

The Role of The Church in Asia

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There is no easy way of resisting the impression that of the five continents the Asian has been the least responsive to Christian missionary endeavour. While in Africa the Christians today account for over 20 per cent of the total population, in Asia not even 4.5 per cent are Christians. Yet Asia has a population which is nearly three times that of Europe and Russia, and nearly twice that of Europe, Russia and the Americas. Over Asia's vast and densely inhabited territory, seventy-three million Christians live (except perhaps in the Philippines) in a diaspora situation—scattered, small in relative number, seemingly of little civic consequence. The question then is whether these Christians who form the Church in Asia have any relevant function towards their far more numerous non-Christian fellow citizens, and whether, beyond the boundaries of Asia, they have anything to say and to contribute to the Church Universal and to the world.

Since it is such a little flock, it may seem futile and pretentious to speak of the role of the Church in Asia. Indeed, the claim is advanced—even though the title of this paper may be misleading—that this role spans not only Asia, but the whole world. The title might of course have been framed less ambiguously as the Role of the Asian Church. But this could have carried certain never-intended separatist overtones. For it is the one Church of God which exists in Asia as in all the other continents. It is the one *ekklesia* of believers in Christ which meets in different places—in Colombo, Tokyo or New Delhi, in Rome, London or New York.

For many centuries it has been thought that it was only the Church in the West that had a universal role to play, a part of that role being precisely to found the Church in Asia (and Africa) and determine its structural features. And never since Xavier, until perhaps very recent years, was it conceivable that the Church in Asia (and Africa) could itself want to determine its own human situation, far less believe that it had its own mission in the universal Church. The climate was one of tutelage, proclaimed by the missionary from abroad and accepted without questioning even by the indigenous Christians. Even today the Church in Asia has very few, if any, Asian theologians. Interpreters of the religious scene in Asia to the West are still predominantly Western. (It is, for instance, significant that most of the articles on Asian countries and Asian religions in the *New Catholic Encyclopaedia* (1967) are by non-Asians.) In missiological

institutes, seminars and conferences the voice of Asians is not often heard. And if today there are signs of an awakening, the chief stimulus has come not from within the Church but from the successful claims to political independence made by the countries of Asia (and Africa). Those who had been treated as slaves or servants or little children now rediscovered that they had the gift of a more ancient wisdom and speech to make that wisdom heard.

Political independence has been an advantage to the Church in Asia in many ways. It has severed any direct or latent, real or imaginary, connexion between the Church and Western political power. Independence compels the Church in Asia to reconsider its own relevance in the continent. Moreover, by a more perfect incarnation in Asia, the whole Church attains new dimensions of life. To the political statement, 'This is now my country and it must have a voice in the councils of the world', corresponds the ecclesial statement, 'This is now my Church and it has something to offer my country and the world'.

Nor can the claim of the Church in Asia to a unique role be dismissed as spurious. For Christianity in Asia antedates the arrival of the Portuguese and the Spaniards. There were almost certainly Christians in Malabar in India at the end of the second century. The Hsianfu monument, discovered in 1623 or 1625, and the documents of the Tun-huang grottoes provide evidence that Nestorian Christianity had reached China in the seventh century. The Rev. Claudius Buchanan, a Protestant chaplain in Bengal in the early nineteenth century, looking for arguments to convince his government of 'the practicability of civilizing the natives', finds a good one in this, that the distant past had proved it false that 'their prejudices are invincible, and that the Brahmins cannot receive the Christian religion'. And he adds a footnote which says, among other things, how 'at the Council of Nicea in the year 325 the primate of India was present and subscribed his name'. And again, 'in the year 530 Cosmos, the Egyptian merchant, who had travelled through the greatest part of the Indian peninsula found in the Dekhun and in Ceylon, a great many churches and several bishops'.¹ While this early period of Christianity in Asia awaits further historical research, it seems to afford proof that Christianity would have continued in Asia even without the advent of Western political and economic overlords.

The number of Christians in Asia when Vasco da Gama arrived in India is not known but was almost certainly small. Nor has the proportion of the Christians to the rest of the population appreciably increased after more than four hundred years of organized missionary activity. Lest there be a tendency for smallness of numbers in Asia to induce a spirit of pusillanimity in the Church in Asia, the

¹Claudius Buchanan, *Memoir of the Expediency of an Ecclesiastical Establishment for British India*. Hilliard and Metcalf, Cambridge, 1811, p. 40.

fact might be recalled that between 1880 and 1958 the proportion of Catholics in the total world population increased by only 0.14 per cent. To be a catalyst in the process of world history, to be always at the heart of things, ensuring love, justice and true humanity, Christians in Asia may seem statistically insignificant. But numbers are not the most important thing in order that Christ should enter a situation and fill it with his redemptive and uplifting presence. Ronan Hoffman writes: 'That God ought to have the 100 per cent is easily understood; that *we* must have the 100 per cent is another matter. . . . We are to be the "leaven in the mass", not the mass of mankind. Recall St Augustine's saying: "Many whom God has, the Church does not have; and many whom the Church has, God does not have."' ¹

However, to be the catalyst in the Asian process, the Asian Christians must belong fully to the Church and fully to Asia. This should apply also to the foreign missionary working in Asia. For unless the missionary priests, religious brothers and sisters and lay-workers identify with the peoples of Asia and consider their individual destinies to be linked with the destiny of Asia, they will not be able to participate in the fulfilling of the role of the Church in Asia and should return to the lands which are their only real home.

Less total commitment than is required of the foreign missionary actually working in Asia but similar empathy with the Asian process is necessary for those missiologists and others in the West who are currently engaged in a reappraisal of the work of the Christian Missions to Asia (and Africa). These can also be missionaries in a very real, though non-traditional, understanding of the missionary role. For this should not be confined to the head-counting one of the number of baptisms conferred, but is the very significant mission of seeking to understand the ways of God to men, of discovering his voice in places where his name may not yet be known, of interpreting to the peoples in the West the manifestations of God among his peoples in the East.

Serving as a bridge between East and West is an important aspect of the role of the Church in Asia. Like Paul and Barnabas who, after their first missionary journey, returned and told what had happened, Asian Christians should be the interpreters of the aspirations of Asia to the West. Once the interpretations have been heard, the Church in the West should be ready to change what needs to be changed, as the Church at Jerusalem changed its structure and thinking after it received the missionaries' reports. Asian Christians have imbibed Western culture more perhaps than any other single group in Asia. It is now high time that their connexions with the West—so long a source of suspicion of their true national identity—should be brought to the service of Asia. The Church in Asia should not beg for charity.

¹'Some Missiological Reflections on Current Theology', in W. J. Richardson, ed., *Revolution in Missionary Thinking*, Maryknoll, New York, 1966, p. 101.

It should demand justice, Asian Christian economists should explode the myth of Western aid and speak clearly and with authority of the contribution made by the colonies and dependencies to the economic growth of the West during the crucial Western take-off stage in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. They should tell the West that aid is insincere if its capitalist structure renders impossible or difficult fair conditions of international trade. They should also make the West understand the reluctance of Asia to follow the western capitalist private enterprise model of economic development and promote appreciation of the reasons behind the Asian trend to socialism. In the field of race relations and justice for the under-privileged, the Church in Asia has the role of making the Church in the West not shirk its clear duty any longer. Hence it should roundly denounce any further tolerance of racial and colour discrimination by the white Church or even mere neutrality or silence about it as a scandal and an outrage to Christ. This is how Asia feels about the West in these matters and the Church in Asia should make it known that it feels the same way.

This is the ideal. In practice, absence of identification with Asia and lack of understanding, still less of appreciation, of the Asian processes of life have often characterized much of the activity of the official Church in Asia. Such unAsianness in the great missionary era has in fact been the legacy which many official ecclesiastical leaders in Asia, even today and even if they are Asians, seem to shake off with difficulty or not at all. In his perceptive study of the Christian Missions in Asia, *Asia and Western Dominance* (New York, John Day, Part VII), K. M. Panikkar proposes four reasons for their failure during the past centuries.

(1) The missionary brought with him an attitude of moral superiority and a belief in his own exclusive righteousness. But the doctrine of the monopoly of truth and revelation is altogether alien to the Asian mind. Practically every educated Asian who has seriously and sincerely attempted to understand the missionary point of view has emphasized this. (2) From the time of the Portuguese to the end of the Second World War, the association of Christian missionary work with aggressive imperialism introduced political complications into Christian work. Inevitably, national sentiment looked upon missionary activity as inimical to the national interest and upon native Christians as 'secondary barbarians'. (3) Not only did the missionaries bring with them a sense of Christian superiority but, what was far more intolerable, they also inculcated a sense of Western (European and later American) superiority. (4) Finally, Panikkar points to the disunion among the various branches of Christianity as being a source of embarrassment to Christian missionary work.

Striking confirmation of Panikkar's views comes from the doctoral thesis of the Asian Christian, Alfred Allaud-Dearn Asimi, *Christian*

Minority in West Punjab, submitted to New York University in 1964. He singles out for analysis five major characteristics which have created the social image of Christianity and Christians in West Punjab. These are (1) the foreignism of Christianity, by which he means the dependence of the Christian Missions for their origin and continuance on foreign countries and foreign agents; (2) the failure of Christianity with the better classes of society: this is especially in relation to Asimi's specific research area which was the Protestant Mission to the Chuhra caste; (3) the unwelcome attitudes and methods of the missionaries: presumptiveness as bearers of the unique truth to the heathen, the pride of power and race, and aggressiveness towards the local people who had other beliefs; (4) the identification of Christianity with British imperialism which was shown by Christian endorsement of British domination in India and by the association of the white missionary with the white rulers; (5) the unworthy motives of converts in the area of the researcher's investigation.

If we look for the reason behind all these reasons, we might well find it in the preoccupation of the missionaries with the setting up of an institutionalized Church in the West. Even if it were held that the efforts made by Ricci in China and de Nobili in India to depart from established Western institutional forms would have merely led to the creation of a new set of ecclesiastical institutions in Asia, these institutions would at least have been more suited to the genius of the Chinese and Indian peoples. As events turned out, however, the Church in the West effectively blocked the progress of these movements. The streams of the life of the Church in Asia were thus destined for centuries to be mere secondary outlets from the West and to have their own independent flow checked by the silt that poured down the main rivers.

By saying this, the present writer has no intention of taking either side in the current controversies among both Protestant and Catholic missiologists about the choice between more liberating inspirational forms on the one hand or the institutionalism of the *corpus christianum* on the other. But the plea is definitely put forward that such institutional forms as are necessary or useful must be adapted to Asian conditions.

However, we must be on our guard. Adapting the Church in Asia to Asia does not mean taking on the objectionable and outmoded features of Asian society. There in the past serfdom and feudalism held sway. The master class was powerful, surrounded itself with pomp and ceremony and in certain countries bolstered up its privileges by means of the caste system. And so the forms and panoply of power in the Western Church were brought into Asia and thought to accord particularly well with the temper of the Asian people. I remember, many years ago in a sprawling poor city of South India, seeing a Catholic Bishop's shining big car parked against the kerb

with the episcopal coat of arms painted on the side door. As two Indian priests stood by the car, one remarked to the other: 'I wonder what all these poor people must think about us?' To which the other replied: 'Let it be here. It is good for them to know that we are also something!' Here showed the clash of the Asia that was with the Asia that wants to be. But religious men notoriously tend to live in the past and so the ecclesiastical limousines and the episcopal palaces in Asia continue to contrast stridently with the simple tenor of life of the millions.

Panikkar cites Claudius Buchanan, whom we have already mentioned, as having advocated the appointment in India of 'an Archbishop—a sacred and exalted character surrounded by his Bishops, of ample revenue and extensive sway . . . something royal in a spiritual and temporal sense for the abject subjects of this great Eastern Empire to look up to. . . . Place the mitre on any head. Never fear it will do good among the Hindus.' Panikkar adds with caustic good humour: 'Poor Buchanan! Bishops and metropolitans had existed in India from the time that "John, Archbishop of India", attended the Council of Nicea. The British Government also, in its turn, was persuaded to extend the organization of its episcopacy to India, with a metropolitan in Calcutta and numerous bishops flaunting territorial names, but the effect does not seem to have been great on the abject Hindus.' (*Ibid*, p. 420.)

'The Son of Man has come not to be served but to serve.' (Matt. 20, 28; Mark 10, 45.) These words should be inscribed on the coat of arms of every Cardinal and Bishop in Asia who should then hand them down as the indispensable regulator of life to every lay and clerical Christian leader in Asia. Moreover, poverty in the sense of effective detachment from material possessions and the actual elimination of all luxuries is a weapon of special potency in Asia. In a recent conversation in Oxford with two young Indian Communists, a youthful Jamaican revolutionary spoke of a Communist student who, upon his return to Jamaica from England, ostentatiously drove around Kingston in a flaming red car. The Indians' reaction was immediate. 'This is most interesting', they said. 'In India, if one wants to lead the masses to revolution, one would take good care to hide every trace of affluence.' Gandhi and Vinobha Bhave have set the standards of living for the great social reformers of India and Christian religious leaders in the new Asia will do well to remember their example. They must lead lives which both are, and appear to be, closer to the masses than they are at present. Otherwise, the Church in Asia will not be the instrument of societal change which so many in Asia of all political persuasions desire but will merely continue the feudal stratification systems of the past.

In this matter of witness to Christ's poor the religious institutes—to which the missions of the Catholic Church were often confided, often under jealously guarded monopoly conditions—have scope

for important re-examination. Vowed though their members are to poverty, they often lead lives in Asia which have all the exterior semblances of riches: well-appointed residences, regular holidays abroad for the expatriates, vacations on hill resorts for all, the best medical care, comfortable means of transport and usually comfortable community living. The problem admittedly is not an easy one, but until it is squarely faced, the religious vow of poverty will continue to be largely meaningless in Asia where the Christian ascetics will be measured by the ideals of renunciation set by Gotama the Buddha and the genuine Hindu sanyasis.

The role of the Church in Asia in upholding the ideal of ascetic renunciation in Asia is, however, only one aspect of adaptation. Wilfred Cantwell Smith has analysed the concept well, calling it Participation. He writes: 'To be Christian or Muslim or Buddhist, to be religious, is a creative act of participation in a community in motion.'¹ Christianity, therefore, has to come to Asia with its message expressed in language which grows out of such participation and conveyed in terms of sympathy with the community's striving for self-fulfilment.

This Christianity ought to be specially equipped to do. For the Christian message is culturally neutral: we are all the children of God and brothers one with the other in Christ. But in any given country, and at any given time, this message has to be conveyed in the most suitable cultural terms. The sterility of the Christian enterprise in Asia may be explained by the fact that, except in certain isolated instances and for brief periods, the cognitive, catechetical and evaluative definitions used were culturally foreign to the people of Asia. No effort was made to secure the definitions that would accord with Asian cultures because no effort was made to participate with or adapt to the communal processes in Asia. Instead, the message came to Asia with even its Semitic origins obliterated by use and stamped all over with the seals of Western manufacture.

The Church in Asia should be concerned about adaptation for two chief reasons. First, in order that Christianity might lose its foreign and colonial character in the continent and, secondly, that its message may be understood by Asian peoples. The Christian way of life, its ethical code, its theology, its liturgy have to be as Asian in Asia as they are Western in the West. The Aristotelianism and other Western categories of Christian thought have to be replaced by a re-presentation in terms of Hindu, Buddhist and Islamic systems of thought. In Asian seminaries and wherever Christian theology is taught, this will call for deep commitment to theological re-thinking in an Asian context on the part of the more gifted Asian teachers and students. This commitment should have two facets: one, fidelity to

¹'Participation: The Changing Christian Role in Other Cultures', *Occasional Bulletin*, 20: 4, April 1969 (Missionary Research Library, New York).

Christ's own commission of his message to the Apostles with Peter and their successors; the other, confidence that this message will stand revealed in greater depth if it is approached from the standpoint of Asia's own religious testaments. Any efforts in this direction are missionary in the highest degree.

'It could perhaps be said that the mission field has deepened. There is a universal realization of the need to take up into Jesus Christ all that is good in the non-Christian cultures and even in the non-Christian religions, so that Christianity in its turn can play its part as "leaven" within them. . . . It is this type of penetration rather than numerical increase, which is seen as the end of Missions. . . .'¹

It must never be forgotten that Asian Christianity has to live in the midst of other great religions purporting, like itself, to afford a world view and a total way of life. Yet even the Vatican Council gave relatively little consideration to the non-Christian religions of Asia (spending most of its time in this area on Judaism, presumably because that was the religion with which the white Western Church was most concerned) and in the final document conceded to Hinduism and Buddhism only a very few lines each. The most broad-minded and the most sincere exponents of the non-Christian religions of Asia often allow that Christianity also has a world view and offers a total way of life. But they fear that Christianity, if at all, only pays lip-service to the salvificatory value of the other great religious traditions of Asia. They fear that Christianity, even in its contemporary ecumenical encounters with other faiths, maintains a certain reserve and secrecy which veil its intention even culturally to oust all competitors and emerge as soon as it can as the sole monopolist in the field.

Furthermore, the most sincere among the inquiring minds of Asia would have shown themselves better disposed to examine the teachings of Christ as the fulfilment of man's noblest desires for deliverance from present sorrow and assumption into the Infinite if Christ had not been presented to Asia leaning on Western political power and clothed in Western cultural garb. Hating the power and despising the garb, Asia rejected Christ.

The tremendous task of the Church in Asia is to redeem the lost time of centuries and rethink the Christian message in the light of Asian cultures. Where this rethinking has already been done, as by Fr Johanns in the light of the Indian Vedanta, the Church must courageously convey the message to the masses in these terms and often in these terms only.

Fortunately, the task of liberating Christianity from the Western cultural tradition in order to propose it to Asia will in fact be far less difficult than, for instance, it will be for contemporary Buddhist

¹S. Masson, S. J., 'The Roman Catholic Church at the time of the Second Vatican Council', *World Christian Handbook*, Lutterworth, London, p. 9.

missionaries to the West to liberate Buddhism from its Asian cultural background. For to the extent that the Asian religions are not revealed or supernatural, they are to that extent human-cultural phenomena and are dependent upon the culture in which they initially arose. Because Christianity is revealed and is supernatural, it is not indissolubly bound up with, but transcends, any single cultural interpretation. The role of the Church in Asia will have significance only when the Church is convinced that this is really so.

With semi-civilized or barbarous peoples, inflexibility in the presentation of Christianity may have been no drawback to the extent that Christian missionaries brought a higher culture to which the rudimentary and primitive culture easily succumbed. This happened when Christianity was introduced to Northern Europe. But with people who already have a highly developed culture, such inflexibility is wholly counter-productive. The great Protestant specialist on the Chinese Missions, Latourette, writes:

It is significant, however, that in the only countries where Christianity has triumphed over a high civilization, as in the older Mediterranean world and the Nearer East, it has done so by conforming in part to older cultures. Whether it can win to its fold a highly cultured people like the Chinese without again making a similar adaptation remains an unanswered question.¹

Unanswered? One would have thought that a most convincing answer has been given by the history of the Christian Missions in Asia during the past four and a half centuries.

There is another factor which affects the activity of the Church in modern Asia. It is the contemporary resurgence of Asian religions which is itself often an element in the process of national self-discovery. That religion should also help a people to achieve national unity and the sense of common destiny is no strange thing. Ireland is a clear case in point. The common culture of Europe is a more complex one. In Asian countries there is usually a situation of religious pluralism. In this situation it is not possible for one religion only to unite all the people. But Christianity should join forces with the other religions in the process of the liberation of the individual and society from all forms of economic, political or cultural subordination. The Good News must also be the news of the equal right to dignified nationhood. The national flag must have its place in all the churches of Asia as it does so prominently in the churches of the United States.

Christianity, in fact, has a special contribution to make to national unity, whenever this may be threatened by the heterogeneity of racial or linguistic traditions. For Christianity is particularly capable of transcending these differences and rallying the citizens round the common cause of nationhood, because in Asian countries it draws its

¹K. S. Latourette, *A History of Christian Missions in China*, Macmillan, New York, 1929, p. 154.

followers from various racial and linguistic groups. That the Christian Church can thus effectively contribute to national unity was demonstrated in Ceylon during the communal troubles of 1958: in the more Christian areas the minorities felt safer than anywhere else in the island.

The chief cultural areas call for attention. Take architecture. What opportunities have been lost for the communication of Christ's teaching! Until very recently there were hardly any churches or Christian schools or other Christian institutions which were built according to national architectural styles and traditions. The spires of neo-Gothic, pseudo-Romanesque, baroque, or rococo churches towered proudly to the skies in glaring contrast with the Hindu gopurams, the Buddhist dagobas and the Muslim minarets. They proclaimed in Asia the grandeur of the Church in the West, but gave no redeeming message to the masses, for whom the imported architecture was as little comprehensible as the languages the foreign missionaries spoke. The buildings, the pattern of internal decoration and furniture, the sentimental Western statuary seemed to come to Asia only to destroy and not to fulfil, in a spirit of loving service, the religious hopes of its peoples.

Neither was anything substantial effected in the fields of music, painting, literature and drama. Such exceptions as there were received little official encouragement, and often much opposition, from the established Church. The knowledge that there were ancient traditions of art in Asia that could be harnessed to the task of conveying the Good News to the people was not part of the baggage the missionary brought to Asia from Europe or America.

The liturgy which could have been such a powerful means of communication with the Asian peoples was neglected. The rich symbolism of Eastern art and ritual, the love of colour and concreteness, the sensuous approach to truth—all these can and must be used to create in Asia a liturgy which will really be a sign to the people that Christ desires to come to them in joy, peace and freedom.

Indeed, the whole ascetico-spiritual life of the individual and the community must be presented to Asia in terms which Asia can understand. And yet, in the vast majority of novitiates and seminaries, for centuries up to and including contemporary times, little or no reference was made to Asia's own ascetical and spiritual traditions. The whole technique of prayer and meditation was, and even today is, taught in terms of the rationalized stereotypes of the West. So Asian novices are taught to pray kneeling at pews or prie-dieus, which is a prayer posture foreign to Asia. The one thing in the West which could have exercised a powerful appeal in Asia was its constant mystical tradition. Yet, this was the one tradition that was never presented with confidence to Asia. Consequently, Christian asceticism and mystical theology appears to the Asian mind as a superficial reduction of the life of the spirit to a set of

rules and regulations whose aim may be safety but not the Infinite.

The adaptation of Christianity to local cultures in Asia should not be seen merely as a technique of making Christians. The main question is not, Will adaptation lead to more conversions? For it may or it may not. So there are those who hold that the anti-adaptation decrees in the matter of the Chinese rites permanently ruined the Christian missions to China while there are others, like Latour-ette, who are much more cautious in expressing their opinions. The question rather is whether adaptation is man's necessary response to God's manifold and diverse manifestations in his creation and whether, in so far as these diverse cultures are wholly lawful, the Church should always beware of imposing the patterns of one culture upon another, even though she may, in her own historical experience, be more sure and more familiar with one than with the other. The Chinese rites may or may not have made more Chinese become Christians, but they surely would have brought into the Church another great cultural tradition, making more actual her potential universality.

Allied to the need for adaptation is the need for greater involvement of the Church in Asia with the life of the people. In the past such involvement was hampered by the aloofness of the foreign missionary, who was unsure of the mentality and of the customs of the people, while he often had only an imperfect command of the local languages. The more important Church schools were citadels of Western culture. Geared as they were to the needs of the colonial bureaucracy, they often paid only scant attention to local history, language and literature. If today an increasing number of educated Christians in Asia is free from the language barrier against their own co-nationals, this is due not so much to any action on the part of the Church, as to the policy of the governments (with which the urban Church schools were often not in sympathy) of introducing the local languages as the compulsory medium of instruction in schools. The way to greater involvement is therefore opening up and there must be no hesitation in following it.

Hence it is hard to understand the attitude which prompts statements such as the following: 'The value of missionary life should be set forth in its relationship with the Church rather than as playing a role . . . in the evolution of world history. We must beware of inaccurate statements which may open the door to new and indefensible theologies. It is safer to use ideas and formulae which have permanent value and which have done so much good to missionaries in the past.'¹ For it was precisely the old ideas and formulae which seemed to render so sterile much missionary activity and delayed for so long the achievement of existential relevance in the Church in Asia.

¹Bishop Velasco of Hsaimen, China, in von Straelen, *The Catholic Encounter with World Religions*, Newman, Maryland, 1966, p. 141.

The role of the Church in Asia should extend particularly to two areas. One is the rural sector, for Asia is predominantly rural. It is true that, as Christopher Dawson has shown, the Church has often functioned best and flourished from the great urban centres—Antioch, Ephesus, Corinth, Rome—and that consequently the Church must be vitally present in the great cities of Asia. But in Asia it seems essential that the Church must use its presence in the cities in order to make the cities more conscious of the importance of the villages for the social and economic well-being of the nation. To this end a deep rural spirituality must be developed in accordance with the villagers' constant and direct contact with nature in both its benevolent and terrifying aspects. The action of the Christians in the temporal sphere should be directed to the promotion of a progressive agriculture, to the opening up of ancillary avenues for employment and to the development of healthy and happy village community centres.

The other area is that of general socio-economic developments. If there is one thing which unites all of Asia together and develops and Asian consciousness, it is the state of socio-economic deprivation and the consequent deep dissatisfaction with its effects. What the Brazilian Archbishop, Helder Camara, has said of South America applies with even greater force of truth to Asia:

This human situation of crisis in society demands a self-awakening on the part of the Church, and a decisive effort to help the continent to achieve its liberation from underdevelopment. If this mission is to be fulfilled, the Church must undergo a radical purification and conversion. Her relationships with the underdeveloped masses, with diverse groups and with all types of organization, must become more and more relationships of service. Her strength must be calculated less in terms of prestige and power and more in terms of the gospel and of service to men. In this way, she will be in a position to reveal to the people of this anguished continent the true face of Christ.¹

And not only to the peoples of Asia but to the whole world. For by seeking to be relevant to Asia, the Church in the West will be inspired to become authentically what Christ wanted it to be. The crisis in the Church in the West today is about relevance and in this sense it is a necessary and salutary crisis. However, the impression cannot be resisted that efforts at the resolution of the crisis are once again being made without reference to the Church in Asia. If the crisis was about old structures that have lost their meaning in the Western world, the Church in Asia is also filled with a similar striving after greater meaningfulness. But when earnest pleas are made to detranscendentalize the Church, when concessions are sought not to a *liberating secularization* but to a *confining secularism*, when the witness- and love-value of virginity is questioned and ridiculed, when it is un-

¹*Church and Colonialism*, Sheed & Ward, London, 1969, pp. 114–5.

fashionable to talk of formal prayer, asceticism and the supernatural—then the best in Asia's spiritual experience must be allowed to question the questionings, and the Church in the West should with humility be ready to listen to the answers from the Church in the East. A distrust of merely material progress, a belief in the reality of the trans-terrestrial world, a high esteem for renunciation, a love of contemplation—all these are characteristic of Asia's spiritual heritage and, through the Asian Church, must influence the renewal of the Church in the West, directing it to the actualization of man's power to lift himself up on the wings of grace into the heart of the Divine.

If there are anxious stirrings in the Church in the West leading it to re-examine the worth and consistency of its traditional positions, the area of concern appears to be too often restricted to the areas of self-interest to the West, and does not extend to the areas which can bring Asia and Africa to a position of equality with the West. How else explain that *Humanae Vitae* draws more adverse comment than *Populorum Progressio* finds voices to defend and develop it, that the laws against the marriage of the clergy are practically considered to be more irksome than the racially discriminatory practices of white Christians, that there is louder reaction against the heavy hand of ecclesiastical authority than against the unfair practices of capitalist international trade?

The Church in Asia, itself struggling to find its own identity, should understand the searchings for renewal and reform in the Church in the West. But it should with confident independence examine the new trends and be wary of the accustomed part it may again be called upon to play in the old game of Follow my Leader. By seeking humbly to fulfil its role in Asia, the Church in Asia might in fact succeed in something which neither the radicals nor the conservatives seem able to do in the Church in the West. It is to find acceptance for the Christ of the Gospels and of authentic Christian experience in the modern world.