

Pastoral Challenges in Parishes

New Evangelization in a Fast Changing Asia

Archbishop Thomas Menamparampil, SDB
Jowai

1. Asia Changing: Break in Cultural Continuity, Globalization, Radical Movements

A new face of Asia is fast emerging. Communities that were rural and agricultural, living generally in isolated villages, and eking out an existence from seasonal labour, have moved into investment and global economy in a matter of a few decades. People are taking time to adjust to the social transformation that is taking place. The “Future Shock” that Alvin Toffler spoke of a few years ago is holding Asia in its grip today. Urban population has grown chaotic. The rural population is left impoverished and helpless.

While a section of society is learning to adjust and to take advantage of newly arising opportunities in a globalized and competitive world, others have fallen behind. Some of those who feel marginalized or exploited have moved into one type of self-assertion group or the other:

- ethnic self-assertion groups
- political fissiparous groups, secessionists
- fundamentalist radicals
- communal armies
- regional patriots
- ideological radicals of the Right or the Left
- armed extremists

Such groups have arisen in countries that were known for their peaceful traditions in a manner that could not easily have been foreseen even a few years ago. The driving force behind most of the above-mentioned movements are **young people** who are searching for solutions to their personal and community problems amidst the anxieties of a globalized world. The New Economy has been pulling more and more young people from their homes, families, religious beliefs, cultural roots, community identities, familiar terrain, and throwing them into the **high seas of uncertainties**. They have too little sense of security and even less of belonging. Their anger and frustration provides the energies.

With the weakening of family and community bonds, they are unable to deepen any convictions or develop a vision for the future. They **miss the cultural continuity** that the presence of parents and grandparents, uncles and cousins used to give in more stable families and communities. They miss the sanctions that parents and community leaders used to impose; the certainties that a common heritage handed down; and the solidarity that the village society used to offer in moments of crisis. Their entire value-system stands under threat.

It is in the midst of these and similar tensions and uncertainties that we offer our pastoral services and try to bring assistance to people who are misguided, poor, under-developed, illiterate, sick, aged, marginalized, or unjustly treated.

2. Erosion of Cultures and Values

Growing tensions in many of our countries tell us that our traditional Asian **ideals and values** are rapidly weakening. This comes from those trends in our society that **undermine our moral fibre**, social bonds, sense of common belonging, and commitment to shared values and ideals...leading to corruption, unabashed egotism and party spirit, and closed-minded sectarian thinking. Accountability is fast waning, and a sense of responsibility for common welfare diminishing. The growth of consumer goods available to people who have risen to the level of the middle class threaten to change human beings from being conscientious citizens with dignity and self-respect to self-oriented individuals, power-and-money-hungry robots, and insatiable consumers.

As individuals and communities **distance themselves from their cultural and religious roots** and turn materialistic, they begin to forget the sources from which they used to derive their moral strength and spiritual sturdiness: family, community, culture, living traditions and shared convictions. They fail to draw energy and motivation from the life-supplying and motivating qualities in their own culture and become incapable of seeing the sublime in the simple elements in their tradition, greatness in their identity and meaning in their faith.

3. Pressure of Western Philosophies on Asian Intellectuals, Every Religion Under Stress

During the colonial era, western education had brought **popular philosophies** of each period to Asian societies. Intellectuals considered it fashionable to adopt one or other of them as it convinced them or suited them.

In the same way, they were influenced by different definitions of religion that were proposed by various schools of thought, e.g. **Religion as alienation**, an instinct provided by nature for softening painful realities, **opium of the oppressed** people; plain escapism, illusion, a useful emotion, a search for solace and inwardness. Our young people today are under the influence of many such theories. Nor are seminarians, young religious, and pastoral men/women totally exempt.

A new world has gradually emerged for Asian intellectuals where religion has been side-lined. In spite of the strength and sturdiness of Asian traditional religions, these secular philosophies and **ideologies** of dialectical materialism (of the Left) on the one hand, and of consumeristic materialism (of the Right) on the other, have been shaping the minds of the intellectuals in Asia for more than one century. The result is that the economic, political, educational, professional, and recreational spaces in our society keep excluding spiritual considerations from their field of interests.

Today with the global economy reducing most members of society to the level of being mere producers and consumers, the worldview of the average Asian too is under heavy pressure. With both education and the mass media placing themselves at the service of this form of economy, religious and ethical values that characterized Asian societies have come under severe strain. While we cannot deny that a big section of the people have remained loyal to their cultures and religions, **younger generations**, especially those who go for higher studies, have to struggle against the current **secularization wave**, a section of them being led into some form of fundamentalism in reaction.

Most people today live merely by what appeals to their good sense in their respective sphere of activity. Public life gives too little evidence of religious convictions or of moral principles derived therefrom. **Every religion is under stress**, seriously challenged by secular ideologies. The latter are fast replacing the former. And a fear is being expressed that the present trend of secularization is irreversible. There are too many prophets of doom.

A good proportion of our youth are reported to have forgotten even Catholic basics, and others in reaction to have shifted to **Pentecostalism!** Even religious persons are often caught between two exaggerations: **secular messianism** (as though building up earthly wellbeing is the sole goal of Christian mission) and charismatic exaggerations verging on Pentecostalism.

4. Interruption in Handing on of the Faith

Anthropologists tell us that behind every civilization/culture there is a **unifying vision of reality**. In the case of Asia as a whole, it is a **‘spiritual vision’**; it is the soul of our cultures. This vision is fast dimming.

As we have already seen, due to the recent globalizing processes, social structures like those of the extended family, school, neighbourhood, traditional patterns of social formation that helped to hand down religious convictions from one generation to the next have been disrupted. There has been a sharp **interruption of the handing on of Faith**.

Similarly there is discontinuity in the handing of social values as well. Value-generating communities cannot be built up merely through the concepts of contractual relationship between atomized individuals, as proposed by social philosophers. For Marx, workers were such atomized individuals who could sell their labour (Taylor 2007:221). **Values, on the contrary, are generated in organic communities** based on ethnicity, culture and religion. But in modern society individuals are forced into impersonal social entities: state, party, class, social movements, economic network, a globalized world. Even religious communities lose their ‘community-sense’ in an impersonal world. Mixing of cultures, again, has made continuity in one’s tradition difficult, almost impossible (Bruce 2011:74). That is what makes people today long for shared values and community living within their own communities.

Growing alarmed about these forms of godlessness and uncertainties, people have turned in response to various types of **fundamentalism**, ultra-conservative in outlook and radically aggressive against others. Our young people at study or work are continuously exposed to these trends. They also interact with people who are active in movements like environmentalism, feminism, human rights, minorities. It is catering to the needs of people under these influences that the Church works out strategies to fulfill her mission.

5. The Passing Face of Leftist Radicalism

A few years ago, a number of our educated Catholic youth were pulled in the direction of Leftist ideologies and activism. The concept of class struggle, popular in those days, was read back into Biblical texts and narratives. The Latin American perceptions about Liberation mission (concepts of Liberation Theology) were universalized and their insights made doctrinaire. This approach had the weakness of overlooking experiences in other regions of the world, dealing with other historical realities, among other ethnic groups, and in other cultural situations.

For some, Faith had become identified with **political messianism** and morality a bourgeois residue. Christian promoters of these concepts were forgetting that while the work of justice is important, Christianity cannot be reduced merely to liberation efforts, justice struggles or human rights. “Where faith is converted into an earthly messianism”, says Ratzinger, it is a betrayal of Christianity (Jankunas 2011:82).

But from the nineties, young revolutionaries changed their mind. Those who used to philosophize over justice-issues in the Third World, prefer today to grab opportunities. And when they do succeed, some go any length in their styles of earning and using money that they had despised before. Their priorities have changed, and today they place all their energies at the service of acquiring consumer goods.

6. Christians Opt for Conservatism or Pentecostalism before Irresponsible Criticism

As things moved ahead in this direction, most Christian believers did not know how to handle the situation except remain helplessly conservative. Not many developed the skill of dialoguing with the new ideas generated by the expansion of atheistic beliefs, sciences, technology, industry, freedom, autonomy, reason, and progress. Church leaders in particular had the anxiety of taking along with them the less enlightened and more conservative crowds of

believers. Their cautious approach to new thinking made them look more traditional than they actually were. But the **apparent conservatism of the clergy** was interpreted by the rest of society as resistance to progressive ideas and unwillingness to change. This perception drove a large number of lay people in the traditionally Christian countries to the camp of the **progressives, liberals and anti-clericals**.

Wherever, in addition, Church leaders were too closely linked to the dominant regime like in Latin America, the progressives became more and more hostile. Amidst these troubles, most believers were happy enough to confine themselves to an external compliance and traditional practices. Meanwhile a great proportion of the clergy remained complacent and passive, inactive before pastoral needs and sluggish before evangelical opportunities. There was a general absence of creativity and dynamism.

7. Secularization a Friend or a Foe?

Having said all this, we must admit that exposure of Asia to western political ideas and styles, economic skills, and modern thinking, helped the nations of this continent to modernize themselves. **Democracy, equality before law**, separation of Church and State, right to participation in decision-making, freedom of expression, basic human rights, equal access to economic opportunities... these concepts proved to be of immense value to Asian societies that were longing for freedom and development. **Western education** was welcomed with enthusiasm and there arose a leadership in most Asian countries who were able to take the destinies of their countries in their hands.

More specially, the Christian minority in Asia saw the benefit of affirming the value a secular polity. They have consistently asked for a **secular Government**, by which is meant not a Government that denies spiritual values or persecutes religious believers, but one that deals with every religious community with equal respect and **extends protection even to minority** communities. Unfortunately, not all Governments in Asia that claim to be secular actually are secular. Some are avowedly sectarian, and others still deny religious freedom to minorities.

8. Fundamentalism a Response to Over-Secularization, to Collective Humiliation

With the rejection of religious certainties and loyalties, some turned to fundamentalism in a frantic search for sure ground to base their world of thought and convictions. In Asia, this phenomenon took on a new dimension in societies that had felt greatly humiliated during the colonial period. Thus, in many places religious fundamentalism came to be closely linked with cultural revival and political radicalism.

Koenraad Elst says that the **Hindu society feels** it has been **humiliated** for a thousand years through political and cultural domination by Muslim and Christian powers (Elst 2001:9). Muslims themselves have hurt feelings about the western treatment of Islamic nations and plundering of their natural resources, which they understand as Christian arrogance. Other religious groups like the Buddhists also have expressed similar grievances.

Right or wrong, it is important that we pay attention to the **collective psyche of an aggrieved community**. General condemnation of these societies because of the radical element in them will not be helpful. Some form of conversation should be initiated. Psychologists tell us that people who have developed an inferiority complex are always eager for affirmation. We need to have sympathy for them, even when we find it impossible to agree with them in everything.

We need bridge-builders today, who, in spite of many difficulties with fundamentalists and radicals, search for a **shared worldview, common ethical values** and a joint approach to global problems. Paul says, "Your speech should always be pleasant and interesting, and you should know how to give the right answer to everyone" (Col 4:6).

Nor can we conclude that the Christian community is totally free of fundamentalism. The multiplication of sects that are strong on the literal interpretation of the Bible and **preach in aggressive tones** may be classified under that category. They have gained additional strength of late in opposition to the aggressiveness of the propagators of atheism and of crude materialism like Christopher Hutchins and Richard Dawkins and the exaggerations of fundamentalist groups in other religions.

Many of our young Christian friends are tempted in two directions: some opt out of religious practice with no qualms of conscience, others feeling insecure in the face of intense secularization, frantically look for emotional and vocal expressions of their faith. An Evangelizer should be helpful to these different groups of people. “Be ready at all times to answer anyone who asks you to explain the hope you have in you, but do it with **gentleness and respect**” (1 Pet 3:15).

9. The Need to Avoid Exaggerations, and to be Open to All Peoples and Perspectives

Amidst such cacophonous voices, we need to **bring a bit of balance** into everything. That is the answer to the supporters of both secularization and fundamentalism. When people exaggerate their own positions, either on the secular side or the religious side, they are heading for a clash. We need to be aware of this fact. Over-confidence on either side must be corrected by self-criticism.

The right kind of evangelization gives unto Caesar what belongs to Caesar and **to God what belongs to God**; gives to every sphere of human activity what is its due and central attention to what is central to humanity. It looks beyond past mistakes of a community and present reasons for conflict. It concedes that no religion or ethical system should ever be condemned because of the moral lapses of some of its adherents. It joins hands with people of different persuasions in the cause of the common good: e.g. ethical values, liberty, reform, rights of individuals, uplift of women, respect for diversity; for women’s rights, minority rights.

10. Reconciling Opposites, Opting for Balance, the Middle Path

Pope Benedict says that it is precisely when a person shows himself/herself most Godlike when he/she makes the right moral decision. Missionary experience tells us that balanced decision, avoiding all sorts of exaggerations, is important for apostolic effectiveness. We go ahead as God inspires and circumstances demand of us. We know how to harmonize *Reason* and *Religion*. We want to be *modern* on the one hand; but we also would like to be faithful to our common Christian *heritage*, and to the distinct cultural heritage of each of us.

We want to be open to the new findings of *sciences*: sociology, psychology, biology, economy, other sciences; but we would not like to compromise the basic tenets of *faith*, Catholic traditions. We accept the fact of ongoing *change* in a dynamic society and in the Church; but our good sense asks us to ensure *continuity* and rootedness. We trust the *dynamism* of the young generation; but we also respect the wisdom and *experience* of older generations. We count on our human *resourcefulness* in difficult situations; but we also trust in God’s *Providence* and seek his assistance. In India we speak of the Middle path of Buddha. Medieval scholars used to say “*in medio stat virtus*”.

Let us continue the list:

Sacred and Secular

Mysticism (personal spirituality) and Prophetism (commitment to the larger society)

Cheerfulness and Seriousness about matters that are serious

Authority and Freedom

Discipline and Humaneness

Immediate issues and Ultimate concerns, Ultimate destiny

Idealism and Realism

Austerity and Moderation
Kindness and Efficiency
Economy and protection of Environment, culture, values, distribution, Joy of the Gospel
Efficiency in Production and Fairness in Distribution, Generosity in Sharing
Financial self-sufficiency and apostolic purposefulness, fruitfulness
Local interests and Global concerns (EG 234-36)
National interests and Universal Outlook
Parochial attitudes and Catholic openness
Personal fulfilment and Community commitment
Bureaucracy (religious discipline) and Chaos, disorganization, lack of commitment (in religious life)
Liberal and Conservative

(Curiously one may be very liberal in one area, but ultra conservative in another, very liberal in religious discipline and liturgical norms may be ultra conservative in social justice issues)

Evangelii Gaudium 229 has its own list:

Heaven and Earth
God and man
Time and Eternity
Flesh and Spirit
Person and Society
Individuality (personal identity) and Community (EG 235)

Many philosophical and theological thrusts developed in response to one or other exaggeration in different directions. It is important for the student of the history of thought to understand this, so that he/she can evaluate some over-emphases in context and avoid making his/her life an unreflected reaction to the past.

The hardest thing on earth is to develop a holistic vision of things, bring opposing views together, and work towards a fusion of diverse horizons. If we are divided in our communities and in our thinking, polarized in our debates, we shall never be able to achieve anything in the apostolic field.

11. Adapting Oneself to all Cultures and Communities

Working across cultures, Evangelizers should **learn to adapt** themselves to different people. It is necessary to take note of differences in worldviews, cultural patterns, meaning-systems, and the religious psychology of different communities when dealing with people of other cultures, in schools, hostels, educational institutions, medical centres, social development activities and pastoral contexts.

Missionaries should remember that every community has its own **way of looking at things** and dealing with each other. You can make serious mistakes by being too assertive where a gentler approach is more acceptable to a community, or by leaving everything to people's initiative where a more direct involvement may be necessary. What appears to one community as respectful and dignified may appear cold and reserved to another. People express their feelings in different ways: familiarity or displeasure, surprise or shock, concern or compassion, cordial welcome or total indifference, acceptance or rejection. Such feelings are expressed at times in explicit in words, at other times through indirect hints. Some prefer to be more indicative than specific, to suggest than to pronounce, to express their meaning in silence or **body language** (shaking of heads, lifting eyebrows, smiling or frowning) than state clearly or affirm strongly.

Certain serious matters are whispered in the ear, not proclaimed from the house-tops. The West usually likes to be frank, the East seeks not to offend. The manner in which children relate with their parents, younger members interact with their elders, boys mix with girls, the way they all show respect to seniors or religious persons, will be

different according to the different traditions of each community. What looks to one as self-confident and expansive may look to another as arrogant and interfering. One enjoys using understatements (euphemisms), another delights in overstatements. Reward or punishment, or the way of administering them may be different. The manner of eliciting help, evoking collaboration, offering scope for participation, seeking assent, expressing dissent, perception of time, emphasis on punctuality, role of the individual in family and society, position of adults, the manner of addressing each otherall these are **culturally conditioned**.

12. Attending to the Collective Mood of Communities

After the fall of the Twin Towers, there was a **change of mood** in the United States of America with regard to people's attitude to religion. Similarly, after a local conflict or a natural disaster like a *Tsunami* people turn to God and become serious even about their human responsibilities.

Historians notice a big difference in the collective mood and general outlook of people in the Western world before and after World War I. Public consciousness and convictions about human possibilities changed radically. Before the War began there was an over-confidence about human potentialities and an **over-optimism** about the natural goodness of man. The irrational attitudes of leaders and inhuman cruelties witnessed during the War brought that period to a close. The **pessimistic slant** of many existential philosophers has origin in the tragic experiences of the War period and the absurd positions that even intelligent people took during the subsequent decades of sharp contention.

And of late, the tragedies of the World Wars and the experience of the Cold War, erosion of cultures, change of World Power patterns, triumph of competition, surrender to individualism, **prolonged recession**, and steadily **aging population** has been influencing the collective mind and mood of the Western world.

Similarly the countries of the Third World have their own stock of memories: of subjugation and enslavement, national awakening due to western education, liberation struggle; difficulties in handling the fresh-won freedom; nationalistic arrogance in their society and ideological aggressiveness; these and similar experiences have left marks on the collective **emotional word** of each society distorting its culture, each in its own way.

Further, there are other differences too: if there have been experiences of a civil war, ethnic conflict, political chaos, instances of gross corruption, fluctuations in economy, trends in secularization, erosion of cultures, loss of values, each community differing according to its experience. Intermixing of cultures makes situations even more complex. In such contexts, it has become absolutely necessary for the Evangelizer to take note of such differences in the collective mood of different communities, relating with each in a meaningful and helpful manner, so that he/she may become 'all things to all men'.

13. Negative Memories of Historic Injuries

In difficult times, we tend to give attention to the immediate causes of conflicts, forgetting that many of them arise due to negative memories of historic injuries that still persist in the minds of individuals and societies. Unless they are healed and prejudices are moved, violence is bound to break out again.

Most social activists today are acutely aware of **Structural Injustices** that need to be redressed, but are unperceptive of the **Historic Injustices** which call for the urgent **healing of the collective memories** of a society. In the latter case, remedies have to be brought not to the structures of society but to a community's psychological depths: to the world of collective emotions, attitudes, motivations, fears, suspicions, prejudices.

There are times when justice-fighters get trapped in other issues. While we have absolute respect for genuine justice-fighters who are urged by a sincere love for the deprived and who themselves remain perfectly detached,

we must admit that some justice-fighters are just fighters by character or habit. They use the **aggressive edge** they have developed in their personality to keep themselves in leading positions in their community; it may also be that sharper people are using them to promote their own interests. There are times when a community itself chooses abrasive spokespersons to press their claims, some in excess of what is in proportion.

This, in turn, provokes harder stands from the other side. Meanwhile real justice issues get marginalized and real victims are left to shift for themselves. What gets public attention are the Egos of leaders and collective stands of pressure-groups. The aggrieved party gets forgotten in the bargain. It is the duty of spirit-driven Evangelizers to keep close to the real victims and offer all the help that is possible, most of all to **sustain their 'hope'** and show them a constructive path forward.

14. Healing of Collective Memories

Historically, we have hurt each other as ethnic groups, nations, or civilizations. It is part of evangelical work to heal the memories of these **historic wounds**, at the ethnic, cultural, national and even civilizational levels. It is not easy. It is here that we often fail. Even a person of Mahatma Gandhi's stature said he had failed. And yet we know that healing of memories is God's work.

There are memories of injuries between Religions, Churches, Denominations, Rites, Congregations; between neighbouring Church institutions, organizations, associations, groups, leaders, members, generations; between generations of missionaries, between genders, colours, castes, classes, age-groups, ethnic groups, religious groups; between foreigners and indigenous communities, better off people and poorer people, between teacher and student, parent and child, formator and formee, religious clergy and diocesan clergy, clergy and laity, authorities and subjects. It is truly a great mission to bring healing to hurt people.

In the pastoral context we come across a village-community, parish-community, a religious community or a province that retains negative memories in relationship to persons who exercised authority over them at an earlier period. It reminds us religious leaders, who exercise any sort of authority at any level, to develop a sense of responsibility for never taking advantage of our position for selfish ends, which would leave bitter memories behind. The entire prophetic tradition stands against any religious authority that draws profit his call. Things misused in this manner are emptied of their sacredness (temple, law, traditions, practices, devotions). Every believer has a religious duty to contribute to the healing of such negative memories and the consequences of such negative experiences. It is a joy-generating mission.

Having worked in the area of reconciliation between communities in conflict for about two decades, I know the meaning of 'collective anger'. It is terrible. The work of **anger-reduction** has become central to our missionary service almost everywhere in our times: anger of class against class, caste against caste, ethnic group against ethnic group, tribe against tribe, religious group against religious group, ideologies against ideologies, theological vision against theological vision, economic interest against economic interest, national ambition against national ambition, political alliance against political alliance. Can we become the '**Lambs of God**' who take away the 'Anger of the World'? At least reduce that anger? While we sing with the angels 'Peace to men of good will' (Lk 2:14), can we help generate this 'good will', the *bona voluntas* that seems to be absent?

The main argument of Arnold Toynbee's voluminous *Study of History* is precisely that collective violence in one direction is usually a response to similar earlier violence in the opposite direction. Only a **healing of memories** can bring a less destructive world into existence. In recent years, prayer-services and commemoration of the dead are being conducted on sites associated with wars, with unhealed or unacknowledged collective wounds: Verdun, Gettysburg, Auschwitz, Hiroshima (Russ Parker, *Healing Wounded History*, Darton, Longman & Todd, London, 2001, 57). We cannot change our past, but we can change our response to the past.

15. Attend to Human Hunger for God

We have referred to the emergence of Fundamentalism in various shapes on the world scene. This new phenomenon proves at least one thing: that religion is still relevant, is alive, it influences people and society. Thank God, there has been a revival of the hunger for God even where religious faith seems to be weakening: greater interest in pilgrimages to sacred shrines, World Youth Days, apparitions, mysterious messages, the Taizé' experience of prayer; there is dynamism in ecclesial movements and charitable associations. Consecrated life is renewing itself both in traditional and in new forms inspired by the radical nature of the Gospel. People are crowding to cathedrals and shrines: to Compostella, Lourdes, Fatima or Czestachowa (Taylor 59), Vailamkani or Bandel.

Church leaders are in the news. The Christian voice is in the media. But what is really important is that the message is able to start from the **cultural assumptions and social realities** of our times. People in Asia, especially, show that they love sacred places, respect religious persons, admire spiritual depth. There is hope. Situations of poverty, injustice, corruption, and conflict call for a whisper of hope, a word of encouragement, an assurance of assistance, a vision for the future. That is what the pastoral worker offers.

16. A Pedagogy of Communication

People then are asking for something deeper than mere economic survival. But it is good to remind ourselves that when we are offering the gift of the Gospel to various categories of people, the pace of progress and styles of approach will differ according to each person's mental preparedness, psychological openness or resistance. We should never forget that there is a **Pedagogy of Communication in presenting the Faith**, which ought to be based on the religious psychology of each community/person. We need to be creative, leading each person from what is **familiar to what is less familiar**, linking new ideas with what is old in each person's tradition.

Radical changes, introduced in haste, can cause a sense of insecurity and fear, and even good suggestions may be resisted or rejected. Generally we will find it easier to win acceptance for new ideas, 1. if they are presented in a vocabulary drawn from the **ordinary parlance** of the day and with images from the **prevalent culture**, 2. if we establish a relationship between the old and the new, 3. If we build bridges linking proposed **ideas with people's needs**.

17. Every Person is Unique

In this noble mission we cannot adopt the 'herd approach'. It is not enough that we 'proclaim' the message loud and clear, with energy and conviction, having confidence in the truth we hold. Nor will a professional approach alone convince: e.g. preaching like politicians, canvassing like commercial agents, seeking attention like professional communicators, using technical devices like media personnel. Society is used to these stunts. They have become resistant to cheap advertizers. People have different notions of truth and different sense of obligation how to relate to it; different concepts of religion and different understanding of its relevance to their lives; different sets of personal values and different depths in which they have appropriated them.

Every person is unique. We have to come on the wavelength of each person in a totally unique way. Jesus caught Zacchaeus at the moment of his curiosity, Mathew at the height of his profit-making performance, the Roman Centurion while engaged in his duty of executing criminals. Philip caught up with the Ethiopian reading a scriptural text; Paul convinced Lydia in her interest in winning new customers for her produce while they listened to the apostle. The list is long, but each can be studied with interest. Almost no two cases seem perfectly to match with each other.

18. Expose People, not to our Skills, but to our Faith

But in every case the personality and **creative instinct of the Evangelizer** seem to play a big role. Many an evangelizer is 'insecure' and afraid to let his/her dialogue partners come too close to him. His fear is that his partner's scrutinizing eyes will size him up and give weight to his words accordingly. He feels that his personality is none too flattering. His worry is legitimate, for his words cannot have greater value than he himself.

This is the reason why we are happy to expose people to our scholarship, our eloquence, our teaching skills, our organizing techniques, our institutional structures, but not to ourselves and to our faith. When we are less than God-centred, dedicated, egoless, other-oriented, generous, kindly and warm-hearted, we seem to be everything except what the Gospel wants us to be. That is the reason for our confusion. That is the reason why our words do not have convincing power and we have long lost the skills of persuasion. **Mother Teresa's whisper** moved millions.

19. Jesus' Style of Using Images, of Adapting Himself to People

It is to Jesus and his style of communicating that we look most of all. In him we find staggering diversity in communicating: various forms of dramatization, drawing a lesson after a healing or the performance of a miracle, censuring Peter with a look, using images with stunning effect, taking dialogue with individuals to depths. The pedagogy he uses is amazing.

In his communicating styles we experience power. We notice diversity in:

His parables,
acted parables (the cursing of the fig tree, washing of the feet),
comparisons,
spontaneous outbursts in the context of real life situations,
raising of voice,
styles of dramatization (calling a child to the centre 'Unless you become like this little child', writing on the ground, mixing of saliva with the soil),
convincing tone in challenging mightier forces (the 'Woe to you' passages),
openness to those beyond the fold (Syro-Phoenician woman, Roman Centurion),

20. Jesus was Attentive to Others' Way of Thinking, Mental World

What is interesting to note is that Jesus was extremely attentive to others' **inner world** which enabled him to dialogue with them at depth. Since he was able to read the minds and thoughts of others before he spoke, his responses were relevant and purposeful:

Mathew 9:4 says "Jesus perceived what they were **thinking**".
Luke 6:8 says, "But Jesus knew their **thoughts**".
Luke 9:47 "Jesus knew what they were **thinking**"
Luke 11:17 "But Jesus knew what they were **thinking**, so he said to them...".
Mathew 12:25 we read, "Jesus knew what they were **thinking**, so he said to them..."

For this reason his words made a deep impression on people.

In a similar way, a Christian communicator should try to acquire a respectful understanding the **mind** of others if he/she wishes to be successful in the **Mission of Persuasion**: e. g. in the work of evangelization, formation, education, invitation to upright living. He must discern and interpret the mentality and attitudes of those persons to whom he wishes to offer his Message. This is required both in order to avoid imprudent and irrelevant approaches to different people and to communicate convincingly. Many preachers are satisfied if they are confident about the content of their message and are eager to speak loud and strong, at times adopting a provocative and confrontational tone. It is counter-productive.

21. Jesus Sensitive to Others' Feelings, Emotional World

Jesus' competence was not only in the area of **thoughts**, but also in the area of **feelings**. He was able to fathom the unexpressed feelings and longings of others so that he responded or intervened helpfully. He delved into the world of **emotions** and addressed them. He had a 'human' approach to persons and adopted a 'personal' tone in speaking to individuals, e.g. the Samaritan woman, the woman taken in adultery, the one who washed his feet, the Syro-Phoenician woman, Martha, Mary, Zacchaeus, Nathaniel, Thomas.

He expressed his compassion for the crowds. For example, we read in Mark 8:2 "Jesus called his disciples to him and said, 'I feel **sorry** for these people, because they have been with me for three days, and now have nothing to eat'". He was **deeply troubled** thinking of Judas (Jn 13:21). And again, "He came closer to the city, and when he saw it, he **wept** over it" (Lk 19:41). Jesus wept at the tomb of Lazarus (Jn 11:35),

There are times when we have a mission to weep. **Lamentation** is also a part of the prophetic ministry, especially when we feel totally helpless before an evil or a tragedy that is too much for us to handle at a given time; like today, when we hear of millions of abortions, worldwide violence, corruption at every level, collapse of moral values. Pope Francis spoke recently of the need to weep before gross violence.

By lamentation in this context, I mean, making our grief evident. Even silent suffering has eloquence. The silent presence of a Mother Teresa or a Mahatma Gandhi changed the mood of an entire society at a given time.

22. Jesus' Teaching was Relevant because it was nearly Always in Response to Actual Questions

Much of Jesus' message was given in response to **questions** which revealed the minds of the questioners. For example we see Jesus responding to the question:

Matthew 15:2 "Why is that your disciples disobey the teaching handed down by our ancestors?"

Mark 10:2 "Tell us, does our Law allow a man to divorce his wife?"

Luke 13:24 "Sir, will just a few people be saved?"

Luke 18:18-19 "Good Teacher, what must I do receive eternal life?"

Mt 19:16; Mt 21:28; Mk 7:5; Lk 5:30; 10:29; 10:40; 11:45; 18:26; 20:33; Jn 1:48; 2:18

It may be good for us to ask whether our **passing on of the faith** is mere transmitting of information-packages. Are we merely handing on mere textbook answers, readymade, stereotyped, cold, uncommitted, impersonal, ideology-influenced answers? Are we specializing ourselves in answering questions that no one is asking today (though asked centuries ago and gone into our textbooks, or giving answers that satisfy only fellow-academicians), and failing to answer those that are actually being asked by individuals in personal agony and communities caught in collective bitterness?

23. Jesus Deepens Understanding through Questioning

One thing is to understand a message and find it acceptable. It is quite another thing to address it to someone's depths. For great indeed is the **mystery** of our Faith (1 Tim 3:16). "How deep are your thoughts!", the Psalmist exclaims (Ps 92:5), and few are those who penetrate them. But those who do, become capable of offering a profound message to others. The book of Proverbs says, "A person's words can be a source of wisdom, **deep as the ocean**, fresh as the flowing stream" (Pro 18:4).

We **Asians esteem depth**. The heart of Inculturation in Asia is to work for this depth, not merely to open Ashrams, or wear indigenous religious garbs (Mahatma Gandhi studiously avoided it), or concentrate on any external adaptations.

Jesus seeks to deepen the understanding of his listeners by eliciting reflection through intelligent **questioning**. Many great teachers of the past like Socrates and Buddha, adopted the same method. Often he takes his disciples aside and puts them questions to invite thought and deepen reflection.

Mark 3:4 "What does our law allow us to do on the Sabbath? To help or to harm?"

Luke 12:42 "Who, then, is the faithful and wise servant?"

Luke 20:44 "David called him 'Lord'; how, then, can the Messiah be David's descendent?"

Luke 7:42 "...so he cancelled the debt of both. Which one, then, will love him more?"

Luke 10:26 "What do the Scriptures say? How do you interpret them?"

There are times when he answers a question by asking another question, Mk 10:2-3 "Tell us, does our Law allow a man to divorce his wife?" Jesus answers with a question, "What law did Moses give you?" Similarly, when he was asked at Mark 11:28-29 "What right have you to do these things? Who gave you this right?" Jesus answered, "I will ask you just one question... Where did John's right to baptize come from: was it from God or from man?"

There is **passion** in Jesus' questions on occasions. For example we read at Mark 8:17-20 "Why are you discussing about not having any bread? Don't you know or understand yet? Are your minds so dull? You have eyes-- can't you see? You have ears-- can't you hear? Don't you remember when I broke the five loaves for the five thousand people? How many baskets full of leftover pieces did you take up?...And when I broke the seven loaves for the four thousand people, how many baskets full of leftover pieces did you take up?"

24. Jesus Understood the Fragile and Uncertain Nature of Human Beings

Jesus could interpret the thoughts and emotions of people, because he had reflected on the **nature of human beings**. This enabled him to act in each occasion as required by the situation, "Jesus did not trust himself to them, because he knew them all. There was no need for anyone to tell him about them, because he himself knew what was in their hearts" (Jn 2:24-25).

Those who profess to be Evangelizers and Christian Communicators should be **experts in human nature** in the diverse contexts of their ministry so as to respond intelligently in each situation. "We who are strong (in this context: well prepared, educated, enlightened, well trained and formed, having authority, senior) ought to bear with the failings of the weak" (Rom 15:1). That is precisely the prophetic mission of the better instructed: to understand, to encourage and to help.

25. Encouraging Diverse Paths

Moreover, within the Christian tradition there are diverse spiritual paths to God. There is no single roadmap. It never helps to look down upon the other person's ways of reaching out to God. Let me suggest you a few examples.

1. Some are inclined to a purely **intellectual understanding of religion** explaining things in philosophical and unemotional terms with a great sense of clarity and objectivity. They look down upon pious practices, devotional objects, religious observances, and emotional expressions of their faith.

2. However, today there is a renewed understanding and appreciation of **popular piety** and devotions. Anthropologists tell us that human beings can make their life together meaningful only through the use of rituals and symbolisms, that they are held together by myth and mystery; and that they need the help of concrete objects they can see and touch in order to grapple with the invisible.

3. A third group feels strongly drawn to **social commitment**. For them, religious faith makes no meaning if it does not commit itself to justice issues, human rights, social development, generous service, prophetic

denunciation, struggles for freedom and equality. They consider popular devotions superstitious and a philosophic intellectual approach to religion elitist and supercilious.

4. Another group still is inclined to the **mystical**. They are drawn to **contemplative life**, keep themselves distant from day-to-day affairs, and are not impressed by the achievements of the other groups. They value apartness and depth.

Besides these four that I have mentioned, there can be other emphases in expressing our faith too. People of different cultures and civilizations may feel inclined in one direction or the other. No one is complete without the other. If each group makes an effort to avoid exaggerations and remains self-critical, and recognize the contribution of others, the Church would be a happy place indeed. Life, after all, is continuous accommodation to each other.

26. Developing a Sense of Strategy, Making Space for Miracles

In our apostolate, we know that we cannot do everything that we would like to do. But there are times when what we actually do is very small but the result is immeasurably great. Repeatedly this has happened in the lives of great missionaries and/or even in our own personal lives. Such things happen especially in the lives of people who have a **sense of strategy**, which yield fruits out of proportion to the energies and resources they put in. In the communication context, it is like the use of a mike; the effect is amplified. It is the Lord who works **miracles**, and he seems to do so often taking us by surprise. He makes our small contribution acquire unforeseen fruitfulness.

Referring to missionary work, I would speak of **strategic places, times, work....** and also of **persons** with unique potential, often hidden from themselves and others. In the context of our limited energies, resources, competences and personnel, there is no other way than make the best of what we have, to take more out than we usually do in our lack of creativity. I should not pronounce myself on what that should be in this fast changing situation. Being creative in this way is where our best energies should be spent. Nor do I underestimate the humblest forms of apostolate done locally, in isolated places, nor the personal human approach and simple styles of doing which always remain irreplaceable. There is always room for **creativity** that makes of the little things we do work unexpected miracles.

What we do may be small, but the result it yields is “**Wonderful** in our eyes!” (Ps 118:23). Our contribution may be five loaves and two fishes, but five thousand people are fed at a given time. There are so many expressions in our Christian tradition to point to the insignificance of our human contribution, but the immeasurable returns the Lord gives when he chooses. Let us look at expressions like these: Dan 3:11-18, what we offer is a humble and contrite heart, but the Lord accepts it like thousands of holocausts. After all, God’s calculations differ greatly from ours; for him a thousand years are like one day, 2 Pet 3:8. “One day in your courts is better than a thousand elsewhere” (Ps 84:10). The soft whisper of a heartfelt prayer may transform the entire world at a given time; a word in the ear or a pat on the back can change the direction of history, if done in the right place, in the right way, to the right person... if you only believe that this is possible.

He is able to “do so much more than we can ask for, or even think of”. But it will be “by means of his power working in us” (Eph 3:20). We must play our part. Our creativity must make space for God’s miracles. We pray, Lord “in the abundance of your kindness surpass the merits and desires of those who entreat you...give what prayer does not dare to ask” (27th Sunday of the year).

27. Sharing the Gospel is Something Simple, not merely for Specialists

We have come a long way and discussed many things. I may have given the impression that sharing the Gospel is an extremely difficult task, almost impossible. On the contrary, it is something **simple**. Evangelization's central concern is not the transmission of an elaborate doctrinal system accumulated over twenty centuries. That would be a frightening proposal. What is more, there would be few takers. People to whom Christianity is unfamiliar would easily turn their backs. Even new Christians would grow anxious. Old Christians who have abandoned their traditions would move to a more helpless position.

Lineamenta no. 23 of the Synod for New Evangelization assures Evangelizers that passing on of the faith is **not a mission merely of specialists**. It is the task for all. The words of Pope Benedict XVI in this regard are most encouraging: "Christianity is not a highly complicated collection of so many dogmas that it is impossible for anyone to know them all; ...it is **something simple**: God exists and God is close in Jesus Christ" (Benedict XVI speaking to priests in July 2007, See Collins 2010:11).

28. Pastoral Care is Radical Commitment: Generosity to the Last

On a continent as vast and various as Asia, it is not easy to define and put into a few words how this "simple" service should be rendered. There are parts in West Asia where the very existence of the Christian community is under threat. There are areas where, while internal worship may be tolerated, but any form of sharing the Gospel beyond the Church premises would be impossible. Then there are areas/nations where the Catholic community is a feeble minority. There are also areas where they form a sturdy minority. But only in the Philippines and East Timor do the Catholics constitute a majority. However, even where the Catholic community is a sizable number, there would be **differences**: where freedom is limited various ways, with reference to the running institutions, the manner of administering them, the manner of propagating the Faith, the possibility of holding public events, etc.

It is difficult for me to be very specific about parish organization when even neighbouring regions differ greatly in situations and possibilities (old Catholics, new Catholics, urban, rural, industrial, agricultural, tribal, belonging to the majority community or to the minority, to a specific caste, within democracies of various shades of differences, under Hindu/Muslim/Buddhist/totalitarian administrations).

But what I would like to emphasize in every context is that a Catholic parish is not predominantly an administrative structure, a controlling and disciplining organ, but a space for **radical commitment** to a community and through it to the rest of the Church and the whole of Humanity. Each pastoral person takes seriously these words of Jesus, "I am the good shepherd, who is willing to die for the sheep... I am willing to die for them" (Jn 10:11,15). And if the wheat "does die, then it produces many grains" (Jn 12:24).

Pastoral care means, as Paul Simon sings, to lay yourself down like a bridge over troubled water (Nouwen 59)

29. Key to Pastoral Success Relationship, it Multiplies Joy

If there is anything that I would emphasize most of all in a parish context, it is **Relationship**. As Jesus said, "The Father and I are one" (Jn 10:30), "I am in my Father and you are in me..." (Jn 14:20), he also said, "As I know the Father knows me I know the Father, in the same way I know my sheep and they know me (Jn 10:14-15). This entire Chapter of John, in fact, the entire Last Supper Discourse is intense with references to **relationships**. It is in this context of warm-hearted relationship, that a look of Jesus, **a gesture**, a touch, a word, **a tear**, a sigh, and even silence made a big difference. It is to this relationship he sought to invite others who were beyond the fold (Jn 10:16). We must belong; Evangelization is **invitation to this belongingness**.

In this context, we understand the importance of **pastoral visits** to the '**periphery**': villages, slums, urban corners, forgotten flats, homes; of meeting people, **dialoguing** with individuals, conversing with families,

meeting groups of fellow pastoral workers, women, young people, children. It is in this spirit of strengthening, diversifying and multiplying relationships, and animating people in relationship-contexts that we organize parish events: feasts, devotions, retreats, family encounters; meetings of different groups, associations, categories of people. In spite of the benefit of technology, efficiency tips, management techniques, organizational skills, Jesus' Message that is effectively passed on is in the context of Relationships. That is why even in the context of our big administrative setups and mighty pastoral gatherings, we need to create **spaces of personal encounters**, sharing, praying and witnessing.

The Universe itself is a network of relationships: atoms, subatomic particles, solar system, galaxies. Living beings themselves are interrelated and mutually dependent. In pastoral contexts too we must respect various forms of **organic relationships** that exist already or spring up in answer to new needs, or arise under inspiration from creative individuals. So we respect living traditions, local devotions, indigenous ways of expressing faith, natural networks of relationships; new inspirations prompting creative forms of spiritual self-expressions, ways of organizing charity, **solidarity**; mutual help and mutual correction.

It is in this manner that we develop the skill of **Persuasion** in the service of Evangelization or pastoral follow-up. We are careful never to use words and *expressions that may hurt*, we ever remain sensitive, we never entertain negative attitudes towards those who have abandoned Catholic traditions or Christian values. We teach with humility. We draw people to God with **affection**. We are open to new thoughts and ideas, we never take offense, we never consider anyone beyond our pastoral concern. We have a good word to/about even an opponent.

30. Attempt the 'Impossible' even When We Fail, that is the Law of Life **"Life Grows by Being Given Away", The Joy of the Gospel 10**

I know I am expecting the 'impossible'. However, unless we attempt the 'impossible' it would be impossible to follow the one who said, "You must be perfect--just as your Father in heaven is perfect" (Mt 5:48). Yes, without wanting it, every day we attempt the 'impossible' when we try to be good and we fail. That is what makes me feel **sympathy** for those **young people** who feel pulled in the direction of consumer goods on the one hand and erratic ideologies on the other.

In the same way, I would have compassion on pastoral persons who are lost between heavy administrative responsibilities and uncertain theologies. If in addition they are over-burdened with pastoral work itself (with large Catholic population, in context of cultural differences and lack of cooperation, internal division, etc), the need for true compassion is complete. However it is in this context that we understand the message of Pope Francis who says "Life grows by being given away... Indeed, those who enjoy life most are those who leave security on the shore and become excited by the mission of communicating life to others" (EG 10).

31. Learn to Sympathize with Human Weaknesses as Pope Francis Does

While we need to be always cautious of weaknesses in human nature, we need to have a sympathetic understanding of the fragility that continues to cling to human persons. Jesus knew what was in human **nature**, says Jn 2:24-25, because he was aware of the evil inclinations in their nature. This enabled him to act in each case as required by the situation, "Jesus did not trust himself to them, because he knew them all. There was no need for anyone to tell him about them, because he himself knew what was in their hearts" (Jn 2:24-25).

Those who profess to be evangelizers and Christian communicators should be **experts in human nature** in the diverse contexts of their ministry so as to respond intelligently in each situation. "We who are strong (in this context: well prepared, educated, enlightened, well trained and formed, having authority, senior) ought to bear with the failings of the weak" (Rom 15:1). That is precisely the prophetic mission of the better instructed: to understand, to encourage and to help.

32. In Asia the Best Evangelizer is a Person Who is Deep and is a Source of Inspiration

Evangelization in Asia is an invitation to return to her spiritual roots. It is not about technological modernization, but personalizing and living the prayer of the **Asian searcher** who cried, “It is your face, O Lord that I seek, hide not your face”. Moses spoke to God face to face (Dt 34:10). It is only people who have had a similar encounter with Jesus that can share the Message meaningfully. They can say with truth “That which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have touched upon with our hands...we proclaim” (1 Jn 1:1-3).

Such announcers become **signs of God’s concern for humanity**. They become like the Father “Who makes his sun to shine on bad and good people alike, and gives rain to those who do good and to those who do evil” (Mt 5:45). They are **witnesses** rather than mere teachers. For them what are most important are inner qualities. In such persons religious zeal never turns into fundamentalism. On the contrary, they remain open to all peoples, cultures, ideas, and points of view. Most of all, they burn with zeal for the concerns of the poor and the neediest, as does Pope Francis.

They strongly believe in Ecumenism and Dialogue. They respect diversity. Their promotion of justice is non-aggressive, their defence of the Christian community is non-provocative, their approach to complex social problems is non-confrontational. They work for peace and reconciliation at the most profound level. They are committed to social causes: education, health, justice, peace, development, poverty-elimination, protection of the environment, elimination of corruption, violence, misuse of the media; of erosion of cultures and loss of values. But every achievement of theirs in the external field points Beyond.

They are intent on promoting shared effort among people of all convictions; they encourage co-search, joint exploration, study together. They stand for free but responsible expression of views, reflection in humility, complementary and mutually respectful roles. They pass on the same spirit to their colleagues, priests, religious, seminarians, and the laity, SCC’s. They keep learning from those who succeeded in various fields of their activity, whether in the religious field or secular field. They seek to learn even from their opponents. They exert themselves in defence of the family that is being threatened, promote community values that are being forgotten, they do everything possible to restore damaged heritages among Asian cultures, including contemplative longing, sense of the sacred, capacity for wonder and mystery, ability to help people to think, search deep, and explore for meaning.

A most powerful message is passed on to society when the bearer of the Jesus’ Message emerges as an in **inspiration in the wider world**. Fr. David May of Madonna House says, ‘inspiration’ is not only for solution to problems, but for generating the required energy. It comes from the cultivation of hope. That is what the profounder person, the contemplative believer does.

Hope is generated in prayer and in keeping close to God (Restoration, October 2014).

Useful Reading

- Aldridge, Alan, Religion in the Contemporary World, Polity Press, Cambridge, 2007
- Berger, Peter, A rumour of Angels.; Modern Society and Rediscovery of the Supernatural, Doubleday Anchor Books, New York, 1970
- Bruce, S., Fundamentalism, Cambridge:Polity, 2000
- Collins, Pat, Basic Evangelization, The Columba Press, Dublin, 2010
- Durkheim, E., The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life, Allen & Unwin, London, 1915
- Edwards, David L., Christianity: The First Two Thousand Years, Orbis Books, New York, 1997
- Hervieu-Leger, Religion as a Chain of Memory, Rutgers University Press, New Jersey, 2000
- Bruce, Steve, Secularization, Oxford University Press, London, 2011
- Collins, Pat, Basic Evangelization, The Columba Press, Dublin, 2010

Elst Koenraad, Decolonizing the Hindu Mind, Rupa & Co., New Delhi, 2001
Elst, Koenraad, The Saffron Swastika, Voice of India, New Delhi, 2001
Jankunas, Gedeminas, Dictatorship of Relativism, Society of St. Paul, New York, 2011
Nowen, Henry, Seeds of Hope, Bantam Books, New York, 1990
Parker, Russ Parker, Healing Wounded History, Darton, Longman & Todd, London, 2001
Simmel, Essays on Religion, Yale University Press, New Haven, 1997
Taylor, Charles, A Secular Age, The Belknap Press (Harvard), Massachusetts, 2007
Wilson, B.R. Religion in Sociological Perspective, Oxford University Press, London, 1982

The End

FABC-00C