

Asia: The Struggle for Life in the Midst of Death and Destruction

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The following pages are a reflection of the Asian reality in its great diversity and complexity, undergoing rapid changes, and take as a point of departure the vision of "a new world being born" in Asia.¹ The birth pangs of this "new world born in Asia" are also struggles for life in the midst of death and destruction. As communities of disciples on mission, the Churches in Asia cannot but be participants in these struggles of the peoples of our continent.

This article gives, in the first part, a general analysis of the Asian scenario focusing on forces of death and destruction operative in our history; in the second part, it points to the emerging challenges and imperatives for the service to life and the approaches of response to them; and the third part briefly states the faith perspectives supportive of life.

I. GENERAL ANALYSIS OF THE FORCES OF DEATH AND DESTRUCTION OF LIFE IN THE ASIAN SITUATION

A. LIFE

Whatever threatens, weakens, diminishes and destroys the life of individuals or groups and peoples; whatever devalues human be-

¹ Cf. G. Rosales and C.G. Arevalo (ed.), *For All the Peoples of Asia*, Claretian Publications, Quezon City, 1992, p. xix.

ings, conceived, born, infant, old; whatever socio-cultural, religious, political, economic and environmental factors threaten or destroy life in our Asian countries challenges the mission of a Church called to the service of life. Life is to be understood in its deepest and richest sense, without discounting the minimal conditions of human life worthy of human beings. An analysis of these factors shows a great variety and complexity. This survey will refer also to the signs of hope seen in movements and initiatives of peoples and groups, above all by the Churches in service to life in Asia.

The Asian peoples' struggles for fuller humanity derive from their yearning for liberation or wholeness as persons and peoples, and for a life of dignity, freedom and solidarity to empower them to become communities of compassion. The vocation and mission of the Church is a dynamic continuation of the mission of Christ, who came that "they may have life, and have it abundantly" (Jn 10: 10).

B. MAJOR AREAS OF THREATS TO LIFE

1. The Globalization of Economy

In their eagerness to modernize and industrialize with a view to economic progress, Asian countries have come under systems of global economy. The question is whether this has contributed or is likely to contribute to justice and equity within nations, especially the poor, and between nations. We need to take a critical look at the global economy being imported into Asian countries.

The *globalization* of economy and the market seems to be relentless. Many Asian countries are becoming part of this system. In this process, the state is expected to play the role of creating an environment favorable to the free expansion of the market and the competitiveness of businesses. There is a call for greater and greater deregulation of the state-planned economy, which threatens the democratic control over the economic processes of globalization. In a recent seminar held in Tokyo on the emerging world order, there was a general consensus about the world order based on the agreement on World Trade (GATT together with NWO to be set up in 1995 as a sequel to this demanding a deregulation in the financial sector. But it was generally felt that the current wave of deregulation sweeping over Asian countries may

weaken governments in their responsibility to regulate economies and finances at the service of the people and their well-being. It leaves important decisions to the private sector, with disastrous consequences to democratic politics expected to serve the common good.²

The progress of developing countries has to question these economic policies and strategies and agreements and pacts, which have been made independently of the goals of social justice and democratic rights and participation. They have to monitor with alertness whether the economic policies and strategies continue to serve the goals of justice, freedom, dignity and the well-being of people. The globalization of economy and its market policy tend to become absolute goals, whereas they should be seen as means to human development and a well-being rooted in justice and solidarity.³ The advocates of the global market economy use easily the language of consultation, cooperation, efficiency and competitive business. They feel ill at ease when questions of justice, solidarity and the rights of the poor are raised.

In the growing market economy, human persons are considered competitors, bringing a fatalistic division of peoples into "winners and losers." This pragmatic definition must be opposed in the name of human solidarity of all who are bound together in a common humanity by which we are brothers and sisters to one another.

Globalization in an unequal world means finally more and more well being and prosperity for the powerful and prosperous, and less and less well-being for the poor of the world.

2. The Economics of Needs and Wants

In the market economy promoted by GATT and WTO, the concept of justice is likely to get distorted. In a world of the powerless poor and the powerful affluent, true justice should bring out clearly the distinction between the basic *needs* of people and (luxury) *wants* of the affluent, and should insist upon consequent options in policies and

² Cf. *The Pioneer*, May 25, 1994, p. 6. Cf. Rajni Kothari, "On Humane Governance," in *Alternatives*, 12 (1987), p. 278.

³ Cf. G. Baum, "A Letter from Quebec," in *The Future of Prophetic Christianity*, ed. D.L. Carmody and J.T. Carmody, (Orbis Books, N.Y., 1993), p. 97.

decisions which guarantee and promote social justice. The global economic arrangement that is taking over most of our Asian countries vitiates the distinction between basic needs and luxury wants, and "wants" become "needs," thus changing the agenda for "justice." In the race for technology, the advanced countries enter the developing countries, proposing to produce for basic needs, but they end up producing for wants, which masquerade as needs, and thus deprive people of their self-reliance in meeting their basic needs.

Social service agencies need to be watchful, lest they themselves be sucked unwittingly into the ethos of a competitive economy and technology conducive to production of wants. Subtle policies of patenting natural resources, biodiversity, plants and their natural products increasingly push the basic natural goods available to people into the imperialism of the market economy, in which everything nature produces becomes a patent-protected, price-tagged commodity.⁴

The globalization of the economy, and of mass media, communication and information in an increasingly unipolar world centered on the market have raised euphoric hopes in Third World countries, as if the global situation is already homogeneous in culture, resources, political power and economy. We have to be alert to the reality of an unequal world. Relationships between nations and peoples are affected by dominance-dependence in a power which derives from wealth and technology. So too, trade relations are established on the same pattern. In this connection the Bretton Woods institutions, the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund, together with the recently concluded GATT at Marrakesh (to which 120 countries have put their signature calling for structural adjustments in economy, trade, wages, reduction of subsidies to public services and agriculture, privatization of public sector industries and banks, the opening of the countries as markets for multinational business and of their resources to multinational corporations, all on easy terms for maximum profit) are going to be of tremendous cost to the lives of the poor. In this bewitching globalization, the priority of justice, equality of opportunity, solidarity of peoples is sidelined and the state is called primarily to facilitate the

⁴ Cf. M. V. Stichele, "GATT: Third World Cultural Diversity Under Threat" in *Third World Resurgence*, no. 37, pp. 35-36; also V. Shivananda and R. Holla-Bhar, "Intellectual Piracy and the Neem Tree," *The Ecologist*, 2 (1994, no.2), pp. 7-14.

market economy benefiting the growing middle-class. This also deepens the debt crisis.⁵

The impact of GATT and liberalization needs to be carefully weighted in terms of the poor who are in a process of development. Economists in India have noticed changes in the approaches of the government after India accepted the GATT dispensation. Until three years ago, the planners gave priority to the *elimination of poverty* (*garibi hatao*). Now the poverty elimination has been reduced to a pragmatic poverty "*alleviation*."

The Indian government has made major commitments for an unsuspecting nation, without taking people into confidence in the matter of GATT. Important areas affected are *agriculture* (our major source) and *pharmaceuticals*. WTO will determine economic and trade relations on behalf of the big traders and their international corporations.

India has agreed to a reduction of 55% on raw materials. Europe and the United States return only 18% and 22% on capital goods and components. Patenting indigenous agricultural and plant resources, and forcing on India and developing countries biotechnologies and their products with patent rights will destroy the indigenous resources. Pressures in negotiations lead to unfair terms, with short-term and long-term consequences. The Indian government has not taken seriously the people's protests (farmers), and goes ahead blithely with GATT agreements in a helpless way. Development and democracy do not seem to go together. Services dependent on community resources will become objects of trade. "People as resource" becomes empty rhetoric before the onslaughts of marketization on human life. The history of the GATT negotiations testifies to the dynamic of unequal partners, leading to weakened benefits for the weak partners. There has been a consistent pattern of surrender. At home, the government denies it. In actual negotiations, it surrenders.⁶

⁵ Cf. World Development Report, 1994, p. 200 (total external debt in millions of US dollars: Bangladesh, 13,189, India, 76,983, Pakistan, 24,072, Sri Lanka, 6,401, Indonesia, 84,385, Myanmar, 5,326, Philippines, 32,498; cf. Felix Wilfred, "Paying Debts with Blood," in *VJTR* 55 (1991), pp. 187-207.

⁶ Cf. *Mainstream*, May 7, 1994, p. 6.

The UNDP's Human Development Report for 1994 calls for a 20:20 global compact to provide for basic education, primary health care, safe drinking water and essential services for family. The report calls for a cut in defense budgets so that the savings could be used to meet the basic needs of people. This is necessary for India and Pakistan so that the savings become "peace dividends" for their people's development. After the Cold War, the reduction of defense budgets has not yet become resources for development of the poor nations of the world.⁷

The globalization of the economy and the liberalization of the market mean more foreign investment for the industrial sector, the introduction of high technology, deregulation, and emphasis on export-oriented cash crops, all of which result in a reduction of goods to satisfy the basic needs of the people. All this spells out disempowerment of the poor nations. Such is the concern of all developing Asian countries. The Churches in their service to life must express their serious concern about the quality and kind of development and strategies adopted in their countries.

3. Science and Technology — To Serve Development or Profit?

Science and technology give an assurance of efficiency and show that things formerly considered impossible can be done. But the quest for meaning will raise the question whether all that is technologically possible ought to be done. The answer cannot come from technology or science. It has to come from the resources of faith and humanity. Technology is not inherently antithetical to human well-being; but advanced technologies coming from developed countries are linked to power, business and profit. These determine the possibilities of technology transfer to developing countries. The operative principal is profit, efficient commerce and political power. In simple language, technology as efficiency tends to subordinate the value priorities derived from social justice to one exclusively of profit.

⁷ Cf. *Human Development Report, 1994*, (Delhi, Oxford University Press), pp. 1-10. According to the Human Development Report, HDI, the Human Development Index for India and Pakistan is 134 and 132 respectively.

The exchange of technologies governed by Intellectual Property Rights (IPR) as part of GATT will adversely affect Third World countries.⁸ The use of technology for the production of goods that satisfy basic needs and to serve social ends such as health care and sustainable agriculture are not a priority.

Faith resists the subjugation of meaning to efficiency. As Kosuke Koyama says: "Religion and technology encounter each other on the question of relationship and meaning."⁹ In the rapid modernization taking place in Asian countries, technology is assuming an all-pervasive presence and importance, almost becoming a religion. In the process, technology and power are closely linked, the former serving the latter, and leaving the powerless and the poor on the side line. The power of technology is linked to the power of the ruling elites. This ought not to be so. The technologization of society should be subordinated to its humanization.

4. Third World Tourism: Cultural Contacts or Exploitation?

Modern tourism is a "frontier industry," replete with advertising images of "paradise," "virgin" beaches and "untouched landscapes," behind all of which lurk conquest and domination.

In the competitive race for the global market, tourism has become one of the most promising Asian industries. The promotion of five-star tourism, with an attendant evil of prostitution, especially child prostitution (cf. Thailand, Philippines, Taiwan, Sri Lanka), only reflects the basic unjust divisions of society. It forces the powerless into the prostitution of their dignity, culture and life. There is need of a critique of and protest on the part of the people and their movements against such a kind of tourism industry open to corporate business. The "hedonocracy" of developed countries entering and controlling tourism on developing countries, in collusion with the national middle class, turns the latter countries into the brothels of developed countries. The promotion of tourism, as demanded by globalization and structural

⁸ Cf. Vandana Shiva, "North Blocks South in Bio-Diversity" in *Third World Resurgence*, no. 28, p. 4.

⁹ Cf. Kosuke Koyama, *Mount Fuji and Mount Sinai*, (SCM Press Ltd., London, 1984), pp. 129-142.

adjustments in our countries, must not forget the unjust and unequal global situation in which the great social goals of justice, equality of opportunity, freedom and solidarity of peoples get sidetracked.

An industry geared to serve the comforts of the tourist rather than the basic needs of the people brings an extravagant lifestyle into a situation where people struggle for sustenance and survival. Studies on tourism have brought out the related crimes of theft, child prostitution, and bride buying, and have led to the to people's mobilization against tourism.

Related to this is the building of golf courses that take away huge tracts of land, including forest land (in Goa, Kerala, Bangalore; in Malaysia, e.g., the rainforest reserve cleared for the Datai Bay Golf Club; in Indonesia, the luxurious golf resort at Mucapi Mountain; in Thailand, the damage done to the natural hill area at Khao Yai National Park for the creation of the Godlen Valley Golf). The golf industry as a part of tourism promotes "an elitist and exclusive lifestyle" for the wealthy urban population, with much damage to environment and to the poor inhabitants of society. Besides, the golf clubs introduce monoculture pesticides, weedicides, etc., upsetting the national ecosystem.¹⁰

Today, there is a move towards mass ecotourism as a tourism alternative. But the tourism agenda is increasingly determined by corporate interests detrimental to local peoples' interests. It, has been reported that an effort is being made to set up the United States' style of national parks in Thailand, which will expel local people and preserve forests for tourists.¹¹

The responsible ecotourism promoted by governments, industry and business including multilateral financial institutions like the World Bank, is problematic insofar as it is promoted on the basis of a free market, with out participation of the local people.¹² Such an ecotourism with a green face needs to be viewed critically.

¹⁰ Cf. *The Eye*, vol.2, no.4. The whole issue deals with tourism in Asia; cf. A. Pleumaron, "Course and Effect, Golf Tourism in Thailand," in the *Ecologist Asia*, vol. 2, no. 2, 1994, pp. 31-40.

¹¹ Cf. *Contours*, vol.6, nos. 3-4. Nov. 1993, p. 17.

¹² *Ibid.*, p. 20.

A close watch on tourism and its effects on people's lives is needed, for which committed action groups and the local churches are very important. They must make people participate in tourism policy-making decisions, expose unequal exchanges between the guest and the host, and ensure that justice and human rights are part of mainline tourism.¹³

Nowadays, there is a talk of a tourism that is humane, acceptable and ecofriendly. But as long as tourism remains an expansion of a domination by developed countries, one cannot speak of an acceptable tourism, as there is no acceptable slavery or acceptable colonialism. Let us judge tourism by what it does to the people's lives, their culture, dignity and their just claims and rights to life.

5. Child Prostitution

Closely linked to tourism is prostitution and child prostitution. The international campaign called, "End Child Prostitution in Asian Tourism (ECPAT)", revealed in 1990 that according to the research done in Sri Lanka, the Philippines, Thailand and Taiwan, there has been a dramatic increase in the number of prostituted children in recent years. Bangkok-based ECPAT is networking with different groups in the whole world to stop the trafficking and flesh trade of children of Asia, or sex tourism, which affect tens of thousands of children. Thailand's sex industry gets children from South China, revealing "the China connection" in this slave trade. Of an estimated 2 million to 3 million prostitutes in Thailand, a third of them are children.¹⁴ In Sri Lanka, in the Free Trade Zone, young female workers (around 70,000 employed) are exploited, for cheap labor for the production of export goods, and many young workers are forced to give sexual "services."

Rapes and abortion are common, health care little.¹⁵ Sex tourists from the West and some Asian countries demand child prostitutes.

¹³ Cf. *The Eye*, *ibid.*, pp. 17-18; "Rethinking Tourism," *Contours*, pp. 8-14.

¹⁴ Cf. *Children Worldwide*, 19 (1992, no.2), p. 19.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 21, 29.

Linked with the child prostitutes' business is pornography. Thus, the demands of the tourism industry which is linked to sex and its demands are met by the poor of Asian countries. Such an industry spells the death of the poor of Asia in more than one sense. Much of the growth of the trade is caused by foreign tourists. A shocking revelation by ECPAT is that an international network of pedophiles has opened what are called "orphanages" or "street shelters," which become supply centers for visiting pedophiles (e.g., the Bangkok Children's Shelter). Such "homes" have been uncovered in Thailand and the Philippines. This seems to be the most cynical and criminal result of globalization. ECPAT organized an international conference on "Child Prostitution" in Bangkok in 1992. According to the conference, there is a need for an international network of support and information that can move with swift united action against the sexual abuse of Asian children. There is need for laws that are stringent, clear and effective against this outrageous "industry." The conference's statement ends like this: "Children are vulnerable. They need the protection of the law, the concern of government, the affirmation of their rights, and our special care."¹⁶

The International Labor Organization (ILO), in its annual report (May 31, 1994), has singled out Thailand, India, Sri Lanka and other Asian nations for exploiting and abusing children (subject to the "intolerable" misery of forced labor and prostitution). The report of ILO calls upon the international community to stop the rampant sex tourism in Southeast Asia. According to its estimates there are 800,000 child prostitutes in Thailand, most of them deceived into this work or abducted, some from Cambodia, China, Laos and Myanmar.¹⁷ Bishop Michael Bunluen Mansap of Thailand remarks with bitter irony on the situation of the poor and the children in developing countries: "In this ruthless environment, to be young, and therefore weak and poor, is a crime punishable by exploitation; a crime against a new world order of profitable materialism and physical gratification. And the sentence for this crime? Child labor and child prostitution."¹⁸

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 31.

¹⁷ *The Times of India*, June 2, 1994, p. 9.

¹⁸ Cf. *Children Worldwide*, *ibid.*, p. 35.

C. PEOPLE ON THE MOVE: MIGRANTS, REFUGEES...

1. Migrants

The phenomenon of migration, displacement and refugees reveals the vulnerability of people's lives, their insecurity, exploitation, joblessness, uprootedness, political uncertainty and humiliating treatment as outsiders or foreigners. The phenomenon is complex and its causes multiple. Here I only stress that it is a significant human issue existing in varying forms and degrees in the countries of Asia, calling the Churches to respond. The outreach in solidarity to these brothers and sisters is Christian discipleship at the service to life. This phenomenon is likely to become intensified in future.

There was a time when Japan was economically poor, and many Japanese migrated to South America, North America and other Asian countries. Today there is a shift from emigration to immigration, Japan being a developed country. There are about 700,000 immigrants in Japan: workers, students from abroad, Japanese war orphans from China and their families, South Koreans, North Koreans, Taiwanese and Chinese, often forcibly brought to Japan earlier for work, etc.

The policy of the Japanese government is to allow in those who have special skills or a high level of expertise. This means unskilled workers are excluded from entry into Japan. Developed countries follow such a policy, which also leads to a "brain drain" in developing countries. Such a policy basically means that the poor who seek employment cannot become immigrants. Most of the immigrant workers suffer from alienation, instability in their living conditions and a lack of legal protection. The most vulnerable are women, who are subject to sexual violence and exploitation.¹⁹

2. Refugees and Asylum Seekers —

A History of Insecurity and the Uncertain Future

Refugees and asylum seekers who require international protection and assistance do not want to repatriate, out of a fear of persecution and violence in their home countries. *The World Refugee*

¹⁹ Cf. Lorscheiter, "Japan From Emigration to Immigration," *People on the Move*, 22 (1993), pp. 9-22.

Survey, 1993 gives the figures for Asia countries:²⁰ China, 12,500, Hong Kong, 45,300, Indonesia, 15,600, Malaysia, 16,700, Philippines, 5,600, Thailand, 255,000, Vietnam, 19,000, Bangladesh, 245,000, India, 378,000, Nepal, 80,400, Pakistan, 1,577,000. Refugees mostly come from neighboring countries. They are usually found concentrated in the border regions of host countries. They need protection, assistance and support for their rights.

3. Internal Migrants in Search of Crumbs

There is an increasing number of people migrating from rural to urban areas. India, traditionally believed to live in villages, is changing rapidly. In 1981, the urban population has increased to 156.2 million from 62.4 million in 1951. With rapid industrialization, more and more landless laborers have diminishing prospects for livelihood and so turn to urban industrial centers, where they hope to get jobs. The poor rural migrants (mostly non-skilled) are increasingly subject to exploitation and cheap labor, with no space for living, and are forced to become "squatters" in clusters of slums with living conditions not worthy of human beings. The megacities of Bombay, Calcutta and Delhi have crossed the 10 million mark. According to the UN's "State of the World Population, 1993," there is an "unprecedented movement from the countryside to urban areas."²¹ In Delhi, 70% live in 700-odd squatter settlements in degrading living conditions. The causes of migration to cities are landlessness, the failure of land reforms, the social neglect of villages, and joblessness. 1988 was the international year of Shelter for the Homeless, but in India often 30% or over 50% of the cities belong to the population of slum dwellers. The question is: Can we speak of the progress of peoples without guaranteeing the fundamental right for a home?

4. Development and Displacement of the Poor

In the present phase of development in India, there is another major phenomenon, namely, the displacement of people from their

²⁰ *The World Refugee Survey, 1993*, p. 3.

²¹ Allwyn Fernandes, "Big City Blues," *The Sunday Times of India*, August 28, 1994, p. 17.

traditional place of residence and work caused by new industrial projects, dams, new forest policies. According to a conservative estimate 15 million persons have been displaced in India between the first and the sixth economic plans, though the real number may be as high as 30 million. People displaced by mining projects between 1951 to 1990 are 2.1 million, and of these, 70 to 80% are tribals, who are the most vulnerable group. Many of the oustees have become bonded laborers.²² We cannot ignore the case of the multibillion dollar Sarovar Narmada megadam, which has become the most controversial project because of its huge displacement of people, especially of tribals, and its disastrous ecological consequences. Even the World Bank, which initially financed the project, withdrew its support,²³ because of the failure of the government to provide the proper rehabilitation of the displaced.

In all this, the state goes ahead with megaprojects of development, with the least participation of the people in the decision making, especially those affected by the project; and in case after case, rehabilitation is the least implemented. Eviction comes first; rehabilitation and compensation come later, or never. Projects of development have become the notorious reasons for displacement and for internal refugees.²⁴

According to the 1994 World Refugee Survey, India hosted a refugee population of more than 325,000 in 1993. Among them are an estimated number of 76,000 Sri Lankan Tamil refugees, (3,000 to 98,000 believed living outside the refugee camps), 119,000 Tibetan refugees, 53,500 Chakmas from Bangladesh, 20,000 ethnic Nepalese refugees from Bhutan, 24,400 refugees from Afghanistan, 1,400 ethnic Nagas, and 170 pro-democracy student activists from Myanmar.²⁵

In Tibet, the very socialist ideology of communist China, which opposed all forms of imperialism and colonialism, colonized Tibet and

²² Cf. A. Camillus, "Internal Migration in India: A Query into Causes and Consequences," in *People on the Move*, *op. cit.*, pp. 7 t-79.

²³ Cf. *Sardar Sarovar*, Report of the Independent Review, by Bradford Norse and Thomas Berger, (RFI, 1992).

²⁴ Cf. Camillus, *art. cit.*, pp. 79-92.

²⁵ *The Pioneer*, May, 25, 1994, p. 6.

holds on to the country as its own, while 5-6 million Tibetan people, with their own culture, religion and language, suffer harassment and torture. Many of these have become refugees in India together with their spiritual leader Dalai Lama.

A recent report called "Children of Despair" speaks of the policy of forced sterilization of women, which has racist overtones. The report based on testimony of Tibetans points to "a planned policy of cultural genocide." As Martin Mos says, "they are the coercive policies by a colonial power upon the subject people of a nation under military occupation."²⁶

The threat of eviction from home and land hangs over millions of poor people all over the globe, especially in Asian countries. There is a diversity of causes, such as overt political manipulation (Tibet), social control and discrimination against particular ethnic groups (Chakmas in Bangladesh, similar groups in Myanmar), more often the clearing of land for public works, better roads for tourism, commercial development, or land speculation. Evictions based on these reasons are marked by blatant human rights violations, culpable denial of suitable compensation and poor rehabilitation. In India, megadam projects are largely responsible for eviction. In the Philippines, between July 1992 and August 1993, a total of 12,686 families (76,116 persons) were forcibly evicted from Metro Manila. According to the center on Housing Rights and Evictions (COHRE), forced evictions are a "consequence of misguided" development "policies, notions of what constitutes progress and who should pay for it."²⁷ On March 10, 1993, the UN Commission on Human Rights adopted a resolution affirming that "forced evictions are a gross violation of human rights. It also demanded that governments confer security of tenure to all dwellers currently without such legal protection and that sufficient compensation be paid to all persons and communities which have already been forcibly removed from their homes and lands. It also stressed that government should desist from tolerating or sponsoring forced evictions."²⁸

²⁶ Cf. "Tibet, Children of Despair," *Sedos Bulletin*, 26 (1994, no. 5), pp. 133-138.

²⁷ Cf. "Evictions," in *Environment and Urbanization*, 6 (1994, no. 1), p. 149.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 150, Resolution No. 1993/77.

5. Ethic Minorities — Do the Small Count?

In Pakistan, of late, human rights violations are on the increase against minorities, like Ahmediyas, Shias, Sindhis, Hindus, Christians and Muhajirs. This seems to be a negative fallout of Islamization through which the above groups become second-class citizens and are excluded from participation in national politics on any footing of equality. The national, polity should reflect the pluristic composition of the citizens of the country and serve the well-being of all in terms of justice, equality of opportunity and participation, freedom and dignity. In Pakistan, this is not possible in the present situation. This has to change. The protests of minority need to be listened to.

Ethic groups, like Sindhis, Baluchis, Pakhtoons, Muhajirs and groups which suffer discrimination in Pakistan, need the support of democratic movements. The Church in Pakistan has been raising its voice to lend support and solidarity to these groups.

6. Ethnic Groups in Search of Peace

In South Asia (and also in Indonesia and the Philippines) conflicts between ethnic groups make the situation worse for the ethnic minorities.²⁹ In Sri Lanka, interethnic justice and peace have broken down. Instead, violent internecine conflicts have erupted. In the process, basic issues of people's just claims to equality of opportunity, legitimate cultural identity, its protection and growth have become a casualty. As Casperz points out, the government has to redress the unjust situation and the legitimate grievances of the ethnic Tamil minority in the fields of education, imposed colonization of Tamil areas without regard for local peoples' legitimate rights, use of Tamil language and employment in public and semipublic corporations.³⁰ Interethnic peace and solidarity between different ethnic and religious groups can be built only on the foundation of social justice, eliminating all forms of discrimination against powerless groups.

²⁹ Cf. Paul Casperz, "Sri Lanka: Ethnic Conflict: Fallacies and Response," *Impact*, 29 (1994, no. 2), pp. 11-13.

³⁰ Cf. *Weltkirche*, 9/1992, pp. 286-287.

The Catholic Bishops' Conference of Sri Lanka has made a determined appeal to solve the problems of the war in the North and East, which has resulted in massive destruction of human life and resources. They criticize the lack of political will to solve this issue of ethnic conflicts; the political parties (the ruling party and the opposition) are not willing to sacrifice their narrow vested interests. Hence, the bishops have made an earnest appeal to all to commit themselves to the task of building a just society in Mother Lanka.³¹ In an island torn by ethnic conflicts, a Church delegation visited Jaffna in Northern Sri Lanka in January, 1994 to open up dialogue. This is the type of mission of mediation the Church is called to exercise whenever and wherever possible. The two sides of a conflict need a mediation that reflects objective issues of justice, human rights and legitimate aspirations, and a reconciliation and peacemaking based on these values.³²

7. Indigenous Peoples, the Neglected Groups

Indigenous peoples are more vulnerable than most groups to violations of human rights. Their life and sources of sustenance are easily threatened. Tribal or aboriginal peoples of different Asian countries need to be guaranteed the basic right to their socio-cultural identity and their right to a fuller humanity, before they are pushed into an integration with the mainstream. There is a legitimate demand of the *dalits* of India to be considered as indigenous peoples. Some of these indigenous groups are counted as ethnic minorities. It is difficult to draw the line between indigenous peoples and ethnic minorities. Their cultures are fast disappearing. According to one anthropologist, U. Clay, "there have been more extinctions of tribal peoples in this century than in any other in history."³³

According the *State of the World, 1993*, there are in East Asia 82 million Chinese indigenous peoples, in South Asia, 71-91 million, in South East Asia, 32-55 million.³⁴ The same report mentions the values

³¹ Cf. *Fides*, Feb. 20, 1994, quoted by *Catholic International*, no. 4, April, 1994, p. 153.

³² *Ibid.*

³³ Cf. *State of the World*, 1993, p. 83.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 82.

of indigenous peoples, which are the values of the future of humankind: "devotion to future generations, ethical regard for nature and commitment to the community." It also asks: "Are indigenous peoples the past or are they the future?"³⁵

D. WORKERS AND CHILD LABORERS

1. Workers

The vast majority of *workers* in developing countries work for their livelihood under conditions of cheap labor, exploitation, child labor and discrimination against women. India, a signatory to several international conventions, with its own plethora of labor laws, is ineffective with regard to their implementation. In Beedi work (indigenous leaf cigarettes), as elsewhere, child labor is banned by law. According to a Parliamentary Committee Report, a large number of children are engaged in this work.³⁶ Child labor continues in the carpet industry, in match works: The root cause for this, of course, is poverty.

According to ILO's *World Labor Report* (Geneva, 1993), debt bondage (bonded labor) is most prevalent in South Asia. According to some estimates, in Pakistan 20 million people, including 7.5 million children, are engaged as bonded laborers in brick making, quarrying, beedi work, and the carpet industry, though it is outlawed by the country's constitution.

In 1988, the Supreme Court of Pakistan declared brickkiln workers to be bonded laborers. In February, 1992, the Pakistan National Assembly passed a law abolishing the bonded labor system. The Bonded Labor Liberation Front has helped bring the release of thousands of bonded laborers and has worked for their self-organization, to prevent them slipping back into bonded labor.³⁷

In India, according to the estimates of voluntary social agencies, five million adults and ten million children are bonded, though this

³⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 100.

³⁶ Cf. *The Times of India*, May 20, 1994, p. 4.

³⁷ Cf. *ILO Report*, 1993, p. 2.

estimate is disputed by the government. The law requires state governments to identify, rehabilitate and release bonded laborers, and to establish vigilance committees to see to the implementation of the law. There is serious doubt about the seriousness of the government in implementing the law.

It has been suggested by social activists that those who bonded the workers should in justice pay compensation to the workers whose cheap labor fattened their profits, rather than looking for humanitarian rehabilitation by the state.

2. No Games for Them: Child Laborers

According to a report prepared by an ILO Committee of Experts, several million children between the ages of 5 and 14 are in chronic bond age in agriculture, about a million in brick-kiln, stone quarry and construction industries, hundreds of thousands in carpet-weaving, match and fireworks industries, the production of glass bangles and diamond-cutting and polishing.

ILO rightly considers all child labor to be forced labor. Besides child bonded laborers, others are kidnapped or lured away from their families to work in sweatshops and brothels. Out of 200 million child laborers in the world, 80 million are from South Asian countries, of which 55 million are from India, most coming from poor and low-caste groups.³⁸ In Thai land, child catchers and recruiters go to rural areas to lure away children from poor families to work in restaurants, factories and brothels in cities.³⁹

3. Workers' Rights — Unite and Be Free

Trade unions in the organized sector of Asian countries vary from 20 to 40 per cent of the work force. "Governments in Asia have strong influence on the growth and character of trade unions."⁴⁰ In the present scenario of structural adjustment to integrate themselves

³⁸ Cf. *The Times of India*, August 12, 1994, p. 19.

³⁹ *ILO Report*, p. 2.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 5.

into the global economy and of privatization, governments tend to exercise stringent control over trade unions, lest too many industrial conflicts discourage foreign investment. For example, Thailand, Malaysia and the Philippines, which are keen to attract foreign investments, are also reluctant to allow a strong trade union movement to build up.⁴¹ Hence, the future of the protection of workers' rights and the political will of governments to protect them are cast into doubt. Hence, to work for the protection of migrant workers, of women (who form half of the labor force of Asia and who are poorly paid) and of child workers, will call for concerted efforts from trade unions. Moreover, the way all economic reforms are structured in South Asian countries, e.g., in India, will create more and more unemployment. According to ILO and UNDP, 4 to 10 million will be unemployed.⁴² By 1997 there will be 9 million educated unemployed. The question is: Is this huge number of unemployed the pangs of transition or the pattern of future development?

E. WOMEN AND THE WHOLENESS OF LIBERATED LIFE FOR ALL

1. Women: Always the Discriminated

The UN Decade for Women (1975-1985) helped to create a worldwide awareness in all the continents of the sufferings of women from poverty, injustice and violence. Yet, the worldwide situation of women has worsened since that decade. The new international economic policies and political mechanisms promoted by the Breton Woods' institutions have made the situation worse in Third World countries, where the brunt of the economic consequences is borne mostly by women.⁴³

In Korea and other North East Asian countries, culture has been pervasively influenced by Confucianism which favored a patriarchal

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, p. 51.

⁴² *New Age*, August, 1993, p. 7.

⁴³ Cf. Sun Ai Lee-Park and Sang Jung Park, "Woman and Man in Community: An Asian Reflection," in *Ecumenical Review*, 46 (1994, no. 2), pp. 147-156.

social and political system. The role of the male is dominant and the status of women devalued. Confucian patriarchy is a political-ethical system ruled by the landed gentry. It stresses hierarchical roles and places. Though Confucianism cannot be thrown off, since it is so deeply embedded, yet from the feminist perspective it needs to be critically examined. Even the Confucian virtue *Jen* (benevolence), which looks to promoting harmonious relationships in society, because it is linked to a patriarchal hierarchy, needs a liberating critique. It fails to recognize the complementarity of women and men. Even the Chinese twin principle of integration of reality, *Yin* and *Yang*, promotes a harmonious benevolent order of human relationship, but according to a patriarchal paradigm. Therefore, the agenda of liberation of women must critically reckon with the socio-cultural factors derived from Confucianism. The harmonious model of society according to Confucianism has envisaged a marginalization of women.⁴⁴

Even in China, the modernization process has benefited a certain sector of society, with increasing exploitation of women as sexual objects in the tourism industry. It has been reported that women from poor areas of China are taken to Hong Kong, Macau or Thailand with the promise of jobs, but finally forced into prostitution or used as a source of cheap labor. The preference for a boy child is also prevalent in China.⁴⁵ In the SAARC Region of South Asia, female illiteracy rates are one of the highest in the world, with 68 percent of women unable to read and write.⁴⁶

In South Asian countries, democracy is "distorted" with large-scale misuse of the democratic institutions (such as the judiciary, legislature, executive),⁴⁷ and the media. Militarism, casteism, classism and sexism play a negative role in politics, along with large-scale corruption among bureaucrats and politicians. In such a situation women suffer most. In the agricultural unorganized and unskilled labor sector, women become the source of cheap labor and suffer from economic insecurity. Women depend on the male members of the

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 148.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 151.

⁴⁶ Cf. *The Pioneer*, August 31, 1994, p. 2.

⁴⁷ Cf. Justice Krishna Iyer, *The Law and Urban Poor in India*, (Delhi, B. R. Publishing House, 1988).

family. They often face sexual and physical harassment from men in workplaces. In the political realm, the electoral process does not help improve the power of women, especially in decision making. Deprived of participation in decision making, women cannot influence and shape decisions bearing on health care, child care, social services, the content and distribution of educational opportunities, and set limits to military spending or stop projects damaging to environment.

2. The Girl Child — The Absolutely Defenseless

The UN has declared 1990-2000 to be the decade of the girl child. Discussion of the girl child is intimately linked to the status of women in a society ruled by patriarchy. Here we come to some concrete data on the continuing discrimination against the girl child.

There is growing awakening to the issue of the girl child in most countries, including Asian countries, but a closer monitoring of development programs touching *health care, education and opportunity for growth* is needed. The girl child is still absent from many development programs. In programs for children, there is no attention to gender-specific neglect.

In the SAARC Decade of the Girl Child, the situation of the girl child continues to be disadvantaged with high rates of mortality for girls.⁴⁸

In India there are 190.8 million girls under 17 years of age but more girls than boys die in the first years of their life — a trend that continues until 19. The main cause is neglect of health care for the girl child. The economic prosperity of a community does not automatically guarantee sufficient health care for the girl child. Every year 25 million girls are born, of whom 25% do not live to reach 15. Early marriage of girls between 15 and 19 (44.2%) causes death in child birth twice greater than in the age group above 19. An UNDP study shows the incidence of HIV infection is the highest among women in the 15-25 age group.

In the area of *education* of the girl child, one sees the same neglect of girls, e.g., in the low numbers enrolling in primary education, and

⁴⁸ Cf. *The Pioneer*, p. 2.

equally low perseverance. Despite the emphasis on girl child enrollment in primary education in the 1980's, the disproportion has increased in India and Pakistan. Even the opening of more schools, unless there are gender specific attention to the enrollment and support of the girl child, will not radically change the situation.

In all our Asian countries, there is need for gender-specific data that would help establish priorities in all programs meant for the child, especially in health and education programs. The option for the poor would become an option for the girl child. These program need to be monitored and measured according to the option for the girl child.

3. Women and Family — Challenge of Human Community

In any consideration of women and of the girl child, we have to take into account the situation of the family, the basic cell of society, the primary community. 1994 was the international year of the family. Today more than ever, forces of death and destruction threaten the dignity and well being of the family.

The *Draft Document* of the World Population Conference in Cairo (September, 1994) seemed to be dominated by liberalist middle-class values of "Individualism, uncontrolled consumerism and unrestricted freedom... The draft virtually ignores marriage, the sacred institution through which children are given appropriate welcome to this world."⁴⁹

In the matter of *health services*, the document puts the responsibility on the family, but says little about society's responsibility to promote the health of the community and, therefore, of families. In the present liberalization and globalization of the economy, health services tend to be privatized, making health care more expensive and less available or unavailable to the poor.

In India, Bangladesh and Pakistan, Islamic fundamentalism in the name of preserving religious identity resists all voices of protest against gender inequality. So too in India, the fundamentalist ideology

⁴⁹ Cf. "The Letter of the CBCI President to the Prime Minister," CBCI, August 1, 1994, p. 2.

of Hindutva promotes a gendered division of labor and resists empowerment of women for equality and justice.⁵⁰ Fundamentalist forces, under the pretext of preserving religious identity and customs, deny the liberative meaning of authentic religion and become stone-deaf to human rights and their violations.⁵¹

4. Numbers and Dignity: Population Control and Service of Life

Two-thirds of the world population is in Asia. While we are concerned about the limited resources of the earth and sustainable development, we need to handle responsibly (i.e., in terms of basic values of our humanity enlightened by faith) the issue of the increase of world population. In the service to life, value-based management of population growth is crucial. Dignity and numbers become a central question.

A responsible management of population growth is related to the creation of a just society. The families are the locus of such a responsible, value-based approach, linked to justice and rights of families, women and children. A control of population through a responsible value-based approach to human life can indeed be a service to life. As John Paul II says in his letter to President Clinton, if we look forward to the year 2000, the draft statement of the World Population Conference proposes a society of things "and not of persons."⁵² In the same letter, John Paul points to "the lack of attention to the conscience and to respect for cultural and ethical values which inspire other ways of looking at life." He tells Clinton that "it is very important not to weaken man, his sense of the sacredness of life, his capacity for love and self-sacrifice. Here we are speaking of sensitive issues upon which our societies stand or fall."

⁵⁰ Jean D'Cunha, "TYF: A Feminist Critique," *Social Action*, April-June, 1994, p. 44.

⁵¹ Cf. Kavita R. Khory, "The Sha Bano Case: Some Political Implications," in *Religion and Law in Independent India*, ed. Robert D. Baird, (Delhi, Manohar, 1993), pp. 122-138.

⁵² Cf. *Origins*, 23 (1994, no.43), p. 760.

5. Respect for Life and the Quality of Life

Threats to life are not merely confined to individual violations but are structural. They are operative in the economic, political, cultural and religious spheres. The structures of injustice, violence and ideologies of death create a culture of death. In the Asian heritage, reverence for life and *karuna* and *jeeva-karunya* (compassion for life) are precious values, which today ironically become only the clichés of politicians making them devoid of substance. The models of development and the structures of governance in many of our Asian countries, marked by elitism, liberalism and the power of vested interests, do not protect the life of the majority who struggle for life. If the concern for human life is not based on the bed rock of the intrinsic dignity and value of all human life from conception to death, it easily slides into a libertarian and utilitarian calculus which justifies abortion on demand, euthanasia and the suffering of the poor as inevitable in the progress of a nation.

Today, we need to recognize the distinction between the "equalitarian use" of the quality of life, which stresses equality of all human beings and their entitlement to a minimum level of well-being, for which basic needs must be satisfied, and a "protectionary use" of the quality of life, which is eudaimonistic at the level of wants, treats needs and wants as equal, and considers redistribution as diminishing the quality of life, which is identified with wants, to whose accumulation there is no limit.⁵³ "If the rich peoples of the world see their material affluence as equivalent to their "quality of life," which they claim they are entitled to protect, then they feel justified in ignoring the claims of the impoverished peoples of the world for emergency relief and developmental assistance."⁵⁴

In bioethics, in situations at the edges of life, the "protectionary quality" of life, based on the eudaimonistic goat of wants, is used for the promotion of euthanasia, abortion, unethical eugenics. Here, what we need is the "quality-of-treatment" norm, not "quality-of-life" norm. What is needed in bioethics, at the edges of life, is the "equalitarian"

⁵³ Cf. William Aiben, "Quality of Life," in *Quality of Life*, ed. J.J. Walter and T.A. Shamon, (N.Y., Paulist Press, 1990), pp. 17-25.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 24.

quality-of-life norm.⁵⁵ This needs to be stressed in our Asian situation, because the liberalist views are aired by activists for euthanasia.

The Korean bishops have expressed their deep concern about the fast diminishing respect for human life in their country, and question the priorities of the state focused on the economy and a growing materialism leading to a collapse of basic values, especially respect for life.⁵⁶ According to the International Planned Parenthood Federation, five million clandestine abortions take place every year in South Asia. In the countries of South Asia, abortions are illegal except in India.⁵⁷ There are 2 million abortions per year in south Korea. The bishops warn against suicide, euthanasia and willful mutilations of the body. They also sound a note of caution about the ecological crisis caused by pollution and alert the nation to the need of a clean environment needed for the healthy life of people.

What becomes clear here is that the sustenance of a decent human life depends on the value system of a society. Rapidly advancing countries promote a model of development which is without a cultural and ethical support needed to regulate right priorities. Hence, the Korean bishops make a plea for a new culture of respect for human life. It is an important point in our reflection on the theme of this assembly.⁵⁸

F. WHOLENESS OF HEALTH AND JUSTICE

1. Health Care

Right to *health care* belongs to the dignity of every human person. A right to life without a right and duty to health care is an empty right. But in the developing countries of Asia, the basic needs of health care are woefully inadequate. As one Anglican bishop remarked, "As long as there is Bangladesh, there is no health for England" (Archbishop Habgood). A high level of health care facilities in one country and the

⁵⁵ Cf. J.R. Connery, "Quality of Life," *op. cit.*, pp. 54-60.

⁵⁶ Cf. *Weltkirche*, 1/1992, pp. 18-21.

⁵⁷ *The Pioneer*, p. 2.

⁵⁸ *Weltkirche*, *ibid.*

absence of facilities of basic or primary health care in another shows the inequity among nations bonded together in one continent. What is most disturbing is the commercialization of health care.⁵⁹ When people work in the most hazardous situations and live in abysmal living conditions, even a minimum of health is a distant dream. This is the situation in India and Bangladesh. As the *State of India's Health* says, "We have to move from free-for-all consumerized medical care" for the few who can afford it, "to a genuine commitment for Health for All," and "to a holistic model which encompasses a socio-cultural perspective."⁶⁰

Modern medical technology, though marvelous in its discoveries, has become an industry that trades in medicines for huge profits, and so places even lifesaving medicines beyond the reach of the poor.⁶¹ Moreover, the World Bank has been advocating privatization of health care in view of profit generation, leaving to governments only a minimum health care for the poor.

Alternative medicines and healing systems based on indigenous wisdom, e.g., naturopathy, herbal medicines, Ayurvedic medicines, etc., are stated to be free from the side-effects common to allopathic medicines. In India, this is being recognized and promoted by a number of voluntary health organizations (cf. CHAI, VHAI). But the present policy of globalization and liberalization of the market and the medical care system leads to a competitive business and a privatization for profits, facilitated by decontrol of drug prices by governments. Hence, there is need for continual monitoring of the health care and drug policies promoted by government in our countries.

2. HIV — AIDS

The HIV - AIDS pandemic is alarming in its rapid spread. According to the Harvard School of Public Health, between 38 million to 110 million adults, plus 10 million children, are likely to be infected by

⁵⁹ Cf. Alok, Mukhopadhyay (ed.), *State of India's Health*, (New Delhi, VHAI, 1992), Prologue.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*

⁶¹ Cf. *Third World Resurgence*, no. 36, pp. 4-5.

HIV by the year 2000. In South and South East Asia, the explosion of HIV infection includes 2 million Indians, several hundred thousand Burmese, and over one-half million Thais. This infection is likely to explode in China, the Philippines, Indonesia, Bangladesh and Pakistan sooner or later.”⁶²

According to recent studies, the spread of HIV infection takes place more through heterosexual than homosexual transmission, from infected men to women and from infected women to men, and this accounts for 71% of all HIV infections at the global level. As of January, 1993, 13 million have acquired HIV infection through heterosexual intercourse.

HIV infection in children is passed on by the mothers. Over 100,000 HIV-infected children are in South East Asia. Of the 1.2 million HIV infected children, 768,000 have developed AIDS and about 90% have already died. It is projected that by January 1996, HIV infected-children in the world will be 2.3 million.

In Asian countries the threat of the increase of HIV infection is very great and real, especially among children, street children being most vulnerable to exploitation and sexual abuse. In Manila, of the 2.5 million children below 15-years old, 1.875 million live at or below the poverty line, and 75,000 of these are street children, who have been abandoned, work up to 12 hours each day, are forced into begging, stealing, scrounging in garbage bins, and taking to drugs. In such situations, reaching out to street children is not only to help them avoid HIV/AIDS or other STD infection but ever more to rebuild their lives already broken and brutalized by the ruthless environment of the streets. Unless we make them whole, we ourselves will never be whole.”⁶³ Church efforts to reach out to these children must be linked with other child-oriented agencies, governmental and non-governmental, that guarantee justice and the rights of families. “A community that rejects children... can never know peace.”⁶⁴

In the fight against AIDS, the prevailing liberalist approach advocates the use of condoms for safer sex, without facing its morally

⁶² *Children Worldwide*, 20, (1993, nos. 2-3), pp. 35-37.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, p. 37.

⁶⁴ Cf. *L'Osservatore Romano*, 22/92, 1993.

negative attitudes to sexual mores. In this context, it is encouraging to read about Muslim, Catholic and Buddhist leaders in Indonesia jointly expressing opposition to the use of condoms, which only promote illicit sex without risk of HIV infection. It amounts to encouraging promiscuity or legalizing prostitution, the destruction of human dignity and death.⁶⁵

The AIDS pandemic is close to the explosion-point in Thailand, and there are ominous signs in the Philippines and other Asian countries. According to Ron O'Grady, customers of brothels and of child prostitutes, conscious of the risk of HIV infection, have turned selective and look for healthy ones "with offers of higher prices." But this is precisely the problem. According to biologists, sex between young children and adults is more likely to lead to HIV infection and AIDS. As O'Grady remarks: "The time bomb will actually force the fuse to burn faster."⁶⁶ The risk of child prostitutes contracting HIV infection is confirmed by the Center for the Protection of Children's Rights in Thailand.⁶⁷ In a statement against the proposed construction of a Voice of America radio-broadcasting station and of a tourist complex, Bishop Frank Marcus Fernando of the Chilaw diocese of Sri Lanka has summoned the local people to protest against these projects because of the disastrous consequences for the people's lives, especially the fisherfolk who will be evicted from their places, and deprived of the fishing resources. In the connection they point to the ill-effects of tourism promoting prostitution, especially among boys in the coastal regions between Negombo and Hikkaduwa. These boys, easy prey to drugs and intoxicants, are likely to become victims of HIV infection contracted through tourists. Bishop Marcus Fernando calls upon the citizens and the Church, "the household of faith, to fight against these threats to people's lives."⁶⁸ According to a recent survey of Bombay brothels, more than fifty percent of the women are HIV/Infected.

Beyond all initiatives undertaken to prevent HIV-infection, the governments, NGOs and Church organizations have to work to end

⁶⁵ Cf. *Catholic International*, 5 (1994, no. 2), p. 52.

⁶⁶ Cf. *Children Worldwide*, 20 (1993, nos. 2-3), p. 43.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 44.

⁶⁸ Cf. *Weltkirche*, 4/1992, pp. 120-123.

trafficking in children, girls and women. Moreover, a comprehensive, culturally specific approach to HIV-prevention and a preventive value-sensitive education are necessary. Poverty (also as result of social inequality), isolation and the low status of women have to be faced in a comprehensive approach.⁶⁹

G. THE PEOPLES' RIGHTS, VIOLENT SOCIETY AND GOVERNANCE

In struggles for peoples' rights, justice and decency of life, peoples' politics are crucial. Even in the so-called democracies, the politics of the state through elected representatives, the executive, and the judiciary, besides the constitution, are not adequate without an active participation of the people, their voice monitoring the state and its policies and their protest resisting anti-people policies. This is peoples' politics. It is crucial for a vibrant democracy and is its basic constituent. Hence, the freedom for grassroots movements of people, for spaces for debate, and for protest, all on behalf of people's rights, are requirements of a true democracy.

1. Human Rights and the Cultures of Peoples

Human rights need to be related to cultures precisely because cultures are the people's way of being human and interhuman. Any understanding of human rights that does not include and integrate a humanity embodied in a people's culture will do violence to people's rights. This does not mean that we must ignore the negative elements of a culture. The understanding of human rights must integrate cultural perspectives in a liberative way. Any abstract theory of human rights that focuses on an abstract universal *humanum* is likely to ignore the concretization of the *humanum* in a people's culture, values, symbols and practices, and thus violate the human rights of a concrete people under the prior pretext that some cultures have only negative elements.⁷⁰ An authentic commitment to human rights must lead us

⁶⁹ *Children Worldwide*, art. cit., pp. 45-46.

⁷⁰ Cf. Felix Wilfred, "The Language of Human Rights, an Ethical Esperanto?", *VJTR* 56 (1992), pp. 194-214.

to work for the liberation of cultures from their negative accretions so that cultures are expressions both of the collective humanity of peoples and humanizing.

The humanization of our countries aims at creating a society that is just, humane, compassionate and non-violent. In this process, a societal reality of peoples is viewed from the standpoint of victims of injustice. The correct observance of human rights will not be adequate to this task since the very concept and praxis of human rights suffers from the divisions of the nations of the world into the powerful and the powerless. In Asia, human rights, with regard to humanization, need to be understood in terms of peoples' rights, especially to justice and dignity, the freedom due to powerless ethnic, linguistic and religious groups, (in India, especially to *dalits*), to tribals, women, children, landless agricultural laborers, and the whole unorganized sector of labor so open to exploitation. We need a political system and governance that aims at the creation of a compassionate society which respects the pluralism of peoples' culture, their languages, religious traditions, ethnicity, under the embracing common goal of creating a humane harmony of peoples.

2. Violence, a Challenge to a Just and Peaceful Society

The Asian scenario presents a complex picture regarding peace, or its absence, in different countries. Ethnic conflicts with an upheaval of refugees, or displacement (e.g., Chakmas in Bangladesh, Kashmiris in India, tribals in Myanmar, refugees in Cambodia); fundamentalism and communalism (Pakistan, India) which disrupt social harmony, the struggles of tribals and *dalits* — all of these basically linked to problems of justice, equality of opportunity and human rights. At bottom, the struggles pertain to justice and the rights of peoples. Unless these are guaranteed, there is no true lasting peace and harmony of relationships. In India, the communalization of religion and politics and of society is a real threat to the peace and harmony of the country.⁷¹

Wherever human persons and communities are denied justice, freedom, dignity and human rights, there violence is born and gets

⁷¹ Cf. *Secularism in Indian Context*, Commission for Justice, Peace and Development, New Delhi, 1994.

embodied in an unjust system of society. Archbishop Helder Camara calls the unjust society (and therefore injustice) "violence number one."⁷² The agents of violence number one perpetrate repressive violence on the victims of violence number one, when they raise their voice against it. Usually, the collective voice of protest and the response of united strength by victims for the cause of justice and rights are called violence by the protagonists of violence number one.

Today, violence is understood in a structural sense more than about individual acts. It is more the former we have to struggle against and change. The humanizing strategy of non-violence, *ahimsa* (which has a strong Buddhist and Hindu tradition), needs to be adopted. Gandhi gave it a historically-tested and credible form. While struggling against violence number one in concrete historical circumstances of conflict, the use of force for a just defense, is at times unavoidable. Our faith in the spirituality and strategy of non-violent struggles for justice, peace and development must make these the preferred option and the way. Violence rooted in injustice is destructive of life, and it is a force of death. Against this kind of violence, our struggle needs to be non-violent, liberative and humanizing. Non-violence, or *ahimsa*, rooted in a vision of a just, humane and non-violent society reflects and embodies this vision.

Today, violence has assumed new forms in the context of scientific and technological advancement. While we accept the beneficial potential of science, the 20th century has been a story of tragedy and destruction (World Wars, Viet Nam, Nagasaki, Hiroshima). The weapon systems of mass destruction belong to this period. The national and international human rights organizations (in India, *People's Union for Civil Liberties* (PUCL), *People's Union for Democratic Rights* (PUDR), *Amnesty International*, and others expand our understanding of the many forms of violence.⁷³ The widespread and frequent violations of the human rights of powerless ethnic groups, indigenous peoples (tribals), *dalits* in India, women and children are violence.

The pervasiveness of violence is growing in new constituencies. Claude Alvares, writing on this theme, remarks: "A natural canopy of

⁷² Cf. Helder Camara, *Spiral of Violence*, (London, Sheed and Ward, 1971).

⁷³ C. Alvares, "Science, Colonialism and Violence: A Luddite View," in *Science, Hegemony and Violence*, ed. Ashis Nandy, (Oxford University Press, 1988), p.68-70.

forest, a bastion of forest life is mowed down and its riches taken over by violent monocultures... violence now includes new and strange forms of mutilation.”⁷⁴ More science, more “R and D” (research and development), the tyranny of the contemporary economy by way of marketization and commoditization of everything for profit appear now to be a kind of war activity.⁷⁵

3. Democracy, Politics and People’s Participation — The Challenge of Humane Governance

In the political realm, participation of people in the decision-making processes, with a guarantee of such participation for the powerless and the marginalized, makes for a healthy democracy. The first principle in democracy is that “people matter” (G.K. Chesterton). In this connection, the usual language of majority and minority in a democracy is not adequate, for in a democracy, people, the poor and their active participation are what matter, and not simply a majority.

Autocratic rule — military or otherwise — pretends to govern in the name of people without their consent (cf. Myanmar, Viet Nam, Mainland China). In Myanmar, the military rule has deprived the Burmese people of their basic rights to a democratic form of government. Suppression of democracy and the confinement of Madam Aung San Suu Kyi, the democratically-elected leader, have left the people defenseless before the military rulers who are least accountable to people and their rights. In 1993, the military government forced 30,000 villagers to work building a railway on the Burmese-Thai border without sufficient food and medical care. The government which controls the media concealed such human rights violations. The neighboring democratic countries should exert pressure on the military rulers to give way to a democratic governance which respects the rights of different ethnic groups. Rebel groups and opposition in Myanmar are only the symptoms and not the cause of the violations of people’s rights. Religious fundamentalism and/or communal politics which divides people and instrumentalizes religion for partisan ends (e.g., India, Pakistan, Bangladesh) threaten democratic values and weaken the pluralistic secular fabric of nation-states in Asia, and, therefore, of

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 69.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 78, Ivan Illych’s comment referred to by Alvares.

people's rights to equality, freedom, justice. In India, the criminalization of politics and corruption in the electoral process have become real threats to participatory democracy.

H. DOWN TO EARTH

1. Degrading Environment - A Threat to Development

As we reflect on the struggle for life in the midst of the forces of death, we have to consider the impact of the contemporary agenda of the globalization of economy on the environment and the earth. In this process everything is "commoditized" and sliced up for the market, including the earth, the common home of all humans. Commoditization is seen in the perverted shift from the protection of biodiversity and of the indigenous knowledge of peoples to the protection of the biotechnology industry and of the intellectual property rights of corporations.

The threat to biodiversity is a major ecological concern in our ecosystem that supports all living species in a marvelous interconnectedness and interdependence. The threat comes from one species, namely, the human. In our divided world, the powerful in the human community try to gain ownership rights over life-forms to earn maximum profit.⁷⁶

If the global warming and other climatic changes are to be reduced, drastic changes in lifestyles and energy consumption are needed, requiring especially reorientation of the industrialized countries. Preserving the rainforests of our South East Asian countries which belong to the ecosystem that supports life, and a drastic curtailment of projects that lead to deforestation become ecological imperatives today.

New Delhi is one of the ten most polluted cities in the world. It compares with other megacities like Seoul, Beijing and Mexico City. According to their Central Pollution Control Board, vehicular emissions account for two-third of the city's air pollution, the bulk of which (80 percent) comes from petrol-driven vehicles.⁷⁷ Yet the political will to

⁷⁶ Cf. Samuel Rayan, "The Earth is the Lord's," 54 (1990), pp. 112-132.

⁷⁷ Cf. *Down to Earth*, 3 (1994, no. 1), p. 56.

implement pollution control is disconcertingly weak. Our leaders indulge in rhetoric for a clean environment and ecological balance in international forums but within the country they keep promoting projects that are environmentally unsafe, and hardly implement any measures for better environment. It is here that peoples' movements play a significant role in awareness raising and calling governments to accountability.

In an ecological perspective linked to justice, the earth must be seen and preserved as the essential life-base for all, not a merchandise for corporate business or for conquest. The earth is our Mother.

The fast-degrading environment and the worsening ecological balance are threats to all life, and to human life in particular in a situation of basic interdependence of all life. In our divided world, the concern for clean environment and ecological balance is at the same time a concern for a just, humane non-violent society. Environment and development are closely linked together. Ecology and justice are inseparable. Together they are at the service of life. The Rio Declaration recognizes that the ecological crisis can be traced to the industrial and consumer practices of the developed countries.

2. The Megadams — Gateways to Destruction and Displacement

The megadams piloted by the state according to its model of development fail miserably to be pro-people projects and eco-friendly enterprises. In India the Narmada and Tehri dams are faulty and controversial. The concerned state governments have to date not provided data on rehabilitation and environmental protection, as required by the terms agreed upon for of these projects. Praful Bidwai says: "Narmada is a sordid story of technological arrogance at the service of commerce gone berserk, and of vested interests on the rampage, against public concerns, environmental sense, even legality. The fact that even a suggestion about lowering the dam height is seen as subversive, or that the Central Executive and the Judiciary have washed their hands of their obligations in respect of the displaced lakhs (hundreds of thousands) is an abiding disgrace."⁷⁸ Given the vested interests of governments and politicians, the only way to fight against

⁷⁸ *The Times of India*, June 2, 1994, p. 10.

such projects is the publication of facts which will reveal the true beneficiaries and the true bearers of the cost of such projects.

The environment movements have an important role to play in advocating principles that respect biodiversity ("the inherent integrity of all species"), with a view to stabilize the life support systems of our planet, its sustainable development, and an equitable access to life generative resources. In this, they protect the territorial rights of indigenous peoples and control the dumping of hazardous wastes (nuclear waste), often in Third World territories.

I. CAN RELIGIONS BUILD SOLIDARITY?

Asia is a region where religions are living and vibrant. Their living influence on people's lives is striking. In this continent, the great world religions of Hinduism, Buddhism, Christianity and Islam, together with the religions of primeval vision, meet and interact with each other. Added to this context of deep religiosity, we have the ethical and religio-cultural traditions of the Confucianism, Taoism and Shintoism in China, Japan and Korea. The negativities of these traditions have also to be reckoned with. In our situation to be liberatively religious is to be liberatively interreligious.

1. The Fundamentalist Threat

While the Church is committed to a interreligious dialogue with Islam, in the Asian situation we have the disturbing phenomenon of Islamic fundamentalism, especially in countries which are Islamic states or where Muslims are in the majority. In Pakistan the Islamisation of the country has led to gross violations of the rights of the minority communities, like Hindus and Christians. The equality before law, justice and the guarantee of human rights are now uncertain. Even in liberal Islamic countries and others, the threat to peoples of other faiths most often come from fundamentalist forces. Liberal-minded Muslim groups and organizations need to be strengthened. It is the latter who can challenge and transform their community, not outsiders.⁷⁹

⁷⁹ *The Pioneer*, May 16, 1994, p. 6.

The specific conflict situations in Pakistan, Bangladesh, Philippines, India and Indonesia between Christians and Muslims, between majority and minority religious communities, (between Hindus and Muslims) threaten the peace and life of people. For example, a conflict between Muslims and Christians in the Philippines has taken a heavy toll on Filipino Muslims: 500,000 forced to abandon their homes, 200,000 houses burned, and many thousands of refugees.⁸⁰

Rising fundamentalism, fanaticism and extremism are part of a global syndrome of religious revival. What we see in the South Asian countries of Pakistan and Bangladesh, and also in Indonesia, does not augur well for the future because in all these cases fundamentalism is mixed with political ambition and power.⁸¹

The world Muslim population is estimated to have reached almost one billion, one fifth of humanity. Islamic fundamentalism, with its slogans "Islam is the solution" and "Allah is the answer," puts its hope "on the Utopia of a return to an idealized early Muslim community," and wants to organize "a stable Islamic state tomorrow according to a blue print of yesterday."⁸² The real challenge to Islam, and for that matter to fundamentalists of all religions, is how they can face, live in and contribute towards an increasingly pluralistic world.

2. The Discriminated Believers: Religious Minorities

In Pakistan, religious minorities suffer from a kind of religious apartheid. The Churches protested against the government's intent to introduce indication of religious belonging on the identity card, which will be source of discrimination and apartheid in public and political life. The founder of Pakistan, Ali Jinnah, had given assurance that all Pakistanis were equal as citizens. The religious note on the IC, and in the passport, will make minorities second-class citizens and lead to sectarianism and strife. In their letter to the president of Pakistan on behalf of their people and for the cause of democracy in a context of

⁸⁰ Cf. S. D'Ambra, "Peace in Jihad in Islam," in *Euntes*, 18 (1994), pp. 4-47.

⁸¹ Cf. Judo Poerwowidagdo, *Towards 21st Century*, (W.C.C., 1993), p. 32.

⁸² Cf. G. Bowerings, *Jesuits and the Islamic World*, Jesuit International Ministries of North America, no. 4, 1993, p. 15.

religious pluralism, the bishops object to this initiative, on the ground that it promotes an apartheid based on religion. By contrast, in another international meeting held in Pakistan, Muslims and Christians pledged themselves to "work together for harmony in God's world."⁸³ More recently, the blasphemy laws introduced in the country have become another source of harassment and in justice, particularly for non-Muslim minorities.

Pakistan needs the equal participation of the minorities in the political process and a good representation at every level of government. Christians are Pakistanis who want to contribute to the welfare of the nation and who should be allowed to vote both for general and reserved seats. The Islamic state cannot bypass these basic principles of justice and equality in a good polity.⁸⁴

In Mongolia, where Christians are 2,000, mainly in the principal cities, a recent law (November 3, 1993) severely restricts religions other than Buddhism, Islam and Shamanism. This law goes against the Mongolian Constitution which guarantees religious freedom. It is heartening to know that five Mongolian judges have ruled that several paragraphs of the law restricting Christianity are illegal.⁸⁵

Religious freedom in China, Viet Nam and North Korea is very vulnerable. In Indonesia too we have cases of anti-Christian prejudice. In 1992 churches were destroyed. So too in India, Hindu fundamentalists have spread destructive ideas against Muslims and also against Christians. The destruction of the Babri-Masjid mosque in Ayodhya had a very negative impact all over the country and abroad.

What we see is that in certain countries which are heirs to Marxist-Leninism, the right of religious freedom is in practice denied or severely hampered, and in others, religious fundamentalists, whether Muslim, Hindu, Buddhist or Christian, destroy the just, peaceful, humane harmony of peoples of different faiths. For the fundamentalists, respect for religious pluralism is not a basic value.

⁸³ Cf. *Weltkirche*, 9/1992, pp. 318-324.

⁸⁴ Cf. *Catholic International*, 5 (1994, no. 3), pp. 103-104; Chandra Muzaffar, "Religious Conflicts," a paper presented at a seminar on ethno-religious conflicts in Asia, Feb., 1992, Manila.

⁸⁵ *The Pioneer*, p. 16.

It is a challenge to the Churches to combat these fundamentalist forces and build peace among religions and their followers on the basis of their liberative meaning and their humanizing potential. This is the challenge of fostering interreligious and intercultural understanding and community.

In Asia the Church is aware of its minority status.⁸⁶ Its minority presence becomes a datum of hope for its service to life. Its discipleship and mission are a call to walk humbly with the Lord, to work in collaboration and solidarity with peoples of other religions and persuasions, and to be a "leaven" of the Kingdom for the transformation of life, for authenticity, wholeness and fullness.

II. THE CHALLENGES OF THE ASIAN REALITY AND THE RESPONSE OF THE CHURCH IN SERVICE TO LIFE

The following areas pose major challenges to the life of Asian peoples:

- Commoditization of life by the new economic order;
- The insecurity and uncertainty of migrants, refugees, the displaced and the ethnic and indigenous peoples;
- The workers, and especially child laborers;
- The forces of death and destruction against women, the girl child and the family, and distortions of the population issue;
- The wholeness of life in the area of health for all;
- People's rights, humane governance, and violence;
- Religions and the solidarity of peoples;

⁸⁶ Except in the Philippines where Catholics are nearly 52,325,000 out of 62,870,000, in all the other countries, Catholics are a minority: in Bangladesh, 209,000 out of 119 millions; in Hong Kong, 255,000 out of nearly 6 million; in India, out of 850 million (1991 census) 14,871,000; in Japan, out of 124 million, 436,000; in Korea, out of 43,270,000, 2,866,000; in Malaysia, out 18,330,000, 558,000; in Pakistan, out of 115,520,000, 912,000; in Sri Lanka, out of 17,240,000, 1,156,000; in Taiwan, out of 21,405,000, 296,000; and in Thailand, out of 56,920,000, 240,000, are Catholics. In Mongolia, Mainland China, Catholics are a tiny minority. Cf. also "The Final Statement of the 5th General Assembly of the FABC," 4.6

These challenges to the service of life call for a *holistic response*. Such an approach means an integration of all aspects of human life and its relatedness to nature. A holistic and liberative integration affirms the different values of all life in their diversity. It includes a creative responsibility for the wholeness of human life and all life, and for their future, in interrelatedness.

The overview of the Asian scenario points to major challenges that require a response on the part of the Church.

A. THE DISCIPLESHIP OF THE ASIAN CHURCH IN THE SERVICE TO LIFE

Rooted in faith in the God of life and the discipleship of Christ, and enriched by the cultural and spiritual heritage of the Asian peoples, the Church is committed to service to life in its fullness. Now, if the Church is called to such a service, then it must be marked by:

- A preferential commitment to the life of the poor and to their rights;
- The affirmation of the sacredness of human life, and its protection from conception through all the stages of life, right up to old age and death;
- A dialogue of life with people of other faiths and all people of good will, for interhuman and interreligious togetherness;
- A vision of the Kingdom of God revealed and made present in the person of Jesus and his Paschal Mystery;
- Prophecy that announces the good news of life, and denounces the idols of death and destruction; and
- A spirituality of gratitude, sharing, caring and a sense of stewardship for life.

1. A Way of Being Church

The response of the Church to these challenges supposes a way of being Church, free for the service to life. This is the ecclesial imperative.

The way of being Church in Asia is the way of discipleship. Every local Church lives discipleship in the concrete socio-cultural and

political situation in which it is placed. In living out this discipleship, the local Church is "the self-acting and self-realizing subject of the Church's mission."⁸⁷ The local Church, i.e., the entire people of God, can alone discern what the imperatives of discipleship for the service to life are in the concrete situation.

In Asia, there is a need for an ecclesiology that has its roots in an Asian understanding of the human community, human relationality and culture.⁸⁸ To be truly Asian, the Churches should reappropriate the Asian cultures as their roots insofar as they are discerned as God's gift and the fruit of the Spirit.

The Church authenticates itself and Christian discipleship by deeply and critically appropriating Asian cultures. Indian Christians, Chinese Christians, Burmese Christians, etc., try to live their discipleship as Indians, Chinese, Burmese, etc., having roots in their cultures. Such communities of disciples live in communion and solidarity with each other and with peoples of Asia with spontaneity and naturalness, without any alienation.

2. The Church in Asia as a *Church of the Poor* Called to Service to Life

The theology of the *Church of the Poor* goes back to the period of the Second Vatican Council. A month before the Council, John XXIII expressed one of the most important intuitions about what the Church should be and should become in our times, which are marked by the unjust world divisions affecting developing countries. The Church of Christ has to be the Church of the Poor: "Facing the underdeveloped countries, the Church shows itself as it is, as indeed it wishes to be, as the Church of all, but particularly of the poor."⁸⁹

This theme, foreseen by John XXIII as the Council's agenda, remains today an agenda of undiminished importance. Considering the global divide of South and North into the developing and developed

⁸⁷ G. Rosales and Arevalo, *For All the Peoples of Asia*, p. xx.

⁸⁸ Cf. Felix Wilfred, "Towards an Anthropologically and Culturally Founded Ecclesiology," *VJTR* 54 (1990), pp. 501-511.

⁸⁹ Cf. *AAS*, 54 (1962), p. 682.

countries, the Church in Asia can serve life credibly and with authenticity only if it understands itself as a Church of the poor for whom life is fragile, threatened and diminished.

For the poor, the struggle for life, dignity and freedom is ever actual. Sometimes, the non-poor become tired of their commitment to the service of the poor and tired of their language and articulation of the cause of the poor. Then, the historical presence of the poor, the broken people, the humiliated can gradually become invisible. Only by participation in the actual struggles of the poor in solidarity with them can the Church keep this essential note of Christianity alive. Cardinal Lercaro's intervention in the first session of the Vatican Council on this point is memorable: "The mystery of Christ in the Church has always been, has continued to be, and today more than ever is, the mystery of Christ in the poor..."⁹⁰

The Church of the poor means a solidarity of the poor. This is not merely a solidarity in terms of economics and politics but also in terms of their religiousness and cultures. In such a Church the poor live their discipleship and communion, experience their own humanity as affirmed, live in solidarity with others, and witness to an open and inclusive community as a sign of true inculturation of anthropological and cultural depth. In our concern for authentic inculturation, we suffer from the still persistent traces of alienation from the Asian realities. In our concern for authentic inculturation, we may devalue the call to become a Church of the poor by aligning ourselves with a dominant culture, which ignores the cultural and religious values of the poor.

In a divided Asia, the Church of the poor is one of the important criteria of authentic inculturation of our mission in the service to life. By becoming a Church of the Asian poor, the Church in Asia will become a Church of all in Asia. FABC has affirmed such an ecclesiology. As long as the reality of the poor in Asian countries and, therefore, their poverty, exploitation and marginalization, are part of the Asian situation, the mystery of Christ in the poor is central for the Church in Asia. Inculturation as conversion to the poor is the evangelical demand for the Asian Churches (Lk 4: 18-21). The option for the poor will

⁹⁰ Cf. *Acta Concilii Vaticani II*, Periodus 1, Pars IV, pp. 327-330.

remain a confession of our faith in God who hears and vindicates the poor (Ps 12:5; Ps 107:6), and a sign of authentic evangelization.

The theme of the Sixth FABC Plenary Assembly brings into focus the importance and urgency of the Church of the poor as a Church in service to life. The poor are the economic refugees of the contemporary global economy and the development model followed by Asian countries. They are the vulnerable migrants, the refugees and child workers searching for crumbs. They are women and children subject of exploitation as cheap labor, forced into prostitution by poverty, and victims of the type of tourism developed by Asian countries; the poor are the indigenous peoples, ethnic minorities and religious minorities displaced, harassed and persecuted. The categories of the poor differ from country to country and from situation to situation. They have names and faces. They live at the margins of society. The Church recognizes Christ the poor in them and obeys God's summons to serve them. If the human person is the way of the Church, all the more, the poor are the way of the Church.

Jesus is the revealer of the paths of life (Acts 2:28) and is "the way, the truth and the life" (Jn 14:6). He came that people "may have life and have it in fullness" (Jn 10:10). The Christian community is a sign and sacrament of life, in committed service, in prophecy for life, and in witness to the good news of Jesus.

B. MAJOR CHALLENGES FOR RESPONSE

1. The Priority of Needs over Wants in a Humanized Development

The present economic order marked by globalization, liberalization and privatization gives a primacy to commercialization and commoditization of resources human and natural, and sidelines the issue of justice, global and local. In this agenda of development, the needs of the poor lose their priority over against the wants of the rich. Policies of science and technology adopted in the developing countries of Asia follow this distorted priority of wants. The zeal for development of tourism in order to earn more foreign exchange commoditizes culture, people and nature. The outrage of commercialized prostitution, including child prostitution, tacitly approved or tolerated by the governments, only reveals the deeper division of the well-off and the

poor, whom the development agenda chooses to ignore. The new economic order is comfortable with the underdevelopment of millions and the superdevelopment of the few. Mammon subtly perverts the priority of justice in development.

The collective greed of rich nations and of the elites of developing countries, an expression of the inequity existing between nations and within nations, is ethically and religiously one of the most serious anti-life factors threatening the poor of the world and of Asia, and destroying the table of life laid out by God for all his children. In Gandhi's terms, "there is enough for everyone's need, not enough for anyone's greed."

The competitive market economy falls within the cycle of the imperialism of money (Pope Paul VI, *Populorum Progressio*, n. 26), and profit ignores the values of justice, equity and sharing which are "characteristically human and humanizing."⁹¹ This situation of inequity indicates something very wrong in the dominant system of production. Our Indian poet of independence, S. Barathi, said: "If there is one human being in this world without bread, we must destroy this universe,"⁹² which means that the order of the world which excludes some people from the table of life is unjust and anti-life, and, therefore, must be dismantled: We must create a new order which lays the table of life for all.

In the light of the Gospel given for the life of the world, we are called to judge the world order and disown the mastery of mammon, the enemy of God (Mt 6:24). The rule of mammon, in its individual and collective expression, plunders the life-resources meant for the well-being of a people. It is the counter-kingdom incompatible with God's rule. In its reign, "life's resources are concentrated in a few hands and controlled by them; vast masses of people experience the evil of dispossession, economic deprivation and social exclusion."⁹³ Called to serve life, the Church in Asia must seek God's Kingdom.

⁹¹ Samuel Rayan, "The Image of God and the Social Order," in *Centre Oecumenique de Liaisons Internationales*, no. 68, winter, 1993-94, p. 23.

⁹² Cf. *Bharathiar Kavithaikal* (Bharatis poems) "Bharata Samudayam," (Cennai, Poompohar Publications, 1978), p. 4.

⁹³ Rayan, *ibid.*, p. 25.

This will help us discern our priorities. "The Earth itself is a great loaf of bread, rich and large, enough for all God's children, baked over the fire of his heart. It is a question now of breaking it in the family of God and reaching it to one another in equity and warmth of affection."⁹⁴ Our discipleship calls us to such a service of life in the area of economic development, by being the social conscience and a prophetic value-raised for the sake of a humanized development that benefits all.

2. The Insecurity of Migrants, Refugees, the Displaced and the Ethnic and Indigenous Peoples — A Call to Compassion, Understanding and Hospitality

"Love foreigners who live in your midst as yourselves... for you, too, were once foreigners" (Lev 19:33-34).

In the present context of development and the type of political power exercised in different Asian countries, the phenomenon of migrants, refugees, the displaced, and the treatment of ethnic minorities and indigenous peoples are a challenging area for the social concern of the Church. This problem will increase rather than decrease in the future.

In South Asia and South East Asia, refugees in varying numbers are facing insecurity and uncertainty. Modern megadams, and projects continually displace peoples, especially the tribals or indigenous peoples and in India also *dalits*, and push them to the margins of society. Often the victims are ethnic minorities.

The Church in Asia is called to render a special ministry of compassion, understanding and hospitality to immigrants, especially the immigrant workers subject to discrimination, prejudice and hostility. They are the little ones, the favorites of God. What the Vatican Council says about immigrants is relevant. It insists on: (a) non-discrimination against them; (b) an appreciation of their contribution to the economic development of a people or a region; and (c) the responsibility of authorities to help them have their families to live with them, and not to treat them as tools.⁹⁵ The local Churches

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*

⁹⁵ Cf. *Gaudium et Spes*, no. 66, *Familiaris Consortio*, no. 77.

can take initiatives in solving their problems and, above all, "creating a warm social space wherein the migrant may live with his family in a feeling of security and trust, in harmony and peace."⁹⁶ The Japanese bishops' invite Christians to look at the Church as the Church for all, a Church where there should be no discrimination based on race, culture, religion. They see immigration as "sign of the times" and an opportunity and challenge to the catholicity of Christian faith.⁹⁷

Various national bishops' conferences have responded to this issue with Christian sensitivity, especially through justice and peace cells or commissions and offices. But the level of response has to seep down to the local communities of Christians and their responsibility. In our Asian situation, Christian communities reach out to brothers and sisters in collaboration with other groups and movements.

3. Workers, especially Child Laborers, the Exploited among the Exploited — A Cry for Bread and Dignity

The wages of poor workers are the life of the poor (cf. Sir 34:18-22). Their rights to just wages and healthy working conditions are essential for a dignified life. The Church has a tradition of social teaching on work, workers and their rights and the justice due to them.⁹⁸ Therefore, the Church's commitment to workers has been an important expression of its social concern.

One important challenge that confronts some of the Asian countries is the phenomenon of *child labor*. Their cry is God's word to us, to listen and respond to. Human rights groups and people's movements are responding. There are a number of action groups working for their liberation. The Church's concern for justice and its option for the poor calls for collaboration with all those who work for the rights of vulnerable workers and child workers. There is legal prohibition of child labor in many countries but a monitoring of the implementation of the law and a rehabilitation becomes urgent and important.

⁹⁶ Cf. Pope John Paul's, "Message on World Migration Day," *L'Osservatore Romano*, Sept. 17, 1993, p. 5.

⁹⁷ Cf. V. Lorscheiter, *art.cit.*

⁹⁸ Cf. *Rerum Novarum*, *Laborem Exercens* and *Centesimus Annus*.

Watchfulness for the rights of the workers and commitment to the elimination of child labor is an important task for the Church.

4. Forces of Death Against Women

The Church's commitment to a life of liberated wholeness for the human person and community becomes a challenging task in the face of immense human damage done to women and the girl child in Asia. The Church as a community (*koinonia*) of men and women disciples will have to become an authentic embodiment of human wholeness and human dignity. We are challenged to create a new culture conducive to the affirmation of equal dignity of man and woman in personal and collective life. Such a commitment and task is a service to life in the truest Christian sense.

a) *Women*

Women's movements are part of the national life of Asian countries. Such an awakening is a "sign of the times," full of promise for the creation of wholeness in our patriarchal cultures. The sense of human dignity and the personhood of woman, the quest for human wholeness, the affirmation and promotion of life, the emphasis on the mutuality of human relationships, and inclusive language are central in this social ferment for women's liberation.

A positive sign of hope is the women's movements, the voice of women for equality and rights, and a participation in decision-making in the political realm. The Churches committed to justice, peace and the integrity of creation must support the participation of women in policy making, especially women who will "struggle for policies of life attentive to the needs of the whole community."⁹⁹ It is heartening to note that the Catholic Bishops' Conference of India has set up a Desk for Women to support women's awakening, their rights and participation in Church and society (CBCI General Body Meeting, Pune, 1992).

The Asian Churches are challenged to respond to the call of this awakening. The Church finds the unchangeable basis of all Christian

⁹⁹ A.K. Hamms, "The Decade: Its Links to JPC," in *Ecumenical Review*, 46 (1994), p. 165.

anthropology in the biblical affirmation of God's creation of humankind as men and women in his image (Gen 1:27; cf. *Mulieris dignitatem*, no. 6). Committed to service to life, the Church has to be part of this social ferment by what it is and by what it does to promote this awakening in culture, in economic development and political participation, especially of oppressed women. Specifically in the developing countries of South and South East Asia, the Churches have to face the destructive practice of prostitution, especially child prostitution, into which women and children are pushed by poverty, the greed of the affluent and a tourism of the rich abetted by the modern state.

In the struggle for life, justice and the elimination of discrimination against women, the Church must oppose all interpretations of religious laws that are misogynist and gender-discriminatory as unworthy of the dignity of women created in the image and likeness of God. Fundamentalist and communalist ideologies (Islamic, Christian, Hindu and otherwise) that perpetuate discriminatory interpretations of scriptures and customs need to be rejected as destructive of wholeness. In all this, the Church is called to take an unambiguous stand for human dignity.

In their statement on Human Rights Day, the bishops of Thailand made a fervent appeal to their faithful to work for the rights of women in a society still filled with prejudices against them. "Women are looked down on and considered as commercial good. Women become slaves in the tourism and advertising industries and, worse still, sexually exploited. These slave trades have become interconnected networks, spreading throughout the country, and even internationally."¹⁰⁰ The Thai bishops draw on the Bible and the social teaching of the Church, and call on Christians to be come a light of the world and the salt of the earth (Mt 5:18-19); the leaven (Lk 13:21) of Thai society, by upholding the dignity of women and their rights. The words of John XXIII in *Pacem in Terris* (no. 41) express this concern of the Church unambiguously: "Since women are becoming ever more conscious of their dignity, they will not tolerate being treated as mere material instruments but demand rights befitting a human person both in domestic and public life." The *koinonia* of Christian discipleship is

¹⁰⁰ Cf. *Weltkirche*, 10/1992, p. 328.

called upon to reflect the dignity and splendor of equality of all, as children of God.

b) *The Girl Child*

The Churches have to respond to the destruction of Asian girl children by creating a social conscience and awareness at the moral level and at the political level, by using their voice to influence governments that they enforce the rights of children, in conformity with the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child.¹⁰¹

Together with these approaches, we need to stress with Bishop Luis Bambaren (Peru) that, "the solution is not the creation of more children's homes. It is to give them love within the family and dignity in society. Only on the basis of a Christian anthropology and of actions which give priority to children can the right paths be explored to resolve their problems, for children and with children, the favorites of Jesus."¹⁰² The words of Jesus, "Let the little children come to me; do not stop them..." (Mk 10:14-16), are summons to the Churches to enact this welcome and blessing of children in their own commitment to children.

The International Summit on the Sexual Exploitation of Children, convened by the Pontifical Council for the Family in September, 1992, in its final statement raises a prophetic voice against sexual exploitation of children through prostitution and pornography. In the words of the declaration: "The sexual exploitation of children is a grave crime against the truth of the human person. Each person is the image of God, the child of God. Each life is a precious gift of God. In each face shines the great dignity of the human person."¹⁰³

c) *The Family*

The Church is also faced with threats to family life, the basic unit of society. 1994 was declared the Year of the Family both by the UN and the Church. This observance has created an awareness of the

¹⁰¹ Cf. *Children Worldwide*, 19 (1992, no. 2), p. 31; Cf. also *United Nations Conventions on the Rights of the Child*, articles 34 and 35.

¹⁰² *Children Worldwide*, 19 (1992, no. 2), p. 3.

¹⁰³ Cf. *Weltkirche*, 9/1992, pp. 284-285.

family and its fundamental importance for the health of human society. The Holy Father in his *Letter to Families* speaks of the family "placed at the center of great struggle between good and evil, between life and death, between love and all that is opposed to love."¹⁰⁴ In the Cairo Conference document on Population (September 1994), liberalist values of aggressive individualism, consumerism and unrestricted freedom seem to dominate, the meeting reflecting a growing anti-life and anti-family ethos. There were heated disputes on the ethical perspectives of the Cairo Population Conference document. Asian countries are not free from threats to the wholeness of families. In the thick of such forces the Church is called to a service of the life of families, their rights and their well-being. For John Paul II the family is the way of the Church in her mission (*Letter to Families*, no. 2). The Christian communities have a task of witness to this primary community of love and promote the rights of families (*Familiaris Consortio*, no. 42). The ministry to families calls for a theology and spirituality of the family that respond critically to the situation of the family in Asia.

d) *Distortions in Population Policies*

The Church is concerned with the issue of population increase, development of peoples and global justice. Asia has two-thirds of the world's population. The Church promotes morally-acceptable ways of planned families and responsible fatherhood and motherhood. In the present context of population control debate (the Cairo Conference), the Church has to stand for value-based population policies and steadfastly affirm the dignity of people in the demographic game of numbers. Behind population figures and statistics are communities of people, with their cultures and spiritual heritages, peoples who struggle for justice, freedom, dignity and solidarity. The service to life includes concern for value-oriented family planning and population policies.

e) *Quest for Holistic Health, Justice and Compassion*

Health care is the area where the demands of service to life become pointed. It is an area in which the Church has invested its

¹⁰⁴ Cf. *Catholic International*, 5 (1994, no. 5), p. 238; *Familiaris Consortio*, n. 86; "Family Creates Peace," *L'Osservatore Romano*, Dec. 22/19, 1993.

resources to a remarkable extent in various institutions, organizations and works of *health care*. It is also an area which faces new challenges in the present context of its global economy, liberalization of the market and privatization. A response to these challenges will become more demanding for our countries and the Church. To provide equitable and necessary health care that embodies wholeness, care-ability, compassion and justice, available and accessible to all, especially to the poor, is a service to life, a signal task for the Church. This calls for a reorientation of the health care institutions and an exercise of prophecy against the commoditization of health.

This also includes the ethics of respect for all human life, its dignity and sacredness from conception through all stages of life right up to death. It is an area where the Church is called to exercise prophecy for the dignity and sacredness of human life in the face of negative liberalist views that promote contraceptive mores, abortion, euthanasia and elitism in amenities of health care, to the detriment of the poor. It would require that the Church engage in the politics of health care in favor of wholeness, empowerment of the people and justice. This is "all the more necessary since a 'culture of death' threatens to take control" (*Christifideles Laici*, no. 38).

Moreover, the pandemic of *HIV-infection* and *AIDS* has become a very challenging area for the Church's healing mission.

The Church has to render a ministry of care for AIDS patients. The real witness of Christian compassion and of faith in the dignity of these patients as God's children is that the Church is "care-able" towards people who are not "cure-able," and that these people need the love and concern of fellow human beings, so that they can meet their death with a dignity worthy of the children of God. In the absence of cure-ability, the deep spiritual resources of Christian faith and the Gospel of Jesus, should impel the Church to respond to the demands of care-ability for AIDS patients."¹⁰⁶ Moreover, the Church has a tremendous task of a value-based preventive education. The healing mission of the Church, originating in the mandate of Jesus to the disciples (cf. Mt 10: 1-2; Mk 3:13-15), continues as a sign of the Kingdom of God (Mt 8:1-17; 1:40-2:12; Lk 5:12-16)), and of messianic blessings (Mt 11:2-6). The commitment of the Church to health care reflects the

¹⁰⁶ Cf. Valson Thampu, *AIDS, Heresy and Prophecy*, (New Delhi, TRACI, 1993).

qualities of Jesus' own healings, and is intrinsic to the proclamation of the good news of life and its fullness.

f) *The Challenge of People's Rights, a Non-Violent Society and Human Governance.*

In all the concerns mentioned above, human rights need to be interpreted also as *people's rights*, the rights of groups (workers, migrants, refugees, the displaced, women, children, ethnic groups, cultural and religious minorities). In the multicultural, multiethnic and multireligious countries of Asia, it is not just the rights of individual members but also the rights of the communities that need to be guaranteed and protected. In this context, the Human Rights Movements and People's Movements play an important role to remind the government of its responsibilities to people's rights, and become the social conscience of the people who suffer injustice. The Church needs to be in touch with these groups and strengthen the voice of the voiceless for their rights and well-being. In the Church's defense of people's rights, the responsibility for rights includes duties (*dharma*).

The violation of these rights constitutes injustice and violence. In this context conflicts and strife arise, threatening democratic participation and human governance. Structural violence is born of such an unjust situation.

In such situations, which vary from country to country, the Church in Asia has a commitment to the promotion of a just, humane, compassionate and *non-violent society*. The gospel of non-violence, which is the expression of the agape of God, is the preferred way of the Church to solve conflicts. The *ahimsa* of the Indian tradition and of Gandhian interpretation as social and political praxis is everywhere relevant. The service to life has to oppose the forces of death and a destructive violence born of injustice and greed by a spirituality and praxis of the *dharma* (duty), of *ahimsa* (non-violent opposition) as the way of a just, humane and compassionate society. "The Law of Non-violence which is the Law of Love is the Law of our species" (M. K. Gandhi). Gandhi combined *ahimsa* with truth (*satya*). In his practice, *ahimsa* is *satyagraha* (clinging to truth) and *satyagraha* is *ahimsa*. The inner force of this *satya-ahimsa* praxis is that it turns enemies into seekers. It aims at the conversion of the enemy. Christian faith tells us that the Reign of God, which dismantles the power of death

and destructive violence, is fundamentally the power of forgiveness and love which challenges the protagonists of violence to repentance and transformation.

In the perspective of the Gospel, non-violence is rooted in a faith that does justice and resists all that destroys and diminishes human life and dignity. It is the power of love that is creatively resourceful in peace making, in reconciling. The economics and politics of violence and death can be broken only by a humanizing wisdom and the praxis of non-violent and compassionate love on the part of nations and peoples; and it remains a challenging ideal to all us strive after. The peace of God's Reign (*shalom*) is the harvest of justice (Is 32:16-17; Ps 85:10). The Church in Asia is called to peacemaking in service to life. It is an area for prophecy against all forms of destructive violence, especially against the powerless, and against forms of violence which destroy the habitat of the earth.

In the multireligious situation of Asia and in the praxis of dialogue, we have to consider the contribution of religions to human rights and peace. Interreligious dialogue and the theology of religions disclose the potential of religions for the historical project of a liberated and compassionate harmonious society and solidarity of peoples.

Despite negative historical memories, religions in their authenticity contain fundamentally significant worldviews and liberative meanings of life and its destiny, precisely focused on the fulfillment of the *humanum*. Thus, religions and, therefore, religious believers should become the signal protagonists of human rights.

Finally, the challenge to a "non-violent" society asks also for a participatory democracy and humane governance. In some of our Asian countries democratic governance is fragile. Participative democracy, which gives priority to the marginalized in decision making, holds to a decentralization, and includes structures of accountability, is essential for humane governance. Humane governance respects pluralism, the legitimate rights and freedom of different ethnic and cultural groups, and adopts the priority of justice over order in the area of public administration, and of needs over wants in the policies of development. The ethos of corrupt politics which has become a subculture in some of our Asian countries destroys humane governance and hurts the poor deeply. The present model of development, based on the liberalization of the market promoting consumerism, is conducive to the culture of

corrupt politics and inimical to the voice of the poor. The Church affirms the priority of the rights of the poor in public life and policies and becomes a value-raiser in the area of governance and power politics.¹⁰⁶ This calls for a politics of power for justice.

***g) Justice and Ecology — An Inseparable Linkage
in Service to Life***

The contemporary ecological crisis, the result of decades of reckless exploitation of nature and its resources, in turn impelled mostly by profit oriented business and industry and the bewitchment of modern technology, all of which have been linked to a lifestyle of consumerism in a world divided into the powerful and the powerless, has become a great concern for all, including Asian countries. In relation to the theme of the Plenary Assembly, we have to consider that there is no wholeness of human life without an ecological wholeness. This dimension should enter into our reflection on service to life.¹⁰⁷

From the perspective of developing countries, ecology and justice should be linked together. Ecoactivism and theories promoted by the countries of the North need to be critically assessed, for they tend to dictate ecological policies to be adopted in turn by the countries of the South from the vantage point of superdevelopment. The global ecological crisis is at the same time a global justice issue. Sustainable development should include justice to the poor and the poor nations, which means also justice to the future generations. In the situation of Asia, the inseparable linkage between justice and ecology calls for a liberation ethic of ecology which will guide the polices to protect the environment and the wholeness of the home for all peoples.¹⁰⁸

The Church's response to the ecological crisis should be seen in this perspective. It would use perspectives coming from Christian faith, other Asian religions and worldviews, and would promote and support

¹⁰⁶ Cf. M. Bonino, *Towards a Christian Political Ethics*, (Philadelphia, Fortress Press, 1983), ch. 6.

¹⁰⁷ Cf. "Love for Creation: An Asian Response to the Ecological Crisis," Statement of an Asian Colloquium in *Weltkirche*, 3/1993, pp. 78-81.

¹⁰⁸ Cf. S. Arokiasamy, "Liberation Ethics of Ecology," *Jeevadhara* 18 (1988), pp. 32-39.

indigenous movements for a safe environment with justice, and would use all its resources, especially educational resources, to raise an ecological consciousness that is in consonance with the life of peoples of the Asian continent and with the justice due them. Moreover, the Church has an important task of fostering ethical values that are fundamental to the development of a just and peaceful society and are relevant to the ecological questions.¹⁰⁹

In a religious vision of things, the earth is sacred and its value and preciousness are known in its sacramentality revealing God's gift to all generations. An Asian theologian expresses beautifully this gift of God to all: "As the home of God's beloved family, the table laid for God's house hold and as God's providence for everyone God loves into existence and nurtures with tenderness."¹¹⁰

There is need for "greening" the Church, to express the Church's concern for ecological wholeness but not without its linkage with concern for justice and solidarity of peoples.¹¹¹

h) Peace Between Religions in Service to Life — The Religious Imperative

Peace between religions in the last analysis is peace between peoples. Peace in the richest biblical and Qu'ranic sense is the sum of goodness of relationships and fullness and well-being of people.¹¹² The challenge of peace between religions is great in South and South East Asia. In a situation of conflicts, the Asian religions' message of peace (*shalom*, *salaam*, *shanti*) needs to be affirmed in interhuman and interreligious dialogue which aims at the meeting of peoples. It becomes a work of peacebuilding and peacemaking. The meeting of peoples belongs to life and to its enrichment. As Martin Buber says, "all real living is meeting."¹¹³

¹⁰⁹ Cf. Pope John Paul II, "Message of Peace Day," 1990.

¹¹⁰ Rayan, *ibid.*, p. 23.

¹¹¹ Cf. "WCC Response to NCED," *Asia YMCA*, Dec., 1992, p. 11.

¹¹² Cf. Sebastian Ambra, "Peace in 'Jihad' in Islam, Muslim-Christian Relations in the Philippines," *Euntes* 18 (1994), pp. 41-47.

¹¹³ Quoted in *The Future of Christianity*, ed. by D.L. Carmody and J.T. Carmody, p. 126.

The Church which treasures the shalom of the Risen Christ can with confidence enter into the enterprise of peacemaking in collaboration with followers of other faiths. A peace-inspired dialogue between religions becomes in the Asian situation the way to a life lived in dignity, freedom and fellowship. Peacemaking is an evangelical task (Mt 5, 9), and an affirmation of life, its goodness and sacredness.

One important phenomenon that stands in the way of peace between religions is *fundamentalism*, which is a collective posture of a religious community towards its own identity, distinct from the faithfulness of a community towards the fundamentals of its faith. When this posture becomes exclusivist and closed, not only with regard to its texts and traditions (without any meaningful reinterpretation of the heritage of faith in a rapidly changing world), but also in the secular realm of politics, economics and, to an extent, of culture, it then becomes less than conducive to a pluralistic secular polity.

In a situation of religious pluralism, it continually generates conflicts and leads to extreme expressions of militancy and terrorism. Knowing full well these dimensions, the Church in Asia does continue the peace project through a dialogue and a communication based on the resources of the Gospel of Christ. For the Church, the past experiences of dialogue hold valuable lessons for the future. Christ the peace of God (Eph 2:14) and the reconciliation will continue to inspire our discipleship for building peace and reconciliation. One important area for common collaboration is the area of social justice and human rights, based on the liberative traditions of our religions. For the Church in Asia, building peace between religions becomes a proper work of evangelization.¹¹⁴

In a situation of religious pluralism, the religions should become agents of truth, agents of light and agents of life — hence the prayer “*Mrtyor ma amrtam gamaya*,” (“lead me from death to the immortality of life”). This is the earnest prayer of the Upanishads for life, which Pope Paul VI prayed in 1964 in Bombay.

In India,¹¹⁵ the *karuna* (compassion) of the Buddha, and the

¹¹⁴ Cf. David Kerr, “Islamic Fundamentalism,” *Euntes* 18 (1994), pp. 58-66.

¹¹⁵ Cf. Justice Krishna Iyer, “Religious Fundamentalism and the Present Crisis,” *Journal of Dharma*, 19 (1994), pp. 13-19.

fellowship of faiths of Asoka, the *daridra narayana* of Gandhi (God as the poor one), and the *daridradevo bhawa* (the poor the image of God) of Vivekananda, and above all for Christians, the Christ of the poor (Mt 11:25; Lk 4:18-21, etc.), and the God of justice and mercy of the prophets point to the fundamentally positive and liberative meaning of religions, which rejects all forms of anti-human and anti-life ideologies, especially any religious fundamentalism and communalism which divide and exclude people. True religion helps us to discover the divinity in every human being created in the image and likeness of God. Vivekananda told us: "Religion is the manifestation of divinity already in man."¹¹⁶

The Muslim writer, Asghar Ali Engineer, speaking about religious fundamentalism, including Islamic fundamentalism, insists that Islam came with "a morality of justice and equality, equality of all human beings, not of Muslims."¹¹⁷ The Qu'ran speaks of God bringing us out of darkness into light. The Qu'ran's openness to the different ways of religions is often forgotten. The Qu'ran says: "For each people we have appointed a prophet, for all, for every people, we have appointed a different way of worshiping; do not quarrel about them. Excel each other in good deeds."¹¹⁸ The injunction of Qu'ran is "do justice." Its meaning is, "be just even if it goes against you, your parents, and those in favor of your enemies."¹¹⁹ Asghar Ali Engineer says that we should become fundamentalist in regard to these virtues, not so much in the practices.

The enlightened believers within each religious community have to become a force for advocacy of true religion, which builds and unites people in their common humanity and divinity and forges a solidarity of all believers and all human beings. It will be a struggle, since fundamentalists within each community will oppose newer, broader and liberative interpretation of texts and practices.¹²⁰

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 13.

¹¹⁷ "Islamic Outlook on Interreligious Dialogue," *Journal of Dharma*, 19 (1994), p. 22.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 24.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 23.

¹²⁰ Cf. S. J. Samartha, "The Future of Interreligious Dialogue," *Journal of Dharma*, 19 (1994), pp. 74-83, esp. p. 82.

The Church in Asia, confident in its faith and grounded and rooted in love, works for peace and harmony between believers through dialogue with faiths, and jointly affirms the value of life and its service. This will contribute to an Asian spiritual commonwealth of religions and will create a milieu of cooperation between faiths. Interreligious dialogue helps believers to say "no" to fundamentalism, fanaticism, extremism, and say "yes" to the liberative values of each faith, to the basic values of the human person and community, and to their protection and promotion. Peace between religions and the solidarity of believers can become a bulwark of the basic human solidarity of the peoples of Asia.

In the service to life the Asian Churches have to learn to be liberatively interreligious. For this, the self-understanding of the Church as a "communion of communities" is essential. Such a communion is to become a leaven to create the solidarity of Asian peoples by building up not only ecclesial communities but by allowing the latter to build basic interreligious and basic human communities, guided by the criterion of the Kingdom of God.

Anthropologically and religio-culturally rooted in Asian realities, the Church is a servant and the sacrament of the Kingdom.¹²¹ And it has to become servant to life and sacrament of life. As the Fifth FABC General Assembly states, it is "a Church built in the hearts of people that faithfully and lovingly witnesses to the risen Lord Jesus and reaches out to people of other faiths and persuasions in a dialogue of life toward the integral liberation of all" (8.1.3).¹²²

Today, interreligious dialogue has to be intensified as a dialogue of life in which the Christian communities and the human communities "at the base" become the primary participants. In the history of interreligious dialogue in the Asian Churches, this perspective has been weak. It is this kind of dialogue that needs to be promoted in the coming years.

¹²¹ Cf. J. Dupuis, "The Church, The Reign of God, and the 'Others'," *FABC Papers* No. 67, pp. 1-30.

¹²² Cf. The Final Statement of BILA 6, in *Weltkirche*, 3/1992, pp. 85-87.

i) *Solidarity of Asian Peoples — The Imperative of Solidarity*

Trying to build a solidarity of Asian peoples, in such a great variety and complexity of cultures, histories and economic and political systems, may sound utopian. But increasing contacts, interactions, communication, cultural exchanges and other relations bear a promise for such a solidarity of peoples, which will promote and enhance the life of all. We need to tap the wisdom of our countries for such a vision of solidarity.

The wisdom of India regards the whole cosmos as a family (*Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam*).¹²³ So too, we find a concept of the universal solidarity of peoples in the ancient wisdom of the Tamils of South India. The saying goes like this: "Every place in the universe is my home town, everyone is my kinsman and kinswoman."¹²⁴

The universal solidarity of all peoples is forged of a communion of particular solidarities, and is not an abstract solidarity which writes off the concrete particular solidarities. A "solidarity" based on a free market and globalization of economy is not worth the name of true human solidarity. The Church should stand for a solidarity based on fundamental values and the dignity of human persons and the community of persons.

In genuine solidarity, everyone, every country is my neighbor in the Lukan sense (Lk 10:25-37), not only by coming close to those in need as fellow human beings but also by staying with them, bearing their burdens in solidarity (Gal 6:2). It is not just a question of aid, alliance or partnership, all of which can hide self-interest. The solidarity between Churches is rooted in the "Jesus solidarity," which includes his table-fellowship with the outcasts and sinners, deep compassion and the re-humanization of the poor.¹²⁵ In a world that is divided, true

¹²³ B.A. Hatcher, "The Cosmos Is One Family (*Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam*): Problematic Mantra of Hindu Humanism," *Contributions of Indian Sociology*, 28 (1994), pp. 149-162.

¹²⁴ Cf. *Purananuru* (Tamil Classic of 1st century A.D. no.131. It has been adopted as the motto of Tamilnadu State).

¹²⁵ Cf. Duncan MacLaren, "Solidarity Beyond Cliches. A Theological Perspective," *New Blackfriars*, 72 (1991), pp. 489-496.

solidarity lies in the way of solidarity with the poor. It is marked by the mutuality of giving and receiving, embracing all levels of life. It is a discovery by the Churches of their identities in human, ecclesial, Christian and interreligious terms in Asia.¹²⁶ Solidarity includes not only mutuality but also co-responsibility in a basic sense of being “keepers” of our brothers and sisters in a personal, collective and structural sense, rooted in an understanding of person: “*persona est esse ad alium*.”¹²⁷ Working for the Kingdom of God means “a recognition of the truth that we are created for interdependence, for fellowship, for family.”¹²⁸ The Churches in Asia have to become embodiments of solidarity and communities of compassion. John Paul II has stressed interdependence as a moral category, and solidarity as a moral and social virtue (*Sollicitudo Rei Socialis*, nos. 38-40).

III. PERSPECTIVES OF FAITH AND SPIRITUALITY

The Church rooted in faith in the Lord of life listens to his summons arising from the struggles of Asian peoples, their pains and their yearnings. The *han* (experience of pain and suffering) of *minjung* (the oppressed people) of Korea, the yearning for liberation as *nirvana* of the Buddhists, the goal of *nippin* (salvation) from *dlikha* (from sorrow) of the Thai, the quest for *mukti* or *moksa* (salvation) of the Hindus, the prayer of Tamils for *nirai valve* (fullness of life), the *kasaganaan* of the Filipinos, “the *Wah, Wah, Wah*” (well-being) of the Dani tribe of Indonesia, the *shalom* of the Hebrews and Christians, and *salaam* of the Muslims, all these multiple yearnings and quests stand for peoples’s faith in life and its fullness, and become the word of God for us, called to serve life. The Church’s commitment to life needs to be rooted in the soil of people’s faith, spirituality and struggles, so that the good news of life announced by Jesus Christ and incarnated

¹²⁶ Cf. J. Sobrino and Juan Hernández Pico, *Theology of Christian Solidarity*, (New York, Orbis Books, 1985), pp. 1-42.

¹²⁷ The quotation is from Duns Scotus, cited by MacLaren, *art.cit.*, p. 494.

¹²⁸ Cf. D. Tutu, “The Role of the People of God in Divine Enterprise,” in *Mission in the Nineties, International Bulletin of Missionary Research*, (Grand Rapids, W. Eermans, 1991), p. 33.

in the cultural and spiritual heritage of our continent can bring the life of Asian peoples to its fullness.¹²⁹

The *God of life* loved us into existence, fashioned us in his image and likeness (Gen 1:26-27) and poured his breath of life on us (Gen 2:7). "God fashioned all things that they might have being..." (Wisdom 1:44). God is the absolute source of all life. He created us in relationship, as a community of men and women (Gen 2:18) and called us to community. He gifted to us a community of wholeness and called us to respond to the gift of life, to care for it and enrich it. The gift becomes the task of affirming it in our history. In the situation of Asia, God calls the Church to a commitment and choice for life and its blessing, "I have set before you life and death, the blessing and curse. Choose life..." (Deut 30:19; cf. Wisdom 1: 1; 11.7). The Church is called to a profound and radical faith in the God of life. This faith becomes the light of life in Jesus (Jn 8.12).

The *gift of life* calls us to be ever open to its fullness as eschatological gift of salvation. The Gospels call it everlasting life, open to all who turn to God in faith. It is this faith in everlasting life that makes us affirm the dignity, goodness and sacredness of life before death. The mystery of the Incarnation, the ministry of Jesus of Nazareth, the inauguration of the Kingdom of God in him and the Paschal Mystery are the vindication of our faith in everlasting life. The message of salvation is the message of life. Jesus came that we "have life and have it to the full" (Jn 10:11). It is the message of redemption of humankind and of all creation (cf. Rom 8:18-22). Hence, our faith calls us to work for integral liberation. This work is evangelization in the service to life.

The *Kingdom of God* as the creative, liberative and redemptive will of God, announced and begun in the person of Jesus and made present in his deeds of healing, exorcisms, his prophetic words and ministry, this Kingdom is moving towards its eschatological fullness. The Church as a communion of communities continues this mission of Jesus in discipleship as servant of God's Kingdom in personal and collective witness and service. This discipleship assumes a specific

¹²⁹ Jose de Mesa, "Pastoral Agents and 'Doing Christology'," *EAPR*, 29 (1992), pp. 111-231.

focus of service to life. The Church is called to a *deeper conversion* to the good news of God's Kingdom and its message of life, and to become a transparent embodiment of the gift of life, its quality and its fullness. There is continuing need for self examination and soul-searching on the part of the Church. We may ask: "Are we free and free enough for the service to life? Can we become friends of life (Wisdom 11:26) and serve life? Can option for the poor become option for life for the Church in Asia?

The mission of the Asian Churches in service to life of peoples goes with a *spirituality of life*. In this spirituality we are nourished by the word of God proclaimed, listened to, meditated upon and broken in faith communities and the celebration of sacraments, of life, of communion and the communitarian outreach of love characteristic of Christians. At the same time, this spirituality of life is also nourished by the spiritual vision and insights of Asian religions and cultures. Religions and cultures imply each other.

In this connection, Peter K.H. Lee, exploring the religio-cultural roots of spirituality in the context of the Hong Kong-Taiwan-China orbit, identifies "sorrowful consciousness" (*yu-huan yi-shih*) of the Chinese religio-cultural resources and links it to the spirituality and theology of the Suffering Servant, which calls Christians both to share in the sufferings of peoples and to redeem the suffering with the hope of the resurrection.¹³⁰ This also goes with a spirituality of self-emptying. The sharing in "sorrowful consciousness," derived from Confucian, Buddhist and Taoist roots, has to be translated into a concrete ethos of neighbor love, especially of the powerless, the suffering, the helpless. It also calls for a spirituality of wealth, marked by detachment and distance from the mammon which is a mark of flourishing economics.¹³¹

Such a spirituality should be developed as contemplation in a liberative action of love, justice, reconciliation, peace and harmony, marked by an agapeic energy and by a vision of the Kingdom nourished

¹³⁰ "The Search for Spirituality in the Modern World," *Ching Feng*, 36 (1993), pp. 169-198.

¹³¹ What Peter Lee insists on is relevant to the context of Hong Kong, Taiwan and China.

by our spiritual traditions to greater outreach and solidarity with the peoples of Asia, especially with the poor.¹³²

We discern the Spirit of Jesus at work in the struggles of Asian peoples, beckoning us to follow the Master, the Lord of Life (Acts 3:15), and to be ready to accept the cost of discipleship (Lk 14:25-27; Mt 10, 37-38). Ours is a spirituality of discipleship in service to life. The Church lives its discipleship as communities of "Jesus the poor," and of "the Jesus of communion and harmony." The Church embodies this in its servanthood of God's Kingdom, in its prophecy, and in its faithfulness to the crucified Lord. The Church lives it as hope in the Risen Lord as the Lord of life.¹³³

EPILOGUE

Kairos. The Church in Asia needs to discern the moment of truth, the *kairos* of God to serve life. The call of the Kingdom comes to us as a call to proclaim life, serve life, protect life and enhance life. This life made known to us in Jesus Christ and gifted to us by him is confessed primarily in deeds, witness, and prophecy by which the Church lives its discipleship.

This confession of faith in the God of life can take place only in relation to the contextual realities of Asia, in which the forces of death and destruction are operative at the macro-and micro-levels of the Asian continent, in their interconnectedness with the global context.

Such a confession of faith in the God of life includes also a discernment of and listening to all those movements and struggles for life, especially as seen in the poor of Asia. They are signs of the presence of the God of life who is the absolute source of all life, calling all people to liberated wholeness of life. Hence, the God of life can be known only in pro-life attitudes, movements, initiatives and actions. The God of life can only be "pro-all" life, and never "anti-any" life, as witnessed to

¹³² J. Dupuis, *art. cit.*, *FABC Papers* No. 67.

¹³³ "The Statement of the Fifth General Assembly of FABC," 9.6.; cf. "Being Church in Asia: Journeying with the Spirit into Fuller Life." Final Statement of the First FABC International Theological Colloquium, Pattaya, Thailand, April 10-16, 1994, in *VJTR* 58 (1994) pp. 379-390.

in the being of the Church and its action. The Reign of God calls the Church to proclaim and witness to the gift of life in a responsible stewardship that announces the good news of life and denounces all forces, machinations and structures of death. The primacy of witness (*marturia*) and deeds in evangelization is also affirmed by John Paul II (*Redemptoris Missio*, nos. 42 and 43).

The confession of the God of life and our proclamation of the goodness of life includes a preferential commitment to the service of the poor of Asia. The Christian communities do this in Christlike deeds that affirm life, care for life and enhance the dignity of life. In this connection what the Fifth Plenary Assembly of the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences says on proclamation can apply very meaningfully to the discipleship of the Asian Church in service to life: "But the proclamation of Jesus Christ in Asia means, first of all, the witness of Christians and of Christian communities to the values of the Kingdom of God, a proclamation through Christ-like deeds. For Christians in Asia, to proclaim Christ means above all to live like him in the midst of our neighbors of other faiths and persuasions and to do his deeds by power of his grace. Proclamation through dialogue and deeds — this is the first call of the Churches in Asia" ("Final Statement," Bandung, no. 4.1). It is obvious that the call to service to life is not only addressed to individual Christians but to our communities, implying a common communitarian task. Service to life is to be understood also in a structural sense, touching the socio-cultural, economic and political realities of Asia.

The Church in its discipleship can and should stand out in this mission. The bishops of Asia have consistently been articulating such an understanding of the mission of the Church in Asia. One of the surest foundations for the life of the peoples of Asia is their solidarity in their very diversity of faiths, ethnicity, language and culture. God's rule of love for us in Asia becomes a confession of faith in the God of life, in our *koinonia* (solidarity) and *diakonia* (service). This solidarity and service "stirs up in us a faith and hope in the Lord of history, a sense of wonder at his mighty work, a hunger for the saving message, and beckons all to share his inner life of God."¹³⁴ □

¹³⁴ *Ibid.*, 9.6.