

Seventh Plenary Assembly: Workshop Discussion Guide

**A RENEWED MISSION OF LOVE AND SERVICE
TO THE INDIGENOUS/TRIBAL PEOPLES OF ASIA**

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by Sebastian Karotemprel
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the Indigenous Peoples of Asia, Hua Hin, Thailand, September 3-8,
1995

**I. THE INDIGENOUS/TRIBAL PEOPLES AND A
RENEWED CHURCH IN ASIA**

BY

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1. INTRODUCTION

Ever since Vatican II, the Church in Asia has been going through a process of renewal. The Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences (FABC) has been a major factor in this process of ecclesial renewal. The recent Special Assembly for Asia of the Synod of Bishops was another very important moment of self-renewal for the Church in Asia. The recent presentation of the synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Ecclesia in Asia* by Pope John Paul II in New Delhi to the representatives of the whole Catholic Church in Asia has already initiated a fresh attempt at continuing the renewal within the Church and her ministry to the peoples of Asia.

Among the many peoples of Asia, the Indigenous/Tribal People are in a special way related to the life and mission of the Church. A significant number of Indigenous/Tribal People have accepted the Gospel message, and they still continue to do so. Hence, it is important to examine the Church's mission to the Indigenous/Tribal Peoples of Asia and the areas of renewal called for in this connection.

This discussion guide has been prepared for the workshops of the Seventh Plenary Assembly of the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences (FABC), convening, January 3-12, 2000, at "Baan Phu Waan," the pastoral formation center of the Archdiocese of Bangkok, Sampran, Thailand, on the theme: "A Renewed Church in Asia: A Mission of Love and Service."

2. INDIGENOUS / TRIBAL PEOPLES

Before we proceed with the discussion of the Church's mission to the Indigenous/Tribal Peoples of Asia, we need to clarify the terms. Several terms have been used in the past to refer to Indigenous/Tribal Peoples: Tribals, Indigenous Peoples, Animists, Primal Peoples, Peoples of Oral Tradition, Pre-literate Peoples, Linguistic and Cultural Minorities, Peoples of Traditional Religion, *Ureinwohner*, and *Adivasi* (both meaning original inhabitants).

All these terms have connotations that are either incomplete, non-comprehensive, pejorative, or even sociologically unacceptable. Besides, no single term enjoys international acceptance. Countries such as India and Bangladesh, because of possible political repercussion, reject the term "indigenous" used by the UN, since indigenous peoples have the right to self-determination. "Tribals" in some areas of the world has a negative connotation of being uncivilized. The term "animists" does not correspond to facts of religious beliefs of Indigenous/Tribal Peoples. "*Ureinwohner*," or "*Adivasi*" (original inhabitants of a place) again does not correspond to geographical facts. Many Tribal Peoples of Northeast India are simply not the original inhabitants of the place where they are now.

Other terms mentioned above suffer from the same or from similar conceptual inadequacies and geographic accuracy. Sometimes, Indigenous/Tribal People are called ethnic minorities. But in some areas they form the majority of the population, or were so in the past. But gradually they were reduced to minority status due to large scale influx of non-tribal people with advanced commercial and administrative skills.

3. TOWARDS A DEFINITION OF INDIGENOUS/TRIBAL PEOPLES

Even though no special term encompasses the whole Indigenous/Tribal reality, there is no denying the fact that at present there are such peoples on the globe. We may say that "indigeneness," "indigeneity," or "tribalness" refers to a state of mind, a particular social organization, a geographic situation, a distinctive world view, a special approach to life, a set of values as guide to life, a way of relating to nature and the world of spirits.

Unfortunately, there is no single term to express all the above connotations or concepts. Hence, we are forced to continue to use inadequate terms to express what is meant by the sum total of all the above concepts.

a) Social Organization

In social organization the Indigenous/Tribal Peoples are divided into

family, village, clan and tribe. They are socially compact units ruled by tradition, taboos and customs. In the Indigenous/Tribal social set-up, the community has priority over the individual. But Indigenous/Tribal communities are highly democratic in their relationships and dealings.

Each Indigenous/Tribal group constitutes a compact social unit. Although there are common characteristics that form a common denominator, geographic, linguistic and administrative isolation has left them with no operative common denominator, such as is found in some advanced societies. Inter-tribal isolation has often led to ethnic conflicts and ethnic cleansing. They have given rise to the negative concept of "tribalism," as distinct from "tribalness."

b) A Distinctive World View

Indigenous/Tribal Peoples have a world view distinct from other Peoples. They are deeply in touch with the world of spirits, and they recognize a supreme deity. They look forward to a specific eschatological status of being with their ancestors. Their moral life is dictated by taboos, placating and propitiating the spirits and the ancestors. Many Indigenous/Tribal Peoples have also legends regarding some form of fall from "grace" or "a blissful" existence, and have messianic expectations of salvation and redemption.

c) A Nature-Bound People

All Indigenous/Tribal Peoples are nature-bound and earth-bound. Nature and the earth are quasi-sacred realities. This explains why they consider some mountains, groves, rivers, rocks, etc., as sacred places and objects of fear, reverence, and veneration. The divine, the spiritual in some form or another, animates nature for them.

d) Oral Tradition as Means of Transmission

Oral tradition, as distinct from a written tradition is another very important characteristic of Indigenous/Tribal Peoples. The accumulated wisdom and heritage of the ancestors are transmitted to succeeding generation by means of oral tradition in stories, epics, myths and symbols. Hence, their philosophy of life is not expressed in elaborate philosophical concepts and systems, but in stories, symbols, symbolic actions and gestures.

e) Succession, Inheritance, Authority

Indigenous/Tribal societies have diverse ways of succession and inheritance. They are regulated by such social arrangements as the

matrilineal, matriarchal or patriarchal systems of government of the family. Laws of inheritance are determined by the particular system of family organization. The exercise of authority, and family responsibilities, are also regulated by the particular system that is followed by an Indigenous/Tribal group.

Indigenous/Tribal existence is imprinted by the above-mentioned world view; and that makes it distinct from other peoples and believers of what may be called classical religions. Besides, factors such as subsistence economy, absence of script and written texts, and geographic isolation did not allow them to enter sufficiently into such cultural exchanges and interaction with other Peoples that would transform their way of life. This has often led to social, cultural and economic marginalization, and even to military, political and economic exploitation.

4. A DEMOGRAPHIC PICTURE OF INDIGENOUS / TRIBAL PEOPLES OF ASIA

According to Barrett, there are nearly 260 million "Tribal religionists" in the world,¹ by the end of 1999. But this number does not include Indigenous/Tribal Peoples who have embraced other religions, such as Hinduism, Islam, or Christianity. All across the Asian continent, from Pakistan to the Philippines, there are considerable concentrations of Indigenous/Tribal Peoples.

a) Problems of Census

Exact figures of the Indigenous/Tribal Peoples in Asia are difficult to come by because of logistical problems of census-taking in remote areas, manipulation of the census mechanisms by interested parties for political or religious motives, or down-right falsification of census figures. We must also keep in mind that Peoples of Indigenous/Tribal origin, due to many factors, such as social interaction, migration, cultural osmosis, economic, political, administrative and modernization processes at work in all societies, have crossed the line of liminality of indigeneity or tribalness into the dominant society. They, however, retain several tribal, anthropological and psychological characteristics and traits.

b) Indigenous/Tribal Presence in Asia

Pakistan has about a million Indigenous/Tribal Peoples, which is less than 1% of the total population. India on the other hand has about a hundred

¹ David B. Barrett and Todd M. Johnson, "Annual Statistical Table on Global Mission: 1999", in IBMR, 23 (1999), pp. 24-25.

million Indigenous/Tribal Peoples. Most of them live in the so-called "tribal belt" of North India and Northeast India. Northern Myanmar (Burma) and Thailand have a considerable number of Indigenous/Tribal Peoples. Indonesia is another country that has a significant number of Indigenous/Tribal Peoples and those who have crossed the dividing line between indigeneity and non-indigeneity. It is difficult to venture into actual numbers since the basic principles and methods of quantifying the population are different from country to country, or are not accurate.

The Philippines has about seven million Indigenous/Tribal Peoples, which constitutes about 10% of its population. In Taiwan, the number of Indigenous/Tribal Peoples is very small. Government statistics put the number of Indigenous/Tribal Peoples of Northern Thailand at close to one million. In Bangladesh the Indigenous/Tribal population forms about 1% of the total population, namely, about 1.2 million. Japan has a small Indigenous/Tribal population, particularly in Okinawa.

In conclusion, we may say that about 10% of the total population of Asia is Indigenous/Tribal. This estimate is close to the estimate made by David Barrett, who is a leading specialist in missionary statistics. This number would be higher if we count peoples of Indigenous/Tribal origin who over the centuries have passed from the Indigenous/Tribal social classification into other dominant social groups. All this means that there is a sizeable number of people who may be classified as Indigenous/Tribal.

There is no doubt that all the above-mentioned factors have an impact upon evangelization work in Asia. They will also influence the kind of local Churches that emerge in the various countries of Asia where there are Indigenous/Tribal Peoples. Evangelization methods, Church organization, liturgical and theological inculturation, models of spirituality and consecrated life will have to take into account the world view of Indigenous/Tribal communities and cultures.

5. EVANGELIZATION AMONG THE INDIGENOUS/TRIBAL

In some countries of Asia evangelization work among the Indigenous/Peoples began in the XVI and XVII centuries already. This was the case in Timor and in some of the Indonesian islands, like Flores. In India, Myanmar (Burma) and Thailand missionary work among the Indigenous/Tribal Peoples began mostly in XIX centuries.

In general, during the XVI - XVIII centuries most missionaries directed their efforts towards the conversion of the dominant communities in Asia, or the backward classes, like the Dalits in India. It was mostly during the last century and this century that missionaries discovered the existence

of Indigenous/Tribal communities and began preaching and conversion work among them.

The encounter between the Church and Indigenous/Tribal Peoples has been variously interpreted by non-Christian historians, sociologists, Christian theologians, mission historians, and by Indigenous/Tribal Peoples themselves. To be fair, one must listen to all of them to come to an objective interpretation of the impact of the encounter between the Gospel and the Indigenous/Tribal Peoples.

a) Positive and Negative Aspects of the Encounter

Despite many shortcomings, failures, and at times even negative attitudes to local cultures, most will grant that much of what Indigenous/Tribal Peoples are today is due to their encounter with the Church and its faith. On the other hand, missionaries acted upon the theological and missiological presuppositions of their times. As a result not enough attention was given to local cultures and the insertion of cultural symbols into Christian life, liturgy and theology. By and large, the models of Church, liturgy, theology, spirituality, and organization were understandably inspired by the Western Church. Not much attention was given to a fruitful dialogue with the local cultures, their oral traditions, their underlying philosophies and their world views.

On the positive side, in many Asian countries, missionaries championed the cause of Indigenous/Tribal Peoples. The Gospel introduced a new leaven of ferment among them that had far-reaching impact not only on their religious beliefs but also on the whole spectrum of Indigenous/Tribal life.

The encounter of Indigenous/Tribal Peoples of Asia with the Gospel has been a moment of salvation for some of them, otherwise destined to misery, or even extinction. This is the case of the Indigenous/Tribal Peoples of Chotanagpur in central India, says one of them. The Church has been the instrument of divine intervention for them.²

b) Support for Indigenous/Tribal Identity

The Church has often salvaged Indigenous/Tribal identity from extinction or the perpetuation of their status of economic, political and cultural marginalization. It is obvious when there is an assimilation of an ethnic group into the popular religiosity of the dominant community, the

² Cf. Abp. Telesphore Toppo, *Intervention at the Special Assembly for Europe of the Synod of Bishops in Rome*, in *L'Osservatore Romano*, 6 October, 1999, p.9.

ethnic group loses its ethnic identity. The same process takes place in the case of Indigenous/Tribal languages. To begin with, these languages often had no script. The absence of script had many implications and consequences. It is obvious that written language and literature are major factors in preserving any ethnic identity.

By introducing script into Indigenous/Tribal languages, and creating the grammatical and lexical infrastructures of Indigenous/Tribal languages, the missionaries contributed to the preservation and strengthening of Indigenous/Tribal identity among Peoples of Asia. Again, by building up a considerable body of secular, religious, and historical literature, the ethnic identity has been permanently established in a number of cases.

Often majority cultural communities imposed their language on other ethnic minorities and groups as a means of silent absorption, assimilation, or marginalization. By bringing the benefits of literacy, school and university education at all levels, the Indigenous/Tribal Peoples have been empowered to resist attempts by majority cultural communities from destroying the Indigenous/Tribal identity altogether.

c) New Political and Social Consciousness

Education brought political consciousness among Indigenous/Tribal Peoples. As a result, Indigenous/Tribal Peoples in India have been able to carve out Indigenous/Tribal states, where Indigenous/Tribal Peoples are themselves the masters of their destiny. In order to have viable administrative, political and economic units, Indigenous/Tribal Peoples, who lived in isolation not only from the majority communities, but also from one another, now had to come together. Thus intertribal rivalries and conflicts, even though not yet fully eliminated, have begun to decrease.

d) Indigenization of the Local Churches

Missionary work in Asia has given rise to a number of local Churches among Indigenous/Tribal Peoples. Over several generations, the "missionary dominated or guided" Churches have undergone a process of what may be called "indigenization," or "tribalization." Local Churches have undergone the process of a spontaneous inculturation in the several areas of liturgy, catechesis, Church organization, role of the laity in Church's life, etc. The indigenization of the Church's leadership, religious life and clergy has given some distinct tribal characteristics to the local Churches themselves. The "tribalization" of the Church is having a great impact upon tribal identity and its relationship with the majority communities. They have begun to accept the Indigenous/Tribal communities as equals in the field of education, health care, political activities, etc. The dominant communities can no longer

ignore the Indigenous/Tribal Peoples.

e) Recognition of the Dignity of Indigenous/Tribal Peoples

In the past, Indigenous/Tribal communities were either totally ignored, or kept as anthropological museum pieces, or as objects of commercial exploitation, cheap labor for industries run by majority communities, or Asia domestic labor force. Often they were alienated from their own land, or forced to witness the exploitation of their forest and mineral wealth. The conflict in East Timor is an example. Large deposits of petroleum are said to be lying in the territorial waters around, and hence the economic interest of the dominant community of not letting the Indigenous/Tribal Peoples of Timor to be independent.

By going to the Indigenous/Tribal Peoples, the Church in world and deed was recognizing and promoting the dignity, equality and human rights of Indigenous/Tribal Peoples. So far, no other community has shown such concern for the Indigenous/Tribal Peoples. This, we would think, is a unique result of the encounter between the Gospel and the Indigenous/Tribal Peoples. The “tribalization” of the Church is an eloquent proclamation of the dignity and equality of all Peoples. This fact is clearly exemplified in the case of Bishop Carlos Filipe Ximenes Belo of East Timor, and its Catholic Church. The Church has been one of the few social forces to support the dignity of the Indigenous/Tribal Peoples and their human rights.

f) A “Catholic” World View

The encounter with the Gospel has enabled the Indigenous/Tribal Peoples to accelerate the process of emerging out of tribal isolation. The Church is an international community, and anyone becoming a member of the Church immediately is brought into contact with an international community and, consequently, millenniums-old traditions of learning, models of government, philosophies, art, diplomacy, and resources unmatched by any other institution in the world.

The Church has brought in a new world view, not to supplant but to supplement the cosmic Indigenous/Tribal worldview. That in turn has its repercussions in tribal self-awareness and relationships among themselves and majority groups. It has set in motion a process of interaction at many levels.

g) Support for Coping with Modernization

Especially during the last two centuries, the Indigenous/Tribal Peoples had to face an accelerated process and impact of modernization, with all its

positive and negative consequences. The process of modernization has always been at work in history, and it will continue to do so. It is an inevitable process. No community can shield itself from the process.

The process of modernization has suddenly overtaken all Indigenous/Tribal communities during the last one or two centuries with extraordinary momentum. Coping with the process of modernization is a difficult task, especially for Indigenous/Tribal communities that lived in relative isolation and in a state of marginalization. Communities can be swept away from their religious and cultural values in the face of the forces of modernization. The Church has enabled the Indigenous/Tribal societies caught up in the maelstrom of modernization to cope with the forces of modernization, without completely losing their cultural, social and religious equilibrium.

In many cases, the Church, which might even have unwittingly or unavoidably contributed to the modernization process, has also equipped Tribal Peoples with a new or an additional set of values to preserve their traditional religious and cultural values, though not always with success. The Church has provided the Indigenous/Tribal Peoples with a new community to belong to, and a new cultural home to live in, and has been able to minimize the negative impact of modernization. Obviously, no individual agency, not even the Church, controls all the forces at work in the process of modernization, such as government, ideologies, philosophies of life, the media and other social factors.

6. PROBLEMS, CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES OF EVANGELIZATION

The problems facing Indigenous/Tribal Peoples of Asia vary according to countries where they live, and their social, economic, cultural and political situations. So too, the problems and opportunities for evangelization are different in the various countries of Asia.

a) Alienation and Marginalization

Economically, culturally and politically powerful communities continue to push Indigenous/Tribal Peoples from their own natural habitats and lands into the ever farther geographical and cultural periphery. Thus, land alienation is a frequent occurrence. Large-scale migration by powerful communities with sufficient investment funds and purchasing power continues to acquire Indigenous/Tribal lands, sources of land-based wealth, and instruments of commerce. Indigenous/Tribal Peoples are scarcely aware of the extent of alienation and marginalization that is taking place.

The Church can be a powerful agent of conscientization of the Indi-

genous/Tribal populations in their given areas. The Church can provide legal aid to support the cause of Indigenous/Tribal Peoples. It can unite scattered Indigenous/Tribal populations for more effective and collective actions against the process of alienation and marginalization.

b) Cultural Exploitation and Imposition

A number of Indigenous/Tribal populations are subjected to cultural exploitation and imposition. The powerful dominant communities do not always recognize the values of Indigenous/Tribal cultures. Since indigenous/Tribal cultures are preliterate, they are considered to be substandard, and, thus given no chance to grow and develop.

Besides such cultural exploitation, there is often cultural imposition. The language, literature, art and script of the dominant cultures are often imposed upon Indigenous/Tribal Peoples against their will. As a result, their own languages and artistic expressions have little chance of growing.

The Church can appeal to the good sense of the majority communities, and support the legitimate cultural rights of the Indigenous/Tribal Peoples. It can promote Indigenous/Tribal cultures by strengthening their infrastructures through education, research, publications and literary works.

c) Political Emargination

In some countries of Asia Indigenous/Tribal Peoples are treated as second-class citizens, or no citizens at all. Some governments do not even grant full citizenship to Indigenous/Tribal Peoples. Some times they are considered to be enemies of the country, strategic and ecological liabilities.

In some countries Indigenous/Tribal Peoples have special privileges, such as a certain number of reserved seats in legislative assemblies and parliaments, and of government services. At times, these are denied to Indigenous/Tribal Peoples on arbitrary grounds, or for purely technical reasons. Such discrimination perpetuates the political, cultural and economic backwardness of Indigenous/Tribal Peoples.

Some Asian countries have governmental commissions for the protection and promotion of ethnic minorities and similar groups of people. The Church can work through Minority Commissions established in some countries for better mutual understanding between peoples, and the removal of prejudices, negative images and perceptions that they have of each other.

The Church can also conscientize Indigenous/Tribal Peoples about their rights and duties according to the constitutions and laws of each country.

The Church can give moral support to political struggle to obtain legal and economic benefits, privileges and rights.

d) Economic Exploitation and Discrimination

Wherever Indigenous/Tribal Peoples form a minority, many forms of economic exploitation and discrimination are practised. Their mineral-rich lands are easily taken over by governments with little, or meager, compensation. Little of the profits are ploughed back into developmental and educational projects in favor of Indigenous/Tribal Peoples. Mega-dams and industrial projects are planned in areas that are inhabited mostly by Indigenous/Tribal Peoples. They lead to the displacement of peoples. Alternative settlements, housing colonies and adequate compensation are not offered to them. Powerful financial-industrial-military lobbies tend to trample over the rights of Indigenous/Tribal Peoples because they are supported by political and economic power.

The Church can join other voluntary organizations in supporting the rights of Indigenous/Tribal Peoples, keeping in mind the ultimate benefits for all concerned. The Church can help to illumine and form the moral and social conscience of governments, financiers and industrialists, to rise above exclusively capitalistic considerations. The human person must be the point of departure and arrival of all economic, industrial and political planning and considerations.

e) Mediatlional and Reconciling Role

Often there are deep-seated historical suspicions and rivalries among Indigenous/Tribal Peoples themselves and with dominant communities. Intertribal hatreds and conflicts with majority communities, and secessionist movements are frequent in some parts of Asia. Insurgency and terrorism are the last resort of some Indigenous/Tribal Peoples and minority groups.

The Church can act as an agent of mediation and reconciliation, wherever that is possible. Both sides could be persuaded to look at the long-term benefits of reconciliation of views and interests, rather than the continuing of conflicts. The benefits of industrial and developmental works and projects must be reconciled with the human rights of vulnerable sections of peoples and their human promotion. Thus, the Church's spiritual ministry of mediation and reconciliation will be extended to the sphere of politics and economics.

The Church should also mediate between different sections of society, when hostilities arise between the more advanced members of Indigenous/Tribal People who have become Christians, and the less advanced members

of the same group who have remained in their traditional religious practices. The Church should also reassure by word and deed that their world view and the core values of their culture will not be replaced by other world views and values, but instead respected and preserved among the Christian members. Thus, it will avoid intratribal tensions and the rise of anti-Christian revival movements.

f) Biblical Values and Values of Cosmic Cultures

There are many values of the culture of Indigenous/Tribal Peoples that are very close to the Biblical world view and values. Communion and consequently community values are central to Indigenous/Tribal Peoples. Communion within the tribe or a given indigenous group, communion with the earth and nature in general, communion with the ancestors and the progenitor, communion with the world of spirits and, finally, communion with the creator God are characteristics of most Indigenous/Tribal Peoples of Asia and elsewhere.

The Judaeo-Christian tradition, as reflected in the Old and New Testaments, holds the above values of cosmic cultures as very important. In cosmic cultures the transcendent and the visible merge into one. The visible is transfused by the transcendent, and hence there is no separation of the one from the other. Hence, the Church must adapt itself to the Indigenous/Tribal society in the manner it thinks and functions, namely, a community of communion among all its members, more egalitarian than hierarchical, a community where all are listened to and all are cared for. The Christian community among the Indigenous/Tribal People must grow to be more a participatory community rather than a pyramidal community.

g) Indigenous/Tribal Symbols and Christian Liturgy

The Indigenous/Tribal world view is not expressed through abstract philosophical or theological concepts. Instead, people of Indigenous/Tribal origin express religious and spiritual ideas and sentiments through stories, myths and symbols. They are also means of communicating religious sentiments to others.

The local Churches of Asia which are mostly made up of Indigenous/Tribal Peoples have done little to absorb into their liturgy and the celebration of the sacraments elements of Indigenous/Tribal cultures. So far we have been using western liturgical patterns and symbols which are far from being intelligible to Indigenous/Tribal Peoples. Little has been done by way of research, study, and application of elements of Indigenous/Tribal cultures and symbols to Christian liturgy.

Whatever may be the historical circumstances and justification for the introduction of Roman liturgy among Indigenous/Tribal Peoples, these do not exist today. Asian local Churches must make serious efforts in this direction, and not merely be content with some Indigenous/Tribal dances inserted into the entrance or offertory processions. The imposition of the structure of the Roman liturgy as the basis of all liturgical inculturation by Rome is not at all helpful in the continuing process of inculturation.

Christian liturgy should not only inculturate itself into cosmic cultures and their symbols but also introduce Indigenous/Tribal Peoples into universal values and symbols. Hence, inculturation implies not only the inculturation of Christian faith and worship into particular cultures, but also inculturation of particular cultures into a universal, "catholic" culture. It is a two-way traffic of mutual inculturation. In this manner Indigenous/Tribal Peoples are helped to go beyond their clan and tribe, and see themselves as a transnational "catholic" community.

h) Theological Inculturation

As far as the Asian local Churches are concerned, theologizing until very recently was dependent on western models and categories of expression. Some effort has been made to theologize using models and categories of the dominant cultures of Asia, such as Hinduism and Buddhism. It is also urgent to begin to theologize in the context of Indigenous/Tribal cultures.

Theology needs to be done in an Indigenous/Tribal context rather than in the western context. It will give greater prominence to narrative theology and oral traditions. In order to do such theologizing we need to develop an Indigenous/Tribal theological language.

Church personnel, especially bishops, priests, sisters and seminarians, should be exposed to theology in Indigenous/Tribal context. Seminaries that cater to Indigenous/Tribal areas have a special obligation to develop and teach theology in such an Indigenous/Tribal context.

i) Care of Indigenous/Tribal Migrants

Large number people of Indigenous/Tribal origin have migrated from their original Indigenous/Tribal habitats to other areas, either within their own countries or abroad. Many are unable to cope with the new economic and cultural situations into which they are thrown. They need to find once again their cultural, religious, and moral moorings, and to learn to adapt themselves to new social and cultural situations.

The Church of their origin and the Church of their host countries can

play a decisive role in minimizing the cultural, economic and social problems of Indigenous/Tribal migrants. Collaboration, exchange of information, and joint pastoral care can be of immense help.

j) New Evangelization and Indigenous/Tribal Peoples

Peoples of Indigenous/Tribal origin have world views and values that are similar to Biblical world views and values. They are, therefore, open to the work of evangelization, especially as *missio ad gentes*.

Tens of millions of Indigenous/Tribal Peoples all over Asia have yet to receive the first proclamation about salvation in Jesus Christ and his Church. All local Churches must give priority to *missio ad gentes* among Indigenous/Tribal Peoples, since they, more than others, give a positive response to the Gospel message of salvation in Jesus Christ. It means that local Churches in Asia must release more resources and personnel for evangelization work among the Indigenous/Tribal Peoples of their regions or countries. This is a missionary challenge to all the Asian Churches to look beyond the narrow boundaries of their diocese or region.

Other religions, such as Hinduism and Buddhism, that were in a certain sense not missionary-minded are becoming so, and using the same evangelizing methods that we have been using. Hinduism does so both by direct missionary work of preaching, and through works of charity, care of the sick, development and educational projects. Missionary work is done also by re-interpreting Indigenous/Tribal religions as historical and cultural variations of Hinduism. In the face of such zealous missionary efforts by the believers of other religions, there is no reason or justification for Christians not to offer the Gospel message of salvation to Indigenous/Tribal Peoples.

k) The Role of the Laity in Indigenous/Tribal Churches

It is a well-known fact that the Indigenous/Tribal societies have been mostly egalitarian. They are used to taking decisions after consultation with the village, the clan or the tribe. Many of them have no clerical or sacerdotal class, with special spiritual authority, mediatory role or jurisdiction.

Even though the Church is essentially a hierarchical and sacerdotal community, yet in all matters that do not belong to sacred orders, there could be a rethinking. In the recent special assembly for Europe of the Synod of Bishops, held in October 1999, Cardinal Carlo Martini of Milan called for reflection on certain ministerial roles by the laity in the liturgical celebrations of the Church. Laity and youth, in particular, have played, and still play, a crucial role in direct evangelizing work and catechesis, particu-

larly by means of "home catechesis," through preaching at the so-called "Prayer Meetings." They also make an important contribution to the planning and organization of expressions of popular religiosity such as religious processions and parish administration.

Clerics and religious should adapt themselves to the Indigenous/Tribal ethos of egalitarianism in all matters that do not pertain to sacred orders and the exercise of sacred authority. They should let the laity in their Churches exercise the roles they are traditionally known to perform.

7. CONCLUSION

As the whole Church in Asia seeks to be renewed in its Christian life and mission to the peoples of Asia, the local Churches of Asia must become truly local, not only numerically but also culturally. Since several local Churches are made up of Indigenous/Tribal Peoples, it is imperative these Churches will have to absorb the core values of the people into the daily life and activity of the Churches themselves.

Churches in the Indigenous/Tribal areas will become truly local when their self-understanding as Church, and expressions of faith, theology, catechesis, liturgy and Christian life, are inculturated. At the same time they will retain the "catholic" or universal values and elements of the Church's tradition. In this way local Churches will be truly Catholic and truly local. This will result in a mutual enrichment. The "catholic" faith of the Church, her "catholic" formulations of faith, symbols and elements of liturgy and Christian life will sustain the Local Churches. At the same time, the local Churches will have their own particular characteristics and will be able to contribute something to the universal Church.

II. RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE CONFERENCE ON EVANGELIZATION AMONG THE INDIGENOUS PEOPLES OF ASIA HUA HIN, THAILAND, SEPTEMBER 3-8, 1995

Aware of the place the indigenous peoples have in the growth of our Asian Churches, we, 45 bishops, priests, religious and lay people of Asia, belonging to indigenous groups, or working with indigenous people, met at Hua Hin between September 3-8, 1995 for the conference: "Evangelization among the Indigenous Peoples of Asia." The conference was organized by the Office of Evangelization of the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences in order to bring together those involved in evangelization among Asian indigenous peoples.

The conference enabled us to share experiences and to reflect together on the history of evangelization among the indigenous peoples of Asia on the difficulties faced, and on the future prospects that lie ahead of us. The conference was a timely venture, in tune with international concern about the situation of indigenous peoples around the world. The fact that many of the participants belong to various indigenous groups made the proceedings more meaningful.

Study papers on culture, on the indigenous people's world view and ethos and Christian worship, on the social marginalization of indigenous peoples, on traditional religions, and on aspects of evangelization for the future were presented. These helped us by providing a basis for our reflections. Country reports on the history, the problems faced, the methods used in evangelization among the various indigenous peoples of Asia were also presented. These made the participants aware of the existence of numerous groups of indigenous peoples throughout Asia. They also helped us to get to know from those close at hand the efforts being made, at times in the face of severe trials, both secular and religious, to spread the Good News to every person on the Asian continent.

In the course of our discussions we also sought to focus our attention on more concrete lines of approach. We acknowledge that over the centuries God has been speaking to indigenous peoples through their cultures. Thus, we seek a new evangelization at the heart of these cultures, a profound encounter between the core values of indigenous peoples and Biblical faith.

Our common reflection has made us aware of the fact that our Church has grown and continues to grow more especially among indigenous peoples. The story of every local Church shows that, while missionaries from Churches with a longer Christian tradition pioneered works of evangelization, it was also our indigenous peoples themselves who, on their part, evangelized and continue to evangelize. The success of evangelization among indigenous peoples owes much to the role played by lay people, who often had to undergo severe trials in order to bear witness to the faith and bring others to Christ. The world of Asian indigenous peoples, varied as it is, is rich in promise and continues to challenge Christian evangelizers to commit themselves anew to the immense task of living and witnessing to the Gospel in the context of indigenous cultures.

During the days of the conference we have experienced communion and solidarity among ourselves. We have been inspired by the Gospel and by each other to recommit ourselves to the work of integral evangelization of the indigenous peoples of Asia, with whom the future of the Church in this large continent is linked. Moved by the same Spirit of communion and

vitality in the Church, we invite the leaders of the local Churches in Asia — bishops, priests, religious, and lay people — to join hands in the task of integral promotion of the life of our indigenous sisters and brothers. For this we need to share our experiences, to reflect together on our common concerns and to draw up common programs of action and evaluation.

May the Lord who promised to be with his people until the end of time continue to send his Spirit upon us to fill us with courage and light. May Mary, Mother of the Church, star of evangelization and mother of us all accompany us on our journey.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. We believe that the evangelization of indigenous peoples of Asia is an **urgent concern** for the Churches in Asia.

2. The Church should support the **right of indigenous peoples to exist and to be themselves**. We should stand with them in their struggle to live as full and equal citizens of their nations and to enter the mainstream without losing their identity.

3. We need to promote a **deeper knowledge** of indigenous peoples and their history. This knowledge should be fostered among indigenous peoples themselves and among majority groups so that all become aware of indigenous peoples' identity and their contributions to society. The Church should help indigenous peoples become aware of the dangers of losing their language, culture and traditional religiosity. By means of social and cultural analysis, indigenous peoples become aware of where they are, how and why they have reached this point, and are thus able to appropriate their culture and decide their future.

4. **Education** of indigenous peoples has to be suited to actual needs, providing formal and non-formal, vocational and professional education. Illiteracy is a basic issue that must be attacked through appropriate programs. Education enables indigenous peoples to move and succeed in the wider culture. Only then can they return to serve their people. We must instill a sense of responsibility in educated indigenous people so that they do not use the tools of education to oppress their own people.

5. In order to foster a genuine life of prayer and worship among indigenous peoples, we must undertake the task of **collecting and studying** our people's religious myths, rites, symbols, poems, and proverbs.

6. The Church must fill the ritual vacuum that is sometimes felt when a person passes from traditional religion to Christianity by enabling the indigenous Christian to have a deep experience of Christianity as the **fullness of life**. This might be done by adopting appropriate rites of blessings.

7. We encourage the **FABC Asian Liturgical Forum** to study renewal and inculturation of the liturgy in the context of indigenous cultures.

8. The **laity** has played and continues to play a central role in evangelization. Pastoral programs and training courses must be devised to promote the role of lay people as evangelizers.

9. **Special pastoral care** must be extended to indigenous people who are forced to move from their ambience to cities and towns where they are cut off from their own culture.

10. We must **oppose laws that oppress and discriminate** against indigenous peoples and educate people concerning land rights. We must develop indigenous leaders equipped to work for their people's rights, particularly in regard to the land. When necessary, Christians must lobby governments and create public opinion in favor of the rights of indigenous peoples.

11. **Meetings** of indigenous priests, religious, and lay leaders, as well as those who live among and serve indigenous peoples, should be organized for exchanging information, sharing reflections, and forming common pastoral strategies.

12. A **directory** of all those involved in the evangelization of indigenous people, of indigenous priests, religious and committed lay indigenous persons, and of pastoral centers promoting the evangelization of indigenous peoples should be compiled.

13. Wherever this has not already been done, we recommend that episcopal conferences set up a **commission** concerned with the interests of the indigenous people. Where there is a need, diocesan commissions should be set up.

14. The FABC Office of Evangelization should organize a **follow-up consultation** on indigenous peoples, preferably to be held in an indigenous ambience, and the Office should undertake to publish and disseminate the proceedings of this present conference.

15. Issues related to indigenous peoples should be considered a priority on the agenda of the forthcoming **Asian Synod**.

16. Dialogue with the **traditional religions of Asia** should be pursued at the national and international level.

17. To promote these recommendations, we request the FABC to explore the possibility of eventually establishing an **FABC Office for Indigenous Peoples' Concerns**.

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