



"Fate risplendere la santità di Dio". "Let the holiness of God shine forth" (cf. Mt 5,16)

ITEM 31

ASIAN CHRISTIANITY

the postcolonial challenge of identity and theology

The current edition of **COMPASS Review of Topical Theology** [Autumn – 2012] contains an interesting – and, I think, both relevant and provocative – reflection on an issue which no doubt remains in the back [forefront?] of the minds of so many ministering in the region. This is the challenge of inculturating the gospel – the Word – into the asian environment, or for that matter the asia oceania environment.

The author is Malaysian, Edmund Kee-Fook Chia, currently on the faculty of the Australian Catholic University in Melbourne. He comments early in his paper:

"Even as there is a 500 year history of Christianity in Asia it might be more appropriate to say that it is not so much a history of Asian Christianity as it is Western Christianity played out on Asian soil"

He goes on to use the analogy of the helicopter view [arriving from above] and the contrasting bullock cart view [his image] of the evangelizing mission of the Church. The paper is used with permission, supplied as an electronic attachment.

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ITEM 30

Pallottine Way of Social Apostolate in Asia Today

Today we live in a broken world which fosters a culture of violence, and divides humanity into rich and poor. In much of Asia, particularly in the Indian context, despite five decades of development basic necessities are still not available to the majority of people. Poverty has declined over the years but not for socially disadvantaged sections like scheduled castes and tribes. Educational inequality has widened between the disadvantaged and the well-to-do sections in the last four decades. Despite a surplus of 65 million tons of food grain, some 320 million people do not get regular daily meals. Domestic violence towards women, atrocities against Dalits, tribals and minorities show no sign of decline. Economic growth in recent years has mostly favoured the rich in making them richer, and the poor, poorer. Living conditions of

workers in small units of the unorganised sectors are pathetic. Similarly, I can elaborate the other side of the emerging super-power and the so called shining India.

It is in the abovementioned context that we are left with the following questions. What is the meaning and relevance of a social apostolate in today's context? As Pallottines, how do we translate the vision of St Vincent Pallotti on social apostolate into the context of developing countries like India? First of all the social apostolate is not as easy as it looks but requires serious and scientific preparation. Our social apostolate is different from mere works of human promotion or the works of philanthropic, social or political activities. The social apostolate has roots that reach all the way back through twenty centuries of Christian life to Jesus himself, and even further back to the prophets before him. Jesus began his ministry with the proclamation of liberation for humanity from its social, political, cultural and religious clutches (Lk: 4:18-19). Over time, beginning with Pope Pius XI, the Church has highlighted the importance of the social apostolate as the primary means to transform society into one united family based on the values of social justice.

When we look at the modern development of the social apostolate, we can identify *three modes* of development. They are as follows – Relief or Charity mode, Service mode, and Rights mode. The relief mode is best explained as giving fish to a starving man. The service mode is teaching a man to fish or giving him skills to earn his livelihood. The rights mode is going beyond the second, i.e., making a person aware that he has rights to fish in the pond or imparting awareness of human rights, rights of a citizen and how to claim them. It is not that these three models are unrelated. All three can possibly co-exist in a given situation. The ideal vision or aim of our social apostolate must be to use the correct mode to transform society.

St Vincent Pallotti had a unique vision of the social apostolate, even before the official teaching of the Church began in 1891 when Pope Pius XI, through his encyclical 'Rerum Novarum', opened a new era in catholic teaching on social apostolate. St Vincent Pallotti learnt his first lessons on charity from his parents. We know this from his childhood whether giving up his bed or shoes for the needy. Later on as a young priest, by opening night schools and hostels for working boys and girls, by frequently visiting the homes of the destitute, the old and the sick, by organising guilds for the unorganised sector workers like the shoemakers guild, and by organising great works of charity with the collaboration of his co-workers, Pallotti displayed a perfect, systematic and modern concept of social apostolate i.e. he perfectly integrated the modern social concepts of relief, service and acknowledgement of people's rights in his own social apostolate.

Now the question comes to mind of how to implement the ideals of St Vincent Pallotti's concept of social apostolate in the actual situation of our ministry today? To answer this we could well start by taking inspiration from Pallotti's charism and spirituality, i.e. '*the Love of Christ urges us on*' and '*respond to the needs of the time in a particular cultural, social and political context in the spirit of collaboration*'.

Additionally the followings steps may help in implementing his vision:

- a. In the Asian context our social apostolate might take various forms like social research and publications, advocacy and human development, direct social action for the poor

and for the socially marginalised such as children, women, and people of so-called lower caste in society.

- b. Continuity in developing the social apostolate can take place effectively, in the Indian context, by the availability of qualified Pallottines and co-workers. Therefore our formation programme must offer ways to be in touch with the poor, not just occasionally but in a more sustained manner.
- c. It is vitally important to have a *Secretariat for the Social Apostolate* at the Generalate level, which co-ordinates and plans programmes for Secretariats at the provincial and regional levels, for the sustained, systematic and effective implementation of various programmes on social apostolate based on the vision of our founder.
- d. Social apostolate involves the participation of people from all walks of life – beyond region, religion and status. It has to be carried on in a spirit of collaboration. This may help to realise the concept of the Union of the Catholic Apostolate.

The crying needs of the poor, the radical demand of the Gospel, the insistent teaching of the Church and the prophetic call of our founder Pallotti, reinforce the need for continual effort in promoting social justice in our mission today. Our social apostolate mission must work tirelessly to transform the terribly unjust structures existing at the economic, political, social, cultural and religious levels in societies like India. In concluding I would say that God is our Father and we are Christ's brothers and, if we ignore our brothers, we ignore Jesus (Mt: 25). May our holy founder inspire us that we may have courage to live among the people and like the people.

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