
by

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INTRODUCTION

The Church in Asia is renewed and sent to be a servant of hope for the peoples of Asia. At the turn of the new century and on the occasion of the celebration of the second millennium of the birth of Jesus Christ, we face in Asia a rapidly changing scenario fraught with threats and risks for the life of the people of the continent. At the same time there are signs of hope of people's awakening and yearnings and struggles for dignity, freedom, solidarity and fuller humanity. Disciples of Jesus Christ, Christians are part of the Asian peoples. They share in the joys, sorrows and hopes of their Asian brothers and sisters in solidarity with them.\(^1\) They learn lessons of life in daily dialogue with the poor, the cultures and religions of Asians peoples.\(^2\) In this multiple dialogue of life, Asian Christians take part in diverse struggles including those in the realm of politics and economics, while they live their discipleship and witness to their faith in service and love. The Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation "Ecclesia in Asia" invites the church in Asia to listen to what the Spirit is saying to churches in Asia and respond in generous commitment to the mission of Jesus Christ in Asia.\(^3\)

This paper does not aim at making a survey and analysis of the Asian situation. The FABC with its different offices and the local churches in different countries of Asia have done this as a preparation for the Asian Synod. "Ecclesia in Asia" sums up the analysis of Asian situation (ch. 4). The varied situations of Asia and the problems connected with them were reflected upon by the participants of the Synod. Keeping this analysis and

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the questions and challenges it raises for the Church's mission I intend to point out in broad outlines the emerging demands of mission of the Church in Asia at the turn of the century, without being detailed and exhaustive.

The Fifth General Assembly of the FABC clearly pointed to the journey of the Church in Asia in a vision of a new way of being of Church in Asia. The Sixth General Assembly focused on the discipleship of the Church in service of life. The church, renewed for mission of service and love, is today called to be servant of hope. The special Synodal Assembly for Asia reflected on this mission in great depth in the exchange of experiences and insights. The theme of the next ordinary Synod of Bishops has the theme: "Bishop, Servant of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, the hope for the future of the world." The Seventh General Assembly assembled in prayerful solidarity is called to listen and respond to what the Spirit is telling the Churches in Asia (an expression used in the Synod for Asia), specially to reflect on how to become communities of hope among our Asian brothers and sisters. We need to discern the beckoning of the Spirit and interpret the demands of mission. The hope-filled and hope-sharing mission of the Church calls for new mindsets, new attitudes, new models and patterns of living, acting and communicating the Gospel of life and salvation. It involves changing priorities and commitments.

When we reflect on the emerging pastoral demands of mission, of the Church in Asia, we stress the quality of "being sent" as the mark of the Church. In Asia, this should include "being with God in Christ." The church participates in the foundational experience of Apostolic faith in a fresh way. Having known God in Christ in contemplative experience of faith, the Christian communities discern and receive the mission. Being with Christ, the Church is endowed with the authority of mission (Mk 3:14), an authority that is interior, spiritual, authentic and credible (exousia, adhikara in the Indian Tradition).

Discerning the emerging demands of the mission, we need to discover new emphases for wholeness and authenticity in our evangelising mission, new dimensions in the commitment of the Church to the ongoing work of renewal and service of the people, and new questions and options in the rapidly changing scenario of the Asian and global situation.

Our reflection is an exercise of discernment. Reading the signs of the times as a method of interpretation has gained importance in theological reflection since the Council. The signs of the times are seen not only in great events in different large areas of human life but also in the positive experiences of the local churches of Asia and of the churches of all Christians, and the new orientations and paradigm shifts and challenges they throw up. We first consider evangelisation and the wholeness it demands in
all its aspects.

I. Evangelisation: Unity of the Paths of Mission and the Triple Dialogue

We need clarity on the unity of the paths of mission and the triple dialogue with the poor, cultures and religions of the FABC for the task of evangelisation in Asia. This clarity comes from the experiences of the evangelisation of the local churches in Asia, living the paths of mission in dialogue. Hence, I would consider them as rich resources to be tapped for insights and new orientations for mission. In the experiences of proclaiming and sharing of faith with others in liberating and dialogical ways we discover new ways of witness, new language of faith, new ways of sharing the hope that we have for the life of the world. These need to be discerned and interpreted so as to arrive at new orientations and even paradigm shifts for the mission of the church.

We learn from Asian cultures and religions that the Gospel communication first and foremost takes place in witness of deeds and in the way Christian discipleship is lived. According to an oft-quoted image of Gandhi, it takes place in the way the fragrance of rose is disseminated. The truth of the Gospel is courteous, hospitable and inviting.¹ The deepest sense of the Gospel resonates within the friendly mode of sharing what we hold as dearest and most precious.

Sharing of faith and witness require responsiveness and sensitivity to the interhuman and interreligious relations with the brothers and sisters of other faiths. It will, therefore take on new forms, and as a result there will be a splendid variety of witness and sharing of faith in the differing situations. It means that the Christian communities enjoy freedom to be truly local churches of Asia, a freedom that is a gift of the Gospel to the community of disciples, a freedom lived in communion and responsibility for mission. Bishops in the Synodal Assembly for Asia gave expression to this freedom to be church and to evangelise. Every local church witnesses to the freedom of the Gospel that belongs to us as children of God, a freedom on which St Paul would never compromise in his apostolic ministry (see his strongest defence of this freedom in his letter to Galatians). It is this freedom that made him to become an apostle of the gentiles. In the early Church, the great breakthrough in the mission to the gentile witnesses to this freedom. The local churches of Asia too have the freedom to make their own breakthroughs and take initiatives for new forms of presence, of sharing of faith, of witness and service (cf. Ecclesia in Asia, no.23; here after referred to as E.A.). They do this with confidence and courage, in communion of faith with the whole church.
The freedom of the Gospel leads to authenticity of life. In this authenticity, the church finds new ways of sharing its faith with others in dialogue because it listens to what God has been doing in and through His Spirit. The germinative seeds of the Word, the fruits of the Spirit, are seen in the holiness and commitment of people's lives, in their cultures, religions and the poor. The Church therefore develops new ways of worship, and new paths of living the triple dialogue in the mission of the church, as the fruit of its evangelical freedom and authenticity.

The recent documents of the church summed up in Redemptoris Missio (R.M) speaks of the mission of the church in terms of paths of proclamation, dialogue and human promotion. FABC sums up the way of fulfilling the one mission of the church in terms of triple dialogue: dialogue with the poor, dialogue with cultures and dialogue with religions. In the highly pluralistic situation of Asian peoples, the church's mission of service and love assumes a variety of forms and commitment discerned in each situation as the required response to the Spirit. The concrete commitments, options and priorities are expressions of the three paths of mission and of the forms of dialogue at the same time. Experiences of the local churches tell us that all paths of mission and all ways of dialogue are truly evangelical in quality and purpose. They are intrinsically interconnected. The paths of mission and the forms of dialogue do not instrumentalise each other. Any utilitarian or instrumentalist approach to these paths of mission and forms of dialogue will be alien to the Gospel of Jesus Christ and of the Kingdom. On the contrary, the value of each path of mission enters into the other.

I understand that in the Asian situation the three paths of mission, namely proclamation, dialogue and human promotion, are fulfilled in the triple dialogue with cultures, religions and the poor. I would say that the triple dialogue is the Asian way of evangelisation. The active agents who fulfill the task of evangelisation are the local churches. They discern the deeper demands of evangelisation in the triple dialogue. The Church lives the inseparable unity of the three paths of mission in the triple dialogue without ignoring the distinctive aspects of each path. In all this, the local churches express both communion of faith with the whole church and make their own unique contribution to the universal communion of churches.

The Church in Asia has always accepted the primacy of proclaiming the most precious gift of faith, the Good News of salvation in Jesus Christ for all, a message, Christianity offers to the whole world, a message of "incomparable comfort and hope for all believers" (E.A. no.12). That sharing of the faith or proclamation holds primacy in our mission is no brief for instrumentalizing the other paths of mission and other forms of dialogue. Proclamation includes the intrinsic value and dignity of the dialogical relationship, for it is done in mutuality and respect, listening, enriching
and challenging to growth. Interreligious dialogue which embodies mutuality of respect, freedom, listening and enrichment is itself a level of sharing of faith. We could say that there is no non-dialogical proclamation. We proclaim and share our faith in dialogue.

So too a sharing of faith that does not intrinsically include commitment to human dignity, freedom, human rights and human responsibility, and respect for the cultural humanum of people and the right of the poor to hear the Gospel in dignity and freedom  would be manipulation, anti-Gospel and anti-human. Sharing of faith in the full Gospel sense can be only dialogical and humanising. If it is not, we are called to self-examination. Here we do not ignore that vested interest oppose the mission of love and service because they have always exploited the vulnerable and opposed and suppressed all awakenings and movements for freedom, dignity, justice and solidarity of peoples.

The dignity and value of evangelisation continually calls us to conversion to God's ways which creatively and liberatively affirm the human, watch over the human and guarantee the promotion of the human. We need to continually ask ourselves: are we open enough to be evangelised as we are ready to evangelise? In the Asian situation of pluralism evangelising and being evangelised go together. Only by this approach of mutuality and integrity, can we witness to the liberating Good News of Jesus Christ and help people come to God and to one another in solidarity. The path of mission and lived and witnessed to in the form of dialogue is truly evangelical, and there is no room here for "guilt-complex." We experience true guilt if in our sinful egoism we fail in commitment to the service of the Gospel -- for which we need repentance and forgiveness.

Proclamation of Jesus Christ as the Saviour of all humankind is to be seen as Good News in the way we share this faith, in mutuality of respect for the dignity and freedom of people and respect for their faith and God's work in them. Proclamation or sharing of faith can therefore take place in Asia, only in dialogue which includes also the affirmation of the dignity of the human person, as image or icon of God. The Church deeply aware of this requirement of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, understands its missionary duty to embody the Gospel and witness to it as sign of hope, in situations of violence, injustice, anti-life-forces, hopelessness and despair.

In the light of the above reflections, we need to resist all thoughts of success and achievement and the language that reflect this approach to evangelisation. We are only servants of God's purposes for humankind. We say 'no' to any utilitarian or instrumentalist approach to the work of the Gospel. The attitude of humble and loving service marks the quality of our work. The images of the Kingdom as a small mustard seed growing into a big tree, as
seeds sown by the sower growing and bearing fruit, as yeast leavening the
dough (E.A. 29), remind us that the ways of the Kingdom are silent and
effective. The glamorous ways of the world do not belong to the ways of
the Kingdom.

II. Renewed Church

a. A new way of Being Church means a new way of embodying hope of
the Good News for the peoples of Asia. It calls for a renewed self-under-
standing of the church continually shaped by the creative summons of the
Spirit addressed to the Church from the midst of the contextual realities of
Asia. This self-understanding of the Church includes being truly a local
church incarnate in a people, indigenous and inculturated. The FABC has
reflected considerably on this self-understanding. As they strike roots in
the soil of Asian peoples, the local churches learn new dimensions of
inculturation. When they participate in the history of peoples' struggles,
their sufferings and hopes, and listen intensely and deeply "to the whispers
voices, groaning and shouts from the depths of Asian humanity," then
inculturation is not just an adaptation, or a translation or just a different
expression of one faith but an event, a happening, an incarnation of the
Word, its growth and fructification in a people's life. By the incarnation the
Word enters into our humanity and "pitched his tent among us" (eskenosen).
There is a birth of the Word in every culture, every people, in every history.

"The Word became flesh" affirms the at-homeness of the Gospel, with
every culture and people, hence, the symbol of affinity and a sign of hope
for all peoples and cultures. It means that the Word enters every culture and
people in deep respect for their diverse identities of ethnicity, language,
geoopraphy. Respect for the plural and diverse identities of people belongs
to the true incarnate process of inculturation. Thus, the Church becomes a
community of hope for the plural identity of Asian peoples. Hence the
Church embodying such hope is consistently and perseveringly friendly,
hospitable, compassionate, and committed to humanisation of society, poli-
tics, economics. It is never a threat to people and their humanity, except its
prophetic stand for justice, freedom and fuller humanity of peoples, and
unfailing solidarity with and the service of the poor.

The Culture, tradition, history of Asia in all its diversity and complex-
ity are not realities extrinsic to the Church, but become the culture-related
humanum into which the Church enters through participation and solidarity
and where we discover the anthropological basis for our ecclesial exist-
ence. The Church as a community of faith and the koinonia of the disciples
of Jesus cannot actualize itself if it bypasses this anthropological founda-
tion. The mystery of the Church as sign and sacrament of the incarnate of
Christ liberatively affirms this principle. The community of disciples be-
comes a work of the Spirit only through the humanum of the Asian peoples, not apart from it. "Gratia presupponit naturam." 13 

Going beyond inculturation calls for a new understanding of living, sharing and witnessing to the faith in Asia. Historically, the proclamation of the Gospel in relation to cultures followed basically the principle "One faith, many expressions". There is distinction between the faith and its expressions. Today, Christians of Asia, rooted in the warp and woof of their cultural traditions appropriate the faith in their own way. The Word of God sown in the soil of Asian peoples germinates, grows and bears fruits of faith and charity of Asian Christians in the dialogue of life. Asian Christians thus bear witness to the work of the Spirit in the history of the Churches and of the Asian continent.

In the multiple and complex plurality of the Asian continent, the Church will manifest a diversity of forms of presence, witness, service, and therefore of mission. This means that the Church must reflect plurality within one communion of faith. In the dialogue interaction with the precious heritage and worldviews of Asian peoples, new images of Christ14 and the Church will emerge including a language of faith fresh and meaningful to Asian peoples, and new theological orientations for evangelisation in dialogue.15

The growing volume of theological thinking and writing in Asian countries contextually sensitive and responsive to the realities of Asia is an encouraging and hopeful sign for the mission of the Church. The importance and contribution of theology which is courageous and faithful to the Scripture, the living tradition of faith and magisterium was duly acknowledged in the Synod. Pope John Paul II encourages the theologians to enter into this work "in a spirit of union with the pastors and the people" stressing the ecclesial nature of theology (E.A. 22). The Post Synodal Exhortation renews the ever present mandate for the inculturation of faith (E.A 20) and contextualisation of theology. Benefitting by the experiences of more than three decades of evangelisation in Asia in the Post Conciliar period, the Church has before it the tremendous but the delicate task of developing a christology that rediscovers "the Asian countenance of Jesus" (E.A.20), so that Asian people recognises Jesus as the Good News of life and salvation, a special gift to them. Christology for Asia is in the making. The Holy Father makes clear the tasks before the Church in Asia. The Asian face of Christ will be different in each situation. In this process, theological exchanges between centres of theology in different Asian countries will be extremely valuable and necessary for joint effort and cooperation. The Office for Theological Concerns (OTC) of the FABC is promising for service in this regard. But the task even though difficult, cannot be evaded. In a vibrant Church in Asia, theologians, pastors and the people of God living their discipleship in the mission of love and service can and should do this
work. It will be a unique and a valuable contribution which the church in Asia can make to the universal communion of faith.

b. One significant implication for the self-understanding of the Church in relation to mission is that the church has to serve the building up of the human community as a communion of communities. For this task and service, the intraecclesial life has to become a model of reconciled diversity in communion and in interecclesial relation through ecumenical dialogue. The Church grows in this model from its committed practice of ecumenical and interreligious relations. The Church itself becomes a communion of communities so that the communities of Christians are authentically local, manifesting a reconciled diversity. From this communion of reconciled diversity flows a mission for promotion of the human community as a communion of reconciled and integrated pluralism. Here we see a congruent continuity between what the Church is and its mission. This mission the Church fulfills together with all people of good will. communities become a communion of communities While the local churches of Asia in their own specific situations engage in building basic human communities, they will also promote and forge ties between these communities so that the larger human.\textsuperscript{16}

There is a cry for community and communion within the Asian situation. The Church's commitment to this task belongs to its integral mission. Fostering a communion of communities draws from our faith in the fatherhood of God which the Good News of God's Kingdom announces and the vision of human society according to the Kingdom.

In the work of building the human community as a communion of communities, we have to face and handle constructively contradictions arising from human sinfulness. We witness religious, cultural and national revitalism based on those movements leading to disruptive phenomena of fundamentalism, communalism, sectarianism. In responding to them in the task of building basic human communities, we have to use the positive resources present in religions and cultures and the worldviews which hold promise for building humane communities and harmony between peoples and shalom and peace of humankind and between humankind and nature and cosmos.\textsuperscript{17}

In Hinduism, the concept of Yajna implies a worldview according to which "everything is interconnected, interrelated and interdependent. Interconnection, interrelation and interdependence are different aspects of all that is real (sat). Whatever is not interconnected, interrelated and interdependent is not real (asat). The real in this worldview is relational, the related."\textsuperscript{18} The same worldview stresses the dharma as network of holistic relationship.\textsuperscript{19} Relational perspectives are central to this worldview, an all embracing and all-inclusive interconnectedness of the whole cosmos. The
concept of Lokasangraha in the Gita speaks of the wellbeing of all beings.

Hence any worldview that communalises relations between beings in the universe and between humans in society destroys the wellbeing of all. The ideologies that exclude people from one another, whether religious or cultural fundamentalism, or racial, casteist, ethnic or nationalist revivalism that divide peoples and communalise society destroy the wholesome and harmony of people. Lokasangraha is the cosmic shalom of all.

Upholding the right order in human society, the biblical and Christian faith affirms that all human beings have one origin and destiny. It confesses the Fatherhood of God making all human beings God's children and brothers and sisters to one another. Humankind is God's family in which all build and shape the brotherhood and sisterhood of peoples. The Gospel or Kingdom values of justice, equality in dignity, freedom, love and fellowship are the hallmarks of a good society of human relationship. The concept of Vasudhaiva kutumbakam, that is, the whole world as one family spoken of in Indian tradition is quite relevant and promising. So too the ancient Tamil tradition which says: "The whole world is my hometown, all human beings are my relatives." In other Asian traditions, I am sure, such views of the universality of human relatedness are found. In Buddhism, there is a great stress on the interrelatedness of all beings. Its sense of reverence is a consequence and expression of interrelatedness. The yin-yang is a symbol of integration and wholeness and also an expression of interrelatedness, provided there is no idea of hierarchical exclusion or marginalisation in it. The Asian approach of the inclusive conjunctive "both/and" in contrast to the Western approach of "either/or" is also an expression of universal interrelatedness.

The Asian church are rooted in these traditions and enriched by them and learn new ways of being Church for mission of love and service. All these traditions also need critical interpretation in so far as distortions which are historically found in these views, need to be overcome, and a contextualised reading of these traditions is required. We are aware of various forms of alienation and divisions in society. That is why building communities of harmony need to include the work of reconciliation, which means overcoming divisions and alienation. This is a point of central significance in the work for harmony and communion. In this connection, I must mention that all holistic worldviews do and should include liberational perspective in so far as we are in a world marked by many unjust and dehumanizing divisions. All true liberation addresses the specific and concrete forms of division and oppression, i.e. the structures of sin.

My intention in referring to all these traditions is that while we promote the Gospel vision of a human community as God's family in which all
are His children and brothers and sisters to one another, we Asian Chris-
tians who are heirs to our cultural traditions, need to tap the resources of
wisdom contained in them (E.A.20). This will be a sign that the churches in
Asia are rooted in the soil of the cultures, religious traditions and history of
our people. The Spirit calls us Asian Christians to fulfill God's purposes in
Asia in fresh ways. We must be open to the Spirit which "blows where it
wills."

These perspectives imply that the local churches of Asia have the free-
dom and responsibility to grow as communities of faith in their own socio-
cultural and religious situation and live their discipleship in witness and
service. By being authentically rooted in the Asian soil marked by wonder-
ful yet complex diversity, the local churches of Asia will make precious
and valuable contributions to the Church universal for the mission of evan-
gelization and universal communion. This is a hopeful sign of the church in
Asia.

We have reflected on the Asian multiethnic, multi-cultural,
multireligious scenario which has, besides, variety of socio-political and
economic structures. While this calls for a solidarity of peoples affirming
their human and their multifaceted identity as a source of their communion,
analogically the Church too will learn new models of apostolic communion
between the local churches, the churches of the Latin and Eastern rites, and
between religious congregations, diocesan clergy and laity, so as to find
concrete response of mission situations. We know that the communion of
the people of God is an apostolic communion at the service of God's King-
dom. The sign of true unity is that it is apostolically dynamic and fruitful. In
the Church, there is continual openness of to the beckonings of the Spirit
for new forms of witness, presence and service.

III. Dialogue

As mentioned earlier, FABC understands that the Church fulfills its
mission in triple dialogue with the poor, cultures and religions.

Dialogue is the fundamental way of being church in Asia. Ecclesia in
Asia mentions "dialogue as a characteristic mode of the Church's life in
Asia" (E.A.3). The dialogue of life is the way to being a rooted and participa-
tory Church in Asia. For a true and dynamic inculturation, participation
and immersion take place first in and through what we call the dialogue of
life, that is, in the daily contacts, the relations of spontaneous humanity in
families, neighborhoods and work places, in cooperation and joint efforts
for the common good and the wellbeing of community. The dialogue of life
should not be understood narrowly. Dialogue of life can and does take place
in small joint efforts as well as in great movements of people in different
areas of societal life, for the promotion of human wellbeing. In a dialogue of life we discover the resources of spontaneous and liberative interhumaneness for building a better society and a harmony of peoples. The Church can be truly evangelizing only in a dialogue of life in which there is respect for the humanity of peoples, their cultures, worldviews, their heritage of values, which are the fruits of the Spirit. The dialogue of life is the locus to discern the works of the Spirit. The evangelizing mission of the church demands this discernment. By listening to the ways and actions of the Spirit, we learn the concrete historical imperatives of mission. It means that the church is concerned not only for orthodoxy but also for orthopraxis which necessarily includes "orthopresence." 21

In interreligious dialogue, we learn from the heritage and wisdom of other religions and cultures, which strengthen and sustain the ongoing praxis of dialogue. For the future of dialogue, the Buddhist virtue of reverence for reverence 22 and the principle of openness to truth wherever it comes from are necessary. 23 These values are not mere philosophical principles, but constitute a way of life and spirituality.

We say that the Church in Asia is a Church in dialogue. One of the first requirements of dialogue is listening. Listening is a spirituality, an exercise and experience of faith. Listening as spirituality demands self-kenosis. Only in kenosis, can one listen or be open to the mystery of the other, above all to the surprising ways of the Spirit, which blows where it wills. Listening takes place within a relationship. It fosters relationships and strengthens them. A Church in dialogue should grow in genuine and intense listening and discerning. When the Church promotes a culture of dialogue, it promotes a spirituality of listening as essential to all genuine human relations. We cannot build communities, ecclesial or human without a culture and a spirituality of listening. The Church can and should contribute also to civil society by its value priorities, especially by a culture of dialogue marked by listening. Dialogue is "a duty and challenge" to the whole Church (E.A. 31).

Dialogue constitutes a model of intercultural and interreligious relationships worthy of human persons and believers. It also means that without dialogue, there is no practice of justice, nay no praxis of the love command. We can affirm that the praxis of true dialogue is the praxis of the love command. We can go further and affirm that praxis of dialogue is an act of evangelisation. The practice of true dialogue is an acceptance of the other as the other, in his/her/their dignity, freedom and worth. This is the first essential element of true love of neighbour, which does not instrumentalize any aspect of the human person. Love command is counter-cultural to exploitation.
In interreligious dialogue, we keep an openness of faith to God's universality of grace, the ways in which it reaches peoples and religions responding to the mystery of the Ultimate and their place in the economy of salvation. Dialogue is a dialogue of salvation. Sharing our faith in Jesus Christ in a dialogical way "cannot constitute exclusion of the religious experiences of our neighbours in their religious tradition".

Interreligious dialogue means to building interreligious relations based on the common humanity and fellowship of faiths. This task includes building a just, humane, compassionate society. Harmony of relationships is the foundation for interreligious harmony. It is axiomatic to say to be human, i.e., to be authentically human, is to be truly and effectively interhuman. Our humanity grows and flourishes when our relationships are humane, brotherly and sisterly. So too to be religious, to be authentic religious believer, is to be truly and effectively interreligious. In this approach, we learn corresponsibility for cooperative action and solidarity to respond to great issues affecting our Asian society. Social justice, peace, human rights, ecology are common questions to religions that challenge them to responsibility.

Instead of being a liability and obstacles to social and religious harmony religions need to be engaged in joint action for building a society that is just humane and compassionate for all. "Religion is not, and must not become a pretext for conflict, particularly when religious cultural and ethnic identities coincide. Religion and peace go together". Committed persons and groups of different religious communities can and do come together in cooperative action for the promotion of human rights, communal harmony and peace and for the protection of the environment. In pluralistic societies such persons and groups belong to different religions and ideologies. In their actions and movements we discern the signs of hope and join them in solidarity in a truly evangelical spirit.

Interreligious dialogue means undergo a paradigm shift from conversation and exchange to one of journeying together, undertaking a pilgrimage towards healed and healing, reconciled and reconciling harmony, in a world saddled with tensions and conflicts. This paradigm shift is rooted in a dialogue of life where people relate to each other as fellow humans and fellow believers and strengthen life in community. We learn the value of respect for others religions and learn reverence for reverence, a Buddhist virtue, so basic in all interreligious relations. In interreligious dialogue, we not only learn from each other but also we are taught by each other. We can as well understand this process as a mutual process of evangelizing and being evangelised mentioned earlier.

The great challenge of interreligious dialogue for the local churches in
Asia is that they grow not only in ecumenical togetherness in mission, but are dialogical in its deepest and richest sense, by being rooted in God's own dialogue of life and salvation with all humankind, and avoid the instrumentalization of interreligious relations. The churches are committed to God's reign and its growth among peoples. Being a church in dialogue is itself an expression of evangelization that encompasses many aspects. In Asia at the turn of the century, building interreligious relations in togetherness with a conviction of God's reign, as a gift and challenge to all, will be one of the most important demands of mission. Sharing or proclaiming the Gospel of Jesus Christ belongs here. The importance and urgency of this demand of mission becomes clearer with the growth of different forms of fundamentalism, cultural, religious, nationalist, which disrupt, break people's togetherness and solidarity.

In countries where there is revival of religious fundamentalism, there is a campaign for homogeneity of culture and nationalism, like the Hindutva of Hindu fundamentalists in India, threatening the pluralistic, secular character of modern democratic polity, affirmed by the Indian Constitution. Such an approach is also seen in some of the Asian countries with Muslim majority. Islamisation promoted by fundamentalists makes those who do not belong to their affiliation second class citizens, outsiders and objects of harassment, a great negative force opposed to solidarity and harmony of peoples. When we say no to such forces, we not only claim our legitimate freedom to be ourselves as churches, but also we also say something about our faith and what it stands for in relation to others, their religious traditions and their rights, and above all our commitment to the Gospel values of justice, dignity, freedom, love and solidarity and harmony of peoples. When we commit ourselves to build interreligious harmony and peace, we do gospel work.

The dialogical way of being church calls for an adequate formation for dialogue for priests, laity and religious. Bishops as pastors of the local churches need to give leadership because the mission of the church can be fulfilled only in dialogue. In Asia, the Church has to learn to be interreligious. Every Christian has to grow in this interreligious relatedness. Here we note that the office for the ecumenism and interreligious dialogue of the FABC and commissions for dialogue in different national Bishops’ conferences have not only been promoting interreligious dialogue but also have been offering training programs for pastors, clergy, religious and laity. At the turn of the century, commitment to the ongoing ministry of dialogue remains a duty and challenge to the Church in Asia. Hence formation needs to be taken up as a matter of urgency. Basic ecclesiastical communities, the hope for the future of the universal church, become conducive to formation in and for dialogue. Faith formation and catechesis need to include this dimension. Christian communities in Asia need to grow in interreligious
awareness as a demand of being church. If the ecumenical relatedness of
the church aims at ecclesial unity, interreligious relations fostered by vari-
ous levels of dialogue become integral to the fundamental goal of the evan-
gelizing mission of the church. Formation for this way of being Church
becomes a priority for which inputs and insights come from the experiences
of dialogue for the last two decades or more.

IV. The Social Concern of the Church and its Future

That the Church is being renewed for mission is authenticated in its
social concern as an evangelical task,\textsuperscript{34} manifested in its committed stand
and praxis of the love command in the different areas of human liberation
and wellbeing. The substantial volume of the social teaching of the uni-
versal magisterium and that of the local churches are a solid testimony to the
ongoing social concern of the Church. The areas of social justice, the com-
mon good, human rights understood in their expanded and deepened sense,
inclusive of social economic and political rights, the rights of ethnically,
culturally and religiously powerless groups and minorities, and therefore
the rights of the poor, call for new commitments, revised priorities and new
relevant approaches. Today we emphasise that all these rights include also
a commitment to clean environment, conservation of natural resources, eco-
logical balance and harmony between humans and other living beings, and
to planet earth as the home for all humans both present and future and all
other living beings. Moreover we include in the social concern of the Church
and its commitments in this area the new rights and duties articulated in the
different U.N. conventions and agreements subsequent to the Universal
Declaration of Human Rights, regarding women, the child, girl child, in-
digenous peoples. We must mention here that in the context of religious
pluralism of Asia, religious freedom becomes an important human right.\textsuperscript{35}
All of them raise new ethical questions and call for responses and initia-
tives based on moral and spiritual perspectives. The local churches of Asia
have contextualised their social concern each in its own situation. They
need to discern the new imperatives of social concern in the fast changing
and globalising continent. In this area, the Church has to become a beacon
of hope for those who are victims of violations of human rights and dignity.

The social concern of the Church is embodied, not solely, in its social
teaching. The local churches in their social concern listen and benefit by the
universal and papal magisterium in this area. They do not merely apply
universal principles to local contexts,\textsuperscript{36} but develop their own social teach-
ing as the fruit of the experiences of the committed witnesses and the deeds
of social concern of the local churches. The communities, pastors religious
and laity contribute to the social doctrine, as well as the insights learnt from
people's movements for justice, human rights, social harmony and environ-
mental and ecological harmony.
The social teaching of the local churches follow a contextualised method and pedagogy. In their approach, the insights and perspectives gained from experiences, action and struggles contribute to and constitute the social teaching from below, from the soil of the people's lives, and provide guide-posts for a relevant and appropriate response and praxis. We may say that in this approach the social teaching does not remain abstract doctrine but involves context and context involves teaching. Teaching and context are correlative. This approach must continue with greater consistency and relevance. The method of reflection on social concern followed by the BISA meetings of the OHD hold promise for the future. It follows a method of exposure and immersion leading to reflection and action which resulted in the method of "pastoral cycle."

Another mark of the social teaching of the local churches is the that in their faith reflection on social concern they draw upon the resources of the cultures, religions and moral wisdom of the people. Given the magnitude of Asian socio-political problems, we need to tap these precious resources in dialogue. "The great civilisations of Asia with their millennial history and resilience possess the necessary resources to overcome present crisis." Here we can also state confidently that the social teaching of the local churches is being enriched by the triple dialogue with cultures, religions and the poor. From the experiences and praxis of triple dialogue, the Church learns to work in joint efforts for the promotion of justice, the common good and rights and duties concerning them, and new models of social commitment at the levels of ecumenical and interreligious dialogue. While the church is deeply rooted in its faith and social teaching, it is also becoming increasingly dialogical (ecumenical and interreligious) and thus truly catholic in this area. This approach of the social teaching of the local churches holds a promise for the future of the social concern and the social teaching. At the same time we have to remember that the local churches engage in this process of social teaching always in communion, continuity, development and dialogue with the social teaching of the universal magisterium. The local churches complement the social teaching of the universal magisterium. The Church learns social commitment when it enters into solidarity with the people in their struggles. It means that we are with the people especially the poor and the marginalised of Asian societies. Relevant reflection and teaching start from this concern, solidarity and commitment.

V. Option for the Poor and the Challenge of Solidarity

Option for the poor is a commitment of solidarity to the cause of the poor and their liberation. This option is not an exclusive or sectarian option but an inclusive one touching the powerless and challenging the powerful to transformation. It is an option for an inclusive solidarity. The option for the marginalised is a collective agenda and a project of integral liberation
that encompasses all dimension of human life. It is an option not only of the non-poor for the poor but also option of the poor for the poor in so far they are united in solidarity with all the powerless in their struggles for liberation. The option for the poor is an act of evangelisation (Vita Consecrata no.82). For the local churches in Asia, it will, at the turn of the century be a mark of discipleship and authentic ecclesiality. The option for the poor calls us not only to share in their struggles and sufferings but also in their hopes for dignified life. The local churches of Asia bear abundant witness to the option lived out in this way. The local churches find also here valuable source for their contextualised form of social teaching in communion with that of the universal magisterium. The option for the Poor affects the being of the Church in a fundamental way. Church of the poor still remains one of the most important challenges. The local churches of Asia, even in advanced countries like Japan, become truly churches when they opt for the poor. The Church in Japan has opted for welcoming migrant workers and minister to their needs in a special way. The foreign migrant workers, with all their limitations including uncertainty and loneliness are the poor. In India, the church has to struggle to become a church of the poor in relation to dalits, a challenge not yet fully responded to be over. Church of the poor is an ongoing challenge, and it belongs to the unfinished work of renewal. Dialogue with the poor within the Church makes sense only when the Church strives truly to become a Church of the poor and for the poor since the Church is the servant of the Good News proclaimed to the poor. (Lk 4:18)

The Church inherits the tradition of love, concern and service of the poor from the Gospel of Jesus Christ. This is a heritage of our faith and it is essential to Christian discipleship. The Church continually discerns and interprets the new demands of this tradition as part of the love command.

Today the Church works for the awakening of the poor to their dignity and subjectivity. This means recognising their dignity as children of God created in God's image and likeness. In this work, we have moved from kindness to solidarity with the poor. Within the Church, it means that the poor in a Church of the poor feel not only accepted and welcomed but that they are also the church, that they can participate fully in the life of the Church and that as brothers and sisters in relation to other members they enjoy equality of dignity and action (c. 208). It also means that the Church not only is a voice for the poor but it works to promote leadership among them so that they come to have a voice in the Church and in society, together with the poor in the larger society. When the voiceless come to have voice, the Church rejoices. It will be a powerful sign of a church of the poor and for the poor (E.A.34).

When the poor enjoy dignity and freedom and equality of fellowship in the Church, it would be a matter of celebration as sign of the liberating
grace of Christ. In this area of solidarity with the poor, dialogue with cultures and religions will also bring insights and perspectives that will strengthen this option. All religions, be they theistic or not, contain a liberative message and social imperatives of compassion, concern, justice and love for the poor. They provide motivation, enlightenment and affirmative perspectives and criteria for liberative action.

VI. Social Concern and Human Rights

How do we understand human rights, their future and our commitment to them?

Human rights are rights of persons and people in their concrete history. The Social Teaching of the Church embodies the Church’s concern and commitment to them. The concrete situation of people shows up areas where human rights are violated. Today, because of the globalization of communication the violations of human rights, even though they are mostly concrete and local are globally communicated. Because they are globally known, there is space for responsible action at the global level. Knowledge brings responsibility. What happens in East Timor or Indonesia is immediately known to the Indian or Sri Lankan or South American, nay global audiences. Such knowledge is a challenge to solidarity of peoples to act and respond.

The language of human rights focused on individuals has shifted to include groups, communities, their cultures, and economic, political situations where the powerless people are more easily exploited. Today there is a need to redeem human rights from their liberal, abstract and conceptual framework through the liberational struggles of the marginalised and powerless groups. The moral foundation of human rights is the dignity of human person constituted in relationality. Today we stress relational anthropology.

In the context of globalisation whose main actor is global market economy, the liberal approach to rights of individuals divorced from the concrete historical context of peoples risks to become dominant. This can expand the liberal approach to rights to include the rights to and of the market, those of capital, of business, industry, multinational corporations, and be unrelated to the concrete situation of people who are powerless, as workers, migrants, women, and other vulnerable groups. Defence of human rights of the latter would be "inescapable and unrenounceable challenge" to the Church in Asia (E.A. 33).

It is disturbing that most of the talk of human rights takes place bypassing the global situation of inequitable division and alienations widen-
ing the gap between the powerless poor and the powerful rich among peoples and nations. In the abstract universalist approach to human rights the rights of the powerful rich will increase and the misery of the powerless poor will worsen. In such an approach, the future of human rights is very bleak. The poor are vast majority of the world's population and more than two thirds of them are in the developing countries. All this means that the realization and guarantee of the human rights of this majority will not be a reality. It appears that the future of human rights will be the future of human rights of the powerful rich of the world!

However, the powerless poor everywhere are raising their voice, and their struggles for fuller humanity are growing. The question raised is: can we redeem the human rights? The future of human rights can be redeemed only by the powerless poor who struggle for dignity, justice and freedom and all those who enter into solidarity with them and make a common cause for what they struggle for. "The future of human rights lies on whether even now we can redeem them to be the rights of the marginalised. It is only by bringing the shelterless poor under the protection of these rights that human rights will acquire their true universal character."

Today the human rights articulated in the U.N. Declaration and other conventions as charters for the rights of different marginalised groups must be sustained by a spiritual focus on the sufferings of the victims. The way to true universality of human rights is the way of protecting and guaranteeing of the rights of the marginalised. The universal guarantee of human rights for all (sarvodaya) can be achieved only through the rights of the poor, their guarantee and protection (antyodaya). We learn the concrete and effective universality of human rights only through the guarantee of the rights of the poor. Our commitment to the promotion of human rights for all actualises itself in concrete through the priority of and inclusive preference for the rights of the poor.

In countries of South Asia and South East Asia, economic development and human rights are not seen in their inseparable linkage to each other. The political leadership in its zeal for rapid economic development in the context of the global market economy does not seem to respect the unity of development and human rights. Economic development is human development. Hence it inseparably and essentially includes freedom, justice, dignity and the human rights of all, especially those of the powerless.

A Church which lives its option for the marginalised poor and solidarity with them, a church of the poor as explained above, is in a better position for advocacy of the rights of the marginalised, their promotion and protection and thus redeem human rights.

For the future service to human rights, the positional vantage point of
the Church of the poor is important and valuable. In its committed stand for and service of the poor the Church knows that the cause of the violation of the rights of the poor is their powerlessness, vulnerability and insecurity. That is why the Church needs to engage itself in the work of empowerment of the poor. In its preferential responsibility for the cause of the poor, the Church must speak for the voiceless. We read in the book of Proverbs: "Open your mouth for the dumb, for the rights of all who are left desolate" (31:8). In this connection, we must mention that the illiteracy of the poor is powerlessness. Hence education as empowerment of the poor assumes new importance. This can pave the way to removal of poverty, insecurity, and vulnerability. The empowered poor, awakened to their subjectivity and peoplehood, will become agents of their own liberation. This also includes strengthening of the solidarity of all who struggle. Commitment to the protection and promotion of the rights of the poor is a priority in consonance with the Gospel of the Kingdom.

We said earlier that human rights can be redeemed by guaranteeing the rights of the poor. Education as empowerment is possible only if there is preferential commitment to the rights of the poor.

Option for the poor and education as empowerment are a big challenge in this area of Church involvement. If this challenge is faced, education for human rights can enter to educational curriculum. It can help create not only a culture of respect for human rights and respects for the rights of the poor but also help towards prevention of violation of human rights. In India the National Human Rights Commission is trying to promote human rights education in schools and in higher education. Some NGOs are experimenting with this programme. In this promising development, it is important to make sure that the rights of the poor become the critical component of the curriculum together with the experiential pedagogy appropriate to the subject. Here we must mention also the hopeful development Human Rights Watch groups, local, national and global and the growing networks between them. For the local churches this is an opportunity and an obligation in the educational ministry.

VII. Shift in Institutional Services

As we are at the turn of the century, the Church needs to reflect on the historically important area of its involvement, namely the service institutions of education, health care and development. This extensive institutionalized involvement calls for reassessment and re-orientation. Involvement continues to be necessary and meaningful in the mission of the Church. The Church’s relation with the larger world is mostly often located in these numerous institutions. People of other religions think of the Church in terms of these service organizations. Though such an identification of the Church
by people is correct and legitimate, today there is need for new emphasis. Can these institutions become human spaces for the exercise of peoples rights, dignity and freedom, and their promotion? At a moment when social institutions are becoming commercialised, can our institution become concrete and challenging models of servanthood and disseminate its spirit in the public space of culture, politics, economics? Is this a tall order for Christian institutions? The raison d'être of Christian institutions and their evangelical purpose demand this. It is a call to work for the transformation of consciousness.

VIII. Educational Imperative

Though I have touched upon education in relation to human rights, I consider it important to reflect specifically on the involvement of the Church in this area. The Church in Asian countries, especially in the subcontinent, is massively involved in education in its mission of service to their peoples. This ministry has been one of its strengths. The value of the Church's commitment in this area has been recognised by people. Education and knowledge as cultural goods are very important for building a just, humane, compassionate, peaceful society. The Church is committed to the transformation of society. Education is crucial to this work of transformation. The local churches have been questioning themselves about the church's ministry of education in today's divided world of rich and poor. The question is: can education become a project of social transformation? Can our involvement in it be a commitment to society that is free, just, participatory, compassionate, non-violent, a society in which the human dignity of every person and community is respected, where no one is discriminated, humiliated and excluded because of gender, caste, ethnicity, language, religion, national identity, a society that is caring and in which no one goes hungry? The response to the educational imperative embodies such a commitment. In this approach, education is an empowerment of people for transformation.

We know that there are temptations and pulls in the educational commitment that drag it into elitism that excludes the poor and into money-making enterprise. In the present situation of globalization, there are many forces at work which leave the poor on the sidelines.

The education imperative as a project of transformation needs emphasis in a situation of ethnic, social, racial and caste discrimination, sometimes erupting into violence in some Asian countries. In some of our Asian countries the educational project gets vitiated by ideologies of religious, cultural and nationalist fundamentalism and communalism. In India, Hindu fundamentalist groups in some States introduce distortions and biases against particular minorities in text books on history. On the part of these groups,
there is an attempt to promote this approach to education (here called "saffronisation" of education). The Church needs to take a prophetic stand to keep education as a project of humanisation of culture and society. At the turn of millennium, the Church stands committed to this vision.

Another important area for which education in developing countries can make a contribution is that of population growth. Education linked to empowerment and social progress has tremendous impact on fertility. As more and more poor get educated, the rule of many children in a family changes. The Church seized of the social question of population growth stands committed to responsible parenthood and justice for the poor, while it cannot be a party to methods of family planning that are morally unacceptable. Despite this delicate question, the Church unambiguously committed to the spread of education as enablement of people, especially among the poor. The world population has reached 6 billion mark and India has reached 1 billion mark in Oct. 1999. In this area, sometimes a false propaganda is going on, namely, the more children in a family, more poverty. Studies show that poverty is often the cause of more children. "The assertion that population growth is a cause of poverty is a dangerous oversimplification, and is to be rejected. Population problems are often the consequence of poverty and the interrelationship is always complex."

IX. The Imperative of Peace and Harmony

In the complex situation of the Asian continent marked by divisions and conflicts, socio-political, cultural ethnic and others, both within and between countries, the imperative of peace and harmony are also complex. The nature of conflict and division is unique in each situation. There are legitimate struggles and vested interests in situations. Building peace and harmony will focus on peoples, their humanity, their dignity, their freedom and their right to justice and solidarity. Making-peace, a beatitude (Mt 5:8), reveals to us the dignity of the children of God, and is a work of the Kingdom, a task for all believers and for people of good will.

The Asian continent is marked by hotspots of conflict within and between countries, be it Sri Lanka, India, Pakistan, Myanmar, Korea, China, Philippines, Indonesia, the recent situation of E. Timor, besides internal conflicts in different countries. The Church in these countries, apart from Philippines, is a minority, yet in its evangelical commitment to justice and peace it is called to be a servant of peace and reconciliation. In the power of the Gospel it is called to build peace and make its contribution responding to the discerned requirements of peace-making. In the midst of conflicts diverse and complex as they are in each country, the Church engages in cooperative action with others or joins other agents of peace to bring people together, to enter into solidarity with the victims of conflicts, with refugees
and asylum seekers in situations of political turmoil and war, to stand for just and humane alternatives of inter-community relations. The Church uses the cultural and spiritual resources of our faith and of other faiths to promote reconciliation and thus become servants of peace and signs of hope for people uprooted, displaced, helpless and defenseless. The local churches in Asia know that the rhetoric of a peaceful society and harmony between people hides the arduous and costly task of building peace. The local churches of India, Pakistan and Sri Lanka, Myanmar, and of the Philippines know this well.

Yet signs of hope for peace and solidarity are not wanting. Before the Kargil conflict in India, there was the initiative of people to people contact between India and Pakistan which brought together people of good will, convinced of the need for peace and solidarity between the two countries, irrespective of religions, cultures, languages, etc. Peace between the two countries has been jeopardized by power politics and the failure to meet the huge problems affecting the well-being of peoples. Peace brokered by governments but divorced from people-centred and people-oriented development in both the countries will not be true peace. The nuclear explosions in both the countries about which people have different perceptions and views, from the short-term and long-term point of view of people-centred development are a reckless, irresponsible, costly and anti-people exercise of power politics. If we want peace, we work for justice and development. "Development is another name for peace" (Pope Paul VI).

The Church in Sri Lanka too supports peace missions together with others in the situation of ethnic conflicts. The Church in Japan, the first and the only victim of atom bombs, has come out with a "Resolution for Peace" in a country in which people deeply long for and appreciate peace because of their history since the end of the war. So too the Church in Southern Philippines is working in a committed way for peace. In Myanmar peace is linked to restoration of democracy; in East Timor peace is linked to self-determination, now struggling to build a battered country into a country of freedom. But building peace in these countries is an ongoing task. In East Timor, the church leadership has been closest to people in their struggle for peace dignity and freedom. The peace imperative for the mission of the Church in Asia is clear.

True and lasting peace within nations and between nations should be fruit of just, and dignified relations of fellow human beings, fellow citizens and fellow believers (Cf. Is. 32:17). Peace within and between nations is peace for every individual and for all. Enduring peace of this quality is built on the foundation of our common humanity, strengthened and nurtured by the cultural humanum of peoples and their heritage and a religious vision and spirituality which are expressions of God's purposes for the integral
wellbeing of humankind.

In working for peace, we have to face conflicts of interest, through dialogue and negotiations and consistently aim at sorting out issues that touch people's genuine and legitimate interests. We have to learn the ways of peace-making, the prevention of conflict through education for peace, the creation of a culture of peace and dialogical ways of conflict resolution. We have to remember that the Church has a Gospel inheritance of peace from Christ, which it can share if it enters in a committed way into the work of peace-making, a beatitude promised to all the peace-makers. Peace is the gift of God to all humankind. All people of God deserve peace worthy of them as children of God.

At the moment, our world and many Asian countries are suffering from violence of various kinds. The U.N. has declared a decade for the promotion of a "Culture of Peace and Non-violence", a decade of opportunity during which the local Churches of Asia can participate and contribute to a culture and ethos of peace and non-violence for our continent and world. In this work for peace, the Church enters into solidarity with all those who work for peace and harmony as fruit of justice and fellowship of peoples.

Hence the church evangelises (1) by building peace and promoting a culture of peace and (2) fosters a faith vision and a spirituality that inspires and sustains our commitment to peace-making. In this work, we join all those agents and people who work for peace and social harmony and benefit by the cultural and spiritual resources of our people in dialogue and solidarity. Peace-making as a work of reconciliation belongs essentially to the message of salvation of Jesus Christ for all humankind. Christians and local churches are challenged to become peace-makers.

X. Peace with Nature and Cosmos: the Ecological Imperative

The peace imperative today expands in the context of ecological crisis and the fast deteriorating environment. Peace as the fruit of just, humane relations between peoples and their solidarity includes peace with wounded nature and the cosmos. The integrity of creation is being violated. In a divided world, concern for harmony and peace with nature inseparably includes concerns for social justice. Peace has therefore two dimensions: justice among humans, and peace with nature. This double imperative of peace will challenge our polluting styles of production and consumption and call for a metanoia to a way of life that responds to this double imperative. In this area of ecological peace and harmony, we have to recognise (using Abraham Heschel's words) that "some are guilty and all are responsible" for the future of just and peaceful society and for that of nature and the cosmos to be the home for humans and all living beings.
Today the social teaching of the church has expressed concern about ecological crisis. So too the local churches of Asia. We have to be careful about one-sided approaches in our responses to this crisis. In a divided world we are in, the rich and powerful countries and the powerful elite in developing countries adopt a universalist approach to the ecological crisis without adverting to differentiated responsibility for the origin of the crisis. Such an approach suffers from deafness and insensitivity to the voice of the powerless, victims of the model of development followed in different countries and callousness to their lot, in the destruction of safe environment and of ecological balance and harmony. The most affected victims are always the marginalised groups in different countries, in India, tribals, dalits, women, fisher folk, migrants, workers, especially child workers in hazardous industries. In India and South Asian countries, mega-projects of industrial development and megadams are not only the cause of ecological damage and disaster but also the cause of massive displacement of peoples, the powerless and the marginal groups in particular. According to Arundhati Roy, nearly sixty percent of the people displaced by the megadam project of Narmada are tribals, dalit and women. She makes a pointed observation that "India's poorest people are subsidizing the life-styles of her richest." Study of displacement of peoples owing to mega projects promoted by aggressive industrialization expose the close linkage between unjust relationships among peoples and rapacious greed towards and destruction of nature's resources and damage to environment.

In our commitment to the ecological imperative which goes with justice and peace among humans, we have to be critical of models of development and human progress which deny and exclude the integral peace and at-homeness with nature. For an adequate response to the eco-crisis, we need to develop an ecosophy of religious and cultural traditions of peoples, especially, those of indigenous peoples who live a life of covenant with nature (land, forests, water, mountains, flood and fauna). Some of the main-line religious traditions have such wisdom encapsulated in texts of scripture. These need to be retrieved and liberatively interpreted for concrete action. This ecosophy will challenge and correct the lop-sided and dominant techno-rationality guiding the present models of development. The Church is called to be prophetic in its option and commitment to the promotion of peace and justice between peoples and peace with nature. Deeply aware of the interrelatedness of human beings and nature, the Church stands for and promotes a sacramental vision of nature and a caring attitude of reverence and responsibility.

XI. Challenge of Solidarity in the Context of Globalization

Globalization: Heresy and Prophecy
The church is called to reflect on the phenomenon of the globalization
of the market economy, together with all people of other faiths and people of good will who are concerned with the poor. In our commitment to the wellbeing of our people and solidarity with them, we have to be discerningly awake and watchful over what globalization does to people, specially the poor.

Whenever we have to stand for justice, dignity and freedom of people, we want that all should enjoy these gifts. In our concrete commitment of action, we begin with those who are deprived of these gifts. Through this preferential commitment which is always an inclusive one, we work for the well-being of all. It is this in-built option for the powerless that is missing in the present process of globalization. In globalization production, marketing, trade are entirely shaped by economic priorities, and profit divorced from value perspectives of social justice and the common good and the rights of the poor. There is a strong view among certain experts of development policies that value perspectives should not enter into production priorities. This is unacceptable. When one decides on the priority of production of luxury goods in a situation where the majority of the population struggle for basic needs, one has made a choice in favour of the affluent middle class to the detriment of justice due to the poor. Our position is that every economic activity, be it production, or trade or any other enterprise, is a human activity, and it can never be value free. This is the clear stand of the Catholic social teaching. Today, the concept of sustainability linked to ecofriendly development enters the whole agenda of development. The Bruntland Commission Report "Our Common Future" (1987) speaks of a "development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. 53 In this discourse, we presume the legitimate distinction between needs and wants. In the present context of the globalization of the market economy, growth has become commercially motivated and calculated for the accumulation of capital and maximisation of profit. In this process, "sustainable" can be distorted to mean perpetual growth or growth without limits. The unacceptable distortion of considering the luxury wants as needs can vitiate the distinction between needs and wants, while 1.3 billion people suffer from dehumanizing poverty. The present world order and models of development have failed to respond to the basic needs of the poor of the world, a great majority of whom live in Asia. Sustainable development should meet people's needs. Sustainable development in its full inclusive sense of the wellbeing of all is far from realisation in the present agenda of the globalisation of the market economy. The Pope in the Peace Day Message of 1998 speaks of "globalization without marginalisation and globalization in solidarity". It calls for justice for all and solidarity with all. It is an ethical imperative and a call to a metanoia for a global spirituality. The Church is the inheritor and communicator of the Gospel of an option for God and the Kingdom and option against mammon, and is called to discern accordingly and exercise
prophecy in deed and word, in dialogical collaboration with the believers of other faiths and people of good will. The social teaching of the local churches will take on the form of prophetic praxis.

In the economic realm, as we witness the rapid take-over by globalization of Asian countries, equity and justice within nations and between Asian countries have become fragile. The powerful actors (advanced countries) have undue decisive influence over powerless countries.

In this context, there is need for coming together in regional groupings of Asian countries and thus move towards a continental union for the progress of Asian peoples so that the lopsided progress of developed nations which leaves behind the developing countries of Asia, is challenged and corrected. The regional unions of ASEAN, ASIA-PACIFIC, SAARC can and should become guarantors of progress of Asian peoples and offset the imbalance set in motion by globalization.

Moreover, in the context of States accepting the regime of globalization, there is need for strengthening the civil society. The global market economy is "characterized by commodification of social relations," whereas "civil society is oriented to the humanization of social relations." The market is focused on the instrumental values of productivity and efficiency (the system of "wants") but civil society defines public spaces in which citizens continually redefine human dignity and equality of human rights as end values in the situation of changing history. Civil society facilitates citizens to exercise their democratic right to call governments to accountability and exert pressure on them to promote equity, justice, social welfare and human rights. Civil society becomes stronger if people's movements and committed NGOs act in solidarity and watch over the forces and agents of the global market for socially negative initiatives and impact on the wellbeing of citizens, especially the powerless groups. The Church in its commitment to the promotion of justice and wellbeing of all and its option for the poor, has an important role to play to promote the virtues of civil society and strengthen it and thus contribute to the humanization of civil society, economy, politics, culture and other institutions of society.

In the present scenario of globalization of market economy, human work is being continually devalued, and the workers, their rights and the justice due to them are being pushed to the periphery of corporate business and enterprise. In this world, human labour is primarily a commodity to be negotiated for the cheapest price, especially unskilled and unorganized labour. Human work is being commoditized. Instead of the priority of human labour over capital, capital is gaining primacy over labour. The reason why this is one of the biggest problems in Asia is because the vast majority earn their livelihood through work. Without the guarantee of the rights of
workers, there is no true progress of peoples. What we have to note is that true progress of peoples can never be promoted with the principle of exclusion. Progress is always marked by the liberative principle of inclusion.

The Church is called to faithfulness to God's purposes for humankind. In the context of globalization, it is called to participate in the creation and transformation of human institutions and modes of behaviour and practices which promote and strengthen "values of inclusion rather than exclusion, protection rather than destruction, stewardship rather than greed, solidarity rather than the survival of the fittest." Participation, especially of the powerless in processes of public life where decisions concerning the lives of the poor are taken should fall within the objectives of the Church's option for the poor and its advocacy. The Church should help in setting up structures that promote the participation of the powerless to the widest possible extent, because of its stand for the dignity of all persons and communities, specially the weak and the vulnerable in society. Moreover, the Church will give priority to the demands of solidarity of peoples and work for it with people of other faiths and all people of good will. In this commitment the Church will be countercultural vis-a-vis the structures of exclusion, marginalisation, aggressive individualism, the competitive principle of market economy and its consumerist ethos.

We need to become aware of the forces of mammon at work in our world of globalisation. We are fighting against acquisitive impulse of greed devoid of care, concern for justice and dignity and fellow humanity generated by mammon. Mammon is an enemy of God claiming our loyalty before God. The forces of mammon that Jesus condemns are anti-human, anti-life and anti-solidarity. While we commit ourselves to globalisation of communication for solidarity and globalisation of solidarity, we have to become critically conscious of the forces of mammon at work in the global market economy.  

XII. The Communication Imperative

Gospel and Modern Media of Mass Communication

Today, we are in a situation of an explosion of information technology, and the new century is called to be the knowledge century. In the area of information technology too, the disparities flowing from the divide between the powerful rich and the powerless poor disturb us. For example, according to Dr Swaminathan, "97 per cent of all internet hosts are in developed nations, home to 16 per cent the World's population". Asian countries are fast taking to the new electronic media of communication despite many limitations. The Church utilises the modern means of communication for its mission. At the same time, the Church in its value approach to the technology of communication has to uphold with a prophetic voice the val-
ues of authentic communication against all exploitative uses for evil ends. In its exercise of prophecy, the Church has to announce and denounce. While it denounces the exploitative use, it acknowledges the immense good of fast communication for the wellbeing of humankind.

Here we have to consider the ethical principle concerning ends and means. Modern technology of fast communication as a means can and does serve good purposes for the wellbeing of people in our committed use of them. A good end justifies good means but it does not justify either use of bad means or the bad use of good means. The goodness of the end is inseparably present in the means. The human agency behind the use of means can never be party to evil end or evil use of means to achieve a good end. With these value perspectives the Church uses the modern technology of communication as a means in its mission. In its very use the Church evangelizes the area. It takes a stand against its abuses, and resists its hegemonic invasions into cultures and the humanity of peoples by its agenda of commerce motivated by greed. Such a prophetic stand belongs integrally to the evangelizing mission of the Church.

But this technology will not abolish the ambivalence of the human heart. Freedom of cyber space needs to be shaped by responsibility for human dignity, life and solidarity. The use of cyber space in the areas of pornography, hate campaign and intrusion into privacy, leads to new structures of sin. Electronic communication is being increasingly misused for spreading consumerism, sexism, racism, religious intolerance. We have to recognize that the economic and political control over the media deeply influences people's perceptions and interpretations of what is happening to the world. Committed to the Gospel vision of society, the Church will have to exercise a prophetic role in the whole area of modern communication. We need to use the technology of communication as a tool not only for sharing the Gospel but also for the spread of values of the Kingdom. In collaboration with all people of good will we must use it in the service of the humanization of society, culture, economics and politics, which always belongs to the work of the Gospel. In this, too, the triple dialogue of solidarity with the poor, with cultures and religions, plays a decisive role.

In the global communication made possible by the modern technology, globality is technological. It does not automatically create global solidarity. It is a mere means. It can never replace interhuman and interpersonal communication, which underlies relationships and solidarity. This kind of relationships and solidarity demand personal time and require human space and sometimes calls for sacrifice. In building global solidarity, we use modern technology of fast communication as an instrument of service. We need to guard ourselves against the invasion of the technical reason that erodes into or supplants the reasons of the heart, which alone shape human
relationships and nurture solidarity of peoples. True human solidarity is a fellowship without frontiers. We have to work for this goal in collaboration with all people of good will.

The globalization of market economy taking place in a unipolar world grows on the liberalization of markets of different countries, the privatization of industry and business, the deregulation of industry, trade, tariffs and withdrawal of subsidy by the state, all of which facilitate the market and its agents. The aggressive competition for markets, is promoted by advertisements focussed on the middle class, who have purchasing power. They subtly promote homogeneity of tastes in food, drink, dress, music, entertainment thus swamping the local traditions in these areas. They bring in a market-based homogeneity of culture and life-styles. They act "powerfully standardizing commercial tendencies to make everywhere seem the same". As Chris Arthur puts it "Global marketing streamlines production, homogenizes content and sweeps alternative perspectives from the mainstream". Ironically, it is a market fundamentalism vis-a-vis religious fundamentalism like Hindutva which also promotes a monolithic homogeneity of culture. The healthy pluralism of cultures of peoples is being eroded by this sort of globalization. In all this, the powerless poor are excluded.

One important mark of a globalised and globalising world affecting the world and Asia is the tremendous spread of communication and information. There is indeed explosion of information. With the introduction of Internet, website and e-mail, every communication has the potential of becoming global. Internet communication points to a much bigger global information superhighway that overcomes space and time limitation.

Asian countries, especially South Asian countries, are fast taking to the new electronic media of communication, some, like India, in spite of internal contradictions. In vast rural areas where the bulk of population still lives, we face very primitive conditions without roads, electricity and telephones, whereas metropolises and towns enjoy the benefits of the latest communication. This points to the model of development followed here.

Today the networks of communication which make an increasingly "wired" word, may create a mirage that people come closer together. Terms like "global village" "information revolution," world civilization are easily bandied about. As Chris Arthur Remarks, "they are dangerously cosmetic". They hide many lacunae in communications and give a false sense of people coming closer. The power relations operative behind the modern mass media are concealed. We have to recognize that information has become a carefully selected and controlled commodity.

In globalization, communication can help increase the "awareness of
cultural, religious political and social diversity" or can "erode precisely this rich pluralism" of peoples. The area of information and information technology too show the divide between the powerful rich and the powerless poor in a disturbing way. The gap between "the information-rich and the information-poor mentioned in the 1980 Mac Bride Report is growing. Moreover, corporations are taking over the communication systems and make them serve private concerns. Therefore the electronic superhighways cannot be left to the forces of the market. "Apartheid in technology and knowledge is just as perverse as social apartheid." Gorostiaga warns us against the development of "cognitive elites."

The church does recognize the immense good that can be done to people and for the work of evangelisation through the use of modern media of communication. At the same time, it knows the ambivalence of this instrument in the contemporary situation. The use of communication in the work of sharing and proclaiming the Gospel message cannot follow the models of communication of the global market. Sharing the Gospel message of Christ through the electronic media remains faithful to the fundamental requirements of the Gospel and retains the liberating and humanizing quality of what we share, namely freedom and respect for human dignity and for people's cultures and religions. Dialogical and humanizing ways of proclaiming and sharing of the Gospel remains the mark of Christian communication (cf the early part of this paper on the indivisible and intrinsic value of inter-connectedness of the three paths of mission).

Another important challenge is democratization of the media. The MacBride Report on communication devotes a chapter on democratization of communication. The right to communicate is a fundamental right that relates to other human rights. People have a right to inform and be informed. They have the right to shape public opinion on issues affecting peoples lives, community needs and solidarity of peoples. People have the right to break the silence imposed on them and to bring pressure for change and demand a response from governments and others for the sake of people and their rights. Aung Sau Suu Kyi affirms that "people's participation in social and political transformation is the central issue of our time." All this makes clear that the right to communicate is necessary for creation of a society that is just free and egalitarian. This is all the more necessary since there is so much economic and political control of the media and commercialization. The globalization of markets uses communication for its models of consumption. This leads people to perceive themselves as consumers. But people cannot be mere consumers of the media products of knowledge and ideologies, or captives to them, but want to be active participants who exercise their responsible choices without succumbing to their manipulations.

Today there is the possibility of "globalization from below", emerging
from the poor, marginalised and indigenous peoples that can say No to the forces of exclusion and enslavement. The churches and Christian communicators cannot be absent from this movement. There is a need of a strong and effective civil society in which organized groups of citizens, people’s movements, human rights groups, women’s organizations can monitor, raise consciousness of people about and watch over the quality of the media orientations and of what is disseminated. They can act in solidarity to prevent the concentration of power in the hands of vested commercial interests and work for an equitable social order. In the civil space, people’s participatory democratic processes have to be strong to offset the undue influences of media closely linked to the contemporary institutions of economy and politics in the context of globalization.

In this age of information, the global civil society must uphold the right of people to "receive and impart information," as given in the article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Plou suggests that such a right should be broadened to include "the right to communication to enable free democratic interactions between peoples". What is important is that new communication spaces open up to promote solidarity, alternative cultures and an equitable, sustainable, participatory society.

The churches have used the media to serve peoples, cultures, dialogue, solidarity, social progress, communion of churches and evangelisation. Pastorally, the Church helps the Christian communicators facing tension so that they work to serve human values, use the media in ways that do not violate people’s dignity, and share the truth entrusted to it in humility and conviction. The goal of communication is the solidarity and communion of peoples. The real future of communication lies in the creative alternatives it can promote toward this goal.

XIII. Formation imperative

The formation imperative flows from the nature and demands of a renewed church on mission of love and service in Asia. The church is deeply committed to a formation that includes a catechesis, a faith formation and structures, models and methods that facilitate the process of a new way of being church and of fulfilling the task of new evangelisation (E.A. 21).

The church will continually work for a formation that is meaningful and contextually responsive to the challenges and opportunities of mission in all its dimensions, new emphases, changed priorities. It is inculcated, holistic and suited to the integral mission of the church in Asia. The local churches of Asia in their mission of sharing of faith with the peoples of other religions are helped by missionary associations and missionary societies in a remarkably fruitful ways. The latter enter dynamically into the
task of inculturation of faith and theology for mission and initiate suitable models of formation and a spirituality that generates a new vision and hope for fresh and creative ventures for the Gospel of Christ and service of people. The church will continually evaluate and reorient formation and protect it from all alienating influences, attitudes, mindsets and structures. It's a formation rooted in the communion of the Church intraecclesial, interritual and intereccliesial including ecumenical and dialogical relations to cultures, religions and solidarity with the poor. It is a formation that is informed and shaped by the conviction that the whole church is missionary. Hence the formation of every group in the fellowship of the church, the family, laity, men and women, youth, religious, clergy and pastors will be a priority. It will be a formation rooted, nourished and directed by the mission mandate of the Lord, in all its richness, depth and openness in the Spirit to the needs and demands of the church in dialogue and in servanthood, a mandate we obey and respond to in discipleship.

XIV. Hope-generating and Hope-sustaining Vision - a Spirituality of Mission and for Mission

The church in Asia can fulfill its task of evangelisation only in discipleship fostered and nurtured by contemplative experience of knowing the Lord in prayer, in the celebration of the Word that is proclaimed and received, in the celebration of the eucharist and sacraments in the communities of faith and encountering God in Christ in love of neighbour and service of the poor and in the faith of the followers of other religions. It is marked by simplicity of life and detachment. It is a spirituality that embodies the kenosis of Christ and meaningfully and fruitfully integrates the great spiritual traditions and values of Asian religions, a spirituality which is at once Christian and Asian, ecumenical and interreligious. It is a spirituality that is open to the impulses and beckonings of the Spirit coming from the burning bush of the Asian peoples, their traditions, their history and struggles.

It is a spirituality that generates and sustains hope for life, solidarity and harmony of peoples. Today there is a felt need for a spirituality for a global solidarity of all the peoples to build a civilisation of love. The simile of the bow and the arrow in which the more inward we pull the string, the greater and the more pointed is the outreach of the arrow is an apt symbol for the integration of deep interiority and committed outreach and solidarity demanded by the spirituality of mission and for mission.\(^73\)

**CONCLUSION**

The Church in Asia is community of disciples of the crucified Jesus. "It will speak of the word of the Cross of Jesus Christ. For in him who emptied himself on the Cross, the fullness of life is found" (Phil 2:6-11).\(^74\)
Our discipleship follows Christ poor, humble, cross bearing (L.G. 41) in Asia. Christ's kenosis and the crucified Christ make us witnesses to the Suffering Servant united to all the suffering and the oppressed. Discipleship and servanthood characterise our missionary commitment and spirituality, where there is no room for triumphalism of any sort. It is the power of the self-emptying love that offers spiritual eligibility to the Church to be a humble and loving servant of the Gospel. The powerlessness of the Cross becomes the power of God for life in fullness and for mission of love and service. In this power of love the church becomes the sacrament of hope for the peoples of Asia, a leaven for solidarity of peoples and a servant of life in its fullness. Evangelisation becomes indeed a hope-generating, a hope-sharing and a hope-sustaining service of the Gospel of Christ.

ENDNOTES

1 Cf G. et Sp. No.1., cf also the Pope's talk in the Cathedral, 6th Nov.'1999, N.Delhi, no.2.
2 Cf triple dialogue, FABC, especially 1st Plenary Assembly, 1974, Taipei.
3 Cf The Pope's speech at the closing of the Synodal process in the Cathedral, 6th Nov.1999 in New Delhi.
4 Cf Ecclesia in Asia, no.23 (hereafter E.A.).
7 Cf Redemptoris Missio (R.M.), ch. 5.
8 Cf Justice in the World no.6; cf E. A. no.32.
14 E. A. no.20. It speaks of "the new and surprising ways in which the face of Christ can be presented". I would think also of the new and surprising ways Jesus will be perceived and experienced both by Asian Christians and others but linked to the essential core of faith : The message of salvation of Jesus Christ for all.
15 E. A. nos.: 20, 21, 22.
16 Cf Felix Wilfred, Asian Theology at the Turn of the Century, University of Madras, 1998.
17 E.A.41. Cf also BIRA v.1,2,3,3,4 and the final report on harmony of OEIA and "Asian Christian Perspectives on Harmony" of TAC of FABC in For All the Peoples of Asia, Vol.2.ed. Eilers.1997.
19 Ibid. p.50.
20 Cf The ancient Tamil literary classic Purananuru.
21 Bp. Prakash Mallavarappu uses this phrase in his presentation on the mystery of the Church in the Colloquium of Bishops and Theologians held in 1998, Bangalore.
22 The Christian and the Other Religion, p.18.
23 Cf Tirukkural: a classic of 1st century in Tamil.
24 Vademecum( This is a note on the thought of FABC on some of the main themes of its deliberations prepared by OTC members and edited by Fr Felix Wilfred as a help to the bishops attending the Synod for Asia),no.4: cf John Paul's address to the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue in Observative Romano No. 13, 1992.
23 Vademeecum: p.6 no.6.
20 Cf Pope John Paul's Address to the meeting with Representative of other religions and other Christian confessions, New Delhi, no.3.
27 Ibidem.
29 Cf Tom Michel: "The challenge of Interreligious Dialogue" a paper read at the Congress of Asian Theologians, August, 1999, Bangalore.
30 Cf Blasphemy Law in Pakistan.
31 Cf Report of this service in the 2 vols of "For All the People of Asia.
32 Cf Pope Paul VI in E. N. no:58.5.
33 E. A. no.31.
34 Cf Justice in the World no.6.
35 Cf Pope's Address to Religious Leaders in New Delhi, 7th Nov, 1999, no.4.
36 Cf Octagesima Adveniens, No.4.
37 Cf the various BISAs organized by OHD of the FABC.
39 Cf Vademeecum. P.7
40 Ibid. P.8.
41 E. A. no.34.
43 Ibidem.
44 Ibid. p.734.
45 Cf Felix Wilfred: Asian Theology at the turn of the Century.
46 Cf The Asian Age, July 24, 1999 pp 1-2.
47 In India, the large increase in population comes mostly from two States of Uttar Pradesh and Bihar. These two States are the lowest in literacy rate. The Southern States, especially Kerala and Tamilnadu have shown decrease in population growth because of the high literacy rate in the two States.
48 Cf IPC's statement. IPC (International Population Concern) is a network of demographers. In the final statement of its consultation, it makes this observation. The consultation was held in New Delhi in Oct. 1999.
50 Cf. R. H.15; E.A.41.
51 Cf. the FABC documents of OHD and OHA.
54 Cf Aloysius Pieris, God's Reign for God's Poor, ch.4 on God-Mammon conflict in the vision and mission of Jesus.
56 Ibidem, p.147.
57 In Laborem Exercens, no.12.3, Pope John Paul II affirms the primacy of labor over capital. This scale of values is being undermined by the commodification of human labour in the global market.
62 Ibid.
63 Ibid. p.7.
64 Ibid. pp.8-9.
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