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## SPECIAL DOUBLE ISSUE

SE DOS 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 SE DOS 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 SE DOS.

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".

SE DOS 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.

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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.

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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.



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# THE CHURCH IN JAPAN

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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 bellicose 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.**

## PANEL

*I would like to focus on a few aspects of inculturation very much discussed in Asia and in Africa. I think inculturation should be thought of in terms of today's Japan, which is complex and quite Westernised.*

*What is important is not adopting traditional exterior forms but looking into more interior aspects, for example, how people think, feel, see, react, etc. I find what Fr Michael Amaladoss writes on this subject very helpful. Shusaku Endo, a contemporary Japanese Catholic writer, has recently written a novel entitled *Deep River*, which shows one of the ways in which Japanese people meet God. In this novel the hero meets God at the Ganges, where everything, the sacred, the dirty, the ashes of the cremated, people, animals, are all mixed together and embraced in the flow of the river. I think it is being translated into English.*

*I think biblical study is a real means of inculturation in its most authentic sense. Ecumenical translation has made a big contribution to the promotion of this study. Today it is lay people and non-Catholics who are attending Bible seminars and courses. As their quality of learning is high and their questions deep, we need opportunities which can respond to their desires.*

*Meaningful liturgy is another important aspect. Liturgy needs to be celebrated in such a way that the people of Japan can live the mystery of the life of Jesus Christ. Language is not everything, but still I feel that real creativity is needed in the area of language, especially that of the Mass. Japanese language changes, not only according to the relationship of the person speaking to the one addressed, but also depending on whether it is spoken or written. To have fixed, written language intended to be spoken to everybody, is unsatisfactory. It is we, the Church in Japan, who should work creatively to solve this problem.*

*During the morning session there was a question about religious life in Japan. I think its ambiguity and struggle are the same as in many other countries. I will say only one thing here; it should be saying clearly that there is no meaning if God does not exist. If our religious life could communicate that God exists and who Jesus Christ is to the Japanese people, I would be able to say that our religious life is inculturated.*

*Weddings in the Church in Japan might be a form of inculturation. Many non-Catholics marry in the Church. They are required to attend preparatory courses prior to the wedding. As this is a moment when young people are serious about life, there seems to be an encounter with the Gospel message for these young people.*

*(I am using the word inculturation as the encounter of the Japanese people with God, or with Jesus Christ, or with the Gospel message).*

Keiko Iwai, RSCJ



It is not important, really, *how* it came into being. What is important is that it renounces any form of war and arms bearing/production. (Existence of the Japanese Self-Defence Forces is problematic also).

The Church seems content in just having this Constitution as "pacifist", but that is not enough. Peace is not simply the absence of wars; peace, according the Bible, is the restoration of human rights for those deprived of them (Biblical word *shalom* means fullness/restoring to fullness, repaying to be fully balanced, wholesome/restoring of wholesomeness ...). Peace is not just a state, it is action -- so bring about the wholesomeness of the original Creation. The Church should consider it her specific duty, her vocation and honour to formulate a solid theology of peace, for herself first of all, in order that she can offer a solid concept of peace to Japanese society which has not yet developed it to sustain her Pacifist Constitution.

2) The Japanese Government looks for opportunities either to amend or interpret the Pacifist constitution (Article 9) in order to be able to have more involvement in world power politics. There continues to be civil movement against this Government tendency, yet it is frustrating to the citizens because they have not yet discovered a possible structure with which to balance non-involvement in military operations and active involvement in peace creation.

It is the responsibility of the Church to provide the citizens with a break-through, with a creative way of pacifist involvement in service to the suffering of the world community. What the "Justice and Peace -- Catholic Osaka", out of which "Hand of Peace" was born (cf. Prospectus of "Hand of Peace"), offered during the Gulf Crisis, was one good example. The Japanese Government tried to send out, against the Constitution, the aircraft of the Self-Defence Forces to the Gulf area "to help refugees". The "Justice and Peace" activists set up a campaign against it and called to the citizens for donations to "charter civilian aircraft" to send instead. It was an immediate and great success, and the Japanese citizens responded eagerly.

3) Japan demonstrates a peculiar hypertrophy of the State, over against the diminishing importance and growing fragility of the citizenship. There is a wide discrepancy between the Government business sectors and the civilian sector. The Japanese have yet to

develop a concept of citizenship; they have difficulty in conceptualising the rights and dignity of individual citizens.

During many centuries of feudalism, in which Japan was a closed, exclusivist society, which nurtured a thorough "island" mentality, she had not much chance of receiving outside foreign influences and stimuli, owing to the fact of not having any borders except for the seas. This allowed Japan to lead a safe life within her confines; and at the expense of the development of a dialectic ability to think she managed to attain a more or less homogeneous society obedient to regimentation at all levels of life.

## II. JAPAN IN THE CONTEXT OF CONTEMPORARY ASIAN DEVELOPMENT

### A. Introductory Remarks

Japan suffers from its own ambivalent attitude toward the other Asian nations. Japan wishes to be considered as an integral part of Asia, yet she feels herself to have become an inseparable part of the West-North complexity. She also fears that the other nations of Asia regard Japan as a sort of traitor to what the Asian community should be.

### B. Japan as an Imperialist Menace to Asia

1) The geopolitical situation of Japan has isolated it from the rest of the Asian countries. After 400 years of self-imposed exclusivist policy, Japan had the shock of being threatened in the form of "Black Ships", by the West that demanded that Japan open her ports to trade. Having escaped being colonised by the West, Japan rushed to imitate Western civilisation. She coined a phrase: "Ex-Asia In-Europe", meaning that Japan considered Asia in general as not advanced enough and that she preferred the Western civilisation and would try to attain a similar industrial standard.

But it was quite obvious that this was a disadvantaged competition, as Japan lacked necessary natural resources for industrialisation that the West had at its disposal. The Japanese Government invented a primitive yet effective national theology of imperial Shintoism, forced it upon the citizens, and the Japanese military forces burst into the rest of Asia in order to colonise it and exploit it for Japan's enrichment and security.

## PANEL

### **How I Perceive the Church in Japan and some of the Challenges to Ourselves**

*I would like to share here some of the challenges which I feel worthwhile for us to take up from my point of view as a religious:*

*Japanese society in general has become consumeristic, competitive and continues to be selfishly ambitious. Too much material security and commodity added to national selfishness only help people to feel the absence of meaning in life. That is why many Japanese especially the youth are losing, if they have not yet lost, the meaning of life.*

*Against this social current - to live a simple life in solidarity with the people who suffer inside and outside Japan has two meanings: first, that our trust and strength are not in material things but in Someone who is our only treasure; and second, that we care for the other people who are suffering. The Japanese people used to be rather austere and simple in their life-style and I think the people are still capable of perceiving what is behind the simple life: in whom or in what is placed our trust and for whom and for what we care.*

*Some ten years ago before the first NICE (National Incentive Convention, for Evangelisation), some people of the Church in Japan who had a prophetic sense became aware of the fact that Japan as a country was considering or wanting to consider itself as a part of Europe rather than of Asia as Ms Michiko Ota well explained it.*

*For us to be very aware of our Asian identity and responsibility of being in solidarity with the people of Asia is what has constantly to be worked at hard, I believe, and at the same time to be open to all the peoples, with a wide vision of the world which is divided, unjust and unequal.*

*In a society such as ours, to form an international Christian community whether it be a religious or parish community and to live in union of faith and love accepting and complementing each other and working together for the Kingdom is a great witness to the Good News of Jesus which we try to transmit.*

*Since several years the Church in Japan has been experiencing an increase in the number of Catholics, not so much because of Japanese conversions but because of the people coming from abroad to work, especially from Latin America and some of the Asian countries. Their life is not at all easy; most of them suffer much hardship and discrimination against them. The Church as a whole is trying to learn how to celebrate and work together with them and how to help them in their difficulties. They are in fact helping our Church to be more open and universal.*

*Among the different religions there exist in Japan certain peaceful and respectful relationships and ecumenism is rather active, I would say, maybe partly because our Church herself had not experienced the historical Religious reform. There are examples that both Churches have worked together in denouncing some social injustice, or to achieve some other good purposes or to celebrate the faith in the same Lord Jesus.*

*To work together for justice and peace, for a more just and fraternal society in dialogue and solidarity with the believers of different faiths, whether Christian or of other Asian Religions, is a great challenge for the Church and also for the other religions, without being satisfied only with the peaceful relationships.*

2) After the defeat of World War II, in the East-West Cold War, Japan's geopolitical situation was again in her favour, and under the protection of the security pact with the U.S. Japan was put on her feet too fast and too easily, and she took advantage of it to comfortably forget and neglect her duty of just restitution to neighbouring countries like Korea, China, the Philippines, Indonesia, and other Asian countries.

Added to this already shameful neglect, Japan is repeating the imperialist invasion, this time in the multiple forms of economic exploitation. Thus, the relationship between Japan and the rest of Asia has not only not improved, rather, it is deteriorating to a dangerous degree.

3) The Church has been slow, and in some ways is still reluctant to admit or confess her failure to protest effectively against the deeds of the imperial-military Government, and thereby to have caused so much suffering to the rest of Asia, and to the world. In this context it should be mentioned that the Church has yet to clarify her position in the co-responsibilities with the Nazi genocide and the atomic bombs dropped over Hiroshima and Nagasaki. These deeds are considered in non-Christian Asia, inclusive of Japan, as committed by the Christian West.

### **III. THE PRESENT SITUATION OF THE JAPANESE CHURCH IN THE ABOVE CONTEXT**

#### **A. Introductory Remarks**

The most frequent question posed about the Church in Japan is: Why does the Church remain so minute, after a century of intense mission efforts? Or, in the words of the interviewer of Radio Vatican: Why has the Christian religion conquered so few Japanese?

My answer is: Because we have not let Jesus try His hand at it.

The "Church", even when this word is pronounced with the best of intentions, does sound institutional. Words carry burdens of history. After Vatican II, the "Church", it has been claimed, should mean the body of the believers. Unfortunately, after 30 years, it remains yet to be seen if the words become reality. For the moment, in Japan at least, the Church remains the buildings with priests in them, where the

laity are supposed to present themselves on Sunday mornings.

#### **1) The Church Before Vatican II.**

a) The Church was introduced to Japan as an institution, and has been received as such. It was not strange to Japan, so well trained into obedience to orders from above, because of centuries of very stable and solid feudal rule. This new institution has not expanded much, as there has been no particular need for it in Japanese society.

When the first missionaries of the modern era arrived in Japan some 120 years ago, they found varied reactions among those Japanese with whom they had contact, among which were the following two opposite ones: that of easy acceptance, since it was new and "Western" yet just another hierarchical feudal system they had been accustomed to; and that of strong opposition, since they resented any more regimentation, especially a spiritual one. Out of the first was born the Catholic Church, and out of the second developed a movement called the Non-Church Christian Movement. (This, of course, is a very simplified and generalised description).

If I dare simplify further the above two attitudes out of which Christian groups came into existence in Japan, I should say that the Non-Church Christian Movement was trying to "return" to the Early Church, looking straight into the face of Jesus, and that the Catholics were comfortable in replacing the former feudal lords with bishops and samurai officials with priests, as agents of spiritual and ethical teaching.

The institution of the Catholic Church was indeed well established, though very small. Theologians occupied themselves with bewildering subtleties of dogmas, especially the Trinity, and Christ was kept up in Heaven, out of the reach of simple believers. The Christology of the New Testament was not introduced, and Jesus of Galilee was absent from the Church.

b) The word "god" was problematic. Since Japan has "eight million" gods and goddesses in her indigenous religion, Shinto, not many really bothered to ask about this new-comer god who claimed to be called "God" with a capital G. The situation seems analogous to the encounter of Yahwism with Ba'alism described in the Books of Judges -- Samuel. As a matter of fact,

Shintoism can be described as the Japanese version of Ba'alism, as both are polytheist, agricultural fertility cults connected to the land on which and out of which the followers live.

I suspect that there are such Christians to this day that are not really clear what to think when they say "God" -- not because the Church did not teach them anything, but because the Church tried too much to "prove the existence of God". She should have obeyed Jesus: He says, if anyone wishes to see God, he should come to Jesus Himself. If the Church would try simply to introduce Jesus of Galilee to Japan!

The Church loves to talk of the Nativity of Jesus. She overdoes the Christmas story, the "Manger scene". In this, Jesus appears as a hero of a success story, where a poor boy conquers the disadvantages of his lowly birth, and climbs up to the top, dies a sacrificial death and becomes a god. In Shintoism human beings become gods after death, especially if they die honourably, being faithful to their land or their people. Rather often in my teaching I meet a subtle confusion in the mind of Christians in this regard.

Considering the Buddhist teaching of paradise and life after death an easy introduction for the catechism, the Church preaches an intricate, institutionalised way of dying and going through stages of purgatory, thence to heaven or hell, depending on some ritual fulfillment of duties. The resurrection becomes problematic.

Eschaton is projected to the "end of the world" after the death of each, and accordingly it is not understood to mean the Christian aeon since the coming of Jesus. Likewise, the Creation seems to be taught, still today, as a once-for-all occurrence at the "beginning of the world", and not as an ongoing process of the work of God. As neither the Creation nor the Eschaton is the "present/now" of our Christian living, the life on earth does not take on any significance, and is not fully appreciated. If so, it is not really worth living, either, nor helping others to recover human rights.

If our life on earth is not important, then there is no need to give the followers any real model. *Imitatio Christi* becomes just a "burden" (Mt 11:28; 23:4) to bear, or laws to obey as the condition for admission to paradise after death. Jesus is not presented in the Christology of the Church as the New Human Being, an example whom we can aspire to imitate, a goal to reach.

If Jesus cannot be presented as the New Human Being, then the Body of Jesus cannot be shown as the New Human Society either. Then, the Promised Land becomes, in teaching the Old Testament, a piece of land on a map, in teaching the New Testament, the Kingdom of God becomes paradise after death. In either, the life on earth is deprived of significance.

Buddhism offers a kind of "trinity" as the seat of final authority of salvation: Buddha-Laws-Clergy. The laity is to be saved through their complete dependence on it. This has a subtle influence over the simple laity who, in addition to depending on God and dogmas, believe that a submissive attitude toward the clergy is crucial for their salvation. Added to the above mentioned "despise for this world", the "clergy" takes on extra importance as "those who abandoned the world" to save others.

## 2) The Bible

Since the hierarchic institution assumes the final authority, there remains little importance for the Bible. The Bible remains a closed book, esoteric or forbidden to general believers, many of whom still consider it vaguely as a collection of tiresome restrictions, or of some obsolete miracle stories.

After the Second Vatican Council the Pontifical Biblical Commission was formed, and with the sudden surge of ecumenical sympathies, the projects of ecumenical translation of the Bible were begun in some countries. In Japan, too, it was proposed in 1968-1970, and a team of some 45 Biblical scholars worked till 1987, when it was published. Serving at one of the translators and then as the editor-in-residence for the Old Testament, I experienced directly such lack of interest from the Church authorities in that endeavour, that the Church was not yet ready for such an undertaking.

### B. NICE I (National Incentive Convention for Evangelisation, no. I).

1) It took the Church some 20 years after Vatican II, till the Bishops' Conference finally decided to hold a national convention in the spirit of renewal. The visit in 1981 of Pope John Paul II to Japan certainly influenced the decision. In 1984 the Bishops' Conference published a letter, entitled "Basic Directives and Priority Tasks of the Japanese Church". Two points were mentioned as the basic directives:

## GROUPE

*Le Séminaire SEDOS de mai 1994 nous a fait grandir dans la conviction que nous devons effectivement nous engager dans une NOUVELLE ERE DE LA MISSION, travaillant à promouvoir autour de nous, dans nos Instituts, cette vision nouvelle pour nous renouveler dans notre FIDÉLITÉ :à cette Mission qui consiste à MANIFESTER L'AMOUR DE DIEU POUR LE MONDE, AMOUR RÉVÉLÉ EN JÉSUS-CHRIST, et cela en témoignant radicalement - en "professionnels" - de l'expérience de Jésus-Christ.*

*Pour cela, nous avons besoin de:*

- prendre plus fortement conscience de certaines déviations;
- agir résolument pour nous renouveler dans la fidélité.

**1. Ne pas chercher d'abord à apporter, mais à recevoir, à apprendre.**

*Etre plus sensibles aux aspirations de ceux qui nous reçoivent où la présence de Dieu nous précède qu'à satisfaire des préoccupations d'efficacité en transposant des habitudes occidentales sans assez prendre le temps de connaître, d'apprécier et d'intégrer les cultures locales.*

**2. Pratiquer la solidarité en étant "avec" les hommes et les femmes que nous voulons servir, plutôt que de faire des choses "pour" eux...**

*Dans cette solidarité, envisager éventuellement de nous limiter dans le temps pour notre engagement apostolique (contrat) afin de favoriser la prise de responsabilités locales.*

**3. Considérer notre mission comme une oeuvre de réconciliation entre les cultures, entre la modernité et la tradition, pour favoriser la libération de toutes les servitudes - autant du consumérisme occidental que du système des castes dans certains secteurs d'Asie et la promotion humaine qui donne tout son sens à la vie.**

*Pour cela, viser à être sincères, vrais, engagés totalement en non en surface.*

*Pour cette qualité de la présence qui relève de la conversion intérieure, compter sur la grâce demandée dans la prière.*

**4. Une proposition concrète: Pour manifester dans notre Église Catholique le respect des cultures, nous demandons à SEDOS de favoriser par tous les moyens la canonisation de MATTEO RICCI et la reconnaissance de son oeuvre au service de la Chine.**

**CONCLUSION:** Il s'agit, dans la MISSION, de rentrer dans le PLAN DE DIEU qui a suivi le chemin de l'INCARNATION, ce qui veut dire patience, humilité, pauvreté, dépouillement, proximité des pauvres, plutôt que compromission avec les puissants de ce monde.

- a) to emphasise the "direct mission", meaning effort to gain more converts;
- b) solidarity with the socially disadvantaged. For the priority tasks 3 points were made:
  - to organise dioceses and parishes as evangelising communities;
  - collaboration with religious congregations and mission societies, and other Catholic

- enterprises;
- to hold NICE I in 1987.

So, in November 1987, NICE I was held in Kyoko, to which some 115 priests, 54 religious, 18 bishops, and about 90 laypersons were delegated (one lay against two clerics).

A year before, 1986, the Bishops'

2) The Church is not effective in true dispensation of charity.

The Church's social concern, expresses those serious academic disciplines to actualise, to those which require intense personal dedication in order to realise. The "response" given by the Bishops' Conference held meetings in three archdioceses to express his/her opinion concerning the purpose of NICE I. What was heard there was later compiled into four volumes, showing that Christians were really very much concerned. At the conclusion of the NICE I, a paper was made public to the Bishops' Conference, taking into consideration the above-mentioned opinions of the general laity and clergy, and what the delegations of the Conference had passed at the Convention itself. Some of the points emphasised are:

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ing the theme to be dealt with. One reason for the lack of general enthusiasm may be that, dur-

ing the six years that had passed since NICE I, very little of what had been suggested then was implemented. The Bishops' Conference did not approve any "teams", which are not reported to have been dissolved. So, they must exist somewhere in the Church, but they do not seem to be functioning.

More serious for the laity is that, as reported in some Catholic media, half the bishops of the Conference seem to oppose what they them-

elves had proposed at NICE I.

It maybe that the New Catholicism of Car-

dinal Ratzinger, which gave many of us a dismal震撼 shock of regression from the spirit of Vatican II, had some influence on that.

1) The "Church" and the "World/Society"

The Church demonstrates serious

inconsistency in this dichotomy, in spite of heaven and earth".

The confession of God as the "Creator of heaven and earth".

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entire universe is the space for the Word of the Creator world its Creator. The Church should not reserve any part of God to realise His economy of salvation.

The Church emphasizes such spirituality as salvation in each individual soul", and admires abandonment of this world.

Thereby human life on this earth is trivialised, hope of salvation is projected to life after death", not giving the right place in the Church to concrete activities of the life of "justice and peace", which type of "justice and peace", inevitable emphasise the recovery of human life within the life on this earth".

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3) Some problematic points of NICE I:

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- The Church is generally closed to those foreigners who come to Japan from the Third World to work. There is a tendency to institute separate liturgies for them, with the excuse of the "language problem", which appears to be kind yet sets them apart from the local congregation.
- The Church has not yet attained the evangelical (requirement "to love till it hurts oneself". She collects money to send cheques but does not take the initiative to institute programmes to send volunteers out to relief/development projects in the Third World.

3) The Church belies expectations that she is the organ to promote justice.

- She adopts a passive attitude in the efforts for reconciliation with the neighbours in Asia. Groups such as Commission Justice and Peace are not well supported by her in the project to learn about, and respond to cases such as the "Comfort Women".
- In remaining apathetic and mute to the facts of atrocities committed by Japan during and since World War II, she continues to be guilty, and in the position of inflicting further pain on the neighbours in Asia, and other countries of the Third World.

#### D. Some Observations on the Basic Question: What Should Christianity be in Today's Japan?

1) The Church must recognise that "being a member" of a parish Church in itself does not mean one is a Christian, a follower of Jesus. A new convert must be made aware that he or she in entering the Covenant relationship with God through Jesus Christ, which means he or she is to live according to the model of the New Person Jesus demonstrated and to join in the communal effort to realise the New Society on earth in today's context.

2) The Church must adapt the *Catechism* for today's Japan, to promulgate the dynamics of the Gospel, and not a set of legal codes. The Gospel is the liberation of human beings through the Word of God. The "why, from what to what, and how" of this liberation must be clearly defined, biblically, theologically, pastorally and socially.

3) The Church must act as the Catalyst between the Word of God and Japan. She must make herself transparent before the Japanese so that they can clearly see Who He is and directly

hear His words.

4) The Church must re-examine her hierarchical system. The roles of the clergy, religious and laity must be stated from the point of view of the Universal Priesthood of all the followers of Jesus Christ. Currently, there is opposition between the clergy and the laity, which must be honestly recognised as such, and efforts must be sincerely made for a true reconciliation. As it is, sacerdotal or religious vocations are endangered, since resentment persists among the laity against the clergy.

5) The ordination of laity to deaconship must be seriously considered.

6) For the parishes without a constant presence of clergy, a liturgy of the Celebration of the Word must be instituted with lay responsibility.

7) For those Christians who cannot attend the Sunday Eucharist inspite of their best efforts, some creative ways for their "participation in absence" in the celebration of the Word of God must be formulated.

8) The laity must be given a more practical and practicable formation in the Christian faith.

9) In an overwhelmingly non-Christian society like Japan, where the intellectual and technical standard of the general public is high, the *Catechism*, preaching, and general formation in the practice of the faith must be formulated accordingly. The Church must guard her Gospel purity and simplicity, but should not offend the intellect and intelligence of the public.

10) The laity must be consulted as to the formation of candidates to the priesthood. Asking only for financial assistance but refusing to listen to constructive lay opinions only discourages the laity as to the future of the Church.

11) If the Church wishes to be a meaningful part of Japanese society, she should re-examine her vocabulary, especially that of her liturgy. All too often the ecclesiastical language is inadequate and does not convey the message, and often it is uncomfortable or unpleasant even to Christian ears. For liturgical language and art to be at the real service of evangelisation, a greater variety of forms must be permitted. They must not be subordinated to excessive faithfulness to the "Western" formulae, nor to

what can only be described as the longing for the exotic (a Japanese quality) on the part of the foreign missionaries, nor to any reactionary 'parties' demand for a return to the pre-Vatican II liturgy.

#### **E. Any Hope for the Japanese Church?**

This question is often asked, not only at the SEDOS Seminar, but also in Japan. What do we hope from the Japanese Church? Or, what sort of a Church do we wish the Japanese Church to be?

The Church will never be a majority; she will be the small "Remnant for Yahweh" faithful to Jesus. There will always be Christians, as leaven, in a State; but there will never be a Christian State. Both "Davidic Kingdom", and "Holy Roman Empire" are a contradiction in terms.

The Church is the Body of Jesus Christ, of Jesus at work in Galilee, Jesus in a fundamental encounter against the institutionalised religious authority in Jerusalem, Jesus crucified by the imperial political power and Jesus Christ victory in the resurrection. If none of this is reflected in the life of the Church, she is not the Body of Jesus Christ.

I place my hope for the Church in God with:

- those who search for Christian identity in today's world context
- those who patiently try from within the Church to renew her
- those who keep working in movements such as Hand of Peace, Justice and Peace Actions Catholiques Ouvrières, and other grass-root groups
- those who try to express their faith in their own words, and try to read the Bible in order to be able to have those words.

#### **IV. Some Concrete Proposals from the Hand of Peace to SEDOS**

A. For those missionary priests who wish to be "missionaries" among youth and among those for whom the present parish situation does not show Jesus of Galilee: Leave the parishes to others, especially to the diocesan Japanese priests, and independently or in a team go into the general Japanese public of salaried people, labourers, students, drop-outs, drug addicts and alcoholics.

If they must stay in their parish, let them

help the congregation turn from introspection towards the outside world of suffering. The emphasis is placed on "the poor" today, and that, in turn must be placed in the context of the poor of the entire world, not just Japan. If service to the Japanese poor is not placed in the context of service to the Third World and to the "South within the North", it will deteriorate into a dispensation of absolute "charity" only.

B. For those missionary priests and religious who know and have experienced the joy of a truly moving liturgy with the sense of the real presence of Jesus, in a good and beautiful celebration: Help to create such liturgies to let the Japanese Christians taste the same joy.

Sunday Mass is practically the only chance for the great majority of the Japanese to have the formation of faith. All other efforts fail -- even Bible study groups -- if the Mass is not celebrated meaningfully for the laity.

C. The Hand of Peace Secretariat together with several very concerned priests, missionaries and lay people, asks the members of SEDOS to help organise a *study team* and place it under auspices of SEDOS:

1. an *ad hoc* study team for a limited period of time, three years, for example.
2. appoint coordinators/Secretariat to organise the team
3. grant budget assistance
4. require a report of determined standard and scale of research, to be presented to SEDOS and published
5. require each researcher to organise a seminar group to assist in and profit from his/her research.
6. the general theme of the study to be: "Evangelisation in Japan toward the 21st century"
7. the study team to consist of: Biblical exegesis, theologians, (socio-political and economic sciences), journalists, etc. total around 12 experts.

We consider this to be of fundamental importance. Japanese society is diamond shaped not pyramidal. If the Church does not wish to see her active members escape into the top small sector of the rich or into the bottom small sector of the poor, but wishes to help the conversion of the majority sector (95% my own estimation of the citizens) in the middle so that, rejecting a comfortable life of mediocrity, they will learn to go out of themselves to save the world of suffering, the Church must formulate

clear directives and more concrete priority tasks than the Bishops' Conference had published before NICE II. Along with it, or in order to assist it, Hand of Peace and its sympathisers consider it their responsibility to offer a basic study of what evangelisation should be for today's Japan.

What is important is that such an endeavour should not be simply a private undertaking, but

one supported by the Church. Considering, however, the actual situation of the hierarchic Church body, we turn to those Congregations and Societies who are still seriously concerned with the re-activation of the Body of Christ in Japan for necessary support. We already have a list of experts who are waiting for your response, and the Secretariat of Hand of Peace is ready to serve in the preparation and implement of the project.

## PANEL

### The Role of Catholic Schools in Japan

*After more than two hundred years of isolation from other countries of the world, Japan was persuaded to open its doors to them in the middle of 19th century. In spite of opposition to establishing international relations, there was a strong hope for enrichment from the countries of the West. Thus the missionaries came back and still more arrived after World War II. Their engagement in social and educational activities and contribution to the introduction of the culture of the West are highly appreciated.*

*One of our Notre Dame schools started in a churchyard, where the pastor could give much attention and care to the Sisters and students. As time went by, the school was expanded and moved to a larger site. Also education systems and policies in the country were developed. Consequently private schools such as ours, started by the religious congregations, had to set up school corporations which were independent from the religious corporations. Even though the religious congregations gave human and financial support to start with, neither buildings nor property are the assets of the congregations or the Church. Though the invitation to found a school came from the bishop, the Catholic schools are legally independent from the Church now. Financially all the private schools are partially supported by the Government.*

*Although we call our schools "Catholic schools", more than 90% of the students are non-Catholics. I used to have 20-25 Catholics among 1,200 students. As we are allowed to teach Catholic religion in school, we could provide many different opportunities for Christian encounters with teachers, students and their parents. They can hear and learn the Word of God, participate at Mass, and join in some voluntary actions. How many of us in the Church can meet daily with that many non-Catholics? Are the churches in Japan the meeting place for all these people every day?*

*Finally, I would like to introduce a Peace Education Programme in our junior and senior High Schools in Hiroshima. We start with HIROSHIMA. The World Peace Memorial Cathedral, which is the symbol of peace and good-will of the people in the world, and the Peace Park, which is sacred ground with many monuments, are visited by the new students. The Hibakusha, story tellers, are invited to each class. The second year girls study the Japanese war crimes in the neighbouring countries in Asia. The third year girls study buraku, discrimination in Japan. The first year of the Senior High focuses on the past relationship between Japan and Korea. The mistreatment of the Korean people continues in the society. The second year girls study discrimination in the world. The last year in our school the girls concentrate on the role of women. We owe much to the outside non-Catholic sources for this programme. For the future growth of the Church in Japan, Catholic schools need more collaboration within and without the Church.*

Keiko Suzuki, SND

# THE INDIAN CHURCH CHALLENGED BY POVERTY AND CASTE

George Soares-Prabhu, SJ

Challenges emerge from specific situations. That is why a reflection on the challenges facing the Church in India today must begin with an analysis of the Indian situation. This situation is both complex, and unfamiliar, for India is a highly diversified society, very different both in its social structure and its ways of thinking, from societies in the West. If we are to understand the challenges that India poses to the Church, it is important that we try to understand the Indian situation in its complexity and its otherness.

## 1. The Indian Situation

### 1.1 India Today

India's 844 million people (15.6 per cent of the world's population) live on 2.4 per cent of the world's surface (3.3 million square kilometres) in an area which contains about 11 per cent (169 million hectares) of the world's arable land. This huge mass of people growing at the rate of 32.5 per 1,000 each year (the despair of any demographer), speak 1,654 languages and dialects of which 14 are recognised as 'national' languages, while a wholly foreign language (English) spoken possibly by 5 per cent of the upper classes, serves as the official language of the central administration, business and the Church.

The linguistic diversity of India is accentuated by its religious pluralism, its shocking economic disparities, and its bewildering variety of cultures. All the great religions of the world flourish in India, along with a large number of aboriginal tribal religions, exiled religions like Zoroastrianism and Tibetan Lamaism, which driven out of their homelands found refuge in India, and now a profusion of psychedelic new cults are mushrooming in a

bewildering variety of forms in every corner of the country. This exuberant religiosity flowers in a climate of great economic poverty -- a poverty which is all the more shocking because it coexists with ostentatious concentrations of great wealth. The scandalous contrast between the great mass of India's poor and the tiny minority of the very rich finds a striking visual expression in Bombay's sprawling slums, stretching out endlessly in the shadow of high-rise luxury apartments and five-star hotels. Such economic disparity can lead to amusing juxtapositions of incongruous technologies. Bullock-carts trundle past atomic reactors; fortune tellers ply a busy trade just outside institutes of advanced scientific research; and scientists, who split the atom and toss satellites into space, arrange the marriages of their children by matching horoscopes, and celebrate them on astrologically determined auspicious days!

Yet, for all its endless diversity, its many regional differences, its growing religious tensions, and its tendency to political fragmentation so evident today, India shows a massive and resilient unity. Jawaharlal Nehru described this movingly as part of his discovery of India:

"Though outwardly there was diversity and infinite variety among our people, everywhere there was that tremendous impress of oneness, which had held all of us together for ages past, whatever political fate or misfortune had befallen us. The unity of India was no longer merely an intellectual conception for me: it was an emotional experience which overpowered me. That essential unity had been so powerful that no political division, no disaster nor catastrophe had been able to overcome it".

India is a land of unity in great diversity. Its unity shows itself in certain common social features which define as it were the 'body' of India (what I have called the **Indian situation**), and in a certain way of experiencing life which defines the 'soul' of India (what I have called the **Indian mind**). Both the Indian situation and the Indian mind pose challenges to the Church in India. The challenge posed by the Indian situation is the challenge of India's caste-ridden poor. This will be the subject of our first session this morning. The challenge posed by the Indian mind and the religious pluralism it fosters is the challenge of inter-religious dialogue in a situation of communal conflict. This will be taken up in the second session. We begin, then, by reflecting on the Indian situation and on the challenge that this poses to the Indian Church.

## 1.2 The Indian situation

Building on an insight of Aloysius Pieris I have suggested that the situation of India today is characterised by three inter-related factors:

1) a massive **economic poverty** which India shares with the Third World; 2) a **pluriform religiosity** which is a mark of its Asianness; and 3) a rigid religiously legitimised system of **institutionalised inequality (caste)** which is specific to India alone. These three factors, economic, religious and social are dialectically interrelated and influence each other mutually. Religion legitimises caste. The social immobility engendered by caste contributes to India's poverty, as does its fatalistic and other-worldly religiosity. Poverty creates a fertile field for the development of a fatalistic and other-worldly forms of popular religion. Poverty-Religiosity-Caste constitute India's *samsara* its cycle of bondage - just as the different but equally destructive cycle of production-consumption defines the bondage of the West.

Of the three factors that determine the social situation of India, it is **caste**, I believe, that is the most significant. Caste defines the typically Hindu (indeed Indian) world view, determines the type of relationship that exists in Indian society, and gives concrete expression to both India's religiosity and its poverty. India's religiosity is a caste religiosity; India's poverty is caste poverty.

Caste determines the shape of India's poverty. The 'poor' in India are not just economically deprived but are socially ostracised as well, and what determines their self-awareness

is not so much their economic as their social status. That is, the 'poor' see themselves not as 'poor' but as 'outcast': they experience them selves not so much as members of an exploited class but of a hierarchically ranked caste. *India is a caste not a class society*. That is why it has been said (with a touch of paradox) that there are no 'poor' in India - in the sense that no group of people who consciously see themselves as part of the great mass (nearly half of India's 846 million people) of the economically deprived. People experience themselves rather as members of this or that caste, different from other castes, even those as poor as themselves. Caste divisions prevent proletarian solidarity (as the Marxists have found to their cost), and caste adds a dimension of social humiliation and hopelessness to the lot of the poor which further repress any movements to social revolt.

## 2. THE CHALLENGE OF THE DALITS

The challenge of the poor to the Church in India is therefore shaped by caste. It finds its clearest expression in the *dalits*, that is in the ex-untouchables of India, who constitute the lowest stratum of Indian society, and form a large component (an estimated 50 per cent) of the Indian Church. The *dalits* are the poor and the outcast, victims of both economic exploitation and social rejection. In them the economic exploitation that devastates the *campesinos* of Latin America meets the cultural and racist oppression that has so deeply scarred the peoples of sub-Saharan Africa. They are thus a microcosm of Third World oppression, systematically robbed of the goods that are their due and (worse still) systematically denied the dignity that is their right. They embody the concrete challenge presented to the Indian Church by the Indian situation. It is this challenge which I wish to explore in this paper. I shall do this by discussing, 1) the place of the *dalits* in Indian society, 2) the *dalits* in the Christian Church, and lastly, 3) the challenge of the *dalits* to the Church.

### 2.1. The *Dalits* in Indian Society

Nearly 16 per cent of India's 846 million inhabitants (nearly 134 million of them) are *dalits*, that is, 'untouchables' living at the very bottom of India's highly structured caste-system. Their lives are wholly determined by their position in the caste hierarchy. To understand their situation we must therefore try to understand the (to us) unfamiliar institution of caste.

Caste is a unique form of social organisation, peculiar to India, and determines life in India to a much larger extent than is often suspected. It is, as G.S. Ghurye, the father of Indian anthropology, has pointed out, marked by its *ubiquity* (it is "the most general form of social organisation in India") and by its *strangeness* (it presents "a marked contrast to social grouping prevalent in Europe and America"). It is therefore both significant for an understanding of the Indian situation and difficult to grasp. I shall attempt a brief presentation of this much studied and still largely enigmatic institution, with a view to understanding the situation of the *dalits* within it.

### 2.1.A The Caste System

Indian society is broken up into thousands of endogamous, hereditary hierarchically ranked groups called castes or *jatis*. Each of which is; 1) associated with a traditional hereditary occupation (though this may not be strictly followed today); 2) is part of a hierarchical system of social organisation in which castes are ranked according to occupational and ritual status, by means of criteria by no means clear to us today; and, 3) is isolated from other groups, avoiding contact, table fellowship and above all inter-caste marriages with them. "Hereditary specialisation, hierarchical organisation, reciprocal repulsion", suggests C. Bouglé (in a somewhat onesided evaluation of the system) are the essential characteristics of caste. The caste system is thus, in the words of an Indian anthropologist:

"The most thoroughgoing attempt in the history of mankind to institutionalise inequality. The caste status is ascribed at birth and remains unchanged during lifetime, exertion of the individual notwithstanding. Ideally, the caste is a hereditary, endogamous usually localised group, having traditional association with an occupation and as such occupies a particular prestigious position in the local hierarchy of castes. Relations between castes are governed, among other things, by the conception of pollution and purity, and generally maximum commensality occurs within the caste".

The thousands of castes and sub-castes (*jatis*) existing in India today are grouped under four traditional castes (the *varnas*), listed in the religious law codes of India, chief among which is the Law of Manu. This insists that there are four and only four castes that constitute Hindu

### PANEL

#### Challenge 1.

*As a woman of the present day Catholic Church, I must be prepared to step out of the Western, (Roman Catholic) traditional Indian institutionalised circle and ministries to strike newer prophetic grounds as a 'Kingdom value promoting person'. (This is a good theory).*

#### Challenge 2.

*I need to be prepared to have the patience and the perseverance of a Guru 'to be' for a long time before I can be a 'to do' person, with systematic strategies to promote wholeness and freedom in Indian society.*

#### Challenge 3.

*Gandhi is supposed to have said: "I love Christ, but not the Christians". And at one other time someone remarked to a group of religious, "I admire your charism, but not your life".*

*If Hindu society were to rank the religious under caste systems, it would put most of us as "a serving class", third caste!!*

#### Challenge 4.

*I am often caught in a dilemma whether to be a true Hindu Indian or to be an Indian Christian.*

#### Challenge 5.

*I prefer to be a woman with no religious labels so I can relate to all religions and classes.*

#### Challenge 6.

*This leads me to conclude that if I had not the limited knowledge and experience I have now, I would not have made these challenges. Hence, the need to challenge the Indian religious to seek a better education, both in academic and sacred sciences.*

#### Challenge 7.

*Finally, to be in solidarity with the oppressed class of the girl, child and women, I feel indeed challenged to be a prophet, to enable religious women to face the Church hierarchies for greater collaboration and in the political and social strata to conscientise women and children for their human rights.*

Bernardine Joseph, CR

society. They are the *brahmins* or priests, the *kshatriyas* or warriors, the *vaishyas* or traders and the *shudras* or servants. But lurking in the background of all these law codes there is a fifth group, the frequently mentioned 'untouchables', who from the first played an indispensable role in Hindu society. Today's *jatis* are subsumed under one or other of these five traditional groups, and it is popularly believed that they have arisen through the division and subdivision of the original groups. But this is probably incorrect. The four traditional castes, (*varnas*) are parts of a conceptual model and may never have existed in fact. Even if they did exist in the past, they have little to do with today's castes, the *jatis*, the thousands of existing, clearly identified local groups, with a constantly shifting relation to the conceptual scheme of the *varnas*. As André Béteille described it:

"*Varna* refers to a scheme or a conceptual model which divides Hindu society into four categories or orders which are arranged in a hierarchy. The *varna* hierarchy is the same throughout the country and has remained so for roughly two and a half millennia. *Jatis*, on the other hand, are real social divisions, the groups by which people identify each other in everyday life. They are many in number, and they constitute regional and sometimes only local systems. The popular view that *jatis* originated through division and subdivision of the four original castes is probably wrong: *varnas* and *jatis* seem to have coexisted since the beginning of Indian history.

### 2.1.B The *Dalits*

Theoretically, the 'untouchables' are outcasts who fall outside the *varna* system. In fact, they are grouped into castes (*jatis*), no different in their social organisation from other castes, except that they tagged on to the very bottom of the caste hierarchy, and are regarded as ritually polluted and so 'untouchable'. The notion of pollution still conditions the relationship between the 'untouchables' and the so-called 'clean castes', even though more extreme forms of untouchability such as 'distance pollution' (that is, the pollution of a person by an 'untouchable' who approaches him within a certain distance) is no longer observed. The Constituent Assembly of India in fact outlawed untouchability in 1949 and made its practice in any form a criminal offence. The ex-untouchables are therefore described in official documents as members of the 'scheduled

castes', that is, of the castes which appear in the list or schedule of disadvantaged groups who are entitled to remedial privileges, like the reservation of jobs or of places in the university. Mahatma Gandhi, in his unrealistic and unsuccessful attempt to rid Hinduism of untouchability without giving up caste, called them '*Harijans*' or children of *Hari* (God), a condescending, and unwittingly insulting designation (for the term is in some places used as a euphemism for an illegitimate child), which the untouchables themselves rightly resent. A growing number of them who have reached political awareness have begun to call themselves *dalits*, that is, people who are oppressed. This is the accepted name of these ex-untouchables in India today.

The name is eminently suitable. No segment of India's people, indeed possibly no people anywhere in the world, are as shockingly oppressed as they are. *Dalits* occupy the very lowest strata in the caste system, which is an intricate, all pervasive and incredibly tenacious structure of institutionalised inequality, unparalleled in the world for the damage it does to people. Not even *apartheid*, which it closely resembles (both are religiously legitimised systems of institutionalised inequality), has inflicted as much material and psychological damage as caste has done.

#### 2.1.B.1 Economic Poverty

In the caste system, the *dalits* are both economically exploited and socially oppressed. Except for a tiny urban *élite* that is now emerging, largely as a result of remedial action by the State, the vast majority of the *dalits* are landless labourers, earning a precarious livelihood in conditions marginally better than serfdom; or they are condemned to engage in religiously polluting and socially demeaning occupations, like scavenging, handling the carcasses of dead animals, or working in leather animal hides. They are the poorest of the poor.

The extent and quality of this poverty can be estimated by taking a look at India's economic pyramid.

a) About 40 per cent of India's population (around 350 million people) live below or just on the poverty line. This poverty line is defined by economists in India so severely that it would in fact be better termed the subsistence line. As determined by the Planning Commission of the Government of India the poverty line is "the

## GROUP

*These days devoted to India, China and Japan have been informative and heightened our awareness, if confusing, confounding, yet leading to future faith and mission journey strategies.*

- pluriform context within which Jesus is to be incarnated;
- search for unity/solidarity as Catholics in diversity;
- each offers unique and varied options to live mission in the 21st century;
- **India:** *The majority of us in the group became aware of what the societal caste system demands and of the challenge to the people of God to continue to make its way forward, recognising its rich interiority and struggle to be incarnational through transformation strategies, by challenging itself to regain its true identity as people of God.*
- **China:** *To some of us in the group, China which was an unexplored mission because of its political and religious nature, has now unfolded glimpses of what the reality is and challenges the members of our group to share further experiences:*
  - to be sensitive to the overground and underground pioneering groups of today.
  - to promote reconciliation between the official and non-official Church.
  - to continue awareness raising - particularly in our own religious group to what is happening in China today - *Tripod* (name of a magazine - Holy Spirit Study Centre, 6, Welfare Road, Aberdeen, Hong Kong. Fr Tong).
  - to pray for the people of China.
  - to continue making direct contact to witness Christian values and serve the expressed needs of the Chinese people.
  - to be in silent solidarity with the struggling Christians of China.
- **Japan:** *Our group responded to reflections of a more constructive nature by listening to some personal experiences. The small pockets of the people of good will in Japan who show readiness for mutuality, collaborative services, (Christian/Buddhist dialogue, peace, the challenging witness of the migrants into Japan, gradual appreciation of multicultural groups are signs of hope for the future.*

*Michiko Ota's call to SEDOS to reach out to Japan's people of God is a heartening and positive sign for the future.*

### Questions:-

***How is the Church to be an evangeliser in materialistic countries across the world?***

***What type of strategy should one bear in mind and heart?***

mid point of the monthly per capita expenditure of the class with a daily calorie intake of 2,400 per person in rural areas and 2,100 in urban areas". This means a person on the poverty line is just able to buy the food (and nothing else) needed to lead a moderately active life. People in this group are mostly landless labourers in rural India (where 75 per cent of

the people live), or causal labourers in the over-crowded cities. They are largely illiterate, suffer from unemployment or underemployment, are chronically hungry, lack adequate clothing and shelter, are subjected to life-long indebtedness which often leads to bonded labour. The *dalits* as we have said are mostly landless labourers who belong this class.

b) 30-35 per cent of India's people, some 250-300 million, belong to what might be called the lower middle class. Organised labour, small shopkeepers, artisans, and small farmers owning up to five acres of land belong to this category. They live a frugal but adequate existence. Thanks to the 'positive discrimination' implemented by the Indian Government (which has reserved 15 per cent of the places available in Government schools and colleges and 15 per cent of the jobs in Government services for the *dalits*) a small number of *dalits* have reached this step of the pyramid and form the élite of the community. But the *dalits* who have climbed up into the middle class are by no means freed from their social handicap, for the whole point of caste is that status comes not from wealth but from birth. Once a *dalit*, always a *dalit*. It is only in the anonymity of large cities that the emergent *dalits* can to some extent escape the stigma of their birth, and be assured of relatively fair treatment. The result of this is that the emerging *dalit* leadership tends to move away from the villages where most of their people live. They are cut off from their base and get coopted into the upper classes. Thus they cease to be potential leaders of their oppressed community.

c) 15 per cent of the Indian people (150-200 million) could be said to belong to the affluent upper middle class. Industrialists and business men, people in the upper levels of Government service, or large farmers, living comfortably, even in ostentatious luxury. A tiny *dalit* minority has achieved this step too. The percentage of *dalits* in the higher echelons of the central Government service has gone up from 2.99 in 1972 to 9.70 in 1992 - still a far cry from the desired 15 per cent, (for Government schemes, however good on paper are poorly implemented by corrupt caste-prejudiced officials) but a gain nonetheless.

d) 10 per cent of India's population (a massive 90 million people), is rich and lives in ostentatious luxury completely oblivious to the poverty that surrounds it. I doubt if any *dalits* belong to this category.

It is these last two classes, highly consumerist in their attitude, who form the 'market' which is attracting the hungry gaze of the transnational companies, now circling like vultures around the country looking for an opening. The recent 'liberalisation' of the economy undertaken by the Indian Government under pressures from the International Monetary

Fund and the World Bank, and the much controversial signing of the GATT treaty, will certainly satisfy the inflated consumer wants and possibly improve the economic assets of these upper class groups. Whether it will ultimately benefit the economy of India, turning it into an Asian tiger like South Korea or Taiwan; or will diminish it, making India a debt-burdened, de-industrialised, producer of raw materials for the First World as has happened in Argentina and Brazil, is hotly disputed among economists in India today. What is not in doubt is that the new economic policy will hit the bottom strata of the Indian pyramid (the poor and the lower middle classes) hard. Growing unemployment, rising prices (especially of foodstuffs and medicines), a sharp reduction in food subsidies, and in Government expenditure for education and welfare programmes, and even for such basic amenities as potable water for India's 500,000 villages, will make the desperately poor *dalits* of India even poorer.

### 2.1.B.2 Social Ostracism

The extreme poverty of the *dalits* is compounded by humiliating social disabilities imposed on them by caste Hindus, who regard them as ritually polluted, intrinsically inferior, "with no rights [but] only the duty to submit to any order and any kind of treatment by the members of the Hindu castes". Their social inferiority, sanctioned by religion, is absolute and unchangeable. They are *dalits* until they die. Despite the safeguards guaranteed them by the Indian Constitution, *dalits*, in the rural villages where most of them live, continue to be treated as untouchables. They are segregated: confined to squalid and unhealthy sections of the village, and denied access to public wells, schools, tea-shops, hair-cutting saloons, or caste shrines. They may be forbidden to wear shoes, or put on a shirt, or ride a bicycle (signs of upper caste privileges) while passing through the caste quarters of the village. The wives and daughters of *dalit* labourers are regularly abused by the caste landlords. Attempts to stop such indignities and assert their rights, can provoke a violent backlash from the upper castes, so that 'atrocities' against the *dalits* are a regular feature of rural India. A Jesuit sociologist of *dalit* origin has summed it up well:

"The burden we carry on our backs is three thousand years of segregation and discrimination. The burden is an immensely heavy one. We have been denied even a dignified name in society.

We have been denied access to public facilities, such as wells, schools, roads, post-offices and courts. We are not permitted to enter into a temple lest our presence pollute the holy gods and goddesses it holds. We have been segregated and forced to live on the outskirts of villages. We have been denied the services of the serving castes. Non *dalits* have prescribed what we should and should not wear. They have even restricted our movements. We are not allowed on the roads and streets within a prescribed distance of persons of higher castes. We have been prescribed certain forms of deference in address, language, sitting and standing in their presence. If we fail to take these prescriptions seriously, we are beaten up, lynched or done away with.

### **2.1.3. *Dalits* in India Today**

The situation of the *dalits* in India is bleak indeed. But it is not altogether hopeless. Although it is clear that "untouchability is still being practised in the countryside and in the cities it continues to exist in a camouflaged form", there is a measure of improvement in the situation of the *dalits*. In this the remedial and welfare programmes of the State (however poorly implemented) have played a significant role. An educated *dalit élite* has emerged and is beginning to consolidate its position through political action. In the elections to the State legislature of Uttar Pradesh held last year, the Bahujan Samaj Party, a party of *dalits* and other backward castes, won, for the first time a substantial number of seats in the State Assembly, and is now part of a coalition that is governing the most populous and most Hindu State of India. Its stunning victory has been a turning point in Indian politics, announcing the arrival of the *dalits* as a power which can no longer be ignored.

## **2.2 *Dalits* in the Church**

It is to be hoped this will soon be true of the Church, where the *dalit* Christians (shocking as this may seem) continue in many places to be an 'untouchable' group, doubly discriminated against. Because they are Christian they are denied the remedial privileges granted other members of the scheduled castes, on the grounds that as Christians they are no longer

disadvantaged since Christianity does not admit caste. But, since they are *dalits* they continue to suffer from caste-discrimination within the Church, in a form only marginally less severe than that inflicted on their *dalits* by Hindu society.

The extent and rigour of caste discrimination in the Christian Churches varies from place to place and from Church to Church. Casteism is more evident in South India where Christian converts from different caste groups live together, than in the North where the Christian communities are generally homogeneous, drawn from a single group of *dalits* or scheduled tribes. It is more pronounced among the Syrian Christians of Kerala (who survived for centuries integrated as a closed caste in Hindu society, and still attach importance to their caste status) than among say the Westernised Christians of the Konkan coast, converts of the Portuguese padroado mission (the Goans, Mangaloreans and the East Indians), where caste discrimination rarely goes beyond a reluctance to marry outside the caste. It is particularly rigid among Christians (and specially the Catholics) of Tamilnadu and Andhra, where quite objectionable forms of caste segregation can exist.

As a result, *dalit* Christians, who constitute about half of all the Christians in the country, frequently suffer caste discrimination within the Church - not only in their social interactions with upper caste Christians, but, specially in Churches in South India, their participation in Church administration and worship as well. They often live in segregated colonies even in Christian villages, are not allowed to draw water from 'clean caste' wells, are segregated in special parts of the Church (at the back or in the side aisles not in the main aisle), are forbidden to serve mass or read at Church services, have little say in the decision-making bodies of their own Churches, are treated with open contempt by their clean caste fellow Christians and their priests (most of whom come from these 'upper' castes), and may even be buried in separate cemeteries. In the conclusion to a recent study of the caste situation in two Catholic villages in Andhra we were told that:

"More than two centuries of Catholic faith among the Reddy's of these two villages have not been able to make any dent in their rigid attitude towards the caste system. By and large they are well integrated with Hindu Reddy's and other

**PANEL****What Could the Indian Church Offer to the Universal Church?**

*India is known for its Religiosity and Interiority. Thousands of foreigners rush to India in search of deep Spirituality, peace and silence. Very often they end up in Hindu Ashrams where they learn various techniques of meditation which offer them some peace of mind as they get in touch with their real self - God, in the depth of their being. In fact the Yoga which India offers, can lead one to*



*harmony within, harmony with others and harmony with the whole universe. One sees God in all things and all things in God. Could not the Indian Church offer something of this interiority and religiosity which seem to be inherent in Indian people to the Universal Church?*

*Living in close contact with people of different religions, languages, cultures and customs, Indians are normally drawn to be tolerant. Non-violence was the method Gandhi used to obtain freedom for India. And yet today communal riot is very common in India in the name of religion and caste. Hand in hand with all the people of good will of all religions and castes the Church could take the initiative to establish peace and harmony in the country, standing by the side of the poor and oppressed of society.*

*I also want to make a comment on what Fr George Soares said on Temporary Mission sending. While I do see a point in it I am inclined to think differently. If a missionary goes to another region or country with the attitude of offering some definite service for a period of time and then returning to his/her country of origin, he/she is going already with an attitude of superiority, to give something which they do not have. Temporary service does not help one to integrate oneself into the culture of the people to whom he/she is sent. Personally I think that a missionary has to go to a place to receive as well as to give. It is not that a certain local Church cannot manage without missionaries from outside, but rather it is a matter of mutual enrichment, one learning from the other. God is so great that no one culture can fully incarnate God. In the midst of regionalism and individualism, missionaries of different regions and countries living and working together in harmony, can by itself be a witness of God's Kingdom and Evangelisation.*

Cecily Paul, FMM

Hindu communities in their villages. They have achieved this by keeping their caste systems intact and not integrating themselves with other Catholic communities including other Reddy Catholic subgroups. The Madigas (*dalits*) who became Catholics, could not improve their status. The Reddy Catholics are also against them and resent their conversion".

There are, I think, two basic reasons for this deplorable situation. The first is a misunderstanding of caste by the missionaries who founded these Christian communities. They confused caste with the kind of class distinctions they were familiar with in Europe and failed to realise the radical difference. For caste is an affirmation not of an accidental but an essential difference between people. The *dalit* is essentially different from the *brahman*, and no amount of education, or wealth can erase this difference. Caste presupposes that humankind is *homo hierarchicus*. A species in which individuals are different and unequal. This understanding is directly opposed to the egalitarian (*homo aequalis*) understanding of Christianity, in which all humankind or at least all members of the Christian community are parts of one family, all brothers and sisters, children of the one parent in heaven (Mt 23:8-10). The caste system is thus radically incompatible with Christianity. If missionaries tolerated it it was, as I have said, because they did not fully understand its implications, and also because (even when they did begin to suspect this) they realised that it was so ingrained into Indian society that conversions to Christianity among the caste Hindus would not be possible unless their caste status was somehow retained. They were prepared to compromise with caste for the sake of conversions. It was both misunderstanding and evangelical need, as Walter Fernandes suggests, that ultimately prompted the tolerance of caste.

"Obviously this understanding (of caste) itself depended also on the missionaries' background and country of origin. The Lutherans, mostly Germans, could either consider caste as irrelevant; as such its existence to be ignored, or as a secular institution that can be maintained. The Catholic missionaries viewed it by and large in terms of the European Estates system, while the Anglicans and the Presbyterians, especially those in North

India, considered it as a religious feature and opposed it. However many of those working in the South had begun their career with the Lutherans and were influenced by their views. Ultimately, evangelical needs were to force even those in the north into a compromise.

The Christian Churches in India have compromised with caste - just as the Churches in the West (and increasingly in India too) have compromised with Mammon. Both compromises have greatly weakened the life and witness of the Church. Ending a survey of caste in the Catholic Church in a district of rural Tamil Nadu, Paul Wiebe and S. John-Peter concluded:

"Though today, the caste system is undergoing many changes, it seems to retain much of its strength as an organising feature of social life in both rural and urban India. In any case, the system has largely absorbed the challenges that non-Hindu religious systems have posed and, in turn, has rendered them relatively impotent".

But the situation is not entirely hopeless. The sinful and terribly damaging and even sacreligious situation of caste discrimination has been tolerated by complacent Church authorities (belonging inevitably to the 'clean' castes), for centuries. But the growing strength of militant *dalit* movements in the country, and now in the Church, has pushed the problem of the Christian *dalits* (Christians oppressed by Christians within the Christian community, members of the Eucharist fellowship discriminated against and humiliated at the Eucharistic meal itself) to the surface. The delegates of the national Convention of Catholics that met in Bombay in June 1989 decided to "commit themselves to conscientize the Catholic community about the sin of caste practice and discrimination that is widespread among Christians"; and the Catholic Bishops' Conference of India at its meeting in Pune in January 1992 announced as its deepest concern "the uplift of the *dalits*, providing a voice to unorganised labour and granting women their due status". There is of course a vast distance between verbal pronouncements like these (at which the official Church is quite expert) and effective action, but as with the *dalits* in India, the situation of the *dalits* in the Church is not without hope.

### 3. THE CHALLENGE OF THE DALITS TO THE CHURCH

The existence of an oppressed and outcast group like the *dalits* not only in Indian society but within the Indian Church is obviously a serious challenge to the identity of the Church as the sacrament (and so the effective sign) of the Kingdom of God. In proclaiming the Kingdom of God Jesus announced the arrival of the eschatological salvation for humankind. He could announce this, although none of the expectations of his people were realised and nothing apparently changed through his coming, because he believed that genuine salvation (that is, the total liberation of people as individuals and in society) would come not through operations of power (moral, cosmic, political) but through the revelation of God's love. For love experienced liberates individuals from the compulsions and inhibitions which block them and frees them to love, that is to do good to, and respond to the needs of, those around them. The love of God experienced by Jesus (who expressed this love by addressing God as 'abba'), and implanted by him into human history (Mt 11:27), functions like the mustard seed sown in the soil or the leaven planted in the dough (Mt 13:31-33). It is a transformative power which changes hearts and structures and prepares for the end-time community (Rv. 21:1-4) where humankind will live together in harmony as God's people, or better, to use the metaphor which dominates the horizon of Jesus' thinking, as God's family. Jesus' use of the expression 'Kingdom of God' stands both for God's liberative (and therefore kingly) action, which brings about human liberation, as well as for the community which results from this action. The kingdom therefore is both the revelation of God's love, which we are invited to accept by "repenting" that is by turning to God in faith and openness; as well as the community of freedom, fellowship and justice which results from such acceptance. As the sacrament of the Kingdom the Church is called to be a symbol of this Kingdom, embodying its values, and an active force which will further its realisation in the world. This is its ultimate mission.

Clerely a community which is meant to be a symbol of the Kingdom cannot tolerate *dalit* groups within it. The existence of Christian *dalits* is not just a shocking scandal. It erodes the very identity of the Church as the community which symbolises the Kingdom. Indeed the very term 'Christian *dalit*' is as I have said

elsewhere a contradiction. How can there be a *dalit* (an oppressed person) in a community which is by definition a family of brothers and sisters who experience (and not just talk about) each other as such, because they have experienced God as Parent? There is surely something sick about a Church which is agitated by infractions of the liturgy, but tolerates without qualms the obscenity of untouchability. If *dalits* exist and suffer in the Church in India this is surely a sign it is not yet 'Church'.

But the same might be said of the non-*dalit* 'poor', that is of those who though not socially ostracized are economically destitute. I do not think we have sufficiently thought out the implications to the existence of the poor and needy in Christian communities. Does not their presence violate the character of the Church as a symbol of the Kingdom? Was not Luke right in positing as the ideal Christian community, the first Christian community in Jerusalem? For there:

"All the believers were of one heart and mind. No one claimed that any of his possessions was his own, but they shared everything they had. With great power the Apostles continued to testify to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus and much grace was upon them all. There was no needy person among them, for from time to time those who owned lands or houses sold them, brought the money from the sales and put it at the Apostles' feet and it was distributed to anyone as he had need" (Acts 4:32-35).

Should not this be the norm not only for religious communities, but for every parish, basic community, diocese, indeed for the whole Church? How can a Church which tolerates destitution among its members, be a symbol of the Kingdom?

But the Church is not just a symbol of the Kingdom it is also its agent. It has a mission to work for the coming of the end-time community, and for the human communities in which this end-community is prefigured and prepared (*Lumen Gentium*, n. 32). Michael Amaladoss is right in pointing out that the mission of the Church is primarily a conversion of culture - that is the Church operates not directly on the structures or mechanisms that create an unjust, violent and exploitative society but on the people who create the structures. The mission of the Church is primarily the transmission

#### 1. INCARNATION - INCULTURATION

- Quelle est notre capacité de présenter le message, de l'incarner dans des cultures différentes des nôtres? Est-ce une mission impossible?

Il nous semble qu'il y a une urgence à dépolitiser le message chrétien de ses catégories culturelles et philosophiques grecs-romaines pour retrouver la pureté originale afin de les reformuler dans des catégories orientales.

Il est étonnant pour nous de voir comment l'esprit oriental peut mater les contraires (par exemple: deux Eglises en Chine).

Est-ce que il y a un message à l'état pur? On ne peut pas faire l'économie de l'incarnation du message.

C'est la communauté chrétienne qui a reçu le message qui l'incarne dans sa propre culture.

Il faut renier complètement la culture et ne pas faire culte à une culture junte.

## 2. SPIRITUALE OCCIDENTALE - SPIRITUALE ORIENTALE

Au contact de l'orient, on se rend compte qu'il y a d'autres chemins vers Dieu, d'autres expériences spirituelles. Face à cette différence, comment arriver à se convaincre et à partager une expérience spirituelle différente.

Au cours des expériences spirituelles, nous avons cru reconnaître deux grandes lignes de source: d'une part, la rencontre avec les grands traditions religieuses de l'orient; et d'autre part, une préoccupation pour la justice, la paix et le respect des droits humains. Comment faire converger ces deux voies? Est-ce que l'orient ne peut pas nous indiquer une nouvelle voie de conciliation entre les deux religions de l'orient?

L'ouverture: en Inde, les Ashrams sont des lieux de prière ouverts à tous: bouddhistes, hindous, non-chrétiens, chrétiens, musulmans etc... Serait-ce une forme d'amitié?

### 3. PRÉSENCE MISSIONNAIRE EN ASIE

Nous avons note de la part de trois Eglises d'Asie (Inde, Chine, Japon) une grande lucidité face à leur situation et face à la réalité missionnaire. Somes nous capables de la même lucidité sur nous-mêmes? Sur nos propres Eglises d'origine? Le succès d'une présence missionnaire est de pouvoir paragarder avec des gens et de développer avec eux des attitudes et des gestes humanitaires. Le succès de l'évangélisation consiste à éviter une préoccupation dans la ligne de l'Evangile, à développer le goût de la justice, de la paix et du shalom.

A quoi sommes-nous appelés comme missionnaires dans ces pays? Un projet missionnaire ne peut pas être défini de l'extérior, mais de l'intérieur de ces pays d'Asie.

Il nous apparaît important de favoriser l'envoi de missionnaires provenant de d'autres continents que l'Europe et de l'Amérique du nord vers l'Asie. L'envoi de missionnaires originaires d'Afrique et de l'Amérique du sud sera certainement bénéfique afin d'éviter le colonialisme.

- *N'y a-t-il pas une nouvelle façon d'être missionnaire pour l'avenir?*

*Comment arriver à cheminer en solidarité avec les pauvres qui forment la vaste majorité de la population en Asie?*

*L'Évangile peut-il être une Bonne Nouvelle pour les sociétés développées de l'Asie?*

*L'Évangile qui a transformé le monde développé de la Grèce et de Rome, peut-il transformer le Japon d'aujourd'hui, la Corée, la Chine, Singapour, Taiwan et la Thaïlande qui sont résolument engagés sur la voie du développement? L'Évangile a-t-il un message pertinent pour les "sociétés développées"?*

*L'évangile peut-il être une voie de réconciliation entre les peuples de l'Asie?*

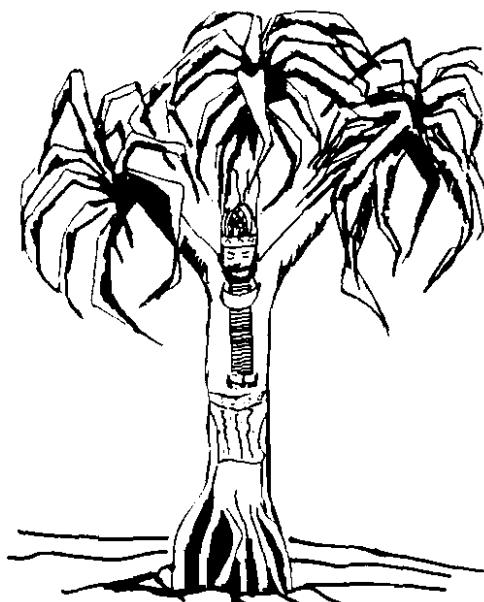
and transformation of **values**. But this does not exclude the participation of the Church in the formulation of **strategies** through which these values are realised and in **action** that will ensure that these strategies are implemented. Otherwise the mission of the Church will remain (as too often happens) an empty verbal proclamation.

In the Church in India, confronted by the challenge of poverty and caste, I see, therefore, three levels of mission. There is, 1) an immense effort of institutional service to the needy (and not so needy) which is quite unmatched in the country. I have read somewhere that the Christian community, numbering about 4 per cent of the population is responsible for about a third of the social services in the country. This is an enormous institutional investment. It was made, significantly, after India became independent. For since then hospitals and dispensaries have multiplied tenfold, high schools sixfold, colleges eightfold. This is clearly part of the effort of a minority community to win the acceptance of the majority. But in spite of this, and in spite of the many ambiguities of

such institutional service, which often seems to serve the interests of the rich, without really imbuing them with Gospel values, it does fulfill in some way the mission of the Church as an agent of the Kingdom.

This mission is fulfilled more clearly, 2) in the increasing number of religious who have begun to work not just for the poor but with the poor, bringing them not only aid but solidarity, and moving from a paternalistic and ultimately crippling doling out of goods and services to a mobilisation of the resources of the people, especially of the women. Such grass-roots involvement which can at times lead to radical confrontation with "the principalities and powers" (local landlords, money lenders, owners of liquor shops) is a conspicuous and growing feature of religious life in India today.

What is still lacking in the Indian Church is, 3) a third level of action, that is, involvement at what I call the tree-tops. Much of the future of India's poor is determined by social, economic and political policies made at high levels of government. We need to influence these. Unfortunately the Church in India lacks institutions and personnel with the competence to do this. Far too much of its energy is spent on an efficient but totally uncreative educational system, which while it satisfies the needs of the middle class, enabling them to get better jobs, does not contribute to the thinking of the country. At the moment the Jesuit-run Indian Social Institute in Delhi is about the only group I know of which can influence Government policy. We need more 'tree-top' groups like these who can translate the values of the Kingdom into economic and political strategies with a competence and an authority that will be accepted by those who shape the future of India. This too is a challenge of the poor to the Indian Church.



# THE INDIAN CHURCH CHALLENGED BY PLURALISM AND DIALOGUE

George Soares-Prabhu, SJ

## 1. Religious Pluralism

Religious pluralism is, we have seen, one of the conspicuous features of India. All the major world religions flourish here beside the cosmic religions of India's *divasis* (aboriginal peoples), and exiled religions like Zoroastrianism and Lamaism which, forcibly expelled from their own lands, have found shelter in India. Hindus make up 83% of India's population, Muslims 11.4%, Christians 2.45%, Sikhs 2.0% and Buddhist 0.75%. The proportion has remained roughly constant over the past twenty years.

### 1.1. Pluralism in the Church: The Four Churches

Among the Christians, the largest group are the Roman Catholics, approximately 14 million of them, making up about 1.7% of India's total population. Small as it is, the Catholic Church in India is not a homogeneous body. It reflects the unity in diversity which is so characteristic of India. There are three distinct and sometimes competing rites in the Indian Church: the Syro-Malabar and the Syro-Malankara rites of the Thomas Christians who have existed in Kerala from at least the first centuries of our era (possibly, though I find it hard to credit this, from the arrival of the Apostle Thomas, who is said to have come to India round 52 A.D.); and the Latin rite which was brought by the Portuguese when they 'discovered' India in 1498. Ethnic and cultural differences, join these rites in differentiating what have been called the four Churches of India.

a) The Syrian Catholics of Kerala belonging to the Syro-Malabar and the Syro-Malankara rites may be said to be the first Church. They make up about 25% of India's

Catholic population. Until the arrival of the Portuguese the Syrian Church existed as an inert caste group in Kerala society. But the new situation created by the coming of the West, unleashed an extraordinary missionary dynamism. This Church has been the main source of native vocations to the missionary congregations of men and women who evangelised the territories of North India; and ever since it was allowed, after Vatican II, to extend its rite outside Kerala, it has built eight Syrian dioceses and an eparchy in North India.

b) The second Church, the Padroado Church, was founded by the missionaries who arrived with the Portuguese in Goa in 1498, and operated under the patronage of the King of Portugal. This classic colonial mission, which identified loyalty to Christ with loyalty to the King of Portugal and Christianity with Western culture, created roughly four groups of Catholics, mostly in the coastal regions of southern India, which they ruled or dominated. Among these we have a) the Latin rite Christians of Kerala, often drawn from the lower castes, who were not welcome in the Syrian caste-Church and tension still exists; (b) the Christians of the Western or Konkan coast (Goa, Bombay, Bassein Mangalore), who were drawn from various strata of native society, given Portuguese names, and a more or less Westernised style of life; (c) the pearl-fishers of the Coromandal (South-Eastern) coast, who converted *en masse* to Christianity to get protection from the depredations of the Muslims, but were built up by Francis Xavier into an extraordinarily steadfast and fervent Christian group; and d) the caste converts in the interior native kingdoms in what is now Tamilnadu and Andhra Pradesh, brought in by the inculturated mission of Roberto De Nobili and his successors.

c) The Tribal Churches consisting basically of 1) the Adivasi Church of Chota Nagpur and 2) the tribal Churches in the seven States on the North East frontiers of India, make up the third Church. Both these are examples of an extraordinarily successful mission. Here Christianity came not at the cost of the enslavement, and decimation of the indigenous peoples and the wholesale destruction of their culture, as happened in the Americas and in Africa. Instead it liberated the *adivasis* (aboriginal inhabitants) from economic oppression, and within a hundred years built them up into a self-confident, self-sufficient, culturally rooted tribal Church. Begun just a little over a century ago by Belgian Jesuit missionaries the Adivasi Church of Central India totals 1,260 000 Catholics, 9% of the total Catholic population in India. With twelve bishops, numerous priests and possibly the largest number of priestly vocations in the country, this is the most significant Church group in North India, a brilliant example of what Christian mission can and should be.

Almost as impressive is the tribal Church in the North East. Much of the North East is Christian, with a Christian majority in three of its seven small States (Mizoram (80%), Nagaland (80%) and Meghalaya (52%). Most of these Christians (nearly 70% of them) are Baptists or Presbyterians, since Catholic missionaries did not begin working seriously in the North East until the arrival of the Salesians of Don Bosco in 1921. Since then, and particularly in the years after Independence in 1947, the growth of the Church has been impressive. The number of Catholics which was less than 60,000 at the time of Independence had grown to 700,000 by 1990. Growth has been fostered by persecution, which has been rare in India. Christians were beaten up, and their Churches burnt in Arunachal Pradesh, the northernmost of the so-called seven sisters, a few years ago. Today, in spite (or because of) of State opposition and the absence of resident priests, about 10,000 people embrace Christianity each year. This remarkable growth is the result of a dynamic laity, aided by Indian missionaries who cross over from the neighbouring States from time to time.

Examples like this should dispel any impression that the Indian Church is less 'missionary' than Churches elsewhere, even though there is a widespread, and I believe erroneous, impression even among personnel engaged in mission itself

that the 'missionary spirit' is declining. What I believe is happening is that the understanding and style of mission is changing. A new missionary praxis more sensitive to the context of the evangelised than the colonial mission, which came to 'conquer' India is developing, and with it a new understanding of mission. I shall say more about this later. But what is worth bearing in mind now is that for its size the impact of the Church and specially of the religious on India society (and is not this mission?), is quite extraordinary, proportionately greater, I believe, than that of many Churches in the Christian West.

4) The fourth Church is the Church of the Dalits. Dalits were converted in South India since the 16th century, "when the Portuguese extended protection to oppressed Paravas of the Coromandal coast in Tamilnadu and Mukkuvars of the Kerala coast", and have since lived in uneasy tension with caste converts, won over by the ambiguous 'caste mission' of De Nobili and his successors. A second phase of mass conversions from the Dalits, seeking social mobility through conversion, began both in South India and in the North in the 19th century. It might have been far more extensive had the Church not projected the image (as it still does) of a foreign body in Indian society. For when Dr B.R. Ambedkar the outstanding Dalit leader of our times sought an alternative to Hinduism for his followers, he picked on Buddhism rather than on Christianity, which he felt was too foreign in its ways, and too riddled with caste discrimination. The result is that Ambedkar with some three million of his followers became Buddhists in October 1956 -- much to our loss and possibly, theirs.

Dalit conversions to Christianity are now declining, and some Dalit Christians are going back to Hinduism -- partly because of the heavy economic disadvantages (loss of government reservations in education and jobs) that conversion to Christianity entails, and partly too because the discrimination they continue to experience in Christian Churches has belied (as we have seen) the hope that they would find acceptance and the dignity they looked for in it. In spite of this Dalits constitute fully half the Catholics in the Indian Church. As they wake up to their situation of oppression, challenge complacent Church leaders who have long connived at caste discrimination, and join hands with Dalit movements across the country, they are a prophetic element in the Church and are of great significance for its future.

These "four Churches" are not of course four distinct and separate bodies, but analytical categories which help us to understand the complexity of the elements, often in tension with one another, that make up the Catholic Church in India today. The Church in India, more perhaps than in most other countries, is plural. Its unity is a unity in diversity. Tensions exist within it. Attempts at reducing this rich pluriformity of the Indian Church to the uniformity of a single 'international' (read, Roman) model, or at conforming the various local Indian Churches to an over-arching Latin or Syrian type are, I believe, forms of imperialism which do not do justice (in every sense of the word) to the rich reality of the Indian Church.

## 2. Pluralism in India: The Indian Mind

This pluriform Church exists as a tiny but significant group in a yet more pluriform society. India we have seen is both socially, culturally, and religiously pluriform. Rajni Kothari, one of India's leading political scientists has said:

"I have long argued that thanks largely to the composite culture evolved in the inter-mix of race, ethnicity and belief systems, we have developed a unique blend of pluralism and that for us pluralism was not a mere political construct for a functioning democracy; *it was basic to our very conception of a social order...* I still think that there is something unique about us, about the inherent diversity of our beings in a world becoming so uniform and homogeneous".

This judgement needs, as Kothari admits, to be nuanced today in the wake of growing Hindu fundamentalism and the violent 'communal' conflicts that followed the destruction of the Barabari mosque at Ayodhya on 6 December, 1992. There has been a great deal of religious violence in India in the last few years which seems to belie this tolerance that Rajni Kothari speaks about above.

### 2.1. Pluralism Threatened: Communalism in India

But such violence must be seen in its context. Religious violence is a relatively recent phenomenon in India. It has become a normal

part of Indian life only since the beginning of the twentieth century, partly at least as a result of the machinations of colonial rulers bent on pursuing a policy of divide and rule. Today such violence is on the increase because of growing 'communalism', that is, because of the turning in of religious communities upon themselves to form tightly knit defensive groups maintaining a hostile attitude of aggression towards members of rival religious groups. The reason for this (as for all fundamental reactions)

### GROUP

*The 1994 SEDOS Conference has been mainly concerned with cultural analysis. It is suggested that SEDOS also address the rapid economic changes following the collapse of Soviet Communism, especially:-*

1. *What are the possibilities of the emerging international economy both for reducing poverty and hunger, as well as the problems, as in equity and income distribution?*
2. *How can the Church offer a constructive ethical perspective for a reformed capitalism, without moralising or excessive negativity, bearing in mind that:*
  - a) *this work will be primarily that of the laity;*
  - b) *and will need people with specialised expertise.*
3. *How do we balance the Option for the Poor:*
  - a) *with the need to evangelise the growing middle and upper classes;*
  - b) *with the task of helping shape social and economic policy?*

is a widespread sense of insecurity among all religions and specially (curiously enough) in Hinduism. Although the Hindus form the majority of the people in India, they feel threatened. They perceive Muslims and Christians not as powerless minority groups but as parts of the wealthy Arab or the immensely powerful Western world, which are threatening the existence of Hindu society. The insecurity is accentuated by the history of its dealings with Islam and Christianity, both of which came to

India as aggressive proselytizing religions growing at the expense of a tolerant Hinduism by making converts often by quite dubious means.

Conversion is still the most sensitive issue in Hindu-Christian dialogue, evoking visceral reactions among Hindus. Conversions to Christianity they feel are 1) unjust, for the conversions are almost entirely from the poor, uneducated, marginalised groups who (they say) are incapable of religious discrimination, and change their religion only in the hope of material gain or social uplift; and they are 2) threatening, because by reducing the numbers of Hindus they diminish their political power; for voting in India largely follows caste and religious lines. This allergy to conversion is partly too a legacy of the colonial mission, which frequently treated Hinduism with contempt, and has left it more defensive than one realises. It needs to be taken seriously. Militant exhortations to mission, or fervid proclamations of Evangelisation 2000 (which is not even 2000 but 1921 according to the Indian calendar!) are far from helpful. They create a climate which hinders mission rather than helps it.

## 2.2. Basic Pluralism

In spite of such religious violence (which is often the result of underlying class and political conflicts making use of religion rather than of religion itself) and the growing Hindu fundamentalism it reflects (which, as recent elections have shown, is much less widespread than the propagandists of the rightist parties would like us to believe), pluralism still remains, I believe, an integral element of Indian culture, part of that basic unity which underlies all the immense diversity of its people. There is no way of imagining a genuinely Indian Christianity which will not be open to such religious pluralism. Such openness is, I would suggest, a necessary part of its Indianess.

This attitude of openness is ultimately the product of Hinduism, which, because it is a culture like Hellenism even more than it is a religion like Judaism, has shaped the 'Indianess' which marks all the various plural religious and social sub-cultures that exist in the this land. The religious pluralism of India is, therefore, not just a *de facto* pluralism. India does not just happen to have many religions because a variety of historical circumstances happened to bring these into the country. A great many religions flourish in India because, they have been wel-

comed and nurtured here, by the tolerance of Indian society. India provided an atmosphere of religious liberty unknown in the West (which was distinguished rather for its persecution of the Jews and its crusades against the Muslims) till the establishment of the post-enlightenment secular state; and unknown in Catholicism until the Second Vatican Council's belated, cautious, and somewhat patronising declaration of religious freedom (*Dignitatis humanae*).

## 2.3. The Indian Mind

Such tolerance is rooted in a particular way of perceiving reality which I have called the Indian mind. It has been suggested with some plausibility by A.K. Ramanujan, poet, professor of English literature, translator of Kannada religious verse, that there is a special Indian way of thinking that differs from the way that people think in the West. Indian thinking, Ramanujan suggests (referring not to the process of thought, which is the same in all people, but to the cultural frame or perspective within which one thinks), is context sensitive, not context free. That is, Indian thinking always perceives persons and things not as isolated individuals or objects but as parts of a context without which they cannot be properly understood. People are experienced not as autonomous isolated individuals, but as persons situated in the social context of his or her family and caste. Cultural anthropologists would say that the Indian perception of the self is sociocentric rather than (as in the West) egocentric. The self, that is, experienced not as an autonomous individual but as an extended-self, part of a larger group, the family or the caste. Things too are perceived as parts of a larger inter-connected, interrelated whole. Indian thinking then, is modelled not on the context-free mathematics of Euclid (which is the paradigm of thinking in the West) but on the context sensitive grammar of Panini, the 4th century B.C. Sanskrit grammarian, who is rightly looked upon as the father of all scientific grammar. This has a number of consequences:

- 1) Indian thinking avoids universal abstract propositions, and prefers concrete context bound affirmations. As Hegel, who caught this point well, put it: "While we say, 'bravery is a virtue', the Hindus say, on the contrary, 'bravery is the virtue of the warrior caste'.
- 2) Because of this sensitivity to the context and ultimately to the concentric series of contexts in which persons, events and things exist,

Indian thought experiences all reality as an interconnected and interdependent whole. It is therefore cosmo-centric and not (like Western thought) anthropocentric in its orientation. The cosmos (not just humankind) is always the horizon of Indian experience. In its core metaphor Hinduism sees the world as the body of God, whereas Christianity sees humankind as God's family.

3) This makes Indian thinking holistic and inclusive. Indian thinking, that is, always tries to grasp the whole because things have a meaning only as parts of this whole.

4) In this effort to grasp the whole, the Indian mind is prepared, as Troy Organ has said, to risk the chance of error rather than the loss of any part of truth. Its thinking is therefore inclusive not exclusive. Truth is not defined by exclusion (A is A because it is not B) but by identity (A is A whether or not it is also B); so that to affirm something is not necessarily to deny its opposite (Panikkar, 1964: 39-41). That is the Indian mind approaches reality through the principle of identity rather than through the principle of non-contradiction. "Knowledge of the other" as Felix Wilfred puts it, takes place by reaching out to the other not through the negation of the other. Indian thinking prefers the *yin-yang* logic of complementarity (both/and) to the Aristotelian logic of exclusion (either/or). It is therefore tolerant of ambiguity, and is able to hold together seemingly contradictory aspects of reality as complementary parts of a never fully to be apprehended whole.

5) The characteristic Indian attitude of 'tolerance' towards all religions (*sarvadharmanasambhava*) is quite different from the attitudes of indifference ('all religions are the same') or consumerism (I shop around in the supermarket of religions for the one that suits me) that appear to be taking over the post Christian West. Felix Wilfred has brought this out well:

"This basic attitude in the inter-relationship between the various religious paths could be characterised, first by stating what it is not. *Sarvadharmanasambhava* is not a statement about equality of all religions; it is not a pragmatic attitude which is popularly expressed as 'live and let live', it is not a superficial irenism forestalling possible religious conflicts. Nor is it a relativism

that fails to respect the specificity of each religious tradition. The attitude of *sarvadharmanasambhava* has a deeper root: it is the result of one's own experience of the ultimate through which he or she is able to understand a similar experience of the other and respect it. From the experience of ultimacy and universality within the realm of one's own religious faith, what results is not the affirmation of its uniqueness over against others; what results rather is the capacity to understand the faith of the other in its ultimacy and universality".

6) This way of thinking is ultimately rooted in an experience of the Absolute as utterly ineffable. The Indian tradition has always insisted strongly that God is wholly beyond name and form; and Hindus on the whole are more aware of this otherness of God than Christians, who have been brought up in a tradition where God has taken on a human form in Jesus Christ and is thought of in terms of an anthropomorphic image of a father. The ineffable reality of God, Indians believe, cannot be grasped by any one dogmatic system or credal statement, nor can access to it be monopolised by any one way. The Indian mind has therefore developed an attitude of respect towards all religions, because it sees them as complementary disclosures of and paths towards the ineffable absolute, which no one religion can comprehend. Its religious tolerance is, as Sarvapalli Radhakrishnan points out, "the homage which the finite mind pays to the inexhaustibility of the infinity".

## 2. Inter-Religious Dialogue

What we have in India today, then is a tiny, divided, highly structured, doctrinally exclusive community, the Catholic Church, thoroughly Western in its doctrine, its administrative structures, its attitudes and its forms of worship, and situated in the midst of an immense pluri-cultural, multi-religious and basically tolerant Hindu society shaped by very different world views and values. If the Church is to survive as 'Church', that is, as a community open to the world, and not to curl up into a closed, inward-looking sect, it has, it would seem, no option but to enter into a dialogue with the pluri-religious society around it. The dialogue I am thinking of is not just the dialogue of life, which Christians as citizens are in fact engaged in daily with their fellow citizens, but an

## PANEL

### Some Challenges Facing the Church in India

*The Church in India is such a complex reality that it would be far too ambitious on my part to address myself to such a task. Instead, in the light of my limited experience of 25 years as a Christian Brother involved in the ministry of the evangelisation of youth, I offer some of my reflections. Besides being a member of my Province Leadership Team, I am presently engaged in vocation promotion, though I have also done a three-year stint in Formation. At heart I am very much a "chalk and duster" person.*

*The thrust in our province, at the moment, is towards a closer involvement with the poor, especially in rural areas where the Church in my country is investing a fair amount of personnel and energy. Towards the end of the sixties we were engaged in a movement which highlighted the Catholic nature of our schools. This meant ensuring that every Catholic that applied for admission was guaranteed entry. Our Faith Formation Programme was beefed up to facilitate a close working relationship between the school, the home, and the parish. Remedial teaching was made available to weaker students to assist them in their academic progress.*

*The present day social and political climate in India has greatly awakened our consciousness to the realisation that:*

1. *Systems of injustice are built into Indian society where the weak and voiceless are greatly discriminated against and exploited.*
2. *If the Indian Church is to be a 'Communion', it needs to examine its relation with the other Churches and the great religious of the land.*

*As a result, we are asking ourselves whether we can continue to narrowly concentrate on working with Catholics when the needs of the poor keep unsettling us. If so, how do we approach people of other faith traditions? What does evangelisation mean in this context?*

*When the Major Superiors of the Conference of Religious In India sat down to analyse the situation, they discovered that inspite of having 84,000 religious in the field -- a figure that represents a tremendous pool of committed energy and giftedness. Our impact on the minds and attitudes of our fellow countrymen belonging to other faith traditions has been quite minimal. A disproportionately large amount of energy is being used up in maintenance work in institutions where our charisma have been domesticated and are engaged largely in serving the interests of the dominant culture in Indian society. The reasons for the present state of affairs are:*

- a. **Institutionalisation.** *Where our own success over the years has led to the creation of a culture where structures take precedence over people.*
- b. **Our lack of God experience.** *We are seldom perceived as people of God and asked more for the services we have to offer.*

**Against this background, here are some of the challenges facing the Church in India:**

1. *The Church must be seen to be Good News for the poor and the oppressed, expressing solidarity with them, working alongside them, empowering them in their journey towards liberation. It is imperative for religious to approach the poor with the attitude of a guest if we are to be evangelised by them. It calls for a stance of humble service and deep sensitivity -- tread cautiously because we are on Holy Ground -- God is already present.*

2. A realisation that the Gospel of Jesus as proclaimed by the Church is limited both historically and culturally. That as the Church makes the world its agenda that it in turn recognises its own need for conversion and adopts an openness to recognising the Word and the Spirit of God which is active in mysterious ways in varied cultures and religions.

*As Jesus revealed to us the heart and mind of God in his mission as logos, we need to recognise the founders of the major religions of the land e.g. Buddha, Mohammed, Mahavira, Vishnu and Krishna in the same capacity as logos.*

*In their plethora of duties, the Hindus enjoy a heightened awareness of the presence of God in nature and in creation. This insight was central to the Man from Nazareth for whom life was never commonplace -- it was always full of drama. Jesus encountered His God in nature, in creation and in his relationships with those whom he rubbed shoulders with.*

3. If we are serious in the area of inter-religious dialogue and we recognise that religion is the soul of culture -- then inspire of the wonderful initiative in this area which are in evidence, though they are generally limited to very select groups -- a hope that I sincerely entertain is that as we grow into a community of committed persons, this dialogue will percolate to the level of the ordinary believer.

*The challenge is to engage with people whom we encounter in our work-places, and neighbourhoods, of varied religious traditions and cultures in the search of God.*

- Where do I meet my God?
- Who is this God of mine?
- How does my experience of God help me to face tragedy and live with mystery in my life?

*Such an endeavour will lead us to discover the same God who is at work in our lives, who enlightens our perception of reality and nurtures and sustains our efforts to establish a new world order based on justice and right relationships.*



explicit **inter-religious dialogue**, with all the risks and opportunities that such a dialogue involves for a community which attaches great importance to its doctrinal purity. Such a dialogue is demanded (a) by the Church as community in mission, for the effective proclamation of the Good News demands familiarity with the interlocutor which only dialogue can give; it is demanded too (b) by the Church as the local embodiment of the salvation revealed by Jesus, for a 'local' Church if it is to be true to itself (and not a colony or a wholly owned subsidiary of a transnational corporation) it must use the resources of its local tradition to express the mystery of Christ. Since Vatican II, moving away from traditional attitudes which had repudiated religions as demonic or patronised them as 'merely' natural stumbling attempts of religiously primitive peoples to reach God has begun to recognise them as 'ways of salvation' (Kurien) as part of God's self-disclosure and they have to be integrated into any genuinely Indian Christian understanding of its faith. Inter-religious dialogue is therefore necessary.

The richly multi-religious and religiously tolerant situation of India would seem almost an ideal set-up for such inter-religious dialogue to take place. In fact, inter-religious dialogue has been a recent experience in the Catholic Church, and is still hesitant, tentative, rarely engaged in depth, and usually restricted to a few pioneering groups, generally among the clergy and the religious. It has, however, resulted in the following four movements:

1) The introduction of courses on Indian religions in the curricula of Seminaries and of Houses of Formation for religious, and to a small extent in our schools, has resulted in the clergy and the religious, (but not to any significant extent the laity, who still labour under the prejudices of a pre-Vatican II situation), are much better acquainted, at least theoretically, with Indian religions than they used to be. Their acquaintance however remains a theoretical, and superficial book knowledge, without much acquaintance with the lived reality of the religions, and with very little familiarity with their religious texts. I doubt whether even half a dozen seminarians in India would have gone through so significant a text as the *Bhagavadgita*. Their understanding of Hinduism and Islam is certainly better than the absolute prejudiced blankness with which priests and religious of a generation ago entered Indian society, but it can hardly be said to be enough.

Yet, significantly, even this little interest in Indian religions on the part of Christians, one sign of which is the growing number of dissertations on Indian topics written by Catholic theologians, does not seem to be matched by a corresponding interest in Christianity by members of other religious groups. A century ago Hindu theologians were, as Felix Wilfred points out, writing so extensively about Jesus that "while Christians were stuck up with the imported Christology, it was the Hindu devotees of Jesus who explored creative ways of understanding and interpreting him". Jesus still remains a subject of interest to Hindu gurus, from Gandhi to Osho Rajneesh. But Christianity does not. There is scarcely anything at all written on the Christian religion by Hindus or Muslims today. Their conception of Christianity continues to be coloured (like the popular Christian perception of Hinduism and Islam) by stereotyped prejudices which perceive of Christianity as a foreign religion which encourages a Westernised, and, to the orthodox Hindu, an immodest and libertine style of life, but is conspicuous for its social service. The mini-skirted secretary wearing a cross over her low-cut blouse, the Christian fishermen waving his bottle of hard liquor, or the kindly cassocked priest who takes care of orphans he finds in the street, are stock figures of the Indian cinema -- the great purveyor of popular culture in India.

2) This growing interest in religions finds a further expression in **dialogue centres** started by Catholic priests and religious in various parts of India. These are not many and it is difficult to measure their impact. They seem to have succeeded in creating a somewhat better understanding and acceptance of Christianity in certain very limited circles of western educated Hindus, but not dialogue at any depth. At any rate, they are not a significant feature in the Church in India today.

3) Where inter-religious dialogue has had its most striking result is probably in the **Christian Ashrams** which are beginning to appear all over the country. The word 'ashram' originally designated the place where a sage or *rishi* dwelt in the company of his disciples. It has come to designate a wide variety of establishments where people gather around a *guru* or a master of the spiritual life to be initiated into a spiritual discipline (*sadhana*) which will lead them to liberation (*moksha*). This is probably the closest that we come in Hinduism to a religious community, and it is, characteristically, less

institutionalised, and more flexible than the Buddhist *sangha* or the Christian monastery. Because the forms of *sadhana* adopted by different *gurus* differ, *ashrams* vary greatly in their style of functioning. But the typical Hindu emphasis on non-attachment and contemplation ensures that most insist on simplicity of life, silence, and the assiduous practice of spiritual exercises. These exercises might take the form of chanting sacred verses, or yogic meditation, or the reading and recitation of the sacred scriptures, or instructions on Vedanta by the *guru*.

With his characteristic creativity Mahatma Gandhi, who as has been said tried to combine the ethics of the Sermon on the Mount with the philosophy of the *Upanishads*, began a new style of *ashram* in which prayer and the reading of the scriptures (of all religious traditions) was combined with productive manual work like spinning (which Gandhi held in high esteem) and with care for the poor around. Thus was born what Richard Taylor called the socially oriented *Khadi ashram* (*khadi* being handloom cloth whose production and use Gandhi encouraged) as opposed to the strictly religious *kavi ashram* (attended by people wearing clothes of the sacred saffron pink colour called *kavi*).

The idea of the Christian *ashram*, along with the idea of constructing an Indian Christian theology based on the Vedanta, goes back to the great Bengali Christian convert, nationalist and theologian, Bhabani Charan Banerjee (1861-1907), better known as Upadhyay Brahmabandhab, the Sanskrit Christian name he adopted when, in 1894, he took up the life of a Sanyasin or renouncer. This extraordinary Hindu-Catholic, as he aspired to be, was the inspiration of one of Rabindranath Tagore's Bengali novels (*Char Adhay*). Tagore said of him: "He was a Roman Catholic ascetic yet a Vedantin -- spirited, fearless, self-denying, erudite and uncommonly influential". Prominent in the nationalist movement that was just beginning in India, well versed in the traditions of Hinduism, Brahmabandhab was interested in developing a non-colonial style of Christianity, shorn of its Western embodiment, in which one could be a Hindu and a Catholic at the same time:

By birth we are Hindu and shall remain Hindu till death. But as *dvija* (twice born) by virtue of our sacramental rebirth, we are Catholic; we are members of an indefectible communion embracing all ages and climes. In customs and manners, in observing caste

and social distinctions, in eating and drinking, in our life and our living, we are genuine Hindus; but in our faith we are neither Hindu nor European, nor American, nor Chinese, but all-inclusive... In short we are Hindus so far as our physical and mental constitution is concerned, but in regard to our immortal souls we are Catholic. We are *Hindu Catholic*.

To achieve this goal (which was more complex than he seems to have imagined, for religion and culture cannot so easily be divested of each other) Brahmabandhab began to work out a Christian theology based on the Vedanta; and wanted to found a Hindu-Christian *ashram*, or better a *math* or monastery, from which trained Hindu Christian preachers could go out to evangelise the land effectively. Both projects, though supported by local bishops, were summarily suppressed by the Apostolic Delegate Ladislaus Zaleski, an autocratic Pole quite insensitive to India, who forbade the construction of the *math* and proscribed both *Sophia* and later *Twentieth Century*, two weekly reviews founded by Brahmabandhab to promote his Indian Christian theology -- even though Brahmabandhab was prepared to submit the articles in them to ecclesiastical censorship.

Although this heavy handed condemnation caused Brahmabandhab much anguish and may have hounded him out of the Church, for it is not quite sure whether he died a Christian or a Hindu (I suspect he was, as always, both), it did not put an end to his seminal work. His attempt to use the Vedanta to elaborate an Indian Christian theology was taken up by the so-called Calcutta School of Belgian Jesuits in their journal 'The Light of the East'. With the general loss of interest in scholastic theology everywhere, this 'to Christ through the Vedanta' movement has more or less petered out, though its spirit survives in Catholic *ashrams* where individuals continue to seek a Christian Vedanta. Bramabandhab's other seminal idea, the establishment of an Indian-Christian monastery has survived better though in a somewhat altered form. It reappears in the Christian *ashrams*. Pioneered by three great Western masters of Vedantic mysticism, the Abbé Mochanin (1895-1957), Dom Le Saux (1910-1973) and Dom Bede Griffiths (1906-1993), whose efforts at a mystical encounter with Vedanta, are the spiritual counterpart to the more intellectual quest of the Calcutta School, the Christian *ashram* movement has

caught on. Christian *ashrams* are appearing in different forms in many parts of India. Their impact on the Indian Church (largely a Church of the very poor, who cannot afford the luxury of the leisured spirituality of *ashram* life) is not massive. Their clientele seems to be Westerners suffering from a surfeit of consumerism or economically secure Westernised Indian religious looking for a way out of their felt alienation. There are as yet few Indians attracted to an *ashram* life. The kind of spirituality Christian *ashrams* cultivate has been accused of being elitist. It is an upper caste, metacosmic religiosity which is suited to the leisured classes, rather than the 'toiling masses', and which legitimises immense social injustices like caste. The life-style followed in some Christian *ashrams* may be so imitative of what goes on in Hindu *ashrams*, that their specifically Christian character is not so evident. While all this is true, the encouraging fact is that the ashramites are aware of such criticism and seem to be responding to them

constructively. In this the *ashram* movement is showing itself to be a living and lively movement which is interacting creatively with its social and religious environment. I do not think that the movement will ever be a major factor of the Indian Church (which is primarily the Church of the poor) but it will, I believe, be a significant factor. Christian *ashrams* will be an important point of contact for dialogue with Hinduism, a constant reminder of transcendence in a secular world, and a continuing challenge to simplicity of life and detachment from material possessions in a world that is being engulfed by consumerism.

4) Finally, the fourth consequence of dialogue is the challenge that it poses to the Indian Church to respond to the **theological issues** raised by its encounter with other religions. At least four such issues can be identified:

## GROUP

*The SEDOS Seminar: "Asia: Challenge to the Church" has exposed us to many of the realities of India, China and Japan, and offered us the following challenges:*

- i) *that these great nations and cultures be approached with a model of mission and an attitude which forego colonial, triumphalist and superior approaches to mission, open to the experience of God enshrined in these countries;*
- ii) *that the Church cannot consider itself 'Catholic' if it is not open to the human and cultural dimensions which are essential to the expression of faith;*
- iii) *that although it represents a small minority the Church is called to be a prophetic voice giving expression to Kingdom values in these nations.*
- iv) *that theological formation and the encouraging of theological reflection on experience rather than reflection from abstract principles be of primary importance.*

1) The first is a **theology of religions** which will take other religions seriously as genuine ways of salvation and sources of revelation. No one who has encountered these religions in the pluralistic setting of India, can possibly dismiss them as false, inferior, or unfulfilled -- even though there is (as in Christianity) much that is evil in them. In India (and I suspect elsewhere in the Third World too) one is too aware of the imperfections of Christianity as it has come down to us, and of the spiritual wealth and holiness that one often meets in other traditions to adopt such a patronising attitude. Far from attempting to reduce this marvellous and enriching spiritual pluralism into a monolithic uniformity, the task of an Indian theology of religions would surely be to determine its theological significance. "We can explain the fact that the Milky Way is there by the doctrine of creation", says Wilfred Cantwell Smith, "but how do we explain the fact that the *Bhagvadgita* is there?" How else, indeed, than by suggesting that the same incredible pluralism which marks the work of God in nature (no two people, no two trees, no two grains of sand are alike) marks also God's work in the world of the spirit. The Spirit is not as monotonously uncreative as we (who like uniformity because it allows us to control things) would like it to be! Towards the end of his latest work, written at the end of years of intense, in-depth dialogue with Hinduism, Bede Griffiths would write of the great religious traditions of the world, that "these different traditions will all be seen as interrelated and interdependent, each giving a particular and unique insight into ultimate truth and reality".

2) Any such understanding of religions obviously poses challenges to the traditional **theology of salvation**. What is the saving role of Jesus in a pluri-religious context which sees each religion as providing a unique and valid insight into ultimate truth? Traditional Western paradigms, elaborated in a situation with little experience of other religions, and by a theology that is intellectual and academic, not existential and spiritual (as Indian theology would have to be), are not likely to be adequate. The problem of reconciling 'the uniqueness of Jesus' in a context of religious pluralism without doing injustice to either, remains I believe the most significant challenge that India offers the Christian theologian today.

3) Related to this is the task of expressing the experience of Jesus in a language that will be intelligible to our people in a way that the Graeco-roman formulations are not. A **Christology** that is not a spirituality, that is, that does not lead to transformation and praxis, would not be an Indian Christology. Elaborate formulae trying to reconcile the humanity and the divinity of Jesus may have their place, but they do not communicate a life-giving experience of Jesus. Instead they tend to remove him to a remote level where he remains a God to be adored, not a Master to be followed.

4) Finally the pluri-religious situation of India challenges the Indian theologian to a new understanding and praxis of mission. The understanding of mission in the West is still dominated by the colonial models which saw mission as a 'conquest' (conquering the world for Christ), and now sees it as a 'sale' (selling Christ), both aimed at maximising 'Church growth'. Such mission, which focuses on the growth and institutional survival of the Church rather than on the welfare of its recipients, is a selfish and therefore a sinful mission. With its experience of the aggression and arrogance of the colonial mission (which has left deep scars in the psyche of our people) the Indian Church will be wary of such selfish forms of mission. It will understand mission not in terms of 'conquering the world' or of 'planting the Church' but of 'serving the Kingdom of God', of which the Church is the symbol and servant. In this task of realising the Kingdom of God and the end time community it anticipates, the Church in India will collaborate with, rather than aggressively confront, the great religious traditions it lives with. But such collaboration will not be connivance at the evil (like caste) that all religious traditions carry because of the

routinisation of their charisma. Instead, it will always be a critical collaboration. For the mission of the Church, as symbol and servant of the Kingdom, is to confront the world religions, with Jesus and the Kingdom values He proclaimed. The Church is nothing if not prophetic. Its prophetic function will be best exercised not merely through verbal proclamation (which can easily become an alibi for genuine Christian praxis, so that we have the curious spectacle of missionaries fervently proclaiming Christ while tolerating slavery, apartheid or caste), but by witness. This is specially true in India, where a religious tradition that 'sees the divine image' (*darshan*) rather than hears the word of God, has made people more sensitive to visual manifestations of religious experience than to words about it. We need to listen to Mahatma Gandhi's words about the 'Gospel of the rose'. Ultimately the challenge of inter-religious dialogue to the Church in India may simply be the challenge to become the Indian Church.



# THE DEVELOPING CATHOLIC CHURCH IN CHINA

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John Tong

It is a pleasure for me to be with you today. And I am most grateful to Father Walter Von Holzen for giving me this opportunity to share with you some personal perceptions about China and the situation of the Catholic Church there. My first talk will deal with the political, economic and cultural background of China, and how the past affects the Government's present religious policy. The second will be devoted to the development of the Catholic Church in China as a whole, this despite the fact that at present there exists serious internal conflict between the underground and official Churches there. I also hope to touch upon the role of my own diocese, the Diocese of Hong Kong, and its effort to play a bridge role between the Church in China and the universal Church. Finally, I shall conclude with a few words about the important part Catholics throughout the world can continue to have in supporting the resurgence of faith and promoting reconciliation among mainland Catholics.

## CHINA'S CURRENT POLITICAL, ECONOMIC AND CULTURAL BACKGROUND

The founding of the People's Republic in 1949, represented not only the victory of the Chinese Communist party over its Nationalist rivals but, more importantly, it initiated a style of leadership that was to govern China for the next 30 years, and to a certain extent, is still with us. The following four elements were then and sometimes still are characteristic of Chinese Communist leadership: 1) violent revolution as a method for maintaining political power;

2) unquestioned obedience to a charismatic style of leadership that jealously guards its absolute authority; 3) the paramount importance of idealism and ideology; and 4) a sense of history bent on keeping alive the memory of the

humiliations of the imperialistic countries during the previous hundred years.

In 1978, the Third Plenum of the Eleventh Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Party, as part of an agonising reappraisal of the current situation, made fundamental changes in Government policies and attitudes. It approved the concept of a free market economy and downplayed the previous emphasis on idealism and ideology in favour of a new consciousness of the rights and interests of the individual. At the Committee meeting Deng Xiaoping emerged as national leader.

Deng was born in 1904, studied in France after World War I, and joined the Chinese Communist Party in 1924. He was one of Mao's closest comrades during and after the 'Long March' (1934-1935), entered the Politburo in 1955, and became one of a handful of China's leading rulers until he was purged in 1967. After being rehabilitated in 1973, he quickly climbed back up to the top of the Party leadership. Within two years he became Chief of the General Staff of the People's Liberation Army, Deputy Chairman of the Communist party and Vice-Premier. By 1976, Deng irritated the Ultra-Leftists by his sharp criticism of their activities. His high political position posed a threat to Mao's leadership and was seen as infringing on Mao's supreme authority. As a result, he was purged once again. Nevertheless, this irrepressible old man returned to power when Mao died, and this time at an even higher post - that of the nation's "general architect of reform".

Deng stressed economic development over politics and ideology. He is a pragmatist, who is often quoted as saying, "It doesn't matter if the cat is black or white as long as it catches mice!" Under Deng's leadership China began a series of economic reforms, furthered a policy

of modernisation and opened its doors to the rest of the world. All this brought sudden and dramatic changes. By 1989, however, two events were to have a tremendous influence on later changes: the 4th June, crackdown on the Student Democratic Movement, and the sudden collapse of Communism throughout Eastern Europe. The Chinese Communist leadership, however, was convinced that it could avoid further pitfalls and weather the storm by tightening control over both the party and the military, while at the same time working to improve the people's livelihood.

Deng is often criticised for failing to press for political change along with his economic reforms. This is not in line with the facts. Deng has already instituted in a modest degree a number of important political reforms which strike at the heart of government administration. He has set age limits on service leading to forced resignations and the early retirement of many high ranking Government officials who were incompetent in carrying out their duties of office. He also has reinstated the system of Government examinations to insure officials are promoted to higher office by what they know rather than who they know. And he has reorganised the party itself by separating out daily administration from centralised Party control. Such a policy of decentralised authority allows mid-level managers more scope and freedom to carry out their tasks effectively and efficiently.

Improving the people's livelihood seems to have been one of the underlying reasons why Deng Xiaoping took a trip South in the Spring of 1992 to visit the economic zones bordering on Hong Kong and Macau. He said then that the purpose of his trip was to liberate the forces of production in support of an already expanding economy, allowing it to develop even more rapidly. Along with the bright side there is definitely a dark side to China's efforts at reform and change. While Government leadership does give moral support to officials bent on reform, it is unable to offer much in the way of financial backing. As a result, the Government often turns a blind eye to the schemes devised by these officials for personal financial gain. Critics of the 'blind-eye' approach see in it a loss of social balance, and they feel that to pay such a price for economic advancement is in the long run unacceptable. Thus, an austerity drive and anti-corruption campaigns have been initiated in China recently.

In trying to evaluate the present political and economic climate, one must turn first to Chinese culture and the traditional philosophies that still influence it.

As Christians we believe human rights to be God-given and we point to the biblical account of Genesis, where it states that God made humans in His own image and likeness, as a source of this teaching. Genesis also states that the human beings created by God are therefore essentially good and only because of original sin are we inclined towards evil. Thus, human rights are respected and defended in Western society, sometimes even when certain extreme forms of individualism lead to their abuse. A concern for the nature of human beings has also been a major pre-occupation of the Confucian scholars of China. Over 2,500 years ago Confucius taught that 'benevolence' was human nature's highest value. Benevolence, he said, lay hidden in the human heart and was nurtured through a person's personal efforts in the pursuit of virtue. Confucius also respected a hierarchical society where relationships were ordered and expressed through ritual. Mencius inherited the Master's mantel, and brought Confucian ethical philosophy one step further by teaching that human nature was not only good in itself but human behaviour was also inclined toward the good. He saw in education, then, the prime means for supporting and furthering good behaviour in society and avoiding evil. These two philosophers have exerted an enormous influence on the Chinese people down through the centuries. Indeed, even today Neo-Confucianism is the reigning social philosophy of Chinese intellectuals throughout the world.

Some years after the death of Mencius, Chinese philosophy took another direction with the teaching of Xunzi who taught that human beings were inclined towards evil, not good, and laws were essential to regulate human behaviour. Naturally enough, this kind of thinking had great appeal among China's rulers and administrators. Xunzi's teaching was taken to extreme lengths by two key officials. One, whose name was Li Si, was Qinshihuang's Prime Minister. Qin was the first emperor to unite China and reigned from 221 to 206 B.C. Infamous for his policy of "burning the books and killing the scholars", he put to death an untold number of innocent people in his quest for power. The second official influenced by Xunzi was Han Fei who founded the very influential Legalist School. The Legalists abandoned the basic moral concepts of right and

## PANEL

*Rather than talk directly about China, I thought I would share a story with you and thus suggest why we need China and her people today.*

### A Chinese Story

*In old China, a young Catholic woman, Miss Wong married a Mr Li. He had worked hard and long to save enough money to marry her. Two years later they had a boy. They lived together happily for five more years. Mr Li had a heart attack and died. Mrs Wong took the added responsibility of a single parent in her stride and continued lovingly to raise their son. However, three years later he too took ill and within three days died of meningitis. Mrs Wong was heart-broken. Her life had lost a primal focus and she started to waste away: her neighbours support and pleas fell on deaf ears. A friend or her dead son's happened to visit her. He told her of a monk on a distant mountain, a monk who was known to work miracles. Deep within Mrs Wong's heart a flame of hope still flickered. She thought... just maybe, this monk could restore her son to her. She resolved to approach the monk to see if it would be possible. On regaining her strength, she and the young lad set off for the mountain to visit the monk. They arrived in the evening. She told the monk her story and made her request. He in turn said he would pray about it that night and would give her an answer in the morning. She was beside herself, he had not said "no"... she could hardly await the morning to find out his answer. In the morning she returned, the monk said he would restore her son to her. He asked one thing of her, a measure of tea from a family in the village at the bottom of the mountain, a family in which no one had died. She flew down the mountain and began going from one door to the next asking for tea. The tea was graciously offered many times; however, having listened to countless stories of sadness and grief, she was unable to accept any tea. She returned to the monk early in the afternoon to inform him that he could not restore her son to her, because she was unable to give him the tea he had requested. She did however thank him for challenging her to live. For she had learned that many had suffered as much as she and some even more and they had gone on living. Now so too must she.*

*I believe that we, as missionaries, are like Mrs Wong. We have had and are in relationship with Jesus our Saviour, brother, Lord and God and yet we miss him. We want to be with him and know more of him. We must share our appreciation, love and understanding of Jesus. We do however recognise that our understanding is limited and that we need to learn more of our God. From our conscious relationship we need to learn from others of Jesus and share our understanding with them.*

*We must note that our place is in the ranks of refugees. Among the political, economic and racial refugees, we as missionaries, are identified as religious refugees, pilgrims of the twenty-first century.*

*We are on the cusp of a new age in mission. Our poverty, our limited understanding of Jesus, compels us now to go forth to learn and share (to be evangelised and evangelise). This poverty calls us forth and forward. The urgency to be evangelised and to evangelise is real and compulsive. It is crying to be addressed with concern and compassion.*

*Concretely in China today and with Chinese people, it suggests that we need to underline and highlight essential God-given values such as the primacy of family and community, a value which is being eroded. Also, the Chinese peoples' respect and appreciation for learning, ecology, truth, beauty and for life. We too are charged with challenging their prejudices regarding their racial and cultural superiority, lack of balanced concern for the individual.*

wrong in favour of pragmatic necessity and State interest. Since, in their view, all people were inclined towards evil, individual freedom and independence were not to be tolerated: all existed for the sake of the collectivity.

In our own time, China's Legalist School exerted more of an influence on Chinese Communist leaders than any Western philosophy including Marxism. Mao was an admirer of Emperor Qin and praised him for "establishing a feudal State where power was centralised in the hands of an autocratic Government". It is estimated that over 43,000,000 died as a result of Mao's policies and political campaigns, many more deaths than have ever been attributed to Emperor Qin. Deng inherited the Legalist approach in a more relaxed way.

An American Sinologist, Lucian Pye, made this perceptive observation:

*"Since the rhythm of Chinese politics is not the left-right swing of Western systems but the up and down notion of tightening and relaxing controls, of centralisation and decentralisation, any increase in anxiety on the part of leadership is likely to translate into a greater degree of repression. This would probably be accompanied by the regime's efforts to attain greater ideological justification".*

### THE PRESENT RELIGIOUS POLICY IN CHINA

The Government's attitude towards religion is one of mere toleration. It applies its religious policy and other regulations with a stick and carrot approach - sometimes restricting religious activity, sometimes relaxing its hold. To understand to what degree this is done we must explore those factors that govern "continuation" and "change" in the religious policy of the Communist Party.

Chinese emperors, from the third century B.C. Han Dynasty to the fall of the Qing Dynasty in 1911, always took an active interest in regulating religion. Their tolerance or lack of it differed only in mode and degree. Religions usually fell into three categories: the orthodox and legal, such as Confucianism; the unorthodox but legal, such as Buddhism, Taoism and Islam; and the heretical and illegal,

such as the sects, secret societies and Christianity which enjoyed only a short period of toleration under Emperor Kangxi. The Government approved of the first category, tolerated the second and took steps to suppress the third. The Communists accepted this traditional form but changed the content. Marxism fell into the first category and became the orthodox and legal religion of the Government; those religious groups that have received Government recognition are tolerated; but those who fail to get Government recognition fall into the final category and are dealt with harshly.

Chairman Mao made it clear from the outset that differences in world view among various political and religious groups would be tolerated in the new State. He said: "Communists can work together politically with idealists and religious believers to establish a united front opposed to feudalism and imperialism, but they can in no way approve of their idealism or religious teachings". This is vintage Maoism, a dualistic and utilitarian approach to the formation of the policy of religious tolerance.

The situation of tolerance for religious believers, according to the Party's own self-reappraisal, can be divided into three periods. The initial period was from 1949 to 1966, when the religious policy suffered from "leftist" influences and some serious mistakes were made. But generally speaking the religious policy was put into practice. The second period was during the Cultural Revolution, from 1966 to 1976, when the Party suffered from serious "leftist" errors and recklessly trampled upon the policy of religious freedom. The third period is from 1976 to the present, during which the party, in summing up its positive and negative historical experiences, acknowledged the error of its ways and restored the policy of religious freedom. Worthy of our attention is Document 19, issued by the Party Central in 1982, entitled: *The Basic Viewpoint and Policy on the Religious Question During Our Country's Socialist Period*. The new Chinese Constitution was passed by the National Peoples Congress during the same year. Document 19 affirmed the position of religion in Chinese society, noting its five characteristics: of long duration, mass nature, belonging to the national minorities, international in character and complex. Article 36 of the Constitution of the People's Republic of China distinguishes between *freedom of religious belief* and *religious activities*, pointing out that only "normal" religious activities are protected by the Government.

However, the Constitution does not define which religious activities are "normal" and which are "abnormal". Article 36 merely concludes with the general statement: "Religious bodies and religious affairs are not subject to any foreign domination". The latest Regulations *Regarding Religious Activities by Foreigners within the Boundaries of the People's Republic of China* in 13 points, promulgated by the State Council in January 1994 spell out in more detail this line of the Constitution.

Mr Leo Goodstadt, director of the Hong Kong Government's Central Policy Unit, speaking of the changes in Chinese religious policy during the Deng Xiaoping era, has written:

*"For very practical reasons, the former total ban on religious beliefs has been relaxed. The Communist Party has pointed out that toleration of religion is justified by the continued existence within the nation of significant groups of believers; by the influence of religious philosophies on Chinese culture; and by the importance of religion in world affairs. Religion has not been granted exactly the same concessions as economic liberalism... Why is religion not treated in the same way?... Religion is very different. It involves not technology or material objects whose use can be controlled by the Chinese Communist Party, but ideology and philosophy that cannot be incorporated into a Marxist-Leninist system of ideas".*

Therefore in essence the present Chinese religious policy is a "continuation" of the historical and cultural tradition and of the foundation established by Mao Zedong. It is only in practice and in management that "adjustments" will appear in the form of a certain amount of restriction or relaxation as the concrete situation warrants. For example, after the "4th June" incident in 1989 and after the political changes in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union, the Chinese Communists considered it necessary to strengthen the Party and the Army's control in order to maintain the Party's political authority, and to avoid a repeat of the disastrous road taken by Eastern Europe and Russia. In line with the political atmosphere, the religious policy at that time became more restrictive. But in the Spring of 1992, Deng Xiaoping's words on his tour of the South created an atmosphere of "expanding openness and deepening reform" and led to a more rapid development of the

economy. At this time, in the atmosphere of an emphasis on economic development, the religious policy experienced some relaxation. However, after over a year of a more open religious policy, the Party discovered that some people used the opportunity to go beyond the Government's bottom line for religious activity, which caused anxiety on the part of the leadership and therefore, it formulated and issued new regulations this year.

On the side of "relaxation", the new regulations point out that the Chinese Government respects the religious freedom of foreigners who are within China's borders, and it protects the friendly relations and cultural exchanges that take place between foreigners and Chinese religious. Within China's borders foreigners can participate in religious activities in Chinese temples, mosques and churches. With the invitation of religious organisations at or above the provincial autonomous region or municipal level, foreigners can explain the Scriptures and preach in Chinese places of religious activity. When entering China, foreigners can bring for their own use printed religious material, audio and video tapes, and other religious equipment. Generally speaking these permissions are somewhat broader than before.

On the "restrictive" side, however, the new regulations say that for foreigners to bring into China printed religious material, audio and video tapes and other equipment, which go beyond their personal use, they must follow the concerned regulations of Chinese customs. It is forbidden to bring into China printed religious material and audio and video tapes which are harmful to China's social and public interest. In carrying out religious activities in China foreigners must obey China's laws and regulations. Foreigners are not permitted to establish religious organisations, business offices, places of religious activity, or religious academies within China's borders. They may not seek converts among Chinese citizens, nor may they appoint religious professionals or carry out any other missionary activity. Therefore, the new regulations contain both restrictive and open stipulations. Or it can be said that "in the midst of relaxation there is restriction, and in the midst of restriction there is relaxation".

The Communists have from the very beginning set their own religious policy which must be followed by the Chinese Catholic Church. This policy demands total and complete independence free from any foreign

intervention and control. In 1989, as China sought international dialogue, it realised that it needed to delineate a new policy toward the Catholic Church. Document 3, issued in February 1989, permitted the Chinese Catholics to acknowledge the Pope as the spiritual leader of the Catholic Church. They may pray for him, but may not talk to him or have any dealings with him whatever. It is still Government policy that the Chinese Catholic Church continue the practice, imposed on it from the beginning, of selecting and consecrating its own bishops without recourse to Rome's approval.

On the whole it can be said that, compared with the past, there has been an improvement in the situation of religious freedom in China. However, there are still several religious believers who are in jail or whose activities are restricted. But religious faith is not subject to any restriction and the number of religious believers continues to grow. The Party continues this policy of religious toleration sometimes loosening the screws and sometimes tightening them again. Despite this however, there has indeed been movement on other fronts. In recent years the Academy of Social Sciences, and other scholars, have come to appreciate the positive role religion plays in the development of society and culture.

Chinese leaders tend to place a higher value on social stability than they do on individual human rights. The experience of South Korea and Taiwan has shown us that with economic development also come social and political development. Once material prosperity reached a certain level in these two countries, a substantial middle class appeared. These people cherish truth, respect the rights of the individual, support freedom and openness, and believe that the Government should be responsible to its citizens. Western-style democracies based on a concept of God-given rights place much emphasis on the individual. On the other hand, democracy in Southeast Asia has been nurtured by another tradition, that of Confucian ethics which has a high regard for an enlightened patriarch, a profound respect for the elderly of society and a stress on harmony and balance among members of the collectivity. I believe that only after China accepts and openly supports this Southeast Asian style of democracy will it be able to join with the larger human community and find its rightful place in the family of democratic nations.

## INSTITUTIONS IMPLEMENTING RELIGIOUS POLICY

The two highest institutions dealing with religious matters are the United Front Work Department and the Religious Affairs Bureau. The first is part of Party policy-making while the latter belongs to Government policy implementation. Similar structures exist at all provincial, urban and rural levels and all are interconnected.

### GROUP

*We believe in God who is the God of life and who calls us to that fullness of life. We believe that the central message of the Good News is a liberating one.*

*As missionaries we recognise that we must go in our poverty. Recognising we need other's vision of Christ ready to receive with openness and deep reverence the life, tradition and culture of the people, recognising that God is already there. We go, in other words, willing to be evangelised in our turn.*

*We go willing to promote dialogue in truth and with love knowing that in the process we will also discover our own identity.*

*We ask that we continue to learn about the Church in different parts of the world, especially the periphery.*

**Question:** *Can a Church which wants to be truly Catholic be satisfied with a geographic centre as opposed to a polarity which is Euro-Africa and Pacific rimmed?*

**Our prayer and hope is that:**

**China:** *for reconciliation between the underground and official Church.*

**India:** *for liberation from the Caste system of Hindu Culture.*

**Japan:** *though small that the Church be prophetic to an affluent Japanese society.*

The task of the United Front Work Department is quite ambitious. According to Chinese Communist sources it is to regulate all positive

components, unify those forces capable of being united, work to change negative into positive elements, unify all political factors, build up the socialist legal system, promote the **Four Modernisations**, and secure national unity. However, in dealing with the underground Church members, the department still follows Lenin's dictum: "It is to unite minor enemies and attack major ones. Once the major enemies are defeated, the minor ones move up to become major enemies".

The Religious Affairs Bureau is responsible for implementing the Party's policy on religion. As China still does not follow a rule of law but a rule of rulers, most Religious Affairs Bureau officials in implementing the religious policy of toleration are inclined to be "left wing" or more strict than necessary in order to protect their own jobs. However, the period dating from 1980 up to the present has seen over 1,000 Catholic priests and bishops rehabilitated and returned to pastoral ministry. This number shows positive efforts on the part of the Religious Affairs Bureau everywhere. A new bureau chief, Mr Zhang Shengzuo, was appointed to lead the Religious Affairs Bureau in the State Council in October of 1992. He is open minded and relatively young for the post. Since he took office, the Catholic Church has experienced gradual but positive changes in its relationship with outside Churches.

### THE EVOLUTION OF THE CHINESE CHURCH

Modern mission history of the Church in China began with Matteo Ricci who entered China in 1583. Many foreign missionaries followed. They established Catholic communities throughout the country: ordaining clergy, even some bishops, establishing religious societies, and opening institutions for education, health and welfare. Chinese Catholics are grateful to them for these things. Unfortunately, they were amiss in a very important area. On the eve of the Communist takeover in 1949, of the 140 dioceses or apostolic prefectures then in existence 120 had foreign bishops in charge. This was a sore point among local Catholics in the past and continues to be a source of criticism whenever the subject is raised in China today.

Bishops are the leaders of the Church and are at the centre of its authority. We cannot speak of the Chinese Church today without some detailed understanding of the present state of

China's Episcopacy. The present body of Chinese bishops may be divided in many ways, but for our discussion here, we shall place them into three categories; (1) those consecrated without recourse to Rome in those years before the Cultural Revolution; (2) those consecrated after it and recognised by the Government as part of the official Church; and (3) bishops at work in the underground Church.

#### First Category of Bishops

One must remember that the Chinese Communists rode to victory on a wave of national patriotic sentiment. "The Chinese people have finally stood up!", declared Mao Zedong on 1 October, 1949, in Tiananmen Square. Everything foreign had to go. Foreign missionaries were expelled from the country and because the Church was deemed to be a foreign religion, campaigns were held in which Catholics were urged to criticise their leaders. Their bishops, priests and lay people were accused of being unpatriotic for belonging to a foreign Church and thus for cooperating with foreign agents of imperialism in China's humiliation. The campaigns were, of course, all orchestrated by the Party to gain control of the Church for its own purposes.

In 1957, the Chinese Catholic Patriotic Association was formed. Why a Chinese Catholic Patriotic Association? How did such an organisation come into being. There are three main reasons. First, the manifest goal of the Chinese Communist Party was to assume leadership of the Church, replacing papal rule by the establishment of a new structure within the Chinese Church. The second reason was that the movement of China away from Western exploitation and colonialism and towards independence exerted at the time a strong influence over a number of Chinese clergy and lay people. Motivated by deep feelings of nationalism, many joined the newly formed Patriotic Association. Some others joined out of a fear of reprisals, while still others were opportunists and joined the association for personal gain. The third reason was the legacy of China's missionary history. Even though the missionaries in the 400 year history of Catholicism in China were accepted and loved by the Chinese Christians, some missionaries either directly or indirectly had strong ties with their colonial Governments.

One year later, in 1958, the first ordination of two Chinese bishops took place without

Rome's approval. From 1958 to 1962, fifty-two Chinese bishops were consecrated in this way. Most of these were good men, men of virtue and intelligence. There was no question of the validity of their orders, but all were declared illicit. Of this number, nine are still active, two have retired, and the whereabouts of a third is unknown. All are elderly men. Some have married, mostly due to political pressure. But their marriages have never been accepted by Chinese Catholics. We, who live beyond the pressures and history of the Church in China try to understand the situation of these bishops, who did not enter marriage freely and of their own accord, and reach out to them with Christian compassion.

### **The Second Category of Bishops**

After the Cultural Revolution, another sixty-five Chinese priests were raised to the episcopacy with the Government's, but not with Rome's, approval. One of the first was Fu Tieshan who was consecrated bishop of Beijing in December 1979. What motivated those bishops consecrated during these years was their pastoral concern for their people. The new open policy of the Government now allowed the Church to function not in hiding but in public. But in order to function as Church, it had to have its own episcopal leaders. Some of the episcopal leaders who had been imprisoned in the past for their unswerving loyalty to the faith and the Pope, and had refused to have any relationship at all with the Patriotic Association, are now more willing to come forward and work together with the Association for the future of the whole Church in China. In some instances they minister to the pastoral needs of Catholics in Churches officially associated with the Patriotic Association. Among this group, there are even some who actively seek to secure higher positions within the authority structure of the Association in order to influence its decisions more effectively and to serve as an inhibiting factor on a tendency of the Association towards unilateral control. These episcopal leaders continue in their loyalty to both the Church and the Pope. Local Catholics are well aware of their efforts in this delicate situation and love them for it. It is common knowledge that most of these bishops hope for reconciliation with the Holy See in the near future. Many, it is said, have already secretly sought legitimisation of their status from the Pope. The situation remains, of course, somewhat confused.

Certainly, it would be rash and unchristian to judge them. Far better to place a blanket of silence over them that they might continue to work for their people as pastors in accord with the directives of their conscience. We must affirm that their problems are not matters of faith but rather of law. In his address to Chinese Catholics from Manila in 1981, Pope John Paul has said: "For those who have never had such experiences, it is difficult to appreciate fully such situations. Yet, I want you to know that, all through this period and up to the present day, I, and the Universal Church along with me, have been with you in thought, in prayer, in genuine brotherly love and in pastoral concern. I place my trust in your faith and in the Lord".

According to recent estimates, only .1% to 1% of Catholics in China are active and pro-Government members of the Patriotic Association which represents a very small part of the official Church mainly in the big cities. Participation in the Patriotic Association has positive and negative points. From the positive side, by joining the Association, they might do more work for the Church, the open seminaries and convents. From the negative side, they are not welcomed by the Catholic community because some of them are used by the Government. When in 1992 the official Church convened its Fifth National Congress of Chinese Catholic Representatives, it drew up a constitution for the Chinese Bishops' Conference which had been established in 1980. The Congress asserted its legal authority within the Church, and elected two bishops as advisers who were originally appointed by Pope Pius XII. In Article II of the Constitution it stated the apostolic nature of the Church and the role of the Pope. It also pointed out that its relationship to the Patriotic Association was one of cooperation. However, it made no statement about who held the higher authority when it came to Church matters. While the Conference was not a total success, it did make great positive strides.

### **The Third Category of Bishops**

What of the bishops of the underground Church? How did they come to be? While some of the bishops of the official Church were ordaining bishops who did not recognise the Pope, there were others who were consecrating priests who did recognise Rome. These of course were operating outside the Government's

## PANEL

### Responding to China Today

*Maryknoll has had a "love affair" with the Chinese people ever since this USA mission society sent its first four missionaries to China in 1918. In recent years, after an absence of more than three decades, Maryknollers have returned to China. They go as "foreign experts", fulfilling Government requests to teach in Chinese schools. Various missionary groups (e.g. Columbans, PMEs, Scarboros, PIMEs, SVDs, OSBs, as well as other women and men) send personnel to serve among the 1.2 billion Chinese.*

*Since the first volunteers returned to China in 1982, over 30 Maryknollers have contributed service in China mostly as teachers of English. At present, 11 Maryknollers (2 sisters, 2 lay missionaries, 7 priests) are placed in scattered cities throughout China. They serve under contract, fulfilling their professional responsibilities as well as (in the words of one Maryknoller) "sowing seeds of hope and love with students and others I meet".*

*The following is a sketch of Maryknoll's China response at this time. It provides a concrete picture of the present involvement; I hasten to add that other groups are providing similar service within China. In short, Maryknoll is NOT unique in its China response.*

- a *Four priests serve in Northeast China's Yanbian Korean Autonomous Prefecture. They all formerly worked in Korea and speak the language fluently. Teaching English 16-18 hours a week gives them opportunities to interact with a variety of students. Benedictine personnel (OSB Tutzing) are beginning medical work in the same area; there may be opportunities for Maryknoll-Benedictine collaboration in the future. On special occasions, the Maryknollers have received Government permission to assist the local Chinese priests.*
- b *Seven Maryknollers (priests, sisters laity) teach in other scattered cities (e.g. Beijing, Jiangmen, Wuhan). Some speak Mandarin; others communicate with their students in English.*
- c *Maryknoll has facilitated a training programme of future formation personnel and teachers for seminaries and convents in China. Three junior sisters and 23 seminarians are studying in various sponsoring Church institutions in the USA. They seek to study current theology and the vision of Vatican II with -- the particular focus of returning to China and forming and educating a new generation of Church personnel.*

*While in the USA, the entire group gathers at the Maryknoll Center in New York every August and January. They participate in "integration seminars", conducted in Mandarin and extending for ten days each. These workshops focus on formation questions, cultural transitions, as well as personal growth and spirituality.*

- d *The above contributions of Maryknollers, like the services provided by various Church groups, seek to build good relations with the Chinese people. They are accomplished on the terms stipulated by the Chinese. A reservoir of mutual respect and good will is being created.*
- e *Maryknoll seeks to inform the USA populace and Church people about Chinese realities. Misinformation and biased attitudes need to be overcome. To accomplish this professionally, concerned groups organised in 1989 the UNITED STATES CATHOLIC CHINA BUREAU (address: President's Hall; Seton Hall*

*University; South Orange, NJ 07079-2689, USA). Maryknoll Sister Janet Carroll is currently the Executive Director of this China Bureau.*

*The above items seek to present the concrete efforts of one religious group with a continuing interest in and dedication to the Chinese people and Church.*

### **Impressions of a Pilgrim**

*During a two-week China visit in 1992, there was an opportunity to visit Chinese Christians. Some dominant impressions remain:*

1. *Chinese Christians are people of deep faith; theirs is a family-centred faith; it is manifested in their attendance at the Eucharist and in the resurgence of vocations;*
2. *Ordinary Christians are balanced, friendly, integrated personalities - even though they suffered severely during the Cultural Revolution and were often under surveillance;*
3. *Catholic Christians have a deep sense of the Universal Church; they are interested in the Church in other countries and pray for the Church's spiritual leaders;*
4. *The seeds of faith sown by missionaries in the past continue to bear fruit today - in marvelous and unforeseen ways;*
5. *There remains the priority of fostering reconciliation among all elements of the Church in China; all have faced difficulties and have suffered; all have struggled to follow their consciences. Based on an informed understanding of the situation, forgiveness, reconciliation, and non-judgemental attitudes need to be promoted as the Church in China moves into the 21st century.*

Jim Kroeger, MM

legal boundaries. But was this done with Rome's approval? Bishop Fan Xueyan of Baoding Diocese who died in 1992, was the first to consecrate bishops without recourse to Government of official Church approval. When released from prison after the Cultural Revolution, he immediately recognised the fact that the Church could not do without bishops. He consecrated three straightaway and only afterwards wrote a letter to Rome explaining the circumstances that demanded he follow such a procedure. The Pope in turn legitimised these bishops and granted them special faculties to ordain priests as bishops from neighbouring dioceses where the need arose. This led to the indiscriminate ordination of bishops on a larger scale than had been anticipated. Some dioceses have as many as three bishop-ordinaries. The underground Church to date has as many as sixty bishops who were consecrated secretly. Some of these men have not received adequate training. They are men of strong faith. Unfortunately, many of their attitudes and ways of acting are not those of the Pope and reflect little of Vatican II's outlook, knowing almost nothing about its directives. In 1989 when a rumour went about that the Vatican was on the verge of establishing diplomatic relations with Beijing, some underground bishops fearing that they would be overlooked in the process called a secret meeting to set up their own independent Bishops' Conference. They were all subsequently arrested by the Government. At this juncture the Holy See seems to have its hands tied in offering any directives in this matter. Any statement at all would be understood by the communists as interference in the internal affairs of China.

Official Government figures place the number of Catholics in China at four million, or one million more than in 1949. Unofficial estimates put the number far higher, between eight and nine million. The last decade has seen about 3,000 functioning Catholic bishops, priests and Sisters, along with some bishops released from prison. About 4,000 Churches have been reopened and over 1,000 seminarians and young Sisters have been trained in the newly-opened seminaries and convents.

There are basically two types of seminary in China: the official and the underground. The underground seminaries have despite great difficulty managed to bring at least 500 men to ordination in their short history. Like the official seminaries, they are recognised and some are even supported financially by the

Government. There are now 24 of them with a student population of over 1,000 throughout the country. For the most part, they follow a pre-Vatican II curriculum and formation and they have to date trained over 500 priests.

When it comes to actual pastoral work, distinctions between the official and underground Churches in many rural areas are not very clear. Many adults, it seems, have been drawn to the Church by healing experiences, especially by claiming to have been freed from diabolic possession. These healings seem to be a major reason why so many new people in the rural areas are becoming Catholics. In the rural areas also the Church establishes recreational centres, where the young can come to play sports, or read books, or study languages. It is hoped that those attracted will also begin to ask questions about religion and eventually ask for instruction in the faith.

Conditions in the urban Church are quite different. New converts in the cities who joined the official Church are mostly intellectuals and university students. Living in a materialistic and consumer society, they experience a spiritual emptiness. Classes are usually held after Sunday Mass, and last for at least six months, after which the catechumens are baptised. Every parish has its share of new Christians. The underground Church communities gather in the private homes of old Catholics. In some places converts in the underground Church exceed those in the official Church. In some areas the underground Church does not exist at all. Be it underground or official the Church in China tends to be pluralistic in nature. As China is big and the situation is complicated, provided the integrity of our faith is not violated, both groups should co-exist and cooperate with each other. Despite its present crises and divisions, the Church in China has been the recipient of many graces that have enabled it to overcome its limitations and make steady progress.

## LEARNING FROM CATHOLICS IN CHINA

### What can we learn from Catholics in China?

After teaching in the seminary for 25 years, I am more and more convinced that the apostolic community of the first century should be the working model for the Church today. Three

major elements defined that early Christian community and are most relevant when speaking about the Church in China.

The first described by the Greek word *didache*, "teaching" which points to "the way of life". This way is not merely something abstract or ideological but rather the active presence within the community of the wisdom of God incarnate, the resurrected Christ, as the source of all Christian practice.

The Second is described by the Greek word *koinonia*, "fellowship" which means "a sharing community". Such a community, while hierarchical in structure, is formed in faith, hope and charity. It is a community called into existence by Jesus to be mutually supporting and to bear one another's burdens.

The third element of the early Christian community is described by the Greek word *diakonia*, "service". The gesture of Jesus at the Last Supper when he washed the feet of his Disciples stands as a symbol of selfless service. He himself explained its meaning when he said to us that the Son of Man has come not to be served but to serve, to give his life as a ransom for many.

When I reflect upon my many personal experiences with the Church in China during the past 15 years, I find many moving incidents that give striking evidence of the presence within the community of these three marks of the Apostolic Church. Circumstances there have served to bring about a reawakening to these basic values and perhaps we, too, have much to learn from China's experience about what should be emphasised in our own Christian communities.

One Bishop in the Patriotic Association, whom I know quite well, recounted to me his own painful spiritual journey. He said that while he had been ordained a bishop because of Government pressure, he had at the time earnestly hoped for papal approval. Unfortunately this hope never materialised. It remains a heavy weight on his conscience to this day, even to the extent of affecting his physical health. Yet he has never complained about his excommunication and continues to pray for reconciliation with the Pope, whom he acknowledges as Head of the Church and for whom he prays daily. With the Government's present policy of greater tolerance toward religion, he zealously serves the Church and gives

himself wholeheartedly to his pastoral task with a special emphasis on the formation and training of future priests and religious.

Such a spiritual journey, it seems to me, exemplifies the way of Christ, a self-emptying, of which St Paul writes in his Letter to the Philippians (2:6-8): "His State was divine yet he did not cling to his equality with God, but emptied himself to assume the condition of a slave and became as men are and being as all men are he was humbler yet, even accepting death, death on a cross". Is this bishop not a moving example of *didache*?

There is a diocese in Western China with which I am familiar. The Church there is led by an elderly bishop of high repute. This bishop is a person of strong convictions but also flexible in their application to existing conditions. He is deeply loved by the people both within and outside of the Church. With the relaxed religious policy, he was allowed to return to his diocese. There is a custom in his diocese on every important feast day for all the Christians to come to the cathedral to celebrate together. Some find lodging with Catholic families, some stay in the cathedral compound. Those who are able make material contributions; all work together to clean and decorate the Church or cook and serve the meals. This diocese is one of the few in China that uses the reformed vernacular liturgy of Vatican II.

Relations with the local Government had been harmonious until March of 1987. When the provincial Government learned of the celebration of the liturgy in the vernacular, it demanded that the diocese go back to using Latin. The Bishop argued with the officials that if the Government was so concerned with the welfare of the Church, it should deal first with the question of married clergy rather than with what language is used in saying Mass. The Government's only answer was, "This is an order that must be obeyed!"

What to do? The Bishop ordered that the liturgy be celebrated in Latin by a priest using a very soft voice. At the same time a lay leader was to read the Mass prayers aloud and the people make all their responses in Chinese. One result has been a more mature Church, the emergence of lay leaders and a strengthening of the spirit of the community. It also reflects the unified spirit of the early Church in "the breaking of bread" and worshiping under adverse conditions. Might this not be an example of

*koinônia*, a community formed in faith, hope and charity?

A couple of years ago in a very large diocese in Northern China, four lay Catholics and a priest, with the permission of the Government, founded an eye clinic. The staff of 18 included: 6 doctors, 8 nurses and one laboratory assistant. In one year the clinic had treated over 7,000 out-patients and 200 in-patients. As is customary in China, the clinic received many commendations in the form of banners and scrolls inscribed with words of appreciation. One of these came from the Government which noted that its small fees, 24-hour service and willingness to make house calls, all gave proof that the clinic's sole concern was to relieve the suffering of the poor.

As a result it soon became a popular saying in the district that if Catholics were part of a community project it could not fail. Is this not a striking example of Christian service, of *diakonia*?

I use these brief examples from my own limited experience to illustrate the vitality of the Holy Spirit in the Church in China -- a vitality that has emerged from decades of hardship. Such a Church bears striking similarity to the Christian community of Apostolic times and offers lessons to be learned by other Christian communities, who grow and flourish in more favourable climates.

## THE DIOCESE OF HONG KONG: A BRIDGE CHURCH

Because of its unique situation, Hong Kong Catholics have the opportunity to act as a bridge between the mainland Chinese Church and the Universal Church particularly in six areas:

1. Mass in the vernacular can now be celebrated in all churches, throughout China. Mainland Church officials turned to the Director of the Hong Kong Diocesan Liturgy Commission to assist them in the task of liturgical reform and most recently in preparing the publication of 290,000 copies of the Chinese missal, which is based on those currently in use in both Taiwan and Hong Kong.

2. Just recently 50,000 copies of the Franciscan Chinese Bible in simplified Chinese characters have been published in Beijing and

very soon 150,000 more will be available to Catholics throughout China. The text has undergone some minor revision but has been stamped with the ecclesiastical approval.

3. Hong Kong Catholics have also shown their concern for the ongoing development of the newly-opened seminaries on the mainland. Sheshan, in Shanghai, in 1989 was the first seminary to obtain Government permission allowing it to invite professors from abroad to lecture and offer courses in theology. Recently, this programme has been extended to include convents of Sisters, too, as the Government has finally given the Diocese of Shanghai permission to invite teachers to offer courses to their newly-opened religious communities of women. While the underground seminaries come under the constant surveillance of the Public Security Forces which control everything and everyone in China, it is a mark of the new openness that Catholics from Taiwan and Hong Kong find it relatively easy to gain access to them without Government interference. All of this is unofficial and low-key, of course.

4. Our Holy Spirit Study Centre has been flooded with requests for help in training seminarians, Sisters, and the laity from mainland bishops. And we receive numerous requests for help in financing new churches, convents and schools. The Chinese Government no longer opposes such requests for foreign aid. On the contrary, it encourages them and sees them as contributing to China's economic progress.

5. With the more relaxed atmosphere, more and more mainland priests, religious, and lay Catholics are allowed to travel or take courses in Hong Kong. Going back and forth across the border, Hong Kong Catholics make frequent contact with their mainland brothers and sisters, often offering material as well as spiritual support. Some parishes in Hong Kong have even set up study groups to learn more about the Church in China to be able to relate more closely to its people and history.

6. Several underground bishops have been released from prison during the past few months and even allowed to return home. This was largely due to the efforts of some Catholics in Hong Kong. The Public Security Bureau continues to keep a close check on their movements. And while there has been no legal change in dealing with the underground Church nonetheless, there has been a change of attitude which is a positive sign of a greater openness.

## BUILDING BRIDGES: CHURCH COMMUNITIES THROUGHOUT THE WORLD AND CHINA

The concern shown by Catholics throughout the world for China in the past few years has taken many forms. You have not only provided economic assistance but engaged in significant exchange programmes with the Chinese. You have sent teachers to China's universities and seminaries. Through seminaries, lectures, conferences, publications and other ways you have helped to educate your fellow Catholics to a better understanding of China, its Church and its problems. All of this has won for you the esteem and admiration of the Chinese people. Each bridge Church, as an instrument of God's love, has many possible avenues of expression. I shall discuss three that I find particularly significant: a sound attitude toward reconciliation, cultural exchanges and financial assistance.

It is more difficult to evaluate than to describe China and the Chinese Church in its present situation. It is easy to fall prey to one of two biased ways of thinking. The first is the tendency to generalise, forgetting that China is large and complicated, where the good is mixed with the bad, and success mingles with failure. The second mistake is the tendency to relativise, to judge China and the Chinese Church not by the same objective standards of good and evil we use to judge ourselves. As a result, we mention the positive and ignore what is negative. Actually, as Christians, while we naturally praise and support the positive elements in China and in the Chinese Church, we should not pass over the darker side in silence. The purpose of our negative criticism, however, should be to help them to improve. Even as we point out what is negative, we do so with hope, faith and a spirit of concern. Only this combination of speaking the truth in love will pave the way for authentic reconciliation.

Furthermore, those willing to act as bridge builders run the risk of falling into one of two temptations. The first is to assume an indifferent attitude toward the real divisions existing between the two Catholic communions, as if their serious internal problems can be viewed as unimportant or pretend that they do not exist at all. The second mistake would be to take sides, favouring one group to the disadvantage of the other. Neither approach will serve the cause of authentic reconciliation. Father Aloysius B. Chang, a well-known Jesuit

## PANEL

### Building Bridges with China

*In this short contribution I would like to expand a little on a specific point, mentioned by Fr John Tong at the conclusion of his informative talk: can we also build bridges with China? I limit myself to the field of cultural dialogue.*

*I have just returned from a short visit to China. The occasion for this trip was a symposium held in Beijing. It had been organised with the help of a group of Chinese scholars who had spent some time in Italy and had set up a sort of informal association among themselves, with the help of some Italian friends. In fact, this symposium was about the cultural contribution of a Jesuit missionary of the XVII century, Fr Martino Martini, and was sponsored by Italian friends from the city of Trento. The symposium was hosted in one of the halls of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences of Beijing.*

*True, one could feel a rather heavy atmosphere of control and censure; the papers to be presented had been carefully selected, and even some of the titles had to be changed. Yet, one can say that, in the field of academic research on many aspects of religion and of Christianity, great changes have occurred in China in the past few years.*

*Up to the late 1970's, the only way one could speak publicly in China or write about religion was to denounce it as an untrue, unscientific vision of reality, born out of fear of unknown natural phenomena, an idealistic superstructure fostered by those in power to keep quiet the proletarian class: the classic description Marx gave of religion as opium of the people was the official dogma held by the theoreticians of the Academy of Social Sciences. Till 10-12 years ago, nobody in China would have dared to challenge such a "scientific" explanation of religion.*

*But, with the unforeseen flourishing of religions in the early 1980's, more and more scholars felt authorised to investigate the new phenomenon; how could it be that, after 30 years of a socialist regime, religion far from disappearing was growing?*

*Protestant bishop K.H. Ting, speaking last year to the Chinese Political Consultative Conference, explained in this way the new development: "Since Comrade Deng Xiaoping's statement 'that practice is the only criterion of truth', social scientists doing research in religion have broken through taboos, and in the spirit of seeking truth from facts and with a Marxist research style, they have probed deeply into the reality of religion in China, undertaken investigative research, and come to a new recognition of religion. They have affirmed that China's religious culture and socialism can be compatible in political and moral values, and have developed a Marxist religious view for China in accord with religion's 'five characteristics', thus providing a strong foundation for the safeguarding of religious freedom" (cf. Bridge, n. 60; Aug. 1993, p. 4). Among the results of such fact finding research, one was the admission by public officials that "crime is much lower in strongly Christian areas than elsewhere" (cf. Time magazine: 10/5/1993, p. 67).*

*Bishop K.H. Ting, who is since many years the head of both the Patriotic Association of the Protestants (the Three Self Movement) and of the China Christian National Committee, is a well known figure and has contributed a lot to this evolution. So, somebody may be surprised to hear him still speaking of a "Marxist religious view of religion...". In 1979 Bishop Ting had been able to establish an Institute of Religious Studies at his Nanjing Protestant seminary, in cooperation with professors of the Nanjing University. Till 1986, his magazine Religion was allowed only as a journal for internal study in the Institute, and even today is not permitted to circulate freely abroad. A recent assessment of the 20 issues published so far underlines the limits and the risks of venturing*

into discussions on religion; it states that "all essays published in the magazine had to use the language of Marxist-Leninist social sciences 'with Chinese characteristics'". Even when going beyond the permitted boundaries, "the arguments had to be founded on the classics of Marxism. Even today, criticism and reinterpretation may be tolerated provided they do not touch on the 'four cardinal principles' on which the regime stands" (cf. *Eglises d'Asie*, n. 161, 16 Sept. 1993, p. 3).

In this rather problematic context, however, a good number of new centres of research on religion and on Christianity started working in recent years, at the initiative of interested scholars in different universities in China, at their own risk.

Today, with the obsessive stress on technical development and the open encouragement to pursue the ideal of successful business and of becoming rich the quick way, the dominant orthodoxy has little to offer with regard to values and philosophy of life. So, many more scholars are exploring different aspects of the Christian cultural heritage.

Some are going further, asking themselves what Christianity could offer to China? An outstanding figure in this field is Liu Xiaofeng, a young intellectual at the sociology department of the new Shenzhen University, in the recently opened Special Development Zone, just across the border of Hong Kong. Liu studied philosophy at Beijing University and then Western Theology in Basel, Switzerland. One of his books published in 1990 in Hong Kong is in fact a collection of articles published by Liu under a pseudonym in the Chinese magazine *Dushu* (Reading): 10 essays presenting Western theologians and their thought. In the book, which came out with the challenging title: "Heading for the truth of the Cross", Liu tries to answer the question: What is the relation between the new scientific, philosophical, historical and other truths? These are all truths: produced by human beings. The truth of the Cross is not a human truth: it is the truth that God, in the weakness and suffering of love, revealed to us". Liu Xiaofeng was not, till recently, a baptised Christian. He belongs to a new reality of China's society, the so-called "Cultural Christians". (Fr John Tong mentioned afterwards that Prof. Liu Xiaofeng received baptism a few months ago as a Protestant).

The question remains open: what is the relevance of such a phenomenon, and what the impact it may have on future acceptance of the Gospel values as something China may no longer feel as alien or threatening? In the present situation in which Christian Churches are still denied any public voice in Chinese society, this new open attitude of some sectors of the intellectual class appears as something of a miracle, after almost half a century of systematic atheistic propaganda.

And I am personally convinced that this is a field in which Western Christian scholars and theologians could give a positive contribution, by entering into friendly, constructive dialogue with their Chinese counterparts. A first step, which is open to every concerned Christian, is to be aware that there are at present some 120 thousand Chinese students and scholars studying abroad. Many of them may surely be simply career minded or seeking success. But many would long to be given the opportunity to make friends with committed Christians and be helped to know from within something about Christianity. This is a field which should not be overlooked by religious orders and missionary congregations concerned with the future of evangelisation among the Asian masses. From this basic open attitude many occasions are likely to develop in view of building bridges of cooperation.

Allow me to mention just a small experience of mine. In a city not far from Shanghai, a Centre for Research on Christianity was created in 1991, inside a local university. It was not easy for the Chinese friends to obtain from the authorities the necessary permission. But, even then, everything was still to be built, from setting up a small library that would allow such a research, to helping find visiting scholars who could go there for free lectures, to the printing of an annual publication. Thanks to a

common effort, the first issue of this series, carrying 14 essays and entitled *Religion and Culture*, came out some months ago, printed in Changchun (Manchuria). The basis of this cooperative effort is that we contribute from abroad part of the essays in English, and the volumes will present all the texts in the Chinese and English version (or at least with extensive abstracts). The second volume is being prepared on two outstanding Italian missionaries and scholars of the XVII century (Martino Martini and Giulio Aleni). The third one is expected to focus on an even more challenging topic: "Christianity in contemporary China and the world". When I met the editor, who is the dean of philosophy in his university, I was told that essays from Western friends will be welcome.

In the field of cultural cooperation, initiatives like the symposium on Martino Martini, in which Chinese Scholars were offered the opportunity to investigate and present their papers on some interesting topic, are also important. Next October 1994 (from 19 to 22), a similar international symposium will be held to study the scientific and pastoral works of Giulio Aleni in his birthplace, the city of Brescia; among other experts, nine scholars from the People's Republic of China have been invited to attend and to speak. Let us hope that all goes well. Thank you!

Angelo Lazzarotto, PIME

theologian in Taiwan, points out how all Christians as members of the one Church of Jesus Christ, sharing the same Trinitarian life of grace, having received the same baptism and reading the same Scriptures are called upon to promote greater mutual cooperation. Father Chang adds that our Catholic faith also requires acceptance of a hierarchical communion which involves accepting papal primacy. For this reason Father Chang says that those who have made extraordinary efforts to preserve the orthodoxy of the faith are worthy of our heartfelt respect and praise. He also urges us to help Chinese Catholics to come to a deeper understanding, a better appreciation and a more sincere acceptance of the ecclesiology of Vatican II, whose richness of ideas and broadness of vision can serve to dispel the antagonism of debate and lead us all to unity as the people of God. Therefore, Cardinal Wu of Hong Kong has encouraged us to use St Augustine's principle to deal with division in the Church; "In necessary things, unity; in doubtful things, liberty; and in all things, charity". In both the official Church and the underground Church, we find both sincere people and opportunists. It is important for us to listen first, then discern the meaning behind what they say, and finally to act on what is truly good and helpful.

Theoretically, it is easy to speak of reconciliation, but difficult to put it into practice. Both sides must be willing to enter into the

dialogue which leads to reconciliation. After hearing complaints, I always put this question to Chinese Catholics: How can we be witnesses to the Gospel of Charity if we continue to refuse to accept each other? Many times I politely and respectfully reminded those who have suffered to reflect on the role of their suffering with the suffering of Christ, remembering that Christ's suffering was to reconcile all to the Father. In my experience with members of the underground Church, what promised at first to be successfull, later proved to be failure. For example, after a discussion with a leader of the underground Church on the accusation that the official Church did not accept the Pope. I explained to him that I personally heard that the official Church preached the primacy of the Pope and prayed for the Pope. But he argued in return that they do not accept the Pope's appointments. I also told him that some official Church leaders are in full communion with the Holy See. After hearing all of this, he agreed to go to greet the leader of the official Church in town. As a result, he went that very evening to speak to the leader. After this reconciling experience he informed his own community in the underground Church. Instead of rejoicing at these steps towards reconciliation, the Church group expressed extreme displeasure at his action and threatened to cut him off permanently for what he had done. As a result, he abandoned all efforts at reconciliation and the situation was back to where it started. I regret that I am unable at this point to answer

the question: "how and when reconciliation can be achieved?" Maybe only time can heal. I look forward to the suggestions of the groups as a way of solving this problem together.

With regard to cultural exchanges, I believe a continuing dialogue would be of supreme mutual value for both Churches. I know China can learn from the social experience of Catholics in the whole world, particularly in the West, how to take a broader view and opt for a long-term solution to social problems. Many Chinese believe that human beings can obtain a lasting paradise through economic and technological development alone. Catholics, particularly in the West, because they belong to a technologically advanced society, can demonstrate how material development brings with it many problems, and technology alone cannot improve the quality of life, nor guarantee happiness, nor give human existence meaning and purpose. But in order for this to become a real exchange, Catholics in the West must also look to the East with respect and appreciation, and be open to the many spiritual values that ancient civilisations represent. The myth of Western superiority perpetuated by the foreign powers who humiliated China in the past has left its mark on the Chinese identity. A willingness on the part of Western Catholics within the context of dialogue to admit and accept their own cultural limitations while reaffirming the wisdom that is to be found in the East, will allow the Chinese to re-affirm their own heritage and free them to discern from their own cultural view-point the meaning of modern trends and what choices are to be made for their nation to move forward in a modern world. In this way, Pope John Paul's statement in his Encyclical, *Redemptoris Missio* would be implemented, "Missionary activity renews the Church, revitalises faith and Christian identity and offers fresh enthusiasm and new incentive" (n. 2). Your commitment to mission will benefit not only China but your own beloved countries as well.

With regard to economic assistance, something must be said. Top priority should always be given to leadership training and to the poor and weak of society. Among the many practical ways Catholics outside of China can be of help is by contacting agencies that provide scholarships, educational resources, formation literature and other such materials to the seminarians and convents of China. A good word to keep in mind when deciding what help to give, how much, and where to give it, is the acronym SMART, i.e., small scale; measurable quantity;

articulated needs; realistic results, and finally time-frame. Obviously, prudence, discipline and caution should dictate the kind and extent of our assistance. And I would also add another quality -- sensitivity on the part of the giver. Be sensitive to the feelings of others lest your gesture of generosity be misunderstood and you unwittingly give offense to one or other party, be it the official or the underground Church.

Finally, I would like to point out that there are four factors leading to an upsurge of interest in Christianity in China now: 1) the destruction of traditional Confucian ethics by the 40 year rule of the Communist Party, 2) the people's weariness with Communism, 3) the spiritual vacuum created by the present drive for economic reform, and 4) the worship of Western culture. The present time is a God-given opportunity for evangelisation in China. I would like also to take this opportunity to thank the members of religious institutes and missionary societies and Catholics everywhere for their prayers and good works on behalf of the people of China. Of course, to the Holy spirit, who has been working through you, we Chinese Catholics are deeply grateful. We hope that you will continue your support of the Chinese Church, so that it may continue to grow into a more lasting unity with the one, holy, Catholic and apostolic Church as it continues to carry out its missionary task to bring the light and joy of the Gospel to its very own children.



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SEDOS SEMINAR**

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Walter von Holzen, SVD	(Director)

**FACILITATOR**

Seán Fagan, SM

**OPENING LITURGY**

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SM	Seán Fagan	SVD	Carlos Pape Martin Mandin
SM(M)	André Vernhes	L A Y	Margaret Mary Moore
SMA	Paul Chataigné		



## COMING EVENTS

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September 30 (one-day seminar)

### **THE SYNOD FOR RELIGIOUS LIFE AND MISSION MISSION IN EUROPE - CHALLENGE TO RELIGIOUS LIFE**

Speaker: Sister France Delcourt, Paris

### **RELIGIOUS LIFE AND MISSION "AD GENTES"**

Place: Brothers of the Christian Schools; via Aurelia, 476

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October 11 (one-day seminar)

### **THE WORLD DEBT - RESPONSE OF THE CHURCH**

Speakers:

Mr Dominick Coyle (London)

Mr Sergio Schlesinger (Rio de Janeiro)

Place: Brothers of the Christian Schools; via Aurelia, 476

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### **WORKING GROUPS**

September 2 Philippines

September 5 Haïti

Place: SEDOS Secretariate; via dei Verbiti, 1

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### **SEDOS RESIDENTIAL SEMINAR 1995 PHILIPPINES - INDONESIA - PACIFIC ISLANDS**

May 30 - June 2, 1995

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