THE BISHOPS’ INSTITUTES FOR SOCIAL ACTION
OF
THE FEDERATION OF ASIAN BISHOPS’ CONFERENCES

FOREWORD

Between March 1974 and November 1975, three Bishops’ Institutes for Social Action (BISA) were held in Manila, Tokyo and Kuala Lumpur. These were two-week affairs designed to introduce Asian Catholic bishops and other Church leaders to the latest thinking on social analysis and action, and their relation to the life of the Church. All in all, 144 people attended the three Institutes, including sixty-four bishops.

The Institutes were organized by the Office for Human Development (OHD) of the Federation of Asian Bishops’ Conferences (FABC). BISA I was held in Manila for the bishops of Southeast Asia (Indonesia, Laos, Khmer Republic, Malaysia, Philippines, Singapore, and Thailand). BISA II was held in Tokyo for the bishops of East Asia (China, Hong Kong, Korea, Macao and Japan). BISA III was held in Kuala Lumpur for the bishops of South Asia (Bangladesh, India, Sri Lanka, Pakistan).

In this little booklet we want to present the results. I think the BISAs were very important for the Church in Asia, and that they already have had innumerable practical results. I know, though, that accounts of old meetings often are not of great interest, except perhaps to those who attended, who may find them nostalgic, or who want to see if their interventions are included. I hope this booklet will be different.

To introduce the BISAs, I have included an historical account of their background and Bishop Bunluen Mansap has given his impressions of the three meetings. Father Tissa Balasurya offers some practical recommendations for the bishop’s apostolate of social action. A summary of the reflections and conclusions is also given. Finally, a list of the participants is provided.

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I. HISTORICAL BACKGROUND OF THE OFFICE FOR
HUMAN DEVELOPMENT AND THE BISAs

by Bishop Julio Xavier Labayen, O.C.D.

From PISA to BISA

Some Catholics in Asia, when discussing the history of their
social action work, begin with the 1965 Priests' Institute of Social
Action (PISA). A colorful write-up of the meeting begins this way:

They flew into Hongkong from fourteen directions, from the
whole arch of Free Asia, as far west as Pakistan, as far north as
Korea — 150 Catholic priests selected, most of them, by their
bishops — and took over the eleventh floor of Kowloon's huge
President Hotel. Sixty portable altar tables lined in corridors, and
in each of their rooms was a study schedule for the whole month
of August, 1965: poverty, population, hunger, disease, communism,
nationalism, socialization, cooperatives, mass communications,
group dynamics, labor unions, agricultural research — and the
heart of the schedule: Mater et Magistra and Pacem in Terris
by the late Pope John XXIII. (William J. Quiry, S.J., Current
Social Problems.)

This meeting had a huge impact on future socio-economic work
in Asia. It was not the beginning — eighteen of the participants were
already full-time social action workers. Nor was it the only powerful
influence on the development of social work in the Church. Even
while the priests met in Hongkong, the world's Catholic bishops were
at Vatican II working out the final version of the Constitution of
the Church in the Modern World — it would be promulgated December
8, 1965 — and the other Conciliar documents, which were to
undergird all change in the Church. In 1965, too, the Cultural
Revolution began. China would prove a big factor in the years to
come through its ideological attraction for the young, including those
within the Church.

What can be fairly said of this PISA meeting was that it pumped
a new surge of energy into social action work. Many of the priests
who attended, went back and began to implement seriously the
conclusions of the meeting. Some are still at it, twelve years later. In
some countries, such as the Philippines, national structures of social
action can be traced directly to the PISA.

Twelve years later, the summaries of the PISA lectures and
discussions are still alive with the intelligence, wit and long experience
of the resource persons and the openness of the participants.
Walter Hogan, who was the resource person for labor, is a good example, with his own peculiar blend of erudition and concreteness.

As I was watching the motion picture on Swedish co-ops, I was absolutely thrilled. Now comes the chance in Sweden to tend to higher things. This is the reason we are so interested in economics. A man can’t go in for high culture, religion or the higher values of life while he is fighting everyday almost like an animal to get his rice . . . It’s no longer a daily fight for existence. But what are we going to do with this material prosperity? We can either use it to be “tramps,” you might say, just to enjoy a pure materialism; or we can say as Msgr. Coady said—I am making part of it up, but it is essentially what he used to say—“of course we have to start with lobster and fertilizer but we want to go on to grand opera and art and the great God.”

Or Jose M. Abad, then of Sophia University, who lectured on the Church’s social teaching:

We Christians, we human beings, cannot tolerate any socio-economic order which doesn’t provide food enough for each human being. But large numbers of people don’t get enough to eat. We call this “The Socio-Economic Order.” It is not social, it is not economic, and it most certainly is not order . . .

Or Father Bulatao talking of ground dynamics:

You learn in a mental hospital a very strange thing, that people who are mentally ill cannot plot with each other, cannot plot even in order to escape from the hospital. They cannot conspire. Conspiracy is a privilege of normal people . . . And this problem of working together, of cooperation, is really something you might describe as an attempt to grow at being human, so that we can learn to work together, which is quite an achievement.

I wonder though what Father Bulatao would say after “One Flew Over the Cuckoo’s Nest.”

Or Isowo Iwakata, a specialist in small farm agriculture, when asked how he would introduce change among very poor subsistent farmers:

Because these farmers have been farming for many years to keep alive, there must be many kinds of procedures and devices done by themselves. Find the farmers who are doing at least a little bit better than the others because of their methods; then encourage these leading farmers in the group to improve still more. Next, try to spread those little improvements to other
farmers. Then they will begin to understand the importance of improving their methods.

If we compare the discussions and resolutions of PISA with those of the BISAs (1974-1975), some differences are apparent.

The BISA documents bring out very strongly the thesis that mass poverty in Asia is not an accident or an oversight but the inevitable result of unjust social, economic and political structures that create and maintain it for the benefit of the rich and powerful. In PISA there is little talk of this, at least in the records available. The Catholic Church in Asia had to wait some more years for the development of liberation theology and growing Maoist influences in the intellectual world before it would come to talk of “liberation,” “social action” and “structural analysis.”

For example, Jose Abad said at PISA:

It took many years, really many years, before the economists themselves, even the technicians, realized that the greatest problem of the economic life — please underline this — the greatest problem of economic life is not how to distribute, which is very important too, but how to produce more and produce better so that today’s production helps for tomorrow’s production.

This was the development theory current at the time. By BISA the prevalent economic thinking was less concerned with greater production and instead stressed equality through land reform, greater taxation of the rich, and government controls on big business. One of Fr. Tissa Balasuriya’s talks at BISA III is a good example of this.

Perhaps as a consequence of these theoretical differences there is some difference in the action programs recommended by the two meetings. PISA’s discussions and resolutions emphasize credit unions, small ways to improve production in rural and urban areas, cooperation with governments and foreign agencies. That is the main emphasis, though the organization of industrial workers got high priority.

With BISA the actions programs are more clearly linked to the struggle for justice through conscientization and mass organization, with little suggestion that help will come from governments or foreign agencies. Again, this is an emphasis rather than the whole picture.

PISA saw communism as the great evil. Father Hogan, for example, felt that “dishonest, exploitative labor leaders are only slightly less destructive of society than communist labor leaders.” By BISA, liberal capitalism is seen as equally evil.

One cannot help but sense at PISA a younger, more optimistic air, than was found ten years later at BISA.
The number of foreigners serving as resource persons is interesting. At PISA, seventeen of the twenty-one main speakers were non-Asian. At the BISAs, only two of thirty.

Behind the organization, PISA was SELA (Socio-Economic Life in Asia), a group of Jesuits involved in social action work in Asia. SELA was very instrumental through PISA and, in other ways, in building the Asian-wide Catholic network of social actionists. Indeed, a history of social action in Asia up to at least 1965 would be a history of Jesuit work, especially in certain countries, such as the Philippines, Indonesia and Taiwan.

The initiative for SELA came from Father Jansen, the Father General of the Jesuits at that time, and its first organizational meeting was in Manila in August 1959. Four Jesuits attended. A fifth thought the meeting was in Tokyo and flew there by mistake. Two years later, Father Walter Hogan became full-time executive secretary. Father Hogan had been connected with the labor movement in the Philippines till he ran afoul of the late Cardinal Santos for accusing the Cardinal of sophisticated union-busting in a Church-owned bank. The Cardinal, no mean adversary, forbade Hogan to preach or teach social affairs within Manila. Whether the Cardinal had the right to do this was debated; but, as the noted canon lawyer, Father Boucaren, said of the case, "ea quae objici possunt contra eam (the Cardinal’s decision), sunt quidem verissima, sed practice parum juvant ob rationes quae facile perspicuuntur." In simple English, "You may be right, but there’s nothing you can do."

The Baguio Meeting

In June 1969, forty bishops, priests and laymen from Asia gathered at the Jesuit House in Baguio, Philippines. It was an important meeting, for here the concept of an Asian-wide social action office was first discussed.

While PISA was a training seminar, the Baguio meeting was a gathering of social action veterans coming together to exchange experiences and to find better ways of working and cooperating with one another.

Father Horacio de la Costa pointed out in his welcome address that the name of the Jesuit House was Mirador—Prospect Point—and went on:

If this house could speak to you, it would say: Look out of my windows and try to extend your vision beyond the Gulf of Lingayen to all of Asia; try to make out more clearly what is God’s plan for all these peoples, and what is God’s plan for those who, like yourselves, seek nothing else but to be of service to man — man, who is the glory of God.
The meeting did this in great detail with admirable acumen.

The principal voices at Baguio were Asian; Cardinal Darmojuwono of Indonesia, for example. His simple message is the first instance this author can find where an Asian Church leader talks of and for all of Asia:

The Asian peoples are changing, are developing, slowly, painfully, but little by little groping their way to more human dignity. We all know that every human being has his human dignity. We know also that the Asian man is proud of his human dignity. He has also his basic human right to exercise better and better that human dignity, to work and fight to raise his living standard, his living conditions, so that he will be a better human being.

Dr. Ulrich Koch of Misereor was the first to suggest the founding of an Asian office.

It would be advisable to set up an independent center for instruction and research in order to work out the theological basis of the Church’s social involvement. Special attention would have to be given to the elaboration of a theory of development which makes clear from a Christian point of view what development means. This would necessarily include the questions of economic growth and a proper social order. Such a center could possibly serve several countries.

During the meeting, the nine bishops present met informally and expressed the need for keeping open lines of communication between themselves and the various national episcopal commissions. They felt a secretariat with a chairman and a full-time secretary would be useful. They discussed this with the larger body, and eventually decided to have the office in Manila, with Bishop Julio Xavier Labayen (a PISA graduate) as chairman and to leave him free to choose his own secretary. He later chose Father de la Costa.

Once an office is set up, new tasks are quickly assigned. Beyond communication, the new secretariat was to promote research and to try to link social action with other Church work, such as mass media and education. It was also to study how it could become the center for the basic ideological and social science reflection that Dr. Koch had called for.

The Manila Meeting of the Asian Bishops with Pope Paul,
November 1970

We the Bishops of Asia, assembled in the City of Manila, thank God for bringing us together at this time ... with special rejoicing, gathered around the Holy Father, Pope Paul VI, whom
we welcome as Peter in the midst of his brothers in the apostolate . . .

The words from the Message of the Conference are fulsome and dramatic, as Church language often is; but this time there was cause. They were an historic ten days when the Pope and over a hundred Asian bishops were in Manila — part council, part celebration and, in good part too, sheer circus excitement.

Manila in late 1970 was swept up in the strident demonstrations of the leftist youth; its walls were plastered with revolutionary slogans. Even moderate people talked of revolution and socialism. There was some fear of trouble when Pope Paul spoke to the students at Santo Tomas University. There was not, of course; the students came through cheering around him, just as the rest of Manila did. (I remember the only group that did not go wild when he passed — the squatters of Tondo. Why? I don’t know.) Into this atmosphere the Pope and bishops came. Whether they were influenced by all that was going on in Manila is not certain; but at the end of the meeting, they put their names — even the most conservative of them — to a document that in some ways was as radical as those of Medellin. Later, the document was criticized by some Vatican Congregations for seeming to be more a work of sociologists than churchmen.

In establishing the Federation of Asian Bishops’ Conferences (FABC), the bishops provided for a Central Committee consisting of the President of each National Conference, and a Standing Committee which would take charge of the day-to-day work. These two committees were given assignments of coordinating and assisting in almost all matters of Church interest, although the concerns of justice and development were given a special priority.

At the Manila Hilton on November 28, 1970, Cardinal Darmojuwono, Bishops Hsu and Labayen and Father de la Costa met with representatives of Misereor to determine how the Asian office they had planned at Baguio the year before could be integrated into the new plan of the Asian bishops. They decided to leave it up to the Central Committee which was scheduled to meet in Hongkong in March 1971.

The question was put to the bishops in March, and again in December 1971. They decided to accept the office described in Baguio as their own Office of Human Development (OHD), with one important change: it would be at the service of all of Asia, where the original concept had in mind only East and Southeast Asia. Bishop Labayen was named chairman, with Cardinals Darmojuwono and Kim and Archbishops Fernandez and Cordeiro (now Cardinal) as members. Father William Roetenberg was named full-time executive secretary. For better communication between the office and its chairman, it was agreed to let the office stay in the Philippines for the time being.
It is difficult to evaluate the importance of this first Asian Bishops’ Meeting. It was an historic event: the first time a Pope had come to the Far East, and the first time so many Asian bishops had gathered together. It had practical results in that it set up the FABC and its offices, including OHD. Perhaps its greatest achievement was in the clear guidelines it laid down for the Church in this part of the world — the essential need of situating the Church within Asian realities, and thus the need for reading “signs of the times,” and also the crying need in Asia for peoples’ total human development and the youth apostolate.

OHD was instrumental in organizing the Asian Inter-Religious Forum for Social Action in March 1973, along with the Protestant Churches of Asia and SODEPAX. Since the meeting, FAO became interested. The organization that resulted is called Asian Cultural Forum on Development (ACFOD), with offices in Bangkok.

With the Bureau of Asian Affairs and others, OHD helped organize the East Asian Seminar on Population in the Context of Integral Human Development in Manila, June 1973. This was one of a series of regional meetings that were held to prepare non-government agencies (in this case, the Church) to take part in the United Nations Population Meeting in Bucharest, 1975.

Conclusion

Some readers may object to the emphases of this article. Why were some events described, others omitted? For example, there is no mention of SELA’s activities after PISA, none at all of credit union work, community organization, Impact, BATU, SEARSOLIN, or a host of other Asian initiatives that have taken place in the last ten years. Why concentrate so much on the OHD which is of limited significance and has done so little? Are the Jesuits the only social actionists among the clergy?

The objections are valid, of course, and we are well aware that OHD has done very little in comparison with other efforts. The purpose of the article is to give a framework for the articles and documentation of the BISAs. Hopefully, it has done this by tracing one line of development over the last few years that led to OHD and the BISAs. Sincere apologies to everyone.

As was said, OHD, soon after its genesis, began to concentrate on the BISAs. This was a result of my first field trips; I saw the overriding need (I hope this does not sound presumptuous) of forming the bishops first. Father Mansap-Bunluen took up this work in September 1974, when he replaced Father Bill Roetenberg as executive secretary. The office also puts out INFO, a modest monthly newsletter, and has helped to organize and take part in several international and national seminars.
So this is what has come out of all the meetings and all the high hopes. In the early years, OHD promised to provide:

Information: It would gather and disseminate information on development efforts in Asia, both on projects and ideology.

Research: Using the data gathered and collating it with data from other agencies, such as the U.N. and the Protestant Churches, OHD would give suggestions for evaluation and planning.

Service: OHD would offer the Asian Bishops expert theological, sociological and economic consultation.

It has done some of this, though much, much more remains.

II. MY IMPRESSIONS OF THE BISAs

by Bishop Michael Bunluen Mansap

I have been asked to write this brief report on the three BISAs, since I was one of the participants in BISA I as the secretary general of the Catholic Council of Thailand for Development, and attended BISAs II and III as executive secretary of OHD.

Before BISA I, I had no clear idea of what OHD was, but I was glad to hear it was organizing social awareness seminars for bishops. Like most people in social action work, I felt the work would move ahead more rapidly if the bishops understood and supported what we were trying to do. Being a bishop now myself, I can admit that many of us have little awareness of, or sympathy for, social action and that this failure of ours hurts the work very much. Later, I came to know that OHD from its inception in 1971 had made the conscientization of Asia’s bishops its top priority.

The main purpose of the BISAs was to relate the Vatican II document Gaudium et Spes or “Constitution of the Church in the Modern World” to our Asian reality. In that document the Council tried, as it said, “to explain to everyone how it conceives of the presence and activity of the Church in the world of today.” It sought to look upon the world, “the theater of men’s history,” and “in a spirit of respect and love” engage with it in “conversation” about the great problems that men face today. Unlike other documents which have an a priori or deductive approach, Gaudium et Spes began by looking closely at the world to see first what was actually happening there, to perceive, in Pope John’s phrase, “the signs of
the times," before interpreting them in the light of the Gospel and tradition.

The BISAs were an attempt to discover the real role of the Church in Asia. What role did this small minority and relative newcomer have in this teeming ancient world? What are we called to do today in this vigorous yet troubled continent? We tried to follow the methodology of *Gaudium et Spes* by looking first at the concrete realities and problems of our people to see what they wanted from us, before deciding what particular shape our service should take.

I will divide my report into input and process, methodology, and output.

**Input and Process**

**BISA I — Novaliches, Manila, March 1-15, 1974**

Forty-four persons attended, including twenty bishops from Malaysia, Thailand, Indonesia, Cambodia and the Philippines.

BISA I began with talks by economists, theologians, social action people, sociologists and pressmen. To me, they seemed very radical and ideological. The Filipinos appeared to be very familiar with the theology of liberation, the need for mass pressure groups, structural analysis, Mao’s China; but not so, I am afraid, the rest of us. As we went on, the Indonesian delegates, while accepting the essential value of a theology of liberation and the rest, began to talk more of their experience with Gotong Royong and the values of communal dialogue. This peculiar Asian nuance was appreciated by the group.

Another Asian nuance was provided by the Thai group when we came to talk about poverty in Asia. For us Thais, to term someone “poor” or to speak of the “poor people” is very insulting. Someone who heard himself called such would feel inferior and despised. Besides, how can we in Asia be called poor? — we asked. We have our resources, our old cultures and religions. Fr. Horacio de la Costa grasped immediately what we were trying to say and put it into words that became part of the BISA conclusions, and later of the Asian Bishops’ Taiwan statement.

Most of Asia is made up of multitudes of poor. Poor, not in human values, qualities, nor in human potential. But poor, in that they are deprived of access to material goods and resources which they need to create a truly human life for themselves. (*Evangelization in Modern Day Asia, 1974.*)

Also, the Indonesian call for authentic dialogue, for a dialogue of life, was blended with the theology of liberation and structural
analysis both in the BISA I conclusions and in the later Taiwan statement.

Still, despite all the input and insights, BISA I still remained on a theoretical level. The turning point came when we visited the Tondo squatters during the second week, when we went in groups to this area of human sickness amid inhuman destitution, where 180,000 people are crowded along with shipping ports and custom yards into about 100 hectares of land.

We met the leaders first, and they told us of their long struggle to get land for their families and to get water, light and other simple needs. We walked around the area and talked to the ordinary people, who were cheerful and gracious despite the poverty. As evening fell, we had Mass in the local church. The Mass was alive. At the prayer of the faithful the people prayed that they would get the land; they thanked God for their victory in getting water taps from the government; they thanked God for bringing us there. The singing was loud, everyone responded. As the Mass went on, I watched the bishops there (I was still a priest), and the poor, and the Eucharist, and I knew in my bones this was a blessed place to be.

Experts might explain theology of liberation to us and tell us how we must opt for the poor and show us how unjust structures work, but without the “gut conviction” we got in Tondo—that it was the Lord’s work—their explanations would be all theory, and of little use.

**BISA II — Tokyo, April 7-19, 1975**

Forty people attended, including sixteen bishops from Korea, Taiwan, Hongkong, Macao and Japan.

BISA II tried to build on the lesson learned at BISA I, namely, that close contact with the poor or “small people” is the best way to get the bishops to see the link between social action and evangelization. Attempts were made to arrange visits similar to the Tondo visit for the participants before the sessions began. However, this was not possible. The next best solution was to get people working among the poor to talk about their experiences.

Luckily, we had speakers who could speak simply yet movingly. They told us of the persecuted Korean minority in Japan, Japanese business’ exploitation of its own workers and of those from foreign countries, such as the Philippines, the story of the deadly mercury poisoning, Kim Chi Ha, the brilliant poet wasting in a Korean jail, the blank malaise of Japanese youth. Especially good were two Buddhists from Japan’s New Life Movement, who talked of grassroots work among the farmers. The participants, with the practical sense of the East Asian, got the point immediately: the Church must be
involved in these issues. It must be admitted, by way of contrast, that we in Southeast Asia, and South Asia too, if I am not wrong, would have gone on talking much longer than did our northern brothers and sisters.

After this the experts in the fields of theology, economics and politics gave us the theoretical framework for a rounded understanding of the reality we had heard described.

The Japanese delegates were eloquent in pointing to their own reality as sufficient proof that economic development is not enough for man.

While our Institute was going on, the war in Vietnam was raging to its climax. No bishop from there was able to come. We felt the vacuum, but paradoxically the effect was to strengthen our sense of solidarity. Communism was not discussed much in BISA II, which may seem surprising, since China, North Vietnam and North Korea are in the region. Some bishops from Taiwan did raise the anti-communist issue, but most others were reluctant to discuss it due to the political situations in their own countries. It would surface again in BISA III.

There was immediate warmth in the agreement between the Japanese and the Korean bishops to work together to help political prisoners and the Korean minority in Japan. The Japanese also pledged to do what was possible to stop Japanese exploitation of other Asian countries.

**BISA III — Kuala Lumpur, November 2-16, 1975**

Sixty persons attended, including twenty-seven bishops from India, Pakistan, Sri Lanka and Bangladesh.

BISA III began with a day of visits to the squatter areas, factories and plantations in or near Kuala Lumpur. This exposure had little effect on the participants; perhaps one day was too short.

The Institute itself began with an excellent but controversial series of talks analyzing the socio-economic and political realities within and without the Church. They shed light, but the participants found it dazzling, even blinding. There was an air of uneasiness and suspicion, a feeling of being brainwashed and manipulated, and that in a way seemed to many to be leftist. One lecturer cited China as an example of social justice, which brought forceful reactions from some bishops: “Social justice, maybe; but at the cost of how many lives?” (One participant went as high as 54,000,000!) Needless to say, there was no resolution to this discussion.

The turning point came towards the middle of the Institute when one evening an informal meeting took place between the bishops and
some Malaysian Young Christian Workers and students. The young people accused the bishops of not cooperating in their work for justice and for making no attempt to understand them. Ordinarily, such charges would be met with an equally strong return fire, but not that night; possibly because the bishops took their cue from the archbishop of Kuala Lumpur who listened humbly, in an effort to understand what seemed to belie the young people’s charges. Also, the strong commitment of the young was evident, and the sincerity of youth touches even the most stalwart Church authoritarian, if he senses there is a love for the Church beneath the heat. The dialogue—for it had now become such—continued in a frank and friendly exchange of views about what they wanted the Church to be in the world, with admissions all around of past and present personal limitations. This spirit of true dialogue lasted through the end of the Institute.

The Methodology

The basic methodology of see, judge, act was evident in each of the three BISAs with some changes of emphasis.

Seeing must include exposure to the life of the poor. No amount of discussion among ourselves can possibly substitute for this, as the Tondo visit proved beyond a doubt. Clerical discussion is always unidimensional and theoretical, with an a priori bias. It is extremely conceptual, and this makes it difficult for people to break out of old patterns of thought, for concepts are static. The world of the poor is so vital and demanding that it alone can help us find new thrusts or new insights and goals.

In BISA II, something like this exposure was provided by the social action people who spoke so concretely of their work. In BISA III, the young Malaysians brought the world of the poor to the participants’ doorstep.

I do not mean to say that a one-day visit is enough to understand the poor. I only mean to stress the necessity of exposure to poverty. Our lives should be lived with the poor, and it will take us years to understand, to come to know, their deepest hopes and strengths. Nor will exposure apart from the action with the poor be sufficient to guide our thinking.

Judging must also include reflection, both theological or biblical reflection and scientific reflection, with the help of the social sciences. It was my experience in the BISAs that when we reflected theoretically, that is, when we sought to discover what the Word of God had to point out to us as important in the discussions and exposure we had undergone, the participants were deeply moved but nothing was resolved. “The poor people, we must do something for them,” would be a typical reaction to this type of reflection. Or the participants,
in all good will, would talk of welfare programs or more social services; but never would they get to the root problem, and never would they be deeply disturbed or challenged.

But when the reflection was done with the help of the social sciences — and some of this is necessarily Marxist — then many were disturbed, became uneasy and defensive, and began to seek shelter in old platitudes. Why? Perhaps the aggressive presentation of some lecturers was partly to blame; but I think the main reason was that the scientific analysis was cutting too close to the bone. The participants realized that if what the lecturers were saying was true, then their lives and works were liable to severe criticism. They saw themselves as part and parcel, indeed key actors, in the unjust structures that were being decried. This was not easy to take, and it is to the credit of the participants of the BIASs that eventually nearly all accepted the criticism and resolved to do better.

Two things, therefore, are most needed: exposure to the poor in order to deepen discussion, and hard scientific analysis as a needed complement to theological reflection.

Action for bishops and other Church leaders must aim at integral human development, which can stand as a definition of evangelization, if we agree with Pope Paul’s description of the ascending steps to authentic development:

... conditions that are more human ... victory over social scourges, the growth of knowledge, the acquisition of culture ... increased esteem for the dignity of others ... a spirit of poverty, cooperation for the common good, the will and desire for peace ... the acknowledgment by man of supreme values and of God ... faith ... and unity in the charity of Christ ...

(Populorum Progressio, No. 21.)

Also, the social action work of Church leaders should be guided by the hopes and desires of the poor when we meet them in true dialogue. And we must work together. This came out in the final reflections of each BISA.

**BISA I:** We become the Church of the poor by opening a continuous dialogue with all peoples at every level.

**BISA II:** We are aware of our responsibility to react to different situations and search for ways of action according to the spirit of the Gospel.

**BISA III:** We will strive for a new society where all men may reach full human development; we commit ourselves to new and just society.
The Output

What was accomplished by the three BISAs? Luckily I have had plenty of time to think of this, so I can neither be euphoric or overly gloomy. I will use “we” in the following paragraphs, but that does not mean that I am necessarily included, nor do I include all the participants. Much will seem old-hat to our more progressive brothers and sisters in the Church, but they should realize how far we have had to come.

We did discover or rediscover the social dimensions of the Gospel. We now read it with a new pair of spectacles given us by the poor and by the social sciences. For example, Our Lord’s words “Blessed are the poor” for most of us used to refer to those who were humble or God-fearing; now they refer to the squatters, the workers, the political prisoners, the youth struggling for justice.

We came to an understanding of our role in society. We are to build God’s kingdom here on this earth with the help of all men of good will, and others among them may contribute far more than we do. We are not building a spiritual kingdom somewhere above this world. We understand total human development includes a fuller handful of rice and a richer faith.

In Asia, to work for total human development means to dialogue with the poor and, then to follow them in their quest for justice, helping them as we can with the strength and light of the Gospel. That is the work in Asia, and I believe in Africa and Latin America, too. Perhaps in Europe or North America or Russia it is something else.

We came to know and love each other, and we decided to work in solidarity. I think here of the Japanese and Korean bishops who have collaborated closely since BISA II, and the present sincere desire all over Asia to work with the Church in Vietnam. Also, the network of OHD is much stronger now than before BISA I.

The methodology of action-reflection used in the BISAs has been widely repeated. For example, the Sri Lanka Church has sponsored a series of similar seminars. So, too, in Malaysia.

For the Future

For those who would run such institutes in the future, I would recommend more exposure to the poor, especially at the beginning of the session. I would let the discussions that follow be largely unstructured, so that people can move at their own pace and come to their own conclusions with the help of theologians and social scientists. This open, undirected method is better in the end than a closely worked out agenda, though it is less predictable.
No matter how we structure a seminar, with exposure or without, with or without specialists and formal talks, not everyone will benefit. Most important are the dispositions that the participants bring, and when all is said and done, it is the grace of God that converts a man to the cause of the poor.

I will end by saying that the BISAs have helped the Church in Asia in a small way to become like Christ—incurse among the poor, liable to suffering and humiliation, poor and humble in its life.

Despite the fact that we know we are all too human, full of weakness, yet we are desirous of justice and liberation for all.

Is this a glimmer of light from the Orient for all the Church?

III. STRATEGIES OF ACTION FOR JUSTICE

By Father Tissa Balasuriya, O.M.I.

The reflection of the past ten days has shown us that there is a situation of grave social injustice and oppression in our countries. A few people dominate the vast majority. The Church too is divided on a class basis. We have seen how the structures of society influence the Church structure and mentalities.

We have noted with remorse our own objective social sinfulness within this system. We regret our alliance with the affluent and our helping perpetuate increasing irregularities. What can we do about this?

First of all, we have to realize that everyone cannot do everything. All cannot do the same things. We have to accept the limitation of our talents, differences in our convictions, in the environment, in the issues faced by us, and even in age. Hence, there will be legitimate differences in approach to these issues.

Single Overall Goal

Our discussions have shown that we cannot agree here about the specific type of social structure that we want. Some may want Socialism, others may fear Socialism; likewise about Capitalism differently understood. We can however have agreement on the overall thrust that is desirable in our social action. We all reject the false values that are incompatible with the Gospel of Jesus Christ, viz., the search for power, wealth and prestige as ultimate goals. We accept the evangelical values of justice, truth, freedom, love and peace as the
ultimate goals of all human evolution. It was around these that Pope John XXIII built his social vision and addressed all persons of goodwill everywhere.

No social structure is perfect. Hence, we shall always have a critical and constructive task—whether within capitalism or socialism—though the tasks will be different in these situations. Our value orientation and that of those whom we influence is essential. We cannot be indifferent to them. They are the values of the Kingdom preached by Jesus. The Church, too, exists to serve them. The Church is in the service of the realization of this kingdom “on earth as in heaven.” In the final stage of our evolution, there will be no Churches, and not even faith and hope. Only love will remain, and God is love. Justice is the beginning of love. Justice, philosophically, may be understood as the giving of each one his or her due. Christ further developed this to relate it to love. He demands more than mere justice, i.e., merely giving each one his or her due. He wants us to give more than that, to share what we have, and even give our lives for our enemies. This is a supreme ideal which is eminently this worldly and profoundly divine.

We are agreed that we want to work for a new person in a new society in which the values of justice, peace, freedom, truth and love prevail. This is the goal of human history. In our day the universal dimension of this evolution is being better realized. The option for justice is essential. Its demands are exacting. Opting for justice is like falling in love. We cannot foresee all that it involves. It is like the decision to join the priesthood or a religious congregation. We are carried along in a process and at each stage we can expect the grace to face the trials involved.

Multiple Strategies on A Trend Line

In action for justice there is work for everyone. Persons of all ages and positions can and must contribute towards social justice. However, not all means are directed towards justice. Thus, a private school which helps the rich to get richer may increase the disparities and discrimination in society and hence foster injustice. We must, therefore, analyze the means with reference to the goals.

There are different strategies towards justice. One method is the revolutionary capture of power and the setting up of an alternative government. Normally, bishops are not now involved in this type of action—though Archbishop Makarios is the ruler of Cyprus, and a bishop leads the liberation struggle in Rhodesia. We, therefore, exclude the consideration of such strategies. Radical social changes in the various aspects of the social structure as industry, agriculture, income distribution, land reform, etc., are intermediate steps. These
can help in a fundamental restructuring of society. We shall not discuss these here either, as they do not receive much attention from this audience for the present, and our time is limited.

There can be strategies of contesting the evils of capitalism from within the system. For most people there is no feasible alternative but to find employment and a livelihood within a capitalistic government or business enterprise. In such situations they have the moral obligation to try to remedy the evils of capitalism wherever they work. We need to develop the moral consciousness of corporate responsibility. A person working for a company, Church or government cannot renounce moral responsibility for his corporate decisions. At certain stages it can involve the refusal to cooperate, as in unjust agreements. We have a teaching on non-cooperation in evils like abortion. We need to develop the theory and practice of non-cooperation in social sins, such as the charging of unfair prices, the waste of resources, black marketing, or even the fostering of grave inequalities. We have many examples of persons who have not accepted to serve an unjust cause and faced risks for it: the publication of the Pentagon papers, the refusal of the U.S. youth to join the U.S. Army in the Vietnam war, Daniel Berrigan’s burning of the draft cards as a protest against the Vietnam War, etc.

These are non-violent methods of moral resistance to exploitation. Bishops need to develop non-violent strategies for injustice as a normal part of their life. Precisely because we do not like violence and war, we must endeavor to remove the social evils which cause violence. Non-violence is not passive, but an active contestation of evils even at the cost of personal suffering. Such methods are part of the process of consciousness-raising or conscientization. Mahatma Ghandi evolved such methods over fifty years ago in the struggle against British imperialism. When he marched to the sea to make salt, he conscientized the people—the ignorant masses—against the salt tax and other measures of arbitrary rule. When he courted imprisonment, he challenged the British rule and mobilized public opinion against it. There are vast possibilities of such strategies to be developed by religious leaders. They can be in the direction of fundamental social change. They can also help create the mental climate for a just society.

The bishops have a special role in society. Their acceptance as persons of integrity can be an immense help to the cause of justice, especially in times of social stress and conflict. In Sri Lanka, immediately after the insurrection of April-May 1971, the country faced a difficult situation. About 18,000 young insurgents were imprisoned. Civil rights were in danger as the country was torn apart by the uprising. At that time public opinion was more or less dead or one-
sided. Some persons, chiefly three courageous women, felt intensely for the suffering of the youth and the harshness of the laws being promulgated for their trial. They wanted to form the Civil Rights Movement. Very few were prepared to come forward in favor of civil rights for the rebels. At this stage they approached two bishops—Anglican Bishop Wickremasinghe and Catholic Bishop Leo Nanayakkara—to join them, as they felt that the presence of bishops would give much support to the cause. The bishops responded, as did also some Buddhist monks and persons in academic and professional positions. The point I wish to make is that a bishop's sponsoring of such a cause is a great help to all. You have all heard of Bishop Tji of South Korea. His witness has given hope to many in Asia, especially the youth. Bishop Helder Camara in Brazil is an inspiring example of an apostle for social justice at the world level, too.

The women religious of the Philippines, of whom Sr. Christine Tan, RGS is well known, have shown great courage in championing human rights and justice under the present martial law regime there. The martial law has had the effect of helping the sisters (and others, including some bishops) rediscover the radical love of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Rabindra Nath Tagore prays for strength "not to bow the knee before insolent might." We too can ask for that grace.

A Group

In action for justice we can do very little alone. It is necessary that we work with a group with whom we can evaluate the conditions in our society. A group gives a better judgment, consistency and confidence. Unfortunately, bishops are generally surrounded by persons whose cares are more administrative and ecclesiastical than pastoral, social and human. A socially sensitive group can help each other by honest self-criticism. Self-criticism is a necessity in any action for justice—and that in a continuing manner right through life. Self-criticism is something which bishops, so used to making decisions and to religious precedence, find hard to accustom themselves to. We have to realize that at present there is much questioning of the way of life and of the social options of bishops. It is better if we can bear these honestly and frankly. We must know how to welcome criticism. A group can also help bishops to overcome the fear of the peer group. The fear that brother bishops may not approve their actions is a great constraint on bishops, as you have mentioned in your workshop reports. On the other hand, if some bishops or others do not decide to act, you get stuck in the status quo. Uniformity of the episcopate is not necessarily a virtue, particularly if it is uniformity in irrelevance or lack of justice and courage. A group can help bishops escape the isolation in which they tend to live so
much of their lives, and that in spite of much activity. If the group includes persons of other faiths and ideologies, it is likely to be more helpful.

Action for justice requires that the power structure in our societies be altered so that the benefits of power accrue to the masses. At present it is the elite who have power, and this power is growing. Power does not give up except before a superior power. We need to develop moral power among the oppressed and on their behalf. This requires awareness of building and organizing. Groups need to be linked together preferably around issues. The alliance of groups can build non-violent power even on a national and transnational basis. Thus, in the campaign for the liberation of tea in Sri Lanka, we received much support from action groups in other countries.

The TV films produced by “War on Want” of London did more than any other single factor to awaken British and Commonwealth awareness about the conditions of laborers on the British tea estates in Sri Lanka. Through the linking up of the world by the mass media, especially TV, there are many dedicated young persons who are convinced of the need of radical changes in society. Bishops can generate much moral power, which is the ultimate form of power, for in the final analysis, it is the masses who will determine the course of history. The awakening of the masses can be a specific contribution by us.

Cultural Action for Justice

An area of action for justice that is most relevant for religion concerns the values which prevail in society and in the minds of persons. Generally, religious people tend to legitimize the inequalities of the unjust system. On the other hand, religious people can help create awareness of justice, truth and freedom. These are contrary to the false values of competition and conspicuous consumption which are so prevalent in our countries. This is a task which all can undertake. The arts, drama, literature, documentation and other media of communication can contribute towards this cultural revolution. But it is principally by our way of life that we can help in this. Such a cultural action for justice is more than the mere indigenization of language, music and architecture. It includes the articulation of the trials and sufferings, hopes and aspiration of the oppressed.

We need to contest the myths that are propagated, especially about the pattern of development in a country. These may be the myths of capitalism, of socialism, or of verbal socialism. We have to deal with the myths that surround us in our societies which are basically capitalistic. These include the myth of threats to national
security, of the distant dawn promised by capitalism, of the need of foreign technology and capital, whereas it is often the poor countries which export both skilled personnel and capital in different forms. Bishops need to be aware of these myths. Otherwise they are easily involved in the defence of the unjust social order. The multinational corporations are among the most dangerous propagators of these myths and false values in our Asian countries.

During the past two weeks we have seen how social, political and cultural values and structures exploit our peoples. Bishops, too, have to be engaged in a counter-action for justice and liberation. I shall mention just a few ways in which some of the activities of a bishop can be related to social justice. These are just a few indications for further reflections.

**Administration and Pastoral Visits**

These can be occasions for the bishop to meet people of different walks of life. The consultations for decision-making can be a great help to the bishop to know the reality of society. The pastoral visit to a parish can be preceded by a sociological survey on a micro-level. The bishop needs to move more freely with the people. We can even pray for the courage and the humility to spend a night in a slum or a shanty. A representative of Christ would find joy in such an identification with the poor and the oppressed. One good shepherd can thus come truly to know his sheep in their trying life conditions.

Finance can be an area in which justice can be fostered. We can support young persons for one or two years in full-time work for consciousness-raising. Religious congregations too can do this, especially as they have the facilities. The students and young workers who met us this week recommended strongly that our priorities in finance be re-thought for forming persons rather than building institutions.

Catechesis should include an analysis of society and a consideration of the Scriptures in terms of their social consequences. The pastoral letters of the bishops can deal with social issues. This can be an aspect of evangelization, like Pope John’s encyclicals which touched the whole of humanity. How few are the socially relevant and challenging pastorals of Asian bishops or hierarchies! The pastoral letter of the Brazilian Bishops can be an inspiration for our bishops. This is a big lacuna in the leadership of our Asian bishops.

The liturgy can be a wonderful opportunity for community building as well as action for justice. There can be no real community with injustice. At present the Sunday gathering is used for church collections, emergency help, as when there are floods. We have a weekly opportunity of meeting, instructing and organizing the
millions of Catholics in our countries. Even a big congregation can be motivated to discuss the Scripture or a relevant issue before or after the Eucharist.

In the Philippines several diocese have coordinated their liturgy and catechesis around themes of social justice. The East Asian Pastoral Institute and the religious help in this. Some Philippine dioceses are thus preparing themselves to meet the issues of public life also. The Eucharist of Jesus was a prelude to his self immolation for the liberation of the oppressed. Our worship must have a similar orientation in order to be Christlike and acceptable to God.

Ongoing formation and informal education are very important activities for justice. It is often difficult to deal with injustice in the elite schools directly. Education through action and outside the school system can reveal to youth, teachers and religious the needs of society and the opportunities for dedication. This BISA III is an instance of informal education. It is by an actual action for justice that awareness and commitment grow.

The retreats are often too individualistic. If group meditation on Scripture and social analysis are introduced into retreats, they will provide a powerful means for changing mentalities in the direction of justice. The spirituality of justice and the contemplative dimension of the struggle for human liberation can be experienced through such helps. Growth in sanctity can be understood also in terms of the progress to social sinfulness. Our illuminative way, or stage, may be thought of as the realization of the nature of love in human relationships, especially of justice. The joy and peace of contemplation can be experienced in union with Jesus who suffered for human liberation. We must combat the individualistic spirituality that is so prevalent in ecclesiastical circles. We can do so mainly by our example.

Father Volken explained here how health services can be rethought in relation to the service of the poorer masses rather than of the affluent elite. If we do not do so, we will be working against the interests of the poor in spite of our good will.

The holding of the diocesan synod, as required by Canon Law once in ten years, can be both an act of justice as well as a help towards justice. Canon law provides for this form of participation, and a bishop should be loath to deny his diocese this special grace. If regular decennial synods are held, there would be about ten diocesan synods each year in India, and one in every fifteen months in Sri Lanka. What a fecund source of renewal these could be for our Churches, as the Second Vatican Council has been for the Church! I would like to urge very strongly that diocesan synods be held regularly. They can be an immense help to bishops, especially in these troubled times.
As a national hierarchy the bishops should make or have made an evaluation of the path and pattern of development in their country. They can then evaluate these trends in the light of the Gospel value, especially those of social justice. Without such a reflection the bishops cannot evaluate their own work or guide their Churches in justice. The national hierarchies should seriously question the prevailing patterns of development in which inequalities grow and a very hard burden of oppression laid upon the poor masses.

They have to see what type of changes they wish to sponsor. We have seen during these two weeks that there are conservative, reformist and radical trends in the countries and the Church. It should be noted that “conservative” in our countries of growing inequalities does not mean the status quo but regression. For if we do not change the situation, the gap between the rich and the poor will become relatively and perhaps absolutely poorer. If Church leaders do not understand the radical trends in the country, they will not be able to appreciate the demands and hopes of the radical persons and groups in the Church.

Conservation Ruins the Churches

Sometimes there is a fear that radicals are dividing the Church. But it is a lesson of history that it is social conservatism that lost the working class to the church in the nineteenth century. As Pope Pius XI said, the great scandal of the nineteenth century was the alienation of the working class from the Church. There is a similar danger today in Asia. Even the youth and more committed priests and religious may find the leadership too conservative or only reformist. Our discussions here have shown a predominantly “conservative-going-to-reformism” option among us. If this trend does not lead to a more serious commitment to radical change or at least to an appreciation of radicals, the Church authorities are not likely to be able to hold the unity of the Church. After all, the Church is a free communion of believers. We have no coercive powers of a physical nature, like that of the State. Ultimately we receive the allegiance we can merit. Hence, those in authority have to be careful to understand the implication of their social options. The Church has never been scandalized by the poverty or radicalism of the bishops. The contrary is rather the situation. In Sri Lanka, we have a bishop who is much admired for his simplicity of life. He travels third class by train. When he is asked why he goes third class, he says because there is no fourth class. It is the radical bishops who are giving a new image to Christianity and the episcopate today.

Our lifestyle has a great relevance for justice. The more we are dispossessed and detached from wealth, power and prestige, the more are we free (liberated) to work for the liberation of the op-
pressed. Should we not seek to simplify our lives to be closer to our peoples in their suffering and joys? It is when we travel by public transport that we understand the problems of the majority of the people who do not have private transport. These are a distinct class of people. The bishops in Asia can learn much from the experience of the bishops in the socialistic countries. When bishops are closer to the suffering and struggle of the people—even physically—their moral and spiritual authority is enhanced. The great spiritual leaders of Asia have lived very simple lives. Mahatma Gandhi’s lifestyle, with his scanty dress, was no obstacle to the people’s acceptance of him as a spiritual leader. Nor was his political action for Indian independence and for the Harijans an impediment to his religion. He was nearer to God because he was close to people. Our peoples know how to appreciate an option for poverty and for the oppressed. What we need is the courage to be poor and for the oppressed as Christ was.

The Strategy of Jesus

In all this work for justice we can draw inspiration from Jesus Christ. Jesus was a lovable person, kind to the poor and the weak. He pardoned the repentant. But he was categorical in his denunciation of social evil. He used hard language such as “Herod the fox,” “you brood of vipers,” against the exploiters of the day.

What was his strategy for changing the world? He chose a small band of followers and trained them by living with them and in action. He took them wherever he went: to the wedding feast, to the funeral house, to the mountain and the lake. He sent them out to bear witness to his teaching.

He was also a mass leader. Thousands followed him. He spoke in the public places. He freed people from their fears, their illness, and the false concepts of religion that domesticated them. He stood clearly, publicly and constantly for integral human liberation.

In every instance of a dichotomy or clash of values he favored the value that was for the dignity and freedom of the human person. He opposed the domination of the law above genuine love, of the lawyer above the ignorant layman, of the letter that kills over the spirit that vivifies, of the hypocritical pharisees over the humble publican, of the priests over the simple faithful, of the sabbath over the man, of the vendors in the temple over the worshippers, of the rich Dives over the beggar Lazarus, of the exploiting rich over the poor, of the proud Jew over the outcaste Gentile, of superstition over true religion, and of hate over love. He transcended the bigotry of race, class and religious distinction by freely associating himself with sinners, including women of bad repute, tax gatherers, Samaritans
and revolutionary zealots. He was truly a liberator of the human person and of oppressed groups in society.

He taught his apostles by his example. He did not play safe. His options were clear. His message was simple and enlightening to the masses. So much so that the powerful of the day were afraid of his public influence. He was considered a political threat to the rulers, including the Romans. “If this man is allowed to continue, we will be ruined,” thought the Jewish leaders. He made the masses aware of their dignity and rights.

Therefore, he was as put to death by a combination of all the powers of the day: the economic, the religious, the political, the military, the mob, and imperial authority. They used all the means: treachery, imprisonment, torture, unfair trial, public humiliation, and finally crucifixion. Through all this he did not compromise his message. He believed beyond death, for he believed it worthwhile dying for a cause. He did not make human survival the ultimate value. He died young. He know the cause would survive him.

He had to overcome personal fear in his agony. He was human like us, but he loved much and offered his life as a ransom for many. Jesus was truly a spiritual leader, because he first faced the risks and invited others to follow him. To follow Jesus is to be a risk-bearer.

His strategy was basically one of non-violence. I do not say that he was against violence. He contested the social sinfulness of his day to the very end. He preferred to die rather than to compromise his stand for the poor people and for the values of the Kingdom. Thus, his strategy is one which we can all follow—young and old, superior and subject. His exercise of authority was not an impediment to a socio-political option for the oppressed and to his early death. On the contrary, that was his way of exercising leadership and authority. We follow him today because he opted clearly for the liberation of the oppressed.

**Liberated and Liberating Bishops**

A new Christianity is being born in our times, and that principally around the struggles for justice. All over the world there are small groups that meditate the social reality and take action for the Gospel values. I have had the privilege of meeting them in many lands from Latin America through Europe, Africa and Asia to Australia and New Zealand. They are prepared to suffer in small ways and big ways for righteousness. I can think of the monks in France helping peasants to oppose the expansion of military bases and the armaments industry, of religious sisters in the U.S. organizing themselves as Network to struggle for justice, of the World Council of
Churches helping the liberation struggle in Mozambique, of Latin American youth opposing unjust dictatorships and working for a just society.

In the birth of this new Christianity, one bishop helped very much. His name was John. Pope John XXIII was a chubby, lovable old man who helped build human understanding and justice universally. He was opposed by the curia that dominated the Roman Church. The curia then was stronger and more traditionalist than at present. Yet he broke through their resistance. He convoked the Second Vatican Council with great vision and tremendous courage. He broke the ideological barriers of the cold war and blessed the daughter and son-in-law of Nikita Kruschev, the Soviet Communist ruler, and sent him also a message of greeting. He did not say Communism is intrinsically evil and therefore he would have nothing to do with Communists. He stood for human liberation and authenticity. Though placed in a position of very great responsibility, he evangelized the whole world by his humanness and sense of justice and love. When he died, the whole of humanity was sad. Here is a model of a bishop that truly served the world in our times. He revealed the gentle and radical fire of Jesus.

Today there are possibilities and there is the need for bishops to be great men in the service to the total human cause. Thank God that today a new type of spiritual leader, laity, religious, priests and bishops, is emerging in the Church. They may be marginal today but they are the hope of the future. Asia is in a stage of vast turmoil. Many of our countries are in a pre-revolutionary stage. The woman rulers of both India and Sri Lanka have spoken of our countries being like volcanoes which may erupt at any time. A confluence of several revolutions make our age an extraordinary period in history. Revolutionary changes of vast dimensions are taking place in our time and countries. These will not wait for us. The Asian revolution will go on with or without us, or even in spite of us. The lessons of Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia are warnings to us all.

If we respond to the genuine aspirations of humanity at this time, the Church can be in the vanguard of this on-going Asian revolution. Men and women who have been suppressed for nearly five thousand years are at last raising their heads and want to live as free, responsible human beings. They look to us for help and even leadership. May we have the grace to respond with enlightenment and courage. This is the way to evangelize the Asian revolution and be evangelized by it.

A liberated and liberating bishop is a gift of God to our people. May you have the grace to be such pastors in our Church for the common good of all.
IV. SUMMARY OF REFLECTIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

Through lectures, field visits and discussions with the poor themselves, the participants were faced with the staggering extent of Asia's material poverty. Material poverty was stressed because, as the BISA I group pointed out, "our people are not poor as far as cultural traditions, human values and religious insights are concerned" (I,11). The participants saw that this material poverty is not an accident, much less a necessity, but rather the inevitable result of unjust social, economic and political structures that are designed for the aggrandizement of the well-to-do at the expense of the poor.

Our analysis of the social reality in Asia has shown us the vast dimensions of hunger, disease, malnutrition and unemployment. We have seen how millions of our Asian brethren are living below the poverty line. It would appear that due to the present economic systems the disparities between the rich and the poor may not only continue but may even widen, so that some of the poor might become still poorer with the years. We have come to realize the enormous social sin reflected through this injustice, oppression and poverty (III,28).

Our people are poor in this sense: the overwhelming majority of them are deprived of access to the material goods they need for a truly human life, and even of access to the resources they need to produce these goods for themselves. We use the word "deprived" deliberately. Our people are deprived of the goods and opportunities to which they have a right because they are oppressed. They live under economic, social, and political structures which have injustice built into them (I,11).

As the end of each institute the participants pledged themselves to greater work with and for the poor, finding motivation for this in the life of Christ and recent Church documents.

We have been asking ourselves these days how we may respond to the cries of our people, especially the poor and oppressed. Evangelization includes social justice. The Synod document, Justice in the World, says: "Action on behalf of justice and participation in the transformation of the world fully appear to us a constitutive dimension of the preaching of the gospel, that is, of the mission of the Church for the redemption of the human race and its liberation from every oppressive situation." We know that Christ has a special love for the poor and wishes to be identified and served in the naked, hungry,

*The Roman numbers refer to the respective BISA; the arabic numbers to the page in the minutes where the quotation is found.
thirsty and imprisoned. The Church, therefore, as a witness to Christ must make a wholehearted commitment to the poor and is impelled to opt in favor of them (III, 29).

**WORKING WITH THE POOR**

What does it mean in practice to make a wholehearted commitment to the poor and to opt in their favor?

— It does *not* mean merely to work *for* the poor, as it were from the outside or from above, like a beneficent institution or an administrative agency.

— It *does* mean to work *with* the poor and, therefore, to *be* with them, and so to learn from them their real needs and aspirations, and to enable them to identify and articulate those needs and aspirations, if they are as yet unable to do so (I, 2).

**Dialogue**

The first step in the process of working with the poor is true dialogue, a word that recurred often throughout the three institutes.

The first consequence of this option for the leaders of the Church, especially bishops, is that they must open, enlarge, and intensify a continuing *dialogue* with their people at every level of *community*. At every level: not only the dioceses and the parish, but also, even more importantly, the village and the neighborhood group, and other functional groups, e.g., workers’ groups. This must be stressed, because it is fatally easy for pastors, who are educated men, to imagine that they are holding a dialogue with the poor when they are merely talking with those who can speak with them at their own level of discourse (I, 12).

The need for grassroots discernment, contacts and dialogue is one of the three main highlights of this institute.

We feel the need to live in contact with and close to the weak, to people in need, without waiting for them to come to us. In a word, we acknowledge the need to work at the grassroots level (II, 23, 24).

This dialogue should be Asian, both in its methodology and in scope, that is, it should not be limited to Catholics.

Let this dialogue be truly a dialogue, in which the pastor really listens to his people with a view to learning from them. Let it be truly communitarian, recognizing and strengthening community where it already exists, and creating community where it does not yet exist. And let it be truly Asian, employing the
procedures for arriving at consensus for action which our people have themselves elaborated, rather than alien techniques which may work well enough in other cultures, but not in our own (I, 13).

The continuing dialogue with people cannot be limited to the Christian community, but must reach out beyond it to all other communities in search of integral human development; for *gloria Dei vivens homo*: whenever man is, man alive, man seeking to be fully alive, there is the glory of God. It is the special responsibility of the leaders of the Church not only to be open to this intercommunication and cooperation with other communities not of our faith, but actively to seek and to promote it, also at the international level (I, 13).

From the dialogue the Church will, as was stated above, "learn from the poor their real needs and aspirations, and it will help the people to articulate their needs and aspirations if they are as yet unable to do so. To do this and to go further and assist the people in the actions they decide to take in order to better their condition, is to take part in the process of conscientization, a word that came up often in the discussions."

For the Church people to be credible participants in this process, there will have to be changes within the Church.

Our poverty should be real and not "paper" poverty and the Church should revise her own lifestyle and institutions in order to first realize within herself whatever she has to say about social justice. Without justice inside the Church our message will never be credible (II, 23).

**Unjust Structures**

The ability to hold true dialogue with the poor is one essential requirement for working with them. Another is to have some grasp of how the social, economic and political system operates to the detriment of the poor. Without such knowledge the Church's workers end in frustration and even become counter-productive to the total human development sought.

The need has been felt to analyze critically and technically the problems we are faced with. We cannot jump from our faith experiences to the concrete decisions of social action without due technical investigations and due account of the ideologies under whose influence we are living. The complications of many of the problems and the limitations of our resources will demand cooperation between different countries and conferences or speci-
alized committees, and also of organizations outside the Church
(II, 23-24).

The Church has always been dedicated to the poor; but we
have observed how our institutions and services have often pro-
jected images of richness, and even alienation from the poor.
With the help of our resource personnel, we have seen that many
of our Church institutions designed to help the poor, not only
do not do so, but may, in fact, have unintended effects against
their interests. They are caught, as it were, in the unjust social
system and structure of our age (III, 28).

Unjust structures have been called social sin by some theologians
in an attempt to link traditional Church concepts with new socio-
economic interests.

In these two weeks of study and dialogue there has been a
growing awareness and understanding of the importance of the
social dimension of sin and grace. This is a concept that comes
out of the biblical experience and the analysis of human sciences
alike and can help us deepen and widen the traditional concep-
tion of sin and grace as total events and dynamics (II, 23).

The areas of Church concentration for work with the poor were
agreed upon by the three Institutes:

With and for: — the urban poor and slum dwellers
— marginated farmers
— industrial workers
— youth

Through: — peoples’ or communitarian health programs
that care for the vast numbers of poor rather
than the few rich (I, 14).

— assistance given to workers to help them or-
ganize freely, bargain effectively, and strike
if necessary (I, 14).

— massive adult education programs for the
poor, even if this requires a reorientation of
existing education institutes and a transfer of
present resources to adult education of the
poor (I, 15).

— efforts to assist the people to design and
operate models of development:

— which place economic growth in the
context of total human development

— 30 —
— in which the cost and the rewards of production are more equitably distributed
— which allow workers and the consuming public to participate more fully with the owners and managers of capital in decisions vitally affecting the economy
— and which will move as rapidly as possible toward self-sufficient national economies, and economic arrangements within the region that shall be complementary and mutually supportive.

In this connection we consider the implementation of a just and realistic program of agrarian reform to be of the highest priority and urgency (I, 14-15).

— using the mass media we have to provide local communities, especially in the rural areas, with information and ideas that will help farmers and workers to become aware of their rights and responsibilities, and enable them to take effective measures for improving their human condition (I, 15).

— becoming the voice of those without a voice: the poor and the weak, the marginalized and the victims of injustice, wherever they may be. To be such a “voice” in a universal Christian love, we should cooperate with any person of good will engaged in the same task without narrowness, without paternalism and in open dialogue. We should always look at people without labelling or categorizing them (II, 24).

— through a new orientation to the whole process of formation, at the school level, but more concretely at the seminary and scholas tic level, to help the students relate with greater sensitivity to justice in the world, respect for the dignity of every human being, and the imperative need for sharing with one’s neighbour (III, 30).
— through our own attempts to conscientize ourselves and others to the unjust situations, movements and systems in our world working against the interests of man. Through personal and community reflection, prayer and action we hope to deepen our concern for the Gospel values of justice, truth, love and peace. We shall make every effort to implement the social teaching of the Church and, where necessary, be ready to take radical stands in favor of justice and the freedom of man (III, 24).

Dangers

There are risks involved: the almost inevitable clash, for example, with the powerful who benefit from the present situation and who, therefore, resist all basic change. Another risk is that various groups in the Church will evaluate the situation differently: differ sharply with each other, thus endangering Christian unity unless a very deep ground for true unity is found.

It is to be expected that in this action for justice, there will be a multiplicity of responses. We accept this pluralism of action, understanding the difficulties of those who advise caution, as well as appreciative and supportive of those who may want to act more forcefully and effectively in the cause of justice (III, 29).

This leads us to admit that pluralism is a necessity once we work through the mediation of secular analysis and world views. This pluralism should not be a threat to our Christian unity, but on the contrary, a positive and creative sign that our unity is deeper than whatever the concrete technical analysis or viewpoints might show—a genuine value that emphasizes unity in diversity. Christian unity is “eschatological”, which is not a big word to avoid the issue, but rather the biblical expression to indicate the inner tension of Christian life in a history of sin and grace. The only reserve should be that this pluralism needs to be one resulting from serious study and openness, and not the casual result of ignorance, prejudice or over-simplification (II, 24).

Discernment

The three BISAs were marked by a prayerful atmosphere of discernment, which is recommended to all for the future.

A feature of the Institute has been a general sense of God at work in our world through the activities and dedication of people — both Christian and non-Christian — committed to the
creation of a new society, in both rural and urban areas. There has been a sense of closeness and communion with them (II, 23).

The specific role of the pastor in the on-going dialogue with the people is not merely that of animator or chairman; it is, rather, that of active participant in the discernment of the community, listening attentively to the Spirit speaking through his people, and then basing his decision on what he perceives to be their truest and deepest aspirations. It should be noted that the decision is his decision, taken on his responsibility, but with the co-responsibility of his community (I, 13).

GOALS AND CONCLUSIONS

Finally, the Bishops sought to clarify the goals they sought in development work. Their emphasis is on total or full development and the urgency of the quest for justice. "The hour for action has now sounded", they remind themselves, quoting Populorum Progressio.

There is a danger in this pursuit of justice, namely, that the good of concrete, vested interests, political parties or groups will be identified with the Gospel, and the Gospel be thereby diminished. To avoid this, the bishops say we must be always aware that the ideals of the Gospel are never fully realized in, or identified with, any group, and that the best way to guarantee a correct, evangelical use of our resources and power is to use them always for the service of the weak and poor.

We need to strive for a new society, so that all men may reach full human development. Our work has to be for the development of the whole man and every man. This wholeness of man includes not only the individual personal fulfillment, but the growth and blossoming of the whole human reality on earth. Hence, our involvement cannot exclude what used to be called secular and profane. In all these spheres, God and his Christ are active in the Spirit, expecting our partnership and collaboration in the shaping and reshaping of human history and human destiny (III, 29).

We have spelt out some of our efforts and commitments to the compelling demands for action for social justice. We now desire to conclude these reflections by applying to ourselves the words of Paul VI in Populorum Progressio: "We are all united in this progress towards God. We have desired to remind all men how crucial is the present moment, how urgent the work to be done. The hour for action has now sounded. At stake are the survival of so many innocent children and, for so many
families overcome by misery, the access to conditions fit for human beings; at stake are the peace of the world and the future of civilization. It is time for all men and all people to face up to their responsibilities” (III, 30).

While working for development we wish to keep always in mind that we, as Christians who believe in the power of the Word of God in history, have a platform which is different from secular society. Our faith, the Scriptures, the historical and living experience of the universal Church, all provide us, in the process of our continuous conversion, with Christian values and with the possibility of Christian discernment. These cannot be limited to partisan politics, to the interests of concrete sectors of society or the temptations of the struggle for political power in terms of authority over people. The power we have—be it charismatic, moral, political, social, intellectual, etc. — should be always used in the service of others, especially of the poor and weak (II, 25).

The three BISAs ended on a note of hope; for example, this quotation from BISA I.

We end with a word of hope. Our problems are great, but the human potential of our people is also great. If only they can liberate themselves from the outer and inner constraints that bind them, they will themselves take up and bring about their own integral human development. To this task of liberation we dedicate ourselves (I, 15).
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