



PONTIFICAL COUNCIL FOR CULTURE

SEARCHING FOR WAYS OF BEING CHURCH IN INDONESIA

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How do we Indonesian Catholics respond to the challenges of our reality? Of course our response will be based on the fundamental principle that we remain truly local Church as part of the universal Church. Our becoming local Church is very much influenced by our relationship with our own culture, the Indonesian world and society. But Indonesia is not excluded from the influence of globalization. International political and economical relations, especially through trade and tourism, are the main areas where the fact of globalization influences the Indonesian people. There are thousands of Indonesians who study abroad, mostly in European and American countries, but also in Australia, Japan and China. Some groups are in South Asia and the Middle East. It makes Indonesia an open air. There is an attitude in many circles that anything from abroad is always better. This xenophilia has helped many to learn much, but has also contributed much to the uncritical takeover of influences. It becomes another name for the absolute relativization of values and homogenization of lifestyles and cultures. People are slowly abandoning their cultural as well as their religious values.

For example, the community life is very much affected by 'profit orientedness'. Of course, there is nothing wrong with being profit oriented. The problems come when we start abandoning as our guide for our life our good cultural as well as our religious values. We get this problem when we listen to the so called witnessing in various prayer meetings: some people feel loved by God when they are helped to get more material profit. Otherwise God seems to forsake them. In some instances, even the contemplative dimension of Asian faith has to suffer, when the spiritual life is nurtured by the so called 'meditation sessions' # offered for very expensive sums of money but very much attended by businesspersons # but that have nothing to do with our Christian faith, which means 'positively relating oneself to God and surrendering oneself to the will of God'. We see no 'kenosis' as Jesus Christ has told us to do (cfr. Filip. 2: 1#11). What they are looking for, is, egoistical joy and shallow feeling about silence, undisturbedness, noncommittal and introvertedness. They do not think of God. God does not present in their meditation. It is a 'prayer without God'.

A second tendency we can trace is corruption in the vast majority of the population. It makes people believe that nothing cannot be achieved if you do not have money and it brings in the *do ut des* mentality, even in our relation with one another and to God. We trade with God. God should give to us everything that we ask. God is nothing more than a materialistic machine # it is the new *Deus ex machina* attitude. A faithless faith.

It is very sad, because the Indonesians use to be a very highly cultured and religious people. The cultural values have succeeded in guiding our social life and in giving support to reliving the values taught by our respective religions. But the frustrating materialistic mentality and widespread poverty give rise also to fundamentalism as well as partisan mentality. We have experienced ethnic tensions, political riots, conflicts between religions. Our joint efforts, therefore, with all others to defend and foster our common, good cultural values must become our common agenda in our dialogue with peoples of other faiths and religions. A sound globalization, carried out in respect for the values of different nations and ethnic groupings, can contribute significantly to the unity of the human family and enable forms of cooperation which are not only economic but also social and cultural, even spiritual. But it becomes dangerous if everything is appreciated from the economical point of view. It makes people engage in a very practical materialism. Even we could feel a materialistic way of experiencing religious practices. There is a very strong tendency toward a kind of welfare spirituality in the sense that people identify faith with a kind of assurance, that God will give us only everything nice. Cross and suffering have no meaning at all. Catholics could forget that we are saved by the power of the cross, that shows the

self-delivering Christ in His obedience to the Father. Only through the cross do we come into Easter. And the true Spirit is the fruit of Easter.

If this is our situation, than how can we proclaim the Good News in effective ways? We are challenged to bear witness to the liberating and transforming power of Christian truth, which inspires people to place their talents, intellectual resources, persuasive abilities, experience and skills at the service of our neighbor, the common good of the human family, and in all that of God. And this God is reconciled in the life of Jesus Christ.

The First way is through **witnessing**. It presupposes a holistic way of living our Christian life, where there is no separation between spiritual and earthly life, between prayer life and human activities in the family and in the society. To live as a disciple of Christ is to live Jesus Christ wholly. "It is not me but Jesus Christ, who lives in me"[1]. When we pray, we do something with Jesus Christ; when we do the 'diakonia works', we act as part of the Body of Christ. Social service for human promotion cannot be separated from faith nor from inculturation and inter#religious dialogue, etc. "In Asia, home to great religions where individuals and entire peoples are thirsting for the divine, the Church is called to be a praying Church, deeply spiritual even as she engages in immediate human and social concerns." [2] "A genuinely religious person readily wins respect and a following in Asia. Prayer, fasting and various forms of asceticism are held in high regard". Renunciation, detachment, humility, simplicity and silence are considered great values by the followers of all religions. Lest prayer be divorced from human promotion, the Synod Fathers insisted that: "the work of justice, charity and compassion is interrelated with a genuine life of prayer and contemplation, and indeed it is this same spirituality that will be the wellspring of all our evangelizing work". (Prop. 19) Fully convinced of the importance of authentic witnesses in the evangelization of Asia, the Synod Fathers stated: "The Good News of Jesus Christ can only be proclaimed by those who are taken up and inspired by the love of the Father for his children, manifested in the person of Jesus Christ. This proclamation is a mission needing holy men and women, who will make the Savior known and loved through their lives. ... " (Prop. 8). Christians who speak of Christ must embody in their lives the message that they proclaim." [3]

It means that we should communicate the holistic meaning of the Good News in the New Testament and that every Christian should live in such a way that the others feel, understand and live with the recognition that God saves them in Jesus Christ. We are called to verbally and non#verbally communicate the Gospel, including through our dialogue with other believers and through our loving social service. We try to so communicate the Good News that the deepest message gets across to the Indonesians in every layer of life, that the Good News is relevant and meaningful for the Indonesians. We look for a comprehensive way of approaching the heart of the Indonesians, the majority of whom are religious, but who are at the same time needy in almost every aspect of their life. All kinds of social services for human promotion are very much needed. We are struck by the fact that the faith of Christ began and was first disseminated in Asia, but there are few Asians who feel existentially attracted by this Asian faith. "Despite her centuries#long presence and her many apostolic endeavors, the Church in many places was still considered as foreign to Asia, and indeed was often associated in people's minds with the colonial powers." [4] Is it true that one of the many reasons is that our approach on evangelization is not sufficiently holistic, culturally contextual and lacking in witnessing through our life?

Second, that our way of Evangelization is **progressive**. The Synod Fathers of the Special Assembly for Asia were keenly aware of the legitimate variety of approaches to the proclamation of Jesus, provided that the faith itself is respected in all its integrity in the process of appropriating and sharing it". The Synod Fathers stated that as follows: "evangelization today is a reality that is both rich and dynamic. It has various aspects and elements: witness, dialogue, proclamation, catechesis, conversion, baptism, insertion into the ecclesial community, the implantation of the Church, inculturation and integral human promotion. Some of these elements proceed together, while some others are

successive steps or phases # of the entire process of evangelization". (Prop. 6) In all evangelizing work, however, it is the complete truth of Jesus Christ who must be proclaimed. Emphasizing certain aspects of the inexhaustible mystery of Jesus is both legitimate and necessary in gradually introducing Christ to a person, but this cannot be allowed to compromise the integrity of the faith. In the end, a person's acceptance of the faith must be grounded on a sure understanding of the person of Jesus Christ, as presented by the Church in every time and place, the Lord of all who is "the same yesterday, today and for ever" (Heb 13:8)."[5]

Third, **social service** should be clearly an expression of our **Christian love and solidarity**. Dealing with social service in Chapter VI, *Ecclesia in Asia* begins with the basic attitude, namely that "the Church reaches out to all men and women without distinction, striving to build with them a civilization of love, founded upon the universal values of peace, justice, solidarity and freedom, ... "[6] , quoting also *Gaudium et Spes*: "The joys and the hopes, the griefs and the anxieties of the people of this age, especially those who are poor or in any way afflicted, these too are the joys and hopes, the griefs and anxieties of the followers of Christ. Indeed, nothing genuinely human fails to raise an echo in their hearts".[7] Applying to our situation in Asia, *Ecclesia in Asia* comes to conclusion with the following words: "The Church in Asia then, with its multitude of poor and oppressed people, is called to live a communion of life which shows itself particularly in loving service to the poor and defenseless."[8]

It is a pity that this world of ours is a world of wars and enmity. Never in human history has it happened that so many millions of people were killed as in our past century. We are the first generation who has invented the word 'love' in a unique way: it is a word that unites many hearts and people; but it also a word that has divided the whole world into different cultures. When we do what the Pope has said, we are invited to build anew the world. We are called to convert people not only into one of so many religions but also to be truly human. But we have a giant task. We should not only begin the start but we should also begin to plant solidarity with our fellow countrymen and women. It is a new culture that we are about to build.

Ironically many programs, that are called 'development', are not in line with our expectations: promoting the authentic and integral development of the human person. Instead, many times they become sources of big and serious challenges resulting in many ways in the process of exploitation, dehumanization, and marginalization. Sometimes they are not the result of the actions of individuals; they come from unjust structures of social, political, economic life. It needs, therefore a critical attitude towards any project of social service, including our own. We should know whether the results are really for the authentic and integral development of human person. It needs "to have the courage of new solidarity, capable of taking imaginative and effective steps to overcome both dehumanizing underdevelopment and the 'over#development', which tend to reduce the persons to an economic unit in an ever more oppressive consumer network",[9]

In concrete terms we have to change our way of living and proclaiming our faith in Jesus Christ. We have to live and teach our faith in a holistic approach to life, and at the same time contextually in our societal life. We consider the following suggestions[10] important:

a) The actualization and carrying out of and the preaching the Catholic faith covers the willingness to nurture true brother/ sisterhood in building a righteous neighborly life, mutual support and caring for anyone or any group, including people of different religions. This is an expression of Catholic faithfulness to Jesus' teaching on unconditional love, and our social service is a concrete sign of it.

b) The preaching and the realization of our faith is incomplete if it is not bonded to cultural values, traditions and religions that influence the local way of life. What is good, true and of positive value needs to be taken over as part of plenitude and supported. On the contrary,

we must eliminate negative matters so that they no longer exercise influence on the life of anyone. Catholics, together with the local community, should create a new culture and new habits that are better than the old ones.

c) The Catholic faith is not completely exercised, if Catholics do not yet deeply care about and try to overcome the problem of poverty, either individual or structural, social injustice and other disparities that exist in society. The Catholic faith encourages the birth of genuine efforts through expertise and professions that together with all people of good will, we fight against, eliminate, and overcome injustice in order to achieve social justice and prosperity for all.

d) Living our faith is not yet complete, if those who work in the executive, legislature, judicature, and law enforcement agencies along with the economists, do not yet take into consideration the social effects of their decisions for the majority of the people. That same faith should affect trade and other business policies to guarantee the welfare of laborers, farmers, fishermen and urban poor, whose social position is not benefited.

e) The realization of one's faith is not yet full, if those who work in the field of science have not yet examined scientific applications on whether they bring social welfare for all or the opposite, preserve social imbalances which unconsciously were created by the application of that science. In this matter, the Social Teachings of the Church should be studied together.

f) The faith of Catholics is not yet completely exercised, if they still do not possess a spirit of solidarity towards the people and society around them, especially towards those people who have yet to achieve a state of well-being. In this matter, if the government and those obligated have yet to perform adequately, faith should drive them to work together with all people of good will to obtain welfare compensation for their fellow citizens, without having to wait for recommendations from anyone.

g) Faith is not yet fully expressed if those who work in social communications through the mass media irresponsibly report events of conflict. That same faith should make practitioners in the field of social communications endeavor to create situations that support peace between the conflicting groups and not conversely prolong the conflict. Although the mass media did not directly create the conflict, it still has a share in aggravating the conflict if it does not report an event with the will to bring peace.

As a strategy, we should take family as an important place and at the same time role in building the concrete Church. It is in this loving community that we learn love, faith and hope as one unity. It does not mean that there is no crisis in the family. There are difficulties, conflicts and unfaithfulness in Catholic families. But with the help of the loving Spirit, we can overcome every single attack of the enemy of the human race. It is also in the Catholic home, where we experience, that God has given us faith in the very human nature, with all its weaknesses; but with the holy hope that love will prevail # since God's grace is our strength and in God nothing is impossible. The Church should help the families to respond to the loving grace of God.

Moreover, the families should be facilitated by the parish and the diocese, to help one another, through a wider community. 10#20 or 30 families could be united in a group, who live in the same region, to build a basic Christian community. They can come together regularly and reflect upon their daily problems: in and outside the church. They could even make a true dialogue of life with people of other Churches and religions, to build their neighborhood, to be a loving brotherhood and sisterhood. If they can meet regularly in the simple basis of their surroundings, the Christian community can become the basic element to build a human community. They will become the salt of the Indonesian earth. Their contribution would become the practical faith put into action. They would become the sacrament of the unity between God and His people, and among fellow Indonesians. Distrust will be replaced by mutual trust. It will become the seed of real faith. That way,

we do hope, the critical situation of our faith will be succeeded by a new faith: more appropriate to be the faith of the 21st century, not without danger but within the embrace of the loving Trinity

[1] Gal. 2:20

[2] EA 23

[3] Idem.

[4] EA 9.

[5] Ibid. 23

[6] Ibid. 32

[7] *Gaudium et Spes* 1

[8] EA 32.

[9] EA. 32.

[10] See *Paschal Pastoral Letter of the BCI*, 2001, 17

