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**THE EMERGING ASIAN THEOLOGY OF LIBERATION
IN THE DOCUMENTS OF
THE FEDERATION OF ASIAN BISHOPS' CONFERENCES
1974-1986**

**BY
D. BOSCO M. MARIAMPILLAI**

**A dissertation submitted to
the Faculty of Theology, Saint Paul University
in partial fulfilment of the
requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Theology**

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1993**

 Don Bosco M. Mariampillai, Ottawa, Canada, 1993



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ABBREVIATIONS

AAS	Acta Apostolicae Sedis
ABM	Asian Bishops' Meeting
ABM/Res	Message and Resolutions of the Asian Bishops' Meeting
ACMC	Asian Colloquium on Ministries in the Church
AG	Ad Gentes
APHD	Asia Partnership for Human Development
BAA	Bureau of Asian Affairs of the Jesuits
BCC	Basic Christian Communities
BHC	Basic Human Community
BILA	The Bishops' Institute for the Lay Apostolate of the FABC
BILA I	Statement of the First Bishops' Institute for the Lay Apostolate of the FABC
BILA II	Letter of the Participants of the Second Bishops' Institute for the Lay Apostolate of the FABC
BILA III	Statement of the Third Bishops' Institute for the Lay Apostolate of the FABC
BIMA	The Bishops' Institute for Missionary Apostolate
BIMA I	Letter of Participants of the First BIMA of the FABC
BIMA II	Letter of Participants of the Second BIMA of the FABC
BIMA III	Letter of Participants and Syllabus of 'Mission Concerns of the Third BIMA of the FABC

BIRA	The Bishops' Institute for Inter-Religious Affairs of the FABC
BIRA I	Statement and Recommendations of the First Bishops' Institute for Interreligious Affairs of the FABC
BIRA II	Statement of the Second Bishops' Institute for Interreligious Affairs of the FABC
BIRA III	Statement of the Third Bishops' Institute for Interreligious Affairs of the FABC
BIRA IV/1	Report on the Assembly of the First Bishops' Institute for Interreligious Affairs on the Theology of Dialogue of the FABC
BIRA IV/2	Report on the Assembly of the Second Bishops' Institute for Interreligious Affairs on Theology of Dialogue of the FABC
BIRA IV/3	Report on the Assembly of the Third Bishops' Institute for Interreligious Affairs on the Theology of Dialogue of the FABC
BISA	The Bishops' Institute for Social Action
BISA I	The Final Reflections of the First Bishops' Institute for Social Action of the FABC
BISA II	Final Reflections of the Second Bishops' Institute for Social Action of the FABC
BISA III	Final Reflections of the Third Bishops' Institute for Social Action of the FABC
BISA IV	Final Reflections and Resolutions of the Fourth Bishops' Institute for Social Action of the FABC
BISA V	Final Statement and Recommendations of the Fifth Bishops' Institute for Social Action of the FABC
BISA VI	Final Reflections of the Sixth Bishops' Institute for Social Action of the FABC
BISA VII	Final Reflections of the Seventh Bishops' Institute for Social Action of the FABC
CAA	Christian Conference of Asia

CBCP	The Catholic Bishops' Conference of the Philippines
CD	Christus Dominus
CCEE	The Concilium Conferentiarum Episcopaliu Europe
CELAM	Consejo Episcopal Latino Americano
CEPAC	The Episcopal Conference of the Pacific
CIDSE	International Co-operation for Socioeconomic Development
CTC-CCA	The Commission on the Theological Concerns of the Christian Conference of Asia
EATWOT	The Ecumenical Association of Third World Theologians
FABC	The Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences
FABC I	Statement of the First Plenary Assembly of the FABC
FABC IB	Briefer Statement of the FABC I
FABC I/Rec.	Recommendations of the FABC I
FABC II	Statement of the Second Plenary Assembly of the FABC
FABC II/Rec.	Recommendations of the FABC II
FABC II/SWR	Summaries of the Workshop Reports of the FABC II
FABC III	Statement of the Third Plenary Assembly of the FABC
FABC III/Res.	Resolutions of the FABC III
FABC III/Syll.	The "Syllabus of Concerns" of the Plenary Assembly of the FABC III
FABC IV	Statement of the Fourth Plenary Assembly of the FABC
FAPA	For All the Peoples of Asia

FTZ	Free Trade Zone
GS	Gaudium et Spes
IMC	The International Congress on Missions
IMC/CPW/I	Consensus Paper Workshop I of the IMC
LG	Lumen Gentium
MNC	Multi-National Corporation
NBCLC	National Biblical, Catechetical and Liturgical Centre, Bangalore, India
NCBB	The National Conference of Catholic Bishops
OEIA	The Office of Ecumenical and Interreligious Affairs
OHD	The Office of Human Development
PISA	Priests' Institute of Social Action
SC	Sacrosanctum Concilium
SECAM	The Symposium of Episcopal Conferences of Africa and Madagascar
SELA	Socio-Economic Life in Asia
SODEPAX	The Committee on Society, Development and Peace
USCC	United States Catholic Conference
Vatican II	Second Vatican Council

CHRONOLOGY OF THE FABC

ABM	29 November 1970
BISA I	1-15 March 1974
FABC I	27 April 1974
BISA II	7-19 April 1975
BISA III	3-17 November 1975
ACMC	5 March 1977
BISA IV	4-8 March 1978
BIMA I	27 July 1978
FABC II	25 November 1978
BISA V	21 May to June 1979
BIRA I	18 October 1979
BIRA II	20 November 1979
IMC	7 December 1979
BIMA II	30 November 1980
BISA III	25 August 1982
FABC III	28 October 1982
BIRA III	20 November 1982
BISA VI	4-8 February 1983
BIRA IV/1	23-30 October 1984
BILA I	31 October - 9 November 1984
BIRA IV/2	17-22 November 1985
BISA VII	12-23 January 1986

BILA II	25-31 May 1986
BILA III	23-28 June 1986
FABC IV	16-25 September 1986
BIRA IV/3	2-7 November 1986

INTRODUCTION

We cannot claim to possess officially any valid Asian theology of liberation: the majority of the local churches in Asia are not yet local churches of Asia. They are extensions of Euro-American local churches in Asia. This is why we Catholics who are no more than members of the Asian branch of Rome have no official theology except the local theology of the local church of Rome.¹

We situate our inquiry in this particular context and in relation to the allegations of Pieris: does the local church of Asia have a valid local liberation theology of its own? In this study we consider the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences (FABC) to be the official local church of Asia. The FABC represents the various Episcopal Conferences of Asia and, by extension, it can be considered representative of all the people of Asia. Hence the documents of the FABC are the documents of the local church of Asia. Therefore, we reformulate the question: is there an authentic Asian theology of liberation in the documents of the FABC? And if so, how does this theology differ from the traditional Western theology and from the Latin American theology of liberation?

When the early [Christian] community moved from its first cultural context, that of Judaism, into the

¹ Aloysius Pieris, An Asian Theology of Liberation, Faith Meets Faith Series (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1988), p. 112.

Greco-Roman world, it underwent a far-reaching transformation. It was a transformation not only in the liturgical, sacramental life of the church and in the structures of its organization and legislation, but also in its doctrine-that is, in the understanding of the revelation that had given birth to it. The early Christians did not simply express in Greek thought what they already knew; rather, they discovered, through Greek religious and philosophical insights, what had been revealed to them... Similar if less radical transformations and reassessments took place as Christianity migrated into the Germanic cultures of northern Europe. Another reassessment occurred when Aquinas adapted Christian doctrine to the "pagan" philosophy and worldview of Aristotle.²

From that time onwards Europe became the centre of Christianity. Its theology was considered to be universal, supra-cultural and applicable to all countries and situations.³ This theology, a product of the Western European historico-political and cultural context, and expressed in Greco-Roman philosophical categories and idioms proved to be inadequate when confronted with other world-views and religio-cultural contexts.

Not only does the faith experience but also the cultures, philosophies and socio-religious histories of people in other

² Paul F. Knitter, No Other Name?: A Critical Survey of Christian Attitudes Toward the World Religions, (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1985), p. 19.

³ Edward Schillebeeckx, in his Foreword to Robert J. Schreier, Constructing Local Theologies, (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1985), p. ix.

parts of the world differ from that of the Western church.⁴ Hence, the Gospel has to be interpreted and expressed in the philosophical categories and cultural idioms of the local people in order to be meaningful and intelligible to them. Furthermore, traditional Christian theology can neither understand nor explain the presence and the working of God in and through the great living religions of Asia. These religions exert a great influence upon the people and have helped shape their histories for centuries and continue to do so.

Western theology has been unable to provide answers to the new questions raised in the context of Asia's poverty, oppression and historical ambiguities. On the contrary it has given answers appropriate to the problems of another continent and the context of another time.⁵ For over four centuries the theology of the Asian church, in its formulation, content and expression, has been the local theology of the particular Western Church.⁶

⁴ Hereafter, "Church" spelt with capital "C" refers to the universal Church and when spelt with small "c" it refers to the local church(es).

⁵ Robert J. Schreiter, Constructing Local Theologies, with a Foreword by Edward Schillebeeckx (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1985), pp. 2-5.

⁶ Schillebeeckx, in Schreiter, Constructing Local theologies, p. ix.

However, the early missionaries to Asia, particularly Matteo Ricci in China (1583) and, Robert de Nobili in India (1605),⁷ made genuine attempts to present Christianity in the local religio-cultural idioms of the people and synthesize Christian faith and the customs, traditions and the way of life of the local people. These were not attempts at theological formulations but merely the adaptation of local social customs and external forms, such as language and attire.

Ram Mohan Roy (1772-1833), Keshab Chandra Sen (1838-1884), and a few other non-Christian Indians were convinced of the universal and perennial character of the message of Christ for Asia. But they were not prepared to identify themselves with the established Christian churches because of the latter's Western cultural garb, structures, character and their association with colonialism. These persons, convinced of the liberative potential of the Gospel, broke away from traditional formulations and presented Christianity in local cultural and

⁷ See M. Amaladoss, "Evangelization in Asia: A New Focus?" in Vidyajyoti, (January 1987), p. 8; J.R. Chandran, "Development of Christian Theology in India: A Critical Survey," in Sergio Torres and Virginia Fabella, ed., The Emergent Gospel: Theology from The Developing World: Papers from the Ecumenical Dialogue of Third World Theologians, Dar es Salaam, August 5-12, 1976, (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1978), p. 159.

religious categories, languages and formulations that were acceptable to the Asians.⁸ Thus they laid the foundation for:

a Hindu Church of Christ, a Church fully loyal to Jesus Christ yet fully Hindu in culture, a Church fully Indian but in friendly communion with the sister Churches of the West.⁹

Then, there was the Christian theologian Brahmabandhav Upadhyaya (1861-1907), who not only donned the yellow robe and led the life of an ascetic but also:

proposed an integration of the social structure of India into the Christian way of life, the establishment of an Indian monastic order, and the recognition of the Vedas as part of the Old Testament for the Indian Church.¹⁰

These attempts were not only resisted by the Church but condemned by Rome. However, this resistance began to give way. Several internal and external factors convinced the Church to rethink the universal validity of uniformity in theology especially with regard to its cultural expressions and philosophical formulations.¹¹ Of these we single out two that

⁸ J.R. Chandran, in Sergio Torres and Virginia Fabella, eds., The Emergent Gospel, pp. 161-63; Hans Staffner, Jesus Christ and the Hindu Community: Is a Synthesis of Hinduism and Christianity Possible?, (Anand, India: Gujarat Sahitya Prakash, 1988), pp. 5-21.

⁹ Staffner, Jesus Christ and the Hindu Community, p. 5.

¹⁰ Ibid., p. 163.

¹¹ See Robert J. Schreiter, Constructing Local Theologies, pp. 2-4; Arnulf Camps, Partners in Dialogue: Christianity and Other World Religions, (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1983), pp. 5-10.

had considerable impact upon theologizing in Asia: one extra-ecclesial and the other intra-ecclesial. The first was the collapse of colonialism in Asia which Buhmann describes as, "an external event which was necessary to set the Church free to develop its true and proper mission."¹² Though, there were no full-fledged local theologies at this time, the people and theologians started to question the validity and the relevance of the received theology in the context of Asia's religious and cultural heritage, and the reality of poverty and oppression.

The intra-ecclesial factor that gave vitality and official recognition to the emerging theology was the Second Vatican Council. In fact, however, the attempt to understand the Gospel in a particular context and to express it in local idioms and philosophies is as old as Christianity itself, as the quotation from Knitter indicates. But, unfortunately, after establishing itself as the dominant religion of the West, Catholic Christianity became a captive of its own structures. However, one can also notice the movement of the Spirit which fanned the flames of change at the fringes of the official Church. With Vatican II it engulfed the Church and burned the barriers to

¹² Walbert Buhmann, The Coming of the Third Church: An Analysis of the Present and Future of the Church, (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1978; fifth print 1982), p. 45. According to Buhmann this was the birth of the Third Church of the Third World. Also we will use the phrase 'Third World' in the nuance given by Buhmann, p. 3.

change to the ground. This marks the dawn of authentic local churches with their proper identity and theology.

These and other factors triggered the emergence of a plethora of local theologies especially in the Third World. These local theologies, called by a variety of names,¹³ are all in fact, contextual theologies. The essential aspect of a local theology is that it does not merely interpret Christian revelation in a particular context and history but is determined by the context. In other words, as Knitter says, "the medium is, or at least reveals, the content of the truth."¹⁴ It is the context that makes a theology local. The general context of Asia is its 'Third-Worldness.' As we shall see later, the theology of liberation has emerged as the theology par excellence of the Third World. Therefore, any Asian Third World theology that is worthy of its name has to be a theology of liberation.

For a variety of reasons our study is limited to the analysis of the documents of the FABC from its inception, that is, from 1970 to 1986. We have chosen the year 1986 as the cut off point because the Fourth Plenary Assembly of the FABC (FABC

¹³ See Schreiter, Constructing Local Theologies, pp. 5-6.

¹⁴ Knitter, No Other Name?, p. 19.

IV) was held in that year and the basic mode of being was established by then. Furthermore, the two volume work entitled, For All the Peoples of Asia,¹⁵ which contains all the documents of the FABC, is our primary source.

In view of the purpose of this study, our inquiry is limited essentially to the FABC documents of the Bishops' Institutes for Social Action (BISA's) and the Plenary Assemblies. From among all the Bishops' Institutes that were held during this period under inquiry, we have chosen the BISAs. These are not only fascinating documents but are also important because they deal with questions that are pertinent to the church of Asia¹⁶ in its endeavour to incarnate itself in the socio-economic, political and religio-cultural realities of Asia. Furthermore, a study of the BISA documents is essential to comprehend their influence upon the bishops at the Plenary Assemblies and to determine their complementarity. Hence, we are of the opinion, that more than any other FABC Institute, the BISAs can contribute to our inquiry: whether the documents of the FABC contain an authentic Asian theology of liberation?

¹⁵ C.G. Arevalo, ed., For All the Peoples of Asia (FAPA), Vol.1: The Church in Asia: Asian Bishops' Statements on Mission Community and Ministry 1970-1983; Vol. 2: The Church in Asia: Asian Bishops' Statements on Mission Community and Ministry Social Action Lay Apostolate Dialogue 1974-1986.

¹⁶ Richard P. Hardy, Being With the Poor, (Manila: Office for Human Development, n.d.), p. 1.

In the first chapter we shall present the history, structure and the orientations of the FABC. Since local theology is a contextual theology, the local circumstances which shaped and gave birth to this theology, are very important to our discussion. Therefore, in the second chapter, we shall analyze the Asian reality in order to understand its multifacetedness and complexity. This study is aimed at uncovering the positive and negative factors that have contributed either to the betterment or to the detriment of the people of Asia. We shall also try to isolate the particular facet of Asia that makes Asia different from other Third World countries or continents.

Since our inquiry is about the theology of liberation emerging in the FABC, we shall begin the third chapter with an analysis of Latin American theology of liberation which is considered to be the basis and model for all liberation theologies. We will focus our attention on determining what makes this theology distinct from traditional theology and makes it a Third World theology. Then, we shall present three dominant Asian theologies of liberation. The first is the Filipino model. The second is that of Aloysius Pieris, who has developed a well defined Asian theology of Liberation which could be called the South Asian model. The third model is the

Korean Minjung theology, which represents the Southeastern Asian countries.

In the analysis of these Asian theologies we shall focus our attention on how they view Asian reality and what they think makes Asia different from other continents. This is essential for our discussion because it is this specificity that should provide the rationale for a specific Asian theology of liberation. Of particular interest to us is the analysis of Pieris because his analysis, based on the multifaceted reality of Asia, seems to be comprehensive. This study will help us to determine whether the theme of liberation is central or marginal in the contemporary Asian theological debate. The ultimate purpose of this chapter is to establish an Asian model of liberation theology with which we can critique the documents of the FABC.

Armed with the model of an Asian theology of liberation, we will then focus our attention on the FABC documents in the last three chapters. In this historico-critical analysis¹⁷ of the said documents our main concern is to determine whether and how

¹⁷ This is the method that was used by Richard P. Hardy in his works, Ating Mga Kapid: A Spirituality of the CBCP, (Quezon City, Philippines: Maryhill School of Theology, 1984); Being with the Poor; and by Pasquale T. Giordano, Awakening to Mission: The Philippine Catholic Church 1965-1981, (Quezon City, Philippines: New Day Publishers, 1988).

the theme of liberation or related themes are integrated into these documents. Since, liberation theology is a reflection on the 'context', we shall proceed, first of all, to analyze how the bishops at the FABCs understand the Asian reality and secondly, how they perceive their mission and that of the church in this particular context when they reflect theologically on this reality.

Hence, in the fourth chapter we shall study the relevant dominant themes found in the documents of the Asian Bishops' Meeting at Manila and FABC I. Owing to the intrinsic relationship between the local church and local theology, we hope to discover how the bishops propose to 'incarnate' the church in Asia and, consequently, what they think evangelization means in the Asian context. These two documents combined will provide us with the general direction that the bishops want the church to take in the future.

Then, in the fifth chapter, we shall study how the theme of liberation is taken up in the seven Bishops' Institutes for Social Action (BISAs) that were held during the period under scrutiny. Analyzing these documents shall enable us to chronicle the historical development or the lack of development of certain liberational themes over the period of time we propose to study. In this we shall be attentive to new elements

or themes, if there are any. The last chapter shall study whether and how the themes developed by the BISAs are incorporated into the final documents of the Second, Third and the Fourth Plenary Assemblies of the FABC. Finally, we shall be able to conclude whether the theology found in the FABC is similar to or leads to the model proposed by Pieris - an Asian theology of liberation.

CHAPTER ONE

THE HISTORY, STRUCTURE AND ORIENTATIONS OF THE FABC

1.1 INTRODUCTION

The Second Vatican Council (Vatican II) was the greatest event that inaugurated the third period¹ in the history of the Church. In his prophetic opening speech to the Council on October 11, 1962, Pope John XXIII clearly pointed out the direction in which the spirit was leading the Church, when he said:

In the present order of things, Divine Providence is leading us to a new order of human relations which, by men's own efforts and even beyond their own expectations, are directed toward the fulfilment of God's superior and inscrutable designs. And everything, even human differences, leads to the greater good of the Church.²

¹ Enrique Dussel divides the history of the Church into three periods. The first is the apostolic times, the second began with the spread of Christianity to the West and the third period began with Vatican II. Enrique Dussel, History and the Theology of Liberation, (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1976), pp. 64-67.

² "in praesenti humanorum eventuum cursu, quo hominem societas novum rerum ordinem ingredi videtur, potius arcana Divinae providentiae consilia agnoscenda sunt, quae per tempora succedentia, hominum opera, ac plerumque praeter eorum expectationem, suum exitum consequuntur, atque omnia, adversos etiam humanos casus, in Ecclesiae bonum sapienter disponuntur." in Acta Apostolicae Sedis (AAS), 54(1962), p. 789. Walter M.

At that time even the Pope would not have imagined the tremendous changes the Council would bring to the self-understanding of the Church. One important development was with regard to the idea of the local church. These are true churches in that they are the authentic particular presence of the universal Church (CD 11; LG 26). Thus, Vatican II opened the way for a limited autonomy for local churches and advocated the formation of regional and national episcopal conferences (LG 23; CD 36-38; SC 22.2). One of the subsequent developments of this trend was the formation of the supra-national episcopal conferences, with the bishops of particular continents as representatives.

Pope Paul VI, in his Apostolic Letter - Motu Proprio "Ecclesia Sanctae", sixth August 1966, gave the approval for the establishment of such conferences.³ The General Conference of Latin American Bishops, Consejo Episcopal Latino Americano (CELAM), 1955, became the model for such conferences in other parts of the world. Thus, the National Conference of Catholic

Abbott, ed., The Documents of Vatican II, (New York: America Press, 1966), pp. 712-13.

³ "Conferentiae Episcopalis plurium nationum seu internationales possunt constitui tandemmodo Apostolica Sede approbante, cuius est peculiare normas statuere. Quoties autem actiones aut rationes a conferentis ineuntur formam internationalem praeseferentes, Santa Sedes praemoneatur." Paul VI, "Motu Proprio Ecclesiae Sanctae I," 41, in AAS 58(1966), p. 773.

Bishops (NCBB) or the United States Catholic Conference (USCC), the Symposium of Episcopal Conferences of Africa and Madagascar (SECAM), the Concilium Conferentiarum Episcopaliu Europae (CCEE), and the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences (FABC) have come into existence to serve the needs of the people of each particular continent. This chapter will trace the history of the FABC, find out its purpose or mandate, probe its structures, and determine the teaching authority of the FABC, as understood by the bishops.

1.1.1 The History of the FABC

The Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences (FABC) was formed as a forum for communication among the bishops of Asia. This trans-national body binds together, under one organization all the different local churches of Asia. The various regional and national Episcopal Conferences of Asia are the members of this conference.⁴

The first meeting of the Asian Bishops was held in the Philippines at Manila, on the occasion of the visit of Pope Paul VI to Asia in 1970. We should note that one of the primary purposes of the Pope's visit to Asia was to confer with his

⁴ Felix Wilfred, "The Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences (FABC): Orientations, Challenges and Impact," in Pro Mundi Vita Studies, January 1989, p. 1.

brother bishops of Asia on the problems and the future of the church of Asia.⁵ It was during this meeting, that a resolution to form the FABC was taken. This Asian Bishop's Meeting (ABM) was not only "a land-mark in the history of Christianity in Asia," but also "marked the beginning of a new consciousness of the many traditional links that united the various peoples of this region."⁶ 180 bishops representing seventeen Asian countries and regions attended this meeting.⁷ The first resolution of this meeting states:

THAT THE EPISCOPAL CONFERENCES HERE REPRESENTED ARE URGED TO AUTHORIZE AND SUPPORT A PERMANENT STRUCTURE FOR THE EFFECTIVE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE DECISIONS OF THIS MEETING.⁸

Though this meeting was not held under the auspices of the FABC, the First Plenary Assembly of the FABC (FABC I) held in Taipei, Taiwan, acknowledged the importance of this Manila

⁵ Vitaliano R. Gorospe, ed., The Four Faces of Asia: A Summary Report on the Asian Bishops' Meeting, (Quezon City, Manila: Ateneo De Manila University Press, 1971), pp. 1-2.

⁶ F. Wilfred, "FABC Orientations, Challenges and Impact," p. 1.

⁷ Parig Digan, Churches in Contestation: Asian Christian Social Protest, (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1984), pp. 53&55.

⁸ Message and Resolutions of the Asian Bishop's Meeting, "Resolutions of the Meeting" (ABM/Res.), 1, in C. G. Arevelo, ed., For All the Peoples of Asia (FAPA), The Church in Asia: Asian Bishops' Statements on Mission, Community and Ministry 1970 - 1983, 2 vols. Volume One: Texts and Documents, (Manila, Philippines: IMC Publications, 1984), 1:19.

meeting when it declared: "We wholeheartedly reaffirm the Resolutions of the Asian Bishops' Meeting (Manila, 23-29 November) 1970."⁹ Moreover, the editorial board that was responsible for editing the various statements of the conferences affirmed that the statement of the first plenary assembly "does not supersede that message, but rather presupposes it, and builds on it."¹⁰

The FABC had a difficult birth. Though it was formed on the recommendation given by Vatican II and the impetus given by the Catholic bishops of Latin America, CELAM, the formal approval by the Holy See came only in 1972.¹¹ In a Church where there were only vertical relationships, this horizontal innovative association among the bishops, was felt as a threat not only to the centralized authority of the Roman Curia but also to the power of the individual bishops. Parig Digan says the "strained exchanges behind the scenes reflected an awareness on both sides that something substantive was at stake."¹²

⁹ Statement and Recommendations of the First Plenary Assembly of the FABC, Taipei, Taiwan 27 April 1974, "Recommendations of the Assembly" (FABC I/Rec.), in Arevalo, ed., For All the Peoples of Asia, 1:9; and see also Editors Note p. 25.

¹⁰ Ibid., p. 25.

¹¹ Parig Digan, Churches in Contestation, p. 53.

¹² Ibid.,

1.1.2 The Purpose of the FABC

During their first meeting in Manila, the bishops indicated in broad strokes the purpose of the FABC. Inspired by the post conciliar spirit of collegiality and dialogue under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, the bishops say that they, "have sought to discover new ways through which we may be of greater and more effective service - not to our Catholic communities only - but to our own peoples and to the future."¹³ More specifically the principal functions of the FABC are:

A. To study ways and means of promoting the apostolate, especially in the light of Vatican II and post-conciliar documents, and according to the needs of Asia;

B. To work for and to intensify the dynamic presence of the Church in the total development of the peoples of Asia;

C. To help in the study of the problems of common interest to the Church in Asia, and to investigate possibilities of solutions and coordinate action;

D. To promote inter-communion and cooperation among local churches and bishops of Asia;

E. To render service to episcopal conferences of Asia in order to help them to meet better the needs of the People of God;

¹³ Message and Resolutions of the Asian Bishops' Meeting, Manila, Philippines, 29 November 1970, "Message of the Conference," (ABM), 2, in Arevalo, ed., For All the Peoples of Asia, 1: 11.

F. To foster a more ordered development of organizations and movements in the Church at the international level.¹⁴

This demonstrates, as has been proposed at the ABM, that the FABC is an attempt to make the church in Asia to be the church of Asia. That means that it become truly an Asian church of the poor, representing two-thirds of humanity; a young church where nearly 60 per cent of its people are below the age of twenty five years; and an incarnate church that is integrated into and becomes a part of the ancient and diverse cultures, religions, histories and traditions of Asia.¹⁵

It is very important to notice that both in the message and in the resolutions of the ABM, the bishops had insisted that they wanted to collaborate with the other communities in Asia, in their "efforts for the development of our peoples, for freedom, justice and peace"¹⁶ and "resolve to uphold and promote the realization of human rights and defend them wherever, whenever, and by whomsoever they are violated."¹⁷ Other

¹⁴ "Statutes of the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conference," chap. I, art. 2, quoted in Robert Hardawiryana, "Asia and Indonesia," in Mary Motte and Joseph Lang, eds., Mission in Dialogue: Sedos Research Seminar on the Future of the Missions, (Maryknoll, N.Y.: 1982), p. 46.

¹⁵ ABM, 5-7, in FAPA, 1:12.

¹⁶ Ibid., 25, p. 16.

¹⁷ ABM/Res., 2, in FAPA, 1:19

resolutions reinforce and explicate the methods or the means with which total human development could be achieved. Of particular importance among these is the need for a theology of development based on the experience and the needs of Asia, an indigenous theology that is incarnated in the rich historic cultures of Asia.¹⁸

1.1.3 The Structure of the FABC

The FABC represents the Episcopal Conferences of three of the major socio-cultural or geographical regions of Asia. South Asia includes India, Pakistan, Sri Lanka and Bangladesh. The Philippines, Thailand, Malaysia, Singapore, Indonesia, Laos, Kampuchea and Burma form the South East Asian region. The third region, East Asia, is composed of the Episcopal Conferences of Japan, Korea, the republic of China, Hong Kong, Macau and Vietnam.¹⁹

The "Annex A: Resolution on Structures," of the ABM authorized the creation of the following structures:

- To create a Central Committee, which shall meet every 18 months and consisting of the presidents or their representatives of the above participating conferences. This committee is to

¹⁸ Ibid., 12&13.

¹⁹ Robert Hardawiryana, in Mary Mote and Joseph Lang, eds., Mission in Dialogue, p. 46.

coordinate the efforts of the episcopal conferences. The central committee will also have the power to call the General Assembly of the Asian Bishops' Conference, when necessary.

- The Central Committee in turn is to constitute a Standing Committee composed of three bishops from the different regions to provide more direct guidance and support to the Central Secretariat, which will be the principal instrument of coordination and this Standing Committee is to meet every six months.

- A Central Secretariat to be constituted by the Central Committee, to function under the guidance of the Standing Committee.

- The Central Secretariat is to be situated in Manila. Its functions are essentially that of ensuring the cooperation and coordination of the different Asian Conferences, and to be a liaison between the church of Asia and the Holy See, the other Western Churches, the East Asian Christian Conference and those of other faiths of Asia, especially in matters concerning social justice, peace, development and intercultural exchange.²⁰

There are two types of FABC assemblies. The first, the highest body, is the Plenary Assemblies of the bishops. The second is the gathering of the Bishops' Institutes, organized by

²⁰ FABC Papers No. 28, (Hong Kong: Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences, 1982), pp. 10-14.

the different offices of the FABC. In the following section, we shall look at the four Plenary Assemblies that took place between 1974 - 1986. In this study the attention will be focused on their composition, workings and general thrust. This will be followed by the study of the different institutes,²¹ their functions and how they are organized by the respective Offices during the same period.

1.2 THE PLENARY ASSEMBLIES

The Plenary Assemblies of the FABC are held once in every four years and the delegates to these General Assemblies are not to be all the bishops of Asia but only the presidents and the elected representatives of the member conferences.²² These are not exclusive gatherings of bishops; the bishops bring with them theologians and experts, both lay and clerical, to present position papers, and as resource personnel to assist them in their deliberations. Only the bishop participants are to be the

²¹ These are, the Bishops' Institute for Social action (BISA), the Bishops' Institute for Missionary Apostolate (BIMA), the Bishops' Institute for Inter-Religious Affairs (BIRA), the International Congress on Missions (IMC), and the Bishops' Institute for the Lay Apostolate (BILA).

²² Felix Wilfred, "The Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences (FABC): Orientations, Challenges and Impact," in Pro Mundi Vita, January 1989, p. 1.

full members, with the right to vote and they have the clear mandate for this from their respective conferences.

1.2.1 The First Plenary Assembly

During the period under consideration, that is from 1970-1986, the bishops met four times in Plenary Assemblies. The First Plenary Assembly of the FABC was held from 22- 27, April 1974, in Taipei. At this conference 14 episcopal conferences and 18 countries were represented by their bishops. The main purpose of this Assembly was to prepare for the Synod of Bishops of 1974 and to discuss matters of common concern for Asia.²³ In line with this purpose the bishops chose 'Evangelization in Modern Day Asia' as the theme for this Assembly. The deliberations and the findings of this Assembly were issued in the form of "Statements and Recommendations of the First Plenary Assembly of the FABC."²⁴ The section entitled 'Recommendations of the Assembly,' begins with the wholehearted reaffirmation of the resolutions of the Asian Bishops' meeting held in Manila, and the Final Reflections of the Office of Human Development's first Bishops' Institute for Social Action (BISA I).²⁵

²³ FABC I, 1, in FAPA, 1:27

²⁴ FABC I and FABC I/Rec. in FAPA, 1:25-41.

²⁵ FABC I/Rec., in FAPA, 1:39.

In these statements and recommendations, one can clearly discern a break with traditional way of doing theology. The bishops say that they are not interested in constructing a "full theology of the proclamation of the Gospel," but want only to address "particular tasks which the evangelization of Asia today demands."²⁶ They do not want to impose preconceived solutions of yester-year and solutions that are only relevant to other continents or contexts. What they proposed to do is "to read the signs of the times, and to discern with our peoples,"²⁷ the demands of Asia. To proclaim the Good News to Asia, the church, the bishops say, has to be an incarnate, indigenous and incultured church. It has to be in dialogue with the great religious traditions and cultures of Asia, accepting them "as significant and positive elements in the economy of God's design of salvation."²⁸

The other important discernment from the reading of the "signs of the times," is that the majority of the Asians are the poor and that poverty is caused and maintained by structural oppression, injustice and exploitation. Therefore, the bishops reaffirmed the position taken by the Synod of Bishops of 1971,

²⁶ FABC I, 3, in FAPA, 1:27.

²⁷ Ibid., 5, p. 28.

²⁸ Ibid., 14, p. 30.

that "action in behalf of justice and participation in the transformation of the world fully appear to us as a constitutive dimension of the preaching of the Gospel."²⁹

In order to carry out the programmes and the deliberation of the FABC, to conduct further research seminars and to be directly responsible for certain functions limited to a particular field, five specialized offices were established, forming different departments. These offices thereafter sponsored several meetings of the bishops, called the Bishops' Institutes, to tackle particular problems or themes pertaining to those respective departments.³⁰

1.2.2 The Second Plenary Assembly

The second assembly of the FABC was held at Morning Star Regional Seminary in Barackpore, India, from 19-25, November 1978. It is appropriate that the theme for this meeting, held in the land of the 'Sadus' and 'Sages', was Prayer - The Life of the Church of Asia. Thirteen episcopal conferences and fifteen countries were represented at this assembly by 40 bishops. In addition to these there were also another 7 bishops from the standing committee and the offices, including the Secretary

²⁹ Ibid., 22, pp. 31-32.

³⁰ Robert Hardawiryana, in Mary Mote and Joseph Lang, eds., Mission in Dialogue, pp. 46-47.

General of the FABC. The Apostolic Pro-Nuncio in India, was a special guest at the assembly.³¹

Archbishop D.S. Lourdasamy, Secretary of the Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples, was the special representative of the Holy See and gave the inaugural address. For the first time bishops from the Episcopal Conferences of Australia, Germany and New Zealand were present at this meeting.³² These bishops who represent the Episcopal Conferences that are not part of the FABC are called fraternal delegates. Their presence not only brought home the universal character of the Church but also manifested their interest in the developments that were taking place in the church of Asia. Twenty seven specialists, theologians and experts were also invited as special participants.³³

The theologians and the experts presented position papers for discussions which were followed by seven workshops. The first was on prayer and human development. One of the important outcomes of this workshop was the realization that "Christian prayer helps us to remain within the healthy tension between

³¹ FABC Papers No. 13, pp. 38-42.

³² Ibid.,

³³ Ibid., pp. 41-42.

wholehearted dedication to the cause of the improvement of society on earth and the expectation of the coming of God's Kingdom at the end of times."³⁴ The final statement and the recommendations of the assembly stressed the link or the relationship between prayer, justice, human liberation, development and brotherhood.³⁵

In the workshop on education for prayer in the Catholic schools of Asia, it was stressed that to live in solidarity with other people and to be "aware of our dependence and relationship with others under the fatherhood of God," were considered to be indispensable aspects of prayer.³⁶ The summary of the third workshop on prayer as witness in the everyday life of the church of Asia, says that, "Prayer cannot be limited to our persons, but must expand to the problems and the concerns of our life today."³⁷

³⁴ Ibid., p. 27

³⁵ FABC, Second Plenary Assembly, Calcutta, India, 25 November 1978, Statement on "Prayer-the Life of the Church of Asia," (FABC II), in Arevalo, ed., For All the Peoples of Asia, 1:52-68.

³⁶ FABC Papers No. 13, p. 28.

³⁷ Ibid., p. 29.

The fourth workshop on prayer, community worship, and inculturation takes up the other important Asian reality of other religions. It recommends:

that the prayer-life of our churches be lived more in keeping with the genius of our peoples and the religious traditions of our countries...that the Spirit is leading us...to an organic integration of all that is good, true and beautiful in the traditions and cultures of our nations."³⁸

A similar approach towards other religions was taken in the workshop on Christian prayer and interreligious dialogue. The sixth workshop on seminaries and religious houses as centres of formation for prayer in the Asian context, speaks of the Asian model of the man-of-God and man-for-others, which should be the model for the life-style of the aspirants.³⁹

The findings and the results of the various workshops were incorporated in the Final Statements and Recommendations of the second FABC assembly. The bishops also reaffirmed the Resolutions and Recommendations of the Asian Bishops' meeting at Manila, and that of the First Assembly of the FABC, thus demonstrating the continuity with the past.⁴⁰ This also shows that the present assembly, though its theme was prayer, was only

³⁸ Ibid.,

³⁹ Ibid., p. 32.

⁴⁰ FABC II/Rec., in FAPA, 1:67.

a continuation of the attempt to make the church in Asia, the church of Asia.

1.2.3 The Third Plenary Assembly

The Third Plenary Assembly of the FABC was held in Bangkok, Thailand, from 20-28, October 1982. Thirty two bishop-delegates from 6 countries representing 12 of the 14 member conferences of FABC, were present at this meeting, including Hong kong and Macau. Most of the offices of the FABC were represented by their chairman-bishops, the members of the ad hoc committee and the standing committee were also present. It was at this conference, that the Episcopal Conference of Burma participated for the first time and there were 11 representatives including the three delegates.⁴¹

Fraternal delegates from the Bishops' Conferences of Germany, Australia, Papua New Guinea and Solomon Islands and United States were also present at this conference. There were at this meeting altogether 49 Asian bishops, the Apostolic Pro-Nuncio in Thailand and the special representative of the Holy See, Archbishop D.S. Lourdusamy, who gave the inaugural address. There were also thirty nine, lay and clerical, special participants, who were invited as experts.

⁴¹ FABC Papers No. 32, p. 5.

This conference also marked the tenth anniversary of the establishment of the FABC. 'The Church - A Community of Faith in Asia,' was chosen as the theme of this third FABC assembly.⁴² The first five statements of the assembly condensed the workings and the achievements of the FABC and that of the institutes, during the past decade. Ten workshop sessions were held after the presentation of position papers and in these workshops the bishop-participants took an active role. The statements and the resolutions were the result of the discussions held at the general assembly and at the workshops.

According to the bishops, the Church has to be understood as a communion, whose foundation is the Trinity, brought about by the Spirit,⁴³ in order to proclaim the Gospel, "in whose light the realities of life and history which surround it are constantly discerned."⁴⁴ The church of Asia should listen to the Spirit at work in the different communities in Asia and realize that Christian discipleship demands that the church, in this particular situation in Asia, work for the total "human development and the building up of fraternal community in the

⁴² FABC, Third Plenary Assembly, Bangkok, Thailand, 28 October 1982, Statement on "The Church-A Community of Faith in Asia," (FABC III), 5, in Arevalo, ed., For all the Peoples of Asia, 1:92.

⁴³ Ibid., 7.1&4, p. 93.

⁴⁴ Ibid., 7.3.

promotion and defense of those rights."⁴⁵ These are not mere social issues, but are intrinsic and fundamental to the dignity of human persons as children of God.

The building up of this fraternal community cannot be effected from the outside but could be achieved only by "being with others and for others,"⁴⁶ in servanthood, following the example of Christ. The bishops were not only conscious but also confessed that they and the Christian community at large, had not been sensitive to the perpetration of social injustice, violation of human dignity and rights in our society. They also accepted their failure to work more effectively towards human development and liberation of all people from all forms of oppression.⁴⁷ This Assembly accepted and made its own, the deliberations of the First International Mission Congress held in Manila, in December 1979.⁴⁸

In addition to the statement and the resolution of the assembly, the bishops also proposed a list or 'Syllabus of Concerns' for immediate pastoral action. These were taken from

⁴⁵ Ibid., 8.1, p. 94.

⁴⁶ Ibid., 9.1, p. 95.

⁴⁷ Ibid., 9.7&8, p. 97.

⁴⁸ Ibid., pp. 92-98.

the longer workshop reports and form an integral part of the statement of the FABC.⁴⁹

1.2.4 The Fourth Plenary Assembly

The Fourth Plenary Assembly of the FABC was held in Tokyo, Japan, 16-25 September 1986. The theme of this meeting was 'The Vocation and Mission of the Laity in the Church and in the World of Asia.' At this Assembly the Holy See was represented by Cardinal Eduardo Pironio, President of the Pontifical Council for the Laity, Archbishop Jose Sanchez, Secretary of the Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples and Archbishop Jan Schotte, General Secretary of the Synod of Bishops. The Apostolic Pro-Nuncio in Japan was also present.⁵⁰

Forty bishops from the various Bishops' Conferences of Asia represented the eighteen countries of the FABC. The entire Bishops' Conference of Japan, altogether eighteen bishops, including the four delegates, was present at this Assembly. They were joined by thirteen ex officio members of the Federation; the five members of the Standing Committee, the three bishops from the Committee for the Laity, the Bishop-Chairmen of the five Offices of the Federation and the Secretary

⁴⁹ FABC Third Plenary Assembly, "The 'Syllabus of Concerns' of the Plenary Assembly," (FABC III/Syll.), pp. 105-08.

⁵⁰ FABC Papers No. 47, p. 77.

General of the Central Secretariat. The presence of the Fraternal Delegates from the Episcopal Conferences of Australia, Europe (CCEE), Latin America (CELAM), Pacific (CEPAC) and the United States (USCC) brought home the universal character and the concern of the whole Church for the Church of Asia.⁵¹ Altogether seventy six bishops participated at the Fourth Plenary Assembly of the FABC in Tokyo.

True to the theme of this Assembly, for the first time in the history of the FABC, forty eight lay women and men from different parts of Asia, joined the bishops as full participants. Apart from all these, were the special participants, the usual contingent of experts and advisors of the bishops.⁵² A short survey of this document will demonstrate that unlike the previous ones, this important assembly has taken into consideration the work done by the different institutes that preceded and had made its own almost all the valuable findings of these institutes.

After a short preamble and a brief background of the FABC, it dealt with the challenges of Asia, in detail. The bishops insisted that they "are keenly aware that the struggle for a

⁵¹ Ibid., pp. 77-82.

⁵² Ibid., pp. 77-83.

full human life is not confined to the Christian community." Hence, they wanted to work in solidarity with the great religions of Asia, for the "full flowering of the human person and the transformation of the world of Asia."⁵³ They accepted that in the past the church in Asia had been an inward looking church and that the hour had come for the church to take a holistic vision as found in the ancient religions of Asia.

The bishops wanted the church to be involved and be present in wider range of issues pertaining to politics, to infuse the Kingdom "values of love and justice into the political, economic, cultural and social world of Asia."⁵⁴ The Final Statement though sympathetic towards the problems and the challenges faced by the youth, also acknowledged the role played by them in organizing, mobilizing and awakening the consciousness of the people for justice, peace and struggle for liberation in Asia.⁵⁵ Since "The youth of Asia are the Asia of today," and they constitute 60 percent of the Asian population, the participants of the Assembly appealed to the People of God

⁵³ FABC, Fourth Plenary Assembly, Tokyo, Japan, 16-25 September 1986, The Statement on "The Vocation and Mission of the Laity in the Church and in the World of Asia," (FABC IV), 3.0.2, in Arevalo, ed., For All the Peoples of Asia, 2:314.

⁵⁴ Ibid., 3.1.2, p. 315.

⁵⁵ Ibid., 3.2.2&3, pp. 317-18.

in Asia to support, trust and encourage the youth to become the "evangelizers, messengers and instruments of God."⁵⁶

The bishops, present at this Assembly, heard the cry of the women and "their deepest longings for dignity and freedom."⁵⁷ The Statement speaks of the many "injustices heaped upon them" by the traditional societies and the exploitation of women by the industrial and commercial establishments. The bishops called upon the Asian people to recognize not only the valuable contributions that women make towards family and society, but also their human dignity that befits the image of God in them. Therefore, the statement insists that it is "a Gospel imperative that the feminine half of the world's population be recognized and their dignity restored, and that they be allowed to play their rightful role in the world and in the Church."⁵⁸

The statement on the laity and the family deplores the oppression, exploitation and poverty caused by social, economic, religious and cultural problems of Asia. It stresses the need to go back to the deeply-rooted cultural values of Asia.⁵⁹ In

⁵⁶ Ibid., 3.2.4&5, p. 318.

⁵⁷ Ibid., 3.3.3, p. 320.

⁵⁸ Ibid.,

⁵⁹ Ibid., 3.4, pp. 320-22.

the field of education, the delegates stated that the schools rather than being instruments of the wealthy to maintain traditional structures, must be a vehicle for the transformation of society.⁶⁰

They recognized the influence of the mass media in shaping the destinies of nations, especially where this powerful instrument has been used by "authoritarian governments or by a handful of economically and politically powerful persons,"⁶¹ to "manipulate and to mould public opinion and to consolidate and perpetuate their position."⁶² Hence, the bishops insisted that the Church in Asia should take full advantage of this powerful means of communication, to proclaim the liberating word of God - "the seeds of the Kingdom" found in diverse cultures and religions" of Asia.⁶³

Any work is a participation in God's own work of recreation, but unfortunately it has become oppressive because of exploitation. This Assembly has drawn up a long list of national as well as international organizations and structures,

⁶⁰ Ibid., pp. 320-24.

⁶¹ Ibid., 3.6.3, p. 325.

⁶² Ibid., 3.6.2, pp. 324-25.

⁶³ Ibid., 3.6.5, p. 325.

that "have made both urban and rural workers cogs of an anonymous productive machine."⁶⁴ Hence, the need to liberate and transform work into an expression of human creativity and a participation in the work of the Creator. The church's preferential option for the poor has to be manifested in its concern for and its identity with all the poor and the oppressed.⁶⁵ In the world of business, the bishops advocate neither capitalism nor socialism but opt for a new type of industry and technology that is at the service of the poor and society at large.⁶⁶ In the field of health services, the traditional health services are to be renewed in the rural areas and should be made available to the less fortunate.⁶⁷

In the fourth statement, titled 'Moving Ahead as a Community,' the bishops want the church to be a communion of committed disciples, rooted among our peoples and in solidarity with them, working for the liberation of Asia - an outward-looking church. In a spirit of co-responsibility, communion and collegiality, they call upon both the clergy and the laity to realize the importance of their participation in the common

⁶⁴ Ibid., 3.7.2, p. 326.

⁶⁵ Ibid., pp. 326-28.

⁶⁶ Ibid., 3.8, p. 328-29.

⁶⁷ Ibid., 3.9, pp. 329-31.

priesthood, the purpose of which is to make present the 'Reign of God'. They speak not of a spirituality of withdrawal but of an involvement in the world around them, be it social, cultural, religious, political or economical. The church of Asia is called upon to incarnate itself in the realities of Asia, in order to liberate and transform it.⁶⁸

1.3 THE OFFICES OF THE FABC AND THEIR INSTITUTES

Five different Offices were established by the FABC to initiate, document, carry out further research and to implement the decisions of the General Assemblies. They were also responsible for coordination between the member conferences and other national and international organizations, as well as for disseminating information and providing documentation. In this section we shall sketch the functions of these Offices and their accomplishments in organizing the Institutes.

1.3.1 The Office of Missions

Altogether three Bishops' Institutes for Missionary Apostolate (BIMA) were sponsored by this office of missions.

⁶⁸ Ibid., pp. 331-40. In this short summary I have only indicated the direction taken by the Fourth Assembly of the FABC, but later on we will have the opportunity to study in detail the magnitude and the far reaching implications of this Assembly, for the life of the church in Asia.

1.3.1.1 BIMA I

The first institute (BIMA I) was held in Baguio City, Philippines, July 19-27, 1978. Forty delegates from various parts of Asia, including about twenty bishops were present. This institute was inspired by the last two Synods of Bishops and by Pope Paul's 'Evangelii Nuntiandi.' Its main task was to discover how to proclaim the Good News of Christ and make Him known to the millions of people of Asia who do not know Him.⁶⁹

This, they said, can be achieved only through a "dialogue in depth" and 'meaningful experience'⁷⁰ which literally means:

witnessing to Christ in word and deed, by reaching out to people in the concrete reality of their lives, in their particular cultural context, their own religious traditions, their socio-economic conditions.⁷¹

1.3.1.2 BIMA II

BIMA II was held in Trivandrum, India, November 20-30, 1980. This was a continuation of BIMA I, but for the region of South Asia, since it was perceived that the countries of this region were culturally identical and their problems were considered to be similar. The participants came from Pakistan,

⁶⁹ "Letter Participants of the First BIMA of the FABC, Baguio City, Philippines 27 July 1978, (BIMA), in Arevalo, ed., For All the Peoples of Asia, 1:59.

⁷⁰ Ibid., 3, p. 156.

⁷¹ Ibid., 5.

Bangladesh, Sri Lanka and India. The representatives from Burma could not attend. There were thirteen bishops, twenty priests and religious, and two lay people, present at this meeting.⁷²

The bishops at BIMA II insisted that in order to evangelize Asia, the church has to be authentic to its vocation and manifest it by sharing its faith experience with the people of Asia, through indigenous forms of expressions. In the Asian context it means the promotion of integral human development,⁷³ and witnessing to justice, in dialogue with the other religions of Asia. This mission is entrusted to the whole church and not only to the Bishops, priests, and the religious.⁷⁴

1.3.1.3 BIMA III

The Third Bishops' Institute for Missionary Apostolate of the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conference was held in Chingshan Taiwan, from 17 to 25 August 1982, for the East Asian

⁷² FABC Papers No. 27, p. 2.

⁷³ For the first time, Pope Paul VI made the link between evangelization and human advancement, development and liberation, in his Apostolic Exhortation, Evangelii Nuntiandi: On Evangelization in the Modern World, December 8, 1975, in AAS 68(1976), No. 29-34, pp. 25-28; see John Eagleson and Philip Scharper, eds., Puebela and Beyond, (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1980), No. 355, p. 173.

⁷⁴ "Letter of Participants of the Second BIMA of the FABC," Trivandrum, Kerala, India, 30 November 1980, (BIMA II), in Arevalo, ed., For All the Peoples of Asia, 1:161-67.

region. Fifty-nine delegates and experts participated. Like its South Asian counterpart, it also stressed that the proclamation of the Good news is entrusted to the whole Christian community. This proclamation must be directed towards the poor, needy and the oppressed, not only in words but also in deeds, in solidarity with them, in their effort to build a just society.⁷⁵

1.3.2 The Office of Human Development

Among the offices that were established by the FABC, the Office of Human Development (OHD) began to function first and triggered a series of further actions. It was organized and was ready to function even before the official approval was granted to the FABC. It was this Office that was responsible for organizing seven Bishops' Institutes for Social Action (BISA) during the period under consideration, which is a record for any Office.⁷⁶

In addition to the BISAs, this Office, under the able leadership of its first chairperson, Bishop Julio X. Labayen O.C.D, was also instrumental in organizing together with the

⁷⁵ "letter of Participants and Syllabus of 'Mission Concerns' of the Third BIMA of the FABC," Chingshan, Changhua, Taiwan, 25 August 1982, (BIMA III), in Arevalo, ed., For all the Peoples of Asia, 1:168-75.

⁷⁶ Parig Digan, Churches in Contestation, p. 57.

protestant churches of Asia and with the Committee on Society, Development and Peace (SODEPAX), the Asian Interreligious Forum for Social Action in March 1973. It also has to its credit organizing, along with the Bureau of Asian Affairs (Jesuit) and others, The East Asian Seminar on Population in the Context of Integral Human Development, (Philippines, June 18-22, 1973).⁷⁷

This demonstrates that, the time had come and Asia was ready to follow the directions taken by Vatican II, owing to the prevailing situation of poverty and oppression in Asia. Rising to the occasion, the OHD had made a clear contribution in sensitizing the Asian catholic consciousness to the social dimensions of the Gospel, by organizing such conferences.⁷⁸

1.3.2.1 BISA I-III

The first three BISAs were conducted on a regional basis in 1974 and 1975. These three Institutes brought together 147 participants, including sixty bishops, from twenty countries. The first Bishops' Institute for Social Action was held in Manila, Philippines, March 1-15, 1974, for the South East Asian region. The idea that the church needed to be a poor church, was the main concern of this meeting and apart from that it

⁷⁷ R. Hardawiryana, in Mary Mote and Joseph Lang, eds., Mission in Dialogue, p. 47.

⁷⁸ P. Digan, Churches in Contestation, p. 58.

remained on a theoretical plane.⁷⁹ While the participants accepted in theory the need for social change, one also notices the differences among the participants regarding its practical implications.⁸⁰

BISA II was held for the region of East Asia, in Tokyo, Japan, 7-19 April, 1975. The 'Social Dimensions of the Gospel: Oppressed People and The Role of the Church', was the theme chosen for this conference, which was attended by forty participants. The delegates were clearly of the opinion that the considerations of this meeting "should not remain mere words and pious considerations but that we all have to commit ourselves to make them real in our life and responsibilities."⁸¹

The same theme was taken for discussion at BISA III, which was held in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, 3-17 November, 1975. Sixty delegates from the South Asian region of Asia, Kuwait, New Zealand, Australia and Papua New Guinea participated. They stressed the importance of a wholehearted commitment and action

⁷⁹ R. Hardawiryana, in Mary Mote and Joseph Lang, eds., Mission in Dialogue, p. 47.

⁸⁰ See P. Digan, Churches in Contestation, pp. 58&59.

⁸¹ "Final Reflections of the Second Bishops' Institute for Social Action of the FABC," Tokyo, Japan, 7-19 April 1975, (BISA II), 4, in Arevalo, ed., For All the Peoples of Asia, 2:352.

for social justice, in the creation of a new, just society where human dignity is upheld and the quality of life is improved.⁸²

1.3.2.2 BISA IV and V

The theme for BISA IV and V was: 'Collegiality of the Bishops for Human Development.' Unlike the earlier BISAs, these meetings were, in line with the theme, opened not only to include all the regions of Asia but also to include for the first time, bishops from the developed countries. Bishop Michael Mansap, the Executive Chairman of the OHD, gave two main reasons for the inclusion of non-Asian bishops. First of all it was realized that the problems of Asia find their causes also in the Western industrialized countries and that part of the solution must also be found in these countries. Secondly, it was felt that the Asians were also in a position to offer and share with the other bishops, in a spirit of collegiality, their own experiences in mutual concern for humanity.⁸³

Bishops and experts from Papua New Guinea, the Pacific Islands, New Zealand, Australia and developed countries such as, France and Canada were invited for BISA IV. They were the

⁸² "Final Reflections of the Third Bishops' Institute for Social Action of the FABC," Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, 3-17 November 1975, (BISA III), in Arevalo, ed., For All the Peoples of Asia, 2:357-361.

⁸³ See FABC Papers No. 24, p. 3

representatives of the member episcopal conferences of the Asia Partnership for Human Development (APHD).⁸⁴ At this meeting, held in Antipolo, Manila, From February 28 to March 8, 1978, there were thirty bishops from twelve countries, present.

BISA V was held in Baguio city Philippines, from May 27 to June 1, 1979. This meeting brought together a variety of bishops from different countries, backgrounds and experience. Together with the bishops of Asia, there were bishops from Canada, England, Finland, France, West Germany, Ireland, Spain, United States, Tonga, Tahiti, New Hebrides, Papua New Guinea and New Zealand. Some of these bishops were invited because of their connection with the International Co-operation for Socioeconomic Development (CIDSE). There were thirty seven bishops present at this Institute.⁸⁵

Another important feature of these Institutes is that the participant-bishops were divided into smaller groups and were sent to different parts of Asia in order to expose them to the realities of Asia. This idea to expose the bishops to the situation of Asia was developed by the APHD in order to assure

⁸⁴ Ibid.,; see also R. Hardawiryana, in Mary Mote and Joseph Lang, eds., Mission in Dialogue, p. 47. The APHD was originally a funding agency of Asians and non-Asians that later became involved in all levels of action in Asia.

⁸⁵ See FABC Papers No. 24, p. 3.

the bishops had direct contact with the problems and hopes of the poor. This exposure programme, at first sight might look a little redundant, since the majority of the bishops were from Asia. The irony is that though most of them were from Asia and sons of the soil, the bishops in Asia were in general shielded from the realities of life and were ignorant of the struggles that the people have to undergo to eke out a meagre existence. This became evident during the discussions, where the bishops spoke of the experiences they had during the exposure.⁸⁶

One can also see the immediacy and direction this has given to the deliberations, which were reflected in the final statements. At BISA IV the bishops spoke of the "liberating vision of the Gospel" and the need to "risk everything for the growth of God's Kingdom."⁸⁷ They took resolutions to establish Episcopal Commissions on Social Action, Justice and Peace and/or Human Development. They also elicited the support of the other conferences for the promotion of solidarity in action on behalf of justice and human development.⁸⁸

⁸⁶ Ibid., pp. 5-6.

⁸⁷ "Final Reflections and Resolutions of the Fourth Bishops' Institute for Social Action of the FABC," Antipolo, Metro Manila, Philippines, 4-8 March 1978, (BISA IV), 11, in Arevalo, ed., For All the Peoples of Asia, 2:366.

⁸⁸ Ibid., pp. 363-70.

BISA V, was held in Baguio City in the Philippines, May 21-June 1, 1979. There were twenty four bishops present at this meeting, of whom eight were Asians, eight bishops from South Pacific countries and the other eight were from Europe and North America.⁸⁹ Though thirteen resource persons and staff were present at this meeting, it was totally dominated by the bishops and unlike the other BISAs, here the bishops themselves drafted the final statements.⁹⁰ This is reflected in the bold stand and the pastoral style of the documents. The bishops went beyond BISA, and declared that the church "must strive to become the church of the poor."⁹¹ They reaffirmed the commitment of the Latin American bishops, in the context of Asia that "our preferential option should be for the poor."⁹²

A great deal of time was spent on discussion on human rights and justice. The bishops affirmed the importance of a firm option for and commitment to justice in order to create a new humanity and a new human family. In this regard they expressed their active support for such bodies as the Pontifical

⁸⁹ "Final Statement and Recommendations of the Fifth Bishops' Institute of the FABC," Baguio City, Philippines, 21 May to 1 June 1979, (BISA V), in Arevalo, ed., For All the Peoples of Asia, 2:371-78.

⁹⁰ See FABC Papers No. 24, p. 16.

⁹¹ BISA V, 12, in FAPA, 2:374.

⁹² Ibid., 26, p. 376.

Commission for Justice and Peace, the agencies of the United Nations Organization and Amnesty International. They also recommended that the respective conferences support their request to convene a Synod of Bishops in Rome on the theme of Human Rights in the Contemporary World.⁹³

In spite of the optimism that BISA V generated, we cannot deny the fact that there were also disagreements and problems. The South Asian bloc especially India, was conspicuous by its absence at BISA V. Parig Digan speaks of the East-West rift in the FABC, especially with regard to the working of the OHD. This he attributes to the minority/majority situation of the Christian church in general of those two camps and to the political affiliation of the dominant countries concerned.

The traditional church leadership of the South Asian countries, where the Christians are only a minority, was not prepared to accept the radical social stance of the Filipino hierarchy and the panel of experts, where the Christians are a majority.⁹⁴ The other reason was that the Southern bloc, because of its religio-cultural heritage, was interested in a more contemplative rather than an active religious dimension. This

⁹³ Ibid., pp. 372-78.

⁹⁴ P. Digan, Churches in Contestation, pp. 59-60.

difference of attitude was also present at the Asian Theological Conference, held in Wennappuwa, Sri Lanka in January 1979.⁹⁵

1.3.2.3 BISAs VI and VII

The Asian Social Institute sent a questionnaire in 1981, a year before BISA VI, to all the 109 bishops who attended one or the other of the five BISAs. Its aim was to find out whether the thinking of the bishops on social problems had changed. While the answer was positive and encouraging, it was revealed that the bishops did not take sufficient positive actions towards conscientization and social issues.⁹⁶

The Sixth Bishops' Institute For Social Action was held in Kandy, Sri Lanka, from January 29 to February 8, 1983, on the theme: 'The Challenge to Human Development in the 1980s: Response of the Church in Asia.' It was attended by twenty six Asian bishops and four non-Asian bishops from United States, Brazil, Mexico and Archbishop Jean Jadot, Pro-President of the Secretariat for Non-Christian, represented the Holy See. They started with an exposure programme for four days.⁹⁷

⁹⁵ This will be dealt in detail in Chapter Three.

⁹⁶ See FABC Papers No. 35, pp. 1-2.

⁹⁷ "Final Reflections of the Sixth Bishops Institute for Social Action of the FABC," Levalla, Kandy, Sri Lanka, 4-8 february 1983, (BISA VI), in Arevalo, ed., For All the Peoples of Asia, 2:379-385.

BISA VI presupposed all that had taken place in the other BISAs and stress was laid on finding concrete responses to the problems discussed in the earlier BISAs. The bishops were aware of the challenges posed by the super powers, the militant resurgence of the non-Christian religions and the rising militarization of the continent. The outstanding contribution of this Institute was the consciousness and affirmation that dialogue of life with the poor also means a dialogue of life with the other Asian religions of Asia.⁸⁸ It is essential to notice the shift, because, as the South Asian bishops have realized, any attempt in this regard is futile without a genuine effort at dialogue with the great traditions, religions and the cultures of Asia, that make up the Asian reality.⁸⁹

The theme chosen for BISA VII: 'Asia's Religio-Cultural Heritage and Human Development' demonstrates the importance of the religio-cultural heritage of Asia, in line with the thinking of BISA VI. This Institute was held in Hua Hin, Thailand, from 15 - 23 January, 1986. Thirty four Asian bishops from each of the twelve Bishops' Conferences of Asia and another nine bishops, representing the Bishops' Conferences of Canada,

⁸⁸ Ibid., 10, p. 382; The ABM and the FABC I spoke of this dialogue but it was at BIBA VI the bishops recognized its implications.

⁸⁹ This will be treated in detail in Chapter Five.

U.S.A., Brazil, Australia, New Zealand, Ireland, South Africa and Germany were present at this Institute.¹⁰⁰

In addition to the exposure, the bishops were also introduced to an immersion programme, to help them see the reality from the perspective of the poor. The method of 'social analysis' was used to evaluate the reality of Asia. Its insufficiency was complemented by the third ingredient, the contemplative dimension of human development. This contemplative dimension of spirituality, the heritage of the Asian religions, is able to bring to the fore, God's preferential presence and activity among the poor, and the liberating potential of religions.¹⁰¹

In the fourth stage of pastoral planning, the bishops attempted to translate the above into actual, pastoral plans. One of these, was their commitment to support the formation of basic communities. The bishops also realized the need of a structure and a method to coordinate their work, which would be effective on behalf of the struggling poor.¹⁰²

¹⁰⁰ "Final Reflections of the Seventh Bishops Institute for Social Action of the FABC," Hua Hin, Thailand, 15-23 1986, (BISA VII), in Arevalo, ed., For All the Peoples of Asia, 2:387-93.

¹⁰¹ Ibid., pp. 390-91.

¹⁰² Ibid., pp. 392-93.

1.3.3 The Office of Ecumenism and Interreligious Affairs

The importance of interreligious dialogue, in the context of Asia's multi-religious context, was asserted at the ABM in Manila.¹⁰³ This was stressed over and over again at the First Plenary Assembly of the FABC held at Taipei,¹⁰⁴ at the Second Assembly at Calcutta¹⁰⁵ and in the Final Statement of the Asian Colloquium on Ministries in the Church of Asia, held in Hong Kong in 1977.¹⁰⁶ The conclusions of BIMA I, held in Baguio City convinced the Office of Ecumenical and Interreligious Affairs (OEIA) of the need to put in place an organization to implement the decision of the FABC regarding interreligious dialogue.¹⁰⁷

Within two weeks after BIMA, the OEIA, decided to organize the first three Bishops' Institute for Interreligious Affairs (BIRA), according to regional religious traditions and affinities. In preparation for this Institute, a questionnaire was sent to all the bishops of Asia, on the state of ecumenical and interreligious dialogue in each diocese. BIRA IV was a

¹⁰³ ABM/Res., 12, in FAPA, 1:21.

¹⁰⁴ FABC I, 13-18, in FAPA, 1:29-30.

¹⁰⁵ FABC II, 34-36, 1:61-62.

¹⁰⁶ Asian Colloquium on Ministries in the Church, "Conclusions," Honk Kong, 5 March 1977, (ACMC), 19, in Arevalo, ed., For All the Peoples of Asia, 1:117.

¹⁰⁷ For further detail see Stanislaus Lokuang, "Reaching out in Dialogue in Asia," in FABC Papers No. 25, pp. 2-10.

series of ten meetings. Only three such meetings were held during the period under consideration.

1.3.3.1 BIRA I

Bishops from five major Buddhist countries were invited for this first BIRA, held in Sampran, Thailand, 11- 18 October 1979. As part of the programme, the participants visited Buddhist temples, where they had an 'experience' of dialogue with Buddhist monks. In the discussions that followed, at least some bishops were of the opinion that the faithful should be instructed on the importance or rather the place of other religions in the economy of salvation. The purpose of dialogue is not to convert the other but to deepen one's faith and to rediscover the full meaning of the incarnation.¹⁰⁸

1.3.3.2 BIRA II

BIRA II was held at Kuala Lumpur from November 13 to 21, 1979, for the countries with major Muslim influence. Six countries with predominantly Muslim population attended this conference. The Secretary General of the Christian Conference of Asia (CAA) was invited as a special guest. The participants

¹⁰⁸ Statement and Recommendations of the First Bishops' Institute for Interreligious Affairs of the FABC, Sampran, Bangkok, Thailand, 18 October 1979, "Statement of the Assembly," (BIRA I), in Arevalo, ed., For All the Peoples of Asia, 1:181-87.

insisted that the common eagerness to serve the one God and the common concern to establish a more just and human order, should be encouraged, with further discussions and dialogue to be built upon these foundations. They affirmed the teaching of Vatican II, that "the Spirit of Christ is active outside the bounds of the visible Church."¹⁰⁹ The importance of dialogue of life by giving witness, "through the daily practice of brotherhood, helpfulness, open-heartedness and hospitality,"¹¹⁰ was stressed.

1.3.3.3 BIRA III

The BIRA III sponsored by the OEIA of the FABC was convened in Madras, India, November 15-20, 1982. This Institute brought together the bishop-delegates from Bangladesh, India, Indonesia, Malaysia, Thailand and Sri Lanka, together with their experts and observers. They represented those countries which come under Hindu influence. The main focus of this Institute was the "urgency, problems and prospects of dialogue between Hindus and Christians in Asia."¹¹¹

¹⁰⁹ Statement of the Second Bishops' Institute for Interreligious Affairs of the FABC, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, 20 November 1979, "Statement of the Assembly," (BIRA II), 12, in Arevalo, ed., For All the Peoples of Asia, 1:192.

¹¹⁰ Ibid., 14, p. 193.

¹¹¹ Statement and recommendations of the Third Bishops' Institutes for Interreligious Affairs of the FABC, Madras, India, 20 November 1982, "statement of the Assembly," (BIRA III), 1, in Arevalo, ed., For All the Peoples of Asia, 1:197.

In addition to the reasons given for dialogue by the earlier BIRAs, they stress the importance of the "quest for a fuller life of peace in freedom, fellowship and justice,"¹¹² through dialogue. Since the fuller life of the community is the end of all religions, the delegates at this Institute insisted that dialogue should "embrace all dimensions of life: economic, socio-political, cultural and religious."¹¹³ They called upon all the religions to collaborate in the task of community building, by which the community is radically transformed into a new humanity of justice and brotherhood. One of the important outcomes was the assertion of a inseparable link between spirituality and total liberation.¹¹⁴

1.3.3.4 BIRA IV

The fourth Bishops' Institute for Interreligious Affairs was different from the earlier BIRAs. BIRA IV was to be a series of ten Institutes, to be held within a period of seven years, from 1984-1990, on the Theology of Dialogue. These meetings were to be held in different parts of Asia at different times in order offer each bishop in Asia the opportunity to participate in at least one of these. The approval for this was

¹¹² Ibid., 5, p. 198.

¹¹³ Ibid., 7, p. 199.

¹¹⁴ Ibid., pp. 197-204.

given at the meeting of the Central Committee of the FABC, held in Seoul, 7-10 May 1984.¹¹⁵

BIRA IV/1 was held in Sampran, Thailand from 23-30 October 1984 and in which ten national commissions for Ecumenical and Interreligious Affairs of the FABC participated. The purpose of this meeting was to deepen "the understanding of the nature and exigencies of dialogue in the context of the Church in Asia today."¹¹⁶ Of interest to us is the clarification of basic concepts, particularly the explanation given to the term liberation.¹¹⁷

BIRA IV/2 was held in Pattaya, Thailand from November 17-22, 1985, on the theme: 'The Church at the Service of God's Reign.' When discussing the 'Kingdom', once again, the situation in Asia made the bishops refocus their attention on the need to build human communities through concerted action and

¹¹⁵ Report on the Assembly of the First Bishops' Institute for Interreligious Affairs on the Theology of Dialogue of the FABC, Sampran, Thailand, 23-30 October 1984, "Brief Report on the Assembly," (BIRA IV/1), in Arevalo, ed., For All the Peoples of Asia, 2:420.

¹¹⁶ Ibid., 2, pp. 415-20.

¹¹⁷ This could easily be understood when we know that it was only a few months before this meeting, the Sacred Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith issued the document "Instruction on Certain Aspects of the 'Theology of Liberation,'" in AAS, 76(1984), pp. 876-909.

witnessing, to be the voice of the voiceless and on the need to "dialogue with all of creation, with all peoples."¹¹⁸

BIRA IV/3 was held in Hong Kong, from 2-7 November 1986, on the theme: 'Discerning the Spirit at work in and beyond the Church in Asia.' Bishops from nine member conferences were present together with the resource persons. Evaluating the Asian reality, they said that it is important to recognize the presence and "the working of the Spirit beyond the boundaries of the Church,"¹¹⁹ which should in turn leaven and "permeate all of the presently emerging Asian theologies."¹²⁰ Therefore, the bishops saw that it was important "to empty ourselves of all prejudices and unrealistic expectations," and learn to appreciate the treasures in Asian religions and cultures.¹²¹

¹¹⁸ Final Statement of the Second Bishops' Institute for Interreligious Affairs on the Theology of Dialogue of the FABC, Pattaya, Thailand, 17-22 November 1985, "Final Statement," (BIRA IV/2), II.5, in Arevalo, ed., For All the Peoples of Asia, 2:421-27.

¹¹⁹ Statement of the Third Bishops' Institute for Interreligious Affairs on the Theology of Dialogue of the FABC, Hong Kong, 2-7 November 1986, "Statement of the Assembly," (BIRA IV/3), 16, in Arevalo, ed., For All the Peoples of Asia, 2:435.

¹²⁰ Ibid., 7, p. 432.

¹²¹ Ibid., 8, p. 433.

1.3.4 The Office of Education and Students' Chaplains

This Office was responsible for organizing three seminars or courses for student chaplains. The first formation course for the university chaplains was held at Imus, Philippines, from 6-26, November 1978, in which ten bishops and seventy others participated. They started with an analysis of society and then proceeded to study the social teachings of the Church.

A formation course was held in Tansui, Taiwan from 10-24 June 1979. The twenty-eight participants - including bishops, priests, sisters and lay chaplains discussed, among other things, the problems in the educational systems in the Far East. The third seminar was held in Tagaytay, Philippines, from 23-30 November 1979, to discuss cooperation and dialogue between Christian and Muslim youth.¹²²

1.3.5 The FABC Committee for the Laity

This Committee for the Laity was established only during the third Plenary Assembly of the FABC in 1982. During this short span of life this committee was able to organize three Bishops' Institute for the Lay Apostolate (BILA) one for each region of the Federation. For the first time the laity were invited as full participants at these meetings. These BILA

¹²² R. Hardawiryana, in Mary Mote and Joseph Lang, eds., Mission in Dialogue, pp. 48-49.

meetings also offered the opportunity to prepare for the fourth Plenary Assembly of the FABC and for the World Synod of Bishops.

1.3.5.1 BILA I

The first Bishops' Institute for the Lay Apostolate was held for the East Asia region from 31 October to 9 November. Sixteen bishops, seven priests, three sisters and sixteen lay persons took part. The participants voiced their concern about the clergy-laity division in the church and recommended that the clergy be updated and educated in the need to work together with the laity. They also insisted that both laity and the clergy understand their mission to the world and society.¹²³

1.3.5.2 BILA II

At this Institute, held in Bangalore, India, from 25-31 May 1986, thirteen bishops, twenty one priests, twenty four lay persons, two religious brothers and two religious sisters, from the South Asian region of FABC, were present. The members wanted the church to be essentially a communion of love, especially between the clergy and the laity. The key word was co-responsibility. They said that the essential aspect of their apostolate is that it should be specifically directed to justice

¹²³ Statement of the First Bishops' Institute for the Lay Apostolate of the FABC, Changhua, Taiwan, 31 October-9 November 1984, "Statement of the Assembly," (BILA I), in Arevalo, ed., For All the Peoples of Asia, 2:397-400.

and developmental priorities of the region. In their letter to the bishops of South Asia, the participants called upon the bishops to discern the charisms and gifts of different people. The tasks in the church should be allotted not according to traditional roles but according to charisms and competency.¹²⁴

1.3.5.3 BILA III

BILA III was held in Singapore from 23-28 June 1986, for the South Asian region. The participants spoke of the vocation and the mission of the laity especially in witnessing to the values of the Gospel. They said that a major thrust of the lay apostolate, in a region where there is so much violence, is to instill in the hearts of people, the centrality and the dignity of the human person, through cultural and interreligious dialogue. The mission of Christ demands that they take a preferential option for the poor, by working with them and for them in order to reduce their poverty.¹²⁵

¹²⁴ Letter of the Participants of the Second Bishops' Institute for the Lay Apostolate of the FABC, Bangalore, India, 25-31 May 1986, "A Letter from the Participants to the Bishops of South Asia," (BILA II), in Arevalo, ed., For All the Peoples of Asia, 2:401-06.

¹²⁵ Statement of the Third Bishops' Institute for the Lay Apostolate of the FABC, Singapore, 23-28 June 1986, "Statement of the Assembly," (BILA III), in Arevalo, ed., For All the Peoples of Asia, 2:407-12.

1.3.5.4 Asian Colloquium on Ministries in the Church

Altogether 114 participants from Asia, including some experts and observers from non-Asian countries, were present at the Asian Colloquium on Ministries (ACM), sponsored by the Central Committee of the FABC. It was held in Hong Kong, for all the three regions of the FABC, from 27 February to 6 March 1977. Having analyzed the present situation in Asia and the challenges thrown at the church by the Asia of tomorrow, they came to the following conclusions;

- that if the right of common heritage is denied there may be a conflict to regain it;
- that the churches in Asia, by reading the signs of the times, should discover their own identity and self-understanding, promoting a participative leadership that fits the local context;
- that there should be new and varied ministries, including the ministries of lay women, to spread the Good News;
- that importance be given by Christians to the solution of social questions and be ready to be martyrs for the cause of justice;
- that the church of Asia should dialogue with other religions and begin a new era of theological reflections;
- that the church may be a model of humble service and be incarnated in the particular Asian situation following the model of Divine incarnation;

- that the local church be more sensitive to the needs of its people, especially in social, political, cultural and economic fields and act accordingly.¹²⁶

1.4 THE FABC'S UNDERSTANDING OF ITS TEACHING AUTHORITY

The bishops of the FABC accept the traditional position that they do not have any official teaching authority over the other different local churches that constitute the FABC, or over any individual bishop. This is the reason why the very first resolution of the first Asian Bishops' Meeting in Manila, 1970, requested the Episcopal Conferences present at that assembly, "to authorize and support a permanent structure for the effective implementation of the decisions of the meeting."¹²⁷

At the same meeting, the bishops stated without any hesitation that the purpose of their meeting was to discover new ways through which they might be of greater and more effective service to the people of Asia. This mandate to work together with the other bishops, in the spirit of collegiality and dialogue, they said, was given by Vatican II.¹²⁸ The bishops

¹²⁶ ACMC, in FAPA, 1:111-51.

¹²⁷ ABM/Res., 1, in FAPA, 1:19.

¹²⁸ ABM, 2, in FAPA, p. 11.

of the FABC did not attempt to construct a full theology of the proclamation of the Gospel, their only interest was to preach the Gospel in modern day Asia.¹²⁹ The bishops at the ABM accepted their failure to incarnate the Christian life and en flesh the church in ways respective of the various cultures.¹³⁰

Therefore, they said that in order to proclaim the Gospel, which is their mission, at this time and history, the church has to be a truly local church, a church incarnate, indigenous and incultured. The local church, they speak of, is not an independent, autonomous and isolated church but a local church of a particular area or territory which is a communion of several local churches - the Episcopal Conference and the Federation of Episcopal conferences.¹³¹ This shows not only that the bishops of the FABC were aware of the importance of the local church of Asia, but also the parameters of the powers of the FABC. This communion of churches, in loving dialogue with the living religions, cultures and traditions, by which it seeks to share in whatever truly belongs to its people, is the local church of Asia.

¹²⁹ FABC I, 3, in FAPA, p. 27.

¹³⁰ ABM, 17, in FAPA, 1:14.

¹³¹ See FABC I, 9-12, in FAPA, 1:29; also FABC III, 7.1&8 in FAPA, 1:93&94.

It is also very important to note that all the Episcopal Conferences of Asia, with the exception of certain conferences which could not attend because of the political situation in their countries, were represented in all four Plenary Assemblies. Their representatives were also present at the various Bishops' Institutes organized by the different Offices of the FABC. This demonstrates the importance given to the FABC and its Offices, by the participating Conferences and the individual bishops themselves.

One should also notice the non-authoritarian tone of the different statements and the resolutions of the FABC Assemblies and those of the Offices. The use of words such as, "collegial concern as Asian bishops,"¹³² "we recommend,"¹³³ "support and encourage," "promote and support," "offer these reflections... to our brother-bishops,"¹³⁴ "we earnestly request the member Conferences,"¹³⁵ "we urge our local churches in Asia,"¹³⁶ are clear indications of this non-authoritarian tone.

¹³² FABC I, 34, in FAPA, 1:34.

¹³³ FABC I/Rec., in FAPA, 1:39; FABC II/Rec., 1:67.

¹³⁴ FABC II, 6, in FAPA, 1:53.

¹³⁵ FABC III/Res., 1, in FAPA, 1:103.

¹³⁶ FABC IV, 4.7.0, in FAPA, 2:335.

Paragraph five of the Conclusions of the Asian Colloquium on Ministries clearly delineates the parameters of the teaching authority of the FABC:

These conclusions, addressed as they are to the member Conferences of the FABC, are offered as mere suggestions. Hence, they have no binding force, nor are they meant to be imposed on any member church....these conclusions are not meant to be understood as implying any measure of compulsion; they are recommendations made.¹³⁷

The doctrinal authority of the FABC in the strict sense of the term is the problem of the theologians and needs to be settled. Yet the FABC participants were aware of the pastoral implications of these documents.

These are the documents of the church of Asia, because they are the products of the bishops and theologians of Asia. Though the theologians were commissioned by the bishops to draft the documents, the contents of the documents were first discussed in the sub-groups, before they were presented at the plenary sessions of bishops for their comments and approval. These documents are not theological treatises but are essentially pastoral in character, born out of the conviction that the liberating message of Christ and of God is valid for all the people of Asia. Neither do they pretend to present a new theology, but what they propose to present is a new method of

¹³⁷ ACMC, 5, in FAPA, 1:112.

doing theology in Asia, taking into consideration the multi-cultural and multi-religious ethos of its people.

These documents are addressed not only to the Christians of Asia but to 'all the peoples of Asia.' The bishops want the 'church in Asia' to be the 'church of Asia.' This means that they want the church to be an incarnate church, and not a church alienated from its people, culture, religion, philosophy and life experiences. This, the bishops suggest, can be accomplished effectively only through a body like the FABC.

1.5 CONCLUSION

Through the FABC, the bishops of Asia have made an attempt to make the church in Asia to be the church of Asia. We have also seen how the bishops, through the Plenary Assemblies and the variety of Bishops' Institutes have made a genuine attempt to read the signs of the times and have proposed ways and means to incarnate the church in Asia.

In this general survey of the texts and documents of the FABC and its Offices, there are certain recurrent dominant themes. The first and one of the most important of these, is the recurring theme of dialogue with the poor. The bishops without any reservation affirm that action on behalf of justice

and participation in the transformation of the world fully is a constitutive dimension of the preaching of the Gospel. The church must have a preferential option for the poor and be a poor church.

Secondly, this transformation of the Asian reality, can be effected not in isolation but through the communion of local churches and in loving dialogue with the other living religions of Asia. This really means that the other religions have a vital role in the economy of salvation and so they also have the liberative potential. Thirdly the church of Asia must be an incarnated and inculturated church. Therefore, it should assume all that is good and ennobling in the cultures, philosophies and traditions of the people of Asia thus making them its own and become the local church of Asia.

In order to comprehend fully the stance taken by the bishops at the FABCs, to work for the total liberation of all people, through human development and dialogue, it is essential to see how the bishops perceive the Asian reality. Hence, the following chapter will be dedicated to the study of some of the writings of Asian theologians and social scientists. This study is important for us because the Asian reality is a complex one and no one person or any particular group of persons can exhaust this reality. This will also help us later on to determine

whether the bishops' understanding of the Asian reality coincides with this analysis and how the bishops propose to respond to the challenges that emanate from this complex reality.

CHAPTER TWO

READING THE SIGNS OF THE TIMES IN ASIA - THE REALITY OF ASIA

2.1 INTRODUCTION

The self-understanding of the church of Asia and its mission, according to the bishops of Asia, revolves around the pivotal point of dialogue - dialogue with Asian religions, dialogue with Asian cultures and dialogue with the multitude of the poor of Asia. Since the Church possessed the 'Truth' and had the teaching authority and the 'Magisterium', the faithful accepted the teachings of the Church in faith. There was no apparent need for the Church to listen. Thanks to Vatican II the word dialogue was introduced into the vocabulary of the Church.

In order to formulate "a genuinely contextual theology," says Robert Schreiter, "the theological process should begin with the opening of culture, that long and careful listening to a culture to discover its principle values, needs, interests, directions, and symbols."¹ This process of listening and

¹ R. Schreiter, Constructing Local Theologies, p. 28.

learning from the 'other' is described as dialogue. It is a genuine attempt to listen to the 'other.' It is not merely being sensitive to the feelings and the needs of the 'other,' but it is to understand the 'other' and to listen to the viewpoint of the 'other.'

In order to proclaim meaningfully the Good News to the people of Asia, it is essential to meet the people in their concrete experiences and life situations.² It is a process of listening and learning from the other, sharing one's convictions without any superiority complex and a willingness to change. Thus, dialogue becomes evangelization where one discerns the presence of God in a particular situation rather than bringing God into the situation through monologue.³

In the past the church in Asia gave solutions to non-existent problems or to the problems that existed in some other countries and answers to questions posed by another era. In order to formulate a local theology of Asia the church must listen to the working of God in Asia and discern God's presence in the religions, cultures and the suffering poor of Asia. As

² R. Hardowirajono, "Evangelization-Dialogue," in Evangelization in Asia Today, Part two, (A compilation of selected papers for use in study and discussion groups in preparation for the 1974 Synod), pp. 53-54.

³ See R. Schreiter, Constructing Local Theologies, p. 39.

Schreiter says, "Only through trying to catch the sense of a culture holistically and with all its complexity will we be in a position to develop a truly responsive local theology."⁴ Hence, theologizing in Asia today means perceiving and responding in faith to the present social, cultural and religious realities, in the context of the peoples' history marred by oppression, exploitation, agitations and struggle for liberation.⁵

The emergence of liberation theology and its impact cannot be fully understood without the background that produced it - colonialism, neo-colonialism of the elite, the ideological divide and the other factors that contributed to the development of underdevelopment in Asia. The study of the history of Asia is important since "history holds a prominent place within liberation theology itself because it sees God as acting 'in' history."⁶ As in the case of the people of Israel, "history is a sacred history, a reflection on the past in which here and now existence takes on meaning,"⁷ so also in the case of Asia. In

⁴ Ibid., p. 28.

⁵ Statement of the Indian Theological Association, "Socio-Cultural Analysis in Theologizing," Vidvajyoti, May 1987, pp. 248-49.

⁶ Arthur F. McGovern, Liberation Theology and its Critics: Toward an Assessment, (Maryknoll, N.Y.; Orbis Books, 1989), p.1.

⁷ E. Dussel, History and the Theology of Liberation, p. 21.

addition we will be able to draw the parallels, if any, to be found between the Latin American context and Asian context.

The Asian reality is multi-faceted. It is shaped not only by its poverty and oppression but also by its living religions and cultures. Enrique Dussel speaks of six great civilizations. It is remarkable that Asia is the cradle of three of these. The first was that of lower Mesopotamia on the Persian Gulf, in the fourth millennium B.C. The second was the Indus Valley civilization around 2500 B.C. The third great culture was the Yellow River civilization around 1500 B.C.⁸ Asia is also the birthplace of all major religions with many languages, nations and ethnic groups forming a mosaic.

Therefore we shall also study the influence of the cultures and the living religions of Asia and the part played by these in the shaping of the reality of Asia. This will in turn enable us to determine whether the Asian reality is identical to that of the other Third World countries or different from that found in others, especially from that of Latin America. If we could prove, through this analysis, that the Asian reality is indeed different, then this difference will be the basis for a distinct

⁸ Ibid., p. 41.

theology of liberation for Asia, that takes into account the difference found in Asia.

2.2 THE ASIAN CONTINENT

The purpose of this thesis is to discover whether there is a theology of liberation in the documents of the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences (FABC). Therefore, the focus of this study is limited to the continent of Asia. Asia is the largest of all continents and is the home of 2.7 billion people, with over a billion in China, nearly 762 million in India, 168.4 million in Indonesia and 120 million in Japan in 1985. It is projected that by the year 2000 Asia will have a population of over 3.4 billion people.⁹

This continent with 56 percent of the world's population is fast becoming the world's centre of gravity, if sheer numbers of people are counted as important.¹⁰ "This remarkable size of population" says Balasuriya, "can also be a basis of the power

⁹ Asia 1986 Yearbook (Far Eastern Economic Review), p. 33.

¹⁰ Omer Degrijse, Going Forth: Missionary Consciousness in Third World Catholic Church, (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1984), p. 34; See also Parig Digan, Churches in Contestation, p. 17.

of the people."¹¹ Asia is also a continent of the poor, where 85 to 90 percent of the world's poor live.¹²

West Asia or the Middle East is the home of the Arabs and Islam. It is also the birthplace of Christianity and Judaism. Though it is a part of Asia, West Asia has become an independent entity in itself for all practical purposes, between East and West. A portion of former USSR forms the Northern Asian region and thus it is separated from the Asian sphere of influence. China, Japan, Korea, Vietnam and Taiwan form the East Asian region. These countries that are under the influence of Chinese culture, possess their own diverse linguistic heritage and political systems that account for their diversity.¹³

The Himalayan mountain range separates South Asia from the North. The former includes countries with diverse cultures and customs such as India, Pakistan, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka. The remaining area between South Asia and East Asia form the South East Asian region. In it are included countries like Indonesia, Laos, Cambodia, Malaysia, Philippines, Burma, Singapore and

¹¹ Tissa Balasuriya, "Recent Trends in Asia" Logos, 24 (September 1985): 55.

¹² Tissa Balasuriya, Planetary Theology, (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1984), p. 55.

¹³ P. Digan, Churches in Contestation, p. 18.

Thailand. Since, FABC is composed of bishops from the last three regions of Asia, our study of Asia, therefore, will be limited to these regions only.

Though there are several centrifugal tendencies and diversities, these countries that comprise the FABC, also share in very many common problems, challenges, and almost identical socio-economic realities and political systems. Their religious affiliations and cultural links, though strained at several times in history, go back thousands of years. It can be safely said that this part of Asia forms a unity because, without any exception all the countries of this region have been and are still influenced by the great cultural and religious giants, India and China.

2.3 A SHORT HISTORY OF ASIA

For centuries before colonization, Asia and Latin America had a self-sufficient agrarian economy with which they were able to feed their masses. However, we do not claim that these economies were able to provide luxuries to the people concerned but they were able to provide at least those basic social and economic needs to their people. Ever since the end of this long period of human history, during which food was gathered or produced only for subsistence, productive activity has led to

the creation of a surplus.¹⁴ This surplus during the long period of feudalism in Asia, has at times seemed to have been quite substantial, leading to the construction of gigantic irrigation schemes, buildings for palaces and temples.¹⁵ Some Asian countries had well organized artisan industries, whereby they were able to export manufactured goods to their neighbouring countries.¹⁶

For thousands of years the continents of Asia, Africa and Latin America were autonomous and self-governing, having their own form of government and kingdoms or social organizations based on tribes and clans. Their boundaries were in a continuous state of flux, depending on the power or the lack of power of their rulers and their armies. Their destiny and history underwent a convulsion with the invasion and colonization by the Spanish, Portuguese, the Dutch, the British

¹⁴ The term 'surplus' is not used in the Marxian sense of the term but to mean excess of requirement.

¹⁵ Paul Casperz, "Plantations: Past, Contemporary and Future Patterns," in Saturday Review, 6 June 1987, p. 4; Ron Rote, A Taste of Bitterness: The Political Economy of Tea Plantations in Sri Lanka, (Amsterdam: Free University Press, 1986), p. 19.

¹⁶ Samuel Rayan, "Reconceiving Theology in the Asian Context," in Virginia Fabella and Sergio Torres, eds., Doing Theology in a Divided World: Papers from the Sixth International Conference of the Ecumenical Association of Third World Theologians, January 5-13, 1983, Geneva, Switzerland, (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1985), p. 127.

and later on by the Americans.¹⁷ This was also the beginning of oppression and exploitation of the people of these newly conquered territories. Therefore the structure and conditions of Asia cannot be understood without the changes that took place during the colonial period.

It cannot be denied that there is a certain correlation between the territorial expansion, the exploitation of the colonies and the development of the West. The latter built their economies and affluent way of life on oppression and exploitation of the conquered territories.¹⁸ The dominant form of exploitation in Asia was done through the plantations. The economies of these countries were changed from one based on traditional subsistence agriculture to a predominantly plantation economy. The colonial governments did little or nothing to encourage industrialization. They favoured plantations and some extractive industries, which produced raw materials for export.¹⁹ This export oriented, cash crop economy

¹⁷ For a chronological account of the country by country conquest by the above mentioned powers see Pro Mundi Vita: Dossiers, 2-3 (1984), pp. 4-67; and also Far Eastern Economic Review: Asia 1986 Yearbook (Hong Kong, 1986)

¹⁸ T. Balasuriya, Planetary theology, pp. 17-21.

¹⁹ Gunnar Myrdal, Asian Drama :An Inquiry into the Poverty of Nations, 3 Vols. (New York/Toronto: Pantheon, 1968,, 1: 457.

destroyed the agricultural basis in such a way that food grains, especially rice had to be imported for local consumption.²⁰

Thus not only the wealth was transferred from the colonies to the centres of power but domestic income capacity was dampened by the import of consumer goods and food items at very high or inflated prices.²¹ Further the import of cheap European goods destroyed local handicraft and other traditional industries, such as the textile industry in India. Everything in the colonies, including the economic growth, was subordinated to the needs of the metropolitan countries.²²

The new masters imposed their own rule, and dominating structures under an unified administration, without taking into consideration the multi-cultural nature of these territories.²³ We shall see later on, the destructive impact of colonialism on the religio-cultural front. The alienation of lands for

²⁰ See Jurgen Von Muralt and Jean-Paul Sajhau, "Plantations and Basic Needs: The Changing International and National Setting," in IDS Bulletin, 18(1987), pp. 9-14.

²¹ Myrdal, Asian Drama, 1: 9-10.

²² Ibid., pp. 581-82.

²³ Asian Report Group, "Toward a Relevant Theology in Asia," in Virginia Fabella and Sergio Torres, eds., Irruption of the Third World Challenge to Theology: Papers from the Fifth International Conference of the Association of Third World Theologians, August 17-29, 1981, New delhi, India, (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1983), p. 62.

plantations displaced multitudes of people and disrupted the way of life not only of those who lived in that particular area or the country but also that of those in the neighbouring areas or countries as well.

The classic Asian example is the forced migration of the Chinese and the Indians to other parts of Asia.²⁴ The Indians became the reservoir of cheap labour for export to British possessions around the globe, to places like the West Indies, Mauritius, Malaysia, Burma and Ceylon (Sri Lanka).²⁵ The root cause of at least some of the socio-political problems faced by Asia, can be attributed to the mass migration of people. This colonial past was the beginning of the present day problems both in Latin America and in Asia.

2.4 THE POST-COLONIAL PERIOD

In Asia, the end of World war II saw the emergence of the nation-states. These countries had to fight for their independence through protracted struggle and bloody wars. India could be cited as the only country that gained its independence

²⁴ Myrdal, Asian Drama, 1: 464-66.

²⁵ V.K. Jayawardana, The Rise of the Labour Movement in Ceylon, (Durham, North Carolina: Duke University Press, 1972), pp. 8-16; see also T. Balasuriya, Planetary Theology, p. 19.

through non-violence means because of the enlightened leadership of Mahatma Gandhi.²⁶ In almost all the countries power was transferred to the western educated land-owning elite of the so called upper class. The prime concern of the first generation leaders was the interest of their country, where the meagre resources and the fruits of independence were to be shared by all the people. However, the subsequent leadership or even the attitude of some of the first generation leadership belied the hope of a democratic socialism.²⁷

The Asian political scene defies any single categorization, yet one can discern the emergence of two opposed approaches or ideologies, as in the rest of the world: one socialist and the other capitalist. However, though all the Asian countries may not neatly fit into these two categories, at least it demonstrates the polarization in Asian politics and economics. China, Vietnam, Cambodia, North Korea and Laos chose the path of socialism. While Japan, Hong Kong, Taiwan, Singapore and South Korea followed a capitalistic philosophy of development. In the political spectrum, between these two ideological extremes, depending upon their affiliation, could we locate the other countries of Asia, that have chosen a middle path.

²⁶ Myrdal, Asian Drama, 1:152.

²⁷ Tissa Balasuriya, "Recent Trends in Asia," in Logos 24 (September 1985), p. 61.

2.4.1 The Socialist Bloc

The countries of Indo-China, because of the intransigent attitude of the French and the Dutch, who refused to hand over power peacefully,²⁸ had to resort to violence and were thus driven into the orbit of the socialist bloc. The emerging leadership of these countries was also infatuated with the rise and the apparent success of communism in China. Under the leadership of Mao Tse-tung, China woke up from its long slumber and began its 'Long March' towards economic development in 1949. Though not much data has filtered through the bamboo curtain, it appears that China has to some extent been able to provide for its citizens at least the basic necessities and self-respect.

It represents the greatest transformation for the betterment of the largest number of human beings in the shortest period of time. It is extraordinary in the sheer magnitude of its undertaking, in the depth of its impact, in facing immense odds-including isolation by the rest of the world-in an enormous effort of self-reliance, innovation, and creativity.²⁹

From its seclusion, China was able to develop its agriculture, industries and social infrastructures, geared primarily to the needs of the people. By utilizing the surplus land and labour, it managed to eliminate not only unemployment but also the everyday occurrences of famine, starvation,

²⁸ Myrdal, Asian Drama, 1: 169-173.

²⁹ T. Balasuriya, Planetary Theology, p. 142.

disaster and disease.³⁰ This greatly increased the life expectancy of the people to 65 years in 1985.³¹ The Chinese socialist model, because of its economic success at home, its march towards self-reliance, and its ability to provide food, clothing and shelter to a billion people, became the model for the other socialist countries of the East.³²

The other socialist countries of the East, adopted their own brand of socialism. The protracted war in Indo-China, the expansionist forays into the neighbouring territories, as in the case of Vietnam and the continuous civil war between the different factions as in Cambodia, totally destroyed not only the economy but also the prospect of a better future. These countries are under totalitarian governments, with central control and planning. They claim to be egalitarian societies. They were able to provide a certain amount of equitable distribution of goods and prevent the accumulation of wealth by

³⁰ Reeistu Kojima, "China - The Achievements of Thirty Years of Economic Development and Today's Turmoil," in Yoshiyuki, Hagiwara, ed., Asia in the 1980's: Peace and Development, (Tokyo: Institute of Developing Economies, 1982), p. 38.

³¹ Far Eastern Economic review: Asia 1986 Yearbook, p. 33.

³² Balasuriya, Planetary Theology, pp. 60-62.

a few. The price the people pay is their freedom and the loss of civil liberties.³³

The socialist bloc is home for about half the population of Asia, and 25 percent of world's population, numbering 1,132.5 million people in 1985.³⁴ Though the externals and their rhetoric may hide the reality, there is evidence of severe poverty and malnutrition in Vietnam and Cambodia.³⁵ There is no end to the exodus of people from these countries, swelling the refugee populations in neighbouring countries. There is also a power struggle within these countries that tends to break them apart. The problem these countries face is so great that they, including China, are gradually opening their doors to foreign investment, collaboration and especially to Western technology and expertise.³⁶

³³ Felix Wilfred, "Sunset in the East? The Asian Realities Challenging the Church and Its Laity Today," A Position Paper for the Fourth Plenary Assembly, 1986, in FABC Papers No. 45, pp. 14-17.

³⁴ Far Eastern Economic Review: Asia 1986 Yearbook, p. 33.

³⁵ See Pierre-Richard Feray, "Indochina in Southeast Asia," in Hagiwara, Asia in the 1980's, pp. 63-89.

³⁶ Robert F. Dernberger, "The State-Planned, Centralized System: China, North Korea, Vietnam," in Robert A. Scalpino, Seizaburo Sato and Jusuf Wanandi, eds., Asian Economic Development - Present and Future, (California: Institute of East Asian studies, University of California, 1985), pp. 39-42.

2.4.2 The Capitalist Camp

Japan is a great success story of capitalism in Asia, where 90-95 percent of the people consider themselves as middle class. Though it tasted defeat for the first time in World War II, it has attained a level of development that is equal to the West. It has also become, together with the other Western countries, the exploiter of its underdeveloped neighbours. South Korea, Taiwan, Hong Kong and Singapore have followed the economic model of Japan. They are export oriented and heavily dependent on the developed world both for their market and for capital.

Within a short period of time, these countries have achieved a higher standard of living and per capita income, than the other countries of Asia.³⁷ However, in real terms this does not mean that all the citizens enjoy equal income. There is a widening gap between the rich and the poor, between the urban and the rural areas. There is also a massive exodus of the poor from the villages to the cities.³⁸ It is the mercantile, military and political elite who are at the top of the economic ladder while the majority of the people are poor. The working class in these countries are very much exploited and in some

³⁷ Tissa Balasuriya, "Recent Trends in Asia," Pp. 58-60.

³⁸ Cyris H.S.Moon, A Korean Minjung Theology: An Old Testament Perspective, (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, Plough Publications, 1985), p. 38.

cases trade unions are banned or their voices muffled. All these countries except Japan, are under dictatorial regimes³⁹ or have one party rule. They have become the Asian homes for the multi-national corporations.

2.4.3 The Third Way

All the other countries of South and South East Asia are caught up between these two ideologies. Some of these have experimented with socialism while others have tended to support capitalism. The latter after an initial hesitation with a little incentive from the multi-nationals, relaxed restriction on foreign investment and introduced favourable legislations to attract foreign capital; the purpose of which is the supposed development of their respective economies, by providing employment, and the expectation of greater productivity with the transfer of technical know-how.⁴⁰

The economic inequalities in Asia increased owing to the high degree of centralization of political power in the hands of a very few upper class people, the elite. Most of the elite and the leadership in Asia, especially in free enterprise countries, are from the traditional feudal parentage and are Western

³⁹ Balasuriya, "Capitalism, Socialism and Democracy," in Logos, 24 September 1985, p. 80.

⁴⁰ Ibid., p. 62.

trained. Their economic and cultural interests are the same as that of their former colonial masters.⁴¹ They control or own almost all the means of production and with their political power, they are able to prevent all forms of progressive measures that could bring meaningful change in the system.⁴²

The elite is so much alienated from the masses that it will not be possible for them to bring about any "fundamental break in the socioeconomic system." The elite are "the greatest obstacles in the realization of social justice in Asian countries."⁴³ In a similar vein J.P. Singh concludes: "The contemporary ruling elite in every country of South Asia, irrespective of their political labels, is incapable of effecting a social revolution because of their aristocratic social base."⁴⁴

⁴¹ Samuel Rayan, 'Reconceiving Theology in the Asian Context,' p. 130.

⁴² Samuel Rayan, "Theological Priorities in India Today," in Virginia Fabella and Sergio Torres, eds., Irruption of the Third World, (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1983), p. 31.

⁴³ Balasuriya, Planetary Theology, pp. 70-72.

⁴⁴ L.P. Singh, "Political Factors in Economic Development," in Angus Maddison, ed., 'Myrdal's Asian Drama': An Interdisciplinary Critique, (Liege, Belgium: CIRIEC, 1971), p. 39.

There is wide spread corruption not only in the economic field but also in politics. Politicians and political parties, as in the case of South Korea, are in partnership with the business elite and criminal elements.⁴⁵ Most of the national income of these nations goes into the pockets of military and civilian officials. Balasuriya also speaks of collaboration between the political, military, bureaucratic and the business elite and how they are influenced by one another. They are, in short, no different from the elites in Africa and Latin America.⁴⁶ Today, the Asians are oppressed by their own rulers.⁴⁷

With a few exceptions, the plantations and other industries in the new democracies continued to remain in the hands of the foreigners or multi-nationals who continued to drain the profits from them. Even after the nationalization of the plantations and the industries, nothing changed in the lives of the workers, but only in the ownership. Even this state control has not

⁴⁵ Cyris H.S.Moon, A Korean Minjung Theology, p. 38.

⁴⁶ Balasuriya, Planetary Theology, pp. 70-73.

⁴⁷ Moon Hee-suk Cyris, "An Old Testament Understanding of Minjung," in The Commission on the Theological Concerns of the Christian Conference of Asia (CTC-CCA), ed., Minjung Theology: Peoples as the Subjects of History, Preface by James H. Cone, (London: Zed Press; Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1983), p. 124.

promoted any social justice in the plantations but has only reinforced the power and privileges of the rich.

2.5 THE DEVELOPMENT OF UNDERDEVELOPMENT

One of the major causes of the underdevelopment in Asia, Latin America, and Africa, the so called Third World, is the exploitative capitalist world-system which "is synonymous with dependency on the centre."⁴⁸ According to the dependency model:

underdevelopment is a process of peripheralizing Third World economies (and societies) incorporated within the world capitalist division of labour. The logic of capitalist accumulation leads to the development of underdevelopment in the Third World.⁴⁹

Wallerstein says that this is because the essential feature of a capitalist world-economy is:

production for sale in a market in which the object is to realize the maximum profit. In such a system production is constantly expanded as long as further production is profitable, and men constantly innovate new ways of producing things that will expand the profit margin.⁵⁰

⁴⁸ Ron Rote, A Taste of Bitterness, p. 11.

⁴⁹ Francisco O. Ramirez and George M. Thomas, "Structural Antecedents and Consequences of Statism," in Richard Rubinson, ed., Dynamics of World Development, Vol. 4 (London; Beverly Hills, California: Sage Publications, 1981), p. 142. Immanuel Wallerstein, ser. ed., Political Economy of the World-system Annals, 4 Vols.

⁵⁰ Immanuel Wallerstein, The Capitalist World-economy, (London New York New Rochelle Melbourne Sydney: Cambridge University press, 1979), p. 15.

Gutierrez, analyzing the situation in Latin America says that underdevelopment is "primarily due to economic, political, and cultural dependence on power centres that lie outside Latin America."⁵¹ Gutierrez defended the use of the theory of dependency and says that this theory has:

helped a great deal in understanding our situation... in understanding the social reality of the poor and the causes of the intolerably unjust situation in which they live... it is also necessary to try to understand the reasons for this poverty, its causes.⁵²

The countries of the Northern hemisphere, the centre, became rich and advanced because they were in a position to exploit and plunder certain nations in the periphery, causing underdevelopment, impoverishment and marginalization argue Leonardo Boff⁵³, Miguez Bonino⁵⁴ and Hugo Assman.⁵⁵ According

⁵¹ Gustavo Gutierrez, The Power of the Poor in History: Selected Writings, Robert R. Barr, trans., (London, SCM Press Ltd., 1983), p. 28.

⁵² Gutierrez, The Truth Shall Make You Free: Confrontations, (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1990), p. 29.

⁵³ Leonardo Boff, liberating Grace, (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1979), p. 29; Leonardo Boff and Clodovis Boff, Introducing Liberation Theology, trans., Paul Burns, (Great Britain, Burns & Oates: 1987, reprinted 1989), p. 68

⁵⁴ Jose Miguez Bonino, Doing Theology in a Revolutionary Situation, (Philadelphia : Fortress Press, 1975), p. 27.

⁵⁵ Hugo Assmann, Theology for a Nomad Church, (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1976), p. 37.

to Gutierrez the underdevelopment of poor countries is "the historical by-product of the development of other countries."⁵⁶

The developing countries do not have any control even over their exports causing a recurrent balance of payment crisis which in turn impedes importation of essential and developmental products.⁵⁷ The West has a tendency to discriminate against manufactured products from Asia. The world markets for traditional exports from Asia have deteriorated because of the low elasticity of demand for raw materials and the use of synthetic substitutes. Furthermore, these new countries had no other choice but "to sell raw materials to and buy manufactured goods from industrialized nations-both on the latter's term."⁵⁸

The underdevelopment in Asia is not a static condition but has developed historically. Its economy has been severely disrupted and distorted so as to serve the need of the

⁵⁶ Gustavo Gutierrez, A Theology of Liberation, p. 84.

⁵⁷ Ajit Roy, in Virginia Fabella and Sergio Torres Irruption of the Third World, pp. 94-95; Myrdal, Asian Drama, 1: 586-591.

⁵⁸ Gustavo Gutierrez, "Liberation Theology and Progressivist Theology," in Sergio Torres and Virginia Fabella, eds., The Emergent Gospel: Theology from the Developing World: Papers from the Ecumenical Dialogue of Third World Theologians, Dar es Salam, August 5-12, 1976, (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1978), p. 236.

metropolitan economy.⁵⁹ The drain of wealth to the metropolitan cities or countries, is one of the important causes of poverty. Today it is continued and widened by the pressure and stress placed upon by the wider international economic investment of the multi-national corporations (MNCs).

The dependence is not only economical but also psychological. Its effects can be seen in "the attitudes, thought forms, and lifestyles of our people."⁶⁰ This underdevelopment has been forced on the people of Asia and Latin America by the developed nations with the connivance of the ruling elite. The local leaders were more inclined to please the foreign capitalists than their own people because their interests coincide with that of the multinationals.

2.5.1 The Militarization of Asia

Almost all the countries of Asia with the exception of a few, have authoritarian, dictatorial or military governments, where "power is being concentrated in one individual or in one

⁵⁹ Martin D. Lewis, "An Historian's Reflections on Myrdal's Asian Drama in Angus Maddison, ed., 'Myrdal's Asian Drama,' p. 25.

⁶⁰ Asian Report Group, "Towards a Relevant Theology in Asia," in Virginia Fabella and Sergio Torres, eds., 'Irruption of the Third World,' p. 62.

party to the suppression of others."⁶¹ Some of the ruling corrupt elite says Ajit Roy have:

been installed in power by the affluent West, which is also sustaining them with massive financial and military aid, including the protective umbrella of the upcoming Rapid Deployment Force.⁶²

The presence of United States military in South Korea and Diego Garcia, its former presence in the Philippines, the military and defence pact with several Asian countries are the clear manifestations of American support to these authoritarian regimes. The presence of communist forces in the communist East Asian countries are also supposed to serve the same purpose.

Some Asian countries, while paying lip service to democracy, have deprived the people of their right to change government by extending their mandate under the pretext of national security. They cling to power through emergency regulations, referendums or by rigging elections on a massive scale. When they are challenged by popular movements, such movements are branded as "subversive," "communist," "anti-government," "separatist," "insurgent," and "terrorist." Under

⁶¹ Felix Wilfred, in FABC Papers No. 45, p. 2.

⁶² Ajit Roy, "The Socio-economic and Political Context," in Virginia Fabella and Sergio Torres, ed., Irruption of the Third World, (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1983), p. 104; See also Samuel Rayan, "Reconceiving Theology in the Asian Context," in Virginia Fabella and Sergio Torres, ed., Doing Theology in A Divided world, (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1985), p. 130.

the name of law and order the might of the military is used to destroy these popular movements,⁶³ thus provoking a backlash.

We hear stories of extra-judicial killings, disappearances, detention without trial, brutal tortures of unimaginable magnitude and complexity, in the Philippines, South Korea, Sri Lanka, Burma, Bangladesh, Pakistan and even in a country like India. In order to cover up their blatant violation of human rights these governments are known to have enlisted the assistance of anti-social elements such as death squads, paramilitary organizations, thugs and hooligans. According to Amnesty International the Sri Lankan security forces and death squads seem to have killed 30,000 'Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna,' or People's Liberation Front⁶⁴ members, supporters and their family members in 1988 and 1989 alone.⁶⁵

There are several factors that have contributed to the emergence of authoritarian, dictatorial, national security and

⁶³ Balasuriya, "Recent Trends in Asia," pp. 67-69; Robert McAfee Brown, Gustavo Gutierrez: An Introduction to Liberation Theology, (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1990), p. 4.

⁶⁴ This organization began as the voice of the oppressed peasants of the majority Sinhala community has been, according to Sri Lankan Government, completely wiped out with the killing of its leaders in 1989.

⁶⁵ "Sri Lanka: A Climate of Fear," in Amnesty International Bulletin, Canadian Section, October/November 1990, p. 2.

military governments in Asia and Latin America. The national security system was born in the United States as a bulwark against communist infiltration. Some countries in Asia and in Latin America following the lead given by the United States have created their own security states. According to national security ideology, "military government is necessary because the nation is involved in a total war" against communism.⁶⁶

Since Communism was considered to be the enemy of democracy and Christianity, the church in Asia like its counterpart in Latin America, was expected to collaborate with the state to fight the common enemy. While the wealthy and the powerful used all the repressive measures at their disposal in the national security state, the church in Latin America provided "the ruling class with an ideology that opposed any change in social structures."⁶⁷ The church in Asia, after independence, lost its power base since it had always identified itself with the colonial masters. Its minority status and its relative affluence made the church support the status quo.

⁶⁶ Jose Comblin, The Church and the National Security State, (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1979), pp. 64-78.

⁶⁷ Penny Lernoux, "The Long Path to Puebla," in Puebla and Beyond, ed., John Eagleson and Philip Scharper, trans., John Drury, (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1978, second print 1980), p. 10.

The second justification for authoritarianism and militarism in Asia is the strained relations between neighbouring countries and the tension within countries between the different ethnic, regional and religious factions. This situation they argue hinders economic development and demands a strong centralized authority.⁶⁸ The third reason is attributed to the conflict caused by the present international economic order. They say that in order to attract foreign investors and the multi-nationals, the host country has to offer some form of political stability. This will assure the investors a continued supply of cheap and trouble free labour, which in turn will guarantee an uninterrupted siphoning of profits etc. The first casualty in this process is democracy.⁶⁹

In these countries there is no freedom of the press and the mass media is either owned by the government or has been made to be the servant of the government. These countries are using a good part of their hard earned foreign exchange earnings to procure arms and armaments for the military.⁷⁰

⁶⁸ Felix Wilfred, in FABC Papers No. 45, pp. 3-4.

⁶⁹ Ibid.,; Ajit Roy in Virginia Fabella and Sergio Torres eds., in Irruption of the Third World, p. 96.

⁷⁰ See "Defence -Spending Trends," in Asia 1986 Yearbook, pp. 18-19.

2.5.2 The Multinational Corporations (MNCs)

There is a new form of colonialism in the place of the old, the economic colonialism or external neo-colonialism of the multi-national corporations. These MNCs, with their headquarters in England or America have a strangle hold on the economies of the countries of the South because these countries have to depend on the North both for capital and market for their products. Only the MNCs are able to provide the capital, managerial skills, technology, and in most cases, the raw materials to the industries in order to generate employment opportunities in the host countries. This is not because of their altruistic or philanthropic motives towards the Third World but because they are assured of huge profits, owing to the availability of cheap labour, protection against strikes or worker-problems and the necessary infrastructure in the host countries, without incurring any extra expenditure on the part of the MNCs.⁷¹ Sri Lanka, Malaysia, Philippines and Taiwan have established free trade zones (FTZ) with very favourable conditions in order to attract investments from the MNCs.

Under the name of development and industrialization, the poor and the workers are exploited by the MNCs. They are forced to work under appalling conditions with minimum wages. Mostly

⁷¹ Ibid., p. 77; see also Felix Wilfred, in FABC Papers No. 45, p. 16.

women and children have become vulnerable and have to bear the brunt of this exploitation. The mass migration of the rural poor to the cities in search of a better life has not only proved false but also has disrupted the traditional family life of the poor. They live in sub-human conditions, without any basic amenities in the ever expanding shanties of the metropolitan cities.⁷² This has also led to the increase in violence, prostitution and drug abuse.

The MNCs have absolutely no concern for the environment either. They have, by their callous discharge of contaminants from the factories, polluted the air, land, and the sea. Their indiscrete use of chemical fertilizers, pesticides and weed killers in the plantations have made the germ carrying insects and mosquitos immune. Further the polluted stagnant water and the filthy slums that have sprung around the industrial centres have provided ideal breeding ground and carriers of diseases. Certain types of epidemics and contagious diseases that had been eliminated by hard labour have begun to reappear in many Asian countries. The MNC's wanton destruction of the primeval forests for timber and through acid rain has destroyed the livelihood of the many tribes who still depend on these forests for their sustenance. This destruction of the forests has either dried or

⁷² Ibid., pp. 97-98.

silted the rivers resulting in the abandoning of the land and in the migration of the peasants to the cities.

Thus the exploitation, oppression and dependency that started with colonialism is being continued after independence, by the economic colonialism of the multinationals with the active connivance of the local elite.

2.5.3 The Oppressed Minorities

The mass migration of people from India and China during the colonial era, as we have seen earlier, has been a source of tension between the migrants and the locals throughout the region. Malaysia "has along with its own five million Malays also five million Chinese and at least one million Indians and Pakistanis."⁷³

Tens of thousands of Indian Tamils brought to work in the plantations by the British in Sri Lanka have been rendered stateless, voiceless and are being forced to work in semi-slavery situation.⁷⁴ Together with native Sri Lankan Tamils they have been deprived of their rights and have been subjected to periodic mass violence, torture, rape and murder. The

⁷³ Felix Wilfred, in FABC Papers No. 45, p. 3.

⁷⁴ See Mayan Vije, Where Serfdom Thrives, (Madras: Sudarsan Graphics for Tamil Information Centre London, 1987).

legitimate requests of the Tamils through non-violent resistance brought more deaths and terror. Under the pretext of national unity and security, emergency regulations were proclaimed. This has forced the Tamil youth to take up arms to regain their lost freedom and protect their rights.⁷⁵ Today the military might is being used to exterminate the Tamils and the Tamil areas are being bombed indiscriminately.⁷⁶

India, Pakistan and China have diversity of languages and regional differences. India, Thailand, the Philippines and Taiwan have several tribal groups.⁷⁷ Race relations in Burma, Indonesia, Malaysia and the whole of Indochina have become very sensitive issues.⁷⁸ The tension between the different religions in the Philippines and in India has turned into armed conflicts.

⁷⁵ For a detail study of the Tamil problem in Sri Lanka see Satchi Ponnambalam, Sri Lanka: The National Question and the Tamil Liberation Struggle, (London: Zed Books Ltd., and Tamil Information Centre, 1983), pp. 151-226.

⁷⁶ See M.E.Pius, Situation Report - February 1991, Jaffna Diocesan Human Development Centre. According to this report, in the North of Sri Lanka alone there are 564,531 persons in refugee welfare centres, with another 100,000 displaced persons living with friends or relatives; See also Julian West, "Civilians Bear Brunt of War on Tamils," in Tamil Times, 10(February 1991), p. 4; and Christopher Morris, "Civilians Suffer in Bombing Raids," in Tamil Times, 10(Feb. 1991), pp. 5-6.

⁷⁷ Felix Wilfred, in FABC Papers No. 45, p. 4.

⁷⁸ Balasuriya, Planetary Theology, p. 75.

Japan, a country that has achieved economic prosperity, treats its Korean minorities, who were brought from Korea in 1930, as non-persons. They have no political power and have to be finger printed when they reach the age of eighteen. There are also the other Japanese, the progeny of the former menial workers, who are considered to be untouchables, though in principle there are no such people in Japan. Over half a million workers from other parts of Asia working as labourers in the factories are without any political status. These minorities are exploited by Japan, in the name of keeping the blood purity and pedigree of Japanese nation, which claims to be a homogenous nation.

All the Asian countries that have a Hindu or Buddhist influence are torn apart by caste discriminations and social stratifications sanctioned by these religions. These and the other minorities in Asia are marginalized and are treated as second-class citizens⁷⁹ by the dominant group that exercises political and military power. There is a horrendous violation of human rights in these countries, where various insidious means of tortures and massacres are inflicted upon the minorities.⁸⁰

⁷⁹ Ibid.,

⁸⁰ Felix Wilfred, in FABC Papers No. 45, p. 4.

2.5.4 The Women of Asia

Asian epics, stories and tradition extol the greatness of women and in almost all the cultures of Asia women are respected. The respect for mother is so great that even God is called Mother and Father. The earth on which the majority of people depend for their livelihood is addressed as mother. But the tragedy is that the more the women are elevated in the traditional epics and literature, in reality, the greater is their oppression and exploitation. This seeming double standard or duality is because the high caste, senior, rich or powerful women with right political connections are certainly respected and treated as equals to men. This is proved by the fact that women have become the heads of state, the highest political and civil status, which is still the preserve of males in other parts of the world. Though some women have reached the pinnacle of power and prestige, they are again the elite, Western educated and of the dominant oppressive class.

On the contrary, the patriarchal Asian society treats the majority of women, especially the young, poor, rural or the so called low caste women as second class citizens. These women are generally much more disadvantaged than men. Women have been indoctrinated through culture and education, to perform a subservient and subordinate role in society. They do not have an identity of their own, but only in relation to men as

"daughter/wife/mother."⁸¹ Rosemary Reuther says that women "suffer from 'double oppression' - oppression both as women and as members of oppressed classist and racial groups."⁸² Elizabeth S. Fiorenza, expands that and identifies the suffering of the poor and Third World women as the "triple oppression of sexism, racism and classism."⁸³

Women are oppressed as women because of their dual role as mothers and wives, who have the task of reproducing the labour force day to day and from one generation to the other. In Asia, cooking and other household chores are mostly done by women, in addition to their employment. Women do not have any say in the running of the society, or even about their own marriage, where the decisions are made by the males and senior women, though women have a certain influence in family matters.

⁸¹ Marianne Katoppo, Compassionate and Free: An Asian Women's Theology, (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1981 second print), p. 10.

⁸² Rosemary Radford Reuther, "A Feminist Perspective," in Virginia Fabella and Sergio Torres, eds., Doing Theology in a Divided World, (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1985), p. 69.

⁸³ Elizabeth Schussler Fiorenza, "Toward a Feminist Biblical Hermeneutics: Biblical Interpretation and Liberation Theology," in Brian Mahan and L. Dale Richesin, eds., The Challenge of Liberation Theology, (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1984), p. 92.

The marriages are arranged and are virilocal, where the women go to live with their husband's family. The in marrying wife is usually treated as an outsider by the in-laws and especially by the mother-in law. The young married women are ill treated and even subjected to torture if they do not bring in the dowry promised by her parents. The dowry system is a curse in Asia, particularly in India.⁸⁴ If the parents cannot find enough money for dowry for their daughters, the latter have either to remain unmarried, which is frowned upon by the society, or they get married to some one and are condemned to a state of semi-slavery to the end of their life. When their situation becomes so unbearable and miserable often they take their own lives or are forced to do so.

This is the reason that most of the parents in Asia not only prefer male children, who are considered to be an asset, but also go to the extent of even killing their own baby girls.⁸⁵ The women and young girls are the most undernourished in Asia. In an area where poverty is rampant, the men and young boys get the lion's share, if and when food is available, while the women folk eat only what is left over. In the case of

⁸⁴ Felix wilfred, in FABC Papers No. 45, pp. 21-22.

⁸⁵ Sun Ai Park, "Women, justice and Peace," in Vidyajyoti, April 1987, p. 187.

Indonesia, Katoppo says that 85 percent of all female children under five are undernourished.⁸⁶

Women and children also have to work to supplement the meagre income of the family. They are employed as house maids, domestic servants, work in factories in unsanitary conditions, do menial jobs and of course in the age old employment of prostitution. In order to get employed and to remain in their employment they are forced to perform sexual favours. The foreign investment zones, the presence of foreign military personnel in some countries and the expanding tourist industry are the main factors that promote and exploit the flesh trade.⁸⁷ The world has not forgotten the thousands of street children in Vietnam and in Philippines, fathered by American servicemen. They are the products of progress, the price for democracy and the "human sacrifices, who are devoured daily, not by the tribal gods of old ... but by the Anti-God, by Mammon, for the sake of GNP."⁸⁸

The worst form of violence is that of rape. In a traditional society like Asia, rape victims, though they are

⁸⁶ M.Katoppo, Compassionate and Free, p. 42.

⁸⁷ Balasuriya, Planetary Theology, pp. 73-75; Felix Wilfred, in FABC Papers No. 45, pp. 21-22.

⁸⁸ M.Katoppo, Compassionate and Free, pp. 47-53.

innocent, are considered a disgrace to the family. They are disowned by their husbands and parents. Katoppo quotes the case of 200,000 Bangladeshi women who have been raped by Pakistani soldiers and abandoned by their husbands.⁹⁰ Bangladesh is only one documented example, but rape, by members of the invading enemy forces, is common. Unfortunately, because of the shame and the disgrace not only to the family but also to that particular community, most of this crime goes unreported. This is the result of militarization and the consequence of military exploits in Asia.

All is not gloom in the life of women in Asia. Today more and more women are fighting for their cause. The emergence of women's movements in India⁹⁰ and mothers' front in Sri Lanka are the signs of the strength and the power of the people. The irony is this that they are not fighting for their own rights only but they have become the voice of the millions of voiceless men and women - the oppressed, the persecuted, the marginalized, the exploited and the poor of Asia.

⁹⁰ Ibid., p. 57.

⁹⁰ Aruna Gnanadason, "Towards an Indian Feminist Theology," in Virginia Fabella and Sun Ai Lee Park, ed., We Dare to Dream: Doing Theology as Asian Women, (Hong Kong: Asian Women's resource Centre for Culture and Theology, 1989), pp. 117-25.

2.5.5 The Consequence

Our analysis of Asian reality shows that poverty is the consequence of exploitation by colonialism, neo-colonialism of the MNCs and of the ruling elite. The land tenure system is a major obstacle to growth and inhibits people from using their potential to the maximum. Almost all the means of productions and 70 to 80 percent of the land is owned by this 20 percent of the rich. The so called industrialization and development brought wealth and prosperity to the few who have achieved a standard of living equal to that of those in the West. The consequence of this is the poverty of the masses. The cause of inequality and injustice is not only individuals but the very system itself. Poverty in Asia is structural and it is legitimized by the ideology of the dominant class.

While a small minority with power over economy, politics and military live in luxury, the majority of people in Asia live in destitution, misery and in squalor whether they be in city slums or in rural areas. Half the population of Asia are children under 15 years of age and it is they who are mostly affected by hunger and poverty.⁹¹ In his assessment of the Indian situation D.S.Amalorpavadass says:

⁹¹ Felix Wilfred, "The Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences (FABC): Orientations, Challenges and Impact," in Pro Mundi Vita Studies, January 1989, p. 3.

Of the 690 million inhabitants of India some 297 million live on or just above the poverty line. About 300 million are below the poverty line, that is to say, without the minimum requirement for survival. About 80 million have sufficient means for a comfortable life. 13 million are rich, living in the luxury of modern consumer society, having the means of production in their hands. 70% of the Indian population are undernourished, 60% of the children in India (between the ages of three and five years) suffer from retarded growth.⁹²

Already Asia with 20 percent of the land mass contains 56 percent of World's population. Therefore the Asian population explosion that Balasuriya speaks of is another cause for grave concern. When a similar situation occurred in Europe, it had almost the whole world.⁹³ One of the reasons for preference of a large family in Asia is unemployment and underemployment. Since the income brought by one or two members of the family is insufficient for their meagre living, they tend to have more children, in the hope that they will bring in additional income. This is a vicious circle, since more members in a family will also need a greater income and then there is a growing number of people chasing after limited resources and thus ever dwindling chances of employment.

⁹² "The Church as a Community of Faith in the Asian Context," in FABC Papers No.30, p. 3; Samuel Rayan in Virginia Fabella and Sergio Torres, Doing Theology in a Divided World, p. 127. The differences in the numbers are because of the time difference between the two articles.

⁹³ Tissa Balasuriya, Planetary Theology, pp. 55-56.

2.6 THE MULTI-RELIGIOUS AND MULTI-CULTURAL REALITY OF ASIA

What we have seen earlier, that is, the situation of oppression, abject poverty caused by internal and external exploitation, is not unique to Asia. It is the common denominator that is found in all the Third World countries. The difference between Asia and the rest of the Third World lies in its living religions and its cultures. By this we do not deny that the other Third World countries have any religion or culture of their own. In fact the contrary is true. They have their own religions and cultures.

Unfortunately most of these religions and cultures, if not all, had been completely wiped out by the colonizers. The ethnocentric attitude prevalent at that time condemned these religions and cultures as superstitions or as evil practices. Enrique Dussel, speaking about the Latin American context says, "Latin America is not given adequate consideration."⁹⁴ Further, the Latin Americans were considered to be "outside history" and "have necessarily fallen prey to an inauthentic history."⁹⁵

⁹⁴ Enrique Dussel, History and the Theology of Liberation, p. 11.

⁹⁵ Ibid., p. 12.

The primitive religions found in Asia, Africa and Oceania have been called 'animism' by certain Western authors. Aloysius Pieris calls these 'cosmic religions', because they revolve around cosmic forces or powers, "where these natural elements and forces merge into the mysterious world of invisible powers that maintain the cosmic balance."⁹⁶ In Asia these cosmic religions have been "domesticated and integrated into one or the other of the three metacosmic soteriologies-namely, Hinduism, Buddhism and to some extent Taoism."⁹⁷ The cosmic and metacosmic religions are well integrated where by the metacosmic religion is 'contextualized.' According to Pieris, Christianity was able to domesticate the 'cosmic' religions of Africa and Latin America but could not do the same with the 'metacosmic' gnostic soteriologies of Asia.⁹⁸

All the major religions of the world, which Pieris calls, "scriptural religions" were born in Asia.⁹⁹ Judaism, Islam and Christianity, that belong to the Semitic group originated from West Asia and have spread all over the world. India, the South Asian subcontinent, is the birthplace of Hinduism, Buddhism,

⁹⁶ Aloysius Pieris, An Asian theology of Liberation, (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1988), p. 71.

⁹⁷ Ibid., p. 72.

⁹⁸ Ibid.,; see also pp. 97-100.

⁹⁹ Ibid., pp. 74, 97-100.

Jainism and Zoroastrianism. Confucianism, Taoism and Shintoism belong to the East Asian Tradition.¹⁰⁰ Asia has a population of about 513 million Hindus, 423 million Muslims, 248 million Buddhists, 206 million Confucianists, 62 million Shintoists, and 31 million Taoists.¹⁰¹

2.6.1 Hinduism

Hinduism is the religion of the majority of the people in India, and is the "subterranean foundation for many Southeast Asian civilizations,"¹⁰² in countries like Indonesia, Burma, Thailand, Cambodia and Sri Lanka. It is very important to note that originally the word 'Hindu' did not denote any person belonging to a particular religion. According to Hans Staffner:

the term 'Hindu' was used by the Persians, by the Greeks who reached the Indus river along with Alexander the Great, and by other people of that region, to designate the people living beyond the Indus (Sindhu) river. Thus the term Hindu was applied to all people living on the Indian subcontinent.¹⁰³

¹⁰⁰ Samuel Rayan, in Virginia Fabella and Sergio Torres, eds., Doing Theology in a Divided World, p. 126.

¹⁰¹ D.S. Amalorpavadass, "The Church as a Community of Faith in the Asian Context," FABC Papers No.30, p. 2.

¹⁰² Pieris An Asian Theology of Liberation, p. 98.

¹⁰³ Hans Staffner, Jesus Christ and the Hindu Community: Is a Synthesis of Hinduism and Christianity Possible?, (Anand, India: Gujarat Sahitya Prakash, 1988), p. 91.

What was to become Hinduism in the later periods of history, was the arbitrary collection of religious elements from the spiritually-rich Hindu culture, basically, and not essentially the acceptance of the authority of the Vedas.¹⁰⁴ Thus Hinduism is not a "monolithic, one-book one-church religion" but a collection of several religious practices or rather a collection of Hindu culture and traditions, to form a unified structured whole.¹⁰⁵ It is the result of "a series of choices made from a range of beliefs, rituals and practices which are collected into the creation of this religion."¹⁰⁶

Hinduism is a civilization and a culture with room for several religions. Being a Hindu does not depend on professing a particular creed or on holding a particular form of worship.

Those who follow the Vedas as well as those who do not follow Vedas are Hindus. Image worshippers as well as those who are against such a practice are Hindus. Agnostics, materialists and those who do not believe in the existence of God are also

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., pp. 91-95.

¹⁰⁵ G.P.Deshpande as quoted in Hans Staffner, Jesus Christ and Hindu Community, pp. 94-95.

¹⁰⁶ Romila Thapar as quoted in Hans Staffner, Jesus Christ and Hindu community, p. 93.

Hindus.¹⁰⁷ Therefore, anyone, even a Christian who follows a particular 'way' to attain liberation could be a Hindu.

Some accuse Hinduism of otherworldliness because of 1) the importance given to 'moksha' and 2) for legitimizing the status quo through its caste system. Therefore, in order to understand the influence of Hinduism upon the people of Asia, it is important for us to study: what is meant by 'Moksha'? and what is the role of caste system?

2.6.1.1 The Hindu World View

The heart of Hinduism is that a person has within oneself the mystery which is one with the mystery of the universe and mystery of God. Thus the innermost principle of human beings and that of the cosmos are not-two but one and the same- That art thou. Hinduism affirms the world and the earthly realities, where the individual, the society and the universe are integrally linked. Salvation or moksha is the "attainment of that state when one transcends all dualism and arrives at an awareness of the identity of both"¹⁰⁸ Atman and Brahman.

¹⁰⁷ Shripaty Sastri quoted in Hans Staffner, Jesus Christ and the Hindu Community, p. 86.

¹⁰⁸ D.S.Amalorpavadass, "The Church as a Community of Faith in the Asian Context," p. 8.

'Dharma,' the fundamental principle which promotes stability and harmony in the universe is called 'rta.' The society is based on this cosmic archetype which demands stability and harmony. 'Dharma' (righteousness), 'artha' (wealth) and 'kama' (pleasure), are the three values that drive human beings. If any one of these is allowed to dominate then chaos reigns. A proper balance among these three will lead a person to 'Moksha'- liberation.¹⁰⁹ Thus, the ethical system of Hinduism is holistic and integral, "that is a comprehensive and wider outlook on life and an integral vision of man."¹¹⁰

The human being is treated both as an individual and as a social being. It is a total and comprehensive system. Dharma is realized by an individual when one devotes oneself not only to one's wellbeing but also to the welfare of others. This solidarity with others requires poverty and detachment and the performance of one's duties in a detached way. Accumulation of wealth without any consideration for others is greed. Wealth is not an end in itself but only a means for a happy life.¹¹¹

¹⁰⁹ S.Arulsamy, "The Hindu Foundational Schemes for a New Society," in D.S.Amalorpavadass, ed., The Indian church in the Struggle for a New Society, (Bangalore, India: National Biblical, Catechetical and Liturgical Centre, 1981), p. 283.

¹¹⁰ S.Arulsamy, "Liberation Theology in India," in Indian Theological Studies, September 1985, p. 275.

¹¹¹ Ibid., pp. 284-85.

Hence, "true development will take place when one renounces his or her cravings to accumulate goods, money and profit."¹¹²

This is exemplified in the life of those who practice radical renunciation. They, the 'sannyasis,' from the moment of initiation are utterly free from family, caste, social and even from religious duties. The identification of Brahman with Atman demonstrates that all are equals and that multiplicity and change are only 'maya' that is not real. The one who does not practice dharma, according to the theory of rebirth, could be caught up in the endless cycle of birth and rebirth, where one could be reborn in a lower state or caste.

In short, Hinduism does not deny the world in its attempt to achieve 'Moksha.' On the contrary liberation, freedom or 'Moksha' is achieved through a harmony with nature and not in subduing it. In fact it tends to identify God with cosmos and creation. It gives primacy of place to intuition and experience than to analysis and rationality.¹¹³ The integral humanism and the holistic approach has helped the Asians to keep a healthy balance between human beings and nature, between individuals and society, and between this world and the other world.

¹¹² Felix wilfred, in FABC Papers No. 45, p. 28.

¹¹³ S. Arulsamy, "Liberation Theology in Asia," p. 274.

2.6.1.2 The Caste System

According to Hindu philosophy, the prevailing social order, assigns a certain type of work for certain types of people or groups. The performance of this prescribed duty is called 'karma' or fate. It is based on the assumption that human society is a complete whole and the different parts are there to perform particular functions. It "points to the functional division of society,"¹¹⁴ where one receives one's identity by "his willing surrender to the common law and by his active participation in the reciprocal nature of group-life."¹¹⁵ If this social order is disturbed then there is disharmony. This state has to be rectified by practising dharma, in a disinterested way, without seeking any personal gain.

Unfortunately a system meant for the proper functioning of the society and founded on dharma has been manipulated by the powerful. It has, because of the supposed religious sanction in terms of purity-impurity, strengthened the feudal-capitalistic structure.¹¹⁶ The caste system has become the cause of many evils and social stratification. It has dominated and become

¹¹⁴ S. Arulsamy, in D.S. Amalorpavadass, The Indian Church in the Struggle for a New Society, p. 288.

¹¹⁵ Ibid.,

¹¹⁶ Michael Amaladoss, "Towards a culture of Wholeness: The Task of the Local Church in Countries or Regions of Major Hindu Influence," in FABC Papers No. 36, p. 25.

the cause of inequality in political, religious and economic sphere. The so called lower caste people are the most exploited social group in those countries under Hindu influence.¹¹⁷ This demonstrates that the caste system is based on economic and ethnic factors, with different groups competing for the scarce resources. The caste system "born of conquest, enslavement, an imposed vertical division of labour, and racial prejudices-received religious legitimation at the hands of priestly groups."¹¹⁸ The powerful group placed itself at the top and others are made to serve it in the name of religion. Popular Hinduism is the religion and culture of the conquered people, which in practice has conquered the religion and culture of the conquerors.

There were and are attempts to turn the caste system on its head in order to accommodate social changes and also to recapture its original purpose. Ramayana and Mahabharata, the great epics, demonstrate that God intervenes in human history when dharma is on the decline. He takes human or non human form to fight evil and to alleviate misery and suffering. In the Bhagavad Gita, the philosophico-religious poem of Mahabharata, Krishna, an incarnation of God, instructs Arjuna about his duty

¹¹⁷ Ibid., p. 26.

¹¹⁸ Samuel Rayan, in Virginia Fabella and Sergio Torres, eds., Irruption of the Third World, p. 34.

to fight against all forms of corruption and bondage. Arjuna, who is overwhelmed with grief and remorse at the thought of fighting to kill his teachers, elders, and the people of his own caste, who are the corner-stone of the caste system, is urged to fight the righteous war.¹¹⁹

Thus, Krishna is presented as the destroyer of the caste system, where he calls upon all to perform their duties and promises liberation to all who love him. Krishna says to Arjuna:

Even those who belong to the lower castes- women, Vaishyas, and Sudras too-can reach the highest spiritual realization, if they will take refuge in me.¹²⁰

Further in the Gita, Krishna speaks about the interconnectedness of the caste system where no one has the monopoly or superior position but all have their particular functions to perform.

a man may become perfect, if he devotes himself to the work which is natural to him. A man will reach perfection if he does his duty as an act of worship to the Lord, who is the source of the universe, prompting all action, everywhere present.¹²¹

In this poem all rituals are transcended and the path of devotion and salvation is opened to all irrespective of their

¹¹⁹ The Song of God: Bhagavad-Gita, trans., Swami Prabhavananda and Christopher Isherwood, intro., Aldous Huxley (New York, N.Y.: The New American Library, 1954), pp. 31-39.

¹²⁰ Ibid., pp. 84-85.

¹²¹ Ibid., p. 127.

caste.¹²² Krishna, through the mediation of Arjuna, invites everyone to give up all their dharma and to take refuge in him.

Lay down all duties
In me, your refuge.
Fear no longer,
For I will save you
From sin and bondage.¹²³

What we find in this and in many other stories in Hinduism, is that confidence is infused in the minds of the suffering mass of people, that God is there always to take their side in their fight against evil and oppression.

In sum, Hinduism is a way of life - 'Sanathana Dharma.' What is important is not dogmas or orthodoxy but orthopraxis, manifested in moral, spiritual and social attitudes. It is a 'marga'- a way. It is a movement or a journey towards the goal beyond- 'moksha' and at the same time a movement towards the inner core- self realization. This leads one to experience the presence of the divine in all realities.¹²⁴ There are positive as well as negative elements in Hinduism. It has contributed to the wellbeing of the people of Asia as well as entrenching

¹²² Samuel Rayan, in Virginia Fabella and Sergio Torres, eds., Doing Theology in a Divided World, pp. 134-36; Francis X.D'Sa, "Caste: Symbol or System," in D.S.Amalorpavadass, The Indian Church in the Struggle for a New Society, pp. 294-98.

¹²³ Bhagavad-Gita, p. 129.

¹²⁴ D.S.Amalorpavadass, "The Church as a Community of Faith in the Asian Context," pp. 5-15.

certain oppressive elements, that constitute the Asian reality.

2.6.2 Buddhism

Buddhism started in the sixth century B.C. as a reaction to the caste and cultic religion of the brahmins of India. Though Gautama Buddha (the Enlightened One) rejected the religion of his ancestors he was also at the same time influenced by it. He preached a way of liberation from suffering, which according to him was caused by desire. Buddha was born in India but it was Buddha's "belief that the Dharma would be established and preserved in its pristine purity,"¹²⁵ in Sri Lanka. According to Pieris though Buddhism is "now preserved in its Indian form only in Sri Lanka," it has also spread to almost all the Asian countries and has influenced the lives of millions of people.¹²⁶

Buddhism is a view of life and at the same time a way of life, a way of salvation. "When doctrinally systematized, this twin aspect of Buddhism takes the guise of phenomenology interpenetrated with a soteriology," says Pieris.¹²⁷ All beings according to Buddhism are in fact only a quick succession of

¹²⁵ Lynn A. De Silva, "Sri Lanka: Theological Construction in a Buddhist Context," in Gerald H. Anderson, ed., Asian Voices in Christian Theology, (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1976), p. 37.

¹²⁶ Pieris, An Asian Theology of Liberation, p. 72.

¹²⁷ Pieris, Love Meets Wisdom: A Christian Experience of Buddhism, (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1988), p. 46.

'phenomena' that is, they are fleeting factors of experience. The term of reference to all 'reality' and of the world is the human person. Therefore the world is not something permanent but only hollow and unsatisfying. Nirvana - liberation, though it is an experience, is transphenomenal. It is the elimination of craving which is the root of all evil.¹²⁸

From this insight Buddha formulated the four noble truths that will lead one to liberation, namely:

1. nothing can satisfy human beings, and therefore everything frustrates them-that is, causes suffering(dukkha);
2. the cause of this frustration is innate human thirst (tanha) or inordinate desire for things that cannot satisfy them;
3. it is by removing this cause of frustration that one can attain nirvana, or interior freedom and peace;
4. the only way to remove 'tanha' and attain 'nirvana' is the Eightfold path.¹²⁹

The "eightfold" path deals with the eight areas of human experiences that demand proper ordering. Buddha saw the eightfold path as the middle way. It consists in: Correct use of speech, correct behaviour, correct means of earning a living, ascetically conducive use of one's energy, training in mindfulness, concentration or gathering of mind, a salvific

¹²⁸ Ibid., pp. 45-49; See also Marcello Zago, "The Proclamation of the Christian Message in a Buddhist Environment," in FABC Papers No. 5, pp.1-15.

¹²⁹ Pieris, Love Meets Wisdom, p. 64.

vision of reality and the organization of thought conducive to liberation.¹³⁰ Such is the path to enlightenment. Though essentially prescribed for the monks, even the laity are requested to practice it on holy day days or for a certain period of time, by abstaining from those things that are considered to be evil.¹³¹ Those who follow these paths are already on their way to liberation, depending on their achievements. The monks and nuns who practice this eightfold path occupy an exalted position among Buddhists. They are expected to live in communities and observe a monastic discipline.

These communities in the later periods came to be called the 'sangha,' which together with 'Buddha' and 'dharma' (truth) form the 'triple gem.' These three are the ultimate objects of worship and those who accept these as their sole 'refuge' are called Buddhists.¹³² The followers of Theravada (The way of the Elders) Buddhism affirm:

I take refuge in the Buddha
I take refuge in the Dhamma (the Truth, the Teaching)

¹³⁰ Ibid.,

¹³¹ Ibid., p. 65.

¹³² Ibid., p. 62.

I take refuge in the Sangha (the order of Monks, existing continuously since the time of the Lord Buddha)¹³³

According to Buddhism, one can by oneself attain 'nirvana' - peace, harmony, tranquillity or supreme happiness in this world through spiritual liberation. The monastic life also becomes the model for society. What is important in Buddhism, is not talk about God or soul but living a life without any attachment or desire. The God-talk is meaningless because God cannot be named. Naming and situating God is to destroy God.¹³⁴

For the Buddha talk about the soul is fictional because the "notion of ego or soul or self is the root of the human malaise, its destruction is the essential feature in the cure of that malaise."¹³⁵ According to Buddhism the self or the soul is the root of individuality which assigns a person to a particular group, caste, or category. The soul is the cause of desire and makes one selfish and blind to reality. Selfishness "is the most harmful driving force which dehumanizes men and women and

¹³³ Paul Clasper, Eastern Paths and the Christian Way, (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1980), p. 34.

¹³⁴ Raymond Panikkar, "Nirvana and the Awareness of the Absolute," in Voices from the Third World, pp. 60-61.

¹³⁵ Piyasena Dissanayake, "The Idea of Liberation in Buddhism an Unorthodox View," in Logos, March 1987, p. 21.

makes harmonious and equitable life difficult if not impossible."¹³⁶

Several governments in Asia have been inspired by the Buddhist doctrine of 'just society' and this has been the driving force for liberation from colonialism. Buddhist monks have been in the forefront of liberation movements and rebellions against oppressive governments, as in the case of Vietnam, South Korea and Sri Lanka. Some monks have attained legendary status because of their self-immolation in their struggle for freedom for their countrymen. The 1971 popular insurrection in Sri Lanka was inspired by Buddhism. Pieris speaks of the radicalism of the revolutionary praxis on the fringes of Buddhism in China, which fermented many a rebellion up to 1956, until they were hunted down by the communists. Speaking of Buddhist resurgence in Burma Pieris says:

initially aimed at Burmese kings, it was later directed towards their British successors. There must have been about twenty revolts from 1838 to 1929 - all inspired by the Maitreya cult: the eschatological expectation of a just social order to be ushered in with the appearance of the future Buddha.¹³⁷

¹³⁶ Ibid., p. 26.

¹³⁷ Pieris, An Asian Theology of Liberation, pp. 105-06.

2.6.3 Islam

Islam, a semitic religion that was born in Western Asia, has spread far and wide. It is the dominant religion in the Middle East and in Africa. Its influence in Asia is very significant. Islam is not only a religion but is also a way of life. In fact, in Islam, politics and religion are so identified, it is difficult to speak about one without the other. It has developed its own "Islamic conception of state, a legal system, social living and economic pursuits, education etc."¹³⁸ In today's world the political power exerted by Islam needs no documentation, since we are the witnesses.

Pakistan and Bangladesh are Islamic states with 96.8 and 85.9 percent Muslim population respectively, while the majority of the people in Indonesia and Malaysia are Muslims. India, Sri Lanka and Thailand have a sizable population of Muslims, and Mindanao (Philippines) has a small but a militant Muslim minority that is fighting for its independence.¹³⁹ It is rather unfortunate that the Asian theologians have not written very much about Islam. It may be because it has several factors common to Christianity - the semitic origin, the worship of the

¹³⁸ Felix Wilfred, in FABC Papers No. 45, p. 31.

¹³⁹ Ibid., p. 30.

One God, its missionary zeal and conquests. However, the impact and the influence of Islam in Asia cannot be discounted.

The fanatic elements found among the followers of these religions have been the cause of religious massacres and tension in certain countries. The people who belong to the minority religions are deprived of their rights not only in matters of worship but also with regard to employment and social benefits. At the same time religion has been a cohesive force in countries where there are so many cultural and linguistic diversities.

2.7 RELATION BETWEEN RELIGION AND CULTURE

Anthropologists study religion only in relation to culture because according to them religions with their rites and rituals, myths and magic are the visible expressions of a culture. Therefore it is very difficult to distinguish or separate the cultural elements from the religious contents. This is especially true of Asian religions, as we have seen in the case of Hinduism, Buddhism and Islam. The Asian religions and their host cultures have the same historical roots and are intertwined. This may not apply to Christianity since, the religion that was born in Palestine in a particular culture was transplanted to the West, where it transformed itself by

adopting the Greco-Roman culture and its philosophy.¹⁴⁰ After this initial transformation Christianity has become the religion of the West and Greco-Roman culture, the Christian culture.¹⁴¹

In theory, culture and religion "are two distinct entities with a personality, identity and autonomy of their own," but in reality, "they are interdependent, need mutual sharing in openness and depth and undergo dynamic interaction and reciprocal influence."¹⁴² In the same vein Pieris says that "religion and culture coincide fully in tribal societies practically everywhere in the Third World. Culture is the variegated expression of religion."¹⁴³ Yet when a metacosmic religion merged with a cosmic religion, it always incorporated the cultural elements of the existing religion. Thus one can discern several cultures in one religion and several religions in one culture.¹⁴⁴

¹⁴⁰ See Enrique Dussel, History and the Theology of Liberation, pp. 21-24.

¹⁴¹ Felix wilfred, in FABC Papers No. 45, pp. 25-26.

¹⁴² D.S.Amalorpavadass, "Gospel and Culture: Evangelization and Inculturation," FABC Papers No. 15, p. 9.

¹⁴³ A.Pieris, An Asian Theology of Liberation, p. 97.

¹⁴⁴ Ibid., pp. 97-8.

One important reason for the spread of Hinduism, Buddhism (and to a certain extent Islam) in Asia, was precisely that they were able to adapt to the situation and they were not identified with any one particular culture. These religions were able to accommodate and even absorb certain elements from the cultures they entered. This was the only way for a metacosmic religion to flourish in a new environment. This is not syncretism but, Pieris borrowing the term from Richard Gombrich, calls it "accretism."¹⁴⁵ What we find in Asia, therefore is not pure religion or pure culture but culture and religion fused to form one single reality - the popular Hinduism or the popular Buddhism

2.8 CONCLUSION

In this chapter we have made an attempt to present at least some aspects of the multifaceted reality of Asia. Though our analysis may not be comprehensive and complete, yet it shows that poverty, oppression and human degradation in Asia is of human making and at times sanctioned by religions. Exploitation of the people and their land by colonialism is only one of the causes of poverty and dependency. Apart from this external exploitation there is also internal exploitation by the elite

¹⁴⁵ Ibid., p.99.

and the powerful. If we could use the Wallerstein's model, we find that the workers in the plantations, in rural areas and in the industries form the periphery. The local military and political elite form the semi periphery which benefit or exploit the periphery, while the metropolitan capitals and the MNCs constitute the centre which exploits the other two.

Thus, the exploitation, oppression, poverty and destitution in Asia are caused by the combination of these factors. In this dark horizon of gloom, the living religions and cultures of Asia have been the refuge for the oppressed mass of Asia. These have given them an identity, self respect and a hope for the future. Both cosmic and metacosmic religions of Asia have always pointed towards a future liberation - heaven, 'moksha,' 'nirvana.' Some times wrongly interpreted as other worldly, this future can only be built by human beings by living in harmony not only with other human beings but also with the whole of creation - a holistic approach.

However, these religions and cultures have also, in varying degree, though at times not very explicitly, offered legitimacy to the existing social structures and justified the oppressive social order. They have also provided the ideology for change

and revolutions.¹⁴⁶ Thus, the presence and the influence of these living religions and ancient cultures of Asia makes Asia different from other Third World continents.

Theology is defined as God-talk, it means an explicitation of God-encounter in a particular situation. Therefore, in the following chapter, we will try to find out how Asian theologians proceed to formulate an Asian theology that takes into account not only the poverty and oppression but also the religio-cultural ethos of the people of Asia. Armed with this model or these models we will be able to critique the theology emerging from the documents of the FABC.

¹⁴⁶ A. Pieris, An Asian Theology of Liberation, p. 107.

CHAPTER THREE

THE EXISTING ASIAN THEOLOGIES OF LIBERATION

3.1 INTRODUCTION

Since the purpose of this thesis is to determine whether the FABC documents contain a specifically Asian theology of liberation, it demands that we present an idea of liberation theology as developed by Latin American theologians, because this is the first source of what liberation theology is. However, this study is not intended to probe the origin or the history of Latin American theology of Liberation. Nor is it about the theological validity or the relationship between liberation theology and traditional theology. These are beyond the scope of this paper. This study will, however, indicate in broad strokes the general acceptance and the impact of Latin American theology of Liberation in the thinking of the Church today.

After analyzing the main characteristics and important themes in Latin American theology of liberation we will analyze three basic Asian theologies of liberation. In this we will try to determine whether the existing Asian theologies of liberation

are similar to or different from the Latin American theology of liberation. If similar, then we will see in what way they are similar and the reasons for the similarity. If not similar, then we seek to determine what make them different and the reasons for this.

This becomes necessary because the socio-economic realities that are at the root of poverty, oppression, exploitation and underdevelopment found in these two continents (Latin America and Asia) are almost identical. But is Third Worldness a sufficient factor for a common theological approach towards the problems of Asia and Latin America? Or does the multi-cultural and multi-religious context of Asia demand a specifically different approach towards a liberation theology for Asia?

While the Filipino theologians claim that the Latin American theology could be the model for Asia, there are at least two other schools of theology in Asia, which insist that the Asian theology of liberation is distinct from the other liberation theologies. This, they say, arises from the reality of Asia itself, which as has been seen, is different in some aspects from that of Latin America. Therefore, after a short study of the Filipino proposal in the second section, the main section of this chapter will be devoted to the analysis of the writings of Aloysius Pieris, who has emerged as the principal

proponent of the South Asian school of theology. The final section of this chapter will be devoted to study of minjung theology. Here we hope to present the specific characteristics of this East Asian theology and see how it differs from the South Asian theology of liberation.

This analysis will help us to determine whether there is specifically a distinct Asian theology of liberation and if so, what contributes to its specificity. If it could be established from the writings of Asian theologians that this Asian theology is indeed distinct from the Latin American liberation theology, then this could be the model with which we could critique the documents of the FABC as it would be an Asian model.

3.2 LATIN AMERICAN LIBERATION THEOLOGY

3.2.1 A New Theological Method

Liberation theology is neither a new theology nor does it offer "a new theme for reflection," but it is "a new way to do theology," says Gutierrez,¹ who is considered to be the father of liberation theology. He defines theology "as a critical reflection on historical praxis in the light of the Word."²

¹ Gutierrez, A Theology of Liberation, p. 15.

² Ibid., p. 13.

Therefore, while not discounting the importance of, "the other functions of theology, such as wisdom and rational knowledge,"³ Gutierrez says "theology in this context will be a reflection from within, and upon, historical praxis, in confrontation with the word of the Lord as lived and accepted in faith."⁴

Theology of liberation "is a reflection from a point of departure in the concrete historical praxis of human beings."⁵ Or as the Boffs say, "the theology of liberation is reflection on the life of the Christian community from the standpoint of its contribution to life."⁶ "The theological contact with reality comes first," says Sobrino, "and only then reflection on the theological implications."⁷ Therefore liberation theology is a second act based on the first act or a reflection on the first act. The first act is the

option and a commitment. It will be an understanding of the faith from a point of departure in real, effective solidarity with the exploited classes, oppressed ethnic groups, and despised cultures of Latin America, and from within their world. It will

³ Ibid.,

⁴ G. Gutierrez, The Power of the Poor in History, p. 60.

⁵ Ibid., p. 61.

⁶ Leonardo Boff and Clodovis Boff, Liberation Theology, p. 13.

⁷ Jon Sobrino, The True Church and the Poor, Matthew J. O'Connell, trans., (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis books, 1989, Second printing), p. 21.

be a commitment to create a just society, a community of sisters and brothers.⁸

The liberation spirituality that Leonardo Boff speaks of is based on the "contact with the poor" and "commitment to justice," which are the characteristics of the Kingdom of God and where one "experiences a genuine encounter with the Lord."⁹ In his 'Presentation of the Dissertation,' Gutierrez explains that in liberation theology first "we must begin by contemplating God and doing God's will and that only in a second step are we to think about God."¹⁰ It is in doing God's will, in dealing with the poor, in radical solidarity with them that one encounters God and this is Christian life, which according to Gutierrez is the 'first act,' and the reflection inspired by this life is the 'second act'-theology.¹¹ "Before we can do theology we have to 'do' liberation," and "first we need to have direct knowledge of the reality of oppression/liberation through

⁸ Gutierrez, The Power of the Poor in History, p. 60.

⁹ Leonardo & Clodovis Boff, Salvation and Liberation, p. 25.

¹⁰ Gutierrez, The Truth Shall Make You Free: Confrontations, Matthew J. O'Connell, trans., (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1990), p. 3.

¹¹ Ibid.,

objective engagement in solidarity with the poor,"¹² where theology comes afterwards as a second step, say the Boffs.

The theology of liberation arises from and is incomprehensible apart from its relationship to practice. It is an attempt to clarify theologically the option taken towards the "conscious and clear identification with the interest of the embattled oppressed of Latin America."¹³ The liberation theologians "reject abstract philosophising as normal theological procedure,"¹⁴ because the traditionalists "do not hesitate to manipulate it in defence of their privileges."¹⁵

The life that liberation theology reflects on is that of the historical poor and the down-trodden, the exploited and the nonperson. "The interlocutor of the theology of liberation," says Gutierrez,

is the 'nonperson,' the human being who is not considered human by the present social order - the

¹² Leonardo and Clodovis Boff, Introducing Liberation Theology, pp. 22-23.

¹³ Gutierrez, The Power of the Poor in History, p. 169.

¹⁴ Denis Carroll, What is Liberation Theology?, (Dublin: The Mercier Press, Ltd., England: Fowler Wright Books Ltd., n.d), p. 26; see McGovern, Liberation Theology and its Critics, p. 31; for a different perspective see Rosino Gibellini, The Liberation Theology Debate, John Bowden, trans., (London: SCM Press, 1987; originally Brescia: Editrice Queriniana, 1986), p. 10.

¹⁵ Gutierrez, The Power of the Poor in History, p. 193.

exploited classes, marginalized ethnic groups, and despised cultures. Our question is how to tell the nonperson, the nonhuman, that God is love, and that this love makes us all brothers and sisters.¹⁶

Theology of liberation, therefore, as Gutierrez emphasized, is a new way or method of doing theology, in which "the experience of responding to the sufferings and struggles of the poor" becomes "the basis of his theological method."¹⁷ Christian praxis of love and charity demands that the world be seen in the light of the Word "from the underside of history,"¹⁸ to listen to the voices of "those who until now were 'absent' from history,"¹⁹ and contribute to the transformation of social and structural sinfulness in society.

3.2.2 Social Analysis

Liberation theology arises from "a prior political and ethical option in the light of the gospel, for the poor,"²⁰ because the poor have taken liberation as a strategy to free themselves from oppression. Clodovis Boff calls this "second theology" which deals with the secular realities of "culture,

¹⁶ Ibid., p. 193; see also his The Truth Shall Make You Free, pp. 23-25.

¹⁷ McGovern, Liberation Theology and its Critics, p. 31.

¹⁸ Gutierrez, The Truth Shall Make You Free, p. 24.

¹⁹ Ibid., p. 8.

²⁰ Gibellini, The Liberation Theology Debate, p. 9.

sexuality, or history-including, here political history."²¹ It is a practical theology, that demands "'socio-analytical mediation.' It calls for a positive, contextual, and concrete knowledge of society."²² The "overarching characteristics of the oppressed in the Third World: they are 'poor' in socio-economic terms."²³

The other reason that made Latin American theologians turn to modern social sciences, was the inadequacy of philosophy. Philosophy, a useful vehicle for explaining the relationship between God, man and the world in a particular era, history and culture could not explain the oppressive situation of poverty in Latin America.²⁴ Hence the theology of liberation makes use of rigorously scientific methods of social sciences to analyze and to understand society.

²¹ Clodovis Boff, Theology and Praxis; Epistemological Foundations, Robert R. Barr, trans., (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1987), Preface p. xxviii.

²² Ibid., p. xxi.

²³ Leonardo and Clodovis Boff, Introducing Liberation Theology, pp. 24-25.

²⁴ McGovern, Liberation Theology and its Critics, p. 31.

The present social order is "not a fixed creation of God or nature" but "is a 'social construction.'"²⁵ Therefore liberation theologians turned to socio-analytical mediation of social sciences as the:

indispensable theoretical condition today for rigorous theological discourse, and the essential practical condition for the insertion of such discourse into (political) praxis.²⁶

Marxist social analysis is used, as an instrument and the theory of dependence to explain and to seek the causes of poverty and other forms of exploitation. However liberation theologians neither give prominence to Marxism nor do they justify "an identification of the social sciences with Marxist analysis."²⁷

Clodovis Boff gives the concrete response of engaged Christians for ethico-political option as the reason for the choice of this social theory.

Suffering and struggling side by side with non-Christians and the most alert of scientists, these Christians have resolutely chosen a conflictual readings of the reality that is theirs. And they have done so on the basis of criteria furnished by their

²⁵ Alfred T. Hennelly, ed., and trans., Liberation Theology: A Documentary History, (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis books, 1990), Introduction p. XX.

²⁶ C. Boff, Theology and Praxis, p. 11.

²⁷ Gutierrez, The Truth Shall Make You Free, p. 11, 53-81; see also C. Boff, Theology and Praxis, pp. 55-57; Leonardo and Clodovis Boff, Introducing Liberation Theology, pp. 24-28; McGovern, Liberation Theology and its Critics, p. 36. They clearly reject Marxism in its materialistic atheistic form.

very faith, in articulation with analyses of the sciences of the social.²⁸

3.2.3 In the Light of Faith

Scientific analysis is not theology, but a mediation that provides a tool to understand reality and the underlying causes. Having grasped reality, the liberation theologian goes to the scriptures to find out what God has to say about this particular situation, because "the word of God is within reality and can be discovered there with the help of the Bible."²⁹ Therefore the scriptures have to be interpreted to fit the present situation, or rather as Mesters says, the people "are trying to interpret life with the help of the Bible" since "for the common people the word of God is not just in the Bible; it is also in the community and in their real life situation."³⁰ This is because the:

biblical symbols are plastic...they are seeds that contain unsuspected potentialities. Each generation must make its own reading for which it is responsible.³¹

²⁸ C. Boff, Theology and Praxis, p. 59.

²⁹ Carlos Mesters, "The Use of the Bible in Christian Communities of the Common People," in Alfred T. Hennelly, liberation Theology, p. 16.

³⁰ Ibid., 22.

³¹ Philip E. Barryman, "Doing Theology in a (Counter) Revolutionary Situation: Latin American Liberation Theology in the Mid-seventies," in Sergio Torres and John Eagleson, ed., Theology in the Americas, (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1976),

This however does not mean the manipulation of the scripture to justify the positions taken, but it is only an attempt to read the signs of the times in the light of the word of God. Scripture may not offer a direct answer to a particular problem but:

what scripture will offer us are rather something like orientations, models, types, directives, principles, inspirations-elements permitting us to acquire, on our own initiative, a 'hermeneutic competency,' and thus the capacity to judge... 'according to the mind of Christ,' or 'according to the Spirit,' the new, unpredictable situations with which we are continually confronted."³²

Boff calls this "hermeneutical mediation," which is the

necessary relationship of a theology of the political with the Christian 'fonts,' which furnish this theology of the political with its proper identity. In this perspective, the Christian scriptures constitute an obligatory and constitutive theoretical resource of any theological process.³³

In Latin America the application of the social sciences has led to the conclusion that the fundamental cause of oppression, poverty and underdevelopment is dependency. This dependency is structural and calls for a strategy of liberation.³⁴ The social

p. 73.

³² C. Boff, Theology and Praxis, p. 149.

³³ Ibid., p. 133.

³⁴ McGovern, Liberation Theology and its Critics, p. 38; see also Hugo Assmann, Practical Theology of Liberation, Paul Burns, trans., (London: Search Press, 1975), pp. 115-17.

reading of the reality is transformed into theological reading of the same reality, by hermeneutical mediation,³⁵ which is liberation theology. The concept of salvation taken from first theology, is superimposed on the concept of liberation provided by socio-analytical mediation in such a way that it produces "a theological proposition such as 'liberation is salvation,'"³⁶ which is the second theology.

3.2.4 Hermeneutic Circle

Juan Luis Segundo, in his book Liberation of Theology, challenges the view that the traditional theology is autonomous and can never be ideological. On the contrary, he says that all theology "is intimately bound up with the existing social situation in at least an unconscious way."³⁷ Theology in fact not only reflects the dominant culture, language and values but also is expressed in dominant cultural idioms. In this sense traditional theology has been used as an ideology, as the bishops of Puebla have noted it:

offers a view of the various aspects of life from the standpoint of a specific [dominant] group in society...it is not surprising that ideologies try to

³⁵ Gibellini, The Liberation Theology Debate, p. 10.

³⁶ C. Boff, Theology and Praxis, pp. 87-88.

³⁷ Juan Luis Segundo, Liberation of Theology, John Drury, trans., (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1976), p. 8.

use persons and institutions as their tool in order to achieve their aims more effectively.³⁸

Traditional theology begins with God, revelation and general principles which are then applied to Christian practice. It comes from above. Whereas liberation theology "begins from praxis and reflects on the praxis of committed Christians."³⁹

Robert McAfee Brown describes this very graphically:

Concern for liberation does not arise from theologians looking for new intellectual toys; it arises from the reality of grinding poverty, the distended stomachs of starving children, the brutality of political oppression, and from a recognition that the Christian gospel announces the possibility of liberation from unjust evils.⁴⁰

As Edward Schillebeeckx has correctly remarked, "liberation theology is not a theory looking for a Church practice which it hopes it will follow, but is called to life by the practice of a living community in reflection on its life."⁴¹

³⁸ The Puebla Final Document, in John Eagleson and Philip Scharper, eds., Puebla and Beyond: Documentation and Commentary, John Drury, trans., (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1980), pp. 198-99; parenthesis is mine.

³⁹ Gibellini, The Liberation Theology Debate, p. 5; see also J. L. Segundo, "Statement by Juan Luis Segundo," in S. Torres and J. Eagleson, Theology in the Americas, pp. 280-83.

⁴⁰ Robert McAfee Brown, "A Preface and a Conclusion," in S. Torres and J. Eagleson, Theology in the Americas, p. xv.

⁴¹ Edward Schillebeeckx, Christ: the Experience of Jesus as Lord, John Bowden, trans., (New York, N.Y.: Seabury Press, 1980), p. 759.

Therefore, liberation theology begins from a specific situation and questions revelation. Segundo says that, "each new reality obliges us to interpret the word of God afresh, to challenge reality accordingly, and then go back and reinterpret the word of God again."⁴² He calls this the "hermeneutic circle: it is the continuing change in the interpretation of the Bible which is dictated by the continuing changes in our present-day reality, both individual and societal."⁴³ It is a way of interpreting the bible, where one starts from experience then goes to the text and back to experience.⁴⁴

Segundo speaks of two preconditions for such a circle. The first is that it starts with a "suspicion about our ideas and value judgements."⁴⁵ The second is that it leads to a new interpretation of the Bible, which will lead one to either change the way one interprets the scriptures or will go back to the traditional answers. Then he speaks of four decisive factors in the circle:

Firstly there is our way of experiencing of reality, which leads us to ideological suspicion. Secondly there is the application of our ideological suspicion to the whole ideological superstructure in general and

⁴² Segundo, Liberation of Theology, p. 8.

⁴³ Ibid.,

⁴⁴ P. Barryman, Liberation Theology, p. 60.

⁴⁵ Segundo, Liberation of Theology, p. 9.

to theology in particular. Thirdly there comes a new way of experiencing theological reality that leads us to exegetical suspicion, that is, to the suspicion that the prevailing interpretation of the Bible has not taken important pieces of data into account. Fourthly we have our new hermeneutic, that is, our new way of interpreting the fountainhead of our faith (i.e., Scripture) with the new elements at the disposal.⁴⁶

3.2.5 Scripture and Liberation

It is no wonder that Gutierrez says, "Bible is our prayer book par excellence."⁴⁷ It is a Christological reading of the bible, a faithfilled reading which is historical and militant reading. The purpose of this reading in the context of Latin America is the proclamation of the good news to the poor.⁴⁸ It is also a selected reading of the bible, where certain liberative themes are studied. The Exodus event, according to liberation theologians, has not only become the central event in the history of Israel but also a model for future liberation. The cry for justice and right by the prophets and the psalmist is another important theme that has been used by liberation theologians. These themes taken from the Old Testament present

⁴⁶ Ibid.,

⁴⁷ Gutierrez, The Power of the Poor in History, p. 3.

⁴⁸ Ibid., p. 4.

God as one who intervenes in human history to demand justice and who acts as liberator of the oppressed.⁴⁹

The overarching or the general theme taken from the New Testament is the theme of 'Jesus the liberator.'⁵⁰ In this general theme are found the other themes such as, 'Jesus and the poor,' 'Jesus means freedom,' 'Jesus and the oppressed,' 'Jesus and women,' 'liberation spirituality,' and 'the Kingdom of God.' It will not be an exaggeration to state that the Kingdom of God, is the basis and foundation of the whole of liberation theology. The other themes are derived from this basic theme. Not only liberation theologians but also the exegetes consider that the central theme of Jesus' mission and of his proclamation is the 'Kingdom of God.'⁵¹ By the proclamation of the Kingdom, Jesus

⁴⁹ For a detail study of these themes see McGovern, Liberation Theology and its Critics, pp. 62-72; Leonardo and Clodovis Boff, Introducing Liberation Theology, pp. 49-52.

⁵⁰ Leonardo Boff, Jesus Christ Liberator: A Critical Christology for Our Time, Patrick Hughes, trans., (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1978); Jon Sobrino, Christology at the Crossroads, John Drury, trans., (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1978); Juan Luis Segundo, The Historical Jesus of the Synoptics, John Drury, trans., (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1985).

⁵¹ McGovern, Liberation Theology and its Critics, p. 73; John L. McKenzie, The Dictionary of the Bible, (London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1972), p. 479; J. Jeremias, New Testament Theology, (London: SCM Press, 1971), Vol. I, p. 96; George M. Soares-Prabhu, "The Central Message of Jesus," in Nirjhari, Bangalore, 1978-79, p. 58.

meant the decisive intervention of God in history and in human experience.⁵²

This is the reason for which Gutierrez states that the basis for liberation theology is the Kingdom of God, which is grace. He also stresses the historical and social aspects of the Kingdom of God:

the coming of the Kingdom, and the expectation of the parousia are also necessarily and inevitably historical, social, and material realities... It presupposes the defence of the rights of the poor, punishment of the oppressed, a life free from the fear of being enslaved by others, the liberation of the oppressed. Peace, justice, love, and freedom are not private realities; they are not only internal attitudes. They are social realities, implying a historical liberation... The elimination of misery and exploitation is a sign of the coming of the Kingdom.⁵³

For Gutierrez, sin looked at from the perspective of the Kingdom of God, is the opposite of the Kingdom:

Sin is regarded as a social, historical fact, the absence of brotherhood and love in relationships among men, the breach of friendship with God and with other men, and therefore, an interior, personal fracture... Sin is evident in oppressive structures, in the exploitation of man by man, in the domination and slavery of peoples, races, and social classes. Sin appears, therefore, as the fundamental alienation, the root of a situation of injustice and exploitation.

⁵² Norman Perrin, Rediscovering the Teaching of Jesus, (London: SCM Press, 1967), p. 60.

⁵³ Gutierrez, A Theology of Liberation, p. 167.

Sin demands a radical liberation, which in turn necessarily implies a political liberation.⁵⁴

Therefore, the struggle to eradicate sin in all its form is to make present the Kingdom of God.

3.2.6 The Consequences

The important element in liberation theology is, that it is a faith reflection on a particular historical situation. It is a theology where:

the ultimate criteria comes from revealed truth, which we accept in faith...a faith that necessarily leads to concrete actions of love for neighbour...a faith that necessarily inspires a practice.⁵⁵

By the use of socio-analytical mediation liberation theologians came to the conclusion that the cause of poverty and oppression is structural dependency. Then reflecting on this situation they proceed to discover:

how God is active in human history, bringing judgement and a transformative moment to history. Such analysis and correlation with the perceived activity of God lead to transformative action on the part of the community of believers.⁵⁶

Gutierrez clearly states that this theology "does not stop with reflecting on the world, but rather tries to be a part of

⁵⁴ Ibid., pp. 175-76.

⁵⁵ Gutierrez, The Truth Shall Make You Free, pp. 101-02.

⁵⁶ Schreiter, Constructing Local Theologies, p. 91.

the process through which the world is transformed."⁵⁷ Hence, liberation theology makes a conscious attempt to transform this dependent state and the resultant oppression on the basis of the gospel. This is what Gutierrez calls, "a critical reflection on Christian praxis in the light of the Word."⁵⁸ This idea is also expressed by Jon Sobrino:

It is not simply a matter of thought based on a particular kind of experience. It is based, not only on a practice that is influenced by the wretched state of the world, but also on the transformation of this wretched state.⁵⁹

This transformation brings about the "creation of new human persons, as well, who must be progressively liberated from whatever enslaves them, from whatever prevents them from acting as the agents of their own lot in history."⁶⁰ Hence "the building of a different society, and of a new human person, will be authentic only if it is undertaken by the oppressed themselves."⁶¹

This is exactly what the people in Latin America are doing today. The Christian communities have already begun to 'apply'

⁵⁷ Gutierrez, A Theology of Liberation, p. 15.

⁵⁸ Ibid., p. 13.

⁵⁹ Jon Sobrino, The True Church and the Poor, p. 22.

⁶⁰ Gutierrez, The Power of the Poor in History, p. 192.

⁶¹ Ibid., p. 193.

the gospel to their particular situation, just as the primitive Christian community sought to do and what the Christian community down through the centuries had been doing.⁶² The situation and the context challenges the word of God and at the same time the word of God challenges the situation and the context. In other words the poor challenge the word of God seeking direction in their struggle and the word of God challenges the poor, seeking conversion, not only of a personal kind but also structural and societal. Therefore what is called liberation theology today is only an articulation of the theology of the people. It is an articulation of a theological response to a distinct historical and socio-cultural situation in Latin America, which is a way of living one's faith.⁶³

Therefore liberation theology is about liberation from all forms of oppression, because liberation theologians, being organic intellectuals, claim an organic solidarity with the poor. First of all, this critical reflection is on Christian praxis, that is on the past and present praxis of Christians, in a Christian continent. Secondly it is a reflection in the light

⁶² See Schreiter, Constructing Local Theologies, pp. 75-94; see especially p. 76.

⁶³ Juan Carlos Scannone, "Theology, Popular Culture, and Discernment," in Rosino Gibellini, ed., Frontiers of Theology in Latin America, John Drury, trans., (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1979), pp. 214-15.

of Word, which again is entirely a Christian concept, denoting revelation found in the Christian scriptures.

If poverty, oppression, exploitation and dependency are the common characteristics of the Third World, then could this Latin American theology be the model for Asia? The Final Statement of the Fifth Conference of the Ecumenical Association of Third World Theologians (EATWOT) held in New Delhi in 1981, seems to imply that the theology of the Third World is the theology of liberation where it says:

The starting point for Third World theologies is the struggle of the poor and the oppressed against all forms of injustice and domination. The committed involvement of Christians in their struggle provides a new 'locus' for theological reflection. Their participation is faith in action and the manifestation of Christian commitment, which constitutes the first act of theology.⁶⁴

This leads us to an analysis of the writings of some Asian theologians to determine whether they accept the Latin American model as the model for Asia, or whether they propose specifically a different model of liberation theology for Asia.

⁶⁴ Final Statement of the Fifth EATWOT Conference, New Delhi, August 17-29, 1981, in Virginia Fabella and Sergio Torres, eds., Irruption of the Third World: Challenge to Theology, (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1983), No.45, p. 199.

3.3 THE FILIPINO MODEL

The Philippines is the only Christian country in Asia, where 90 percent of the population are baptized Christians. The model proposed by the Filipino theologians is based essentially on that of Latin American liberation theology, with only minor modifications. Carlos Abesamis, representing Filipino theologians in general and Cebu-Malaybalay consultation group in particular, insists:

The primary focus of our theology, then, is the concrete human situation in the Third World, in Asia and in the Philippines today, especially with its main human realities of poverty and oppression, and the hope and the struggle for justice and liberation.⁶⁵

From their involvement with people and through their pastoral experiences, the Filipino theologians found that primarily, "poverty and subhuman life of our people were the most obvious and the most serious human problem."⁶⁶ Further, as a result of social analysis, they discovered "that the human problem today is structural oppression, and that participation

⁶⁵ Carlos H. Abesamis, "Faith and Life Reflections from the Grassroots in the Philippines," in Virginia Fabella, ed., Asia's Struggle for a Full Humanity: Towards a Relevant Theology: Papers from the Asian Theological Conference, January 7-20, 1979, Wennappuwa, Sri Lanka, (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1980), pp. 123-129; quotation from p. 129.

⁶⁶ Ibid., p. 129.

in the transformation of the social order is an imperative."⁶⁷ Secondly, this analysis of the reality is interpreted in the light of biblical faith. The Filipino theologians found the biblical faith to be:

historical in outlook; i.e., a faith which has to do with historical events and 'total' in concern; its concern is not just the salvation of the soul for heaven but of total persons, societies, nations, and the whole of creation for total life (grace, Spirit, health, peace, justice, human life, joy); and such concern for total salvation is not just for the life-after-death but also during the life-after-birth.⁶⁸

In this "biblico-historical framework" and "faith-outlook," Abesamis says, that they were able to "situate the struggle of our people and our own commitment to them within the history of God's total salvation."⁶⁹ The third element in theological reflection in Asia, say the Filipino theologians, is the "native wisdom."⁷⁰ This consists in the "particular ethnic or class outlook - our culture," and the "religious wisdom...that is born out of centuries of religious philosophy and practice, asceticism, and piety."⁷¹

⁶⁷ Ibid., pp. 129-30.

⁶⁸ Ibid., p. 131.

⁶⁹ Ibid.,

⁷⁰ Ibid., p. 132.

⁷¹ Ibid.,

This short discussion clearly demonstrates that the Filipino model is almost identical to the Latin American model. According to the Filipino theologians what makes the Asian theology of liberation different from that of Latin American theology is the native wisdom. Thus, they say:

the main and principal characteristic of a truly Asian theology is its 'Third Worldness.' To highlight this primacy, we say: Third Worldness is the substantive, while 'Asian' is the adjective. The primary thrust and concern, therefore, of the Asian Third World theology is liberation, which, of course, to be authentic must be indigenous and incultured.⁷²

These theologians, it has to be remarked, do not consider the Asian religions and cultures as that important nor as what constitutes the specificity of Asia. This leads directly to the heart of the problem. What is the place of the other living religions and cultures of Asia in liberation theology? Are they essential or peripheral to the Asian theology of liberation?

3.4 THE SOUTH ASIAN MODEL

The South Asian theologians offer a different model of liberation theology. They, unlike their Filipino counterparts, theologize from a basically non-Christian world, where over 90 percent of the population belong to other living religions⁷³ and

⁷² Ibid., p. 134.

⁷³ Digan, Churches in Contestation, p. 28.

are under the influence of the ancient cultures of Asia.⁷⁴ This study will concentrate on the writings of Aloysius Pieris,⁷⁵ a Sri Lankan theologian, who could be considered a representative of the South Asian school of thought. Without any doubt Aloysius Pieris, could be considered to be the most outstanding Asian theologians because of his contribution to a specifically Asian theology of liberation.

3.4.1 The Unique Situation of Asia

The model that Pieris proposes for an Asian theology of liberation is radically different from that of Latin American theology and thus also of the Filipino model. Pieris, being faithful to his multi-religious and multi-cultural context of Asia, and speaking from the Third World perspective, insists that any theology truly Asian has to take into account the two inseparable realities that constitute the Asian context:

the Third worldness of our continent and its peculiarly Asian character. More realistically and

⁷⁴ It is beyond the scope of this paper to study all the contributions that have been made towards the Asian theology of liberation.

⁷⁵ This task is rather a difficult one since his thoughts are dispersed in the several articles he has written and no one work could be taken as the one that proposes a model for Asia. Further as Pieris acknowledges: "Certain basic ideas and insights recur frequently, and some times verbatim. This is inevitable in a series of essays that were originally written not as interconnected chapters of a book but as disparate works intended for different audiences," in the Preface of his book, Love Meets Wisdom, p. xii.

precisely, the common denominator linking Asia with the rest of the Third World is its overwhelming poverty. The specific character defining Asia within the other poor countries is its multifaceted religiousness.⁷⁶

The conclusion that D.S.Amalorpavadass reaches, after reviewing the Indian situation, is similar to that of Pieris and is applicable to Asia as a whole:

the prevalent Indian situation of which the two major aspects and dimensions are an active religiosity of the people and their common struggle for liberation and development. These are not contrary and mutually exclusive concerns; modern India's relentless and all-out effort for development and liberation is nothing but a modern expression of her age-old spiritual quest for moksha and mukti, by a process of self-realization by discovering in the depth of one's being the identity of one's self... with the self of the universe.⁷⁷

Both poverty and religion, which express the reality of Asia, says Pieris, "are themselves polysemous words, signifying contradictory realities,"⁷⁸ and are also "bipolar, each containing a negative and a positive role."⁷⁹ He insists that

⁷⁶ Pieris, An Asian Theology of Liberation, p. 69.

⁷⁷ D.S.Amalorpavadass, "The Church's Role in the Context of the Indian Reality: Its Two Aspects," in Approach, Meaning and Horizon of Evangelization: The Theological Orientation Speech delivered at the All-India Consultation on Evangelization at Patna, 3-8 October, 1973, (Bangalore: National Biblical, Catechetical & Liturgical Centre, 1973), p. 72.

⁷⁸ Pieris, An Asian Theology of Liberation, p. 37.

⁷⁹ Ibid., p. 38.

without concentrating on the negative pole of these realities one should pay attention to their positive values especially the liberative potentials of Asian religiousness, both Christian and non-Christian.⁸⁰ Taking the example from Buddhism, he illustrates how the positive pole of Asian religion synchronizes with the positive pole of poverty.⁸¹

Those engaged in cosmic activities of day to day life, maintain and support the monks with their wealth. This is considered to be the former's contribution towards their own metacosmic goal which is also a sign of their detachment from acquisitiveness. From this Pieris concludes that in Asian spirituality:

Wealth is at the service of poverty, and poverty is the condition for liberation from acquisitiveness and greed... Hence, in an Asian situation, the antonym of 'wealth' is not 'poverty' but acquisitiveness or avarice, which makes wealth antireligious. The primary concern, therefore, is not eradication of poverty, but struggle against mammon - that undefinable force that organizes itself within every person and among persons to make material wealth antihuman, antireligious, and oppressive.⁸²

This ideal is verified in Asian monastic communities, in their relationship of interdependence with the people of the

⁸⁰ Ibid., p. 41.

⁸¹ Ibid., p. 75.

⁸² Ibid.,

surrounding areas. Their lifestyle is not very different from that of the rural population. They are the proof and signs of a egalitarian society where the poor are cared for.⁸³ In these communities "poverty-even economic poverty-seems to acquire an evangelical flavour because it is practiced 'voluntarily' for the good of the community."⁸⁴ This rejection of mammon says Pieris is "motivated by the desire to bring about the kingdom of God."⁸⁵ Therefore he says:

it is not just a passive solidarity with the poor in their poverty and oppression, but a dynamic participation in their struggle to be fully human. Indeed, a dynamic following of Christ!⁸⁶

These monastic communities symbolize and anticipate "what could be everybody's future," an eschatological community.⁸⁷

This religious socialism is not limited to the monasteries, but is also reflected in the attitude of the ordinary people towards nature and in their concern for the other, by which "social harmony is insured by cosmic communion with the elements of nature."⁸⁸ Further, Asian spirituality is not a withdrawal

⁸³ Felix Wilfred, in FABC Papers No. 45, p. 50.

⁸⁴ Pieris, An Asian Theology of Liberation, p. 44.

⁸⁵ Pieris, Love Meets Wisdom, p. 37.

⁸⁶ Ibid.,

⁸⁷ Pieris, An Asian Theology of Liberation, p. 121.

⁸⁸ Ibid., p. 43; see above pp. 100-01.

from the world but everything is seen in relation to the ultimate union with God/ liberation/ Moksha/ Nirvana/ salvation, which is the ultimate freedom. However there is a disinterested involvement in the other proximate freedoms found in social, political, economic and religious fields. These are in themselves indispensable steps in the journey towards spiritual freedom. Hence Pieris says:

liberation of the poor, their psycho-spiritual and socio-political emancipation from that which keeps them poor, is an essential concern in an Asian theology.⁸⁹

Viewed from this angle, the Asian attitude to liberation is holistic; "liberation in the Indian [Asian] context is total and comprehensive."⁹⁰ This could be a model for an Asian liberation theology.

Thus, Pieris shows that there is an intrinsic connection between religion and socio-economic life in Asia. Firstly, these two realities are so intertwined "culturally and economically to constitute the vast socio-political reality that is Asia."⁹¹ Secondly, owing to the dual aspect of Asian reality, any theology that claims to be Asian, cannot be based solely on Christian revelation and scriptures but has to take

⁸⁹ Ibid., p. 113.

⁹⁰ S. Arulsamy, "Liberation Theology in India," p. 285.

⁹¹ Pieris, An Asian Theology of Liberation, p. 69.

into consideration the revelation of God in other religions and scriptures. The Final Statement of the Sixth EATWOT Conference, Geneva, acknowledges the fact that:

there are other sources of inspiration and revelation besides the Judeo-Christian scriptures. The other great religious traditions are also source of revelation.⁹²

Similarly, D.S. Amalorpavadass, an eminent Indian theologian, stresses the need to discern the presence of God beyond Judeo-Christian revelation and the Church:

The religions of the world and its temporal realities must be viewed as included in God's one universal saving plan and the historical fulfilment of this plan. The revelation and realisation of God's universal plan of salvation is wider, older and longer than the Church: it is wider than her visible institutions and structures, and not limited to the 4,000 years of Judeo-Christian history. God's saving action and presence through Christ are universally operative in time and space; they were operative before the foundation of the institutional Church by

⁹² Final Statement of the Sixth EATWOT Conference, in Virginia Fabella and Sergio Torres, eds., Doing Theology in a Divided World: Papers from the Sixth International Conference of the Third World Theologians, January 5-13, 1983, Geneva Switzerland, (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1985), quotation p. 191. See especially pp. 179-93. For similar views see, "The Final Statement of the Asian Theological Conference," in Virginia Fabella, ed., Asia's Struggle for Full Humanity: Towards a Relevant Theology: Papers from the Asian Theological Conference, January 7-20, 1979, Wennappuwa, Sri Lanka, (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1980), pp. 156-57; and also Tissa Balasuriya, "Towards the Liberation of Theology in Asia," in Virginia Fabella, Asia's Struggle for Full Humanity: Towards a Relevant Theology, (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1980), p. 19.

Christ and are active outside the Church also today.⁹³

Pieris would insist, "we need a theology of religions that will expand the existing boundaries of orthodoxy as we enter into the liberative streams of other religions and cultures."⁹⁴ Hence Pieris sees the need "to resurrect a new credible symbol of God's saving presence among our peoples, an authoritative word from a source of revelation universally recognized as such in Asia,"⁹⁵ an Asian liberation theology.

3.4.2 A Valid Theology for Asia

Having seen that for Pieris "the religiousness of the poor and the poverty of the religious masses together constitute the complex structure of Asian reality,"⁹⁶ now we can proceed to study how he constructs a theology of liberation that is specific to Asia. First of all, Pieris says that all theology is liberation theology because it is 'liberation' that ultimately determines the validity of any theology.⁹⁷ Secondly the most important element that constitutes a valid local

⁹³ D.S. Amalorpavadass, "Evangelization in the Context of India," in Indian Theological Studies, 17 (June 1980), p. 102.

⁹⁴ Pieris, An Asian Theology of Liberation, p. 87.

⁹⁵ Ibid., p. 35.

⁹⁶ Ibid., p. 113.

⁹⁷ Ibid., p. 111.

theology, is that it has to arise from the praxis of the local church:⁹⁸

the same praxis of liberation that makes a theology valid also creates the indigenous identity of the local church that co-originates with that theology. The genesis of a liberation theology overlaps with the genesis of an authentically local church.⁹⁹

After establishing the essential relationship between the local church and local theology, Pieris proceeds to examine whether the local churches in Asia are truly the local churches of Asia. He answers in the negative and says, "the majority of the local churches in Asia are not yet local churches of Asia,"¹⁰⁰ but are only members or the extension of the one Church in Rome. This is because the official Asian church does not have a valid theology of its own "except the local theology of the local church of Rome."¹⁰¹ By their failure to incarnate in the Asian ethos, the official local church in Asia has failed to fulfil the mission of Christ.¹⁰² The Asian cultures have

⁹⁸ For the importance of this see also D.S. Amalorpavadass, "Theology of Evangelization in the Indian Context," in Joseph Pathrapankal, ed., Service and Salvation: Nagpur Theological Conference on Evangelization, (Bangalore: Theological Publications in India, 1973), pp. 32-34.

⁹⁹ Pieris, An Asian Theology of Liberation, p. 111.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid.; see also p. 36.

¹⁰¹ Ibid.,

¹⁰² Ibid., p. 36.

theologies of their own whereas the official local church in Asia, is caught up between two ideologies and two theologies.¹⁰³

Pieris proceeds to show that the two dominant Western ideologies, present in Asia, Marxist socialism and capitalist developmentalism,¹⁰⁴ that propose to "eradicate poverty with naive disregard for its religious dimension,"¹⁰⁵ cannot succeed in Asia. Similarly the two theologies, the inculturation models and the Latin American theology that attempt "to encounter Asian religions with no radical concern for Asia's poor,"¹⁰⁶ are bound to fail. In his attempt to draw the contours of an Asian theology of liberation, Pieris, begins by analyzing two of the existing theologies.

3.4.3 The Inculturation Model

Pieris has already rejected the validity of traditional European theology as the model for an Asian theology of liberation. Then speaking of adaptational models he condemns them for their manifest disregard for the religions and philosophies of Asia and "they seem to have initiated a 'Christ-

¹⁰³ Ibid., p. 82.

¹⁰⁴ See above pp. 69-72.

¹⁰⁵ Pieris, Love Meets Wisdom, p. 36.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid.,

against-religion theology.'"¹⁰⁷ This attitude has changed, owing to the influence of some Indian theologians, leading to a Christ-of-religions theology. This is the theology found in Vatican II documents, where Christ is presented as the fulfilment of all religions.¹⁰⁸

Pieris also rejects the inculturation model because it takes into consideration only one aspect of the Asian reality, the culture and philosophies of Asia, without any regard for the Asian multifaceted religiosity. As we saw in chapter two,¹⁰⁹ in Asia, religion and their host cultures have the same historical roots and one cannot be separated from the other. "In all the nonbiblical soteriologies of Asia," says Pieris, "religion and philosophy are inseparably interfused. Philosophy is a religious vision; religion is a lived philosophy."¹¹⁰ Speaking about the Hindu tradition, Amalorpavadass says, "religion and philosophy, theology and spirituality are two inseparable aspects of the same thing."¹¹¹ Pieris concludes:

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., p. 52.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid., pp. 93-94.

¹⁰⁹ See above p. 113.

¹¹⁰ Pieris, An Asian Theology of Liberation, pp. 83-84; see also p. 25.

¹¹¹ D.S. Amalorpavadass, Poverty of the Religious and the Religious as Poor, Mission Theology for Our Times Series, No. 14 (Bangalore, NBCLC, 1982), p. 20.

in our Asian culture method cannot be severed from goal... in Asian traditions, the art of doing a thing is itself the thing done. The perfection to be achieved is the style of achieving it! The obvious corollary is that the Asian method of doing theology is itself Asian theology. Theopraxis is already the formation of theology."¹¹²

Therefore, the Greek manner of 'instrumentalizing,' a method by which "they took 'pagan' philosophy out of its religious context and turned it into an intellectual weapon serving Christian apologetics against those very religions"¹¹³ is not only unproductive but is also counter productive in Asia. This attempt gives a cerebral thrust to the theology of religions which made theology and theopraxis to part ways. This 'baptism' of Asian cultures and philosophies, says Pieris, is "theological vandalism," that resulted in the separation of these from their "religious context and turned it into a means of conversion."¹¹⁴

This is also somewhat similar to what Pieris calls, 'the North European model of Christianization,'¹¹⁵ in which the

¹¹² Pieris, An Asian Theology of Liberation, p. 84.

¹¹³ Ibid; see also Felix Wilfred, "Inculturation as a Hermeneutical Question," in Vidyajyoti, LII September 1988, pp. 629-23.

¹¹⁴ Ibid., p. 85.

¹¹⁵ Ibid., pp. 54-55.

metacosmic religion was able to complement the cosmic religions with transcendental orientation. In Asia, except for very small pockets, the cosmic religions have already been domesticated by the Asian metacosmic religions, long before Christianity arrived at the scene.¹¹⁶ Hence, Pieris welcomes:

the bidisciplinary approach of the scripture scholars who turn to anthropology in order to respect the hermeneutical reciprocity between book and beliefs, scripture and tradition, written text and living context. Popular hermeneusis[sic] of ancient lore reveals the people's ongoing creative response to contemporary reality.¹¹⁷

According to Pieris these theories of inculturation also concur with the theory of Western developmentalism, in that both have as their end the liberating of Asia from its superstitious practices and thus from its non-Christian religions. For Pieris the direct object and a valid starting point of interreligious dialogue is not God-talk but liberation:

Soteriology is the foundation of theology. Regrettably, the contemporary theologies of religions (with Christ pitted against religions or niched within them) are devoid of any Third World perspective: they take off from textual accounts of non-Christian religiousness and ignore the historical fact that a religion's micro-ethical concern for self-purification of individuals ("cultural revolution") is often projected into the macro-ethical level of socio-political catharsis ("structural revolution").¹¹⁸

¹¹⁶ Ibid.,; and pp. 96-100; see also above p. 115.

¹¹⁷ Ibid., p. 99.

¹¹⁸ Ibid., p. 107.

Pieris also calls upon the theologians to pay equal attention not only to the great religions of Asia but also to the popular "religiousness of Asia's poor and the poverty of the religious masses,"¹¹⁹ which constitute the Asian reality, the matrix of Asian theology.

3.4.4 The Latin American Model

The above analysis demonstrates that according to Pieris the classical Christian theology, in all its various forms, cannot be the model for Asia. However, he says that the Latin American liberation theology has some relevance to Asia, since it "offers a stopgap alternative to the other brand of theology here in Asia."¹²⁰ Pieris also has some reservations about the validity of Latin American theology of Liberation for Asia.

According to Pieris the first problem the Asians have with Latin American theology is that, because of its Marxist influence, it "lacks a perspective understanding of the religious ethos of the East."¹²¹ According to the Marxist view culture and religion form the 'superstructure' of reality, while the important infrastructure is determined by economic factors.

¹¹⁹ Ibid., p. 113.

¹²⁰ Ibid., p. 40.

¹²¹ Ibid.,

Therefore they give priority to the transformation of the economic reality, which in turn, they say, would bring a change in culture and religion. Hence, the starting point of Latin American liberation theology is the socio-economic and political situation.

On the contrary, race, ethnicity, tribe and other communal factors are considered to be essential factors in Asia and Africa.¹²² As we saw in chapter two, the poverty of the masses and the wealth of its living religions and cultures are two inseparable aspects of one Asian reality. Almost all the Latin American theologians are silent on these issues of culture and other religions, except for a few like Gutierrez, Juan Carlos Scannone,¹²³ Jon Sobrino¹²⁴ and Carlos Mesters.¹²⁵ Pieris condemns the attitude of some Asian liberation theologians who "define religion and poverty as negative forces forming an unholy alliance from which the Asian masses have to be

¹²² Tissa Balasuriya, "Editorial, Culture and Third World Theology," in Voices from the Third World, IX December 1986, pp. 2-3.

¹²³ See J. C. Scannone, in R. Gibellini, Frontiers of Theology in Latin America, pp. 213-37.

¹²⁴ Jon Sobrino, The True Church and the Poor, p. 41.

¹²⁵ Carlos Mesters, in Hennelly, ed., Liberation Theology, pp. 14-28.

liberated."¹²⁶ This, he says, is because of their lack of understanding of the religio-cultural reality of Asia and the Asian monastic ideal the "freedom that comes from poverty."¹²⁷ These theologians view Asian poverty only in terms of economics without any regard for its religiousness.¹²⁸

Pieris explains that poverty in the Asian sense means a "nonaddiction to cosmic needs."¹²⁹ Hence, he incorporates this Asian poverty of the religious into the Latin American 'praxis' in order to create an authentic Asian theology of liberation:

The Asian religious attitude to poverty, even in the context of its march to economic progress, differs from the Latin American attitude as a psychological method differs from a sociological one. In the former, voluntary poverty is a spiritual antidote; in the latter it is a political strategy... A 'liberation theopraxis' in Asia that uses only the Marxist tool of social analysis will remain un-Asian and ineffective. It must integrate the psychological tool of introspection that our sages have discovered.¹³⁰

According to Pieris the second factor that militates against the Latin American theology is that it is also a Western theology because it is influenced by the Western Christ-against-

¹²⁶ Pieris, An Asian Theology of Liberation, pp. 37-38.

¹²⁷ Ibid., p. 80.

¹²⁸ Ibid., p. 69.

¹²⁹ Ibid., p. 43.

¹³⁰ Ibid., pp. 80-81.

religions attitude. The final remark, which is implicit in Pieris, is that the Latin American theology is addressed to the Christians, in a Christian context and continent, where both the oppressors and the oppressed are Christians. This is a situation unique to Latin America and the Philippines. Whereas the interlocutor of Asian theology of liberation is not only the small minority of poor Christians but also the multitude of poor, who belong to other living religions of Asia.

However, Pieris says that the Latin American liberation theology is "so radically renewed by the challenges of the Third World that it has relevance for Asia that classic theology does not have."¹³¹ This theology that makes a radical epistemological break with traditional theology is not a new theology but a new way of doing theology. And it is the correct method of doing theology in the Third World. He points out that this important breakthrough in Western theology came with the complete reversal of method brought about by Latin American theologians: "They put theology back on its feet. They grounded it on theopraxis."¹³²

¹³¹ Ibid., p. 82.

¹³² Ibid.,

3.4.5 An Asian Theology

Pieris proceeds to construct an Asian theology of liberation in the context of Asia's poverty and religio-cultural diversity using Latin American methodology. Theology is about God, a God, who speaks through a people, therefore he says:

all theology is about a people's God - that is, about God's people. The major focus of all 'God-talk' or theology, then, must be the Third World's irruption as a new peoplehood announcing the liberating presence of a God who claims to humanize this cruel world.¹³³

However, he says, this "irruption of the Third World is also the irruption of the non-Christian world."¹³⁴ Therefore he bases his theology on what he considers to be the all important element - the vast majority of the poor, who are not Christians. He insists that an authentic Asian liberation theology, that is indigenous or local, could be formulated only when the Asian Christian community gets involved into Asia's struggle for full humanity, by incarnating itself in the cultural history of Asia, which is primarily shaped by the other religions.¹³⁵

Then Pieris reflects on this Asian reality under the light of two biblical axioms: "(1) the irreconcilable antagonism

¹³³ Ibid., p. 87.

¹³⁴ Ibid.,

¹³⁵ Ibid., pp. 111-12.

between God and Mammon, and (2) the irrevocable covenant between God and the poor."¹³⁶ Pieris says that it was the Latin American biblical hermeneutics that brought to the fore the first biblical axiom. However, this biblical perspective is not unique to Christianity but "is a universal spiritual dogma that defines the very core of practically all religions of Asia."¹³⁷ The Asian religions have been proclaiming for ages the importance of opted poverty through the symbol of monks and Sannyasis. They have demonstrated that:

(1) not only that the absolute alone is the ultimate source and the intimate moment of liberation, but (2) also that the cult of mammon or the enthronement of capital (profit-accumulation) is not merely not the guarantee of human liberation but is certainly the very negation of that liberation. Thus the negation of this negation-that is to say, the open repudiation (not necessarily the overthrow)-of any order of society based on the cult of mammon is an essential ingredient of Asian religiousness as symbolized in the monastic ideal of voluntary poverty.¹³⁸

Pieris finds in Buddhism the ideal that demonstrates very clearly the antinomy between wealth and the Ultimate: "the Buddha's explosive social message: that it is tanha -the acquisitive tendency, the accumulative instinct in the human

¹³⁶ Ibid., pp. 120-21.

¹³⁷ Ibid., p. 121.

¹³⁸ Ibid., p. 121.

heart-that generates all social evil."¹³⁹ Since Pieris speaks mostly from his Buddhist experience, we should add the Hindu notion of 'Moksha' or liberation in order to represent and to have a comprehensive notion of poverty in the great religions of South Asia as we saw in chapter two. The Hindu concept of poverty is a positive and a comprehensive one. It is a life-long process and an indispensable condition in the journey towards the ultimate reality. Poverty is identified with God-experience, social justice and cosmic harmony. Poverty becomes "meaningless without cosmic dimension, communitarian concern and spiritual experience."¹⁴⁰

Taking the example from the Christian desert fathers and the Asian hermits or 'sannyasis,' Pieris, presents two important dimensions of genuine asceticism. They are:

- (1) interior liberation from worldly possessions (material poverty) or at least from greed for possessions (spiritual poverty); and (2) visible rejection of a society that is egocentric, acquisitive, power-hungry, and dehumanizing."¹⁴¹

¹³⁹ Ibid.,

¹⁴⁰ D. S. Amalorpavadass, "Poverty of the Religious; The Poor Against the Background of Indian Religious Traditions," in Voices from the Third World, IX January 1986, p. 54; The Poverty of the Religious and the Religious as Poor, Mission Theology for Our Times Series, No. 14, (Bangalore, India: NBCLC), p. 24.

¹⁴¹ Pieris, An Asian Theology of Liberation, p. 119.

Pieris translates these values in biblical terms, as "the renunciation of mammon within" coinciding with the liberative search for God and "a denunciation of world order built on mammonic values."¹⁴² The contribution of Pieris towards an Asian liberation theology is this discovery of the monastic ideal. He says that this monastic ideal:

the personal rejection of wealth-accumulation or mammon as anti-God, and the establishment of a socially recognizable sign of that rejection - constitute the starting point of a liberation theology for Asia. It is a starting point based on the principle revealed in all religions, biblical and nonbiblical: that God or the Liberative Agent is irreconcilably opposed to mammon or wealth-accumulation, the source of human enslavement.¹⁴³

This spirituality is verified in the monastic/ashramic communities of Asia. He presents them as the model for the future eschatological basic human communities of Asia. He considers these basic human communities, based on absolute poverty and greedlessness, composed of Christian as well as of followers of other religions, to be the "sacrament" of the kingdom."¹⁴⁴ For Pieris these "prophetic communities are the founders of the not-yet-discovered liberation theology of Asia, for they are the seeds of the not-yet-developed local churches

¹⁴² Ibid., p. 120.

¹⁴³ Ibid.,

¹⁴⁴ Ibid., p. 121.

of Asia."¹⁴⁵ It is in them that, "the authentically local churches of Asia and the valid Asian theologies of liberation have already been conceived as twins in the same womb of praxis."¹⁴⁶

The second biblical perspective that the Latin American theologians have discovered with the help of biblical scholars and from their own experience with the poor in latin America, is that "God has made a defense pact-a covenant-with the poor against the agents of mammon."¹⁴⁷ Poverty was practised by different people for different purposes, but voluntary poverty was not embraced in order to show solidarity with those forced to be poor. The important idea that Pieris wants to convey is that this "axiom-God's partiality towards the poor" was never recognized as the important factor in:

the construction of a new order of love (or kingdom of God)-action whose final result only approximates the ideal that everyone dreams of (the ideal in itself is of course a gratuitous gift drawing from the other side of our human horizon).¹⁴⁸

¹⁴⁵ Ibid.,

¹⁴⁶ Ibid., p. 112.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid., p. 120.

¹⁴⁸ Ibid., pp. 121-22.

Thus, according to Pieris, what the Latin American theologians have rediscovered for us is that "the poor must be seen as those through whom God shapes our salvation history."¹⁴⁹

Pieris, after reviewing the different perceptions of liberation draws out the specific contribution that the Bible makes towards liberation. Firstly, he says the:

biblical revelation seems to advocate a unitary perception of all these aspects of liberation so that it admits a mutuality in dyads-personal/social, spiritual/material, internal/structural-whenverthese are predicated of "sin" and "liberation from sin."¹⁵⁰

The second is that,

liberation in the Bible is a religious experience of the poor, for what liberates is the redeeming love of God, and the final fruit of liberation is the saving knowledge of God! Biblical revelation is more than class struggle. It is the God-encounter of the poor, the poor by choice (the renouncers) and the poor by circumstances (the anawim of Yahweh).¹⁵¹

Thirdly, this biblical liberation "is a joint venture of God and the people (poor) covenanted into one indivisible Saving Reality," says Pieris.¹⁵² He calls this "election of the

¹⁴⁹ Ibid., p. 122.

¹⁵⁰ Ibid., p. 123.

¹⁵¹ Ibid.,

¹⁵² Ibid., p. 124.

oppressed class as God's equal partners," the foundational experience that gave birth to the bible.¹⁵³ All human beings are called upon to work towards and to co-operate with God to bring about this liberation, yet it remains a gratuitous gift of God. Finally, biblical liberation does not speak about a mere salvation of individuals or conversion of persons, but demands that "racial groupings, cultures, peoples, and nations"¹⁵⁴ be perfect as the heavenly Father/Mother is perfect. According to the bible it is the victims who will judge the nations. Hence, the missionary mandate of the Asian churches is to make the nations be aware and "fear the judgements of the victims they themselves create."¹⁵⁵

Pieris, says that the biblical idea of the religiousness of the poor fully coincides with the reality of Asia, the poverty of the religious masses. Therefore, he says that an authentic Asian liberation can be formulated only when "Christians judiciously appropriate the religiousness of the poor" as their own spirituality, "for it is the locus for a theology of liberation in Asia."¹⁵⁶ Hence, he calls for a:

¹⁵³ Pieris, "Human Rights language and Liberation Theology," in Vidyajyoti, LII November 1988, p. 535.

¹⁵⁴ Pieris, An Asian Theology of Liberation, p. 124.

¹⁵⁵ Ibid.,

¹⁵⁶ Ibid.,

specifically Asian reading of the Bible, which is in itself a theological exercise that reveals the dynamics of a liberation praxis in Asia: the discovery, through participation in the lives of others, of the revolutionary potential of their (Christian and non-Christian) religiousness—something that Marxists have not yet discovered.¹⁵⁷

Hence, Pieris says:

the first and the last word about the local church's mission to the poor of Asia is total identification (or "baptismal immersion,"...) with monks and peasants who have discovered for us, in their religious socialism, the seeds of liberation that religion and poverty have combined to produce.¹⁵⁸

Further, Pieris says that Asians have undergone a similar experience of colonization and exploitation that the people of the Old Testament times underwent. The people of Israel were 'no-people' but Yahweh made them a people through the covenant. They experienced the liberating acts of Yahweh in and through their struggles for freedom. This, says Pieris, is "an excellent paradigm of a God-encounter (that is, liberation) for the Asian poor."¹⁵⁹ The nation of Israel was able to formulate its own laws and regulations of a just society based on the covenant experience, which the other advanced nations could not do. Similarly, Pieris says that only those who experience poverty, oppression and colonization are able to

¹⁵⁷ Ibid.,

¹⁵⁸ Ibid., p. 44.

¹⁵⁹ Ibid., p. 125.

experience the justice of God and understand God's just demands, because God is biased in favour of them. Therefore, he says that, "the textual religions in Asia need to be revitalized by the people's religion that contains the seed of this revelation."¹⁶⁰

Lastly, Pieris points out that when Israel attempted to ape the so-called developed nations and wanted to be a 'people' it met with disastrous consequences. The Asian churches could learn a valuable lesson from this, because, he says, "liberation does not mean aping the rich; it means teaching the rich nations the justice of Yahweh."¹⁶¹ Through these biblical data, Pieris demonstrates that there is evidence in the bible to "support the insight that the religiousness of the Asian poor (who are largely non-Christian) could be a new source of revelation for the Asian church."¹⁶² Thus, Pieris emphasizes the importance of revelation and liberative potentials found in other religions and cultures in the formulation of an authentic Asian theology of liberation.

¹⁶⁰ Ibid.,

¹⁶¹ Ibid.,

¹⁶² Ibid.,

In sum Pieris comes to the inevitable conclusion that the reality of Asia cannot be reduced to its overwhelming poverty but must also include its religio-cultural heritage. He proceeds to construct a theology that is based on these two realities. In this Pieris makes use of Latin American theological methodology of 'praxis' because of its radical methodical break with traditional theology. Pieris accepts that it was the Latin American theologians who rediscovered for the Asians the biblical axiom that there is a irreconcilable antagonism between God and mammon, and that God has made a defence pact with the poor against the agents of mammon. In short, they reinterpret the scriptures in terms of the religious experience of the poor. Pieris finds a parallel between this and the religious experience of the poor in Asia. It is only by partaking in the struggles of the poor that one is able to discover the revolutionary potential of their religiousness. Hence Pieris says that the religiousness of the non-Christian poor of Asia could be a new source of revelation for the Asian church.

Therefore, he says that in order to formulate a valid Asian theology the church of Asia has to take into consideration not only the socio-economic Asian reality of poverty which is the common characteristic of all Third world nations but also the liberative potentials and revelation found in the religions and

cultures of Asia, which are specific to Asia. Hence, Pieris insists that an authentic Asian liberation theology could be formulated by the local church of Asia that gets involved in the struggle for full humanity by incarnating itself in the cultural history of Asia which is shaped by the living religions of Asia. Thus, the model Pieris presents is different from other liberation theologies because it is conditioned by the religio-cultural specificity of Asia.

He sees the emerging basic human communities of Asia as the local churches of Asia where authentic liberation theology is being formulated. It is in such communities the poor by choice and the poor by circumstances encounter God irrespective of their religious affiliations. These are the "'kingdom communities'... wherein Christian and non-Christian members strive together for the dawn of full humanity."¹⁶³ They are socially recognizable signs of the rejection of wealth which is the starting point of a liberation theology in Asia.

Now we can proceed to study the third dominant form of liberation theology found in Asia, namely, the minjung theology. So, without pretending to be exhaustive, certain relevant

¹⁶³ Ibid., p. 126.

aspects of minjung theology will be studied in the following section.

3.5 KOREAN MINJUNG THEOLOGY OF LIBERATION

The starting point of Third World theology is the reflection on "God's activity in history and life of a particular people in a particular time and context."¹⁶⁴ The Koreans say that God communicates with different people in their own cultural and linguistic idioms. They insist that God has been communicating with people of Korea even before the advent of Christianity, through God's liberating activities and the presence of the Holy Spirit. This is expressed in the social biography of Korean people's traditions.

3.5.1 The Minjung

Minjung is a loaded Korean word that cannot be directly translated but can only be defined. It is formed by the combination of two Chinese characters: 'min' means 'people' and 'jung' means 'the masses'. In broad terms it could be translated as "the mass of the people, or masses, or just the

¹⁶⁴ Cyris H.S. Moon, A Korean Minjung Theology: An Old Testament Perspective, (Hong Kong: Plough Publications; Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1985), p. v.

people."¹⁶⁵ This word is neither identified with 'the people of God,' though it may be the safest word politically,¹⁶⁶ nor is it identified with the socio-economic category of Marxist proletariat - inmin.¹⁶⁷ Kim, in his "Messiah and Minjung," distinguishes the category of people included in this dynamic concept of minjung from that of the Marxist proletariat:

Woman belongs to minjung when she is politically dominated by man. An ethnic group is minjung when it is politically dominated by another group. A race is minjung when it is dominated by another powerful ruling race. When intellectuals are suppressed by the military power elite, they belong to the minjung. Of course, the same applies to the workers and farmers.¹⁶⁸

¹⁶⁵ Suh Kwang-sun David, "A Biographical Sketch of an asian Theological Consultation," in The Commission on the Theological Concerns of the Christian Conference of Asia (CTC-CCA), ed., Minjung Theology, (London: Zed Press; Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books; Singapore: Christian Conference of Asia, 1983), p. 16; C.H.S. Moon, A Korean Minjung Theology, p. 1; Jung Young Lee, ed., in his Introduction to An Emerging Theology in World Perspective: Commentary on Korean Minjung Theology, (Connecticut: Twenty-Third Publications, 1988), p. 3.

¹⁶⁶ Suh Kwang-sun David, in CTC-CCA, ed., Minjung theology, p. 16.

¹⁶⁷ Kim Yong-Bok, "The Minjung (People) as the Subjects of History," in John C. England, ed., Living Theology in Asia, (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1982; Originally London: SCM Press, 1981), p. 27; see also Jung Young Lee, ed., in his Introduction to An Emerging Theology in World Perspective, p. 4.

¹⁶⁸ Kim Yong-bock, "Messiah and Minjung: Discerning Messianic Politics over against Political Messianism," in CTC-CCA, ed., Minjung Theology, p. 185.

Minjung is also differentiated from 'minjok'- the national people, a term that has been appropriated by the national bourgeoisie for their own ends during the national independence struggle.¹⁶⁹ Minjung denotes more than all these and includes "all the common people who have been regarded as the subject of Korean history."¹⁷⁰ Moon defines minjung in relation to political power which in turn includes socio-economic determination:

The minjung are those who are oppressed politically, exploited economically, alienated socially, and kept uneducated in cultural and intellectual matters.¹⁷¹

This suffering of the minjung is described as 'han'. Moon says, "the minjung are han-ridden people."¹⁷² He translates 'han' as "'grudge' or 'resentment.'" "Han is the anger and resentment of the minjung which has been turned inward and intensified as they become the objects of injustice upon injustice."¹⁷³ Han is not only personal but is also collective

¹⁶⁹ Kim Yong-Bok, in J.C. England, Living Theology in Asia, p. 27.

¹⁷⁰ Jung Young Lee, ed., in his Introduction to An Emerging Theology in World Perspective, p. 4.

¹⁷¹ C.H.S. Moon, A Korean Minjung Theology, p. 1.

¹⁷² Ibid.,

¹⁷³ Ibid., pp. 1-2.

and represents the suffering of millions of oppressed and subjugated people. Han is the lot of the Korean minjung.¹⁷⁴ It represents the underlying psychological "feeling of defeat, resignation, and nothingness" of Korean people.¹⁷⁵

The plight of the minjung and the feeling of han as the "tenacity of will for life"¹⁷⁶ are expressed in poems, art, stories and especially through mask dance.¹⁷⁷ Through these art forms the minjung propagate their culture and traditions, the social biography of the minjung. The Mask dance is the expression of the suppressed feeling of han, through which, "the minjung are conscientized and are provided with a stance of critical transcendence."¹⁷⁸ In fact, when the feeling of han explodes in the mask dance the critical transcendence is acquired and the han of the minjung is thus released. The social biography of the minjung expressed in these art forms,

¹⁷⁴ For a detail treatment of 'han' see Suh Nam-dong, "Towards a Theology of Han," in CTC-CCA, ed., Minjung Theology, pp. 55-68.

¹⁷⁵ Ibid., p. 58.

¹⁷⁶ Ibid., p. 58.

¹⁷⁷ See Hyun Young-hag, "A Theological Look at the Mask Dance in Korea," in CTC-CCA, ed., Minjung Theology, pp. 47-54.

¹⁷⁸ Ibid., p. 50.

"may be considered the roots of a theology of minjung."¹⁷⁹ Hence minjung theology is also "the theology of han."¹⁸⁰

3.5.2 Minjung Theology

Minjung theologians are the 'priests' of han who attempt to resolve this han of the minjung through 'dan,' which means the 'cutting off' of the vicious circle of han.¹⁸¹ The minjung theologians insist that han is not sin but is the result of sinful structures and of oppression.¹⁸² Hence, the eradication of sinful structures that cause injustice is the way to heal the han of the minjung. For the minjung justice is more important than forgiveness and love, because justice is the way to the liberation of the minjung.

Liberation is achieved only through releasing the power of han, both in the personal and social level. By self-sacrifice personal han could be cut off at the social level. The collective han of the minjung "can be cured only when the total

¹⁷⁹ Suh Kwang-sun David, in CTC-CCA, ed., Minjung Theology, p. 29.

¹⁸⁰ Jung Young Lee, ed., in his Introduction to An Emerging Theology in World Perspective, p. 9.

¹⁸¹ Ibid.,

¹⁸² Ibid.,; see also Suh Nam-dong, "Historical References for a Theology of minjung," in CTC-CCA, ed., Minjung Theology, p. 179; also his "Towards a Theology of Han," in CTC-CCA, ed., Minjung Theology, p. 68.

structure of the oppressed society and culture is changed,"¹⁸³ through social revolution. Kim Chi-ha, the priest of han and a leading minjung poet says that han "ought to be developed into a decisive and organized explosion,"¹⁸⁴ by which "the bottom is heaven so that turning the bottom up is to realize the justice of heaven,"¹⁸⁵ This will usher in the Messianic Kingdom or the Reign of God on earth. Here, the Minjung theology reintroduces the notion of the second coming of Christ, where "the unification of God and revolution"¹⁸⁶ will be achieved in the form of the minjung church.

Suh Nam-dong says that according to the thinking of Kim Chi-ha, "the minjung are the partners of the covenant with God and the true subjects of human history."¹⁸⁷ Hence, they together with God are called upon to bring about justice in the world, through upheavals by which they "will retake the power which has

¹⁸³ Suh Kwang-sun David, in CTC-CCA, ed., Minjung Theology, p. 25.

¹⁸⁴ Kim Chi-ha, as quoted in Suh Nam-dong, "Towards a Theology of Han," in CTC-CCA, ed., Minjung Theology, p. 65.

¹⁸⁵ Ibid., p. 66; see also Jung Young Lee, ed., in his Introduction to An Emerging Theology in World Perspective, pp. 10-11.

¹⁸⁶ Kim Chi-ka as quoted in Suh Nam-dong, "Historical References..," in CTC-CCA, ed., Minjung Theology, p. 166.

¹⁸⁷ Suh Nam-dong, "Historical References..," in CTC-CCA, ed., Minjung Theology, p. 156.

been taken from them and used against them."¹⁸⁸ Hyun Young-hak says, "God is working and revealing his will in and through the minjung of Korea, especially the minjung's history and culture."¹⁸⁹

The specific contribution of minjung theologians is that God is active in the history of the minjung, not only in the past but also at present. Hence, Korean theologians are making attempts to reappropriate this dimension from the perspective of the oppressed people of Korea - the minjung. The beginnings of Minjung theology has to be found in the social biography of the minjung.¹⁹⁰ Therefore, in the opinion of Suh:

Kim Cha-ha indicates that the Korean church in the Korean historical and political situation should unify God (spiritual renewal) and revolution (structural renewal) concretely, and that it should refine the historical tradition of the Korean minjung movement with the chisel of a liberation-oriented theology so that it may suggest the direction along which the people's rights movement should go.¹⁹¹

The scriptures and the mission of God in Korea have to be reinterpreted in the light of people's rights movement. Suh proposes that the Exodus, Crucifixion-Resurrection, the history

¹⁸⁸ Ibid.,

¹⁸⁹ Hyun Young-hak, in CTC-CCA, ed., Minjung Theology, p. 54.

¹⁹⁰ Ibid., p. x.

¹⁹¹ Suh Nam-dong, in CTC-CCA, ed., Minjung Theology, p. 156.

of the church and the tradition of the minjung movement as the three 'paradigms' or 'archetypes' that could be used as references to reinterpret and to actualize the people's rights movement. These are interpreted "in terms of socio-economic history and in terms of the sociology of literature."¹⁹² Thus, minjung theology departs from the methodology of traditional theology, and uses, like the other Third World liberation theologies, "the social condition of human existence"¹⁹³ as the framework for interpretation - a new hermeneutics.

Contrary to the traditional understanding, the minjung theologians insist that the Exodus event and the Jesus-event are not merely spiritual or religious experiences but are liberational with historical, political and socio-economic implications. Hence, they are paradigms or usable traditions for minjung theology. While the revolution of Moses was an once and for all event where Moses answered the cry of the oppressed, in the Jesus-event, "Jesus was the very cry (aspiration) of the people,"¹⁹⁴ a part and a personification of the minjung. The minjung theologians identify Jesus with the 'ochlos' of Mark's gospel, which terminology is almost identical to that of the

¹⁹² Ibid., p. 157.

¹⁹³ Ibid.,

¹⁹⁴ Ibid., p. 159.

minjung.¹⁹⁵ This Jesus-event is repeatable and is being repeated in the struggles, sufferings, death and resurrection of the minjung through the continuous action of the Holy Spirit. Lee identifies several past and present liberation struggles of the minjung as the manifestations of the Jesus-event.¹⁹⁶

Suh complains that the true image of Christ as the political and historical messiah of the minjung has been compromised by the "Hellenistic metaphysical thinking" and "co-opted by the Roman political power,"¹⁹⁷ whereby religion was used as the ideological tool of the ruling class. Traditional theology projects the Kingdom of God proclaimed by Jesus to be otherworldly and individualistic. Whereas, the aspirations of the oppressed took the form of Millennium, which is understood as "a historical, earthly and semi-ultimate symbol."¹⁹⁸ Suh reintroduces the concept of Millennium that "was the orthodox

¹⁹⁵ Ibid., pp. 159-60; see also Jung Young Lee, ed., in his Introduction to An Emerging Theology in World Perspective, p. 12; Ahn Byung-mu, "Jesus and the Minjung in the Gospel of Mark," in CTC-CCA, ed., Minjung Theology, pp. 138-151; and David Kwang-sun Suh, "A Theology of Minjung," in Samuel Amirtham and John S. Pobee, eds., Theology by the People: Reflections on Doing Theology in Community, (Geneva: World Council of Churches, 1986), pp. 72-75.

¹⁹⁶ Jung Young Lee, ed., in his Introduction to An Emerging Theology in World Perspective, p. 12.

¹⁹⁷ Suh Nam-dong, "Historical References...", in CTC-CCA, ed., Minjung Theology, p. 162.

¹⁹⁸ Ibid.,

doctrine of the church of the first century."¹⁹⁹ Since, Kingdom of God represents the salvation of the individual, he says that Millennium, a concept that expresses the aspirations of the minjung, should be accepted as that which secures "the salvation of the whole social reality of humankind."²⁰⁰

Hence, he insists that the original revolutionary fervour for justice for the minjung has to be recaptured and reintroduced in theology. Following the traditions of Joachim of Floris and Muentzer, Suh says that the present period of history is that of the Holy Spirit, who "is the principle and the power through which we interpret the Bible,"²⁰¹ and the minjung traditions. This is exactly what the minjung theologians are attempting to achieve in Korea. They see the direct actions of the Holy Spirit in the world and in their history, working for the liberation of the minjung from their han. Therefore, according to Suh the task of the theologians:

is to testify that in the Mission of God in Korea there is a confluence of the minjung tradition in Christianity and the Korean minjung tradition. It is to participate in and interpret theologically the events which we consider to be God's interventions in history, and the work of the Holy Spirit.²⁰²

¹⁹⁹ Ibid., p. 163.

²⁰⁰ Ibid., pp. 162-63.

²⁰¹ Ibid., p. 165.

²⁰² Ibid., p. 177.

The various liberational movements of the past, because of the presence of the Holy Spirit, are considered to be the paradigms for the present. Seen from this perspective Donghak rebellion and other struggles for liberation of the minjung are seen as acts or interventions of God. Through these historical events the minjung asserted their independence and their desire to be the subjects of history.²⁰³ God is known not through speculations but through God's acts of liberation in the history of the minjung. Therefore, reflection on this praxis of liberation is the starting point of minjung theology.²⁰⁴

Minjung theology is also influenced by Maitreya Buddhism, which is the religion of the minjung. Amita Buddhism reflects the ideology of the ruling class, which promises a paradise after death. It advocates passivity and renunciation. On the other hand according to Maitreya tradition of the minjung the Buddha of the future, "will come to this dirty world to make it pure; and the Saint King Jun-ryun will appear to realize the just and ideal society of the Yongwha world."²⁰⁵ It became the

²⁰³ Ibid., p. 171.

²⁰⁴ Jung Young Lee, ed., in his Introduction to An Emerging Theology in World perspective, pp. 14-16.

²⁰⁵ Suh Nam-dong, "Historical References...", in CTC-CCA, ed., Minjung Theology, p. 175.

source of rebellion and resistance movements, through which the minjung proclaimed their subjecthood.

The Korean minjung theology is, therefore, an attempt to rediscover the messianic traditions of Maitreya Buddhism and Donghak tradition. In its dialogue with these different messianic traditions of the minjung it proposes the messianic politics of Jesus as that will help the minjung realize its historical subjecthood, unification of Korea and justice.²⁰⁶ The minjung want to be the masters of their own destiny and the subject of their own history in order to participate in the Messianic Kingdom.

Kim distinguishes between messianic politics and political messianism. The former is the rule of the minjung where they join Messiah to realize his messianic role. Political messianism on the other hand is totalitarian and absolutist rule of one leader or of a ruling class, in which the minjung are reduced "to historical nothing or objects of its messianic claims."²⁰⁷ Kim says, "the relationship between minjung and Messiah should be understood as a relation between the minjung

²⁰⁶ Kim Young-bock, in CTC-CCA, ed. Minjung Theology, pp. 185-87.

²⁰⁷ Ibid., p. 191.

as the subject and the Messiah as their function."²⁰⁸ The title Jesus the Suffering Servant is that "provides the two messianic qualities of identification with the suffering people and functioning as the servant."²⁰⁹ This is the ideal that is placed in front of the Korean Christian community.

The minjung theology challenges the Christian community in Korea to be the servant of the suffering minjung as Jesus the Messiah did and make present the hope of resurrection of all the minjung through its liberative actions. The shamans are only able to release the han of the dead through 'Gut'²¹⁰ whereas Jesus the Suffering Servant takes upon himself the han of the minjung and as Messiah assures not only a personal salvation but also the resurrection of the minjung. This liberation is not only a spiritual one but is also political, by which the minjung are really made the subjects of their own history. Hence, minjung theology is the story of the minjung and not of its masters. This clearly manifests a reversal or a transposition of power, where the judged become the judge. Further, contrary to the idea of inculturationists:

²⁰⁸ Ibid.,

²⁰⁹ Ibid.,

²¹⁰ For a detail study of 'Hut' see Lee Chung Hee, "Gut and Shin Myung: Liberating Spirituality in the Korean Minjung Tradition," in Voices From the Third World, XII June 1990, pp. 88-110.

in minjung theology the culture of minjung has a tendency to transform the image of Christ to meet the needs of the cultural adaptation of Christianity and a structural reform of society to liberate the minjung.²¹¹

Minjung theology is different from the Latin American theology of liberation, which is based on Marxist social analysis, while the Minjung theology is based on the social biography of the minjung. It is not an imported theology, since a foreign theology cannot express the experience and the thinking of the ordinary people adequately. It is a Korean political theology. It is based on "a political hermeneutics of the Gospel and a political interpretation of Korean Christian experiences."²¹²

3.4 CONCLUSION

The Latin American theology of liberation as we saw in the first section of this chapter is a valid Third World theology. It is different from the traditional Western theology not because of its content but because of its methodology. The starting point of Latin American theology is not the revealed

²¹¹ Jung Young Lee, ed., in his Introduction to An Emerging Theology in World Perspective, p. 18.

²¹² Suh Kwang-sun David, in CTC-CCA, ed., Minjung Theology, p. 17.

truths or dogmas of the church but the socio-economic situation of oppression and poverty in Latin America. The interlocutor of Latin American theology, "is the non-person, the marginalized woman or man consigned to the 'underside of history.'"²¹³ Thus, theology becomes the second act whereas the commitment to the praxis of liberation is the first act. Hence, Gutierrez defines liberation theology "as a critical reflection on Christian praxis in the light of the Word."²¹⁴

The starting point of liberation theology in Asia as in other parts of the Third World is the cry of the oppressed. Hence it does not begin with philosophical speculations but with real life situations of the people. This is the radical epistemological break they speak of. This theology is the result of a critical reflection on the praxis of faith. Hence, involvement is the first act of theology.²¹⁵ Thus, Pieris and the other Asian theologians do not have any problem either with the Latin American or with the Filipino proposition that liberation theology starts from a commitment and leads to the analysis of that particular reality, which leads to praxis.

²¹³ Denis Carroll, What is Liberation Theology?, p. 26.

²¹⁴ Gutierrez, A Theology of Liberation, p. 13.

²¹⁵ Ibid.,

However, Pieris says that the Latin American Theology cannot be the model for Asia because the reality of Asia is different from that of Latin America. An Asian theology of liberation has to take into consideration the "religiousness of the poor and the poverty of the religious masses,"²¹⁶ that constitute the Asian reality. In this, overwhelming poverty is the common denominator that links Asia with the rest of the Third World, while the specific characteristics of Asia is its "multifaceted religiousness."²¹⁷ Therefore, any theology of liberation that attempts to liberate the masses from socio-economic and political oppression but does not take into consideration the religiousness of the masses and their host cultures seriously cannot be an authentic Asian theology of liberation.²¹⁸ Hence, it has to take into account the revelation of God found not only in Christian scriptures but also in the scriptures and traditions of other religions.²¹⁹ This, Pieris claims is because "the religiousness of the Asian poor (who are largely non-Christian) could be a new source of revelation for the Asian church."²²⁰

²¹⁶ Pieris, An Asian Theology of Liberation, p. 113.

²¹⁷ Ibid., p. 69.

²¹⁸ Ibid., p. 113.

²¹⁹ See The Final Statement of the Fifth EATWOT, 1981, New Delhi, India, "Irruption of the Third World," No. 59, p. 202.

²²⁰ Pieris, An Asian Theology of Liberation, p. 125.

In Asia, religion and philosophy, religion and culture, and praxis and theory are so well integrated, that one cannot be separated from the other. Similarly, according to Asian spirituality, there is no dichotomy between belief and action, theory and practice, word and deed. The "Asian method of doing theology is itself Asian Theology."²²¹ Therefore, Pieris discounts the validity of inculturation models for Asia. What is important is not orthodoxy but orthopraxis, whereby "God-talk is made relative to God-experience."²²² A God-experienced person is a poor person, who has renounced everything as a necessary condition for total liberation, which is theopraxis. This calls for voluntary poverty in solidarity with those who are forced to practice poverty and as "an antidote to greed and accumulation."²²³ This rejection of mammon, according to Pieris, "constitutes the starting point of a liberation theology in Asia."²²⁴

This rejection of mammon is exemplified in the Asian monastic/ashramic communities. The emerging basic human

²²¹ Ibid., p. 84.

²²² Ibid., 85.

²²³ Felix Wilfred, in FABC Papers No. 45, p. 48; see also The Final Statement of the Fifth EATWOT, No. 56, p. 201.

²²⁴ Pieris, "A Theology of Liberation In Asian Churches?" p. 120

communities in Asia are based on this monastic model. For Pieris they "are the founders of the not-yet-discovered liberation theology of Asia, for they are the seeds of the not-yet-developed churches of Asia."²²⁵ Thus, liberation theology is not an invention of theologians but a discovery or an "explicitation of the theopraxis of these ecclesiolae."²²⁶ The starting point of an Asian theology of liberation is the identification with the religiousness of the poor and a commitment to the liberation of the poverty of the religious of Asia. Liberation theology arises as a second act when a given community reflects on this Asian situation in the light of God's word found both in Christian and non-Christian revelation. Hence, one could conclude with Pieris:

liberation theology begins to be formulated only when a given Christian community begins to be drawn into a local people's struggle for full humanity and through that struggle begins to sink its roots into the life and cultures of these people, most of whom are non-Christians.²²⁷

The minjung theologians have rediscovered for Asia, the importance of the social biography of the minjung, which the South Asian theologians and especially Pieris have failed to take into consideration. According to minjung theologians God

²²⁵ Ibid., p. 121.

²²⁶ Ibid., p. 110.

²²⁷ Ibid., p. 111.

has been not only present in the history of Asia but is also active through the Spirit in the history, struggles and sufferings of the people and in their fight for freedom from oppression. The minjung theologians are calling for a new hermeneutics of the Gospels in relation to the Asian reality, its scriptures and its traditions.

In short, out of the four models of liberation theology, the Latin American model is the non-Asian one. Though, the Filipino model is similar to that of the Latin American model it is also an Asian theology. The other two models are truly indigenous theologies with their specific Asian characteristics. At the same time one cannot deny that the Asian liberation theology is in a process of formation and clarification, without any well defined contours. However incomplete these different models may be, they are the pointers and the forerunners of an Asian theology of liberation.

Therefore, armed with these above models, one can proceed to analyze the Documents of the FABC to determine whether the documents of the FABC contain a specific Asian theology of liberation as articulated by Asian liberation theologians.

CHAPTER FOUR

FROM SALVATION TO TOTAL HUMAN DEVELOPMENT

ABM (1970) AND FABC I (1974)

4.1 INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this thesis is to determine whether the Documents of the FABC contain a specific Asian theology of liberation. In the previous chapter we saw that, according to Pieris, an authentic Asian liberation theology could be formulated. But this would come about only through a genuine involvement of the Asian Christian community in Asia's struggle for full humanity. Such an involvement necessitates the church of Asia being incarnated in the cultural history of Asia, a history shaped primarily by the other living religions of Asia.¹ Therefore, in this chapter we will study these questions: did the bishops of Asia attempt to become involved in the day to day struggles of the people and create an incarnated church of Asia? In doing so did the bishops articulate an authentic Asian theology?

¹ See above p. 186.

In order to achieve this, therefore, in the first part of this chapter, we propose to do a historico-critical analysis of the document of the Asian Bishops' Meeting (ABM), Manila, Philippines, 1970. In the second part we will continue the analysis of the First Plenary Assembly of the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conference (FABC I), Taipei, Taiwan, 1974. Since liberation theology is the 'second act' or the reflection on the 'first act' of commitment in the light of faith,² we will analyze these documents to determine whether the bishops begin their reflections on the actual situation in Asia or not. In this process we hope to answer the questions: how do the bishops reflect on the realities of Asia and what do they find therein? The answers to these questions will determine whether the bishops of Asia have opted for a new way of doing theology in Asia as proposed by Asian liberation theologians.

4.2 THE ASIAN BISHOPS' MEETING (November 1970)

Strictly speaking, the ABM does not belong to the FABC series. However, a study of this document will be useful, since the decision to form the FABC was taken at this first meeting of the Asian bishops. Furthermore, it was this meeting that provided the general direction and set in motion the process of

² See above pp. 122-24.

change that brought about a new way of being the church of Asia. Hence, a study of this document will also help us to situate Asia's struggle for full humanity and the rationale for a local theology.

In line with the questions posed in the introduction to the first sub-section, we will try to analyze the 'experience of the Asian church' and the reasons for the bishops to opt for 'a new point of departure' in their theological methodology. Secondly how does this change in methodology affect the bishops' understanding of the complex socio-economic and political reality of Asia? How and why do they make the transition from 'salvation to total human development.' The final sub-section will probe the document to see how the bishops react to the overwhelming presence of other religions and cultures in Asia?

4.2.1 A New Point of Departure: The Experience of the Asian Church

At the ABM, the bishops established a new procedure for being the church in Asia which in turn will also be the method of doing theology in Asia. They said that in order to understand the situation in Asia, they have made every effort to open their minds and hearts "to the needs and aspirations"³ of

³ ABM, 3, in FAPA, 1:12.

the people. The bishops put forward two reasons for this new method and why it is important to listen to the people.

Firstly, the bishops say that in order to be more truly at the service of the people they want to make the concerns of the people truly their own.

We ask ourselves how we may more truly be at the service of our peoples. We ask how we may fully engage ourselves in the common task wherein all men of good will must be joined, of building up within our nations societies which respond to the deepest aspirations of our peoples as well as to the demands of the Gospel: societies "grounded on truth, guided by justice, motivated by charity, realized in freedom, and flowering in peace."⁴

Since the purpose of the church is to be at the service of the people and not the people at the service of the church, the starting point of theology must be the concrete practical experience of the people as they encounter the Gospel. The Latin American theologians call this option and commitment, the first act.⁵

The second is to bring to the people and to their struggle, "the wisdom that the Gospel teaches" and thus "bring all men a

⁴ Ibid., 14, p. 14.

⁵ See above pp. 121-22.

fuller and more abundant life."⁶ Here the bishops are not concerned about a process which would impose the Gospel upon the people of Asia. On the contrary their concern is to find out from the Gospel what God has to say about the situation of poverty and oppression in Asia. Further, according to the bishops the "profound religious sense" found in the Asian traditions can be helpful not only in their developmental efforts but also in deepening their own spirituality.

We know that the first task must be the renewal of ourselves in the light of Christ. We must begin always with a return to the Gospel. This renewal must be rooted in prayer and in the vivifying of "that profound religious sense which characterizes the spirit of the Asian world." In our development efforts we must continue to treasure the resources of the spirit found among our peoples. We realize too that we must deepen in ourselves the spirit of servanthood taught to us by Him who lived in our midst "as one who serves" and who came "to give his life for the redemption of all."⁷

The bishops at the ABM have clearly indicated that what they want to reflect on is not only the Gospel but also the socio-economic and the religio-cultural reality of Asia. This reflection on reality in the light of the Word, according to the liberation theologians is the second act-theology. It has to be noticed that the Asian bishops have opted for an inductive rather than a deductive a priori approach. By opting for this

⁶ ABM, 3, 14, 28, in FAPA, 1:12-17.

⁷ Ibid., 15.

"epistemological break" advocated by the Latin American theologians and by Pieris,⁸ the bishops of Asia have laid the foundation for an authentic Asian theology.

This change in methodology clearly indicates a break with the past, where abstract philosophising was the norm. Now the bishops have shown a willingness to approach theology in a new way. Accordingly, the experience of responding to the sufferings and struggles of the poor, is the starting point for a new theological method.⁹ This option for a new way of doing theology, a theology from below, from the perspective of the poor, from the underside of history, is certainly an option for liberation theology.

In order to understand and experience Asian reality from the underside of history, the bishops looked "upon the many faces of Asia and contemporary Asian man."¹⁰ Breaking out from their isolation and seclusion, they saw the reality of Asia. Firstly it is a continent, "largely marked with poverty, with under-nourishment and ill-health, scarred by war and suffering,

⁸ See above pp. 123&157-58.

⁹ See above pp. 120-22.

¹⁰ ABM, 4, in FAPA, 1:12.

troubled and restless" mass of people, two-thirds of humankind, almost two billion people.¹¹

Secondly, the bishops acknowledged that the heritage of Asia is not only its poverty and oppression but also it "is the continent of ancient and diverse cultures, religions, histories and traditions."¹² This did not mean that the bishops were unaware of the presence of other religions and cultures in Asia. The fact is that the bishops were reawakened by the cultural and religious resurgence and the dominant role they played during the struggles for national independence. The bishops became acutely conscious of the religio-cultural wealth of Asia and the influence exerted by these heritages, which gave the people an identity and a hope for the future.¹³ Therefore the dominant concern of the bishops at the ABM was to incarnate the church in this multi-faceted reality of Asia.

4.2.2 From Salvation to Total Human Development

At the ABM in Manila, the bishops began to take the first steps in their long march towards making the church in Asia the

¹¹ Ibid., 5.

¹² Ibid., 7, p. 12.

¹³ Ibid., 9, pp. 12-13.

incarnate church of Asia. They clearly perceived the need for a new direction and:

to discover new ways through which we may be of greater and more effective service - not to our Catholic communities only - but to our own peoples and to the future, pregnant with both fear and promise, which opens up before us.¹⁴

This opening to the world outside, is an indication of the bishops' decision to break away from the ghetto mentality of the Asian church which has made "it alien in our lands."¹⁵ This concern for all the people of Asia, irrespective of their religious, cultural, social, economic and political affiliations, will be one of the overarching theme of the FABCs.

An important step in the right direction was the bishops' constant affirmation at the ABM, not only to make every effort to open their minds and hearts "to the needs and aspirations" of the people but also to be at the service of the people, by making these concerns truly their own.¹⁶ In order to achieve this the bishops looked "upon the many faces of Asia and contemporary Asian man."¹⁷ Firstly, it is a continent of poverty, suffering and human degradation.

¹⁴ Ibid., 2, p. 11.

¹⁵ Ibid., 17, p. 14.

¹⁶ Ibid., 3, p. 12; 14, p. 14; and 28, p. 17.

¹⁷ Ibid., 4, p. 12.

Secondly, the bishops saw the problems and agonies of the young nations of Asia and their struggle to free themselves from colonialism, fatalism, injustice and exploitation. Though the Asian bishops' first official statement on the socio-economic situation in Asia did not arise from a scientific social analysis, it shows that the bishops were concerned about the situation in Asia. They saw the peoples' attempt to rebuild Asia from the ashes of past failures and dashed hopes.

We witness the awakening of the masses, and the ending of the long ages of resigned fatalism and passive acceptance of poverty, ignorance and sickness, of injustice and exploitation, of mismanagement and corruption among those responsible for the conduct of public affairs. We witness their expectations of a better and fuller life for themselves and their children, for more rice on their tables, knowledge for their sons, their yearnings for greater freedom and dignity, recognition and acceptance, for a life more truly worthy of man.¹⁸

This statement is an example not of what the bishops wanted to do for the people of Asia, but of the awakening of the people themselves to the situation in Asia. The people of Asia have discovered that poverty, sickness and ignorance were not accidental. They are the result of oppression, exploitation, injustice, mismanagement and corruption which have their roots in politics. By recognizing this fact, the bishops accepted the dominant role of politics and politicians in the day to day

¹⁸ ABM, 10, in FAPA, 1:13.

lives of the people. This also means that an authentic local church that wants to be a part of Asia and that is determined "to bring to all men a fuller and more abundant life"¹⁹ to the people of Asia, cannot claim to be neutral.

Thirdly, the bishops also situated the problem, anxiety, rebellion and the plight of the youth of Asia, who constitute sixty per cent of the population, in the total context of unjust socio-economic and political structures. By calling for "urgent reforms and bold transformation," the bishops showed that the youth have to be taken seriously and that their demands were just.²⁰ It is by listening to the youth, that the bishops resolved:

to become, in them and for them, "the Church of the Young." We wish to be, in them and for them, a Church that they shall see as worthy of their devotion and hope: which seeks to understand and trust them; which is responsive to the needs and demands of men in contemporary society; a church not "established" in the world and which lives out in deeds, day by day, the convictions of her faith and the imperatives of her compassion.²¹

This statement is the first clear indication of the direction that the bishops of Asia want the church to take in

¹⁹ Ibid., 3, p. 12.

²⁰ Ibid., 11.

²¹ Ibid., 23, p. 16.

order to be the church of the people. The bishops at the ABM, were neither interested in 'establishing' the church, an institution superimposed without any concern for the reality of Asia, nor were they speaking about 'saving souls' in Asia. The church they spoke of is one that is attentive to the needs and demands of the people of Asia. The church becomes a local church not by proclaiming a particular doctrine or belief, but by getting involved in the day to day struggles of the people. Therefore, the bishops committed themselves "with all eagerness 'to whatever concerns the dignity of man.'"²²

As a result of the awakening of Asia, the bishops saw the formation of a true community of people, the breaking down of the barriers that kept people and nations isolated for centuries. They also perceived the desire among the Asians:

to know each other and to find in each other as Asians, sister-nations among whom relationships of friendship and trust, of collaboration, sharing and genuine solidarity may be firmly lastingly wrought.²³

This desire for unity and fellowship among the people certainly had an impact upon the bishops. One important outcome was their realization that the church can no longer remain isolated from the rest of the community. Hence, with the deepest sense of

²² Ibid., 18, p. 15.

²³ Ibid., 12, p. 13.

solidarity and speaking on behalf of all the Asian Catholics, the bishops declared:

We are proud to be part of this continent of tomorrow: for we as Asian Catholics desire - as Catholic communities - to be increasingly integrated within the larger communities around us, culturally part of that Asia which is coming to slow but certain birth in the present moment.²⁴

This identification with the people of Asia was so vital to the church that this statement was repeated verbatim at FABC I.²⁵ Probably this was the first time the bishops of Asia acknowledged that they were proud to be part of this valuable and rich heritage of Asia. This has to be seen in relation to the bishops' acceptance that the church in Asia has kept itself aloof from the day-to-day struggles of the people, their dreams, and their history.²⁶ The bishops regretted their silence in the face of injustice and for not speaking in the defence of human rights of the oppressed. For this alienation and their failure to incarnate the Christian life and en flesh the church in Asia, the bishops accepted their responsibility. They said:

we have been found wanting: where we have tended to foster only narrow and 'domestic' interests; where we could have shown more compassion and solicitude for the poor and have not been sufficiently vigorous in speaking out for justice and the defence of human

²⁴ Ibid., 13.

²⁵ FABC I, 5, in FAPA, 1:28.

²⁶ Felix Wilfred, in Pro Mundi Vita Studies, p. 2.

rights; where we have not incarnated the Christian life and enfleshed the Church in ways and patterns of our respective cultures, and thus kept it alien in our lands; where we have not sought understanding of, reconciliation and collaboration with our brothers of other Christian Churches and other faiths.²⁷

Here, it becomes clear that according to the bishops' perception, it was not the others who considered Christianity to be alien but that the church has made itself alien by its failure to incarnate itself in the life and history of the people of Asia.

In view of the challenges posed by the majority of Asians who are poor, and driven by the demands of the Gospel, the bishops resolved to identify themselves with the poor and make the church in Asia more truly 'the Church of the poor.' In order to achieve this end, they proposed to take some effective and practical measures. There is no doubt as to their highest priority-to be poor as Jesus was poor. Therefore, they said:

we must in our way of life share something of their poverty. The Church cannot set up islands of affluence in a sea of want and misery; our own personal lives must give witness to evangelical simplicity, and no man, no matter how lowly or poor, should find it hard to come to us and find in us their brothers.²⁸

²⁷ ABM, 17, in FAPA, 1:14.

²⁸ Ibid., 19, p. 15.

The bishops were disconcerted by the fact that the church in Asia and particularly the bishops were completely cut off from the people because of their way of life and that they themselves had failed to be witness to evangelical poverty. Since poverty was the lot of the majority of Asians, the bishops said they also should share in their poverty by living a life of poverty. It was by identifying themselves with the poor that the bishops were able to see the world from the perspective of the poor. Seeing the world from this vantage point, they felt that it was their duty to lay bare the causes of oppression and in that process resolved to:

 speak out for the rights of the disadvantaged and powerless, against all forms of injustice no matter from what source such abuse may come; we will not tie our hands by compromising entanglements with the rich and the powerful in our respective countries.²⁹

This statement is important because of what it implied. The bishops acknowledged indirectly their past failures where they have betrayed the poor and the oppressed either by cooperating with the rich and the powerful or by their silence, under the pretext of neutrality. Hence, their determination to speak for the poor and their resolution not to be influenced by the rich and the powerful. Hence, the bishops said:

 Resolutely we commit ourselves to the concern for the total development of our peoples. We believe that

²⁹ ABM, 20, in FAPA, 1:15.

man's humanity is God's gift and making, and its promotion a task and duty laid on all of us by Him.³⁰

When these two passages are examined carefully in conjunction with the 'Resolution of the Meeting,' we cannot but come to the inevitable conclusion that the bishops have directly linked injustice, oppression and individualism to the existing political systems. This is an important step in understanding the Asian reality which led the bishops to enumerate in practical terms the tasks and the line of action that they proposed to take in order to help people attain their freedom:

a) to work for and defend human rights together with people of other religions; b) to identify with the workers and educate them to help defend their rights; c) to find a basic minimum standard of living for all especially through a programme of land reform and distribution; d) to educate the people with regard to responsible parenthood; e) to find an open market for the products of Asia and to pressurize the foreign governments of the importance of trade to aid; f) to struggle against both communism and imperialism in search of peace and justice for all.³¹

³⁰ Ibid., 21.

³¹ ABM/Res., 2-7, in FAPA, 1:19-20.

Among these, the bishops seem to have singled out and directed their strongest condemnation against capitalism. This could be gleaned from the bishops' "resolve to help secure the basic means of livelihood for all," and their commitment to "an equitable distribution and socially responsible use of land and other resources."³² They deplored the inequitable trade among nations, the arbitrary and unjust capitalist system of price-fixing for Asian products.³³ They also promised to "support the struggle against atheistic communism and imperialism of every kind."³⁴

Steeped in the Asian religious traditions and as pastors of the Catholic church, their struggle against atheistic communism is understandable. However, it has to be noted that this was neither a condemnation of communism nor was their struggle directed against communism as a political system, and certainly not against socialism. This does not mean that the bishops were ignorant of the dangers of communism nor of its aberrations. By associating communism with imperialism, the bishops have indicated that these two systems were responsible for the lack of peace in Asia. The peace which they spoke of, was not the

³² Ibid., 4, p. 20.

³³ Ibid., 6.

³⁴ Ibid., 7.

peace enforced by the victors upon the vanquished but a "peace with justice and freedom."³⁵

The bishops at the ABM, blamed not only the "narrow egoism and particularist interests" but also the systems³⁶ and unjust structures for inflicting untold sufferings upon the people of Asia. Hence, they perceived it to be their duty to make their own the hopes and aspirations of the people and struggle with them in the building up of a new Asia.³⁷ Apprehensive of the enormous task facing them, the bishops resolved:

to gather the needed knowledge for the difficult planning in which we must henceforth participate, and to muster the effective will to eradicate entrenched injustice and replace oppressive structures, thus bringing to realization in each of our nations of that society which is the substance of the expectations of our peoples. It remains for us, with patience and decision, to help bind together the new world of Asia, as a true family of nations in this part of the earth, linked not only by lines of geography, but by mutual understanding and respect, by the nobler bonds of brotherhood and of love.³⁸

This paragraph contains several important points, which merit our attention. First of all, the bishops saw the need for

³⁵ Ibid.,

³⁶ ABM, 26, in FAPA, 1:17.

³⁷ Ibid., 28.

³⁸ Ibid., 27.

serious analysis and planning.³⁹ Secondly, the bishops have clearly indicated that they are no longer going to remain on the side lines but want to take an active part in the transformation of society. The result is their determination to struggle for the eradication of entrenched injustice and for the replacement of oppressive structures in society.

The bishops recognized the indispensable importance of education as a tool for change. It was by educating and exposing the masses to the dangers posed by the present unjust system and the oppressive structures that the people themselves could be made the agents of change. Hence, in the field of formal education, the 'Resolutions of the Meeting' called upon the:

Catholic educational institutes and educators to put increasing emphasis on education for total development, and that for this purpose, adequate arrangements be made for the active involvement of our teachers and students in spiritual leadership training, social welfare, and community development programs.⁴⁰

In the area of non-formal education, the bishops saw the need to assist the workers and peasants "in their education and

³⁹ Later on, we will have the opportunity to study how this has led the bishops to opt for the method of scientific social analysis.

⁴⁰ ABM/Res., 18, in FAPA, 1:22.

organization in order to enable them to exercise and defend their rights in society, according to the teachings of the Church."⁴¹ However, this opens the way for the other assemblies, particularly the BISAs, to opt for the method of "conscientization." The bishops also requested that radio, television, press and films be used effectively to "make the voice of Christ heard more relevantly on such current problems in Asia as social justice, education and political freedom."⁴² This leads to the third point, namely, that according to the bishops, the important function of the church in Asia is to help build the new world of Asia. This is founded not in any humanism but on "God who alone is the true source of human brotherliness,"⁴³ the principle of brotherhood and love.

Perhaps some bishops were not convinced of the new direction taken by the ABM, and still favoured the status quo with their rights and privileges. So, we see the effort made by the other bishops and particularly by their theologians to prove to the sceptics that "man's humanity is God's gift and making, and its promotion a task and duty laid on all of us by Him."⁴⁴

⁴¹ Ibid, 3, p. 19.

⁴² Ibid., 20, p. 22.

⁴³ ABM, 26, in FAPA, 1:17.

⁴⁴ Ibid., 21, p. 15.

The bishops were quick to point out that their commitment to and identification with the 'other' was not against the mission entrusted by Christ. On the contrary, the mission of Christ demands this commitment and identification. Quoting from the Message of the Council Fathers, the bishops reiterated:

it is far from true that because we are committed to Christ we are diverted from the duties and tasks of this earth. On the contrary, faith, hope and the love of Christ compel us to serve our brothers, knowing that as He laid down His life for us, we too, ought to lay down our lives for our brothers.⁴⁵

Further, they also quoted from the 'Asian Ecumenical Conference for Development' which says in no uncertain terms:

"Where the sick are healed, the hungry are fed, and captives set free, where individuals and communities are reconciled and nations live in peace and cooperate with one another, we see the hand of God at work. He is also at work in science, technology and culture where these serve the welfare of mankind."⁴⁶

Finally, almost at the end of the ABM document, the bishops in an address directed to Christ, "the Lord of the future of man," request Him:

by His presence beside us and within us, to help us raise up the city of brothers - a city which shall

⁴⁵ Ibid., 18, p. 15; quoted from The Fathers of the Council to All Men, "Message to Humanity," in AAS, 54(1962), p. 823.

⁴⁶ Ibid., 22.

mirror, in hope and promise, the kingdom whose foundations He laid."⁴⁷

The bishops certainly identified their effort to build a new world of Asia with the building of God's kingdom and saw as a continuation of the mission of Christ.

At the ABM, the Asian bishops prophetically anticipated and proclaimed in their own words, what is to be considered the most revolutionary statement of 1971 Synod of Bishops, "Justice in the World." The bishops of the ABM, understood their mission and that of the church in relation to the total human development of all the people of Asia. This building up of authentic human communities could be accomplished only by working with all the people in their effort to eradicate injustice and struggle with them to replace the oppressive structures.

The one constant and overarching theme that runs through the whole of the ABM document is, 'to be at the service of the people.'⁴⁸ It was in this spirit of service to all the people in Asia, the bishops declared with all sincerity:

⁴⁷ Ibid., 29, p. 17.

⁴⁸ Ibid., 2, 3, 14, 15, 18, pp. 11-15.

We make ours, in the most solemn ways, their hopes and aspirations for a new Asia which shall be worthy of the future that is laid up in the heart of Asian man.⁴⁹

It is clear that the bishops did not want to impose any preconceived solution from outside as to what they perceive to be the need of Asia. On the contrary they decided to listen to the needs and aspirations of the people themselves and discern where the Spirit was leading them. After enumerating the challenges faced by the people, the bishops questioned themselves as to their own role in this situation.

we ask ourselves how we may more truly be at the service of our peoples. We ask how we may fully engage ourselves in the common task wherein all men of good will must be joined, of building up within our nations societies which respond to the deepest aspirations of our peoples as well as to the demands of the Gospel: societies "grounded on truth, guided by justice, motivated by charity, realized in freedom, and flowering in peace."⁵⁰

Breaking from their isolation, the bishops resolved:

...to uphold and promote the realization of human rights and defend them wherever, whenever, and whomsoever they are violated.
 ...to make our special concern the lot of the workers and peasants, ...
 ...to help secure the basic means of livelihood for all.⁵¹

⁴⁹ Ibid., 28.

⁵⁰ Ibid., 14, p. 14.

⁵¹ ABM/Res., 2-4, in FAPA, 1:19.

The bishops assembled at the ABM have rediscovered that theirs is not an introspective church but one that is determined to share and be at the service of the people, thus becoming an integral part of Asia. The church they spoke of is not an elitist rich church concerned in preserving the status quo and its self-identity but a church that is resolutely committed to the "total development of [all] our peoples."⁵² This theme of 'total development of all people' will be the focal point and the fundamental preoccupation of the FABC. In fact, this is the foundation of an authentic Asian theology of liberation.

Shifting from a lop-sided 'other-worldly' spirituality, the bishops became sensitive to see the anthropological dimension of revelation.⁵³ This situates spirituality in the total context of human relationships. If theology is about God, then it has also to speak about the relationship between God and human beings, and among humans themselves. This encounter takes place in history, in the concrete reality of poverty, oppression, injustice, exploitation and the inhuman situation in Asia. The bishops' attempt to encounter God in these human situations is a breakthrough for the church of Asia.

⁵² ABM, 21, in FAPA, 1:15.

⁵³ Gutierrez, A Theology of Liberation, p. 7.

This shift from salvation to total human development could be seen as the bishops' attempt to get involved in Asia's struggle for full humanity. Thus, the ABM has to be credited with discovering the primacy of theopraxis over theology which demands a radical involvement with the poor and oppressed.

4.2.3 From an Alien to an Incarnate Church of Asia

When the bishops of ABM looked at the changing faces of Asia, they saw not only its poverty and the peoples' struggle for emancipation but also the other face of Asia, "the continent of ancient and diverse cultures, religions, histories and traditions, a region like Joseph's coat of many colors [sic]."⁵⁴ In order to be an incarnate church in this particular context, the bishops perceived that it was important for the church to develop a deep respect for and dialogue with other religions and cultures of Asia.

In the inculturation of the life and message of the Gospel in Asia, there have been hesitations and mistakes in the past, but we are more than ever convinced that dialogue with our fellow Asians whose commitment is to other faiths is increasingly important. We also urge on all a deep respect for the culture and traditions of our peoples, and express the hope that the catholicity of the Church, the root of our diversity in the oneness of faith, may serve to help Asians remain truly Asian, and yet become fully part of the modern world and the one family of mankind.⁵⁵

⁵⁴ Ibid., 7, p. 12.

⁵⁵ Ibid., 24, p. 16.

When the bishops spoke of hesitations and mistakes, they had in mind first of all the failure of the official Church to take seriously the religio-cultural ethos of the people of Asia. Secondly, in the process of inculturation the bishops demanded a deep respect for the culture and traditions of Asia. This is because, it appears that for the bishops, inculturation does not mean an uncritical and superficial use in liturgy and worship of certain gestures, rites, myths and symbols from the local cultures. These rites and rituals were taken totally out of their context with complete disregard for their deep religious connotations. Nor were they satisfied with the use of Asian philosophical categories and Asian scriptures to draw parallels and to make known the "Unknown Christ" of Asia,⁵⁶ because the Asians' commitment to other faiths has to be recognized as important.

For the bishops inculturation does not mean 'baptizing' or 'christianizing' the local cultures but it means dialogue and proper respect for the cultures and traditions. The ABM clearly repudiated the traditional attitude of the early missionaries and that of the Western mind set that 'other' cultures are not ideal vehicles of divine revelation. On the contrary, according

⁵⁶ The classic example is that of Raimundo Panikkar, The Unknown Christ of Hinduism: Towards an Ecumenical Christophany, Revised and Enlarged edition, (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1981).

to the ABM it is in this cultural and religious diversity that one is called upon to rediscover the unity of humankind and ultimately the oneness of faith which is catholicity. The basis of this unity is the presence of God in science, technology and culture which are at the service of humanity.⁵⁷ Thus the bishops recognized God's activity in and through the religions of Asia, which have manifested a "profound religious sense which characterizes the spirit of the Asian world."⁵⁸

Thus, the ABM seems to have provided the answer to the question that has vexed Christian converts for hundreds of years: whether one has to abandon one's culture and customs in order to be a Christian? According to the bishops at the ABM, one can continue to be an Asian with one's own cultural identity and social affiliations while at the same time remaining a Christian and being part of the greater human family.⁵⁹

In this paragraph under discussion (24) though, the bishops used the current language of 'inculturation' probably owing to a lack of proper terminology. In fact, the model they proposed was that of incarnation. When this is read in conjunction with

⁵⁷ ABM, 22, in FAPA, 1:15.

⁵⁸ Ibid., 15, p. 14.

⁵⁹ Ibid., 24, p. 16.

paragraph 17 it becomes evident that the bishops actually did speak of incarnation. In the latter, they clearly acknowledged that they have failed in their own responsibilities saying: "we have not incarnated the Christian life and enfleshed the Church in ways and patterns of our respective cultures."⁶⁰ The time has come, they said, for the Catholic communities "to be increasingly integrated within the larger communities around us, culturally part of that Asia."⁶¹

In a continent with "ancient and diverse cultures, religions, histories and traditions," this incarnation literally means working together with all people of good will. The purpose of this is the building up of societies "which respond to the deepest aspirations of our peoples as well as to the demands of the Gospel."⁶² This idea is expressed in no uncertain terms, again in paragraph 27, where the bishops speak of the "bringing to realization in each of our nations of that society which is the substance of the expectations of our peoples."⁶³

⁶⁰ Ibid., 17, p. 14.

⁶¹ Ibid., 13, p. 13.

⁶² Ibid., 14, p. 14.

⁶³ Ibid., 27, p. 17.

The bishops acknowledged that, this building up of the new world of Asia could be accomplished neither by the church alone nor by the others in isolation. Hence, they committed themselves at this Meeting:

to an open, sincere, and continuing dialogue with our brothers of other great religions of Asia, that we may learn from one another how to enrich ourselves spiritually and how to work more effectively together on our common task of total human development.⁶⁴

The purpose of dialogue with the other religions was not a pretext to convert them to Christianity. On the contrary, an open and sincere dialogue was essential, said the bishops, first of all to enrich the spiritual heritage of the church. Secondly and most importantly, the bishops realized that only through dialogue and by working with the followers of other religions that the church could bring about the total human development of all peoples.

This demonstrates the bishops' attempt to break away from the traditional Christian attitude of certitude, that it possessed the truth and had nothing to learn from the 'other.' This is significant because what they needed to learn was the 'other's' spiritual experience. The bishops quoting from Pope Paul VI's Message to the ABM, refer to this experience as the "profound religious sense which characterizes the spirit of the

⁶⁴ ABM/Res., 12, in FAPA, 1:21.

Asian world."⁶⁵ Further, since the bishops also accepted the presence and the working of God in other religions, they found it essential to learn from others. This learning was part of the process of conscientization for the bishops. Others' experience and understanding of Asian spirituality is vital if the church is to work together with them effectively in the task of human development. The bishops made it very clear that, "if men of good will and sincere purpose will labour together we can build this new society."⁶⁶

Another important outcome of this meeting was that it requested the various Asian Episcopal Conferences to:

establish suitable procedures for fostering a continuing dialogue between the theologians and specialists in religions in our Asian Churches and their counterparts belonging to other Asian religions.⁶⁷

This could be attributed to the realization that the existing theology of that time could neither provide the basis nor the rationale for dialogue. This could also be taken as a clear indication that the bishops of Asia are calling for a new theology of religions.

⁶⁵ ABM, 15, in FAPA, p. 14.

⁶⁶ Ibid., 31, in FAPA, 1:18.

⁶⁷ ABM/Res., 14, in FAPA, 1:21.

The bishops pledged:

to develop an indigenous theology and to do what we can so that the life and message of the Gospel may be ever more incarnate in the rich historic cultures of Asia, so that in the necessary process of modernization and development, Asian Christianity may help to promote all that is "authentically human in these cultures."⁶⁸

The bishops found the existing theology, based entirely on Judeo-Christian revelation and expressed in Western philosophical categories, to be wanting. It was particularly biased against other religions and cultures of Asia. The purpose of this local theology was neither to undermine nor to repudiate other religions or even to gain converts to Christianity. It was not to be an apologetic theology but an indigenous theology that will be instrumental in incarnating the Gospel in the religio-cultural and socio-economic realities of Asia. This incarnation is indispensable if Christianity is to become an Asian Christianity-the local church. Only an incarnate and incultured Christianity could get involved in the life-problems of the people and work for the modernization and development of the people of Asia.

Although the bishops used the terms modernization and development, the discussion that we have already had indicates

⁶⁸ Ibid., 13.

that they were not talking in terms of capitalist form of development or modernization, but of a "total human development."⁶⁹ According to the ABM Resolution the purpose of incarnating "the Gospel in the rich and historic cultures of Asia," is to help "in the necessary process of modernization and development" and also to "help promote all that is 'authentically human in these cultures.'"⁷⁰ This seems to suggest that the bishops had some reservations regarding some of the values and traditions in Asian cultures. Being brought up in an alien culture, their apprehension is be understandable, and, probably this meeting was their first attempt to understand other cultures and traditions.

4.2.4 Conclusion

The vision the bishops speak of, is not limited to the churches or to the Catholic community of Asia, but is the broader "vision of human progress and peace," that Populorum Progressio had chartered for them.⁷¹ They clearly indicated that their intention was to help build "the new world of Asia, as a true family of nations... linked not only by lines of geography, but by mutual understanding and respect, by the nobler bonds of

⁶⁹ Ibid., 12.

⁷⁰ Ibid., 13.

⁷¹ ABM., 26, in FAPA, 1:16.

brotherhood and of love."⁷² The ultimate goal of all these, as the bishops prayed, is "to help us raise up the city of brothers - a city which shall mirror, in hope and promise, the Kingdom whose foundations He laid."⁷³

This could be achieved only by a local church that is incarnated and incultured. This incarnation is possible only when the church becomes the poor church of Asia and identifies itself with the people, their struggles and hopes. This means that the church has to get involved in the socio-political and economic realities of Asia, in search of justice, freedom and equality in order to provide a full human existence to all the people of Asia. Further, according to the ABM, in order to be an incarnate church it has to send its roots deep into the religio-cultural reality of Asia and draws its strength and inspiration from it. Drawing from the Asian cultural wellsprings, the church could speak to the people of Asia in their own cultural, religious, linguistic idioms and even in their philosophical categories.

⁷² Ibid., 27, p. 17.

⁷³ Ibid., 29.

For the bishops, building up God's kingdom is the same as working for the total development of all people,⁷⁴ commitment to whatever concerns the dignity of human person,⁷⁵ the eradication of entrenched injustice and oppressive structures⁷⁶ and thus, the building up of a new world of Asia.⁷⁷ This is the mission of the local church of Asia. The theology arising from this is the theology of the local church of Asia.

By basing its theology on the concrete experience of the people and by its commitment to their struggles, the ABM made a radical epistemological break. This new method of doing theology was the contribution of the Latin American liberation theologians and is the foundation of liberation theology. Hence, one could conclude that the bishops of the ABM by opting for this methodology, seem to have shown their preference for liberation theology.

However, our study also indicates that the Asian bishops found that a liberation theology that does not take into consideration the religio-cultural reality of Asia to be

⁷⁴ Ibid., 21, p. 15.

⁷⁵ Ibid., 18.

⁷⁶ Ibid., 27, p. 17.

⁷⁷ Ibid.,

wanting. Therefore, it cannot be applied to Asia as it is. This is precisely because the Asian reality is multifaceted and cannot be reduced to its socio-economic conditions. Further, owing to the tremendous influence exerted by the Asian religions and cultures upon the lives of the people, the bishops found it extremely important to dialogue and co-operate with these religio-cultural realities of Asia in the common task of total human development. Yet the primary concern of bishops at the ABM was the socio-economic development of the people of Asia.

Thus, the ABM is unable to provide an adequate answer to the question raised at the beginning of this chapter: what makes the Asian liberation theology specific? However, they have indicated without any doubt that the Asian reality is not only its poverty and oppression but also its religio-cultural heritage. Thus they have indicated the direction and the locus of a future Asian theology-the total reality of Asia.

4.3 THE FIRST PLENARY ASSEMBLY OF THE FABC (April 1974)

Bishops from eighteen Asian countries representing fourteen Episcopal Conferences attended this first meeting of the FABC in Taipei, in 1974. This meeting had a double purpose. Being the first assembly of the Asian bishops, one of the important items on the agenda was to discuss matters of common concern for the

Church of Asia. The other was to prepare the bishops for the forthcoming Roman Synod of Bishops (1974)⁷⁸ on evangelization.

The various episcopal councils throughout the world were requested to take an active part in the preparation for the Synod and to send in their findings and deliberations to the Permanent Secretariat of the Synod of Bishops in Rome. Since 'Evangelization' was the common theme for the FABC I and the Synod of Bishops, a lot of time and energy was spent at the grass-root level in preparation for the forthcoming meetings. All the Episcopal Conferences of Asia took an active part in the preparation of these meetings.⁷⁹

The final Statement of the First FABC Assembly was drawn up by theologians but was submitted to the bishops for their comments and final approval. The result was a sixteen page document with fifty paragraphs under thirteen subtitles comprising the main Statement of the Assembly and another twelve paragraphs of Recommendations. The bishops also approved a six page 'popular' version titled 'Briefer Statement of the

⁷⁸ FABC I, 1, in FAPA, 1:27.

⁷⁹ For a detailed study of the interest shown on this topic of evangelization see J. Dupuis, "Synod of Bishops 1974," in Doctrine and Life, 25 (May 1975), p. 324.

Assembly' containing 34 paragraphs under four subtitles.⁸⁰ Like that of all the other transnational Episcopal Conferences, these documents are non-doctrinal and are pastoral in character.⁸¹ However, owing to the wide consultations made in the preparation of this assembly the bishops-delegates at FABC I had a clear mandate from their respective conferences and the faithful to deal with the topic of evangelization.

In this chapter we will continue the historico-critical analysis of the documents of the First Plenary Assembly of the FABC. Since 'Evangelization' was the theme of this Assembly, we will attempt to find answers to the specific questions: What do the bishops mean by evangelization? Is there a change in their understanding of the mission of the church in Asia? Therefore in the first section we propose to study the transition 'from direct to indirect evangelization to an incarnated church.' This will be done in relation to the bishops' desire to make the church the local church of Asia. Did the bishops at the FABC I, see the need to adapt their preaching to the context, cultures, customs, needs and aspirations of the people of Asia?

⁸⁰ See Arevalo, For All the Peoples of Asia, pp. 27-47.

⁸¹ See above p. 53.

In the second section we will do an analysis of this FABC document to see what made the bishops change their attitude from conversion confrontation with the Asian cultures and religions to dialogue with the them. Attention will be paid to determine the relationship between Christianity and other religions of Asia. Then in the third section we will attempt to find out how the bishops understand the socio-economic and political reality of Asia? In this we will see the bishops' reasons for their shift from developmentalism to identification.

If the concerns of the people are their highest priority, then how do the bishops propose to make the transition from an alien church to a church in "dialogue of life" with the poor? This will lead us to the final section in which we will be able to find out what the bishops mean by evangelization in Asia. We propose to demonstrate that in order to be the local church of Asia the shift in the proclamation of the Good News has to change from salvation to total human development.

4.3.1 From Direct and Indirect Evangelization to An incarnated Church

From the very beginning the missionary endeavour in Asia was directed towards direct conversion and saving of the souls

of the so called 'pagans.'⁸² The interest of the colonial government coincided with that of the missionaries, which was to exert a 'civilizing' influence upon the 'uncivilized' society of that time. Most of the missionaries and almost all the bishops, up until the time of political independence, were Westerners. Because of their common origin and interest, the missionaries had the open support and protection of the colonial government. One important consequence of this was the identification of the missionaries and thus Christianity with colonialism and oppression.

When direct evangelization became impossible owing to the change in circumstances after the political independence of most Asian countries after World War II, the church in Asia resorted to the indirect method of evangelization. The developmental and social work done by the church through schools, hospitals and other charitable organizations, and dialogue with the other religions and cultures were seen as praeparatio evangelica.⁸³ What is essential for our discussion is that these activities were considered to be peripheral and as a means to the

⁸² For a detailed study of the pre-independence Christianity in India see Anto Karokaran, Evangelization and Diakonia, (Bangalore, India: Dharmaram Publications, 1978), pp. 7 ff.

⁸³ See M. Amaladoss, "Evangelization in Asia: A New Focus," in Vidyajyoti, January 1987, p. 7.

proclamation and certainly not as integral or constitutive dimension of the proclamation of the Gospel.

As we stated in the very first sentence of the first chapter, the greatest event that inaugurated the third phase in the life of the Church was the Vatican II. This Council was the primary agent of change that transformed the history and the life of the church in Asia. However, at the end of the Council neither the bishops nor the people of Asia could have anticipated its consequence for the church in Asia. Of signal importance was Vatican II's contribution to the change of attitude towards other religions, cultures and context, which in turn brought about an enlightened view of evangelization.

There were three other factors that contributed to the renewed understanding of the notion of evangelization in Asia. Firstly, while there were some half-hearted attempts at adaptation and inculturation in Asia, the real impact of Vatican II began to be felt when some of the leading Asian theologians began to reflect upon the Christian faith and its meaning in the multi-religio-cultural context and the dehumanizing situation of poverty in Asia. The second factor was the popular mass struggle for freedom, truth, justice, equality and honesty in public life and the life of the church, particularly as this struggle was articulated by the youth of Asia.

The third factor was the tremendous influence of the bishops of CELAM, especially through their Medellin Document, on the Asian bishops' social thinking. The 1971 Synod of Bishops, Rome, was tangible evidence of the influence of the bishops of CELAM on the whole Church and especially upon the churches of the Third World.

The bishops at FABC I, like their predecessors at the ABM, saw themselves and the church inextricably bound to the people and the problems of Asia.⁸⁴ Therefore, they reaffirmed their commitment taken at the ABM and in line with the thinking of Gaudium et Spes.⁸⁵ They realized that their vocation and thus the mission of the church of Asia has to be found within this particular social, economic, cultural and religious situation in Asia and to discern the Spirit within this society:

We who make up the Church in Asia today are inextricably part of this new world, since we are bound to our peoples by a common history and a common destiny. With the light which God's Spirit and His Word provide us, we seek to read the signs of the times, and to discern with our peoples what, in their present situation, they must accept and foster, and what they must reject and refuse.⁸⁶

⁸⁴ ABM, 13, in FAPA, 1:13.

⁸⁵ GS, 1, in AAS, 58(1966), pp. 1025-26.

⁸⁶ FABC I, 5, in FAPA, 1:28.

The guiding principle of this unity and discernment is the Spirit of God, present and active in the life and history of the people of Asia. The Spirit is the source of unity which is able to subsume all the diversity of languages and cultures without destroying their identities. Hence, in order to find unity in diversity, the bishops proposed to listen to the spirit by reading the 'signs of the times'⁸⁷ in Asia, as advocated by Vatican II: "the Church has always had the duty of scrutinizing the signs of the times and of interpreting them in the light of the gospel."⁸⁸ By reading the signs of the times the church is called upon to go beyond the obvious and the ordinary to discover what God is saying in and through this context of poverty, oppression, injustice and human degradation as well as in the multireligious and multicultural realities of Asia.

The bishops saw the primary focus of evangelization was to be found in inculturation, indigenization or incarnation

To preach the Gospel in Asia we must make the message and life of Christ incarnate in the minds and lives of our peoples. The primary focus of our task of

⁸⁷ This phrase taken from Mt. 16:4 was used by Pope John XXIII in his Apostolic Constitution Humanae Salutis to convoke the Second Vatican Council. From that time onwards this has become an important theme in contemporary theological currency especially in the Third World.

⁸⁸ GS, 4, in AAS, 58(1966), p. 1027.

evangelization then, at this time in our history, is the building up of a truly local church.⁸⁹

It is important to notice that according to the bishops, the mission of the church and thus of evangelization is not conversion but the building up of the local church, an incarnate church. Thus the bishops make an essential link between evangelization and the building up of the local church. They clarified this further by saying, "Evangelization is the carrying out of the Church's duty of proclaiming by word and witness the Gospel of the Lord."⁹⁰ In this perspective orthodoxy is integrated with ortho-praxis where evangelization is seen "rather as the building up of a community which witnesses with its life more than with only words."⁹¹

The bishops realized that the church will be an alien and transplanted church unless it incarnates itself by making the message and the life of Christ meaningful to a particular people and become part of their traditions. The bishops chose the word incarnation deliberately, because they wanted the church to enflesh itself and become part and parcel of the people of Asia in this particular time and history. "For the local Church is

⁸⁹ FABC I, 9, in FAPA, 1:29.

⁹⁰ Ibid., 25, p. 32.

⁹¹ Amaladoss, "Evangelization in Asia..." p. 11.

the realization and the enfleshment of the Body of Christ in a given people, a given place and time."⁹²

Thus, one of the outcomes of the reading of the "signs of the times," is the necessity to build "a truly local church." The bishops proceed to explain what they mean by local church:

The local church is a church incarnate in a people, a church indigenous and inculturated. And this means concretely a church in continuous, humble and loving dialogue with the living traditions, the cultures, the religions - in brief, with all the life-realities of the people in whose midst it has sunk its roots deeply and whose history and life it gladly makes its own. It seeks to share in whatever truly belongs to the people: its meanings and its values, its aspirations, its thoughts, and its language, its songs and its artistry. - Even its frailties and failings it assumes, so that they too may be healed. For so did God's Son assume the totality of our human condition (save only sin) so that He might make it truly His own, and redeem it in His paschal mystery.⁹³

The bishops did not speak of an external and superficial adaptation of certain elements of culture, in worship, and philosophy as a vehicle to propagate Christianity but they spoke of incarnation. It is not a superimposition of doctrine and practice upon the people of Asia with no regard for their cultures, customs and religions. It is a meaningful theological interpretation of God's revelation in and through the cultural

⁹² FABC I, 10, in FAPA, 1:29.

⁹³ Ibid., 12.

wealth and the lived experience of the Asians.⁹⁴ This does not mean that the bishops were against doctrine or were dissatisfied with the faith that was handed down. But the problem was that this faith and the doctrine were presented and interpreted in a particular cultural medium and philosophy.

The bishops found these Western cultural constructs to be alien to the cultures and traditions of the people of Asia. What they were attempting to do was to peel off the Western cultural garb and the Western interpretations and formulations, from the fundamental truths of revelation. These cultural formulations, undoubtedly served a purpose in the Western church, in a particular time and history. However they need not be valid for all peoples of all cultures at all times. It is important to note that the perception and understanding of truth is mediated through one's culture, philosophy and experience. These factors are not universal and they vary from people to people, and culture to culture.

A theology becomes local and incarnate when the original experience is interpreted and expressed in that particular local context, in myths, symbols and linguistic idioms that are easily

⁹⁴ See Thomas Manickam, "Indian Culture as a Theological Base," in Jeevadhara, 83 (September 1984), pp. 368-69.

understood by the local people.⁹⁵ Hence, the bishops spoke of an encounter, an incarnation, a total identification with the problems, aspirations, the world-view and the life-realities of Asia. The church has to share in the very life of the people in their material poverty as well as their cultural riches, their failures as well as their values.

The FABC paragraph under discussion demonstrates the delicate balancing act of the bishops; on the one hand they speak of indigenization and inculturation advocated by inculturationists and on the other the model of incarnation suggested by the liberationists.⁹⁶ The inculturationists were only interested in using certain elements from culture, and the local philosophy as a vehicle to preach the Gospel. Whereas the bishops want to adopt not only the external forms and symbols but also want the church to send its roots deep down and be enlivened by the spirit and the soul of Asian cultures.

Hence, in order to be the local church of Asia, it has to be reshaped by the local events, experiences, the concrete situations and the cultural genius of the people. This seems to be the spirit of Vatican II:

⁹⁵ Ibid.,

⁹⁶ See above pp. 151-54.

From the customs and traditions of their people, from their wisdom and their learning, from their arts and sciences, those Churches borrow all those things which can contribute to the glory of their Creator, the revelation of the Saviour's grace, or the proper arrangements of Christian life.⁹⁷

The local church comes into being through an encounter with the cultural and social realities of Asia. This process is called incarnation. Thus it appears that the bishops at the FABC I seems to have indicated an intrinsic connection between the local church and the local theology.

This incarnation demands a reinterpretation of the Gospel tradition, in the context, culture, traditions and events of Asia and which in turn are reinterpreted in the light of the Gospel. This new interpretation is essential since all this time the Gospel was interpreted in relation to a dominant foreign culture where neither the bishops nor the Christians considered themselves to be part of Asia. According to this new understanding, the local church is not something that is superimposed from without, but a church that forms a constituent part of Asia, in this particular time, history and culture.

⁹⁷ "Ipsae e suorum populorum consuetudinibus et traditionibus, sapientia et doctrina, artibus et disciplinis, ea omnia mutantur quae ad gloriam Creatoris confitendam, ad gratiam Salvatoris illustrandam et ad vitam christianam rite ordinandam conferre possunt." AG, 22, in AAS, 58(1966), p. 973.

The integration of the Gospel message with the local cultures and traditions, is the birth of an authentic local church. In fact, it is the cultural component that makes it the local church and distinct from other local churches. At the same time all the churches, with their cultural distinctiveness, share in the same faith, Spirit and are called to achieve the same end. These also provide the catholicity and unity among the local churches that are culturally diverse.

It is not a community in isolation from other communities of the Church one and catholic. Rather it seeks communion with all of them. With them it professes one faith, shares the one Spirit and the one sacramental life.⁹⁸

4.3.2 From Confrontation to Dialogue

Now we can proceed to see how the bishops of the FABC propose to accomplish this task. In order to be an incarnate church, it has to read the signs of the times in Asia through the exercise of discernment, especially through the discernment of cultures. Only a genuine discernment could bring about a true integration of culture with the Gospel. Therefore, the bishops called for a dialogue with the great religious traditions of Asia.⁹⁹

⁹⁸ FABC I, 11, in FAPA, 1:29.

⁹⁹ Ibid., 13.

First of all, it is a dialogue not by the hierarchy alone or by the elite or the theologians, as had been done in the past, but by "the entire local church."¹⁰⁰ Almost at the beginning of the FABC I statement the bishops insist that this discernment has to be done not only with the help of the Spirit and the Word but also with people in their present situation:

With the light which God's Spirit and His Word provide us, we seek to read the signs of the times, and to discern with our peoples what, in their present situation, they must accept and foster, and what they must reject and refuse.¹⁰¹

Secondly, for the bishops, dialogue does not mean a simple and an uncritical acceptance of all that is found in the Asian religions and cultures. They said that it is essential to discern those elements that are conducive to authentic human living from those that are detrimental or even go counter to human dignity and freedom. Though divine revelation is mediated through one's cultures, these cultures are also at the same time human constructs and are prone to frailty. Therefore, the bishops stressed the mutuality of dialogue:

This dialogue will teach us what our faith in Christ leads us to receive from these religious traditions, and what must be purified in them, healed and made whole, in the light of God's word.¹⁰²

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., 33, p. 34. underlining mine.

¹⁰¹ Ibid., 5, p. 28.

¹⁰² Ibid., 17, p. 30.

While insisting upon the importance of incarnating the Gospel in the local cultures the bishops also seem to have been heavily influenced by the position taken by Ad Gentes.¹⁰³

Indigenization renders the local church truly present within the life and cultures of our peoples. Through it, all their human reality is assumed into the life of the Body of Christ, so that all of it may be purified and healed, perfected and fulfilled.¹⁰⁴

In this process of indigenization the bishops distinguish two important yet contrary characteristics of Asian cultures. On the one hand, cultures, value systems and traditions, even religious traditions, have been used to justify certain dehumanizing and enslaving practices, such as the caste system in India and the inferior status of women throughout Asia. Here the cultures are challenged by the Gospel to be authentic to their vocation. On the other hand, the bishops saw the valuable contribution made by these cultures such as fostering of family and ethical values. Hence, the bishops saw the need to dialogue with them and accept them:

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

¹⁰³ AG, 9, in AAS, 58(1966), p. 958.

¹⁰⁴ FABC I, 26, in FAPA, 1:32.

of their hearts, and the home of their contemplation and prayer. They have helped to give shape to the histories and cultures of our nations.¹⁰⁵

Here, for the first time the bishops of Asia have unambiguously accepted other religions as significant and as the means of salvation for the people of Asia. God's revelation is not found in a vacuum but mediated through a particular culture. In other words, cultures are the vehicles of revelation (GS 58) and therefore, they have been ordained by God to perform an indispensable function in a particular situation. This does not deny their autonomy or their proper identity but goes to show that they form a vital part of God's creation in shaping and reshaping a particular human history. The bishops at the FABC I were thus clearly conscious of the importance of and the contribution made by the Asian cultures to the well-being of the people of Asia.

Therefore, dialogue with the other religions and cultures will enable the church to be authentic in expressing its faith and will help the church to rediscover 1) the 'seeds' of the Word of God and 2) certain aspects and truths that hitherto have remained hidden or forgotten. Hence, realizing the importance of dialogue the bishops said:

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., 14, p. 14.

Only in dialogue with these religions can we discover in them the seeds of the Word of God (Ad Gentes, c.I,9). This dialogue will allow us to touch the expression and the reality of our people's deepest selves, and enable us to find authentic ways of living and expressing our own christian faith which we perhaps would not have perceived. Thus it can become a sharing in friendship of our quest for God and for brotherhood among His sons.¹⁰⁶

This means that according to the Asian bishops, these religions and cultures also contribute to the understanding of certain aspects of God's revelation not explicitly found in Christianity.¹⁰⁷ God's revelation cannot be limited to a particular culture and civilization. The Judeo-Christian revelation found in the context of only one of the ancient civilizations has to be seen only as a component part of a totality. Further, it is filtered through a particular cultural and political medium, and is very much intertwined with one particular vision and world-view. Therefore, the revelation found in the other civilizations and cultures, in our case Asian, have to be appreciated and positively promoted. The bishops expressed this appreciation in a rhetorical form:

¹⁰⁶ Ibid., 16.

¹⁰⁷ See Paul F. Knitter, No Other Name?: A Critical Survey of Christian Attitudes Toward the World Religions, (Maryknoll, N.Y: Orbis Books, 1985), p. 132.

How then can we not give them reverence and honour?
And how can we not acknowledge that God has drawn our
peoples to Himself through them?¹⁰⁸

These are the challenges that face the church of Asia and conversely by responding to these, the church will become the church of Asia. This means, as we saw earlier, to reach the Asian heart and soul, the Gospel has to go through the culture of the people. The church has to discern and discover the presence and the activity of God and His Spirit in the ancient yet modern cultures of Asia.

Thirdly, dialogue with the other religions and cultures is important precisely because it leads to the discernment of the presence of Christ in the reality of Asia. Contrary to the traditional understanding that Christ was brought to 'pagan' Asia by the early missionaries, the bishops proclaimed that Christ has been and is present in the life and history of the people of Asia. The presence of God, the Spirit and even the Word, in other religions and cultures are accepted by several theologians as well as by Vatican II. However, the bishops in the 'Prayer to the Lord' found in the penultimate section of the document, have made the transition from the presence of God and

¹⁰⁸ FABC I, 15, in FAPA, 1:30.

the Spirit to also the presence of Christ in Asia. The bishops confessed:

You have been present already in their histories and traditions. In hidden ways you have led them, because for them too, you are the Way. In ways unknown to us you have enlightened them in their worship, their beliefs, their philosophies, since for them, too, you are the Truth. In diverse manners you have already made yourself present in their lives, for you are their Life. From the beginning you have called our peoples, and from your Cross you have drawn them to yourself.¹⁰⁹

When they spoke of the Truth, the Way and the Life, the bishops certainly spoke of Christ. Further, they said that not only has God called the people of Asia from the beginning of history, but Christ has also already drawn them to Himself from the Cross. This christological reduction was the result of the existing Christology which identifies the Word with Christ. However, whether the bishops intended it or not, there seems to be an identity between the Cross of Christ and the 'crucified' (made to suffer) poor of Asia. It is to the poor that Jesus proclaimed God's kingdom. By His coming He has put an end to their suffering and oppression. This means that by taking upon himself the sufferings of the poor and dying on the cross, Christ has identified himself with the poor. Thus the poor

¹⁰⁹ FABC I, 46, in FAPA, 1:36-37.

could also identify themselves with Christ. They are 'happy' because they are to be poor no more.¹¹⁰

Finally, according to the FABC I the 'Asian spirit' could be discerned only through prayer and contemplation. Reading the signs of the times in Asia, means an openness of heart, a willingness to listen and to learn from others, even from the young.¹¹¹ The Briefer Statement of the Assembly calls this a challenge, that is so great and difficult:

It demands competence, dedication, effort, openness of heart, the capacity to be silent and to listen, willingness to learn from others, even from the young. To contact the Asian spirit we must be devoted to prayer, and to contemplation. We must be able to read the signs of the times.¹¹²

All these are indispensable ingredients of dialogue. In a culturally and religiously diverse situation only by learning from others in openness of heart, through dialogue and communion can the church become the local church of Asia.

However, there seems to be a problem: how to reconcile the bishops' understanding of the role of other religions; the

¹¹⁰ George Soares-Prabhu, "Good News to the Poor, the Sociological Implications of the Message of Jesus," in D.S. Amalorpavadass, ed., The Indian Church in the Struggle for a New Society, (Bangalore, India: NBCLC, 1972), pp. 620-21.

¹¹¹ FABC I, 31, in FAPA, 1:33.

¹¹² FABC I, "Briefer Statement of the Assembly," (FABC IB), in Arevalo, ed., For All the Peoples of Asia, 20&21, 1:45.

revelations found in other religions; the presence of God in the Asian situation vis-a-vis of Christ? One approach is that the bishops in spite of all their overtures to other religions, were still thinking in terms of the hidden presence of Christ in these religions and cultures. This could be the reason why the bishops at the FABC I, insisted over and over again the need to discern what should be accepted and fostered, and what should be rejected and refused.¹¹³

While acknowledging the presence of God and the working of the Spirit in and through the religions and cultures of Asia, the bishops at FABC I, were fully convinced that "Christ alone... is for every man 'the Way, the Truth, and the Life.'"¹¹⁴ Therefore they stated that Christ alone could fulfil the hopes and aspirations of the people of Asia and thus the liberation that the people were seeking.

We believe that it is in Him and in His good news that our peoples will finally find the full meaning we all

¹¹³ FABC I, 5, in FAPA, 1:28. See also its parallels, "what must be purified in them, healed and made whole" Ibid., 17, p. 30; and that "all of it may be purified and healed, perfected and fulfilled" Ibid., 26, p. 32.

¹¹⁴ Ibid., 7, p. 28; See C.B. Putranta, The Idea of the Church in the Documents of the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences (FABC) 1970-1982, Extracts from Doctoral Dissertation (Roma: Pontificia Universitas Gregoriana, 1985), pp. 70 ff.

seek, the liberation we strive after, the brotherhood and peace which is the desire of all our hearts.¹¹⁵

This sentence provides the key to understand the meaning and the purpose of proclaiming the good news of Christ. The Gospel has meaning precisely because it is a liberating message that proclaims the brotherhood/sisterhood of human beings. It was this conviction that made the bishops state:

On our part we can offer what we believe the church alone has the duty and joy to offer to them and to all men: oneness with the Father in Jesus His Son, the ways to grace Christ gives us in His Gospel and His sacraments, and in the fellowship of the community which seeks to live in Him; an understanding too of the value of the human person and of the social dimensions of human salvation - a salvation which assumes and gives meaning to human freedom, earthly realities, and the course of this world's history.¹¹⁶

The ultimate purpose of dialogue, as the bishops state was to share "in friendship of our quest for God and for brotherhood among His sons"¹¹⁷ and daughters. Hence, the mission of the church is "to foster the love and justice, the truth and peace, that make up of God's kingdom on earth."¹¹⁸ It is in this process the bishops see the renewed understanding of the social dimension of the Gospel of Christ and the duty of the church to

¹¹⁵ Ibid.,

¹¹⁶ Ibid., 18.

¹¹⁷ Ibid., 16.

¹¹⁸ Knitter, No Other Name?, p. 132.

shape the "future of mankind,"¹¹⁹ in service, joy and gladness. To this we shall return in the next section.

In conclusion, according to the bishops of the FABC I, the mission of the church is not to convert people of Asia and take them to Christ as if He was not present in their midst. Rather it's mission is to be "the memory of His coming into the world, the sacrament of His presence in our midst, the sign of His shaping of the future of mankind."¹²⁰ Thus dialogue with other religions and cultures is seen not only as means to enrich the church and to purify the enslaving elements found other cultures and religions. The bishops found that dialogue with the religions and cultures of Asia was the only way to contribute and co-operate with them in the building up of God's kingdom.

In this, Christianity is not seen as the one and only true religion that possessed the Truth. Nor are the cultural and religious practices of the Asians condemned as evil, just because they are not identical or went counter to the Christian customs and borrowed culture. On the contrary dialogue opens the way for a more creative way of being the church of Asia by participating in the non-Christian experience of liberation.

¹¹⁹ Ibid., 45, p. 36.

¹²⁰ Ibid.,

Therefore, without denying the salvific value of other religions and the indispensable role of local cultures as vehicle of divine revelation, the bishops present the church to the Asian people, not as a repository but as a sign and sacrament¹²¹ of the presence of God's kingdom on earth.¹²²

Asia is a cultural mosaic. Its cultures were forged not only by the wisdom of the people for centuries, but are also animated by the many ancient religions of Asia. The bishops were certainly aware of the tremendous influences exerted by these religions, as we saw in the previous section. Further, since culture is a living and dynamic reality, the impact of socio-economic-political realities upon the cultures of Asia is enormous. In fact, the present situation in Asia is the result of the inter-articulation of these with traditional cultures. Hence, the following section is devoted to the study of the socio-economic and political situation in Asia.

4.3.3 From Developmentalism to Identification

In Asia, while some of the newly independent nations adopted a Western style of democracy others opted for a socialist model of government and still others an Asian form of

¹²¹ Ibid.,

¹²² Ibid., 48, p. 37.

communism as seen in chapter two. During the 70s, the formative period of the FABC, all the countries in Asia, whether democratic, socialist or communists, with the exception of Japan, had authoritarian, dictatorial or military regimes. Further, irrespective of their political hues, most of the newly independent countries opted for centralized economies.¹²³

The bishops of Asia, generally contributed to the prevalent theory of that time that poverty in Asia was the result of underdevelopment and that this situation could be changed only by following the Western developmental model of modernization and industrialization, which have proved to be successful in the developed countries. Hence, most if not all the bishops of Asia during the early days of independence openly supported this developmental model for Asia. By advocating a Western Capitalist form of government and economic development the bishops thought that they could not only develop Asia but also form a bulwark against the spread of communism in Asia.

Furthermore, the bishops justified their claim by saying that the authoritarian form of governments provided stability, law and order to these countries. To substantiate his claim Mil

¹²³ See Mil Roekaerts, "Authoritarianism and Development: The Decline of Democracy in South and Southeast Asia," in Pro Mundi Vita: Dossiers, 23 (October 1982), pp. 2-3.

Roekaerts cites the pro-government stance taken by the Catholic Bishops' Conference of the Philippines (CBCP).¹²⁴

C.T. Kurien speaking about the emergency in India, while acknowledging the courage of some bishops who spoke openly against the Emergency, condemns the docility, fear and opportunism of the majority of the bishops.¹²⁵ Commenting on the performance of the Catholic church in Taiwan E. Tang says:

its leadership has always been most prudent in their relation with the government, and that is a restraint in their views on political and social issues. In fact, while hierarchies in other countries may be forced to remain silent under the force of circumstances, the support given by the Catholic leadership in Taiwan to the government is voluntary.¹²⁶

In South Korea, Vietnam and Philippines where the Christians form a sizable number, the majority of bishops opted for a 'critical collaboration' with those in power. They justified their position as their contribution towards the creation of a 'new society,' which has been the declared motive of these governments for these harsh measures. Thus, some

¹²⁴ For a detail study of the Indian bishops' response to the Emergency see M.Roekaerts, in Pro Mundi Vita: Dossiers, 14 (May 1980), pp. 13-14.

¹²⁵ C.T. Kurien, "The Emergency and Ecclesiology," in CCA News, May 1977, p. 12.

¹²⁶ E. Tang, "Taiwan: The Catholic Church," in Pro Mundi Vita: Dossiers, 6 (March-April 1978), p. 24.

bishops collaborated with the authoritarian, dictatorial and military or emergency governments of Asia. This could also be attributed to the minority status of Christianity in Asia where the overarching concern of the bishops seems to have been the preservation of their institutions from hostile governments.

In order to have a complete picture, we also present the minority yet powerful opinion of some other Asian bishops. P.T. Giordano throughout his book documents the courageous steps taken by Bishop Francisco F. Claver, S.J. and Bishop Julio X. Labayen, O.C.D. in opposing the Emergency in the Philippines.¹²⁷ In South Korea, Stephen Cardinal Kim (Kim Su-havan) the Archbishop of Seoul, and Bishop Daniel Chi could be named as the most radical and outspoken opponents of the 'Emergency' in South Korea, which gave the President additional dictatorial powers.¹²⁸ These bishops not only championed the poor and the oppressed in their own countries but also should be credited for their untiring effort to sharpen the focus of the church on the social dimension of the Gospel. Their influence extended beyond their dioceses and countries to the whole of Asia, which could be seen clearly in the documents of the FABC.

¹²⁷ Pasquale T. Giordano, The Awakening to Mission: The Philippine Catholic Church 1965-1981, (Quezon City, Philippines: New Day Publishers, 1988), pp. 100-06, 155-61 & 198-206.

¹²⁸ See "South Korea Under Emergency Rule," in Pro Mundi Vita: Dossiers, 1 (January 1976), pp. 6 ff.

When the bishops met at Taipei, Taiwan, for the FABC I Assembly in 1974, it appears that the bishops reevaluated their commitment to and the support of developmentalism. The very first paragraph of the FABC I, document betrays the deep division and polarization that existed among the bishops with regard to their assessment of the social reality of Asia and the impact of Western industrialization. In the introduction to the Statement of the Assembly they acknowledged:

Modern day Asia is marked today by swift and far-reaching transformations, a continent undergoing modernization and profound social change, along with secularization and the break up of traditional societies. Side by side with undeniable benefits and positive values, these processes have brought most serious problems. Industrialization and all that goes with it violently threatens our peoples with irreparable alienation and the disintegration of patterns of life and social relationships built up over the centuries. Stable meanings and values which have supported their lives are deeply shaken, and Asian peoples are today left in confusion and disorientation, even in despair and darkness of spirit.¹²⁹

This statement presents two different views with regard to modernization and industrialization. On the one hand it speaks of "undeniable benefits and positive values" of modernization or industrialization. One of the reasons may be that the bishops may have genuinely seen the economic growth and development in their own countries. The other probable yet compelling reason

¹²⁹ FABC I, 4, in FAPA, 1:27.

is that owing to their alienation from the poor and the down-trodden, the bishops may not be even aware of the resultant oppression and the plight of the poor. This also shows how hard it was for the bishops to make a clear break with the past as promised at the ABM.¹³⁰

On the other hand, it appears that the bishops were really concerned about the destructive influence of modernization upon the Asian societies which had been built on social relationships and thousands of years of wisdom. The process of secularization which was supposed to liberate people from superstition and fatalism, in fact had the opposite effect of alienating them from their cultural and religious roots. The secularization process has taken away the security that these Asian cultures, religions, rituals and myths provided to the people only to replace them with confusion and disorientation.

Thus, the bishops seem to have accepted the failure of the capitalist system because of its dismal performance and the grave crisis precipitated by it. After almost thirty years of experimentation, the bishops were awakened to the fact that this transplanted Western Capitalist form of development has, except

¹³⁰ See above p. 201; see also P. Digan, Churches in Contestation, p. 56.

for a few countries and limited number of individuals, failed in Asia.

Another factor that made the bishops question the present Western economic model of development was that it not only failed to deliver the goods it promised, but on the contrary the communist countries with China at the helm seem to have at least provided for the people the basic requirements. One could also perceive the influence of the social scientists and theologians present at the FABC I. They brought home the fact that the local Capitalist governments were autocratic, authoritarian and much more oppressive than the socialists regimes in Asia.¹³¹

The influence of the socialist model was so great, that the Asian youth were attracted by it¹³² in spite of its human rights records. Even a person like Cardinal Cooray, a bitter foe of

¹³¹ See above pp. 72-73&79-83.

¹³² Thus the bishops at FABC I spoke of the "ideological current which captivates the youth of Asia." FABC I, 32, in FAPA, 1:33.

communism¹³³ acknowledges the revolutionary impact of Chinese communism in Asia, quoting from an unnamed source says:

The tragedy of our peoples is that no one else other than Mao's China seems to offer realistic solutions that are radical enough to meet the urgent and grave needs of the poor Asian masses-the proletariat of the world.¹³⁴

Therefore, in order to comprehend the complex social, economic and political reality of Asia, the bishops found it necessary to have an understanding of:

the ideological currents [sic]... the contribution of social and behavioral sciences; a serious understanding of the factors, including the political, which enter into the dynamics of national development.¹³⁵

It was through the use of these scientific socio-economic analysis that the bishops were able to identify the impact of modernization and industrialization upon the Asian traditional societies. Not only that they found these structures of

¹³³ This same Archbishop, addressing the nation on behalf of the bishops of Sri Lanka in 1950, stated that all Catholics who support or in any way co-operate with the Communist party will be excluded from the Eucharist, Christian funeral etc. and will be considered public sinners. See Thomas Cooray, "Pastoral Letter - Reconciliation of Public Sinners," (Colombo, Ceylon: Catholic Press, 1950), pp. 1-2.

¹³⁴ Thomas Cardinal Cooray, in V.R.Gorospe, The Four Faces of Asia, p. 17.

¹³⁵ FABC I, 32, in FAPA, 1:33; see also GS, 62, in AAS, 58(1966), p. 1083.

bondage¹³⁶ to be the root causes of poverty, exploitation and oppression but also their impact on the family, religion, culture and the values cultivated by these realities, to be devastating.

The bishops' analysis of the socio-economic and political situation made them convinced that poverty in Asia was not accidental but the people are poor because:

they are deprived of access to material goods and resources which they need to create a truly human life for themselves. Deprived, because they live under oppression, that is, under social, economic and political structures which have injustice built into them.¹³⁷

In sum, the bishops at the FABC I, as we saw earlier, considered themselves and the church as inextricably bound to the "people by a common history and a common destiny,"¹³⁸ and thus to their problems of "confusion and disorientation, even their despair and darkness of spirit."¹³⁹ After their general statement on the socio-economic situation in Asia, the bishops

¹³⁶ Ibid., 6, p. 28.

¹³⁷ Ibid., 19, in FAPA, 1:31; Since, this passage was influenced by BISA I and was taken from it verbatim, we will study the implication of this statement when we deal with the BISA I statement. See below pp. 297-99.

¹³⁸ Ibid., 5, p. 28.

¹³⁹ Ibid., 4, p. 27.

clearly affirmed their desire to make their own the problems, anxieties and the struggle of the people of Asia for full human life. By reflecting on the socio-economic situation in Asia, the bishops heard the cry of the people, a cry:

to find new meanings in their lives and endeavors [sic], to overcome destructive forces and to shape a new integration in our societies, to free themselves from structures which have created new forms of bondage, to foster human dignity and freedom and a more fully human life, to create a more genuine communion among men and nations.¹⁴⁰

Even though this statement itself did not clearly identify the "destructive forces" and the "structures" of bondage, in the light of the above discussion, one could conclude from the discussion that we had that the bishops were referring to the process of modernization and industrialization, which have destroyed the Asian ethos. Again, in section five of the statement, the bishops made it very clear that poverty, deprivation and oppression in Asia were the result of injustice inbuilt into the social, political and economic structures.¹⁴¹

By identifying and articulating the specific problems faced by the people, the bishops have firmly placed these social concerns of the people at the centre of their discernment and

¹⁴⁰ Ibid., 6, p. 28.

¹⁴¹ Ibid., 19-21, p. 31.

deliberations. Therefore, the question arises: what is the relationship between the Bishops' concern for the socio-economic situation in Asia and their declared motive to "make the message and life of Christ truly incarnate in the minds and lives" of the people and "the building up of a truly local church" in Asia?¹⁴² According to the bishops, it appears that even the preaching of the Gospel has to be seen in relation to this dehumanizing context of Asia.

As we have seen the church in Asia was not an incarnate local church of Asia because of the 'alienness' of its structures and its failure to get involved in the lives of the people of Asia. In section 4.3.2 we saw the bishops' effort to incarnate the church in the religio-cultural reality of Asia. Now having seen the decisive influence of socio-economic and political spheres upon the people of Asia, we will try to find out: how the bishops proposed to incarnate the church in the socio-economic-political reality of Asia? Were they willing to demonstrate their identity with the people by getting involved in their struggle to free themselves from this oppressive situation?

¹⁴² Ibid., 19&20.

4.3.4 From Alienation to a "Dialogue of Life"

In the previous section we saw the bishops' determination to identify themselves with the people and their problems. The concrete form of this identification was their determination to dialogue with the people, especially with the poor. This, they felt was the new way of being the church of Asia:

A local church in dialogue with its people, in so many countries in Asia, means dialogue with the poor. For most of Asia is made up of multitudes of the poor.¹⁴³

Then the bishops proceed to explain what they mean by poor in the Asian context:

Poor, not in human values, qualities, nor in human potential. But poor, in that they are deprived of access to material goods and resources which they need to create a truly human life for themselves. Deprived, because they live under oppression, that is, under social, economic and political structures which have injustice built into them.¹⁴⁴

The bishops said that it was through a "dialogue of life" and not by confrontation they could take an active part in the transformation of the society and contribute to the betterment

¹⁴³ Ibid., 19.

¹⁴⁴ Ibid.,; Since this definition of the 'poor' and was directly taken from BISA I, we will return to this in the following chapter where we will study in detail how this came to be formulated. Here it is sufficient to note that the bishops at FABC I not only integrated the BISA I definition of 'poor' and made it their own but also accepted the interpretation given by BISA I with regard to the cause of poverty in Asia-deprivation.

of the life of the people of Asia. This will also provide the opportunity to "read the signs of the times, and to discern with our peoples what, in their present situation, they must accept and foster, and what they must reject and refuse."¹⁴⁵

Dialogue is the new key to the hearts and minds of the people of Asia and forms an essential aspect of the mission of the church of Asia. This dialogue with the people of Asia means dialogue with the poor since the majority of the Asians are poor. As we shall see, it is not another covert ploy used to convert the unsuspecting non-Christians to Christianity, but it does arise from the bishops' desire to liberate all human beings from oppression and degradation, and as a means to establish the Reign of God in Asia.

The "dialogue of life," the bishops spoke of is not a paternalistic moral or external support but a total identification with and a commitment to the struggles of the poor to free themselves from unjust social structures which keep them in that deprivation and powerlessness. To quote the bishops:

This dialogue has to take the shape of what has been called "dialogue of life." It involves a genuine experience and understanding of this poverty, deprivation and oppression of so many of our peoples.

¹⁴⁵ FABC I, 5, in FAPA, 1:28.

It demands working, not for them merely (in a paternalistic sense), but with them, to learn from them (for we have much to learn from them!) their real needs and aspirations, as they are enabled to identify and articulate these, and to strive for their fulfillment, by transforming those structures and situations which keep them in that deprivation and powerlessness.¹⁴⁶

According to the bishops this "dialogue of life" means a total identification with the poor, by which the church is called upon to experience poverty and understand what it means to be deprived and oppressed. Further, without imposing solutions from outside to problems that do not exist in Asia, the church has to learn from the poor through dialogue, what their needs and aspirations are, and find answers to those questions. This learning will help the church to experience what it means to be poor and to become the church of the poor.

The identification with the poor calls for an active solidarity with them not only in identifying and articulating the structures of oppression but also in transforming these structures and situations that have caused deprivation and oppression. According to the bishops of the FABC I, this dialogue with the poor in search of justice necessarily leads to the importance of conscientization:

¹⁴⁶ Ibid., 20, p. 31.

This dialogue leads to a genuine commitment and effort to bring about social justice in our societies. In turn this will include an operative and organized "action and reflection in faith" (sometimes called "conscientization"). This is a process which seeks the change and transformation of unjust social structures. Through it the deprived and oppressed acquire effective responsibility and participation in the decision which determine their lives, and thus are enabled to free themselves. Through it those who (consciously or unconsciously) maintain these structures may be made aware of them, and hopefully be converted to justice and the freedom of Christian love for their brothers.¹⁴⁷

In this paragraph the bishops laid down two cardinal principles that are to be followed in order to transform the oppressive structures and to bring about social justice. The first is action. Without action or active involvement in the problems, anxieties, and thus the struggles of the people, the church will not be able to understand the oppressive and dehumanizing nature of the situation in Asia. This, is what the liberation theologians call 'the first act.'¹⁴⁸

For the bishops of FABC I, the encounter with the Lord takes place:

in the midst of His community, an encounter in faith and in the Spirit, which will in turn awaken faith in

¹⁴⁷ Ibid., 21.

¹⁴⁸ See above p. 122.

those to whom we announce His Word. And this encounter, we know, is His gift.¹⁴⁹

Therefore, the corollary is that for the participants of the FABC I, the contact with the poor in the concrete historical situation and commitment to justice, is the same as God-encounter.

Secondly, with the light of faith, the church is called upon to reflect on this particular, concrete, historical situation in Asia and discern the will of God for Asia. The liberation theologians call this the second act-liberation theology.¹⁵⁰ In this new theological method experience plays an important part. There is a direct correspondence and correlation between faith and experience or action. However, this method is not new to Asian philosophies and traditions, since they are based on the immediate experience of reality. Hence, this method of doing theology in Asia is the correct and the typical method of Asian theology. This rooting of theology in reality means that one's life is dictated by one's belief and which in turn is expressed in action.

In Asia this means an attempt to understand faith from the perspective of the poor and in solidarity with the oppressed.

¹⁴⁹ FABC I, 30, in FAPA, 1:33.

¹⁵⁰ See above pp. 122-23.

What the FABC I, said in relation to other religions and cultures is also applicable to this dialogue with the poor.¹⁵¹ The bishops say very clearly that the interaction of the Gospel with the culture of the poor will help the church to understand certain aspects of the Gospel that are hidden or misinterpreted. A good example of this interaction is the discovery that liberation in the Bible is a religious experience of the poor. At the same time faith and Gospel could also give new meaning and new understanding to the problems faced by the people. The Gospel could reveal that the poor are not alone in their fight for liberation and that it is a joint venture of God and the poor.¹⁵²

This interpretation of the interaction between the Gospel and culture of the poor is perfectly in line with what we saw earlier, namely, the bishops' effort to read the signs of the times and discern with the people, in the light of God's Spirit and His Word, what in this present situation should be accepted and what must be rejected.

In conclusion, in order to be an incarnate church of Asia, say the bishops of FABC I, the church has to get involved in the

¹⁵¹ See above pp. 237-38.

¹⁵² See above pp. 162-64.

lives of the poor through a "dialogue of life." It means an involvement in their lives and an identification with their problems and anxieties. It also means a commitment to and struggle with the poor for justice and freedom. This process, say the bishops "renders the local church truly present within the life and cultures of our peoples," whereby "all their human reality is assumed into the life of the Body of Christ."¹⁵³ Hence it is not an exaggeration to state that according to the bishops the dehumanizing context of poverty, oppression and injustice is the primary source of theologizing in Asia. For an Asian the "encounter with the Lord" takes place not only in the Christian scriptures but also through the revelation of God "in the midst of His community."¹⁵⁴ Therefore, the "dialogue of life" with the poor is not a mere exchange of ideas and messages but it calls for action and reflection.

4.3.5 From Salvation to Total Human Development

The action and reflection, which the bishops called conscientization,¹⁵⁵ is not an exercise meant to satisfy the curiosity of the arm-chair theoreticians. This praxis will lead the church to realize that this present situation of injustice,

¹⁵³ FABC I, 26, in FAPA, 1:32.

¹⁵⁴ Ibid., 30, p. 33.

¹⁵⁵ Ibid., 21, p. 31.

oppression, deprivation and poverty is contrary to the will of God. This unjust situation was created by human acquisitiveness because the Asian poverty is the result of deprivation and exploitation.¹⁵⁶ Therefore, the process of conscientization seeks the change and transformation of these unjust and sinful social structures. This transformation could be brought about only by the poor themselves.¹⁵⁷ They must be given the freedom and the opportunity to be the masters of their own destiny. Not only the oppressed said the bishops, but also the oppressors should be conscientized as to the oppressive nature of their actions and be given an opportunity to be converted to justice and Christian love.

It is important to note that the bishops of FABC I, have deliberately chosen certain terminologies such as, "action reflection," and "conscientization," and made their own, the nuances given to these concepts by Latin American theologians. This indicates the Asian bishops' preference for Latin American liberation theology, not to the traditional Western theology. This was precisely because the bishops found the dehumanizing situation of poverty, oppression and deprivation in Asia to be identical to those of Latin America.

¹⁵⁶ See above pp. 254-55.

¹⁵⁷ See Karl Leveque, "Social Analysis: Concept and Method," in FABC Papers No. 39, pp. 29-40.

The ultimate purpose of dialogue with the poor of Asia, according to FABC I, was to insert "Christ's renewing life and the power of His paschal mystery," into the Asians' "search for human development, for justice, brotherhood and peace."¹⁵⁸ This is the new meaning of evangelization. The bishops were of the opinion that Christ and His Gospel could be meaningful only in so far as they contribute to the liberation of the poor of Asia. Of course, the bishops were convinced of the power of the Gospel to bring about the liberation the people are longing for.¹⁵⁹

The liberation and the brotherhood they speak of are not limited to the Christian communities, but are meant to be for all the people of Asia. Nor did the bishops limit the power of the Gospel only to save souls but they said that it helps us to understand:

the value of the human person and the social dimension of human salvation - a salvation which assumes and gives meaning to human freedom, earthly realities, and the course of this world's history.¹⁶⁰

This shows that the bishops were able to transcend the traditional dichotomy between body and soul, sacred and profane, salvation and liberation. They demonstrated that they were interested in the whole human being and all humans. This was

¹⁵⁸ FABC I, 28, in FAPA, 1:33.

¹⁵⁹ Ibid., 7, p. 28; also see above p. 244.

¹⁶⁰ Ibid., 18, p. 30.

because they were convinced that the liberation Christ brought was neither limited to one compartment of our lives (soul) nor to a particular people (Christians). The only way for the church in Asia to become fully Asian and yet fully Christian was to assume all human reality "into the life of the Body of Christ, so that all of it may be purified, perfected and fulfilled."¹⁶¹

It has to be noted that, at the FABC I, the bishops did not talk about conditions conducive for Christian life for a few or the salvation of souls but of full human life. The bishops broke away from the traditional straight-jacket ideas of holiness, flight from the world, the notion of the chosen people and even that of the people of God. Owing to God's presence and activity among the people of Asia, all of them are the people of God, the chosen people. The bishops did not speak in terms of the salvation of those who belong to the church, nor was their concern limited to Christians. This is what is meant by total and integral liberation. In other words, it means to make present the Kingdom of God.

Thus, the bishops made it clear that the Kingdom of God which Jesus inaugurated and which is moving towards its

¹⁶¹ Ibid., 26, p. 32.

fulfilment cannot be identified with the church. Though the church is the sign and sacrament of the Kingdom, the Kingdom is greater and wider than the visible boundaries of the church. By participating in the struggle for freedom, justice and human dignity, the local church makes that Kingdom present in the life of the poor and the down-trodden and thus becomes a sign of that Kingdom. In this we see a clear shift from a church centred spirituality to Kingdom spirituality.¹⁶²

Viewed from this perspective, according to the bishops of FABC I, evangelization or the preaching of the good news to the poor means, not conversion to a particular faith or the acceptance of a bundle of doctrines but a search for human development in justice, brotherhood and peace.¹⁶³ Thus, the overarching concern of the bishops was the restoration of full human life to the people because the people in these parts of the world have lost even their basic human dignity and freedom. The Briefer Statement of the Assembly puts this succinctly: "they are not only hungry for food; they are hungry for freedom, for dignity, for a life that is human."¹⁶⁴

¹⁶² See M. Amaladoss, "Evangelization in Asia," pp. 14-15.

¹⁶³ FABC I, 28, in FAPA, 1:33.

¹⁶⁴ FABC IB, 4, in FAPA, 1:42.

The bishops realized that one of the greatest impediments for total human development is the lack of social justice.¹⁶⁵ It was in this context and background that the FABC I reaffirmed the teaching of the 1971 Synod of Bishops (Rome). In its introduction, the document on 'Justice in the World' says:

Action on behalf of justice and participation in the transformation of the world fully appear to us as a constitutive dimension of the preaching of the Gospel, that is, of the mission of the Church for the redemption of the human race and its liberation from every oppressive situation.¹⁶⁶

This action on behalf of justice is not a preparation for or a concomitant to the proclamation of the Gospel but the proclamation itself. By quoting the document on 'Justice in the World,' the bishops have not only affirmed the stance taken by the Synod but also have made it their own. In this manner they also justified their own position with regard to liberation, namely, that they have not ventured beyond the Roman position on liberation.¹⁶⁷

¹⁶⁵ FABC I, 21, 1:31.

¹⁶⁶ "De Justicia in Mundo," in AAS 63 (1971) 923-442. English translation: "Justice in the World" in Joseph Gremillion, ed., The Gospel of Justice and Peace: Social Teachings since Pope John, (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1976), p. 514. Underlining is mine; See also FABC I, 22, in FAPA, 1:31-32.

¹⁶⁷ The Asian bishops preferred this definition of liberation to that of the Latin American theologians. Out of the many reasons for this choice, one possible reason is that the bishops of Asia were still of the opinion that poverty could be eliminated through development. The other being their

Thus, the FABC I continuing the discussion started by BISA I, comes to the inevitable conclusion that, in the Asian context, working for total human development in justice, means liberation. According to this understanding, the action on behalf of justice and the transformation of the world is constitutive and essential to evangelization thus not accidental or external to it where this could be dispensed with if the situation demands.¹⁶⁸ Since this nuance categorically rejects the view that the mission of the church primarily pertains to the 'spiritual' or 'religious matters,' the bishops of the FABC hasten to add:

Engaged in tasks of justice in accordance with the spirit and the demands of the Gospel, we will realize that the search for holiness and the search for justice, evangelization and the promotion of true human development and liberation, are not only not opposed, but make up today the integral preaching of the Gospel, especially in Asia.¹⁶⁹

By substituting the term 'integral' in place of 'constitutive' in this paragraph, the bishops have avoided a confrontation with the traditional elements in the Asian

timidity to take bold steps, lest they offend Rome. A careful reading of the FABC documents will demonstrate this fact. See also Donal Door, Option for the Poor: A Hundred Years of Vatican Social Teachings, (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1983; First publication: Dublin: Gill and Macmillan Ltd., 1983), p. 179.

¹⁶⁸ See Donal Dorr, Option for the Poor, pp. 187-88.

¹⁶⁹ FABC I, 23, in FAPA, 1:32.

hierarchy. This was also an attempt to bridge the gap between the prevalent idea holiness and working for justice. For some bishops of Asia working for the poor and the struggle for justice have nothing to do with holiness, so much so they have forbidden their priests from getting involved in the so called political quagmire.¹⁷⁰

In fact the FABC I makes a conscious attempt to rectify the past mistakes of some bishops whereby it promised support and understanding to those engaged in the field of social justice.

We pledge ourselves to a continuing and a large-hearted encouragement and support for those who are engaged in these tasks and for those who we believe have a special call from God to identify with the poor, especially when their work meets with difficulty, failure and oppression.¹⁷¹

The struggle for justice and the need to identify with the poor was found to be so vital to the mission of the church, the

¹⁷⁰ See the case of Father Walter Hogan in the Philippines who was forbidden to teach or preach social affairs within Manila, in Bishop Julio Xavier Labayen, O.C.D., "Historical Background of the Office for Human Development and the BISA's," in FABC Papers No. 6, p. 5; see also the case of Archbishop Suh of Taegu and the two other bishops of South Korea who restricted the activities of the Priest's Association in their dioceses; and also the 'command' issued by the Apostolic Pro-Nuncio Archbishop Luigi Dossena to the Korean Conference of Major Superiors of Men, not to discuss the socio-political situation of the country, in "The Emergency in the Mid-1970s," in Pro Mundi Vita: Dossiers, 1 (January 1976), pp. 18-19.

¹⁷¹ FABC I, 24, in FAPA, 1:32.

'Recommendations of the Assembly' called upon the leaders of the Church to "support and encourage those who identify with the poor, the marginalized and the exploited, personally showing the way by Christ-like witness of poverty in their own lifestyle."¹⁷² So it appears that those bishops who supported this identification with the poor and the struggle for justice, were able to prevail upon others if not convince them.

This was the main theme of Bishop Joseph R. Rodericks' pastoral presentation. In his address to the FABC I Assembly he drew the attention of his fellow bishops to the intrinsic connection between Christ's mission and that of the church. He says like Christ the church has to be concerned with the total salvation and liberation of the whole human person,

from sin and its consequences, from suffering and death, from fear and ignorance, from hunger, want and oppression, etc. Hence, the proclamation of the Gospel cannot be separated from action for justice, participation in transforming the world, liberation from every form of oppression."¹⁷³

In sum, the bishops of Asia perceived working for justice and the struggle for total human development as their mission of

¹⁷² FABC/Rec, 6; in FAPA, 1:40.

¹⁷³ Bishop Joseph R. Rodericks, "Evangelization in Modern Asia: Pastoral Presentation," in Evangelization in Asia Today: Part One, Unofficial compilation of papers for the FABC I, limited circulation, Taipei, 1974.

proclaiming the Good News to the people of Asia. Therefore, the Assembly proposed that the dialogue with the poor has to be "a dialogue of life."¹⁷⁴ It is this same process of dialogue that helps the church participate in the transformation of the world and liberates it from the oppressive structures, that also makes the church in Asia the incarnate church of Asia.

4.3.6 Conclusion

After Vatican II and especially with the establishment of the FABC the notion of evangelization underwent a dramatic and irrevocable change. According to FABC I, evangelization or the mission of the church of Asia is to be an incarnate church of Asia. The bishops were neither satisfied with the adaptation models nor with mere inculturation of the Gospel. To be an incarnate church, the bishops said that it has to get involved in the life and history of the people of Asia.

Therefore, in order to be an incarnate church, first of all, it has to be in dialogue with the religio-cultural heritage of the people of Asia. This process of dialogue on the one hand will help the church to clarify and discern the ennobling and liberating aspects of these religions and cultures. On the other the cultures and religions of the people can also

¹⁷⁴ FABC I, in FAPA, 1:29-31.

contribute to the understanding of certain hidden aspects of the Gospel. It is only through dialogue with other religions and cultures that one is able to discern the presence and the working of God in Asia. Hence the proclamation of the Good News in Asia demands a reinterpretation of the Gospel in the Asian religio-cultural ethos the people.

Secondly, the bishops at the FABC I also realized that in order to be an incarnate church, it has to identify itself with the majority of the people who are poor. They called this process the "dialogue of life." After analyzing the socio-economic and political situation in Asia the FABC I came to the conclusion that the Western Capitalist form of development has not only failed to produce the desired results but in fact destroyed the Asian ethos. It appears that the bishops have attributed the magnitude of the problems in Asia, particularly the abject poverty, exploitation, inequality and human degradation to the destructive forces modernization and industrialization.

The bishops were of the opinion that the Gospel would become meaningful to the people of Asia in so far as it is able to contribute to the liberation of the poor in Asia. It is neither by alienation nor by super-imposition but through a "dialogue of life" with the poor, the bishops said that,

Christ's renewing life and the power of His paschal mystery can be inserted into the people's struggle for total human development, justice, brotherhood and peace. Hence, the bishops at FABC I spoke of the mission of the church of Asia in terms of justice.¹⁷⁵

Further, the bishops declared that only a church that is in dialogue with the poor and involved in the struggles and aspirations of the people of Asia, could be the local church of Asia. Accordingly, the struggle for justice and the total development of all people is not something peripheral to the preaching of the Gospel but forms part and parcel of the preaching of the Gospel in Asia. This is evangelization and the new way of being the local church of Asia.¹⁷⁶

4.4 CONCLUSION

Our goal in studying these documents has been to see whether they contain or lead to a theology of liberation that is specific to Asia. This is what we tried to do in this historico-critical analysis of the documents of the ABM and FABC I. We have demonstrated that the overarching concern of the

¹⁷⁵ FABC I, 8, in FAPA, 1:28.

¹⁷⁶ Ibid., 9, p. 29.

bishops gathered at the ABM and the FABC I, was how to make the 'alien' church in Asia, the local church of Asia. In order to achieve this end, the bishops said that the church has to undergo the paschal experience and die to its alien cultural and social practices and be reborn in the Asian socio-cultural context. The bishops called this process 'incarnation.'

This, the bishops accepted, calls for a reinterpretation of the Gospel and a renewed understanding of the mission of the church. In their attempt to build an authentic local church in Asia the bishops have contributed to the emergence of a local theology. It emerges as the result of the interaction between the Gospel and the particular context of Asia-the local theology of Asia. Our analysis demonstrates that the bishops at the ABM and FABC I have been very careful not to offend Rome and did not venture beyond the directions given by Vatican II. Further, one could perceive at least two parallel streams of thought existing side by side at these two meetings. There were those who advocated the inculturation models and others liberational models. This could be attributed to the religio-cultural and socio-economic diversities of Asia.

On one end of the spectrum of the Asian reality is its poverty, oppression, exploitation and degradation of humanity and on the other the wealth of its many cultures, traditions and

religions. Our analysis of these two documents has clearly demonstrated that by reading the signs of the times in Asia, the bishops were determined to listen and discern what the Spirit was saying both in the religio-cultural and the socio-economic-political realities of Asia. Therefore, when the bishops spoke of incarnating the church in Asia, they were not only interested in expressing the faith in local cultural and linguistic idioms (inculturation) but they wanted the church to incarnate itself in the religio-cultural ethos of the people as well as in the social, political and economic realities of Asia.

The essential aspect of this incarnation is a meaningful interpretation of God's revelation in and through the cultural wealth and the lived experience of the people. This, they said, could be achieved only through a dialogue with the religions and cultures of Asia. God is encountered not outside of history but in the midst of God's people in Asia. The incarnation of the Gospel in Asia has to follow the pattern of the divine incarnation by which it is called upon to empty its cultural and religious prejudices and express itself in the religio-cultural idioms of the people. We have also shown that this process, according to the bishops involves a mutuality, where one is purified, enriched and enlightened by the other.

Owing to this change in understanding of the mission of the church in Asia the notion of evangelization also underwent a change. Evangelization during the colonial period was seen as planting the church in Asia through direct conversion. Then, after the political independence of the nations of Asia, the stress was laid on maintaining the institutions of the church in the face of national and cultural resurgence. During this stage the social services and the works of mercy done by the church were seen as a preparation for evangelization and not as something essential to the preaching of the Gospel. These two stages are clearly distinct from the third stage that began with the formation of the FABC.

In this chapter we have shown that the ABM and the FABC I in particular have brought about a revolutionary change in the church of Asia with regard to the understanding of its mission of preaching the Gospel in Asia. We tried to show that for the bishops of Asia evangelization does not mean 'saving souls' or expanding the territorial boundaries of the institution called the church. The FABC I, defines evangelization as "the carrying out of the Church's duty of proclaiming by word and witness the Gospel of the Lord,"¹⁷⁷ in the Asian context, by which "Christ's renewing life and the power of His paschal mystery is inserted

¹⁷⁷ FABC I, 25, in FAPA, p. 32.

into our peoples' search for human development, for justice, brotherhood and peace."¹⁷⁸

Thus, the primary purpose or the mission of the church of Asia is to build a community which shall mirror the reality of the Kingdom of God. Hence the bishops came to the inevitable conclusion that the eradication of poverty, exploitation and oppression, in short, whatever concerns the dignity of human person is the same as building of God's Kingdom. Therefore, in the Asian context of poverty, oppression, exploitation and sub-human standard of living of its masses, the bishops redefined evangelization or the mission of the church as working for justice and the full human development of all peoples.

Hence, the bishops said that in order to be an incarnate church it has not only to identify itself with the poor but also participate in their struggle for freedom, justice and human dignity. It was this commitment to and identification with the poor and the oppressed of Asia that made the bishops also to identify and articulate the structures of oppression and exploitation. The essential consequence of this is that, the struggle for justice and working for full human development is not a preparation but is the preaching of the Gospel itself.

¹⁷⁸ Ibid., 28, p. 33.

This is done not in isolation but in the context of and in relation to God's self-revelation found in other Asian religions and cultures. This is the new way of being the church in Asia—the incarnate church of Asia.

Therefore, according to the bishops, an incarnate church has to identify itself with the poor, the majority of whom are non-Christians. As an important step the bishops recognized the presence and working of God in and through the religions and cultures of Asia and the need to work with them in their struggle for full human life for all the people of Asia.

The first conclusion is that the bishops at the ABM and at the FABC I, have clearly opted for a new method for doing theology in Asia. At the ABM, the bishops declared:

We make ours, in the most solemn of ways, their (peoples') hopes and aspirations for a new Asia which shall be worthy of the future that is laid up in the heart of Asian man.¹⁷⁹

Thus, they committed themselves to listen to the peoples and to create a theology arising from the people. This was continued by the FABC I, where the bishops indicated a preference for a theology 'from below' to the traditional deductive theology 'from above.'¹⁸⁰

¹⁷⁹ ABM, 28, in FAPA, 1:17.

¹⁸⁰ See above pp. 123-24.

This change in methodology is that which makes liberation theology different from traditional Western theology. We have seen that the bishops present at the ABM as well as at the FABC I, have opted for this new theological method. Thus, they demonstrated a preference of praxis over theory. The point of departure for an Asian theology of liberation is this need to respond to the aspirations of the people, the concrete ecclesial praxis.¹⁸¹ Since, this methodology is that which makes Third World theology distinct, in the following chapter, we will try to find out whether this methodology was followed at the BISA's

Secondly, the bishops found the existing models of inculturation, that did not take into consideration the socio-economic and political reality of Asia, to be insufficient. Furthermore, the bishops were not prepared to 'baptize' the Asian philosophies and cultures, and use them only as a vehicle for conversion. Nor were they satisfied with the Latin American model of liberation since it is based entirely on Christian revelation and has nothing to say about the multi-religious and multi-cultural context of Asia.

Thus, in the process of making the church an incarnate church of Asia, it appears that the bishops laid the foundation

¹⁸¹ See Arevalo, in Evangelization in Asia Today: Part One, pp. 54-55.

and drew the general guidelines for an authentic Asian theology of liberation. It is neither an adaptation of Western theology because of its radical epistemological break, nor is it a developmental theology but a liberation theology based on action and reflection that leads to commitment-praxis. Yet it is also different from the Latin American theology of liberation.

Therefore, in the following chapter we will continue the analysis of the BISA documents, to find out: whether and how the bishops continue to subscribe to this theology of liberation? and if so what are the new developments? How do they understand the mission of the church in the Asian context of religious-cultural diversity, and its other reality of poverty, deprivation and oppression? Finally and most importantly we will try to find the answer to the unanswered question: what makes the Asian theology specific?

CHAPTER FIVE

THE BISA'S OPTION FOR THE POOR

5.1 INTRODUCTION

The Asian Christian involvement in the socio-political sphere antedates FABC and Vatican II. Since we are not concerned with the history of social protest in Asia, it is sufficient to note that some sections of the church such as, the Socio-economic Life in Asia (SELA), 1959 and the Bureau of Asian Affairs (BAA) of the Jesuits, were already active in the field of social action.¹

In 1965, the Priests' Institute of Social Action (PISA) for the diocesan priests engaged in social action in Asia was launched by SELA in Hong Kong.² These groups were more concerned with social action and development. PISA emphasized the creation of credit unions, ways and means to improve greater production through co-operation with government and foreign

¹ See Bishop Julio X. Labayen, "Historical Background of the Office for Human Development and the BISAs," in FABC Papers, No. 6, pp. 2-9; and also Parig Digan, Churches in Contestation, pp. 50 ff.

² Parig Digan, Churches in Contestation, pp. 50-51.

agencies. For the participants of PISA, Communism was the greatest threat to peace and stability in Asia.³ At PISA, they lacked a theology of liberation and the insights of social analysis which would have shown them the perils of developmentalism and capitalism.⁴

Forty bishops, priests and lay people active in social work from all over Asia gathered in Baguio City, Philippines in June 1969 to share their experiences and to coordinate their work. It was at this meeting, says Bishop Labayen, that for the first time an Asian Church leader spoke about and on behalf of all the people of Asia. He quotes from Cardinal Darbojuwono's speech at this meeting:

The Asian peoples are changing, are developing, slowly, painfully, but little by little groping their way to more human dignity. We all know that every human being has his human dignity. We know that the Asian man is proud of his human dignity. He has also his basic human right to exercise better and better that human dignity, to work and fight to raise his living standard, his living conditions, so that he will be a better human being.⁵

³ Note the similarity between the position of PISA and that of the Asian bishops with regard to communism and development. See above pp. 204&247.

⁴ see Julio X. Labayen, "Historical Background of OHD and BISAs, in FABC Papers No. 6, p. 4.

⁵ Ibid., p. 6.

This quote presents the programmatic summary of the mission of the church in Asia in the future. This will be the programme not only of the BISAs but also of the FABC.

It was at this Baguio meeting that the bishops decided to create a centre to facilitate communication and cooperation between the various national episcopal commissions. Bishop Julio X. Labayen was chosen as the chairman and it was decided that the office would be established in Manila. In addition to "communication, the new secretariat was to promote research and to try to link social action with other Church work, such as mass media and education."⁶

Thus, when the Asian bishops met in Manila in 1970 for the ABM they were already able to feel the impact of PISA. It was decided at the Central Committee of the FABC in December 1971 "to accept the office described in Baguio as their own Office of Human Development (OHD)" for the whole of Asia.⁷ This Office was able to start work immediately and is credited with organizing seven Bishops' Institutes for Social Action (BISA) from 1974 to 1986, apart from various other meetings and seminars.

⁶ Ibid.,

⁷ Ibid., p. 7.

The immediate concern of the OHD was to educate the bishops about poverty and oppression in Asia in order to help them understand the need for social change and to encourage them to support the efforts made towards it. As a result of his first field trips Bishop Julio X. Labayen, the Executive Chairman of the OHD, saw the overriding need of forming the bishops first.⁸ He found that most bishops of Asia were not aware of the deep rooted causes of poverty, oppression and exploitation. Nor were the bishops sympathetic to social action and involvement. Hence the OHD proceeded to achieve this end by conscientizing the bishops through social awareness seminars-the BISAs.

Speaking of his own experience of the first three BISA seminars Bishop Michael Bunluen Mansap comments:

many of us have little awareness of, or sympathy for, social action, and that this failure of ours hurts the work very much. Later, I came to know that OHD from its inception in 1971 had made the conscientization of Asia's bishops its top priority.⁹

The BISA seminars used the process of conscientization to make the bishops aware of the need to relate the Vatican II document Gaudium et Spes to the situation in Asia and to

⁸ Bishop Julio X. Labayen, O.C.D., "Historical Background of OHD and the BISA's," in FABC Papers No. 6, p. 8.

⁹ Bishop Michael Bunluen Mansap, "My Impressions of the BISAs," in FABC Papers No. 6, p. 9; see also his "Introduction to BISA IV in FABC Papers No. 24, p. 9.

"discover the real role of the Church in Asia" in this particular context.¹⁰ The concern of Gaudium et Spes, was:

to explain to everyone how it conceives of the presence and the activity of the Church in the world of today.

Therefore, the Council focuses its attention on the world of men, the whole human family along with the sum of those realities in the midst of which that family lives. It gazes upon that world which is the theater of man's history... so that this world might be fashioned anew according to God's design and reach its fulfilment.¹¹

We have divided this chapter into three main sections. In the first section we will be dealing with the first three BISAs. The second section we will study the fourth and the fifth BISA documents and the final section will deal with the sixth and seventh BISAs. These divisions and clusters are not arbitrary but dictated either by the intrinsic relationship found among them or by the time they were held.

5.2 BISA I-III (March 1974-November 1975)

This section is divided into five sub-sections. The first sub-section will deal with the BISA methodology. In this we

¹⁰ Ibid., p. 10.

¹¹ "omnibus exponere cupiens quomodo Ecclesiae praesentiam ac navitatem in mundo hodierno concipiat.

Mundun igitur hominum prae oculis habet seu universam familiam humanam cum universitate rerum inter quas; mundum, theatrum historiae generis humani... ut secundum propositum Dei transformetur et ad consummationem perveniat." in AAS, 58 (1966), p. 1026.

will attempt to find out whether the bishops added any new dimensions to the existing Latin American methodology. In the second sub-section we will see how the analysis of the Asian reality influenced the bishops to take the option to be the church of the poor.

Thirdly, we will seek the answer to the question: In their option for the poor how do the bishops see the relationship between evangelization and action for justice? Fourthly, we will study what they mean by conscientization and how this could help transform oppression and lead to liberation. Finally, our intention is find out what the bishops mean by total and integral human development. What makes it different from the traditional ideas of salvation and development?

5.2.1 The BISA Methodology

The BISA seminars followed the methodology: see, judge and act. The theology of the church in Asia had been entirely dominated by European theology with its a priori or deductive approach. It did not have any particular relevance to the problems of Asia. Therefore, there was an urgent need to read the signs of the times in Asia and find out from the people themselves what they required, what they dreamt of and what they expected from the church. This does not represent a new

theology but merely a change in methodology. This methodology, however, is the one liberation theologians employ.¹²

In line with the methodology followed, an important part of the BISAs was the exposure programme. BISA I began with talks by theologians and social scientists and, as usual, the discussions remained on a theoretical plane. The breakthrough came in the second week of the Institute with the field trip to the Tondo squatter area in Manila. The organizers of the BISAs literally took the participating bishops to the slums, barrios, fields and factories to see for themselves the situation and the squalor in which the people lived and worked. Writing about the positive results of this visit Bishop Mansap comments:

Seeing must include exposure to the life of the poor. No amount of discussion among ourselves can possibly substitute for this, as the Tondo visit proved beyond doubt. Clerical discussion is always unidimensional and theoretical, with an a priori bias. It is extremely conceptual, and this makes it difficult for people to break out of old patterns of thought, for concepts are static. The world of the poor is so vital and demanding that it alone can help us find new thrusts or new insights and goals.¹³

During this visit the bishops saw the peoples' struggle for existence amidst appalling poverty, sickness and destitution.

¹² see above pp. 120-24.

¹³ Bishop M.B. Mansap, "My Impressions of the BISAs," in FABC Papers No. 6, p. 13.

This contact with the poor and an inkling into the world of the poor became essential for the bishops since they were usually secluded and shielded from the poor and the marginalized.¹⁴ This direct experience of poverty, marginalization and inhuman living conditions of the people, provided the impetus for action. It helped the bishops to begin to discuss the actual situation rather than sterile theory. Owing to the experience gained at BISA I, the exposure programmes became an integral part of the other BISA seminars.

When field trips were not possible, as at BISA II, arrangements were made for those working among the poor to share their experience and the expectations of the poor with the bishops. At BISA III in addition to the exposure, the bishops had the opportunity to listen in humility and in a spirit of dialogue to what the Young Christian workers and youth had to say about the bishops themselves. At this meeting the speakers, "accused the bishops of not cooperating with them in their work for justice and for making no attempt to understand them."¹⁵

It has to be admitted that these short visits were not sufficient for the bishops to understand fully the complexity

¹⁴ Ibid., pp. 11-14.

¹⁵ Ibid., p 13.

and the magnitude of the problems faced by the poor. They did, however provide a window on the life of the poor. The results of the field trips were sufficiently encouraging and fruitful so that from BISA IV onwards the organizers gave more time to this type of exposure. As we proceed we will be able to see how these exposure and immersion programmes helped the bishops to take a stance of preferential option for the poor and encouraged them to struggle for the total liberation of all people.

The exposure programmes helped the participants of the BISAs to see the situation in which the great majority of people live. Seeing helps provoke sympathy but it does not give enough to enable a person judge a situation. As happened at the PISA deliberations, the bishops would have suggested some stop-gap solutions to the problems, such as, welfare programmes, credit unions and social services. So there was a second phase of the institute in which reflection on the reality was provided by theologians, social scientists, social workers, economists and other experts. These talks were aimed at unmasking the deceptive external appearance of the Asian situation by going to the root of the problems by means of social and theological analysis.¹⁶

¹⁶ Ibid., pp. 13-14.

At these BISAs the bishops were generally receptive to the ideas presented by the resource persons and usually a good portion of their suggestions came to be included in the final statement of the meetings. At times, some bishops found it hard to subscribe to the views of the speakers because of their theoretical nature which appeared to be radical and ideological.¹⁷ Agreement was particularly difficult for some of the bishops when the speakers not only spoke of the need to submit the present socio-economic and political realities to scientific analysis but also stressed the need to subject the church and its structures to the same process.

Except for those from the Philippines, the bishops were unfamiliar with liberation theology, social analysis and peoples movements. According to Bishop Mansap some of the participants at BISA III:

found it dazzling, even blinding. There was an air of uneasiness and suspicion, a feeling of being brainwashed and manipulated, and that in a way seemed to many to be leftist.¹⁸

For others, the use of social sciences, especially social analysis smacked of Marxism. They were as yet, unable to accept this slant.

¹⁷ Ibid., p. 10.

¹⁸ Ibid., p. 12.

At BISA I, the Indonesian delegates, without rejecting the importance of liberation theology, added a new but typically Asian dimension to this methodology. They spoke of their own experience of "communal dialogue" and the "consensus method" of reaching solutions to problems.¹⁹ The bishops appreciated this insight and adopted this method as their strategy. According to this, the leaders and the people come together where in dialogue the leaders "listen to the people with a view to learning from them."²⁰ This becomes a communitarian task taken in concert with all the people, especially the poor.

Dialogue recognizes and strengthens the community where it already exists. It also helps create community where it does not exist because it uses a methodology that is truly Asian since it employs:

the procedures for arriving at consensus for action which our people have themselves elaborated, rather than alien techniques which may work well enough in other cultures, but not in our own.²¹

A significant fact that has to be noted is that the bishops proposed a participative way of exercising authority or decision making through consensus.²² This absolutely new approach to the

¹⁹ Ibid., p. 10.

²⁰ BISA I, 9, in FAPA, 2:347.

²¹ Ibid.,

²² See also ACMC, 46, in FAPA, 1:127.

problems of Asia is perfectly in harmony with the Asian traditions. It clearly demonstrates a new way of being the church of Asia.

It is in this context that one has to read the cautionary remark against the use of preconceived, "theological, legal and sociological systems developed principally in the West."²³ Further, this warning against preconceived Western systems could also be seen as a reaction against the traditionally minded bishops, who, for a very long time had been looking to the West for answers and solutions to the problems of Asia. Now the bishops at least suggested that attempts be made to find Asian solutions to Asian problems. Therefore, it appears that the bishops at BISA I used this opportunity as a double-edged sword to caution those who followed Western theology slavishly as well as those who advocated uncritical use of socio-economic analysis and the conscientization process that were developed principally in the West and in Latin America.

Therefore, the bishops at BISA I proposed to listen to the people at all levels:

not only the diocese and the parish, but also, even more importantly, the village and the neighbourhood

²³ BISA I, 6, in FAPA, 2:346.

groups, and the other functional groups, e.g.,
worker's groups.²⁴

This process of dialogue was seen as the best way to draw from the well-springs of ancient religions, traditions and wisdom. Contrary to the traditional understanding of the church as a self-sufficient independent entity, the bishops stressed the need for communion and dialogue, by which it becomes the local church of Asia. This communion or incarnation is not something that is superimposed but is achieved through dialogue with the people.²⁵

At the first BISA, which was held for the South-east Asian region, one can clearly see the influence of the Filipino theologians. For them, as was seen in chapter three,²⁶ the primary focus of theology is the concrete human situation of poverty and oppression which has to be interpreted in the light of biblical faith. The method used to decipher this cannot be alien but should be guided by the native wisdom of the people and their particular cultural outlook. These make this theology indigenous and incultured. Thus the bishops at BISA I down-

²⁴ Ibid., 8, p. 347. underlining is mine.

²⁵ FABC I, 12, in FAPA, 1:29; see above pp. 235-37; For a detail study of this see Robert J. Schreiter, "A Framework for a Discussion of Inculturation," in Mary Motte, F.M.M and Joseph R. Lang, M.M, eds., Mission in Dialogue, p. 546.

²⁶ See above pp. 139-41.

played the importance of social analysis and stressed that the present social order could be transformed only through "a discernment of the historical process taking place among our own people."²⁷ They opted for a method that is based on local culture, native traditions and wisdom - the consensus method.²⁸

However, at BISA II the bishops repudiated the stance taken against social analysis at BISA I, and began to advocate a pluralistic theological approach. One of the reasons was that though there were several similarities between the member countries and regions regarding their problems and expectations, they were not identical. Therefore, while respecting the diversities and the decisions each bishop would have to make in relation to his particular situation, the bishops felt that it was important

to analyze critically and technically the problems we are faced with. We cannot jump from our faith experience to the concrete decisions of social action without due technical investigations and due account of the ideologies under whose influence we are living. The complication of many of the problems and the limitations of our resources will demand cooperation between different countries and conferences or specialized committees, or also of organizations outside the Church.²⁹

²⁷ BISA I, 6, in FAPA, 2:346.

²⁸ Ibid., 9, p. 347.

²⁹ Ibid., 10.

Here, in addition to theological reflection, the bishops have indirectly opted for the scientific social analysis as a means to understand the complexity and the causes of the present situation in Asia. The other reason for theological pluralism is the presence of other world views and ideologies in Asia:

This leads us to admit that pluralism is necessary once we work through the mediation of secular analysis and world views. This pluralism should not be a threat to our Christian unity, but on the contrary, a positive and creative sign that our unity is deeper than whatever the concrete technical analysis or viewpoints might show: a genuine value that emphasizes unity in diversity... The only reserve should be that this pluralism needs to be one resulting from serious study and openness, and not the casual result of ignorance, prejudice or oversimplification.³⁰

The participants insisted that the bishops should have an open mind and reject any prejudice or over-simplification. This assertion is essential for our discussion because there was a tendency in Asia to dismiss the influence and the importance of other religions and ideologies. The complex nature of Asia made the bishops demand cooperation not only within the church but also between the church and other religious as well as secular organizations.

³⁰ BISA II, 10, in FAPA, 2:353.

The purpose of this reflection and analysis, said the bishops at BISA III, was to interpret the social dimensions of the Gospel in the context of Asia:

we studied the social and economic situations prevailing in this continent and reflected on the role of the church in the face of the urgent challenges posed to us.³¹

We saw that the purpose of social analysis was not merely to uncover the unjust and oppressive social mechanism but its ultimate end was to transform the existing social order. Therefore, the bishops at the first three BISAs made an attempt to understand the socio-economic-political reality of Asia. However, this analysis was not complete because for most of the bishops this was a new experience. As we shall see later on in the study of the other BISAs, this social analysis will become a very important tool in the hands of the bishops, to understand and to transform society.

5.2.2 The Church of the Poor

The very first sentence of BISA I, clearly situates the purpose of this meeting. Its primary focus was to make the church of South-east Asia, the church of the people.

The Church is the People of God. The Church in South-east Asia will become more fully the people of God,

³¹ BISA III, 1, in FAPA, 2:357.

the more it is, recognized to be, the Church of the People.³²

In order to be the church of the people it has to be the church of the poor since the majority of the people are poor.

The overwhelming majority of our people are poor, but let it be clearly understood what we mean by "poor." Our people are not poor as far as cultural tradition, human values, and religious insights are concerned. In these things of the spirit, they are immensely rich. But our people are poor in this sense: the overwhelming majority of them are deprived of access to the material goods they need for a truly human life, and even of access to the resources they need to produce these goods for themselves. We use the word "deprived" deliberately. Our people are deprived of the goods and opportunities to which they have a right because they are oppressed. They live under economic, social, and political structures which have injustice built into them.³³

This passage contains two distinctions that are essential to understanding the complex characteristics of Asian reality. Owing to the special nuances provided by this paragraph, it was incorporated into the final statement of FABC I.³⁴ The first is that the bishops made an essential distinction between poor in economic terms and poor in relation to religio-cultural heritage and traditions. The second is that to be poor in itself is not something bad or evil.

³² BISA I, 1, in FAPA, 2:345.

³³ Ibid., 2.

³⁴ See above p. 253.

As to the first point, this nuance was the insight of the Thai delegation. In Thailand, they said, it is demeaning and disgraceful to call someone 'poor' or to refer to a group as 'poor people.' Further, they asked how Asians could be called poor when Asia is rich in cultures, values, religions and human potential.³⁵ Fr. Horacio de la Costa, an expert present at the institute, formulated the above definition of the concept of poverty in the context of Asia, which was included in the final statements of BISA I. An important consequence is the realization that the Asian reality is multifaceted. This was one of the conclusions reached at the last chapter, where we saw that the Asian reality is not only its poverty and oppression but it is also shaped by the multireligious and multicultural heritage of the people.³⁶

As to the second point, according to Asian spirituality a religious person is a poor person, who voluntarily embraces poverty or spurns the riches of the world, that are the causes of suffering and pain, in search of a lasting and eternal happiness-'Moksha.' Hence, what the bishops condemned was not the voluntary poverty of the religious but poverty³⁷ enforced

³⁵ Bishop Mansap, in FABC Papers No. 6, p. 10.

³⁶ See above p. 275.

³⁷ See above pp. 144-45.

either by external or internal forces or by the combination of both.

The bishops' understanding of the social reality of Asia convinced them that poverty in Asia was caused by the present economic order, based on the exploitation of the many by the few and the powerful. Thus it was not accidental but was caused by oppression and deprivation. The bishops said that they used the word 'deprived' deliberately in order to bring home the fact that poverty in Asia is essentially the result of injustice built into the social, economic and political structures. By using the term 'deprived' the bishops have also rejected the notion of chance or the fatalistic determination of history. Hence, poverty is not a predetermined feature of God's creation, but is a social construction.³⁸

BISA II, following the direction given by the FABC I,³⁹ speaks of God's presence and activity in the history of the people of Asia where God is calling human beings to be co-creators to recreate the world with God's grace. According to BISA II, God's presence is not limited to the Christian community nor are God's actions confined to the boundaries of

³⁸ See above p. 126.

³⁹ See above pp. 239-41.

the church. God's presence is manifested in and through the activities of both Christians and non-Christians in the creation of a new society in Asia. They said:

A feature of the institute has been a general sense of God at work in our world through the activities and dedication of people - both Christian and non-Christian - committed to the creation of a new society, in both rural and urban areas.⁴⁰

By reflecting theologically on the light socio-economic analysis sheds on the Asian situation, the bishops came to the realization that a world order built on injustice, oppression, underdevelopment and poverty was the result of social sin. Their analysis of the situation in Asia has shown that the present world order is structured in sin. What the bishops are attempting to say is that this world order is in direct opposition to God's plan for the world. The bishops came to a:

growing awareness and understanding of the importance of the social dimension of sin and grace. This is a concept that comes out of the biblical experience and the analysis of human sciences alike and can help us deepen and widen the traditional conception of sin and grace as total events and dynamics."⁴¹

The awareness of the social dimension of sin and grace, said the bishops, "made real and concrete through shared concern for and involvement in painful and hopeful issues of our society

⁴⁰ BISA II, 3, in FAPA, 2:252.

⁴¹ Ibid., 5.

should be a guiding principle in pastoral directives."⁴² The bishops, therefore, saw sin as having a social dimension where it affects not only the individual but also society. Sin is not only 'spiritual' but also expresses itself in and through material deprivation. Hence, the need to eradicate sin and its consequences from society which are the causes of all evils. In view of this, BISA II called upon the bishops to work out at every level of Christian life and community a process that will lead to the "total salvation" of all.⁴³

BISA III was forthright in condemning the structures of sin. Their analysis of the society, say the bishops:

has shown us the vast dimension of hunger, disease, malnutrition and unemployment. We have seen how millions of our Asian brethren are living below the poverty line. It would appear that due to the present economic systems the disparities between the rich and the poor may not only continue, but may even widen, so that some of the poor might become still poorer with the years. We have come to realize the enormous social sin reflected through this injustice, oppression and poverty.⁴⁴

Reflecting on the situation in Asia with the help of social analysis enlightened by both Biblical and non-biblical revelation the bishops came to the same conclusion as that was reached at BISA II, namely, that poverty in Asia is not

⁴² Ibid., 6.

⁴³ Ibid.,

⁴⁴ BISA III, 2, in FAPA, 2:357-58.

accidental but structural and is the result of social sin. This is a giant step for the bishops of Asia, for whom sin is no longer something personal and private. Sin is reflected in the various, social, political, economic, cultural and religious structures. Therefore, struggle against these structures of sin and the power of evil is a duty of a Christian. This should not be construed as class struggle.

At BISA II, the regional meeting for the East Asian region, which includes the Asian communist giants, China, North Vietnam and North Korea, the bishops from Taiwan did make an attempt to condemn Communism. This did not materialize, since the majority of the bishops present did not think it opportune to discuss Communism at this time for variety of reasons.⁴⁵ At BISA III the guest speakers 'the experts' brought back the issue of Communism and spoke about its positive contribution to society especially its achievements in the field of social justice. Now it was the turn of the more traditionally minded bishops to object that they were being brainwashed and manipulated.⁴⁶ However, the bishops were under no illusion about the influence of not only other religions but also other ideologies prevalent in Asia,

⁴⁵ See Bishop Mansap, in FABC Papers No. 6, p. 12.

⁴⁶ Ibid.,

particularly Communism.⁴⁷ Since there was no agreement among the bishops with regard to Communism, no resolution was reached. However, this will surface again at BISA IV.

To be the 'Church of the Poor' was the clarion call of the ABM,⁴⁸ FABC I⁴⁹ and it reverberated in all the BISAs. While BISA I defined the term 'poor' in relation to material poverty, BISA II extended the term 'poor' to include those categories of people who are marginalized and deprived of their humanity. Included in this category of poor are the "workers, youth, the rural marginated population, political and social situations."⁵⁰ It is rather unfortunate that the bishops failed to include women among those termed poor. In Asia women are a special category of people who are the most exploited victims through greatest discrimination. Could this be because the BISAs were dominated by men who could not understand the triple oppression suffered by the women of Asia? Or was it a manifestation and an acceptance of the Asian cultural construct of patriarchy where

⁴⁷ BISA II, in FAPA, p. 353.

⁴⁸ ABM, 19, in FAPA, 1:15.

⁴⁹ FABC I, 19-24, in FAPA, pp. 31-32.

⁵⁰ BISA II, 11, in FAPA, 2:354.

the women are considered only in their relationship to men, either as mother, wife or sister?⁵¹

One cannot deny the fact that the church has always been concerned with the poor, the needy and the downtrodden. The church in Asia, with the assistance from its rich and affluent sister churches of the North, has been a pioneer in providing social services to the needy and the poor. It built hospitals, schools, orphanages and created charitable organizations;⁵² it fed the poor and clothed the naked. The church has always felt that this charity towards the less fortunate is a task imposed by its founder and Lord, Jesus Christ. However, while the church has been a social service organization working for the poor, it has not felt the need to identify itself with the poor. The poor have been looked upon as those who need the church's sympathy and assistance.

Thus, the poor were considered to be the objects of one's charity and generosity, "the recipients of what was seen as good for them by a church really apart from them."⁵³ Even in those programmes that were supposed to be for the benefit of the poor,

⁵¹ See above pp. 89-90.

⁵² See ABM, 16, in FAPA, 1:14.

⁵³ Richard P. Hardy, Being with the Poor, p. 16.

the people concerned were not consulted about their needs and expectations. Further, in the eyes of the poor, the authorities in the church were almost always on the side of the oppressors and the rulers, since they benefited from and were dependent on the support of the rich and the powerful. In short, as Richard Hardy has correctly diagnosed, "the poor were definitely not Church"⁵⁴ in Asia.

The bishops at BISA I, recognized this problem and accepted the fact that the church in Asia has not yet become the church of the people. This prompted the bishops to redefine the church in relation to the people in the very first statement of BISA I:

The Church is the people of God. The Church in South-east Asia will become more fully the People of God, the more it is recognized to be, the Church of the people.⁵⁵

Here the bishops do not define the church as an institution but as the people of God in line with Vatican II.⁵⁶ For the most part, before Vatican II the church was identified with the hierarchy. By introducing the formula 'people of God' into its vocabulary Vatican II redefined the church so as to include all the baptized, both the hierarchy and the laity.

⁵⁴ Ibid.,

⁵⁵ BISA I, 1, in FAPA, 2:345.

⁵⁶ See LG Chapter II in AAS, 57(1964), pp. 12-21.

The bishops at BISA I, proceeded to explain that church must first of all recognize and appreciate the values found in the traditions and cultures of the people of Asia if it is to be a church of the people. Secondly, it should take a clear option for the poor and be determined "to do something about the state of deprivation and oppression in which most of them are," and become the "Church of the poor."⁵⁷ Therefore, only by becoming the church of the poor, can the church become the church of the people. This conversion to the poor is essential since the vast majority of the people in Asia are poor.

Then the bishops asked what it means to be the church of the poor in Asia and what are the practical consequences or implications for them as pastors. Their answer at BISA I, was:

It does not mean merely to work for the poor, as it were from the outside or from above, like a beneficent institution or an administrative agency. It does mean to work with the poor, and therefore to be with them, and so to learn from their needs and aspirations, or to enable them to identify and articulate those needs and aspirations, if they are as yet unable to do.⁵⁸

Therefore, to be the church of the poor does not mean to be content with working for the poor but working with them. It means essentially, totally identifying with them. This

⁵⁷ BISA I, 3, in FAPA, 2:346.

⁵⁸ Ibid., 4.

identification is not a demonstration of mere passive solidarity but helping them to fulfil their basic human needs and achieve their aspirations. In order to do this the church first of all, has to listen to their needs and aspirations. Secondly, not only must it assist the poor in articulating their needs but it must also educate them to understand the hidden and complex nature of oppression which prevents them from satisfying their basic human needs.

In order to be the church of the poor, says BISA I, it is not enough for the church to be with the poor; it must also be a church that learns from them. Here the bishops were not speaking of a hierarchical church in which they teach and the laity listen in obedience. They have proposed a reversal of positions. In the spirit of dialogue the leaders are called upon to listen to the poor in order to learn their real needs and aspirations. This learning from the poor is important for the church since it has lost the meaning of poverty and ceased to be the church of the poor. This listening and learning from the poor is the starting point of an Asian theology of liberation which amplifies the cry of the oppressed and seeks to elicit an answer to their cry by reading the signs of the times.

Certainly the participants of BISA I were aware that this option for the poor and the struggle for justice will lead to a

prophetic denouncing and opposing the rich and the powerful who refuse to share in this concern for the poor.⁵⁹ This option, they said, has to be taken in spite of its attendant dangers and unforeseeable consequences.

Thus, opting to be with the poor involves risk of conflict with vested interests or "establishments", religious, economic, social, political. It also involves for leaders of the Church especially, loss of security, and that not only material but spiritual. For it means taking the unfamiliar course of looking for guidelines of policy and action not to ready-made theological and sociological systems developed in the West, but to a discernment of the historical process taking place among our own people.⁶⁰

The first consequence of this option is the loss of material security provided by the rich and the powerful, on whom the church has depended so much for so long. The second is the loss of security offered by the traditional formulas and theological systems developed in the West. This realization is very important because the traditional theology and even the church's policies were biased against the poor. The situation of poverty and exploitation in Asia demands a new interpretation and a new understanding of God's revelation in relation to the developments taking place in Asia.

⁵⁹ Ibid., 5.

⁶⁰ Ibid., 6.

Hence, the bishops said that it is an act of faith because it cannot be assumed:

that the Church in Southeast Asia will become the Church of the poor simply as a matter of course. It can only be the result of an option consciously and deliberately taken.⁶¹

It is essentially "an act of faith"⁶² since it is from this material deprivation and in the midst of rich cultural, religious and human potential that the Spirit is calling the church to be the church of the poor and to transform the world into a fully human and brotherly world.⁶³ It is an act of faith, because it is an attempt to discern God's will for the people of Asia in this present situation. This leads to the realization that the present world order based on oppression, exploitation, poverty and dehumanization is in contradiction to God's will.

It is an act of faith because faith demands that our concern for the poor not remain merely speculative and theoretical but that it be translated into action. In order to proclaim the 'Good News' to the poor and to bear witness to the liberator God, the church, above all, has to put into practice what it proclaims. This is all the more important in Asia

⁶¹ Ibid., 7, pp. 346-47.

⁶² Ibid., p. 347.

⁶³ See FABC I, 22, in FAPA, 1:32.

where, as we shall see, there is no dichotomy between theory and practice, and orthodoxy and orthopraxis.

When the bishops at BISA II reflected on the 'Social Dimensions of the Gospel: Oppressed People and The Role of the Church' they admitted that they had long been concerned only about their role and the "responsibility of the institutional Church."⁶⁴ They realized that the time had come for the Church and for them in particular to be concerned about the problems of the people of Asia. They said: "We are deeply concerned and are aware of our responsibility to react to different situations and search ways of expression and action according to the true Gospel spirit."⁶⁵ Therefore, they said that the call of the Spirit in the present Asian situation of poverty, is to live in contact with the people at their own level in their own milieu and become the church of the people, particularly of the poor.

The outcome of this concern was their acknowledgement of "the need for grass-root discernment, contacts, and dialogue."⁶⁶ They said in no uncertain terms:

We felt too the need to live in contact with and close to the weak, to the people in need, without waiting

⁶⁴ BISA II, 2, in FAPA, 2:351.

⁶⁵ Ibid.,

⁶⁶ Ibid., 13, p. 354.

for them to come to us. In a word, we acknowledge the need to work at the grass-roots level.⁶⁷

When the bishops took into consideration the 'alienness' of the structural image projected by the church in the context of the religio-cultural diversities found in Asia, they saw the importance of building the church from the grassroots - the church of the people.

The process of listening, learning and being with the poor become meaningful and effective only when the church and especially the bishops willingly share in the life of poverty that is the lot of the majority of the people in Asia. This identification with the poor is essential in Asia precisely because, according to the ancient religious traditions of Asia, a religious person or seeker is a poor person.

In Asia the poor felt alienated not only by the lifestyle of the bishops but also by their insensitiveness to injustice both in society and within the church itself. To rectify this situation of alienation the bishops at BISA II called for a reassessment of their own lifestyle and stressed the importance of justice in the church. They pointed out that in their lives,

⁶⁷ Ibid., 3, p. 352.

poverty should be real and not 'paper' poverty and that the Church should revise her own lifestyle and institutions in order to first realize within herself whatever she has to say about social justice.⁶⁸

The bishops, realizing the usual fate of documents produced at meetings of this nature, insisted "that these considerations should not remain mere words and pious considerations but that we all have to commit ourselves to make them real in our life and responsibilities."⁶⁹

The church's option for the poor and commitment to their cause in this particular Asian context demands that it be the voice of the voiceless, since the poor, the majority of the people of Asia, are deprived of their voices. The BISA II statement continues:

We felt that the Church should also be the voice of those without a voice: the poor and the weak, the marginalized and the victims of injustice, wherever they may be. To be such a voice in a universal Christian love we should cooperate with any person of good will engaged in the same task without narrowness, without paternalism and in open dialogue. We should always look at people without labeling or categorizing them.⁷⁰

In this statement, the bishops have stated the need for the church to work for the benefit of all and have called for the

⁶⁸ Ibid., 4.

⁶⁹ Ibid.,

⁷⁰ Ibid., 11, p. 354.

breakdown of all barriers, both within and without the church. Further, they want to be the voice not merely of poor and oppressed Christians but of all people. It is "by becoming one with the people, the community becomes the church of the poor."⁷¹ This, they said, is the vocation and the mission of the Church of Asia, which calls for dialogue not only with a section of the people but with all people at every level,⁷² which demands a continuous conversion.⁷³ In this sense salvation becomes the liberation of the whole person and all human beings from the clutches of sin, death and all that dehumanizes them. "This liberating and saving activity of God," says Amalorpavadass, "has both physical and spiritual, this-worldly and other-worldly existential and eschatological dimensions."⁷⁴

Therefore, to be the church of the poor, the church has to take a preferential option for the poor, as a witness to Christ, "who has a special love for the poor and wishes to be identified and served in the naked, hungry, thirsty, and the imprisoned."⁷⁵ Hence, the mission of the church in Asia, is to be poor as Jesus

⁷¹ Richard P. Hardy, Being with the Poor, p. 18.

⁷² BISA I, 8, in FAPA, 2:347.

⁷³ BISA II, 13, in FAPA, 2:354.

⁷⁴ D.S. Amalorpavadass, Approach, Meaning and Horizon of Evangelization, p. 90.

⁷⁵ BISA III, 4, in FAPA, 2:358.

was poor and to bear witness to him. This can be achieved by working for the total and integral development of all, which will culminate in the creation of a new society which is the same as the "building of God's kingdom on earth."⁷⁶

5.2.3 Action for Justice

The bishops at the BISAs over and over again stated, both implicitly⁷⁷ as well as explicitly, that the mission of the church is to make present the Kingdom of God.⁷⁸ In order to make it present the church has to take a preferential option for the poor and work for the total and integral development of the whole person and all people. This has to be seen in the light of what we saw in the previous chapter, namely that for the bishops present at the ABM, and at the FABC I, the building up of the new world of Asia in justice, freedom and human dignity is the same as building up of God's kingdom.⁷⁹

⁷⁶ Ibid., 8, p. 360.

⁷⁷ When BISA I spoke of the 'people of God' and 'community,' it did mean more than the Church and the Christian community. See BISA I, 1, 7, 8 & 12, in FAPA, pp. 345-48; BISA II was more explicit when it spoke about the creation of a new society. See BISA II, 3, in FAPA, 2:352.

⁷⁸ BISA .II, 8, in FAPA, 2:360.

⁷⁹ See above p. 277.

Since the bishops declared that the building up of God's kingdom coincides with the building up of a just society, then the church of Asia must be more than a social service agency. It must be involved in the day to day struggles of the poor in order to help them achieve full integral human development and justice. The BISA I document enumerated in practical terms what it means to work for social justice and total human development in the subsection 'Areas of Concern.' This stressed the need to work out with people a community based "effective programme of health promotion and disease prevention" in rural areas where the majority of the people in Asia live.⁸⁰

The participants of this assembly were very much concerned about the squalor, the sub-human living conditions and the deprivation of basic human rights of the people in slums areas. The bishops attributing this to the "personal greed and oppressive social structures" called for action in justice.⁸¹ Since they realized that an individual bishop might not be in a position to take action with regard to the violation of these human rights, they requested each bishop to inform the others

⁸⁰ BISA I, 14, in FAPA, 2:348.

⁸¹ Ibid., 15, p. 349.

about violations in his diocese so that they could "take collegial and solidary action about them."⁸²

The bishops also recognized the rights of the workers to "organize freely, to bargain collectively, and to resort to strikes if that is the only way they can obtain redress of grievances."⁸³ It appears that the bishops were not convinced of the fundamental right of the workers to strike. This could be resorted to only after exhausting all other means. However, they expressed their desire to work with the people in their search for "effective ways of securing or restoring these basic freedoms for our workers."⁸⁴

According to the bishops the most poignant and fundamental expression of the unjust political and social structures was the alienation of people from their lands and the exploitation of the fruits of their labour by a few.⁸⁵ As an important consequence of this the bishops considered "the implementation

⁸² Ibid.,

⁸³ Ibid., 16.

⁸⁴ Ibid.,

⁸⁵ Ibid., 17.

of a just and realistic program of agrarian reform to be of the highest priority and urgency."⁸⁶

In their search for justice the bishops at BISA III looked at the church's traditional response to the needs of the people. Evaluating the ministry of social services done by the church the bishops expressed their dissatisfaction because these social services that were supposed to help the poor had in fact produced the opposite effect by perpetuating the status quo and doing nothing to remedy the situation of oppression. They said:

The Church has always been dedicated to the poor, but we have observed how our institutions and services have often projected images of richness, and even alienation from the poor. With the help of our resource personnel, we have seen that many of our Church institutions designed to help the poor, not only do not do so, but many, in fact, have unintended effects against their interests. They are caught as it were, in the unjust social systems and structures of our age.⁸⁷

Thanks to the social scientists the bishops woke up to the fact that they together with their schools, hospitals and social institutions had wittingly or unwittingly contributed to the oppression of the people of Asia. At this meeting, Balasuriya cited as an example how a private school could contribute to the injustice and oppression in society. He said, "a private school

⁸⁶ Ibid., 18.

⁸⁷ BISA III, 3, in FAPA, 2:358.

which helps the rich to get richer may increase the disparities and discrimination in society and hence foster injustice."⁸⁸

The bishops realized how the present educational system has contributed to the legitimization and sacralization of the established dominant order by providing the ideology that instilled resignation and submission. Hence the bishops at BISA I decided:

to work out effective ways of extending the benefits of education to the masses of our people. We realize that this may require a re-orientation of existing educational institutions and a transfer of resources and personnel to community-based, community-directed, non-institutional forms of the educational apostolate.⁸⁹

It becomes clear that the bishops were not merely satisfied with working for the poor like any other organization but they saw its place in relation to the full development of the people of Asia in communities. Hence, BISA III challenged the bishops of Asia, "to be ready to abandon old works and to take on new forms of apostolate" in their search for social justice.⁹⁰

It appears that the participants of BISA III were not only speaking of the need to abandon the paternalistic social

⁸⁸ Tissa Balasuriya, O.M.I., "Strategies for Action for Justice," in FABC Papers, No. 6, p. 17.

⁸⁹ BISA I, 19, in FAPA, 2:349-50.

⁹⁰ BISA III, 8, in FAPA, 2:360.

services but they also underlined the urgent need to reevaluate the direction of traditional ministries, religious practices, pious associations and even the meaning of evangelization itself. Looked at from this new vantage point, it is important that the ministry of the church i.e. evangelization, should contribute to the eradication of injustice, which is sin, through the conscientization of people. This new approach becomes necessary because, as we saw earlier,⁹¹ sin, grace and salvation are seen not as merely personal and pertaining to the other-world, but as having a social dimension and a tremendous impact on the day to day life of the people. The church has the duty to help human beings to live in communion not only with God but also with one another. This is evangelization.

According to the bishops of BISA III, responding to the cries of the poor and the oppressed is evangelization because "evangelization includes social justice."⁹² Following the direction given by FABC I, BISA III redefines evangelization in the light of the most often quoted statement of the 1971 Roman Synod of Bishops document Justice in The World.

"Action on behalf of justice and participation in the transformation of world fully appear to us a constitutive dimension of the preaching of the Gospel, that is, of the mission of the Church for the

⁹¹ See above pp. 300-02.

⁹² BISA III, 4, in FAPA, 2:358.

redemption of the human race and its liberation from every oppressive situation."⁹³

We have already indicated how FABC I had watered down the original impact of the dynamic statement of the Synod of Bishops. However, by the time of BISA III many bishops came to accept the full force of the Synodal document by insisting that like Christ, the church should, not only love the poor but also identify with and be committed to them through its action and struggle for justice.⁹⁴

At BISA III it appears that not all the bishops were prepared to accept the intrinsic relationship between working for social justice and preaching the Gospel in Asia. Therefore, the bishops proceeded cautiously to accommodate the differences in opinion and "multiplicity of responses" among the bishops with regard to action for justice. Hence the statement continues:

We accept this pluralism of action - understanding the difficulties of those who advise caution, as well as appreciative and supportive of those who may want to act more forcefully and effectively in the cause of justice.⁹⁵

⁹³ Ibid.,

⁹⁴ Ibid.,

⁹⁵ Ibid., 6, pp. 358-59.

This paragraph betrays the differences of opinion among the bishops. These differences between the bishops were also evident at BISAs I and III. However, as we saw, the reasons for this was with regard to the method employed. The bishops at BISA III were able to overcome these by accepting the importance of consensus in dialogue. When this problem cropped up at BISA II, the bishops attempted to bridge the gap by appealing to Christian unity in the face of diversity.

This pluralism should not be a threat to our Christian unity, but on the contrary, a positive and creative sign that our unity is deeper than whatever the concrete technical analysis or viewpoints might show: a genuine value that emphasizes unity in diversity. Christian unity is eschatological, which is not a big word to avoid the issue but rather the biblical expression to indicate the inner tension of Christian life in a history of sin and grace. The only reserve should be that this pluralism needs to be one resulting from serious study and openness, and not the casual result of ignorance, prejudice or oversimplification.⁹⁶

One can attribute two reasons for this division among the bishops. The first is the common division between the conservatives and the progressives. This polarization of the episcopate along the traditional divide is a problem that the Latin American bishops had to face and the history of the Church at large also manifests this predicament. This is a fact of life and the bishops call this inner tension the result of the

⁹⁶ BISA II, 10, in FAPA, 2:353.

human aspect or the woundedness of the church. However, these contradictory views, one supporting the status quo and the other the voice of protest, have to be understood in their complementarity, which make the church a living organism. This tension exerted by the two poles helps the church to maintain a healthy balance or a compromise that provides accommodation.

Secondly, the source of this polarization could be traced to the particular preoccupation arising from the differences in the political, religious and cultural background between the two dominant countries, the Philippines and India. On the one hand in the Philippines, the only Christian country in Asia, which at this time was reeling under martial-law, many of the religious leaders and theologians were very much concerned about social and political issues. The majority of Filipino bishops and theologians influenced by Latin American liberation theology advocated a prophetic stance with regard to the socio-political situation in their country. They wanted a similar commitment from the bishops of Asia and wanted the church to play an active role in shaping the future of Asia-a continent to be built on equality and justice for all.

On the other hand, because of their minority situation the South Asians and the Indians in particular, were interested not so much in political or economic problems, but in inculturation.

Even when India came under the emergency rule of Indira Gandhi in 1975 the bishops' reaction ranged from outright support to fatalistic resignation which prompted them to refuse to get involved in so-called secular and political affairs. Their dominant concern was limited to the spiritual sphere especially in relation to their cultural and religious heritage. While some were preoccupied and concerned how best to present Christ and his message in the religio-cultural idioms of the people, others were making bold attempts to discover the presence of Christ or rather the presence of God in the cultural and religious ethos of the local people. To cite an example from BISA III:

In all these [secular and profane] spheres God and His Christ are active in the Spirit, expecting our partnership and collaboration in the shaping and reshaping of human history and human destiny.⁹⁷

The bishops insisted that it was their duty to cooperate with God in the recreation of this new world and new history. Here, it is evident that the bishops were not merely interested in the past history of another people of another time but also in the present history of the Asian people because God is active and is calling the people of Asia to be free. In this struggle for freedom the past history and the collective memory of the church could on the one hand become the source and inspiration

⁹⁷ BISA III, 5, p. 358.

for the present and on the other a reminder and a warning against excessive involvement.

Thus, working for justice is seen as the new way of being the church of Asia. Hence, according to the Asian bishops to be with the poor means a preferential option for the poor and struggle with them to achieve justice and self-empowerment for them. In their search for "integral human development,"⁹⁸ 'action for justice' has become the basic theme of the BISAs, because, "evangelization includes social justice."⁹⁹ The method employed to achieve this end is conscientization.

5.2.4 Conscientization

As we have seen, an important aspect of dialogue with the poor is to learn from them and to forge a solidarity with them. This solidarity is made real and reinforced only when the church is able to assist them to identify and articulate their needs and help them overcome the obstacles to full human development. This is essential because there are times and situations where the poor themselves are not aware of their situation of poverty and oppression.

⁹⁸ BISA I, 12, in FAPA, 2:348.

⁹⁹ BISA III, 4, in FAPA, 2:358.

This situation arises precisely because the poor have been "methodically socialized"¹⁰⁰ into the established dominant social order and conditioned to accept the existing socio-economic division of labour and stratification. It is rather unfortunate that the poor in most Asian countries do not perceive the underlying causes of poverty and oppression but have accepted their lot as the will of God or have accepted their fate in resignation which I call 'blissful ignorance.'

Even if they know the causes of oppression and poverty and were able to identify them they would not have the power and the courage to oppose these powerful structures of oppression. Owing to this, as at FABC I, the participants of BISA I spoke of the need "to enable them to identify and articulate those needs and aspirations, if they are as yet unable to do so."¹⁰¹ It is not enough to identify the oppressive structures but a genuine dialogue will have to enable the poor to transform these structures and make the people the masters of their own destiny.

According to BISA I, the option for the poor does not mean abandoning the small oppressive minority; they too need to be

¹⁰⁰ Anthony Giddens, Durkheim, (Hassocks, Sussex: Harvester Press, 1978), p. 72-73.

¹⁰¹ BISA I, 4, in FAPA, 2:346; and its equivalent in FABC I, 20, in FAPA, 1:31.

educated and influenced to take their responsibility to share resources with the poor. Hence, not only the poor and the oppressed but also the oppressors themselves, say the bishops, need to be educated to enable them to see the injustice caused by their selfishness and be converted to justice and Christian love for their fellow human beings.¹⁰²

The FABC I, which was held immediately after BISA I, also found it important to educate not only the poor and the oppressed but also the oppressors themselves. FABC I, borrowing the terminology from Latin American theologians, called this process of education 'conscientization.'¹⁰³ This term and this methodology of education was first proposed by the eminent Latin American educator, Paulo Freire.¹⁰⁴ According to Amalorpavadass the ultimate aim of conscientization:

is to realize the humanization of dehumanized man caught up in dehumanizing structures, and to bring about the liberation of the oppressed culminating in the liberation of the oppressors themselves by unleashing the power that is in the oppressed masses

¹⁰² Ibid., 5.

¹⁰³ FABC I, 21, in FAPA, 1:31; also see pp. 259&263-64.

¹⁰⁴ Paulo Freire, Pedagogy of the Oppressed, (England: Penguin Books, 1986, First published in Great Britain by Sheed & Ward, 1972), p. 15.

to change their situation and to convert the oppressors themselves by a process of love.¹⁰⁵

Therefore, conscientization means a historical commitment and a critical insertion into history by which the dehumanizing structures are transformed and history is created.¹⁰⁶

Though the bishops at BISA I were hesitant to speak of conscientization, in the other BISAs this became an important theme. At BISA II, following the lead given by FABC I, the bishops openly spoke of the urgent need to conscientize all, particularly the youth and "educating all to justice" in order to identify the oppressive structures and to make them aware of the root causes of oppression.¹⁰⁷ At BISA III, in accordance with the main purpose of the BISAs, the bishops were interested not only in conscientizing other people but also themselves with regard to the situation in Asia. They said without any hesitation, "We desire to 'conscientize' ourselves and others to

¹⁰⁵ D.S. Amalorpavadass, Approach, Meaning and Horizon of Evangelization: The Theological Orientation Speech Delivered at the All-India Consultation on Evangelization at Patna, 3-8 October, 1973, (Bangalore, India: National Biblical, Catechetical & Liturgical Centre, 1973), p. 69.

¹⁰⁶ See R. Hardawiryana, "The Service of Faith in Asia," in FABC Papers No. 8, p. 38.

¹⁰⁷ BISA II, 7, in FAPA, 2:353.

the unjust structures, movements and systems in our world working against the interest of man."¹⁰⁸

The bishops felt that their own conscientization was important because in the past either by omission or commission they had collaborated in the exploitation of the people of Asia.¹⁰⁹ This fact was also acknowledged at the ABM.¹¹⁰ and again at BISA III. The bishops at BISA III blamed themselves for the present state of affairs. Therefore, the bishops looked for ways and means to respond the cry of the people. The outcome was the realization that the church "as a witness to Christ must make a wholehearted commitment to the poor and is impelled to opt in favour of them."¹¹¹ Hence they determined to deepen their "concern for the Gospel values of justice, truth, love and peace."¹¹²

The implication is that the church which legitimized and helped sacralize certain mental and social structures of injustice and domination should now help to unmask and

¹⁰⁸ BISA III, 8, in FAPA, 2:359.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid., 3, p. 358; see above pp. 324-25.

¹¹⁰ See above pp. 199-200.

¹¹¹ BISA III, 4, in FAPA, 2:358.

¹¹² Ibid., 8, p. 359.

desacralize these through the process of conscientization based on social analysis. The bishops said that this was essential since the problems they confronted with were "unjust social systems and structures."¹¹³ The people in Asia were living "under economic, social, and political structures which have injustice built into them."¹¹⁴

The complicated nature of these problems which was compounded by the lack of resources, made it all the more urgent that they be analyzed critically and technically. This also demanded cooperation between the various conferences and countries as well as with organizations outside the church.¹¹⁵ Since there is an intrinsic relationship between the exploited nations of Asia and the industrialized nations, the Asian bishops at BISA III were pleased by the presence of bishops from the developed nations. Their presence offered them, they said, an opportunity "to conscientize each other" and assured them "of a better understanding of the complementary roles of the affluent nations and the developing countries must play in the search for justice."¹¹⁶ This has to be seen in the light of the

¹¹³ Ibid., 3.

¹¹⁴ BISA I, 2, in FAPA, 2:345.

¹¹⁵ BISA II, 9, in FAPA, 2:353.

¹¹⁶ BISA III, 7, in FAPA, 2:358.

bishops' own perception of the reality of oppression and exploitation in Asia.

The underdevelopment of Asia, according to the bishops of Asia, is the byproduct of the development of the West and Western developmentalism. Though the bishops did not use the exact terms, in our study we have seen that certainly the bishops implied this at BISA I,¹¹⁷ and its equivalent in FABC I¹¹⁸ and at BISA III.¹¹⁹ Therefore, the bishops at BISA III, found it necessary to conscientize the bishops of the developed world as a means and a way to shape public opinion in the industrialized countries with regard to their exploitation and oppression of the people of Asia. Thus, the bishops sent a clarion call to the churches in affluent nations to educate and conscientize their own people on the need for a new world order that calls for a total transformation of the existing unjust social order that is based on exploitation and domination.

In sum, the first three BISAs, first of all, saw the need to conscientize the poor and the oppressed with regard to their state of oppression whereby they become the masters of their own

¹¹⁷ BISA I, 2&17, in FAPA, 2:345&349.

¹¹⁸ FABC I, 19, in FAPA, 1:31.

¹¹⁹ BISA III, 2, in FAPA, 2:357.

destiny and secondly, the oppressors themselves, both at the national and international level. Thirdly, the bishops of Asia have to be educated in order to enable them to take the option for the poor and to struggle with the poor to attain their due in justice. Lastly, the bishops from the West need to be conscientized so that they may in turn conscientize and sensitize the industrialized nations as to the extent of their exploitation of Asia.

It should be noted that according to these three BISAs the action for justice and conscientization do not exhaust all that it means to be the church of the poor. The ultimate purpose of this struggle for justice and the process of conscientization is to bring about the total and integral development of each and every person so as to denote the presence of God's kingdom.

5.2.5 Total and Integral Development

According to BISA I, the option for the poor essentially means a dialogue with the poor which has to be undertaken "consciously and deliberately."¹²⁰ FABC I called this total identification with the poor, "the dialogue of life."¹²¹ This dialogue says BISA I, is neither limited to matters related to

¹²⁰ BISA I, 7, in FAPA, pp. 346-47.

¹²¹ See above 256-58.

the church nor is it with the other Christian communities only:

but must reach out beyond it to all other communities in search of integral human development. For Gloria Dei Vivens Homo, wherever man is, man alive, man seeking to be fully alive, there is the glory of God.¹²²

As we saw in the last chapter, both the ABM and the FABC I have stressed the importance of identifying with the poor of Asia irrespective of their religious affiliation and cultural diversities. According to FABC I the mission of the church of Asia is to be found within the particular social, economic, cultural and religious reality of Asia-an incarnated church.¹²³ Hence, total human development and fulfilment is not only the goal of politics, civilization and development but also of evangelization.

True human development cannot go counter to God's plan. In this context the purpose of evangelization is to help people to discern and live according to that Divine plan. The presence of God and the action of the Spirit in Asia has been a dominant preoccupation of the bishops because this guarantees authenticity and leads to eschatological fulfilment. The

¹²² BISA I, 12, in FAPA, 2:348.

¹²³ See above pp. 277-78.

bishops at BISA II saw the presence of God in Asia as the basic thrust of the institute:

A feature of the institute has been a general sense of God at work in our world through the activities and dedication of people - both Christian and non-Christian - committed to the creation of a new society, in both rural and urban areas.¹²⁴

The bishops were concerned about the problems faced by all people and particularly by the poor because the bishops saw the presence of God in their lives, irrespective of their religious affiliation. It made them aware of their own responsibility to find solutions to these problems in the light of the Gospel.¹²⁵

The participants of BISA III were convinced that God is active in the history and in the destiny of the people of Asia and is "expecting our partnership and collaboration in the shaping and reshaping of human history and human destiny."¹²⁶ According to this statement, God is present in every human community and this presence is neither a general presence as in all creation nor is a preparation for evangelization. This presence is Trinitarian.¹²⁷ God invites all human beings to be partners in re-creating a new humanity.

¹²⁴ BISA II, 3, in FAPA, 2:352.

¹²⁵ BISA II, 2, in FAPA, 2:351.

¹²⁶ BISA III, 5, in FAPA, 2:358.

¹²⁷ See Hardy, Being with the Poor, p. 13.

The bishops at BISA I found that dialogue was the only way to listen to the Spirit speaking through the people which will enable the church to discover God's plan for the people of Asia:

the sharing of experiences and insights with the people in community in order to discover where God is leading, is the way to be a living Church, faithful to the covenant that God has made, and continues to make with His people.¹²⁸

The bishops not only take for granted the presence of God in Asia but also speak of God's covenant with the people of Asia. Hence the task of the bishop is to be a "active participant in the discernment of the community, listening attentively to the Spirit speaking through his people."¹²⁹

This dialogue has to take place at all levels not only with those in the church but also with all the people. Of particular importance is the dialogue at the grassroots level of the village, neighbourhood groups and other functional groups.¹³⁰ The purpose of listening and learning in dialogue was to help them to "liberate themselves from the outer and inner constraints that bind them, [then] they will themselves take up and bring about their own integral human development."¹³¹

¹²⁸ BISA I, 10, in FAPA, 2:347.

¹²⁹ Ibid., 11, p. 348.

¹³⁰ Ibid., 8, p. 347.

¹³¹ Ibid., 22, p. 350.

Here the bishops made it very clear what they mean by liberation. According to them integral human development means liberation. Whereas, the ABM spoke of the intrinsic relationship between the development of all people in justice and human dignity, and the building up of a new world of Asia, without using the word 'liberation.'¹³² However, as we saw earlier, FABC I following the lead given by BISA I used the term 'liberation' with qualifications.¹³³ The bishops at BISA I also accepted the proposition of Gutierrez, namely, that the poor themselves have to be their own agents of liberation.¹³⁴ However, because of their organic solidarity with the poor, the bishops stated that it was their duty to dedicate themselves to this task of liberation.¹³⁵

The new society¹³⁶ the bishops spoke of is not an exclusive club or a privileged society of a few, nor is it a society that is totally preoccupied with other-worldly salvation; it implies

¹³² See above pp. 208-11.

¹³³ See above pp. 267-68.

¹³⁴ See above p. 136.

¹³⁵ BISA I, 22, in FAPA, 2:350.

¹³⁶ This new society should not be confused with the American dream of 'a new world order' which is based on the neo-imperialism of American supremacy and dictated by its own advantages. Nor should it be identified with the Marxian 'proletarian revolution' which again is an ideological apparatus that masks an ideology of communist domination.

a new era that will assure the total salvation of all people and the whole person. The bishops at BISA II said:

We would like to work out at every level of our Christian life and our Christian community a process by which we deepen this awareness in our common striving for the total salvation of man.¹³⁷

Though the bishops used the phrase 'total salvation,' the context and the tone of the document manifest that they were thinking in terms of total liberation. It appears that they were reluctant to use the word 'liberation' because of the misunderstanding and the controversy surrounding it.

On the other hand BISA I, held almost an year earlier than BISA II, perhaps because of the Filipino influence did not refrain from using concepts such as "integral human development" and "total human development."¹³⁸ By this deliberate choice of terminologies the bishops have clearly avoided both the lopsided traditional idea of salvation, and the Western capitalist notion of material development, which enslaves peoples.¹³⁹ While

¹³⁷ BISA II, 6, in FAPA, 2:352.

¹³⁸ BISA I, 12, 17 & 22, in FAPA, 2:348-50.

¹³⁹ It is interesting to note that today scientists, ecologists, doctors and informed ordinary lay people in the West are questioning the effects of the so called progress and benefits of industrialization, development and technology. Though they do not deny the short term benefits and their contribution in making life a little more comfortable, they are concerned about their long term domino effects on the environment, health, ecology, nature, the depletion of the ozone layer and on human life itself.

rejecting developmentalism, BISA I proposes an alternate model of total human development based on justice, equality and basic human rights:

It is clear to us that the overall effect of the models of economic development at present operative in our region is to widen the gap between the few rich and the many poor, and to strengthen unjust political and social structures. We are resolved to assist our people to design and create alternative models of development: which place economic growth in the context of total human development; in which the cost and the rewards of production are more equitably distributed; which allows workers and the consuming public to participate more fully with the owners and managers of capital in decisions vitally affecting the economy; and which will move as rapidly as possible towards self-sufficient national economies, and economic arrangements within the region that shall be complementary and mutually supportive.¹⁴⁰

The development that the bishops spoke of was certainly not the type that the governments in Asia were advocating, which brought poverty, death and destruction to the majority and prosperity to a few. Nor did they speak of development in the sense it was used during the decade of development that preceded the BISAs.¹⁴¹ They meant a full and integral development that is attuned to the culture and ethos of the people of Asia.

¹⁴⁰ BISA I, 17, in FAPA, 2:349.

¹⁴¹ See above pp. 245-48.

By appropriating the 1971 Synodal statement¹⁴² the bishops clearly and unambiguously accepted the view that their mission and that of the church was to transform the whole world by liberating human race from all forms of oppression. Hence its mission is neither the conversion of people and attracting them into its fold nor does it mean a territorial expansion of the church.¹⁴³ This change in attitude about the mission of the church is perfectly in line with that of ABM and FABC I.¹⁴⁴ In all these meetings the stress was laid on the creation of "a new and just society," based on the parenthood of God and Divine filiation. A society:

where men will uphold the dignity of the human person, provide the opportunities for development and progress, and promote that quality of life which would enable them to reflect their sonship in God.¹⁴⁵

The bishops at BISA III, were keen on avoiding a language which indicated a preference for the baptized by saying "We need to strive for a new society, so that all men may reach full human development."¹⁴⁶ They insisted upon the need to build a

¹⁴² BISA III, 4, in FAPA, 2:358; see above pp. 319-20.

¹⁴³ This territorial expansion or conversion was considered to be the mission of the church prior to Vatican II.

¹⁴⁴ See above pp. 276-78.

¹⁴⁵ BISA III, 7, in FAPA, 2:359.

¹⁴⁶ Ibid., 5, p. 358.

new society and work for the development of the whole person (body and soul, intellect and will, everything that makes one human) and of all persons (rich and poor, powerful and the weak, all cultures, races and even all religions).¹⁴⁷ This is the reason why the bishops at BISA I insisted that:

dialogue with people cannot be limited to the Christian community, but must reach out beyond it to all other communities in search of integral human development.¹⁴⁸

This new holistic vision includes everything that pertains to human wellbeing - political, economical, social, cultural, spiritual. At BISA II the bishops said that their concern:

cannot be limited to partisan politics, to the interests of concrete sectors of society or the temptations of the struggle for political power in terms of authority over people. The power we have... should be always used in the service of others, especially of the poor and weak.¹⁴⁹

In their attempt to respond to the cry of the oppressed, the bishops saw the need to create a new and just society. This new vision of society transcends the dichotomy between body and soul, thus, breaking the barrier between the holy and the profane, the sacred and the secular:

¹⁴⁷ See above pp. 209-10.

¹⁴⁸ BISA I, 12, in FAPA, 2:348.

¹⁴⁹ BISA II, 13, in FAPA, pp. 354-55.

We need to strive for a new society, so that all men may reach full human development. Our work has to be for the development of the whole man and every man. This wholeness of man includes not only the individual personal fulfillment, but the growth and blossoming of the whole human reality on earth. Hence, our involvement cannot exclude what used to be called secular and profane.¹⁵⁰

The new society the bishops want to create is not an inward looking church but one that is at the service of others. Its aim is the total human development of each and every person. This is the Kingdom spirituality in which the whole community, without any distinction is involved in "building God's kingdom on earth."¹⁵¹ There is nothing human and nothing in the whole of creation that is outside the purview of God's plan and hence God's kingdom. Therefore the bishops saw the "need to relate more fully with the ancient cultures and religious traditions of Asia and their deep spiritual heritage."¹⁵²

The church in Asia can become a "sign and sacrament of the Kingdom of God"¹⁵³ only when it recognizes and makes present the Kingdom of God in the particular historical reality of Asia. It is only by a total identification with the poor, the exploited,

¹⁵⁰ BISA III, 5, in FAPA, 2:358.

¹⁵¹ Ibid., 8, p. 360.

¹⁵² Ibid.,

¹⁵³ Ibid., 19, p. 385.

the dehumanized, the marginalized, and by working with them for their emancipation/liberation that the church can proclaim the Good News of God's kingdom to the Asia's poor. In short, this is the option for the poor. This is the mission of the church and as we saw in our study of the FABC I, the church has to take this option in order to be the local and incarnate church of Asia.¹⁵⁴ This is the theology of the local church of Asia.

The question now is how this local theology of the local church becomes the Asian theology of liberation? The bishops at the first three BISAs were not interested in formulating theologies. Their concern was of practical nature. In their analysis of the Asian reality the bishops appear to have favoured the methodology and the theological approach used by Latin American theologians.

Nevertheless this methodology and the analysis of the Asian reality made the bishops recognize the need to take into account the importance of the age-old wisdom of the people. Without going into details the bishops have also indicated that the Asian religio-cultural heritage is an essential factor in the formation of an authentic Asian theology of liberation.

¹⁵⁴ See above pp. 271-2.

Therefore, we shall continue the study of the other BISAs in order to determine: 1) whether the bishops present at these BISAs were prepared to follow the methodology of socio-economic analysis to understand and to change the reality of poverty and oppression in Asia; 2) how they proceed to deepen and enlarge the themes discussed at the first three BISAs, namely, the option for the poor, action for justice, conscientization, dialogue, and total human development; 3) and finally how the religio-cultural diversity of Asia contribute to the formation of an Asian theology of liberation?

5.3 BISA IV (March 1978) AND BISA V (June 1979)

BISA IV and BISA V took up the same themes proposed by the previous BISAs, such as, human rights, conscientization, social justice, total human development etc. and expanded on them. In this section we will only indicate those elements that are new or those that indicate a change in the thinking of the bishops at BISAs IV and V.

However, these two meetings were also somewhat different from the previous BISAs. The first three BISAs were held almost exclusively for the Asian bishops, with the exception of BISA III, in which some Australian bishops also took part. At BISA IV and V, the geographical boundary of Asia was extended to

include bishops from Australia, New Zealand, Papua New Guinea and the Pacific Islands.

The bishops from the developed countries were also invited for BISA IV and V, in order to take an effective collegial action for human development.¹⁵⁵ Altogether sixty seven bishops participated at these two BISAs.¹⁵⁶ It is remarkable that twenty five percent of Asian bishops attended one or the other of the first five BISAs.¹⁵⁷

In line with the methodology used in the BISAs the first part of the seminars was the exposure programme. Owing to the experience gained at the previous BISAs more time was given to exposure.¹⁵⁸ The second phase of the methodology was reflection. At BISA IV, apart from the brief remarks by theologians, there were only two talks by guest speakers. The bishops used a greater part of the meeting for their own reflections and discussions. At the previous BISAs the final drafts were drawn

¹⁵⁵ See above pp. 330-31.

¹⁵⁶ See Bishop Michael Bunluen Mansap, "Collegiality of the Bishops for Human Development," in FABC Papers No. 24, p. 3.

¹⁵⁷ Bishop Bunluen Mansap, "Foreword," in FABC Papers No. 35, p. 3.

¹⁵⁸ See Bishops M.B. Mansap, "The Fourth Bishops' Institute for Social Action - February 24 to March 8, 1978," in FABC Papers No. 24, pp. 5-6.

up by the experts. At BISA IV a committee of bishops and resource persons was assigned to the task of formulating the final statement.¹⁵⁹

BISA V was completely dominated by the bishops. It appears that the bishops were not pleased with the presentations of the experts owing to the latter's "failure to understand the audience and speak to its experience and need."¹⁶⁰ As a result few of their suggestions were incorporated into the final statement which the bishops wrote themselves for the first time. Almost half the bishops present were Westerners and they seemed to have dominated this meeting owing to their fluency in English.¹⁶¹

5.3.1 The BISA View of Reality

In their encounter with workers, farmers, slum dwellers, minority groups, political prisoners, representatives of other religions and government officials during the exposure programme of BISA IV the bishops said that they:

found the same basic patterns though to different extents: growing poverty, a shameful and widening gap

¹⁵⁹ Ibid., pp. 5&8.

¹⁶⁰ "The Fifth Bishops' Institute for Social Action - May 27 to June 1, 1979," in FABC Papers No. 24, p. 18.

¹⁶¹ Ibid., pp. 16-19.

between rich and poor, dislocation, authoritarian governments, violence, fear, alienation.¹⁶²

This helped them to recognize similar patterns in their own countries. This contact with the people and the urgent need to find solutions to their problems gave the bishops "a greater sense of immediacy and direction" into their discussions.¹⁶³

Their immediate experience of the poor, heightened by the enlightening talk of the experts and the insights of social analysis, helped the bishops at BISA IV, to go to the root of the problem in Asia as the participants of the previous BISAs had done. After a lengthy discussion the bishops produced a document that stopped short of calling for a revolutionary and violent overthrow of the system by people's organizations.¹⁶⁴ Though, at the earlier BISAs the bishops condemned exploitation and the structures of oppression, it was at BISA IV, that the bishops clearly identified colonialism, feudalism and Western capitalism as the underlying causes of oppression, deprivation, poverty and underdevelopment in Asia.¹⁶⁵

¹⁶² BISA IV, 3, in FAPA, 2:364.

¹⁶³ Ibid., 2.

¹⁶⁴ Ibid., 8-10, pp. 365-66.

¹⁶⁵ "Because of colonialism and feudalism and the introduction of Western classical capitalism, the traditional economic texture of Asian society with its inbuilt balances has been disrupted. Often the economies of these countries are not geared primarily to satisfying the requirements of the nations

The bishops accepted the fact that before the introduction of Western capitalism and the so called 'development' which caused underdevelopment in Asia, there was a stage of self-sufficiency, economic growth, cultural and religious prosperity.¹⁶⁶ There were some forms of inbuilt checks and balances that provided a safeguard against abuse and guaranteed the proper functioning of these societies.¹⁶⁷

The problem of poverty in Asia, the bishops realized, was not only the result of direct external exploitation but is also caused by the continuing exploitation of people and their resources by their own governments. The bishops accused the Asian political elite of exploiting their people in conjunction with the multinational corporations to satisfy the insatiable thirst of the developed world for cheaper goods and services to the detriment of the basic needs of the people.¹⁶⁸ The bishops were concerned particularly about the yawning gap between people and governments; the authoritarian and oppressive rule of those

but rather to responding to external markets, and within the nation; not to the basic needs of people (food, housing, education, jobs) but to the demands of a consumer society." Ibid., 4, p. 364.

¹⁶⁶ BISA I states, "our peoples are rich: our Asian traditions, cultures, values." 2-3, in FAPA, 2:345-46; see also ABM, 7, in FAPA, 1:12.

¹⁶⁷ See above p. 63.

¹⁶⁸ BISA IV, 5, in FAPA, 2:364; see above pp. 73-75.

in power: the concentration of wealth in the hands of the few.¹⁶⁹

This brings us to the other important issue that has been the cause of so much disagreement and division among the bishops of Asia, namely, Communism. Once again the topic of communism was taken up for discussion at BISA IV. The two French bishops¹⁷⁰ present spoke of their own positive experience with Communism. One of them stressed "there are Communist Party members among the workers who are good Catholics after two years."¹⁷¹ The others present also saw the need to appreciate the positive aspects in communism especially its struggle for justice. The example of Archbishop Binh of Ho Chi Minh City,

¹⁶⁹ "The ever widening gap between the rich and the poor; the great distance in some countries between people and government; the impact of non-democratic and martial law governments; the far-reaching presence of Communism; the plight of refugees; the failure to meet the ecumenical and interreligious demands relating to human development; the lack of consensus in the Church as to decisions for action; the explosive situation of a youthful population becoming aware of a most uncertain future - these are some of the many enormous problems that posed a challenge to us." BISA V, 9, in FAPA, 2:373

¹⁷⁰ These two bishops knew what they were speaking since they had co-authored a statement on "Faith and Marxism," on behalf on the French bishops.

¹⁷¹ "The Fourth Bishops' Institute for Social Action," in FABC Papers No. 24, p. 8.

who advocated collaboration between the church and the state in order to build a socialist society, was cited.¹⁷²

A draft statement of BISA IV stated, "while communism tends to limit man and history, there are positive aspects in it, and there are many valid approaches that Christians might take in dealing with it in concrete national situations."¹⁷³ This provoked a long argument. Some bishops who pointed to the severe criticism levelled against capitalism at this institute, wanted Communism treated the same way because of its atheistic views, and its ruthless suppression of religious and individual freedoms. Others, while not disagreeing with the above criticism, questioned their own competence and the appropriateness of such a stance since none of the participants present had any direct experience of Eastern Communism. Still others spoke of the need to dialogue with communism and make use of those good elements in it.¹⁷⁴

¹⁷² It was only a year earlier that Archbishop Binh in his address to the 1977 Synod of Bishops in Rome said that Catholics who live in communist countries should not hesitate to translate the Gospel into Marxist categories just as others had not hesitated to express it in Aristotelian or existentialist terms. See Parig Digan, Churches in Contestation, p. 55.

¹⁷³ "The Fourth BISA," in FABC Papers No. 24, p. 8.

¹⁷⁴ Ibid., pp. 8-9.

The discussions went beyond pastoral concerns to theoretical and political issues. There was no compromise to be found and hence some bishops were clearly dissatisfied with the final statement which read:

Communism plays a very important role in Asia by the very fact that some 60% of all Asians live in communist states. We are aware that communism presents different faces throughout the world. But its Asian face makes us apprehensive, although we cannot deny that they also present some positive aspects. We have criticized classical capitalism because while professedly promoting economic growth, it has deprived man of the just fruits of his labour. We now criticize communism because, while professedly promoting liberation, it has deprived man of his just human rights. In their historical realization both have hindered true human development, the one creating poverty in the midst of affluence, the other destroying freedom in the pursuit of equality.¹⁷⁵

This statement has to be seen in the light of the paragraph preceding it, which speaks of the importance of impregnating the existing ideologies, i.e. Communism, with Gospel values in order to humanize them. This is perfectly in line with what the Archbishop of Hanoi had been advocating. However, the bishops also refrained from presenting a particular model or "blueprints for social, economic and political life," but insisted upon the need for the church to adapt the Gospel to the needs of the people, place and time.¹⁷⁶

¹⁷⁵ BISA IV, 13, in FAPA, p. 367.

¹⁷⁶ Ibid., 12, pp. 366-67.

In sum, the bishops at BISA IV and V insisted that a local Asian theology can neither be based on the Western developmental model nor on the communist model. They realized that these two ideologies that were supposed to liberate human beings and usher in a new era of freedom were in fact enslaving. These two BISAs were preoccupied only about the socio-economic and political situation of Asia.

The total silence and a lack of concern for the religio-cultural heritage of Asia was the proverbial last straw that broke the already strained relations between 'liberationists' and 'inculturators.' Thus at BISA IV, we see a widening of the gulf that existed at the previous BISA's.¹⁷⁷

The shift in emphasis and the divergent directions that these two groups were taking became apparent in January 1979 at the EATWOT conference in Wennapuwa, Sri Lanka.¹⁷⁸ This came to the open at BISA V, which was boycotted by the Indian delegation: However, except for the brief statement with regard to the change of venue from India to the Philippines, found in the introduction to "The Fifth Bishops' Institute for Social

¹⁷⁷ See above pp. 321-23.

¹⁷⁸ Pieris, An Asian Theology of Liberation, p. 88.

Action - May 27 to June 1, 1979," in FABC Papers No. 24,¹⁷⁹ the BISA documents do not mention anything about this rift.¹⁸⁰

Nevertheless the division among the bishops cannot be dismissed as something unimportant. In order to evaluate the theology found in BISAs IV and V it is essential to understand how the two antagonists, namely, the Indians and the Filipinos view Asian reality? As we saw, for the Filipinos it is the Third Worldness or the poverty of Asia that determines its reality and thus its specificity. But for the Indians the poverty of the masses and the religio-cultural heritage of the people are the dual realities of Asia. The determining factor is Asia's religio-cultural heritage.¹⁸¹ Hence their theological preoccupations and approaches are also different. These two meetings were dominated by the Filipinos and heavily influenced

¹⁷⁹ See page 19.

¹⁸⁰ The only place it was mentioned, as Digan reports, was in "The Report of the Standing Committee" of the biennial meeting of the Indian bishops of October 1979, which states: ... The first meeting... of Bishops of the South Asian Region (India, Sri Lanka, Pakistan and Bangladesh) from March 24-27, 1979...offered the occasion to consider the forthcoming BISA V and the slanted composition of the panel of animators.

The Bishops of India declined to take part in... BISA V... The non-participation of the Indian Bishops raises the important question the way the entire FABC is organized and the weightage to be given to the pronouncements and doings of its subsidiary organizations." Catholic Bishops' Conference of India, Report of the General Meeting, pp. 30-31, as quoted in Parig Digan, Churches in Contestation, p. 60.

¹⁸¹ See above p. 184.

by their version of Latin American theology. This provides the key to the understanding of BISAs IV and V.

5.3.2 The Option for the Poor

In their option for the poor the earlier BISAs appeared to be paternalistic towards the poor. On the contrary BISAs IV and V took a positive attitude towards the struggles of the people. Instead of teaching the people how to liberate themselves, BISA IV recognizes the struggles of the people:

Despite difficulties the people are beginning to become aware of the causes of their problems and to organize themselves in various ways to solve them. The Church does stand with them in many places. We want to express our admiration and gratitude to those engaged in this work, especially to those who have suffered or been jailed. From our point of view the efforts of the people to develop themselves and build their new communities are far more important than production figures.¹⁸²

The bishops not only assured their support to such people movements but also voiced their solidarity especially with those who were persecuted or jailed because of their involvement and dedication to the poor. This denotes a reversal of positions taken by their predecessors, prior to the formation of the FABC.

¹⁸² BISA IV, 7, in FAPA, 2:365.

The bishops at BISA V appreciated the efforts of some churches in Asia to get involved in the struggle of the people to liberate themselves through various liberation movements:

many churches of Asia are moving in the direction of greater and greater involvement with the life of their people; their simply being with the poor; their attempts at working out programs of human development - integral, respectful of the people's dignity, attuned to their cultures, their standing with them in their hard struggle for justice and for self-empowerment.¹⁸³

The only reference BISA V made to the cultures of Asia was in the context of human development. It was totally preoccupied with "material poverty in Asia."¹⁸⁴ For the participants of BISA V, to be with the poor or to be the church of the poor, means "a preferential option and a respect for the poor."¹⁸⁵ This is similar to the position of BISA I.¹⁸⁶ Further, BISA V endorsed the stance taken by the bishops of Latin America and said, "that our preferential option should be for the poor."¹⁸⁷

¹⁸³ BISA V, 13, in FAPA, 2:374.

¹⁸⁴ Ibid., 10, p. 373.

¹⁸⁵ Ibid., 14, p. 374.

¹⁸⁶ See above pp. 306-08.

¹⁸⁷ BISA V, 26, in FAPA, 2:376.

This option for the poor, the struggle for justice and "the search for a new humanity and a new human family"¹⁸⁸ said the bishops, will lead to conflict.¹⁸⁹ The BISA IV participants came to realize that the church cannot avoid conflict in its struggle for justice. It may even be a necessary consequence of its preferential option for the poor. It is in this context that one has to situate the Asian bishops' attitude towards violence.

The bishops who justified the violence of the oppressor in the name of law and order a few years ago,¹⁹⁰ at last came to the realization that:

Conflict is common where there are competing interests. Social action work often faces the reality of conflict. We want to stress two points: conflict is not necessarily violence (which needs another process of discernment), nor is it necessarily opposed to Christian charity. Secondly, conflict is often a necessary means to attain true dialogue with people in authority. The poor do not achieve this until they have shown they are no longer servile and afraid. Dialogue of this type searches for the common good and a free community which is the master of its own destiny.¹⁹¹

It is no accident that the three BISAs which spoke of conflict, namely BISA I, IV and V were entirely dominated by

¹⁸⁸ Ibid., 30, p. 377.

¹⁸⁹ Ibid., 31.

¹⁹⁰ See above pp. 246-48.

¹⁹¹ BISA IV, 9, in FAPA, 2:366.

Filipino theologians and bishops.¹⁹² However, we make the following distinction in the use of the word 'conflict' in these institutes. At the first institute, 'conflict' was used in a passive sense to indicate that the church, because of its option for the poor, has to face the "risk of conflict with vested interests or 'establishments,' religious, economic, social, political" and suffer the "loss of security" and support from them.¹⁹³ This loss is not only material but is also spiritual in the sense that the conflict causes a rupture with the dominant cultural and religious ideologies.

On the other hand BISA V and especially BISA IV speak of conflict in the active sense. Conflict is seen as "a necessary means to attain true dialogue" with those in authority and to demonstrate that the poor "are no longer servile and afraid."¹⁹⁴ Thus, conflict becomes an instrument at the hands of the poor to obtain "what is their due."¹⁹⁵ An option for the poor, in this situation demands that the church support them in their struggle and "encourage the growth of a courageous people sensitive to a

¹⁹² See above pp. 293&254.

¹⁹³ BISA I, 6, in FAPA, 2:346; also see above p. 308.

¹⁹⁴ BISA IV, 9, in FAPA, 2:366.

¹⁹⁵ Ibid., 8.

divine purpose in human history and willing to pursue it."¹⁹⁶ Thus, the participants of BISA IV came to the firm conclusion that: "The growth of people and communities is the principal concern of the Church."¹⁹⁷ By their option for the poor and by accepting the reality of conflict in the process of emancipation, the bishops provided a theological legitimacy to liberation struggles.

The bishops were quite certain of the invariable reaction of authoritarian regimes to the option for the poor. Under the pretext of national security they have been intolerant of people's organizations.¹⁹⁸ However the bishops took the unusual step of supporting conflict precisely because they had witnessed not merely conflicts but violence, torture, destruction and death unleashed upon the people by their own governments.¹⁹⁹ The bishops' option for the poor and commitment to justice were not motivated by political gains but were based on Christ's radical teaching.²⁰⁰ This oneness of the human race and its consequence, namely, that the fruits of the earth belong to all, provide the

¹⁹⁶ Ibid., 10.

¹⁹⁷ Ibid., 7, p. 365.

¹⁹⁸ Ibid., 11.

¹⁹⁹ See above pp. 79-81.

²⁰⁰ BISA V, 26, in FAPA, 2:376-77.

theological foundation for the church's involvement in the creation of a better world order.

Therefore, as in the previous BISAs, BISAs IV and V considered working for justice as the new way of being the church of Asia. Hence, according to the Asian bishops to be with the poor means a preferential option for the poor and struggle with them to achieve justice and self-empowerment for them.²⁰¹ Thus, 'action for justice' has become the basic theme of the BISAs, because, "The Promotion of justice is part and parcel of evangelization."²⁰²

In sum, the bishops at BISAs IV and V were concerned about the socio-economic and political situation in Asia. Owing to this preoccupation the bishops devoted their discussions totally to the problem of material poverty and oppression. Therefore, they followed the same method of conscientization employed by the previous BISAs. With the help of social analysis they tried to understand the underlying causes of poverty and oppression in Asia. Then they reflected on this situation in the light of the revelation found in the (Christian) scriptures. Hence, they insisted that it was their duty to support the efforts of the

²⁰¹ Ibid., 13, p. 374.

²⁰² BISA IV, 8, in FAPA, 2:365.

people by presenting "the liberating vision of the Gospel" and the urgent need to discern the "divine purpose in human history."²⁰³

The only a new element that was introduced to their basic Latin American methodology was that it needed to be "tempered by the deep ancestral wisdom of Asia's long history of patient endurance and contemplative realism."²⁰⁴ In this sense BISA V spoke not only of the material poverty and exploitation of the people but also of what it considered the other reality of Asia, the traditional wisdom of the people. This also refers to the religious and cultural reality of Asia. However, the bishops at BISA V failed to elaborate this important aspect of the Asian reality.

The essential difference between these two institutes and the previous ones is the former's almost total silence about the other facet of Asia, namely, the multi-religio-cultural reality of Asia. The only time BISA IV spoke of other religions was in the context of developing new communities, where they found the "growing cooperation among the religions of Asia"²⁰⁵ as a sign

²⁰³ Ibid., 10, p. 366.

²⁰⁴ BISA V, 16, in FAPA, 2:374-75.

²⁰⁵ BISA IV, 7, in FAPA, 2:365.

of hope. BISA V seems to contradict this claim of BISA IV and said, "the failure to meet the ecumenical and interreligious demands relating to human development,"²⁰⁶ was one of the areas of great concern. Hence it called for "further dialogue with the great religions about the meaning of faith and service in daily life."²⁰⁷ Again while BISA IV was silent about the local cultures of Asia, only once did BISA V speak of other cultures.

5.3.3 A New Community

In our study of the first three BISAs we saw that the basic thrust of these Institutes was the presence of God in Asia.²⁰⁸ Similarly, the bishops at BISA V came to the conclusion that, "the Lord of history is at work in that world of poverty among the countless poor,"²⁰⁹ and that it was their duty to discern "the direction of His action." God's presence and action in this dehumanizing situation in Asia, said the bishops, "forces us to re-examine our notion of ourselves as Church, as the people of God."²¹⁰ Here, for the first time, the bishops called

²⁰⁶ BISA V, 9, in FAPA, 2:373.

²⁰⁷ Ibid., 30, p. 377.

²⁰⁸ See above pp. 332-34.

²⁰⁹ BISA V, 10, in FAPA, 2:373.

²¹⁰ Ibid., 11.

into question the exclusive language²¹¹ of Vatican II and BISA I, where this term 'the people of God'²¹² was used to designate the baptized, who constitute the church. Whereas BISA V, went beyond the definition of Lumen Gentium and said that the presence of God in the lives of the poor and God's actions in the history of the people of Asia make them also God's people. The implication is that not only the baptized but the whole human race is called to be the new people of God.

Therefore, the bishops' concern was the human development of people and not merely their spiritual wellbeing.²¹³ After enunciating their wholehearted support of those engaged in

²¹¹ Today this terminology is used to indicate the gender difference, where the choice of words used usually indicate a bias against women. Here I am using this terminology in the general sense which manifests a preference for a particular group over against others.

²¹² See LG. Chapter II, in AAS, 57(1964), pp. 12-21; also see above p. 306. Originally this term was used in the Old Testament to denote the chosen people of God-the Jewish people. 'The other' was alien and pagan. When Christianity became the dominant religion of Europe, the Christians called themselves 'the people of God and 'the other' was considered 'pagan' or 'barbarian'. Gandhi on the other hand called the 'other' the so called 'untouchable,' harijans-the people of God. This was Gandhi's preferred way of saying that they are also the children of God and that God's presence among them is unique. For further details see I. Jesudasan, A Gandhian Theology of Liberation, pp. 77 ff.

²¹³ BISA IV, 6, in FAPA, 2:365.

human development the bishops clearly defined the purpose of the church in Asia:

From our point of view the efforts of the people to develop themselves and build their new communities are far more important than production figures. The growth of the people and communities is the principal concern of the Church.²¹⁴

Here we find a continuity between the previous meetings and BISA IV. The former spoke of 'the new society'²¹⁵ in general while BISA IV speaks of 'new communities' or 'communities.' These are "self-reliant, participative, self-determining people's groups," capable of realizing "their dignity and their human equality with anyone,"²¹⁶ with "their own proper and participative leadership."²¹⁷ In the formation of this new society and new community, the bishops recognized the changing role of religion "which once may have been used to sanction the status quo is gradually coming to be a source of courage and vision toward needed social change."²¹⁸

For a long time it had been argued and even accepted that the mission of the Church could be fulfilled by its present

²¹⁴ Ibid., 7.

²¹⁵ See above pp. 338-40.

²¹⁶ BISA IV, 8, in FAPA, 2:356.

²¹⁷ Ibid., 10, p. 366.

²¹⁸ Ibid., 7, p. 365.

structures. The bishops of Asia, taking into consideration the alien nature of the ecclesial structures in the context of Asia's abject poverty, realized that the present administrative structures and institutions were incapable of fulfilling the mission of Christ adequately.²¹⁹ Therefore the church of Asia had to look for different ways and means of continuing the mission. The church must show more openness and a willingness to accommodate the various tendencies and movements at the grass-roots. The bishops at the BISA V aware of the situation seemed to have proposed a new way of being the church of Asia.

The bishops recommended the formation of "Basic Christian Communities"²²⁰ which would reflect and make real this new way of being the church. Though at first glance these might have contributed "to a more participatory approach to Church witness and action,"²²¹ the very idea of 'Basic Christian Community' itself was a product of Latin American theologians. Its success in Latin America and in the Philippines could be attributed to the majority status of Christianity in those countries. This is not the case in multi-religious Asia where Christians are only a tiny minority.

²¹⁹ Ibid., 5, p. 364; BISA V, 22, in FAPA, 2:376.

²²⁰ BISA V, 23, in FAPA, 2:376.

²²¹ Ibid., 25.

However, the bishops at BISA V also used the term 'basic community,' to denote a reality that will accommodate and take into consideration the various religions, movements and the total complex reality in Asia. It has to be noticed that the bishops were not calling anew for the establishment of 'basic communities,' nor were they suggesting that these could be instituted 'from above' by the hierarchy. These communities were already in existence in certain Asian countries. Hence the statement was only an acknowledgement and an acceptance of that fact:

We saw this idealism translating itself into all sorts of initiatives of people, by people, for people. The growth of basic communities is the best illustration of this phenomenon: people in many countries of Asia are in the process of building themselves up as communities and nations, becoming more and more aware of the real causes of their problems even in the face of seemingly impossible constraints. Their witness of faith is indeed tremendous.²²²

What we see here is a struggle to name and to identify a reality that will best represent the new way of being the church in Asia. Though the whole of BISA V was dedicated to and centred upon the theme of human development, the bishops did not have the courage to speak of 'Basic Human Communities' as best fulfilling the aspirations of the people of Asia and the mission of Christ. It appears that the bishops were reluctant to name

²²² Ibid., 17, p. 375.

it, lest they hurt the sentiments of the traditionalists. Or it may be that they themselves were not very clear on what they were aiming at. This may also be considered an indication of the growth in understanding of the mission and the purpose of the church which is taking place among the bishops of Asia.

5.4 BISAS VI (February 1983) AND VII (January 1986)

At the end of BISA V the OHD embarked on a programme of evaluation in order to determine what had been achieved by the five BISAs. Since BISA VI and VII were supposed to be the continuation of the previous BISAs it is important to find out the results of this survey. This will also help us to situate BISA VI and to understand its context.

This evaluation programme was implemented with the help of the Asian Social Institute, situated in Manila, Philippines. It was done through a questionnaire sent to all the participants of the first five BISAs. In addition to this an in-depth study was made in three dioceses - one each in East Asia, South East Asia and South Asia. In order to determine the effects of the social thinking of the bishops in their diocese the questionnaire and the interviews contained the following questions:

When he went home what did the bishop do to implement the meeting's resolutions? What response did he get

from his priests, religious and laity? What were the results?²²³

The survey was completed in 1981. Though we do not possess the text of the evaluation, we are able to present some of the important findings of that survey as reported by Bishop M.B. Mansap in his 'Foreword' to the Sixth Bishop's Institute For Social Action:

There have been big shifts of social thinking which has taken into consideration a growing understanding of Asian realities. While there has been a wide array of influences on this development, it is encouraging to note that the BISAs, with their emphasis on a people oriented perspective, have been one of the most effective contributory factors.²²⁴

While accepting that the "bishops are more aware of the prevalence and structural nature of injustice," Bishop Mansap says that this understanding was not translated into action programmes. Again he quotes the evaluation report:

As mentioned in the introductory chapter, one of the objectives of the BISAs was to redirect the structures of social action endeavors, that is, more emphasis on making people aware of the root causes of poverty, and on organizing them in their struggle for justice. The data at hand, however, do not warrant the conclusion that a significant change in emphasis has taken place. The bishops started a wide array of new projects of the welfare, developmental and conscientization type,

²²³ Bishop M.B. Mansap, "Introduction" in FABC Papers No. 24, p. 4.

²²⁴ Bishop M.B. Mansap, "Foreword," in FABC Papers No. 35, pp. 1-2.

with slightly more stress on educational and rehabilitation projects.²²⁵

The main reason for the inaction was as the survey suggests some bishops were not convinced of the need for conscientization and social change.²²⁶ We have already indicated that the division among the bishops was one of the major obstacles for the reluctance on the part of the bishops to implement the decisions taken at the BISAs. Thanks to the findings of the evaluation, the organizers of BISA VI decided to make it a very practical institute. BISA VI and BISA VII did not break any new grounds but only attempted to build on what had been achieved so far. These two BISAs tried to find an answer to the question: are there new, or old, and increasing obstacles and challenges to (integral) human development in Asia in the 1980's?²²⁷

Twenty six Asian bishops and four non-Asian bishops took part in the institute. Though several First World bishops were expected only one from the United States attended the meeting. For the first time two bishop-representatives came from Latin

²²⁵ Ibid., p. 2.

²²⁶ Ibid., pp. 2-3.

²²⁷ See BISA VI, 4, in FAPA, 2:380; and BISA VII, 1, in FAPA, 2:387.

America.²²⁸ However at BISA VII, the composition of the delegates was international. There were thirty four Asian bishops and nine non-Asians representing the Bishop's Conferences of Canada, U.S.A., Brazil, Australia, New Zealand, Ireland, South Africa and Germany present at this institute.²²⁹

5.4.1 The Methodology

The methodology followed at these two BISAs were similar to that of the previous ones, namely, exposure and discussions. During the four days of exposure at BISA VI, the bishops divided into three main groups and went to Sri Lanka, Korea and the Philippines. This time they went to see the social action programmes undertaken by the churches in these countries. They also met people involved in these programmes and learned from the organizers the purpose of these programmes, the concrete results they achieved and the Church's role in them.²³⁰

In addition to the exposure the participants of BISA VII were also introduced to an immersion programme. This was intended to offer the bishops an experience of the reality from the perspective of the poor themselves, an insider view.

²²⁸ Ibid., 1, p. 379.

²²⁹ BISA VII, 2, in FAPA, 2:387-88.

²³⁰ See "Bishop's Institute Working paper," in FABC Papers No. 35, p. 8.

Exposure brought us closer to the stark reality of poverty, but immersion sought to experience reality from the perspective of the poor themselves. Exposure is like a doctor's visit for diagnosis; immersion is like the visit of a genuine friend entering into dialogue-of-life.²³¹

According to BISA VII document, this exposure-immersion programme was based upon the model of the Incarnation.²³² After their exposure-immersion experience in different parts of the world, the bishops proceeded to analyze the social, cultural, religious, political and economics systems with the help of social scientists. This method was used at BISA VII in order:

to discern God's plan in the signs of the times, in the voices of our age, in the events of history as well as in the needs and aspirations of our people. Nevertheless, social analysis as a tool, is unable to provide an adequate grasp of the whole of reality. This is due to the perennial possibility of our brokenness intervening, thus resulting in deception either by ideology or self-interest.²³³

Here it is important to note that while the bishops used the method of social analysis to understand society, they also cautioned about the inability of this analysis to explain Asian reality in its totality. One compelling reason for this apprehension could be the Ratzinger Document. The document

²³¹ BISA VII, 8, in FAPA, 2:390.

²³² Ibid.,

²³³ Ibid., 9, pp. 390-91.

Instruction on Certain Aspects of the "Theology of Liberation" (1984)²³⁴ attacked the theology of liberation and especially the method of scientific social analysis it employs.

Another possible reason for the caution is that it lays an undue emphasis on socio-economic-political realities to the detriment of the religio-cultural reality of Asia. Hence, the bishops at BISA VII insisted that this social analysis has to be integrated with the Asian religio-cultural reality:

discerning not only its negative and enslaving aspects but also its positive, prophetic aspects that can inspire genuine spirituality.²³⁵

Therefore, the bishops at BISA VII incorporated the typically Asian method of contemplation to that of social analysis in order to understand the complex Asian reality. As we shall see later, this contemplative dimension of human development, will help us to discover the presence and activity of God in Asia. In fact this new dimension is one of the specific contributions to the theology of liberation from the unique religio-cultural reality of Asia.

²³⁴ Sacred Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, Instruction on Certain Aspects of the "Theology of Liberation," in AAS, 76 (1984), pp. 876-909.

²³⁵ BISA VII, 10, in FAPA, 2:391.

5.4.2 The Option for the Poor

The bishops at BISA VI, looked at the challenges to human development in Asia from the time of the ABM to the present day.²³⁶ The bishops' analysis of the actual situation of poverty and underdevelopment in Asia represents a completely new vision and is comprehensive. They were able to perceive the overt and covert agenda of exploitation perpetrated by foreign powers as well as by the local elite. The bishops identified the accumulation of wealth or economic gain for a few as the ulterior motive behind this explosive and exploitative situation in Asia. For the bishops, dependency aggravated by the superpower rivalries was the main problem in Asia and thus, they situated the Asian problematic in a global perspective. The superpower rivalry and the increasing gap between the rich and the poor countries, they said, are a threat to peace and stability of not only of Asia but also the whole world.²³⁷

Further, the bishops' analysis of the situation shows that the exploitation of Asia is carried out by political and economic 'centres' that lie outside of Asia, in the First and Second World economies:

Asia's global dependency on First and Second World economies and manipulation by such politics presents

²³⁶ BISA VI, 5, in FAPA, 2:381.

²³⁷ Ibid., 7,16&17, pp. 382-84.

one of the major challenges to human development in Asia in the 1980's.²³⁸

Asian countries have become dependent on developed nations not only for markets for their products but also for their very existence even after gaining political independence.²³⁹ The above analysis demonstrates that the bishops and the experts at the BISAs, came to a similar conclusion as that of the Latin American theologians, that the underdevelopment and Asia's dependency is the "historical by-product of the development of other countries."²⁴⁰

The bishops at BISA VI, then, proceeded to chronicle the response of the church to these challenges to human development in its attempt to be the "Church of the poor." First of all, they found that from the time of 1970 Manila meeting the overriding concern of the bishops was its commitment to be the Church of the Poor. Secondly, the bishops said:

One of the greatest signs of hope in the Asian Church has been an increasing number of Church people trying to live the response called "the preferential option for the poor." This consists in certain identification with the poor in life style, and in solidarity with the poor in their struggle for justice and a more human existence.²⁴¹

²³⁸ Ibid., 6, p. 381.

²³⁹ See above pp. 76-79.

²⁴⁰ See above p. 77.

²⁴¹ Ibid., 8, p. 382.

Thirdly, speaking of the church's preferential option for the poor, the bishops restated the stance taken by BISA V and clearly identified the creation or the emergence of Basic Christian Communities and Basic Human Communities as the answer and a sign of hope for the church in becoming church of the poor.²⁴² Fourthly, taking into consideration the minority status of Christianity, the bishops welcomed the stance taken at FABC I, to dialogue not only with poor but also with other religions:

This dialogue studies the positive elements in these religions in order to make all people, both Christians and non-Christians, respond together to the poor, irrespective of caste or creed.²⁴³

Thus the purpose of dialogue is not to convert others to Christianity but to promote and work together to obtain justice and freedom for the poor. Lastly, the bishops saw the work done by the BISAs as the appropriate response to the challenges of Asia and reaffirmed their faith in them "as an instrument for evangelizing bishops."²⁴⁴

Then the bishops at BISA VI indicated certain areas in which they could take further action. One of these was in the field of human development.²⁴⁵ They saw the need to go beyond

²⁴² Ibid., 9.

²⁴³ Ibid., 10, pp. 382-83.

²⁴⁴ BISA VI, 11, in FAPA, 2:383.

²⁴⁵ Ibid., 13.

social action and charitable services to that of developmental projects which promote self-reliance.²⁴⁶ BISA VI gave its highest priority to the conscientization of the religious and the laity to the needs of the poor. It saw:

the need for a macro-ethic, that is an ethic that is reliable to influence the decisions made at the centers of power-local, regional and international. Decisions made at these centers are often detrimental to the poor.²⁴⁷

Further, they said, "Peace is the aspiration of the human heart. In Asia, we are particular about harmony in the whole creation."²⁴⁸ This peace and harmony, was threatened by the widening of the gap between rich and poor countries. Therefore, the bishops felt that it was important to use their moral and spiritual influence to convince those in power "to divert expenditure for arms into resources that foster integral human development."²⁴⁹ In their struggle "against moral imperialism," the bishops saw the significance of mass media as a valuable instrument in propagating the values of love, justice and peace.²⁵⁰

²⁴⁶ Ibid., 12.

²⁴⁷ Ibid., 14.

²⁴⁸ Ibid., 16.

²⁴⁹ Ibid., p. 384.

²⁵⁰ Ibid., 15, p. 383.

According to BISA VI integral human development necessarily includes 'social justice' and 'human rights.' These notions have a different meaning in Asia than they do in the West.²⁵¹ In the West these terms are centred on the rights of the individual with their focus on civil liberties. In this context 'social justice' means that one should get one's reward according to one's merits.²⁵² By 'human rights' they mean the freedom of speech, thought, movement, the right to own property, found a family and to form associations.

In the East, in addition to the rights of the individual, human rights mean "the rights of the poor to have food, shelter, medical care and other amenities of life."²⁵³ Similarly, social justice in Asia:

includes economic, cultural and political aspects and aims at the eradication of abject poverty, the promotion of economic and social equality and the development of a "participative democracy."²⁵⁴

The bishops acknowledged the above distinction at BISA VI:

²⁵¹ See R. Hardawiryana, "The Service of Faith in East Asia: Directions in Mission," in FABC Papers No. 8, pp. 22-23.

²⁵² See Mathew Paikada, "Characteristics of an Indian Liberation Theology as an Authentic Christian Theology: A Study Based on the Analysis of the Indian Situation and the Documents of the CBCI and the FABC," (Ph.D Dissertation, Westphalia Wilhelms University Munster/ Westf, 1988), p. 326.

²⁵³ Felix Wilfred, "Sunset in the East," in FABC Papers No. 45, p. 43.

²⁵⁴ M. Paikada, "Indian Liberation Theology," p. 326.

In a world where human beings are treated with indignity, often for economic gain, the Church has stressed human dignity and human rights. Human rights are inalienable in every person and evoke corresponding duties from others. In some countries of Asia the Church has tried to defend human rights whenever these rights were abused. The emphasis now has often been on individual rights. This emphasis has the danger of breeding individualism, because it disregards corresponding duties towards others. Also in the context of Asia's cultural heritage of close family and community ties, the communitarian aspect of human rights needs equal emphasis.²⁵⁵

BISA VI was very particular in protecting the rights of the individual and as well as those of the community. What they tried to achieve was a healthy balance between these two poles. On the one hand, when individual human rights were violated under the pretext of the common good of the society and economic development, the bishops spoke for the rights of the individuals. On the other, the bishops were also not prepared to sacrifice Asia's cultural heritage, the wisdom of the sages and religions and the traditional family values at the altar of individualism and selfishness.

Therefore, it can be safely stated that in Asia 'human rights' and 'social justice' are understood to be essentially communitarian in character. Then, the bishops at BISA VI

²⁵⁵ BISA VI, 17, in FAPA, 2:384.

proceed to explain that this 'holistic' approach is essential for 'total human development'.

5.4.3 A Spirituality of Involvement

Since the bishops at the BISAs accepted the relationship between evangelization and total human development, at BISA VI they proceeded to enumerate the characteristics of this new involvement spirituality. It is a holistic spirituality that is not reducible to the salvation of souls and individuals but that embraces the whole of humanity and all creation:

The task of evangelization in the field of human development is not worthy of its name unless it is suffused with spirituality. This spirituality embraces the plan of God for the whole creation. It is a spirituality that cannot be reduced to merely individual salvation but embraces the whole man and all men and the rest of creation. It is a spirituality that is relevant to the times and the needs of social actionists actively involved in the field. It is an involvement-spirituality that helps committed social actionists bring their faith values to their work and to have them enriched by their work and by reflection sessions and prayer. This spirituality cannot be inward looking but must place the church at the service of the whole of human race and creation towards the full realization of God's plan in Jesus Christ, who "came to serve and not be served." (Mk. 10:45)²⁵⁶

According to this statement spirituality means to be directed by the Spirit. It means, as we saw earlier, to discern

²⁵⁶ Ibid., 18.

the will of God for Asia and doing it.²⁵⁷ It relates development to spirituality and to the mission of the church in Asia. This statement is the most comprehensive of all and incorporates into it all that the previous BISAs said about evangelization in the Asian context. This could even be considered a breakthrough because the bishops refused to reduce spirituality to individual salvation. Further, they demonstrated that they were concerned not only with the development of human communities, but with the whole of creation. It demonstrates the nexus between work and contemplation, involvement and spirituality - an involvement-spirituality.

Though the bishops at BISA III²⁵⁸ and later on at BISA VI attempted to formulate this new spirituality, it was at BISA VII that they succeeded. The bishops at BISA VII, looked at the previous BISAs to find out their reaction and their response to these challenges of Asia.²⁵⁹ Then they proceeded to analyze the Asian reality in order to "discover a liberative spirituality for social action among the poor and by the poor."²⁶⁰ In their assessment they came to the realization that the Asian reality

²⁵⁷ See above pp. 314-15, 332-33 & 360.

²⁵⁸ See above p. 339-40.

²⁵⁹ FABC VII, 3, in FAPA, 2:388.

²⁶⁰ Ibid., 4, p. 389.

is a complex one. It is the product of Asia's religio-cultural heritage compounded by the socio-economic and political systems:

Culture, religion and society are interdependent, interacting and mutually transforming. In our Asian continent, which is the cradle for all the great world religions, culture and religion are integrated. Religion is the dynamic element of culture. Together they form the religio-cultural system which interacts with the socio-economic-political system of society, permeating every sphere of human life. Asian poverty is not a purely economic concept, neither is its religiosity merely cultural. Poverty and religiosity are interwoven in the Asian ethos, in such a way that at a certain point they seem to coalesce in order to procreate the specific character of Asia. Within the fabric of this rich and varied religio-cultural heritage of Asia, but especially in the lives of the poor, the bishops sought to discern the creative impulses of God's liberating Spirit as the poor struggle to free themselves from deprivation and oppression and strive for genuine communion among people and nations.²⁶¹

This passage represents a total and a new understanding of Asian reality. This contains several important and salient points that could help us in our effort to determine not only whether the documents of the FABC lead to a theology of liberation but also to pin point what exactly makes this theology specific. The first is that according to the bishops culture and religion are the overlapping facets of one indivisible reality. In Asia, philosophy is a religious vision and religion is a philosophy of life that gave birth and shaped the cultures of Asia. Thus, religion, culture and philosophy

²⁶¹ Ibid., 6.

cannot be separated one from one another. These constitute the religio-cultural ethos of the people of Asia.

Secondly, the bishops recognized the intrinsic connection between poverty and religiosity, namely, that Asian poverty is not merely economical. The Asian religious attitude to poverty is a positive one. It consists in the renunciation of worldly possessions and acquisitive tendencies which is the way to internal liberation.²⁶² The Asian concept of poverty has to be interpreted in relation to the nuance given by BISA I and FABC I, namely, that poverty in itself is not evil but can be liberating. At the same time neither the religions nor the cultures of Asia advocate poverty for the sake of poverty. It is a religious experience.

Thirdly, Asian religiosity is not merely cultural. It pervades and governs the totality of one's existence. Asian religions have been a source of liberation including political liberation. Hence, "the bishops sought to discern the creative impulses of God's liberating Spirit"²⁶³ in these religions and

²⁶² See above pp. 101-02.

²⁶³ FABC VII, 6, in FAPA, 2:389. In chapter two we saw that according to the 'Minjung' theologians God is present in the history and the life of the people (above p. 169). The FABC I (above pp. 239-41), and the previous BISAs (above pp. 332-34&359) also insisted upon the presence of God in Asia.

in the struggles of the people to free themselves from enforced poverty and deprivation. However, these religions and cultures also have a tendency to perpetuate the status quo by providing the ideology for oppression.²⁶⁴

Therefore, the bishops categorically state that poverty and religiosity are interwoven in the Asian ethos. One cannot be separated from the other. The Asian poverty and for that matter the Asian reality cannot be understood solely in relation to material deprivation and oppression. It also possesses a religious dimension. Hence the bishops came to the conclusion that in Asia poverty and religiosity "seem to coalesce in order to procreate the specific character of Asia."²⁶⁵ Thus, BISA VII provides a new understanding of Asian reality and defines the uniqueness of Asia. Can this unique combination of poverty and religiousness of Asia that constitute the reality of Asia be the basis for an authentic Asian theology of liberation?

In order to formulate an authentic Asian theology, the bishops insisted at BISA VII that it was essential to take into consideration not only the poverty of the masses but also the

²⁶⁴ See above p. 116.

²⁶⁵ BISA VII, 6, in FAPA, 2:389.

religio-cultural heritage of Asia. Hence, they used the method of social analysis:

to evaluate the social, economic, political, cultural and religious systems in society. ...to discern God's plan in the signs of the times, in the voices of our age, in the events of history as well as in the needs and aspirations of our peoples.²⁶⁶

In order to be authentic, the bishops realized that any theological reflection on Asian reality has to be formulated in the context of Asia's poor and its religio-cultural heritage - An Asian spirituality. Since, both poverty and religions have jointly contributed to the well-being as well as to the problems of Asia, the bishops realized that the resolutions to the problems of Asia also have to be sought among these two realities. Hence, an authentic Asian theology should include both liberative and contemplative dimensions.

The bishops made a deliberate attempt to bridge the gap between contemplative spirituality and involvement or liberation spirituality and also between the Western idea of contemplation and the Eastern view of contemplation. According to popular spirituality, contemplation means a withdrawal from the world, where, shielded from the distractions of the world, one attempts to meditate on God. Contemplation as practised by the Asian

²⁶⁶ Ibid., pp. 390-91.

sages, is essentially a means to understand the world and the place of the human beings in the plan of God.

By contemplating on the religio-cultural and socio-economic reality of Asia, said the bishops, one could discern the presence and the will of God in Asia. Since:

Contemplation is a heightened awareness that makes us discover God's presence and activity within social reality. Contemplation enables us to become aware of non-analyzable phenomena within reality and to be transformed by the gradual unfolding of the mystery of that reality. The mystery of God's preferential presence and activity among the poor is an unrecognized resource that only the contemplative dimension within us can discover. The poor provide us an opportunity to be evangelized. They supply us with a new liberating potential for spirituality. We could discover in their ethos, cultural values and religious practices that make up the elements of the spirituality. But to recognize these elements in the spirituality of the poor, the bishops or other enablers should live in a contemplative spirituality themselves. Once we resonate with the poor in their spirituality and discern its values and elements, they can be appreciated and announced as genuine Gospel values -simplicity of life, genuine openness and generous sharing, community consciousness and familial loyalty. This stage of ongoing theological reflection is an affirmation that the Gospel of the Kingdom is being shaped in the reality of their lives and the Spirit of Jesus the liberator is at work among them.²⁶⁷

This paragraph appears to be an explicitation of what the bishops said at BISA I. Firstly, contemplation enables one to discover the presence of God in the cultures, religions and the

²⁶⁷ Ibid, 11, p. 391.

poverty of Asia. Secondly, though social analysis is useful in understanding the working of the society, there are certain non-analyzable phenomena within that reality which can be understood only through contemplation. It is through contemplation one becomes aware of the preferential presence and activity of God among the poor. This unfolding of the mystery also leads to the transformation of those elements that are contrary to God's will for Asia.

Thirdly, BISA I spoke of listening to the poor.²⁶⁸ However, it was at BISA VII the bishops enumerated the reasons for that openness and said that the poor offer us an opportunity to be evangelized. This is because, as we saw in our study of FABC I, only the poor can help us to understand certain aspects of the Gospel which are hidden or misrepresented.²⁶⁹ It is the poor who brought to the fore that liberation in the bible is a struggle against mammon and its agents. The religious poor, through their voluntary poverty and detachment constantly challenge the church to be poor as Jesus was poor.

²⁶⁸ See above p. 307.

²⁶⁹ See above pp. 237-38&261.

Fourthly, this spirituality can be discovered in the people's "ethos, cultural values and religious practices."²⁷⁰

It means that an Asian spirituality and thus an Asian theology cannot be formulated apart from these Asian realities. Contemplation is the means to discover the power of the liberating spirituality of the poor. By resonating with the liberation spirituality of the poor the church will be able to discover and announce the values they profess, such as, "simplicity of life, genuine openness and generous sharing, community consciousness and familial loyalty," as genuine gospel values.²⁷¹

Finally, this theological reflection on the 'religiousness of the poor' of Asia, said the bishops at BISA VII, demonstrates that "the Gospel of the Kingdom of God is being shaped in the reality of their lives and the Spirit of Jesus the Liberator is at work among them."²⁷² Therefore, the mission of the church of Asia is to discern God's will not within the narrow confines of the church but in the social, economic, political, cultural and religious realities of Asia, where the Kingdom is being shaped. According to this perspective, to be involved in the world in

²⁷⁰ BISA VII, 11, in FAPA, 2:391.

²⁷¹ Ibid.,

²⁷² Ibid.,

recreating it together with God and according to the heart of God, is the spirituality of local church of Asia. This is orthopraxis where theory or belief and practice or action coincide. In this spirituality there is no longer any dichotomy between contemplation and involvement. In other words the ultimate end of both contemplation as well as social involvement is 'God-experience.'²⁷³

In sum, to be involved in the world and to contemplate the actions of God one has to read the signs of the times. The ultimate purpose of social and theological analysis was to help the bishops to read the signs of the times and discern God's will for Asia, "in the voices of our age, in the events of history as well as in the needs and aspirations of our people."²⁷⁴ Reading the signs of the times means that the church is summoned not only to interpret these signs but also to make present the Kingdom of God in the present situation. Though the final fulfilment will be achieved at the end of time, the church can help the people in their journey towards it, by working for the total and integral development of all people and the whole person. In order to achieve this end, the church not only has to broaden its outlook but also its spirituality.

²⁷³ Ibid., 7, p. 390.

²⁷⁴ Ibid., 9, pp. 390-91.

This is the reason why the bishops at BISA VI stressed the need to develop a holistic spirituality that can neither be reduced to individual salvation nor relegate the developmental and liberational activities to the merely natural order. At BISA VII the bishops explained that the Asian reality is not only its poverty but it is also shaped by the religio-cultural ethos of the people. Hence they said that in order to formulate an authentic Asian theology of liberation the church has to listen and understand the working of God in the social, economic, political, religious and cultural realities of Asia.

5.4.4 Basic Human Communities

Now the question is whether the existing church structures can accomplish these tasks and what is the mechanism that will make real this new understanding of the mission of the church of Asia. A new society and a new family of people-the new people of God-has to fulfil the stated purpose and the mission which is the integral human development of the whole person and of all persons in the multi-religio-cultural mosaic of Asia. At BISA V, it appears that the bishops proposed the model of 'Basic Christian Community' since that fulfils this mission. Since BCC denotes an exclusiveness whereby the non-Christian majority is excluded, BISA VI boldly moved away from this exclusivism to a broader vision of the church.

BISA VI analyzing the bishops' response to the challenges to human development from the time of Manila meeting (1970) said that the overarching concern of the bishops was to make the church of Asia the "Church of the Poor."²⁷⁵ Without enumerating whether or not the official church made any effort to make this a reality, BISA VI acknowledged:

One of the greatest signs of hope in the Asian Church has been an increasing number of Church people trying to live the response called "the preferential option for the poor." This consists in a certain identification with the poor in life style, and solidarity with the poor in their struggle for justice and a more human existence.²⁷⁶

It appears that BISA VI recognized and gave legitimacy to the existing basic communities that were committed to the poor by their preferential option for the poor. Notwithstanding the particular terminologies used at BISA V, such as, 'Basic communities' and 'Basic Christian Communities,' the bishops at BISA VI interpreted them to mean 'Basic Human Communities.' Speaking about "the preferential option for the poor" BISA VI summarized the response of BISA V thus:

BISA V when addressing itself to the problem, "What does it mean to be the Church of the poor?" saw Basic Christian Communities and Basic Human Communities (communities of non-Christians) as an important response of the Church. The proliferation of Basic Christian Communities and Basic Human Communities is

²⁷⁵ BISA VI, 8, in FAPA, 2:382.

²⁷⁶ Ibid.,

a sign of hope that the Church will become the Church of the poor.²⁷⁷

Thus, BISA VI seems to have taken for granted the existence and the importance of 'Basic Human Communities.' These were seen as the church's response to its commitment to total human development and make God's kingdom present in Asia. In fact BISA VII did not contribute anything new towards the ideal of 'Basic Human Communities.' On the contrary, BISA VII while speaking about the perennial hope of the BISAs, identified two signs of hope for the church of Asia: the basic communities and dialogue with other religions. It states:

In the past BISA's the bishops have voiced their hopes and expressed their commitment to supporting the formation of basic communities of peoples.

We also saw certain signs of hope.... From our point of view the efforts of people to develop themselves and build their new communities are far more important than production figures. The growth of people and communities is the principle concern of the Church.²⁷⁸

The last paragraph is a direct quotation from BISA IV. The bishops at BISA VII, by incorporating this statement, seem to indicate that the purpose of 'basic communities' was to achieve material development only. This is reinforced, by the fact that

²⁷⁷ Ibid., 9.

²⁷⁸ BISA VII, 14-15, in FAPA, 2:392.

they present the dialogue with other religions as the other sign of hope for the church of Asia. According to BISA VII:

Besides the growth of basic communities, the bishops indicate that another sign of hope is the growing cooperation among the religions of Asia.²⁷⁹

Then the bishops at BISA VII proceeded to quote another paragraph from BISA V which also speaks of the importance of "dialogue with the great religions"²⁸⁰ These two statements one from BISA IV and the other from BISA V are the only instances in which these two institutes spoke of other religions.²⁸¹ This can be attributed to the fact that these two were dominated by the Filipino theologians and their concern for socio-economic development.²⁸² Thus, it appears that the bishops at BISA VII were thinking in terms of two different, though complementary programmes for the future church of Asia: apparently, one pertaining to socio-economic and political- the basic communities and the other to the religio-cultural sphere-dialogue.

In sum, the shift in emphasis from BCCs to 'Basic Human Communities' is a necessary condition of being the church of

²⁷⁹ Ibid., 16.

²⁸⁰ Ibid., 18.

²⁸¹ See above pp. 357-59.

²⁸² See above pp. 351-52.

Asia since the majority of the Asians are non-Christians. A genuine "dialogue of life with the members of non-Christian religions"²⁸³ can be continued only through such communities. Moreover, if the church has to be faithful to its proclamation of being the church of the poor; to its commitment to the development of the whole person and of all persons; and in its search for a new humanity and a new human family, then the 'Basic Human Communities' are the new way of being the church of Asia. Only these communities that transcend the barriers of politics, economic and social status, caste, race, culture and even religious isolation, can contribute to the total and integral development of all people of Asia.

5.5 CONCLUSION

The overarching concern of BISAs was how to make the church in Asia the church of Asia. Through the exposure-immersion programmes, the bishops have made a genuine effort to learn from the poor and discern the working of the Spirit among them. The BISA documents have made a serious effort to face and find answers to the challenges encountered by the people of Asia.

²⁸³ BISA VI, 10, in FAPA, 2:382.

The bishops employed the method of social analysis in order to understand the inner workings of the Asian society and to have a deeper grasp of the causes of oppression and poverty. The bishops were convinced that the church of Asia has to be the church of the people, the majority of whom are poor and belong to other ancient yet living religions of Asia. The result, as we saw, was the decision to take a preferential option for the poor and make the church in Asia, truly the church of the poor. That means a total identification with the poor which demands that the church struggle with them for justice, self-empowerment and liberation from all forms of oppression and exploitation. The BISAs proposed the method of conscientization not only to educate the poor and the oppressed but also to conscientize the bishops of Asia as well as the bishops of the developed world and the oppressors themselves as to the devastating nature of exploitation and oppression.

In their analysis of the Asian society the bishops also came to the understanding that not only poverty but also the religio-cultural ethos of the people together form the unique Asian context. They were also convinced of God's presence and actions in the multifaceted reality of Asia, especially in and through the revelation found in religion and cultures of Asia. Hence, the bishops at the BISAs stressed the importance of 'dialogue of life' with the poor and the religions in order to

read the signs of the times and to learn where God was leading.

Owing to the intrinsic relationship between socio-economic reality and the religio-cultural ethos of the people the bishops realized that the Asian reality cannot be understood by social analysis alone. This analysis, the bishops said, has to be complemented by the age old wisdom and the religio-cultural ethos of the people. Therefore, the BISAs proposed the contemplative spirituality of liberation as the method to appropriate the Asian spirit and to be part of Asia-the church of Asia.

Finally, the bishops struggled to identify the new society or the new community that can best fulfil their hopes for a better future for all, a reality that will in some manner reflect and make present the total and integral liberation of all. They came to the conclusion that the 'Basic Human Community' is the model for the future church of Asia. Only these communities that transcend the socio-economic, political, cast, race and even religious isolation can contribute to the total and integral development of all peoples-the church of the poor. In this process the bishops articulated a theology from below, a theology from the grassroots: an Asian theology of liberation.

CHAPTER SIX

THE EMERGING LIBERATION THEOLOGY OF THE ASIAN CHURCH

6.1 INTRODUCTION

In our study of the ABM and the FABC I we saw that in order to be the church of Asia, the bishops said that it has to take an option for the poor and become the church of the poor. In the previous chapter we saw how the seven Bishops' Institutes of Social Action attempted to translate the general directions and the guidelines into concrete action programmes through their option for the poor. In this process of making the church in Asia the local church, the church of the poor, we also found that the bishops appear to have articulated an authentic liberation theology for Asia.

In this final chapter, we propose to study the Second, Third and the Fourth Plenary Assemblies of the FABC. Our examination will be limited to determining whether these documents contain or lead to an Asian theology of liberation. The previous chapter has demonstrated that the bishops present at the BISAs had progressively but surely contributed to the emergence of an authentic Asian theology of liberation.

Therefore, this present chapter will be further limited to the question: do the bishops of the FABC Assemblies subscribe to the theological stance taken by the BISAs? In order to find a satisfactory answer to this we propose the following questions: what is the starting point of the bishops' theological reflection at these FABCs? If their starting point is the reality of Asia, does it correspond to that of the BISAs? Do the bishops present at these Assemblies take up the same or similar themes as their counterparts at the BISAs and make their own the conclusions of the BISAs? This study is divided into two main sections. In the first we propose to examine the documents of the Second and Third Plenary Assemblies and in the second section the Fourth Plenary Assembly documents.

6.2 THE SECOND AND THIRD PLENARY ASSEMBLIES OF THE FABC

In the first sub-section we propose to study how the Second FABC Assembly relates prayer to total human development. In the second sub-section, we intend to find out how the bishops at FABC III define the church in relation to other communities of faith and the wider Asian human community.

6.2.1 The Second Plenary Assembly (November 1978)

The FABC II held in Calcutta, India, 1978, summarises the deliberations of the previous meetings and Institutes. Almost

at the very beginning of the statement one can clearly see the influence of the BISAs. It states that the primary concern of the church of Asia demands:

commitment to the upbuilding of Asian communities in the life of the Gospel, to inculturation of Christian faith and life, to the endeavour for total human development and authentic liberation of peoples in justice and love, to interreligious dialogue and to a renewed missionary formation.¹

Thus, FABC II can be seen as a continuation of the process of a deeper understanding of the mission of the local church of Asia that began with the ABM and was elaborated by the BISAs.

Though the theme of this Assembly was prayer, a closer look at the Statement of the Assembly indicates that the bishops' real concern was directed towards the building up of authentic human communities.² The bishops illustrated that they were aware of the dehumanizing situation and the gradual disintegration of traditional Asian values by modernization, secularization and materialism.³ Owing to this situation, the

¹ FABC II, 3, in FAPA, 1:52.

² The APMC, which was held in the previous year, summoned the "Asian Christians to contribute their faith-reflection towards the growth of Asian peoples to fuller personhood and a human community." See APMC, 10, in FAPA, 1:113-14.

³ "The modern world, despite its undeniable great achievements, brings about the gradual disintegration of our traditional societies and the effects on people's lives which follow on it. The loss of a sense of belonging in community, depersonalized relationships, disorientation and loneliness, - these have become part of the lives of our people. With its

bishops said that only through prayer and contemplation could human society be preserved from losing its way. Prayer enables one to find Christ in others,

especially in the suffering and the afflicted, in the poor and the powerless, in "the least of these." In them all we are enabled to see Him and serve Him. And thus this prayer sends us into the world and into history, that we may help to transform them according to the designs of the heart of the Father.⁴

Thus, the bishops see prayer not as something personal and private between a person and God but as having a communitarian dimension. Moreover, it is through prayer that one encounters God in the poor and the powerless. And, in prayer through the outpouring of love, peace and joy, the oppressive world is transformed. This also deepens and intensifies God's action in the history of the people of Asia.⁵ Therefore, the shared responsibility for justice and brotherhood demands that the church work for the poor, the oppressed and those deprived of their dignity.⁶

accompanying secularization, too, with its worship of technology, narrow materialism and secularism, its fever for consumerism, its ideological pluralism - realized in diverse ways in different societies, - our age quite swiftly erodes religious values and often suffocates the aspirations of the human spirit, especially among the young." FABC II, 8, in FAPA, 1:54.

⁴ Ibid., 18, p. 56.

⁵ Ibid., 19, p. 57.

⁶ Ibid., 42, p. 63.

Hence, quoting from Evangelii Nuntiandi the bishops said that the mission of the church in the context of Asia is to work for total human development:

"For the Church, evangelizing means bringing the Good News" into all dimensions of human life and society "and through its influence transforming humanity from within and making it new." Some of these areas... total human development, education, and - in a more general way - the conduct of everyday life.⁷

The bishops insisted that prayer is essential to "achieve genuine human liberation and development."⁸ Contrary to the traditional understanding, prayer awakes one to one's responsibility towards the world. It reveals the intricate relationship of interdependency between people and makes one to understand that selfishness and sinfulness are the root causes of injustice. Therefore, the struggle for the liberation of the poor and the oppressed has to begin at the liberation of people from their selfishness and sinfulness.⁹

This has to be seen in the context of the workshop on 'Prayer and Human Development,' which taking the lead given by FABC I and very specially the BISAs identified sin and evil as the causes of "poverty, deprivation and oppression of so many of

⁷ Ibid., 21, p. 57.

⁸ Ibid., 22, p. 58.

⁹ Ibid., 23.

our peoples."¹⁰ According to this workshop, prayer does not alienate one from the world but on the contrary awakens one to human needs and sufferings. In fact, there is an intrinsic relationship between prayer and integral liberation:

Christian prayer, far from alienating us from the world, we ought to build, is necessary in order to be committed as Christians to human needs and suffering. While making us no longer of the world, "prayer renders us more effective" for working in the world, more involved in the integral salvation of man, which should begin always with the conversion of the heart to Christ, and will finish with the conversion of structures and situations which keep our peoples in that deprivation and powerlessness (cf. Evangelii nuntiandi, 18, 36). Christian prayer helps us to remain within the healthy tension between wholehearted dedication to the cause of the prosperity of society on earth and the expectation of the coming of God's Kingdom at the end of times.¹¹

Although, the bishops used the term integral salvation, the text clearly indicates that it was used as a synonym for total human development or liberation. This Assembly established a link between prayer, integral salvation (total human development) and the realization of God's Kingdom.

Once again, in their conclusion the bishops at the FABC II affirmed the connection between the conversion of hearts and the transformation of oppressive structures, liberation from sin and

¹⁰ FABC II/SWR, 1, in FAPA, 1:75.

¹¹ Ibid., 4, pp. 75-76.

its consequences, the fulfilment of the earthly tasks and the pilgrimage to the Kingdom of God. Therefore, the bishops called not for a conversion from one religion to another but for the conversion of hearts of all people. Irrespective of their religious affiliations all are called upon to join together to build a better society, a society based on truth, justice, reconciliation and peace.¹²

Owing to the unfortunate divorce between prayer and practice, the bishops said that the church has ceased to be the sign and sacrament of that Kingdom because Christians "do not impress those of other Asian religious traditions as men of prayer, as contemplative communities."¹³ Therefore, in order to make the liberating message of the Gospel meaningful to the Asians the bishops saw the need to integrate prayer and (Christian) praxis. They proposed inculturation, interreligious dialogue, and renewed formation in prayer as the necessary means to achieve this end.¹⁴

When the bishops spoke of inculturation it appears that they did not think in terms of adaptation but in terms of

¹² FABC II, 43, in FAPA, 1:63.

¹³ Ibid., 28, pp. 59-60.

¹⁴ Ibid., 29, p. 60.

incarnation. They wanted the church of Asia to integrate and make its own "the riches of our nations, which have been given to Christ as inheritance."¹⁵ Of importance were the forms of prayer developed by the native genius of the people which shaped the traditions of Asia. While rejecting syncretism the bishops saw the need to integrate this rich Asian spirituality "into the treasury of Christian heritage."¹⁶ Asian prayer, they said:

has much also to offer to authentic Christian spirituality: a richly-developed prayer of the whole person in unity of body-psyche-spirit; contemplation of deep interiority and immanence; venerable sacred books and writings; traditions of asceticism and renunciation; techniques of contemplation found in the ancient eastern religious [sic]; simplified prayer-forms and other popular expressions of faith and piety easily available even to simpler folk, whose hearts and minds so readily turn to God in their daily lives.¹⁷

Here we find the roots of the holistic spirituality that was developed by BISA VI.¹⁸ The bishops accepted the validity of Asian spirituality, its sacred books and the importance of asceticism and renunciation as practised by the Asians. It is also remarkable that the bishops acknowledged their past

¹⁵ Ibid., 30.

¹⁶ Ibid., 31.

¹⁷ Ibid., 32, pp. 60-61.

¹⁸ See above p. 384.

failures and hesitancy in integrating these valuable elements found in Asian religions.¹⁹

Then, the bishops proceeded to explain how interreligious dialogue could help discern the presence and the activity of God in other religions:

The spirituality characteristic of the religions of our continent stresses a deeper awareness of God and the whole self in recollection, silence and prayer, flowering in openness to others, in compassion, non-violence, generosity. Through these and other gifts it can contribute much to our spirituality which, while remaining truly Christian, can yet be greatly enriched. Sustained and reflective dialogue with them in prayer (as shall be found possible, helpful and wise in different situations) will reveal to us what the Holy Spirit has taught others to express in a marvelous variety of ways. These are different perhaps from our own, but through them we too may hear His voice, calling us to lift our hearts to the Father.²⁰

The bishops clearly affirmed the presence of God in other religions and the need to read the signs of the times, through which the Spirit was speaking. This theme of the presence of God in other religions and cultures has to be seen in relation to BISA II and III, held before this Assembly.²¹ Thus, other religions were not seen as the 'other' and from whose influence

¹⁹ FABC II, 33, in FAPA, 1:61.

²⁰ FABC II, 35, in FAPA, 1:61.

²¹ see above pp. 333-35.

the Christians have to be safeguarded. On the contrary it is by learning from them that the church becomes an Asian church.

In sum, the Second Plenary Assembly of the FABC did not deal in detail with all the themes that were taken up by the BISAs. However, while dealing with prayer, it brought to the fore the intrinsic connection between prayer and total human development. For the bishops, prayer does not mean a flight from the world but leads to a conversion of heart and in turn to the transformation of the oppressive structures.

To be effective, Christian prayer has to appropriate the particular Asian experience of God in prayer and share the Gospel experience of liberation with the people of Asia. The Asian spirituality which was developed by the native genius of the people offers a total vision of liberation. Christianity could become meaningful and local only when it learns from and makes its own the rich spiritual heritage of Asia.

It is by entering into this spirituality that one is able to understand and discern the presence of God in Asian religions. According to FABC II this could be achieved only through a dialogue with other religions of Asia. Finally,

according to the bishops, the ultimate "purpose of our prayer is the oneness of our peoples in the Kingdom of the Father."²²

6.2.2 The Third Plenary Assembly (October 1982)

The FABC III at Sampran, Thailand, took up again the task of building authentic communities of faith in Asia. In this Assembly the bishops acknowledged the valuable contribution of the various Bishops' Institutes and Offices. An essential aspect of these Institutes was that they helped the bishops to ground their reflection on the actual situations which exist in Asia and to respond to the needs of the people effectively.²³ Hence, in the light of the Gospel and "led by the guidance of the Spirit"²⁴ they studied and analyzed the Asian realities. The starting point of the bishops' theological reflection was the experience of the people. This demonstrates the bishops' determination to continue this new method at the FABC III. This is the method employed by liberation theologians.

In accordance with the theme of the Assembly, 'The Church-A Community of Faith in Asia,' the bishops proceeded to explain what they mean by 'Community of Faith.' This faith community,

²² FABC II, 50, in FAPA, 1:65.

²³ FABC III, 3.3, in FAPA, 1:90.

²⁴ Ibid., 7.4, p. 93.

the bishops said, is not a community closed in upon itself but has its vocation in relation to the larger human community.

...the issue of its discipleship shall not only be reconciliation constantly renewed in the midst of the brethren, as a sign and promise of reconciliation within human community, but that vis-a-vis the world it shall fulfill the Gospel mandate of mission, proclaiming Word through word and witness; reaching out to others through ways of dialogue; and serving in evangelical diakonia; so as that the Word and the Spirit may be shared in fidelity and joyfulness with our brothers and sisters in the other human communities which surround it.²⁵

This communion of Spirit and Word is not merely an intra-ecclesial affair but calls for a total involvement in the concrete realities of Asia. The bishops were acutely aware of the "Church's responsibility in the world, in the public spheres, in the construction of a more fully human future for Asian peoples,"²⁶ and the church's vocation to be a community for others. Therefore, drawing its inspiration from the previous meetings of the bishops, FABC III saw socio-political involvement as its first priority.²⁷ In order to be an

²⁵ Ibid, 7.9, p. 94.

²⁶ Ibid., 17.1, p. 100.

²⁷ "Our local churches are to realize their lives and destinies as Church in the midst of the harsh realities of the contemporary histories of our peoples, marked by turbulent political events and traversed by sweeping social transformations and movements, as, e.g., the resurgence of fundamentalist religious forces and militant ideologies, and the mechanisms and mindsets which create increasing poverty and injustice. Confronted with these, our communities must make

incarnated church it has to struggle for full human development and the building up of human communities by eradicating poverty and injustice. This struggle for justice and human dignity is based not on any humanism, but on divine filiation, as the BISAs proclaimed.

Secondly, the document called upon the Christian community to be in communion with the religio-cultural reality of Asia:

our Christian communities in Asia must listen to the Spirit at work in the many communities of believers who live and experience their own faith, who share and celebrate it in their own social, cultural and religious history, and that they (as communities of the Gospel) must accompany these others "in a common pilgrimage towards the ultimate goal, in relentless quest for the Absolute," and that thus they are to be "sensitively attuned to the work of the Spirit in the resounding symphony of Asian communion."²⁸

Although, the previous FABC Assemblies accepted in principle the presence of the Spirit in Asia, it is the FABC III which stated explicitly the presence of the Holy Spirit in the history and the destinies of Asia. However, the presence of God and that of the Spirit was the constant theme of the BISAs.

their Christian discipleship significantly present and operative, in tasks of human development and the building up of fraternal community, in the promotion and defense of those rights which issue from the fundamental dignity of human persons as sons and daughters of God, and in other societal and political areas as well." Ibid., 8.1, p. 94.

²⁸ Ibid., 8.1&2, pp. 94-95.

This theme surfaced over and over again in almost all the other Institutes.²⁹

Having demarcated socio-political and religio-cultural spheres of Asia as the two main areas in which the church needs to continue its dialogue, the bishops proceeded to analyze some of their own inadequacies and failings. First, they spoke of the church's shortcomings in its spirituality and in its structures. Then they spoke of the church's failure to dialogue with the other communities of faith. They asked:

How often too our communities, in relation to the communities of other faiths which surround them, have failed to be communities of dialogue. Lacking in "ecumenical and dialogal" consciousness and orientation, they can be complacent in attitudes of superiority. They can be unconcerned in reaching out to their neighbours of other religions in their day-to-day relationships, seemingly unaware that the "dialogue of life," through which we interact with one another and become mutually enlightened, encouraged and carried forward in our response to the challenging Spirit, is an indispensable element for the building up of our own community life on all levels.³⁰

²⁹ The workshop report of the 'International Congress on Mission' states: "The Church has rediscovered the deep conviction that "the light that was shining into this world" illumines every man with its divine splendor. Today with openness of mind we can see the tremendous treasures God created in the countries of the Third World, the living religions which reflect this divine light and are an everlasting glory to its Creator. IMC/CPW/I, 13, in FAPA, 1:225.

³⁰ FABC III, 9.6, in FAPA, 1:96.

The report of the workshop on 'The Dialogue of Communities of Faith in Asia,' gives four reasons for this 'dialogue of life' and how to be a community for others. Firstly, the bishops affirmed God's revelation and the working of the Spirit in the socio-cultural and religious history of Asia. Secondly, the bishops acknowledged that as Asian Christians they are primarily Asians and are the heirs to the religious and cultural heritage of Asia. Thirdly, they called upon the Christians to be attentive and to join in the age old search of the people of Asia for the Absolute. It is only through collaboration, conversion, sharing and in dialogue with others that one is able to respond to the challenges of the Spirit. Finally, one's religio-cultural belonging and one's Christian faith cannot be put into two separate water-tight compartments. They have to meet in real life situations and expressed in liturgy, theology, worship and lifestyle.³¹

Now we return to analyze the third area in which the bishops acknowledged that the church has failed, namely, in the field of social justice and human development. The church has not lived up to its vocation and failed to identify itself with others and for others, especially with the poor and the oppressed. Its silence and its lack of awareness of the

³¹ FABC III, "The Reports and the 'Syllabus of Concerns' of the Plenary Assembly," in FABC Papers No. 32, pp. 39-40.

appalling social situation in Asia, they said, have contributed to the sufferings of the poor and thus betrayed the mission to proclaim the Good News of liberation.³²

When speaking about oppression, the bishops singled out the oppression and degradation of women in Asia, particularly by industries, tourism and the sex-trades, and of their inaction to rectify this situation.³³ While accepting their failures the bishops also indicated the direction that the church of Asia has to take. In order to be the church of Asia the Christian community in Asia must get involved in the struggles of the people. It is also important to notice that the bishops were not talking about forming Christian communities nor were they interested in working only for them and those belong to these. The overarching concern of the bishops, appears to be the

³² "How often too, our communities especially among those favoured in life, have failed to grow in awareness of situations of social injustice, of the violation of human dignity and human rights massively present around them. How inadequate has been our proclamation of the Church's social teaching, and the formation and transformation of social attitudes as Catholics in line with that doctrine. How indifferent and hesitant, only too often, has been our involvement in the concerns of human development and liberation; in issues where the rights of women, the poor and the powerless, are crushed; where the relationships and structures which perpetuate injustice and exploitation in society are extended and reinforced, and where the proliferation of arms (including nuclear arms), oppressive militarization and established patterns of violence grow and spread." FABC III, 9.7, in FAPA, 1:97.

³³ Ibid., 9.8.

building of authentic human communities, by striving for human development and liberation of all.

In a footnote to the terms, 'human development and liberation,' the bishops made it clear that they used these terms in the meaning given them in Populorum Progressio and Evangelii Nuntiandi.³⁴ This note indicates that some of the bishops present at the Assembly were either not in favour of these loaded terms as used by Latin American liberation theologians or that they were not yet prepared to take a prophetic stance because of the political situation in their particular countries. However, one could not deny the import of the meaning given to these terms in the whole context of the Statement as well as in the context of Asia.

Further, FABC III incorporated some of the decisions taken at the First International Mission Congress (IMC), held in Manila, in December 1979, particularly with regard to poverty, human development and "grassroots ecclesial communities." As we saw in the previous chapter, these are also some of the dominant themes of the BISAs. Of special interest to us is the bishops' acceptance of the 'grassroots ecclesial communities' as valid

³⁴ Ibid., see footnote on p. 97.

form of Christian praxis.³⁵ By incorporating these themes the FABC III has shown a preference for a theology of liberation.

In short, the bishops at the FABC III after recognizing the failure of the church's to incarnate itself in Asia, said:

Our theological vision must be turned ever more resolutely to the Church's responsibility in the world, in the public spheres, in the construction of a more fully human future for Asian peoples.³⁶

Thus they paved the way for a new way of being the church of Asia, a church in communion with the realities of Asia; a church that is attentive to the Spirit and involved in the struggles of the people in building up authentic human communities. Hence, the bishops proposed dialogue with the religions, cultures and the poor of Asia as the indispensable and necessary means to achieve this end.³⁷

³⁵ Ibid., 11.5-7, p. 98; The full text of the ICM and the workshop reports are found in FAPA, 1:211-69.

³⁶ FABC III, 17.1, in FAPA, 1:100.

³⁷ Therefore, it is no surprise nor is it an accident that the BILAs convened after this Plenary Assembly insisted that the mission of the church in Asia has to be "directed outwardly to the world and society." BILA I, 9, in FAPA, 2:399. In this regard BILA II spoke of the need to remodel the Christian spirituality into "an incarnational spirituality of a salvific involvement in the world." Hence, the bishops felt that the, "form and content of the present lay apostolate, should be specifically directed to justice and developmental priorities of the region, and not limited to church-centred and church-oriented tasks." BISA II, 9, in FAPA, 2:404. The bishops at BILA III, recognizing the multireligious, multicultural situation and the poverty of Southeast Asia, defined the mission of the laity as that of "witnessing to the values of the Gospel, in order to

6.2.3 Conclusion

There is no doubt that FABC II and III did not deal with all the themes taken up by the BISAs. However, the theme of total human development pervades the whole of these two assemblies. By incorporating this theme and centring their discussions around it the bishops have certainly grounded their theological discussions on the multifaceted reality of Asia. According to the bishops at FABC II and III, the socio-economic situation and the religio-cultural heritage are the determining factors of the Asian reality. Therefore, a church committed to the people and wanting to be identified with the larger community has to incarnate itself in this dual reality of Asia.

The FABC II speaking about prayer discovered the intrinsic connection between prayer, total human development and the coming of the Kingdom of God. This Assembly also found it important to commune and dialogue with the other Asian religions in order to appropriate and as well as to contribute to the spiritual heritage of Asia. Thus, through dialogue with other religions and by a deep sharing in prayer one is able to make present the liberating vision of the Gospel.

make the Reign of God present in a non-Christian milieu, in secular society, and in places where so much misery and poverty abound." BILA III, 7, in FAPA, 2:408.

The FABC III in speaking about the church as a community of faith stressed that it has meaning in so far as it is a communion and is in dialogue with the other religious communities in Asia. Further, the bishops insisted that the church has to be concerned about the life and the problems of the people of Asia. Thus, the bishops saw the church in relation to the wider human community. Hence the need for the church to get involved in the total development and liberation of all people through its struggle for justice and human dignity.

Therefore, it will not be presumptuous to state that the bishops at the FABC II and III, by basing their reflections on the concrete human situation in Asia, have contributed to and made their own the liberation theology of the BISAs, though in a limited way. This leads us to the study of FABC IV, where we hope to find satisfactory answers to the questions raised at the introduction of this chapter.

6.3. THE FOURTH PLENARY ASSEMBLY OF THE FABC (September 1986)

The FABC IV Assembly of Tokyo, opened a new chapter in the life of the church of Asia. Our immediate purpose is to determine whether the Fourth FABC Plenary Assembly subscribes to and makes its own at least some of the insights of the BISAs or

does the FABC reject any of the BISAs' conclusions? We have divided this section into two sub-sections. In the first, we will see how the FABC IV proposes to make the transition from non-involvement to an incarnate church of Asia. Then in the second, we will study why an incarnated church has to change from an inward-looking church to a world oriented church.

6.3.1 From Non-Involvement to Incarnation

'The vocation and Mission of the Laity in the Church and in the Modern World,' was the theme of this Assembly. Though, this title appears to restrict the discussion to the laity, in his inaugural address Cardinal Eduardo Pironio, the President of the Pontifical Council for the Laity, stressed the "fundamental equality of all the baptized."³⁸ Further the bishops at the FABC IV made it clear that as baptized persons the clergy also have the same mission as that of the laity and are not isolated from them.³⁹ Both clergy and the laity together constitute the people of God:

The entire People of God is called to engage in such "politics," for the sake of infusing the Gospel and Kingdom values of love and justice into political, economic, cultural and social world of Asia is an imperative of the Gospel.⁴⁰

³⁸ Cardinal Eduardo Pironio, "Inaugural Address," in FABC Papers No. 47, p. 15.

³⁹ FABC IV, 4.3.1, in FAPA, 2:332.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 3.1.2, p. 315.

Since the mission of the people of God is to infuse the Gospel and Kingdom values into the world of Asia, the very first statement of this Assembly begins with a clear presentation of the actual reality of Asia:

an arena of conflict and division, the world's exploited market place, the continent of the suffering humanity; Asia cradle of culture, birthplace of great religions, a continent awakening to new and gigantic responsibilities.⁴¹

Having made these introductory remarks about the multifacetedness of Asia, the bishops described the situation in Asia. They used words such as, "the battered condition of Asia," "poverty, wretchedness and misery," "the contradictions of humanity," "the darkness of suffering, pain, death and despair,"⁴² to highlight the dehumanizing situation in Asia. This without any doubt demonstrates that the bishops were acutely aware of the pain and the suffering of the people of Asia. In this situation, therefore, the bishops perceive their mission and their vocation:

to be instruments of his work of liberation. The Spirit of Jesus enables us to discern his call, and we want to listen to his voice today. Our hope based on the paschal mystery of Jesus urges us to discover how we can be instruments of God, the harbingers of the Good News of liberation for Asia.⁴³

⁴¹ Ibid., 1.1, p. 312.

⁴² Ibid., 1.3&4, pp. 312-13.

⁴³ Ibid., 1.5, p. 313.

According to the bishops this IV FABC Assembly has brought:

a deeper understanding and renewed awareness of the urgency of the call, and the need to accelerate the pace of our involvement, since we experience a deep crisis in every sector and a threat to human life and dignity.⁴⁴

Without remaining in the theoretical plane with diplomatic language the bishops were at last ready to confront the reality of Asia and face the challenges. In no uncertain terms the bishops expressed this basic presupposition:

We are keenly aware that the struggle for a full human life is not confined to the Christian community. We acknowledge that there are many great religious traditions in Asia which form the basis of the establishment, growth and development of the many cultures and nations in this great continent. In solidarity with them, we seek the full flowering of the human person and the transformation of the world of Asia into that which pleases the Creator (cf. Gen 1).⁴⁵

The primary concern of the bishops was the struggle for full human life. They made it very clear that the full human life they want to achieve is neither limited to the Christian communities nor is it possible to accomplish it solely by them. The transformation of the world of Asia can be brought about only in solidarity with the other religions and cultures of Asia. Further it is not a mere religious transformation but the

⁴⁴ Ibid., 2.3.

⁴⁵ Ibid., 3.0.2, p. 314.

full flowering of the human person. This is what the BISAs call the full or integral human development of all the peoples.

In order to achieve this integral development of all peoples, the bishops looked at the challenges of Asia and identified nine areas of concern. We will analyze some that are of particular interest to us. They are: politics and the community of faith, the youth of Asia, the plight of women, the laity and the family, laity in the world of work and social responsibility in the world of work.

According to the FABC IV, the first priority was the need to get involved in the so far forbidden arena of politics. The bishops said that it was the misguided and selfish power politics that was the immediate cause of the massive poverty and degradation.⁴⁶ Analyzing the situation in Asia, the bishops identified the structural relationship between the political and economic community as that which contributed to the unequal distribution of wealth and the unfair control of the resources of the earth by a few:

Today's Asia has spawned structures and relationships in the political and economic community that are widening the scandalous gap between rich and poor,

⁴⁶ Ibid., 3.1.1, p. 314.

denying to the latter a fair and just access to the resources of the earth.⁴⁷

In line with the prophetic stance taken by the BISAs, the bishops at FABC IV proceeded to take the unprecedented step of attributing not only the present economic and social ills but also the political turmoil in Asia to the vested interests of the political and economic elite.⁴⁸ The bishops also attributed the blame for the present state of oppression and destitution to the "attitudes of apathy and indifference"⁴⁹ of the majority of the people and particularly to the church's traditional policy of non-involvement. Hence, the FABC in its attempt to reverse this attitude stressed the intrinsic connection between politics and the Gospel. They stressed:

Politics needs, first of all, to become a purposeful activity which seeks the common good. The entire People of God is called to engage in such "politics," for the task of infusing the Gospel and Kingdom values of love and justice into the political, economic, cultural and social world of Asia is an imperative of the Gospel. Participation and involvement are duties

⁴⁷ Ibid., 3.1.

⁴⁸ "Repression, oppression and exploitation are realities that result from the greed of vested interests and political power. Ethnic, cultural and linguistic conflicts which unleash violence, death and destruction are also linked with economic and political divisions. The political situation in many Asian countries has become volatile, and a sense of insecurity permeates particularly the minority groups." Ibid., p. 315.

⁴⁹ Ibid., 3.1.4.

that flow from the secular implications of the Gospel and the Reign of God.⁵⁰

Here it is important to note the similarity between this statement and those of the 1971 Synod of Bishops' document Justice in the World, and BISA III.⁵¹ The bishops at the FABC IV, like their predecessors, accepted the intrinsic connection between the preaching of the Gospel and the struggle for justice. This found its expression in the bishops' support for peoples' movements for justice and political transformation.⁵²

While acknowledging what the masses have achieved through their own struggle, the bishops also saw the changing role of the church from the preservation of the status quo to the struggle for justice and peace in all spheres and for all

⁵⁰ Ibid., 3.1.2.

⁵¹ See above pp. 319-20.

⁵² "we have come to discover with joy that in all parts of Asia the laity are growing in political consciousness. Even in countries where the Church is a minority, they are gradually shedding centuries-old indifference. Protests, processions, vigils, citizens committees, organized for the cause of justice and the rights of the poor, are the signs of this growing political awareness. The people of the Philippines who, in February of this year, were able to achieve a significant political transformation through active non-violence inspired by faith in the Lord, have given us much to reflect upon." FABC IV, 3.1.5, in FAPA, 2:315.

people.⁵³ Once again, it has to be noted that for the bishops the primary task of the church is to get involved in the lives and problems of the people. Therefore, in order to be a sign and sacrament of the presence of the Spirit it has to:

respond to the deeply entrenched and widespread network of political, economic, religious, social and cultural injustices. Such a response will clearly indicate the presence of the creative and transforming power the Spirit in the community of believers.⁵⁴

The participants of the FABC IV while acknowledging the presence of both negative and positive aspects or influences of Asian religions and cultures, stressed the need to look at the many positive elements especially the "holistic vision provided by the ancient religions of Asia."⁵⁵ They called the churches of Asia to a dialogue of life with the other religions and to collaborate with them in order to find just solutions to the common problems which affect the life of the community, such as the "issues of fundamental rights, the rights of tribals and

⁵³ "In the past, the Church tended to limit itself mostly to the protection of its interests regarding religious freedom, the family and schools. But now the Church is becoming involved in a wider range of issues pertaining to fundamental human rights and freedom, to labour and business, health, women, the arms race, the international order and other issues of justice and peace that seriously affect the peoples of Asia and especially the poor and the downtrodden." Ibid., 3.1.7, p. 316.

⁵⁴ Ibid., 3.1.8.

⁵⁵ Ibid., 3.1.10.

other minority groups, problem of political, social, economic and religious development, and of justice and peace."⁵⁶

Secondly, the Fourth Assembly, took up the problems faced by the youth of Asia, who constitute 60% of the population. The bishops demonstrated that they were aware of the plight of the youth, when they said:

Many are living under wretched conditions, unable because of poverty to liberate themselves from the bondage of ignorance and illiteracy, and are shackled to life severely limited by inadequate skills and knowledge. They are also vulnerable to the temptations of materialism and consumerism... And because the doors of education are often closed to them, the sense of social belonging, already eroded by abject material conditions, is even more seriously weakened. Many among those who have had the benefits of education and find themselves unemployed or underemployed... Anxiety about the future, the apparent hopelessness of the present, alienation and other pressures drive them to seek escape in destructive substitutes like drugs, alcoholism, suicide, vandalism, premarital sex and delinquency.⁵⁷

The bishops also voiced their appreciation for the good qualities of the youth in their service to the church and the nations, their struggle for social transformation and for their lives of witness to Kingdom values.⁵⁸ In sum, the bishops called upon the church to support their struggle because:

⁵⁶ Ibid., 3.1.12, p. 317.

⁵⁷ Ibid., 3.2.2, pp. 317-18.

⁵⁸ Ibid., 3.2.3, p. 318.

The youth of Asia are the Asia of today. The compulsive struggles for liberation in Asia are reflected in the pains of growth among the youth in their deepest longings for a new world and a meaning for life.⁵⁹

The third aspect of the Asian reality that touched the hearts of the bishops was the plight of women. While recognizing the traditional place of pride given to women in Asia and their contribution to the society at large, the bishops spoke of the dual oppression, exploitation, dehumanization and the degradation of women by traditional societies as well as by modern industry.⁶⁰

Fourthly, the delegates pointed out that all of Asia's problems of poverty, repression, exploitation and degradation are intertwined with religious, political, economic, social and cultural problems of Asia, which affect the whole gamut of life. The bishops were particularly aware of the situation of poverty and destitution which has forced women and children at a tender

⁵⁹ Ibid., 3.2.5.

⁶⁰ "Many are the injustices heaped upon them because of the traditional societies which discriminate against them and because of the new economic and industrial situation. Dowry, forced marriages, wife-beating and destruction of female fetuses weigh heavily on them, driving many to desperation and even suicide. Modern industry exploits their work - for example, paying paltry sum for their hard labour in quarries and on construction sites of local and multinational companies. There is discrimination against them in the employment policies, and as domestic workers they are also abused. In general, Asian society views women as inferior." Ibid., 3.3.1, p. 319.

age to undertake hard labour or migrate to cities in search of employment. "A hopeless struggle for survival benumbs the conscience, increases the number of unwed mothers and abandoned children, and causes rampant prostitution and abortion."⁶¹

The bishops, who have been accused of promoting a Western model of developmentalism and were considered to be the last bastions of Western domination, demonstrated their solidarity with the poor and oppressed of Asia. This brings us to the fifth point where, speaking about the world of work, the FABC accused the local and multinational corporations of shattering the dreams and the hopes of the people for integral liberation. The bishops proceeded to enumerate the various destructive and high handed methods employed by the MNCs to maximise profit. The MNCs took over the traditional industries and agribusiness where the workers were compelled to work under very trying conditions without any basic rights or security. Thus:

political, economic and agricultural structures have made both urban and rural workers cogs of an anonymous productive machine, their work a dispensable commodity depending only on the law of supply and demand.⁶²

The bishops' preferential option for the poor was manifested in their concern for the Asian workers especially the women and children. The bishops enumerated the sufferings and their

⁶¹ Ibid., 3.4.3, p. 321.

⁶² Ibid.,

struggle for survival because to unemployment or underemployment.⁶³

Finally, the bishops, dealing with the problem of social responsibility in the world of business, categorically stated that "the resources of this world belong to the entire human family and that social responsibility means stewardship of the goods of this world."⁶⁴ Analyzing the Asian economic systems the bishops blamed the capitalist system for degrading workers.⁶⁵ They also accused socialism of enforcing a new form of state domination. Since these two models of development cannot be the model for Asia,⁶⁶ the bishops saw the need to create new forms of worker participation through cooperative movements. This, they said, "prevents the centralization of power in the hands of a few, and supporting the use of technology in the service of labour and not the reverse."⁶⁷ Hence the bishops called upon the

⁶³ Ibid., 3.7.7, p. 327.

⁶⁴ Ibid., 3.8.1, p. 328.

⁶⁵ Ibid., 3.8.2.

⁶⁶ Ibid., 3.8.3.

⁶⁷ Ibid., 3.8.4, p. 329.

laity to live up to their vocation of involvement to transform society.⁶⁸

In sum, according to the FABC IV the church is not an isolated community of faith. The presence and the activity of God in the struggles and aspirations of the people as well as God's revelation in the Asian religions and cultures demands that the church be in communion with the other faith communities of Asia. The FABC IV made a genuine attempt to understand the causes of poverty and oppression in Asia. It viewed these challenges of Asia as 'the signs of the times.'⁶⁹ Hence, the bishops realized that the vocation and the mission of the local church of Asia is to respond in faith to this situation. It means to discover Christ as the liberator of Asia and the sole purpose of the church is to be the servant and instrument of that liberation.⁷⁰

Therefore, to be committed to Christ the Liberator means working for the liberation of Asia. Communion with Christ

⁶⁸ "from the simple exercise of the values of truth, justice, and love to their active participation in transforming the social structure of the whole process towards greater worker participation, more discerning consumer guidance, more responsible interventions by governments and a more equitable society." Ibid., 3.8.5.

⁶⁹ Ibid., 4.0.1, p. 331.

⁷⁰ Ibid., 4.1, p. 331.

demands communion with one's neighbours.⁷¹ This is the mission of the church of Asia. It is this struggle to liberate Asia from all forms of oppression in solidarity with the people that the church becomes the true church of Asia. Thus, the bishops saw the need to re-arrange priorities and redirect the energies of the church from a disinterested and alien church to an incarnate church of Asia. It has to become an "outward - and forward - looking Church" rather than an inward looking church.⁷²

6.3.2 From an Inward-looking to a World Oriented Church

One could also notice the FABC IV's shift in emphasis, firstly, from a hierarchical church to a church of communion.⁷³ The local church is a communion of all peoples in collegiality and co-responsibility, where the laity are recognized as full-fledged members. The recognition of this equality is important because, as the bishops understood, a church which tries to liberate others has to be in itself a liberated church.⁷⁴ Long before this Assembly in 1974, the bishops at BISA I spoke of the

⁷¹ Ibid., 4.1.3.

⁷² Ibid., 4.3.2, p. 332.

⁷³ For a detail study of this communion theme see S.J. Emmanuel, "Contemporary Catholic Thought on the Vocation and Mission of the Laity in the Church and in the World," in FABC Papers No. 44, pp. 1-39.

⁷⁴ Ibid., 4.7.1.2, p. 335.

communitarian dimension of the church and of the practicality of the consensus method as a procedure for action.⁷⁵

Again, according to BIMA II, Trivandrum, India, 1980, communion, co-responsibility and autonomy are the key elements of an authentic local church. It says that the local churches:

must project the image of communion within themselves and among themselves; they must have the legitimate autonomy that will enable them to express their life of faith and worship within their specific human context; they must have the opportunity to share their faith-experience with their fellowmen.⁷⁶

This same meeting also stressed the importance of "corporate responsibility"⁷⁷ of all the members in the mission of evangelization. Evangelization in the context of Asia means, "to promote integral human development and to witness to justice in our societies."⁷⁸ Interreligious dialogue forms the other integral part of this evangelization.⁷⁹

In accordance with the thinking of the bishops at the previous meetings, FABC IV acknowledged that in this church which is a communion, the laity have their particular role in

⁷⁵ See above pp. 291-94.

⁷⁶ BIMA II, 3, in FAPA, 1:162.

⁷⁷ Ibid., 11, p. 165.

⁷⁸ Ibid., 12.

⁷⁹ Ibid., 14, p. 166.

making the church more effective and relevant in Asia. Though the mission of both the clergy and the laity, thus the mission of the church, is towards the world, the bishops attempted to delineate the proper function of the laity.⁸⁰ Thus, the second and the most important shift in the understanding of the church is that the apostolate of the laity is not merely within the church but it has to be world-oriented and Kingdom-oriented:

The [lay] apostolate must involve more lay initiatives and the power of decision-making; and it must respond to the real needs of the people. The ordained leadership need not fear or be overconcerned about juridical problems in starting newer forms of lay apostolate or ministries relating to the contextual realities of their Churches. Instead they should encourage and promote more vigorous, world-oriented forms, initiated and directed by the laity themselves. Such initiatives will help the laity to mature, and consequently make the whole Church more effective and relevant in its mission.⁸¹

The above paragraph has to be seen as an attempt to relate the church to the people and situations in Asia. The church is not an end in itself but its mission is towards the world. Further, in Asia where religions are unstructured and led by charismatic persons, they are seen as a 'way.' Hence, in order to have an appeal to the Asian people the church has to become

⁸⁰ Unfortunately this distinction between the laity and the clergy has been advocated by Lumen Gentium (LG 31) and the bishops at the FABC IV found it difficult extricate themselves from this model. However, they have, as we have indicated made an attempt move away from this dichotomy.

⁸¹ FABC IV, 4.6.2, in FAPA, 2:334.

the 'way' to liberation.⁸² Thus, in Asia ortho-praxis has primacy over ortho-doxy. It is in this process of being the church of Asia that the Asian theology of liberation is being formulated.

As to the particular form of these new ministries or apostolate the bishops were not very definite. However, we present three arguments to support our presupposition that the bishops were at least thinking in terms of Basic Christian Communities or the Basic Human Communities. The first argument is an indirect one taken from the previous chapter. BISAs V,⁸³ VI and VII,⁸⁴ clearly spoke either about Basic Christian Communities or Basic Human Communities. Hence, it is possible that the bishops at FABC IV may have accepted them in principle.

The second reason for the presupposition is that Cardinal Eduardo Pironio, President of the Pontifical Council for the Laity, in his inaugural address to the FABC IV Assembly had this to say about Basic Christian Communities:

There have been aberrations here and there in the direction taken by some basic Christian communities, and care must be taken that they become neither so

⁸² See Fourth Assembly: Workshop Discussion Guide "The Laity in Mission," in FABC Papers No. 46g, pp. 7-8.

⁸³ See above pp. 362-63.

⁸⁴ See above pp. 386-88.

"spiritual" and disincarnated that they almost resemble sects, nor that they end up as merely instruments of political or ideological militancy. Nevertheless, after my own long experience in Latin America, and bearing in mind the overall judgement of bishops' conferences - the ad limina meetings with ten distinct groups of bishops from Brazil over the last eighteen months are particularly in my mind - I am convinced that often these communities are truly providential as a response to the needs of the Church in the world today. As far as time allows, the pastors must stay close to these communities, conscious of the riches of the Spirit that are often revealed in the poorest and simplest of them. I am aware of the importance played by these communities here in Asia-Malaysia and the Philippines spring to mind as examples.⁸⁵

This passage clearly demonstrates the Cardinal's own wealth of experience with the BCCs and his conviction about the importance of these communities in the life of the church not only in other parts of the world but in Asia itself. This lends support to the argument that the bishops at FABC IV also may have accepted not only the existence but also the importance of these communities as alternative forms of apostolate.

Thirdly, the FABC IV workshop report on the 'Laity within the Church,' clearly accepted the Basic Christian Communities as one of the ways of being the church in Asia. It states:

We believe that smaller caring communities, like the Christian Family movement in India, the Basic Christian Communities in the Philippines and other countries, which provide an effective forum for the deepening of faith, for living the Church, for mutual support and sharing, for training, participation in

⁸⁵ Cardinal Eduardo Pironio, in FABC Papers No. 47, p. 17.

the apostolate of the Church, should be strongly encouraged.⁸⁶

Here, like the Cardinal, the workshop cited the example of existing BCCs. After elaborating the valuable services rendered by the BCCs, the bishops sought the assistance and the support of the bishops for these type of communities. These three arguments, though not directly from the documents of the FABC IV, lead us to conclude that according to the FABC IV, the BCCs offer the people of Asia an opportunity to be rooted in the realities of Asia-to be an incarnate church of Asia. However, there is no conclusive evidence in the documents of the FABC IV to show that the bishops were thinking in terms of Basic Human Communities as an alternative to or as an extension of the church. In this perspective, it appears that in relation to the last three BISAs, the FABC IV takes a retrogressive stance with regard to Basic Human Communities.

The new vision of the church as Basic Christian Communities will bring into perspective the true nature of the church as a communion, as a sign and sacrament of the Kingdom, as the people of God, as the servant church and as a 'way of life.'⁸⁷ This is

⁸⁶ The Reports of the Workshops of the Plenary Assembly, "Workshop: The laity within the Church," in FABC Papers No. 47, p. 48.

⁸⁷ See Fourth Assembly: Workshop Discussion Guide, "Lay Spirituality," in FABC Papers No. 46b, p. 3.

based on the model of the early church of the New Testament times. It is in this context that the bishops redefine (lay) spirituality in relation to and rootedness in the realities of Asia. It is a way of finding and responding to God in a given cultural and social environment. It is an incarnate spirituality which is in constant tension "with the destructive powers of sin and its consequence, of conflict and injustice."⁸⁸ The FABC calls this the dynamic process of incarnation where one is called upon to discern the death dealing realities from those that give life. Hence the need to discern:

the movement of the Spirit who re-enacts in us the mysteries of Jesus Christ in the contextual realities of daily living and struggling. Here is seen the value of the contemplative dimension, of Asian peoples who discern the movement of God in mundane events and activities. Such a prayerful attitude is immersed in life.⁸⁹

According to this statement spirituality means to live in the Spirit of Jesus, where the Spirit leads one to relive the paschal mystery of dying and rising. This can be achieved by participating in the struggles of the people "against evil, suffering the pains and anguish of a people, dying and reaching out for new life."⁹⁰ Thus contemplation enables one to

⁸⁸ FABC IV, 4.8.3, in FAPA, 2:337.

⁸⁹ Ibid., 4.8.3, p. 337.

⁹⁰ Ibid., 4.8.4.

rediscover the presence of God in the ordinary and mundane events and actions.⁹¹ Therefore, the bishops say that it is not only important:

to listen to Christ as the Word in the Scriptures and in the church, but we need also to listen to the Word in persons and in events, in the ebb and flow of life; to listen to the poor and the needy and to reach out to them as Jesus did, for they are the least of his brethren. Here is where a preferential option for the poor, the example of Jesus himself demands, a spirituality of incarnated "otherness," all that is meant by the simple words "love of neighbour."⁹²

This is the involvement spirituality that the BISAs spoke of and which leads to a preferential option for the poor. Therefore, according to the FABC IV Assembly, the church is not an end in itself but the mission of the church is towards the world. It is an attempt to make present the Kingdom of God.⁹³ According to this Kingdom spirituality the vocation of a Christian is to be committed to the social, economic and political context of Asia. It is not a running away from the

⁹¹ Ibid., 4.8.3.

⁹² Ibid., 4.8.5, pp. 337-38.

⁹³ "Seeking the Kingdom that Jesus proclaimed is really to build it in the concrete experiences of the social, political, economic, religious and cultural world of Asia. In Jesus, the Reign of God began; he came that we might have life to the full. The struggle for fullness of life in Asia is a seeking of the Kingdom. Discipleship then is not at all a withdrawal from the world, but an immersion into the wellspring of Asian reality so that it might have life. Communion, solidarity, compassion, justice, love are keynotes of a spirituality of discipleship." Ibid., 4.8.7, p. 338.

world but through one's work or labour one continues to re-create the world. This commitment seeks the transformation of sinful structures of oppression, suffering, poverty and alienation.

The bishops also spoke of building God's Kingdom in the religious and cultural world of Asia. Asian cultures and religions have been manipulated and distorted or destroyed by the impact of modernization, colonization and domination. These have deprived the people of their identity and values which are essential for full human development. Hence, the struggle for fullness of life in Asia also includes the right to one's culture and religion. It is in and through them that one finds the 'way' to God. Thus, Christians as belonging to these particular cultural and religious traditions of Asia are called upon to commune with the people of Asia. It is only by being "rooted among our peoples and in solidarity with them," that the church could work "for the liberation of Asia."⁹⁴

Thus, the local church of Asia is challenged to get "involved in the transformation of Asian realities." Hence, the

⁹⁴ Ibid., 4.1.3, p. 331.

bishops determined "to exercise their service to the Word of God and of building up the community" in Asia.⁹⁵

6.3.3 Conclusion

The FABC IV does not take up all the themes discussed at the BISAs, nor was it intended to discuss again all that transpired in the Institutes. However, from the discussions we have had, we can conclude that the overarching concern of the bishops at the FABC IV has been "the full flowering of the human person and the transformation of the world of Asia."⁹⁶ Therefore, firstly, the bishops, looked at the problems faced by the people. This was clearly the method followed by the BISAs. Then, from their analysis of the Asian reality they came to the conclusion that the Asian reality is multifaceted. Of particular interest to us is the answer the bishops give to some of the problems arising from the Asian reality. They said:

The entire people of God is called to engage in such "politics," for the task of infusing the Gospel and the Kingdom values of love and justice into the political, economic, cultural and social world of Asia is an imperative of the Gospel.⁹⁷

⁹⁵ Ibid., 4.8.10, p. 340.

⁹⁶ Ibid., 3.0.2, p. 314.

⁹⁷ Ibid., 3.1.2, p. 315.

This text and the other texts we analyzed demonstrate that according to the bishops at the FABC IV, the Asian reality is not only its injustice, poverty, oppression and exploitation which are the results of the cumulative impact of politico-economic ensemble, but the religio-cultural heritage of Asia also forms an integral part of the Asian reality.

Secondly, the bishops reflecting theologically on this multireligio-cultural context of Asia, saw the "need to rediscover Jesus Christ as the Liberator of Asia, and his Church as the servant and instrument of that liberation."⁹⁸ The basis of this reflection is not only the Word found in the Bible but also the Word speaking through the events and persons in Asia. The bishops call this incarnational spirituality⁹⁹ or spirituality of involvement. The FABC IV defines this spirituality as:

the deepening of our baptismal commitment, our incorporation and communion with Christ; growth in meaningful and inspiring ways of reading the Scriptures and of making the Word of God the guiding and integrating norm of our daily life; exercising the mission of reconciliation out of a deep life of communion with God and others; molding mind and heart towards a Christ-like sensitivity to the cries and sufferings of the poor in order to respond generously and courageously to their needs; joining these poor and those who struggle for a full life in committed solidarity; discovering forms of prayer transformative

⁹⁸ Ibid., 4.1.1, p. 331.

⁹⁹ Ibid., 4.8.8.

of values and attitudes and undivorced from life; integrating traditional practices and devotions from popular religiosity into a spirituality of involvement; becoming more deeply aware of the paschal mystery, the cross and resurrection of Christ as the basic paradigm of Christian life and of the struggle towards God's Reign; the deepening of our appreciation of the sacraments as a participation in the memory of Jesus, becoming alive and active in the realities of our lives; assuming a discerning way of life.¹⁰⁰

The spirituality of Involvement that FABC IV spoke of appears to be similar to the liberational spirituality of BISA VII.¹⁰¹ The specific characteristic of this Asian spirituality is that it contemplates the Asian reality of poverty and human degradation in the light of revelation found not only in Christian scriptures but also in popular religiosity-the revelation found in other religions and cultures of Asia. Here we find the essential ingredients of a specific Asian theology of liberation. Certainly this inclusive spirituality of liberation calls for a new way of being the church of Asia. The existing Basic Christian Communities could be accepted as a valid form of this new way of being the church of Asia.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., 4.8.9, p. 339.

¹⁰¹ See above pp. 381-84.

6.4 CONCLUSION

In this chapter we have tried to find answers to three specific questions. The first question was: what is the starting point of theological discussion in Asia? The above analysis demonstrates that the FABC Assemblies based their reflections upon the actual reality of Asia. This is the first act. As a result of this reflection in prayer the bishops came to see the reality of oppression, exploitation, poverty, the dehumanizing situation in Asia, the disintegration of traditional social and family values. Like their counterparts at the BISAs, the bishops at the FABCs were convinced that these were the results of the worship of technology,¹⁰² vested economic interests and political power.¹⁰³

It was particularly the FABC IV that continued and deepened the socio-economic analysis of the Asian reality started by the BISAs. At the FABC IV the bishops analyzed in detail from several angles and perspectives the challenges faced by the people of Asia. They identified the vested interests of the socio-political elite, both local and foreign, as the root causes of the Asian problematic. The bishops at the FABCs,

¹⁰² FABC II, 8, in FAPA, 54.

¹⁰³ FABC IV, 3.1.1, pp. 314-15.

especially at FABC IV came to the conclusion that there is a structural relationship between politics and economics. One of the major contributions of the FABC IV was its call to the Asian church to get involved in the so far forbidden area of politics.

The reflection upon the Asian reality in prayer led the bishops to the understanding that the Asian reality is not only its socio-economic conditions but its religio-cultural aspect as well. Like their counterparts at the BISAs the bishops at the FABCs perceived the presence and the activity of the Holy Spirit in the multireligio-cultural context of Asia. This presence of the Spirit beyond the visible boundaries of the church convinced them of the necessity to recognize the revelation of God found in other cultures, religions, and the history of Asia. Therefore, they saw that it was essential for the church to incarnate itself and express the Gospel values in the religio-cultural idioms of the people and at the same time integrate the values found in other religions and cultures.

The bishops, therefore, proposed the "dialogue of life" with other religions and cultures as the method to appropriate the Asian spirituality. For the bishops at FABC IV dialogue with the other religions and cultures was the key to finding solutions to the common problems faced by the people of Asia. Since, the full flowering of the human person in community was

their end, the bishops said that this cannot be limited to the Christian communities only but has to include all the people of Asia. Hence, the answer to the first question is: the starting point of theological reflection in Asia is the concrete reality of Asia.

This also answers the second question: is the analysis of the Asian reality at the FABCs similar to that of the BISAs? We have shown that according to the FABCs reached the same conclusion as BISAs, namely, that the Asian reality is not only its overwhelming poverty, economic and human degradation but also its religio-cultural heritage. The bishops at the FABCs used the method of scientific social analysis together with the typical Asian dimension of contemplation advocated by most of the BISAs to understand the multifaceted 'Asianness.'

Their reflection on the realities of Asia manifested the intrinsic connection between prayer, integral development and the building up of the Kingdom of God. The bishops were convinced that the mission of the church or the preaching of the Gospel in Asia means infusing the Kingdom values of justice and love into the social, cultural, religious, economic and political world of Asia. In line with the thinking of the bishops at the BISAs, the FABC IV declared that the primary

concern of the church of Asia is to struggle for full human development of all people of Asia.

The need of the situation, the abject poverty, oppression and human degradation convinced the bishops that the church of Asia cannot be an inward-looking church but a church working for the liberation of Asia. Hence, they said that it has to be an incarnate church that is:

involved in a wider range of issues pertaining to fundamental human rights and freedom, to labour and business, health, women, arms race, the international order and other issues of justice and peace that seriously affect the people of Asia and especially the poor and the downtrodden.¹⁰⁴

This struggle for the fundamental human rights, freedom and justice for the people of Asia means an option for the poor. It is by discovering Jesus as the liberator and by becoming the instrument of liberation that the church could become the "way" of liberation for the people of Asia. Hence, it has to be rooted in the religio-cultural heritage of the people. It must discern the presence of God in Asia by reading the 'signs of the times.' This is the new way of being the church, whose sole purpose is to be the sign and sacrament of God's Kingdom. Since, it is Kingdom oriented, its mission is to work for the

¹⁰⁴ FABC IV, 3.1.7, p. 316.

total liberation of all people in order that they may find fullness of life, solidarity, compassion and justice.

From the study of the FABC documents one can conclude that the overarching concern of the bishops is the creation of a better world, or a new world or a new society built on justice and peace. This clearly demonstrates that the present order, the best society or the ideal Christian society, based on Western developmental model has failed in Asia. The new world they speak of necessarily implies a society without exploitation and oppression, a just society based on genuine human values especially those found in the religions and cultures of Asia. This could, according to the bishops of Asia, be achieved only through a contemplative spirituality of liberation.

Thus, the answer to the third question is that though the FABCs did not deal with all the BISA themes in detail, the former certainly incorporated almost all the main themes of the BISAs. To cite a few: the option for the poor, struggle for justice and fundamental human rights, the presence and the activity of God in Asia, 'dialogue of life' with the religions and the poor of Asia. We have also shown that the foundational theme that was constant and recurrent in all the documents of the FABC is the total and integral development/liberation of all the peoples. This is the holistic spirituality of the FABC.

However, there appears to be certain themes that have been left out at the FABCs. Of particular interest to us is the bishops' silence about the 'Basic Human Community,' which was an important contribution of the BISAs. Though the bishops spoke about the BCCs, and Basic Ecclesial Communities the total silence about Basic Human Community is very difficult to understand.

If the bishops' primary purpose is to incarnate the church in the multireligious and multicultural context of Asia; if the mission of the church is to be world-oriented and the building up of truly human communities; if working for total human development/liberation of all people is the same as working for the Kingdom of God; and if the new society is to be seen as the 'way,' then what could express adequately these qualities of the church and make them present in this new community other than the reality, the 'Basic Human Community'?

CONCLUSION

The aim of this thesis was to discover whether the documents of the FABC, contain or lead to an authentic Asian theology of liberation. In order to determine, we analyzed the BISA and FABC Plenary Assembly documents. In this historico-critical analysis we saw that the primary concern of the bishops was to make the church in Asia the local church of Asia. This concerted Asia-wide move began in 1970 at the ABM¹ with the establishment of the FABC.

The bishops at these FABC gatherings were convinced that the only way for the church in Asia to become fully Asian and yet fully Christian was to assume all human reality "into the life of the Body of Christ, so that all of it may be purified and healed, perfected and fulfilled."² Therefore, the bishops adopted the methodology of see, judge and act.³ In order to 'read the signs of the times' and to discern where the Spirit was leading them, they opened their hearts and minds to the needs and aspirations of the people.

¹ See above pp. 194-95.

² FABC I, 26, in FAPA, 1:32.

³ See above p. 286.

An important outcome of this discernment was the realization that the Asian reality is shaped not only by its poverty and human degradation but also by the religio-cultural ethos of the people. This led the bishops to the inevitable conclusion that an incarnate church has to be truly present in the life and culture of the people. The bishops' attempt at incarnating the church in the socio-economic and religio-cultural context of Asia is very important for us because as Pieris says, the emergence of a theology of liberation coincides with the genesis of an authentic local church. Pieris makes an intrinsic connection between the emergence of the local church and local theology which, according to him, are two names for the same process.⁴

The bishops at these FABC meetings addressed themselves, as pastors, "to particular tasks which the evangelization of Asia today demands," and not to the construction of "a full theology of proclamation of the Gospel."⁵ However, they said that because of its importance, they said that the task of constructing a genuinely Asian theology must be given special priority. They described this as the task of the entire local

⁴ See above pp. 149-50.

⁵ FABC I, 3, in FAPA, 1:27.

church in relation to the realities of Asia.⁶ Thus, the bishops seem to have recognized the importance of enumerating a local theology in their attempt to incarnate the church in Asia.

From our studies of the FABC documents we can conclude that the bishops of Asia have shown a preference for a theology of liberation. We came to this conclusion because the FABC has appropriated three important methodological considerations which are fundamental to liberation theology. First of all, the bishops clearly opted for a new method of doing theology in Asia. The starting point of theology or contemplation is not God and revelation in the abstract sense. On the contrary, the bishops of Asia began their reflection by considering the present social reality of poverty, oppression and the brutality of life in Asia.⁷

Thus, the FABCs' starting point is the concrete historical praxis of human beings. Gutierrez calls this the first act of theology.⁸ The Asian bishops' attempt can be seen as an answer to Gutierrez' question: "What is the meaning of the faith in a life committed to the struggle against injustice and

⁶ Ibid., 33, p. 34

⁷ See above p. 120.

⁸ See above pp. 122,183.

alienation?"⁹ Here the hermeneutical priority seems to have been given to the historical project. The bishops were convinced, as Minjung theologians pointed out, that God is present and active in the history and the lives of the people of Asia.¹⁰ Therefore, the bishops saw the need for the church to identify itself with the people - the poor of Asia - and become the church of the poor sharing in their poverty.

The second point is that, because of their identification with the poor, the bishops opted for a socio-analytical mediation similar to that advocated by the Latin American liberation theologians.¹¹ The bishops chose this method of scientific social analysis because they found Western philosophy and Western categories inadequate to explain the reality of oppression and exploitation in Asia. Social analysis is not a theology but it provides the tool to understand the working of society and the underlying factors that contribute to its present situation. The bishops' analysis convinced them that the people of Asia are poor because of exploitation, oppression, deprivation and dependency.

⁹ Gutierrez, A Theology of Liberation, p. 135.

¹⁰ See above p. 187.

¹¹ See above pp. 124-27.

It was with this understanding of society and the concrete experience of the people the bishops went back to the scriptures to find solutions to the problems faced by the people and to find answers to the questions raised by Asians. This new way of interpreting the bible in context was not to justify the positions taken but to find out what God has to say about this situation and to challenge the way things are.¹² Thus, according to Segundo, the social reading of the reality is transformed into a theological reading of the same reality by hermeneutic mediation.¹³ In this process, the question is posed: "What is the meaning of the struggle against an unjust society and the creation of a new man in the light of the Word?"¹⁴

Thirdly, the bishops' analysis of the Asian reality made them re-examine the present Asian situation in the light of faith. This unjust situation which was created by humans is clearly against the will of God. Therefore, it has to be rectified by doing God's will and by freeing people from all forms of oppression. Hence, the bishops at the FABCs proposed the method of conscientization to educate the oppressed, the

¹² See above p. 131.

¹³ See above 3.2.4.

¹⁴ Gutierrez, A Theology of Liberation, p. 149.

bishops themselves, and the oppressors on the importance of justice, human dignity and, above all, the equality of all human beings who are not only created in God's image but are the children of God.

The three methodological approaches discussed above distinguish Third World Theology from First World theology. This Third World theology, which was discovered by Latin American theologians, is not a developmental theology but a liberation theology. We have termed this new methodological approach 'The Latin American Model.'¹⁵ While the Filipino theologians accept the total validity of the Latin American model for Asia, the South Asian theologians merely recognize its relevance for Asia because of its epistemological break with traditional theology.¹⁶ Pieris says, "the replacement of philosophical speculation with sociological analysis in order to change rather than to explain the world of injustice has become the immediate concern of liberation theology."¹⁷

However, our study demonstrates that the bishops were not satisfied with merely finding a solution to only one part of the

¹⁵ See above p. 187.

¹⁶ See above pp. 182-83.

¹⁷ Pieris, An Asian Theology of Liberation, p. 82; also see above pp. 154,157.

Asian problematic - the poverty and oppression of the masses. The bishops' analysis of the Asian reality revealed that it is shaped not only by socio-economic and political factors but also by the religio-cultural ethos of the people. We found that the bishops' analysis of the Asian reality was similar to that of Pieris. Speaking of the unique characteristic of Asia, Pieris says, "poverty and religion (each understood in its fourfold sense) seem to coalesce in order to procreate the Asian character of our continent."¹⁸ The BISA VII statement is almost identical to it. It states:

Poverty and religiosity are interwoven in the Asian ethos, in such a way that at a certain point they seem to coalesce in order to procreate the specific character of Asia.¹⁹

Though this final statement of BISA VII, especially in its wording, was identical to that of Pieris and may have been influenced by him, one cannot come to the conclusion that the bishops' analysis of Asian reality was inspired by Pieris.

It is essential to note that some of the FABC documents such as those of the ABM (1970), FABC I (1974) and FABC II (1978), that speak specifically of socio-economic and religio-cultural realities of Asia antedate Pieris. It was in September 1978, in his lecture at the "German Theology Professors'

¹⁸ Pieris, Love Meets Wisdom, p. 36; see also above p. 146.

¹⁹ BISA VII, 6, in FAPA, 2: 389: See above pp. 378-81.

Seminar," organized by the Protestant Association for World Mission (Evangelisches Missionswerk), Switzerland, that Pieris spoke for the first time of this dual aspect of Asian reality.²⁰ However, it was in his address to the Ecumenical Association of Third World Theologians (EATWOT III), Wennappuwa, Sri Lanka, 1979, that the English speaking audience was exposed to his analysis. The written form of this address appeared in the Sri Lankan journal Dialogue, in 1979.²¹

Furthermore, summarising the statements of the ABM and FABC I, FABC II enumerates the tasks facing the church of Asia:

What was said in the statements which were issued at those conferences remain valid and relevant today. We commend them anew to the prayerful attention of our priests and our faithful. They dealt largely with the task which the carrying-out of the mission of the Church in Asia demands: commitment to the upbuilding of Asian communities in the life of the Gospel, to the inculturation of Christian faith and life, to the endeavour for total human development and authentic liberation of peoples in justice and love, to interreligious dialogue and to renewed missionary formation.²²

This paragraph, without any doubt, asserts that to be an authentic local church of Asia the church has to incarnate itself into the dual reality of Asia: 1) by building Asian

²⁰ Pieris, Love Meets Wisdom, see foot note on p. 17.

²¹ Dialogue, 6(1979), pp. 29-52;

²² FABC II, 3, in FAPA, 1:52.

communities through its struggle for the total human liberation of all peoples (socio-economic sphere) and 2) by inculturating Christian faith and life through interreligious dialogue (religio-cultural sphere). Thus, the bishops at the FABC II laid the foundation for the formulation of an authentic Asian theology of liberation.

At the earliest stages of the FABC the bishops of Asia were in favour of inculturation, adaptation and fulfillment models of traditional theology. However, after taking into consideration the intrinsic connection between culture, philosophy and religions in Asia the bishops abandoned these models in favour of the incarnational model. It appears that the bishops' understanding of the relationship between religion, philosophy and culture, and the consequent approach to theologizing in Asia have been influenced by Pieris. According to Pieris:

In Asia, religion and philosophy are inseparably interfused. Philosophy is a religious vision; religion is a lived philosophy. Every metacosmic soteriology is at once a darsana and a pratipada, to use Indian terms - that is, an interpenetration of a "view" of life and a "way" of life.²³

At the FABC meetings the bishops proposed the model of 'incarnation' as the model for Asia. Just as at the

²³ Pieris, An Asian Theology of Liberation, p. 84; also see above pp. 106,185.

'incarnation' the Son of God was born in a particular human society, history, culture and time so the church incarnates itself in the religio-cultural history of the people of Asia in this particular time and place to become an Asian church. This, the bishops said, can be achieved through a dialogue with other religions and cultures. Thus, the bishops concluded that the Asians can remain Christians and be faithful to their traditions.

Through their dialogue with the religions and cultures of Asia the bishops came to understand both the liberative and oppressive potential of these cultures and religions. The dialogue is very important because the vast majority of Asians adhere to other living religions. These religions and their host cultures have sustained and given meaning to the people of Asia for thousands of years. Hence the bishops tried to answer the question: might the religiousness of the Asian poor (who are largely non-Christian) be a new source of revelation for the Asian church?²⁴

Because of the intrinsic relationship between Asian poverty and religions, the bishops acknowledged that it was not sufficient to analyze the socio-political situation critically

²⁴ See Pieris, An Asian Theology of Liberation, p. 125.

and scientifically. They said that it is by appropriating the spirituality of contemplation practised by Asian monks and 'sages' that the church can comprehend certain un-analyzable phenomena found in Asia. Contemplation enables one to recognize the presence of God and the action of the Spirit in and through these religions and cultures and in the poor of Asia. It is by resonating with the liberative spirituality of the religious poor that the church will be able to discover the freedom that comes from voluntary poverty.

Thus, other religions and cultures which have directed and guided the destiny of the people of Asia can also be a source of revelation to Asian Christians. While avoiding syncretism, the church of Asia has to appropriate the liberative potential of Asian religions and its contemplative spirituality which can bring to light certain aspects of the Gospel that were hidden by two millennia of Western cultural and philosophical captivity. Similarly, the encounter of Asian religions with the Gospel will enable them to be faithful to their vocation to be the forces of liberation rather than of enslavement.

Furthermore, In their struggle for a just and better society, and the total liberation of all the people of Asia without discrimination, the bishops realized the indispensable role of other religions and cultures. Though the bishops did

not distinguish what makes the Asian situation specific, they clearly recognized poverty and religio-cultural diversity as elements that constitute the Asian reality. However, Pieris points out that it is the multifaced religiousness found only in Asia that makes it different from other continents or that, in other words, constitutes its specific character.²⁵

Since the religio-cultural diversity is that which makes the Asian situation different from that found in other Third World areas, Pieris insists that an authentic Asian theology of liberation has to take into account not only the socio-economic and political aspects of Asian reality but also the religio-cultural ethos of the people of Asia.²⁶ Therefore, we come to our first conclusion that, in the process of the building up of the kingdom of God "in the concrete experiences of the social, political, economic, religious and cultural world of Asia,"²⁷ and making the church the incarnate local church of Asia, the bishops at the FABCs have enumerated a specifically authentic Asian theology of liberation.

²⁵ See above p. 184.

²⁶ See above p. 184.

²⁷ FABC IV, 4.8.7, in FAPA, 2:338.

We claim this to be an authentic Asian theology of liberation because, as Pieris has proposed, the bishops of Asia at their Plenary Assemblies and especially at the BISAs demonstrated their determination to get involved into Asia's struggle for full humanity by incarnating the church in the cultural history of Asia, which is primarily shaped by the other living religions of Asia.²⁸

An important consequence of this is that the bishops recognized and took into account the revelation of God found in other religions and cultures.²⁹ The other factor is that the liberation they wanted to achieve is not limited to the Christian community but extends to all the people of Asia. It is a total and integral liberation from all forms of oppression. God is encountered in this particular situation of material poverty, social deprivation, political alienation and, in the rich religious and cultural heritage of Asia. Hence, the bishops at these Assemblies found the traditional structures of the church to be wanting. This leads us the second conclusion we want to draw, namely, they proposed the 'basic Human Communities' as the ideal for Asia.

²⁸ See above p. 158.

²⁹ See above p. 184.

These communities that were emerging at the fringes of the church of Asia are the signs of the Kingdom - the local churches of Asia. In these communities, as Pieris says, the poor by choice and the poor by circumstance endeavour to encounter God irrespective of their creeds, casts, occupation or status through their struggle for full humanity.³⁰ It is in them and by them, says Pieris, that an authentic Asian liberation theology is being formulated.³¹

However, our studies also demonstrate that the bishops of Asia were neither unanimous nor totally in favour of this Asian theology of liberation. The bishops at the BISAs were more favourable to the above proposals than those who attended the FABC Assemblies. This curious composition, concludes Parig Digan, "opened the way for a 'BISA line' to emerge which might not be representative for the FABC as a whole."³² Since this study was limited to the FABC Plenary Assembly and BISA documents, further study will be required to determine whether the other Bishops' Institutes take a similar stance with regard to this Asian theology of liberation. This further study must also determine whether the subsequent Assembly (1990) and the

³⁰ See above p. 168.

³¹ Ibid.,

³² Parig Digan, Churches in Contestation, p. 59.

other Bishops' Institutes that were held after 1986 continued to advocate this new method of doing theology in Asia.

Since, liberation theology arises from the concrete ecclesial praxis, it is essential to determine how far this theology has been influenced by the actual praxis of the church of Asia and how much impact this liberation theology has had on the praxis of the church. In other words, is there a genuine effort to move away from an institutional church towards the new local churches of Asia - the Basic Human Communities? Lastly and most importantly, further research has to be done with regard to the Asian bishops' idea that revelation is to be found in other religions and cultures.

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