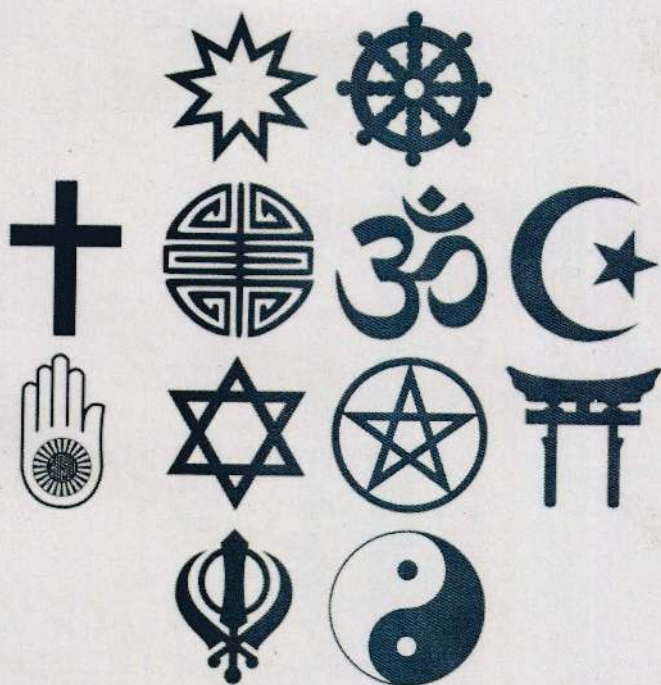


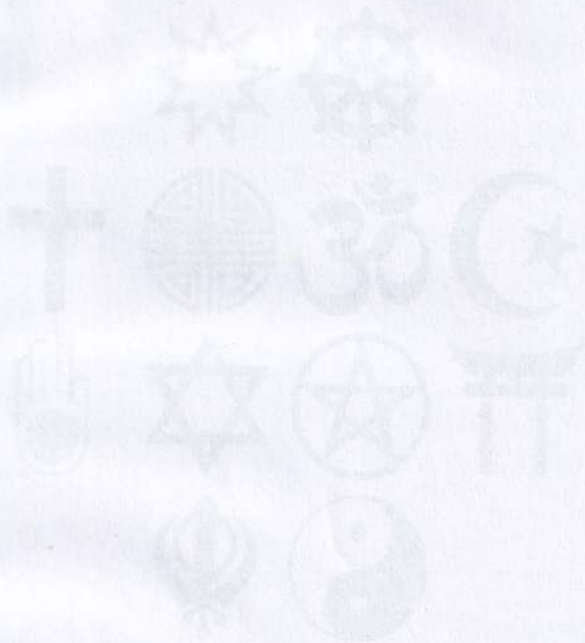
# **S**OME THEOLOGICAL CONCERNS OF THE **ASIAN** CHURCHES



**S. J. Emmanuel**



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## Introduction

The contributions I have selected for publication have each a relevant context and role they had in the reception of the teachings of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Vatican Council into the Asian churches. Hence before each chapter I narrate the context of my contribution.

During my 21 years long self-exile in Europe, my engagements and interactions with western theologians of Europe, convinced me of the importance of a dialogue between theologians of the west with those of Asia. Hence, I offer my contributions for such dialogue.

The church of Jesus Christ in all parts of the world is to be the light and salt to usher in the Kingdom of God. Hence theologies from different continents, based on their contextual experiences will enrich our common mission to the world.

S.J.Emmanuel

Bishop's House, Jaffna, Sri Lanka.

Tel. 0094763531104

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[esjayemmanuel@gmail.com](mailto:esjayemmanuel@gmail.com),

twitter Prof.Dr.S.J.Emmanuel

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### **CONCERN 1 - ASIAN CHURCHES FOR A NEW EVANGELISATION - CHANCES AND CHALLENGES**

*Author's Notes:- When I was a visiting scholar at Heythrop College of the London University in 1999, I was invited by the Jesuits who published The Way to write about the Asian churches in the new millennium. My original was slightly edited and published in The Way of April 1999, vol 39, nr.2. It was later published in Manila, EAPR » East Asian Pastoral Review 1999 » Volume 36 (1999) No. 3 and also in Germany, Jahrbuch fuer Kontextuelle Theologien 99, Pp66-95, with the title, Asiens Mission fuer das nachste Jahrtausend)*

### **CONCERN 2 - ASIAN CHURCHES AND THEIR THEOLOGICAL ISSUES**

*Author's Note: This is a talk I gave to the community of Heythrop College, when I was a visiting scholar there from 1996-97)*

### **CONCERN 3 - INTER-RELIGIOUS DIALOGUE AT A TURNING POINT IN ASIA - TOWARDS NEW CHRISTOLOGIES & ECCLESIOLOGIES**

*Author's Note:- This was a presentation I made on invitation to the meeting of the Pontifical Council for Inter-religious Dialogue, led by Card. Arinze and its Asian consultors of the Office of Ecumenical and Inter-religious Affairs of the Federation of Asian Bishops Conferences (FABC) at Hua Hin, Thailand from 23<sup>rd</sup> Sept.- 29<sup>th</sup> Sept. 1988. This was published in EAPR of 1988, in Manila, an extract in Zeitschrift fuer Missionswissenschaft und Religionswissenschaft ZMR in Aachen, Germany. But the Pont. Council agreeing with me to publish it in their document in Rome, never published. I received 8 questions in Italian, through the Nuncio Sri Lanka, to clarify certain points. I clarified all. Again asked to write an article to encourage their missionary activity. I did. But Rome appeared not satisfied! In 1999 when I was lecturing as a guest-professor at the University of Frankfurt about Clash of Civilizations at Vat. II., Card. Ratzinger wrote to Bishop Camphaus of Frankfurt to be vigilant about my theology! Bishop Camphaus directed the letter to Bishop Reinhardt Lettmann of Muenster and he wrote to Rome about my good work in Germany)*



## **CONCERN 4 - MARTYRDOM IN AN ASIAN STRUGGLE FOR LIFE AND DIGNITY – SRI LANKA**

*Author's Notes:- 20 years after the death of Karl Rahner, the international theological magazine Concilium, wanted to commemorate his call to a revival of the concept of martyrdom. And I, as a Tamil catholic priest, struggling with my Tamil people for freedom and human rights, was invited to share my thoughts.)*

## **CONCERN 5 - ORDAINED MINISTRIES IN THE LOCAL CHURCHES OF ASIA**

*In 1977 after my doctoral research in Rome about unrecognized lay ministries- the catechists, in the church I published it as a book titled, Recognizing the Faceless Minister. In 1979 the church of Philippines was celebrating 450 years as a church. And a Conference was held in Dec. 1979 in Manila. I was invited to share my thoughts and lead a discussion on the ordained ministries in Asia)*

## **CONCERN 6 - ROLE OF RELIGIONS AMONG THE PEOPLES AND CULTURES -EXAMPLE - SRI LANKA**

*Author's Notes:- I was invited to present a paper at the regional conference on pluralism in south east Asia, held at the Mt. Lavinia Hotel, colombo 24-27, March 2008) But I could not travel at that time to Sri Lanka. I sent a video presentation of my paper to be screened at the Conference to Mr. Jehan Perera of the National Peace Council in Colombo.)*

## **CONCERN 7 - CONTEMPORARY CATHOLIC THOUGHT ON THE VOCATION AND MISSION OF THE LAITY IN THE CHURCH AND IN THE WORLD**

*Author's Note: This position paper was prepared as my keynote address to the Fourth Plenary Assembly of the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences (FABC), convening at the Major Seminary, Tokyo, Japan, September 16-25, 1986 (FABC - Paper 44 k). The theme of the Plenary Assembly was: "The Vocation and Mission of the Laity in the Church and in the World of Asia."- as a preparation for the Bishops Synod of 1987 on the theme of Laity. John Coleman, editor of Concilium 177 of 1987, wrote in his editorial: The most thoughtful article I have read on a theology of the laity and the Synod-S.J. Emmanuel's 'Contemporary.....and World'*

## CONCERN 1

### Asian Churches for a New Evangelization: Chances and Challenges

#### **Towards A New Mission in the New Millennium**

With the world celebrating the birth of the new millennium by commemorating achievements of the closing millennium and by giving expressions of hope for the new, so too the churches are exhorted to celebrate the 2000 Jubilee Year of the manifestation of salvation in Jesus Christ(1). The much younger churches in Asia, while joining the world church in their celebrations, have their own task of taking stock of the few hundred years of Christianity behind them and of envisioning for a new mission into the next millennium. How has Asia accommodated or taken in Christianity till now? What are the chances and challenges to the churches for a new evangelization of Asia as inspired by the Spirit active in Asia? With the Second Vatican Council, the Pentecost Event of this century, as the turning point in modern church history, especially for the younger churches of Asia, we look briefly before and after that event in order to see ahead for the future.

Churches in Asia were not part of early Christianity, not even of the first millennium, nor of the first half of the second millennium leading up to the Reformation. They did not exist then(2). Charismatic churches born in Galilee and in Jerusalem were cradled in the world of Hellenistic philosophy and later were brought up in the ritualism and rigid institutionalism characteristic of the then Roman Empire. From the 16th century onwards, they experienced the great Reformation and the Catholic Church was engaged actively in a counter-reformation movement. It is from



these churches that the missionaries loyal to their experiences, transplanted the churches on Asian soil. Hence, the birthmarks of the churches in Asia are not from those of Jerusalem and Galilee but from the counter-reformation churches of Portugal, Spain and Holland. The heroic and self-sacrificing efforts of the European missionaries to Asia were planned, supported and coordinated by the religious congregations working under the guidance of the Sacred Congregation for the Propagation of Faith.(3)

In this century, the modest pastoral *aggiornamento* was intended by Pope John XXIII by calling the Second Vatican Council, a new Pentecost for the Mission-churches of the Third world. Furthermore, the Copernican-ecclesial-revolution initiated by the Council for the Church to become more and more a Church in the world and for the world, as well as its new understanding and vision about peoples, religions and cultures, gave the Asian churches the possibility of seeking a new self-identity, a new vision as well as a new mission in Asia. With the post-conciliar period as the spring time for this new birth, the Asian churches launched new efforts towards recognizing the religious, cultural and secular realities of Asia and towards anchoring a new mission on their own soil. These efforts were naturally characterised by challenges, problems and tensions, both within the churches themselves as well as with the Magisterium of the world Church.

The recently concluded Special Assembly of the Bishops' Synod for Asia held in the Vatican has brought to the surface many of these concerns and challenges. They are not mere regional issues or problems decisive for the relevance and effectiveness of the mission of the Asian churches but also signs and issues that challenge and stimulate the theological vision of the world Church with its Magisterium

Hence, we propose to study historically and in stages, the nature and mission of the Asian churches as developed during

their journey towards the present, seeking a new identity and a new evangelization in Asia. In the first part, we will briefly describe the first phase of the evangelization of Asia as carried out until the Second Vatican Council. In the second part, we will show how the Asian churches gained a new vision at the Second Vatican Council for a new mission in Asia. In the third part, we will describe how that new mission enjoyed its euphoria as well as faced new challenges. In the final part we will offer our views about the pastoral and theological reflections that continue to accompany the Asian praxis of mission.

## **1.0 The First Phase of Evangelization and the Consequent Birthmarks of the Churches in Asia**

Had Paul and Barnabas travelled into the Asian continent, Christianity and Christian churches in all probability would have taken a different shape, and also their relationship to the Roman or European churches would have developed differently. But that was not to be so in God's plan for the Asian continent. Though the Spirit of God was already at work in Asia among God's people in their religions and cultures with designs unknown to us and beyond our reckoning, it was left to the counter-reformation churches of Europe to undertake and promote the mission of Christ further into Asia. Except for the churches of St. Thomas Christians in India, the first phase of the evangelization of Asia started only in the 16th century and had lasted almost five centuries. Though the churches have grown up to a certain maturity marked with martyrdom and evangelical zeal, they still carry some "birthmarks and burdens" of history. For our study of the future mission, it is useful to take note of these birthmarks and burdens of history still affecting the churches.

### **1.1 European Architecture and Life-style**

The European missionaries who planted the churches in Asia

were sons and daughters of the Church of the time. Challenges for the reformation of the Church were met by a counter-reformation Tridentine Council and the Council of Vatican I. The pioneer missionaries who mostly accompanied colonial powers for the conquest of new lands for their kings in Portugal or Spain went with an almost similar zeal for conquering souls for Christ and His Vicar in Rome. Besides teaching some prayers and baptizing the indigenous peoples, they planted and built churches according to their understanding and experiences at home and were loyal to instructions from their superiors in Rome. It was not only the architecture of the churches they built on the Asian soil but also the style of Christian life and traditions and customs that were all imported from Europe.

These pioneer missionaries deserve much merit and praise from the present churches for the sacrifices they made and for the zeal and devotion with which they planted the churches. Most of these missionaries are buried on Asian soil and are worthy of our respect. Though the challenges facing today's evangelizing mission are different and their methods are out of date, still missionaries like Francis Xavier and de Nobili are venerated for their courageous zeal.

## **1.2 Polemic mission of the Counter-reformation Church.**

Losses to the Catholic faith through a division of the churches in Europe appeared to have been compensated by gaining new converts in the new missions which were opened up with the help of colonial powers. Although Asia had nothing to do with the Reformation (4) or counter-reformation, the sons and daughters of a counter-reformation Catholic Church could only plant the new churches according to their own understanding of instructions given by their Roman mother houses and later the Roman Congregation for the Propagation of the Faith.



Missionary activity in Asia was not in the first place the sowing of the seeds of the Gospel or the Bible but consisted more of teaching the Tridentine Catechism and the prayers for the liturgy. What gave the people the hope of salvation was not so much belief in Jesus Christ and His Word, but becoming members of a Church that claimed that salvation is possible only within the church. The dominant note of the preaching done in the vernacular through indigenous lay catechists and other lay helpers was that it was only the Church, as the unique bark or saving boat of salvation, that can save people from ruin and damnation caused especially by the satanic forces operative in the false religions of Asia. It was an anti-religion missionary activity.

### **1.3 Financial dependence and Paternal Supervision**

Due to changes both in Europe and in Asia, new missionaries for Asia are neither available in Europe nor welcome in Asia. But the much needed finances for initiating new activities and for building and maintaining institutions continue to flow from the western churches. Without this financial assistance, many of the institutional buildings like bishops' houses, seminaries, catechetical centres, schools and convents and the education of priests and religious in Europe are not possible.

Much of this assistance is facilitated and channelled through Rome. As a result the Asian churches have not only to be loyal and faithful to the authorities in Rome, but also have to be dependent on them for their survival as an institutional church.

### **1.4 Minute minorities among Asian Religions**

Compared to the older religions like Hinduism, Buddhism, Confucianism, Shintoism etc. of Asia, Christianity enjoys only a minority-status among religions. After nearly 400 years of missionary activity, the Catholic population, including the

Philippines is only 2.27% of the Asian population, and excluding the Philippines only 1.47% of the Asian population! The exceptional situation of the Philippines with its 84% Catholic population, not only boosts up the overall Asian Catholic percentage but also often blurs the challenging realities of Asia. With the growth of other churches and sects in the Philippines as well as the prohibitive policies and laws introduced in many Asian countries against conversion to Christianity, the minority character of the Asian churches is bound to stay, if not to further diminish. But how far is the minority character a handicap for its true mission?

This minority character is often made an excuse for a lack of prophetic courage and action vis a vis the sinful and unjust measures of the majority religions and cultures. To be a minority is characteristic of the prophets and their eloquent stance for truth and justice. It is often forgotten that the Church is prophesied to be a 'small flock'(6) and a Lumen Gentium(5) and still is faithful to its mission for truth, justice and peace. Hence, Asian churches will do well not to be disheartened by "a minority position in a massive continent" but to appreciate and discover the strategy and mission present in their minority situation(7).

### **1.5 Respected services but Suspected Motives**

With finances flowing freely from their mother churches, the missionaries built up not only churches, presbyteries and convents but also schools, hospitals, orphanages, homes for the aged etc. More and more personnel from Europe and Asia were educated and trained for specialized services in these institutions. The unmarried status of the religious and priests enabled them to give a very dedicated service that captivated the minds and hearts of the people of other faiths. Many conversions were effected by the evangelical witness of priests and religious.



All the same these services evoked certain suspicions among the non-Christians. Since it was believed that outside the Church there was no salvation, zealous missionaries sacrificed everything to convert peoples from their Ôpagan' religions and cultures to bring them into the fold of the churches. In most cases it was a direct invitation to conversion, baptism and membership in the churches while offering pre-evangelization or pro-evangelization services as attractive incentives. Although missionary convictions like - "no salvation outside the Church" and - "salvation of souls is the supreme law"(8)- justified their efforts, still the methods used came under suspicion and resentment. All the same, it could be said that the churches are appreciated and respected for their services to the poor and the oppressed.

Numerically their presence in this massive continent of peoples is far below the global average of 18%. But their influence in the Asian countries is visibly over-proportional. Today, if the churches command any importance and respect among the peoples, religions and cultures of Asia, it is not because of any power or superiority of what they preach, not because of the massive institutions they have and the influence they wield on the world scene, but because of the witness and service rendered by many churches and their charismatic leaders(9).

## **1.6 Turning Point for the Asian Churches**

By the middle of this century under Pope Pius XII and his Sacred Congregation of Propaganda Fide, the churches in Asia reached a turning point in history when the English, French, Spanish and Dutch were dismantling their colonial regimes in Asia and were granting autonomy status to their subjects. The churches which were born under colonial regimes and enjoyed privileged status under such regimes were called to go through

the transition of political power from the Europeans to the Asians. The post-colonial resurgence of nationalism along with the revival of Asian religions and cultures were making their initial moves. The churches felt the need for change along those same lines. But how? It was at this juncture that Pope John XXIII appeared as the man sent by God to call a renewal - an *aggiornamento* of the Church - through the Second Vatican Council.

## **2.0 The Second Vatican Council as the “The First Council of Jerusalem” for Asia**

For the world Church the Second Vatican Council was the end of the counter-reformation period and the beginning of a new era. For the churches in Asia, it meant even more than that. It was a radical transition from an old vision of itself as well as of the Asian realities which the church is called to serve. This transition can only be compared to the break through made in the First Council of Jerusalem with regard to its transition from a Judaic Church to a gentile Church. Karl Rahner compared the launching made by the Second Vatican Council of the Church of the world to that of the First Council of Jerusalem and referred to the latter as the fundamental interpretation of Vatican II(10). And this is true much more in the Asian situation than anywhere else in the world.

This does not mean that the Asian churches articulated their problems or the means of their first evangelization and campaigned for a new vision. Not at all. The Spirit worked in other ways to clear the way for Jesus Christ and his Church in Asia.

## **2.1 Asians were unprepared and passive participants without particular demands**

After the Second World War, there were a number of movements within the European churches for the renewal of

liturgy, study of the Bible, apostolate of the laity and the unity of the churches. These were practically forerunners to the Council and in a way succeeded in funnelling most of their aspirations into the Council resolutions(11). On the Asian soil there were none. The planting of the churches and maintaining them proceeded smoothly, especially with the help of the colonial powers.

Many of the European bishops to the Council brought with them leading theologians from their countries. In addition, there were theological discussions arranged in the evenings outside the Council sessions to debate issues. Although many of the younger Asian bishops participated in these evening sessions in English to learn of the new theological thinking from their European counterparts, they did not actively take part or contribute directly to the Council Sessions. Because of inadequate preparations in their churches and with Latin as the official language of the Council, only a few of the enthusiastic bishops gave oral submissions on the floor. A few others submitted their contributions in writing. But the majority had to be satisfied in being enthusiastic hearers, if not spectators of the historic events.

In its preparatory stage and, to a great extent, in the sessions, the Council was dominated by European churches. Most of the Asian participants were either European missionaries or young Asian bishops.(12) Problems and difficulties of the churches in Asia did not figure in the Latin schemas already prepared in Rome and circulated before the sessions. Themes like non-Christian religions and cultures, figured only later during the Council while some European issues were dealt with.(13)

## **2.2 Still they were urged to go for an Asian identity and mission.**

As individual bishops they had been invited to Rome once in five years for their *ad Limina* visit to render their reports to Rome and to take instructions home. But being called to participate



in a decision-making world-event such as this Council, they all felt exhilarated about their belonging to a world Church. Though they rejoiced over this global identity, yet they were not clear about their identity and mission in their home country.

But there was the happy coincidence of parallel developments in the political and the religious world of Asia. The euphoria of socio-political changes around them, combined with the opening and encouragement given by the Second Vatican Council, urged the churches too to seek their new identity in the changing conditions as well as to discover their new mission to Asian realities.

### **3.0 Post-Conciliar Spirit, Euphoria and Mission**

The personal experience and the outcome of the Council in the form of its sixteen documents gave the Bishops of Asia a new spirit and courage, not to stop with initial euphoria but to proceed along new paths of mission. This outbreak of freshness, enthusiasm and commitment were helped largely by the sharp increase in the number of indigenous priests, religious and bishops<sup>14</sup> during the fifties and sixties. We will identify some of the landmarks of the last three decades after the Council.

#### **3.1 Spirit of openness to the Whole Person and to the Person's Whole World**

In the first two decades after the Council, when the documents of the Council were scrupulously translated and interpreted in the various national contexts through seminars and studies, the spirit of change was increasingly visible. There were efforts made in studying, planning and making the churches to be really present in their world of religio-cultural and socio-political realities. The courage to move forward with a spirit of openness - to the whole person, to the person's whole modern world, and

the enthusiasm to dialogue with all these realities was visible in many ways. Besides the already existing institutions for education and charitable works, by which the churches were mostly known in Asia, new centers of theological and pastoral animation were established in the field of Bible Study, Liturgy, Spirituality, Catechesis etc. New centres for ecumenism and dialogue with other religions as well as centres for the promotion of socio-political and cultural activities sprang up both at diocesan and national levels.

The opening of the doors and windows of the Church after centuries of a rigid and ghetto Christianity was naturally felt also in some quarters as a whirlwind of the Spirit, liberalising some traditional structures and questioning some age-old practices of religious obedience and clerical celibacy. But unlike in the west, fewer priests and religious in Asia abandoned their ministry(15 during this whirlwind- experience.

### **3.2 Initial euphoria with the Vernacular Liturgy**

For Asian churches which grew up mostly as liturgy-centered institutions, the best of the gifts the Council Fathers brought with them appeared to be the use of the vernacular in the liturgy. Though the churches ran well known educational and charitable institutions, it was the liturgy in their churches that stood out as the distinguishing mark of Catholicism. Hence, hearing the Word of God and singing praises in their mother tongue, composing hymns and introducing new gestures, were all a great achievement. A good part of the resources by way of personnel and funds were devoted to translating, composing and rendering of liturgical music with due cultural expressions of community celebrations.

Seminaries and centers for pastoral and liturgical renewal ventured with enthusiasm to incorporate religio-cultural elements



of the land and people into the catholic liturgy. The paternal concern of the Magisterium for the initiatives of the young churches allowed only a limited time of three years for guided experiments in approved institutions like seminaries and liturgical centres. But this tended in practice to be a period of toleration rather than an encouragement to venture out with the Spirit to express creative ideas and feelings in liturgy. Concern for preserving the Roman liturgy from syncretism and fears of making it unclean by the rituals of pagan religions and cultures, hardened the Roman attitude towards the liturgical renewal undertaken by many of the local churches of Asia. What was initiated with much euphoria and enthusiasm came soon to a grinding halt. At present the liturgy of the Catholic churches in Asia has a largely translated but not a sufficiently inculturated form.

The literal translations of Roman Latin texts into the vernacular naturally bring dissatisfaction and impel the talented of the local churches to venture into more meaningful and relevant composition of texts for liturgy and its music. The insistence of Rome, with inadequate resources on its power of validating translations from all over the world, was not helpful. Liturgical translations and suggestions prepared by indigenous experts and recommended by episcopal conferences were often incompetently handled by limited resources and personnel in Rome. The vernacularization of the liturgy is clearly a small step forward in giving an Asian face to the churches hitherto seen as European churches. Even without having a true Asian identity, the churches already saw that their new mission went far beyond this initial euphoria with the liturgy.

### **3.3 Mystery of the New Mission**

In the worldview promoted by the Second Vatican Council and in keeping with the new self-understanding of the Church as the light of the nations, the old concept of missionary activity

naturally had to undergo a radical change. To this end, the Council defined the whole Church to be missionary and not just the churches of the mission territories.(16) Secondly, this activity was defined as salvific service to the whole person and to the person's whole world. This salvific service had deeper consequences for the younger churches of Asia - to become new missionaries of the Light to their lately discovered Asian brothers and sisters and to their world of realities. The concept of mission widened from a narrow-minded conquest-activity into a deeper and broader involvement for the salvation of the person and the person's world.

Missionary activity no longer meant a proclamation or teaching of a catechism for the conquest of souls (parallel to the colonial conquests) or for the conversion of people of other faiths into the Catholic fold or for taking the people away from their native culture and heritage. It was no longer an attempt to introduce a way of life that was largely European but alien to the local socio-political and economic realities.(17) Instead, the new missionary activities encouraged by the Council are not done for the exclusive purpose of conversion nor for planting or extending the Church but for giving to people (proclaiming) the Good News of salvation in Jesus Christ. Thus new missionary activity, though ecclesiastically organized in some way, is no more church-centered but gospel-centered. It is a proclamation and an invitation to live the Gospel as a community that becomes the church.(18) Through the new missionary activities, conversion can take place, and churches can grow, but the main focus of evangelization is neither conversion nor planting of churches, but enabling an encounter of the Asian person with the gospel of Jesus Christ.

A clearly defined but narrow mission of conquering souls by "teaching, converting and baptizing" to extend the European Church in foreign territories widened into a broader but challenging mission of proclaiming the Gospel of salvation in

Jesus Christ to all the realities of Asia. The Gospel and the Lord's command to preach it remain the same and retain its permanent validity for all times. How is, then, the new Church, to go ahead with its new mission to the realities of Asian peoples, religions, cultures and other secular realities? By no means is that an easy task to comprehend and still less to realise. Here lies the mystery of the Lord's mission-command(19) and its fulfilment.

In this perspective the new missionaries are not those who go out with their knowledge of the Gospel, with their skills and blue-prints for preaching, teaching and building the church, but rather those with courageous prophecy of the Good News of Jesus Christ. They venture into the unknown urged by the Lord's command, and with faith that Jesus accompanies them. They go where the Spirit prompts and guides them to go. They carry not the mere light of their learning, nor the tactics of a bible-promoter, but the light and love of Christ's message as well as His humble life-style to meet persons of other faith. They join seekers of other faiths in their journey seeking answers to the problems and challenges of modern people.

### **3.4 Proclamation and/through the Three Dialogues**

The Asian bishops slowly converged towards an understanding of mission by way of three dialogues - namely, with religions (interreligious dialogue), with culture (inculturation) and with the poor (socio-political and economic involvement). With regard to dialogue with culture and dialogue with the socio-political realities, though hard work is demanded, the path of dialogue and mission was somewhat clear.

But the dialogue with and mission to the religions were fraught with questions and difficulties. To what extent is interreligious dialogue compatible with proclamation? Is proclamation weakened or replaced by dialogue? To what extent is dialogue proclamatory? The consensus seems to grow that the



old direct-proclamation directed at conversion from other religions is no longer compatible with interreligious dialogue. Besides, conversion to Christianity has become more and more provocative and offensive to other religions and vehemently opposed by them.

Hence, Asians tend to understand their proclamation of Jesus Christ and his Good News of salvation in terms of enabling an encounter of the salt and light of Christ with the Asian realities in the form of various dialogues - with culture, with religions, with the poor and suffering. But mission in Asia through this type of salt-light-proclamation and not by direct proclamation, has evoked dissatisfaction in Rome and continues to cast suspicions about the missionary seriousness of the Asian churches. The center complains that direct proclamation is neglected, if not given up, in favor of interreligious dialogue. Hence, the dispute between the leaders of the Asian churches and the Roman authorities will, in the future, be more and more about Asia's mission to proclaim Jesus Christ and the Good News of salvation and the compatibility of this mission with the mission of sincere dialogue.(20)

### **3.5 Inculturation Encounter between Gospel and Culture?**

The Council clearly gave a courageous vision and mission to the young churches of Asia to engage in "a wonderful exchange" with the peoples, their religions and cultures. In order to achieve this goal, it also encouraged theological investigations to be undertaken in each socio-cultural region, including even a fresh scrutiny of the deeds and words of the scriptures as unfolded by the teaching authority of the Church.(21)

With the usual euphoria of returning to their "own native context and richness," the Asian churches undertook efforts at divesting the churches of their colonial or western garb and trying to become an indigenous one, at least in some areas of ecclesial and ecclesiastical

life. With the European missionaries winding up their pioneer efforts and increasingly handing over the responsibilities to indigenous clergy and their bishops, this phase was easy, well taken up by the people and financially supported by the West.(22)

### **3.51 Inculturation: Corrective Accommodation and Adaptation?**

Inculturation, though based on the new ecclesial vision of the incarnation and the contextual demands of the churches for an Asian identity and mission, it was not to be a daring mission into all Asian realities to be led by the Asian bishops and guided by the Spirit moving in Asia. It was greeted with enthusiasm and hope but soon slowed down to adaptation and accommodation with much caution.(23)

As time went on, it became clear to the Asian churches that the inculturation they conducted by way of certain accommodation or adaptation was not sufficient to realize the true vision of the Second Vatican Council as based on the incarnation. Often the question arises whether inculturation is only tolerated by the Magisterium as a necessary corrective of appearances and attitudes left by the first evangelization, or it is promoted as a genuine encounter between the Gospel and the cultures.

However, Asian theologians continue to interpret the “wonderful exchange” between Gospel and culture - based on the incarnation and promoted by the Council, as not only the enriching of the Gospel and the Christian faith through the cultural medium (inculturation of the Gospel and doctrine), but also the enriching of the cultures through the values of the Gospel (evangelization of cultures). The growth of the local churches are so conditioned by the cultures and the cultures themselves have to be evangelized by the life and witness of the local churches. It is true to say that the local churches are realised only by a



continuous process of inculturation and evangelization.(24)

### **3.52 Inculturation: Way to Asian Identity**

With the process of inculturation is also bound up the effort of the Asian churches seeking their true identity in Asia. Christianity, though originally non-western, yet, as was then embraced in Asia, was European. Asian Christians had a Christian identity that was often suspected as diminishing, if not disloyal, to their national identity. Hence, Asians have the need to harmonize two identities into a single identity to live and act as Asian Christians. While Hindus, Buddhists, Confucians or Shintoists find themselves in their 'Ônatural habitat' for their religious practices, it is Christians in Asia who are called to show their patriotism and nationality. This suspicion over their true loyalty to the nation and a consequent minority complex urge them to go further than mere adaptation limited to liturgical decorations and some dewesternization. They want to follow the prompting of the Spirit as discerned by their Asian leaders for a genuine encounter with the cultures of the land. If culture is the God-given natural cradle of their birth and Christian faith too is a gift of God, why should we hinder the encounter urged by the Spirit?

The long road for Christians in Asia to become Asian Christians and live as Asian churches and concurrently evangelize Asia, depends much on the co-operation extended to the Spirit at work in Asia. Some leaders responsible for the institutional Church may frown on inculturation as fraught with syncretism and as a threat to the institution. But do the churches have a future mission in Asia without listening to the Spirit active in Asia? Without genuine encounter with the cultures? Without finding their identity in Asia?

### 3.6 Inter-Religious Dialogue

Besides the encouragement given by the Second Vatican Council to improve relations with the non-Christian religions, to recognize all that is true and holy in them and to forge ahead to dialogue and collaboration with them,(25) the multi-religious situation of Asia demands dialogue as indispensable for the future of the Asian churches.(26) Further, the struggle of the Asian people towards liberation and wholeness needs a common and complimentary (moral and religious) foundation as well as an active interreligious collaboration. Asians feel that the churches can do all these within the universal salvific plan of God the Father revealed through His Son Jesus Christ and realized by the universal presence and action of the Spirit. Hence, notwithstanding some accusations and suspicions about the Christians who have found a new way to effect conversions through friendly and subtle conversations, the churches have opened themselves up for better relation through interreligious dialogue and interreligious collaboration.

Dialogue understood and undertaken as communication and sharing of divine life, as journeying together in a common search of the work of the Spirit, removes prejudices and helps mutual understanding and enrichment. Involving both individuals and communities, dialogue proceeds from exterior aspects of living and working to more interior aspects of spiritual life.(27)

Interreligious dialogue, we repeat, is not against the proclamatory mission of the church. In fact, dialogue and proclamation are integral but dialectical and complimentary dimensions of the church's mission of new evangelization. Hence, interreligious dialogue is an integral element of the process of building up authentic local churches in Asia.(28)

### 3.7 Dialogue with Socio-political and Economic Realities

Along with the resurgence of post-colonial nationalism and development of new nations in Asia there has been a growing awareness of socio-political and economic problems in Asia.(29) The problems and their tragic consequences naturally pose challenges to the churches for immediate relief as well as for long term remedies or solutions. They call the churches and their organizations to be genuine and compassionate helpers. The humanitarian response of the churches which were financially supported by the churches of the west were gratefully recognized by the non-Christian governments and the people and have won acclamation and even privileges for the churches. But this ecclesial response of helping “to bury the dead, heal the wounded and console the victims” amounts to treating only the symptom and not the remedy or solution of the problems. And such an approach is nothing more than that of Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) like the International Red Cross (ICRC) or Medicine sans Frontier (MSF).

With the encouragement given by the Second Vatican Council to the churches to be in the world and for the world, to function in the heart of secularity through the witness and services of adult laity, the churches are called to play a role far beyond those humanitarian services. They are not only to participate in the joys and sorrows of the world, not only to be in solidarity and in service to the needy but also to become courageous witnesses to truth, advocates of the poor, defenders of justice and so on. In spite of (or because of) their minority-status in the country, they are increasingly demanded to be the leaven for change and to be the light to dispel the darkness of sin (corruption, injustice, oppression). Their leaders are called to be the voice of the voiceless and advocates of the oppressed.

Here many challenging questions await for an answer. Will



the churches and their leaders pay the price for their prophetic stance? Will they give up their safety and security to go with the poor and stand up for them? Will they become living martyrs for the truth they are called to witness? The martyrs of the early churches were tested for their faith and that martyrdom became the seeds of the later churches. The Asian martyrdom guaranteeing a future for the Asian churches will be one of witness to truth, justice and human dignity in the context of socio-political and economic upheavals.(30)

#### **4.0 Hopeful Structures and Reflections for the New Millennium**

The post-conciliar decades also saw the functioning of new structures and therefrom a growing consensus in pastoral and theological reflections. These will continue to serve the Asian churches in their challenging and complex mission into the new millennium.

#### **4.1 Bishops' Synods offered New Chances for the Asian Churches**

The Synods, unlike the Council, gave chances to the bishops from the younger churches of Africa and Asia to participate more actively and make more specific contributions. The very first 1971 Synod on Ministerial and Justice in the World did not evoke much interest and enthusiasm, but the 1974 Synod on Evangelization in the Modern World was a more relevant one for the Asian churches. The theme chosen and the preparation made for the Synod, all done in living languages, encouraged the bishops to a more active participation(31) of this synod.

Though the extraordinary Synod for Asia in Rome 1998 had the usual limitations: central-steering, dogmatic preoccupation and western priorities, bishops of Asia frankly voiced their

concerns and priorities for Asia.(32) The final proposals are now in the hands of Pope John Paul. They will influence his message to Asia on the eve of the new millennium.

#### **4.2 FABC and its Offices**

The formation of the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences- (FABC) officially in 1971 and consequently their various Institutes and Offices(33) for various apostolates brought in new structures for Asian renewal and commitment. The efforts of diocesan and national commissions with regard to social, missionary, religious and lay efforts were animated and coordinated through these FABC structures. Unlike in the earlier days when instructions came down from Roman offices and mother houses in Europe for implementation, more initiatives, reflections and study-exchanges were done on a regional or national basis. These built up regional consensus as well as initiatives to make demands from the center. Hence, the themes of the synods were also studied before and after the event through these structures and a minimum of consensus arrived at before participation in the events. All these activities at different levels of the churches were eloquent signs of the movements of the Spirit in Asia, and the cumulative effect of these was a gradual growth in awareness of Asian realities as well as in self-confidence and self-identity.(34)

#### **4.3 Rethinking Western Aid to Asian Churches**

This dependence has facilitated undue surveillance and control done by the donors that the freedom and space for new initiatives demanded by the Asian context is narrowed down.

Most of the western aid presently given to churches in Asia is for pioneer missionary activity and for building and maintaining institutions for pastoral training. While the former is

limited by the secular and anti-conversion feelings growing among the non-Christians of Asia, the latter is becoming increasingly difficult for an Asian economy. Further, this dependence has facilitated the strict surveillance and control done by the Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples over these churches. As a result, freedom and space for new initiatives demanded by the Asian context are narrowed down.

Hence, Church leaders are more and more convinced that the institutions they build and maintain with foreign-aid are not only too expensive for them but also foreign to the people of the land.

In the perspective of the above considerations, the aid flowing from the western churches into Asia needs rethinking. If the Asian churches continue to maintain a church model that is too expensive for Asia, then they will continue to be dependent in many ways on the western churches but alien to the Asian context. They will be thankful to the European churches for the aid given and the European churches will continue to aid only those structures known to them as missionary activity, but not to the genuine efforts of the churches to become Asian.

Hence, the churches in Asia should not be considered by western donors as branches of a western institution functioning in Asia but as brothers and sisters who are poor but who should be helped to grow to maturity and independence.(35)

#### **4.4 Growing Dissatisfaction about Past Theological Methods and Priorities**

In keeping with the spirit of the churches transplanted from Europe, a scholastic philosophy and theology - in the form of Latin text-books written by professors of the Roman universities - were taught to most of the Asian clergy. A strong counter-reformation approach given in these books,(36) kept the Asian



students under Roman control! Consequently academic dissatisfaction as well as feelings of pastoral irrelevance were already growing among the indigenous bishops and leaders of the churches.

It is at this point that the Council awakened interest and gave hope of a better future not only for the people as a whole but also to those leaders who, suffocated in tight institutions, want to breathe more of the Spirit present and active in Asia. With the Council Documents as the new scriptures, courageous men and women of the Spirit walked out of traditional structures, organized seminars and reflections, founded centers for regular action and reflection and formulated the prompting of the Spirit as they experienced on various issues of the Church. Bishops who were taught by the Council not to curtail the Spirit, had a hard time in discerning the Spirit and controlling spirit-filled persons! But such were the beginnings of biblical, liturgical, ecumenical, dialogue and socio-political centers as well as ashrams, study-circles, research institutes and so on in Asia. Though these efforts may suffer temporary setbacks due to Roman scrutiny and financial pressures, if they are truly of the Spirit working in Asia, who can curtail them?

#### **4.5 Asians Taking to the New Ways of the Spirit**

Asians do have a right and a duty to question and challenge the validity, relevance and suitability of a theology formulated in Europe and imposed on Asia as the one and only theology. If we believe that the Spirit is present in Asia too and moves Asian churches to new missions of faith vis a vis Asian realities and these give rise to new theological reflections and formulation — who is, then, to curtail this move?

And what is coming out from Asia in humble forms, without the tussles of a scholastic theology, may be the beginnings

of Asian theologies. This incipient theological thinking, if it happens to disturb or question the methods and contents of earlier theologies monopolized by European churches, does not suggest that its proponents are old rebels and heretics in new uniforms. It does not mean that such things emanate from an evil spirit from the East contrary to the good one from the West. It need not evoke alarm signals at the center nor be silenced for the sake of uniformity and centrality. What is needed is a sincere dialogue in a spirit of openness with the new thinking prompted by the Spirit in Asia. Condemnations and excommunications from the center without the least dialogue cause unnecessary pain.(37) New missions vis a vis new realities evoke new reflections. As long as they are done in faith and with the guidance of the Spirit, they have a value of their own, call them what you want.

What has emerged on the Asian scene is the sincere and enthusiastic effort in theological reflection starting from contextual realities and using Asian resources in preference to western resources. The praxis-oriented search is to find an Asian vision, understanding, formulation, motivation and spirituality for further practice of faith in the Asian context. Guardians and architects of western theology should not be over-critical and cynical but welcome most of these efforts as corrective, complimentary and impulsive for further search.(38)

#### **4.6 Reflections from Pastoral Praxis**

Pastoral reflections arising from a growing concern for Asian challenges and issues and from a praxis of faith in these Asian context have brought up more theological reflection and formulation. They take up issues vitally related to Christian life in Asia.(39) A deductive approach of reasoning downward from enunciated principles or teaching of the church to reach liturgical,

moral and pastoral conclusions are given up in preference for an inductive approach of moving from a faith-oriented praxis to a praxis-based reflection and formulation. Contrary to propping up reflections on enunciated principles or statements with Scriptural quotations, Asians prefer identifying the challenging realities around them and then bringing relevant scriptural reflections to bear on them. By further enriching that biblical reflection of the issue in the light of other revelations and manifestations of God, Asians are trying to reap the harvest of God's revelation in its fullness for that particular issue or challenge. Thus theological reflection by Asians takes a serious look at the revelations of the Spirit in the "non-Christian resources" too.

## **5. Conclusion: A Courageous Faith to Walk Over the Rough Waters of Asia**

The churches in Asia are moving into the new millennium, not with any confrontational or conquest mentality to win over converts and save only those baptized from the millions of followers of other faiths. They believe in the universal salvific will and plan of God as well as in the unique mission of Christ in Asia. The lessons of the first phase of evangelization, as learned and reflected in the Second Vatican Council, had opened to them a new vision and understanding of Asian realities, given them new directions and priorities and taught them new ways of spreading the light of Jesus Christ into the multi-religious and poverty-stricken continent of Asia. With the help of the Spirit active in Asia, they are discovering their own identity as Asian churches among other religions and are taking responsibility for identifying the chances and challenges of Asia and to be a new evangelizing presence in Asia. Their presence can be evangelizing only to the extent that the light of Christ is carried deep into the world of religions, cultures and poverty of Asia.



Though the Lord of Asia beckons and the Spirit in Asia urges the churches to move on, some questions continue to lurk in the minds of leaders and hinder them from responding to the call. May the Lord who calls and the Spirit which urges grant to the Asian churches a courageous faith to walk over the rough waters of Asia.

## NOTES

1. Pope John Paul II had given an Apostolic Exhortation *Tertio Millennio Adveniente* on 10 Nov. 1994 for a three years preparation to the event and recent Declaration of the Great Jubilee Year 2000 *Incararnationis Mysterium* on 29 Nov. 1998.
2. Here we speak not of the churches in Middle East, which took part in the Asian Synod in Rome. Nor are we speaking of the St. Thomas Christians of Kerala (South India) who claim their existence from the 5th Century.
3. After Vat. II, it was renamed as the Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples.
4. Depending on the country and the colonial power that helped in the missionary activity of the churches, Asian churches were experiencing their own version of *cuius regio eius religio*. Some became Catholics, others Dutch Reformed Catholics, others Anglicans, Methodists and so on according to the confessions of the colonizing powers.
5. The biblical image of the Church as the *pusillus grex*, salt of the earth, leaven in the dough is often forgotten.
6. The biblical title chosen by the Second Vatican Council for its Dogmatic Constitution on the Church *Lumen Gentium* speaks volumes for the new self-understanding of the Church in the modern world. Light understood as a centrifugal radiation of waves of energy help us to understand the enlightening mission of the Church in a world of much darkness.
7. The situation of churches in lands where they are a majority is not that encouraging when it comes to evangelization and prophetic mission in their context.
8. *Extra ecclesia est nulla salus* and *Salus animarum est lex suprema*.

9. Mother Theresa of Calcutta has won more accolades for the Indian Church than most of its church leaders.
10. Karl Rahner, "Towards A Fundamental Interpretation of Vat. II," Theological Studies, 1979, pp. 716.
11. The influence of theologians from Holland, Germany, France, Switzerland into the hitherto dominant Italian-Latin theology was described by an American writer as the Rhine flowing into the Tiber.
12. The number of indigenous bishops from the mission lands increased rapidly during and after the Council. Unlike for Apostle Paul in his missions, even after centuries of Christianity in mission territories, indigenous clergy were considered not up to the required standards to become bishops!
13. For example, inspired by Cardinal Augustino Bea and other German Bishops, the Council attempted to rectify and renew relationship between the Church and the Jews. But the Council Fathers went on to discuss the relation of the Church with other religions too. This gave birth to the document *Nostra Aetate* on the Relation of the Church not only to the Jews but also to believers of other Non-Christian Religions.
14. More and more missionary bishops of European origin while recommending the documents of the Council felt the need to hand over the leadership to indigenous bishops for better implementation. On the other hand, with the growth of seminaries and secular clergy more indigenous bishops were appointed.
15. This may be due to two reasons: i) the fact that the new ways opened by the Second Vatican Council for the churches in Asia were more attractive and promising than the questions about chastity and obedience. ii) the values of obedience and chastity are already well recognized values in Asian religions and cultures.
16. In this perspective, the older churches of Europe which were supporting missionary activities in other parts of the world were called to their mission in their context of atheism, secularism and other forms of socio-economic evils.
17. Admirable services done by the missionaries in education and charitable works were probably seen, if not intended, as pre-evangelical or pro-evangelical leading many beneficiaries to conversion and protecting the converted in their faith.

18. Just as the love of neighbor cannot be divorced from the love of God, community living of the Gospel cannot be divorced from the following of Christ. Following of Christ implies community living and becoming-church.
19. The missionary hears the Lord's command "Go and teach/preach" as were from behind and moves forward to meet the new challenges ahead.
20. Three important Roman documents treat this post-conciliar problem. After the 1974 Synod on evangelization, Pope Paul VI gave the Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Nuntiandi* which has gained wider acceptance as the Magna Carta of evangelization in the modern world. With growing concern about the disinterest for direct proclamation, the Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples urged Pope John Paul II to write an encyclical letter *Redemptoris Homini* to warn about the Christological errors involved in dialogue and insisted more on direct proclamation. The Secretariat for Interreligious Dialogue simultaneous to the encyclical brought out its statement on Dialogue and Proclamation clarifying a certain type of own dialogue that is not incompatible with proclamation. But all these have not solved the mystery of the new missionary activity.
21. A.G. 22. Thus in imitation of the plan of the Incarnation, the young churches rooted in Christ and built on the foundation of the apostles take to themselves in a wonderful exchange all the riches of the nations which were given to Christ as an inheritance (cf. Ps. 2.8). From the customs and traditions of their peoples, from their wisdom and their learning, from their arts and sciences, these churches borrow all those things.... If this goal is to be achieved, theological investigations must necessarily be stirred up in each major socio-cultural area ... a fresh scrutiny will be brought to bear on the deeds and words which God has made known ....and which have been unfolded by the teaching authority of the Church.
22. For the formation of the indigenous clergy, religious financial assistance for building suitable institutions and their further maintenance was given by the older churches. But this had a long term effect of the West controlling and steering a formation that was in many ways contrary to inculturation.
23. A.G.22. Thanks to such a procedure, every appearance of syncretism and of false particularism can be excluded....and the churches be taken



- into Catholic unity....without prejudice to the primacy of Peter's See.
24. Theses 5, 6, 10 of the TAC-FABC Theses on the Local Church in Being Church in Asia, Vol. 1, Claretian Publication 1994.
  25. N.A. 1-2
  26. The urgency of interreligious dialogue prompted the Theological Advisory Committee of the FABC to study this theme as their first task in 1987.
  27. Theses 1-5 of the TAC-FABC Theses on Interreligious Dialogue in Being Church in Asia, Vol. 1.
  28. Thesis 7.
  29. Asia consists of three regions - Far-eastern (Japan, Korea, China, Taiwan, Hong Kong). Eastern (Philippines, Indonesia, Thailand, Vietnam etc.) and South-east (India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka). Socio-political and Economic situations vary a lot from massive poverty in Bangladesh and India and Philippines to economic prosperity in Japan, Korea and Singapore.
  30. Pope John Paul II in his Declaration of the Jubilee Year 2000 states "our present century has had as consequence of national socialism (Hitler's), Communism and racial conflicts many martyrs....the churches all over the world will be anchored to the witness of martyrs..." *Incarnationis Mysterium*, no. 13.
  31. The valuable contributions from the three continents have appeared in three volumes and the Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Nuntiandi* of Pope Paul VI -called the *Magna Carta* for a New Evangelization - was an outcome of this synod.
  32. "Asian Bishops were not to be steered by the priorities and plans prepared by the Roman Secretariat through the *Lineamenta* and *Instrumentum Laboris*. The stimulus given by the FABC and it's various institutes during the last 27 years have prepared them to articulate eloquently Asian contextual realities and their vision of the Church to meet those realities. Hence, efforts by curia cardinals to draw them into discussions about old theological questions about the divinity of Jesus Christ and how to deal with theologians who go soft on it and so on. did not bother them in their *circuli minores*. They preferred to talk about inter-religious dialogue, dialogue with the socio-political realities of Asia, inculturation etc. rather than to be on the hunt for theologians who breach the dogmatic definitions of scholastic theologians."

33. BISA = Bishops' Institute for Social Apostolate; similarly, BIMA = for Missionary apostolate; BILA = for Lay Apostolate; OEIRA = Office for Ecumenical and Inter-religious Affairs etc.
34. But the procedure of selecting bishops who will show more obedience to the directives of Rome than to the cries of the people hinders the growth to this self-identity. Immaturity is still seen in some bishops who expect more directives about their particularities given by Rome and spurn the urges of the Spirit in Asia.
35. Fr. P. Divarkar, S.J.: What is clear from history is that as long as the present Catholic Church, with its intricate structure and centralized control, claims Asia as an occupied territory, the Savior's mission will not progress on the very continent where Jesus was born and died "that they may have life and have it abundantly" (Jn 10:10).
36. Many of the professors in the Asian seminaries were trained in European seminaries or universities. Even now the Asian seminaries affiliated to Roman universities and financially supported by Rome are expected to follow strict guidelines in the teaching of theology and philosophy.
37. The recent excommunication of Fr. Tissa Balasuriya, OMI of Sri Lanka without sufficient dialogue with the local hierarchy, within the Oblate Congregation and with the Roman Office, caused much pain and protest among theologians not only in Asia but also world over. The belated dialogue facilitated by his religious congregation to rehabilitate him in the church could have spared all.
38. Missiology, earlier understood as the learning of missionary methods and praxis was taught as a marginal subject outside of dogmatic theology. But the new questions for dogmatic theology arise truly out of the missionary-dialogues taking place mostly outside Europe.
39. During the first ten years of their existence, the Theological Advisory Committee of the FABC had not picked up dogmatic issues to split hairs with western theologians. They have reflected on the following: Interreligious Dialogue, Local churches and Inculturation, Church and Politics in Asia, Towards a Theology of Harmony in Asia, The Spirit at Work in Asia Today. Nor have the Asian bishops at the Synod for Asia attempted to be drawn into dogmatic debates about older questions. Instead, they underlined dialogue, inculturation, poverty as their own challenges and priorities for mission.

## CONCERN 2

### ASIAN CHURCHES AND THEIR THEOLOGICAL ISSUES

#### Introduction:

Churches in Asia were not part of the Reformation of the 15th and 16th. centuries. They did not exist then. They were born actually during the Counter-reformation period in Europe. Only in this century they became gradual participants, first of the **Aggiornamento** initiated by Pope John XIII and then of the **Copernican-Revolution** of the Church. in our times - namely, Church **IN** the world and **FOR** the world. With **Vatican II as the Pentecost** of this Century, there is a whirlwind of the Spirit in Asia, there emerges a new phase of change for the Churches in Asia - a **re-birth of the Churches**, if we may use a Hindu-Buddhist concept - to be born again, this time as Asian churches. Consequently there emerges theological issues - **vital fur the futurability of the Asian Churches** and also affect, and even **challenge the theological vision of the world Church or Universal Church.**

We are on the eve of an **Asian Synod** to be held in Rome in April of this year. Here I limit myself to take a brief look

- 1) at the different phases the Churches in Asia have gone through and mention some of the problems they have as a burden of their history.
- 2) the new theological priorities determined by their context and the modest efforts made to respond to them.
- 3) Some decisive questions to the world church



## **1.0 The General Character of the Asian Churches before Vat.II**

### **1.1 They were European Churches transplanted on Asian soil.**

The European missionaries who planted the churches in Asia were sons and daughters of Europe, they grew up with the experience of the church of their times and of their land. Hence they planted faithfully the church they experienced then at home. It was not only the architecture of the churches they built on the Asian soil but also the style of Christian life and traditions and customs they imported from Europe.

They deserve much merit and praise from our churches for the daring sacrifices they made. But they St.Francis Xavier, the Patron of the missions, is fondly venerated, but his methods of missionary activity is a past thing.

### **1.2 They were born from a world-church in a counter-reformation context**

It was a new phase for the Church in Europe. Missionary endeavours were made from a counter-reformation Church at home in Europe. Losses through a division of the churches in Europe appeared to be compensated by gaining new converts in the new missions which were opened up with the help of colonial powers..Although Asia had nothing to do with the Reformation or counter-reformation, the sons and daughters of a counter-reformation Catholic Church could only plant the new churches according to instructions given from their mother houses along with those of the Roman Curia of Propaganda Fidei in Rome.

### **1.3 They are still young churches**

With the exception of the Thomas Christians and their oriental churches - Syro-Malabar and Syro-Malankara rite, who claim their beginnings to the 5th.Century, all the other Christians

in Asia are not more than 500 years old. Hence compared to most of the **European Churches which have rich and at the same time burdensome traditions**, we have a **shorter history and open to changes** demanded by the times

#### **1.4 With one exception, they are all minority-churches**

Compared to the older religions Hinduism, Buddhism, Confucianism of Asia, Christianity is a minority religion. After nearly 400 years of missionary activity, we have not grown to be a sizable group, reaching an average of 2.27% of the Asian population when we include Philippines and **only 1.47% without Philippines**. An exception is in Philippines where we are more than 84% - and that too is on the decline, due to the growth of other churches. Hence the minority character is bound to stay..

#### **1.5 As Churches in the Third World, they are all financially dependent on the Western churches.**

Understanding missionary activity as giving personnel and finance to plant the churches, the richer churches of Europe and America have helped us a lot to grow to the present status. **They cannot any more send missionaries** because they themselves are in shortage. **Finances continue to flow** to our churches for their maintenance and new activities. Without this maintenance most of the institutional buildings for Seminaries, Catechetical Centres, Schools and Convents and their maintenance cannot be built or maintained.

#### **1.6 They are under a strict surveillance or control of the Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples**

As a consequence of the above characteristics, the Churches in Asia, like those of Africa and Latin America, are under the strict surveillance and control of the Congregation for

the Evangelisation of Peoples. This control is made easier by the financial assistance given to these churches either directly or channelled from Europe through Rome.

The Prefect of this Congregation, sometimes known as the black pope of the Third World, has his finger on many things from a surveillance of theology to naming of bishops, from formation of priests and catechists to building of institutions.

### **1.7 They are awakening to new realities and challenges**

Although they are at times treated as young immature churches by those who control and guide them from above, they cannot but help awakening to realities, often shocking, realities of their context. Just as many of the Asian countries are going through a post-colonial resurgence of nationalism in various forms, the churches too, encouraged by the Pentecost of Vatican II, are awakening to the new realities and challenges facing them **in becoming a church IN the world and FOR the world.**

These challenges will definitely cause pain which may be the birth-pangs for the birth of new Asian Churches. The success will depend not only on the Asian Churches themselves but also on the understanding and help given by the world church.

## **2.0 Asian Churches at the Second Vatican Council**

### **2.1 It was a grace - a kairos - grace-filled opportunity for the Churches in Asia to realise themselves as Asian Churches**

Firstly, the event of Vatican II and so many Asian bishops taking part in it, was already a grace for the churches in Asia. At the Council of Trent and Vatican I, there was hardly any presence of Asia. This was the first time when all the bishops of Asia were called to participate in a world event which **underlined their belonging to a world church.**



Secondly the **16 documents** the council brought out have become a great Charter to these younger churches. They were not dealing with any particular heresy of dogma, they were not condemnations but **a whole vision and an exhortation to new ways. In this respect, they filled a great need not responded by the Scriptures the Canon Laws and the Dogmas.**

## **2.2 In comparison with the European Churches, the Asian churches were not prepared for the Council**

After the Second World War, there were a number of movements within the European churches for the **renewal of liturgy, study of the Bible, apostolate of the laity and the unity of the churches.** These movements were forerunners which made the way for the Council and in a way funneled themselves into the Council resolutions.

On the Asian ground there were no such shocking events to shake up the churches and there were **no cries for renewal or change.** Surely, they experienced difficulties vis a vis the contextual realities, but they did not attempt to meet them.

## **2.3 Asian Bishops mostly as Spectators and Auditores in Council, not as active participants**

Many of the European bishops brought with them leading theologians from their countries. In addition there were theological discussions arranged in the evenings outside the Council Sessions to debate issues. Although many of the **younger Asian bishops participated in these evening sessions in English to learn of the new theological thinking from their European counterparts, they did not actively take part or contribute directly to the Council Sessions of the mornings.** They were mostly enthusiastic spectators and hearers,

Besides hindered by the use of **Latin as the official**

**language** of the Sessions, many Asian bishops could not easily follow or contribute to the Sessions proceedings. Many resorted to written submissions which were not seriously considered.

## **2.4 The Demands of Asian Contexts were not a theme of the Council.**

Although the bishops from Asia had their own problems and difficulties, they did not figure in the **Schemas already prepared from Rome and circulated in Latin**, nor did they have the courageous voice to introduce their priorities into a “European Council”

Themes like non-Christian religions and cultures, figured only while treating European issues. For example, while trying to study the relation of the Jews to the Church, we went to discuss our relation with other religions and that was the birth of the document *Nostra Aetate* on the Relation to Non-Christian Religions.

The valid observation of Karl Rahner that in Vatican II, the Catholic church has really become **a world Church is not in the sense that issues from all over the world, including those of Asia, were taken up at the council, but only in the sense that the European and American bishops have widened their interest on issues of the world churches.**

## **3.0 Asian Churches After the Council**

### **3.1 Liturgical Euphoria**

As the Asian Fathers of the Council packed their bags for return to their churches, the best gift to their people were about the use of the vernacular in the liturgy. The Churches of Asia were specifically liturgy-centred institutions. Although they were known for thie educational and charitable works, it was liturgy in

their churches that stood out as the distinguishing marks of Catholicism. Hence hearing the Word and singing their praises in their mother tongue, composing hymns and introducing new gestures were all a great achievement.

### **3.2 Holy Spirit moves over Asia**

As a sign of the churches in Asia intaking the Spirit of the council, there were efforts made in making the churches to be really IN their world of religio-cultural and sociopolitical realities. The Courage to move forward with a Spirit of Openness to the whole man and to his modern world, the courage to Meet and Dialogue with these realities were seen in the network of centres that sprang up. In addition to the already existing institutions of educations and charitable works, Centres of animation in the field of Bible Study and Catechesis, Commissions for Justice and Peace, Centres for the promotion of Cultural Activities, Centres for Dialogue and Ashrams,

### **3.3 Bishops' Synods -( for an unfinished agenda and a post-conciliar period) - anew chance for the Asian Churches.**

Pope Paul VI had already realised that Vatican II was more a beginning of a new era in the church than an end to counter reformation church. He had also foreseen the problems of a post-conciliar period. To face these issues and problems he instituted the regular holding of Bishops' Synods for various themes of concern.

The very first Synod on Priesthood and Justice did not evoke much interest and enthusiasm, but the second in 1974 on the theme of Evangelization in the modern world was a more relevant one for the Churches of the Third World. The contributions of three continents have appeared in three volumes. *Evangelii Nuntiandi* - the magna carta - of a new evangelisation - was an outcome of this synod.



### **3.4 The formation of the FABC 1971 and its Institutes**

The formation of the Federation of Asian Bishops Conferences and consequently their various institutes - BISA, BIMA, BIRRA, BILA etc. were the new structures for Asian renewal and commitment. The efforts of diocesan and national commissions with regard to social, missionary, religious and lay efforts were animated and coordinated through these FABC offices,.

### **3.5 Birth of Asian Theologies**

Theology is no more a monopoly of the Universities and its professors and students. The universities have a role in theologising, but they have to depend on a praxis-oriented sources.

#### **3.51 Ecumenical Association of Third World Theologians EATWOT**

#### **3.52 Theological Advisory Commission of the FABC FABC-TAC**

## **4.0 Asian Theological Sources, Method and Themes**

### **4.1 Asian Theological Sources**

With Vatican II giving a greater impetus to the study of the Scriptures and also making that study to be **the starting point for theological reflection**, we took farewell from the old method of supporting the teachings of the Church with Scriptural “prop-ups” and making **scriptural reflection of themes a starting point for theologising**. Besides this change towards a genetic approach, we revised our understanding of Revelation to include manifestations of God through the various truths and

**goodness recognizable in other religions and cultures outside the Church**, but God-given resources of the lands and the peoples.. Hence all Asian theological reflections, in addition to the primary and central reflection of the Christian Sources in the Bible, in the Fathers of the Church and in history, take a serious look at the “non-Christian resources” available in Asia through religions, ideologies, cultures and movements for change. Whether it is the notion of salvation, sin, grace, salvation, spirituality or the

## **4.2 Asian Theological Method and Themes**

Deductive approach of reasoning downward from annunciated principles or dogmas from above to reach out liturgical, moral and pastoral conclusions are not convincing. Instead an **Inductive approach** of moving from a faith-oriented praxis to a praxis-based reflection is preferred.

The first *Theological Advisory Committee* appointed by the FABC and consisting of theologians from 18 Bishops Conferences of Asian countries, met annually for about ten days in an Asian city like Kong or Singapore and took up a theme for discussion and preparing a Paper. Before 1994 five such issues were taken up.

### **4.21 Six Theses on Inter-Religious Dialogue**

### **4.22 Local Churches and Inculturation in Asia**

### **4.23 Church and Politics in Asia**

### **4.24 Towards an Asian theology of Harmony**

### **4.25 Towards an Asian Pneumatology**

## **5.0 Asian Churches begin to recognize and respond to the realities of their own world/context**

## 6.0 The Dawn of a New Vision for a New Mission

### 7.0 Priorities of the Asian Churches from Vatican II

With slogans like *Aggiramento*, Return to the sources and Church to be reformed always, there was more interest in the documents that relate to the outside of the church than to inner-church documents

### 8. Questions

If the churches continue to remain as at present, they remain thankful to the European churches for the aid given and also the European churches will continue aid to structures known to them as missionary activity.

The churches as they are are expensive models for an asian economy.

Hence true missionary work of the Asian churches consist in responding to the challenges of the Asian realities. And **the role of the western churches is to help us help ourselves.**

1. How far can we go with inter-religious dialogue? inculturation? contextualisation?
2. Understanding of Salvation and Mission in Asia?
3. Understanding Jesus Christ and his discipleship and the Church?



Today (29.05) church celebrates feast of St. Paul VI - Pope 1963-1978. I was privileged 2 meet him in Castel Gandolfo 4 times. On 15/8/1966 my ordination 2 sub-diaconate, he gave me a copy of the NT. A great Pope, guided Council Vat II, with great courage & openness 2 modern challenge



**CONCERN 3**  
**INTER-RELIGIOUS DIALOGUE**  
**AT A TURNING POINT IN ASIA**  
**TOWARDS NEW CHRISTOLOGIES &**  
**ECCLESIOLOGIES**

I propose to present here my humble understanding of the progress and problems of inter-religious dialogue in Asia, as it reaches a turning point towards demanding as well as evolving new Asian christologies and ecclesiologies. I attempt to do this in two parts - first to see how the Asian inter-religious dialogue after Vatican II has grown from being an exercise in good, religious neighborliness to becoming more fundamental and challenging obligation to all Christians and churches of Asia. And in the second part to see how in the fulfilment of this dialogical obligation, some questions are posed to the traditional christologies and ecclesiologies and consequently how new raw materials and directions for their future developments are indicated.

**PART 1**

**FROM BEING AN EXERCISE IN GOOD RELIGIOUS  
NEIGHBORLINESS TO BECOMING A MORE  
FUNDAMENTAL AND CHALLENGING OBLIGATION**

- 1. Jewish Christianity dialogued with the Greco-Roman world and found a favorable home- but not so with Asia where it is still considered foreign and at times even as a threat to the traditional religions of the land.**

Christianity from its very birth out of a Judaic religion

and culture, has grown and encountered many other religions, cultures and philosophies, and lived for centuries through various socio-political climates. Its present form has been deeply influenced and even shaped by them. Historians speak of at least three long stages of encounter, namely, that with the Greco-Roman world, with the religious and political power of Islam, and later with the revolutions and reformations of Western Europe. These encounters and climates have given Christianity such a strongly institutional form, and dogmatically a defensive stance, that the Asian encounter with Christianity in the first phase of evangelization could not affect much of the needed change.

Christianity, born in Judaism, cradled in Hellenism and grown up in the Roman Empire for long centuries has been transplanted, as a well institutionalized and stands as not-reformable religion in Asia. Even after three to four centuries of Christianity, the churches are still, justly or unjustly, linked up with colonial arrogance and absolutist-exclusionist claims about salvation. In spite of their assurance of salvation to their followers and their massive social action in favor of the poor masses, the churches of Asia are still seen as foreign bodies. In some countries they are even considered as foreign agents, threatening the very indigenous religions, cultures and ideologies which have given life and direction to millions of people for thousands of years. Fortunately after Vat.II, the church has initiated a new renewal of self and a new vision of the world that the accusations and suspicions of the past are on the decrease.

## **2) The call of Vatican II for renewal within and without the church necessarily becomes an urgent call for the Asian churches to dialogue with people of other faiths.**

With the advent of Vatican II all the churches of the world were called to an up-to-date self-renewal (*aggiornamento*) as well as to an optimism and openness to the whole world of life-

realities. It was the undoubted vision of Vatican II that a deeper renewal from within the church as the church of Christ is intrinsically bound up with its renewed relationship to the religions, cultures and ideologies of the modern world. It was its conviction that a sincere openness to the Spirit in dialogue and collaboration with people of other faiths, cultures and ideologies will result not in depreciating our own specific identity' as Christians and churches, but in strengthening and enriching our very identity and strategy, not for conversions, but in the overall plan of God for all mankind.

Naturally such a call for renewal and openness sounded a special urgency for the Asian churches, especially at a time when they were facing new and crucial challenges. In the recent wake of neo-nationalism, Christians have been increasingly viewed as followers of a foreign religion and culture. Even their good actions were tied up with suspicious motives and consequently curtailed by restrictive laws of the land. These churches were challenged, on the one side, by wide-spread dehumanizing poverty and oppression of the masses to make a clear option for the poor and the down-trodden, and on the other side, by the massive presence and renaissance of religious traditions and ideologies to work together for the salvation of humanity.

Hence, the call of Vatican II for interreligious dialogue with people of other faiths was a God-given chance and a radical obligation for us, to get rid of the last vestiges of our foreign character and become more indigenous, relevant and effective to the socio-political - and-religious-cultural realities of Asia. The Churches are called to make a dear option in favor of the poor and the oppressed and in favor of more collaboration with all religions for the ultimate salvation of the whole human race. But for this task, a courage and creativity - comparable only to that of the early Jerusalem church in the face of Hellenistic- gentile



realities - called for, Hopefully the Christian leadership of Asia realizes more and more” the seriousness ,of this call and continues its sincere efforts to respond.

**3) Asian response to the call for inter-religious dialogue is attempted and articulated, not through any planned institutions nor through any authoritative or a-priori statements, but through grassroots- experiences in a dialogue of life and their praxis-oriented theological consensus.**

Having lived at least for three centuries as missionary and under-developed” churches under a paternal Congregation of Propaganda Fide, and having depended largely on the older churches of the west, not only for personnel and finances - but also for theology, spirituality, life style etc. the call for a serious encounter and exchange with religions and cultures of Asia can come to be understood by the young Asian churches only slowly and with some hesitation.

At first, all condemnations and condemnatory statements and open hatred or antagonism towards people of other faiths come to an end. Pope John XII led the way for an optimistic view of other religions. Along with this initial euphoria a new interest to - increase knowledge about other faiths appeared, But even this study of religions was very often undertaken with an air of religious superiority and only by a few theologians and philosophers of religions. These few-steps, we reckon, are probably the benefits of a first understanding of the Vat. II documents GS, LG, NA DH. The enthusiasm and euphoria that characterized this first reaction were also expressed in fellowship gatherings, common prayers and summit-meetings between religious leaders on various occasions.

The minority and dispersed situation of the Asian churches (except the Philippines) among the non-Catholic or non-religious

(Hong Kong) majority, naturally imposed a dialogue of-life before any organized institutional dialogue. Very often the socio-political and economic threats served as common challenges to intensify ecumenical and inter- religious collaboration.

Even these initial reactions are not without problems and con-fusion. The objections raised by a minority at the Second Vatican Council against the declaration about non-christian-religions (NA) continues to be heard even now after the council. For-some, the call for new missionary dynamism was still incompatible with-the call for better relation with other religions.

For some others, it caused confusion, with respect to the traditional missionary methods of proclamation and conversion. Consequently the Asian churches devoted a good part of their post-Vat II missionary zeal to clarifying and renewing basic notions about evangelisation, missionary activity, proclamation, conversion etc. In this process fortunately some characteristic elements of a church that is truly missionary and at the same time open to other religions and ideologies have emerged.

Asian churches will no more be self-centred institutions, for uprooting people from their native religions and cultures and planting them within their boundaries (no more proselytism) They will be other-centred -communities striving to contribute their specific share as light of nations in dispelling the evil and darkness that inhibits our society. They will accompany humanity in their search for the ultimate reality. (LG. 16d). Thus our dialogical attempts, though fraught with problems, difficulties and suspicions, are the „incipient raw materials” and locus theologicus for evolving a future theological consensus. It is for this reason that theologians of the third world (e.g. EATWOT) strongly opt for dialogue of religions and a praxis-to-doxie method in theology

**4) It is the dialogical experiences at grass-root level that contribute most towards theological consensus and provide**

## **initial raw material for new christologies and ecclesiologies**

If there is any progress in the theology of inter-religious dialogue, it is happening, not so much in our catholic institutions seminaries and theologates, nor are they initiated by professors of theology, but in the **grass-root experiences of basic groups initiated by radical Christians**. These latter, guided by the Spirit have courageously at great risks and under discouraging suspicions, launched out into new ventures with people of other faiths. Although the ecclesiality or Christian authenticity of such groups or persons and their actions may have been initially under suspicion from the institutions of the church, **the fruits we reap today confirm the genuine ecclesiality of such groups and the authentic Christian discipleship of the people involved**. The numerous ashrams, fellow-ship centres basic human communities, their inter-faith experiences, exchanges and sharing have contributed largely to the emergence of new ideas and consensus towards Asian theologies, They help US to rethink and reformulate the traditional theological formulae still echoing in our lecture halls in the light of the history of our churches and in the context of our religio-cultural pluralism.

Many of our catholic institutions do in fact gratefully acknowledge and recognise these contributions.

### **5) The FABC and its structures have done well in encouraging and fostering much of the dialogical experiences.**

The role of the FABC and its structuring with respect to persons and groups involved in inter-religious dialogue, have been positive but not encouraging. Far from being a “regional magisterium” for monitoring dialogical encounters. the FABC activities in general, and those of the OEIA in particular. have prompted, encouraged and profitably orchestrated dialogical efforts towards the emergence of some regional theological consensus and plan for action.



The very first Plenary Assembly of the FABC at Taipei in 1974 recognised, in strongly positive terms, the religious experiences of other faiths in Asia and encouraged dialogue with them as a means of learning and receiving from these faiths. It recognised these religions, as those “from which our contemporaries do not cease to draw light and strength” as the “home of their contemplation and prayer which have given shape to the histories and cultures of our nations, and as those through which “God has drawn our people to Himself” (nn14-18). It has kept up to these words in all its later ventures. A wider call for serious dialogue at all levels (BIRA – I), an exhortation to go beyond introductory euphoria regarding knowledge about religions to a leper sharing in prayer (BIRA-II) and a commission to be with ‘the total life of all people (BIRA-III) are examples of this encouragement.

Without allowing the experiences at grass-root levels to get lost as free lance conclusions, the numerous BIRAS of the OEIA have done well to co-ordinate those conclusions and at the same time inspire the leaders of our churches with them.

**6) The Pontifical Council for inter-religious Dialogue has the vital role of mediating the challenges and fruits of Asian diabolical experiences for the benefit of the universal church.**

The Asian experience at dialogue with other faiths has awakened the whole church to view religio-cultural pluralism, not merely as a barrier to be overcome, but as a **fact, revealing the total plan of God for the whole humanity. In a way, it has helped Us Asians to an optimistic view of the ultimate plan of God, as one that includes and provides for the final fulfilment of all peoples, religions and cultures. It is also a more realistic vision of God and his goodness of salvation for all.**

The Pont. Councils as the organ of the universal church,

having the vital responsibility to keep open all the doors and windows thrown open by Vat II (Thanks to John IXXIII and Paul VI - *Ecclesiam suam*). must mediate the above experiences of the Asian churches regarding pluralism to the universal church. It will help the so called "churches of the Christian west" to liberate them from their narrow vision of God's plan.

The Asian experience at dialogue is also fraught with many challenges and risks. But for that reason, we are not to bury our specific task (talent) in a pluralistic context, nor are we discouraged from following the spirit, wherever he leads us. With increasing encounters and experiences new doubts and questions will naturally emerge, namely - what is the final goal of our dialogical efforts, how will dialogue affect our missionary enthusiasm, will our specific identity as Christians and Catholics be erased, is dialogue a gradual way to syncretism etc. But all these vicissitudes form part of the Asian journey "of growing and straining towards the consummation of the Kingdom" (LG.5). These questions and attempts at responses really help us purify and strengthen our faith in God, in Christ, and in His church.

The Council, can calm down protests from some quarters and instead - muster support and encouragement of the universal church for our difficult journey with the Spirit. And on the other hand it can mediate the fruits of our Spirit-guided experiences to the others of the universal church. (This is the cross and resurrection of inter-religious dialogue).

### **7) We are now called for a reversal of vision' in situating Christianity in the religious pluralism of Asia.**

One conclusion that emerges clearly from the past experiences is about the **new place of Christianity in Asia**. There are still among us elitist Catholics, who consider their Christian belief as 'an absolute and exclusive heritage'. Coming to terms

with religious pluralism means to them a weakening of a long cherished tradition and a move towards syncretism. Belonging to the church has given to many a false superiority. We are now cajoled to renounce this supercilious stance in the new world of religions, cultures and ideologies. Unless and until we give up such a narrow vision, and the false superiority, and accept a realistic vision, we cannot assume our true identity and our specific roles along with other religions of Asia and in the total plan of God.

**For US it is no more a question of how to relate other religions to our Christianity - directly or indirectly, visibly or anonymously, but more a question of how to situate our Christianity in the midst of other religions and cultures.** It is no more "How shall we sing the Lord's song in a foreign land? Ps. 137:4, but "How can we sing a foreign song in the Lord's land? (S.J.Samartha, *Courage for Dialogue*, p.88). This is the Copernican Revolution called for in our Christian. vision.

Thus a challenge to Christianity, that went unanswered or smothered during the first phase of evangelisation in Asia, is emerging now with a new vigour and vitality. The emergence is enhanced by the new religious renaissance evident in all asian religions as well as by the common challenge to all religions, from the growing oppressive situation in Asia. That this challenge went unanswered by the earlier Asian churches and its foreign missionaries is understandable and even excusable. But who will forgive us - leaders and animators of Asian churches today - if we do not accept the-challenges of a God-given religio-cultural pluralism, and a man-made-unjust oppressive System?

Hence inter-religious dialogue in Asia is no more a means to subdue or avoid religious conflicts or to find a passive way of co-existence with other religions (good- neighborliness. Nor is it a mere tolerant act towards other religions. It is a radical and existential response to the demands of our Asian situation as well



as to the call of the Universal Church in Vat.II. It is basically a **rediscovering of the imperative of the Incarnation of Christ and his church in Asia**. It is a privileged gift and a crucial challenge to Us Asians, in our growing commitment to usher the Kingdom of God in Asia.

## Part 11

### AT A TURNING POINT TOWARDS NEW DEMANDS AND PROSPECTS

#### We have reached a turning point in our dialogical efforts.

Having completed the initial phase of a general openness and optimism towards people of other faiths, we now appear to be at a turning point. The larger sections of our churches, being not involved and active in dialogue, may not recognize any such turning point. But as front-line leaders having the obligation to make others aware of the progress of our journey in dialogue, we have to take timely and sufficient notice of this turning point.

Vat. II and the universal magisterium, and even some theologians of the older Western churches - all encourage US to face courageously, the God-given challenge of religious pluralism in Asia and to move past this turning point, towards a new future. Hence the relevant question - what is this turning point? In what does it consist? What demands does it make in our theologies?

In the recent decades we have rightly pre-occupied ourselves in searching the reasons for dialogue, and establishing the need and necessity for it. It is no more a question about the need and necessity of dialogue. Nor is it even trying to reach more and more agreement on commonalities and shelving back the unpleasant differences and difficulties for the future. **It is now**

**time for a sincere and committed review of our own faith, of the form (formula) and content of our belief and for facing the consequences of such a renewed faith for our Asian Churches moving towards God's Kingdom.**

In the light of our new experiences in Asia, with the people of other faiths, in the light of our own histories and the religious-cultural heritage, God has given to US, in the light of all socio-political challenges facing US in Asia, **we are called to justify, express and witness our belief in a new way in Jesus Christ and his church.** In-the Asian continents defined as one rich with cultures and religions, but poor in socio-political-economic realities, it is only right and fitting that **Christianity be conceptualized both in the richness and poverty of Asia.** In responding the challenges of the turning point we do not overlook or under-value our Christian sources. The sacred scriptures will continue to inspire US, the heritage of Christian tradition and magisterium (as constitutive elements of an evolving Christianity) will continue to guide and help US. It will be our sacred responsibility to be faithful to these, as well as to the new demands of our Asian journey around the turning point.

**1) Our convictions are strengthened about new directions for the Future.**

**a) We can move only forward**

What is for US beyond doubt is that we cannot go back on Vat.II. We can move only forwards. ( Final statement of the Extraordinary Synod -1985). As far as the third world churches are concerned, **Vat. II is a great stride forward, in the direction of the coming of God's Kingdom'.** ( Enelbert Mverg, Africanisches Profil von theologie und Kirche, in ZMR Heft 2/8 1986 p. 154).

**We cannot stop with Vat. II either.-as a conclusion valid**

**for all times.** The fruit of Vat. II lies not merely in concluding a counter-reformation period, but more in initiating and encouraging a progress for the future. The universal magisterium of the day is obliged -therefore not to stifle, but to discern optimistically the Spirit of Vatican II, moving also over Asia. The very Holy Spirit who inspired Vat. II with the renewal of the church from within (LG, GS, AG,) and opened the church to the world outside (GS, NA, DH,) continues to operate in the Asian churches and even in other religions too, on their journey towards the Kingdom.

**b) Our search with others not against authentic Christian faith.**

There is no such thing as a partial renewal of the church only from within. The inner and outer renewals are inter-dependent and simultaneous. A deeper renewal of the church as that of Christ, will imply a new relationship with the world of religions, cultures and ideologies. And a sincere openness and collaboration with the world of religions and cultures will result in appreciating and strengthening our own faith and life in the church in an authentic way. In other words, a life of deep faith in Christ, and within his church, is not to be falsely polarized as against a sincere and collaborative search with people of other faiths for ultimate truth and realities.

**c) Nor are we giving up our specific richness.**

The dialogue experience with other religions do not demand a giving up or a watering down of the specific richness that is revealed in the mystery of Jesus Christ - nor of any specific richness, that was assumed by his church through the early encounters with other religions and cultures of the-West. On the contrary, dialogical experiences will only help **US to situate the mystery of Jesus Christ on a wider perspective of the divine presence in the whole world and show how the Divinity is**



**active also in other eastern-religions.** It will also help US to situate Jesus the Christ, **in the right order of divine revelations** and the church which came after him - in the proper context of world religions. Exclusivity and isolation with respect to Jesus Christ and to his church, will only amount to hiding the light under the bushel, or preserving the salt and leaven in a bottle.

**d) Jewish Christian Revelation does not exhaust all divine revelations.**

We have had in the past a concept of revelation which limited all divine revelation to Jesus Christ and his church in a narrow sense. The truth that we profess that all revelations reach their fullness in Jesus Christ or that Jesus Christ being the fullness of revelation must not be interpreted to limit and impoverish the infinite revelatory action of God to solely in and through Jesus Christ, but must be understood only in relation to the revelations made to the Jews in their history.

Hence a distinction must be made between the Jewish Christian revelation that has come to us through the medium of the church and the other non-Christian revelations (of the same God) in the religion's and cultures aroused us. We need to complement our Jewish-Christian linear notion of revelation with a God-centered but all radiating and all-pervading notion of divine revelation.

History of Israel is no longer the unique place where God's actions for the salvation of the world is realized. It is a paradigm, a powerful example of how God's mission makes its way into the history of the nations of the world. What happened in Israel happened in the history of other nations as well (JAN VAN Butsela, Israel in ecumenical thinking: an analysis, in IRM July 1988, p. 444).

Accepting Christian revelation should not lead us to deny

or depreciate the revelatory force of other religions and cultures, but on the contrary, show us a christian way of praising and thanking God for his marvels among men.

**e ) False fears of syncretism could impoverish our idea of God**

False fears that dialogue with or openness to other religions will lead to syncretism have made some of us unwilling to open ourselves to anything outside the church and outside the Christian revelation. Our understanding of God and Jesus Christ has been nourished only by a Christian revelation - and that too filtered through scholastic philosophy and theology of the West. As a consequence we tend to impoverish our concept of God and forget a fact that is evident in all world religions - God is All in All. This does not mean that the christian revelation is imperfect and wanting. It only means that the wholeness of God be not denied for the excellence of the part.

**f) The need for a Kingdom-centered Christology and ecclesiology**

The Jewish-christian revelation, though linear, yet points towards an understanding' of the finality and goal of all religions and cultures. Revelation of Jesus was all about the kingdom and he presumed a whole variety of religions and cultures from East and West meeting on the last day (Is. Lk. 13.29; 60:4- 7; Ps. 72: 10) . Instead of developing a kingdom-centred christology, eschatology and ecclesiology, we have been influenced probably by the earthly' kingdoms, principalities and powers, and moved away in other directions. Consequently we have inherited only a narrow understanding' of revelation, salvation and even of the Kingdom! This narrowness has made us somewhat uncomfortable in the total context of' the God-given religions and cultures, and made us less concerned, or even unconcerned about the Kingdom for the vast majority of humanity.

We used to interpret the “ May thy Kingdom come” into “ may thy church grow” and consequently interpret missionary zeal and activity in terms of” quantitative church-growth. Vat. 11 has helped us to rediscover the Kingdom-centred Christ and the Kingdom-centered Church so that all our missionary efforts will be within the parameters of a Kingdom centered Christology, ecclesiology and missiology. **In this perspective inter-religious dialogue is an integral and indispensable dimension of the new missionary vision of the church.**

**g) We Asians can contribute to the enrichment in the understanding of Christ and his Church**

In the first phase of evangelization, the Asians accepted Jesus Christ and his Church in the dress and language in which he was accepted by the Jews, the Greeks and the Romans. What was presented then to the Asians was not the historical person of Jesus Christ and the form of’ early communities of believers in him. It was an already developed Christology and an already fortified institutional church. We have gone along with such a Christology and ecclesiology for three to four centuries.

But such a Christology and ecclesiology, by their monopolistic-exclusivist absolutism cannot meet the demands of the Asian pluralism. **Nor are we wanting in the necessary religio-cultural and socio-economic categories that can grasp and express belief in Jesus Christ and his Church.** Hence we are faced with the obligation to re-discover Jesus the Christ from the biblical sources through Asian categories wild allow an Asian Christology to evolve in history. Similarly we have to re-discover the constitutive elements of the early Christian communities ( Word, Spirit, Faith, Worship, Eucharist, Service etc) and allow Asian christian communities of believers to move towards new ecclesiologies (new local churches, basic Christian communities etc. ).



Such a re-discovery with respect to **Christology and ecclesiology** is not counter to, nor a denial of the **one faith, one baptism, one church**, nor even a contradiction of the **scholastic Christology and ecclesiology that is taught in Europe**. The **Asian Christologies and ecclesiologies by their diversity**, will only help enrich the **universal understanding of Christ and his Church**.

**2. The New Testament origins of Christology and consequent development in the first centuries will still remain fundamental and constitutive for future development.**

We who are familiar with the origins and foundation of the New Testament christology are also aware

a) that behind all christological developments, there stands the historic figure of Jesus and the claims - direct and indirect - which he made for himself in the midst of a judaic audience.

b) that it was the resurrection of Jesus which gave the decisive stimulus to christological thinking of Jesus as Lord and Messiah.

c) of various tools - Palestinian Judaism, Hellenistic Judaism, hellenistic Gentile vocabulary used in evolving Christology and

d) that the roots of Christology were in the application of expectant wild nostalgic categories from the O.T and Judaism to Jesus.

We are also aware that the development of Christology, during the first few centuries of the church has been stimulated by heresies and erroneous claims made by different churches.

Hence the teaching of the Universal Church assumed the form of an apologetic Christology which gradually reduced the functional claims of Jesus as Christ and increased an ontological absolutism about his being and nature. This led to an exaggerated Christocentric sense in phraseology and revelation, to the detriment of a Theo-centric sense in them. The experience of dialogue with other faiths can help us to move away from such an exaggerated pre-occupation with Christ to a more realistic and beneficial understanding of Christ in human history. The first Christ-event is not an end in itself, but an effective pointer (Sacrament of God) to the wider presence of God in history. The factors that contributed to early Christology also remind us of the new factors from our own time and place, which can shape the future Christologies.

### **3. Need to think and revise the absolutist and exclusivist claims of Christology and ecclesiology**

We have passed the initial stage of joy and consolation at discovering some similarities between christianity and other religions, at seeing Christ and christianity latent in other religions and at seeking other religions and their scriptures as having a preparatory role in relation to Christianity similar to that of Judaism to christianity.

With the official statement given by Vat.II against the absolutist and exclusivity stance of the church with regard to itself, with regard to salvation, with regard to the non-Catholic Christian churches (LG.15,16, 8; N.A.1,4), we are slowly led to discover the kernel of that openness of Vat,II in things such as universal salvific will of God, possibility of salvation in other religions, the true church of Christ only subsisting in the Roman Catholic Church, the action of the Holy Spirit outside the Church etc. All these have the cumulative effect of calling for revision and re-

understanding of our old theological formulae - and among these eminently, those of Chalcedonian Christology and counter-reformation ecclesiology.

Contrary to the accusations that dialogue with other faiths can relativize (reduce) our faith in God, in Christ, in Church etc., we Asians have a different experience. We start from the experience how God the Infinite has relativized Himself as man in order that he be understood, how he has revealed himself in various forms and in stages in the history of humanity, and how he has been active and still active in our cultures and histories. In such a perspective we feel that the Christian revelation and its contents have been too much isolated and absolutized

Vat.II, realizing the difficulties of harmonizing the traditional Christian teaching with that of the local religions and cultures, admits that such difficulties must stimulate the mind to a more accurate and penetrating grasp of the faith through new theological investigations. Hence its exhortation that theologians take “to more suitable ways of communicating doctrine to the men of their times” (Gs. 62 abc).

Further the conviction that we are responsible for our own salvation and that we Asians must take more seriously and evaluate positively all the God-given native religions and cultures of Asia, is growing. **The fear of syncretism decreases and the heroism to take risks increases** - especially after Vat.II’s clear statement that the deposit of faith or revealed truths is one thing, the manner in which they are formulated without violating their meaning and significance is another” (GS 62c).

**Hence many of the Asian theologians reject an unparalleled, unsurmountable uniqueness, absolutism and exclusivity in their Christlogy and ecclesiology.**

It is only God who is “absolutely absolute, exclusive and unique”. Religions, Christianity inclusive, can only opt for a



unrestrictive absoluteness” that can compromise with religious pluralism, with salvific values in other religions and even salvation in other religions. Thus each religion enjoys a “relative absoluteness” which is different from the absoluteness of God. Religious beliefs and their practices are only experiences of an Absolute Reality far beyond their limits.

#### **4. The distinction between the historic person of Jesus and his Christological titles is necessary and important**

The unity of the person Jesus Christ was established in Chalcedon (451 ) as a definitive answer to all the christological errors that arose in the 4th and 5th centuries. But an uncritical acceptance of this dogmatic truth has led catholic theology to overlook an important distinction between the historical Jesus and his christological titles and has helped to identify totally Jesus as Christ, and Christ as Jesus. It is now questioned not for any heretical reasons as in the 5th century, but by those who see an important and necessary distinction between the once and for all definitive event of a historical-Jesus and the Christological titles given to him later by particular beliefs and cultures that accepted him. Seeking a re-understanding of the Chalcedonian Christology is not to go back to anti-chalcedonian heresies or watering down the christological belief of the present Church. It is precisely to make real and integrated our christological faith in Jesus that such a revision, rethinking and reformation is demanded. An example of how experiences and expressions of the ultimate reality are conditioned by languages and cultures of people is seen in the distinction and parallel Aloy Pieris draws between Jesus the Christ and Gautama the Buddha. He brings out the dangers of a closed and total identification between the human person and the titles they inherit from their believing communities and indicates a prophetic phraseology vis a vis the buddhology. (The Buddha and the Christ, Part III, in: EAPR 19 8 8 / 2 . )

Asians will accept and acknowledge the historic Jesus and profit from the Christological titles given by the early Christians of the Judeo-Hellenistic communities, But we will not stop with those titles. We will accept and acknowledge the same Jesus in our own categories.

## **5. Asian Christologies and ecclesiologies must have a cultural and liberative dimension**

In the language of the West, a neat distinction has been made between religion, culture and between social, political and economic conditions. That this distinction cannot hold water in Asia is the experience of Asian Christianity. It is struggling to live as an institutional church, foreign to the religio-cultural character of the people but promoting inter-religious tolerance or dialogue. Even the socio-economic development services are being attempted through a superiority of Western funds and technology. In recent times parallel to its openness and optimism towards other religions, there are also attempts at inculturation and contextualization . **But the futility of promoting culture and at the same time attempting development in the above way, namely, without a dialogue with the culture and religions of the people, without harnessing the local potentialities and without involving them directly in the process, is emerging clearly in many instances.**

Asian theologians, taking religions, cultures and socio-economic realities of the people as constituent components of the one emerging society, will find theological value not merely in a purely restricted inter-religious dialogue of the word nor in a restricted inculturation or contextualisation, but in **a dialogue (dialectic) of life that encompasses religion, culture and socio-economic conditions. Hence Asian Christologies and Ecclesiologies must vibrate with the religio-cultural richness**

as well as with the socio-political poverty of Asia.

**Conclusion:-**

Dialogue as dialogue or its goals and methods have not been our primary concerns here. We have tried to see the demand and impact of inter-religious dialogue in the evolution of Asian christologies and ecclesiologies, There are a litany of ways to prepare raw materials towards Asian theologies. For example, the struggles of the Asian masses on one side for justice and freedom - in the face of dehumanizing injustice and oppression - and on the other side, the various images of Jesus, as emerging even in popular Asian religiosity, will contribute to the future christologies and ecclesiologies in Asia.

Christology or ecclesiology is not the goal of dialogue, nor dialogue the goal of any Christology or ecclesiology. But dialogue in so far it remains a movement of life, of *sincere searching together towards the Ultimate Truth and Ultimate Happiness* will have the greatest impact and evolutionary force on these sciences. And conversely a progress in these sciences, through their praxis-doxis consensus will greatly enhance and enrich the movement of humanity towards the Ultimate.

***May all attain Ultimate Moksha, Nirbana, Eternal life & Kingdom!***



*I am grateful for all theological discussions I had with him in Tübingen about Church, world - religions, global ethics & my work in Sri Lanka & in Asian Churches. He wrote letters encouraging me in my struggles, somewhat similar to his. God is Truth & Justice, our victory assured.*



## CONCERN 4

### MARTYRDOM IN AN ASIAN STRUGGLE FOR LIFE AND DIGNITY

#### **1. Renewing concept of martyrdom in the light of present struggles**

Karl Rahner on the eve of his death rightly called for an enlargement of the concept of martyrdom in the context of active struggles for truth, justice and peace in the world. This call is increasingly justified in the context of the many struggles for life and dignity going on within the Asian continent. Though this continent of peoples is blessed with great religions and age old cultures and traditions, human life is still conditioned and threatened by many man-made practices of social injustices, oppressions and discriminations.

While the governing structures and the higher strata of society in these countries, enjoyed fellowship and recognition as enlightened democrats from their former colonial masters and present counterparts of the first world, much of the Asian population as such still faces many threats to life and its human dignity from these very democratic governments. Hence there are many struggles of people against their own governments for survival, human dignity and liberation.

As a result millions of Asians are victims of oppression. They die in their fight against evil, they die because they do not want to betray the good values of their ancestors, their forefathers and their religions preserved, because they want to defend the God-given land and heritage to them as a people, because they want to cherish the dignity and right conferred on them by God by reason of their Likeness to God. Still the se victims and

defenders are not counted in history.

With Asian struggles becoming the matrix of a new victimhood and martyrdom, going beyond the “catholic concept” towards a widening concept that will recognize other forms of martyrdom will serve the growing need for religions to join hands in fighting the common threats to life and dignity of the human being.

It is with this interest a case study could be made of the long Struggle the Tamils are waging for life and dignity on the island of Sri Lanka. The so called ethnic conflict in Sri Lanka, between the majority Sinhala people and the minority Tamil people degenerated into a 20 years long horrendous war between the Sinhala oppressive State and the Tamil militants who rebelled against it. Such a study can be a resourceful window to see some of the new images of victimhood and martyrdom emerging out of this struggle.

## **2. The Tamil Struggle<sup>4</sup> in Sri Lanka**

History reveals that by successive migrations from the Indian sub-continent beginning before 2000 years, the south and west of this island were inhabited by the Sinhala people who were Buddhists and the north and east of the island by the Tamils who were Hindus. Islam, as the religion of the later migrant traders from India and Christianity as the religion of the 16<sup>th</sup> century Portuguese colonizers, also found a place in the religious niches of the island.

As a result of many south-Indian invasions and feudal wars among the Singhalese and Tamils, there emerged three kingdoms - two Singhalese kingdoms with their capital in Kotte and in Kandy and one Tamil kingdom with its capital in Jaffna. From the beginning of the 16<sup>th</sup>. Century the island came under three successive waves of colonialism – the Portuguese, the Dutch

and the British – each ruling the island for about 150 years. The Portuguese, brought Christianity with them and the Dutch after persecuting the Catholics introduced their Reformed Churches. The British who took full control of the island, including the Kingdom of Kandy, brought all three kingdoms as one state and introduced in 1833 one centralized administration of the whole island with Colombo as capital and English as the official language of the country. Under the British, except for the so called Indian Tamil tea-estate workers brought by the British for their tea plantations, others of different ethnicity and religions enjoyed equality of rights.

The island enjoyed the natural resources and the human potential to become a multi-ethnic and multi-religious island of unity in diversity, but chauvinistic politicians helped by extreme nationalists have ruined it.

When the three waves of colonialism( Portuguese, Dutch and British) came to an end, after almost 450 years, political power went into the hands of the Sinhala majority, who overlooking the rights of the Tamils as genuine and equal citizens of the island, converted the British centralized administration into a Sinhala Buddhist administration thus forcing the Tamils under a new form of imperialism. The last 50 years has witnessed the Sinhala majority Government using a majoritarian-democracy to pass anti-Tamil laws, oppress an ethnic minority by plundering its rights and denying their identity and their homeland.

### **3. Ethnic Discrimination, mob-violence and State-violence leads to counter-Tamil violence and War against the State**

When three decades of non-violent and democratic attempts to win their basic human rights failed miserably, the Tamil people, faced with further genocidal measures, resorted to a militant struggle against the oppressive forces of the State. State



terrorism begot counter Tamil terrorism and finally a war between the State and the LTTE which rebelled against the State in the name of the victims. The war-weapons of the state were not mere aerial bombings and artillery shelling but economic blockade, media blockade, rape of Tamil women, disappearances of Tamil youth and wanton destruction of ecological resources of the Tamils. To these the Tamil response was guerilla and suicide attacks on the enemy positions.

On the other hand, hundreds of soldiers from very poor Sinhala families, who only joined the Army to earn their bread, were getting killed leaving behind many widows and orphans. Thousands of innocent Tamils were victims of aerial bombing and artillery shelling of schools churches and temples. 800,000 Tamils have fled the island for survival and an equal number are internally displaced destitute.

The human and material loss incurred by the 20 years old war and the bankruptcy of the governmental coffers to continue a war have finally forced both sides to a cease-fire and begin direct talks towards a political resolution of the conflict.

#### **4. Glorifying and Demonizing tendencies will not help**

The martyrs and saints on one side of the conflict tend to be the enemies and demon-figures of the other. While the State-forces and their actions, are seen by many extremist Singhalese as justified actions of a democratic state to defend itself against separatism and terrorism of the Tamil rebels, the non-violent and democratic pleadings of the Tamils for almost 30 years are overlooked or even ridiculed and only the actions and reactions last resorted to by the Tamil militant LTTE against State-Terrorism, are easily labeled as mere Tamil terrorism and thus indiscriminate killing of Tamils justified.

Hence a dispassionate reading of the struggle and the

struggling people - their aspirations, convictions, motivations and mindset of the people who are struggling as victims and as self-giving (*that-kodai*) martyrs have to be undertaken.

Many of the Tamil Christians forced to live as victims under aerial bombings, artillery shelling, economic blockades and horror rapes of women and murder of innocents were reading the Bible from the perspective of the oppressed. And this gave them strength to suffer and hope to walk along. Out of these experiences when they cried for better understanding and justice they were labelled as rebels and supporters of terrorism.

## **5. The Religious view of Tamils about their Victims and Martyrs**

All Tamils, be they Hindus or Christians, view their suffering very much in the same way because they share a worldview. This view is largely conditioned by Hindu-Saivism, the centuries old religion of the Tamils, which believes in a destiny decreed by the gods called (*thali eluththu*) and in present suffering caused by past evil (*Karma*). A form of resignation based on the above belief plays a role in accepting and withstanding much suffering with patience and endurance. Although they suffered many discriminations and humiliations, immense loss of life and property, yet they were resilient, cool and calm against the provocative and inhuman actions of the State. Such a view does not give a direction or impetus to fight back against the alleviation of the suffering or the complete removal of suffering. Instead the Hindu belief in reincarnation of gods as super-human beings to fight against evil plays a role in accepting and recognizing those in the name of the suffering people or victims fight back the oppressor.

While we Christians believe that it is only by the removal of sin, the root cause of suffering, that we can overcome the

suffering these Saivites believe in the re-incarnation of the gods as super human beings in many ways to fight against evil. They live also in the hope that leaders will be born even with divine power to fight for them against the triumph of evil. It is on this view that the LTTE invites all the Tamils to two focal commemorations –one on Victimhood and other on Martyrdom.

## 6. Victimhood and Martyrdom:

### Focal Commemorations of the Tamil Liberation Struggle

On the 23<sup>rd</sup>. of July 1983, thousands of innocent Tamils, including 53 Tamil prisoners in the state prison at Welikade, were literally butchered to death all over the island. This holocaust is commemorated annually as Black July of victims. And on the night of the 26<sup>th</sup>.- 27<sup>th</sup>. of Nov. is observed as the Heroes Night (*Mahaveerar Thinam*), honouring thousands of Tamil heroic youth who gave their lives in fighting for the liberation of their people. These two events commemorating the *victimhood* and *martyrdom* have fostered a powerful growth of Tamil nationalism and an increasing thirst for Tamil liberation.

Besides these there are also commemorations of those who fasted to death against the cruelties of the Sri Lankan Army and the Indian Peace Keeping Forces respectively (*Satyagrahis – Annai Poopathy and Deleepan*)

Both Hindus and Christians participate actively in these commemorations honouring their dear ones as self-sacrificing heroes of Tamil liberation. Though the majority of the Tamils are Hindus and it is customary in Hinduism to burn their dead, those who die in combat are given burials with due military honours in well-kept war cemeteries and their memory commemorated as *martyrs for the cause of liberation of the Tamils*.



Without attempting to explain away, justify or encourage violence in any form, one can easily understand how a struggling people and their leaders, are forced by the oppressor to react to state injustice and state terrorism through suicide bombings even overlooking collateral damages to innocent lives.

Repeated pleas not to air-drop bombs on civilian population under the pretext of targeting terrorists went unheard for years. Air attacks were carried out even on refugee camps, churches, temples, schools and hospitals. What action could be expected on behalf these victims? Not having any plane or a bomb to retaliate in a similar manner (as in the case of war between two states), some suicide cadres of the LTTE secretly penetrate the military base situated next to the civil Airport in Colombo, make themselves into human-bombs and explode the very jet planes which bombed their brethren for days and nights for years. This was done without killing a single civilian.

### **An Overview**

Struggles bring out the best in human beings. And in the case of the Tamil Struggle one good thing is that it had motivated Tamil Christians to better inter-religious solidarity in suffering along with the Hindus, to greater awareness of injustices inflicted on the Tamils and to recognize values such as self-sacrifice, heroism and patriotism beyond the boundaries of their churches.

The phenomena of victimhood and martyrdom unfolding within the liberation struggle of the Tamils, though condemned by the opponents, ridiculed by the media and abhorred by the modern society as mere terrorism, they still raise disturbing but valid questions to our present day establishments - be it the so called "democratic State", be it the neutral NGOs or the Church within such a State.

The struggles of people for truth, justice and freedom,

have more and more focused the attention of the world on new culprits of oppression and oppressive structures near and far. But the major powers of the world tend to strengthen a coalition of oppressors who have an absolutist stance about order and justice in the world.

The western world proclaiming its “new world-order”<sup>10</sup> and wielding its political and financial power tends to absolutise its own interests, form of democracy, human rights and international laws, easily accuses struggling people with their own definitions of terrorism, seeks to justify their hidden power-seeking acts of horror and bulldoze over the genuine aspirations of people dying for their convictions.

People in struggle believing in the righteousness of the international community appeal to their highest authorities, for example – to the UN and its Structures. But to their disappointment they find that even these are subject to manipulations by the powers!

Unfortunately the religion founded on Jesus Christ the Prophet, to question the partiality of the rich and the powerful has succumbed to some of the world views of the major powers, taken over uncritically the vocabulary and judgments of the oppressor, and gradually weakened and silenced itself to be part of the establishment. But the majority of humanity suffering and struggling are relying more and more on the cries of their victims and on the heroic martyrdom of their rebels who have given up their own lives so that others may have a just and free life.

It is up to religious institutions like the church to stand out as advocates of these struggles and cry halt to oppressions, injustices and mass killings.

## CONCERN 5

### ORDAINED MINISTRIES IN THE LOCAL CHURCHES OF ASIA

#### **1. Problems facing the pastoral ministry today**

The PRESENT pastoral situation in Asia as in other parts of the world can be evaluated from within the Church as well as from outside. Both forms of evaluation are important, because the Church we believe in is in the world and for the world and its service is not only for those within the church, but also, in a special manner, to those outside its visible membership. Such an evaluation reveals the following significant aspects of the situation.

##### **1.1 Falling Numbers**

However, much Church leaders may delude themselves with an apparent numerical increase of vocations and the consistent maintenance of established parish structures, a realistic view of the proportional increase of population and tasks versus an increase in the number of drop-outs and retirement from active ministry definitely indicates a fall in the number of vocations to the ordained ministry. Though the seminaries and houses of formation have tried to adapt their methods of formation in favour of a more liberal growth to maturity, the priestly vocation in its present form does not appear to offer an attractive challenge to the young Asian of today.

##### **1.2 Inadequate Services**

Due to the widening of the concept of evangelization to mean an integral development of the whole human person (cf.



*Evangelii Nuntiandi*, n. 18ss) and consequent call for involvement in the struggles of Asians for salvation from injustices, oppression and poverty, the services to be done by the ordained minister have considerably increased. The same ordained minister especially in the absence of special and suitable lay ministers for such services, divides his time and concern between the traditional services around the altar and the new services demanded by the human and social conditions of the people. Consequently the services of the ordained who is called to work, often beyond his competence, are neither qualitatively nor quantitatively adequate.

### 1.3 Clergy-laity relation still immature

In spite of some initial moves on the part of the clergy and laity to reduce the gap between them, much has still to be done in the area of mature relations and right attitudes among them. The clergy,

who should know better and who have an obligation to make the initial moves to reduce this unjust gap of superiority to a mere functional 'distinction entailing a unifying purpose' (*L.G.*

32d), often appear suspicious of the laity and are reluctant to cede due rights to the laity. They are still afraid that such moves would wrest sacred powers from their hands and reduce their status in the Church. And on the other hand, the majority of the Asian laity are no better. They appear to be satisfied, to leave the clergy on their pedestal of power, while they themselves are content to take a back seat and play a passive role of non-involvement in the Church. Thus, the false positions, into which the clergy and the laity have mutually pushed each other in the course of time, continue to be perpetuated.

### 1.4 The spirit of clerical relation unevangelical

The height of the pyramidal structure of power has not

been sufficiently reduced to allow collegiality to function at all levels as a principle. Collegiality, though stressed by Vat.II and accepted as a principle in decision making, in team spirit and in the apostolate, there are still practical difficulties in the present structuring of our ecclesial communities.

Often a misunderstanding of freedom and maturity and a lack of interpersonal relationships prove obstacles to an evangelical practice of obedience due to bishops and superiors. Since Vatican II there has been an increase in the number of structures to promote better relationship among the clergy - the senates of priests, pastoral councils, commissions for various apostolates - but much still remains to be done to create that fraternal spirit which should characterize the co-workers of Christ.

### **1.5 Lack of leadership in Asian Society**

The present situation as seen from the outside shows a decrease in the visible and effective leadership of the ordained ministers in Asian society. In an Asia that is rich in religions and cultures, where ordained ministers, especially during the period following independence from colonialism, exerted greater force of leadership in the political, social and educational, But the present state of things shows a decline in their influence.

Surely under colonial leadership the Christian leadership enjoyed a privileged position and exerted greater weight. We cannot of course aspire to such favoured positions today. But in the wake of the resurgence of nationalism - religiously and culturally, the Christian leadership of ordained ministries, under the false pretext of distancing themselves from all political involvement, has failed to identify itself with the aspirations of the masses for a just and social order. This non-involvement may be largely due to a fear of being in opposition to governments in power. But such altitudes and positions have robbed us of any social leadership and irrelevant to the injustices and sufferings of people.

## 1.6 Distant from the darker realities of Asia

The ordained ministers even now appear to remain at a distance from the problems that are constitutive of our Asian-ness or Third Worldness, namely poverty, injustice, oppression, ill-health. If religions and cultures are considered as riches constituting one side of the Asian reality, the other side is constituted by the total infra-human condition of Asia. With the sole exception of Japan all the Asian countries are densely populated with suffering masses of human beings. If the Church has a salvific role to play in Asia, it is primarily to liberate the Asian from his sub-human condition or poverty and injustice. And the ordained ministers, as chief stewards of the churches, cannot but identify themselves with movements for human liberation.

## 1.7 Priestly Problems in an Asian Style

The ordained ministers of Asia - both bishops and priests - have their own share and style of the common priestly problem faced by their counterparts of the world. We mention some as examples. Recognition of the salvific value of other Asian religions poses not only questions about motivation for missionary work or conversion, but also leads priests to question their own faith and the value of their work, and can lead to frustration and despair (*P.O.* 22b).

Celibacy, which is better appreciated in Asian religions, meets with resentment, opposition and criticism, particularly because of its compulsory nature and the over-emphasis given to it by the Latin Church. Obedience to superiors, independence in thinking and decision making, maturity in their dealings - these are all largely conditioned by a certain amount of financial security of priests. At times these very short comings are misused by superiors, for their own ends. Such situations generally result in a crisis of faith or of identity (irrelevancy/immaturity), and consequently a priest opts out of the diocese institution or goes his own way, to operate centres of influence (if it be possible, independent of the bishop!) or goes in search of green pastures of the



Western world, either as a priests or a layman. The net result of these accumulated decisions is a loss of ordained personnel for the established structures of services in the local churches.

## **1.8 Ordained ministers raised no cry for useful reforms**

The present pastoral policy of the majority of Asian churches, seems to be still striving at great cost to maintaining the *status quo* reached centuries ago. This may be due to an exaggerated submissiveness to Rome and equally uncalled for respect for the wishes of western benefactors.

The emergence of the indigenous clergy in this century and the maturation of our local churches in the course of time, have not much to be proud of, by way of new efforts at spreading the faith or at building up the Christian communities. Prior to Vatican II, the Asian churches knew no renewal-movements for liturgy or lay apostolate or ecumenism such as arose in Europe after World War II. Although the need was felt to some extent at the grass-root level, there was no leadership of the ordained ministry, not even in the form of local movements to agitate for reform as was being done in the West. The reforms brought about Vatican II were the fruits of the four movements – biblical, liturgical, ecumenical and lay - that preceded the Council especially in Germany, France and Italy. There were no such movements from Asia to influence any reform specifically for our benefit. The brave spirit of an Alexander de Rhodes or a de Nobili of the early Asian Churches was conspicuously absent in the recent past.

## **2.0 General nature of the attempts at finding solutions**

### **2.1 No significant effort to close the gap between increasing need and decreasing personnel**

The diaconate was restored as a permanent state of life (*L.G.* 29) and recommended to the young churches especially to meet their shortage of personnel (*A.G.* 16g). Although this was

warmly accepted by the bishops of our churches, in actual practice they did not see much profit in having them, for most of the functions attributed them were already done by religious and lay people.

The Asian Colloquium on new ministries (Hong Kong, 1976) made a positive contribution by way of situating the ministries squarely in the, context of Asian realities. But regrettably little has been done to renew the traditional ministry or to create new ministries for new demands.

## **2.2 Neither the religious-cultural richness nor the material poverty of Asia has been adequately articulated in the ordained ministries of Asia**

Any ministerial leadership for the salvation of Asia which does not take into serious consideration the multi-religious and cultural situation, by way of dialogue, tolerance and fellowship, and the oppressed situation by way of solidarity and liberative movements, is bound to fail. Our ordained ministries, which are so sensitive and eager to regulate and ritually celebrate liturgy and effectively give sacramental services within diocesan or parochial structures, do not appear to be equally sensitive to the richness and poverty of Asia!

## **2.3 Ad hoc solutions for emergency situations**

A false notion is often created that after the Second Vatican Council we are in an emergency situation with regard to services and consequently many *ad hoc* solutions are justified and radical solutions are postponed or completely ignored. The hope that things will return to 'normal' as was before Vatican II is a type of wishful thinking and of escapism from real situations. This is anything but a sign of true leadership. Under the pretext of providing a solution for a passing situation, leaders have very often proposed

*ad hoc* solutions without courage, foresight and continuity. It is not unlikely that those who pose such short-term solutions intend them to be effective as long as they are in office or that they may help them to tide over a difficult period in their tenure of office.

#### **2.4 Regional Problems seeking universal solutions**

Although after Vatican II national and regional hierarchies have started to function for common pastoral programmes and for better co-ordination with the universal church, they still do not enjoy sufficient freedom and initiative to decide nationally or regionally, their priorities and problems. Independence and plurality of forms of local churches are still not very effective. Hence it very often happens that local issues are placed before regional bodies and regional issues before universal bodies, and in each case detailed guidance from such bodies is expected.

Although the higher bodies have invited the local churches at least a few times to show initiative and creativity to discover solutions for their own problems, the latter often seem to be neither adequately responsive, courageous nor mature. They still look to Rome to spell out in detail all what has to be done at home. If the Church has a genuine right to be Asianized (as was told to the Church in Africa by late Pope Paul VI, Kampala, 1969:- You *could* and you *ought* to have an African Christianity) then the leadership of the ordained ministry in Asia has an obligation to be more courageous and creative,

#### **2.5 Financial Assistance determining the forms of our ordained ministries and ministers**

Our ordained ministries and ministers, more than any other aspect of the Church, for maintaining their own form and structure, for their formation and maintenance depend largely on the outside for finance. Vocations are not sufficiently community-based or community- supported, but treated as the private affair of the



hierarchy which sees to the education, formation and maintenance with funds from abroad. This situation of financial dependence results in the Church, in general, and the ministerial structure in particular, becoming a too expensive and un-changeable structure for the poor of Asia,

In spite of this consequence, a certain style of selection, formation and education is still encouraged by the benefactors as universally suited.

With the above conspectus of the pastoral situation, problems and attempts at our *locus theologicus*, let us proceed to seek the necessary evidence from the sources and the history.

### **3.0 Biblical Evidence on Ordained Ministries**

The foregoing exposure must be viewed in the light of the relevant biblical evidence. We propose to bring in here the conclusions of biblical theologians under the following aspects:

1. For the general institution of ministries
2. On the ministerial praxis of the N.T. churches
3. On the priesthood

Amidst the wide biblical research that is being done with regard to ministries in the Church, we could mention for our purposes some basic and commonly agreed findings of the scholars (cf. A. Lemaire, 'The Ministry in the N.T.: Recent Research' in *Biblical Theology Bulletin* 3 (1973), pp.133-166). These will have a value for our discussions both as norms to measure ministerial developments and deviations in our present churches and as inspiration and incentives for any further ministerial development.

#### **3.1 For the general institution of ministries**

- a) Scholars who agree that the public life of Jesus had laid

the foundation for the Church as a visible institution in history, will also readily agree that this institution was largely meant to be one of servants and helpers. Hence ministeriality was a fundamental character of the Church. And already in the first century of the Church there were various functions and titles encountered in the N.T. There were apostles, prophets, teachers, evangelists, doctors, presbyters and a large number of Pauline co-workers (cf. E.E. Ellis, 'Paul and his co-workers' in *NT Studies* 17, 1971, pp.437 - 452).

- b) Among these services there was one service that of the Twelve and of the apostles - which seen from different angles appeared to be original, essential, constitutive and fundamental. This becomes evident not only from the manner in which Jesus called them and dealt with them but also from the way they were later replaced or their function handed over in succession (Acts 1: 15-26, 1 Tim. 1:18, 1 Tim. 4:6.11.13, II Tim. 2:2.15, II Tim. 4:2, Tit. 2:1.15). This ministry of the Twelve enjoyed a unique authority from the Founder to 'invent' direct and sustain other ministries. All other dependent ministries acknowledged the centrality and presidency of this ministry and worked around and under it (cf. K.E. Kirk (ed.), *The Apostolic Ministry*, pp.10-12).
- c) Every community in the NT appears to have had its own gifts, charisms and services and none appears to be deficient or unable to meet a need with respect to services. Ministerial crisis or shortage was unknown in the NT churches.
- d) Titles and group patterns of service appear to be conditioned by the milieu and hence were different. The church at Jerusalem - due to the Jewish influence - had its

apostle, prophets and presbyters. The church at Antioch - a dynamic community of dispersed disciples from Judea - had its prophets and teachers. The Pauline communities of multiple charisms, in addition to the great apostle as leader had a variety of co-workers.

- e) But these differences in gifts, titles and patterns of organization do not appear as any obstacle to the strong and evident unity that existed among the various churches. Ministers were sent out to areas in need and gifts were sent to the communities who were in need of relief (Acts 13:1-3).

### 3.2 On the Ministerial Praxis of the NT Churches

- a) One thing stands out clearly from a critical analysis of the limited instances where ministerial needs were met by the early churches: The churches felt themselves competent to 'invent' (Acts 6:1-6) and direct (Acts 13:1-13) ministries to meet the needs that arose within and without the community.
- b) There was a *community consciousness* and a *collective sense of responsibility* to find the needed ministers, and a conviction that the Spirit filled community could meet their needs from its own resources.
- c) The independence with which the leaders acted, without in any way endangering the unity with the other churches and with the mother church, was evident.
- d) The qualities and conditions that were imposed were according to local standards and in keeping with the demands of the gospel message.
- e) The titles were taken from the environment with great liberality.



### 3.3 On the Priesthood

- a) Although the OT had a definitive Levitical priesthood for the function of sacrificing, teaching, and even consultation of gods, in the NT no Christian was identified as a priest (*hierus*). Though the early Christians, as a movement within Judaism, celebrated the Eucharist regularly, they did not see nor understand the celebration as a sacrifice, nor did they see any need for calling the one who presided over it a priest. Sacrifice and priesthood were associated with the temple, *which* they continued to attend even as Christians. It was only after the destruction of the temple (70 AD) when, in absence of Jewish priestly leaders, Christians had to think of themselves as founders of a new religion distinct from Judaism, that they came to see in the Eucharistic celebration a sacrifice and the one who presided over it as a priest.
- b) Although in the NT times those who presided at the Eucharist were not spoken of as priests, the seeds had already been sown in the gospel for a later development. By giving special significance to the elements of the meal that he ate with his disciples, Jesus himself supplied the community with a rite and a commemoration, that would later be seen as a sacrifice with its president called as priest (cf. R. Brown SS, *Priest and Bishop*, London (1971), pp. 10-20).
- c) So, the development or the evolution that took place already within the first century is not merely justified but potentially inspired by Jesus.
- d) Hence our usual claim, that Jesus clearly and explicitly instituted at the Last Supper as a sacrifice and a priesthood, should be modified to see more clearly the seminal beginnings of the Eucharist as a commemoration of his

saving love and of the washing of the feet of the disciples as a commemoration of his service.

*Hence the understanding of Christian priesthood as a Spirit-guided evolution from the seminal inspiration of Jesus, largely conditioned by the historical situation of the churches.*

But what has happened in history - especially in our young Asian Churches?

#### **4.0 Historical Development**

The churches that were transplanted faithfully in Asia with the help of colonial masters were very different from those planted by the apostles or the NT, The former were the products of a long and hazardous development of thought, life and structure on an alien soil (Mediterranean Countries). And worse still for the ordained ministers of our early churches as it was the time of counter-reformation rigidity and legalism.

The long ministerial development that preceded the Reformation affected both the bishop and the priest - but more especially the latter. The episcopate, based on an earlier tradition of the Greek-speaking communities, remained always in the Church as the pivotal leadership - even in spite of its having been contaminated by the trappings of high social and political privileges. The priesthood on the other hand, being the product of a longer evolution, was subject to deeper impacts and changes from socio-political history.

When the Reformers of the sixteenth century directed their attack against the cultic priesthood and its excesses, the Church was compelled to fortify its defensive structures. The first missionaries for our Asian churches were the loyal sons of missionary religious congregations born during the reformation and counter-reformation periods, which were marked by polemics

and disciplinary rigidity with respect to ministerial structures. Unlike Paul and Barnabas and the missionaries of the early churches, our missionaries were understandably preoccupied with fidelity to Rome and to their mother churches and less open to the new possibilities which encounters with different religions offered them.

Hence we could appreciate and understand the situation of this band of missionaries who understood themselves as men filled with sacred powers for definite sacerdotal and cultic functions within the churches. They were seen as the *alter-Christus* personifying all the ideals of Christian life, Hence spirituality was identified with sacerdotalism, and lay spirituality was hardly spoken of.

While the bishops tended to become increasingly administrators and guardians of order, and the diaconal ministry was seen merely as a liturgical step to priesthood, it was the priestly ministry that emerged into central prominence by swallowing up all other ministries in the

Church. If the laity did anything in the Church, and for the Church, it was done as an extension or a substitution of the priestly ministry. While Protestantism was making the Church into a people without a priesthood, we were reducing the Church to a priestly system without a genuine people.

Today when the ordained ministries are again feeling the impact of some deep sociological and ecclesiological changes - clearly acknowledged in the documents of Vatican II, and evident all over the world in a series of crises - it is incumbent on all our young Asian churches to examine their past history and become firmly decisive about the future. We could spell out this in the following three steps:

- i. We have accepted as genuine, original and *de fide* the already historically developed forms of ordained



ministries presented by the counter- reformation churches.

- ii. The ordained ministries, as practised by the young missionary churches, notwithstanding a colonial-conquest-and-conversion-attitude based on a hierarchical ecclesiology, did yeoman service in founding the churches of Asia. The pioneers worked under severe sub-human conditions and their discipline and heroic dedication led them to martyrdom. Their institutions for education, priestly formation and charitable services - all built at the cost of their sweat and blood - are facts which cannot be overstressed, nor for which we can ever be sufficiently grateful.
- iii. But today we find ourselves at the crossroads where we have to make decisions involving changes for *a clear vision, sincere consideration and boldness ill planning for the future*. We want to listen to the word of God and to the lessons of history, from within our own Asian situation of joys and sorrows, of diverse cultures yet common poverty. This is no reaction to counter- reformation practices not a rejection of the ways of our predecessors, but a holy obligation to read and interpret the signs of our times. And woe unto us if we do not (Mt. 16:3).

If the biblical evidence gives us an insight into the essential nature of the ministries in general and priesthood in particular and if the historical development shows the gradual development to present forms, then in determining the future shape of the ministries, the priorities and demands of today's Asia will play an important role.

## 5. Situational Priorities and Demands

The priorities that should underline and determine the future of ordained ministries in our churches could be briefly brought under three categories corresponding to three aspects of our Asian-ness,

1. Inculturation of our ministries.
2. Emphasis for ministries against poverty and social injustices.
3. Ministries to suit new ecclesial structures.

### 5.1 Inculturation

The second phase of evangelization in Asia is definitely an attempt at inculturation and the future of the church of Asia is bound up closely with the outcome of this attempt (cf. Cardinal Sin, *The Future of the Asian Church*).

If inculturation is understood as incarnation of the gospel message or values into a particular culture, so as to become relevant, meaningful and effective for the salvation of the people, then the need for it evidently springs from its very nature. This has been amply demonstrated by the pluriform birth and growth of the early apostolic churches. Had Paul and Barnabas set foot in India or China, instead of on Cyprus or Seleucia, the story of evangelization, in general, and of ministerial structure in particular, would have been quite different. But for us the first phase of evangelization in Asia was not a genuine encounter between the gospel and the culture but a transplantation of the Church in its long developed or alien in cultured form. And embracing the Christian faith meant estrangement from our own religious-cultural forms. Hence the need for inculturation springs also from our present unfortunate state of being foreign and not close enough to our own origins.

Culture is supportive and expressive of the life of the people. So is ministry to our faith and love for service. Hence ministry as the visible institution in expression and support of Christian life, has a primary need for inculturation. And such inculturation was evident already in the early churches. But in our Asian situation we face additional problems, as a consequence of our past history, and as a result we are forced to think of two types of inculturation - *direct inculturation* and *corrective inculturation*.

By the former we mean a genuine encounter between the gospel values and a new culture. Such an encounter may be effected in primary/frontier re-evangelization or in evangelization through dialogue with non-Christian religions where we do not carry or propagate the cultural forms of our institutional ministry but only the essential elements of Christian ministry (salvific service) which may put on suitable cultural forms through encounter.

By corrective inculturation we intend a simultaneous process of deculturation and inculturation - liberating ourselves prudently and gradually from acquired forms and taking in the genuine cultural forms of our lands. Most of our churches need to go through this complex and painful process. For this reason, we could perhaps express this complex process as the cross and resurrection of inculturation.

Hence the demands of inculturating our ministries will be basically three.

1. Only a ministry that is genuinely evangelical, open to cultures and social impacts can be incultured. And inculturation will be furthered in proportion to making the ministries more evangelical.
2. Community and culture are so intimately connected - one feeds on the other that if the minister is really from the



midst of community then he has assimilated basic cultural elements (of the community) in a natural manner and can re-express the faith and service in relevant forms. And vice versa, if the minister has firm ties with the culture of the community, then he could be incorporated into it. Hence inculturation will be in proportion to the extent to which the minister is community-based. Instead of selecting the minister from one community, forming him another and sending him to a third, each community with its positive religious-cultural riches and negative economic-social poverty should be the matrix and base of all its ministries.

## 5.2 Poverty and Social Injustices

Asia is poor. And Asia is ridden with a variety of social injustices like discrimination, political oppression and economic inequalities.

If religious and cultural plurality be the brighter face of Asia-ness, then there is a darker face too in the poverty and social injustices of Asia. If the former realities call for a sincere and genuine encounter in inculturation, the latter throws out a challenge to the salvific or liberative services of the Church in Asia. Thus eradication of poverty and the fighting of social injustices have become a central priority for the leadership of the churches. The future *raison d'être* of our churches will be determined largely by the response given by the ordained leadership of our churches to this challenge.

In spite of centuries of ecclesial dedication to the cause of the poor and the afflicted through the charitable institutions, we are all unhappy, or even ashamed, of our silence and non-involvement - let alone the occasional connivance in the face of massive poverty and social evils. Our excuse for such attitudes

has been often to label such inhuman evils as political, social and economic, and consequently, taboo for the ordained clergy.

But the new understanding of the mission of the Church in such situations, especially as found in the Conciliar documents and in the encyclicals *Pacem in Terris* and *Populorum Progressio* has been to encourage the Church leadership to fight these evils at all levels, and in ways in keeping with the moral teachings of the Church.

On the one hand this leadership must obviously avoid the two extremes: viz., of becoming friends with unjust powers that be, in order to win favours and privileges and thereby lose their strategic strength to Sponsor the cause of the poor of becoming too closed up / isolated labelling all inhuman issues as political, social and economic issues taboo for the Church.

But on the other hand, the ordained leadership must strive to develop positive and heroic forms of prophetic leadership for such causes. It is true that the laity have a right and duty to dominate on many secular issues. But that does not justify our labelling the world or the evils of the world as sacred and secular and carving out a safe and sacred niche for the ordained minister. Our form of leadership may be solidarity with the suffering or may be leadership of movements against such evils, both challenging in many ways.

But such forms of leadership will demand various life-styles or approaches in keeping with the struggles we are engaged in. And this in turn will require that the local churches inspire, guide and design their own method of selection formation and maintenance of their ordained ministers. In this sense it is obvious that many of our present seminaries and houses of formation have outlived their period of usefulness and need to be replaced by other forms of training suited to the local churches.

### 5.3 New Ecclesial Structures

The third priority which will determine the form of the ordained ministers in Asia are the new structural and communitary forms to which they are tending or aspiring to become. A great achievement of the ecclesiology of Vatican II is in the shifting of emphasis from an institutional concept of the universal church, which is divided into large administrative districts called dioceses, to a concept of the Church as mystery and sacrament, concretized or concretizable in every local human situation without losing any of its ecclesial gifts. This has resulted in the healthy acceptance and encouragement of the reality and pluriform of the local churches within the reality of a universal communion or universal Church which remains as a sacrament of salvation for the whole world.

Hence irrespective of any imposed conditions - especially those that cut through diverse cultures or races, and notwithstanding their administrative advantages - the sacrament of the Church will incarnate itself in a perfect manner within various peoples living with various cultural and social links. These churches will become local churches lacking none of the gifts necessary to become fully ecclesial.

Fortunately, parallel to the growing consciousness of the rights and duties of our churches to become local and incultured, there is also an increasing awareness, based on recent biblical research and situational needs, of the ecclesial dimension of our ministries. The ministers of the Church tend to move away from their clerical, hierarchical or power-block status and are becoming more and more ecclesial, community-based and community-oriented (cf. Y. Congar, *Ministres et communion ecclesiale*, Paris, 1971). Ministers are no longer individuals who descend from above filled with sacred power to do 'wonders' among the people according to their own fancies, but rather men



among men, blessed with certain gifts of the Spirit to be of service to their fellowmen. They are filled with powers and gifts of the Spirit for the benefit of the community - not to rule it but to serve it. According to Dietrich Bonhoeffer, they neither create the community nor are they created by the community but created with it and in it by the Spirit (his biography by E. Bethge, E.T., 1969).

Hence the various churches will have their right and obligation to determine, with their pluriformity of existence and function, the form of their ministers without in any way lessening their communion with the other churches. The present moves of the local churches to divide or demarcate dioceses is guided largely by administrative priorities as Rome sees them. A better approach would be to recognize the autonomy of the regional or national hierarchies, which can, not only divide and demarcate regions, but also recognize new forms of ecclesial communities (such as the Basic Christian Communities, Functional groups and centres other than the traditional parishes) - by using better criteria, like the presence of the Spirit, the Word, the liturgy, fellowship ... then territorial basis. This will facilitate recognizing the ministries and ministers that are created in the community by the Spirit.

## **6. Theological and Pastoral Perspectives**

The foregoing biblical evidence (b), historical evidence (c) and the situational priorities of Asia, (d) if allowed to interact on the pastoral situation of the ordained ministry, (a) in an interdisciplinary manner, will lead to theological conclusions with a pastoral orientation. Hence, we will try in this final section to present some such conclusions.

### **6.1 A shift in the notion of ordained ministries is evident**

The traditional understanding of the ordained minister as a mediator sent by God, as a man filled with sacred powers, as a man set apart for the offering of sacrifice and presiding over worship

and as an official of the institutional Church is being surpassed by his acceptance as an ecclesial community leader, as the point of unified ecclesial leadership, and as the representative of the headship of Christ - in the mystical body. This shift is not only justified and inspired by the NT evidence, but also in line with the ecclesiology of Vatican II which is in favour of an ecclesial-centred theology of ministry in preference to a sacerdotal theology of ministry.

## 6.2 New motives impetus to re-examine old questions

If the questions once raised by the Lutheran reformers regarding ministerial priesthood are raised again, it is not for any objectionable state of the clergy *vis-a-vis* the laity but for other genuine reasons. The pastoral situation of utter need of the Church in Asia obliges us to re-examine some of the traditionally accepted ecclesial realities, especially with respect to ministries. In this re-assessment we are encouraged and enlightened by the new insights into the sources as well as by an unbiased view of past historical development. The freedom for biblical research enjoyed in recent times gives evidence of an openness and liberality in NT attitudes and praxis, which are normative and inspiratory for our present situations. And 'our view of the historical development of ministries - especially, in our Churches - is not biased by the spirit of the encounter-reformation, but urged more by a genuine spirit of ecumenism.

Hence it is important to note that we cannot afford to dismiss the re-entry of old questions regarding priestly ministries as really belonging to a dead past and as being settled once and for all. The growing pastoral need and the decadent ministerial situation demand new answers under new light. Hence we could appeal to the defenders of pseudo-orthodoxy to be guided by genuine orthodoxy and orthopraxis and to put gospel values, situational needs and ecclesial goals before any other consideration from scholastic theology or ecclesiastical history and renew scholastic definitions regarding priestly ministry viz. ordination, character, laying on of hands . .

### **6.3 Ordained ministries within a wider structure of ministries: orders within a wider sacrament of, service: ordination within wider forms of recognition**

Though biblical evidence is for a large variety of ministries in different forms, early historical development narrowed them to the tripartite (three-tiered) ordained ministries and later development tended to make the priestly ministry to be identified as the only one ministry. The present needs, inspired by NT teaching and praxis, impel us to re-distribute the accumulated priestly functions to others in the Church on a wider structure of ministries. Thus, the ordained ministries must recognize and read just their image, role and function to make room for other collaborators or co-ministers. Such a move will not be detrimental to the present ordained ministers but will only demand of them that they should be the central leadership with a strong inspiration and encouragement for other ministers.

In the understanding as we have postulated above, the sacrament of orders should come to be understood as the sacrament of service - open *to* the whole people and *for* the whole people. It cannot be conceived only as a sacrament around the Eucharist or cultic services, but conceived *re* in terms of services to the whole Church. This sacrament will commemorate the servant - hood of Christ (cf. the washing of the feet of the disciples and the discourses about it) and will celebrate the ministeriality of the Church in general in terms of the gifts and services. Hence it is an occasion for the local church to thank the Lord, to accept the gifts, to recognize them suitably, to be at the same time the matrix and recipient of the services. It will be an incorporation into the public ministry and ministerial college of the local church.

Within this one sacrament, there should be a variety of recognition and strengthening too (valorising) according to the



needs of places and the nature of services demanded. This variety in recognition and strengthening is not intended to build a new power-structure or grade of membership in the church, but to create a diversity of functions for a unifying purpose (*L.G.* 32d). Ordinations could be meant for more stable and responsible leadership which will remain as the core of the whole ministerial college. Such moves in our view has advantages of smoothening out gradations and differences into functional distinctions, incorporating the whole ministerial college into the local church and will widen the services of the ministerial college. In this view the sacramental character in ordination would have to be rethought along the original Augustinian idea of incorporating one into the *ordo* of the church ministry (Piet Fransen, 'Orders and Ordination' in *Sacramentum Mundi*, p.1146) rather than creating a new juridical and ontological relation leading to 'metaphysical clericalism' (*ibid.*).

#### 6.4 The Disciplinary Structure of the Ordained Ministry

For the ordained ministries to continue to remain as the core or backbone of the churches' leadership and ministries they undoubtedly need a certain amount of discipline. But the form, the spirit and the exercise of this discipline will need changes based on the safe principle that the charism of institution (of structures, laws) is at the service of the other charisms (services, ministries) (K. Rahner, 'The Factor of the Charismatic in the Church' in *Theological Investigations*, vol. xii, p.86). Hence the churches must allow fresh and hitherto unknown forms of the charismatic factor in the church to appear... and give them any institutional embodiment that may be useful to stabilize and strengthen them (*ibid* 86-88).

For a long time, it was the voluminous decretals (*Decretum Gratiani, Decretales Gregorii IX, Decretales Clementis V/If*), all stated in the pastoral context of problems and abuses, that guided

the ministries and ministers of the counter-reformation Church. With the Codification of 1918, it became a set of more abstract and less pastoral canons (CC 108-486). But the post conciliar legislation on ministries has been a return to the older tradition of dispositive laws trying to set the laws squarely on their context (cf. Coriden, J.A., 'Ministry' in *Chicago Studies*, vol. 15, n.5). Yet we do not consider this to be in keeping with the theology of the local churches and their ministries.

Rome still continues spelling out in greater legalistic and ritualistic details the conditions, required standards and methods of formation for the ordained ministries. But the local churches, devoid of initiatives and courage for re-thinking their ecclesial situation must change in favour of more initiatives on the part of locally responsible leadership. Hence we expect maximum encouragement and a minimum of guidance necessary from the centre and a maximum of inspired initiative from the local churches.

## 6.5 Formation of Future Ordained Ministers

One of the important and more pastoral consequences of situating the future ordained ministries within a wider structure of ministries will be the change demanded from the present seminaries and houses of formation. They should change from their isolated and uniform patterns to other patterns dictated more by the local needs, new principles of formation, charisms of Founders, etc. Any attempt to maintain a system of recruitment and institutions of training beyond their time of usefulness and efficacy will only increase problems for today and tomorrow.

Hence leaders of churches will do well to courageously launch out on methods of selection and establishment of houses of formation inspired more by the spirit of their place and time and face new relevant issues like mature vocation, in-culturated

spiritual and academic formation, pluri-formity within the priestly ministry, priestly ministry within the pluri-formity of ministries, etc.

## 6.6 Conclusion

What the pastoral and sociological conditions of Asia demand in terms of ordained ministries is already inspired by the Sources, attested in history as possible and supported by the post-Vatican theology as strongly desirable. What prevents us Asians from taking the initiative and being as creative as the early churches, the churches of the Barbarian Kingdoms or the churches of the Counter-Reformation?

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## CONCERN 6

### ROLE OF RELIGIONS AMONG THE PEOPLES AND CULTURES EXAMPLE - SRI LANKA

**1. Introduction:** I thank the organizers for the invitation to be a panelist at this conference and regret my inability to be present among you. But I am happy to present my views on this subject as a Tamil Christian Theologian, with some theological experiences in the Asian region and in Sri Lanka both in the south as a witness well as in the northeast of Sri Lanka as a victim and witness of the ethnic conflict and war for the last 60 years.

I hope and wish that this Conference serves to resolve conflicts emerging in our region, from our diversities in ethnicity, cultures and religions. My contribution is limited to the role religions can play in serving peoples to find a peaceful coexistence.

**2. My Convictions:** I am convinced that we human beings are born into a people of a particular land and inherit freely the culture and religion of our parents. This matrix of life, giving sufficient means to live, grow and mature is not of our own choice, but a gift of the super-human power beyond this world as recognized by our religious beliefs. Religions exist as part and parcel of all human societies to help man understand the mystery of life and its purpose, to live a life that is humane and to direct us all towards higher and noble goals of love, unity and peace, not only among the human kind in the immediate neighbourhood but also with those outside our own race, religion and culture.

For this reason they are to harness all their spiritual resources and energies to help man recognize the super-human

source and summit of all life, as well as discerning and recognizing the evil forces which hinder the progress of man towards the supreme Summit of life, known among us as Eternal Life, Reign of God, Nibbana, Moksha etc.

Each religion has its sacred scriptures and teachers and promotes a style of life for the individuals as well as for communities. And when it comes to combating and eradicating evils which threaten the unity and diversity among peoples, they are called to join hands in an inter-religious dialogue of life and collaboration. **Unfortunately Religions have ignored or overlooked this one goal of serving a peaceful coexistence among peoples.** Quite the opposite has happened and is continuing to happen in many of our countries.

Not only have religions misunderstood their role in society and distanced themselves from the vital concerns of man, but also allowed passivity, ignorance and mistrust and even arrogance to take over their sacred teachings. In some cases they have fuelled extreme fundamentalism to add momentum to already burning inter-racial and intercultural conflicts. Here I like to quote Prof. Hans Küng, a key promoter of global ethics and inter-religious dialogue says – *“there is no peace in the world without peace among religions, and there is no peace among religions without interreligious dialogue”*

### **3. Efforts of the western world for peaceful coexistence**

Nations and states of the present western world have had their wars and disputes for many centuries in shifting borders and forming states culminating in two world wars during the last century. Soon after the Second World War the United Nations was formed by the western powers (1945) and a Universal Declaration of Human Rights was promulgated(1948) as a Charter for peaceful coexistence of peoples and cultures. During the

decades following the end of colonialism several new nations from Asia and Africa were added as members to this august assembly and many sub-structures and instruments for good governance became operative in almost all parts of the world for preventing conflicts and wars, for helping the victims of war and other human tragedies. (During the last 10 years I had the chance to follow regularly the annual sessions of the Human Rights Commission of the UN, and hear the conflicting voices of the member states and their peoples caught in conflicts and wars)

In spite of the vigilance and preventive measures of the UN and its sub-structures, there are new forms of misunderstandings, mistrust, ignorance and wars among peoples and cultures, between states and within the recognized states. There are many dictatorships, military rule and corrupt governments, which under the cover of democracy and international membership, and with the connivance of the super powers, continue to oppress and discriminate peoples and cultures within their states. 'Corrupt democracies', 'failed-states' and 'state-terrorism' have brought in new challenges to the world bodies.

Founders of the United Nations and the super powers aligned in various ways for their own interests believe that the world has been well organized for the future. They tried to contain these new challenges but have shown their weakness for self-interests and have become ineffective.

#### **4. Resurgence of many peoples seeking self-identity are crushed**

Resurgence among peoples and cultures within recognized states against new forms of oppression and disrespect for the rights of people and their cultures, have been falsely labeled as terrorism and outlawed by states. Struggles from among peoples and cultures



seeking self-identity and freedom have been misunderstood, mishandled and brutally suppressed by the old states.

Inter-racial, intercultural and inter-religious conflicts within the borders of countries and states have led to prolonged state-terrorism under the cover of majoritarian democracies and at times even with the connivance of super powers. As a consequence, peoples-terrorism from below to face up to state-terrorism from above have led to a “spiral of terrorisms” and wars. Such conflicts and wars are consuming daily valuable human lives and property.

International organizations, Super-powers and NGOs have their limits in fostering understanding, unity and peace among peoples and cultures. Hence the religions of the place have an urgent and indispensable role to play in complementing their efforts.

## **5. My Views from a Sri Lankan Experience: Failure of Religions**

In my own experience as a Tamil catholic priest, I am convinced that the 4 major religions of the world have not played their due and unique role in fostering mutual understanding, appreciation and respect among peoples in Sri Lanka. They were all called in the context of Sri Lanka to build up a unity out of the diversity of peoples and cultures.

Soon after Independence (1948), when the island was beginning its new journey as an independent state, when the majority people were justly enthusiastic in promoting a national identity, when political leaders for their profit presumed this national identity mostly as a Sinhala Buddhist identity, religious leaders unquestioningly and passively accepted such attitudes and the result was a long drawn out conflict and war about identities.

The self-understanding and mission of the religions were either very much self-centred or limited to the sacred place. They

were not directed to serve the peoples called to inhabit this island and destined for a peaceful coexistence. The religions all pointed to an after-death future-life, and were least anthropocentric and contextual in their mission.

We will substantiate our views by recalling some basic principles about true religion and in the light of those principles, show how religions failed to serve the cause which they proclaim to serve in the Sri Lankan context,

### **5.1 Religion is for man, not man for religion.**

Man in his search for the ultimate, in his quest for peace and happiness, responds to the signs and revelations of superior beings in a language and style proper to him. The visible organization of the variety of divine initiative and human response is called religion. It is therefore a human effort with the help of the divinity. The divine initiative does not stop with a once and for all revelation or help. It continues. Hence the response of man must be organized accordingly to keep the human quest, the divine initiative and again the human response all alive. Religion is to serve man and it should be continuously renewed and reformed.

Serving man in fighting against the evil forces of the world and defending the life of human beings wherever they may be affected and in whatever way have been the proclaimed goal of all religions. But in practice competitiveness in winning adherents to their faith or misunderstandings about one another have exhausted valuable energies and caused even conflicts, death and destruction.

### **5.2 Religions cannot afford to opt for safe and passive neutrality**

Religions which opt for passive neutrality or be silent and opt for silence in the face of any evil affecting peoples gradually

lose their own right to defend and protect themselves against those evils. If they have kept silent for a long time in the face of evils affecting others, then they lose the right or do not have anyone to speak up for them in defence of their own interests.

### **5.3 Religions must go beyond sympathy, prayer, condemnation and humanitarian help to stand up and fight for Truth and Justice.**

Compassion, solidarity and prayer have their indispensable place in religion. So too with the condemnation of evil whenever and wherever it shows up. Humanitarian services organized in solidarity with the victims are indispensable. But all these could turn out to be a form of 'escapism' and excuse from the more important role of religions in fighting the evil, the root cause of all oppressions, tragedies, death and destruction. So long as there are good Samaritans, hospitals and cemeteries, violence and wars will continue. The most important thing is to go to the root cause of such evils and fight against them.

## **6. Failure of the world's four major religions vis a vis the ethnic-conflict in Sri Lanka.**

The attitude and activities of the four religions amidst the long drawn out ethnic conflict, violence and war during the last six decades in Sri Lanka have amply demonstrated how religions become ineffective and destined to fail when they do not serve man in his context of life by recognising their life-and-death priorities on that island and accordingly rearrange their religious priorities and renew their institutions to motivate their followers towards a peaceful coexistence.

Sri Lanka, the island with a multi-ethnic (Sinhalese 74% + Ceylon Tamils 18% + Moors and Muslims 8%) and multi-religious (Buddhists 65% + Hindus 18% + Muslims 8% +



Christians 7.5% ) character is clearly **destined to survive only as an island of peoples and cultures. Sinhalese, Tamils and Muslims can find peaceful co-existence on that island, only when they appreciate, respect and support each other in their diversities.**

This is a challenging task demanding strong convictions about man, his dignity and rights. Different people and their cultures have noble values to be respected, valuable traditions to be supported and unforgettable experiences of history to be learnt by one another. These require strengthening of true convictions, respect for one another and collaboration with another – all these clamour for the help of religions.

Unfortunately, all the four major religions of the world found in Sri Lanka have failed in one way or other to respond to the needs of man in Sri Lanka.

**What is the present attitude and role of the four major religions vis a vis the ethnic conflict , violence and war in Sri Lanka?**

**6.1 Buddhism (65%),** as found in Sri Lanka, a Theravada form closely knitted to the island and the majority race the Sinhala people, suffers from an extremist form of Sinhala Buddhist Nationalism. The latter basing itself on the Mahavamsa chronicle, written by a Buddhist monk in the 6<sup>th</sup> century A.D, makes an exclusive claim for the whole island. The Sinhala race and their form of Buddhism must enjoy the exclusive privilege of ruling the country. The other peoples inhabiting this island and their cultures and religions can only be second to the Sinhala people and their religion. Their world-view is exclusive in character, claiming place and privileges only for the Sinhala people, Buddhist religion and Sinhala Buddhist culture. Their wish is that the others

– ethnic, cultural and religious minorities – have only a secondary existence and no claims for equal rights. Their wish is for a peaceful, but subordinated, coexistence between the privileged majority (as proprietors and rulers) and the under-privileged minorities (as good and obedient servants with no rights!). Any demand or quest for equality must be put down by the state, even with military might, in order to preserve the unity, integrity and sovereignty of the (Buddhist) State!

Thus in Sri Lanka a political and protest tendency in Buddhism, based on the 6<sup>th</sup>. Century AD chronicle *Mahavamsa*, has overtaken the Teachings of Buddha as given in the 5<sup>th</sup>. Century B.C. According to this chronicle, Buddha had destined the gods to protect Sinhala people and their Buddhism on this island. Hence politicians and monks tend to see Sri Lanka as exclusively for the Sinhala Buddhists. Tamils and their Hinduism are seen as a threat. Hence everything must be done to protect that sovereignty of people and religion. These tendencies started as impulse for post-colonial resurgence to resuscitate Buddhism to its pristine glory, have unfortunately led to discriminations of the others and ended up paving the way for a break up of the country through violence and war.

**6.2 Hinduism (18%)** or Saivism as found in Sri Lanka, practiced by the majority of Tamils, who are the victims of state-and mob-oppression, has accompanied the people with its temples and rituals, as balsam comforting them and encouraging believers to accept suffering as the will of the gods or the consequence of past sins. *Thalai Vithi*, or *Thalai Eluththu*, meaning “the Will of the Divine as written on our heads”, are phrases often heard among the Tamils, mostly Hindus, in accepting the tragedies which befall them. Belief in rebirths in proportion to the merits and demerits of the present life also helps them to accept uncritically the present tragedies.

Some humanitarian services are done by some lay-organisations for the victims of war, but no form of religious protest was encouraged by the religious leaders. The rebel-protest and anti-state violence have nothing to do with religious beliefs or support.

**6.3 Islam (8.0%)** followed by the Moors and Muslims among the Tamils, fosters a strongly religious-centred ethnicity for the followers. Though most of the followers of Islam in Sri Lanka, speak Tamil as their mother tongue and home-language, they distinguish themselves from the Ceylon-Tamils and Tamils of Indian origin. They are settled in the Jaffna-peninsula as shop-keepers, mostly as farmers and fishermen in the eastern coast and businessmen in the cities. Though they too were affected by the discriminatory policies of the majority Sinhala Buddhist governments, the Muslims and their political leaders followed a practical way for survival by supporting whatever government that came to power and extracting the maximum benefits for their communities as Muslims. They hardly resorted to strong protests like their Tamil brethren. Only during these last two decades, they were directly affected by the war and their stance swings between the Sinhalese and the Tamils.

Their religious practice of regular Friday prayers and close brotherhood have led them more and more towards a self-centred solidarity among their brotherhood and prevented them from inter-religious dialogue or collaboration for the larger good or resolution of the conflict.

**6.4 Christianity (7.5%)**, introduced with Portuguese Colonialism (16<sup>th</sup> Century), has followers from among the Sinhalese and the Tamils, in its European form, has the strategy and potentials for mediation between the Sinhalese and the Tamils. But it suffers from a minority-fear and European-complex vis a



vis the majority Buddhists, and its governments.

The Sinhala Bishops (8) of the leadership preserving unity of the Bishops' Conference as its supreme value and expression of a united church, prefers to leave many issues threatening life and human dignity of the Tamils regions (with 3 bishops) under the carpet for the fear of the Buddhists, and believes in peaceful co-existence by the generosity of the majority. The official church prefers passive silence, proclaims non-effective neutrality for its safety and satisfies the Roman authorities for a non-disturbing sail of the church in the Sri Lankan context.

Organised humanitarian services are undertaken for the victims of violence and war with the help of foreign assistance. Constant appeals are made especially by the Tamil bishops, for prayers, for the more victimised Tamils. Condemnations of violence and war are made by the official church from time to time through "neutral" statements, taking extreme care not to offend the oppressors or the majority sentiments. Even when Tamil Christian priests are killed by the state forces or catholic parliamentarian murdered during a midnight mass in a cathedral, lack of courage prevents the leaders and most of the Christians from organising or participating in protests and demonstrations against injustice.

### 7.0 Conclusion:

Though Sri Lanka, a beautiful paradise-holiday island, is blessed with a chance to forge a rich unity out of the diversity of peoples, languages and cultures, the necessary motivation and enlightenment necessary to facilitate mutual understanding, appreciation and respect for one another and forge a peaceful coexistence is missing. To a great extent this is due to the ineffectiveness of the four world religions present and operative among the peoples.

1. *Religions, as the soul and motivating force among the various peoples, were inward-looking and self-centred towards feeding and caring for their own followers. They were not sufficiently outward looking to take responsibility for all the peoples and cultures to live in peace with a unique Sri Lankan identity.*
  
2. *With respect to Christianity and Buddhism, there was never an in-depth encounter or dialogue which could have paved the way for mutual appreciation, respect and collaboration. While the church remained still with the initial colonial attitude and superiority or even absolutistic, Buddhism still had the suspicions of the colonial days, recalling the earlier debates with Christianity. There were superficial mutual appreciations between the leaders, ( like the dhana given by the Archbishop to the monks, or the monks garlanding and praising him). There was never a deep study undertaken by the church about rooting or contextualising or acculturating the church within a Buddhist majority.*
  
3. *The Church is the primary cause of the failure for inter-religious Dialogue. While having the strategy, the personnel, the resources, and the means, it never went down to its essential teachings of Christ to explore a deeper understanding and appreciation of other religions, especially Sri Lankan Buddhism. Maintaining the position that going towards meeting the other religions as forsaking its claims for superiority, and expecting always the other to take the initiative, the church failed in not moving towards inter-religious dialogue and inter-religious collaboration.*

4. *A true and positive understanding of peoples, of ethnicity and culture was lacking in the religions. Any religion for it to exist and be a motivating force among the people, there has to be also a religious understanding and appreciations about peoples and cultures as God-given riches. Their origins and their god-given heritage of language, culture, drama, arts, and philosophies have to be understood. Even for the church in spite of all its missionary encounters with peoples and cultures, it was only at the Second Vatican Council, the church realised the importance of these elements of a people in order to evangelise them. (AG.22)*

Hence it is up to the religious leaders to rethink their understanding of religion in the multi-ethnic multicultural context of Sri Lanka, to appreciate the richness in diversities and renew their lifestyle and mission so as to be effective in helping all the people for a peaceful coexistence in Sri Lanka.

**Twitter**

*I took a beggar by back-door, gave left-overs & asked him 2 pray with me „our father in heaven „he asked „your father in heaven? I said, say Our father, he said if we are sons of same father, you would have taken me by front door, served your food on table.*



## CONCERN 7

# CONTEMPORARY CATHOLIC THOUGHT ON THE VOCATION AND MISSION OF THE LAITY IN THE CHURCH AND IN THE WORLD

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## INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 Not only a theme but also a plan

The organizers of this assembly have given not only a general theme - namely, the vocation and mission of the laity in the Church and in the world of Asia — but also wished a certain structure to it, based on two position papers and a series of twelve workshop discussions.

### 1.2 Two position papers in dialogue

The two position papers, one on contemporary Catholic thought on the subject of laity, and the other on the Asian realities that challenge the laity are in my opinion two complementary and interdisciplinary approaches, one “from above” and the other “from below,” to make up a sincere dialogue and a fruitful exchange between the world-Church and the Asian realities on the subject on laity.

### 1.3 Contemporary Catholic Thought

By contemporary Catholic thought, we refer:

(a) to a period that stretches from the eve of Vatican II, to the twenty years following it;

(b) to the teachings of the official Church through documents of Vatican II, and other follow-up magisterial pronouncements;

(c) to theological thought that has influenced the teachings of Vatican II, (more directly its teachings on the laity), as well as post-conciliar thinking that continues to contribute by its critical and prophetic collaboration to further “development of the doctrine” of Vatican II.

Hence, we strive to present here theological thought that made up the Council to be what it is for the future, as well as further reflections following upon the Council and based on the pastoral experiences of the Church.

## **2. The theme of laity in the Church in the world:**

### **2.1. No laicology in the manner of a hierarchiology**

The theme, "the vocation and mission of the laity in the Church and in the world," is an ecclesiological theme. But the fact that it was not studied before in a systematic manner and with special attention, as was the case of the hierarchy, does not demand now a new field of study in ecclesiology under a title like "laicology." Such a move could endanger the whole of ecclesiology, and consequently the whole Church. When the study of the hierarchy in the Church was isolated and overemphasized (for defensive purposes), the consequent "hierarchiology" became the ecclesiology of the day, and the hierarchy became the Church. A similar danger is present in the wish to do a parallel laicology based on "hierarchiological premises" as a starting point, and mistaking the functional distinction between clergy and laity for an ontological-status division.(1)

To avoid such a dangerous situation from developing in the future, it is necessary to keep the theme of laity well within the total ecclesiology of Vatican II.

### **2.2. But a laity-problematic within ecclesiology**

The present problems connected with the vocation and mission of the laity in the Church and in the world are not so simple and clear as to be easily identified, sorted out and handled. They grew out of a divinely intended ecclesial distinction of gifts and functions, which deteriorated in history into a complex of

problems, divisions and discriminations. And this historical deterioration has passed into most areas of ecclesial life. Consequently, all the problems connected with the laity, taken in their complexity, have become a problematic theme in ecclesiology.

### **2.3. Without isolating or “cordonning off**

Keeping the theme of laity well within a total ecclesiology does not mean that we “cordon off” a certain section in ecclesiology exclusively for laity. There is no isolated theology of the laity; nor a sectional-ecclesiology, taking laity merely as a part of the Church (or as a people with a limited concern in the Church); nor an appendix-ecclesiology of a few added changes to the old ecclesiology. It is not right for us to consider the laity as part — be it an essential or a subsidiary part of the Church, and consequently as objects meriting special reflection.

### **2.4. Within a total ecclesiology**

The laity are simply and squarely the Church. They make up the Church, and they live the Church. Any theology of the laity has to be an all-embracing presence and participation in the whole of ecclesiology, and the laity themselves become the subject along with the clergy, to reflect on themselves.

In this sense, the subject of laity cannot be and should not be narrowed down to become merely a pastoral or a sectional concern—even by the well-meaning leadership. This is what was summed up clearly long ago by Father Congar: “Laicology supposes the existence of a whole ecclesiological synthesis, wherein the mystery of the Church has been given all its dimension including fully the ecclesial reality of the laity.”(2)



This clearly implies that our understanding of the laity within the Church is totally dependent on and conditioned by our understanding of the total Church itself.

## **2.5. To rediscover the ecclesiality of the laity**

The vocation and mission of the lay person are realities not merely to be identified with his native place of life in the world, or with the place allowed to him in the Church. That will be a partial reality and hence a partial ecclesiality (ecclesial + reality). The total reality of place, vocation and mission includes not only what is allowed or prescribed by law but also the potentialities of his vocation in the Church and in the world.

The true ecclesiality of the laity is the total reality of what is achieved and achievable within the framework of a total Church in a total world — in a Church which remains always a divine mystery, as well as a visible institution. And this Church, in which he has a full-fledged reality, is not an isolated Church, from within which he goes into an alien world — as two sphere of life. No, the Church is no more isolated from the world—as two isolated spheres — but situated in the world at the heart of secularity. Hence a layman's ecclesiality is in a Church which is truly in the world. His ecclesial reality and secular reality are not in two spheres of life but one within the other — Church within the world.

The Mystery-Church is concretized in the history of a people (LG 2), and comes into being by the communitary response of the people to the divine initiative of salvation. Thus the ecclesiality of the laity is a constitutive component of the Mystery-Church (just as his citizenship is constitutive of his secular society). It cannot be a private gift of a part of the Church (hierarchy) to the other part but a gift of the Lord, to both laity and clergy — to be realized by them in their communality.

## 2.6. Theme: a sign of ecclesiological development

The non-separability of the theme of laity from a total ecclesiology makes the 1987 synod uniquely different from the previous synods and offers a *kairos* chance for renewal of the whole Church.

Though much was done towards a radical change for the future, Vatican II closed with an “open-end.” Episcopal synods were intended to follow-up with further study and development what was begun in Vatican II.

Accordingly in the eight follow-up synods of the last two decades, various aspects of ecclesial life have been taken up: 1967, doctrine; 1969, liturgy; 1971, priesthood and justice; 1974, evangelization; 1977 catechesis; 1980, family; 1983, reconciliation. But the coming synod of 1987 takes up a topic which is in itself a major content of post-Vatican 2 ecclesiology. The request of the majority of the episcopal conferences for a synod on laity, the choice of the topic and the form given to it, (“the vocation and mission of the Church *ad intra* and *ad extra*”), all reflect a development in the ecclesiological consciousness reached. By continuing this development of the topic from its ecclesiological totality, we can reap the benefits of a fresh renewal for the whole Church.

It was providential that the extraordinary synod of 1985 came as the precursor to the synod of 1987, confirmed Vatican II, and encouraged a forward march to be a Church of the laos.(4)

## 2.7. Ecclesiality according to the Lineamenta

The ecclesiality of the laity is mentioned in a limited and narrow sense in the Lineamenta of the coming synod as one of the “new problems” consequent upon the growth of lay groups: “... This growth of lay groups at times gave rise to new problems,

for example, the problem of the “ecclesiality” of the laity (to what extent, and especially with regard to their temporal activity, can the laity be considered as authentic expressions of the Church?), the problem of the laity’s connection and cooperation with the common building up of the one body which is the Church of Christ” (N. 7 and 8).

The Lineamenta goes on to mention a series of “problems, dangers, confusion, incorrect relation and even impoverishment of the salvific mission of the Church” (N.8) — as a consequence of lay collaboration with the clergy! These are only symptoms of a wrong relation between clergy and laity. But the Lineamenta apparently fails to see the root cause of such problems and dangers, although it longs for a solution in the synod.

It is an isolated definition of infallibility at Vatican I that leads to “heretical” functioning of minds. Similarly, with respect to the laity, an isolated understanding of “problems of laity” or an attempt to give premature remedies will lead to more difficulties.

Hence, our hope is that the synod will not aim at ad hoc changes or strategies to solve problems but aim at discovering the true and total ecclesiality of the laity. In Vatican II, the Roman Catholic Church, by recognizing and conferring “ecclesiality” and ecclesial status on other non-Roman Catholic churches, went a long way to create the ecumenical climate of mutual confidence and unity. Similarly, we hope that in the synod of 1987 the Synodal fathers will do their utmost to dispel fears and doubts and clarify questions about the ecclesiality of the laity.

## **2.8. With consequences for the ecclesiality of the clergy**

Both the evangelizer and the evangelized are the constituent components of the community. If the ecclesiality of the one (hierarchy) or the other (laity) had suffered in history by



any devaluation or oversight, or by mutual pushing of one another out of position - clergy behind the altar and laity outside the Church - then it needs to be regained or rediscovered. Hence, our present effort to rediscover the ecclesiality of the laity will have consequences for the ecclesiality of the clergy. Because the two ecclesialities — that of the clergy and of the laity — are almost two sides of one relational reality, our efforts will in effect lead to a common discovery of the ecclesiality of both, of the laity as well as of the clergy.

## 2.9. Calls for courageous magnanimity from the clergy

By seeking a total ecclesiality for the laity or by stressing a close identity and interdependence between the problematic-laity and ecclesiology, do we face the danger of a cheap democratization, laicization or secularization of the Mystery-Church?

There appears to be a fear that from an ecclesiology, which was indeed a hierarchiology (science of the sacred government), we may swing to the other extreme, to an ecclesiology of a too much secularized-laicology (science of the laos.) This fear can sometimes hold the hierarchy back from making the needed move towards developing a true and balanced ecclesiology of the “whole” Church. But underneath such a “theological fear” of a secularized ecclesiology is also the inner fear of the clergy that an emergent laity may threaten their own security, status and “position.”

Hence, it is important at the outset to state that by advocating an ecclesiality of laity within a total ecclesiology we are not promoting laicism or secularism in any way but only attempting to regain the lost ecclesiality of the laity and rehabilitate the lay person in the Church. Such a change will call for a readjustment

of the ecclesiality of the hierarchy, and it must be done courageously and magnanimously for the welfare of the whole Church. It is in this sense that Pope John Paul II, speaking of the common preparation both clergy and laity have to make (for the synod of 1987), called for a dialogue between two groups at all levels: "In the time of preparation that remains before the 1987 synod, I urge you to intensify the dialogue between the ordained ministers and lay men and women at all levels ... This dialogue is something that must involve all members of the ecclesial community without exception."(6)

### **3. Stages of development in the laity-problematic**

The rediscovery of the laity in the Church has already begun. We can already speak of several stages within this century. And the synod of 1987 can be viewed as a fourth stage in this development of thought on the subject of laity.

#### **3.1. First stage: (the awakening of the laity)**

The first stage took place when lay voices broke the centuries of silence: in movements after World War II, in the ecclesiology of Father Congar, in the JOC movements of Canon Cardijn, in the Catholic Action groups of Western Europe, and in the lay apostolate congresses under Pope Pius XII. The hierarchy noted this awakening on the part of the laity and encouraged the laity, not entirely and unconditionally but only as its indispensable arm. The hierarchy saw in the laity people who could be commissioned by them into the world to do a necessary apostolate on their (the hierarchy's) behalf, and so to boost the effectiveness of their own mission. This was the stage of hierarchical mandates and "canonical missions."

### **3.2. Second stage: (the recognition of the laity)**

The second stage was during those few conciliar years of 1962-1965, when the great biblical, liturgical, ecumenical and lay apostolate movements converged and become the pentecostal event of Vatican II, of change and renewal. Though it was a brief period, it effected the Copernican revolution of ecclesiological perspective. From a Church-centered ecclesiology (the world is for the Church) we moved to a world-centered ecclesiology (the Church is for the world), and from a hierarchy-centered laity (a pyramidal hierarchy), we moved to a laity-centered-hierarchy (concentric community). Thus it was a council which appeared to break with the counter-reformation Church and to have recaptured the spirit of the primitive churches of the New Testament. This reversal has been termed as an “embryonic inversion,” bound to grow in the future.(7)

### **3.3 Third stage: rediscovering the laity**

The third stage is the interaction between post-conciliar thinking and the pastoral experiences of the last two decades. In the first two stages, the contribution of the non-Western Churches (South America, Africa, and Asia) was modest and relatively passive, compared with what they did in the later synods. But much has happened and has been experienced in this third stage of the non-Western Churches, both in applying the teachings of Vatican II and in pastoral work, experimentation and regional reflections (within FABC, CELAM, SECAM). Hence, our duty both to contribute to the ongoing theological development and to benefit from others with similar experiences. In this effort not only a Rome-centered regional theological reflection but also an interregional theological reflection would be useful (8)



### **3.4. Fourth stage: becoming a Church of the people**

We are preparing now for a fourth stage, and in this stage the Asian Churches have an active and important role to play. The future of the Church of Asia will depend on what we make of this favorable time (kairos) the time of decisive truth, and especially for us Asians.

“(The synod of 1987) should mark a decisive stage towards the reception of the grace of the Second Vatican Council ... to live our Christian vocation and common mission according to the dynamism of the Council.”(9)

Father Karl Rahner, giving a fundamental interpretation of Vatican II and its dynamism, compared it with the Council of Jerusalem, in which a Jewish Church leaped forward to be also a Gentile Church. Similarly at Vatican II, he sees the Church of Western Europe becoming a Church of the whole world, of South America, of Africa and of Asia.(10)

Now if the first stage of development (1940-1960) could be seen as preparation for the second stage (Vatican II), in which a radical leap from a Western-Church to a world-Church was taken, then the present development, combined with the pastoral experiences from all the regional Churches of the world during the last two decades, must be seen as a preparation, probably, for a second leap at the coming synod. And this time hopefully, the leap is from a world-Church to becoming a Church of the people (laos).

#### **3.4.1. Dynamic conservation and development of Vatican II**

Becoming a Church of the people is neither an anti-hierarchical revolution nor a cheap popularization (a democratization of the Mystery Church), but a conservation of the gains made at Vatican II, in a dynamic manner.

The gains made at Vatican II cannot be reduced to or presented merely through a post-Vatican dogmatism,"(11) (i.e., instructions from the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith), or a legalism, (i.e., the New Code of 1983), however necessary dogma and law may be. It cannot be reduced to any "ritualism," or even to a "catechism." It can be preserved only through a "dynamic development" of the doctrine of Vatican II.

This dynamic development is determined by the embryonic reversal within it towards a world-centered Church, and by the growing interest among our people to become the Church.

A Church of the people may mean the becoming of a Church of the place (local Church), as well as becoming a Church of the people (popular indigenous Church). Though the two are important and inseparable aspects of the one reality, for the purpose of our theme we shall refer more to the latter — the people's Church — than to the former. Why?

In order to make the Church really local, of the place, we have to speak also of inculturation, contextualization and localization, and so on. But one may ask: Are these not the problems only of the clergy or religious who lead a Westernized style of life, learn a Europeanized theology and perform a Romanized liturgy? As far as the people are concerned, do they not seem to live where they are, breathe an atmosphere of the place and celebrate a culture that is theirs, though changing? They continue to follow, without any guilt feelings, their customary and cultural patterns of their social life at home and in society. But it is in their Churches and in their ecclesial life that they are often called to embrace another style of life and culture. Consequently arises the question — who/what needs inculturation?

Hence, our efforts towards inculturation/ contextualization/ localization consist not so much in discovering rites/lifestyle/ architectural modes for the people, but rethinking radically with the people the form of our common response to Christian revelation.

Hence, becoming a Church of the people may mean many things in one. To a large extent we must admit that the present Churches, even after Vatican II, are still Churches run by the clergy for the people who belong to it or who come to it searching for help. For many the Church is nothing more than a “religious supermarket” where you pay and get the services you want, but have no say in the management or any interest in their gain or loss(12) Such a situation is not in keeping with the Church described by Vatican II, and does damage to the laity. We must grow and develop further to become more and more a Church of the people, where people feel at home, where people are interested in the prosperity/welfare of the whole Church. This is not pure idealism, but an ideal we strive to reach — and it is in this process of development towards a Church of the people that most of our problems regarding the laity, problems regarding their relationship, their vocation and mission, get clarified or reshuffled and so find solutions.

### **3.4.2. Resulting in the rehabilitation of laity and clergy**

Hence a movement towards becoming a Church of the people is definitely a movement to rehabilitate the laity (consequently, the clergy too) to their rightful place and function. It is a movement with a genuine interest of the Church at heart. It has been initiated in Vatican II and remains fundamentally an irreversible direction. Only by moving forward in this direction can we attain the right balance of relation between the hierarchy and the rest of the faithful. There is no fear of a “popular-



democratic Church,” running over the rights of the hierarchy, or of a divinely-instituted hierarchy robbing the people of their fundamental rights. Mutual trust and communal initiation are indispensable for this move for rehabilitation.

#### **4. Magna Carta and the conversion demanded from us**

What we had in Vatican II was a radical advance which yet did not run its full course — especially with regard to its stand about the laity. Many things were initiated but left as unaccomplished tasks for the future.(13) It did not map out a course of ecclesiological-pastoral development for the future growth of the laity, but it gave only a valuable orientation, impetus and the firm theological basis for the future. A continuing interpretation of the doctrine of Vatican II, based on an optimistic and hopeful reading of the signs of the times, is the surest way to a faithful development in favor of the laity.(14) Based on the Church’s understanding of herself, together with twenty years of pastoral experience, the positive advances, as well as the difficulties encountered, the Church can step forward confidently and keep moving into the future millennium. For such a task to be done in a daring but responsible manner an ecclesiological Magna Carta is indispensable. And this is exactly what we have in the documents of Vatican II “Let us carry forward its work ... The message of the Council ... is and remains the Magna Carta for future times.” (15). A clear understanding of, and a firm grip on all the ecclesiological gains made in Vatican II, and a continued living of these gains in the true spirit of Vatican II, enriched by our regional pastoral experiences, are the ingredients for an authentic rehabilitation of the laity in the Church of the future.

And what is required from the Church leadership, as a *sine qua non*, is a conversion to the ecclesiology of Vatican II, to imbibe its spirit, to make its outlook (*weltanschauung*) its own

and to keep moving forward in faith, hope and charity. But are we, even after twenty years, ready for that conversion? Or are we still rejecting this invitation of the Spirit? Any attempt to rehabilitate the laity in the Church without the spirit of the great charter of Vatican II is foolish, if not hypocritical.

#### **4.1. Vatican II, between reception and rejection**

If Vatican II is to be the Magna Carta for our efforts in rehabilitating the laity in the Church, it is indispensable that it be accepted in a positive light and as the true motive force (spirit) for our efforts.

Although Vatican II marks the conclusion of the counter-reformation period of the Church and ushers in a new era of openness to all religions, to all cultures, and to the world, the reception of the teachings of the council unfortunately has not been all that positive, encouraging and uniform. The kind of response of Church leaders still spreads from almost a rejection or non-acceptance to an enthusiastic and active acceptance of its letter and spirit.

#### **4.2. Non-acceptance - dangerous**

For some the council was more an unnecessary disturbance of the Church's clarity, serenity and discipline which existed before. These resist most of the changes advocated by Vatican II, if not in words, at least in action. And with such an attitude they set themselves against the will of the Holy Spirit in the Church. Though a minority, some still exist within our Churches not merely in a passive role but as a threat to the rehabilitation of the laity.

#### **4.3. Conservative acceptance – not enough**

Yet, for another sizeable group of leaders, who are generally conservative and who dislike any movement for change

or innovation, the council has firmly settled once and for all the open questions that required some decisive clarifications, and has mapped out clearly the path of the future. For these, the whole spirit and interpretation of the council have been codified in the latest code of canon law (1983) and “ritualized” in some instructions or catechism. These scrupulously follow instructions from above and continue to wait for further instructions from Rome. (*Nihil faciendum est, nisi Roma locuta est.*) Now there is something that Rome cannot do, even if it wishes to do, i.e., to give detailed instructions for an on-the-spot operation. It is a sign of immaturity on our part to expect such instructions. And that is the danger of “premature stabilization of the council” through laws and detailed instruction(16). Such an immaturity on the part of the local Churches, or a paternalism on the part of the authorities, is helpful to none.

#### **4.4. Progressive acceptance – indispensable**

But happily there is an increasing majority of our Asian church leaders who welcome Vatican II as the unique Pentecostal event of the century. They believe that its spirit and message have inaugurated a new era of mature openness (with respect to salvation, secular realities, and a forward march into the future. Any fear they had about an attempt elsewhere to restore the Church to a pre-Vatican posture was happily dispelled in the synod of 1985. Almost every episcopal conference of the world spoke for the continued implementation of Vatican II and insisted that the spirit and message of Vatican II be neither monopolized by certain congregations nor stabilized by any codified or ritualized instructions, but should go beyond and carried forward. For them, Vatican II was still a beginning, an orientation and a spirit. It is neither a concluded program, nor a set of work instructions, but the greatest grace of the century, which must carry the Church forward in its pilgrimage towards the third millenium.(17) (The



proposed catechism can be accepted only as a set of basic teachings of Vatican II, open to the future, or a set of positions attained in Vatican II, but not a Trent-style catechism. Hence, the rejection of Cardinal Oddi's catechism).

It is in such an active acceptance of Vatican II and its ecclesiology that we could expect a rightful place for the laity in the Church. If the ecclesiology of Vatican II is an evolving one, then the problematic of the laity, which is so dependent on and identified with it, must evolve too, for further enrichment and relevance.

#### **4.5. The synod of 1985 stimulates the “carrying forward”**

It was providential that the synod of 1985, which evaluated the post-conciliar Church, took place just on the eve of the synod on the laity. Having reaffirmed the teachings of Vatican II, and the need to read the signs of the times over and over in a changing world, the synod encourages all to go forward in the spirit of Vatican II. (18) Questioning neither the world view (*weltanschauung*) nor any document of Vatican II, it has reaffirmed Vatican II, as the Magna Carta for future times. Further, by recognizing “the world in a state of continual evolution” and our duty “to analyze the signs of the times over and over again,” the synod has urged and encouraged us not to stagnate with a part of Vatican II, but to carry forward the spirit, the message and the work of Vatican II (D7). But what is this spirit of Vatican II?

#### **4.6. Not merely the letter but the spirit of Vatican II**

“There was full agreement among us on the necessity of carrying forward further the understanding and application of the Council, both in letter and in spirit.”(19) Hence, one does not accept Vatican II, while still continuing in the counter-reformation spirit of Trent and Vatican I), or merely executing the changes

introduced by Vatican II in an appendix manner. Such an attempt results in hardly any profit, and raises some new problems.

The mistake of putting new wine into old skins has been a common one in some of our post-Vatican II pastoral practices. Examples of such “ritualistic” practices could be found not only with our hard-core traditionalists, but also with some curial implementations of Vatican II, where appeal is made to the word and not to the spirit and world view of the council. A concrete pastoral example of this is often seen in parishes which are governed, well-nurtured, and even smoothly run, by parish priests, without any collaboration, collegiality and subsidiarity involving the laity.

Hence, it is indispensable that we understand and apply the council both in the letter and in the spirit. While the progress achieved in Vatican II is found in the words of the documents, the force to carry forward what was begun is largely in the spirit of Vatican II.

#### **4.7. Characteristics of the spirit of Vatican II**

There was a view of the world that was realistic and existential, and a missionary approach that was holistic and secular. There was a will to be the Church of Christ for today’s world.

##### **4.7.1. Realistic view**

The fathers of Vatican II were not agitated by any polemics over dogma, but were conscious of a world that was fast evolving, of a man who was increasingly afflicted by secular problems, religion and ideologies, and of a Church that could not any more remain closed to this man in this world. This consciousness was not the result of a fear of being overtaken by the world, and by its secularism, but of a realistic view and a sincere desire to become

what they ought to be in and for the world. Just as in the case of the universe we moved from a geocentric to a heliocentric universe (Copernican Revolution), so with the ecclesiology of Vatican II, we moved from a Church-centered world to a world-centered Church. From viewing the Church as the small lifesaving “bark of salvation” afloat on a “sinking world,” we moved on to viewing the Church as present in and for the world, as its sacrament of salvation.

#### **4.7.2. Existential view**

This vision was also existential. The Church was not merely an otherworldly or transcendental reality. It sought to identify itself with the joys and hopes, the griefs and anxieties of the men of this age (GS 1), and to offer an integral salvation to the broader desires and deeper questionings of man (GS 9, 10) living under profoundly changing conditions (GS 5). Thus Vatican II lays stress on the existential situation of man and speaks of integral salvation as permanently and inescapably presented to the situation.(20)

#### **4.7.3. Holistic approach**

Because of a two-spheres view of man (soul-body) and of his life (Church and world), the post-World-War II, lay movements, Catholic Action, Pious Unions were all based on such a dichotomy of life, and led to the clergy monopolizing the sacred and the laity the secular; and spiritual and sacred work to be done only by the hierarchy, and temporal and secular were left to the laity. Sin and salvation belonged only to the sphere of the soul; secular realities were seen mostly as stained with evil.

But this dichotomy or dualistic pessimism was rejected by Vatican II, thanks to the integral and cosmic views of people like Jacques Maritain(21) and Teilhard de Chardin. In its place a



holistic view of man and world has been promoted as the only authentic Christian approach.

In this new integralism both the difference and relatedness of a true Christian dualism are acknowledged. What is rejected is any dichotomy or autonomous character of either, e.g. the immanentism of world vs. the transcendentalism of religion. Accordingly, there is no dichotomy (or isolation) between soul and body, between sacred and secular, or between Church and world. One is within the other and related to the other, but still transcends the other. In short, from the two-sphere-reality of sacred and the secular, we move to a one-God-centered concentric reality of sacred within the secular.

The effects of these can be evidenced in the Dogmatic Constitutions' broader understanding of Christian and non-Christian revelations, the Church as a sacrament in the whole history of salvation, and the Church taking its place, not vis-à-vis the world, but in the world.

#### **4.7.4. Secularity – not secularism**

What characterized Vatican II was thus a realistic, existential view of man and his world and a holistic approach. The positive appreciation of secularity that came in as result of the above view and approach must not be mistaken or written off as a “secularism of Vatican II.” A secularism, understood as an atheistic immanentistic and autonomistic view of man and world, which endangers the mysterious transcendental and the integral view of man and world, is clearly rejected by Vatican II, and the synod of 1985. But there is also a danger that by an overreaction to secularism, we may fall into another danger, of devaluing the secular realities already affirmed in Vatican II.

Secularity was not only accepted and appreciated in Vatican II with a new openness; it was made the specific character

of the laity. A misunderstanding or a devaluation of secularity will lead to a biased or negative understanding of the laity. And equally true is the fact that a realistic appreciation of secularity will lead to a sound understanding of the laity.

Hence, the spirit of Vatican II which should be the motivating force for our rehabilitating the laity in the Church and in the world - is the "realistic, existentialistic" vision and the holistic secularist approach of Vatican II. Only within such a vision and approach can we speak of some irreversible and undisputed ecclesiological gains in favor of the laity, their position in the Church and their mission.

## **5. Ecclesiological gains-constitutive of the new laity**

In speaking above about the ecclesiality of the laity, we maintained that it could be found and evolved only within and simultaneous with the ecclesiology of Vatican II. Now, presuming that the ecclesiology of Vatican II has been progressively accepted, both in letter and in its spirit as the Magna Carta for our search, we will try to discern and sift the constitutive elements of an ecclesiality of the new laity within and parallel to the ecclesiological growth that came in the wake of Vatican II.

### **5.1. In the mystery of the Church in this world, the lay person is a Christian with a specific spirit, dignity and freedom**

The theme of the opening chapter of *Lumen Gentium* and the gradual displacement during the council of the chapter on the hierarchy, making way for the chapter on the people of God, shows the primacy of the spirit, and the mystery and history dimensions of the Church gaining over the institutional and the hierarchical aspects. This is not to belittle the institutional and hierarchical aspects of the Church. It only means that the polarity, the class-structure and the concentration, if not monopolization, of the Spirit and his power at the top, as seen in the earlier pyramidal structure of the Church, is reduced so as to present the Church more as a

community of Spirit-filled men and women with various gifts than as an institution of power. Accordingly, the primacy of the Spirit and the recognition of his gifts, even outside the hierarchical structure,(24) is emphasized to present all the people (laos) of the Church, as emancipated, heirs of the dignity and freedom of the sons of God in whose hearts the Holy Spirit dwells as in his temple (25) (LG9d).

What one inherits by his baptism is an ontological change into the new humanity in Christ. The ontological status is that of christifidelis; he is filled with the Spirit of Christ and inherits the new freedom and dignity of the sons of God. The power of the baptismal Spirit is sufficient to make him a full-fledged member of this Spirit-filled community.

Hence, it is incumbent on the part of the leaders of the Church to clearly opt for the primacy of the Spirit which promotes the spiritual, ontological status of laity; to recognize the Spirit and his gifts in them, and their place of dignity in the Church; and to give them enough freedom for thought, initiative and action. This naturally calls for a readjustment of our personal and pastoral priorities.

By recognizing and promoting the specifically Christian spirit, dignity and freedom of the laity (26) the clergy do not lose anything, (except a false clericalism of spirit, dignity or freedom) but gain their own true ecclesiality.

## **5.2. In a Church of the people the lay person regain the subjectivity of a mature person, with status, power and rights**

Vatican II not only presents the Church within a background of the mystery of salvation unfolding itself in the history of a people of God, but the Church itself is presented as the new people of God. This decision of Vatican II to present the Church as the new people of God, without denying or devaluing



the importance of the image of the Church as the mystical body of Christ, is more than a mere matter of a complementarity, and was clearly intended (27) There are signs of unscrupulous moves and suggestions to ignore or overlook this shift of emphasis, and even push back the “people of God” image of the Church and bring forward the mystical body concept.

But the council’s preferential option for the people of God” concept is constitutive of the ecclesiological revolution of Vatican II, and has made an indispensable contribution towards rediscovering the ecclesiality of the laity.

In the Church seen as the mystical body of Christ certain values of a “vertical unity” between head and members, and of a “horizontal unity” among members, i.e., of discipline, subordination, etc., were strongly and rightly affirmed. But other values of subjectivity, individuality, personality, maturity, the right of self-determination, personal power to initiate, etc., were overlooked or devalued as mere human democratic values. The body of members, in short, became the object of a pastoral paternalism exercised by the leadership.

In order to recover the balance, Vatican II emphasizes an understanding of the Church as a new people of God in pilgrimage and as a covenant relationship between the Bridegroom and the bride. This shift recovers the subjectivity of the Church, as well as the subjectivity of the individual Christian. Furthermore, it reduces as unreal the idea there are “subordinated personalities,” as implied by the concept of mystical body, and holds up Church members as mature persons with rights of self-determination and the power to undertake new initiatives. Every Christian has Christian fundamental rights (similar to fundamental human rights with respect to food, clothing and shelter) for sufficient nourishment of word and sacraments, and also responsible duties (like civic duties in a society) towards others on behalf of God

and his Church. The subjectivity, personality, rights and duties must be respected in the Church. Because of the violation of these rights before, there already exist committees for the defence of Christian rights in the Churches (similar to human rights organizations).(28)

How can we achieve this ecclesial change which favors a mature laity? We can move with these two steps:

- (a) From being a clerical Church open to the people to becoming a Church run by the clergy for the people. This stage, to a great extent, is already what we have.
- (b) But the next step is to move from being a Church of the clergy for the people to becoming a Church of clergy and people. This is our goal.

The clergy considering themselves more and more ministers (servants) of the people does not necessarily mean that they have given up their sole proprietorship of the Church. There is evidence still — and we experience it — that the churches are owned and run by the clergy, either passively keeping them open to the people if they wish to avail themselves of their services, or actively for the people, directing them for their welfare. In either case, the Church is for the people, but because it is not of the people, the laity are not yet subjects but only objects to be served. Unless and until the clergy and the laity together recognize themselves as the total subject of the Church, as the “total bride” of the Bridegroom, Christ, the laity will not have any ecclesiality of status, power and rights.

### **5.3. In a Church that is meant to be in the world and for the world, the lay person must have a true and real ecclesiality, as well as a true and real secularity**

Pope John XXIII, in opening the doors and windows of the Church to the world for an *aggiornamento*, wished the Church

to take its rightful place and goal in the divine plan of salvation. The Church is not a closed community, isolated and separated from the world, of believers or of those already saved, but it a Church meant to be in the heart of the world. Nor was the Church meant to be concerned only with those within its visible institution, but meant as sacrament of salvation for the whole world, for all men and women.

In Vatican II we moved, firstly, from a closed and isolated ecclesial existence to an open and relevant existence in the heart of secularity. Secondly, we moved from a Church with sacraments for salvation of its members, to becoming in itself the sacrament of salvation for the whole world

These shifts, as regards place and goal of the Church, imply naturally that we accordingly reorder our internal ecclesial relationships and our external means and methods. In order that the world and its realities may experience the grace of salvation from the Church of Christ, the internal ecclesial ordering and the means have to be changed. Thus the mission of Church in and for the world cannot be done by a Church whose majority, though living all the secular realities of the world, has only a passive and marginal role within their Church. Though the overall view of the whole council, as stated above, was holistic, still one can detect a dualism of inequality in the documents where they speak mainly of the clergy and then adjoin “but the laity also.” Any such dualism — “clergy only, but laity also” — may be due partly to the not-fully-thought-out consequences of the Church-world relationship in Vatican II. But we can overcome such tendencies by reminding ourselves of the spirit and overall direction set by Vatican II. The fathers of Vatican II were not for a two-sphere theory of Church vis-à-vis the world. Such a dualism, they saw, may even promote two sets of standards for behavior in Church and in world. They rejected as the title for *Gaudium et Spes*, “Church and the modern



world,” instead opting for “Church in the modern world.” Thereby they affirmed the one God-centered concentric reality of a Church in the world, of the sacred within the secular, of a sacrament of salvation present within and for the sake of the world, of an “earthly and heavenly city penetrating each other.”(29) Such a reality can promote a harmony of good life both within the Church and in the world. The laity specifically meant “to penetrate and perfect the temporal sphere with the spirit of the Gospel ...” exercise an apostolate both in the Church and in the world, in both the spiritual and temporal orders. These realities, although distinct, are so connected (concentrically?) in the one plan of God ... “to appropriate the whole universe into a new creation, initially here on earth, fully on the last day”(30) (AA 5).

Hence, the lay person cannot be “diplomatically” assigned to the world and its secularity, as if to keep him out of a real ecclesiality. (This may be a “cunning clericalism” to keep him outside the Church, in order to continue his (the cleric’s) own monopoly in the Church). A true Church lives not on the margin of secularity but in its heart to animate it. Hence, a total, or real, ecclesiality for the laity does not imply a partial secularity. Nor does it mean encroaching on or disturbing the ecclesiality of the clergy. A true and real ecclesiality of the laity is not incompatible with his real secularity. In a concentric-sphere existence of Church in the world, the lay person without a true ecclesiality cannot have a true secularity, and vice-versa. His ecclesiality will mean effectiveness and relevance for his secularity. Conversely, his secularity will not be an evil one (encouraging a *fuga mundi*) but one to be redeemed by his saving presence, and in that sense, the field in which to realize his ecclesiality.

#### **5.4. In a Church with a threefold messianic character, the lay person too has a real priestly, prophetic and royal mission to be activated**

The threefold messianic functions of Christ (priest, prophet and king) characterize the whole laity as the people of God. Bishops and priests are rightly entrusted with their prophetic, priestly and royal roles. And these roles have been studied with interest in Vatican II.”(31) But in the case of the laity, who by virtue of baptism and confirmation received the threefold mission and the necessary powers, only some beginnings have been made by Vatican II.(32) Adequate meaning and form, helping these “Christian powers” become operative in normal Christian life, need further study.

##### **5.4.1 The reality and potentialities of the common priesthood need further study.**

Catholic Counter-Reformation’s defence of the ministerial priesthood made the Church shy away from making concrete Catholic belief in the priesthood of the faithful. This latter doctrine was seen chiefly as a banner of protest used by the reformers against the ministerial priesthood. Very little “flesh and blood” were given to this old biblical concept of a priestly people. Vatican II has indicated ways of giving meaning and form to the exercise of this priesthood(33) In *Lumen Gentium* greater emphasis is laid on the essential difference and the inter-relatedness of the two priesthoods, but very little is said about the meaning and content of both, certainly not in holistic manner and within the context of the people of God. Consequently, the teachings about the ministerial priesthood of *Presbyterium Ordinis* and of the 1971 synod lack the needed ecclesiological foundation. Hence, this silence or emptiness of content about the two priesthoods has not

helped us understand the ecclesiality of clergy and laity, or the relationship between the two.

The priesthood of Christ, which is not sacerdotal in the line of the Old Testament, is a unique once for all sacrificial priesthood with a sacramental representation and realization in the Eucharist. The sacrifice of Christ was really and truly on the cross, but a sacramental representation (re-enactment or re-living) has been made possible by the Eucharist.

Both clergy and laity participate in the once-for-all sacrifice of the old Calvary. Both are called to live this sacrifice of Christ today in their lives by offering spiritual sacrifices (existential sacrifices). This is the common priesthood of all. Any amount of sacramental celebration will not substitute for the living out of an existential sacrifice which is all-life-embracing and required of both clergy and laity. In the sacramental celebration through the Eucharist of the unique sacrifice of Christ the priest has the power to preside and enact what was commanded. Thus the ministerial priests, in addition to their common priesthood, receive a specific task or commission, with a specific anointing, in order to confect and re-enact the Eucharist. The calling of a few to the ministerial priesthood should neither relegate the laity to an inferior position nor make the laity's priesthood less real. The ministerial priesthood is instituted within the common priesthood, in service to the common priesthood and is ordered towards it.(34) Hence "the tension between an ontological sacerdotalist view of the ministry on the one hand and a purely functionalist view on the other must therefore be resolved by a theological view of the Church's ministry as a charismatic office — the service of leading the community and therefore as an ecclesial function with the community and accepted by the community."(35)

The common priesthood, which continues the sacrifice



of Christ through an existential sacrifice, in a sense is “more real,” though less specific (i.e., more general), than the ministerial priesthood. Hence, it is the ministerial priesthood that has to be understood in the context of and in service to the common priesthood and not vice versa. This implies too that it is the clergy who have to be understood in the context of and in service to the laity, not vice versa. It is in this sense that the common priesthood, prior to being a ministry/apostolate to others, is a situation or condition of election, consecration and grace.(36) This condition of election and baptismal consecration gives a power to the laity to continue in an existential manner the sacrifice of Christ on the altar of secular life, by a witness and service of love for the salvation of others. Hence, it is wrong to see the ministerial priesthood as a privilege over and above the common priesthood, and consequently to monopolize there all powers and charisms of priesthood in the Church. An exaggerated sense of priestly mediation on behalf of others (laity)” makes the laity powerless; and an exclusive “configuration (by the priest) of Christ the head” in the community denies a similar “configurative power” to laity. In short, a ministerial priesthood that does not serve and activate the common priesthood, or fulfill the demands of the common priesthood, is no true ministerial priesthood.

Such an ecclesiological and pneumatological view of the two priesthoods does not preclude its christological basis. Both priesthoods have their christological basis in the Christian discipleship, even before or prior to any configuration to the “headship of Christ.” Exaggerating the headship of Christ in the ministerial priesthood, and ignoring the fundamental and proper discipleship of Christ, brings about a false ontologism of status. Hence, all three dimensions — christological, pneumatological and ecclesiological—are constitutive of both priesthoods.(37)

A radical conversion of heart and mind is demanded of

the ministerial priesthood for the survival and activation of the common priesthood. The clergy-laity relationship is largely determined by the relationship of the two priesthoods. The realistic and existential view of Vatican II demands that without raising an old reformation-fear, we reform our understanding of the ministerial priesthood and activate the common priesthood of the laity.

#### **5.4.2. The prophetic potential of the laity needs realization within the Church and within the world**

Vatican II indicates certain ways in which lay persons can exercise their prophetic role of witnessing to the truth in their life-situations. Strengthened by the common *sensus fidelium* (faith instinct) and the various charisms, the laity lives out their faith so that the power of the Gospel shines forth in their daily social and family life.

Vatican II situates the much misunderstood infallibility of the Pope within the broader infallibility of the whole people who cannot err in matters of belief (*sensus fidelium*), and speaks of the supernatural sense of the faith which characterizes the whole people (*consensus fidelium*), to the last member of the laity.(38)

Hence the prophetic role of the laity is not one of mere passive reception, nor an active one merely in the secular field of politics, economics and social life, but is to be fully activated even within the Church. We need a broadening of the meaning of magisterium to include consulting the laity, or involving them in the consultative process towards a magisterium of the Church, and reducing the gap between a teaching Church and a learning Church to become one Church - which learns from the Spirit.(39)

Time was when every little political or social crisis in a society waited upon a too-cautious clergy to pronounce a belated statement — (and often that was hardly relevant or equal to the

demands of the situation). The laity acting as Christians, on the strength of their own prophetic vocation and guided by a Christian conscience, are required to speak out fearlessly their praise and protest. Thus the prophetic presence of the Church or the critical function of the Church in the service of truth and justice, love and mercy — all values of the God's Reign — is not a monopoly of the hierarchy but a function of the whole Church as a prophetic people.

The prophetic voice of the laity must be heard, and encouraged not only outside of the Church in politics, economics and social life but also within the Church, with respect to ecclesial life, even in matters of belief and doctrine. (40)

#### **5.4.3. The royal character of the lay person makes for a real and active citizen of God's Kingdom-to inaugurate and build**

Comparatively little is said with regard to the royal character and function of the people of God. When theology speaks of the threefold character and functions of the ordained minister, a strict parallel is often maintained between the characters and the functions. The prophetic character is associated with his teaching and witnessing functions; the priestly character with his sacrificing, sanctifying and mediatorship functions; and the royal character is the basic for the ruling (pasturing) function of the pastor. Very little, or hardly anything, is said about the royal function of the whole people of God — their being citizens of a new Kingdom, and their concern and effort for the Kingdom. Usually, only a hasty corollary is given that bishops or priests must govern or rule (more than guide or serve) their flock.

The need arises to deepen the royal character of this priestly and prophetic people of God. And this is possible only by transcending our narrow ecclesial limits and understanding the vocation to be a royal people in the larger background of our



history of salvation, which is now identical with the building-up of God's Kingdom."(41)

For us Christians the salvation of man has been offered and worked out in the divine plan described as the Kingdom of God. We, who are followers of Christ who inaugurated the Kingdom, are ourselves citizens, inaugurators and builders. Our whole task as a people of God - preaching, witnessing, celebrating and awaiting - is geared to serve this Kingdom to come. To attain the goals of the Kingdom, "the laity have the greatest importance ... to be a leaven animating temporal affairs from within ...»(42) Thus "the tasks of earthly culture become the incarnation of the Christian commitment, in ordering life in this world to bring it into harmony with the Kingdom of God."(43) In this perspective we learn the deepest meaning and value of all creation, of its universality and its diversity.

Even ordained ministers and religious must understand and situate their vocation not merely within the Church but within this broader concept of salvation through the coming of God's Kingdom. The earlier narrower concept of salvation and sanctification exclusively in and through the Church often led to a misunderstanding of the clergy and religious to be those "saved and powerful" sent to save "the powerless people" — the laity. The laity was seen as those depending on the mercy and generosity of the institutionalized community of clergy and religious for their salvation.

Unfortunately, ecclesial (even ecclesiastical) values and priorities still predominate within the Churches, leaving the Kingdom-values of love, truth, justice, peace to the world, to be preached and practiced mostly by the laity.

In a God-centered (concentric) Church and world, the Church is present as the light and servant of the Kingdom,

penetrating all the world's realities to dispel the darkness of sin. The presence and task of the laity in secular tasks should not be graded as marginal or secondary to the Church's strictly intra-ecclesial religious presence and cultic tasks. The laity who in their own distinctive role penetrate the world with the Christian spirit have also a religious mission to function as light and energy, to serve, build and consolidate the human community, according to the divine law(44). "Just as the religious state of perfection within this world is a sign of the future of the Kingdom of God, so the integral lay state in the world is a sign of how salvation exists in this world." (425)

The leadership of the Churches neither tolerates nor undervalues the role of laity in the political, social, economical and other fields of life, but encourages positively lay leadership roles in these areas. "You who are lay persons ... have a unique opportunity and crucial responsibility ... to show the power that faith has to transform the world and renew the family of man."(46)( To be courageous in the world, the layman needs to be courageous within the Church. But within the Church, if he is discouraged, he can only be a coward in the world. And he is no more part of a sign raised up among the nations."

### **5.5. In a Church rich in charisms and services, lay persons have immense potentialities for their services and ministries**

Pope John XXIII wished and prayed that Vatican II be a new Pentecost. For a Church that had not sufficiently emphasized the role of the Holy Spirit for a long time, the initiative given at Vatican II to emphasize the pneumatological character of the Church was in itself a great Pentecost.

In a biblically rich paragraph the numerous acts of the Spirit in the Church (dwells, prays, witnesses, guides, gives unity, growth and renewal) are summed up to make the Church of

Vatican II not only a gift of the Father and the Son, but above all, a gift of the Spirit.”(47) Consequently, the gifts of the Spirit Himself are recognized to be no more limited to sacramental and hierarchical channels, but also are given to faithful of every rank to make them fit and ready to undertake various services and ministries. (48)

Although the opening sentence of chapter three of *Lumen Gentium* speaks logically of the variety of ministries instituted by Christ the Lord in his Church for the nurturing and the constant growth of the people of God,”(49) it hurriedly turns its attention in the rest of the chapter to just one minister, the bishop.

Still, the Council did give an explicit encouragement to the already begun recognition of charisms and services (especially after the encyclical *Mystici Corporis* of Pius XII in 1943). It speaks often of the importance and variety of charisms(50)

Among our leaders there are still some unwilling to recognize and “receive with thanksgiving and consolation these gifts exceedingly suitable and useful for the needs of the Church,”(51) because of a latent fear that such recognition, promotion and utilization may be detrimental to the ordained ministries and the Church’s hierarchical structure. Surely this fear is based on a misunderstanding of the relation between the charismatic and hierarchical aspects of the Church.

The Church is an historical concretization of the charismatic, and the hierarchical-institution (another gift of the same Spirit) is its necessary guide. The hierarchy has the responsibility to recognize and give due ecclesial place to the other charisms appearing in the communities in order to make them more effective and stable. “The officials must have the courage to allow fresh and hitherto unknown forms of the charismatic factor in the Church to appear. They must also help in the further process by which they are given that institutional



embodiment in some form, to which they have a right, and which they must achieve at a very early stage in order to be effective and to endure.”(52)

It is only by widening the structure of services and ministries in the Church that the whole community will have a charismatic structure-collegial and concentric - around the bishop, who in turn has the charism to responsibly recognize, encourage and institutionalize the other charisms. Only in such a situation conducive to recognition and promotion of charisms can the laity come of age and into their own.

At present all ministries in the Church are monopolized by the ordained clergy, as if ordination and clerical style are the essence and form of all ministries. The signs of emergent charisms among the laity, and their enthusiasm to utilize them in many services and ministries have forced a rethinking of the traditional ordained ministries in order further to diversify ministries.

The initial euphoria of welcoming lay charisms, as providing handy services in a time of need, should not blind us to the fact that a misuse of these new services can be dangerous and counterproductive. Pastors, in their initial enthusiasm, can pave the way for a new kind of ecclesiastical “domestic servants” by their enthusiasm and willingness to encourage lay workers. Pastors need to be cautious as well as responsible in inviting, facilitating and directing the laity into services and ministries. Only in this way may the laity be helped to come into their own in the Church.

Church leaders must be alert not to stifle charisms but to discern them, help them to grow and even institutionalize them into stable ministries, if needed.(53) The leadership often fails to recognize and welcome such gifts of the Spirit, simply because they do not know how to help these gifts to grow or how to put them to work (temporarily and permanently).

As a result, genuine charisms are either prematurely stifled or wasted and the increasing need for such services and ministries is not met. The cause for the present ministerial shortage or crisis is not that the Lord of gifts has abandoned us but is largely due to the immature and irresponsible handling of emerging lay charisms. Leaders, used to a uniform pattern of institutional and academic formation of future ministries — mostly determined from above for a full-time celibate professional — are often unable to handle courageously and creatively the lay charisms.

Rediscovering the laity with their potentialities for charisms, services and ministries will not only increase their ecclesial personality but also will pull the Church out of an unbiblical ministerial crisis.

### **5.6. Only a Church that is not a mere hierarchy but a hierarchical communion can rehabilitate the laity**

The efforts of theologians like Y. Congar, J.A. Möhler, E. Prigmore and H. de Lubac to resolve the tension between the Church as a hierarchy and as a communion led Vatican II to discover more the meaning of the term “hierarchical communion.” Although explicitly not used in the Vatican II documents, the concept has been very useful for emphasizing the principle of collegiality for the episcopate in particular and for the Church in general. Vatican II of course was directly concerned with establishing the biblical and doctrinal basis of episcopal collegiality. The post-Vatican Church, returning to the sources and to the experiences of early Churches, is gradually rediscovering the larger collegiality of the Church.

Both the infallibility of the Bishop of Rome and the apostolic succession of the bishops are better based and understood in the larger infallibility of the Church and in the broader apostolic succession of the Church. Similarly, the collegiality of the bishops

must be understood as an articulation and concretization of the larger communion of the apostolic Church. Thus, it is not a privileged and isolated *modus agendi* exclusively for the bishops; it is already a principle of life and function for the whole Church.

“Communion” implies a greater recognition of the gifts of believers, and “hierarchy” a personal pastoral authority at the service of these gifts. For a true hierarchical communion, a right balance must be found between the traditional principle of personal pastoral authority and the continuance of the Church as a Spirit-filled community of gifts.

The rehabilitation of the laity in the Church will depend, almost totally, on the realization of the Church as a hierarchical communion by the mutual recognition of gifts among the clergy and the laity.

At present, there is a happy and growing consciousness of the collegiality of the bishops; events and structures, such as episcopal ordinations, bishops’ conferences and synods to articulate and vivify that collegiality, are not wanting. This is a welcome change after Vatican II. Despite attempts to limit and curb these latter collegial bodies in that they might become a danger to the central authority of the Church, they are found to be increasingly useful in promoting and initiating a new ecclesial life at the regional and national level. Hence the 1985 synod affirmed their necessity and pastoral usefulness, as expressions, if not of episcopal collegiality, certainly of the collegial spirit. (54) A similar consciousness among the laity at the base about their own collegiality, among themselves and with their leaders, is a great need. Structures, like parish councils, diocesan unions, pastoral councils and the like, are striving to live out that collegiality of gifts and services. But how much freedom, responsibility, trust and deliberative strength are given to these bodies? Some of them have quickly lost their initial euphoria;



others have caused dissension and dissatisfaction; and very few have succeeded in contributing substantially to the collegializing (communitarizing) of the Church. The success or failure is due, not only to the unpreparedness or lack of zeal of the ~~laity~~ laity but to a greater extent to the sluggishness or disinterestedness or fear of the clergy.

Two principles must be kept clear before our minds:

- 1) The collegiality and subsidiarity that bishops and priests seek with their immediate leaders must be first conceded and practiced at all the levels of parish or community life.
- 2) Structures that promote collegiality (and communion) and subsidiarity cannot be decreed through constitutions and rules from above. Collegiality in the Church must be first lived and then articulated from praxis to doxis.

Collegiality is not merely for relation among bishops themselves and with the Pope, but a principle of hierarchical communion is to be operative in all stages and structures of ecclesial life. So too with the principle of subsidiarity. Though the degree of application of this principle to ecclesial life has been left open by the synod of 1985 for further study, the validity of the same principle for good and healthy human relations urges us to welcome it as a guiding principle in our ecclesial life too, and especially for better clergy-laity relationship.

### **5.7. Directing the gains towards a description of the new laity**

The ecclesiological gains listed above made after Vatican II are indispensable for a true leap forward towards making the present Church a Church of the people, a Church of the laity. They contain the ecclesiological elements constitutive of the new laity and provide the right climate for their growth in the future. We may undertake a whole series of appendaging and corrective

changes in our approach to the laity, but if these are not imbued with the spirit of Vatican II, as we have envisaged them, or are contrary to any of the above ecclesiological gains, they neither consolidate the position gained nor help the future growth of the laity. Much pastoral effort is going on everywhere, partly because Rome asks for it and partly from personal conviction. Much of it is wasted and unproductive, merely because of the lack of the spirit and motivation that characterized Vatican II.

Hence, we may try to bring together the constitutive elements of the new laity, as born out of the post-Vatican II ecclesiology, in the following manner:

The vocation of the new laity is to be a full-fledged member, no less than any other member in the Church. By virtue of baptism and confirmation, he is filled with the genuine spirit of Christ and enjoys an irrevocable dignity and freedom of the sons of God. He has the divine wisdom and the maturity, the juridical status and the Christian power to be a true subject of ecclesial as well as secular life. His ecclesiality and secularity are both God-centered (*terminus a quo*) and Kingdom directed (*terminus ad quem*). The one reality of being a Christian in the world could be thus expressed in two ways—one ecclesial and the other secular.

His mission in the Church in the world will be the actualization of all his human and Christian potentialities in favor of the Kingdom. The threefold messianic character in him, combined with the gifts and charisms that he receives from the Spirit, will enable him to live his existential priesthood, to bear witness in a prophetic manner to the Kingdom values and, as a responsible citizen of the Kingdom, to build it up along with other people of good will.

Such a laity with a noble vocation and a responsible mission can thrive in a Church that is a hierarchical communion.

But he may not even survive in a Church that is still of the hierarchy, devoid of any collegiality and subsidiarity.

## 6. The spirituality and apostolic life of the laity

The search towards the vocation and mission of the laity in the Church in the world should not be limited only to the ecclesiological aspect. There must be considered also the spiritual life and the apostolic mission of the laity — as individuals, families and communities. It is in spirituality and apostolate that the laity will actualize their vocation and mission and also find an acid test of the true ecclesiality and secularity of a Christian.

### 6.1. Lay spirituality of dialogue with the world

The universal call to holiness of Vatican II is in perfect unison with its call to the Church to be of the people, to be in and for the world, and to be a community of equals. In short, it is a logical consequence of the total and horizontal ecclesiology of Vatican II.

Not only the clergy and the religious but also the laity has been called to holiness, to the one holiness. What is new in this call is the sincerity and intensity of the invitation. Moreover, the concept of holiness has been not reduced, but made accessible and realizable for the laity where they are and not with a “*fuga mundi*” attitude.

The meaning of the lay person’s spirituality is widened, on one side, by widening the borders of sacredness beyond the visible limits of the Church to cover the whole of secularity and, on the other side, moving the marginalized majority to be in the heart of secularity. No more is spirituality a series of pious or sacramental acts with observance of laws that once made up his spirituality and give him a sense of satisfaction about holiness, but is more a style of living in a context of life where he can be in



communion with God and his world. It is a thing of right relation, right attitude, right union with God and man, to God and man.

Unfortunately, the concept of spirituality has been distorted and the emphasis is still placed on a clerical spirituality (that was mostly cradled and brought up in the Western monasteries). We continued to exhort the laity to follow the clerical way of life as an ideal of spirituality. The “*alterChristus*” is identified with Christ himself. Consequently, the laity tries, in spite of their very secular context, to adopt a spirituality of imitation - a mini-clerical spirituality. The “failure” to attain such a mini-clerical form of spirituality leaves many good followers of Christ disillusioned that they are not meant to be spiritual people.

The discipleship of Christ cannot be funnelled down through history into the one ideal of the priest in the parish. He is and ought to be a model to others by his style of discipleship, but this model must provoke in others other rich ways of following Christ. Just as around the person of Jesus the Christ, there emerge many rich christologies, so too there are many ways of discipleship and spirituality.

Pastors need not strain themselves to design a lay spirituality; they can help laity discover their own spirituality. This implies encouraging, by word and necessary sacramental services, a spirituality of life in the world - a secular spirituality. Sacramental services that are celebrated for the laity are not only sources of divine energy to strengthen them but also events of directing their solidarity with the success and suffering of their world. A secular spirituality is a spirituality of dialogue between the sacred functions we celebrate in church and the secular realities we encounter outside church.

## 6.2. The lay apostolate of evangelizing the world

Vatican II acknowledged clearly that the lay apostolate was not a mere participation in the apostolate of the hierarchy, but a direct participation in the total mission of the Church.”(55) In virtue of their baptism and confirmation they are commissioned by the Lord himself to such an apostolate. The content and form, then, of this apostolate have been radically affected. With regard to content, there is no more an apportioning of an exclusive part of the mission field of the Church to the laity. And with regard to form, the mandate or *missio canonica*, permission from the bishop or from the parish priest to do an apostolate, is no long the basis of the apostolate.

The ecclesiology of Vatican II makes it clear that apostolate is more than a faithful execution of an order from the ecclesiastical authority, but rather an active realization of the total mission of the Church by virtue of a power within — ordained or lay, always Christian. Apostolate comes from the apostolicity (apostolic character) of the whole people of God. The basis of episcopal and ministerial apostolicity — apostolicity understood not as authority but as mission and power — is the apostolic power and mission of all the faithful. The laity, therefore, can do apostolic work (apostolate) to which they are commissioned by the Lord by their sharing in the total apostolicity of the Church.

On the other hand, the lay character does not weaken or tone down the vigour of their apostolic action but qualifies it and rather enriches it by the secular contextual realities. When it is understood that it is the Christianisation of secular realities (nourished and encouraged by ecclesial institutions) that really prepares the way for the Kingdom, then the real and relevant value of lay apostolate for the coming of the Kingdom can be appreciated.

Hence, the present content and forms of lay apostolate, seen against the post-Vatican concept, are only feeble or limited efforts in the form of participation and collaboration with the apostolate of the hierarchy. In order to become really apostolic action of the laity, as laity, and concerned with the real secular realities, we must change direction, content and style of these apostolates. The direction of the lay apostolate must be more world-oriented (centrifugal), and not mere Church-oriented or sacraments-oriented (centripetal). The content of lay apostolate must include lay initiatives, decision-making and the realities of one's life - political, social or economic. The style of doing these apostolates need not be always stream lined efforts, but includes also the spontaneous efforts of doing things. This widens the apostolate of the Church to embrace a whole range of realities for the Kingdom and also harnesses a variety of charisms and services found among the laity. The role of the clergy in the apostolate of the laity must not be that of dominating, nor of decision-making nor of guiding. All this may have been meaningful in the not-too-distant past of the lay apostolate when work was done through lay apostolate organizations, or in the present, when the apostolate done is in close collaboration with the hierarchy. But with the mature lay apostolate, the priest will only be an animator, promoter and coordinator of lay initiatives to evangelize secular realities in view of the Kingdom.

Since the lay apostolate is largely concerned with the christianization of secular realities, the way Christians participate in political, social and economic life needs to be studied in each instance. Without dragging the Church into or binding it to any political/social/ideological system, the Church in general, and laity in particular, must exercise its duty to diffuse and defend the values of the Kingdom.



### 6.3. Lay ministry to widen ecclesial services

A beneficial return to the theological sources in the understanding of ministries and an acknowledgement of lay charisms and gifts, on the one hand, and the growing shortage of ministers together with the increasing demand for ecclesial services), on the other, have initiated a healthy rediversification of ministries in the Church. The question of lay ministry in the Church is not a question arising out of a lack of resources, gifts and charisms (and the need of creating them) but a question of the leadership giving due recognition, encouragement and help to stabilize the already existing charisms for better, wider and stable services. The initiatives of Rome and of the FABC have not found sufficient and concrete responses from the local Churches. (56)

Recognition of lay ministries should be preceded by a recognition of lay charisms and their place in the wider scope of the lay apostolate. Lay ministry is a form of apostolate, in which a lay person, while remaining a lay person, in virtue of charism, Christian powers (baptism and confirmation), and jurisdictional status in the Church as a full-fledged member, exercises stably and publicly one or more of the messianic functions for the mission of the Church in the world.

Attempts made in the pastoral field during the last two decades have surfaced both advantages and problems of lay ministries. On the part of the laity, there is a need for enthusiasm and generosity, and a true service in the Church or on behalf of the Church. On the part of the clergy, there is feeling that they have found a "friend in need" in their ministerial shortage. But on both sides there are elements of immaturity, and even insincerity, which can become harmful to further clergy-laity ministerial collaboration. And some laity who desire to acquire a "lay clericalism of power and privilege" could be do more harm than good.

For the clergy any attempt to make use of the laity as “cheap labor,” “transitional substitutes,” or even as “ecclesiastical servants,” must be discouraged. Lay ministries must remain true ecclesial ministries, and at the same time lay, without succumbing to any clericalism.

There are problems with regard to the training, employment and remuneration of lay ministers. For a Church leadership that is used to handling celibate clergy or religious, there will be additional problems connected with the family status of the lay ministers. Since the leadership and power (sacred and material) are still with the ordained male celibate, there is a host of problems to be faced not only in the question of married associates but also of women lay ministers. But these problems are a part of the larger problem of the laity in the Church and their relation to the clergy. No isolated solution can be found for the problem of lay ministers, unless the other areas are also simultaneously tackled. More and more pastoral initiatives from the Churches and by the local leadership of our Churches will bring in a wealth of experiences from which the Church can reflect, consolidate and grow.

### **6.3.1. Formation for lay ministries**

If the vocation and mission of the laity in the Church in the world are well-understood and expectations increase for the future, then the question will be asked about formation for such a calling. Can the present laity live up to such expectations? Have they the resources and the “factories” or seminaries to turn them out? These questions only spring up when we identify a calling to ministry with current seminary formation. The Spirit who calls gives also the charism and the help to respond to the call. Any formation has to be in the form of collaboration with the Giver of gifts to make that charism grow into a service or ministry.

Within a general program of conscientization and catechesis, there could be a theological and pastoral formation for the laity. The latter is already taking place in the context of pastoral life. And the former need not be an elaborated “seminary style” theology — even in miniature or simplified form, but a “job-oriented” program of theological and pastoral reflection.

Many of the laity who are willing to serve the Church also come in large numbers to follow courses in theology. The bishops are happy to organize week-end courses in theology — either similar to the seminary program or a miniature version of it. This can give the impression that scholastic theology (the privileged science of the clergy) is indispensable for active service in the Church. It also has the clandestine tendency to clericalise the laity.

Even with regard to the formation of our future priests there are many questions regarding the method and context of their spiritual, disciplinary and academic formation — the aprioristic, speculative approach and the unrealistic context in which it is done. We can envisage the formation of the laity only as a kind of conscientization program — conscientization about their ecclesiality and a faith-reflection in the context of their life and mission. Any attempt to give a glasshouse formation in discipline and theology to the laity must be resisted.

This will demand that we invest our resources for formation not only in the seminaries but also in theological schools for the laity, and also change the nature of theological studies done in these institutions, namely, doing theology not in isolation from the community of the Church but in the context of its ecclesial and secular realities (contextual theology). There is no place for a theology designed by the clergy to be taught to the laity (theology for the laity). We can only speak of a theology done by the laity along with the clergy about their own common



situation and about their specific vocation and mission of one another (theology of the laity).

It is clear that conscientization, or education of the laity in the Church, leads to reforming also the methods, contents and places of formation of the clergy.

## **7. Tasks ahead: incentive and challenge for future**

While assuring for ourselves a good grasp and understanding of the ecclesiological gains made in Vatican II, and their further development during the last two decades in the true spirit of Vatican II, we must also move on to the unfinished tasks of the past. There is no reason for pessimism but we have indeed an incentive and a challenge for further growth and development through timely re-evaluations and fresh attempts. It is up to us to face this agenda of unfinished tasks, post-Vatican II deviations and even any incongruence with that overall orientation, courage and prophecy characteristic of Vatican II. The Spirit will not fail us. Here we shall expose briefly just two of the glaring blind spots and inconsistencies in the doxis and praxis of post-conciliar Churches, so as to alert ourselves to further reflection and action.

### **7.1. Participation of laity in ecclesial decisions**

If there is one aspect to which the documents of Vatican II and the post-conciliar magisterial statements have conspicuously turned almost a blind eye and consequently evoked lay dissatisfaction and questioning, it is the participation of the laity in the decision-making processes of the Church. The Church, we believe, is neither a democracy nor a monarchy, nor an hierocracy, but a unique hierarchical communion, with sacred powers of leadership given to a few and sacred rights of collaboration to the rest. Today no decision is to be arrived at by the mere will of the

majority or by the mere power of the minority. It has to be a communal decision through a process of community discernment of the will of God in a particular context. It has to be a common search and finding in unity with the Spirit.

The more we accept the Church as a people, as a hierarchical communion, as a community of gifts and services, and the more we believe in one Lord, one Spirit, one body, one faith, one baptism, one grace and one mission, the greater is the need for common arrival at decisions. Vatican II has invited the laity to take an active part in the life of the Church, but it keeps a timid silence over their sharing in the decision-making power. If we speak of the laity having a duty to decide in the world but not in the Church, then we pave the way not only for an immature authority in the Church but also a lack of consistency in principles, and consequently fall back into our pre-Vatican dualism, the Church for the clergy and the world for the laity. If we really want the laity, as laity, to be at home, not only in the world, but also in the Church, then their participation in the life of the Church will imply also his decision-making power in the Church.

“The person who can advise and collaborate but does not participate in decision-making, in a manner befitting his status and gifts, is not really the Church but only belongs to the Church.”(57)

Recognizing the apostolic succession of the whole Church and the gifts and charisms of the laity does not mean a devaluation of the apostolic succession of bishops and the charisms and sacred powers bestowed on the ordained. It only means that the laity are not powerless, gift-less, ignorant minors, but adult members with gifts and “powers” (baptismal), who can play a joint role in decision-making.

A lack of trust, or a devaluation of these gifts of the laity, taking them to be ecclesially immature, shows only a lack of

maturity and an authoritarianism on the part of some clergy. Being ordained, intelligent or academically qualified does not necessarily save one from being immature.(58) Post-Vatican II attempts at a true collaboration between the clergy and the laity leave much to be desired. Lay councils and lay apostolate groups are not so numerous. And even if they exist, they meet with considerable difficulty for want of a joint decision-making power for clergy and laity, at least at the pastoral level. The various lay councils and lay apostolate groups, supposed to enjoy the minimum consultative and collaborative character, are often “authorized hands and feet” of the parish priest. These bodies are not demanding any democratic vote to oust the sacred leaders, but only claiming due weight for their *sensus fidelium* for their power of discernment, for their capacity to interpret to the signs, and for their initiatives.

## **7.2. An inconsistency of language in doxis and praxis**

The positive existential and mature outlook on man, given in *Gaudium et Spes*, and the biblically-based recognition of the laity in *Lumen Gentium* as regards their fundamental equality, dignity and freedom are not consistently maintained throughout in all the documents and directives of Church leadership. In language and attitude they still smack of a certain paternalism, if not a clergy-superiority.

Our pastoral practice often continues the spirit and language that can be expressed thus: “clergy only, but laity also.” The initial enthusiasm of Vatican II to bring a new type of lay existence with equality and maturity, has been reduced by patriarchal paternalism, as well as by the clerical fear of losing authority over the laity. If the laity are not to feel as “foreigners” but as citizens of the Church, and to be “at home” in the Church, then a more Christian exercise of fraternal authority is demanded from Church leaders.



In order to make grow this spirit of equality, spirit of brotherhood, it is necessary that we drop our unbiblical and unchristian titles, step down from our pedestal of power and talk a language pregnant with the values of biblical brotherhood and service. Unfortunately, we continue to walk (figuratively) either in front of the laity, expecting all the laity to fall in behind us, or behind them in the place of honor, but rarely with them or among them in fraternity. Is it not our task to be their energizing leaders from within and from amongst them. The style of leadership in the Church is still too much of the “we first and foremost, you also; but later and after us.”

## 8. Conclusion and Summary

We are all awakening to the fact that the laity — the majority in the Church — have been for a long time treated and allowed to feel as the marginalized majority(59). The stages of development that came in quick succession, especially after the Second World War, have borne many fruits during the past decades and we are now hopeful of witnessing the initiation of another important and decisive phase of those developments in the coming synod on laity.

In the earlier stages of the awakening of the laity, it was unavoidable and understandable that the lay enthusiasm, powers and charisms found limited expression, especially in those movements approved and directed by the clergy. Magisterial and clerical exhortations to the laity to be more active meant a more intimate collaboration with the clergy but not often any daring and prophetic lay initiative. Similarly, the magisterial exhortations to the clergy to encourage and animate the laity meant keeping the laity away from the evils of secularity and well within ecclesiastical boundaries, but not encouraging any incentive to get involved in the sociopolitical or secular aspects of building the Kingdom of God.

But in the Pentecost of Vatican II a great change, if not a revolution, took place. It was as radical as that of the First Council of Jerusalem which opened the Jewish church to the Gentiles without undue imposition of Jewish laws and customs. The radicality of Vatican II was more in spirit than in its published word. The realistic and existential view, combined with its holistic approach, initiated a Copernican revolution by which we moved from a Church-centered ecclesiology to a world-centered one, and from a hierarchy-centered laity to a laity-centered hierarchy. Hence, it is not enough only to appreciate the word of Vatican II and make it the final word of our future program. It is far more important to believe in the moving spirit of the Council, in its consistent orientation, and then keep moving forward with its dynamism towards the third millennium. The Spirit will never fail us.

“The lay movement of the post-war decades was one of the major forces that prepared the way and influenced Vatican II to be what it turned out to be. And it is our belief that the process of rediscovering the laity in the Church has to be necessarily in close conjunction with their continuous development. Insofar as the theme of laity is a laity-problematic within a total ecclesiology, and any understanding or renewal of this problematic has to be well within a total ecclesiology, it was in this conviction that we decided to move with and within the moving spirit of Vatican II and to look correlatively from the ecclesiological gains in favor of the laity to the ecclesial elements constitutive of the new laity.

Because the elements of the new laity emerge only as corollaries to the ecclesiological gains of Vatican II, an active and optimistic acceptance of the latter as the Magna Carta of our search is indispensable.

In the post-Vatican Church, whose *raison d'être* is to be in and for the world, there is only one vocation and mission for

the laity, namely, the vocation and mission to be a Christian in the Church in the world. This vocation to be a Christian contains the *raison d'être* of the in and for dimensions of the Church, and also presupposes his human vocation (to be an authentic person in God's world). Thus the radicality and the originality of the lay person's vocation and mission are to be God-centered. He has a God-centered humanity before being called to be a Christian and this latter vocation includes and presupposes his vocation to be a man of God. His theological (son of God), christological (disciple of Christ), and his basileological (builder of the Kingdom) dimensions are more basic than his ecclesial and secular dimensions. His ecclesial and secular vocation and mission are thus unified as one Christian vocation.

We discover in our search that the constitutive elements of the new laity include the spirit, dignity and freedom of the sons of God as well as his Christian maturity, status and power to be a full-fledged subject in the Church. As a messianic people, the laity have the threefold character and functions to live an existential priesthood of life, to bear prophetic witness to truth and justice and, as citizens of the Kingdom, to build up his new world. It is for these functions that gifts and charisms are also given to the laity and also regulating charisms (in service to the former) are instituted (charism of the hierarchy).

Besides situating the laity in the main body of the Church, Vatican II has also initiated a style of life (spirituality) and a mode of operation (apostolate and ministry) in keeping with his new vocation. He is called to a secular spirituality of dialogue whereby he lives in his context, but always in communion with God and his Kingdom. Liturgical and sacramental life in the institutional Church will be a source of nourishment and a summit of celebration, to strengthen him in his way of life. Conscious of being a genuine and responsible member of the Church in the



world, he undertakes, on his own initiative and on his own sacramental basis (baptism and confirmation) and strength (Eucharist), tasks — individually or in an organized manner — for the evangelizing of the world through Kingdom values. When his services are wished for in a stable and public manner, he undertakes them, in collaboration with the ordained ministers, but directed in building the Kingdom even beyond the walls of his Church.

The laity, with such a noble vocation and a responsible mission, cannot emerge and grow to be their own in a Church that is dominantly hierarchical and devoid of any collegiality and subsidiarity. They can only emerge and grow in a Church that is a hierarchical communion with sufficient freedom, flexibility, collegiality and subsidiarity. The laity-problematic being the other side of the clergy-problematic, any emergence and growth of the one will imply also a similar effect on the other. The rediscovery and renewal of the laity depend heavily on the rediscovery and renewal of the clergy. And these both have begun. As long as they are done with and within the moving spirit of Vatican II, we are assured of a Church truly of the people, to serve the coming of his Kingdom. From the present powerful leadership much more than a passive cooperation is expected, namely, a radical conversion to the spirit and letter of Vatican II, with a continuous interpretation of these, coupled with a radical reformation of our own selves. Similarly, from the laity who have either strayed away from the Father's house, or fallen into a deep slumber, a decisive return to the Church and an active presence therein is hoped for.

**The Church has not been truly established,  
And is not yet fully alive,  
Nor is it a perfect sign of Christ among men,**

Unless, there exists a laity  
Worthy of the name,  
Working along with the hierarchy.  
For the Gospel  
Cannot be deeply imprinted  
On the talents, life and work of any people,  
Without the active presence of laymen.  
Therefore, even in the very founding of a Church,  
The greatest attention is to be paid  
To raising up a mature Christian laity. (AG 21a)

#### Footnotes:

1. E. Schillebeeckx, *The Church with a Human Face*, p. 157.
2. Y. Congar, *Lay People in the Church*, p. XVI.
3. Archbishop Dermot Ryan, *Osservatore Romano*, March 4, 1985, p.
4. Final Report of the 1985 Synod, I, 2.
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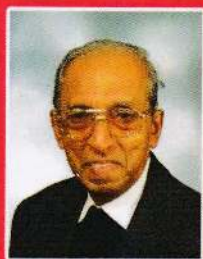
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**M**y priestly formation in Rome during the 2nd Vatican Council 1962-6, made me a direct witness of the whole Council and listen to its main periti-experts Karl Rahner, Yves Congar, Ed.Schillebeckx, Hans Kueng & others. Later in 1972-1976 for my doctoral research I studied the role of unrecognized lay ministers in the mission churches of Asia and Africa which I published in 1977 in Sri Lanka as *Recognizing the Faceless minister*.

Besides being professor of theology in the two major seminaries of Sri Lanka for 20 years, I served as a Sri Lankan theologian in the first Theological Advisory Committee of the FABC (TAC-FABC) from 1986-94. Those were the years when the newly formed FABC was updating the Asian churches with the spirit and teachings of the 2nd Vatican Council. These experiences helped me to think and reformulate my earlier understanding of theology. My lectures in European Universities and inter-actions with western theologians during my 21 years-self-exile from 1996-2017, further convinced me, that the growth of Asian theology, can also enrich the western scholastic theology.

Hence, these selected lectures/writings, are my humble contribution a) for the benefit of our Asian theologians to go forward as light and salt for God's Kingdom in Asia b) to western theologians of the world, to engage in a fruitful theological dialogue with Asian theologians about the unfolding of the mission of Jesus Christ in the world.

**S.J. Emmanuel**

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