

**THE SEVEN POSITION PAPERS  
IN THE  
PAN ASIAN MEETING OF EPISCOPAL CONFERENCES  
Manila, November 23-29, 1970**

*Following is the opening speech delivered  
by Archbishop Teopisto V. Alberto, presi-  
dent of the Catholic Bishops' Conference  
of the Philippines.*

Your Eminences: Your Excellencies: Guests: Friends:—

This historical meeting of the Bishops of Asia was conceived and planned by representatives of the different Asian Conferences in October, 1969, during the Synod of Bishops held in Rome.

The idea was conceived in a common consultation of the Bishops of Asia in order to give meaning to the doctrine of episcopal collegiality, to dedicate a time of serious collective study to the problems predominant in the region, and to find ways and means to foster the common welfare of the Asian countries, and to promote the growth of the Church among their people.

The gravity of the responsibility incumbent upon us, as shepherds of the flock entrusted to our care by God, requires a serious study of the causes, difficulties, and hardships that contribute to retard the development of the social, economic, educational and cultural and, even theological life, of the peoples of Asia.

The seriousness of our responsibility is aggravated by ideological threats and material handicaps, and, in order to surmount these, the Bishops of Asia need the aid of sister churches in other parts of world.

Nevertheless, while we need the assistance of others outside of Asia, we should be on the alert that what is valuable in our own cultural

heritage, and our profound religious spirituality be zealously preserved. It would be precisely one of the aims of the Bishops' meeting to safeguard for Asian development its own native character.

The world's attention is focused on us at this very moment. There is great expectation that this Meeting will produce practical solutions to the problems that have been nagging our Asian countries for so many years. This is precisely the objective of this meeting.

The topics we are going to discuss will deal with the social, political, economic, cultural, educational, and religious life of the peoples of Asia. They are subjects that are universal in character and in scope, because they are common to the people of almost all areas of the world, but they are particularly relevant to the present condition of the Asian countries.

We are not to presume to offer solutions to the ills plaguing the world at large, but rather the problems knocking right at our own door. We don't assume either, that our solutions will be exclusively Asian, for the problems in some measure are universal. We should adopt universally tested and tried solutions, with special adaptations to our Asian situation.

The frank exchange of views, ideas and information regarding our respective countries will give us a clear vision of our common problems. Our knowledge of the real condition of the people of Asia will serve as a basis in assessing their needs, their expectations, their hopes. It affords us an opportunity to delve into and examine more deeply the realities of our own situation. It places us in the best position to choose the remedies appropriate to the maladies of our people.

Today we are happily gathered in collegial meeting to give eloquent testimony of the wish of the Holy Father expressed in his *Motu Proprio* "Ecclesiae Sanctae":— "That relationships between episcopal conferences especially of neighboring countries be fostered and maintained in opportune and suitable ways"; "that questions which may be of great importance in modern times and particular circumstances be seriously studied"; and, "that dangers and errors arising in their own countries which can also creep into other countries be indicated; so that suitable and opportune measures can be taken to guard against them, remove them, or constrain them". (*Ecclesiae Sanctae* I, 41, 5).

We are neighbors not only from the fact that we live in adjoining lands. Our neighborliness embraces a much wider and deeper dimension than the geographical circumscriptions in which we live. Our faith, our culture, our mores, our problems, our needs, and many other things which we share in common, make us true neighbors. All these contribute favorably towards mutual comprehension and understanding. They likewise place us in a vantage position to work together harmoniously and effectively for the total development of our people.

As a matter of fact the topics tentatively proposed by the 13 Presidents of the different Episcopal Conferences of Asia who attended the Synod of Bishops in Rome in October 1969, were later thoroughly discussed, assessed, expanded and unanimously approved by 18 representatives from different Asian Bishops' Conferences in a study meeting held in Manila in April 1970.

In these two preliminary meetings the Bishops tried to verify and identify the major problems and the legitimate aspirations of the peoples of Asia who rightfully aspire to total development and progress. Too long have they been bound by the shackles of poverty and illiteracy.

Even though the existing distress of our common condition presses for an immediate solution, yet, the fact that the great majority of the Asian people live in a sub-human condition is not necessarily the problem that we seek most urgently to solve. In their depressed material condition they can always find temporary relief in the aid and sympathy of their fellowmen, and in the spiritual comfort their religion can offer. The major problem, and this our deep concern at the moment, is how to provide them with the opportunity to rise permanently from their present level of depression.

Their misery, we repeat, does not consist merely in being situated in a sub-human condition, but principally in being without means to extricate themselves from such a deplorable condition. And the condition is really deplorable. The problem is not so much of obtaining a measure of comfort over and above what is essentially necessary for human subsistence, as of liberating them from the bondage of a sub-human existence by providing them with the power to obtain the very necessities of life.

The focus of the solutions should be the liberation of man from misery, the elevation of his person to the dignity and decency he deserves as a worthy creature of God in the consortium of honorable men.

The Church and its Bishops, being the constituted authority and guardians of the purity of Christian doctrine which insists on upholding the dignity of the human person, cannot remain indifferent to the social struggle going on in the world for the assertion of individual freedom. However, in extending the activities of the Church to the solution of social problems, attention should not be diverted from her principal and primary mission which is essentially spiritual, moral and pastoral.

Bishops are preachers of the Gospel and dispensers of the means of salvation rather than experts in the area of physical technology or economic science. Churchmen are not supposed to be either technicians or scientists in the material development of the world. There are lay experts for this. And that is their area of competence.

As preachers and ministers of a kingdom that is not of this world, although in this world, it is the task modern social development presents, how the Gospel is to be interpreted and preached; and how to apply its teachings so as to make them conform to the legitimate requirements of modern technological experiences and social development.

In our eagerness to hasten the development of the peoples of Asia where only one out of every forty is Catholic, there is danger that the Church may give the impression that it seeks the happiness of mankind in this transitory world more than the attainment of the Kingdom of Heaven.

This impression can only be given if the spiritual and eternal values on the one hand, and the temporal and material goods on the other, are not properly presented and accurately understood in their intrinsic worth. That is why in the preparatory meeting held in Manila in April 1970, it was clearly emphasized that our concern with development is essentially spiritual and pastoral. Any program of development must always be made to relate to the upliftment of the dignity of the human person, and ultimately towards the attainment of his final purpose in life.

It is not often that the Bishops of Asia come together, so seriously concerned with the demands of their pastoral responsibility and so deeply impressed by the human wants of the people.

Individual differences and cultural gaps that intervene among our countries, far from hindering the harmonious progress of this meeting, will be a challenge to make manifest the catholicity of the Church and the collegiality of Bishops.

It is not language, culture nor technology that will unite men in mutual love, but unity of faith and charity in Christ. It is this unity among the peoples of Asia, based on faith in God, charity in Christ and love among men, that this meeting of Bishops is seeking to establish through solicitude for human fulfillment in conformity with the Gospel doctrine.

The Episcopal Conference of the Philippines cordially welcomes the Episcopal Conferences of Asia, and wishes them a pleasant and fruitful sojourn.

The Episcopal Conferences of Asia would like to express their deepest sentiments of gratitude to the Holy Father for having deigned to send a representative to this Meeting in the person of His Excellency, Most Rev. Archbishop Pignedoli to whom we extend our most heartfelt welcome.

But above all the Episcopal Conferences of Asia are most grateful to the Holy Father for having imposed upon himself the heavy sacrifice of a long arduous journey so that he could be with us to get a personal knowledge of our problems, to share with us our anxieties and inspire us in our apostolic labors.

The Episcopal Conferences of Asia would like also to renew to His Holiness the testimony of their profound devotion by pledging to him, as supreme pontiff of the Church, their unconditional adhesion and collegial collaboration. We humbly pray that the Good Lord may perfect and strengthen this human renewal.

May the Holy Spirit bless and assist us in our deliberations that this Meeting will bring an increase and enjoyment of peace and prosperity. I thank you.