

called, is to be proposed to the Apostolic See. In the preparation of this list, it is the responsibility of the papal Legate to seek individually the suggestions of the Metropolitan and of the Suffragans of the province to which the diocese in question belongs or with which it is joined in some grouping, as well as the suggestions of the president of the Episcopal Conference..." (Can. 377 n.3)

13. Thus e.g. Cardinal Ratzinger, Prefect of the Congregation of the Doctrine of Faith, does not want to acknowledge a theological status to the Episcopal Conferences, but only a practical one. (See Ratzinger, *Zur Lage des Glaubens* [The situation of the Faith], Munich 1986.)

Asian Approaches to Theology and Theological Formation in China

by Georg Evers

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Vatican II marks a watershed in theological thinking for the whole Church but in a special way for the Asian Churches. In the aftermath of the new insights opened up by the Council we see the beginning of the development of a number of specific Asian approaches to theology in various Asian regions or countries. What all these attempts have in common is that they start from a specific context and try to respond to the challenges arising from a given situation by way of theological reflection.

Asia is a vast continent where many religions and cultures live side by side. Any general characteristic of Asia taken by itself, therefore, has its limitations. Nevertheless, we can name some common characteristics which determine the overall Asian context:

- Asia is the continent of the great religions;
- Asia is a continent rich in cultural potentiality;
- Asia is a continent of poverty and oppression.

Accordingly, we can find three different types of doing theology in

Asia responding to these characteristics:

- theology in dialogue with the living faiths and traditions;
- theology in dialogue with particular Asian cultures;
- theology in tackling the challenges of the social, political and economic situation.

These various contextual theologies can be assigned to certain geographic regions. Theology in dialogue with living faiths, for example, may then be seen as an Indian way of doing theology. The Philippines would stand out as an example of an Asian theology of liberation in addressing the pressing socio-economic and political problems of the country. Something similar would hold true of the Minjung-Theology of Korea. The theological enterprise in Taiwan could be taken as an example of a theology in dialogue with the culture, that is, the Chinese heritage of Yin-Yang harmony and Confucian tradition. During the last few years there has developed a growing conviction among Asian theologians, particularly among those organized in the Ecumenical Association of Third World Theologians (EATWOT) in Asia, that contextual theology in Asia should aim at uniting the various approaches into some form of combined approach. At their last Asian Theological Conference (Suanbo, Korea, 1989), they dealt with the problem of Asian sources of spirituality and theology. They reached agreement on the proposition that the Christian biblical tradition, Asian scriptural religions like Buddhism, Hinduism, Islam, Confucianism and Taoism, the experience of actual liberation struggles of the people, and the cosmic religiousness of the common people should all be considered sources for an Asian spirituality and theology.

The various new ways of doing theology are still in development and have not yet reached maturity. A. Lambino (Philippines) calls the present generation of Asian theologians, therefore, "theologians of transition", expressing the hope that the next generation will be able to develop a form of theology which can be called more authentically an "Asian Theology".

With regard to theological formation in Asia, these new approaches to theology have begun to affect and change to a great extent traditional priestly formation. Of course, there still exists a rather traditional mode of seminary training in some Asian countries. But there are also many attempts to develop new forms of theological formation by trying to bridge the gap between theoretical theology and the practice of living the faith at the grass roots level. In preparation for the coming Bishops' synod on priestly formation, the directors of Asian major seminaries met in the Philippines in 1989 to discuss more contextualized ways of

theological formation.

The Asian theological scene is very much in motion. There are many local initiatives and at the same time there has developed a new form of theological exchange among the various Asian countries. The Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences (FABC) has played an important role in bringing bishops and theologians into contact and cooperation on the various theological problems common to all Asian churches, such as interreligious dialogue, social action, missionary activity, involvement of the laity and others. At the same time, there has developed a growing ecumenical cooperation among the various Christian Churches in Asia, especially in the field of theology.

Theological Formation in China

The major changes in the development of an Asian theology and Asian local churches have taken place without the participation of the Catholic Church in mainland China. The experience of the Council and its subsequent influence have not yet been able to influence theological thinking in the seminaries in China. The last ten years have seen the establishment of up to twenty seminaries for priestly formation in the People's Republic. They have been set up on national, regional, provincial and diocesan levels. What all these seminaries have in common is that they lack theologically qualified teachers, adequate philosophical and theological libraries and other facilities required for doing theological studies. The old libraries have nearly all been destroyed and books that were saved are outdated and incomplete.

Who Is Doing Theology?

The priests working in the seminaries at the present time in China are old and have for the most part never had any special philosophical or theological training which would qualify them as teachers of theology. The seminarians sent to the seminaries are chosen for the most part from old Catholic families and have a difficult time learning the still required Latin. It is hard for them to adjust to the requirements of traditional seminary discipline and to master the dry fare of a somewhat out-dated scholastic theology. There is, practically speaking, no theological community engaging in mutual exchange and able to remain in constant contact through joint publications and working on common projects. At present, there is little effort to attempt to combine resources in order to write theological textbooks, and, to date, there are in existence only a few basic publications dealing with theology in some form or other. During recent years, books have been imported from

Europe, the United States and, especially, from Taiwan and Hong Kong.

Besides the theological teaching done in the open-seminaries which are recognized and controlled by the government, there are several clandestine seminaries run by the "underground Church". The latter are more or less of a stable nature and try to train future priests in small groups where seminarians live together when possible, and are supervised by elderly priests who try to pass on their knowledge and experience as best they can. These seminaries are always in danger of being dissolved by government agencies, because they are operating without permission and against existing regulations.

At present, there are not many signs of a theology from the grass-roots or the common believers as can be observed in other Asian churches. The experiences of oppression during the Cultural Revolution should provide ample material to reflect theologically on the meaning of being Christian and on the Christian responsibility of living and working in present-day Chinese society. But there is little encouragement and guidance given for such a luxury. The cooperation of lay people in church affairs as can be seen in the work lay people are doing in the Catholic Patriotic Association should lead to a deeper reflection on the theological contribution of lay people.

Possible Theological Topics

Contextual Chinese Theology: The Catholic Church in China claims to have reached the status of a truly local Church rooted in Chinese soil. On the other hand, the outward appearance of this Church in its various expressions of Church life - one need only to mention the liturgy - does not support this claim. There is a real need to develop a form of contextualized theology to change this state of affairs in the near future.

Theology of the Local Church: The course of political developments - more than controversial thinking - has brought about the rift between Rome and the Catholic Church in China with its focus on the question of the election and consecration of bishops. From this has come the claim to have become a local Church "independent" from Rome. This claim, too, calls for a deeper theological reflection which the Catholic Church in China in its present situation could best accomplish in cooperation with other Catholic Churches in Asia.

Theological reflection on social action: The Catholic Church in China prides itself on how Catholics contribute to the advancement of Chinese

society by being model workers and exemplary citizens. But there is not much theological reflection on the Church's social action nor of its relation to socialism, etc. There is much need here to catch up to the ongoing development of the social teaching of the universal church. The Catholic Church in China has avoided up to now taking a stance on the urgent problem of birth control in the face of the official "one-child-policy" of the government and the regulations enforcing it.

Theology of evangelization: The Catholic Church in China always refers to the "Three-Self-Principles", among them the principle of self-propagation. At present there are quite a few catechumens asking for instruction and baptism. But these people are coming on their own accord and not in response to any actively organized form of evangelization. The missionary nature of a Chinese Church needs more theological reflection than is visible at the present time.

Theology of reconciliation: The sad fact of the present situation of Catholics in China is the division between Catholics operating openly in the ecclesial structure acknowledged by the government, and the other Catholics who have built up their own network without government approval and in violation of existing regulations. The hostile relationship existing between the two groups, the accusations of having betrayed the faith, and the excommunications hurled at one by the other are a counter-sign and scandal which have to be removed in order to restore the credibility of Catholic life in China.

Outlook

China has been isolated for a long time from theological developments in the world and in Asia in particular. There is a strong need to enter into a new relationship of mutual exchange and mutual enrichment. Some positive developments can be seen. There have been invitations offered to theologians from Hong Kong, Taiwan, USA and other countries to teach for short periods in Chinese seminaries, in Sheshan and elsewhere. The Hong Kong Chinese Theology Association has organized theological seminars for mutual sharing and exchange in 1988 and 1989. There have been visits by representatives of EATWOT to the People's Republic. Some theological students from China have had the opportunity to visit foreign countries, e.g. the Philippines. There are plans to send young Chinese priests for special studies abroad. For the future, it will be essential to find opportunities to train new teachers for the various philosophical and theological institutions on mainland China. In this sector, there is still much need for combined cooperation and coordination of effort.