sees the oneness of the whole creation. If the Confucian finds his joy in the harmony of human relations, the Taoist finds his joy in the harmony of the individual with the Cosmos. Chuang Tzu, the greatest Taoist after Lao Tzu, has presented the essence of the Taoist vision when he declares: "The Cosmos and I were born together; and all things and I are one."

If you understand that "all things belong to the treasure," the treasury of nature, and if you are one with nature, then the sun is yours, the moon is yours, the stars are yours, the whole universe is yours. The joy of the Taoist is the joy of non-attachment, of perfect freedom. If Confucian joy is the joy of fullness, Taoist joy is the joy of emptiness. The one comes from effort and action; the other springs from spontaneity and quiet contemplation. The one is human, the other cosmic. The one is like warm sunshine in a winter's day, the other is like cool showers in hot summer.

Chuang Tzu said: "Human joy consists in being in harmony with men, while heavenly joy consists in being in harmony with Heaven." It was precisely because he was in harmony with Heaven, that he felt at home in Nature.

#### 3.2.5.5 Joy in Zen Buddhism

Buddhism used to be looked upon in the West as a pessimistic and nihilist philosophy of life. This is untrue of all Buddhism, and especially of the Mahayana school, with its positive conception of *nirvana* and its generous *bodhisattva* ideal of working in the world and refusing to enter *nirvana* before all beings are liberated. The joy of the *bodhisattvas* arises

from bringing joy to others. Enlightened themselves, they desire to be instruments in enlightening others.

Zen Buddhism inherited the generous Mahayana impulse, with its vast mental horizons. But so far as the content of its teaching and the mode of its thinking are concerned, it is essentially Chinese, being a vital attempt to reconcile Taoist Transcendentalism with Confucian Humanism. In a sense, Zen effected a tremendous revolution in Buddhism. The traditional Buddhist teaching is that the believers should rely on the Buddha, the *Dharma* (Law), and *Sangha* (the community of monks). Hui-neng, the founder of the Chinese Zen school, teaches that they should rather rely on Enlightenment, Rightness and Purity. In truth, this is a doctrine of self-reliance. His teaching may be summed up briefly in his own words: "Within, keep the mind in perfect harmony with the self-nature; without, respect all other men. This is reliance on oneself."

According to Ch'ing-Yuan, a Zen master of the Sung period, there are two diseases to be avoided in the practice of Zen. "The first is to ride an ass in search of the very ass you are riding; the second is to ride the ass and refuse to dismount." It is easy to see the silliness of seeking the ass you are riding. The second disease is more subtle you are no longer seeking outside. You know that you are riding your own ass. You have already tasted an interior peace infinitely sweeter than any pleasures you can get from the external things. But you become so attached to it that you are bound to lose it altogether. This is what Ch'ing-Yuan meant by "riding the ass and refusing to dismount." This disease is common to contemplative souls in all religions.

### 3.3 Biblical Perspectives on Harmony

The Bible is the word of God incarnated in human language. Since the language is very much conditioned by its cultural fabric, the reading and interpretation of the Bible will also depend on one's cultural vicissitudes. In fact, the biblical revelation, in many aspects, is congenial to Asian cultural thought patterns and approaches. After all, the Judaeo-Christian tradition is an Asian religious tradition. However, its reading and interpretation in the past have been very much determined by Western cultural approaches. The formulation of an Asian theology of harmony necessarily calls for a rereading of the biblical data on harmony from an Asian perspective.

Though there is no such term as "harmony" in the Bible, the biblical term *shalom* (peace) comes closest to harmony. Besides, there are other terms like "covenant" (*berith*), "justice" (*sedaka*), "blessing" (*beraka*), "reconciliation" (*katallage*) and "communion" (*koinonia*), which represent the different aspects of harmony.

### 3.3.1 Original Harmony in Creation

In the beginning God created heaven and earth in full harmony through his word (Jn 1:3). The biblical narrative of creation gives us two pictures of God creating this world in full harmony. The first picture is that of Genesis 1:1-4a. God created this world in full harmony; namely, there is order, hierarchy of values and mutual relationship of complementarity and service. The celestial bodies are “to divide day from night and indicate seasons, days and years” (Gen 1:14). All plants and trees are given to the humans — male and female — as their food (Gen 1:29). Human beings are created in the image of God and are put in command of all that was created before (Gen 1:26-28). The vocation of the human as the *eikon* of God was to be stewards of the Creator for the well-being and harmony of the whole universe.

The second picture of creation in harmony describes it in terms of mutual relationships between human person and animals, between man and woman. “The man gives names to all the cattle, all the birds of heaven and all the wild beasts” (Gen 2:20a): each one was to bear the name the man would give it (Gen 2:19c). Between man and woman there was mutual trust and harmony. This trust and harmony between man and woman are more clearly and forcefully expressed through a primordial image of shame/no shame: “Both of them were naked, the man and his wife: but they felt no shame in front of each other” (Gen 2:29). Here is hidden the seed of future disharmony, when they will realize that they are naked (Gen 3:7).

#### 3.3.1.1 Disharmony Caused By Sin

The sin of Adam introduced disharmony into creation: “They heard the sound of the Lord God walking in the garden . . . and the man and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the Lord” (Gen 3:8). From then on, it is the history of disharmony that dominates mutual relationships between man and woman (Gen 3), between brothers (Gen 4:12), between man and his fellowmen (Gen 4:23-24). The disharmony of human history, now called “the wickedness of humankind” (Gen 6-5), was so great, that “Yahweh regretted having made man on the earth” (Gen 6:7). The story of the flood (Gen. 7-8) shows how much the disharmony caused by human wickedness was disgusting to God.

#### 3.3.1.2 From Disharmony to Harmony

The history of God’s salvific work of restoring harmony in Christ begins at the very moment when disharmony was introduced into the world of God’s creation (Gen 3:14-15). The Flood which was the sign of disharmony with its devastating consequences was itself a purifying process. Through it God wanted to restore the primeval harmony of his

creation: "As long as the earth lasts, sowing and reaping, cold and heat, summer and winter, day and night shall cease no more" (Gen 8:22). Furthermore, God established his covenant with Noah and his descendants, and "also with every living creature . . . birds, cattle and every wild beast" (Gen 9:9-10). The covenant with Noah, with the rainbow as its emblem, indicates God's intention of restoring harmony to the whole of creation.

According to the Biblical story the whole of humankind, which was in harmony with one language, ended up in disharmony and scattered over the face of all the earth with a confusion of languages, owing to the attempt to build a tower with its top in the heavens (Gen 11:1-9). The story of the Tower of Babel symbolizes the disharmony caused by human sin. On the other hand, on Pentecost, people from every nation under heaven heard the apostles speaking about God's deeds of power in their own languages (Acts 2:5-11). The Pentecost event reveals the harmony that God wants to restore to humanity.

### 3.3.2 Restoration of Harmony In Christ

Restoration of harmony in Christ was to be prepared and to be fulfilled through the history of a people of God. God's covenant with Abraham — the sign of which was circumcision — though, embracing only his descendants (Gen 17:1-14), was in view of blessing all the families of the earth (Gen 12:3). The Exodus event and God's Covenant with Moses, with the accompanying obligation of fidelity to the Lord (Ex 19:5; 24:7-8), though confined to Israel, was a preparation and paradigm for the liberation of the whole of humankind from sin and its restoration to harmony. Though God's Covenant with David, with the promise to establish his kingdom forever (2 Sam 7:8-16), had immediate reference to one nation, it was a promise of the kingdom of peace and harmony for all the nations.

The prophets denounced the violation of the stipulations of the Covenant and constantly called the people to fidelity to the Covenant relationship. The prophetic movement in Israel reached its climax in the announcement of the New Covenant, as expressed in Jeremiah and Ezekiel (Jer 31:31-34; Ez 36:26-28), which was to be established through the Messiah, the Wonderful Counselor and Prince of Peace (Is 9:6-7; 11:1-9).

God's work of restoring harmony finds its fulfillment in Christ. The New Testament presents it in its different aspects.

#### 3.3.2.1 The Reign of God and Harmony

At the beginning of his ministry Jesus announced: "The reign of God is at hand" (Mk 1: 15; see Mt 4: 17; 10:7; Lk 4:43; 10: 9); and in a

controversy with the scribes and Pharisees he declared: "The reign of God has come upon you" (Mt 12: 28; Lk 8:20). This reign is not only God's rule as the Creator (Ps 93; 104; Mt 5:34; 1:25; Lk 10:21), getting creatures to interact harmoniously even in a world spoiled by sin, and orchestrating the cultures and religions of the human race so that they would move towards harmony in spite of divisive and corruptive elements. It is even more than God's governance as Savior of Israel (Ex 15: 18; Ps 47; Is 51:52). It is the salvation that God brought to the whole human race and the cosmos by sending his Son into the world. For "God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him may not die, but may have eternal life" (Jn 3:16), with which perfect harmony is concomitant.

The historical coming of Jesus Christ born of a woman (Gal 4:4, Jn 1: 1-14) is, for the New Testament, the salvific event that fulfilled the Old Testament expectation of God's reign, ushering in a better harmony among people and in the cosmos. Jesus fulfilled the Old Testament expectation of the coming reign of God by being the person of harmony through whose mystery and ministry God saves the whole human race and the entire cosmos.

The reign of God has come upon us through the Christ of harmony. Through his ministry of preaching the Good News, as well as by his calling for repentance, through his exorcisms of Satan and his healing of the sick and his pardoning of sins, through his parables that conveyed his wisdom to those whose hearts had already been touched by it, but took away understanding from those who had never learned to listen and obey (see Mt 13: 12-13; Mk 4: 11; Lk 8:10), through his prophetic denunciations as well as his personal witness of compassion and love, he exemplified the harmony brought by the reign of God.

The mystery of Jesus, of the reign of God, of harmony, became operative in the life of the whole human race and in the order and workings of the cosmos especially through the paschal events of his passion, death, resurrection and glorification. By these events Jesus brought judgment upon the world, cast out Satan and drew all human beings to himself (Jn 12: 31-32), so that they would walk in harmony towards the eschatological coming and transcendent destination of God's reign.

When will the eschatological event and transcendent reality of the reign of God ultimately transform the human race and the cosmos and bring about the "new heaven and the new earth" (Rev 21: 1)? We find two dimensions of eschatology in the New Testament: one, "realized," highlighting the actual presence of the reign of God (see e.g., Lk 11:20; 16:16; 7:28; 17:21; Mt 12:28; 11:11-13), and the other "consequent," emphasizing its future reality (see Mt 5:20; 6:10; 22:12; 25:10; Mk 14:25; Lk 22:30). These two dimensions organically express the dynamic

relationship of the present and the future aspects of the reign of God, operating as history and mystery.

The reign of God was already present and operating in the person of Jesus during his earthly ministry and is now even more present, because through his glorification he now exercises the power to encompass all time and space and every nation on earth and share his Holy Spirit with his disciples (see Jn 20:22-23; Mt 28: 18-20; Mk 16: 15-20), in order to strengthen us to make this mystery of God's reign a reality of human history.

The full and perfect realization of God's reign has to take place at the end of human history, precisely because until that time the salvation and harmony it brings must reach all human beings in one way or another; and the completion of Christ's work will not be realized until he comes again to raise the dead to everlasting life, judge the whole of humankind from beginning to end, and bring his people to their eternal, transcendent home, where they will live as complete human persons with glorified bodies and souls.

### 3.3.2.2 Christ the Suffering Servant of Harmony

From Incarnation to Resurrection the life of Christ was characterized by suffering and the cross. It is through his self-emptying, becoming obedient unto death on the cross, that he identified himself in love with the whole of humankind, especially with those most rejected, the weakest and the poorest (Phil 2:6-8). Thus, the cross is the glory of the Suffering Servant and the power for establishing harmony among humankind.

Jesus, whose birth ushers in "peace to men of good will" (Lk 2:14), is also proclaimed as one "destined to be a sign that is rejected" (Lk 2:34), a sign of contradiction. Jesus was confronted by the evil power of disharmony and division in his very mission to bring about peace and harmony in the world. In Jesus God's love, mercy and forgiveness are manifest for the world so that peoples of all nations, Jews and gentiles alike, can be reconciled to God the heavenly Father and to one another, to become a communion of harmony and love. Jesus' teachings and works of mercy and forgiveness, in which he has shown special concern for the poor and oppressed, for the sinners and for the gentiles, became on the one hand a sign of controversy and rejection for those who questioned his authority (Lk 20:1-2), and on the other hand brought crowds of people close to him and to the heavenly Father.

Even Jesus' claim as Christ typified by the suffering servant of the cross (Lk 9:18-20, 44-45; 18:31-34) appears at first instance as a sign of contradiction for those who were very close to him, his disciples; yet through the glory of the cross as manifested in the resurrection the disci-

ples were strengthened by Jesus to become a community of fellowship and love.

### 3.3.2.3 Reconciliation and Recapitulation in Christ

The Pauline writings present harmony in terms of reconciliation and recapitulation in Christ. Human beings stand in a state of broken relationship and must be reconciled to God. This has been done by God through the death and resurrection of Christ. To express this idea, Paul uses the term *katallassein*, which means a change from the estrangement to friendship with God.

Reconciliation is God's work of grace. Before the coming of grace human beings were under the sway of sin (Rom 1-3). But God through Christ has brought about a change. Human beings now have peace with God (Rom 5: 1-11), and are freed from sin, death and the law of Moses (Rom 5:12-7:25). In the new state human beings have been empowered by the Spirit of God and have become children of God (Rom 8). Since they were unable to reconcile themselves with God, God himself brought about the reconciliation of human beings with himself and also among the peoples themselves. This is the great work that God does in favor of the world. When human beings were in sin and estranged from God, God was reconciling the world. This is the Good News, that God has sent Christ into the world to reconcile the world and has entrusted this ministry of reconciliation (*katallage*) to the Church. Through this, people become a new creation (2 Cor 5:16-23).

The cross of Jesus Christ broke down the dividing wall of prejudice and hatred between the Jews and gentiles and has made them into one people in place of two. In this way Christ has become our peace. He has further abolished the law of Moses that alienated the gentiles from the Jews. In Christ is the New Man, the New Adam, in whom all races come together (Eph 2:11-22). In Eph 1:10 Paul speaks of God's plan to unite, to recapitulate (*anakefalaiosasthai*) all things in Christ. Christ subdues the cosmic powers and everyone on earth, and brings them under his rule (Col 1:15-20). Finally, when everything is subjected to Christ, he will hand the Kingdom to the Father (1 Cor 15:20-28).

### 3.3.2.4 Peace and Harmony

The biblical concept of peace is the one that is closest to harmony. *Shalom* on the one hand means "peace" and "friendship"; and on the other hand it means "welfare," "prosperity," and "happiness." Basically, it denotes always wholeness, health and completeness.

Peace is very often coupled with justice and is the effect of justice (Is 32:17). Ps 85:11 (10) says: "Justice and peace will kiss each other."



Justice before God and justice among the human beings is the only foundation of peace, since it is justice which eliminates sin, the source of all divisions. Christ became our peace by destroying sin, breaking down the dividing wall of hostility (Eph 2: 14). The association of peace with justice ties together the nuance of wholeness with the notion of peace as an action. "Do good, seek peace, pursue it," says Ps 34:14. Peace is not something that simply happens, but it should be pursued. Peace is not seen simply as tranquillity but as the work of justice.

Peace is the messianic gift that Christ has achieved for humankind through his redemptive work (Lk 2:14; Jn 14:27; 20:19; Eph 2:14-22; Jn 16:33). Christ is the "Prince of peace" (Is 9:5 [6]). He is the bearer of justice and his kingdom shall be the kingdom of peace, established and sustained by justice (Is 11:1-9).

### 3.3.2.5 Life, Communion and Harmony

In the Johannine perspective Jesus Christ is the Lamb of God who came to take away the sin of the world (Jn 1:29) and to give humankind life in abundance (Jn 10:10). Sin is death, while life is love, harmony and communion (1 Jn 3:4). The reality of sin and death is manifested in disharmony, resulting in the division of humanity into rival groups, always tempted by hatred, contempt, injustice, scorn, exploitation, racism, murder, war, etc. (1 Jn 3:15). Jesus Christ through his glorification (death and resurrection) destroyed the power of sin (Jn 12:31-33; 1 Jn 3: 5, 8) and gathered into one the children of God who were scattered by sin (Jn 11:51-52).

### 3.3.2.6 Pentecost and the Inauguration of the Redeemed Humanity

Pentecost was the culmination of Christ's redemptive work of restoring the harmony of humankind. All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit, with the bond of unity and harmony, and they began to speak in other languages, as the Spirit gave them ability. Every nation under heaven was represented among those who heard the apostles speak in each one's native language (Acts 2: 4-6). This was a historic sign that the disharmony of humankind, manifested in the confusion of language at Babel, is now remedied, and that the way to harmony of the whole of humanity has been decisively opened.

## 3.3.3 The Church and Harmony

### 3.3.3.1 The Church as Communion: Sacrament of Harmony

The very substance of the Christ event was the revelation of the communion in the Godhead (Father-Son-Spirit) and of enabling humankind to share in this communion. Hence, the Church as the community of those

who have experienced Christ and have appropriated the life manifested in Jesus Christ is the community of those who are restored into communion and fellowship (*koinonia*) among themselves, which is a communion and fellowship with God the Father and his Son Jesus Christ in the Holy Spirit (1 Jn 1:1-3).

This communion and fellowship is expressed in a unity of life and the plurality of harmonious relationships of the believers in the Father and the Son, on the one hand, and among themselves, on the other (Jn 15:9-10; 17:21). It is in this loving one another and living in harmony that the Church will be recognized as the community of the disciples of Jesus (Jn 13:34-35). This unity and harmony of the disciples of Jesus makes the Church the sign and instrument for the world for its restoration to harmony in Jesus Christ (Jn 7:22-23). Hence, the Church as communion is the sacrament of harmony of the humankind.

Christian life is characterized by an earnest hope for peace and commitment to bring about peace (Mt 5:9). The Church is called to transcend distinction of race, caste and sex (Gal 3:28; Col 3:11) and become the locus, sign and instrument on earth of peace among the peoples. As the Body of Christ enlivened by the Spirit of God, the Church is called to be the Sacrament of peace and harmony of the whole of humankind. The Church can fulfill its mission as sacrament of peace and harmony only insofar as it is committed to establish justice, by listening to the Word of God who alone gives peace, and by being open to the Spirit of God who is constantly at work weaving among human beings one solid bond (Eph 4:3).

### 3.3.3.2 The Church at the Service of Cosmic Harmony

The Church as the community of those who are restored to communion and harmony cannot be indifferent to the destiny of the whole of creation, since the Mediator of this communion is Jesus Christ, the Word (1 Jn 1:1-3), through whom all things were made (Jn 1:3), and whom God made the Head of the Church and the Lord of the Universe (Col 1:14-18). In his salvific plan God destined humans to be molded into the image of the Son, so that Christ will become the eldest born among many brethren (Rom 8:29). Already in the beginning God put the human person as the icon (*eikon*) at the center of creation and as his steward.

This creation was later disfigured by sin. Hence, the Church, as the communion of the children of God, is the community of restored humanity, the icon (*eikon*) of God. Therefore, the Church has to be at the service of the restoration of the whole creation in its original harmony. The descriptions of eschatological salvation in terms of a new Heaven and a new Earth (Rev 21:1), of the creation waiting with eager longing for the

revealing of the children of God (Rom 8:19), and obtaining the freedom of the glory of the children of God (Rom 8:21), indicate this cosmic dimension of the restoration of harmony in Jesus Christ. Hence, the Church is the community of those who, transformed by the Holy Spirit, are children of God, living in harmony with God and with one another, and are authentic servants of God for the restoration of the whole of creation in its original harmony.

### 3.3.3.3 Mission for Harmony

The risen Lord caused his disciples to participate in the same mission he received from the Father: “So you see how it is written that the Christ will suffer and on the third day rise from the dead, and that, in his name, repentance for the forgiveness of sins would be preached to all the nations beginning from Jerusalem. You are witnesses to this” (Lk 24:46-49). In order to bring peace and harmony to the world through mercy and forgiveness the disciples of Jesus are called to become servants, indeed, suffering servants, as Jesus was.

Blessed by the Lord for their life and mission of repentance and reconciliation, the disciples were full of joy as in prayer and worship they awaited the power of the Holy Spirit (Lk 24:51-53). The disciples of Jesus received the Holy Spirit, new believers were added to their number, and they lived as a community in mutual sharing, one in mind and heart (Acts 2:42-47; 4:32-35).

The commission of Jesus — to “go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, Son and the Holy Spirit” (Mt 28:18-20) — indicates that his disciples are called upon to build up the human community in a harmony based on the Trinitarian communion.

### 3.3.3.4 The Church: the Instrument of Dynamic Harmony

The communion and harmony in the Christian community has not been a static thing. In the midst of the overall communion and harmony there have been instances of controversy and disharmony in the Christian community (Acts 5:1-11; 6:1 ff; 11:2 ff; 15:2). But there were constant efforts to establish harmony through God and the Holy Spirit working in the community.

Much crucial controversy and disharmony within the new community arose early over the understanding of the manifestation of God’s mercy and love in Jesus for the gentile nations. Efforts were made, in union of mind and heart, to arrive at a decision that seemed good to the Holy Spirit and the Church. The restoration of harmony after this grave, yet passing, problem was a cause of joy and peace among the brethren (Acts

15:31-33), providing the grace and vision to go forward with their mission.

In the history of the Church of the New Testament times, there were repeated occurrences of conflicts, such as the partisan allegiance to Paul or Apollos (1 Cor 1:10-17), disturbances caused by the conflictual use of charisms (1 Cor 14:1 ff), etc. Striving for harmony was a matter of constant struggle. Despite occasional internal and external controversy and disharmony, the Christian community continued in communion with one another as true disciples of Jesus and continued to be servant, indeed the suffering servant, who was to bring about communion and harmony among all the peoples.

### **3.4 Conclusion**

It is clear that there is an Asian approach to reality, an Asian understanding of reality that is profoundly organic, i.e., a world-view wherein the whole, the unity, is the sum-total of the web of relationships, and interaction of the various parts with each other. There is no part which is not in relation to all other parts; and all the parts together make the whole. The parts are understood in terms of their mutual dependence. Our efforts to resolve disharmony and promote wholeness of life need to draw from our Asian cultural and religious resources which will resonate with our people and speak to them more effectively.

## **Chapter Four**

### **Orientations of the Churches in Asia**

#### **4.1 Introduction: The Asian Churches' Vision of Harmony in the Context of Church Tradition**

There is at our disposal an abundant heritage of the Fathers of the Church, who were much closer to biblical tradition than our present generation of Christians is. They were yet no less committed to the life and mission of the Church within the concrete life situations of their times. We have to acknowledge, however, that most Churches in Asia so far have failed to live up truly to the demands of faith communion with the Fathers, and to avail of the wealth of patristic tradition, in order to be enriched in their Christian faith, their vision and their ways of life.

Similarly in our theological reflection on harmony we can be enlightened by some documents of the universal Magisterium, particu-

larly concerning its social teaching. This is, according to Pope John Paul II, “an integral part of the Christian concept of life”; its object is: the sacred dignity of human person, the image of God; its purpose: the realization of justice as the advancement and liberation of the human person; its foundation: the truth about human nature, learned from reason and illuminated by revelation; and its propelling power: love as the Gospel commandment and norm of action (see address on May 13, 1981).

FABC texts on the social teaching of the Church, the pursuit of peace, integral human development, social justice, and the need for the reconstruction of the social order, already point to the realization of harmony in the world. The texts presented here are just pointers to highlight some major elements in reflecting on harmony, to point the way towards a vision in the context of the Asian cosmic world-view.

Recent FABC documents especially have been ever more clearly geared to reflection on harmony within Asia’s organic world-view. The particular appeal of the Fifth FABC Plenary Assembly (FABC V, 1990) in Bandung — the birthplace of the Non-Aligned Movement — came as an official confirmation of what had become obvious during the previous years: i.e., the process of theological reflection on interreligious dialogue in Asia, as envisaged by the entire fourth series of the Bishops’ Institutes on Interreligious Dialogue (BIRA IV) meetings, of itself gave rise to an earnest search for a theology of harmony.

Particularly by emphasizing the antagonism between “death-dealing forces” and “life-giving forces,” and hence, by stressing the meaning of “Christian Discipleship as Service to Life,” the Sixth FABC Plenary Assembly in Manila (FABC VI, January 10-19, 1995) greatly enriches our concept of harmony. Hopefully, the texts presented here will serve as a stimulus to further elaboration of our vision of harmony and of its implications for the life and mission of our Churches in Asia.

#### **4.2 How is Harmony to be Understood?**

Based on the concrete experiences of Asian Churches in the field of interreligious dialogue, two successive BIRA meetings held in Sukabumi, Indonesia (June-July, 1988), made their first attempts to explore in depth the meaningfulness of “harmony.” According to BIRA IV/10, which specifically evolved a theology of harmony, harmony embodies “the realities of order, well-being, justice and love as seen in human interaction. The diversity in living and expressing those realities is rooted in the value systems developed in their histories” (n.4). Harmony is not simply the absence of strife. According to BIRA V/11, the test of true harmony lies in acceptance of diversity and richness (n.15).

Harmony cannot be reduced to an exterior and objective order. It has a very strong experiential and affective component. Harmony requires that the whole person with his heart, sentiment and mind be involved in its realization. . . . It must be first of all an experience and starting of experience in which all religions are involved (no. 19).

. . . in considering peace and harmony we need to widen our outlook beyond the circle of family, society, region, nation and continent. Our vision of harmony must be inspired by a global and universal concern. The steps we take in our immediate surroundings for the promotion of harmony must be geared ultimately to the well-being and peace of the universe and of humankind (no. 21).

### **4.3 The Cosmic World-View: Context of the Asian Vision of Harmony**

Important in our view is the conviction, more than once expressed in FABC documents, particularly since the Second FABC Plenary Assembly in Calcutta (FABC II, 1978), that God's life-giving Spirit is at work beyond Christian communities, in whatever is good and true (see *Lumen Gentium*, no. 16; *Nostra Aetate*, no. 2), in other religions and religious traditions. Openness to the Spirit present there will greatly enrich our own lives of faith.

Prior to BIRA IV/10-11, the Fourth FABC Plenary Assembly in Tokyo (FABC IV, 1986) already alluded to the cosmic world-view present in many Asian cultures. The positive aspect is represented by the holistic view of reality. Asian religious cultures see human beings, society and the whole universe as intimately related and interdependent. Fragmentation and division contradict this vision (no. 3.1.10).

FABC IV poses in this context the question: "In the light of the Gospel, how does the Christian base the struggle for peace, justice and wholeness in this holistic vision provided by the ancient religions of Asia?" (ibid.).

FABC V (1990) stressed the need for "compassion for and solidarity with all, and especially with the poor, meekness and humility — virtues promoted by active non-violence" as "significant features of the spirituality we need." Gospel values resonate deeply with the cultures of Asia; a "spirituality of harmony" expresses intimate communion with God, docility to his Spirit, and challenges "the disharmonies of our Asian world" (no. 9.5).

#### 4.4 Human Harmony: Pivotal in Cosmic Harmony

The Greek Fathers often speak of the human being as a “little world,” a microcosm, of the whole creation. At the same time the human being, created in God’s image and likeness, after the pattern of Jesus Christ, “the image of God” (see 2 Cor 4:4), transcends the material world, because it participates in God spiritually and consciously. Humankind then stands as a connecting link, as a priest or mediator between the creation and the Creator, as stewards (*oikonomoi*) of God’s material world, caring for the world, maintaining it in its integrity and perfecting it by opening it up to God through our divinization (*theiōsis*).

Although not in an explicitly Christological way as the Church Fathers did, BIRA IV/12 (1991), speaking in more general terms, reminds us of “an important strand in Asian religious traditions,” which “acknowledges the sacredness of nature and invites us to live in harmony with nature and foster its growth” (no. 33).

FABC VI recognized in the rich diversity of ancient Asian cultures and faiths “a vision of unity in diversity, a communion of life among diverse peoples.” It is a vision of “holistic life . . . achieved and entrusted to every person and every community of persons, regardless of gender, creed or culture, class or color . . . the fruit of integral development, the authentic development of the whole person and of every person” (no. 10).

#### 4.5 Disharmony Brought about by Humankind

Patristic tradition considered sin as obscuring the glorious image of God in the human person, but without effacing it completely. As a consequence of sin, human harmony with God, nature, other human beings and itself gave way to disharmony, enmity, exploitation, egoism, the destruction of human solidarity and of the environment.

In a more concrete and poignant way FABC VI expressed deep concern about “whatever threatens, weakens, diminishes and destroys the life of individuals, groups or peoples; whatever devalues human beings, . . . whatever socio-cultural, religious, political, economic, or environmental factor that threatens or destroys life in our countries” (no. 7).

The assembly identified and denounced as “death-dealing forces”: market forces ruling the global economy to the detriment of peoples’ real needs; forces causing the insecurity and vulnerability of migrants, refugees, displaced ethnic and indigenous peoples, the pain and agonies of exploited workers; forces that deprive women of their dignity, freedom, personhood and fuller humanity; “liberalist, anti-life, anti-child, anti-woman, anti-family policies and values” undermining the family as

the basic cell of society and the Church; arms trade and greed for profit fueling growing violence, terrorism, conflicts and nuclear proliferation.

A similar description of disharmonies in Asia is found in the Final Statement of the First FABC International Theological Colloquium on "Being Church in Asia in the Twenty First Century," held in Pattaya, Thailand (April 10-16, 1994) (Part I, nos. 8 ff.)

In the area of religious pluralism FABC VI deplored:

the growing fundamentalist extremism and fanaticism discriminating against and excluding people who belong to other religious traditions, thus destroying the harmony of peoples' lives and their solidarity already witnessed to in a dialogue of life (no. 7).

#### 4.6 Restoration of Dynamic Harmony in Jesus Christ

But the Son of God who created all things in the beginning (*en archè*) was incarnate in the person of Jesus to "save the work of his hands" (St. Irenaeus) and to restore human beings in the divine image. He empowers humanity to exercise its freedom in a new way which serves God's gracious activity for the reintegration and transfiguration of all reality.

According to patristic tradition this renewing work of Christ in the Spirit dynamically moves creation to its full realization in the *eschaton*, when it shares in the glory of the Creator and Savior, through human beings; a growing communion with God which is a sharing in the Holy Spirit. In virtue of the Spirit, people try to imitate God's saving justice by caring for their neighbors, all human beings, as well as the material world.

Following up Vatican II's faith that the Holy Spirit is present in the universe (see *GS*, no. 11), and sustains the dialogue of salvation by working through the signs of the times (see *GS*, no. 4), FABC documents repeatedly emphasize the enlightening and vivifying action of the Spirit, who in ways known only to God, leads people of other faiths to participation in Christ's Paschal Mystery (see *GS*, no. 22).

The First FABC International Theological Colloquium at Pattaya describes Jesus Christ as "breaking down social barriers encrusted in customs and traditions and entrenched in social structures" (no. 28); "the face of Jesus as reconciliation and peace" as having a special appeal, calling the Church community to be "the sacrament . . . of the communion with God and with humanity" brought by Jesus (no. 41).

Emphatically, FABC VI also pointed to Jesus Christ, "bringer of harmony," who restores human communion:



He breaks down barriers set up by greed, pride, discrimination, lopsided social norms, and even religious distortions. Outcasts become sisters and brothers. Sinners are worthy of compassion. The hungry, the thirsty, the prisoners, the naked bear the divine presence. And God is our Father. In the freedom and communion that Jesus offers, a new creation dawns. The human community is reborn. Indeed the time of fulfillment has come. Life in abundance is in our midst. The Kingdom is here (no. 13.2, ref. Lk 17:21).

#### **4.7 Communion in the Holy Trinity: Source and Summit of Harmony**

Since Creation, according to the Fathers of the Church, finds its ground in the perfect personal relationship between the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, it is an organic unity, a cosmos, i.e., a created order with its harmony, because all its elements are united and interrelated in time and space.

In the plenary assembly on the general theme "Christian Discipleship in Asia Today: Service to Life," FABC VI was not as explicitly Trinitarian in its wording as the Fathers, since it encompassed in its vision all Asian peoples with their immense variety of cultures and faiths. Yet along the same line the assembly very succinctly presents as ultimate foundation of its holistic vision on life, as its most intimate life-giving force "the Asian reverential sense of mystery and of the sacred, a spirituality that regards life as sacred and discovers the Transcendent and its gifts even in mundane affairs, in tragedy or victory, in brokenness or wholeness." It is "this deep interiority that draws people to experience harmony and inner peace and infuses ethics into all creation" (no. 10).

More explicitly, however, the assembly affirmed that through communion with and within the life of the Triune God, Christ's disciple-community "can more credibly share the love and life of God with others, and more effectively bring the forces of God's Kingdom of Life to bear on the death-dealing realities of Asia," and thus become the sacrament of eschatological cosmic harmony of the "New Heavens and the New Earth" (see Rev 21:1; Manila Statement, no. 14.1).

Enlightened by the omnipresent life-giving Spirit, peoples in Asia are to be incorporated into Jesus Christ, "the Way, the Truth and the Life" (Jn 14:6), "the Image of God" (patristic tradition), and thus enter into the glory of the Father's Reign, of which the disciple-community is in a particular way the initial presence (sacrament) on earth.

#### **4.8 Dynamic Harmony to be Achieved in Human Society**

In writing about justice some Church Fathers used an organic and holistic approach, understanding justice as the right ordering of the parts

of human nature and, by extension, in society. For Clement of Alexandria, for instance, justice is “the harmony of the parts of the soul” (*Stromata*, 4,26). Others used a distributive approach. St. Basil says: “Justice is a permanent condition of distributing to each according to their value” (*Homily*, 12, 8). Concerning social issues, Fathers, such as Chrysostom, understood justice as based on the inherent human worth of the poor. Justice makes claims upon the wealthy, so that the essential needs of the poor may be met. Excess in wealth, in justice does not belong to the rich; it is only theirs as stewards for the poor.

In his encyclical *Summi Pontificatus* on the needs of the present time (1939), Pope Pius XII affirmed in the light of the unity of humankind that individuals ought to feel themselves united by the very force of their nature and by their supernatural destiny into an organic, harmonious mutual relationship. The nations too, despite many differences, are to enrich the human race by the reciprocal interchange of their own gifts, which can be possible and efficacious only when a mutual love and a lively sense unite all children of the same Father and all those redeemed by Jesus Christ.

FABC VI identified “the many signs of hope,” as seen “in peoples’ movements and the initiatives of groups, peoples, and the Churches in Asia for the service of life,” in “the growing consciousness regarding human dignity and empowerment of the poor, the growing voices of groups and peoples for humanized development, and the cries of the marginalized groups for participatory and democratic governance,” in “the solidarity of committed groups and peoples in the struggle for the rights of women, children, especially the girl child, and those of indigenous peoples” (no. 8).

#### **4.9 Harmony to be Restored in the Integrity of Creation**

Pope John Paul II addresses the urgent question of respect for natural resources. The moral character of development cannot exclude “respect for the beings which constitute the natural world.” There must be an awareness of the fact that “one cannot use with impunity the different categories of beings, whether living or inanimate — animal, plants, the natural elements — simply as one wishes, according to one’s own economic needs.” Natural resources are limited; some are not renewable. “The direct or indirect result of industrialization is, ever more frequently, the pollution of the environment with serious consequences for the health of the population.” This is a moral question. “The dominion granted by the Creator is not an absolute power” (*Sollicitudo Rei Socialis*, no. 34).

Concern about the destruction of ecosystems has been steadily growing in the FABC region as well. The ecological question or the harmony and balance of the natural environment in relation to human life is

a fundamental one. BIRA IV/11 stresses the “inextricable” connection between the destiny of humankind and the way they cultivate the earth and share its resources.

Harmony and peace call for respect for the earth. She is the mother of whose dust we are made and to whose womb we shall all return. The usurpation of the fruits of the earth by some and deprivation of others of the same results in the rupture of harmony among peoples (no. 13).

The very same concern for the integrity of Creation was expressed by FABC VI which deplored — beside “death-dealing realities, oppression and injustice, discrimination and exploitation” — the destruction of ecosystems as “the tampering with life” (no. 14. 3), and — as part of its holistic vision on life — stressed “a life of solidarity with every form of life and of sensitive care for all the earth” (no. 10), and supported “the movements for the protection of the environment and ecosystem linked to justice” (no. 8).

#### **4.10 Collaboration in Restoring and Promoting Universal Harmony**

In a message addressed to the 46th Social Week in France, June 12, 1959, in the context of development problems, Pope John XXIII exhorted Catholics of the “awakening nations” to “join their love and loyal service to their country to a spirit of peaceful cooperation with countries which can help it, without enslaving it to objectionable doctrines.” In *Pacem in Terris*, April 11, 1963, the first encyclical directed to all people of goodwill, the Pope emphasized mutual rights and obligations not only between citizens and society or state, but also at the international level between states. The state itself is to conscientiously preserve harmony by taking care that the defense of individual or collective rights or privileges could neither justify encroachment upon those of others nor rationalize its failure to intervene against injustices.

His successor, Pope Paul VI, during his visit to India in 1964, made from Bombay a historic appeal to all governments “to set aside for the welfare of the developing nations some of the funds which can be realized by a reduction of armaments.”

In the same spirit, Pope John Paul II in his address to the ambassador of Nepal, December 9, 1985, pointed out that:

to work for peace is to serve the cause of human dignity; it is to defend the fundamental rights of individuals and groups; it is to act according to the principles of solidarity and brotherhood in the service of the common good. The safeguarding of all these values is essential to the well-being and happiness of all.

John Paul II says that the social teaching of the Church insists on the need for solidarity and cooperation in accordance with justice and the demands of Christian charity (see *SRS*, no. 17; 35 ff).

Not only is harmony to be striven after at the level of personal/individual spiritual life. According to *FABC III* (1982), Christian communities in Asia are entrusted with the mission to accompany other believers “in a common pilgrimage toward the ultimate goal, in relentless quest for the Absolute.” Thus, they are to be “sensitively attuned to the work of the Spirit in the resounding symphony of Asian communion” (no. 8.2).

The present Asian situation in which the violation of human dignity and rights is becoming increasingly widespread, presents indeed, according to *BIRA IV/11*, an invitation to the followers of all religions:

to unite themselves in defense of them, and thus lay the foundation for right order and harmony in public life. One should be on guard against idyllic peace or sinful counterfeit of harmony in society which could be promoted at the cost of justice for furthering vested interests and egoistic goals . . . Peace and harmony in Asian societies, composed as they are of many cultural, ethnic and linguistic groups, would require recognition of legitimate pluralism and respect for all the groups (nos. 14-15).

The First *FABC International Theological Colloquium* at Pattaya reaffirmed — “in the context of religious fundamentalism, interreligious violence, societal fragmentation and ecological destruction” — the validity of the *FABC*’s insights into being a Church of Dialogue. “Dialogue is the primary mode for the Church in Asia in the promotion of harmony. But like our Master, we will be able to foster harmony only by taking the path of a love of preference for the poor” (no. 43).

#### **4.11 Recapitulation: Towards the Development of an Asian Christian Vision of Harmony**

Nowhere in *FABC* documents have we found an adequate well-articulated definition of harmony. The rich heritage of life experiences and reflections at the *FABC* level, as well as at that of national bishops’ conferences and of individual dioceses in Asia, provides us not with a conceptualistic approach but with some orientations scattered throughout the many statements and reflections, especially those issued during the past decade, which undoubtedly can serve Christian communities to deepen their awareness of the relevance of harmony for the active commitment of our Churches to the well-being of our peoples.

In the spirit of Biblical revelation, which, then, are the orientations we can garner from the life of our Churches in Asia for evolving a Christian

vision of life in harmony with God, with one's self, with other humans and with nature?

1. First of all, human harmony must involve the whole person (body-psyche-spirit) and the entire human family (as "a communion of life among diverse peoples"), and is a central and decisive element within the totality of cosmic harmony. Our vision of harmony, however, cannot be confined to the merely "secular" spheres of culture, psychology, sociology, economics and politics — no matter how important these are. Christian faith, even more articulately than in other religious traditions in which the Holy Spirit is actively present, discloses the divinely transcendent and immanent, metahistorical dimension of harmony.

2. By their existential and experiential approach to realities Asian Churches, in the spirit of *Gaudium et Spes* (no. 1), are sensitive to almost overwhelming disharmonies. As "death-dealing forces" these widespread disharmonies, especially during the last decades, have created socio-political upheavals and communal conflicts, and caused masses of our downtrodden people to constantly live in pain and agonies brought about by impoverishment and oppression. These disharmonies have disrupted the lives of most Asian societies, and built up persistent dehumanizing structures and mechanisms of flagrant injustice.

3. Since the harmony of the universe finds its origin in the one Creator God, and human harmony should flow from the communion of Father and Son in the Spirit, and ought to be continually nourished by the "circumincession" (*perichoresis*) in divine life, merely human endeavors will never achieve the goal of creating a trustworthy and everlasting harmony among humans and between humans and nature. The enlightening and life-giving Spirit, poured out in the hearts of our sisters and brothers in Asia will make them, together with us, cry out "Abba, Father!" (cf. Rom 8:15; Gal 4:6), so that they "be in union with us, as we are in union with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ" (1 Jn 1:3).

4. Jesus Christ has enfleshed himself in humanity in order to break down barriers and create harmonious unity, so that in union with him humans may have life and have it to the full (Jn 10:10). It is Christ, through whom and in whom God has reconciled the world to himself, and thus made humans "a new creation" (2 Cor 5:16-19). It is the power of his unifying and life-giving Spirit who incorporates us with him and makes us grow in him, until he will reveal himself as the Cosmic Christ, under whom as head everything in the heavens and on earth will be brought together (Eph 1:10), and who in his turn, when at the end of time everything is subjected to him, will be subject to God his Father, so that God may be all in all (1 Cor 15:28).

5. Jesus Christ is continuing his Spirit-filled mission of restoring peace and harmony with God and among humans not only in individuals, nor only within the fellowship of his disciples, who through continuing renewal and conversion — by loving one another just as he has loved them — will give proof that they are his disciples (Jn 13:34-35). In virtue of Christ's Spirit of communion in love his disciples are called to be effective signs of union with God and unity of humankind, sacrament in its fullest sense of human harmony. Moreover, in them — as stewards (*oikonomoi*) of God's material world — the attitude of harmony is to become a Christian attitude of respect for mother Earth, "of whose dust we are made and to whose womb we shall all return." It should overflow in active commitment for Justice, Peace and the Integrity of Creation.

6. The community of Christ's disciples, as a tiny minority among the teeming millions of Asia, as a "little flock" (*pusillus grex*), will never be able to do it alone. They are, with an open mind and a humble heart, to recognize in all sisters and brothers, of whatever faith-conviction and culture, fellow wayfarers to God's Reign. It is through a triple dialogue with cultures, with religions and with the poor (FABC I), through a mutually-enriching interchange in its various modes and at various levels, not the least in the dialogue of life with people of other faiths and religious traditions, that Asian Christianity is to strive for human and cosmic harmony in Jesus Christ.

## Chapter Five

### A Life of Harmony

Keeping in mind the Asian preference for a living experience of reality before any systematized theological reflection on that experience and programming for future action, we need to look into the life or praxis of harmony in a new order, namely, a spirituality of harmony, then a theology of harmony and finally, based on these two, an active commitment to harmony. Expressed in another way, it will mean, a moving from inner personal and communitarian praxis to a systematic reflection and formulation, and then again back to an outer praxis of commitment to action or implementation.

Irrespective of the religious, cultural and social diversities of our contexts, we keep moving on our common journey of life, experiencing the joys and sorrows of our people, the consolations and the contradictions of our times, thereby molding and at the same time assimilating a vision of harmony that takes hold of us and urges us to zealous action in favor of harmony.

## 5.1 The Spirituality of Harmony

The challenges of the conflictual realities in our Asian situation call us Christians to a new spirituality or lifestyle that will enable us to be witnesses, messengers and mediators of harmony. It is based on the radical values of the Gospel and enriched further by similar insights and values from the other faiths and cultures of Asia.

Christian spirituality flowing from biblical tradition has unfortunately lost some of its pristine emphasis on the inner experience of the Spirit and taken other forms of self-centered spiritual exercises in the form of pietistic devotions. The Asian experience calls for a return to the spirituality of inner experience which gives rise to a new vision and a series of new attitudes for outer relationship and living. The experience of the macro-cosmos within the micro-cosmos of oneself, through the discipline of silence, solitude, retreat into oneself and dialogue within oneself facilitates a deeper spirituality of harmony in the person.

### 5.1.1 The Unfolding of the Spirituality

The spirituality of harmony thus envisages a four-fold unfolding from within oneself. Starting from a consciousness of the God-given harmony within oneself, one moves into harmonious relationship with one's fellow humans; then one spreads out to be in harmony with nature and the wider universe. This unfolding and realization of right relationship within oneself, with the neighbors and the cosmos leads to the summit experience of harmony with God.

#### 5.1.1.1 Harmony with Oneself

Created as we are in the image of God, human life is considered in the cosmic view as reflecting the universe and, vice versa, the macro-cosmos is considered as a reflection and projection of the micro-cosmos within the human person. In Christian spirituality, every form of sin disturbs, if not destroys, the divinely-established harmony. Hence, the inner harmony of the human person demands a constant struggle with the forces of evil.

#### 5.1.1.2 Harmony with our Fellow Humans

Harmony with our fellow humans consists in recognizing in others God's image and likeness (Gen 1, 26). This harmony in its supreme form is experienced in Jesus, "the image of the invisible God" (Col 1:15). In its noblest form it was love of one another as Jesus himself loved his disciples (Jn 13:34-35). This demands an emptying of oneself (*kenosis*) and a wholehearted openness to our neighbors, especially the lowly, as against a temptation to be egocentric and conceited.

“Live in harmony with one another. Do not be proud but be willing to associate with people of low position. Do not be conceited” (Rom 12:16).

“Finally, all of you. live in harmony with one another, be sympathetic, love as brothers, be compassionate and humble” (1 Pet 3:8).

#### 5.1.1.3 Harmony with Creation

Harmony with nature requires humans to reject an anthropocentric view of the universe, and to respect all of creation as the *vestigia Dei*. This respect generates a harmony which reflects God’s providential love for his creatures. Humanity is called to discover in the universe God’s very presence (Ps 104, 109), and to cocreate with him, making the earth more fruitful.

Since “human greed, leading to misuse and plundering of nature, poses a serious threat to the survival of our human family,” BIRA IV/12, 1991, recalls the urgent responsibility of believers of all faiths to open themselves to the voice of nature and its mystery, to return to the primordial attachment to and respect for nature, to grow in a creation-centered spirituality, to come together in silence and love before creation, to accept that God-given order and harmony of nature, to counteract the forces of exploitation and ruin, because “harmony with nature brings harmony of hearts and harmony in human relationships” (nos. 33-34).

#### 5.1.1.4 Harmony with God

God is the source and summit of all harmony. He is the foundation and the fulfillment of it. Our pilgrimage to God passes through Jesus, our only “way, the truth and the life” (Jn 14.6). With him and under the guidance of the Spirit we are crying in our hearts “*Abba, Father*” (Gal 4:6) and “*Maranatha, Come, Lord Jesus*” (Rev 22:21). Thus, the mystery of Trinitarian life and love is the pattern of all human communion and community life (*GS*, no. 24), leading to final fulfillment.

#### 5.1.2 Spirituality of Communion and Dialogue

Christian spirituality is based on the revelation and experience of the Triune God. God has deigned to reveal himself through his work of creation, redemption and providential animation of a unity in diversity. Our faith in the Triune God calls for a more intensive life of communion and fellowship, which is not confined to one’s own religion or culture but open to embrace all in their diversities.



Based on our faith that we are all children of the one Father, without any distinction of race or religion, endowed with gifts from him for a common journey of life towards a common goal, our spirit of openness to others, as others, for dialogue and cooperation (interreligious dialogue, interreligious collaboration) is a gift enabling us to live out our basic communion with all.

Although this communion must find expression at the international and national level and at the level of religions and cultures, for us Christians it is an obligation. To reduce structural conflicts and realize more harmony within the Church community, there is need for more sharing and participation, for more understanding and forgiveness among the various sections of the Churches. As a Church we are called to a harmonizing of our hierarchical and functional differences. It is only a Church that lives and bears witness to a life of communion and dialogue within itself that can become a witness and a messenger of harmony to the world.

### 5.1.3 Incarnational and Paschal Spirituality as the Way to Harmony

The mystery of God becoming part of our humanity is a call for us to identify ourselves in solidarity with all the realities that need to be harmonized. This becoming another, to be with another and to be for another demands a *kenosis*, an emptying of our own selves, a liberating of ourselves from a greed for power, prestige and wealth. The present age of consumerism needs to be countered continuously by more ascetic ways of self-giving.

On the other hand, the Paschal Mystery, which we celebrate in our liturgy, and consider the source and summit of our Christian journey, is a call for us to accept the way of the cross amidst the conflicting realities of the world. These realities inflict pain and suffering on all those consciously or unconsciously caught in the conflict. Denial of basic human rights, loss of freedom, loss of lives and destruction of valuable property are only some of the visible consequences of conflicts in our regions. Either accepting those sufferings as the cross of our times, or identifying with those who are called to such suffering, is the Christian way to liberation and harmony.

### 5.1.4 A Prophetic Spirituality in the Service of Harmony

Prophets, as servants and witnesses of the truth, can appear to be discordant and disturbing voices in situations that passively accept, if not connivingly compromise with, injustices and inequalities. But the prophetic approach of Jesus Christ to his mission of reconciling the world within itself and to his Father, shows the need of prophets for rec-

conciliation and harmony. Listening to God's word and striving to be faithful to that word, they become eloquent witnesses to the truth in its various forms.

A prophetic spirituality moves us away from listening to the worldly voices, to becoming attentive listeners of God's word. It demands moving from images of exterior organization, power or more secular effectiveness to images of simplicity, humble presence and service. It is the spirituality of the *anawim* in compassion for and solidarity with all, and especially suited to the poor (FABC V, no. 9.5).

Harmony is promoted neither by a blanket-acceptance of the unjust status quo, nor by a compromising with evil, nor by an involuntary tolerance of the other, but by a courageous condemnation of evil in its various forms, and an active tolerance, if not a charitable acceptance, of the other in his or her otherness. Thus, in the building up of a unity in the midst of deep religious and cultural diversities and conflicts, a genuine prophetic spirituality is indispensable.

Harmony is neither a compromising with conflictual realities, nor a complacency about the existing order. Harmony demands a transformative attitude and action, to bring about a change in contemporary society. This can be provided only by a prophetic spirituality which exercises charitable but courageous criticism of the situation.

While stressing the need to know, appreciate and understand existing value systems, BIRA IV/10, 1986, strongly recommends a critical attitude, because existing value systems may also serve to legitimize the status quo perpetuating violence, injustice and the suppression of freedom. Our task in favor of harmony demands more involvement in transforming social structures ( no. 4).

#### 5.1.5 A Profound Prayer Life: A Way to Harmony in Spirituality

The unfolding of harmony in its various stages from within oneself through neighbor and nature to God is also the way of prayer as lived by Jesus. In his earthly life, he was constantly opening himself through the world around him to his Father. Our Christian prayer has to be rediscovered in that model.

In Asian societies, with their wealth of religio-cultural traditions, it would be fitting that forms of Eastern contemplation, desert experience, spiritual recollection and community life be developed, which would help people to grow in their experience of cosmic harmony aspiring for its fullness at the end of time.

FABC II (1979) has already included among the elements of "authentic Christian spirituality a richly developed prayer of the whole person in unity of body-psyche-spirit" (no. 32). It was thus stressing the necessity of harmony in the spiritual life, which requires the growth of the human person towards his full material and spiritual stature. The fulfillment of the human person's aspirations to equality and participation in keeping with human dignity and freedom, and the inner "desire for a loving relationship between God and his people in their daily lives, in their concrete situation: religio-cultural, socio-economic, political," were amply stressed by the assembly (no. 2).

Hence, efforts have to be made to overcome a proneness to a pietistic and basically egocentric mysticism. Christians are to be motivated about their right place in the cosmos and about their respect for God's creation of the human person and nature, to practice a spirituality that promotes social harmony by concrete action. Devotions mostly centered around personal needs cannot promote an other-centered spirituality of harmony.

## **5.2 Theology of Harmony**

The growing disharmony among the various realities of Asia, including the religious and the cultural ones, has been a great concern of all people of good will in the Asian continent. The Christian Churches in Asia, for their part, have tried to contribute their share to the betterment of peoples and to understanding among them, and have promoted harmony through their educational, charitable and other works. But at the same time the Churches feel that, given the richness of their message, mediatory advantage, institutional links, etc., they could have done much more for the stability and harmony among peoples.

In the years following Vatican II, there has been an increasing acknowledgment of the rich religious and cultural resources of Asia, as well as a more intense concern for harmony in Asia. Hence, the disharmonious or conflictual situations in Asia are read or reread not merely with a compassionate and generous heart, but with an openness to the Spirit at work in the realities of Asia, and with an eagerness to do more for harmony in Asia. While consolidating all that the Churches have been doing in the past in favor of harmony, they must seek new ways of improving their contribution.

Situations of conflict and disharmony are not merely sinful relationships, or structures calling for healing and restoration according to our own Christian way of reading and restoring, but also realities revealing God's Spirit at work amidst them. Hence, our theologizing about the restoration of harmony in the disharmonious situation is not an approach

from outside the situation or by an outsider, but by those living and experiencing these conflicts; and also situations calling for a reading and listening to the message God is giving through those realities, however conflictual they may appear.

Hence, a theology of harmony cannot be formed solely within the categories of a traditional Christian theology, by reading Christian revelation and applying its principles to the conflictual situation in Asia. It has to be a reading and reflection of the realities themselves, along with other religious and cultural revelations, as well as of the messages continually emerging from the conflicts themselves. In short, a theology of harmony in Asia can only be a contextual theology, done from within the context of Asia, and either from within such contexts or in deep solidarity with the conflictual situations of Asia. At the same time, it has to be done only in communion with the rich religious and cultural resources of the people experiencing those situations. It can neither be a theology merely addressed to the situations, nor be directed merely towards the situations. It has to be a theology from below, from among those living in such situations. It is in this spirit of deep solidarity with the context, and of an open appreciation of the rich religious and cultural traditions of Asia, that a theology of harmony could even be attempted.

### 5.2.1 A Theology of Harmony as a Rationale for Asian Collaboration

The present Asian situation of conflicts and crises is a chance for and a challenge to the religio-cultural resources of the continent to search for ways of resolving them. There is a growing consciousness among religions and cultures that the conflicts need not be resolved by the use of force or the imposition of foreign structures, but by activating the already existing religio-cultural potential, including that of Christianity, within the continent. Accordingly, there are already movements working with such an ideology.

The Asian Churches, though a small minority in most of our countries, are increasingly aware of the prophetic role they can play amidst the conflictual and critical situations. Realizing full well that this role is not something that they can play alone but can only be a collaboration in a humble but courageous spirit with the other religions and movements of Asia, they need a rationale that establishes their compatibility and potential for collaboration with others in this field.

Enriched by the Western theological traditions of the past, they have, in some small way at least, played a prophetic role of denouncing the various injustices and oppressions, as well as of announcing the values of the Reign of God. Though this mode of action was easily understood and supported by the Christian West, yet it lacked the potential for col-

laborative action with the Asian religio-cultural movements against conflicts. This inability of Christians and their Churches to collaborate more closely with other Asian movements is due primarily to the world-view and the theological vision we Christians have had in the past.

Our theological vision is becoming more and more based on an organic view of the world. As a result, in approaching our Asian realities, anomalies and their resolutions, we find an organic approach that will adequately correspond and respond to the Asian situation.

### 5.2.2 Obstacles Preventing the Church from Being an Agent of Harmony

With a world-view nourished by the Greco-Roman philosophies, and a resultant theology, especially its moral principles about unity, justice, peace and harmony, the Churches tend to resolve conflictual issues by the imposition of law, compulsion and order, by demanding distributive justice, and by condemning people as outcasts to irremediable situations.

Besides this, our arrogant and absolutist stance of being mere moral judges and critics, without much collaboration with others to resolve conflicts, made us appear like isolated Pharisees. Thus, the Church was in some way handicapped by its theology and pastoral approach in its attempt to collaborate for peace and harmony.

### 5.2.3 A Call for a New Ethic of Harmony

If Christians and their Churches are to become effective instruments of reconciliation and harmony among peoples, there arises a need to revise some of the ethical and moral values regarding truth, justice and freedom. These values were meant to preserve the ethic and aesthetic of right relationships in the original harmony. They were meant to regulate and shape the relationship and collaboration of people in favor of harmony. But, unfortunately, these values have been blunted in history by institutions and their laws. They have lost their original radicality as taught in the Gospels, and have made easy compromises in the name of conformism and obedience.

These values have to be rediscovered as taught by Christ in his Gospel, and enriched by the understanding available in the religio-cultural heritages of the Asian peoples. Because these values are urgently needed for healing our Asian situations of disharmony, Asian Christians and their Churches need a greater sensitivity to violations of truth, justice and freedom. Their zeal and action in favor of harmony will be proportionate to that moral and ethical sensitivity. Courageous denunciations of injustices, inequalities and oppression are facilitated by such sensitivity.

Calling for a new ethic of harmony which emphasizes the values of truth, justice and human freedom should not be misunderstood as a reduction of Christianity to a set of ethical and moral values, or to a new liberalism. On the contrary, such emphasis will make Asian Christianity more faithful to the Gospel and more relevant to the Asian need for harmony.

#### 5.2.4 A Rereading of Revelation Towards a Theology of Harmony

While cherishing the theological traditions which we have inherited from the past, genuine efforts are being made to reread the Christian Revelation, especially the Gospels, in our Asian religio-cultural and socio-political contexts. Asian theology, which is also at the service of revelation and guided by the Spirit, must be encouraged to rediscover and articulate anew the Church's faith in Jesus Christ as the One sent by the Father to reconcile, restore and recapitulate the whole universe. That is to say, we must evolve a Cosmic Christology of harmony. Only by basing itself on such a Christology, will the theology of the Church go beyond its institutional concerns to understand the Church essentially as a centrifugal Church, open to the whole universe and present in and for the universe (Cosmic Ecclesiology). Only with such an ecclesiological vision will our concern for religio-cultural and socio-political realities broaden from an ecclesio-central focus to a truly theocentric focus.

If we can speak at all about the Church's mission for harmony and about a missiology, its target of commitment and action has to be, not an ecclesial target, but that eschatological fulfillment that is coterminous with final harmony and peace in the world.

#### 5.2.5 Christ as the Sacrament of the New Harmony

When sin is understood as the disturbance of the original harmony of creation and Jesus Christ as the One who was sent to reconcile and reestablish the harmony, attention is drawn to his central message and act, namely, the proclamation of the values of the Reign of God and his Paschal Mystery of life through death. For the values he proclaimed as love, truth, justice and the dignity of the human being, he gave his life, died for them. It was a commitment unto death. In understanding Christ as the sacrament of the new harmony inaugurated by him, we should understand ourselves as his disciples in our situation for these values.

If the conflictual realities of our Asian situation demand a self-giving love, a courageous stance for truth and justice and the dignity of the human person, then Asian Christians cannot but be active agents for love, truth, justice and human dignity. Christ as the sacrament of the new harmony can be realized only by our courageous witness to these values.

## 5.2.6 The Church as the Servant-Sacrament of Harmony

In Vatican II, the Church defined herself as a sacrament of unity: union with God and among men and women. Basing itself on the foundation of Trinitarian unity, the Church proclaimed itself as an effective sign among the nations of communion with God and among humankind. It also defined itself as a salvific servant for the coming of the Kingdom. In this combined perspective of a sacrament of unity and servant of the Kingdom, the Church needs to rediscover its humble but messianic role in Asia.

Within its role of being the universal sacrament of salvation, the Asian Churches must reunderstand and situate their local roles as sacrament of harmony radiating a reconciling grace on conflictual realities. They need to purify, renew and reform their vision and mission, so as to become more effective within the religio-cultural realities of the place.

Sometimes, there are still elements within the Church, vestiges of an earlier period and mentality, which cause disharmonious, or even conflicting, situations within the Church, and hinder or weaken its mission for harmony. These have to be resolved with a harmonious vision in the theology of the local Church. Thus the religious, cultural and ideological pluralism of Asia is both a challenge to live and work with the others for harmony, as well as a force to bring about an ecclesiology of harmony.

The values of the Kingdom — love, mercy, forgiveness, justice, compassion, unity, peace, as proclaimed by Jesus Christ — are the seeds of the new harmony inaugurated by him. And in order to sow these seeds or rather offer them to others in all humility, devoid of any triumphalism, requires a Church that is harmonious within itself.

The vision of Christ as the sacrament of the new harmony, and of the Church as its servant-sacrament, excludes all forms of conformism to conflictual situations and compromise with values contrary to love, truth, justice and the dignity of human person.

## 5.3 An Active Commitment to Harmony

Every Christian has a mission to help restore harmony in this world of tension and conflict. We have not only been given peace. We are called to be peacemakers. Having experienced what it means to be a new creation, what it is to enter into a harmonious relationship within ourselves, with God, with our fellow human beings and with the rest of creation, we are empowered to proclaim and to share the harmony we have experienced. We can fulfill this as individuals, as a Church-community and in collaboration with others.

### 5.3.1 A Call for Self-Examination

There is an urgent need for the Churches in Asia to make a self-examination of their world-view, their faith-vision, their inner life, their attitudes, their relationships, their structures and programs of pastoral action. The Second Vatican Council sets us an example in this direction. The council was primarily a self-examination by the Church of its mystery in relation to God and his world. It gave a radical description of the Church as a sacrament of intimate union with God and of the unity of humankind; it is a sign and instrument of such union and unity (*LG*, no. 1). The Church must first embody and realize in itself this union and unity of which it is a sign. Then it must radiate this harmony in its relationship with the world.

### 5.3.2 The Need for a New Self-Understanding of the Church

Institutionalization has made the Churches in Asia insular and self-serving structures, rendering it almost impossible for them to enter into the mainstream of history, culture and the national life of the people. The Church has to go through a fresh process of understanding itself and re-identifying itself in relation to the concrete communities — ethnic, religious — whose life and struggle we share.

### 5.3.3 Focus on the Formation of Christian Community

The Christian community has to appreciate this new vision of harmony and manifest it in the way it lives its daily life. The mission of the community is in a way a communication of its own inner life of harmony. A community that is beset with continual tensions and conflicts cannot fulfill its mission of bringing harmony to the world.

Formation for a life of harmony in the Christian community can take different forms, depending on the circumstances. One of the most effective ways is perhaps to make the parish a communion of communities wherein the faith-vision can be meaningfully lived and translated into action. In the small communities within the parish, prayerful reflection over the word of God, against the background of the multireligious, multi-ethnic community we share with others, will make the members more sensitive to the problems of social injustice, discrimination, conflicts, etc. The members will thus be enabled to forge ties with other groups of other religious traditions, and collaborate with them in matters of justice and peace.

### 5.3.4 A Prophetic Leadership of the Community

Every disciple of Jesus and the whole Christian community has to play a prophetic role, i.e., a liberative leadership in the spirit of the Gospel



and the praxis of Jesus. Different groups, such as men, women, youth, etc., need to be formed in this kind of leadership; and it has to be an ongoing process in the parish community through prayer sessions, discussions, seminars, etc. The liturgical life of the parish can be an effective instrument to instill in the people the vision of harmony and develop in them leadership with a true ecumenical spirit.

#### 5.3.4.1 Prophetic Leaders

We must develop prophetic leaders among both the clergy and laity who can spread this broader vision. Such training in leadership must become a part of the seminary training of our priests. The formation of lay leaders in this new vision of harmony should take place in different levels in the Church. A systematic training with regular courses, seminars, etc., is an urgent need. The model and inspiration for Christian leadership is Jesus himself and his praxis; it was a liberating leadership in the sense that it was contextual, prophetic, ready to face conflicts in solidarity with the oppressed.

Teams of resource persons, or task forces, need to be developed to effectively conduct the training programs, be they in the diocese or the region or the country.

#### 5.3.4.2 Formation in the Family

The disharmony in our society often has its roots in the disharmony in the home. When there is harmony in every home, the nation will be peaceful. In a family centered on God and suffused with love, the primacy of relationships over things, as well as the correct relationship with things will be fostered. The family should be the first school of a dialogic way of life. Respect for the faith of our brethren of other religious traditions, and concern for issues of social justice, need to be initiated in the family. Religious and social contacts, participation and involvement in various activities and programs that build up a community of brotherhood need to be encouraged.

#### 5.3.4.3 Training for Conflict

Dealing effectively with conflictual situations is a social skill which must be learned. If we as Christians and promoters of harmony want to be effective in our work, we must acquire the skills needed for this delicate task. Training programs for leaders, clergy and laity, must be devised by experts in the field and made use of by all who wish to engage in the task.

## 6. Conclusion

We have seen some of the common, national and regional problems that the nations of Asia face today. They can be summarized in the phrase "a lack of harmony." We have reviewed some attempts to promote harmony and looked at the resources that our Asian cultures provide for the promotion of *harmony*. Above all, there is an Asian approach to reality, a world-view, wherein the whole is the sum-total of the web of relationships and interaction of the various parts with each other, in a word, *harmony*, a word which resonates with all Asian cultures. The parts are understood in terms of their mutual dependence. Efforts to promote harmony need to draw on the resources of our Asian cultural and religious life, the roots from which the modern societies of Asia draw their sustenance. We have looked at some of these resources in the cultures and religions of Asia, including Christianity which in its origins is, after all, an Asian religion. Finally, we have tried to indicate some broad outlines of a spirituality and a theology of harmony and indicated some directions for a practical commitment to harmony.

This is not a final word on harmony. It is rather a tentative beginning and an invitation to all to work out a theology of harmony, and a commitment to action in the context of their own national and local situations. At the same time we realize that the promotion of harmony and commitment to action is not the preserve of the small Christian community of Asia. It is a common task, and we invite our brothers and sisters of all the different religious and cultural traditions of Asia to join us in this effort to bring human society and the cosmos, with each of us men and women and all other beings, into the Ultimate Harmony.

**Published March 1996**

\* \* \* \*

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: FABC, 16 Caine Road, Hong Kong.

## **The Theological Advisory Commission (April, 1995)**

### **The Bishops' Committee**

Most Rev. Teodoro Bacani, auxiliary bishop of Manila, Philippines  
Most Rev. Gali Bali, bishop of Guntur, India  
Most Rev. Vincent Ri Byong-ho, bishop of Jeon Ju, Korea

### **The Members of the Commission**

#### **Bangladesh**

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

#### **India**

Rev. Matthew Vellanickal  
Rev. Felix Wilfred (Secretary)

#### **Indonesia**

Rev. Robert Hardawirana, S.J.

#### **Japan**

(to be appointed)

#### **Korea**

Rev. Matthias Ri Yoon Hoon

#### **Malaysia-Singapore-Brunei**

Rev. William Goh

#### **Nepal**

Rev. John Locke, S.J.

#### **Pakistan**

Rev. Lawrence Saldanha

#### **Philippines**

Rev. Efren O. Rivera, O.P.  
Most Rev. Crisostomo Yalung

#### **Republic of China**

Rev. Mark Fang, S.J.

#### **Sri Lanka**

Rev. S.J. Emmanuel

#### **Thailand**

Rev. Francis Cais, S.D.B.

#### **Invited Expert**

Dr. Georg Evers

#### **TAC Secretariat**

Rev. Edwin Mercado

## FABC Papers:

- No. 69. The Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences: Orientations, Challenges and Impact. A Background Paper of the Sixth Plenary Assembly of the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences, 1995.
70. Asia: The Struggle for Life in the Midst of Death and Destruction, by S. Arokiasamy. A Position Paper for the Sixth Plenary Assembly of the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences, 1995.
71. Jesus Christ: His Service to Life, by Luis Antonio G. Tagle. A Position Paper for the Sixth Plenary Assembly of the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences, 1995.
72. Sixth Plenary Assembly: Workshop Discussion Guides
  - a. Prayer, Contemplation and Holiness: the Church, Community of Christian Discipleship in its Service to Life, by Catalino Arevalo.
  - b. Dialogue at the Service of Life, by Michael Amaladoss.
  - c. Christian Discipleship in Asia: Protecting Human Life, by Francisco F. Claver.
  - d. A Life-Giving Asian Spirituality for the Service of Life, by Thomas H. Green.
  - e. The Christian Vocation to Promote Justice, Peace and the Integrity of Creation, by Sean McDonagh.
  - f. The Family and the Child: The Asian Family's Struggle for Life, by Catherine Bernard Haliburn.
  - g. The Struggle for Life: Asian Youth, by Leo Perera.
  - h. Women and the Church's Service to Life in Asia, by Amelia Vasquez.
  - i. Religious Life: A Service to Life in Asia Today, by Virginia Fabella and Quirico Pedregosa, et al.
  - j. Christian Discipleship in Work and Profession — A Service to Life in Asia Today, by Cora Mateo.
  - k. Formation and Education for Christian Discipleship in Asia, by Wendy Louis.
  - l. The Church in Asia and the Ministry of the Media and the Arts at the Service of Life, by Gaston Roberge.
  - m. Integral Human Development and Justice and Peace at the Service of Life in the Context of Asia.
73. Journeying Together in Faith with Migrant Workers in Asia, by Graziano Battistella. A Background Paper for the Sixth Plenary Assembly of the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences, 1995.
74. Christian Discipleship in Asia Today: Service to Life. A Report of the Sixth Plenary Assembly of the Federation of Asia Bishops' Conferences, 1995.
75. Asian Christian Perspectives on Harmony. The Theological Advisory Commission of the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences, 1996.