



Council 50

Towards a Church-Inspired by the Gospel-for the world
Rumbo hacia una Iglesia-inspirada en el Evangelio-para el mundo
Vers une Eglise-inspirée par l'Évangile-pour le monde
Verso una Chiesa ispirata dal Vangelo per il mondo

Church Reform in Asia as Lay Empowerment for New Movements

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Introduction : Asian Reality

Asians constitute 54% of the world's population and the Catholic population is just some 3% : these figures show the failure of the Asian Church in articulating and communicating the Christian faith with local cultures.

Key factors to take into account are:

Cultural and Religious Plurality, Massive Poverty : extreme economic dependency and polarization(Global South/Global North), Oppressive Social Systems : Dalits, sex tourism, “bought wives”, Political Disturbance and Militarization : ethnic/religious conflicts, communist regimes, military dictatorship (China, Laos, Myanmar, Vietnam).

Islam and Christianity in Asia

In 2009, Islam has 1.57 billion adherents, i.e. 23% of the world population, the world's second largest religion after Christianity. Some 2/3 Muslims in the world live in Asia. Indonesia has the largest Muslim population of any single nation in the world, followed by Pakistan, Bangladesh and India. Less than 20% of Muslims in the world live in Arabic-speaking countries_(but many people consider Islam to be mainly an Arab religion).

The Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences (FABC) is a voluntary association of episcopal conferences in Asia, established with the approval of the Holy See in 1972. The foundation for the FABC was laid at a historic meeting of 180 Asian Catholic Bishops in Manila for the first time_during the visit of Pope Paul VI to the Philippines in November 1970.

The focus of the FABC is on *the new way of being Church* in Asia. This 'new way' is the *triple dialogue*: dialogue with the poor of Asia, dialogue with the religions of Asia and dialogue with Asia's diverse cultures.

The Special Pastoral Concerns of the Federation of Asian Bishops chosen in its 6th and 7th plenary assemblies are : 1) Family, 2) Women and Girl Children, 3) Youth, 4) Indigenous Peoples(Ips), 5) Ecology, 6) Migrants and Displaced People.

Challenges Facing Asian Church

Kairos – Time for Church Reform

There are “ecclesial structures which can hamper efforts at evangelization”(Evangelii Gaudium no.26). Hence we need a change of structure. The Church has to move :

1) from centralization (John Paul II, Benedict XVI) to de-centralization (Francis) ; Vatican's bodies such as councils, committees of Migrants, Indigenous Peoples (IPs), Interreligious Affairs and Culture, have to be relocated to a place where diversity is life, as it is in countries in Asia;

2) from clericalization (John Paul II) to de-clericalization/declericalism (Francis):

a) Married priesthood or celibacy as option to candidates,

b) Election of Bishops by Lay People: Attention should be given to the two particular cases of Chinese and Vietnamese churches in light of being a genuine local church:

* Vietnam: the negotiation between the government and the church goes first. Government has the right of rejecting or accepting the candidates proposed by CBCV without contesting the right of the pope to approve bishops.

* China: “self-election and self-ordination” (自選自聖) done for the past 58 years without papal approval. “We have contacts. We talk. We are moving forward. But for me, to have as a friend a great country like China would be a joy.” (Francis, Sept.28th, 2015)

Local Churches

East Asia : China

Brief history

Roman Catholic missionary priests from Europe entered China in the 13th century. The Government of China established diplomatic relations with the Vatican in 1943. In 1949, there existed 20 archdioceses, 85 dioceses, 39 apostolic prefectures. There were 3080 missionaries and 2557 Chinese priests.

The establishment of communist regime in 1949 put these early advances on hold and led to the persecution of thousands of clergy and faithful in China.

In 1957, the Chinese Catholic Patriotic Association (CCPA) was set up to uphold the principle of an "independent, autonomous and self-managed" China Church. China asked Vatican to permit it several times. But the Holy See replied ordination of a bishop without papal mandate incurs automatic excommunication.

In 1958, for the first time, the government-sanctioned China Church elected and ordained, without papal approval. During the 50 years since then, there have been about 170 "self-elected, self-ordained" bishops in China.

After the reform and opening of China in 1978, Chinese Catholics have gradually resumed contact with the Universal Church. Many "self-elected and self-ordained" bishops sought papal legitimization, and some candidates apply for papal mandate before they are ordained. These days, there are still some bishops who were ordained illicitly and have not been legitimized by the Vatican. In his June 2007 letter to Chinese Catholics, Pope Benedict XVI said the pope's appointment of bishops guarantees Church unity and hierarchical communion.

In 2008, a 50 year anniversary event was organized: 45 bishops and about 200 priests, nuns, and laity in "open Church" have attended the commemoration of the golden jubilee of "*self-election and self-ordination* of bishops."

Other face of the Chinese Church

On Jan. 25, 2009, Auxiliary Bishop Leo Yao Liang of Xiwanzi was released after being detained for 30 months, partly for blessing a large church. Some 1,000 Catholics attended the Mass that the "underground" prelate celebrated on each of the following Sundays. The underground Church rejects the government-approved administrative structures for the Church in mainland China.

Bishop Joseph Ma Yinglin, president of the Bishops' Conference of the Catholic Church in China (BCCCC), and Bishop Joseph Guo Jincui, vice-chair of the Chinese Catholic Patriotic Association (CCPA), are not in communion with the pope. The BCCCC and the CCPA are also not recognized by the Vatican.

Although the Pope had appointed already a bishop in 2006, Shantou diocese in southern Guangdong province held a vote on May 11, 2011 on a bishop candidate under the watchful eye of public security officers. The result saw 66 votes in favor and three votes against Father Joseph Huang Bingzhang who was the only candidate.

More than one year ago, some 400 crosses were removed and 35 more churches were wholly or partially destroyed in Zhejiang, according to Christian Solidarity Worldwide (CSW). Auxiliary Bishop Thaddeus Ma Daqin, who has been under de facto house arrest since 2012, is to remain in detention. The influential bishop, who defied the government in July 2011 when he became the first bishop to publicly quit the state-backed Chinese Catholic Patriotic Association, should continue his "repentance and reflection," officials told clergymen and nuns attending a "learning" class in Shanghai.

Catholic Church in China faces new hurdles after the Communist party issued first time public rules. (Sept. 2015). Party members are officially banned from following a faith as part of rules stipulating that religion must be separated from the Chinese state.

The State Administration for Religious Affairs oversees China's five recognized religions- Catholicism, Protestantism, Islam, Buddhism and Daoism.

I bet that the new rule would be a problem in ongoing talks regarding China and Vatican ending China's practice of appointing bishops.

South East : Indonesia

Brief introduction

Jesuits from the Netherlands first began to work in 19th century. Roman Catholicism in Indonesia is one of the six approved religions with Islam (80%), Protestantism, Hinduism, Buddhism, and Confucianism. Catholics make up 3.05 percent, or 6.5 million of the population in 2000. The Church is organized into 10 archdioceses and 26 dioceses.

Catholic involvement in the public sphere is larger than other religions. The local Church has had a long tradition of providing social services to the poor, especially in health and education areas. Since the 1960s, a large number of development projects have been added to the Church's tasks.

Religious situation

Amid various ethnic groups, cultures and languages, Javanese culture and people play an important role and their influence can be felt throughout the nation.

Internal ethnic conflicts are common and the dominance of Java has until now endangered the national unity of Indonesia.

More than 500 attacks have been reported in the country in the last 20 years including forced closure of Catholic schools by local Muslim activists

Challenges: The 1945 Constitution guarantees each and every citizen the freedom of religion and of worship. However, in implementing it in society, the principle of religious freedom is still controlled by various regulations. A survey of 30 Church-run primary and secondary schools revealed that 19 showed *decreased* enrollment totaling 20,355 students over four years. Of the 12 Church-run higher-education institutions surveyed, 10 of them *lost* a combined 17,106 students over the same period

Violent jihadi groups drawing inspiration and support from Al-Qaeda and ISIS have sprouted in the Philippines, Indonesia, Malaysia and Thailand. Armed attacks, suicide bombers, beheadings and violence against innocent civilians have made the news. Teachers in Bandung say a book, distributed by the Ministry of Education and Culture to schools across West Java since August 2015, promotes religious extremism. It contains a chapter titled “Rise Up All Islamic Fighters” and details the teachings of Muhammad Abd Wahhab, the founder of the Wahhabi Muslim movement.

East South Asia : Vietnam

In 1954, Catholics made up approximately 1.9 million of the roughly 30 million population. Today, there are 6.2 million Catholics — 7 percent of the population.

The greater difficulty for the Catholic Church today is handling a mercurial and far from monolithic government. What is permissible in some areas may be met with jail time in others. Authorities who look the other way for years might suddenly decide to crack down without warning.

Unlike in the early days of communist control, the government tends to stay out of ecclesiastical affairs. Unlike in China, which continues to follow the model of government-appointed bishops, appointments in Vietnam are left in the hands of the Vatican and the local church.

Communist-ruled Vietnam hosted the 10th assembly of Federation of Asian Bishop Conference (FABC). The FABC’s plenary assembly took place in November 2012, at the archdiocesan Pastoral Center in Ho Chi Minh City. According to Cardinal Pham Minh Man, FABC Central Committee had made the decision to hold this meeting in Vietnam during a meeting in Bangkok which he attended in January 2011.

There are however disputes between the authorities and the Catholics:

Six catholic defendants were found guilty by the court of causing social disturbances and fighting the local government over land disputes. Catholics gathered on Oct. 24, 2010 at a church in Ha Noi to pray for the six Catholics defendants who were sentenced 9-12 months. A Church source said the six sentenced Catholics submitted appeals to the People's Court of Da Nang on Nov. 1.

In 2013, a group of 14 were sentenced to between three and 13 years in prison after holding peaceful protests or calling for freedom of expression. In the highlands, human rights groups report routine and protracted persecution of Christian and Catholic followers.

South-Asia : India

Statistics

Christianity in India was introduced by Thomas the Apostle in 52 AD. There are some 20 million Catholics in India. It represents less than 2% of the total population and is the largest Christian church within India. There are 160 ecclesiastical units in India comprising 30 archdioceses and 130 dioceses. Of these, 130 are Latin rite, 25 Syro-Malabar rite and 5 Syro-Malankara rite.

There are 14,000 diocesan priests, 13,500 Religious Priests, 4,300 Religious Brothers, some 100,000 Religious Sisters, 300 Religious Congregations: (Men, 70; Women, 230). Regarding education, there are also 3,785 Educational Institutions Kindergartens/Nursery Schools, 7,319 Primary Schools, 3,765 Secondary Schools and 240 Colleges. Regarding health and social care, there are 1,085 Orphanages, 704 Hospitals, 1,792 Dispensaries/Health Centres and 455 Homes for aged, destitutes & physically challenged people.

Church reform as Lay empowerment

There is a urgent need to structural change of Church. "Who is a right force to bring the change possible and visible?" It could be Catholic NGOs or Church-related organizations working for social ministries/actions to make church "go forth" and be a "field hospital" for the poor/margin.

Reforming the old structure necessarily requires the establishment of a more powerful and solid lay movement. WE NEED NEW MOVEMENTS IN CHURCH NOW!!! How could we establish such a movement? There is ALL Forum, the Asian Lay Leaders Forum for empowering young lay leaders.

Asian Lay Leaders and A Way Forward

Back ground

Since installation of Francis' papacy, churches in Asia have little changed on the levels of parish, diocese and nation/continent until now. Neither has the church hierarchy any move nor even any endeavor to have been made so far. There has been an urgent need for their renewal about which Francis points out: there is "ecclesial structures which can hamper efforts at evangelization."¹ In other words, there is reason why the "should-be-open church" to all especially the poor which remains a church for church.

This isolation has happened because of strong clericalism and clericalization in the whole Asia. This is a problem of structure or "structural sin" seen in the current hierarchical structure of the church everywhere in the world. Therefore, when it comes to the term "Church reform", the structural change comes necessarily first. Without changing such sinful structure, church reform or renewal must not make the kingdom of God present. It is the first reason why church of Asia needs the wind of change.

Then the following question would be "who is a right force to bring the change possible and visible?" My answer is simple and clear: It should be Catholic Lay NGOs or church-related organizations working for social ministries: human rights work, justice and peace building, work with migrants, with women and young children and with ecological concerns. I don't have any intention to exclude other organizations and devotional groups but do focus on the formers' nature and duty. Their job is to work for and help those peoples already highlighted in the Sixth General Assemblies of the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences (FABC), which took up their "special pastoral concerns." As we emphasize the need to assist Catholic lay NGOs and related Catholic organizations in Asia, we are in fact following the lead of the FABC and its stated pastoral concerns.

The issue of reforming the old structure necessarily moves forward to the next step, say, how we could establish a more powerful and solid lay movement. For this, we have tried for years and finally succeeded in could establish a pan-Asian lay organization aiming especially for young lay leaders and their formation in Asia on the one hand and effective communication with clergies as a their partner to be a "community of communion" in Asia on the other.

Lay Catholic NGOs, groups and movements face major challenges throughout Asia. Often isolated and working in settings that are overwhelmingly non-Catholic, Asian lay Catholics need more support from the wider Church. Among the challenges Asian Catholics face today are social and economic pressures emerging from widespread unemployment, growing materialism, and widening gaps between rich and poor. Asian societies are especially vulnerable to ecological degradation as decisions are made under the corporate pressures of globalization and market-dominated economic policies.

¹ Pope Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium* no.26.

Asians face not only physical poverty, but also a “poverty of spirit” that comes from, in no small part, by their sense of isolation from other like-minded Catholics in Asia and throughout the wider Church. Asian lay Catholics have a hunger for Christian support and community. They need encouragement to help meet their many challenges. This is yet another reason Asian lay Catholics need solid formation.

Inter-religious work begins with solid Catholic formation. Unfortunately, because of a lack of resources these Catholics don't get adequate formation, pastoral care or ministry support from their local Churches. In some cases they have been largely abandoned by some in the Church hierarchy who do not understand or do not agree with Pope Francis' vision. While our Church eagerly provides support for seminarians who want to enter the priesthood, it does very little for young lay leaders' in great need of Catholic formation.

Under the circumstance, we have created Asian Lay Leaders (ALL) Forum which aims to bring together Asian lay Catholic leaders and activists, and in so doing, encourage them and provide them the necessary tools they need to carry on their social justice and pastoral development work.

Promotion of Lay formation network

As a first step, we the leaders and actors of the organizations have decided to come together in faith and humility to work in partnership and mutually support the common causes we stand for by focusing on what unites us. This is a joint application of four organizations, combining priest, religious, laity and endorsed by the Bishop-in-charge of Youth for the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conference (FABC).

1. Characteristics of ALL Forum

Following Pope Francis' teachings, ALL Forum promotes the spirit of “reaching out” to the marginalized as a Church. In this, three elements are distinguished: Collaborations among partner organizations, providing on-going and holistic program for youth formation and promoting “wider ecumenism”. By wider ecumenism, I mean ALL Forum is to open not only to other Christian denominations but those from different religious traditions: Faith-based organizations from Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism and others. This is quite relevant to Asian soil from which diverse cultures as manifested peoples' lifestyles cannot be separated from what we call “religions”. In this sense, it is not quite strict that there is a clear division between believers and non-believers in Asia which is other continents. Therefore, it should be another reason why the church “goes forth” to cultures, that is, peoples' real lives.

ALL Forum is based on concretized and praxis-centered collaborations among four partners: social issue-specialized the Center for Asia Peace and Solidarity (CAPS), spirituality-centered Fondacio Asia, and ecology-focused Jesuit Center for Indigenous Mission (JCIM) & Research and Training Center for Religio-Cultural Community (RTRC). While JCIM focuses more on developing contextual theologies specialized in shamanic-spirit based theology, RTRC

has tried to train and form young lay leaders among Indigenous peoples in Chiang Mai, Thailand.

Secondly, from its close collaborations of the groups, ALL Forum could provide on-going and holistic formation programs for young lay leaders in the whole Asia. What do we mean by “holistic formation” here? It firstly shows its ability to embrace multi-dimensional characters in providing a suitable formation program for youth. Such multi-dimensions for youth formation are possible because all the four partners contribute strength of each group and organically combine and inter-connect them together through discussions and workshops: from hot and urgent social issues to relevant theologies and to spiritualities for person and group. Lastly, ALL Forum focuses on Catholics but is not limited to them. It promotes a wider ecumenical, inter-religious and inter-cultural encounter and learning for mutual growth.

2. Purposes and Methodology of ALL Forum

Young lay leaders working for “social ministries” have played an important role in bridging Church to societies in Asia, but reality of encouraging and empowering them is actually close to zero except some lay organizations. But their supports have often stopped at a short term or an event-based occasion. Recognizing it deeply, ALL Forum is to provide them with a solid and systematic formation program for them.

In order to realize the People of God as a genuine local Church of Asia, ALL Forum is committed to urgent matters such as youth, women and girl children, ecology, migrants, Indigenous peoples (IPs) and other marginalized whom FABC designates as the object of “special pastoral concerns” by harnessing the Catholic Social Teachings (CSTs) and “pastoral spiral” assessment of FABC. Especially ALL Forum is to provide young lay leaders with a combined program like Asian Youth Academy (AYA)/ Asian Theology Forum (ATF), a “Moving School” for those who cannot afford to join AYA/ATF held on a national or regional level and Spirituality & Peace-building Pilgrimage in Asia.

All the three major programs are based on theo-spiritual approach as a contextual doing theology, or “theology of relevance” to Asian peoples and cultures.

CATHOLIC YOUTH IN ASIA

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The challenges met by the Youth in Asia Today

During the 3rd Bishops’ Institute for Lay Apostolate (BILA) on Youth, under the Federation of Asian Bishop’s Conferences – Office of the Laity and Family – Youth Desk (FABC-OLF-YD), the following was identified:

1. Youth search for their identity, the truth and meaning of life. They thirst for God and

seek meaningful relationships.

2. However with the fast changing Asian societies and the impact of technology, we see and hear their struggles in life:
 - They need guidance, direction, to find purpose and to grow in self-esteem.
 - Because of their negative experiences, they have difficulty to trust others.
 - More than previous generations, the youth today experience the problem of unemployment and greater stress at work and study.
 - A large number of youth become migrants due to economic and educational reasons, and in their search for better lives.
 - In some parts of Asia, victims of human trafficking and forced labour are largely young people. Many illegal migrants and prisoners are also young people.
3. Furthermore, Asian youth lack access to education, suffer from financial difficulties, and material poverty and its consequences. They also live in conditions of cultural, religious and structural discrimination which deprive them of opportunity for growth. Proselytisation in some parts of Asia is a major concern.

The Challenges Within the Church Today:

As we survey the challenges confronting the young in Asia we also acknowledge the need for us as Church to be transformed by Christ in the following areas:

1. An increasing number of youth have difficulty relating to certain aspects of the faith and the Mass.
2. They then do not practice their faith and experience spiritual poverty.
3. There is clericalism or priest centeredness in many of our ministries.
4. We find competition instead of collaboration among different realities.

Recommendations

1. Continue to respect value the youth as gift and vital part of the Church today and its future.
2. To provide regular opportunities for dialogue between Church leaders and young people.
3. To empower the youth and provide opportunities for them
4. To explore new methods and ways of reaching out to the young especially those who suffer in the peripheries