

# **THE ASIAN PRIEST OF THE FUTURE: HIS CHARACTER AND FORMATION**

*TRIPOD*

The Asian Bishops' Conference holds its meeting once every four years. This year the Bishops met at Bandung in Indonesia. Most of those present were from various dioceses in Asia. There were also a few Asian theologians, some priests and lay representatives. Some cardinals and bishops from Rome, Belgium and the United States were also invited to attend.

The Eighth World Synod of Bishops also happens to take place in Rome in October of this year. Its theme is: "The Formation of the Priest in Today's Society." Those who were present at the Fifth Asian Bishops' Conference were also very much concerned about this question of priestly formation, especially as it pertains to the formation of seminarians. At the Bandung Conference the bishops discussed questions on "The Training and Character of the Asian Priest." I believe that the questions with which the Asian Bishops' Conference was concerned will also be addressed by the bishops at the coming synod. Some of these questions are outlined below.

## **I. The Characteristics of the Asian Priest.**

The Asian priest of the future should possess the following three characteristics: he should be able to dialogue, possess a sense of the sacred and be willing to offer humble service. The ability to dialogue: a priest should have the desire to dialogue and the ability to do so. This will enable him to reach people at their level and understand and sympathize with them. A sense of the sacred: this will give the priest a deep experience of faith. He should not only witness to God's holiness by the testimony of his own life, but he should also be able to transmit a sense of this holiness to others. Humble service: this means that the priest will be able to discern the signs of the times and indeed understand and grasp the meaning of these signs. He should be able, by relying on his faith, to answer the questions these signs pose. In this way he can fully listen to and respond to the needs of present society and those who live in it.

These three characteristics will allow the priest to become one who truly devotes himself to bringing men and women to encounter their God.

## II The Direction Priestly Formation Should Take.

The Formators: the Bishop is the primary formator in his diocese. Together with him the formation team in the seminary, through the experience of a simple life style and depth of faith, will serve as role models for the seminarians. These formators should have the ability to understand how the psychological and spiritual life of the seminarian mature. They should also know the difficulties that beset this process of growth.

Spirituality: outstanding spiritual directors are needed in Asia who can synthesize both Eastern and Western traditions. There is a need to create a spirituality suitable to the Asian Church.

Experience: Asian seminaries must share in the formation experience of different seminaries from other continents. This will not only enlarge their vision, but through this interchange of experiences will also express the Church's catholicity.

General direction: formation must emphasize community spirit and avoid all individualism. Seminarians must be trained to respect their own culture as well as that of other countries. To do this they must be imbued with apostolic zeal and a spirit of self discipline.

Philosophy and theology: in today's pluralistic society the study of philosophy and theology must pay attention to cultural, historical and social analysis. This will give the seminarians the ability to incorporate the knowledge of their faith and of the world into a unified whole.

Prayer and the Bible: the Bible must become the main daily sustenance of the priest. To use the Bible in one's daily prayer will enable the priest gradually on a deeper level to meet Jesus Christ who has been revealed to us. This "High Priest" of the Bible is precisely the model and center of the priest's life of commitment.

In conclusion, the Asian priest must be a person who commits himself to the "meeting" of God and human beings. He must be able to dialogue, be imbued with the sense of the sacred and be willing to serve others humbly. Only in this way can he meet the challenges, conflicts and promises which Asia's society holds out today.