

The Church in Asia Today: Communion and Mission*

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Varied Religious Traditions

To converse about Asia is a daunting task. For Asia is a repository of ecclesial and religious experiences too complex for any one discussion framework to encompass. The story of Asia and of the Church's role in its societies places special demands on both narrator and listeners. It asks us to enter into cultural and conceptual frames of reference that could be radically different from our own.

Take for example the existence in Asia of religious and philosophical traditions differing from those in the West. The Western mind tries to comprehend reality through the optics of Plato and Aristotle, of Augustine and Aquinas down to Newton, Kant and Darwin. On the other hand, millions in Asia draw inspiration for their philosophy from the ancient text of the *Bhagavad Gita*¹ where the great warrior, Arjuna, discusses a vision of righteous living with his charioteer, Krishna. In Asia's largest archipelago, millions of Indonesians lead an intensive devotional life based on the Qumran. While sociologists link the Protestant ethic to be successful capitalist societies in the West, it is the Confucian way which provides the foundation for the disciplined habits of the spirit among Asia's newly industrialized countries. An-

* Keynote address during the historic celebration of the Bicentenary of St. Patrick's College, Maynooth, Ireland, on May 6, 1995.

¹ BHAGAVAD GITA (bug'a-vad-ge'ta) n. a sacred Hindu text consisting of philosophical dialogue in the Mahabharata expounding the duties of caste and the yoga doctrines of devotion to the Supreme Spirit, the Blessed One (*Krishna*). Krishna—a celebrated Hindu deity, an Incarnation of Vishnu.

other great tradition, Buddhism spread from India and flourishes in Sri Lanka, Thailand, Myanmar as well as in Tibet and China. Recently, we saw how sensibilities can be injured when Pope's comments on Buddhism were taken out of context.

In describing the complex phenomenon of Asia's religious traditions, I do not intend to highlight merely the difficult task in understanding which it presents for those of us whose ideas are shaped by another world view. I also wished to underline the protean reality of the Asian religious scene which comforts the Church in her task of evangelization."

It is a reality which raises vexing questions. These questions are concerned with the meaning of mission and the process of community building. We must ask ourselves; is it part of the new evangelization's thrust to plant the church among non-Christians and to bring about their conversion? What does Christianity have to offer the believers of other religions?

These are religions which have become, in the view of the historian Arnold Toynbee, the chrysalises of new civilizations.² Their holy books have inspired the conduct of millions in Asia. Their teachings have counseled young and old to be compassionate and unselfish. Housewives and businessmen from Bangkok to Tokyo and beyond have found peace of mind in following their prescriptions. Their myths become the substance of songs and poems while their rituals give meaning to the mysteries of birth, suffering and death.

Moreover, it is still an absolute necessity for the Church to expand territorially in areas already dominated by ancestral religions? What is meant by the Christian presence in countries whose values have been defined and nourished for centuries by other religions?

Challenges of Modernization

The Church in Asia confronts not only the questions posed by the past through the great religions but also the questions of contemporary ideologies which define men and women only in terms of efficiency,

² Arnold Toynbee, *A Study of History*. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1957), p.380.

profitability and technical utility. As we enter the third millennium it is the capitalist ethic that will impose itself in Asia as it has done elsewhere. Already a paradigm shift has taken place in Asia from precapitalist to capitalist cultures. This entails significant changes not only in sending habits but also in the moral virtues promoted by the capitalist system

Like any economic system invented by humankind, capitalism presents an ambiguous face. For some the capitalist system not only brings about greater economic progress but also promotes human creativity and higher moral standards.³ But the Pope in the famous section no. 42 of *Centesimus Annus* has strong criticisms against unbridled capitalism which blindly entrust to market forces the solutions to the great material and moral poverty faced by millions. An Asian lay theologian lists the sins of capitalism such as: continued acute income inequalities where capital is concentrated in the hands of the few; persistent erosion of truth and attempts to subvert human freedom in order to create demand for goods and services; the exploitation of sex and women; the systematic depredation of the earth and its resources; the promotion of industries designed to terminate rather than to promote life; the worldwide conspiracy to prevent conscientious investigation of the issues just mentioned.⁴

Furthermore, capitalism has produced a technological development which is dehumanizing. As noted by the French sociologist, Jacques Ellul, "... the essence of technique [is] to compel the qualitative to become quantitative, and in this way to force every stage of human activity and man himself to submit to its mathematical calculations."⁵

This then is the dual predicament faced by the Church in Asia: How to proclaim the Gospel to a vast multitude whose hunger for transcendence finds fulfillment in the bosom of ancestral religions and yet whose entry into the modern economic system is dictated by secularism where God becomes "an unnecessary hypothesis."⁶

³ Michael Novak, *The Catholic Ethic and the Spirit of Catholicism*. New York; Free Press, 1993.

⁴ Alfonso J. Aguirre, *Understanding Religion and Development*. Manila, 1995.

⁵ Jacques Ellul, *The Technological Society*. Toronto: Vintage Books, p.xvi.

⁶ Reply of the mathematician Laplace to Napoleon's comment on that reading

This clash of two divergent outlooks, one stemming from the religious sphere and the from the secularism, tends to create a form of cognitive and psychological dissonance in contemporary men and women trying to integrate them. This leads to the question on whether the ancestral religions with their problems of rigidity and entropy, can still command unquestioned obedience from their adherents now exposed to scientific explanations of religious phenomena.

It would be helpful to insert here an insight of the Pope on why he believes that the great continent of Asia is at a "spiritual crossroads." In his most recent address to the FABC, he noted:

Even more striking than Asia's recent material progress has been the transformation of the spiritual landscape of the continent. Religious indifferentism and exaggerated individualism now threaten the traditional value which, generally speaking, bestowed meaning and harmony on the life of the individuals and on the communities they composed. The forces of secularization tend to undermine your rich religious and cultural heritage.⁷

Federation of Asian Bishops' Conference (FABC) Context

This somewhat lengthy preface was intended to provide an overview of the main challenges to evangelization confronting the Church in Asia and which is the context of my talk. Like ancient Gaul, my address is divided into three parts.

Firstly, the response of the local Churches of Asia to the challenges of their milieu as expressed in the various commitments taken by the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conference (FABC).

Secondly, the links between the churches in Asia and the Church in Ireland, recalling, as Cardinal Daly suggests, "some salient links in the past and possible ways of cooperation and partnership in the future."

his treatise he has found no reference to the work of God. Laplace replied: "Sire, I have no need of that hypothesis." Cf. C.A. Coulson. *Science and Christian Belief*. Fontana Books, 1958, p.41.

⁷ *L'Osservatore Romano*, 25 January 1995, p.5.

Thirdly, to explore possibilities of Mission for the student world, especially in a Pontifical University like Maynooth.

First of all a brief word on the Federation of the Asian Bishops' Conference. The origin of FABC goes back to the historic gathering of 180 Asian bishops in Manila in November 1970 on the occasion of the visit of the Pope Paul VI to the Philippines. The meeting gave birth to the awareness and appreciation of common traditional ties among Asian peoples particularly in terms of spiritual affinity and religious aspirations. The organizational expression of these bonds became the FABC. The various programs of the Federation are carried out through five offices dealing with ecumenical and interreligious affairs, education and student chaplaincy, evangelization, social communications and laity. A theological advisory committee is at the service of its members. The FABC celebrated its 25th anniversary in January 1995 by holding its Sixth Plenary Assembly during Pope John Paul II's visit to Manila.

"Fire in the Bones"

Inherent in any discussion based on documents is the risk of handling words far removed from life. Such a discussion would hide the richness of the reality being described textually. My contribution therefore to your understanding of the Church in Asia has to be a modest one.

The kind of experience which I believe would be more enriching is one that goes beyond a purely intellectual understanding of documents. The FABC papers are meant to be a living documents which seek to convey the struggles of the Church in Asia along frontiers where life and death, peace and violence, humanity and inhumanity are in daily confrontation.

What is the ideal mode of discourse for communicating this reality? To exemplify one approach I recall the description of an African slave describing the religious service of his people held after their emancipation. He said:

The only meeting house caught on fire. The spirit was there. Every heart was beating in unison as we turned our minds to God to tell him of our sorrows here below. God saw our need and came to us. I used to wonder what made people shout, but now I don't.

There is a joy inside, and it wells up so strong that we can't keep still. It is fire in the bones. Any time that fire touches a man, he will jump."⁸

I hope that as I narrate the story of the Church in Asia, some form of Pentecostal fire will illumine our meeting.

Allow me to introduce the FABC's reflections on *Missio* and *Communio* by describing concretely an Asian frontier town whose quality of life is inexorably being changed by forces beyond its inhabitants' control.

Craddled by the rugged mountains on the border between China and Myanmar (Burma) is the town of Ruili.⁹ Just 10 years ago it was a sleepy mountain town which served as part of the supply route for communist insurgents. Now, modern tractors sarong-clad women on motorbikes congest the legendary Burma Road, pushing aside slow-footed water buffalos. At night, the town is lit by flashing red and green neon lights advertising massage parlors and discos some of which are blaring heavy-metal rock music. It is a town that has heard Michael Jackson and Disneyland. It is a town not one of whose citizens has heard the name Jesus Christ proclaimed. In Asia, there are thousands upon thousands of towns like Ruili.

What approach does the FABC plan to utilize in order to proclaim the Good News of Jesus Christ in Ruili? Or for that matter, in Karachi and Bangkok, in Bali and Tokyo, in all the highways and byways of the bewildering continent of Asia?

It is obvious that the Gospel can no longer be proclaimed today in conjunction with the sword. Missionary collaboration with colonial and commercial interests with its often disastrous results is no longer a contemporary temptation. No Asian state would invite the Church to assign chaplains to its armies should it decide to engage in an imperialist adventure.

Here is another thing worthwhile to share since it could help explain the challenges facing the FABC. It is a statement which the

⁸ Albert J. Raboteau, "Fire in the Bones: African-American Christianity and Autobiographical Reflection." *America*, 21 May 1994, p.4.

⁹ Described in *Far Eastern Economic Review*, 22 December 1994, p.22.

first Chinese Catholic bishop of Hongkong, Msgr. Francis Hsu made in 1968. Bishop Hsu, a Shanghai man of letters, an Oxford graduate and a convert from Protestantism remarked that before the Church could plan its work in Asia, it must first draw lessons from the missionary experiences in pre-1949 China. His conclusions brought out these points:

The Church that has received from its divine founder the mandate to teach all nations was mute when my country, having broken with its past, looked beyond its horizons for light and guidance. I was born the year after that May 4 Movement¹⁰ when anti-Confucian iconoclasts finally won the day and projected science and democracy as the new gods almighty. Less than thirty years later, communism had conquered the country. In between there was a long, tormented period of disenchantment with Western civilization followed by cynicism, war-weariness, decadence and moral collapse. The spiritual vacuum that appeared in the wake of the dissipation of Confucian influence became wider and deeper until communism filled by its default. The Church was a helpless spectator to all of this. I do not mean that the missionaries were not aware of the danger or did not preach the Gospel with zeal. No, I mean that faced with a desire for a change and new order of things, the Church failed to make its message intelligible and obviously relevant. The traditional way of preaching, even if it had been extended and enlarged a thousand times, would have remained ineffective. Given to pagan Chinese as it had been given by Christ to the Jews, the Sermon on the Mount must have sounded like romantic escapism. 'Is that all you have to offer us?' incredulous Chinese intellectuals asked the sons of Matteo Ricci. China was going through a phase of soul-searching agony and the Church in China could offer no help."¹¹

¹⁰ May 4, 1919 marks the Student Demonstration in Beijing outside Tianamen Square when students showed their anger at the Chinese statement at Versailles who signed away China's rights at the World War I Peace Conference. From this event the Students' Movement began which Mao Zedong later capitalized on. It was thus the beginning of the Chinese People's struggle for autonomy from Western influence. Reference to this can be found in Harrison E. Salisbury, *The Emperors*, HarperCollins Publishers, 1992, pp. 55, 439, 463. The author notes that the Emperor's Palace is the place of authority and the symbol of power where all the great events in Chinese history occur. The recent student demonstration a few years ago take on an added significant in the light of May 4 Movement.

¹¹ Quoted in Michel Masson, "Chinese Cultures and Christianity: Assessing the Agenda," *Pacifica* 7 (1994).

I quote this reflection in full because of its wider relevance for missionary work not only to China but to all of Asia. Like pre-1949 China, many Asians experience a spiritual vacuum in the wake of the dissipation of traditional values. A period of disenchantment with the dehumanizing consequences of Western civilization is emerging. Asians are looking beyond the horizon offered by modernity for an alternative vision of the good life.

Church in Dialogue

Will the Church remain a silent spectator to this search for a meaningful paradigm of life? Will the Church in Asia find its fulfillment as a permanent "minority culture" living a ghetto-like existence with no influence on the "majority culture"? Is that what it means to be a *pusillus grex* in Asia?

It is not the aspect of pusillanimity but rather of pastoral courage and creativity that the FABC emphasizes in acknowledging the numerical smallness of the Church in Asia. The FABC tries to articulate the reality of a small Church journeying with the multitudes of Asia, a journey in which the Church as pilgrim discovers its role and mission in today's Asia.

For FABC therefore, the Church in Asia is a pilgrim Church in dialogue. It is a dialogue to be initiated and pursued in three inter-related spheres, namely, with Asian religions, with Asian cultures and with Asia's poor.¹²

As regards the first sphere of dialogue with Asian religious in its very first Plenary Assembly held in Taiwan in 1974, the FABC described the importance of this dialogue thus:

"In this dialogue we accept them as significant and positive elements in the economy of God's design of salvation. In them we recognize and respect profound spiritual and ethical meanings and values. Over many centuries they have been the treasury of the religious experience of our ancestors, from which our contemporaries do not cease to draw light and strength. They

¹² Felix Wilfred, "The Federation of Asian Bishops' Conference", in *For All the Peoples of Asia*. (Quezon City: Claretian Press, 1992) pp. XXII-XXX.

have been —and continue to be— the authentic expression of the noblest longings of their hearts, and home of their contemplation and prayer. They have helped to give shape to the histories and cultures of our own nations.¹³

This interreligious dialogue should lead a common witness and action. The Theological Advisory Commission on the FABC in its 1987 Singapore meeting expressed this as a “dialogue of life” with these characteristics: —

In the developing, multireligious societies of Asia struggling towards liberation and wholeness, all religions are called to provide a common and complementary moral and religious foundation for this struggles, and be forces for growth and communion rather than the sources of alienation and conflict. They can do this only through dialogue and collaboration. The religions have a prophetic role in public life.”¹⁴

Several initiatives of the FABC have paid special attention to dialogue with Asia’s cultures, in particular, the Bishops’ Institute for Missionary Apostolate (BIMA) and the Bishops’ Institute for Interreligious Affairs (BIRA).

As for the dialogue with Asian cultures, in its 1982 meeting in Taiwan, the Bishops’ Institute for Missionary Apostolate spoke of this dialogue as part of a process of inculturation in which the Church in Asia attempts to take root in and transform the cultural environment. “In this way,” the BIMA report stated, “new expressions of Christian faith can emerge which are at once deeply Christian and at home in the local cultures. Through this process of dialogue, the Church itself in enriched and gains new insights and apostolic impetus.”¹⁵

For its part the Bishops’ Institute for Interreligious Affairs (BIRA) recommended that “the process of inculturation in our Christian communities be deepened and that the formators (pastors), seminary professors, catechists, community organizers) be given specific training in inculturation and in the practice and deeper commitment to

¹³ *For All the Peoples of Asia*, p.14.

¹⁴ “Seven Theses on Interreligious Dialogue: an Essay in Pastoral Theological Reflection,” *International Bulletin*, vol. 13, no.3, July 1989, p.109.

¹⁵ *For All the Peoples of Asia*, p. 107.

dialogue. Particularly, professors in seminaries must be encouraged to explore ways of relating the Christian faith to the wisdom and the ways of thinking of peoples of other faiths."¹⁶

We know consider the dialogue with Asia's poor. The dialogue of life is especially relevant when working with the multitude of Asia's poor. For FABC, this means experiencing and understanding this poverty as pre-conditions for working to transform those structures and situations which deprive the poor of access to basic resources which they need to create a truly human life.¹⁷

All these impulses towards dialogue find their inspiration in Vatican II' Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World (*Gaudium et Spes*) which opens with an anguished cry:

The joys and the hopes, the griefs and the anxieties the men (and women) of this age, especially those who are poor or in any way afflicted, these too are the joys and hopes, the griefs and the anxieties of the followers of Christ.¹⁸

Authentic dialogue puts an end to the criticism that the Church in Asia is a mere spectator of events. True dialogue is one of the highest forms of human communication since it leads to personal encounters and interactions. For the Church in Asia, engaging in serious dialogue is an exercise in discerning the movement and presence of the Spirit in the signs of the times.

It is a providential gift for the Church in Asia that we have a Pope who is convinced that the use of dialogue as a pastoral method is not opposition to the mission *ad gentes*. Pope John Paul II states:

Dialogue does not originate from tactical concerns or self-interest, but is an activity with its own guiding principles, requirements and dignity. It is demanded by deep respect for everything that has been brought about in human beings by the Spirit who blows where he wills.¹⁹

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 311.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 15.

¹⁸ The Documents of Vatican II, ed. W.M. Abbott, S.J., New York: America Press, 1966; p. 199.

¹⁹ *Redemptoris Missio*, no. 56.

The Pope concludes his reflection on dialogue with a telling remark:

Dialogue leads to inner purification and conversion, which, if pursued with docility to the Holy Spirit, will be spiritually fruitful.

In effect, dialogue without conversion is but the noise of a cymbal clashing without signifying anything much. To avoid a sterile dialogue which merely produces superficial fellowships, the Church in Asia resolved to be a Church of the Poor. In the 1970 Asian Bishops' Meeting which gave birth to FABC, this resolve was already a firm commitment. Its final message had this statement:

It is our resolve, first of all, to be more truly, 'the Church of the poor.' If we are to place ourselves at the side of the multitudes in our continent, we must in our way of life share something of their poverty. The Church cannot set up islands of affluence in a sea of want and misery; our own personal lives must give witness to evangelical simplicity, and no man, no matter how lowly or poor, should find it hard to come to us and find in us their brothers (and sisters)."²⁰

Dialogue of the Churches

It is fitting that I conclude the first part of my talk by emphasizing that the Church in Asia understands its identity as being a Church of the Poor. Poverty is not a stranger to the Church in Ireland, where it even plays a prophetic role. Let me explain this through an analogy taken from a lecture on "Theological Reflections on the Holocaust" by Dr. Irving Greenberg, Professor at the City University of New York. In the history of the West, Greenberg noted, the Jews have had a curious mission. They have very often been the first victims of a plague that would eventually befall the entire population. As canaries carried into the depths of old mines serve to reveal by their sudden death the presence of the poisonous gases, so the Jews have often been the first victims of a more universal threat to human society.²¹

²⁰ *For All the Peoples of Asia*, p. 5.

²¹ Quoted from: Gregory Baum, "Theology After Auschwitz: a Conference Report," *The Ecumenist*, vol. 12, no. 5, July-August, 1974, pp.68-69.

It was an Irish missionary, Fr. Brendan Lovett, who provided me with the link between Asia's poverty and the history of Ireland. In a recent paper delivered at a theological meeting in Galway University, Fr. Lovett made this observation: "One hundred fifty years ago, during the Great Hunger, our people experienced *in advance* the fate of the world's majority."²²

It is this history of suffering which leads the Church in Asia to believe that solidarity with the Church in Ireland will have compassion as one of its principal characteristics. Our mothers and daughters share a common history: They have known what it means to have hungry children. Our fathers and sons have traversed oceans in search of jobs. And I daresay that our peoples also share a common love and heritage of freedom whose value our poets express in songs and whose preservation is paid for by our youth's blood. I also venture to add another common denominator which we share: Our churches find themselves facing new crises which beset institutions at a "spiritual crossroads."

What can we do together at this stage of our respective histories? What can the Church in Asia do for the Church in Ireland and conversely, what can the Church in Ireland do for the Church in Asia?

I propose that we attempt to answer these questions through the instrumentality of *dialogue*.

For true dialogue strengthens relationships of respect and understanding among its participants. Thus it corrects the lack of symmetry that at times characterized relationships at the height of the missionary period.

Furthermore, the ideal dialogue situation requires for its precondition solidarity in working towards a free society based on truth, non-violence and justice.

Likewise, dialogue is marked by a process of change and conversion. For true dialogue is not mere information exchange and sharing documents. There is no "fire in the bones" in such disengaged communication. Every well-ordered dialogue is uttered in the Spirit — it has

²² Brendan Lovett, "Marginalisation, Secularisation and the Third World," March, 1994.

a revelatory dimension. From it we derive a new understanding of ourselves leading to conversion and new possibilities of living and acting. This is how meetings come alive and catch fire.

Three considerations could make up the substance of our dialogue, namely: (1) a dialogue of remembrance; (2) a dialogue of encounter and (3) a dialogue of commitment.

Any dialogue between a First World Church and one in the Third World does not start without a history. We recall a missionary history with all its limitations and ambiguities as well as its magnificent achievements which were the first fruits of the initial evangelization and the pledge of hope for new evangelization. Thus a need for a *dialogue of remembrance*. For us, it is to remember your missionary sons and daughters with gratitude and for you to remember them with justified pride. To remember them is to rediscover the origins of Christianity in Asia and to be in awe at the variety of charisms and creative pastoral strategies utilized by the first Irish missionaries to Asia.

These two discourses, that of the "sending Church" and of the "receiving Church" need to be integrated in order that they might become part of the common language of a united Christian community. The attainment of such an integration is still an *ongoing challenge*.

From this dialogue of remembrance flows the *dialogue of encounter*. As we listen to each other's history, we discover the "other." The strangeness of the "other" diminishes and our interaction begins to cultivate meetings places for deeper dialogue. We begin to invest in each other's future.

This encounter is only possible because we are able to transcend the constraints of each other's culture. If we remain locked in our Irishness and Asian-ness, our dialogue remains parochial. But since true dialogue is uttered in the Spirit, it leads us to discover the universal Christ within and beyond our parochial worlds. The Asian is given the opportunity to encounter Christ in the Irish missionary or lay person who serves the poor. The Irish priest or nun who visits sugar workers unjustly detained, meets Christ in Asian prisons. It is in our common encounter with Christ among the poor and the oppressed that we discover our solidarity as travelers journeying together to the Father's Kingdom.

A third characteristic of our dialogue is *commitment*. Again, this follows from the previous dialogues. It is a commitment that derives its patient perseverance from remembering the witness of fidelity given by the missionaries whose love of Christ could not be confined within a national boundary. But it is also a commitment to risk change and conversion. For dialogue is listening; it is to listen to the deprived and alienated, to the lonely and the broken; it is to enter into an unpredictable world beyond the securities of a familiar, unchanging world. Pentecost dramatized the fact that there is no one Christian tongue but a plurality of new tongues with which to proclaim the Gospel in the "new forms of the areopagus."

There is a risk to every dialogue. It could fail. It could exacerbate differences and fragmentation rather than forge unity and understanding. This would happen if our remembrances are distorted by bias and ideology; if our encounter remains confined within parochial interests and if our commitment lacks the courage and faith to bring about change and conversion.

Possibilities of Mission

In the period after the catastrophe that was Auschwitz, the question was whether God is dead. More recently, in the face of resurgent fundamentalism and pervasive secularism, and in the light of tensions provoked by internal scandals, the fashionable question has become *whether the Church is dead*.

The Church has an astonishing capacity to survive crises far worse even than what it now faces worldwide, is a historic fact. One has only to recall the perilous periods endured by the Church during the lifetime of St. Augustine and St. Patrick, of St. Benedict and St. Gregory. Though the Church had fewer spiritual resources then to fall back upon than what we now possess, still the Church in the fourth and fifth centuries found a way to preserve itself and civilization.

But we may not use the triumphs of the past as a rationalization for any temptations to complacency on our part. It is our turn to invest to the full our energies and charisms in the unfinished tasks of bringing the good news of Jesus Christ to all humanity.

A more discerning reading of the signs of the times would not favor the view that now is the hour to sing a Requiem for the Church.

Rather, there is the stirring of hidden forces just before the breaking of a new dawn. So was it in the great turning-points of church history — the Constantinian era, the Gregorian reform and the Second Vatican Council. In each case, the Church had to preserve its integrity and creativity through the turbulence of historical change. But the Church is at home in the crossroads of history. It is there that the proclamation of her Founder's messages takes on new vigor, discovers new spokespersons and attracts new following. For at the center of every historical crossroads stands Jesus Christ. From there he proclaims the nearness of the Kingdom of His Father for the poor, the rejected, the humiliated and oppressed.

This brings us back to that bustling border Asian town of Ruili. What are the possibilities of mission in a modernizing town like Ruili for the academic community of Maynooth?

Once upon a time, it might have sufficed to plan one's missionary program from seminaries and universities in Europe. Today, it is necessary to plan the missionary enterprise *jointly with partner Asian institutions* and even with village people themselves. After Vatican II with its great emphasis on episcopal collegiality, it is no longer seemly to speak of the Church in the West as "mother churches" and the younger churches as "daughter churches." All the churches are *sister churches* sharing the responsibility for mission and evangelization. An *unequal* relationship is in a sense a *divided* relationship. Thus my emphasis on the use of *dialogue* as an effective means of creating mutual respect and equality which are the foundations of that unity which, in Christ's own words, is the most effective means of evangelization: "Father, may they be one in us, as you are in me and I am in you, so that the world may believe it was you who sent me." (Jn. 17:21)

Here I recall the observation of a scholar of the Renaissance who noted that during the Middle Ages, most European countries and *two* literatures. They had books written and songs sung in their own dialects and languages; but they also had Latin literature. Thus they had a national literature side by side with an international literature — both constantly growing. Sometimes the two interpenetrated. When this happened, the synthesis could be a nobler creation than any purely national or Latin work. Such was Dante's *Comedy*.²³

²³ Prof. Gilbert Highet, quoted in *Manas*, May 30, 1984, p. 3

Dialogue and Testimony

This literary insight has lessons for pastoral reflections. A missionary renaissance can result from a synthesis, for example, of *Maynooth's fruitful experiences in mission methodology* and of the *Asian Church's inceptive contributions in this field*. The curriculum of our centers of learning and formation must include not only the language or our national ethos but also the international language of the poor — the idiom of the shelterless and the landless, the vocabulary of the oppressed and the accents of the victims of injustice. Our mastery of this language of the poor and oppressed liberates us from the confines of parochial interests and brings us into the universal dimension of our vocation.

We not only have to go back to the townsfolk of Ruili, but we must also keep in mind the *mandarins* of China. Their remark that the Sermon on the Mount is a form of a romantic escapism is echoed by the Bismark's retort that one cannot build a government based on the Beatitudes. Both commentators failed to see the *social dynamism* of the Beatitudes which is not concerned with building governments but with creating an *entire civilization*.

This civilization was beyond the ken of human vision to fashion since it is founded on the love revealed to us in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

It is the presence of Christ in history which urges you to train theologians and missionaries who can offer Asia an alternative to cyclic model taught by other religions. For them, only that is real which always was and which never changes. The secular equivalent of this is a technological society which restricts its thoughts only to what are administrable, calculable and manipulable. But the proclamation of Jesus Christ suddenly introduces into Asian cultures a new way of seeing reality thereby answering the deepest needs of men and women hitherto held captive in the iron cage of a static world view. For Christianity is a religion of the future which teaches us to go beyond the *status quo*, to probe its greater possibilities.²⁴

²⁴ cf. Walter Kasper, *An Introduction to Christian Faith*. New York: Paulist Press, 1980, ch. 10.

This emerging hunger of Asia for a religion which makes room for more responsible freedom and more mature humanity is one of the frontiers of mission work where Maynooth's students can make a decisive contribution.

When starting the draft of this third part of my lecture I thought of recommending as possibilities of mission those *loci communes* long known to missionaries. This would be the building of schools and seminaries, hospitals and orphanages as well as organizing Basic Ecclesial Communities and credit cooperatives. But these traditional spaces of mission are being managed for the most part by the local church. Perhaps the time has come to de-emphasize the old links between mission and buildings, between evangelization and territorial coverage and expansion. Instead the vitality of Maynooth's mission formation might perhaps be directed to producing men and women able to live in a fast changing world and to dialogue with the world of unbelievers. To give testimony and witness to the Gospel, they would not need first to be contained in secure institutions but wherever they are, they create mission. Wherever they are, they raise questions among today's Gentiles about the strangeness of their Christian life — a life that is a countersign to the hedonism, selfishness and violence of present society.

When they walk through the streets of Ruili or Shanghai, the poor, the sick, the oppressed in whose midst they live and labor will take notice and say of them:

"They have fire in their bones." □