

DEVELOPMENT IN ASIA: A VIEW FROM BELOW*

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INTRODUCTION

Asia is swirling in ferment. The whole of life is undergoing gigantic changes throughout the region, as nation after nation frenziedly pursue the goal of development. Industries and factories, new technologies and mass media, strategic growth centers, burgeoning metropolises demonstrate the reality of relentless and dynamic social change. The face of Asia is being transformed. Despite political, social and ethnic upheavals, development seems to be going well.

But here precisely is the rub. The question is often asked in Asia today: "*Development for whom?*" Development is often largely and sometimes almost exclusively considered from an economic point of view. A perspective in terms of *human* development indices is of recent vintage and is continually being refined.¹ But seldom in the professional literature is development seen from the viewpoint of its ultimate beneficiaries, namely people, and especially the poor among them. This paper attempts to present such a perspective, a perspective of development *from below*, a view from the poor peoples of Asia.

How do the poor of Asia see the development going on around

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1. "The publication of the first *Human Development Report* (UNDP) in 1990 helped put people back at the centre of development." *Human Development Report 1995*, p. 13.

them, its processes, its beneficiaries, and its impact on their lives? Do they see themselves being liberated from poverty? Has their lot changed for the better? Some answers may be gleaned from the documents of the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences (FABC). For this purpose, it would be necessary to explain how it is possible for the FABC to be a legitimate voice of the poor in Asia. This paper will, therefore, proceed in presenting the view *from below* in the following way:

- 1) a brief overview of the Asian situation *from below*;
- 2) a critique of development;
- 3) in dialogue with the poor: FABC's social teachings;
- 4) an alternative approach to development.

I. ASIAN REALITIES: A PERSPECTIVE *FROM BELOW*

USING SOCIAL ANALYSIS

In 1970 on the occasion of the visit of Pope Paul VI the Bishops of Asia met in Manila, Philippines. The forerunner of the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences, the Manila meeting began a process of pastorally discerning the realities of Asia. Subsequent Bishops' assemblies would generally follow a similar process of: social analysis, reflection in faith, and pastoral decision-making. By 1986 the FABC, through its Office for Human Development (OHD), could present a more refined and more systematic pastoral discernment process now called the *pastoral spiral*,² which would include, besides the above elements, cultural analysis, planning, action or implementation, and evaluation. But always, the process starts with social and cultural analysis, including an attentive and *prayerful listening* to the life-situations of the people and of their cultures.

A basic insight recurring in the various analyses is the evidently ambivalent character of socio-economic and cultural developments in Asia, the lights and shadows, the positive and

2. FABC-OHD first called this process the *pastoral cycle*. Cf. *For All the Peoples of Asia*, Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences Documents from 1970 to 1991, ed. Gaudencio Rosales and C. G. Arévalo, S.J. (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1992). (Henceforth cited as *FAPA*.)

negative aspects of reality.

Already at the 1970 Manila meeting, a general sketch of major Asian realities had emerged, namely, the great poverty and suffering of Asia's teeming masses (in fact, "nearly two billion people, almost two-thirds of mankind," and about 70% are poor), Asia as the continent of the youth ("nearly 60% of its people are below 25 years in age"), the richness of Asia's cultures, and the pluralism of Asia's ancient faiths.³

THE POOR IN ASIA AND THE VISION TO BE A CHURCH OF THE POOR

And already in 1970 the Asian Bishops resolved that the Church in Asia "be more truly 'the Church of the poor'. If we are to place ourselves at the side of the multitudes in our continent, we must in our way of life share something of their poverty."⁴

At FABC I the Bishops resolved "to support and encourage those who identify with the poor, the marginalized and the exploited, personally showing the way by Christ-like witness of poverty in their own life-style."⁵ Thus, from the very beginning of FABC, the resolve of the Church in Asia to take up the voice of the poor became an official endeavor.

Through such social analysis, the BISA I Bishops were convinced "that the overall effect of the models of economic development at present operative in our region is to widen the gap between the few rich and the many poor, and to strengthen unjust political and social structures."⁶ The concern, therefore, was to look for "alternative models of development: which place economic growth in the context of total human development in which the cost and rewards of production are more equitably distributed . . ."⁷

3. See Asian Bishops' Meeting, 1970, Message of the Conference.

4. Ibid., no. 19, in *FAPA*, 5; see also Fifth Bishops' Institute for Social Action (BISA V), 1979; First Bishops' Institute for Missionary Apostolate (BIMA I), 1978; International Congress on Mission, Manila, 1979, Workshop III Consensus Paper; BIMA II, 1980; all in *FAPA*, 94, 144, 100.

5. FABC I, Resolution 6, in *FAPA*, 20.

6. BISA I, no. 17, in *FAPA*, 201.

7. Ibid.

THE SITUATION OF WOMEN

Regarding the situation of women in Asia the Bishops confessed in dismay: "How little, in Asia, have we spoken or taken action against the oppression and degradation of women, especially among the poor and less educated, for the purposes and profit of various exploitative industries, tourism, the sex-trades, and the like."⁸

A more comprehensive discussion on the situation of Asian women went beyond the exploitation of women at work, in tourism and entertainment — and into the cultural situation. "Many are the injustices heaped upon them because of the traditional societies which discriminate against them. . . . In general, Asian society views women as inferior. Such are some of the tragic realities of Asian women that cry out for transformation."⁹

Finally in 1995, FABC VI in Manila decided to make the situation of women one of the five major pastoral concerns of the Church in Asia.¹⁰

POPULATION

FABC discussion of the population issue invariably revolves around the issue of the Asian family, particularly with government approaches to family planning.

Concern about the limited resources of the earth and about sustainable development should not blind us to the necessity of basic human values that are involved in the population problem. The Church in Asia believes that such basic values are being ignored by development policies that prescribe an aggressive population control, which is targetted especially against the

8. FABC III, Bangkok, 1982, nos. 9.7-9.8, in *FAPA*, 58; see also Fourth Bishops' Institute for the Lay Apostolate (BILA IV), no. 8.5, in *FAPA*, 297. See also Consultation on Christian Presence Among Muslims in Asia, 1983, Pastoral Recommendations, no. 3, regarding Muslim women, in *FAPA*, 171-72.

9. FABC IV, Tokyo, 1986, no. 3.3, in *FAPA*, 182-83.

10. FABC VI, Manila, 1995, no. 15.2, referring particularly to women and the girl-child. *Ibid.*, no. 15.1. For example, S. Arokiasamy, "Asia: The Struggle for Life in the Midst of Death and Destruction," Position Paper for FABC VI, esp. pp. 37-38. See *Sollicitudo rei socialis*, no. 25.

majority poor of Asia. FABC insists that concern for human life has to be based on the intrinsic dignity and sacredness of all human life from conception, through birth, to death.

Necessary then is a *value-oriented view* of the population problem and not merely a number/food equation view. The former links population questions to justice and human rights for families, children and the unborn, to inequitable access to resources at national and international levels, and to imbalances in resource consumption which are partial to the less populated but more developed countries of the world. On the other hand, the number/food equation views the population problem only narrowly, in terms mainly of curbing the galloping rates of population increase in poor countries because of limited food production.

AUTHORITARIANISM AND MILITARISM

Through the years FABC has been emphasizing the need for people's participation, respect for fundamental human rights, the growth of *participatory communities*.¹¹ Asian Bishops have supported and fostered non-violent movements for freedom and democracy and have recognized these movements as positive signs of the Asian reality. Against this position are two realities in Asia, *statism* and *militarism*. They seriously affect FABC's commitment to peace and freedom, people's participation, respect for human rights, and to the proper development priorities of nations.

GLOBALIZATION

It is particularly in the BISA series of the FABC that the phenomenon of *globalization* is analyzed — and generally in a negative way as a confirmation of *economic imperialism* and *neo-colonialism*. Asian countries are seen not as subjects of their own development but as dependent objects acted upon by others

11. E.g., BISA V, no. 17; BISA VII, 1986, no. 14. BISA IV, nos. 3, 5, 11, 13, in *FAPA*, 212-13; also BISA V, no. 9; FABC IV, no. 3.6.3 on control of mass media. BISA VI, 1983, no. 5. FABC V, Bandung, Indonesia, 1990, nos. 2.2.1, 2.3.2, 2.3.6, in *FAPA*, 276-78. FABC VI, no. 7. BISA VI, no. 5, in *FAPA*, 224.

and unable to chart out their own economic destinies.

Local economies are caught up in a global economy that exercises excessive and aggressive trade exchanges which suck out much of Asia's assets. Thus economic structures are characterized by dependence, exploitation of cheap labor, destruction of natural resources and the environment, unfair prices in trade.¹²

FABC V (1990) would again pick up this theme of globalization. While pointing out a positive aspect in the form of global solidarity, the Bishops said:

We are conscious that the Asian reality is increasingly part of the global reality. Our world is becoming progressively interdependent, with mutual interests and concerns. This situation holds out great opportunities. The old order dominated by the two power blocs has broken down. A new order is emerging in which even the smallest nation can play its role, Asian countries influencing, as well as being influenced by, the rest of the world.¹³

MODERNIZATION AND INDUSTRIALIZATION

Tremendously significant changes are being ushered into Asia by science and technology. Along with these changes a process of modernization is taking place, where Asian traditions interplay with the dynamic forces of modernity. Keenly acknowledged is the fact that modernization is value-laden and that many of the values imparted by the process are economic in character.

Though recognizing the many positive contributions of modernization to the Asian way of life, the Church in Asia likewise witnesses its negative effects. Modernization is an ambiguous process. It often leads to social and cultural dislocation and its beneficiaries are "too often infected with secularism, materialism, and consumerism."¹⁴

12. Conclusions of the Theological Consultation, 1991, no. 4, in *FAPA*, 336. Likewise the UNDP *Human Development Report 1995*, p. 14, states: "The poorest 20% of the world's peoples have benefited little from the increased globalization of economies. In world trade, their share is only 1% — and in world commercial lending, a scant 0.2%." BISA IV, no. 6, in *FAPA*, 225.

13. FABC V, no. 2.1.2, in *FAPA*, 275-76.

14. *Ibid.*, no. 2.1.6, in *FAPA*, 276. FABC I, no. 4.

Noted here is the dominant influence of economic values over cultural values. Economic values of modernity often turn a blind eye to positive cultural values, such as the Asian sense of harmony with creation, and the sense of the sacred and divine.

Moreover, industrialization, as a component of the process of economic globalization, solidifies neo-colonialism as developing countries totally depend on foreign capital and new technologies. Industrialization changes basic work patterns and relationships and correspondingly causes a neglect of rural and agricultural concerns.¹⁵ The quest to satisfy needs created by media and the new technological culture are subtly leading people to life without moral and religious roots.

ECOLOGY

The same peremptory drive towards development has seriously undermined the environment. Throughout Asia, ecological destruction has been due, to a great extent, to irresponsible exploitation. More and more the natural resources of Asia are being diverted to fulfill the needs of a market-oriented economy and industry. Such demand worsens the situation of the great majority of Asia's poor who depend for their sustenance on the products of land, forests, and seas.

FABC V explicitly connected the ecological problem to the problem of massive poverty. Succinctly the Bishops declared: "Hundreds of millions of people are debarred from access to natural resources. Exploitation of the environment destroys precious resources and thus destroys the material and spiritual habitat of many of our peoples."¹⁶

15. See First FABC International Theological Colloquium, Pattaya, Thailand, 10-16 April 1994, Final Statement, no. 9. Ibid., no. 21. FABC VI, no. 15.4.

16. FABC V, no. 2.2.1. In a brief summary of Pope Paul VI's encyclical, *Populorum progressio*, Pope John Paul II wrote that we are faced "with a serious problem of *unequal distribution* of the means of subsistence originally meant for everybody, and thus also an unequal distribution of the benefits deriving from them." *Sollicitudo rei socialis*, no. 9. FABC V, no. 7.3.2.2.4, in *FAPA*, 286. Bishops' Institute for Inter-religious Affairs (BIRA) IV/11, 1988, no. 13, in *FAPA*, 320. Not surprisingly, BIRA IV/12 held in Hua Hin, Thailand in 1991, would echo the thoughts of BIRA IV/11 and uphold the harmony of nature and warn against plundering it, see nos. 33-34, in *FAPA*, 330-31. Globally, the UNDP *Human Development Report 1995*, p. 14, states that "as many as 70,000 square kilometers

Finally in 1995 FABC VI, keenly aware of "the immense damage to the ecosystem of our planet which offends justice and the rights of people," made the issue of ecology one of the five major pastoral concerns that would occupy the attention of the Church in Asia in the following years.¹⁷

THE VIEW *FROM BELOW*: LESS EMPIRICAL, MORE ETHICAL?

Social and cultural analysis has, of course, uncovered many other aspects of the Asian situation that are of great importance to development, such as the following: ethnic and religious conflicts, the rise of religious fundamentalism, ideological divisions, migration from rural to urban areas, child labor, refugees, mass media, the health situation, problems of education, development of the Asian family. However, for the purposes of this paper, the realities that have been briefly sketched above are fairly illuminative and illustrative of the development concerns emerging *from below*.

Much of FABC analysis of Asian realities are the results of "listening to the people at the grassroots level" with facilitation by experts in theology and the social sciences, including economics. Eventually the process of immersion-exposure in the lives of the poor and oppressed would become a regular practice in FABC institutes, particularly in the BISA series.¹⁸ Hundreds of Asian Bishops thus came into direct experience with the lives of minority groups, oppressed and exploited women, peasants, fisherfolk, factory workers, slum dwellers, etc. And although their reflections and those of Bishops who participated in other FABC institutes do not bear the full authoritative stamp of FABC Plenary Assemblies, still their experiences and reflections are eventually inputted into the latter. Hence even more deeply would FABC Bishops involve themselves in the plight of the poor.

In a very true sense, then, with Bishops articulating the sufferings and aspirations of the poor, FABC documents espe-

of farmland are abandoned each year as a result of degradation, and about 4 million hectares of rainfed cropland are lost annually due to soil erosion."

17. FABC VI, nos. 7 and 15.4.

18. See particularly BISA VII, 1986, nos. 8-13, in *FAPA*, 231-32, for a presentation of the *pastoral cycle*.

cially in the area of development most surely reflect a *view from below*. BISA II in Tokyo, Japan on 7-19 April 1975 unhesitatingly declared "that the Church should also be the *voice* of those without a voice: the poor and the weak, the marginated and the victims of injustice, wherever they may be."¹⁹

The analysis by the Bishops can surely be faulted for not being scientific and systematic enough or for not being adequately supported by empirical data.²⁰ But the analysis is borne out of their experiences with the poor — and with many actual situations of massive miserable poverty, vicarious or shortlived those experiences may be. Bishops are, indeed, aware of poverty fluctuations over time in Asia. Poverty is not stationary but to Bishops the "big picture" of poverty is rather constant.

Their purpose is not to provide an economic treatise on development but to voice out the experiences and the perceptions of the poor, frustrated with the ways of economic development that keep them in poverty. It can be said then that the analysis of the Asian situation by the Bishops may be less economic and more sociological, less sociological and more ethical.

If this be the case, then the Bishops are nevertheless on the right track regarding the pursuit of their mission — to proclaim the Kingdom of God in the human development of Asian peoples.

19. BISA II, 1975, no. 11 in *FAPA*, 205.

20. John Carroll, S.J., Director of the Institute on Church and Social Issues, Ateneo de Manila University, Manila, Philippines, analyzing the economic data for me, concluded that in fact economic development in Asia, over time, has resulted in a perceptible, though not necessarily substantial, decline in the gap between rich and poor in the 8 high performing East Asian economies: Japan and the "four tigers," Hong Kong, Taiwan, Singapore, Korea; and the three newly industrializing economies, Indonesia, Malaysia, and Thailand. Some economists also argue that the success of the high performing East Asian has been due to a model which is basically a "State-assisted capitalism" and not to the western free market model. Moreover, Mahar Mangahas, a reputable Filipino economist, thought that Bishops seem to regard poverty as static rather than "fluctuating perhaps sometimes upwards, perhaps sometimes downward, at various points in time" ("Poverty and Development in Indonesia, the Philippines and Thailand: A Discussion," Symposium of the International Jacques Maritain Institute, Manila, 22-25 February 1994, mimeo, p. 1). Such professional observations provide helpful qualifying nuances to the generalizations generated by FABC social analysis.

II. A CRITIQUE OF DEVELOPMENT

From the above analysis the general outline of a critique of development viewed *from below* emerges. And this critique is devastatingly negative, granted that development in Asia has a few brilliant spots as represented by Asia's "economic dragons," Singapore, Hong Kong, Japan, and Taiwan.

Keeping in mind the critique of development already implied in the first part of this paper, the following would be some of the major theses of the critique:

1) Development is almost exclusively economic oriented. It ignores social, cultural, and religious development. In many cases the modernizing influence of development weakens positive cultural values related to the individual, the family, and society. In some cases, the drive towards economic development ignores the valid and legitimate religious values and sensitivities of peoples.²¹

2) Development neglects already deprived and already marginalized sectors of society, such as indigenous peoples, and makes them even more marginal. In violation of their fundamental human rights many of them are often forcibly displaced from their ancestral domains to make way for development projects which do not directly benefit them. Further with little consideration for their cultures, a type of development is imposed in an effort to bring them into the social mainstream.

3) Development while targetting industrialization as the priority neglects the development of agriculture. Land use is in favor of the former. The great majority of the poor who live by the fruits of the land thus suffer even more deprivation. With lesser opportunities to improve their lives many peasants, landless or not, are forced to migrate to already crowded urban areas where women and children are prone to exploitation. Furthermore, demands for raw materials by the competitive market economy place great burdens on the environment and cause ecological destruction.

21. See, e.g., Colloquium on the Social Doctrine of the Church, Pattaya, Thailand, 1992, "We recognize," no. 4, "We denounce," nos. 1, 3; First FABC International Theological Colloquium, nos. 12, 14-15.

4) The development process works through the controlling political and economic elites in Asian countries and preserves the present imbalances in the power structures of society.²² Especially is this true when development assistance is on a government to government basis. The development process thus benefits immediately and directly the upper crusts of society. Hardly do its benefits trickle down to the poor. The basic needs of the poor for food, clothing, shelter, education, and medicines are not met, since development priorities are directed to meet the needs (wants) of trading partners. Greater impoverishment results from such development. The situation is aggravated by the fact that the poor do not participate in development decisions.

5) Social justice and the promotion of the common good, understood as the sum of social conditions that promote a just, prosperous and peaceful life for all members of society, including the fair and equitable distribution of everything that makes up the public good, may be the avowed objectives of development, at local and international levels. In actuality development objectives are less oriented to social justice and consist in effectively maintaining political and economic structures that serve the interests of the more powerful, locally and internationally. The net result is that not enough of the benefits of the "Asian economic boom" go to the poor, and too much of the benefits go to the controlling elites and the growing middle class.

6) While multinational and transnational corporations bring tremendous investments for the development of countries, they are *ethically value-free*, leaving much to be desired in terms of their accountability to the peoples and communities where they set up their business. Many have been ruthlessly exploitative of local resources to the ultimate detriment of the common good,²³ while their profits are funneled out.

7) International financing institutions and the dominant economic powers impose a development philosophy on indebted countries in Asia that is at worst perceived as counterdevelopmental. For one, significant amounts of national budgets have to meet required repayments, to the sacrifice of many worthwhile

22. See, e.g., First FABC International Theological Colloquium, no. 16.

23. *Ibid.*, no. 13.

development projects. GATT and other trade agreements are also criticized for throwing less competitive countries into the global arena of free market forces where the more competitive are seen to have the greatest advantage.

8) The globalization of the economy is, therefore, critically evaluated. As the state creates an environment favorable to the free expansion of markets and the competitiveness of business, greater and greater deregulation takes place. Whatever protection the poor may be getting from the state is sacrificed as powerful free market forces are put into play. In an unequal world, globalization favors the more prosperous and more powerful.²⁴ It aggravates massive poverty in Asia since development approaches and policies go along with inequitable international political and economic relationships, which create and perpetuate dependency and neo-colonialism on the part of client-countries.

9) The phenomenon of millions of Asian migrant workers is mainly due to massive poverty. But their poverty is caused by social injustices brought about: by internal factors such as elitist control of wealth and power, neglect of agrarian development, lack of employment opportunities, misguided development policies; and by external factors such as the globalization of the economy where better off countries become the beneficiaries of cheap labor from poor countries.

Such a critique of development is in actuality a critique of the approach to development or the model of development that is followed by Asian countries. The model puts more emphasis on total incomes than on their fair distribution, more on market demands than on basic needs, more on economic growth than on social justice.

III. IN DIALOGUE WITH THE POOR: FABC'S SOCIAL TEACHINGS

One may then understand why Asian Bishops insist on a select number of social teachings in order to respond to the Asian situation. It is from a continuing dialogue with the poor that these

24. *Sollicitudo rei socialis*, no. 17, comments on globalization in terms of *interdependence* and states: "When this interdependence is separated from its ethical requirements, it has *disastrous consequences* for the weakest."

social teachings take on an urgency and life of their own. More than anyone else, the poor *experience* the irrelevance of economic indicators of development to their lives.

Although economic indices of development are not unrelated to the quality of human life, nonetheless in the life-experience of the poor, national statistics of average family incomes, of per capita incomes, of GNPs and GDPs are quite meaningless in societies with great imbalances in the economic sphere. While the poor immediately and directly suffer the negative impact of economic decisions such as the increase of oil prices, they do not at all feel that their lives have become better because their countries may be enjoying an unprecedented growth rate. The benefits of such development simply do not trickle down to the poor, or at best only barely and slowly.

Among the social teachings of the Universal Church that the Asian Bishops emphasize as particularly relevant and urgent in the region are:

1. INTEGRAL DEVELOPMENT

This is development "beyond economics." It is, as Pope Paul VI's *Populorum progressio* says, the development of the *whole* person, including the transcendental dimension, and of *every* person, regardless of class, color, belief, gender, age or tribe.²⁵

The social teaching addresses the lack of authentic religious development in communist countries of Asia, the withholding of religious freedom from minority faiths in some countries either in law or in fact, the imposing of a type of development that is not properly respectful of cultures. At the same time, it addresses the neglect of various sectors at the grassroots level such as women and peasants and the ignoring of tribal or indigenous minority groups.

25. See FABC III, Calcutta, India, 1978, nos. 22-24 and Summaries of the Workshop Reports, nos. 1-4, in *FAPA*, 33, 44, which emphasize the role of prayer and contemplation in integral human liberation and development. The notion of integral human development is also treated in, e.g., BISA III, 1975, no. 5; BIMA II, 1980; in *FAPA*, 208, 100.

2. UNIVERSAL DESTINATION OF THE GOODS OF THE EARTH

God gave the earth to everyone, not only to some, in terms of responsible stewardship. It would be against the plan and intention of the Creator if access to the world's resources and access to the benefits accruing from their development were to be withheld from the poor and the weak. The above social teaching, emphasized fairly recently by FABC, is addressed to the inequitable sharing of the world's goods and to an absolutist understanding of private property.²⁶ It also addresses the lack of access of the less powerful to the earth's resources.²⁷ Thus the principle calls for a *democratization of wealth*. Further, it is applied to the defense and promotion of the integrity of creation. It denounces the ecological degradation of land, air, forest, and water. In some countries the destruction of forest cover is threatening to reach irreversibility.

3. SOCIAL JUSTICE, HUMAN DIGNITY AND HUMAN RIGHTS

The Church's social teachings on human dignity, human rights and social justice are addressed particularly to the denial and violation of fundamental human rights in various countries of Asia, partly due to conflicts, to cultural and religious factors, to authoritarian political or military regimes. Likewise, they address the great imbalances within countries in the economic and political sphere, where the *common* good of all is not served but development is biased towards those who hold economic and political power. The social teachings are also addressed to the inequitable economic arrangements at the international level and call for a more just international order.²⁸

26. Colloquium on the Social Doctrine of the Church, "We Believe That," no. 6.

27. "More than three-fourths of the world's people live in developing countries. But they enjoy only 16% of the world's income — while the richest 20% have 80% of global income," UNDP *Human Development Report 1995*, p. 14.

28. See, e.g., FABC I, no. 21; BIMA II, 1980, nos. 12-13; FABC IV, no. 3.1.2; BISA III, 1975, no. 8; FABC V, no. 7.3.2.2; BISA IV, nos. 5, 8; BIRA IV/10, 1988, no. 11; BISA VI, no. 17.

4. CULTURE, ETHNICITY AND RELIGIOUS TRADITIONS

Development cannot be simply economic. It has to interplay with the values, motivations, and attitudes of peoples — in short, with their varying cultures. For Asia, development is a process of dialogue with culture, ethnicity and religion. This insight is probably the most emphatic development concern of the Church in Asia.

It has to be so because the region is alive with an unbelievably rich variety of cultures. Its politics and economics, its progress as a region are all culturally rooted.²⁹ It is likewise the birthplace of the world's ancient religious traditions. Its peoples have a characteristic contemplative sense of the sacred and divine. Yet also characteristically Asia is at the same time the arena of ethnic and religious divisions and conflicts. These convulsions in the region necessarily affect the nature, the process, and the pace of development.

The development process cannot ignore these pervasive features of the Asian situation. Unfortunately development has done so. The failure of a succession of development decades to bring the region to economic competitiveness with the West is rooted ultimately in a failure to respect the centrality of culture in Asia.

5. DIALOGUE WITH THE POOR: PREFERENTIAL OPTION FOR THE POOR

Well known in the Asian Church is the triple dialogue that the First FABC Plenary Assembly suggested so that the message of Jesus may be effectively and credibly announced and lived: a

29. For instance, widely held is the idea that Confucianism and its work ethic, emphasizing respect for authority, education and diligence, has much to do with the economic development of Japan and the other East Asian dragons. Still, one should note with Vera Negri Zamagni ("Toward a One World Strategy: Outstanding Lessons of the Last 40 Years in Asia," Paper prepared for the International Symposium on Development: The Call of the Catholic Church in Asia, Manila, 22-25 February 1994, mimeo, p. 15) "that a great diversity of cultures has produced similar economic results in different places." Further she states that lack of development should "be ascribed to wrong economic and social strategies or to lack of will" rather than to cultural and religious traditions by themselves.

dialogue with the cultures of Asia (inculturation); a dialogue with the different faiths of Asia (inter-religious dialogue); and a dialogue with the poor of Asia (liberation and development).³⁰ Through the years, the triple dialogue has come to be recognized as Asia's *mode of mission*.³¹

The dialogue with the poor in Asia takes on a special form, called *dialogue of life*.

It involves a genuine experience and understanding of poverty, deprivation and oppression of so many of our peoples. It demands working, not for them merely (in a paternalistic sense), but *with them*, to learn from them . . . their real needs and aspirations, as they are enabled to identify and articulate these, and to strive for their fulfillment, by transforming those structures and situations which keep them in that deprivation and powerlessness.³²

The dialogue of life with the poor is a first step for the Church in Asia to exercise "option for the poor." This Christian imperative is invoked on behalf of the hundreds of millions of Asia's deprived and oppressed peoples.

For development to be integral and authentic, it has to give preferential priority to the poor as a moral demand.³³ The question — *development for whom?* — must be raised and the response has to be — all peoples, but especially the poor. Therefore, in the mind of Asian Bishops a *trickle-down* process of development where the poor are the last beneficiaries would be morally skewed.

6. PEOPLE EMPOWERMENT AT THE GRASSROOTS

For development towards self-reliance and autonomy to happen and for dependency and subservience to end, the empowerment of people must take place, especially at the grassroots

30. See, FABC I, nos. 12, 14, 16, 19-23; BIMA III, 1982, Syllabus of "Mission Concerns," nos. 4-6.

31. See, e.g., FABC V, no. 4.0; BIRA I, 1979, no. 9; International Mission Congress, no. 19.

32. FABC I, no. 20.

33. See, e.g., FABC IV, no. 3.7.7; International Mission Congress, Workshop IV, nos. 4, 14; BISA V, nos. 12-14; BISA VI, no. 8; BILA III, 1986, no. 11.

level. In Asia, culturally, politically, and economically, they have been simply at the receiving end of charity-based assistance rather than involved actors in a justice-oriented development process. The situation has to be reversed. Development should be directed towards the active participation of grassroots people, requiring a movement from passivity to involvement and empowerment, creating "initiatives of people, by people, for people."³⁴ A genuine *democratization of power* must, therefore, take place.

Of the 6 pervading pastoral imperatives that FABC V in 1990 discerned, two are directly pertinent to the social teaching: "the imperative of *empowering people* for mission, ministry, and the task of integral liberation" and "the need to encourage, initiate and facilitate *micro-level initiatives* with ripple effects especially at the grassroots level."³⁵

It is in the light of this situation that FABC places great emphasis on the building of Basic Ecclesial Communities. They are seen as models, not only of evangelized and evangelizing communities, but together with Basic Human Communities (i.e., inter-faith communities) they are regarded as *contrast communities* and products of an alternative model of human development.³⁶

7. THE REALITY AND TRANSFORMATION OF STRUCTURES OF INJUSTICE

For the Church, a primary focus of development lies in the inner spirit of the human person, in a profound change of heart, *metanoia*. Neither personal nor social development can dispense with this as a *sine qua non*. Yet the Bishops of Asia recognize only too well that personal change does not necessarily result in social change. For social change to take place, one must reckon with social structures that have obstructed genuine integral

34. See, e.g., FABC I, no. 21; BISA IV, nos. 7-8; BISA V, no. 17.

35. See FABC V, no. 7.2.

36. See, e.g., FABC III, no. 11.6; BISA V, no. 17; BISA VII, no. 15; BIRA IV/2, Recommendations, no. 12.3; Asian Colloquium on Ministries, nos. 41-50; International Mission Congress, Workshop III, no. 4.e, Workshop VII, no. 4; BIRA IV/2, 1985, no. 12.3; FABC V, no. 2.3.6.

development. Such structures are the products of human interests and decisions, repeated and entrenched through time in policies, laws, and practices. They are sinful or unjust in the sense that they prevent social justice from coming to fruition.

FABC IV in 1986 cites the political sphere in Asia as an example where structures of injustice exist:

The impact of misguided and selfish power politics on the reality of Asia is beyond imagining. Today's Asia has spawned structures and relationships in the political and economic community that are widening the scandalous gap between rich and poor, denying the latter a fair and just access to the resources of the earth. Repression, oppression and exploitation are realities that result from the greed of vested interests and political power.³⁷

In fact, from the very first plenary assembly of FABC way back in 1974, the Bishops of Asia have recognized that the underdevelopment of Asian peoples has been due not merely to the inconstant, unpredictable vagaries of human behavior and folly but due, even more, to structures of injustice that have been built over time because of human selfishness and greed. It is part of the Church's task to assist Asian peoples in their quest "to free themselves from structures which have created new bondage."³⁸ The Bishops are convinced that no future can be genuinely built "unless men and women of good will . . . seek the deeper conversion of hearts and the transformation of oppressive structures."³⁹

"Oppressive structures" have many forms. One form refers to the internal social systems in Asian societies where the control of wealth and power is totally in the hands of the elite. Another form consists in the international relationships (e.g., political, business, trade) that do perpetuate the internal social systems and/or keep entire countries or regions in inferior, dependent or subservient positions. Yet another form would be the system of patriarchy in Asia which keeps women in subjection.

Therefore, while insisting on a change of heart and of values,

37. FABC IV, no. 3.1.1, in *FAPA*, 179-80; see also BISA III, no. 2, *ibid.* 207.

38. See FABC I, no. 6.

39. FABC II, no. 43.

Asian Bishops likewise recognize the absolute necessity of structural change for Asia to develop authentically. For they even admit that structures within the institutional Church could inhibit participation and the integral development of her own people.⁴⁰

8. DEVELOPMENT BEYOND IDEOLOGIES

The stance of FABC on the role of ideologies in development is clear from its criticism of the prevailing ideologies. While observing that 46% of Asians live under communist rule, BISA IV in 1986 illustrates the basic position of FABC:

We have criticized classical capitalism because while professedly promoting economic growth, it has deprived man of the just fruits of his labor. We now criticize communism because, while professedly promoting liberation, it has deprived man of his just human rights. In their historical realization both have hindered true human development, the one creating poverty in the midst of affluence, the other destroying freedom in the pursuit of equality.⁴¹

At the plenary level of FABC, the 1986 FABC IV in Tokyo provides another insight into the same stance, as applied to the world of work and business. The Bishops observed that in Asia free enterprise has failed to recognize "the principle of the priority of labor over capital" that Pope John Paul II's social encyclical, *Laborem exercens* (no. 12), so emphatically enunciated. Instead, the capitalist system has not uplifted the workers of Asia and has degraded the working class. On the other hand, centrally planned or socialist economies in Asia have also brought state-domination over the workers. *Thus, neither capitalism nor socialism in their present forms can provide a new model for social structuring in favor of the great majority, the poor.*⁴²

Though not professing to be economists and social scientists, the Bishops recognize that ideologies are necessary for the designing of economic blueprints of development. But likewise

40. See, e.g., FABC III, nos. 9.2, 9.3.

41. BISA IV, no. 13.

42. See FABC IV, nos. 3.8.2 and 3.

they cannot fail to see the evident effects of the two general economic ideologies in the lives of the poor and reflect on the kind of approach to development that would respond to the challenge of integral human development. Some elements of that approach may themselves be gleaned from the social encyclicals of the Popes especially since Pope Paul VI, and from the reflections of the poor in Asia.

9. IN VIEW OF THE GOSPEL AND GOD'S KINGDOM

The social and cultural analysis of the Asian Bishops claims to be rooted in the actual perceptions of the poor regarding development — i.e., their lack of development. Yet even a cursory look at their social teachings would indicate that the Bishops' preoccupation is not merely development understood in terms of the economic liberation of the poor. Indeed, their view of development goes beyond the temporal order.

Their horizon is nothing less than the Gospel of Jesus and the Kingdom of God that he proclaimed.⁴³ How is the Gospel to be announced to Asian peoples? What Gospel values do we see sprouting as seeds in the ground of various cultures and peoples? How do we assist in their growth towards full maturity in Jesus Christ? How do we see the coming of God's Kingdom for Asia? If the Kingdom is one of justice and peace, truth and love, are these values emerging? Are they being nurtured? Are political, economic, social behavior, movements, structures, and relationships in Asia promoting the values of the Kingdom? Are the hundreds of millions of Asia's poor liberating themselves from situations of injustice, deprivation, exploitation and oppression?

The Asian Bishops are in truth dialoguing with Asian realities and asking: In Asia is the Kingdom of God *becoming*? For this process, what should the Church be and do in Asia for all Asians? It is in the light of such a mission that the reflections of FABC regarding development can be properly understood. In the final

43. See, e.g., FABC I, nos. 22-23; FABC IV, Preamble, no. 4.8.7; FABC V, no. 1.7; BIRA III, 1982, no. 11; BIRA IV/2, nos. 7-8; BIMA I, 1978, nos. 2, 5, Resolutions A.1, in *FAPA*, 291-92, 293.

analysis the integral human development of peoples goes beyond economics and ideologies. It does include development in the temporal order but it necessarily goes beyond this — into the eschatological future of Asia's peoples in God's Kingdom, a reign of justice, truth and freedom, peace and love that has the challenging dimension of being *now and not yet*, beginning and awaiting to be fully realized.

IV. AN ALTERNATIVE MODEL OF DEVELOPMENT

The Asian critique of development implies an alternative approach. Such approach is being tried out at the micro-level, especially at the level of *Basic Ecclesial Communities* and *Basic Human Communities*.

It consists in the active participation of peoples in their own development, in their solidarity towards self-reliance, using maximally their own resources with minimum external help. For such communities, sustainable development is not an empty concept but both process and goal. As a process, sustainable development has to keep pace with the peoples' own resources for purposes. As a goal, it has to make sure that succeeding generations will continue to reap the fruits.

It requires the harnessing of a community's resources through the conscientization of its members, raising their awareness regarding their situation of poverty, its causes and effects. It leads them to a recognition and appreciation of their own cultures, their human dignity and human rights, their own abilities to liberate themselves from age-old attitudes of being passive objects acted upon by others and waiting for solutions from others. It is a process of truly becoming *persons*.

This alternative development model also requires the organization of conscientized grassroots people into a united community with democratic and participatory leadership that *enables* and *empowers* members to be co-responsible, who actively participate in the making of community decisions. Thus organized, the community moves into self-help development projects, that are respectful of the environment. Community cooperatives and the setting up of appropriate technology are features of such development model. Democratization of power and wealth be-

comes a reality. The model includes the building up of solidarity among communities, with non-government organizations and peoples' organizations.

Along with various religious faiths, peoples' organizations and non-governmental organizations, play midwife to the development process. On the other hand, the State is expected to fulfill its duty to ensure that development proceed in freedom and in peace, and that logistics needed for viability and sustainability are adequately provided.

The model facilitates social justice at the grassroots level, does away with structures that exploit the many for the benefit of the few, promotes human dignity and solidarity, harnesses the liberative forces of a given culture, empowers people at the grassroots, and activates their participation in development decisions and processes.

The community that is created at the grassroots from such an alternative model of development may not necessarily boast of quantum leaps in incomes. But it would certainly enjoy integral, equitable, and sustainable development.

CONCLUSION

This portrait of a development approach and the community that results from it may be a romanticized and idealized presentation. From a macro view, it may even be quaint, utopian, and seemingly out of touch with harsh competitive, even dictatorial market forces.

But such an approach has been tried and is being followed in many village communities in Asia. Today there are thousands of active communities of conscientized poor that have been created with the alternative approach. It is literally a *development from below*. In some small parts of Asia, they are making ever widening ripples in the waters of social transformation.

Realistically, there is no way that this alternative approach can take the place of the dominant model at the macro-level. The prevailing social structures above the village level and up to the international level, through which the dominant model operates, are too entrenched and too powerfully supported.

What the alternative model can do is to make certain that the

“little people” are not exploited or manipulated and further deprived, but will survive and develop in freedom and dignity, using as capably as they can the forces of modernization and industrialization to their own benefit.

But who knows what might happen even if only one percent of the hundreds of millions of Asia's poor would unite and, in solidarity, raise their collective voice against the forces that now control their lives — and move as active agents towards their own authentic integral development? Would such a voice resound perhaps — and be heeded — in the international corridors of political and economic power where decisions that profoundly affect their lives are being made? Would that this be so.