

Seventh Plenary Assembly: Workshop Discussion Guide

**THE ROLE OF WORKING PROFESSIONALS IN BUILDING A
JUST WORLD**

by
ANSELMO LEE

INTRODUCTION

"How Christian working professionals can contribute to the promotion of justice in society" is one of the workshop topics chosen for the Plenary Assembly of the FABC. The issue of justice has usually been understood as the work of some specific professions or groups of social and politically engaged Christians. However, taking into consideration the complexity and variety of justice-related issues today, it is very important to recognize the positive role of working professionals in building a just society in Asia.

This discussion paper will first look at how justice has been dealt with during the Synod for Asia in Rome, April/May 1998, and the list of justice-related issues mentioned in the Apostolic Exhortation presented by Pope John Paul II in New Delhi, India in October 1999. This is to help the workshop participants to be situated in the concrete context where justice is at stake today in Asia rather than discuss justice in theory.

Then we will look at the situation of Catholic working professionals by suggesting several categories to refer to their understanding of faith in relation to justice and their attitude toward their role in promoting justice. These categories are based on my experiences of dialoguing and working with Christian professionals of various professions in Asia. They are not exhaustive but hopefully they will be useful for us to understand better the situation that most Catholic professionals find themselves in.

Using these categories as a framework, I will try to present several key challenges and tasks to be met in our pastoral plans in the future. In order to

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facilitate this process, several questions will be presented for sharing and discussion in the workshop.

Working Professionals and Justice at the Synod for Asia

New evangelization has been the central theme of all continental synods. It has been expressed, however, at the Synod for Asia in the form of three dialogues; dialogue with the poor, with cultures and with religious. Justice was considered as part of the dialogue with the poor which undoubtedly was one of the central issues during the Synod for Asia. According to the analysis made by the FABC, out of a total of 192 interventions, there were about 30 interventions concerning justice under various specific topics; the option for the poor (the Church with the poor), globalization, indigenous peoples, Christian social doctrine, human rights, peace issues, law and freedom, etc.

With respect to the Apostolic Exhortation following the Synod justice-related issues are discussed in Chapter VI: The Service of Human Promotion. They include the social doctrine of the Church (No. 32), dignity and human rights violations (No. 33), migrant workers, indigenous and tribal peoples, violence and discrimination against women, exploitation of children, refugees and asylum seekers (No. 34), unborn babies (No. 35), the sick and disabled, and AIDS patients (No. 36), armed conflicts and wars, militarization, landmines, nuclear, chemical and biological weapons, the suffering of the people of Iraq (No. 38), the negative consequences of economic globalization (No. 39), the heavy burden of debt (No. 40), and environmental degradation (No. 41).

The emphasis on justice at the Synod for Asia implies that justice is now understood as a constituent element of Christian faith as well as an essential part of the evangelizing mission of the Church in Asia today at least among the Bishops. However, there were no specific interventions about the role of working professionals in promoting justice during the Synod for Asia as they were included as part of the whole laity.

Situation of Working Professionals in Asia Today

The following cases are various categories of faith perspectives which I have encountered during my work with Catholic professionals.

Case A: "Justice is good but I am too busy earning a living for my family. The economic situation is getting harder and harder and I am not sure about my job security. I do not even have time to go to Church on Sunday regularly, not to mention other Church activities or programs. Sometimes I attend the mass, but I hardly feel spiritually inspired" (salesman).

Case B: "Justice is important but I think Christians should not get involved in politics in the name of justice. Justice and secular issues should be dealt with primarily by politicians. The Church should remain distant from political issues and should not take positions on political issue as it is counterproductive and can split the faith community. In particular, the Church as a tiny minority in our country should concentrate on evangelisation by converting people to Christianity rather than working for justice or political issues" (manager in a commercial company).

Case C: "Justice is important and good and I am interested in it as Christian. However, my profession has little to do with justice and human rights. What I could do in my profession is try to do business honestly and morally. On the other hand, I used to donate some money to various Church charity campaigns or sometimes try to participate in the voluntary service activities for the poor in society. I want to do something more about justice but I often found little space for lay people in the Church. The Church structure is too clerical and priest-centered" (self-employed).

Case D: "I know justice is important, and Christians should promote justice and protect human rights. I am also faced with various injustice issues because of my profession. I once learnt about the social doctrine of the Church but I found it rather 'abstract' and not relevant to the reality I am living. I don't know how to put it into practice when it comes to the concrete issues in my daily professional life. I find very little practical support from the Church. I try very hard but I often find myself alone and helpless" (lawyer).

Case E: "I am interested in justice issues as a Christian but it is difficult to find like-minded groups in the Church, particularly in the parish. My fellow professionals attend Sunday Mass regularly and sometimes Bible classes, prayer meetings, etc. but they are reluctant to talk about their professional life in the Church. They do not seem to be interested in the social doctrine of the Church and social justice issues. In fact, there is no formation program to learn about them. There are some Catholic professional associations but I found that they are not really interested in justice issues that affect their own profession. They seem to be just another exclusive and privileged 'social club'" (TV journalist).

Case F: "I am working for the Church institutions as a full-time lay person because I am deeply concerned about injustice in society and I believe that the Church can and should contribute to the promotion of justice and human rights. However, I often find that what the Church says is rather different from what the Church does. I don't feel that the Church really gives priority to working for justice and human rights in terms of the allocation of resources. Furthermore, there seems to be less and less space and

opportunities for lay people working for justice in the Church institutions" (worker for Justice and Peace Commission).

Case G: "Now I am working as a full-time activist for a Non-Governmental Organization (NGO) dealing with human rights issues. I opted to work for an NGO out of my Christian conviction for justice. I hardly find Catholic Christians in my organization but I can find many people of good will from other religious backgrounds. I am happy about my work as I can witness to my faith through my work for justice in civil society" (Human Rights NGO activist).

The cases mentioned above represent the seven categories of Catholic professionals that can often be encountered when discussing the justice issue. Although their perspectives and attitudes were 'constructed' for the sake of discussion and analysis, their comments show a reality that needs to be taken into account and some challenges that need to be faced in developing more effective pastoral strategies for working professionals in building a just society.

I would like to briefly analyse the above cases in order to identify the challenges and needs presented.

First of all, the case A reminds us of the harsh reality of life and of survival which many lay people are faced with today in Asia. He represents the majority of people who should be able to, and are entitled to enjoy basic human security and at the same time who are able to play a role in promoting justice in society.

The case B typically shows a certain faith perspective on justice which a large number of laity still subscribe to. They are reluctant to talk of justice in relation to faith as they believe faith is transcendent and justice is a secular or worldly issue. With the implementation of various lay formation program, particularly ASIPA program by FABC Office of Laity, more and more lay professionals gain a new faith perspective which is in line with contemporary social doctrine of the Church after the Vatican Council II.

The Case C is open and willing to talk about justice issues as a Christian but does not know what to do. He represents a number of lay people who would welcome a clear lead from the Church. The case D is more open and ready to do work for justice but needs more formation and organizational support. The case E is part of a group that is very active in Church life and activities. However there is a clear distinction between their professional life and their 'Church' life. He sees the need to integrate the two, to live out Gospel values in both spheres of his life. These three cases are the people who need more intensive formation in order for them to be able to live their Christian vocation more fully and actively.

The Case F is one of the small number of dedicated lay people working specifically in Church institutions as a means to live out her faith perspective. She is rewarded by her work yet at the same time would like to see more opportunities for lay people and a greater allocation of resources to the work.

Lastly the case G, like many others, has chosen to express his convictions by working in an NGO on human rights issues. He is satisfied with what he is doing and enjoys working with like minded people. However the number of Catholics actually working in his field is small. Taking into account the minority situation of the Church in most Asian societies, those Christians who work in secular civil society is very important.

Challenges and Tasks for the Church

Based on the above analysis, I would like to outline several challenges we need to face in order to develop more effective pastoral strategies for lay professionals working for justice in society.

1) Separation of Faith from Life

As seen from the cases of A, B and E, many lay people find it difficult to relate their faith to their life and work as professionals. Many still live their faith life in a dualistic way - the Church is holy while society is secular and less holy. This dichotomy between faith and life is the most fundamental challenge to overcome in order to encourage the laity to become the main actors in the evangelising mission of the Church in society. Many lay professionals tend to feel their Christian identity most when physically participating in the sacramental life of the Church not in their professional life and work.

Furthermore, they still find it difficult to consider justice as constituent element of faith, and essential part of evangelizing mission of the Church. This question need to be addressed more systematically in the lay formation program from a catechism class for baptism to the social doctrine of the Church.

In this regard, the Synod for Asia once again stressed the importance of lay participation in the missionary work in various fields of society.

"As the Second Vatican Council clearly indicated, the vocation of lay people sets them firmly in the world to perform the most varied tasks, and it is here that they are called to spread the Gospel of Jesus Christ. By the grace and call of Baptism and Confirmation, all lay people are missionaries; and the arena of their missionary work is the vast and complex worlds

of politics, economics, industry, education, the media, science, technology, the arts and sports" (Para. 45, Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation, *Ecclesia in Asia*).

2) Lay Leadership and a Participatory Church

As mentioned in the cases of C, D and F, many lay people are still seen as the object of 'mobilization' or 'the extended arm of the clergy' for the mission of the Church. Many see themselves as helping and serving the clergy who are the 'owners' or 'managers' of the Church. Although the clergy is becoming more aware of the role of the laity, the structure of the Church is still far from being participatory and laity-centered. Most lay people still continue to "pray, pay and obey" without experiencing a genuine partnership and shared responsibility.

The key to living 'A New Way of Being Church in Asia' for the third millennium will very much depend on the possibility of creating an environment and structure where genuine partnership and co-responsibility among laity, religious and clergy are exercised and implemented in the decision-making processes within the Church.

In this regard, formation of lay women leaders need to receive special attention, and there has been concern adequately expressed about it at the Synod for Asia.

"The Synod Fathers were most concerned that the Church should be a participatory Church in which no one feels excluded, and they judged the wider participation of women in the life and mission of the Church in Asia to be an especially pressing need. ... To enhance their service in the Church, there should be greater opportunities for women to take courses in theology and other fields of study; and men in seminaries and houses of formation need to be trained to regard women as co-workers in the apostolate. Women should be more effectively involved in pastoral programmes, in diocesan and parish pastoral councils, and in diocesan synods" (Para. 45, Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation, *Ecclesia in Asia*).

3) Formation : Spirituality and Vocation of Lay Professionals

As clearly indicated in the cases of D and E, lay formation is one of the top priorities for the Church in Asia in making lay people the main actors in the evangelizing mission of the Church. At the same time, the formation of lay leaders is fundamental to the promotion of justice in society. It means that lay formation is needed to help lay people to engage in proactive dialogue between the evangelization of cultures and the inculturation of the Gospel through work and their professional life. It is

needless to say that the social doctrine of the Church should be central in this type of lay formation.

Many Churches in Asia still continue to give priority to the formation of priests and religious as well as to the building up of Church institutions in terms of resource allocation. However, there is a growing awareness among Church leaders, particularly bishops, that without having a properly informed and formed laity, the social doctrine of the Church will not bear any fruits at all, and justice will remain an ideal.

In this sense, the appeal made by Pope John Paul II in the Apostolic Exhortation deserves special attention.

"Witnessing to the Gospel in every area of life in society, the lay faithful can play a unique role in rooting out injustice and oppression, and for this too they must be adequately formed. To this end, I join the Synod Fathers in proposing the establishment at the diocesan or national level of lay formation centres to prepare the laity for their missionary work as witness to Christ in Asia today" (Para. 45, Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation, *Ecclesia in Asia*).

Regarding lay formation in relation to justice, there are several specific challenges to be faced.

a) Goals of lay formation

Lay formation programs should first of all enable lay people to develop a sense of vocation and their own spirituality of proclamation of faith through witnessing. For this, we cannot stress too much that lay formation should be Gospel-centred, and equally importantly that it should be based on the experience of life, not on theoretical lectures. The "See-Judge-Act" approach developed by AsIPA program of the FABC Office of Laity has proved to be very useful pedagogy and it need to be further implemented in all types of lay formation at local level. This type of formation will produce properly informed and formed lay leaders who can put into practice the social doctrine of the Church in their professions and public life in society as the Synod for Asia emphasized.

"It is essential that the faith engaged in human promotion should have a firm grasp of this precious body of teaching and make it an integral part of their evangelizing mission. The Synod Fathers therefore stressed the importance of offering the faithful in all educational activities, and especially in seminaries and houses of formation solid training in the social doctrine of the Church. Christian leaders in the Church and society, and especially lay men and women with responsibilities in public life, need to be well

formed in this teaching so that they can inspire and vivify civil society and its structures with the leaven of the Gospel" (Para. 32, Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation, *Ecclesia in Asia*).

b) Contents of lay formation programs

Lay formation in the social doctrine of the Church needs to help lay people to understand and act upon the structural aspects of social injustice, particularly the problem of the development model dominating most Asian society. In this regard, the Synod for Asia adequately pointed out its importance.

"If in recent times the Church's Magisterium has insisted more and more upon the need to promote the authentic and integral development of the human person, this is in response to the real situation of the world's peoples, as well as to an increased consciousness that not just the actions of individuals but also structures of social, political and economic life are often inimical to human well-being" (Para. 32, Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation, *Ecclesia in Asia*).

It is also important to create opportunities for formation in human rights as defined by the civil society and international bodies such as the United Nations, in order to enable effective communication, dialogue and action in the promotion of justice. Lay professionals need to be aware of the current concepts and concerns within civil society in order to effectively open up spaces to express the Church's social doctrines.

c) Formation of chaplains of lay professionals and movements

It would be good also if the value of the work of priests who are dedicated to working with lay professionals and movements as chaplains be recognised. It is important also that they, and seminarians, receive formation with regard to the experiences and expectations of lay professionals, especially if their experience of the secular work place is limited. Taking into account the reality that the present lay formation is very much in the hands of priests, lay people need to be more encouraged to become a trainer of other lay people and this need to become a process of lay leadership formation and development.

4) Renewal of Catholic Professional Movements/Associations

As seen from the case of Mr D and E, professionals often feel helpless and powerless as individuals in society and this is the case in the Christian-minority milieu in most of Asian society. Witness to justice requires courage and involves risks, and faith grows with courage and risks. Mutual

support and encouragement among lay professionals, therefore, is crucial in promoting prophetic witness to justice based on Gospel values.

The Synod for Asia, sympathetic with the difficulties involved, strongly expressed its concern about the role of lay people regarding the fight against corruption.

"... the Synod Fathers also drew attention to the widespread corruption existing at various levels of both government and society. Too often, people seem helpless to defend themselves against corrupt politicians, judiciary officials, administrators and bureaucrats. However, there is a growing awareness throughout Asia of people's capacity to change unjust structures. There are new demands for greater justice, for more participation in government and economic life, for equal opportunities in education and for a just share in the resources of the nation" (Para. 8, Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation, *Ecclesia in Asia*).

In this regard, Catholic professional movements or associations of various professions or professionals can and should play an important role in renewing and revitalizing the basic Christian communities in the work place. They should not be a 'ghetto' or an 'exclusive social club' without reaching out to other colleagues in their work places.

There are many Catholic professional associations of various professions in Asia which are linked to the International Catholic lay organizations (ICOs) such as the International Catholic Movement for Intellectual and Cultural Affairs (ICMICA), the International Union of Catholic Press (UCIP), the international Catholic movement for medical doctors and nurses (CICIAMS), the World Movement of Catholic Workers (WMCW), etc. Though small in number and in the resources available, they play an important role in promoting justice in society in collaboration with the Church-based institutions like the Justice and Peace Commissions and FABC offices. They also play a bridging role in mediating and promoting dialogue between the Church and civil society based on the common good and a vision in favour of the poor and marginalized people in Asia.

They are autonomous as lay associations but have a strong identity as part of the Church rooted in Church history and tradition. However, they find it difficult to find an adequate space in the Church as the pastoral priorities and the Church structure are not favorable for them. The structure of parish and diocese has been basically based on geographical boundaries of people living in a certain territory. It is still important as it provides a space of community building among the neighbors living in same area. However, it is not flexible enough to address the specific pastoral needs and primary concerns of professionals whose lives and work conditions are not limited

to the geographical boundaries of a parish or diocese. Furthermore some clergy have very little understanding about the nature and needs of such lay organizations in promoting justice. In this situation, some professionals involved in justice through those organizations and movements sometimes find themselves obliged to stay out of the Church structure in order to continue their commitments to justice.

Taking into account their present role and potential contribution to promoting justice in Asia, it is important to encourage and develop such movements by providing adequate support and space within the Church structure, and by developing an adequately resourced pastoral program specifically for lay professionals. As participants at the Fifth FABC Plenary Assembly (Bandung, 1990) stressed, they can be the main actors in evangelizing each sector of society if they are provided with proper formation and orientation .

"This calls for a thorough education of Catholics in the social doctrines of the Church, as well as the formation of their hearts toward just and compassionate living in present-day Asian society. Christians formed in this manner will be evangelizers of their own - the young evangelizing the young, workers evangelizing workers, professionals evangelizing professionals, government officials evangelizing government officials, families evangelizing families - and will be leaven for the transformation of Asian society" (FABC V, No. 5.2.).

In the face of various challenges of globalization sweeping throughout Asia today, they should be able to play a more active role in the global arena at both global civil society and various bodies of the United Nations. In this regard, the Synod for Asia made a special appeal.

"The Church insists upon the need for 'globalization without marginalization'. With the Synod Fathers, I call upon the particular Churches everywhere, and especially those in the Westerns countries, to work to ensure that the Church's social doctrine has its due impact upon the formulation of ethical and juridical norms for regulating the world's free markets and for the means of social communication. Catholic leaders and professionals should urge governments and financial and trade institutions to recognize and respect such norms" (Para. 39, Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation, *Ecclesia in Asia*).

5) Promoting Justice in the Church

What the cases of C and F said about the reality of the Church is worthy of special attention. While the Church continues to promote justice in society, it is equally important to put what she preaches into practice in the

life of the Church. In the eyes of many lay people, the preaching of the Church about justice and human rights often seems to be in conflict with its practice. For instance, some Church institutions such as hospitals and schools follow the market logic of profits and competition without creating an alternative model to the secular ones based on Gospel values and the social doctrine of the Church.

Furthermore, there is often a lack of respect for basic human rights and justice in the Church, particularly among employees or lay people working in Church institutions. Regrettably, some lay people, who once came to Church lost their interest in faith due to their disappointment about the contradiction between the teaching and practice.

In this regard, it is important to listen to the call of the Bishops in 1971 once again.

"The Church ... recognizes that anyone who ventures to speak to people about justice must first be just in their eyes. Hence we must undertake an examination of the modes of action and of the possessions and life style found within the Church itself" (Justice in the World, #40).

The Synod for Asia also expressed the importance of the Church to be an authentic witness to what she preaches.

"Solidarity with the poor becomes more credible if Christians themselves live simply, following the example of Jesus. Simplicity of life, deep faith and unfeigned love for all, especially the poor and the outcast, are luminous signs of the Gospel in action. The Synod Fathers called on Asian Catholics to adopt a lifestyle consonant with the teachings of the Gospel, so that they may better serve the Church's mission and so that the Church herself may become a Church of the poor and for the poor" (Para. 34, Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation, *Ecclesia in Asia*).

6) Participation in and Cooperation with Civil Society

The Church is not the only actor in building a just society. On the contrary, the Church should be able to work together with people of good will and like-minded people of other religions. Given the situation that Christians are a tiny minority in most Asian countries, inter-religious dialogue and cooperation as well as participation in strengthening civil society is becoming crucial in promoting justice in Asian societies.

After experiencing the malfunctioning of representative democracies or the collapse of authoritarian governments in most Asian countries, the importance of civil society has been emphasized in an effort to strengthen

participatory democracy. Recent experience also shows that a strong civil society is fundamental to the decision-making process being more democratic, transparent and accountable. The formation of civil society requires freedom of thought, expression and association. It also demands an autonomous 'public sphere' which is interconnected with but independent from the state power and market forces.

The civil society movement, often formed into so-called Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs), has effectively intervened in some national and international issues by mobilizing people and forming public opinion. As happened most recently in the Jubilee 2000 campaign for the cancellation of the external debts and in the ministerial Conference of the World Trade Organization (WTO) in Seattle in December, 1999, NGOs have emerged as influential key actors in global politics and economy.

This changing context poses serious questions about the relationship of the Church with civil society and the State. Is the Church part of civil society or does she opt for the State? Can the Church opt for and be with the poor struggling for their basic human rights? Or will the Church remain uncritically silent about injustices, enjoying its privileges for the sake of vested institutional interest? Some Church leaders are reluctant to be part of civil society for fear of losing protection from the State or authority over society. However, the emerging civil society is indeed a blessed invitation and a challenge to the Church to be more instrumental in promoting the Christian vision of the Kingdom of God by building a just society.

It is important for the Church to provide the necessary resources to develop Catholic NGOs in various fields in order to implement the social doctrine of the Church in cooperation with the NGOs in civil society. There are also a number of Catholic professionals actively involved in various NGOs in civil society at the national and international levels in Asia and very encouragingly most of them were formed and trained in the Church during their university or college education or their involvement in the various Catholic social movements. They could be a useful linkage to making the Church participate more actively in the projects of civil society.

7) Developing a New Vision for Society

Last but not least, it is important that professionals should play a more active role as intellectuals in redesigning a new vision for society based on their professional experiences and commitment. Today's complex reality requires a more comprehensive approach to social injustice and development. The sharing of experiences and knowledge among different professionals and intellectual groups are crucial in developing a more integrated and holistic ethical vision for society. If the social doctrine of the Church

provides basic guidelines and principles, then the role of lay professionals and intellectuals should be to articulate and apply them in concrete contexts in collaboration with Church institutions.

"The great moral challenge facing nations and the international community in relation to development is to have the courage of a new solidarity, capable of taking imaginative and effective steps to overcome both dehumanizing underdevelopment and the 'over-development' which tends to reduce the person to an economic unit in an ever more oppressive consumer network. In seeking to bring about this change, 'the Church does not have technical solutions to offer', but 'offers her first contribution to the solution of the urgent problem of development when she proclaims the truth about Christ, about herself and about man, applying this truth to a concrete situation'" (Para 32. Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation, *Ecclesia in Asia*).

For this end, we need to develop a new type of Catholic intellectual, not simply academics confined to academic institutions without being in touch with the changing reality. They should be "politically concerned, socially engaged, culturally informed and sensitive, globally connected and spiritually rich and rooted". Their primary task is to articulate a creative vision of the society based on the common good and aspirations of the peoples, and to realize it through their proactive professional and intellectual commitments and participation in public affairs in society locally and globally.

Some Questions for Sharing and Discussion

1. What are the key justice issues which you think are to be addressed urgently in your dioceses or country? What kinds of Church institutions exist in your dioceses and country to respond to those issues? How have lay professionals been participating in such institutions?
2. What kinds of formation programs are being provided for lay professionals in the promotion of justice in society through their professions, dioceses and at the national level? How has the social doctrine of the Church been used for such formation? How much of Church resources are put into the formation of lay leadership among professionals?
3. What kinds of lay professional movements/associations are active in your dioceses and country in promoting justice? How do you assess their work? What kinds of lay professional associations do you think need to be developed as a matter of priority in your dioceses and country?
4. How have you been working with NGOs in civil society as well as

with groups from other religions to promote justice in your dioceses or country? Who are the reliable partners identified in your work for justice in your society? What are your positive experiences and difficulties encountered in the process?

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