

# THE GOSPEL IN ASIA

*Thomas Menamparampil, SDB*

## I. History

### **The Beginnings**

In this brief historical sketch, I would like to draw your attention to some of the less remembered facts and events in the history of the missions in Asia. The evangelisation of Asia did not begin with St. Francis Xavier. It did not begin during the Vasco da Gama era. It began on that glorious day when Christ came on the shores of the Sea of Galilee announcing, "The kingdom of God is at hand; repent, and believe in the Gospel" (Mk1:15). It took another step forward when he sent out his disciples two by two saying, "Preach as you go ....Heal the sick, raise the dead...You received without paying, give without pay" (Mt 10:7-9).

His disciples continued this mighty undertaking, beginning with Peter and the other Apostles on Pentecost day. Some of them fleeing persecution settled in Antioch, where they came to be known as 'Christians' for the first time, and where again for the first time they began presenting their Master as 'Lord Jesus' in order to make his figure intelligible to the Greeks. Early steps in Inculturation!

It is from Antioch that the Evangelisation of the world begins, the Christian community sending out Paul and Barnabas to carry the Good News to new areas. Paul was to become the first Asian missionary to Europe at the call of the Macedonian. And he was not the last (*a*). Peter went to Rome, James to Spain, Mark to Alexandria. In the same way, Bartholomew and Thomas came Eastwards to Persia and India.

The evangelical zeal of the first generation Christians was picked up in later times by *persons of the monastic tradition*. It was through them that the radical living of the Gospel, which the martyrs had represented earlier, became visible again in the Church when a life of compromise made its way into the Christian community with the freedom that Constantine gave. In the monks we have also the *prototype of the missionaries* of later days. While the ascetics of Egypt withdrew into the deserts seeking isolation, those of Syria chose to become *wandering missionaries*. Even as early as 225, Syrian monks had reached out across the Persian Empire and set up Christian communities as far as today's Afghanistan (Bevans 78).

With these monks began various forms of inculturation. They "*borrowed from the storehouse of indigenous languages, cultures, religions, and ideas* that they found around them. The results were new and sometimes creative expressions of faith that reflected the living nature of the Christ whom they worshipped" (Irvin 115). They also advanced theological thinking. The theological writers of this period were inspired mostly by a missionary motivation. And Christianity spread. What is

---

(*a*) During the next generation, Asian Irenaeus, moving Westwards from Asia Minor to Lyons, is described as having learned the language of the "despised barbarians" and emerged as a great evangelizer, church organizer, and prominent theologian in the Western world. Christianity is Asian. "Founded in the Near East, Christianity for its first thousand years was stronger in Asia and North Africa than in Europe, and only after about 1400 did Europe (and Europeanized North America) decisively become the Christian heartland" (Philip Jenkins, *The Next Christendom: The Coming of Global Christianity*, New York, Oxford University Press 2002, 15).

interesting for the missionary in Asia today is to take special note of the fact that it was precisely persons radically committed to God, *hermits and "monks"*, that took the Christian message to the heart of Asia those days (Bevans 79-80) (a).

## **Persia, India**

It is said that Constantine wrote to the Persian emperor (Shah of shahs) pleading for benevolent treatment for Christians. Whether the message was received or not, the declaration of Christianity as the official religion of the Roman Empire made it appear to the Persians that the Christian religion was closely allied to Rome, Persia's chief rival and enemy. An image of having alien loyalties would cling to the Churches in parts of Asia during the entire colonial period, making it appear like an unrooted and unreliable community in the larger Asian society, to be constantly watched. As the Zoroastrian priests in Persia looked at Christian missionary endeavours with an unfriendly eye, religious and cultural zealots within Asian communities would warn their people to keep a strict watch on Christian activities. Hostile governments would victimise this minority community. Much misunderstanding would linger on to our own days (b).

Persecution, far more severe than the one in the Roman empire, weakened the Persian Church. Many fled East and West. A significant group of 400 Christians, under the leadership of Thomas of Cana, possibly a merchant of Armenian origin, migrated to South India (Kerala) around 350. Their arrival strengthened the existing community there, known as "St.Thomas Christians". We have an account from an Egyptian monk of the sixth century, known as Cosmas the Indian Navigator, who noticed on the Kerala coast a community with strong Semitic cultural links under a bishop from Persia, and in Sri Lanka also Christians of Persian origin (Bevans 104).

In the midst of varying vicissitudes, *"monasteries became important centres for preserving Christian identity and life"* in Persia and central Asia (Ibid. 101). Monastic centres became *fortresses of theology and spirituality* (c).

---

(a) The Church in Persia, called the East Syrian church, with its headquarters at Seleucia-Ctesiphon flourished from 226 when the liberal Sassanid dynasty took over power from the Parthians. Strongly under Semitic cultural influence, it did not use images in the churches, but a bare wooden cross. One of its weaknesses was that it continued to use Syriac as its church language, possibly because its early membership was confined to Syriac-using people. It moved its theological centre from Syrian Edessa to Persian Nisibis (Bevans 78), which became "the most famous centre of learning in all Asia outside China" with courses in philosophy and medicine (Ibid 103). While merchants, migrants, slaves, travellers, soldiers *"gossiped the Gospel"* wherever they went, there were a large number of fulltime evangelists too like Addai, Tatian, Gregory Illuminator and Pantaenus who spent their entire energies for the spread of the Gospel. Thus Christianity spread in Asia. The first nation to call itself Christian was an Asian country, Armenia (around 301). The new religion made an immediate appeal to the masses (Ibid 89). Women felt their position enhanced in the Christian community. Widows and orphans found security. Travellers and migrants were given a sense of belonging. Within a short time half of Asia Minor had become Christian.

(b) The plight of the Christians was very similar both in the East and West in the early days. A second century document describes the Christian situation thus: "They live in their own native lands, but as aliens; as citizens they share all things with others; but like aliens suffer all things ..... They are treated outrageously and behave respectfully to others. When they do good, they are punished by evildoers; when punished, they rejoice as if being given new life. They are attacked by Jews as aliens, and are persecuted by Greeks; yet those who hate them cannot give any reason for their hostility" (Letter to Diognetus ).

(c) From the 4<sup>th</sup> to the 10<sup>th</sup> century, a network of monasteries arose all along the road to India and along the 'silk route' to China, serving the interests of the Christian missions and offering hospitality to "Christian merchants, artisans, physicians and administrators" (Bevans 102). But, more particularly, their contribution to civilization deserves special attention. It was precisely these monks who passed *on Greek philosophy, science and medicine to the Arab world*. "One of the greatest contributions of the Asian Church to the history of human thought was its key role in transmitting to the Arab empire the heritage of the Greek classics and, through the Arabs, preserving them for rediscovery and transformation of the West in the Renaissance and Reformation" (Moffet, *Christianity in Asia*, 354).

In those days, Asia was the centre whence learning emanated. It is very interesting to note how much Greece, which was the chief civilizing force in the Western world, had borrowed from Asia. Clement of Alexandria argues that the Greeks had plagiarized the Egyptians, Chaldeans, Indians, and a host of others (Irvin 124). Tatian said that the Greeks had "learned the art of astronomy from Babylon, magic from the Persians, geometry from the Egyptians, the alphabet itself from the Phoenicians" (Ibid 143).

The distances that grew between the Christian communities of Asia, Africa and Europe due to the Christological debates preceding the Council of Chalcedon (451), were not all for theological reasons, but also for political, cultural, nationalistic and other reasons as well. The resulting mutual alienation was the chief cause of the decline of the Eastern churches.

## China, Central Asia

In 635 an East Syrian missionary team under Alouben reached Chang'an (now Xian), the T'ang capital of China (Palmer 39). The emperor financed the construction of the first Christian church in China. Other churches and monasteries came up in due course. Several Christian works were published, among them 'Jesus-Messiah Sutra '(a). A certain *bishop Adam was known for his proficiency in the Chinese language*, and even Buddhist missionaries came to consult him. It is said that he helped a group of Indian and Japanese Buddhist monks to translate seven volumes of Buddhist Sutras into Chinese (Bevans 105).

This offers us a very early example of *inter-faith cooperation*. Undoubtedly Christian monks had to interact with Zoroastrians, Buddhists, Manichaeans, Taoists, Confucians, Hindus, Muslims, and leaders of tribal religions among the Turks, Huns, Mongols during their peregrinations (Ibid 101). There was much mutual borrowing. We find certain Buddhist and Taoist expressions being used to articulate Christian teachings (Irvin 314). And the Christian community continued to grow.

## Under Islam

Within a century of the death of Muhammad, half of the world's Christians were under Muslim political rule (Irvin 271). *Christian leaders had little choice but develop the skill for dialogue*. Caliph Mahdi of the Abbasid dynasty, we are told, invited the Persian patriarch Timothy I for a debate on Christology and the Christian understanding of Muhammad. Both approached the question with absolute seriousness and mutual respect (b). Indian emperor Akbar was to attempt similar inter-religious dialogue in later times. Living and working with people of many religious persuasions is nothing new for Asian Christians. That is the only experience they are familiar with. But they never failed to witness to the Gospel (c).

---

(a) The Jesus-Messiah Sutra speaks of the "compassionate joyous lamb" who will "free us of the karma of our lives, bring us back to our original nature". The worshippers pray that God will "hear our prayers, send Your raft of salvation to save us from the burning streams" (Palmer 202).

(b) Patriarch Timothy seems to have been an amazing missionary strategist. We are told that he was preparing to consecrate a bishop for Tibet. Christian monasteries continued to spread to areas that are today Uzbekistan, Kazhakstan, Tajikistan, Tibet and West China (Bevans 109).

(c) Speaking of dialogue with Muslims, we may recall the example of St. Francis of Assisi, whose encounter with the Sultan brought a war to an end. It is said that the Christian saint admired the Muslim periodic call for prayer. Dialogue benefits both parties. It is not that Francis did not preach. His unflinching message was, "Preach always, and, if necessary, use words."

The impact of Christian monasticism on the Muslim society was so great, that it prompted the development of a distinctive form of Islamic mystical and ecstatic tradition known as Sufism (Irvin 283).

While we admire the early Christian efforts for dialogue in Central Asia, we must also admit that some isolated Christian communities merging in thought and religious expressions with other religious groups, lost their separate identities. We have no trace of them. Something similar happened towards the end of the first millennium in India when

By 1000, Christianity had reached the Kerait Turks in Mongolia and probably Korea and Japan (Bevans 109). However, with the fall of the tolerant Tang dynasty, Christian fortunes waned. But the East Syrian monks continued to serve as a mighty force for evangelisation (Ibid 121). They did what the Irish monks did in the West, whose *'Peregrinatio pro Christo'* took the faith to new areas and new ethnic groups. Carrying the Gospel to new people is not a by-product of colonialism, nor a sign of a conquest mentality; it is a sign of the believers' love for people. The Syrian monks also offered medical, pastoral and educational assistance to Christian communities and to the neighbourhood, much like what the missionaries do today in different parts of Asia.

The minority status of the East Syrian church in many nations, the need they felt for dialogue, and their determination to preserve their identity and share the Gospel with others in the face of all odds, the great role the monks played in all this .....offer great lessons for the missionary working in Asia today.

John of Monte Corvino, a papal delegate, claims to have baptized 6.000 persons by 1305 among the Turks. Then there were the tolerant Mongols who had established a short-lived empire stretching from the Pacific to the Polish borders, a veritable Eurasian empire. During their rule in China, the Franciscans led several missionary expeditions to that country: in 1313, 1322, 1342. But this venture came an end in 1369 with the overthrow of the Mongols. Scholars have speculated how different Asia's history would have been if the Mongols had accepted Christianity instead of Islam during those crucial years.

### **A brief sketch of more recent Times**

St. Francis Xavier's mass baptism of fisher-folk on the shores of South India and Sri Lanka, his work among the people of the Malay Peninsula and Japan are too well known to be retold. He converted some Buddhist monks in Japan, who provided leadership to the young Christian community there. With the adoption of the local cultural models of the 'ministry of the word' by Alessandro Valignano the community stabilised (Bevans 186).

Matteo Ricci's approach to Chinese scholars and Robert di Nobili's efforts to come to terms with the caste-system in India, have received much attention from mission historians. Likewise, Alexander de Rhodes' skill in empowering lay evangelisers in Vietnam is greatly remembered. It would be too long here to recount the achievements of Fr. Lievens in Chotanagpur, the recent progress of the Church among the tribals of North-East India, and similar advance of the Christian Church in Korea, Indonesia, and mainland China.

It must be admitted that during the colonial period, the national rivalries among imperial powers played an undue role in determining the fortunes of the infant Christian communities. However, we cannot ignore the fact that the present Church in Asia today (except for the oriental Churches) is the fruit of the apostolic labours of the very many generous missionaries of this period. Unfortunately there is school of thought that is far too critical of this most dynamic era of Mission history, alleging that that the evangelisation efforts in those days were too closely associated with imperialism. This is an unfair way of looking at things.

The reason is that the missionary team in that period of history lived and worked under several compulsions. Just as in modern times we have learned to judge people of other cultures kindly, because they are used to other ways of thinking and acting, we ought to judge people of an earlier

---

the Hindu and Buddhist thought and lifestyles came so close to each other, that most Indian Buddhists were absorbed into Hinduism. This is happening in our own days, when a group of Hindus, who had accepted Buddhism under Ambedkar during the last century, have become hardly distinguishable from neighbouring Hindus. Multiple belonging is not uncommon in Asia. But it obscures identities.

era of history according to their own understanding of what was proper and good. Again, as have special sympathy for Christian communities who labour under totalitarian regimes, or excessively nationalistic governments, or a fundamentalist administration, it is helpful for us to remember that so many of our missionary pioneers during the last half a millennium worked under hostile governments, anti-clerical authorities, heartless adventurers, and insensitive empire-builders. There were times when many of their missionary societies were struggling for very existence in their own homeland. It would have been impossible for them to move to mission territories, much less become effective in the field, without some measure of accommodation to the demands of those hard-hearted colonial authorities. In spite of all that, the miracles they worked under such a tyrannical dispensation amazes us today (a).

For, we see that those heroic souls penetrated the most inaccessible places, confronted the most unwelcoming rulers, transcended immense cultural barriers, announced the Gospel, built up communities, put languages into writing, provided literature to linguistic groups, pursued ethnological studies, presented unknown communities to the wider world, created interest in anthropological reflections, intervened in behalf of oppressed communities, offered services in the field of health and education setting up impressive institutions, pressed for social reforms, introduced entire societies to modernity, and planted ideas into the hearts of people to guide their society to freedom and offer leadership in the Church and in the wider society. They initiated theological reflection in different cultural contexts, with an edifying measure of self-criticism that laid the foundation of today's missiological thinking. We ought to be proud of these and other accomplishments. If the Church in Asia has emerged today as a force to reckon with, the credit is greatly due to these valiant men and women.

## Conclusions

Profiting by the insights of Stephen Bevans and Roger Schroeder in their *Constants in Context*, I would like to draw a few conclusions from what we have said above: 1. the need to *enter into the world of other communities with respect*, 2. to communicate with people in a way intelligible within a local culture, 3. *recognise the Gospel values already present in that culture*, and thus continue the tradition of Origen, Justin, Cyril and Methodius (b).

"While we witness to the Lordship of Christ, we also pay due respect to the wonderful power of human reason, human experience and human culture" (Bevans 54). It means *listening attentively to cultures in order to notice the presence of God and activity of the spirit, to discover the hidden*

(a) It is persons who are excessively nationalistic in their outlook today that find it most difficult to understand persons of a similar nationalistic vision in an earlier era. They suffer from the same sort of narcissism that they accuse others of. But people who read history insightfully and cultivate a broader outlook and truly Catholic view of the human reality, discover people of the same attitude in every period of Church history in every society. It is they who build up the Universal Church and give continuity to the story of believers. They find it easy too to empathize with people of every persuasion in every age of history and of our times. All that I am saving is not to deny that there are many historic wounds that need to be healed. In fact, it is part of the mission of the Evangeliser to work for the healing of the historic memories of the society in which he/she lives. We need to get over our post-colonial complexes, and reacquire the serenity typical of the Asian wise man/woman to be able to engage ourselves creatively in fresh theological and missiological thinking.

Schibinger speaking of that era says, "The collision that occurred in the sixteenth century was not just between opposing cultures, or between races, or between different historical products; it was not between 'more advanced' and 'backward' cultures, or 'civilized' peoples and 'barbarians'. It was, essentially, between two states of consciousness, and this is perhaps why it is so painful" (Bevans 175).

(b) For Clement of Alexandria philosophy was a stepping stone to Christ. Origen said, "Every wise man to the extent that he is wise participates in Christ who is Wisdom" (Commentary on the Gospel of St. John). For him, it is the work of the Christians to take materials out of the secular world and fashion from them objects for the worship and glorification of God (Philokalia, xiii).

treasure of Christ in cultural patterns and values, to call cultures to their deepest identity through the message of the Gospel (Ibid 60), to draw people to fulfill their deepest human potentiality, and answer their most profound desires. It means to keep learning all the time, which someone has described as 'mission in reverse'. This type of learning attitude implies a '*missio inter gentes*'.

## II. The Present Context

There have been changes since those days. The change from the colonial period to an era of free nations was so radical that we have hardly got over it. In the meantime the world has changed again in an unforeseen manner from the 1980's: the demise of Communism that had held so many unrealistic hopes to the poor of the world, the dismemberment of the Soviet Union, change of economic balance due to the rise of oil prices, emergence of Islamic nations as a world force often confronting the West, resulting situation of confrontation in many parts of the world and the new phenomenon of global terrorism, rise of the so-called Asian Tigers and the unexpected crisis they faced, growing power of multinational companies and the globalisation of market economy, transition of third world countries from political dependence to economic dependence (often called neo-colonialism), hardening of the neo-liberal ideologies, formation of the European Union, rapid growth of China as an economic giant.

There are other trends more specific of Asia in recent years: population growth running ahead of economic growth in many countries; starvation deaths (it is said that 35,000 children die every day of starvation, Asia Focus, August 8, 2003); urbanization on a gigantic scale; consequent sense of uprootedness of people rushing into the cities for jobs; mass migration of Asians to Western countries or to Japan or the oil-rich countries of West Asia, which makes an impact also on their home-countries; fragmentation of rural societies; xenophobic, ethnocentric and racist attitudes of countries receiving migrants and guest workers; political mobilization of people using religious symbolisms; self-assertion of Asian nations in search of a place in the newly emerging political scenario; arms race between neighbouring countries<sup>(a)</sup>; political exploitation of religious sentiments of people; conflicts between neighbouring countries that are redefining their roles in a regional power-alignment or over-claiming their boundaries; persistence of personality cult and dynastic rule, perpetuating feudalism in new forms; democratic forms devoid of democratic values; identity-affirmation of minority ethnic groups within nation-states leading to secession-struggle or ethnic conflicts; threat to the integrity of God's creation and to biodiversity, i.e. violence to nature in a massive scale to serve the new economy.

There are more problems still directly affecting our value-systems: violence coming to be accepted as a respectable way of pressing one's point of view, and state violence in response; all pervasive corruption becoming recognised as normal to public life; popular religious movements like Falun Gong (China) and Sangh Parivar (India) winning an impressive following; weakening of ideologies that promoted social commitment; a sense of helplessness before mighty problems like HIV/AIDS or SARS, TB, malaria, drug addiction, illiteracy, unemployment, pornography, urban violence ; increase in the number of street children, divorcees, unwed mothers, prostitutes, handicapped persons, exploited women, untrained youth, gambling (casino) centres; idealism vanishing from the ranks under pressure from the harsh realities of the new economy.

---

(a) For all the self-assertion of Asians, individual Asian countries prefer to keep close to those Western nations that they are comfortable with, and are largely indifferent to the fortunes of neighbouring countries, thus losing many opportunities for mutual assistance. There are tensions in many zones: Kashmir, Kurdistan, Tibet, Iraq, Kuwait, Aceh, Mindanao, Laos, East Timor, etc. Crude pragmatism seems to be all that counts. The triumph of cut-throat competition keeps eroding the Asian values of harmony and solidarity. The recent popularity of the biographies of Genghis Khan, Attila the Hun, Alexander the Great, and the presentation of their military strategies to business executives as though they are the models to be followed in an effort towards the elimination of rivals, can make us wonder in what direction our world is moving. Hitler's *Mein Kampf* and Sun Tzu's military strategies are equally popular!

Looking at the changes in the Christian world, we notice a **decline of Christianity in the West** (especially in Western Europe) and the shift in the centre of gravity of Christianity to the non-Western world. The Catholic population in Africa, for example, has trebled during the last twenty-five years. There are more than 100 million Catholics in Asia today (a).

We notice new tensions building up too: 1. as the economy is being globalized, so are poverty and uneven distribution of wealth; and in response, a perception of injustice grows deeper, and terrorist trends grow wider; 2. in the face of the secularisation of life and media, people seek the security ensured by exaggerated forms of religiosity and fundamentalism; 3. as mighty nations interfere in the internal affairs of sovereign nations in the name of democracy and human rights, the weaker ones respond with terrorism and violence in the name of religion and culture; 4. as the former try to impose mono-civilizational solutions upon a multi-civilizational world and seek to homogenise cultures, the latter confront the trend by an exaggerated reaffirmation of local and subaltern cultures.

In this complex world, the mission of Evangelisation too has become complex. An air of helplessness seems to come upon us as we observe humanity moving round in circles searching for an answer. It is not that justice is more important than peace, or vice versa. It is not that cultivated selfishness will solve the problem of imposed equality. It is not that we have no choice between a crassly materialistic outlook on life and fiercely fanatic forms of religious self-expression. It is not as though an economic boom is a supreme value even at the risk of damaging persons, local communities, natural environment, cultural identities, and human relationships. It is not as though irresponsible consumerism is the only alternative to absolute poverty. It is not that theologies that ignored justice is best confronted by theologies that condone violence. It is not that we can promote

---

(a) Religious communities too are realizing that "The geographic and cultural shifts can become a new stage of refoundation and of evangelical radicality, revisited with new eyes"(Congress on Consecrated life, "Passion for Christ...", Religious Life: Asia, October-December, 2004, pg.29).

Year	Catholics Western	Southern
1900	77%	23%
1970	49%	51%
1980	42%	58%
2000	30%	70%

(Religious Life: Asia, April 1999)

There is a growing perception that the future of Christianity will not depend on the speculations of the intellectuals of the declining Churches, but on the **life experiences of the growing Churches**. These latter Churches have not put their experiences, perceptions, reflections and convictions into writing as yet. They have not become vocal as yet. But one day they will. Anyone who wishes to have an insight into the future must observe thoughts and events there. They seem to lean towards what others describe as "conservative". Many of them are inclined to Pentecostal and charismatic styles of belief and worship.

For many people in Asia, conversion to God does not take place during a brilliant lecture, but during a deep prayer-experience with a believing community. These growing communities have a vision that is clearly Christ-centred. They are dynamic; they seem to give life and energy to various ecclesial movements. Historically speaking, all growing Churches manifested these traits in the period of their expansion. The charismatics keep growing in Asia, Africa, Eastern Europe and other places. Surprisingly, the post-modern culture in the West too seems to be open to Pentecostal and charismatic forms of worship. Is the world moving towards the new Pentecost that John Paul II foresaw?

the values of the Kingdom and pretend that the King does not exist. It is not that the wrong done by those who believed in Jesus as the unique saviour of mankind will be rectified by placing him in a wider pantheon.

No, we can be sure that there is an answer to every problem, though we cannot pretend that we have readymade answers, or that all the answers have already been given centuries ago, or that we do not need to search and reflect and discuss and discover and rediscover in every human context what we ought to do, where we can find wisdom, whence we can derive strength. So often we keep answering questions that were asked centuries ago which no one is asking now, and are deaf to those that keep arising in today's society. We need to think anew how we may respond to today's searcher. "... reverence the Lord Christ in your hearts, and always have your answer ready for people who ask you the reason for the hope that you all have" (1 Pet 3:15).

Our starting point for search is always the human situation where we are, where we work. The themes for reflection are pressing human needs. The solutions we are searching for may arise from the insights that our culture/civilization provides. But when darkness deepens, we look for light. May be, we will find light through Him Who said, "I am the light of the world; he who follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life" (Jn 8:12). Did He not also say, "I am the Way, the Truth and the Life". Was his name Jesus of Nazareth?

For a believer, these are certainties. But others may be invited, "Come and see". "Who is this Jesus about whom we have heard so much?", asks my Asian friend. Is he a healer? A wonder worker? A social activist? An exceptional guru? An insightful teacher? A great prophet? Someone who has the words of eternal life? Is He really the Son of the Living God? The Only Redeemer of humankind? If you have found Him to be Master, Saviour and Lord, you will want to tell of Him to others so that they too may have the same joy. That is what evangelisation is all about. There is *a wise pedagogy in the teaching, and graduality in the discovery*. In the West, Plato spoke of the philosopher-king. In the East, our civilizations believe in the *wise man, the sage, the seer, the guru, the holy man* who can teach. Will the missionary of today rise to that great vocation?

Discovery of our way through life, amelioration of the human condition, and the manner in which we find our role in human history and the path to our ultimate destiny is not something that we can attain without assistance. This assistance is what may be described as Evangelisation. It is a complex reality. It involves serving human needs in the varied situations described above, healing and teaching, organizing social assistance and inspiring social change, defending the environment and standing by weaker communities, witnessing and speaking of God and his marvellous ways among people, **dialoguing and persuading**, eliciting conviction, evoking faith and commitment.

Evangelisation includes being involved in human development and living through the painful realities of social tension, bringing about reconciliation and peace, building up human communities in the context of their cultures, tapping the resources of their civilizational heritage, unraveling the mysteries of human existence, accompanying people on their pilgrimage to God, wounded and constantly searching as we ourselves are. It calls for respect for people's traditions and religious experiences and being prepared to be a co-pilgrim, a humble searcher, while offering guidance based on faith. It calls for courage, it calls for humility, it calls for daring, it calls for preparedness to offer the ultimate form of witness: death. Such persons of evangelical boldness have become icons of God's love for his people like Oscar Romero, Mother Teresa and John Paul II.

### III. The Missionary's Religious Image in the Asian Context

The great cultural changes that came upon the Western world during the last half a century have so affected Church life that priests and religious are no more merely seeking to restructure community life and redimension apostolic activities, but questioning the very foundational principles on which these forms of life were built up. Some are asking whether they have a future at all. In this crucial period of Church history, may be it is time that we looked at the understanding of the religious person in the Asian context itself quite independently of the reflection that is going on in another

part of the world. And if we have to pay attention to the cultural realities that have an impact on religious life, it is right that we study carefully those of Asia and the image of the religious person in our own cultural world. For, it is a mistake to take up for reflection repeatedly themes that are thrown up for public discussion by the rapidly changing cultural scene in the West, almost from decade to decade, and reorganize our life and ministry in answer to the problems that are severely felt elsewhere. For examples, see (1).

There needs to be no identity crisis for the religious person working on this continent, if he/she is true to his/her identity...unless it is imported from elsewhere, and unless he/she makes himself/herself culturally uprooted. Here, religious commitment is understood, its relevance is recognised, its contribution is appreciated, its representatives are respected; for, we Christian religious personnel are not the only ones in the field; there are native models of religious life belonging to other Asian religions. History tells us that monasticism flourished in Ireland and certain parts of Germany soon after their acceptance of Christianity, because such a form of life had native models. In the same way, in Asia vocations are on the rise today (except where the culture has changed very substantially), seminaries are full, new congregations come into existence, new religious initiatives are launched, because such a trend corresponds to the general atmosphere prevailing in the larger society, where ever)' religion is renewing itself, and where religious "virtuosos" are convinced of their identity and not lost in constant self-questioning.

While vicariously participating in the anxieties of other parts of the world, we should be careful not to think that all their problems have a universal application. And while studying ourselves in the context of the recent changes in Church life, we need not adhere too closely to the self-descriptions of Church personnel elsewhere as medieval, pre-modern, modern, late modern, post-modern and post-post-modern, as though our own Asian society has gone through the same historic experiences that another society has gone through and thought the same thoughts that intellectuals elsewhere have done. Unless we resist the temptation to slide towards developing this 'carbon-copy syndrome', and specialize in what Arnold Toynbee has described as *mimesis*, we will swing like a pendulum with the changing cultural moods elsewhere. We need to look at our own histories, observe native models, stand close to the indigenous religious identities and austerities, and build up and preserve values, attitudes, relationships, traditions and symbols that make meaning in our own context. For example, in Asia what people admire more in a religious person is renunciation than efficiency, moral authority than mobilizing skill, God-experience than political correctness.

Historically speaking, most of our societies and congregations were born in the West. We need to be extremely grateful. They were founded in an era when the Western society did not differ very greatly from the Asian—both were rural, agricultural, very attached to the family, to tradition, very loyal to religion; in that period both societies enjoyed an impressive measure of inner cohesion. During the extension of the activities of these orders and congregations to Asia, the Asian members found it easy to identify themselves with their founding stories, documents, charismas, emphases, thrusts, and priorities. This is not to deny the differences that existed even those days.

However, more particularly during the last half a century the Western cultural world has undergone such radical changes, that Church life, in an effort to respond to those changes has rightly set itself on a process of on-going transformation. But since all those changes have not taken place in the same manner in Asia, it has not been easy for Asians, (while recognising the significant value of many of those reflections and changes), to identify themselves with all the debates that have arisen within the societies whose leadership and membership live and work largely in another hemisphere of the world. Asian problems, possibilities, anxieties and ambitions are different. Most societies and congregations recognise the need for reflection in the context of different cultures; which means Asian Church personnel need to be aware of and respond to the religious traditions of the Asian people and the cultural changes that are taking place here, if they wish to play a meaningful role as

religious missionaries on the Asian continent. In this area, we may have failed (a).

This is not to claim superiority for the Eastern over the Western, or vice versa, or to assert an Asian identity in an arrogant, aggressive, chauvinistic or grievance-ridden manner, much less to build up an Asian lobby of regional interests, or to seek special importance or special exemptions for the Asian sector. Nor do I claim this reflection can be done in isolation, or that it has nothing to do with similar efforts being made in the West. In fact, we shall soon be using insights drawn from certain Western authors who have set in motion a deeper study of religious life in Asia. If the type of reflection I am suggesting has to be of any value, it has done with a deep sense of responsibility to the Universal Church, avoiding anything that sounds like excessively nationalistic or regionalistic. It is undertaken only for deepening the core values of religious life itself and ensuring greater pastoral effectiveness in various cultural contexts. It seeks to draw from the ancient resources of Asian's religious traditions. *Asia, with its profound 'sense of the sacred' may have something to offer to the world (b).*

---

(a) To take one or two examples, when we introduced with absolute enthusiasm various forms of freedoms into our renewal program that stood for special respect for the individual, we responded correctly to the cultural wave that had been sweeping the West during the last few generations. We did a good thing. But meanwhile we distanced ourselves from the general communitarian ethos that prevailed in Asian societies. Individualistic undertakings and subjective spiritualities can be alienating in Asia. If at that time we had tried to renew and strengthen community bonds in our religious communities, we would have retained an organic relationship with the culture around us. Pressing fervently for inculturation while we are inattentive to the organic nature of culture does not reveal perceptive depth. In the same way, when we began to emphasize the secular dimension of our services, and our discussions and interests moved in the direction of a perfectly secularised academic world (of work, thought, journalism, research), we came on the wavelength of academicians in the West, but meantime we moved away from the local society that was steeped in religiosity, with which we became incapable of dialoguing, in whose name we were taking up issues. Meanwhile we were becoming more and more strident in our criticism against missionary pioneers, crying hoarse against slow steps in inculturation and imposition of 'western ideas' by the highest Church authorities on accommodating Asians. My argument is not that Asian values are absolute, but they deserve attention even while we are welcoming new ideas.

As the criticisms grew harsher in fighting for an Asian identity and respect for Asian civilizations, what became most evident was that the themes of discussion, approach to problems, styles of communicating, quality of relationships were all non-Asian. Vocabulary used was closer to Voltaire, Nietzsche, Hegel, Sartre, Marx, and Darwin than to the Buddha, **Panchshila**, Gandhi, the Dalai Lama, and Asian concepts of harmony. We spoke in two voices. Some of those who spoke louder in Asia's interests seemed culturally unrooted people, over-concerned with issues marginal the consciousness of the Asian masses, though in keeping with the interests of equally unrooted Asians. Meanwhile other most relevant themes received too little attention: themes like cultural identities of Asian societies, continuity and change in Asian cultures and civilizations, revival of Asian religions, ways of preventing communal conflicts and inter-ethnic strifes, possibility of tapping the resource of religion for ethical behaviour and social commitment, correct understanding of what is described as Asian forms of religious "fundamentalism"; and if at all, it was always from an outsider's point of view. There was too little depth, perception, creativity, and cultural insertion. An insider's understanding was missing. Thus, too much of Asian energy was running waste in negative exercises.

There were for a while debates on 'Asian Values'. But as they were proposed by persons who wanted to justify their authoritarian regimes, the proposal did not meet with wide acceptance. This little note is an invitation to the study of the nature of our cultures at depth, retaining an Asian quality- about the entire debate. We know for certain that the cultural values of the Hindu, Buddhist, Confucian, Taoist, Shinto, Islamic, and tribal societies have something to offer to world civilization, e.g., sense of the sacred, solidarity, community, renunciation, respect for life, attachment to family and tradition, love for mysticism.

(b) The use of the term 'Western' with a negative connotation is unfair. It is as unfair as using phrases like 'oriental despotism', or 'Asian decadence'. There is nothing negative about being Eastern or Western, Asian or European. Every form of stereotyping is odious. We feel hurt when Christians are stereotyped in Hindi films as unprincipled villains. In the same way, Muslims can feel hurt if they are pictured as terrorists, indigenous communities (tribals) can feel humiliated if they are presented as uncivilized people. Our friends from the West can feel uncomfortable, if we constantly refer to 'Western' things with a tone of the "negative-other". The fact is that both Eastern and Western civilizations are two mighty streams of human experience which have frequently overflowed one into the other, and in which many rivulets of each are very close to those of the other. What is important is that there be respectful sharing, intelligent and selective acceptance and organic assimilation.

It is true that the West has set the whole world rethinking (a). With greater economic and technological development in the different countries of Asia, some of the Western experience may be repeated here. However, no matter how profound the impact of the West, Asian societies seem serenely determined to preserve their identities and strengthen them further with insights derived from the Western experience. Religious personnel on this continent will need therefore to walk with these societies, understand the religious psychology of these communities, draw from the inherited religious sturdiness of the Asian peoples, while guarding against their in-built weaknesses. For, we have examples of renounced and contemplative traditions in Asia, going back to the earliest times, especially because this was *the continent where a radical living of religion took a certain definitive shape* (2).

1. Historically speaking, Hinduism is the oldest world religion, dating from about 2,500 B.C, and presently claiming over 820 million adherents, "it is the seedbed of formal religious life ..... Today, there is an estimated one million monastics in India alone" (O'Murch 16). In the Hindu tradition, there is a great deal of freedom and flexibility, marked by a vast variety of lifestyles and spiritualities. There are hundreds of thousands of God-seekers and world-renouncers in India. "Hinduism has always differentiated between the priest and the monk" (Ibid 21). "The monks and nuns take three vows: poverty, chastity and reverence for elders....They are accountable to a spiritual master...". Their spiritual guidance is sought after. Some are celibates. Some are involved in education and healthcare.

2. "Buddhism originated as a monastic religion. The Buddha himself was a monk and passed on to his followers a well developed monastic system which took its main ideas from the Hindu sannyasi"

---

(a) Civilizations grow and diversify for a multiplicity of reasons: varied geographical settings, climatic differences, diverse historical experiences. Every civilization has something unique to offer to humanity even though its vision of life and insights are specific to its own historic experience: (a) Thus, the European society in its struggle against monarchy and various other forms of absolute power, developed a deep understanding of and appreciation for democracy and individual freedoms. We might say a very specific contribution of the Western society to humankind has been the concept of '**the individual's rights**' as against every sort of interfering authority, (b) On the African continent, on the contrary, tribal and village solidarity was found to be the greatest strength of the society in its struggle for survival both against natural elements and threatening communities. A powerful '**sense of community**', continues to characterize the African society, along with an attitude of mutual dependence and mutual assistance, (c) It may be argued that a distinct contribution of the Asian society to humanity is its belief in '**strong family bonds**'. They help to keep clear of exaggerated individualism popular in modern times and excessive subordination to the larger society (tribe, class, village, etc.) as seen in some contexts. But there is no perfect balance in any of them. Humanity will be wise, if it learns to profit from these different insights without absolutizing any one in particular. A **dialogue of civilizations** must go on.

Nor can we deny very basic differences among the various civilizational and cultural zones of Asia itself, nor ignore the cultural changes that are taking place in all Asian societies. As the Western society, coming under the full impact of Renaissance, Reformation and Enlightenment, totally renewed itself over centuries, Asian societies coming under the **impact of the Western thought** and experience are trying to rediscover and redefine themselves. This impact is not undifferentiated. For example, the pace of change has been different from one Asian society to another. Each has also opted for that stream of the Western thought that pleased it best. For Example, while Japan opted for Western technology from its earliest days of exposure to the West. India indicated its special preference for a democratic polity: while China was deeply impressed by the egalitarian ideas that sprang up in the West (Marxist and others), Taiwan, Hong Kong, Singapore and Korea were affected by the Western economic experience; other countries like Thailand, Malaysia and Indonesia were also influenced in the same way: Philippines by the Western lifestyles. While most accepted the concept of nationalism that developed in the West, a few were contented with forging an opportunistic alliance with it while retaining Machiavellian ruling styles. In this way the countries of Asia deriving inspiration from different schools of thought from the West have become even more differentiated.

For all the legitimate pride that we have in our ancient civilizations, an external **stimulus was** necessary for Asia in a particular period of history. To societies that had grown self-absorbed and complacent, a stimulus from outside came as a major shock. The less the openness to others, the greater the shock when it came. Self-universalisation is the greatest weakness of any civilization, even of the modern one. Criticisms that come from outside may be painful, but are beneficial.

(O'Murch 19). Buddhist monks follow a communal lifestyle. They are subject to authority. They are considered sources of wisdom and inspiration. They have a long tradition of begging and ascetical practices. "Buddhist monks do not recruit; the people try to ensure that there is a constant supply of candidates" (Ibid 22). Though, today, we notice Buddhist monks (like Hindu Sanyasis) getting involved in politics, it is a departure from sound tradition.

3. Sufism arose in Islam as a counter-cultural movement, emphasizing prayer and contemplation, simple and frugal lifestyle. They follow a hierarchic structure, pledging strict obedience. Some are celibate. "They have a strong reputation for holiness and learning on a par with many of the great orders of Christianity" (Ibid 14).

4. There are other traditions too. Jain monks propagate non-violence. Religious professionals in Sikhism and Judaism do not seek to live a life of celibacy. But austerity of life is hallmark of all persons professing a deeper commitment to religion.

Sandra Schneiders says that there are many things in common between the Catholic religious life and monasticism in other religions (3). She argues that ours is the historical realization of the "**monastic archetype**" that is always present in the collective unconscious of every society. She emphasizes further, "Monasticism as the **singe-minded concern with the God-quest**, institutionalised in a distinct lifeform, is at the heart of Religious Life..." (Schneiders 13). She sees a common desire to go apart, "aloneness" (Ibid 9) (a).

Certain things emerge in this brief study of religious life in Asia: intense God-search, simplicity of life, a tradition of renunciation and asceticism, concepts approximating the Christian practice of poverty and obedience in more radical form, celibacy for those who have chosen celibacy, disciplined community life for those who have opted for that form of life, **witness to God's holiness and compassion, source of wisdom and inspiration, moral authority** in the contemporary world, **propagation of religious teachings** in society (b). It is important to remember that these elements do not depend on the recent General Chapter or the Revised Constitutions, since they do not have any such authorities. But when one fails to be true to these traditions, one ceases to be a religious person in the estimation of Asian society.

#### IV. Evangelisation

In presenting this paper, it is not my aim to go through all the recent church documents on evangelisation and present you a summary of the material. I would rather adopt an experiential approach. But I do hope that the most important topics that are usually discussed in relationship to evangelisation are presented here in some manner or the other.

(a) Among the religious professionals of other religions too we notice that candidates discern their vocation, elders advise and assist, go through to temporary and more permanent commitment, accept a life of poverty even of an extreme nature and adhere to a simplicity of life. This form of life almost always includes some form of submission to an authority, regulated by a fixed schedule conducive to orderly and disciplined lifestyle (Schneiders 10). "...asceticism in the form of silence and solitude, fasting, restriction of sleep, and exposure to the elements; meditation and chanting; confession and public penances for infractions of the rules; study of the sacred texts of the tradition. Very often the monastic community becomes a centre of learning and of transmission of culture, both sacred and profane" (Ibid 10-11) (4).

"Interestingly enough, an increasing number of secular leaders, such as CEO's of successful corporations, are learning from their experiences and observation that spiritual values are necessary elements in leadership. For instance, the virtue of humility..." (Religious Life: Asia, October-December, 2004. pg. 70).

(b) I may add one more helpful point. Most Asians have always lived in a multi-ethnic, multi-cultural situation. Living with people who are very different from oneself is nothing new for Asians. That is why Asians could make a useful contribution to the reflection on the emerging multi-cultural situation in religious life and in the larger society in many parts of the world today.

## What Evangelisation is not

There are so many misconceptions about Evangelisation that I must begin by saying a few words about what it is not. Evangelisation is not a form of political campaign, a commercial advertisement, an ideological propaganda, a refute-all debate, a ridiculing contest, an arrogant claim of superiority, a religious *Jihad*. It is not a spiritual boxing match to knock out every other person in the ring. It is not a threat to people's cultural heritage, ethnic identities, national heritage, healthy traditions, anthropological diversity, ancient wisdom, inherited bonds and kinships, heirloom of ideas, civilizational archetypes, nor people's native religious genius. Christ comes to affirm and uplift, to fulfill and perfect, to heal and empower; not to damage and destroy, to denounce and derail, to deny and reject everything of value. "He will not argue or shout, or make loud speeches in the street. He will not break off a bent reed, nor put out a flickering lamp. He will persist until he causes justice to triumph, and on him all peoples will put their hope" (Mt 12:18—Is 42:1-4).

Good Muslims will tell you that the real meaning of *Jihad* is a 'struggle for peace'. They will even say that there is an inner *Jihad*, a spiritual struggle, leading to a 'conversion of heart' to God.

I do not deny that the work of evangelisation may be carried on in a hurtful manner. That is a study of culture is very important. In this paper I can no more than hint at certain areas where care may be required. It is clear that *constant vigilance and self-criticism are required when we are offering any kind of cross-cultural service*, whether it be in the field of education, health or social assistance. The work of evangelisation, like any other human service, can be handled wrongly.

The fact is that we are no more than limited human beings, and all that we do have the mark of human frailty. But we must not be discouraged. A mother, reaching out with love for her child, may not hold a degree in childcare. She may be at an imperfect task. But her services are required to sustain life, and for the continuity of the human race. Evangelisation is the central mission of the Church. It is that activity that keeps the Christian community alive and effective in serving the Lord and humanity. Apart from it, the Church ceases to be relevant, to have energies; she even ceases to exist. **Evangelisation represents God's loving kindness reaching out to every person** in human society through human agencies and **his caring concern for the whole of creation**. It is the hand of a loving friend stretched out in help; it is an encouraging and reassuring word from a brother/sister who cares. That is why the religious have a special role in this noble mission. It is a privilege to be called to assist in this work.

## Come into the Lives of People

The first thing to be done, if we are earnest about evangelisation, is to come into the lives of people. We cannot stand aloof and organize this important work from a distance. We may be able to keep a mighty organizational machine going by remote control, but that would be a lifeless structure. That is why some of our parishes and institutions have become lifeless. It is when things happen in this manner, that our works lack the vibrancy and energy of a living organism. They fail to grow, and they fail to yield the desired fruits.

We are amazed at the way that Jesus kept walking into the lives of people. He takes people by surprise. He enters into the lives of Andrew and Peter. James and John while they are busy fishing; he calls Levi from the tax-collector's desk; he summons Philip and Nathaniel on the wayside; he surprises Zacchaeus by inviting himself to his house. He is ever sensitive to the needs of people. He goes into the house of Peter and cures his mother-in-law. He calls up a man with a paralysed hand and cures him, unasked. He cleanses lepers, cures people of all kinds of diseases; he raises the dead. What stands out evident is his *keen interest in the other person: his warmth, his relationship*. It is not that he is offering help all the time, he asks for help too. He asks for a drink from the Samaritan woman. He seeks to stay with Zacchaeus. He relaxes at the house of Martha, Mary and Lazarus, He

dines with Simon the leper. He accepts invitation from Simon the Pharisee (Lk 7:36). He takes part in a wedding feast at Cana (Jn 2:1-2).

If you wish to be a good missionary, you must be involved in the lives of people. You will be happy to welcome people into your house, make **them** feel at home. You will be equally happy to visit them, enter into a dialogue with them, discuss matters of common interest; you will be interested in their children and their education, their fields and their crops, their economic problems and their uncertainties, their domestic tensions and their search for peace, their spiritual struggles and their religious aspirations. *Your conversation may move to deeper levels* and to areas of self-understanding, and the presence of God in their lives. It is at such moments that God reveals his face quite unexpectedly to new persons and communities. And miracles take place.

Among the more educated persons today you are likely to come across individuals who live by a philosophy of undefined pluralism, vague openness to everything, eclectic spirituality, inner ambiguity and indeterminism, preparedness for multiple religious-belonging, lack of enthusiasm about any form of organised religion, resistance to the establishment. Attitudes that we call post-modern were never absent in the Asian tradition. For one thing, Asian elite in general cannot be said to be secularised. There is an openness to the spiritual, though not to specific affiliations. However, simpler societies have less inhibitions, especially indigenous (tribal) communities and those of primal religions. And miracles do take place in unexpected areas. There was a sixfold increase of Christians in Wuan, North China, in less than a decade, 1996-2003 through the work of lay evangelists (Asia Focus, November 14, 2003). Incheon diocese in Korea witnessed a tenfold increase during the pastoral ministry of a single bishop (Asia Focus, May 10, 2002).

What is important is that we keep going out, not merely to new geographical areas, not only to new individuals and communities, but to new areas of human life and activities. We need to explore the 'frontiers' of every human thought, ambition and commitment, and **press the line that divides the possible from the impossible!** Yes, we should keep 'going'.

### **Remove barriers, Build bridges**

When you are initiating a work in a new place or coming into contact with a new community for the first time, some people may look hostile. But when you enter into dialogue with them, you realize that they are just ordinary people with ordinary human goals and ambitions. If you are planning some beneficial work in their area, you may be sure that they too are interested; they too want their place and their community to develop. However, they want to know what this 'outsider' is all about. You need to explain to them your intentions, associate yourself with the good they are already doing in the neighbourhood, recognize the role of the local leaders and keep up a stimulating dialogue with the local community as your work develops. There is a dialogue that is meant to solve the immediate problems. There is another form of dialogue oriented towards joining hands with people of different cultures and religions for the development of the local community and for the promotion of genuinely human values. There is still another type of *dialogue at a deeper level in search of what is true and good, ultimate sources of your inspiration and strength, with an eagerness to discover God present in various cultures and operative in various societies, and active in human hearts, with an openness to where he will lead us.*

Dialogue is a learning process. Francis of Assisi was deeply impressed with the prayer habits in Islamic society. Charles de Foucauld rediscovered his Christian faith in the Sahara living among his Muslim friends. But you also have an opportunity to share your own perception of truth, your own understanding of God and His plan for the wellbeing of the human race. Dialogue ultimately is about relationship, common commitment to what is good, not about argumentation, ideological subtleties. It is oriented towards a sense of mutual belonging which everyone is longing for (*a*).

---

(a) Having absolute respect for the faith of another person does not mean that you need to hold your convictions in abeyance during the dialogue. If dialogue partners had no convictions, they would cease to have identities, they would have nothing to offer. It is a person with deep convictions that recognises and respects another person with convictions. It is the genuine believer that recognises and respects another believer.

When you begin discussing with them more at length, you discover that their starting point is different from yours. Their mental makeup is not influenced by Aristotelian intellectual discipline, Thomistic theology, Catholic Catechetical tradition, or the type of spiritualities and metaphysical concepts that you have inherited from a Christian tradition. The words you use, especially about religious realities, have other connotations. The symbolisms you are familiar with may not evoke the same response. The hymns you sing may not stir the same religious sentiments. If you refer to the mass and other sacraments, they may remain nebulous realities to them. Some of the rules of the Church may appear to them arbitrary and unrelated to anything religious (e.g. Church contributions, records, regulations regarding marriage, etc.). Words like 'Catholic', 'Apostolic' have different meanings in the Catholic, Orthodox and Protestant traditions. Christian concepts of God and afterlife differ from those of our Hindu, Muslim and Buddhist brothers and sisters. A missiologist remembers how when "Lord have mercy" was translated into a dialect of Ghana, it sounded like "Lord be miserable"!! (a)

Some recent converts have seen a relationship between the Buddha's eightfold paths and the Beatitudes. Today what we need most are people who can build bridges between communities and their varying visions of realities. As the world is globalizing itself, we are becoming acutely conscious of the sharp differences of points of view, collective interests, political perceptions, cultural identities (in dialogue with the "*cultures of Asia*" as an earlier FABC document says), philosophical outlooks, civilizational mental slants. We need people who can interpret one to another, who can cross such barriers with ease, and help others to negotiate their way through the contradictory stands that people often take, and lead them to mutual understanding. We in Asia have to deal simultaneously with people of different religions (in dialogue with the different "*religions of Asia*").

### **Give attention to the Needs of individuals and communities Cultivate a Universal sense of Responsibility**

We said that Evangelisation represented God's loving kindness reaching out to individuals and communities. If this is so, the *evangeliser feels responsible for everyone and everything around him/her*. This sense of responsibility will lead him/her to enter into a vast variety of activities. What these activities ought to be can only be determined by the needs of the situation in the different areas of Asia. But attention to the needy is central to the mission of the Church (in dialogue with the "*poor of Asia*" as an earlier FABC document says). One should consider it the path to egolessness and to God, in the true Asian way. An evangeliser seeks to keep close to the suffering, the sick, the old, handicapped, prisoners, exiles, migrants, slum-dwellers, orphans. He/she comes to the help of alcoholics, drug-addicts, handicapped, school drop-outs, AIDS victims, TB patients, lepers, landmine victims. He enjoys this mysticism of generous service (becomes a true Karma Yogi).

---

(a) It is extremely important for an evangeliser working among the subaltern communities of Asia to understand folk-culture and be **sensitive to folk perception of religious mysteries**. The so-called scientific surveys and political mobilizations usually remain totally innocent of the potentiality of such realities. One must learn to enter into the world of myth and mystery among the indigenous (tribal) communities before one can communicate Christ. A recent study showed that belief in the spirits was popular among the young Japanese (Asia Focus, October 1, 2004), and that Shamanistic religiosity had a hold in Korea still. Social anthropology, more practical than theoretical, more functional than academic, ought to play a big role in his/her life. Religious psychology of communities will be equally important.

All theology was contextual in its origin. Further indigenisation in different contexts is important; but it should not be a mild form of the xenophobia and cultural nationalism that characterise many of our societies in our times.

Referring to culture's relationship to evangelisation, it has been suggested that the **inculturation model** would be more suitable for Asia and Africa, where cultures have been devalued and disparaged by anthropologists, and the **counter-cultural model** for Europe, where culture has departed from the Gospel (Bevans). The fact, of course, is that both attitudes are necessary in every place, with shades of differences to respond to each situation.

"Today, one third of (Asia's) population lives below poverty line....(900 million live on less than \$1 day). About half of Asia's poor are in India, with 450 million leading hand-to-mouth existence—that's 45% of the population. In China, 275 million people, or two out of 10 Chinese are poor. Because of the Asian Crisis, Southeast Asia saw more than 10 million of its people return to poverty, bringing the total number of the poor to 85 million—16% of the combined populations of ASEAN and Papua New Guinea" (Asiaweek, November 19, 1999, pp. 168-69).

As you will find individuals in special need, so you will also come across communities that are under undue stress. St. Francis Xavier came to the aid of fisher-folk who were being exploited, Fr. Lievens to the rescue of Chotanagpur tribals who were losing their land. Many ethnic minorities and *indigenous communities (tribals)* today are under great pressure: loss of land, weakening of identity, damage to culture, diminishment of dignity, alienation from tradition, sense of rootlessness, marginalization in society, lack of space in economy, a sense of being used by the powerful as a tool for their own ends. An evangeliser cannot remain indifferent before such a situation of helplessness among indigenous communities.

People crowding into the great cities of Asia call for attention and assistance. John Naisbitt says that *seven of the thirteen mega-cities in the world are in Asia*. These people, uprooted as they are from their own specific culture in the villages and being herded together into urban agglomerations, have a psychology of their own. Hungering for the solidarity that they miss, they tend to re-create a 'village' in their urban surroundings (*a*). In the same way, *Migrants* (some called 'illegal') in search of better fortunes, land up in similar situations of helplessness. They too seek solidarity and guidance. The evangeliser can help them in their effort to eke out an existence and struggle for justice. Political *refugees*, likewise, need encouragement and assistance. Then there are specific problems of individual countries, e.g. Cambodia has the problem of exploding landmines. It is said that there are in Asia more than 100,000 amputees and *disabled due to landmines*, and that 200 to 300 people fall victim every month. They need to be assisted and rehabilitated.

However, the evangeliser's intervention in behalf of communities differs from that of a mere social worker. He/she is conscious that it is God's loving kindness that is reaching out through him/her.

---

(a) None of the problems we experience in cities today is totally new to Christian experience. In fact, in early history, it was Christianity that courageously addressed some of the distressing situations in urban life. "Christianity revitalized life in Greco-Roman cities by providing new norms and new kinds of social relationships able to cope with many urgent urban problems..... To cities filled with newcomers and strangers, Christianity offered an immediate basis for attachments. To cities filled with orphans and widows, Christianity provided a new and expanded sense of family. ...And to cities faced with epidemics, fires, and earthquakes, Christianity offered effective nursing care", says Stark (Bevans 89). Curiously, some of the conversions took place among the *sicarii*, people engaged in urban violence, and among zealots, armed rebels against Rome (Irvin 15).

Among the other pressing needs that call for special attention in Asia are: peace initiatives in contexts of inter-ethnic and communal tensions; education to prejudice reduction; ecumenical collaboration; inter-religious dialogue and collaboration in local issues; building up the self-esteem and self-confidence of marginalized communities; activities of advocacy; assistance to neighbourhood schools and health centres that do not function properly; intervention for government efficiency; intervention against corruption, state violence, abuse of human rights, kidnappings, extortion; promotion of prisoners' rights; strengthening of civil society (contribution to a democracy that works!); defence of life, opposition to euthanasia; work for gender equality, struggle against abortion, female foeticide and infanticide, child marriage, dowry system, domestic violence, trafficking in women; care of unwed mothers and neglected children; service in schools, hospitals, old age homes, social centres, literacy centres, places of prayer; education to ecological concerns like deforestation, extermination of living species, pollution, disposal of toxic wastes, global warming, deterioration of the ozone layer; cleanliness drives; assistance to AIDS HIV patients; promotion of street children; assistance to physically and mentally challenged persons; counselling for those suffering from depression, victims of violence, persons who attempted suicide; literacy programmes, slum work, self-help groups, micro-financing schemes, economic empowerment; promotion of culture; encouragement to freedom struggle, anti-caste struggle, human rights struggle.

## **Developing Strategies and Plans, Media**

In this paper, my emphasis is on the spirit that should invest the entire effort for bringing the message of Jesus to people. I do not intend to go into the organizational dimension of announcing the Gospel through parish work, schools, hospitals, social work, etc. Specialized attention to catechists, teachers; services to women, family; mobilizing the services of associations, lay volunteers, SCC's; tapping the resources of youth who form two thirds of Asia's population; taking evangelisation to the universities, the world of sports, business, professions...these activities have great importance. Remembering that what thinkers, writers, artists, poets and other intellectuals think today, society will think tomorrow, it is most exciting for Evangelisers to dialogue with them; they will be able to address the Gospel to the collective psyche of a nation. Such mighty undertakings will call for an entry into the "linguistic, literary, scriptural, artistic, cultural and ideological heritage" of a nation, and interacting with the various dimensions of the national identity of one's country. It will include exploring the universal spiritual values inherent in various religious traditions and opening out to secular ideologies.

While I greatly appreciate the great role played by the media in sharing the Gospel: news agencies (like UCAN, SAR News), literature, correspondence course, Radio (like Radio Veritas), TV, Internet, I will have to leave the development of such themes to others. On-line evangelisation has been announced. Possibilities are enormous.

As those who exercise authority should exercise it with a sense of responsibility, as people who command material resources should administer things in the spirit of Christian stewardship, those who control media ought to have a great sense of responsibility to society as well. In an effort to give voice to the voiceless and to the dissenting person, one should not banish from public consciousness persons who guide the destinies of entire societies, or thoughts or events or images that stand for continuity while pointing to the future. Over-concentration on the rare and the exceptional may not contribute to the emergence of a balanced point view. Demonisation of people of other perspectives and promotion of polarisations are not helpful activities. Sensationalism in journalism, or in ideological or theological speculations may be a commercially effective, but can distort the vision of the readership. Ideas that de-motivate individuals and fragment societies cause damage. But on the contrary, the media can inform, educate, build up, heal, reconcile, and evangelise.

### **Building up a Future for people who suffer Injustice**

With all our proud boast of rapid development in parts of Asia, we notice that power and resources come speedily to be concentrated in the hands of a few. This happens in situations of state socialism, irresponsible capitalism, or monarchic/oligarchic rule. For the weaker sections in society, ethnic and religious minorities, life means a constant struggle against injustice under regimes that may be described as semi-military, civil-authoritarian, elitist-democratic, or majoritarian.

*But even in fighting for what is right, there is an evangelical style. God's justice is a justice that defends, not destroys. Zeal for justice that is not an expression of love can become an untamable monster. Denunciation that does not end with a word of blessing can prove to be effectively a curse. Severe criticism, even when well deserved, should have a touch of encouragement somewhere. Accusations will end well only if there are words of affirmation as well. True prophets are not inspired by anger, but by love. Gustavo Gutierrez, the father of Liberation Theology, says that if the task of the Church is denunciation, it is also annunciation.*

In our struggle for justice then, one form of collective selfishness is not fought with another form of equally selfish collective self-affirmation, but the spiritual energies that proceed from the 'mystical

blending' of strong self-assertion and claim for rights with gentle self-renunciation and eager concern for others; fierce loyalty to one's own community with radical commitment to the long term good of the larger society. So, to take a small example, Euro-centrism is not confronted by Indo-centrism or Sino-centrism or Asia-centrism, but by universal brotherhood/sisterhood.

A happy blending of what looks like opposites is neither impossible nor undesirable. It is generally considered a part of the Asian genius to harmonize opposites. It is the failure to work out a happy synthesis and attain a new harmony (*a*), a new balance in thought, that leads human processes to swing from one exaggeration to another, from one radical position to another. It was Paulo Freire who said, that, once liberated, the oppressed becomes an oppressor. The pendulum will keep swinging as long as there is a calculated imbalance on either side. One has to plant moderating influences into the mechanisms built up for pressing for one's rights or fighting for one's community's interests. Such an attitude springs from one's concern for others and firm confidence that the **future belongs to the 'victims of history'**.

The Beatitudes offer the most reliable assurance of better times to history's victims. Blessed are those who suffer ..... But when the victims seek to punish the oppressors too severely instead of entering into critical dialogue with him, and begin to act aggressively with the aggressor, 'the future' slips too fast from their hands in favour of the new victims of history. In other words, unless we work out a situation of '*stimulating harmony*' and usher in a '*culture of responsibility*' to each other, society will not take a single step forward. One group will keep dragging the other behind.

### **Tapping the Creativity that shows itself at the Periphery**

We are in search of creative and innovative ways of sharing the Gospel. Amazingly, in many areas of life, *creativity does not lie with the dominant groups or intellectual leaders, but with people at the margins of society*; not with the elite who are in search of fulfilment or suffer from hurt egos, but with the feebler groups who are striving for sheer existence and are serenely confident of their destinies; not with those who present ready-made answers, whose reflections are lost in stereotypes and worn-out jargon, but with those who are contending with actual human problems in real life with their multi-faceted manifestations; not with those who are rule-bound and contended with established patterns of functioning, but with those who take risks and venture out in new directions; not with those who place all their trust in their abundant resources and limitless resourcefulness, but with those who simply fall back on God.

When engaged in justice-struggle, one need to remember that the *creativity of the poor is expressed most of all not in anger and aggressiveness, but in forgiveness and faith*. It is the ability to forgive

---

(*a*) Apparent paradoxes that confront human existence should be harmonized: "transcendence and immanence, emptiness and fullness, death and life, suffering and joy, the finite and the infinite, poverty and riches, the temporal and the eternal, the historical and the cosmic" (Relatio ante Disceptationem , *L'Osservatore Roman*, April 17-29, 1998,9); justice and peace, proclamation and silence, claiming and renouncing one's rights, giving and receiving forgiveness.

The superiors general gathered in Rome in November 2004 on the theme "Passion for Christ, Passion for humanity" felt that in order that such attitudes may be developed, •"Humanity needs to meet men and women who are moved passionately in the mystical dimension of life, who know how to hear the voice of silence, who are in contact with the flow of existence common to all, and whose word resonates with their life in God. The world needs to see living persons, who assume the sentiments of Jesus Christ in daily life (Phil 2:5). and are witnesses through justice, peace, pardon, mercy, tenderness, freedom, beauty, gratitude, solidarity, meekness, love..." (Vita Consecrata 27, as quoted in Religious Life: Asia October-December 2004, pg. 25). There is therefore need of "a new spirituality that integrates the spiritual and the corporal, the feminine and the masculine, the personal and the communal, the natural and the cultural, the temporal and the eschatological, and is with us in all our living and doing". (Religious Life: Asia, October-December 2004 pg.6). "Consecrated life must preserve its identity and irreducibility even as far as finding itself in a paradox (Ibid pg. 19)

that enhances the personhood of diminished persons, invests them with special dignity, and equips them with a sense of equality with even the mightiest powers on earth. The cry of the poor is not a war-cry spurred on by social activists, but the expression of a spiritual hunger, of trust and confidence in the One Who, they know, will intervene in their behalf without fail. It is the creativity of the poor that gives new directions to human history. Arnold Toynbee in his voluminous '*A Study of History*' continuously refers to the creative contribution of the poor ('internal proletariat' as he calls them) in the field of religion and the growth of civilization.

Indeed, we need to discuss, as we do today, concepts and approaches related to Evangelisation, Dialogue, Inculturation, organization of health and education, struggle for justice and similar topics. But creativity will reveal itself only in concrete situations: a missionary trying out new ways of sharing the Gospel with amazing results, with no precedent, no sophisticated equipments or methods, no elaborate plans or training; a local Christian team achieving unforeseen results in the area of justice, development, reconciliation, or peace. We can only encourage the initiators of such ventures, learn from their experiences, and propose worthy models for imitation. Even so, some will always remain inimitable.

Cultural diversity itself is a source of creativity. Young people think up more new ideas than those whose thoughts have begun to freeze. Women have a unique style of innovating. "Outsiders" present fresh points of view. Enthusiasm about the goals stirs new thinking. Information about the success of recent creative ventures stimulates further creativity.

### **Call people to the Central Concerns of Humanity Give attention to the Core Values of Religious Faith**

Whatever great service you render to society in the material order, people are touched ultimately only by the respect you show to their person, to their dignity. They may admire your efficiency or financial sturdiness, but they are moved only when you manifest the ability to lead and guide them along life's uncertain ways to humanity's nobler ideals. They will go with you when they see that you are not lost in the midst of theologies, ideologies, structures, laws, traditions, practices; that you do not absolutize your pet theories or devotions or favourite programmes; but that you have at heart central human concerns: *justice and peace, mercy, love and forgiveness, family values so typical of Asia, neighbourhood relationships, honesty and uprightness in a corrupt society, sincerity and authenticity, solidarity and generosity, faith and prayerfulness, respect for life and concern for the poor and a profound sense of responsibility for human affairs*. These are virtues that have a universal appeal, they provide us with the language everyone understands, they have a marvellous motivating power.

When we divert too far from these central concerns, we are moving on unsure grounds, no matter how well motivated we may look. As soon as we are aware of the distance that has grown between us and these core concerns of humanity, we must hasten to return. Jesus himself severely rebuked the leaders in Israel who allowed people to bypass their obligations to care for their parents by having recourse to pious-looking religious legalism. or to get rid of a spouse adhering to the letter of the law.

It is equally important that even,- form of religious fervour keeps referring back to the central concerns of religious faith: *encounter with God, repentance, sacrifice, renunciation, faith, fidelity, prayer experience, authenticity, love*. If we are not careful, we may be lost in the midst of theologies, argumentations, social struggles, fashionable trends of the day and even a multitude of devotions, and find ourselves distant *from true God experience, spiritual depth, Christian authenticity, earnest religious search, transparent charity, genuine zeal, spiritual unction, evangelical persuasiveness*.

## V. The Religious Person in the field of Evangelisation in Asia

*If God-quest is the central goal of religious life in itself pointing to God is a related obligation. It is the absolute joy of the Evangeliser to speak about God and his wonderful plan for the ultimate good of his people. That is what Asians expect from a religious teacher.*

### **Have answers for those who ask Serious Questions**

In spite of an apparent appetite for superficial things in life (money, pleasures, excitement, continuous change), humanity has not lost taste for something more serious: *something deeper in meaning, higher in destiny*. That is precisely the area where religious persons are expected to be specially competent. If you know how to come on the wavelength of individuals and communities, you win a hearing. Speak of something that touches their lives closely, no matter how serious the topic, there will be listeners. Even as some seek distance from such messages because of their own superficiality, others draw close. Even in the very rejection of the transcendent by some, you will notice a hunger for the invisible in their deeper selves.

The age of religion is not over, it is just beginning. When people give up formal religious practices, reject excessively organized religion, and go for religious experiences and devotional thrills, they are not giving up religion; they are only manifesting their *religious earnestness and spiritual hunger for what constitutes the core concern of religion*. Unconsciously they are also exposing the lack of authenticity and seriousness in too many of our religious practices. Give these practices and traditions depth, meaning and relevance, and people will return. They will rush back when they actually find genuineness and true encounter with God in our traditional observances. Asian pilgrimage places are crowded. New temples and mosques keep coming up.

Lengthy discussion about the uniqueness of Christ, opinions for and against the theology of 'outside the Church there is no salvation', 'demythologisation' etc. can be totally irrelevant to a dialogue between a Searcher and an Evangeliser. Quite independent of the theological discussion about the uniqueness of Christ, it is precisely his 'uniqueness' that draws people to the faith. He remains a compelling figure in all human history. His words hold you by their power, and stun you into a new realization of reality. We should never be hesitant to present the person of Christ to people. It is he who gives meaning to everything Christian.

There is something like '**faith language**'. An average Muslim believes that there is no salvation outside Islam. For a Krishna devotee, Krishna is everything. For a devout Buddhist, everything is destined to Buddhahood. A Christian does not look on other people's faith as a threat, but as a resource. Genuine believers in other religions look to Christian faith statements with respect. It is the politically motivated person that objects sharply to faith statements of others. It is the secularly motivated religious person that hastens to apologize for his faith.

### **People search for Depth, admire Renunciation**

In Asia, we are not living in a secularised world, but in a society that takes religion seriously. It is not a 'death-of-God' theology that is gaining ground here, but 'God-is-alive' conviction. What we have to struggle against is not godlessness, but the misuse of religion for political and partisan purposes. Our task is not to plant faith in human hearts, (it is already there), but to channel people's faith-fed energies towards human growth the way Jesus did. For, this, we point the Jesus way. For he is the Way, the Truth and the Life.

In order to be able to do this we need to be people of deep faith. It is in this area that the religious can be experts. But it happens that when an inquirer comes to an Evangeliser, he is surprised to find that the bearer of so profound a message is totally lacking in depth: depth as a person, depth in

conversation, depth in relationships, depth in understanding God's word, depth in relationship with God. Some evangelisers are lost in administration, some in debates over concepts, and some in self-display. Where is the man of God, the inquirer asks. Where is the committed person?

Certainly, one universally accepted trait of a committed person in Asia is a measure of renunciation. In Eastern cultures, this is considered the touchstone of the genuineness of a man of God. *Silence, self-possession, calm inner serenity, gentleness, quiet joy, humble service, respectful approach to persons and traditions*—these and many other qualities are expected in the lives of 'God-realized persons'. How else would you describe the religious? Even the busiest missionary must make space, like Mother Teresa, for contemplative closeness to God.

Tagore sang, "Fill my mind with the music to last through the desert of noise".

As religious persons, we need to take our religious life seriously. Soon after the Vatican Council, congregations were updating themselves and redimensioning their communities. The questions they were asking were about time-tables, structures, relaxation of rules, extension of freedoms, etc. Today the religious are asking far profounder questions: what is religious life? What do people of all races and religious faiths expect from persons who are fully given to their religion (consecrated, dedicated persons, sanyasins, monks, religious professionals)? If they expect *spiritual depth, religious seriousness, detachment, apartness, sacrifice*, there is no way of bypassing these without renouncing our identity. It is no more a question of negotiating with Rome, mobilizing opinions within chapters and councils or bulldozing some religious authority. It is a question of accepting or denying one's religious identity before Asian society.

### **Announcing the Message through Symbols Becoming ICONS of God's love for his people**

The religious are the prophets of our age, and visionaries of the future. It is by becoming ICONS of God's love for his people, that we become true to this great mission. There is something unique about *Icons*. They *speak to the collective unconscious of communities. They speak to illiterates. They speak to the masses. They speak to poetically sensitive persons.* They speak to religiously open people. They influence culture at a very deep level. They address the Gospel to the human psyche (a). That is why the Icon of Mother Teresa was unbelievably intelligible and acceptable to the Indian masses. That is why too John Paul II has emerged as a meaningful and appealing icon in our days. Gandhi was similarly an icon to millions of Indians. The innumerable martyrs that Asia has produced are the Icons of the evangelical boldness and fidelity of our ancestors. The religious who propose to live the message of the Gospel to a radical measure will most eloquently announce the message by allowing themselves to grow into becoming icons of God's love for his people.

Images mean much to a society in which non-verbal communication has the privileged place, where non-argumentative sharing is the more desirable mode of communication in the area of religion. We Asians are specially gifted in communicating through images. Mahatma Gandhi was a wizard at image-creation: the loin cloth, the spinning wheel, the salt march, inter-faith meetings, stay among the humbler caste people, periods of silence....all these had powerful symbolic meaning that appealed to the Indian population. He stirred millions of inert and passive crowds to action as few people in history have ever done. It was from the Jain and Hindu traditions that Mahatma Gandhi

---

(a) Scholars speak of communications that are pre-verbal, epiverbal, subverbal and nonverbal (Rhetoric in Intercultural Contexts, ed. Alberto Gonzalez, Dolores, V. Anno, International & Intercultural Communications Annual, 1999, Vol XXII—Sage Publications, Thousand Oaks, 2000). Asians generally prefer a non-argumentative approach to matters related to religion. The Chinese often say, "We do not argue" (Ibid 59).

drew his inspiration for symbols, while often giving a Christian message. In fact, Hinduism communicates and propagates itself more through the use of symbols than catechisms and creeds: feasts, fasts, figures, numbers, colours, sacred rivers, cleansing dip, holy mountains, hallowed trees, forms of asceticism.

When Mao said that half the heavens were held up by women, the meaning was powerfully clear. Or, when Deng said that it did not matter whether the cat was white or black as long as it caught mice, he was clearly emphasizing the unimportance of the Communist system in preference to the Capitalist, as long as the prosperity of the people could be ensured.

Jesus spoke in pictures: light, salt, lamp, net, coin, mustard seed, fig tree, living water, straying sheep. The Church too uses images in educating people in the faith: water, fire, oil, ashes, candle, change of colours, the use of art, architecture, stained glass windows.

Reformation ushered in an era of the 'Culture of the Word' in the West (Wessels 162). Statues, paintings and many other religious images were banished from places of worship, and practices and observances from Christian life. Subsequent success of precise sciences only went to strengthen this trend and build up an over-confidence in the power of the 'word'. Greek philosophy had already been inclined in that direction. But with the popularity of the TV in modern times, we are returning to an era of images once again. And we have seen how media images speak, influence minds, change mentalities, transform cultures and revolutionize entire societies, even of the most educated communities living in the most developed regions of the world. Images can ensnare, enslave or empower people. While the TV and other visual media can mislead and confuse, they can also become 'narrative theologians'. The best textbooks are not grievance-ridden and ideologically loaded theological discussion and social disputations, but "the living works of artists who are connected to the sources of fantasy" (Ibid 184) (a).

---

(a) "The ultimate mystery can certainly be presented better in the symbols of myths than the concepts of thought", says Hans Jonas (Wessels 176). Emerson once said, "I would rather live in a world where my life is surrounded by mystery than live in a world so small that my mind can comprehend it". 'Myth' produces a sense of awe, gratitude, wonder, ecstasy. 'Myth' in this sense is not an object of knowledge, but a category of knowledge. It corresponds to "the subtle and direct language of experience, and re-enacts moments of signal truth with its haunting universality." It is the symbol of a higher reality with "archetypal significance". "The Christian revelation did not destroy the matrices of human imagination but made use of them and added a new value to them" (Ibid 179).

James Russel makes the curious statement that the Western Church did not replace paganism, but was merely Germanized, with its magico-religious orientation (Bevans 135). If German Christians took ideas from Hellenistic Christian world, they took their attitudes from the Germanic primal world (ibid 135), to be corrected by the Reformation and Counter-Reformation. But when demythologisation goes too far, there are consequences.

With the abolition of 'myths' and images in a secularised modern society, the silenced and suppressed human unconscious has begun to express itself in bewildering forms of modern art, literature, music, films (Ibid 181); religious aberrations, experimentations with new creeds and esoteric religious experiences, strange life-styles and weird self-garbing. It may be unwise to put Talibans, Falun Gongs, Bajrang Dais in the same list, but it is worth a thought.

It will be important to study the various forms of native movements, ethnic self-assertions and religious radicalism (often described as fundamentalist) that have come up in Asia recently. These need to be studied not with the mind-set of a casual journalist or secularised social scientist, but with the concern and sympathy of a fellow Asian and the penetrating perception of a social psychologist. For, native movements generate strength; the energy hidden there can be tapped for positive purposes. But they can go awfully wrong too. It will be only Asians who are rooted in their culture that will succeed to handle them. Why are the Chinese authorities more afraid of the apparently harmless Falun Gong groups than the highly motivated Human Rights activists? The former appeal to the psyche of indigenous communities, while the latter touch only the country's westernised fringe-group. Why was the fatwa of Khomeini against Salmon Rushdie more dreadful than threat from social radicals? Because one has roots in ancient cultural traditions and deep religious loyalties, the other are built on acquired convictions of recent origin. Why did the 'self-respect movement' of Periyar gather momentum and broaden into an all-India dalit struggle today, while the Naxalite movement maintains merely a token existence in certain limited areas of India? The first has touched the

## Making of our Works Symbols of Transcendent Realities

All the services we render will have value only if they point to something beyond themselves. We should not rejoice solely in the number of children we educate, or the sick people we heal, or the social goals we achieve. Can all these visible achievements be made symbols of invisible realities and reminders of abiding truths? Can they be made to speak of, teach, describe and point to something beyond the 'visible', to things more than what can be counted and measured and calculated? Can they be made images of his abiding love, his forgiving mercy, his reconciling initiative, his healing touch, his transforming message?

We are accustomed to evaluating our works in terms of their calculable results, not for their 'sign-value'. But in the final analysis, it is the sign-value that makes the difference (*a*). Jesus' works of healing and feeding pointed beyond the immediate benefit they conferred. He explained the significance of what he had done through the spoken word. It was after he had opened the eyes of the blind man that he spoke of himself as the Light of the World. It was after he had fed the crowds that he referred to himself as the Bread of Life. The 'word' explained the 'image', and the image stood for the word. If our work of education, health and social transformation has no sign-value, it has lost its purposefulness; it is a soul-less service. If it does not speak of something beyond itself and its immediate goals, it lacks life and pointedness. The visible targets must be transcended. It is the sign-value that makes the difference in the long run. Someone has said, it is only when we begin to look beyond the visible goals that the visible goals themselves may be meaningfully attained.

A religious person who is a social worker witnesses to God's caring love for his people; a doctor or a nurse to his healing touch. Persons belonging to different cultures living and praying together in a religious community witnesses to the unity of humankind and to its eternal destinies; it is a sign of God's presence and action in the world that cannot be resisted; it translates the Gospel into life and writes its achievements into human history. The religious, by their very authentic life, are powerful evangelisers even in the midst of the greatest obstacles. They are like a city set on a hill that cannot be hid. They are like a lamp placed on a lampstand. They constitute what may be called a "living image". Anthony Wessels calls such a 'living image' the Fifth Gospel (Wessels 184), especially when it uses the language of love (Ibid 194) as Mother Teresa did.

According to some studies, those Churches, at the service of a mere 'social Christianity' in certain countries of the world, went on the way to decline, once their social goals were attained. In fact, those who rejected the Churches first were precisely those who had benefited most from the Churches' social programmes. On the other hand, those Churches

---

deeper self of communities and appealed to their collective psyche, while the second is of alien inspiration, and, though it is a powerful tool in the hands social activists, it sits ill-at-ease on the collective unconscious of the same communities. Why do the different movements of indigenous (tribal) communities find sustaining strength and provide on-going stamina to their activists? Because they have been launched to defend the identities of their communities and directly appeal to their collective psyche.

In trying to root concepts like human rights and democracy into the soil of Asia, it is essential that we search for corresponding native values and traditions, onto which they should be grafted. As long as they are treated as alien concepts, they will remain for us pieces of 'borrowed equipment'.

(*a*) A document of the Congress on Consecrated Life held in Rome, "Passion for Christ, Passion..." says, "....It is normal to insert ourselves into the dynamism of creation, of society and history', by living together with other human beings, with the flora and the fauna, also through our own work. It is normal to be a citizen with all the duties and responsibilities. It is normal to associate with other citizens for the development of society and creation. When we live all these realities from the perspective of the Christian faith, everything continues being the same, but with a different inspiration. Everything continues being the same, but from the perspective of a mystic which dignifies everything and enriches it with transcendent and eschatological meaning" ( Religious Life: Asia, October-December 2004, pg. 43). "Clearly you are a letter of Christ which I have delivered, a letter not written with ink but by the Spirit of the living God...." (2 Cor 3:3).

that offered a 'pastoral Christianity', i.e., those that offered the element of 'mystery' in their life and organization, while not neglecting the community's social needs, continued to grow. They served social goals, but they pointed beyond to the human beings' eternal destinies. These findings offer us many lessons. Those who instrumentalize religion for personal advantage, ideological pursuit or political advancement, debase what is best in human life. Those who limit it to merely a secular service, with no further purposefulness, are at an incomplete task. Voltaire once said that he would gladly recommend religion to his wife so that she might remain faithful, and to his butcher and grocer so that they might remain honest. Is that all to religion? Is there not further a mystic element, and an encounter with the ultimate?

### **Ability for Personal Encounter, Personal Relationships**

Services in the field of education, health, development, social change—these are all possible contexts of encounter. Unless a genuine encounter between the Evangelizer and the person(s) to be evangelised takes place, the service bears no fruit. This encounter cannot be mechanized or made in an impersonal way through mass contact, e.g. TV appeals, though such contacts can serve as a starting point. What is important is that the Spiritual Enquirer be exposed to the living faith of the Believer, not to a lifeless list of doctrines, opinions, rules, practices. A personal encounter makes all the difference.

It is through frequent interactions, close collaboration in common endeavours, or through the sharing of ideas and ideals that relationships are built up, friendship fostered and faith communicated. The evangelizer is the 'universal brother' (sister) of whom *Redemptoris Missio* speaks. This universal brother must reach out in sympathetic understanding, human warmth and caring love. There is no doubt that persons who are able to make *warm, intense, personal contact, and are capable of deep and lasting relationships*, work great missionary miracles. Warmth kindles warmth, trust generates trust, concern stimulates concern....and faith gives birth to faith.

An atmosphere for such personal encounters can be created in Christian institutions through the rich and judicious use of Christian symbolisms: the cross, statues and paintings, inscriptions from Scriptures. A prayer-room or chapel invites people to closeness to God. A Counselling or spiritual guidance centre offers them a chance to seek spiritual assistance. But there is no substitute for informal friendly meeting with students, parents, patients, visitors and casual passers-by.

### **Searching for Relevance**

The question we pose is not therefore whether the Gospel has something to offer the people of our times, but how we may make it intelligible and acceptable; how it can be made to address the problems of the day and point to greater human possibilities. It is said that the reason for the success of Lincoln's 'Gettysburg Address' and Kennedy's inaugural speech was that they summed up the nation's feelings and reflected the people's mood at a given time. The Gospel needs to be addressed to a people (tribe, caste, community, ethnic group, society) in a way that it responds to its needs, aspirations, and longings in a particular period of history. And then indeed the message truly comes alive. Such an announcement of the Gospel is not merely a matter of academic excellence, oratorical or demagogic skill, but the right interpretation of history, correct understanding of the era in which one lives, an ability to re-interpret such an understanding for the specific area where one works, a firm grasp of the diverse social trends and conflicting forces at work, a sober search for one's role in this complex situation. Over-simplified, ideology-laden, jargon-loaded answers can only mislead (a).

---

(a) What causes anxiety in the society in which we live are not merely economic and demographic problems, but a situation of on-going moral decline, cultural aggressiveness, political disunity, social divisiveness so visible among our communities. People speak of the hijacking of democracy, 'the tyranny of democracy', corruption-run democracy, majoritarianism that ignores minority communities, and violent minorities that hold the larger public to ransom, state terrorism. In an age when entire systems collapse, ethical principles vanish from public life and violence becomes entrenched in society, can we work out a new consensus on commonly held values that will contribute to the survival of humanity? Will we subordinate faith convictions and universally accepted human values to immediate political advantages, or economic interests, or constantly changing ideological goals? It is in trying to answer such complex questions that the Gospel message has something to offer. T.S. Eliot has a powerful way of expressing the idea. "Even now in sordid particulars the eternal design may appear" (T.S. Eliot. Murder in the Cathedral).

Evangelisation in our times should go therefore beyond mere routine preaching, repetition of platitudes, and denunciation of what evidently stands condemned. These are no doubt necessary, but not sufficient. Offering the Gospel today should include *exerting a moral influence on society in such a way that it feels challenged to revise its basic assumptions, review its value-system, remodel its living norms, and reorganize its self-improvement energies according to certain universally acceptable codes of human behaviour*. Any conscientization, 'organization of the oppressed', or struggle for justice that does not contribute significantly to this form of cultural regeneration, reaffirmation of moral values, recognition of the need for greater transparency, resistance to a culture of death, fostering a sense of mutual belonging and mutual concern will not be found adequate.

Moral authority is founded on the social legitimacy built up through our commitment to the common good. John Paul II was a wonderful example of that in our times.

## Searching for God

We notice a gap constantly widening between religion and irreligion. Here we are not speaking of legitimate forms of secularism. We rather are referring to a form of slavish consumerism, a soulless materialism and a type of Ego-centrism that seeks to crush out the 'Other' from existence. Before this Spiritless and 'Other'-less vision of life and realities, every form of religion is under threat. It promises to spare no faith, or philosophy, or ethical code, or society or civilization. That is why every religion, and consequently every civilization, is in crisis today.

The future polarizations will not be between religions as Hans Kung argues; not between civilizations as Samuel Huntington contends; but between those who promote the human spirit and those who seek to put it out. Beginning with a healthy and legitimate form of secularism, large segments of human society are becoming totally alienated from anything that has reference to religious faith. If Asian society is not moving in that way, Asian elite is strongly tempted in that direction. The human spirit seems to find no recognition in the modern secularised society, and one seems to be vainly searching to place the foundations of a morally sound society somewhere. The barrenness of materialism and self-seeking nihilism do not offer any hope. "*If men thought of God as much as they think of the world, who would not attain salvation?*" asked an ancient Indian (Maitri Upanishad 6:24).

A time is coming when believers in religion will need to join hands together to preserve and strengthen their faith in God and *promote those values that will sustain the human spirit*. They will have to keep supporting an on-going struggle against the forces of irreligion which are trying to establish their dominance over human history. During this struggle, it will become evident, one will need to contend with totally secularised perspectives even within the ranks of the religious, persons in religion's service, and in one's own heart. Hence, struggle within one's own ranks and conflict within one's own heart!

Social scientists do not believe that Asia is on the way to total secularisation. However, there is the danger of the rise of a type of religious fervour with no reference to ethical behaviour and social commitment.

For one thing, criticism of religion by secular critiques purifies our understanding of religion, rids us of superstition and collective egoism. And criticism of Christianity by persons of other persuasions (and from within) purifies the Christian society. Only those with the highest motives and firmest faith will endure. But having been purified inwardly, they will become irresistible witnesses to the Truth and convincing announcers of the Gospel. Such persons will truly be the *God-experienced messengers that Asia is waiting for*. They will be sharing realities that they have personally experienced at the depths of their hearts. They will repeat with John, "something which has existed since the beginning, that we have heard, and we have seen with our own eyes; that we

have watched and touched with our hands; the Word, who is life—this is our subject..... What we have seen and heard we are telling you so that you too may be in union with us, as we are in union with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ" (1 Jn 1-3). And they will carry the world before them!

## VI. Presenting Christ

We do not intend to deny the difficulties that the Evangeliser experiences in Asia. The word 'conversion' has acquired a negative connotation in many countries on this continent. Not rarely people associate the word with a change of religion under duress, deceit or enticement. We know that genuine conversion is something different. However, if this word or any other gives offence, we should opt for other expressions. Nonetheless, it is legitimate to claim, on the one hand, the right to choose one's religion, and on the other, the freedom to share one's faith.

The fiercest opposition to such claims is likely to come from those who have an ethnic notion of religion. Some countries in Asia manifest this tendency. A universal religion, like all truly human ideals, knows no boundaries. No nation or ethnic group that respects human freedom has ever attempted to interfere in the religious choice of members. It is the most personal of all choices. Compared with political, economic, or cultural options, it is the most sacred of all rights.

There have been many instances of harassment of Christians in different countries of Asia in recent times: burning of Bibles, churches, imposition of specific attire, anti-conversion laws, beating up of preachers, and even murder (India). Government has passed laws and imposed restrictions: blasphemy laws (Pakistan), religious regulations (China, Vietnam) There have been re-conversion drives by the extremist elements among the majority community using force and offering enticements.

It is not true that a missionary spirit is proper of Christianity only and that it is a sign of intolerance. Every universal religion has had among its chief traits the desire to share its message with the whole of humanity. The Rig Veda said, "This message ensuring the ultimate good has to be conveyed to all men". The Buddha ordered, "Go you now, monks, for the benefit of many, for the welfare of mankind, out of compassion for the world. Preach the doctrine which is glorious in the beginning, glorious in the middle, and glorious in the end". The Koran instructed, "And we do not send the messengers but as bearers of good tidings and warners. And whoso shall believe and amend, there is no fear on them nor shall they grieve. But whoso shall charge our communications with falsehood, on them shall fall a punishment of their wicked things" (Koran VI,48,49). So with other religions. It is quite unfair to say that Christianity alone believes in self-propagation.

Something amazing happens when people are confronted with God's word (*a*). How it touches human hearts remains always a mystery. It transforms the lives of people.

---

(*a*) If chosen passages from the Bible are made available to people, if notice-boards, picture cards, wall posters, printed leaflets, dance songs, dramatized stories carry God's word in attractive forms, somewhere someone will be touched. You will find from experience how great Jesus' words are, how stunning his images.

It is important to place art at the service of the Gospel. "Art and beauty are icons of all cultures; artists help the communities of consecrated life fight against a consumerist mentality, create beautiful spaces for prayer, find new symbols to tell new stories to the hearts of the men and women who listen" (Congress on Consecrated life, Passion for Christ..., Religious Life: Asia, October-December 2004). Encourage the communication of the Christian message through art. The world can be won for God only by beauty, not arguments. Search for beauty in its billion forms, and place it at the service of God's message. Religious art teaches. Religious dance communicates. Music evangelises. We should always encourage musicians and composers to carry God's word to the depths of human hearts.

## **The Unique figure of Christ**

Of late, there is a growing anxiety in the mind of some Christian believers that, while Christ's teaching about human brotherhood is welcome in Asia, his unique person is an obstacle. Such a fear is largely entertained by those who have never had a lived experience of presenting Christ to a Searcher. We are absolutely certain that the person of Christ is not an obstacle, but the most attractive force and the most inspiring figure on the continent of Asia. Is he not the most eminent of Asia's children?

The problem is not actually with the image of Christ itself. Difficulties may arise from other areas. There may be unhealed colonial memories of historic injuries received from countries that are considered Christian. There may be perceptions of political and economic threats from such nations even today. Such perceptions certainly need to be considered carefully. In fact, it is part of the evangeliser's mission to heal the memories of historic injuries within the society in which he lives. Forgiveness is the only path to the future. However, what is significant for us to realize is that there is no aversion to Christ himself and what he stands for.

Anyone who has the experience of sharing the Faith knows that arguing about the uniqueness of Christ is an idle exercise. Bringing theological contentions to the ardent Searcher only dampens his or her enthusiasm. Persons at the service of the Gospel must stop being wranglers and keep away from sterile apologetics. Let us present Christ as he really is, as he is presented in the Scriptures. That is sufficient. Let them find out for themselves. Let them be the judges. "Come and see", Jesus said to the disciples of John the Baptist (Jn 1:39). Know for yourselves: Christ, his life, his love, his gracious words, his help, his healings, the style of his dealings, the rare way he accepts sufferings, the unique manner in which he gives up his life. Forgiving! Is he not unique? If not, who is!

Asians of different religions have painted the figure of Christ, composed poems, written novels, acted in dramas, produced films, interpreting his personality and message with skills that amaze the Christian believer. They have acted as though Christ belonged to them. He does. Christ belongs to all.

Veteran evangelisers in Asia tell us that certain evangelical approaches are in bad taste: arguments in general; going across cultures and 'convicting people of sin'; aggressive evangelistic crusades and campaigns; claims of numbers. In the same way, we must be cautious of over-using certain images, even when they are theologically correct. The justice of the Father that calls for the shedding of the blood of an innocent victim looks unfair to many searchers. On the contrary, Jesus' love and compassion that led him to the uttermost sacrifice is inspiring. The offering of his blood as a drink is a terrible thought. The gift of his life for the redemption of humankind is far more intelligible. Miracles do not make an impression on communities that are already over-credulous of wonders performed by their holy men and their deities. But the teachings of Jesus always make Asians sit up in amazement. They treasure his words. Indeed, "Nobody has ever talked the way this man does" (Jn 7:48). Is he not unique?

## **The Definitive Opting for Christ is always a Miracle**

We are living through troubled times. Nations are in conflict, societies keep breaking up, ethnic groups collide, disrespect for traditional ethical values is mounting, and old points of references are fast vanishing. There is uncertainty, confusion, despair, but also, thank God, expectancy. God is 'shaking the nations once more'. The hour has come again for the Gospel. People are looking for God's powerful intervention in human history and his reconciling Word. There is a growing hunger for God, of which many Christian thinkers and pastors are little aware. New religious movements, rebirth of traditional religions, and emergence of new forms of spiritualities (related to ecology, tribal traditions, indigenous identities, healing, esoteric experiences) are telling us something. Religious leaders are waiting with improved ideas and programmes, with mission statements and vision statements, but unfortunately not with God. Would that they would develop the unique skill

to offer God's transforming message to a God-hungry world! That can best be done by a team of God-intoxicated persons: the religious.

To *decide to whom to whisper the Gospel directly*, when and how to do it, whom to invite to a definitive choice and decision .....is a spiritual skill an evangeliser should daily pray for. Asia's soul awaits this message!

A definitive choice of Christ is always a wonder. It is nothing short of a miracle. How it happens no one can tell. But it happens. It happens through you and me. It happens in spite of me ..... and yet, it happens through me too. I have an irreplaceable role in this divine economy. If I fail, that God-given role will not be fulfilled. No one else can fulfil the task assigned precisely to me. May the Lord enable me to discover that irreplaceable role. May he enable all of us to do so. "Do great things for us, O Lord, for you are mighty, and holy is your name".

*Bevans, Stephen B. & Schroeder, Roger, P., Constants in Context, Orbis, Maryknoll, 2004*

*Irwin Dale T. & Sunquist, Scott IV., History of the World Christian Movement, TPI, Bangalore, 2004*

*O'Murchu, Diarmuid, M.S.C., Religious Life: A Prophetic Vision, Ave Maria Press, Indiana, 1991*

*Palmer, Martin, The Jesus Sutras, Ballantine Publishing Group, New York, 2001*

*Schneiders, Sandra M., Finding the Treasure, Paulist Press, New York, 2000*

*Wessels, Anthony, Europe: Was it ever Christian?, SCM press, London, 1994*

---

(1) Sandra Schneiders shows how many religious have hooked their boats on to ideologies that have collapsed. She says, "Anthropocentrism, individualism, consumerism, masculinism, materialism, scientism, progressivism and much of the rest of the modern heritage is socially, politically, and morally bankrupt" (Schneiders 116). She adds, "Religious have found themselves without theological resources for dealing with the emerging questions. Religious are not alone in this theological wilderness. The 'death of God' controversies in the 1950's, the liberation and process theologies arising in the 1960's, the feminist theological challenges of the 1970's, the ecological and inter religious problematics of the 1980's and 1990's have kept professional theologians struggling with a constantly lengthening agenda confronted through an epistemological and methodological kaleidoscope in which the pieces never assume the same position twice" (Ibid 147). Again, "Ad hoc spiritualities, often pieced together from elements borrowed from Eastern religions, decontextualized Native American practices, New Age philosophies, and therapeutic techniques did not seem to need the theological foundation or communitarian framework that traditional religion had. Generation X is a kind of incarnation of this rather rootless approach to life as a moment-by-moment invention of coping strategies that make no claims to validity beyond their aesthetic appeal and pragmatic efficacy" (Ibid 148). "Communities struggled over Eucharist, inclusive language, innovative forms of prayer, times and places for prayer, common retreats, and even art and music. Nothing pleased most people even some of the time. Desperate for spiritual nourishment, many religious found themselves in a virtual desert no matter where they turned and what they tried" (Ibid 173).

(2) Sandra Schneiders asks, "How, for example, are religious related to their obvious analogues in other religions such as Buddhist or Hindu monastics or Islamic Sufis?" (Schneiders xiv). She claims that monasticism arises "from the constellation of a human archetype across time, in many cultures and in both genders, which has given rise to both eremitical and cenobitical forms of monasticism in virtually all the great literate religious traditions" (Ibid xxiii). We notice some form of radical living of religious values in every culture and ethnic group that we know in history. Despite differences, it always tends "to be a lifestyle of simplicity and austerity, of prayer and devotion, and frequently an apostolic commitment to the poor..." (O'Murch 33). ). Max Weber too notices that nearly all cultures had people who wanted to go beyond the religious requirements of their societies and who thus become 'experts' in religion or spirituality and serve a social function as models or embodiments of the religious and spiritual ideals of the society.

"The recluses who lived in the temples of Sarapis around the Mediterranean basin in pre-Christian antiquity, the Alexandrian schools of philosophy in the second and third centuries, the Greek Pythagoreans, the Orphic communities in ancient Greece, Italy, Africa and Gaul, and the Celtic Druids, all exhibited features of monastic life. Among the Jews, the Essenes who lived in the area of the Dead Sea in the two centuries before the Common Era, the Therapeutae whose life Philo described, the Nazirites and the Rechabites lived ascetical community lives that would today be recognized as monastic. In the East, the religion of Jainism gave rise to what is probably the oldest known form of

monasticism, dating back to 1500 B.C.E. in its solitary form and to the sixth century B.C.E. in its cenobitic form. Hinduism gave rise to Brahmanic monasticism, and Buddhist monasticism spread throughout India, Japan, Korea, China, Sri Lanka and Tibet. Islam also has its form of monasticism in Sufism. In short, Christian monasticism is actually not only not sui generis; it is a fairly late version of a very ancient and widespread religious phenomenon. The roots of this phenomenon seem to lie deep in human nature itself (Schneiders 5).

(3) Here are a few quotations from the scriptures of different religions on Religious Life:- They who practice austerity and faith in the forest, the peaceful knowers who live on alms, depart passionless through the door of the sun to where is that important Person, even the imperishable Spirit (Hinduism Mundaka Upanishad 1.2.11). Revile not, harm not, live by rule restrained; of food take little; sleep and sit alone; keep thy mind bent upon the higher thought—such is the message of the awakened ones (Buddhism, Udana 43). In the first place the sage should relinquish attachment to objects, whether animate or inanimate; he should then subdue his mind and senses; and finally he should resort to mortification of the flesh in progressively increasing intensity. (Jainism, Acarangasutra 4.40.45). Yogis and celibates have practiced austerities and adopted ochre robes \_\_ The devotees questing after Thee have renounced home. Mansions luxurious, elephants and chargers, and sojourned into strange lands. Saints and prophets, seekers and devotees—such have renounced the world and met with Thy acceptance. They renounced pleasures, comfort, joys of the palate; gave up clothing and wrapped themselves in hides (Sikhism, Adi Granth, Asa, M.I,p.358). He who forsakes his home in the cause of God, finds in the earth many a refuge, wide and spacious; should he die as a refugee from home for God and His Apostle, his reward becomes due and sure with God (Islam, Quran, 4.100).

(4) Interestingly, dialogue is easier between persons who have a lived experience of spirituality than others who are conversant more with dogma, church order, or institutional structure. Sandra Schneiders says, "Not surprisingly it was usually not the ecclesiastical officials, that is, the clergy or even the professional theologians, who were most competent in these dialogues, but rather the most intense practitioners of the spirituality who, in most cases, were the monastics. Monasticism, surprisingly similar in the great religions of the world, is an institutionalised, full-time living of the characteristic spirituality of the religion and thus provides a point of articulation and encounter among the world's great spiritualities" (Schneiders 5-6). Thomas Merton died in Bangkok while engaged in such a dialogue.

## **Questions**

1. What are the attitudes and approaches that characterised evangelisation work in the early period of Church History? How can we recapture that spirit in our own days?
2. What are the qualities that people expect from religious persons in the Asian cultural context today? How can we give evidence to these qualities in our times?
3. What should be the core concerns of an Evangelizer in Asia today? How shall we address these concerns?
4. How can we draw from the deep religiosity of the Asian society in our work of evangelisation?
5. In what way can we bring the Gospel to contribute to the regeneration of our society that is greatly weakened by violence and corruption?
6. How do we offer an answer to genuine God-seekers in Asia today?