

## **A SYNODAL CHURCH IN THE ASIAN CONTEXT**

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### **ABSTRACT**

This article explores the concept of a synodal church within the Asian context, emphasizing the themes of synodality, communion, participation, and mission. It presents a framework for understanding synodality as a dynamic praxis rooted in the teachings of Christ and the early Church, while also reflecting on the transformative spirit of the Second Vatican Council. The article addresses emerging realities in Asia, including religious moderation, solidarity in the face of natural disasters, and the plight of marginalized communities, highlighting the need for the Church to engage actively with societal issues. It advocates for a Church that embodies inclusivity, promotes equality, and fosters collaboration among diverse communities. Additionally, the article calls for a new theological language that resonates with contemporary challenges and emphasizes the importance of lay participation in the Church's mission. Ultimately, it envisions a Church that serves as a beacon of hope and joy, actively participating in the quest for justice and peace in a rapidly changing world.

**Keywords:** synodality, communion, participation, mission, Asian context, solidarity, emancipation

### **INTRODUCTION**

The article discusses the concept of a synodal church within the Asian context, emphasizing the themes of synodality, communion, participation, and mission. It highlights the importance of adapting the Church's approach to Asia's unique cultural, social, and political realities, advocating for a Church that is inclusive, engaged, and responsive to the needs of marginalized communities.

### **THEORYTICAL FRAMEWORKS**

Key points of this article include:

1. **Synodality:** The article outlines a framework for synodality that encourages creative freedom and active participation in the Church's mission, drawing on the teachings of Christ and the early Church.
2. **Emerging Realities:** It addresses pressing issues in Asia, such as religious moderation, solidarity in the face of natural disasters, the plight of marginalized groups, and the challenges posed by political authoritarianism.
3. **Promotion of Equality:** The article stresses the need for the Church to advocate for equality and justice, particularly for vulnerable populations, and to engage in environmental stewardship.
4. **The Role of the Laity:** It emphasizes the importance of lay participation in the Church's mission and the need for clergy formation that is sensitive to the diverse realities of Asian societies.

5. **New Pathways:** The article calls for the Church to adopt new approaches to outreach, emphasizing the importance of dialogue, solidarity, and active engagement with the broader community.
6. **Theological Reflection:** It advocates for a new theological language that resonates with contemporary issues and promotes public engagement, encouraging a theology rooted in people's lived experiences.

Overall, the article envisions a Church that embodies joy and hope, actively participates in societal issues and fosters a spirit of inclusivity and collaboration in the diverse Asian context.

## ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

### 1. Synodality Scheme: Communio, Participation, Mission

A scheme is a design framework that has a direction to be a building in the future. As a scheme, its perfection lies in its concrete spark. Its schematic understanding components extend to movement, not concept. Scheme refers to praxis. The scheme below is intended simply to propose creative freedom, not a frozen doctrine of the idea of synodality. There are many references to synodality, but this paper only intends to emphasize some of its schematic meanings.

#### 1.1. Synodality Scheme

- a. The Incarnation of Christ and the Gospel of the Kingdom of God. Christ is God who became human. He emptied Himself to be present, to have dialogue, and to proclaim the News of Salvation to humans in the language and context of human civilization. God comes and walks with humans.
- b. The early church of the apostles. The early apostolic church is the earliest, most obvious scheme of synodality. They live with one heart and soul, centered on the Eucharist, and together proclaim the Gospel in an astonishing way of life.
- c. Second Vatican Council. This council marked a Church renewed by the Holy Spirit. The renewal took place in its entirety, except for the truths of faith that had been witnessed by the apostles. By itself, every renewal requires adjustments which are not easy in the life of the Church.
- d. Communion, participation, and mission spark the scheme of "a new way of being Church of the today". Pope Francis launched a renewed spirit that invited the Church to be creative in seeking new ways to present the actual Church for this era.
- e. Listening to the Apostolic Exhortation, *Evangelii Gaudium* (November 2013); Encyclical *Laudato Si'* (May 2015); and *Fratelli Tutti* (October 2020). These three documents describe the "new ways" presented by Pope Francis for a joint journey (synodality) of the Catholic Church that is increasingly responsive to the changes and developments of modern civilization.
- f. "I prefer a Church that is bruised, hurt, and covered in dirt because it has been on the streets, rather than a Church that is unhealthy because it locks itself up and clings too much and seeks its comfort... And by imitating Mary, Mother of the Lord Jesus, "we want to be a Church that serves, that leaves home and goes from its places of worship, comes out of its sacristy, to serve life, to kindle hope, and to be a sign of unity... to build bridges, to tear down walls that divide people- humanity, and to sow the seeds of reconciliation" (Francis).

- g. Pope John XXIII, when publishing the Encyclical *Pacem in Terris* on April 11, 1963, emphasized the position of the Church to stand up for a peaceful order based on truth, justice, love, and freedom.

### **1.2. Communion Scheme**

- a. The center of communion is Christ himself.
- b. Communion is meant for the truth that the Church is a pilgrimage community.
- c. Communion has many “doors” and “windows” to welcome other people with whom we make pilgrimages together.
- d. Communion is the spark of inclusivity and must seek new ways to present the Kingdom of God that welcomes everyone.

### **1.3. Participation Scheme**

- a. The spirit of participation is the spirit of sons and daughters of God who are free and have been redeemed by Christ.
- b. Participation has a scheme of unlimited creativity and unconditional love, which comes from God's grace.
- c. Participation means participating in church life in the parish to present the Church as the Sacrament of salvation.
- d. The participation scheme also means God's people participate in the life of the surrounding community. The church, through the presence of its people, takes part in the governance of political, economic, business, education, culture, defense and security, health, and other daily activities.
- e. On the other hand, the participation scheme also presupposes the Church affirming openness, inclusivity, and collaborative creativity toward anyone who takes part in works to present the Kingdom of God.

### **1.4. Mission Scheme**

- a. The mission is the duty of Christ himself to every Christian.
- b. The mission, as Christ, has carried out in Luke 4: 18, is the mission to proclaim the Good News of the Gospel to the poor, abandoned, liberation for those in prison, and so on. That is, the mission is not just a mission to go, but to go and preach the Gospel.
- c. The mission was sparked in real witness to God's love, solidarity, struggle for a just life order, peaceful order of living together, and the presence of God's Kingdom.
- d. The invitation to carry out Christ's mission is specifically addressed to anyone, especially young people, to have the courage to become partners in Christ's work. Missionary means to be a co-worker with God himself in spreading the Gospel.
- e. The Indonesian Church has developed into a Missionary Church. Indonesia has sent many missionaries around the world.

## **2. The Emerging Realities and Trends of Concern in the Context of Asia**

### **2.1. Moderation of religions**

Moderation of religions has been a major concern in some countries of Asia in recent times. Indonesia might be one of them. Moderation is a pathway of being genuinely the faithful adherent of religious belief that is more rooted in the cultural heritage of the local wisdom. To be genuinely religious does not mean to embrace the cultures of other countries where religion originates from. Thus, to be a Christian does not presuppose taking European cultures. Likewise, the identity of the true Muslim does not refer to being an Arabs alike with styles of living in the Arabic cultures, but to remaining faithful and

well-rooted in the Indonesian cultural contexts and wisdom. The moderation of religions to some extent also affects the peaceful relationship of the people who live faithfully in their religions.

## **2.2. Solid solidarity**

In everyday life in Asia, the phenomena of natural disasters occur every year with sometimes large-scale devastations due to fragile areas in terms of geographic positions. Earthquakes, tsunamis, volcanic eruptions, recurring floods, landslides, and the like are threatening almost all the time. Sufferings and severe devastation are logic consequents afterward. Our homeland seems to be a home of suffering. In this context, strong solidarity should not be temporary, but the permanent call of being Christians in Asia. The phenomenon of disasters has urged us to theologize Asia in new ways. There must be a real and fervent effort that theology must also flow into practical management for the environment. Theology needs to depart from local wisdom which is often crushed by the policies of the political authorities who prefer development and material benefits related to dredging natural resources to conserving the environment.

## **2.3. The “third persons” in our home**

The “third persons” in our everyday life are the people oppressed, abandoned, and thrown away from the political system in society. They do not take part in the grammar of social communication. Some ethnic groups living in the forests or remote places in some countries of Asia are the excluded ones as a community of human beings. They are marginalized or suffocated by development policies or deforestation or oil palm cultivation. When they do not enjoy health services at a fundamental level, they are squashed from the just order of life. When basic facilities such as electricity, water, and good air for living become unlikely items, they become the third persons in society. As the third person, they are voiceless. There is no possibility of participation in public policy because every protest is only interpreted as a resistance to the existing political power. Due to this unjust political society, their lives are always threatened; their human rights are easily violated caused by the pretext of opposing the ruler's public policy.

## **2.4. “Isolated zones”**

The reality of Asia with its various cultures, ideologies, and religions often unjustly creates what is called “isolated zones”, the unfortunate territory of the “third persons”. How does this isolated zone begin in our society? The isolated zone is formal-artificial. It started with the formalization of the unjust system of social life and was produced by human engineering in the political, ideological, and cultural landscape of the country. By “formalization” we mean legalization of the natural reality in which there was a sort of belief that there are higher and lower values, customs, and even religions; there are groups of people who are more and less dignified than others; a group has more rights and other fewer rights, or there are jobs that are higher and less valuable, and so on. Gradually this formalization generates the creation of castes and other conditions of discrimination.

Ideology and religion create to some extent isolated zones as well. Ideology is not merely an ideal concept but creates segregation in society. In ideology, there is no absolute egalitarian concept. Communism, which glorifies even a “classless” society (egalitarianism), has a big hole in terms of discrimination against certain groups of society which is not in the same ideology. Often not being realized, religion also becomes a kind of “means” of creating this isolated area. The isolated area in the religious context is sometimes a form of oppression and (often so) contempt in human history. Women and

the vulnerable in some countries are the victims of this isolated zone in religion. Conflicts in the so-called “religious countries” in Asia, for example, put religion on the margins of humanity. Wars are so cruelly carried out for various political and social reasons that intersect with religious doctrines within religion. Or, if the reasons are not directly linked with religion, the question is why religion is unlikely to be a means of peace for one another.

Who are the inhabitants of the isolated zone in religion? And how does this zone become an absurdity that can be created so easily? In the first place, the inhabitants of the isolated zone in religion are those minority communities of other religions; or, also those who come from the same religion but have different teachings. They are the vulnerable groups who easily become the third persons in religion. Minorities often become “easy prey” for the madness of religious groups who worship power and vain glory. And, often the “worship of power” is based on a justified concept of interpretation of their sacred texts. And, their absolute interpretations often cut off human principles and the universal logic of peace.

The problem occurs when the realm of religious absolutism is brought into the public sphere. Religious absolutism is described as the concept of the fact that there is only one truth that belongs to their religion. This absolutism of truth has always been proposed by radical groups. The absolute interpretation of religion changes the way how people relate to each other. Their behavior turns to completely unfriendly and intolerant conduct toward different persons. Living together which was originally peaceful turns to turbulent. Violence occurs every time, because they associate themselves with the truth on the one hand, and different people are seen as those who propagate the rivalry of their truth on the other. This kind of absolutism concept gave birth to isolated zones in religion. Those who do not partake in the same truth of the religion are taken away and led to isolated areas. They will surely suffer injustice in the religious society.

## **2.5. Emancipatory characteristics**

The context of life in the early decades of the 21st century is often called “post-religion”. Post-religion does not mean the era of the decline of the role of religion in our age, but rather the spread of critical awareness of religions that tend to appear oppressive. Our everyday life has been saturated by religious conflicts. Religion seems to go away far from the spark of the beautiful relationship between man and God. Religion has not only shown an emancipatory characteristic, rather it has turned into a kind of tyrannical ideology that colonizes and plunders the order of everyday life. The “spring” of religious-political power collusion in several countries has turned into a nightmare of endless destruction of human life. Poor people, minorities, and vulnerable refugees become the very victims of endless suffering.

The “Monolith concept” of religion departs entirely from an abstract assumption that there is no diversity of reality. As a result, the reality of human life is believed to be true only when it is in the box of single truth within one’s religion as in his interpretation and organizational institutions. The next consequence is not only the rejection of plurality but religion (religious organizations) turns to a repressive and anti-emancipatory power. Entering that religion is like falling into a trap in a small box that shackles and smells stuffy, as it is full of violence and conflicts.

Religion or religious institutions (or even an assembly of experts) do not own patents of the truth of everyday life. Patent holders are human beings themselves who struggle with the burdens of life. Any human being - in the common life system - has the right to participate in matters of ethical and moral truth, even the truth of religiosity



(relationship with God). Emancipatory religion does not only boast of the validity of revelation or scripture. When a group fights against one another in some countries that uphold religions, who takes care of many refugee children and displaced women? They are usually groups of doctors and observers of humanity who generally do not care about the existence of God. It is absurd if people are so proud of the truth of their religion, revelation, prophet, and God, but at the same time do not care about the sufferings of the refugees. Emancipatory religion does not alienate human beings from a relationship with other people. Religious truth does not uproot humans from being together with their neighbors. Denial of the beauty of togetherness is a spark of destructive religious egoism.

## **2.6. Dehumanization of being “the other”**

In some cultures in Asia, the “others” are the people marginalized. They are marginalized because they are foreigners or migrant workers or refugees or a minority for ideological reasons. In the Indonesian context, the others are those who are not “masters” of their own lives. Our brothers and sisters who live in the forests are the Others because they are expelled from the whole realm of their own life. They were pushed out by investment policies. They are deprived of their land because of environmental pollution due to uncontrolled exploitation of nature and deforestation. They become human beings who are not only alienated from their land but are transformed into “unknown” figures. When humans are deprived of their culture, they not only experience an “unjust policy of modernization”, but particularly suffer from a “disappearing process” of their existence. Humans are no longer elaborating on their life but undergoing “dehumanization”. Because of dehumanization, the homeland no longer offered any possibilities. What exists is only continual threats of self-annihilation of their existence as the “Other”.

## **2.7. Concern about political authoritarianism**

The history of Asian political civilization is identical to authoritarianism or tyranny with some typical flavors of the respected countries. Some countries suffer from the emergence of authoritarian politics, either by one person (tyranny), several people (oligarchy), the military (timocracy), or also people at large (lawless). We can't turn a blind eye to dictatorship carried out by power holders who arbitrarily oppress other people for many reasons and by certain groups who claim to be the majority who persecute minorities. Authoritarianism or tyranny in the political system is a major concern for Asia. We must not remain silent which could easily be interpreted as condoning or agreeing with authoritarianism. The courage of the politicians, sons, and daughters of the Catholic Church, needs to be supported to synergize with activists from other religious groups with the good wills. The “rebellion” of our conscience over authoritarianism must also be followed up in effective cooperation and peaceful movements to improve people's lives.

## **3. Glaring Gaps**

### **3.1. Promotion of equality and participation**

Promotion is not only a one-time event but also especially continual “efforts” or “struggles” or “concerns of practices” of doing something good for the benefit of society. In reality, the Asian Catholic Church is a “small community” among the majority of people of different faiths. The struggle for equal participation, therefore, is a serious endeavor. The concept of equality and participation belongs to the nature of the person to uphold his/her human dignity. The Asian Church needs to be more courageous to promote equal

human dignity and participation. The Prophetic presence of the Church means social engagement in faithfulness to the Word of God. The stories of courage of the modern prophets (Catholics in Asia) to promote equality and participation becomes model of how faith reflection is carried out by the Asian Church. In some countries, discrimination linked with religion, belief, and ideology is not a myth. In the field of education, acts of bullying of students often take place due to different religions, races, or castes. Within such discriminating conditions, equal participation is unlikely. Racism related to ethnicity in some countries is still a serious obstacle to justice and fairness.

### **3.2. The “don’t” of committing injustice**

The Asian Catholic Church must not be tired of speaking up in wise ways to the state leaders or community stakeholders not to commit injustice in any way against ethnic minorities, indigenous people, women or migrant workers, or those who are struggling to find jobs. Investments and all efforts for development should not contradict the preferential option for the vulnerable ones. The interests of the minority must not be sacrificed for the economic or cultural development intended for a larger community. The “ease” of committing injustice in society must be resolved systematically by ratifying fair and just laws. Do not let it happen, in Asia, the expulsion or deprivation of a community or ethnic group from their homeland. It is but injustice in the strict sense. The Asian Catholic Church must be more courageous to speak up about the “don’t of committing an injustice” on various occasions.

### **3.3. Environmental Problems**

Asia, like the other continents, suffers from the negligence of environmental conservation programs. Indonesia records serious cases related to injustice in the environment. Forests are cleared for projects that generate financial profits for the benefit of a few people and corrupt officials. The rivers are subject to unbearable pollution. Floods were everywhere and afflicted poor people. The sea is contaminated by the uncontrolled disposal of industrial waste. Politicians display an indifferent attitude to the importance of maintaining a clean and good environment for future generations. The ratification of legal provisions on the conservation of nature and the environment has been neglected in the rooms of the legislative council. And, in turn, this negligence becomes an evil model of systemic impoverishment of society of today.

## **4. Images of the Church in the Asian Context**

### **4.1. Church of joy and hope**

The Asian Catholic Church is transforming into a Church of joy and hope for the Asian people. A rereading of the Second Vatican Council urges the Asian Catholic Church to seek an identity that is in harmony with the context. When most Asian countries as “emerging countries” are struggling to get out of the shackles of poverty and underdevelopment, the Catholic Church needs to present itself as an “oasis” for anyone looking for hope. On the other hand, when some Asian countries have developed, the Catholic Church has become a place that provides true joy in its relationship with God and the community of the faithful. When in a country there are various religions, Christianity must be ready to present the charm of joy and hope of the togetherness and plurality that is negotiated in the Word of God as the good news to everyone.

Archbishop Karol Wojtyla, later Saint Pope John Paul II, became one of the most enthusiastic supporters of the so-called theme of “Schema 13” of *Gaudium et Spes*. He said:

In scheme 13 we must speak in such a way that the world does not see us teaching in authoritarian ways. Rather, the world sees that the Church is always looking for new and just solutions to the difficult problems of human life together with the world itself. The problem is not in the fact that we have the truth. The problem is in the world, that the truths of our faith should be the longing of the world (*Acta Synodalia* 3/5, p. 299). [...] It is not enough to say, "I am the child of God, a free child" (for His Son has saved me). Instead, we must dare to say, "I am the children of God who will be responsible." Responsibility is a high expression of freedom. What is meant by "responsible" is the courage to maintain and live the truth of the Christian faith and prevent one's self from being indifferent. As children of God, we must display a deep sensitivity to the needs of others (*Acta Synodalia* 4/2, p. 12).

Thus, the Pastoral Constitution of *Gaudium et Spes* is a sign of the Catholic Church's involvement and commitment to take responsibility for the pilgrimage of today's people. The Church of Joy and Hope is a Church that presents herself as a pilgrim together with all human beings who desire a better civilization, dialogue, and peace.

#### **4.2. "The seed has been growing up"**

Asian theology needs to reflect on Jesus, the Sower (Matthew 13: 1-23). When the Lord Jesus dealt with the people of his day, He communicated "new" themes that were relevant to their lives. Various parables and metaphors are effective models of evangelization. If theology is a matter of "sowing the seed of the Word", the first theologian is Christ Himself. Because He is the Sower of the Word. Every effort to do theology must refer to the Spirit of Christ Himself. Not only sowing, but theologizing in the example of Christ is also an activity of caring for cultivation, making seeds grow, strengthening roots, and growing branches so that the tree produces abundant fruits. This is the real meaning of theological activity. Doing theology - if it is linked to proclaiming the Word of God - is not just the pursuit of spiritual knowledge or spelling out complicated terms, but rather a knowledge of the secrets of the Kingdom of Heaven. And, this kind of knowledge is "not open" to most people. For, although seeing, they generally do not see; although they hear, they do not listen to and do not want to understand. Their hearts are thickened, their ears are heavy, and their eyes are closed. The latter, perhaps true, theology does stop when the heart is insensitive, not open, undisciplined, with heavy ears heeding to the words of God in the frenzy of the events of civilization. Theology calls for a "listening", "sensitive", and "watchful" attitude. The saints, "teachers" of practical theology, such as Vincent de Paul, Mother Teresa, Leo XIII, and others said, "when listening to the events of the times, one must try to discover God's will."

God's words in Matthew 13: 18-23 clearly state the "fundamental components" of the so-called "theologizing".

First, theology is the activity of listening to God's words about the Kingdom of Heaven. Theologizing does not start from a "beautiful hobby" "trend of concern" or "casual conversation about the sacred mysteries by deploying a lot of technical terminologies." Rather, theology must be worked out from reading the Word of God with all of its depth. Thus, theologizing Asia requires new ears, new hearing, or new ways of listening to the Gospel.

Second, doing theology means seeking the correct understanding of the word of the Kingdom of God. The parable of the Sower, in Christ's own words, affirms the same thing: hearing the Word without understanding it correctly, the hearer will be easily swayed by the influence of the evil one.



Third, to do theology means to take root in the Word or to make the seed root deeply and firmly in the land of human life. Doing theology - in the spirit of the Second Vatican Council - is synonymous with efforts that are often called inculturation. The point is that the Word of God may be deeply rooted in human culture in such a way that the Word will not only grow and bear fruit but also evangelize cultural values. At this moment, theology enters a very complex area, because theology requires methodologies to get to know the "lands" of human culture well. In every land, it must be assumed to have fertility values or wisdom that can "grow" the Word. Hence, in this "rooting the Word" phase, new and serious efforts are needed to explore local policies. The gospel is the Word of God that is lived by humans who cannot be deprived of the roots of their cultural, religious, and social-ethical wisdom.

Fourth, doing theology means having a dialogue with the world. When describing the seed that grows among the thorns, God refers to the "world" realm, namely worldly anxiety as the cause that chokes the growth of the seed and can even kill it. The Second Vatican Council does not only interpret "the world" in a more sophisticated way but also urges us to do theology by "having a dialogue with the world". The church makes pilgrimages and communicates with the world. Theology becomes an activity to have a correct dialogue with the "world". Theology must make a man strong to grow the seed of the Word and make it bear abundant fruit in the world.

So, the fifth component of doing theology is bearing fruits as many as possible. Christ reminds teachers and students of theology that doing theology does not culminate in "inner gratification" of a complex reflection of the experience of faith or "intellectual clarification" of the mysteries of the Christian faith. Theology is a productive activity, which must also display tangible fruits to their full potential. Christ also says that in doing theology we should not be relieved in imaginative and reflective speculation in various self-satisfying creativities. Instead, theology should continue in serious efforts that could produce maximum fruits in daily life for the Church, society, and the world.

#### **4.3. A Hospitable Church**

A hospitable church is the very nature of the characteristics of the Asian Catholic Church. When has the Catholic Church become a welcoming community? When the methodology of theology turns to the charm of everyday life; when the Church is at the service of humanity; when the Church forms "management of consciousness" so as not to be frozen in the absolutism of dogma teachings that easily dominate human obedience; when the Church communicates its truths in ways of love that help people give meaning to his or her experience of sufferings. In religions, the "absolutism" of religious teachings has often been proven to be the very reason for discrimination and other unjust treatment. Religious absolutism leads religion to the reduction of self-righteousness which discriminates against others.

The paradigm of Asian theology today is shifting from the perspective of the transcendent to an immanent God who struggles and engages in real human life. God involves Himself in the rigors of human struggles. Theology occurs no longer from imagining the great existence of Allah, but from listening to human experiences on the "rough grounds", which is also the context of God's presence.

The truth that Jesus, the God made flesh and died on the cross - in the Gospel of Mark 15:39 - is proven by the mouth of the ungodly commander: "He is the Son of God." There's a great contrast paradigm here. Jesus fell limply hanging on the wooden cross and died as a human, but He was seen as God. Jesus was helpless, but it was at this moment the proof that God's presence was real. Jesus died, but that was the beginning of the salvific

life. Jesus died, but that is the ultimate proof of His victory over death. Easter is both defeat and victory. The deity of Christ does not lie in His mighty power, but in His helplessness and weakness. The deity of Christ lies precisely in his humanity, in His solidarity (with human suffering), in His wounds (which were finished until His death), and in His downfall (on the Cross). The story of Christ's helplessness is not a story of the past. The story of Christ's defeat is a representation of the various stories of suffering and grief of the people of our time. Allah is extraordinary, precisely because He entered the area of various stories of sorrow in the "steep land" of human life. But, as Christ was lifted on the cross, human suffering is not in vain. God is not praised in victory.

## **5. The need for changes**

### **5.1. The need for a "new" language**

Theologizing Asia needs a new "language". In Medieval, theological and philosophical language flourished in school/college classrooms of which the methodology was called scholastic. Theological language underwent "abundant shifts" during the Renaissance when literature, art, architecture, mathematics, and scientific discoveries gained popularity and became the spark of faith. Rerum Novarum (1891) also noted a finding of a "new language" in theology. Theological language is brought to a critical philosophical nuance to cases of justice and siding with the poor workers. The language of the Rerum Novarum theology will continue to be developed from period to period to the present in what is called the Catholic Church's Social Teaching. Theology is no longer speculative which stops in the logic of language, but must be transformative, criticize, change, ignite movements and create new orders that promote justice and peace.

The Second Vatican Council also insisted on a new language with dialogical theology that greeted people from all cultural backgrounds. The local languages have their importance in the realm of the proclamation of the Word of God. When the world is gripped by the cruelty of structural injustice, theological language has to turn to participatory models that liberate and empower humans.

Public theology is one of the concrete triggers for the search for a new language in theology. Public theology comes from the real awareness that theology as an activity of the life of faith must have a language that can be understood publicly. Theology should not be practiced solely in the classroom, in the honorable rooms of faculties and colleges, or in writings that are technically complex and difficult for the public. Theology must have a language that speaks of matters that belong to the public. Public theology is like the missionary activity which has instilled Christian faith in our territories. In the past, missionaries to bring Christ had to learn a language that belongs to the public. And, we see how the language of the missionaries has been effective in bringing the Christian faith everywhere. Theology must also arrive at an understanding of such "missionary language" in the sense that theological languages need to adapt to public experience. Public experiences are so diverse, and each has a unique depth. Today is the time for theological activities to become down-to-earth activities in public life and language. In public theology, local wisdom is not only counted as material for theology but also seems to be a language perspective in the reflection of the Christian faith. Grace is not only reserved for the nation of Israel with all its languages and identities as the chosen people but - as the Lord Jesus says - must be proclaimed throughout the world, to the public anyone, anywhere, at any time. Because the people to whom the gospel is preached already have local wisdom roots, it is impossible to evangelize without having a dialogue with local cultures.

### **5.2. A new paradigm of clergy formation**

The formation of the clergy in Asia will still be very crucial in the coming years because the presence of priests and religious leaders has a very deep meaning for people's life. Asia, the home of religions, has provided a unique understanding related to the presence of religious leaders. Priestly formation needs extra attention from the Asian Catholic Church. Bishops need to pay attention to the quality of their priests' education by working closely with other bishops and leaders of the religious congregation (Cf. *Optatam Totius*, art. 7). It is not the time in which seminary education is carried out separately in each diocese, especially if there are not enough human resources. Besides, it is also necessary to prioritize the paradigm of the formation of collaboration and collegiality within the system of education. The education of the candidates for priesthood needs to include sensitivity to respond to today's realities and challenges of the Asian realities.

The Asian context is plural in terms of culture, religion, language, and various riches of life. The education of the priestly candidates needs to provide a lot of portions of the characteristics of internationality and interculturality in harmony with the Asian reality. The concept of priestly education - in an Asian context - calls for new strategies which become the elaboration of the *Optatam Totius* of the Vatican II, which accentuates the missionary spirit of collaboration. The formation system of seminaries in Asian countries should not be like "islands" separated from each other, proud of their unique education style. We have to enter the gates of international and intercultural collaborations in the continent. Also, the lay people must have the same opportunity for quality training regarding the Catholic faith, church life, and so on. Catholic lay missionaries have also become an interesting phenomenon in the recent development of the Asian Church.

### **5.3. Full participation of the lay people**

The full participatory courage of laity in theology is gaining traction these days in the Asian Catholic Church. In line with the spirit of the Second Vatican Council, the call to action from *Octogesima Adveniens* has had a very long "history" and has become a step for Catholic laymen to participate in evangelization in various fields related to the promotion of social justice.

The *Apostolicam Actuositatem* (AA) describes clearly the position of the laity in evangelizing. The laity takes on the role of the "spearhead" of the Church in their pilgrimage in the world. When a hierarchy has a "limited" space for participation in the political sphere, the laity is the one who directly enters it. The laity has a sacred call to take part in the busy activities of the world order. The holiness of the laity is not in anything other than their loyalty to the service of the world. Serving the world means offering and giving oneself as best as possible in all fields<sup>5</sup>, such as politics, economics, art, business, education, health service, and all things of activities of daily life. The Church views the witness of the life of the laity as a presence of the Catholic Church herself. The history of the local Church around the world engraves the history of the role of the laity with all its ups and downs. The progress of the Catholic Church is largely determined by the role and commitment of the laity. The role of the layman is so important; therefore it is necessary to make an adequate education for them. Formal and informal education must be pursued in various methods to achieve the quality of testimony of the laity, especially the youth. It is the responsibility of the particular churches to provide them with the education system as best as possible for the benefit of their formation.

## **CONCLUSION**

### **“New Pathways” for the Church in Asia**

#### **1. The reaching out, embracing, and welcoming pathways**

The Asian Catholic Church needs to have "new hands" capable of reaching out to especially the poor and vulnerable, homeless people, unemployed, and the indigenous who live in remote places. Not only that, but the Church also needs to have good relationships that reach out to anyone from all religious and ideological backgrounds. Jesus Christ revealed the truth that God entered the world of human life and reached out to anyone who was marginalized and abandoned: those who were possessed by an evil spirit, who were lepers, sinful and condemned women, those who were imprisoned, and so on.

The Pastoral Constitution of *Gaudium et Spes* intends to invite all mankind to talk about the various problems facing the world today. In the first part, the problem is linked to human society (GS, 23-39), family (GS, 47-52), culture (GS, 53-62), economic life (GS, 63-72), life in political society (GS, 73-76), and peace (GS, 77-90). The Catholic Church listens to the challenges and asserts her relationship with the world and how she takes a firm stance against the threats. But, the Church also reaches her hands out and invites mankind to establish cooperation and dialogue. "Everything we have said about human dignity, human beings, and the deep meaning of human effort is the basis for the relationship of the Church and the world and the basis for dialogue between them" (GS 40). To the faithful, the Church urges concrete action to contribute to the world, but at the same time advocates to open up and be enriched by the world.

The Asian Catholic Church needs to follow an embracing pathway in its pilgrimage. The church has to have a good relationship with the civil government without losing its prophetic presence. Catholic politicians must pay attention to the truths that flow from Christian faith and love. This pathway is often steep and arduous, but the Catholic Church's calling and mission is to follow these alleys. Jesus embraced Zacchaeus; Levi, the tax collector, was called and sent as one of his close co-workers, His apostle. The love of Jesus for man is the love that "embraces" anyone and brings him, calling him, sending him as a preacher of the Word of salvation.

The Asian Catholic Church is a Church that "welcomes", and opens its hands to anyone. The land of Asia is kind, fertile, and cultivating the land. Asian societies in most countries display sympathetic hospitality. They welcome foreigners, ideologies, and religions that they see will be able to develop their lives. Various traditions that are synonymous with cultural wealth show how Asian people are "welcoming" people. The Asian Catholic Church should unlikely be thatch or weed on the fertile ground. The Catholics must be like one of the best wheat, which bears much fruit, precisely because we grow on the fertile soil of Asia. Theologizing Asia metaphorically also refers to the concrete efforts to make the gift of the "fertility" of Asian soil effective for the growth of the seeds of the Word of God. And, the Asian Church must be more active and diligent in sowing these seeds.

#### **2. Being “one of them”**

Being "one of them" is a radical spark of solidarity. The Asian Church thrives on Asian soil not by "defeating" local culture, but by showing attitudes of solidarity with a society filled with life's burdens. Solidarity also needs to be interpreted more deeply by building local communities, strengthening a culture of peace, and growing the seeds of God's Word. The Asian Catholic Church is like a tree among other trees whose fallen leaves that



become humus have helped to fertilize the land of Asia. That humus should be the word of God that has been sown with the sacrifice by missionaries. Being "one of them" also means that the Catholic Church enters a dynamic reality that calls for courage to cooperate and dialogue with people of other faiths.

### **3. An appeal to the political leaders**

To the political leaders, the Catholic Church of the Vatican II does not ask for anything else but "freedom", which can now be translated to equality, human right, and justice. She also wishes that the political leaders may not hesitate to enter into collaboration and work together with the Catholic Church. The Church is ready to partake to build a new order of society based on justice and equality. The following is an excerpt of the address of the Fathers of the Vatican II, read by Achille Cardinal Lienart of Lille, France, assisted by Bernard Cardinal Alfrink of Utrecht, the Netherlands, and Giovanni Cardinal Colombo of Milan, Italy. This could be somehow a way for the Federation of Asian Bishops Conference to tell the same wish and truth to the political leaders in the Continent of Asia.

At this solemn moment, we, the Fathers of the 21st ecumenical council of the Catholic Church, on the point of disbanding after four years of prayer and work, with the full consciousness of our mission toward mankind, address ourselves respectively and confidently to those who hold in their hands the destiny of men on this earth, to all those who hold temporal power. We proclaim publicly: We do honor your authority and your sovereignty, we respect your office, we recognize your just laws, and we esteem those who make them and those who apply them. But we have a sacrosanct word to speak to you and it is this: Only God is great. God alone is the beginning and the end. God alone is the source of your authority and the foundation of your laws. Your task is to be the promoters of order and peace among men in the world. But never forget this: It is God, the living and true God, who is the Father of men. And Christ, His eternal Son, came to make this known to us and teach us that we are all brothers. He it is who is the great artisan of order and peace on earth, for He it is who guides human history and who alone can incline hearts to renounce those evil passions which beget war and misfortune. It is He who blesses the bread of the human race, who sanctifies its work and its suffering, who gives it those joys which you can never give it, and strengthens it in those sufferings which you cannot console [...] What does the Church ask of you today? She asks of you only liberty, the liberty to believe and to preach her faith, the freedom to love her God and serve Him, the freedom to live and to bring to men her message of life. Do not fear her. She is made after the image of her Master, whose mysterious action does not interfere with your prerogatives but heals everything human of its fatal weakness, transfigures it, and fills it with hope, truth, and beauty. Allow Christ to exercise His purifying action on society. Do not crucify Him anew. This would be a sacrilege for He is the Son of God. This would be suicide for He is the Son of man. And we, His humble ministers, allow us to spread everywhere without hindrance the Gospel of peace on which we have meditated during this council. Of it, your peoples will be the first beneficiaries, since the Church forms for you loyal citizens, friends of social peace and progress [...] (Closing Messages of the Second Vatican Council quoted from 40 Tahun Konsili Vatikan II, *Seri Filsafat Teologi Widya Sasana*, Malang 2005).

The series of sentences to the world leaders above demonstrate the Church's concern about the importance of building a peaceful world system. The Church respects its authority. But the Church needs to remind the truth that God is the source of authority and the foundation of various laws of the common life. This call to build a peace-filled world order reminds us of John XXIII's famous *Encyclical Pacem in Terris* (1963).



#### **4. Educating the youths on political participation**

The youth of the Asian Catholic Church also need to be led to the courage to participate in politics, even though this requires sacrifices. The big challenge for the youth is how they can participate in political life in their own country, and how to enter into the arrangement of a common life negotiated with legal justice and respect for human dignity. The relationship between Church and state must be referred to the Catholic social teachings which prioritize the universal principles of peacefully living together. This means that political education for young people has an actual context in the experience of several countries that are often plagued by political injustice. In many parts of Asia, the Christian minority community should not make young people inferior to other communities' participation in politics.

It might be better to recall what was once delivered at the closing ceremony of Vatican II. Young people are not only an important group but determinant of the future of the Church and human civilization. In the closing speech of the Vatican Council II (1965), on behalf of the Fathers of the Council, the famous Cardinal *Agagianian* from Armenia addressed the youth, saying: It is to you, who are to receive the torch from the hands of your elders and to live in the world during the period of the most gigantic transformations ever realized in its history. It is you who, receiving the best of the example of the teaching of your parents and your teachers, are to form the society of tomorrow. You will either save yourselves or you will perish with it. For four years the Church has been working to rejuvenate her image to respond better to the design of her Founder, the great Living One, the eternally young Christ. At the term of this imposing re-examination of life, she now turns to you. It is for you, youth, especially for you that the Church now comes through her council to enkindle your light, the light which illuminates the future, your future. The Church is anxious that this society that you are going to build up should respect the dignity, liberty, and rights of individuals. These individuals are you. The Church is particularly anxious that this society should allow free expansion to her treasure ever ancient and ever new, namely faith, and that your souls may be able to bask freely in its helpful light. She has confidence that you will find such strength and such joy that you will not be tempted, as were some of your elders, to yield to the seductions of egoistic or hedonistic philosophies or those of despair and annihilation, and that in the face of atheism, a phenomenon of lassitude and old age, you will know how to affirm your faith in life and in what gives meaning to life, that is to say, the certitude of the existence of a just and good God. It is in the name of this God and of His Son, Jesus, that we exhort you to open your hearts to the dimensions of the world, to heed the appeal of your brothers, and to place your youthful energies at their service. Fight against all egoism. Refuse to give free course to the instincts of violence and hatred which beget wars and all their train of miseries. Be generous, pure, respectful, and sincere, and build in enthusiasm a better world than your elders had. The Church looks to you with confidence and with love. Rich with a long past ever living in her and marching on toward human perfection in time and the ultimate destinies of history and life, the Church is the real youth of the world. She possesses what constitutes the strength and the charm of youth, that is to say, the ability to rejoice with what is beginning, to give oneself unreservedly, to renew one's self, and to set out again for new conquests. Look upon the Church and you will find in her the face of Christ, the genuine, humble, and wise Hero, the prophet of truth and love, the companion and friend of youth. It is in the name of Christ that we salute you, that we exhort and bless you (Closing Messages of the Second Vatican Council quoted from 40 Tahun Konsili Vatikan II, Seri Filsafat Teologi Widya Sasana, Malang 2005).

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