

Vol. 26 No. 6 & No. 7
Double Issue
15th May

SEDOS

bulletin
1994

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SEDOS Research Seminar, May 1994

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SPECIAL DOUBLE ISSUE

SEDOS Secretariate is happy to present to you in this double issue of June/July the excellent conferences given at our four-day residential seminar at Villa Cavalletti, near Frascati. It was the last time that a SEDOS seminar could be held there. This is the moment therefore, to thank the Jesuit community and the Sisters for the many years of hospitality they gave to SEDOS.

One hundred religious from 55 congregations came together to reflect on the situation of the missionary Church in Asia. In the first of two sessions we concentrated on three countries of great importance in Asia: **India, Japan and China**. While the political and economic importance of Asia is growing steadily, the Church must reflect on how she can bear witness in an increasingly modernised Asia.

Ms MICHIKO OTA, gave us a critical but hopeful vision of the possibilities of the Church in Japan. How can the Church become more relevant to Japanese society? *The Church in Japan*, was the title of her two conferences. She insisted that what Japan needs is Christ, but a Christ embodied for Japanese people. Michiko touched on the role of Japan in the contemporary international situation, its history, and its special place in the inter-Asian context. She elaborated especially on NICE I and II (National Incentive Convention for Evangelisation). In spite of the limitations, the Church carries hope into the future.

Father *GEORGE SOARES-PRABHU, SJ.*, confronted the actual Indian Church with its main challenge: *The Indian Church Challenged by Poverty and Caste*. In a most interesting review of the situation in India, he showed us how the Church has to take up this major issue: not only a general form of the option for the poor, but an option in the special Indian context, the Castes which permeate all realities. In *The Indian Church Challenged by Pluralism and Dialogue*, he elaborated on another essential dimension of the Church in India. The Indian Churches are called to dialogue among themselves, and then to an inter-religious Dialogue which is for them an every day form of missionary activity.

Father *JOHN TONG* gave a very comprehensive presentation of the situation of the Church in Continental China: *The Developing Catholic Church in China*. He showed us how the present situation must be understood against China's current political, economic and cultural background, which is of course fast evolving. An observer must understand the present religious policy and the institutions implementing them. He elaborated extensively on the evolution and the complex realities of the Church. Father Tong is convinced that other Churches can learn from the Church in China. As a Catholic, residing in Hong Kong, he stressed the importance of the Hong Kong Community as a "Bridge Church".

SEDOS Executive Committee, and the participants who greatly enjoyed the seminar, would like to thank the three speakers for their excellent conferences. We would also like to thank the nine panelists for their contributions; their insights greatly enrich this Double issue.

SEMINAR SPEAKERS

Ms *Michiko Ota* was born into a Presbyterian family in Japan. She studied at universities in the USA, Jerusalem, Germany and the Pontifical Institute in Rome, where she specialised in Old Testament Exegesis. During her studies in Rome she became a Catholic. She served many years on the Translators Commission and as the Editor-in-Residence for The Old Testament and worked on the project of translating the Bible into Japanese. Ms Ota is currently Secretary General and member of the Board of Directors of the "Hand of Peace" in Osaka, a Catholic non-governmental organisation in Japan.

Father *George Soares-Prabhu* was born in India. He joined the Jesuit order and studied Exegeses at the Biblical Institute in Rome. Father George has been teaching many years at the Jesuit Major Seminary and Theological Faculty at PUNE, in India. Father Soares is well known for his publications and conferences on different topics of sacred scripture, and for his contributions on missionary spirituality in an Asian context. He has also treated many questions of missiology and inculturation, basic to the life of the Indian Church.

Father *John Tong*, is a Chinese Diocesan Priest of the Archdiocese of Hong Kong. At the moment he is the Vicar General of the Archdiocese. Father Tong is a specialist on China, well known through his publications on the Church in China. He has lectured on different occasions in Europe. Father Tong regularly visits communities in Continental China. He also serves as Director of the *Holy Spirit Study Centre* in Hong Kong, where the development of the Church in China is accompanied and studied.



THE CHURCH IN JAPAN

Michiko Ota

General Introductory Remarks:

I come to your Seminar not alone on my own, but representing the "Hand of Peace" and over a thousand very seriously concerned Christians -- Japanese and foreign missionaries -- who expect great things to come out of this gathering of Christ's Body in Japan.

I held many meetings with those concerned persons about what I should be saying to you, as I felt I should bring to you as many opinions as I could collect from among those who are really desperately fighting to salvage our poor, sinking boat of Peter that is the Japanese Church.

We are going to say some critical things about the Japanese Church. To make an appeal to you within this limited time of 2 and a half hours or so, I needed to cut out many general things from my presentation, but you, as person in positions of responsibility, certainly possess a certain amount of information supplied by your brothers and sisters in Japan.

Let me only suggest that you re-examine *what type of persons* your missionaries in Japan are surrounded with. Even if they have been a long time in Japan and speak fluent Japanese, very often foreigners, especially missionaries, are at the mercy of those locals who surround them to formulate their picture of Japan. (This is also true of diplomats).

For me, the central issue of Christianity is "Shalom", which can be translated as "wholesomeness". It is the joint effort of God and humans, to restore the wholesomeness of the Creation, and as such, it seeks to liberate, and restore human dignity and rights to those deprived of them.

The dynamics of this is as follows: the Bible presents human beings as independent,

autonomous individual beings of complete freedom. Next, the Bible presents the human society as an autonomous community of such beings, who are capable of living independently yet join this community out of their own free choice and decision. For such a human society, the Bible presents "Yahweh" as its central principle of life. Yahweh is, of course, the name of the Lord of Israel, and at the same time Yahweh is the *raison-d'être* of such a society. Yahweh was the way of life, the central principle, though which a piece of land was to become the Promised Land in the Old Testament.

Jesus was almost stoned to death as He identified Himself with Yahweh in His "ego eimi" (Gospel of John). In the New Testament this Yahweh-ego eimi was to free the search for the Promised Land (Kingdom of God/Heaven) from being a geographical point, into that which was to be fulfilled in the human relationship in the name of Jesus.

Jesus quoted from His Bible: Human beings are not to live by bread alone, but also by the word of God. The bread is the material richness, the word of God is what gives the life, the capacity to organise the material into a life-giving force. Without the word of God, the bread turns itself into a destructive force.

We must bring this truth to Japanese society -- we must evangelise it. Japan has an intense technical ability. If she is not taught, directed by the Word of God, she will destroy the world.

Japan's society is a technical/technological potentiality, but curiously, it is devoid of the strength of *logos*. Lacking training in freedom of thought, the Japanese are easily regimented into obedience to authority, and enslave themselves to the earthly values made easily accessible by the authority controlling them. This is the strange stamp of Japanese materialism. The

role of the Church, then, certainly is to liberate Japan from her obsession with the bread so that she can find life for herself and for others in the Word of God.

I bring to you a most cordial greeting from the Archbishop Paul Yasuda of Osaka, the president of the board of directors of "Hand of Peace", as well as from all those (of whom I spoke at the beginning) - members of "Hand of Peace" and other groups, who wish to speak to you through me.

I should like to add to their greeting my gratefulness for your mission, the 120 years of effort for evangelisation, of which I am a product.

I. JAPAN IN THE CONTEXT OF CONTEMPORARY INTERNATIONAL SITUATION.

A. Introductory Remarks:

1) In dealing with such themes as "evangelisation" or "inculturation" the Church should place herself in the broad context of the social, economic, and political realities of the current world situation and the position of Japan in them.

Only in that context can the mode of evangelisation be adequately determined. Without taking into consideration Japan's specific role and responsibilities for the present and future of the international community efforts at "inculturation" of Christianity will have more regressive effects on the Church, as one is inclined, even if unconsciously, to put emphasis on the past rather than on what Japan actually is and wishes to become.

2) The Church often refers to herself as though she were a separate entity outside of what she refers to as "the society/the world". When she says, for example, in many of her publications, that the Church must be "open to the society", where does she think she is, in Heaven?

Taking such an attitude, of not considering herself as a part of the society, she endangers her own *raison d'être*, her mission on earth and becomes an irrelevant and obsolete institution, seldom offering effective messages to society.

B. Some of the Current World Problems that the Japanese Church should be Aware of:

The Church must study carefully the position of Japan vis-à-vis the immense suffering of the contemporary world. Yet she appears to be indifferent or incapable in general, and a small minority of concerned Christians, usually active in organisations such as "Justice and Peace", "Hand of Peace", ACO and the like, feel a great deal of frustration.

GROUP

At the beginning of the Seminar all of us confessed to very little understanding of the Church in the countries of Asia under discussion. Our three speakers have enabled us to see why this is so and have taught us to approach the subject as "holy ground".

Having Reflected on these Holy Grounds

We leave convinced of:

- *the need for all Churches, even minority Churches, to be prophetic,*
- *the need for reconciliation everywhere, between Churches, groups and individuals,*
- *the primacy of witness over teaching,*
- *the need to listen and learn before teaching.*

We are indebted to Fr George for showing us what the Church in India has to offer Hinduism, i.e. social justice. What Hinduism has to offer us, i.e. tolerance and non-violence and for demonstrating that while the Church must stand by the poor, there is need of a presence at the top to change structures.

Fr Tong's Panel's exposition and the panel on the many Christian activities in China and Hong Kong unknown to most of us gave us great hope for the future.

Michiko has impressed on us the need for support and solidarity with prophets, who will bring new vision to a "contented" Church. In her, we see a prophet in action.

1) Concerning the East-West conflicts after the collapse of USSR:

The Church is mute as to the explosion of conflicts in many newly independent political entities which had to pretend to be submissive under the strong hegemony exercised by USSR for nearly half a century. These manifest intense power struggles among political elites and technocrats at the sacrifice of the welfare of the citizens. In this situation, one fears an intractable dispersion of nuclear technology, technicians, and even of arms, to some belligerent States in the Third World who are ready to offer big sums of money, and an increasing incapacity to control nuclear arms and nuclear power plants, which threaten global security.

Furthermore, increasing bloodshed over ethnic-religious-economic clashes of interests, such as demonstrated intensely and typically in former Yugoslavia, should be a warning to the Church that she be conscientised to the consequences of fundamental neglect or even rejection of spiritual education under an extremely materialist regime. Japan, though under a different guise, neglects spiritual elements in human development, places excessive emphasis on technical excellence out of her peculiarly materialist values, and is suffering already from symptoms of inner collapse of her post-war generations. Many Christian families look with anxiety toward so-called mission schools, wondering if they would ever be capable of taking a creative position against this tendency.

2) Pax Americana is just as dangerous to the Church as Pax Romana was to the Early Church and as Pax Assyria to ancient Israel. This is not peace -- it is only a fragile "balance of power", the power of armed forces.

Even more threatening to the advance of the Church into the 21st century is the reactionary tendencies against the spirit of *aggiornamento* of Vatican II, which one seems to feel in some publications of Rome, reflecting perhaps the upward surge of neo-Nazism or neo-Fascism in Europe.

3) The North-South imbalance seems to be increasing. The Church has not yet really spoken out against the Japanese involvement, or rather, initiative, in multinational econ-

omic/technological imperialism which further impoverishes the Third World.

Neither is the Church fighting effectively against the syndicated trafficking of small arms, narcotics, slaves, and human internal organs -- dreadful examples of institutionalised evils, which demand sacrifice of the lives of the poor.

4) Though the Church is attached to Palestine as the Holy Land, or because she does so, she does not seem to be aware of the realities of the "Palestinian question". She sends out many pilgrimage tours without really understanding about the historical Catholic role in anti-Semitism, or about the part we, as one of the "North", play in Arab-Israeli conflicts. The Church should be playing, it is sincerely hoped, an important role in their reconciliation, as Japan is about the only "North" nation which has no anti-semitic record, owing to the fact that it is not Christian.

5) Japan, yet immature in international diplomacy, takes rather a simplest attitude of idealising the UN, and does not or will not discern its serious internal problems of structural hypertrophy and bureaucratizing, lack of transparency in accountability, discrepancies among the member nations as to capacity, purpose, or ideology, and of the inevitable conflicts between its supposed neutrality and actual exercise of power called PKO.

Because the UN serves increasingly the super-powers as their proxy, the roles of NGO's in the international conflict scenes gain more serious recognition. The Church should not forget that the Judeo-Christian social concerns two thousand years ago were the first and original NGO's of the world. The Church should restructure her agents of *diakonia*, such as *Caritas*, in order that the Church be able to serve the world more effectively.

C. The Church should Assist Japan in Her Role in Promotion of Peace

1) What is known to the world as the "Japanese Peace Constitution" is the political-historical product of the American Occupation Forces in Japan at the conclusion of World War II, and some Japanese, especially reactionary politicians, consider it as imposed by foreign powers.

