

THE FUTURE OF CATHOLICISM IN ASIA

By

His Eminence Jaime Cardinal L. Sin, D.D.
Archbishop of Manila*

Let me begin this conference by saying that its very title sounds scary and foreboding. Only a prophet could speak authoritatively on "The Future of Catholicism in Asia". And, as far as I know, neither bishops nor cardinals are necessarily endowed with the charism of prophecy, if by that word we understand "predicting" the future. There are no graduate masters in futurology.

However, once I accepted your invitation to develop this topic, speak I must. I am duty bound to present to you honestly and without any pretension what I think the future of Catholicism in Asia may be.

I am fully aware that when we try scanning the future, we may be liable to confusing reasonable perspectives with emotional hopes. But while I may be unable to totally divest myself of the connatural frame of mind that is a characteristic feature of incorrigible optimists, I will try to keep my feet on the ground. I will start by citing a few basic facts and figures so that we may at least start safely on the road towards formulating a "prophecy" that might claim some reasonable support.

Somebody has remarked wittily that "statistics is the art of lying with numbers". And yet we still need such "lies" to have an approximate quantitative view of the reality. Accordingly, I will try to present briefly some figures which will serve as necessary premises for conclusions we may draw in our topic. In order, however, to prevent an overdose of figures, I will use in most cases the closest round number.¹ I will make abundant, although not exclusive, use of the 1975 *Statistical Yearbook of the Church* published by the Vatican Secretariat of State.²

* Conference given at the Circolo di Roma, 10 March 1978.

¹ Exact figures will be usually enclosed in parenthesis; details will be remanded to the footnotes.

² Secretaria Status, Rationarium Generale Ecclesiae. *Annuario Statisticum Ecclesiae. Statistical Yearbook of the Church. Annuaire Statistique de L'Eglise*, 348 pp.

A preliminary remark on the geographical limitation of my reflections may be in place. My conference will consider the countries of South, South East and Far East Asia. The Middle East countries will not be generally included (Afghanistan, Cyprus, Iran, Iraq, Israel, Jordan, Lebanon, Syria and Turkey). For obvious reasons this is an almost natural selection.

It will also help our purpose to present at the very beginning an overview of the religious population of Asia, following the 1975 *Britannica Book of the Year*,³ but completing it when necessary. This is the general chart of the main religions:

Total World Religions Population	2,249,665,000	Asia	1,571,729,000
Word Christian population	944,065,450	Asia	86,811,000

Of these Asian Christians (almost eighty-seven million) about two-thirds are Catholic; about one-third belong to Protestant or indigenous Christian churches.

Orthodox:	world population 89,301,600;	Asia 1,835,000	(including Middle East)
Jewish:	world population 14,386,540;	Asia 3,026,150	(including Middle East)
Muslim:	world population 529,108,700;	Asia 422,208,000	(including Middle East)
Shinto:	world population 62,149,000;	Asia 62,004,000	
Taoist:	world population 31,388,700;	Asia 31,360,700	
Confucian:	world population 205,976,700;	Asia 205,725,700	
Buddhist:	world population 248,516,800;	Asia 247,951,500	
Hindu:	world population 514,432,400;	Asia 512,418,000	

In the concrete, Asia has a proportion of 2.3% Catholics out of 2,300,000,000 (2,301,291,000) Asians. In other words, around 58,000,000 are Catholic. This makes Asia — the most populated continent with almost two-thirds of the world population — the continent with the lowest proportion of Catholics.⁴

A deep feeling of tragedy invades the soul at the sight of empty slots in the statistical tables after the names of some Asian countries. Whether the items refer to the number of Catholics or of ecclesiastical territories, to the number of apostolic workers, of schools or students or of sacraments administered, the empty spaces are tale-tellers of an immense drama. They speak of silence, the silence of death. The background makes these omissions doubly heart-rending: Only a meager 2.3% Catholic population thinly scattered among a populace of more than two billion, spread over forty million square kilometers, is a frightening picture.

³ *Britannica Book of the Year*, 1975 (Chicago: Encyclopaedia Britannica, Inc.).

I

What is then the record in Asia? When anyone compares the record of Christianity throughout Asia and other continents, one fact becomes clear. In all other continents Christianity has taken firm root, and the proportion of Christians to the total population is at least substantial; Christianity is at home in Europe, North and South America, Africa, Australia, Oceania. Only in Asia is Christianity, apart from the Philippines, an infinitesimal fraction and something of "a stranger in the land". Why?

The first reason is that practically only in Asia has the Church encountered established religions. Africa, Latin America and Oceania were largely animistic societies, which present fewer difficulties. Even in Asia itself, most of the little success has usually been among animistic societies. For example, in the Philippines, Antonio Morga, describing in 1609 the religion of the people and its private, uncommunitarian framework, commented: "All this was with so little aid, apparatus or foundation" ... In a word, the Philippines contained no rooted liturgical or doctrinal system.

But authentic Buddhism, Hinduism, Shintolism have always been a different story. They have so literally possessed the souls of men, and have so rooted themselves in their daily culture, that any other religion is foreign and an intruder. And all this is even more true of Islam, a post-Christian religion.

Unfortunately, this inherent difficulty was compounded by the "Chinese Rites" controversy in the 17th and 18th centuries. More and more today it becomes abundantly clear that the Chinese Rites decision had very far-reaching consequences. To quote a non-suspect source, a recent issue of *Fides*, published from Propaganda Fide itself in Rome, speaks as follows: "While the question (of Chinese rites) was admittedly a complicated one and involved doctrine as well as ritual, it is generally considered now that the enforcement of Pope Clement's condemnation did great harm to the development of Christianity in China."⁶

What is the solution to this problem? Surely there is no one complete solution, but at least one fundamental remedy would be this: — encourage inculturation and indigenization in every way possible. Here there is unquestionably a danger of syncretism.

⁴ The Americas have the highest proportion with 61.4%, followed by Europe with 39.8%, Oceania with 24.6%, and Africa with 12.1%.

⁵ Antonio Morga, *Sucesos de las Islas Filipinas* in vol. 16, p. 32 of E. Blair and James A. Robertson, *The Philippine Islands* (Cleveland: Arthur H. Clark, 1902-1909).

⁶ *Fides* (July 11, 1970), p. 307.

But a worse danger is for the Church to continue as it has through the last few centuries. Somehow Asian Christians must convince Asian non-Christians that Christ is not a foreign import, and that to belong to the Christian Faith is not to abandon the deepest and dearest traditions of their culture and history.

The modern magna charta for this incarnational outlook, of course, is Vatican II. All its various paragraphs are too well known to be quoted again here fully, but this one can represent the others:

"In imitation of the plan of the Incarnation, the young Churches, rooted in Christ and built up on the foundation of the apostles, take to themselves in a wonderful exchange all the riches of the nations which were given to Christ as an inheritance (cf. Ps. 2:8). From the customs and traditions of their people, from their wisdom and their learning, from their arts and sciences, these Churches borrow all those things which can contribute to the glory of their Creator, the revelation of the Saviour's grace, or the proper arrangement of Christian life."¹

At a deeper level of this inculturation process must be the constant, patient, sympathetic study of Eastern religions and dialog with them. Articles and books are already appearing from time to time on these themes, and future publications must continue the same approaches and advance them.

For example, the author of an arresting article entitled "Fictitious Walls,"² asks whether we have invented unnecessary obstacles by insisting that an Indian convert must cease being a Hindu to become a Christian. From his long experience in India he opts for Catholic Hindus, just as those converted from Greek religions became Christian Greeks. Others may dispute this individual theory since it seems to involve a doubtful presupposition or at least an ambiguous use of a term, "Hindu", with its religious connotations. This theory may fade away ultimately; but everyone must consider the possibility of this type of approach until undiscovered worlds open to us.

All must be therefore allowed the freedom and be positively encouraged to explore these Eastern religions, — almost as men are exploring space. In space we do not know what we will find, yet the world will never fully rest until we do know. So with the great world religions; our knowledge of them so far has been superficial and often pre-judged. The Church cannot rest until it has penetrated the heart of them, not only in learned circles but on the daily level of people.

¹ *Ad Gentes*, 22.

² Hans Staffner, S.J., "Fictitious Walls", *Worldmission* 20 (Summer 1969), pp. 17-22.

All this study and dialog may mean that for some years Christianity will be in a time of sowing, not of reaping. Since this is a Scriptural phenomenon and common to various periods of Christian history, however, Christian patience and hope can, by the grace of the Holy Spirit, rise to the challenge.

What precedes has been said in order to explain a fact, the sad fact of a 'not-yet-Catholic Asia', and a hope, the hope of a "Catholic-Asia" — or at least of an Asia wherein the Catholic faith will feel at home and thrive as its own motherland. This, Church will be truly inculturated in the religious reality of the submit, will come to be, will "be-come" when, and only when the Asian people and thus become an "Asian religion".

Let us now pass on to consider some concrete statistics related to other aspects of the Church in the Asian continent.⁹

The number of priests working in Asia is, in round figures, 22,000,¹⁰ giving Asia the lowest proportion of priests per inhabitant among all the continents, 0.001%. It is 0.4% in the proportion of priests to Catholics — slightly ahead of Africa, 0.33%, and the Americas, 0.34%.

A somewhat consoling fact is that the absolute number of priests in Asia in 1975 did not diminish in comparison with the preceding year, and in fact showed an increase, although only slightly. This was due to the number of ordinations representing an increase of 4%(4.06) over the existing clergy. Besides compensating for the decrease due to death and defections, this represent a total positive increase of 2.5%(2.46). But this increase represents still a very meager prospect, considering the proportionate — or rather disproportionate — increase in population. This tragedy will be felt with acute and ever-increasing anguish in the years to come.¹¹

If from the priests we pass to the number of religious men other than priests and of women religious, the number of these apostolic workers is 75,000 (75,237), of whom only about 5,000 (5,236) are men and the rest women (70,001).

⁹ From a world total of 2,342 ecclesiastical territories, 270 or 12.24% are in Asia. As for pastoral centers involved in the work of evangelization there are 43,363 such centers, understanding by this term parishes and quasi-parishes (9,278), mission stations (28,444, of which only 1,177 or 4.1% have a resident pastor), and chaplaincies.

¹⁰ The figure is 21,833, of whom 10,883 are diocesan and 10,950 religious priests.

¹¹ As it is, the proportion is desolate: In Asia three is only 1 priest for every 100.00 people. The increase of priests in 1975 was 0.97% while the population had increased 5%. In other words 106 priests more were added, but during the same time Asia increased by 115,000,000.

The number of candidates for the priesthood constitutes a coordinate that must always be considered for any projection towards the future. In this respect Asia occupies the second place among the continents. A proportion of 10% of the candidates in relation to priests (Africa has a proportion of 178.5%) gives some hope. This represents a total of 23,368 candidates, 13,403 in secondary schools and 9,965 in philosophy or theology.¹²

Another patch of blue are the Catholic schools, although they they are threatened by the sword of communist advances, totalitarian governments, nationalistic sensitivities and the revival of Asian religions.¹³

An interesting, although by no means infallible, index of the Church's evangelizing drive especially amidst a non-Christian population, is the number of adult baptisms administered. Of the 16,543,000 worldwide baptisms reported only 6% are adult baptisms, meaning by "adult" persons over 7 years of age. In 1975 Asia had 10.7% of the total adult baptized numbers.¹⁴

Two more items help to complete the picture. Regarding the situation in countries that had recently fallen into communist hands, Cambodia has expelled all foreign missionaries. In Laos there has been a progressive elimination of religion from the life of the nation since the Pathet Lao take-over. Foreign missionaries were expelled by August 1975, and religious teaching was suppressed. Catholic Church buildings and Buddhist pagodas were seized by the

¹² The percentage of 107% is more than twice as high as the overall percentage of the world which stands at only 49.8%. Central America has 89.1%, South America 83.5%, North America 28.1% only. Europe has 36.4% and Oceania 26.9%. The proportion of those leaving the seminary is lower in Asia than the total world average, 6.7% as against 9.9%. This is still a far cry from the needs of a fast-growing Asia.

As for centres for the formation of candidates to the priesthood there are 220 seminaries at the high school level, comprising both those of the diocesan and the regular clergy, and 112 centers for philosophical and theological studies, again for both clergies.

¹³ The number of Church-run primary or elementary schools in Asia is 10,786, with a student population of over three million (3,000,031). The Church directs 5,516 secondary schools with 2,497,835 students. Over 800,000 students frequent her institutes of higher education, colleges and universities.

¹⁴ Out of 1,797,279 adult baptisms, 192,568 were administered in Asia. This represents a 4.7% higher percentage than the average. Africa had the highest rate of adult baptisms, 33.5%.

Another important aspect, because of its social and religious character, is the number of marriages within a determined period of time, as well as the relation between the number of marriages celebrated and the total figure for the Catholic population. We find that in Asia 90.8% of the marriages (or 283,304) were celebrated between Catholics, with a 9.2% (or 28,818) of marriages between a Catholic and a non-Catholic.

government; only a few were allowed to remain open for any kind of services. As for Vietnam, assessment of church activity and viability is a matter of guesswork because of the dearth of reliable reports.

The Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences (FABC) representing 14 episcopal conferences in Asia (excluding the Middle East) was established in 1970, and its statutes approved in 1972. Its headquarters are in Hong Kong. Beyond doubt the FABC may prove in the future the organism (I prefer the word organism to "organization") for vitalizing the common thrust of the Asian Churches and unifying their endeavours for a more integrated and more "Asian" evangelization.¹⁶

Up to now I have developed at some length an aspect of the Asian situation which, I believe, is basic for the proper projection into the future: the enormous disproportion between a "non-Catholic" Asia and the present means for its evangelization. By this I mean not only personnel and resources as placed in relief by the statistics I have quoted, but above all the problem of inculturation and Asianization, a topic I touched upon during one of my interventions at the last Synod.

II

Asia's reality is many sided. But today, along with the problem of religious inculturation, most of its characteristics force themselves on our attention. Asia is young, Asia is poor, Asia is moving into action. The Church should be attuned to this triple reality and in full harmony with it.

1. Asia is young. Its people form 56% of the world's population, and 56% of Asia's people were born since the end of World War II. In Thailand this latter proportion is 60, in the Philippines it is 66 per cent. By 1980, 80 per cent of Asia's people will be under 40 years of age.

¹⁶ There are 12 cardinals from Asia, the same number as from Africa, of whom 3 are from India, 2 from the Philippines, and 1 from each of the following countries: China, Indonesia, Japan, Korea, Pakistan, Sri Lanka and Vietnam. — The number of *Episcopal Conferences* is 15: Latin Bishops of the Arab Countries, Bangladesh, Burma, China (Taiwan), India, Indonesia, Japan, Korea, Laos & Khmer Republic, Malaysia & Singapore, Pakistan, Philippines, Sri Lanka, Thailand, Vietnam. — As far as the *oriental rites* are concerned there are oriental jurisdictions in India with hierarchy and faithful of the Antiochene rite (Malankarese) and of the Chaldean rite (Syro-Malabarese). There are Chaldean and Armenian rites in Iran, and Antiochene, Byzantine and Chaldean in Iraq, not to speak more directly of Syria, Lebanon, Israel, Jordan and Turkey.

Asia's youth largely shares the outlook, needs, and aspirations of youth everywhere in today's world; they are restless, in ferment, conscious that grave problems confront them. The present-day youth of Asia has outstanding assets, they are imaginative, resourceful, energetic and hard-working. They want employment, but they ask that it be meaningful. They are eager for change in a swiftly-moving intoxicating era of dynamic transformation. They are adaptable and idealistic.

This youthful force for change is massive. The immensity of young Asian manpower need not be a drag on its progress towards development. Christians must see that in human resources great potential lies. God intends them to cultivate and expand the physical resources He has created for us. If the Church can help inculcate in this youthful mass of manpower a will to corporate effort and a spirit of social responsibility, she will offer striking witness and render superb service to the human family of new eras to come.

So this youthfulness of Asia must be welcomed and utilized within the Church's life and work in Asia. Failure to move with the young will cost the Church manpower she badly needs. High pastoral priority ought to be given to communicating with the young through all personal and mass media. Our best efforts should be devoted to solid leadership training of Catholic youth.

2. Asia is poor. In comparison with the nations of Europe and North America, her per capita income and her gross-annual-product growth are lamentably low; the rate was 4.6% throughout the promising "development decade" of the sixties. A few economically bright spots (Japan, Singapore, South Korea, Taiwan, Thailand) relieve the dark picture, but then the low average in spite of those gains is all the more disturbing. The gap between the "have" and "have-not" nations grows wider. Asia is still mainly rural and agrarian, while Western lands have become industrialized and urban.

Likewise, within Asia's several countries, some few individuals and families enjoy huge wealth. In view of that fact, the low per capita income is the more shocking. In the Philippines, 70% of the families must subsist on 33% of the country's total income; ten per cent of the families receive 40% of that revenue. It is said that about half the total income earners bring in less than (U.S.) \$330 a year. Six or seven persons need to be fed, clothed, and housed in an average family. Economic inequalities split Asian societies into social classes fearful and resentful of one another.

Poverty means little food and that of poor quality, inadequate clothing and housing, helplessness against illness or accident, limited

schooling and employment, an anxious, precarious old age. It also breeds crime and subhuman living.

The 'Green Revolution', increasing the supply of food grains raises hope that most countries will be able to put more rice in the pots of their people more bread on their tables. Some arable land can be utilized for the raising of industrial crops which may set economies on an upward course. But socially conscious administrators must try to see that the new windfall is shared widely, especially by the indigent.

The Church knows that Christ came to fill the hungry with good things, to befriend the poor. A man who fails to be moved and shaken by the physical poverty of people in misery is simply no partaker of the mind and heart of Christ! If the Church would communicate, then, with the countless masses of Asia, serve as their spokesman, champion their cause, and help lighten the burden they carry, she must walk in frugality and simplicity among the poor, and not leave them ill at ease at a distance. The Social Teachings of the Church can lend much light to Asia as she tries to stand on her own feet and bring her people a kind of living more fully in keeping with human dignity.

Asia today must live in sober austerity in order to develop her resources more efficiently. Here as elsewhere, then, the Church must avoid any show of wealth and lavish spending.

At this point a twofold problem confronts us: "Asian" "development" not merely "development in Asia".

With the possible exception of Japan, Asia belongs to what is called the Third World, the world of developing nations. Asians see the good things the industrialized nations of the West are able to produce and enjoy, and they want them.

But they don't want to be "westernized". They want to continue being Asians. For some Asians, perhaps for many, this may simply be inertia. They don't want to jettison things that have been with them for so long: traditional values and attitudes. Other Asians, more reflective, feel that they have a distinctive cultural heritage which they must preserve not only because it is of great human value but because it is what gives Asians identity, it is what makes Asians what they are.

To develop as the West has developed — technologically, economically, humanly, yes, but at the same time to remain Asian: is this possible?

It is a problem. But it may have a solution.

The example of Japan, may be cited. There, certainly, the rewards of development are no longer limited to a few. And yet, does not the Japanese success story involve a different kind of alienation, a materialism which other Asians are unwilling to accept? Have the Japanese, the leaders in Asian development, succumb to an outlook on life that is alien to the humane tradition of Asia?

Moreover, certain basic cultural features of Asia differ from those of Europe. The peoples of the West share a universe of discourse based on a common historic experience: the unity of the ancient Mediterranean, the unity of medieval Christendom.

We Asians do not have this shared universe of discourse. And so, when we even as Asians speak of Asia, we do not know whether we are thinking of the same thing. We may have found ourselves as Chinese, as Japanese, or as Indians; but we have not yet found ourselves as Asians. We need to find ourselves as Asians, because we need to form a community of Asian nations and Peoples. This need is becoming more and more apparent every day.

In the first place, with rapidly growing populations everywhere in the region, we need to share the resources of the region, to develop some kind of regional complementarity by which we can fruitfully exchange goods and services with one another.

But, secondly, this complementarity must be achieved by consent, not by force. It must not be imposed by stronger nations simply by moving in on the weaker nations who have the resources the stronger need.

And therefore, thirdly, we need to acquire a basic trust in one another, for without a minimum of mutual trust dialog is impossible.

In short, we must find ourselves as Asians, as Asians together; and, upon this hard anvil of an Asian consensus, hammer out the differences that can and will arise among us.

This is our present, this is our urgent need.

Who, or what, will then help Asians find themselves? Is it Christianity? It is very possible. And yet, after four hundred years of continuous, dedicated, often heroic missionary effort, what is Christianity in Asia? It is a diaspora: small, isolated communities lost among teeming millions.

You may say that numbers are not important. It is quality that is important. Yes; and the quality of being Christian has been rather authoritatively described as being leaven. Is this, then, the case? Has Christianity acted, is it now acting as a leavening force in Asia?

And now my answer in the form of a question: will not Christianity become the great leavening force for total, human "Asian development" precisely when it will become fully inculturated? Will there not be then an Asia where the Christian faith will feel totally at home, as in its own motherland?

3. We listed as a third feature of present-day pastoral importance in Asia the fact that its people are moving to action. Asia, more and more, is where the action will be. The action, hopefully, will be collective, with intelligent initiative and committed participation from the people themselves on a wide scale. Into new policies Asian countries must work their own traditions and spirit. They should therefore refuse foreign aid that is either patronizing or paralyzing.

Professor Anwar Barkat, a Pakistani political scientist, elaborating on this idea in a recently published article, observed that development achieved thus far has usually benefitted the few: wealthy industrialists, landlords, families highly placed in politics. Barkat deplors the fact that governmental authority is often an instrument of control rather than an agent for creative and directed change such as the masses hope for institution and structures. So there is little popular support and understanding of development efforts, little popular motivation and enthusiasm for change. He says that the modern Asian is a new and awakened man... part of the new Asian masses who are ready and willing to seek change and development actively, although this may involve personal and communal hardships. In modern Asia, he says, the masses awakened are asking for the rights and responsibilities of participation. It is not merely bread they seek, but bread as the symbol of their new-self-realization as participants in society.¹⁶

It seemed to be the clear mind of Vatican Council II that such active and intelligent participation of laity and clergy alike should be exercised in the corporate life of the People of God. It was invited and encouraged in matters liturgical; it was to be fostered in the elaboration of diocesan programs, and in the planning and execution of common apostolic endeavors. For the Church to move with Asia in motion, and for everyone to profit from this change in Asian attitudes, Catholic bishops and other leaders in the Church might take special care to listen receptively to opinions and suggestions from the junior clergy and the laity. Leaders might well find

¹⁶ Anwar N. Barkat, "The Quests of Contemporary Asia", *International Review of Mission* vol. LIX, n. 234 (April 1970), pp. 135-136.

it fruitful to facilitate judicious experimentation more than has been done, and to place greater trust in the loyalty and gifts of mind and heart enjoyed by the "common Christian", by the "Asian Christian".

III

From the foregoing, are we now in a position to draw any futuristic conclusions? I am tempted to say "yes", but I am just as strongly tempted to say "no". You may call this a typical Asian answer. All in all, however, I am more inclined to say "yes" but with some "ifs".

If Catholicism in the Asian continent enters by the paths of authentic "inculturation", if it follows the clear directives of Vatican II in the Decree on the Church's Missionary Activity and the Declaration on Non-Christian Religions, if the Church in Asia generously endeavours to integrate Christianity into the Asian life and the Asian people while preserving its universal character — as the 1974 Synod on Evangelization so forcefully proposed — then "yes". Catholicism will then be a living reality in Asia, it will permeate the lives of many Asians, it will be at home in Asia; it will be — or if you allow me to put it this way — it will be "again" (not simply become) an Asian religion. After all, Christ was an Asian, and Christianity started to thrive precisely in Asia.

For some countries Christianity may look "imported". But Non-Christian religions do not hide the fact that they have been transmitted from abroad. Buddhism came into Vietnam from China and into China from India. Buddhist pagodas in Vietnam are decorated with buddhist aphorisms in Chinese, and Moslem prayer-houses in the Southern Philippines bear inscriptions in Arabic. Even the great "non-religion" which is Marxism has been "imported" but has become "inculturated" at a pace that leaves all religions astronomically behind.

Though necessarily brought by foreign missionaries, Christianity everywhere can and must adopt indigenous elements, persons, culture, — even religious culture — while remaining universal in all essentials.

Briefly then: if the Church is inculturated in the Asian people, in the Asian peoples, in their culture, in their youth, in their poverty, in their action, in their spirituality, I see a bright future for Catholicism in Asia.

What Our Holy Father Pope Paul VI said to the African Bishops in Uganda on July 31, 1969 applies equally to Asia: "We have no other desire than to foster what you already are: Christians and Africans".¹⁷

Let me end this conference with a quotation from the same address. After having expressed the need for unity in faith, the Pope continued on the topic of inculturation. He addressed Africa, African bishops, African Christians. It seems to me that the principles are so valid and so universal, that where the text reads "Africa", I may be allowed to read "Asia". And thus his message, without any other change, will apply to Asia with the same force and strength with which it was intended for Africa:

"An adaptation of the Christian life in the fields of pastoral, ritual, didactic and spiritual activities is not only possible, it is even favored by the Church. And in this sense you may and you must have an Asian ("African" in the original) Christianity. Indeed you possess human values and characteristic forms of culture which can rise up to perfection, such as to find in Christianity and for Christianity a true superior fullness, thus proving to be capable of a richness of expression all its own and genuinely Asian ("African" in the original). This may take time. It will require that your Asian ("African" in the original) soul become imbued to its depths with the secret charism of Christianity, so that these charisms may then overflow freely in beauty and wisdom in the true Asian ("African" in the original) manner".¹⁸

My friends, it could not have been said better.

With this I conclude. "The Future of Catholicism in Asia" is bright, but only with God's grace and blessing. "If Yahweh does not build the house, in vain the masons toll".¹⁹ May I ask your prayers for the Church in Asia.

¹⁷ *L'Osservatore Romano* August 2, 1969. English translation from *The Pope Speaks* 14 (1969), 214-220.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 219.

¹⁹ *Ps.* 127:1.