

TOWARDS AN ASIAN THEOLOGY OF LIBERATION: SOME RELIGIO-CULTURAL GUIDELINES

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Vorbemerkung

Vom 7. bis 20. Januar 1979 fand in Sri Lanka die ASIAN THEOLOGICAL CONFERENCE (ATC) statt, die von der ECUMENICAL ASSOCIATION OF THE THIRD WORLD THEOLOGIANS (EATWOT) getragen wurde. An dieser Tagung nahmen mit geringen Ausnahmen nur Vertreter der außer-europäischen und -nordamerikanischen Welt teil. Wie aus beobachtenden Kreisen mitgeteilt wird, stand die Tagung stark im Schatten oder im Licht der Initialzündung: Befreiung der armen, unterdrückten und ausgebeuteten Menschen der Dritten Welt, die deutlich von marxistischer Ideologie und einem Engagement für die unterdrückten Menschen geprägt war. So heißt es im Schlußdokument: „Der erste Akt der Theologie, ihre Herzmitte, ist Engagement. Dieses Engagement ist die Antwort auf die Herausforderung der Armen in ihrem Kampf für eine vollkommene Humanität ... deshalb beginnt die Theologie bei den Erwartungen der Unterdrückten in Hinsicht auf eine vollkommene Menschlichkeit; sie rechnet mit der wachsenden Bewußtwerdung und den immer größeren Anstrengungen, alle Hindernisse zu überwinden im Licht der Wahrheit ihrer Geschichte.“

Im Rahmen dieser Tagung hielt der ceylonesische Jesuit A. PIERIS das nachfolgende Referat. PIERIS versucht dabei, die religiös-kulturelle Dimension der heutigen asiatischen Welt zu beschreiben, indem er einmal auf grundlegend linguistische Problemstellungen aufmerksam macht, sodann der Frage einer Integration von kosmischen und metakosmischen Elementen in den klassischen asiatischen Religionen nachgeht, um schließlich auf die überwältigende Präsenz nichtchristlicher Soteriologien aufmerksam zu machen. Im Hauptteil seines Vortrags analysiert PIERIS dann die Mächtigkeit der nichtchristlichen Soteriologien, wobei er Spannungen zwischen Reichtum und Armut, Staat und religiöser Gemeinschaft, wissenschaftlichem Wissen und geistlicher Weisheit nachgeht. Diese Ausführungen bilden dann den Ausgangspunkt für eine aus asiatischer Sicht vorgelegte Kritik an der Vergangenheit der christlichen Theologie. Die Arbeit endet in der Vorlage einiger Hinweise auf den asiatischen Stil der asiatischen Theologie.

H. W.

PART I

TOWARDS A DEFINITION OF THE RELIGIO-CULTURAL DIMENSION

1. This being a "Third World" Theologians "Asian" Consultation, I presume that the theological axis of our deliberations should have, as its two poles, the "Third Worldness" of our Continent and its peculiarly "Asian" character: two points of reference we must never lose

sight of. Spelt out in more realistic terms, the common denominator between Asia and the rest of the Third World is its overwhelming *POVERTY*; the specific character which defines Asia within the other poor countries is its multifaceted *RELIGIOSITY*. These are two inseparable realities which in their interpenetration constitute what might be designated as the *ASIAN CONTEXT* and which is the matrix of any theology that is truly Asian.

2. We must immediately warn ourselves that Asian poverty cannot be reduced to purely "economic" categories as much as Asian religiosity cannot be defined merely in "cultural" terms. They are both interwoven culturally and economically to constitute the vast socio-political reality that Asia is. Hence an Asian theologian can hardly ignore Roy PREISWERK's appeal¹ that the "dependency theories" of the Latin Americans (CARDOS, FRANK, FURTADO, etc.) which offer valid explanations of and useful strategies against the increasing poverty in the Third World, ought to be complemented (and I would add, even corrected) by the "cultural approach" of social scientists.

3. This is nowhere more applicable than in Asia, for there is, in our cultural ethos "a yet-undiscovered — point" at which *Poverty* and *Religiosity* seem to coalesce in order to procreate the Asian character of this Continent. In fact history attests, as we shall indicate later, that the *theological* attempts to encounter Asian Religions with no radical concern for Asia's poor and the *ideological* programmes that eradicate Asia's poverty with naive disregard for its Religiosity, have both proved to be a misdirected zeal. Hence the theologies now prevalent in the Asian Church and the secular ideologies presently operating in this Continent have all to be judged in the light of this axiom, as will be done in the course of our discussion.

4. Without, therefore, diluting or de-emphasizing the economic features that define the "Third-worldness" of Asia, I am compelled here, by the Organizers, to concentrate on the "religio-cultural" dimension of the Asian context. As it might be objected that such a dimension exists also in all other poor countries, let me straightway name three distinctive features which clearly demarcate the "religio-cultural" boundaries of Asia within the Third-World. They are:

- (a) linguistic heterogeneity
- (b) the integration of the cosmic and the meta-cosmic elements in Asian religions
- (c) the over-whelming presence of non-Christian soteriologies.

(a) *Linguistic Heterogeneity*

5. Asia is diversified into at least seven major linguistic zones, the highest that any Continent can boast of. There is, first of all, the *Semitic*

¹ ROY PREISWERK, „La rupture avec les conceptions actuelles du développement“ in: *Rélations interculturelles et développement* (Geneva, 1975) 71—96.

zone concentrated in the Western Margin of Asia. The *Ural-Altaic* Group is spread all over Asiatic Russia and North West Asia. The *Indo-Iranian* stock alongside the *Dravidian* races have their cultural habitat in Southern Asia. The *Sino-Tibetan* region, by far the largest, extends from Central Asia to the Far East. The *Malayo-Polynesian* wing opens out to the South-East. Last but not least, is the uncataloguable *Japanese* forming a self-contained linguistic unit in the North-Eastern tip of Asia.

6. The first theological implication of this linguistic heterogeneity derives from the very understanding of "language". According to a nominalist view, a truth is apprehended intuitively and is then expressed outwardly through a language. If this were true, communal disturbances between linguistic groups — such as those in Sri Lanka or Cambodia or Burma, would have to be explained purely in terms of political and economic factors; which is not the case.

7. The fact, however, is that each language is a *distinctly new way* of "experiencing" the truth, implying that linguistic pluralism is an index of religious, cultural and socio-political diversity. ZAEHNER seems to be implying this when he, too easily perhaps, typifies the whole Western Religiosity as 'semitic' and the Eastern Religiosity as 'Indian'.² I think it is only partially true to say that religion is an "experience" of Reality and language is its "expression"; the converse is closer to the Truth: *language is the "experience" of Reality and religion is its "expression"*. Religion begins with language. Would it be wrong to say that language is a *theologia incohativa* — an incipient theology?

8. And what is the fundamental Reality that a particular culture grasps through its own language and symbol? Read what the Asian proletariat has produced over the centuries, and not merely the sophisticated writings such as the Vedas and Upaniṣads, the Tripiṭaka, the Torah or the Tao Te Ching. Learn, first the folk-language. Assist at their rites and rituals; hear their songs; vibrate with their rhythms; keep step with their dance; taste their poems; grasp their myths; reach them through their legends. You will find that the language they speak puts them in touch with the basic Truths that every religion grapples with, but *each in a new way*: — the meaning and destiny of human existence; Man's crippling limitations and his infinite capacity to break through them; liberation both human and cosmic; in short, *the struggle for a full humanity*.

9. Every Asian culture, therefore, has grown round a soteriological nucleus which has not yet been assimilated into the Christian conscience. The Asian Theology of liberation lies hidden there, awaiting to be discovered by whoever is ready to "sell all things". For a recovery of an ancient revelation is indeed a new creation.

10. This means that the task of the Asian Theologian is more complex than that of his colleagues in the North Atlantic Region and the

² R. C. ZAEHNER, *Foolishness to the Greeks*. An Inaugural Lecture Delivered Before the University of Oxford on 2 November 1953 (Oxford, 1953) 17.

Southern Hemisphere. After all do not the European Theologians communicate in the same Indo-Germanic languages? Even Liberation Theologians think, act and speak in a common Latin idiom. They are all within reach of one another by means of a European medium of communication. Such is not the case here.

11. It is therefore regrettable that Asians (like the Africans at the Conference in Ghana) are not able to consult each other's hidden theologies except in a *non-Asian idiom, thus neutralizing the most promising feature in our methodology*. We Asians professionally theologize in English, the language in which most of us think, read and pray. The theological role of Language in a "continent of languages" has been grossly underestimated and our stubborn refusal to consult each other's treasures directly in each other's linguistic idioms, or even to be familiar with *one's own cultural heritage*, will remain one major obstacle to the discovery of a truly Asian Theology. This is not an appeal for Chauvinism but a plea for authenticity imposed on us by what we have defined as the Asian Context. The foundation for a genuinely *Asian* consultation must be laid here at this Conference.

(b) *Integration of the Cosmic and the Metacosmic in Asian Religiosity*

12. The Institutional framework within which Asian Religiosity operates is composed of two complementary elements: a *Cosmic Religion* functioning as the foundation, and a *Metacosmic Soteriology* constituting the main edifice.

13. By the term "cosmic religion" I wish to designate that species of religion which is found in Africa and Oceania and has been *pejoratively* referred to as "animism" by certain Western authors. Actually it represents the basic psychological posture that the *homo religiosus* (residing in each one of us) adopts subconsciously towards the mysteries of life; a sane attitude which an unwise use of technology can disturb. They relate to the cosmic forces — heat, fire, winds and cyclones, earth and its quakes, oceans, rains and floods — which we need and yet fear. They serve as ambivalent symbols of our own subconscious powers, symbols freely employed in ordinary speech and in sacred rites, as expressive of our deepest yearnings. Even in the West where these natural elements serve man through technology, can the Christian celebrate the Paschal mystery without using fire and water? After all, if the theory of evolution is really true, we were all once a mountain, the crust of the earth, the water and the fire and all that we now carry with us as our material substratum, by which we become sacramentally present to others and to ourselves. We cannot be fully human without them.

14. In our cultures these natural elements and forces merge into the mysterious world of invisible powers which maintain the cosmic balance. They may appear in various guises in various regions: *Devas* in the Indianized cultures of S. East Asia; *Nats* in Burma; *Phis* in Thailand, Laos and Cambodia; *Bons* in Tibet; *Kamis* in Japan; and of course in the

Confucianist worldview, the departed *ancestors* belong to this invisible sphere. Rites, Rituals and a class of mediators form the constitutive elements of this religiosity.

15. The characteristic feature of Asian religiosity is that unlike in Africa or in Oceania, this cosmic religion does not appear in its pure and primordial form except in certain isolated pockets which Anthropologists frequent. It has practically been domesticated and integrated into one or the other of the three *meta-cosmic soteriologies*, namely, *Hinduism*, *Buddhism*, and to some extent *Taoism*. The Summum Bonum they present is a "Trans-phenomenal Beyond" which is to be realized here and now through *gnosis*. This justifies the existence of a certain spiritual elite, the wisemen, who become the personal embodiments of the *mystico-monastic* idealism held out as the climax of human perfection. They serve as models and symbols of "liberated persons".

16. Hence it is also true that the metacosmic soteriologies mentioned above are never found in abstract "textual" form but always "contextualized" within the world-view of the "cosmic religion" of a given culture creating a two-fold level of religious experience well integrated into each other. Here the Asian Context differs from the African, because due to this super-imposition, cosmic religions, unlike in Afrika, are *not regarded as salvific*. This is of great consequence for Asian Theology. Let me mention in passing that it is invariably at the cosmic level that both technological and socio-political activity affect the major religions: a fact which we shall discuss later.

17. [One might say, parenthetically, that the establishment of Biblical Religions such as Islam in Indonesia and Catholicism in the Philippines, was easier partly because "cosmic religions" were found there in undomesticated or mildly domesticated forms at that time; whereas in Sri Lanka, India, Burma and other countries, neither Islam nor Christianity could sweep over these cultures because the aforesaid gnostic soteriologies had already domesticated cosmic religions into a well integrated cultural system].

18. These facts have hardly engaged the attentions of Asian theologians but have been a major preoccupation of Anthropologists doing field-work in Asia.³ The terms cosmic and metacosmic used here, however, have not been borrowed directly from Anthropologists, but derived from a Buddhist self-understanding of the two levels: *Lokiya* (Sinh: *Laukika*) and *Lok'uttara* (Sinh: *Lokottara*). Buddhists recognize the two dimensions and explain their own religious experience in terms of this distinction [See diagram on p. 170.]

19. My reference to Buddhism here is not accidental. To sharpen our focus on Asian Religiosity, it is only reasonable that I should concentrate

³ For the most recent discussion on the matter, cf. H. BECHERT (Ed.), *Buddhism in Ceylon and Studies on Religious Syncretism in Buddhist Countries* (Göttingen 1978), specially Part III, pp. 146—339.

on one of the major religions. If my choice falls on Buddhism, it is not only because I would be traversing familiar grounds, but even more because it is the one religion which is *pan-Asian* in cultural integration, numerical strength, geographical extension and political maturity. Though an integral part of Indian heritage, now preserved in its Indian form only here in Sri Lanka, it had penetrated practically every linguistic zone — even the semitic, for a brief period^{3a}. In other words, Buddhism is not limited to one language or national group — as in the case of Hinduism and Taoism. By allowing itself to be shaped by the various “cosmic religions” of Asia, it has in turn, moulded several Asian cultures. Thus today there is an Asian Buddhist for every Roman Catholic in the World. There are at least 20 political territories in Asia where Buddhism is either the official religion or a culturally influential factor. It is the one religion that can boast of an Asia-wide ecumenical organization such as the World Fellowship of Buddhists (*WFB*) or the World Buddhist Sangha Council (*WBSC*) or the World Buddhist Social Service (*WBSS*), all of which look to Sri Lanka for leadership. It is also politically the most resilient of Asian religions with a major role to play in the development and liberation of Asia — for it has a rich experience of Western Colonialism as well as of Marxism. Hence no Asian theology of Liberation can be construed without consulting Asian Buddhism.

20. While Buddhism, we grant, does not exhaust the whole phenomenon of Asian Religiosity, it will nevertheless serve us as a mere paradigm to demonstrate how the interplay of the cosmic and the meta-cosmic levels of religious experience gives a new point of departure for politico-social change and technocratic advancement in the very process of Asia's liberation; something that neither Western Technocracy nor Scientific Socialism has sufficiently appreciated and which Asian Theologians cannot underestimate.

(c) *The Overwhelming Presence of Non-Christian Soteriologies*

21. Asia is the cradle of all the Scriptural Religions of the World, including Christianity which, however, left Asia very early and forced its way back several centuries later as a stranger and an “intruder” whom Asia consistently refused to entertain. Thus with four centuries of missionary presence the Christians are numerically and qualitatively an insignificant minority: a sheer 2 % of the Asian masses. A good half of this Christian population is in the Philippines, which, in the process of becoming Christian, was forced to cut off its Asian roots. The Philippine Church is only a magnified version of most Christian communities scattered in the Asian Diaspora. Can a Christianity that has lost its “Asian Sense” presume to create an Asian Theology? Even the Churches of the Oriental Rites have frozen their early openness to the Asian Reality.

^{3a} Rock Edict XIII of Asoka speaks of Buddhist Missions to Syria. A complement to this is the Aramaic Inscription found in E. Afghanistan in 1969.

22. However, this limitation is also the greatest potentiality the Asian Church possesses of creating a Third World Theology that will radically differ from the South American and the African theologies. The Liberation Theologians of S. America can speak of Christ and His Liberation as a national and continental concern because of their traditional Christian heritage in South America. This is why they are able to offer us a relevant Christian Theology in place of the classical one of the European Churches. So can the Africans become soon, numerically and qualitatively, a powerful Christian voice within the Third World. But Asia, as circumstances clearly indicate, *will remain always a non-Christian Continent*.

23. This situation is ambivalent. It creates enormous opportunities for more creative modes of Christian presence in Asia by humble participation in the non-Christian experience of liberation; or it can repeat past mistakes in radically new ways. Let me, substantiate this immediately by signalling out some salient features of a non-Christian soteriology with Buddhism as our sample — and disclosing thereby the world-view within which the Asian Church is called to make her options. If our approach is basically positive and appreciative, it is because we wish to absorb from these religions the Asian Style of being, thinking and doing.

PART II

NON-CHRISTIAN SOTERIOLOGY: SOME THEOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVES

24. We must, first of all, recapture the picture of institutional Buddhism with its cosmic and meta-cosmic dimensions of religious experience. To the cosmic sphere must be relegated (a) all *Socio-political activities* and (b) *technological and scientific progress*; to the meta-cosmic pertains all that is ordained towards the *interior liberation of man*. These elements are so well integrated, that the equilibrium of the religious system could be disturbed by certain species of "cosmic" activities both political and scientific, as it happens when Buddhism faces Capitalist Technocracy coming from the West or scientific socialism introduced by the Marxists. To this we shall return a while later.

25. The *Sangha*, i. e. monastic nucleus round which Buddhism evolves, is, of course, the institutional centre and the spiritual apex of a Buddhist society. It serves the cosmic level of human existence by directing its attention to the meta-cosmic goal, the ultimate Perfection (*Arahatta*) which consists of an absence of acquisitiveness and greed (*alobha*), absence of oppressiveness and hate (*adosa*) and perfect salvific knowledge (*amoha*). This is the classical description of Nirvana. The monastic community which embodies this ideal is also a symbol of religious communism since they are called to share all things in common, "even the morsel of food falling into the begging bowl", as the Buddha has declared⁴.

⁴ Samāgama Sutta of the Majjhima Nikāya.

26. The basis of such a community is *Poverty*, voluntary renunciation of wealth and family life. But this poverty is sustained by the wealth-acquiring laity who are entrusted with the task of advancing material (technological) progress and socio-political well-being. The mutuality implied in this system of cosmic and meta-cosmic Religiosity can be best discussed in terms of the bipolarity that exists between (a) Wealth and Poverty (b) State and Church and (c) Scientific Knowledge and Spiritual Wisdom.

(a) *Wealth and Poverty*

27. In this system he who renounces wealth is maintained by the wealth of him who does not. Wealth is at the service of *Poverty*, and poverty is the condition for Liberation from Acquisitiveness and Greed (*taṇhā*, *lobha*, *upādāna*, etc.) Hence all material progress is tempered by the ideal of *non-acquisitiveness and sharing* of which monkhood is the symbol. This is, of course, the ideal; but it is open to abuse, as history shows.

28. Hence in an Asian situation, the antonym of "Wealth" is not "Poverty" but *acquisitiveness* or *avarice* which makes wealth anti-religious. *The primary concern, therefore, is not eradication of poverty, but struggle against Mammon* — that undefinable force which organizes itself within every man and among men to make material wealth anti-human, anti-religious and oppressive.

29. In fact, one source of Christian failure in Asia was its association with Mammon (commercial and colonial exploitation) and its refusal to enter into the monastic spirit of non-Christian soteriologies. Today, this mistake is repeated through massive "development" programmes with which the Asian Churches (being minorities threatened by possible loss of identity) consolidate themselves into Western oases [big private educational, technological or agricultural establishments run with foreign aid] thus forcing a non-Christian majority to depend on a Christian minority for material progress. This use of Mammon to be imposingly and manipulatively present in Asia is a continuation, albeit in a new way, of the missiology of conquest and power characteristic of the colonial era. When a revolution rises against such establishments, the Churches speak of themselves as being persecuted — when in reality they are only trampled upon, as salt without flavour (Mt. 5 : 13).

30. On the other hand Mammon has not left monks in peace either. For a monk Poverty is the most difficult virtue, not celibacy. The paradox of monastic renunciation is this: The holier the monk appears to be, the more generous the people are towards him. The poorer he wants to be, the greater are the donations he receives. The more he runs away from riches, the closer he comes to it. The further he removes himself from society, the more crushing becomes people's devotion to him. Thus, dependence on the people for material sustenance is at once the most basic condition and the most vulnerable feature of monastic poverty.

31. What is true of the individual monk is even more true of the monastery as a whole. Rich benefactors and even Rulers, show their appreciation by lavishing land and wealth on monasteries. Wealth-acquiring monasteries were not less frequently found in medieval Asia than in medieval Europe. In Tibet and Japan at one time, armies were maintained to protect the wealth of monasteries⁵. In fact, the monastic ideal of religious poverty which, by contrast, makes worldly happiness illusory, tends, under Mammon's influence, to become a "worldly structure" confirmative of MARX's opposite thesis that abolition of such a religion as an "illusory" happiness is required for their *real* happiness. In fact it is here that Marxists and Monks have collided in Asia⁶.

32. Theoretically, at least, Marxism is more consistently anti-Mammon than purely anti-poverty, in contrast with Capitalist Technocracy. In fact no religious persecution under a Marxist regime can be compared to the subtle undermining of religious values which Capitalist Technocracy generates in our cultures. The former may purify institutional religion of its unholy alliances with the creators of poverty; the latter pollutes religion by betraying it to Mammon. Hence, the monastic spirit, healthy in itself, has always required as its complement a state-machinery that could create a socio-political system conducive to its well-being. The reciprocity between religious and civil authority is an essential ingredient of the Buddhist World-view.

(b) *The State and the Sangha*

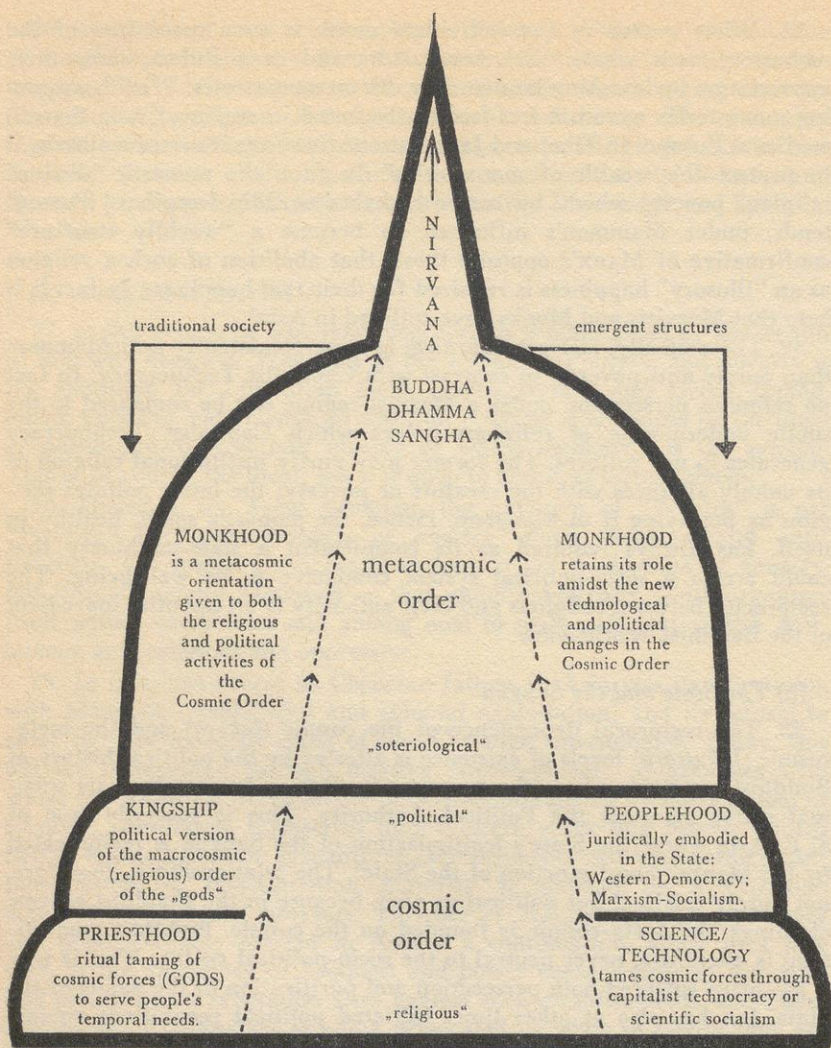
33. The reciprocal dependence of the cosmic (*lokiya*) and the meta-cosmic (*lokuttara*) levels of existence is attested by the political history of Buddhist countries where the monastic institution has retained its spiritual status *vis-a-vis* the Political Authority. This is specially true of S. E. Asia where the State's legitimization of the Sangha is reciprocated by the Monks' moral sanction of the State⁷. The relationship is, therefore, not purely spiritual but political as well, because in the Buddhist scheme of things, the Meta-cosmic is founded on the cosmic. Buddhist monasticism is, therefore, never neutral to the socio-political reality. This is why it has often suffered both persecution and purification in the hands of the State, but has also at other times initiated political revolutions against the State. In fact one hears today of a Military College in Thailand where monks prepare for an anti-Marxist war⁸. The anti-Christian and

⁵ Cf. E. CONZE, *Buddhism* (Oxford, 1953) 64—65.

⁶ Cf. DULAMZHAYVN DASHZHAMTS, „Non-Capitalist Development and Religion“ in: *World Marxist Review*, Dec. 1973, 27—29.

⁷ For an exhaustive historical illustration, see BARDWEL L. SMITH (Ed.), *Two Wheels of the Dhamma: Essays on Theravada Tradition in India and Ceylon* (Chambersburg, Pennsylvania, 1972).

⁸ Cf. News item „Militant Monks“ in: *Far Eastern Economic Review*, 97/39 (Sept. 30, 1977).



anti-Colonialist Movements of Sri Lanka, Burma and Indo-China were born in Buddhist Monasteries. There were several uprisings in China since the 5th century, which were messianic movements based on a desire to bring here and now the "era of justice and peace" foretold by the Buddha⁹. The Ming Dynasty in the middle ages sprang out of a Buddhist inspired rebellion. Some of those political movements continued up to the

⁹ In Cakkavattisihanāda Suttanta of the Dīgha Nikāya.

middle of this century¹⁰. The dialectics between withdrawal from the world and involvement with the world — or contemplation and action — illustrative of the mutuality between the cosmic and the meta-cosmic is no where so clearly attested as in the political role that spiritual men play in a Buddhist culture.

34. Let me illustrate this by referring to a lesson that Marxists learnt about Buddhism.

35. As WELCH has shown in his ponderous treatise on how Buddhism fared in revolutionary China¹¹, MAO-TSE-TUNG did not at first insist on the eradication of Buddhism or any other religion in the beginning of his rule. His thesis was that religion springs from certain socio-economic structures which when changed would automatically make religion disappear. Instead of wasting time on eradicating a religion he preferred to make use of it to change social structures, to expedite thus its own disappearance. This is the classical Marxist thesis¹².

36. In this context we can understand the establishment of the Chinese-Buddhist Association (CBA) with its organ "*Modern Buddhism*". Through this periodical the CBA tried to convince Buddhists that they could live meaningfully within a Marxist regime, by collaborating in the renewal of social structures. This is an understandable reaction. The CBA also organized goodwill missions to other Buddhist countries.

37. At the 6th Session of the World Fellowship of Buddhists (WFB), it tried to convince the Buddhist World that the Maoist vision of the new Society was acceptable within the WFB. However, at this Session the right wing ideology prevailed and the failure of the Chinese delegation became all too evident. The Tibetan issue, misconstrued by the anti-communist section of the Buddhists, became a set-back for the CBA. On the other hand, one can never underestimate the active part that the Chinese Buddhist Association played in the anti-Diem demonstrations on S. Vietnam (1963—64), even though its success was of a temporary nature. In the period 1963—65 one is amazed at the debates conducted in the mainland China, about the "relevance of religions in the now society". After all, religion did not die with the change of structures, but only adapted itself and regained its vitality.

38. It is not surprising, therefore, that by 1965 we see a change in the Marxist thesis. Religion is described, at this juncture, as a dying cobra who can sting before it dies. The need for killing it, therefore, was imperative. We see, at this time that "*Modern Buddhism*" ceases to be

¹⁰ Cf. DANIEL L. OVERMYER, "Folk Buddhist Religion: Creation and Eschatology in Medieval China" in: *History of Religions* (Univ. of Chicago) 12/1 (Aug. 1972) 42—70.

¹¹ Cf. H. WELCH, *Buddhism Under Mao* (Camebridge, Mass. 1972) 1—41 & 340—363.

¹² Cf. LUCIANO PARINETTO (Ed.), *Karl Marx sulla Religione* (Milan, 1972) 511ff., referred to in ERICH WEINGÄRTNER (Ed.), *Church within Socialism* (Idoc International, Rome, 1976), 9.

published almost abruptly. The President of the CBA goes out of circulation and the PANCHAN LAMA is demoted. These were the clouds that heralded the storm. Of course, the storm was the Cultural Revolution of 1966. There was a large-scale laicization and secularisation of Monks, not to speak of the destruction of statues and sacred articles. Since the persecution of 644 AD and 845 AD, Buddhism had never met a worse crisis until the Cultural Revolution of 1966¹³.

39. The Russian experience, on the other hand, moved in the opposite direction. It began with an intolerant attitude towards Buddhism and ended up dialoguing with it. The Chief Lamas' attempts at the beginning of the October Revolution, to accommodate Buddhist thinking and behaviour to the new Marxist environment were not taken seriously by the Russians. The Buddhists tried to accommodate their religion to the new ideology by appealing to Atheism and Humanism as the common ground they had with the Marxists, but at that time such overtures appeared naive to the new regime. Revolution was decidedly anti-religious and anti-Buddhist. *Filosofikaya Entsiklopediya* (Moscow 1960 Vol. I, s. v. Buddizm) gives the classical Marxist explanation of Buddhism as ["opium"] pacifying the oppressed classes of Asia making them submissive to the oppressive regimes. One need not tarry here to prove how convinced the Marxists were of their position. The ruthless elimination of the Lamas persistently accused of spying for the Japanese, was a proof of this.

40. But in recent times we see a sudden change in the Russian approach to Buddhism. One wonders what the reason could be. Is it just a genuine appreciation of the religious content of Buddhism or is it a recognition of the social reality of the Buddhist masses who did not give up their convictions; or, is it the recognition of the potentialities that Buddhism has for social change? Or search for political influence in Buddhist countries against Sino-American manoeuvres?¹⁴

41. We see for the first time since the Russian Revolution, a World Buddhist Conference organised in Ulan Bator in June 1970. It is significant that among the participants both Red China and Taiwan were conspicuously absent. The official statement issued by the Organisers made it clear that their intention was to save Buddhist countries against American aggression¹⁵. This Meeting has had its follow-up since then.

¹³ The CBA is once more in the news. Cf. *China Talk* 8/78 quoted in: *LWF Marxism & China Study*, INFORMATION LETTER, No. 23 (Sept. 1978), 5.

¹⁴ Parallel to CBA activities, there was, on the pro-Western side, a world-conference which called itself *World Buddhist Union* whose political leanings could be guessed from the non-participation of Peoples China, N. Vietnam and N. Korea and the presence of Taiwan and S. Vietnam (cf. *World Buddhism* XIX/4, Nov. 1970, p.111). It regarded itself the 4th World Organization after the WFB, WBSS & WBSC (*Ibid.*, XIX/5, Dec. 1970, p. 136).

¹⁵ Cf. *World Buddhism* XVIII/12, July 1970, p. 325 and XIX/1, Aug. 1970, p. 17.

42. Moreover, the *Bolshaiya-Sovetskaya Entsiklopediya* of 1971, (Moscow 1971, Vol. IV, p. 89) seems to take a more lenient stand in its column on Buddhism and is clearly anti-Chinese in its evaluation of the Tibetan question, in contrast with the 1960 *Entsiklopediya*. This appreciation of Buddhism has been accounted for by PARFIONOVICH, a Russian Marxist. He asks himself why Marxists should be so concerned about Buddhism; should not Marxists rather fight against Buddhism? His answer is enlightening:

Well, didn't Lenin say that Marxism, far from repudiating the past, should absorb and work on it as the only sure foundation of a proletarian culture?

Who can deny that Buddhism has been not simply a religion, but a way of life for millions? That its cultural and historical values have moulded the spiritual heritage of mankind? And still conscious of Lenin's precept that we should absorb all the achievements of the human spirit, we are acutely aware that our knowledge of the ancient and medieval world is largely concerned with Europe and the Middle East. We know far too little of the great civilisations of Asia¹⁶.

43. Both, the Chinese experiment which moved from accommodation to persecution, and the Russian experience which started with intolerance and ended up now with dialogue, shows that Buddhism is a power to reckon with. This power is not merely in the sacred texts of a bygone era but in the culture of a people who have learnt to integrate their cosmic concerns with a meta-cosmic vision, politics with spirituality.

(c) *Scientific Knowledge and Spiritual Wisdom*

44. Technology tames the cosmic forces and puts them at the service of man. The "religious rites" by which such powers were earlier tamed may recede to insignificance as technology advances. There is, in a way, a desacralizing process which could be interpreted as a "liberation of man" from superstition. But this is not all there is to it.

45. Technology is as ambivalent as the cosmic forces it claims to domesticate. Its unwise use far from making cosmic forces really submissive to man, has only provoked them to retaliate and "enslave man" with pollution, consumerism, secularism, materialism and a host of evils that a technocratic society has produced in the first world. Besides, it has deprived the human mind of the *Myth* and the *Rite*, two things by which man enacts his deep yearnings and keeps himself sane in mind and body. Can technology liberate man? Certainly not in the form in which "Christian" nations have offered it to us. It takes away the cosmic religion from the masses, and substitutes it with neurosis. It takes away religious poverty to give us Mammon.

46. One is annoyingly amused, therefore, to read a theological justification of this "development ideology" in the classical thesis put forward by VAN LEEWEN: — The scientific and industrial revolution with its

¹⁶ „Relevance of Buddhist Studies“, *World Buddhism* XXI/3, Oct. 1972, p. 67ff.

modern secular culture is to be welcomed as the fruit of (Western) Christianity; hence, Christianity should carry this mission to Asia and *liberate* its masses from its superstitious religiosity! The implication of this thesis seems to be that the Church's mission is to use Western ideology and theology to eradicate at once the Religiosity and the Poverty of our Continent! NINIAN SMART of Lancaster University has described this missiology beautifully when he called it "Western Tribalism".¹⁷

47. It took a wise man in the West — PAUL VI — to appeal for a reciprocation between the *Technician* busy with scientific progress and the *Wise Man* who could guide him from a contemplative distance¹⁸. Thus, the Patriarch of the Western Church has recognized the need for a bi-polarity between secular knowledge and spiritual wisdom. Asia has taught this for centuries in its religious view on material progress.

48. Look at the ancient irrigation works of Sri Lanka. What a feat of engineering they uncover! How then has our technology failed to keep pace with the West? After all, was not technology — or "*ars mechanica*" as the medieval Europeans called it, imported from the East after the Crusades?¹⁹ Why are the skills of the past still hiding behind the façade of archaeological remains? One thing is sure. The Technician in our culture remained an illiterate artisan whose skills did not enter the ola-leaf manuscripts that the monks authored. The *literati* who knew the arts were also the wise men; cosmic sciences did not strictly enter into their domain. Thus technology as it started seems to have disappeared in the course of time. This could very well be a fundamental weakness in the Asian system.

49. But there is another side to it. In that system, the scientists could not create a class of "white robed cleris" who officiate in the Sanctum of the Laboratory, preaching a dangerous brand of "neo-gnosticism" which claims that the *power to liberate* man resides in the scientific *Knowledge* of nature's secrets²⁰. The Buddhist world-view has always preserved that orientation which PAUL VI advocates: and according to which, true *gnosis* is Spiritual Wisdom guiding Scientific Knowledge to the "fullness of authentic development".²¹ Technology is an induced cosmic process, which is at once a conscious continuation of the biological evolution, and which like the latter becomes humanized only by its meta-cosmic orientation.

50. The thesis that superstition has to be removed by technology must also be qualified by the fact that the cosmic religions in Asia are already

¹⁷ Quoted in: CHARLES DAVIES, *Christ and the World Religions* (London, 1970), 21.

¹⁸ *Populorum Progressio*, No. 20.

¹⁹ Cf. E. SCHILLEBEECKX, *God the Future of Man* (New York, 1968), 54.

²⁰ Cf. L. GILKEY, *Religion and the Scientific Future* (London, 1970), 76—77.

²¹ The quotation is from *Populorum Progressio*, No. 20.

being purified by the meta-cosmic orientation they receive in the hands of monastic religions — a fact that our own field work has amply demonstrated, and to which we cannot deviate here²².

51. The Priest and Journalist PIER GHEDDO is also oversimplifying the case when he says that Western progress came from the Christian doctrine of the "dignity of man" and that underdevelopment amongst us is to be partially explained by a lack of such a perspective in our cultures²³. *Contra*, a distinguished economist saw in our "slow progress" a certain wisdom which in the long run preserves human dignity. He called it "Buddhist Economics" and epitomized it in a neat slogan: Small is Beautiful²⁴. Which means, Mammon is Ugly.

52. "Freedom from Poverty" which is the goal of Western Technocracy, can be an enslaving pursuit ending up in Hedonism, if not tempered by the "freedom that comes from poverty". This is not a glorification of poverty which is the "spirituality" that the exploiter usually imposes on the poor. I rather refer to the *religious understanding of poverty*, which forces the Church to choose either Marxist materialism or Hedonism of affluent societies! If "it is to the former that the Church turns its attention since it is potentially more renewing, closer to the call of justice and equality, even if to a lesser degree, a defender of formal liberties",²⁵ it is equally true that Marxism has not appreciated fully the religious dimension that Asian cultures attribute to poverty and consequently, the Latin American Theology, which is the only valid theology for the *Third World today*, lacks in a perceptive understanding of this monastic ideal. The Marxist embarrassment in the face of Asia's indestructible religiosity, as described above, may reappear in an Asian Theopraxis too heavily dependent on the Latin American model.

53. The Asian religious attitude to poverty, even in the context of its march to economic progress, differs from the Latin American attitude as a *psychological* method differs from a *sociological* one. In the former, Voluntary Poverty is a spiritual antidote; in the latter it is a political strategy (see para 64). Mammon — which some Christian Theologians have translated with the word 'Capital'²⁶ — needs to be vehemently opposed with both methods. To borrow a Maoist jargon, a structural

²² Our study of healing ceremonies shows that demons associated with sickness are brought to the open and then eliminated till the Buddha emerges as the Powerful one and his *doctrine well observed* is presented as the cure par excellence. The beliefs of the cosmic religions are constantly purified and made to align with the metacosmic goal of Perfection.

²³ Cf. PIER GHEDDO, *Why is the Third World Poor?* (New York, 1973), 30—37 and *passim*.

²⁴ E. F. SCHUMACHER, *Small is Beautiful*. Economics as if People Mattered (London, 1973).

²⁵ Cf. E. WEINGÄRTNER (Ed.), *op. cit.* (cf. note 12 above), 3.

²⁶ Cf. R. B. Y. SCOTT & G. VLASTOS (Eds.), *Towards the Christian Revolution* (London, 1937), p. 104.

revolution can avoid much of its unnecessary violence if accompanied (not followed) by a cultural revolution. A "Liberation-Theopraxis" in Asia which uses only the Marxist tools of *Social Analysis* will remain un-Asian and ineffective till it integrates the psychological tools of *introspection* which our sages have discovered. A new Society evolves with the evolution of the New Man; and *vice versa*.

54. May I suggest a useful exercise that might illustrate what I am trying to say? Read theologically the revolutionary theory and praxis of CHE GUEVARA in the light of a similar reading of HO CHI MINH. Taste the distinct Christian flavour in the former. Then note the difference in the latter. What you notice would be the *Asian Sense*.

PART III

THE ASIAN SENSE IN THEOLOGY

55. To predispose ourselves to receive the *Asian Sense* into our Christian Consciousness, certain inhibitions inherited from the local churches of the West need first to be eliminated. Consistent with the methodology so far pursued in our investigation, this review of our theological past must also be made (a) from the *Third-World point of view* in general and (b) from the *Asian point of view* in particular. The contents of an Asian Theology however does not concern us here. All we hope to achieve by this critique is to discover the *Asian Style of doing Theology*.

(a) *A Third World Critique of our Theological Past*

56. In the course of our discussion we met two "secular" movements engaged in liberating us from our "poverty"; both have originated in the West; the first is *Marxist Socialism*; and the other is the *development ideology* associated with Capitalist Technocracy. The West is also "spiritually" present through the Church which, for the most part, is an extension of Western Christianity. Thus the Church too reflects, in her own *theological* self-understanding, the *ideological* conflicts of the West. Hence, this inquiry into the theological equipment of the Church.

57. The Asian Church, for the moment, has no theology of her own, though the cultures that host her teem with them. She is today caught between two "theologies" which are as "Western" as the secular ideologies just mentioned. The first is the *Classical European Theology* which, in its various brands, is officially taught in all major institutions of the Asian Church. The second is the *Latin American Theology* which is also making itself felt in certain theological circles. These theologies, of course, are diametrically opposed to each other, as do also the secular ideologies mentioned above.

58. Classical Theology in the West which went through the mill of renewal since the 19th century is said to have made a major "break-through" in the middle of this century, climaxing in modern theology

with its openness to the "world". The chief centres of this renewal were the French and German linguistic zones, according to MARK SCHOOF, because, to quote his own words, it was there that "the theologians seem to have the necessary scientific tradition and sufficient creative energy at their disposal".²⁷ One major source of inspiration for Catholic renewal of European Theology is traced back to Protestant Germany according to the same author²⁸.

59. This close-range view of European Theology justifies SCHOOF's title of his thesis: *Breakthrough*. But an Asian looking from a critical distance sees quite another picture. The real break-through in Western Theology came with the Latin American critique of that same "scientific tradition" which SCHOOF proudly alludes to. The openness to the World which European Theologians achieved upto the sixties by dialoguing with contemporary *philosophies*²⁹ is only a mild reform compared to what the Latin Americans achieved from the sixties onwards. The latter effected a complete reversal of method. They seem to have done to European Theology what FEUERBACH did to Hegelian dialectics. They put theology back on its feet. They grounded it on theopraxis. What was formerly revolving round a Kantian orbit was made to rotate round a Marxian axis³⁰.

60. For us Asians then, Liberation Theology is thoroughly Western, and yet, so radically renewed by the challenges of the Third World, that it has a relevance for Asia, which the Classical Theology does not have. The Ecumenical Association of Third World Theologians (*EATWOT*) which is now holding its Asian Consultation here is perhaps its first tangible fruit in Asia. In the Churches of the East this *new method* has already begun to compete with the traditional theology. What the Latin Americans claim, and what we Asians must readily grant, is that it is not perhaps a new theology, but a theological *method*, indeed the *correct method* of doing theology.

²⁷ MARK SCHOOF o. p., *Breakthrough*. The Beginnings of the New Catholic Theology (Dublin, 1970), 17.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 22—30.

²⁹ It is observed *Ibid.*, 26, that the new theology began by making the „whole life of the Church“ the locus of a theological reflection, specially, „the world in which this community (of the church) lived, specially, the world of contemporary philosophy“ (emphasis and paranthesis mine). The way the world in which the church lived is filtered into „the world of philosophy“ would not escape South American criticism.

³⁰ For a lucid exposition of this Latin American breakthrough cf. JON SOBRINO, „El conocimiento teológico en la teología europea y latino-americana“, in: *Liberación y cautiverio: Debates en torno al método de la teología en América Latina* (Mexico City, 1975), 177—207. For a neat summary of it, cf. ALFRED T. HENNELLY s. j., „Theological Method: the Southern Exposure“, *Theological Studies* 38/4 (Dec. 1977), 708—735.

61. The features of this methodology peculiarly relevant for us in Asia can be selected from SOBRINO's presentation³¹. The first feature is that the Kantian attempt to "liberate reason from authority" paved the way to a theological preoccupation with harmonizing "faith with reason" while the Marxian attempt to "free reality from oppression" did not receive theological attention in Europe until the South Americans made an issue of it³². Thus, the use of "Philosophy" to explain away "suffering" rationally or to define God and His nature in such a way as to justify the existence of oppression and injustice, was understandable in an European socio-political context, while substitution of philosophical speculation with "sociological" analysis to *change* rather than explain the world of injustice has become the immediate concern of Liberation Theology. Such a concern cannot come within the "scientific" purview of European Theology, whether Protestant³³ or Catholic³⁴.

62. The second feature, quite important for Asians, is the primacy of praxis over theory. Spirituality, for instance, is not the practical conclusion of Theology but the radical involvement with the poor and the oppressed, and is what creates Theology. We know Jesus the *Truth* by following Jesus the *Way*.

63. Thirdly, this Way is the Way of the Cross, the basis of all knowledge. Thus, the growth of the World into God's Kingdom is *not* a "progressive development", but a process punctuated by radical contradictions, violent transformations and death-resurrection experiences — what SOBRINO calls the "ruptura epistemologica" — scripturally founded in the "Transcendence of the Crucified God".³⁵

64. Fourthly, we see that it is not a "development theology" such as would justify and perpetuate the values of an "acquisitive" culture, but a "liberation theology" demanding an Asceticism of Renunciation and a voluntary *poverty* that sneers at acquisitiveness. This resultant "spirituality" is not self-enclosed, motivated as it is by the desire to bring about the kingdom of God here on earth. What it inculcates is not merely a *passive solidarity* with the poor in their poverty and oppression, but also a *dynamic participation* in their struggle for full humanity. Indeed, a dynamic following of Christ!³⁶

³¹ *Art. cit.*, passim.

³² However, a relatively early example of a pioneering, and perhaps premature but certainly praiseworthy attempt at a Christian assessment of the Marxist challenge can be found in R. B. Y. SCOTT and G. VLASTOS (Eds.), *Towards the Christian Revolution* (London, 1937).

³³ According to the thesis put forward by W. PANNENBERG (*Theology and Philosophy of Science*, London, 1976), the main task of theology is to establish rationally the truth of theological propositions.

³⁴ For a self-understanding of Catholic theology as a "scientific pursuit", cf. Y. CONGAR op, *A History of Theology* (Garden City, NY, 1968), 221ff.

³⁵ Here SOBRINO (*art. cit.*, 201) quotes MOLTSMANN. Cf. HENNELLY, *art. cit.*, 721.

³⁶ HENNELLY, *art. cit.*, 710—713.

65. Finally, the encounter of God and Man, i. e. the interplay of Grace and Liberty, is seen as Man's obligation to use all his *human potentialities* to anticipate the kingdom which, nevertheless, remains *God's gratuitous gift*. This explains the Liberation Theologian's political option for socialism, i. e. for a definite social order in which oppressive structures are changed radically, even violently, in order to allow every person to be fully human, the assumption being that no one is liberated unless every one is.

66. This Theology, and also its European predecessor, receive their contextual significance in Asia precisely in relationship to the aforesaid Western ideologies with which they are very closely connected. Our earlier criticism of how these ideologies operate in Asia, has clearly situated the two theologies, too, in the context of Eastern Religiosity. Hence, our task is to complement the Latin American method with an Asian Critique of Classical Theology.

(b) *The Asian Style as Asian Theology*

67. Peking's recent prediction about the future of Buddhism runs as follows: —

The Communists hold that, as a *religion* Buddhism will gradually die out, as history moves forward; but as a *philosophy* it merits careful study³⁷.

This sort of apocalyptic optimism which turns hopes into predictions is not new in the history of Asian Buddhism. For instance, the Christian missionaries in Sri Lanka used to pronounce such prophecies in the last century³⁸ when the whole colonial state machinery was backing their missions against the Buddhists³⁹. Buddhism, however, has lived to tell the tale. The analogy with the Chinese situation need not be laboured here.

68. The Marxists seem to grant that it is "religion" that will die and not the "philosophy" which merits study. Here again, I cannot help drawing a parallel with the Theologians of the West who, too, have detached religion from philosophy in their "Theology of Religions". In fact, the inherent incapacity of both classical Marxism and classical Theology to grasp the Asian Sense as revealed in the multifaceted Religiosity of our people, is ultimately rooted in this unhappy dichotomy which both have inherited from a tradition which began perhaps with the early Western encounters with non-Christian Cultures⁴⁰.

69. Let me then put things back in focus. In all, the non-biblical soteriologies of Asia, *religion* and *philosophy* are inseparably interfused. Philo-

³⁷ *Peking Review*, No. 47 (Nov. 24, 1978), p. 31. The emphasis is mine.

³⁸ Cf. K. MALALGODA, *Buddhism in Sinhalese Society 1750—1900*. A Study of Religious Revival and Change (Berkeley, UC Press) 173—174.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 191—196.

⁴⁰ Cf. ALOYSIUS PIERIS S. J., *Western Christianity and Eastern Religions: a theological reading of historical encounters* (Pro Manuscripto), a paper read out at the German Theology Professors' Seminar, Bossey, Switzerland, Sept 27—30, 1978.

sophy is a religious vision; and religion is a philosophy lived. Every meta-cosmic soteriology is at once a *darśana* and a *pratipadā*, to use Indian terms; i. e. an interpenetration of a "view" of life and a "way" of life. In fact, the oft-repeated question whether Buddhism is a philosophy or a religion was first formulated in the West, before it reached Peking *via* Marxism. For in the Buddha's formula, the fourfold salvific *truth* incorporates the Path as one of its constituents while the Eight-fold *Path* coincides with the realization of the Truth.

70. Here let me refer to the current trend of using "Buddhist techniques" of meditation in "Christian Prayer" without any reverence for the soteriological context of such techniques. For, the naive presupposition is that the (Buddhist) *Way* could be had without the (Buddhist) *Truth*. It is time to impress on our theologians that in our culture the *method* cannot be severed from the *goal*. For the word "technique", now misused in task-oriented cultures to mean a mechanical action which, when done according to set rules, produces predictable results, must be traced back to its original Greek sense. *Techne* is not a mechanical action, but a skill, an art; In our traditions, the art of doing a thing is itself the thing done. The *goal* of life, in Buddhism, is the *art* of living it. The Perfection to be achieved is the style of achieving it! The obvious corollary is that the Asian method of doing Theology, is itself Asian Theology. *Theopraxis* is *already the formulation of Theology*.

71. Thus the mutuality of praxis and theory which defines the Asian sense in Theology is the missing ingredient in the Theology of Religions which we have uncritically accepted and which hampers our task of acquiring the Asian style.

72. This inadequacy seems to have been introduced by the early Fathers of the Church who in their dialogue with the non-biblical systems, restricted their interest to the *philosophical* rather than the *religious* plane.

They further impressed this dichotomy in the Western theological tradition when they took "pagan" philosophy out of its religious context and turned it into an intellectual weapon serving Christian apologetics against those very religions! Thus, philosophy became the handmaid of Christian religion, *ancilla theologiae*, as already noticed in the writings of CLEMENT OF ALEXANDRIA and PETER DAMIEN⁴¹. It is in this play of circumstances that one can understand the two permanent dents which Western Theology of Religions has received very early in history.

73. Firstly the use of philosophy minus religion imparted a *cerebral thrust* to the theology of religions. This emerged side by side with an abhorrence of "pagan" religious practices: an old semitic intransigence continuing upto the Apostolic era. Nevertheless, in the course of time these religious practices did influence Christian liturgy and ethics ... even though Theology held fast to her *ancilla*! Thus from the very incep-

⁴¹ Cf. PANNENBERG, *op. cit.*, 10.

tion, Theology and Theopraxis parted ways. The God-talk of Theologians and the God-experience of the Monks ran parallel. The former was working on 'pagan' thought and the latter, on 'pagan' spirituality! The Academicians and the Mystics lived in mutual suspicion.

74. The second dent is even deeper. It is the apologetical technique of using a non-Christian religion against itself. This later became a missiological strategy, still resorted to in our Theology of Religions. It began with the way a "pagan" philosophy was removed from its original religious context and made to serve Christianity not merely to enrich itself with an intellectual equipment but also to counteract the "pagan" religions. This process of "instrumentalization" is not absent even in De NOBILI and RICCI, the missionary innovators of the 17th century Asia. What the early Fathers did to non-biblical philosophy, these men did to Asian *culture*. They truncated it from its religious context and turned it into a means of conversion. It was a step forward, no doubt, but in the same direction! To this category must be relegated also the Christian "Guru" who, as we mentioned earlier, plucks Zen and Yoga from the religious stems which give them sap, and adorns Christian spirituality with sapless twigs!

75. This species of "theological vandalism" has been euphemistically expressed by a new Christian usage of the word "Baptism". One hears of "baptizing" Asian cultures, and now after Vatican II, baptizing Asian Religiosity". Baptism which in its scriptural usage, expressed the most self-effacing act of Christ, first in the Jordan where He knelt before His Precursor (*Mk. 1/9—11*) and then on the Cross (*Mk. 10/35; Lk. 12/50*) where as the suffering servant He ended His earthly mission in apparent failure, has now come to mean Christian triumphalism which turns everything it touches to its own advantage, with no reverence for the wholeness of another's religious experience.

76. Hence our conclusions:

(i) Our theology is our way of sensing and doing things as revealed in our people's struggles for spiritual and social emancipation and expressed in the idioms and languages of the cultures such struggles have created.

(ii) Theology then is not mere God-talk; for, in our cultures, God-talk *in itself* is sheer "nonsense". As evidenced by the Buddha's refusal to talk of Nirvana, all words have *Silence* as their Source and Destiny! God-talk is made relative to God-experience. The word-game about nature and person or the mathematics of one and three have only generated centuries of verbosity. It is word-less-ness that gives every word its meaning. This inner *Harmony* between *Word* and *Silence* is the test of Asian authenticity, indeed it is the Spirit, the Eternal Energy which makes every word spring from Silence and lead to Silence, every engagement spring from renunciation, every struggle from a profound restfulness, every freedom from stern discipline, every action from stillness, every "development" from detachment and every acquisition from non-

addiction. Since, however, Silence is the *Word Unspoken* and the Word is *Silence Heard*, their "relationship" is not one of temporal priority but dialectical mutuality. It is the Spirit of Buddhist Wisdom and Christian Love. If there is Harmony between our Speech and our Silence, whether in worship or service or conversation, the Spirit is amongst us.

(iii) The same *Harmony* reigns between *God-experience* which is Silence and the *Man-Concern* which makes It Heard. One is not temporally prior to the other. It is, rather, the mutuality between Wisdom and Love, Gnosis and Agape, Pleroma and Kenosis, or as the Buddhists would put it, between "Knowledge that directs us to Nirvana and the Compassion that pins us down to the world".⁴² For liberation-praxis is at once a withdrawal into the meta-cosmic and an immersion into the cosmic.

(iv) The most subtle point of this dialectic is between *authority and freedom*. The magisterial role in the Asian Church has to be earned by the Master's *competence to mediate liberation*. Authority makes no external claims. Authority is competence to communicate freedom. He who lacks competence uses power. "With whose authority . . .?" asked the power-thirsty clerics from the Son of Man who submitted himself to that very power in order to vindicate his authority. His *authority was His freedom* available to all who touched Him. It is a self-authentication derived from a liberation-praxis; it is a Man-Concern testifying to a God-experience: the two prongs of a liberation struggle.

(v) To regain her lost *authority*, therefore, the Asian Church must abdicate her alliances with *Power*. She must be humble enough to be baptized in the Jordan of Asian *Religiosity* and bold enough to be baptized on the Cross of Asian *Poverty*. Does not the fear of losing her identity make her lean on Mammon? Does not her refusal to die keep her from living? The Theology of Power-domination and instrumentalization must give way to a theology of humility, immersion and *participation*.

(vi) Hence our desperate search for the Asian Face of Christ can find fulfilment only if we participate in Asia's own search for it in the unfathomable abyss where Religion and Poverty seem to have the same Common Source: — God, who has declared Mammon his Enemy. (*Mt.* 6/24).

(vii) What then is the locus of this praxis? Certainly not the "Christian life lived within the Church in the presence of non-Christians"; rather, it is the "God-Experience (which is at once the Man-Concern) of God's own People living beyond the Church" and among whom the Church is called to lose herself in total participation. That is to say, *Theology in Asia is the Christian apocalypse of the non-Christian experiences of liberation*.

⁴² *Nibbānābhīmukhā paññā, samsārābhīmukhā karunā*. For a lengthy excursus on the dialectics between *paññā* & *karunā* see *Itv A* I 15—16, *Cp A* 289—290, *Pm* 192—193.