

E-BULLETIN #86

"Let the holiness of God shine forth" (cf. Mt 5, 16)

item 161

why the Asian Church needs the winds of change

Perhaps not always, but I often feel that it is difficult for a lay person with some sociological and theological background to work with the Church hierarchy, especially in Asia. Its rigid top-down structure and culture make it virtually impossible for lay people to be equal partners with the clergy in most Asian countries, despite the fact that Christianity is a tiny minority here.

But the wind of change is blowing stronger and stronger. It would be illogical if I say it is thanks to Pope Francis, because he himself is one of the clergy. Rather I would say it is because of the Spirit, working both among lay people and clergy. That is what is making the wind blow, albeit at a slow but steady pace.

Let me tell you the story of Maria (not her real name), a lay activist from Sarawak in eastern Malaysia. When I invited her to a theological forum and training workshop for young activists which I have conducted yearly for the past 10 years, she said to the participants at that meeting: "This is a life changing experience." The reason: she received affirmation from the event which enabled her to identify herself as "Christian" with much more confidence.

She was baptized a Christian and still is, so for her to make such a statement in public may not be remarkable. It was special for her, though, because she is the granddaughter of a shaman in her village. No one told her before that Catholicism and theology could embrace her grandparents' traditional, animist belief system.



Theologians and scholars have dealt and wrestled with this sensitive theological issue. Among them, Thomas Berry is especially distinguished; he has even suggested the concept of "Christian animism" as a creative interpretation of traditional religions like Maria's grandparents'. But that's in a scholarly world, not in the real life of someone like Maria.

Until she met a theologian at the meeting, she had no one to help her reconcile her present faith with the traditional religion that was part of her roots. Maria grew up with the

notion that the primal religion is animism, a religious belief that still has many adherents in rural parts of

Asia. Animists believe that natural physical entities including animals, plants and even inanimate objects possess an influential spiritual essence. Maria also grew up with the notion that animism and Christianity are intractably incompatible.

Naturally, that made her feel discouraged and guilty because of her respect for her elders. She had struggled to reconcile her sense of “double belonging” and failed.

At the conference, however, she embraced the insight that animistic spirits can be seen as the diverse faces of a “Cosmic Christ.” That was the “life changing good news” that made Maria so happy she could dance. But Maria was perhaps lucky; there are many Christian NGO workers from diverse religious traditions in Asia who have no one to ask for this kind of help.

In my opinion, they have an urgent need to strengthen their Christian identity while embracing their local, traditional cultures and religions, in order to commit themselves more strongly to their work. But they don't get the support they need from the Church. They are literally abandoned.

Naturally, any institutional faith will support its seminarians and prepare them for priesthood. But with regard to the relationship between Christianity and animism, the sum of young lay leaders' formation amounts to zero. Nor is there recognition of the harsh realities that Church-related NGO activists face in Asia.

I see this as a simple, clear sign that the clergy of the Church is not ready to work with the laity.

Local bishops put great emphasis on ‘collegiality,’ one of the great rediscovered treasures of Vatican II. Nowadays it is usually taken to be all about the bishops, their relationships and autonomy. Unfortunately, it often stops with the bishops and ignores the bigger picture, which is the people of God as a communion of communities.

As Pope Francis rightly said, the Church is not an NGO. But Church-related NGO workers are important and we should not overlook them. They could even be the ones who make the Church as a pilgrim move toward the Kingdom of God.

So let's use that wind of change to create a spirit of solidarity between laity and clergy. In a modest way, my theological program for youth shows how the two can work together. I am sensing that change is coming from within. But at this crucial juncture, we need to make even more effort.

Solidarity should be made manifest with increased laity involvement in decision making at all levels of the Church in Asia. We need systematic support for lay formation in general, especially for young lay leaders. I would like to see an appropriate body or committee set up to deal with these issues positively. That would be a giant step in making the wind of change in the Church visible and realized.

Dr Paul Hwang – Seoul – STH KOREA
18.09.13

item 162

vocations ministry – OZ

The following item is in fact a descriptive summary submitted to the Australian Catholic media for this year's **VOCATIONS WEEK**. It was prepared by one of our Vocations Team, **Br Lindsay Rust sac**. Maybe there is merit in comparing different approaches to vocations advertising – where that is done – by reprinting in coming weeks some comparative efforts of communities elsewhere in Asia Oceania [or beyond]? Anyone willing to accept that challenge?

embracing new paths

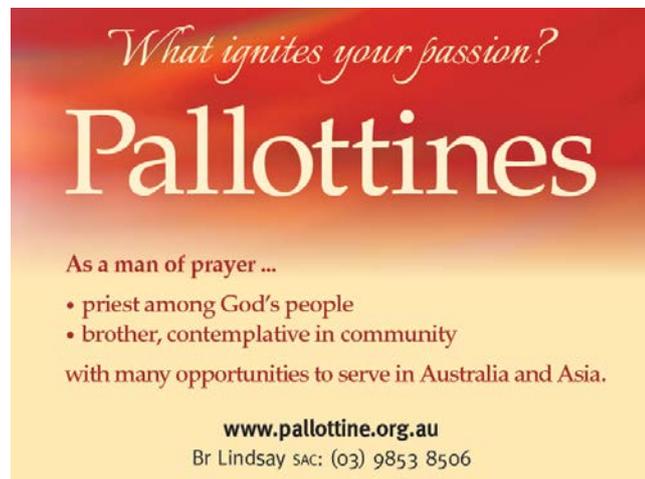
In Asia Oceania, the Pallottines have embraced interesting times. Numbers are increasing regionally, as new ministries are taken up in numerous asian countries [Hong Kong, Sth Korea, Taiwan, Philippines] and New Guinea, and entering into new apostolates and new countries regionally. With the valued presence of priests from India we are committed to parishes in Melbourne and Perth. Along with publishing and retreat work at Millgrove and our care for people in need, we have young men and women committed to work in the Casa Pallotti network and Melbourne Youth Initiative, and there are international arrangements by which young Germans come to work with us too.

We are a worldwide congregation of men (mostly priests) and, while in Australia we have no secondary schools or residential colleges or tertiary fellowships, the opportunities are still many and perhaps only restricted by imagination, yet open to 'God's foolishness'.

Vincent Pallotti did not seek that his society become the largest in the Church, but that its unique calling have indeed a life-giving part. We are called to be fully ourselves, unique and broken open, and people whom God utterly loves and graces.

Vincent was both contemplative and active. We offer open welcome and, as one brother recently noted, Vincent wanted our houses to 'exude an atmosphere of contemplative silence', this being reflective of deep prayer. But also there is a daring in life, a mischief, to be sure—to be more receptive through knowing our own faults, open to growth and to embrace new paths, especially now in missionary adventures.

Broken open and graced, made different, and unique too ... through your presence?



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you commented...

on #85 thanks for sending me E-BULLETIN. The article by Fr. Jose is worth reflecting. Pilgrimage to the "Heart of Pallottines' work in planting faith" is worth remembering and thanking God.

BB 16.09.13