

Poverty, Culture and Religiosity

To See Realities for Political Charity and Vincentian Formation

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INTRODUCTION¹

In his first encyclical, *Deus Caritas Est*, Pope Benedict XVI mentioned Vincent de Paul and Louise de Marillac among “the men and women of faith, hope and love” (art. 40) who have exemplified for us authentic Christian charity. Love, which proceeds from God, can only be real when it shows itself in concrete ‘charity’ for the neighbor; when it expresses itself in viable structures which alleviate hunger, loneliness and pain in society. All throughout this great letter, the Pope outlines how the Church has made the practice of charity its main responsibility. The ministry of charity is part of the Church’s nature, “an indispensable part of her very being” (*DCE*, 25). In fact, Benedict XVI asserts that it is only when we see charity effective in the structures of society that “we see the Trinity,” he quotes St. Augustine (*DCE*, 19).

St. Vincent already made the same assertion almost 400 years earlier when he told the sisters “to leave God for God.” He also once reminded the missionaries who wanted to abandon the ministry of charity in favor of preaching: “Are not the poor the suffering members of our Lord? Are they not our brothers? And if priests abandon them, who will be there to help them?” (SV XII, 87). Organized charity — that is — charity effectively working in the structures of the church and society is not only a work of the Company. It belongs to the deepest part of its identity.

It is within this tradition that Vincentian formators in Asia Pacific study ‘political charity.’ We think that our candidates should not remain indifferent towards what is happening in contemporary society. They should be grounded in their own socio-political

¹ *Introduction* to the first Joint Meeting of the Commission of Vincentian Charism and Culture and Asia Pacific Regional Formators at Prigen, Indonesia, July 1-15, 2007 drafted by Armada Riyanto, C.M., and Danny Pilario, C.M. (chair and co-chair of the CCC).

situations, be formed to analyze it critically so that they can respond to its challenges more effectively. The term ‘political charity’ does not appear in the sociological and political science dictionaries. But, in the Vincentian tradition, charity can only exist ‘politically,’ that is, in concrete works and social structures. As St. Vincent says: “Our work [for the poor] is the only proof of our love.” In the same conference, he continued: “Let us love God, my brethren, but let us love him with all our strength and in the sweat of our brow” (ABELLY, Bk. I, Ch. XIX, 81).

In the gathering of Vincentian formators and other members of the Vincentian family in July 2007 at Prigen, we have chosen the theme: “Political Charity and Vincentian Formation.” Our aim is to think of concrete ways with which to equip our candidates and members with critical sensibility to the movements of contemporary society — its joys and hopes, its ups and downs, its lights and shadows.

This paper offers a brief outline of “to see”² the realities of Asia Pacific as the first step of delving into the main topic, “Political Charity and Vincentian Formation.” The Asia Pacific region has been called the place in which poverty, culture, and religiosity are characteristically its three main pillars of existence.

1. POVERTY

Understanding Poverty. Before proclaiming the Gospel to the poor, Saint Vincent examined the poverty of his time by paying visits to the poor, listening to confessions, learning zeal by living a hard life. Following the example of the holy Founder, today it would be worthwhile to listen to what the poor people say about their understanding of poverty. In *India*, indigenous *women* (or ‘tribal women’ as they are called) describe how they view poverty. Poverty, to them, is not having enough food from the farm, little or no access to drinking water, low literacy, and being landless.³ Group discussions among migrant youths and children in *Vietnam* identify

² “There are three stages which should normally be followed in the reduction of social principles into practice. First, one reviews the concrete situation; secondly, one forms a judgment on it in the light of these same principles; thirdly, one decides what in the circumstances can and should be done to implement these principles. These are the three stages that are usually expressed in the three terms: observe, judge, act” (Pope JOHN XXIII, 1961, *Mater et Magistra*, 263).

³ The IFAD-funded Bihar-Madhya Pradesh Tribal Development Program, 1997.

specific situations that illustrate poverty to them: being pulled out of school because parents cannot afford the costs; schools being closed down; teachers beating or humiliating poorer pupils; fathers drinking and beating mothers, shouting and quarrelling in the household, neighborhood fights; drug addiction; being considered inferior by wealthier households, being beaten by richer children; unstable income, being hungry, having poor clothes; concern about mother's health and inability to afford good health care.⁴ In the *Philippines* the poor categorize themselves in status groups according to access to basic survival means: *Walang-wala* (have nothing or next to nothing, meaning no land to farm, scarcely any income, tiny houses and, worst of all, little food); *Sumasala sa oras* (missing meals); *Isang kahig, isang tuka* (living hand-to-mouth and eking out a living like a chicken scratching and pecking the ground); *Agaw-buhay* (hovering between life and death).⁵

In *Indonesia* the meaning of poverty can perhaps be defined as the life of the *indigenous* as those of Papua, Kalimantan, Sumatra, and many other parts of the archipelago of Indonesia. Their condition means *par-excellence* lacking good health service. There have been thousands of children, mostly poor ones, suffering from malnutrition, starvation or lacking of good quality of food that causes them to be sickly ones with big stomachs and "tiny" brains. These children are usually found in villages, remote places, uplands, coastlands, the inner part of forested lands. Poverty is also in connection with very limited conditions of basic infrastructures. This is the crucial problem of small islands or remote places in the big ones like Papua, Kalimantan, Sulawesi, Flores where streets, schools, electricity, health services are not properly established. Or, if they have been set up, they have often been neglected. Consequently, poverty is just everyday life. People have difficulty in breaking up poverty and developing their quality of life.

Overall rural poverty. Some 1.2 billion people in the world are estimated to consume less than a 'standard' dollar a day and are therefore in 'dollar poverty.' More than two thirds of the world's poor are in Asia, and poverty is disproportionately concentrated in the rural areas of the region. Almost 75% of the poor live in the rural

⁴ Source: Save the Children Fund 1999.

⁵ Source: Kerkvliet 1990 as quoted in IFAD 2003. Cf. <http://www.ifad.org/> (Accessed on June 20, 2007). See also the meaning of poverty in the web "povertyNet" <http://web.worldbank.org> (Accessed on June 10, 2007) & in the web "a dollar a day" http://library.thinkquest.org/05aug/00282/over_what.htm (Accessed on June 10, 2007).

areas.⁶ In Asia Pacific countries there is a somewhat sluggish policy over rural development. Though Indonesia, for instance, is not yet categorized as an industrialized state, recently people have been desperately trying to abandon their lands. The government for sure recognizes the crucial problem of farmers, yet politically it remains paralyzed to resolve immense challenges of the so-called “globalization”. Assuming that developing countries have sometimes become victims rather than protagonists in the globalized world, I think the similar condition is happening in countries of Asia Pacific. The fact that poor people are those who live in rural areas is indeed true.⁷

Urban poverty. 700 million people in Asia and the Pacific live on less than US\$1 a day, 400 million of which are residing in urban areas. Each day a further 120,000 people are added to the populations of Asian cities due to rural-urban migration and job-mobility.⁸ Many Asian cities face deteriorating sanitation and environmental conditions, inadequate housing and infrastructure, and other problems.⁹ Urbanization, however, is also a chance for the poor to escape poverty though oftentimes they fall into another trap of poverty and marginalization.

Environmental poverty. Over the past decade, there has been a corresponding increase in the incidence of poverty that can be attributed to environmental causes. Floods, landslides, tsunamis, gas volcano, declining natural resources productivity, droughts and urban pollution exert disproportionate impacts of poverty on the lives of people. The poor suffer more losses, illnesses, injuries and death as a result of resource degradation, natural disasters and pollution than the rest of the population, because they are more likely to be dependent upon natural systems for their livelihoods.

The Feminization of poverty. While nearly two thirds of the world's poor are in the Asian and Pacific region, two thirds of the region's poor are women. And poverty is particularly acute for women living in rural areas. The notion of ‘feminization of poverty’ was first used to imply that women are making up an ever increasing share of the world's poor as a result of recession and cuts in public spending.¹⁰ The term has been used for any or all of the following situations:

⁶ ADB 2005 (Asian Development Bank). <http://www.abd.org/> (Accessed on May 20, 2007).

⁷ IFAD 2001. http://www.ifad.org/poverty/region/pi/PI_part1.pdf (Accessed on June 15, 2007).

⁸ ADB 2005.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Asian Development Bank 2005.

More women than men are poor; poor women suffer more from capability deprivation than poor men; the severity of poverty is higher for women; women face greater hardship in lifting themselves and their children out of the poverty trap; there are poor women even within non-poor families. Male migrants in search of work and consequent changes in household structures have placed additional burdens on women, especially those with several dependents. Improving the political, legal, cultural, economic, and social status of women is thus pivotal to escaping the poverty trap.

2. CULTURE

A common way of understanding culture is to see it as consisting of three elements that are “passed on from generation to generation by learning alone”: *values, norms, institutions*.¹¹ Values comprise ideas about what in life seems important. They guide the rest of the culture. Norms consist of expectations of how people will behave. They are concrete in what we may call “*habitus*,” the series of ethical customs and habits, including laws and sanctions enforced. Institutions are the structures of a society within which values and norms are transmitted. Institution is a part of culture as it is typical in different people of different places. It depicts symbolically some ideas of culture.

Culture as worldview. People started to understand culture as worldview in the time of ideology especially the Second World War. The notion of worldview implies ideas of the ways that people define their relationship with the world. It can be something traditional inherited by the ancestors from generation to generation such as rites, popular “liturgical” celebrations, values, and series of laws. But,

¹¹ “In its widest sense, culture may now be said to be the whole complex of distinctive spiritual, material, intellectual and emotional features that characterize a society or social group. It includes not only the arts and letters, but also modes of life, the fundamental rights of the human being, value systems, traditions, symbols and beliefs... it is culture that gives (man) the ability to reflect on (himself and the world). It is culture that makes us specifically human, rational beings, endowed with critical judgement and a sense of moral commitment. It is through culture that we discern values and make choices. It is through culture that (man) expresses (himself), becomes aware of (himself), recognizes his incompleteness, questions his own achievements, seeks untiringly for new meanings and creates works through which he transcends his limitations.” HERVE CARRIER, “Understanding Culture: The Ultimate Challenge of the World-Church?,” in *The Church and Culture since Vatican II: The Experience of North and Latin America*, Edited by Joseph Gremillion, University of Notre Dame Press, 1985, 19.

worldview is also connected with ideological ideas that people live out and promote.¹²

Culture as phenomena of the everyday-life. Oftentimes we have heard people spontaneously saying “culture of violence,” “culture of death,” “culture of corruption,” “culture of harmony,” “culture of hedonism,” “culture of materialism,” “culture of feminism,” “culture of gender equality,” “culture of fear,” “culture of terror,” “culture of terrorism,” “culture of globalization,” “culture of instant mentality,” “culture of getting suddenly rich.”¹³ The way of understanding culture as indicated above is based upon what we may call concrete experiences of “everyday-life.” The terminology “everyday-life” is taken from the philosophy of Alfred Schutz whose book, *Phenomenology of the Social World*, became the emblematic line of phenomenological approach, the new mainstream of sociological research. Everyday-life is understood as the “province of reality which the wide-awake and normal adult simply takes for granted in the attitude of common sense.”¹⁴ In everyday life the style of lived experiences is wide-awakeness. For Alfred Schutz, “consciousness is itself under the greatest tension, which originates from the attitude of full attentiveness to life and its necessities. In acts and doings that are directed toward the surrounding world, the ego is fully interested in life and is therefore wide-awake.... It is the world from which we cannot escape as long as we are wide-awake, the world where stones hurt our toes, where desires demand satisfaction, where fears inhibit our freedom, where we encounter our fellows in the flesh and have to communicate with them.”¹⁵ So, when we hear people saying “culture of violence,” it indicates their awakening to the concrete world they live in. That saying of “culture of violence” does not refer statistically

¹² In Asia, Mao was the one who called the ideological revolution of the communists in Mainland China that of culture in 1949. In Indonesia, there is a national ideology called “Pancasila” (the five Principles). These five principles (1. belief in one Supreme God, 2. sovereignty of the people, 3. deliberation to arrive at consensus, 4. humanitarianism, and 5. social justice), are also understood as a set of values and common beliefs based on the cultural heritage of the Indonesian cosmic world-view.

¹³ Culture of being suddenly rich happens in our experience: to some candidates and their parents especially from middle class or poor economy, being a priest means being rich, since a priest has cars, an amount of money, a good relationship with the haves and business people, etc.

¹⁴ ALFRED SCHUTZ - THOMAS LUCKMANN, *The Structures of Life-World*, Volume II, Translated by Richard Zaner and David J. Parent, Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1989, 3.

¹⁵ MARCELO MANIMTIM, C.M., *The Concept of Lifeworld in Jürgen Habermas*, Rome 1993, 49.

to objective facts of violence (though it can be so). The concrete world is given to us in the sense of experience.

Asia Pacific and Culture of Harmony. Being young in its zest for life, Asia Pacific is ancient in its own cultural heritage. It can be seen not just from plurality of cultures, cultural rituals and types of societies, models of economic practices, variations of technologies, arts, sciences, and philosophies. But, it can be clear from the most worthy one, that is “culture of harmony.” I underline the importance of “harmony” since Asia Pacific is granted with rich diversity of cultures. Diversity can be richness and challenge at the same time. It is richness, as diverse cultures indicate the beauty of differences. Yet, it is challenge as in many cases people of Asia Pacific have suffered cultural tensions, conflicts, or even civil wars.

Just take as an example, Indonesia has a population of around 210 million people (2001), including 500 ethnic groups speaking more than 600 languages (dialects). This ethnic diversity is understood as an asset of cultural riches supporting state unity, which is reflected in the national motto, *Bhinneka Tunggal Ika*, unity in diversity. All these have also contributed to the complexities of life, to its agony and ecstasy. Yet, in Indonesia too, we observe the search for cultural and human as well as religious harmony, that vibrant dynamic totality attained by interacting with other pulsating and maybe conflicting parts. Harmony in a certain sense constitutes “the intellectual and affective, religious and artistic, personal and societal soul of both persons and institutions in Asia” (Fourth Bishops’ Institute for Interreligious Dialogue, BIRA IV, 1984).

Challenges to Culture of Harmony. Many situations in the Asian and Pacific reality have threatened and contradicted harmony. Financial crises hit Asia cruelly at the end of the ninetieth decade a few years ago. Indonesia was one among the most suffering countries. The death toll might not be countless. Yet, for nearly all of Indonesian people such a crisis brought a very bitter experience of living together. We saw conflicts between people everywhere around the regions. Moslems were against Christians, Buddhists, Hinduists and vice versa. Fundamentalist Moslems were against the moderate ones and vice versa. Human beings destroyed forests; and illegal logging was obviously uncontrolled. During the crisis, being far from promoting the worthy value of harmony, Indonesian people as well as others in Asia cultivated concretely a culture of violence. In time of violence people were against one another. There was somewhat *bellum omnium contra omnes* (war of all against all). In many cases women and children suffered most. There was no friendship as such. After the economic crisis people have started to enjoy an economic growth. Yet, according to the UN economic and social commission

for Asia and the Pacific, in its recent report, the improvement in living conditions and living standards has often been offset by new social problems like urbanization and the global crisis of energy and food.

3. RELIGIOSITY

Asia is the womb of ancient cultures as well as religiosities. Asia is also the birthplace of the world's great religions: Buddhism, Christianity, Confucianism, Hinduism, Islam, Jainism, Shintoism, Sikhism and Taoism. Despite the common Asian world-view which perceives reality as "one," and a widespread tolerance which subscribes to a basic equality among all religious convictions, Asian religious pluralism remains a problem. The problem is acute, because Asian religions still constitute a powerful force controlling the consciences of people and influencing every area of their social life. As such, they can serve to bring together peoples and nations in unity and harmony, or cause division and fragmentation. Sadly, to a large extent, the latter has been the concrete experience of the Asian peoples.

Fundamentalism. As there is a strong bond between religion and culture, fundamentalism has given rise to numerous conflicts and bloody violence. Such conflicts and violence, besides having disrupted harmony, have also resulted in the loss of human lives and the destruction of sacred temples, especially in India, Pakistan and Bangladesh, all in the name of religious affiliation and cultural patrimony. In Sri Lanka, conflicts between ethnic and linguistic groups have been a cause of continual violence and bloodshed. The events surrounding the razing of the Babri Masjid in Ayodhya in December, 1992 have demonstrated how devastating the forces of religious fundamentalism can become. In the whole of the Indian subcontinent, there have been clashes between Moslems and Hindus, during which Hindus were chasing the Muslims in Bombay, and Muslims retaliating by persecuting Hindus and destroying their temples in Pakistan and Bangladesh. In Indonesia there were hundreds of Christian and Catholic churches burned down by fundamentalists; several houses of prayer that belonged to Buddhists, Hinduists, as well as Confucionists were destroyed; some mosques were hit by other fundamentalists. Terrorism has been one of the expressions likeable to fundamentalists. Fundamentalism in Indonesia usually comes from those people who underwent some kind of activities in the Middle East claimed as "jihad" (action to defend

God).¹⁶ In the case of Islamic fundamentalism, young people who had “jihad” experiences outside Indonesia become trouble makers in the Archipelago.

Religion and human freedom. Religion has also something worthy of human beings. Reflections on religiosity have led me to the following “spaces” for religion in society: *First*, religion brings completion to human freedom. Most, if not all, religions speak of freedom from oppression, from evil, pain, suffering and death. In the words of Pope John Paul II, “Freedom is the measure of man’s dignity and greatness. Living the freedom sought by individuals and peoples is a great challenge to man’s spiritual growth and to the moral vitality of nations.... Freedom is ordered to the truth, and is fulfilled in man’s quest for truth and in man’s living in the truth.” Religion speaks of the language of hope, the hope of total emancipation and fullness of freedom. *Second*, religion provides the rites and rituals for institutionalization of civil society. It is Through ritual, that beliefs, values and human ordering are invested with the aura of the sacred, at least in the sense of asserting a foundation beyond ourselves for inalienable rights and common horizons. Religious rite deepens the conviction of the human person-participants in civil society by embodying the source of authority in its institution. *Third*, religion sets the way of life of loving and caring, and laying the ground for a standard of ethical behavior. Religion, especially oriental religion, is a way of life, of living in harmony with nature and with others, through loving and caring for one another. Religion addresses the heart and speaks of the transcendent source and ultimate end of all values. Religion attests to the universality of values of peace, solidarity, justice and liberty. Civil society in its effort to build a civilization of love based on these universal values and in a culture of freedom needs religion as its impetus. Finally, religion founds the unity and diversity of peoples and cultures. We all belong to one family.

In Indonesia as well as India, for instance, one often hears simple people saying that all religions teach the same basic moral teachings that God is one and all have to reach Him in the end. People only take different paths to get there. The Catholic Church announced

¹⁶ The meaning of “jihad” has been somehow a confused one. The fundamentalists use the term “jihad” to encourage war against enemies of Islam. Yet, the term itself possesses a good notion indicating “an act of exerting best effort for the sake of Allah or in the way of Allah.” However it is indeed true that common people have often been more overwhelmed by the meaning of “jihad” proposed by the Islamic fundamentalists rather than by the moderate Moslems.

novel ideas through Vatican II, its historic council. It no longer spoke in harsh terms about pagans, or in a tone of self-complacency as if it alone had the monopoly to total truth about God. Vatican II documents in *Nostra Aetate* (1965) nos. 1 and 2 stated that in this age, with people drawing more closely together and the bonds of friendship between different peoples being strengthened, the Church examines with greater care her relation to non-Christian religions. Aware of her duty to foster unity and charity among individuals and among nations, the Church reflects on what people have in common and what tends to promote fellowship among them. *Nostra Aetate* further states that the Catholic Church rejects nothing that is true and holy in these (other) religions. She has a high regard for the manner of life and conduct, the precepts and doctrines which, although different in many ways from her own teaching, nevertheless often reflect that truth which enlightens all people. The Council brought this consciousness to many, and while some were struggling with these proclamations, it went a step ahead to instruct itself and its faithful in these words. The Church, therefore, urges her sons to enter with prudence and charity into discussion and collaboration with members of other religions. *Nostra Aetate* has given birth to what is called "inter-religious dialogue."

Religious tolerance and dialogue. Religious tolerance is considered as an expression of one's attitude towards other religions and to some specific religious situations. However, religious tolerance does not exist in a vacuum, but in definite concrete situations, and can vary according to the situation. This religious tolerance is studied in view of inter-religious dialogue. Religion is something that leads people to God, exhorts its followers to live good moral lives and calls people of God to be of one mind and heart; but the present state of affairs shows an inconsistency between preached and lived religion, its tenets and practices, and its doctrine and behavior. This causes an immense amount of dissonance, this time from the angle of religious beliefs. Religion here, instead of achieving its positive function of mutual love, understanding among peoples, unity, purity, etc. has in the end made them less tolerant. There is clearly an inconsistency. Tolerance goes hand in hand with intolerance. This inconsistency is one the major problems in religiosity.

4. CONTEMPORARY RESPONSES

Be ready to collaborate with people. Saint Vincent de Paul was never alone to give response to the needs of his time. He worked together with the *Ladies of Charity*, priests as well as religious reformers at that time. Poverty was not simply a matter of lacking

food or shelter. It was inhuman conditions. The way Saint Vincent responded to the demands was collaboration. Evangelizing of the poor was done in collaboration and partnership with the lay people, sisters as well as priests, or even with the poor themselves.

Today the call of collaboration is loud and urgent. *Pastores Dabo Vobis* emphasizes the demand that religious persons should be able to collaborate with one another and with people regardless of culture, nationality, religion or faith. Vincentians should learn and listen to other people about how the crucial problems of poverty, cultural problems and religious conflicts are to be responded to cooperatively.

The amazing phenomenon of contemporary responses to poverty in the world as well as in Asia Pacific regions has been defined as setting up the MDGs (Millennium Development Goals) to be achieved together. MDGs are not just a series of common goals. They depict something deeper than just goals consented to by world leaders. Since creation human beings have been against one another. MDGs indicate a marvelous understanding of togetherness, of working together, of journeying together.¹⁷ The goals are: Eradicate extreme poverty and hunger, achieve universal primary education, promote gender equality and empower women, reduce child mortality, improve maternal health, combat HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases, ensure environmental sustainability, develop a global partnership for development.

Promote culture of harmony. The fact that Asia Pacific is the cradle of diverse cultures is clear from the everyday life that we concretely experience. Diversity is worthy but also can become a source of bitter conflicts. In some places of Indonesia, let us take a look at Sampit, a small town known as the place where conflicts between the Dayak and Madurese people began; diversity is indeed something crucial. We cannot say that diversity is simply worthwhile. We have to acknowledge that diversity is also a challenge to be responded to.

The picture of the Asian situation is not altogether “doom and gloom.” In Asian Pacific civilization, we observe how the “coincidence of opposites” has been all along a characteristic way of life and thought. In ancient Chinese thought, harmony requires the interplay of seemingly-antithetical elements such as human person and nature, *yin* and *yang*, benevolence and autocracy. The two components are regarded as mutually necessary, rather than irreconcilable; the antagonistic elements are interdependent partners without whose

¹⁷ See <http://www.un.org/millenniumgoals/> and <http://www.undp.org/mdg/basics.shtml> (Accessed on June 1, 2007).

joint activities a harmonious society would be impossible. Harmony is not the attainment of an absolute standard, but the happy outcome that can be achieved when one takes account of all circumstances.

The Javanese people of Indonesia think that everyday life cannot continue unless we cultivate the sense of harmony. Each Javanese is urged to live out harmony not just with one another but also with creatures, the world, and harmony within oneself. In such kind of wisdom, the sense of self in Javanese tradition is somewhat complex. The Javanese believes in *Manunggaling Kawulo Gusti* (unity of God within one's self). The sense of "unity" cannot be understood in Western notion. It says something about the harmonious presence of a human being within his/her self. And the source of harmony is nothing other than the presence of God within me (myself).

Promote culture of peace. As we can imagine easily people of Asia Pacific have often fallen into the trap of conflicts for many reasons such as economical crisis, socio-political disorder, or cultural rivalry. We need peacemakers. Saint Vincent did some exemplary actions of reconciling peoples who quarreled during popular mission activities. In today's condition, being Vincentian should also mean being a promoter of peace. "Peace" is not only a situation without physical conflict. It suggests a peaceful and conducive situation in which people may live in solidarity and collaboration, as well as dialogue.

Be perseverant to dialogue of life, of concrete collaboration, and of faith. In responding to the challenge of religiosity in Asia Pacific, inter-religious dialogue or inter-ideological/cultural dialogue is to be cultivated in any kind of circumstance. Far from being an easy task, inter-religious dialogue has often been frustrating and sweating. We ourselves cannot help but acknowledge that inter-religious dialogue seems to be more formal, artificial and pretending than a radical, genuine, and authentic movement. Those who involve themselves in and experience religious dialogue often fall into a dark corridor that they must go through. There have been so many studies, theological-philosophical-cultural reflections, countless appointments done, yet still there are vast stones, thorns and blocks. Karl Rahner conceives of "Christian Anonym"; Leonard Swidler proposes "the Dialogue Decalogue"¹⁸; C. Arrevalo suggests "indigenizing of theology";

¹⁸ **1st COMMANDMENT:** The primary purpose of dialogue is to learn, that is, to change and grow in the perception and understanding of reality, and then to act accordingly. **2nd:** Interreligious dialogue must be a two-sided project — within each religious or ideological community and between religious or ideological communities. **3rd:** Each participant must come to the dialogue with complete honesty and sincerity. **4th:** In interreligious dialogue we must not compare our ideals with our partner's practice, but rather

Raimundo Pannikar offers the concept of “intra-religious dialogue”, and many more scholars. But, who would deny that inter-religious dialogue (at least of life and work)¹⁹ is still the most urgent and necessary action to cultivate our being together in everyday life within diverse cultural traditions and socio-political dynamism of Asia Pacific region?! Nevertheless, it is still to be expressed concretely again and again with great perseverance and diligence. Inter-religious dialogue is an unfinished project or, better expressed, an ongoing formation of life itself. Oh, we have just done a good response!²⁰

5. IMPLICATION FOR FORMATION: NEW SPIRIT, NEW EYES, NEW HEART

Learning from realities is the very first step of renewal in formation. Formandi, formators and those involving themselves in formation should keep on looking at realities around their everyday lives. Asia Pacific faces immense poverty. It is also blessed by great

our ideals with our partner’s ideals, our practice with our partner’s practice. **5th**: Each participant must define himself. **6th**: Each participant must come to the dialogue with no hard-and-fast assumptions as to where the points of disagreement are. Rather, each partner should not only listen to the other partner with openness and sympathy but also attempt to agree with the dialogue partner as far as is possible while still maintaining integrity with his own tradition. **7th**: Dialogue can take place only between equals, or *par cum pari* as the Second Vatican Council put it. Both must come to learn from each other. **8th**: Dialogue can take place only on the basis of mutual trust. **9th**: Persons entering into interreligious, interideological dialogue must be at least minimally self-critical of both themselves and their own religious or ideological traditions. **10th**: Each participant eventually must attempt to experience the partner’s religion or ideology “from within.” The “Dialogue Decalogue” was first published in the *Journal of Ecumenical Studies* in 1983 and has been translated into more than a dozen languages. It is presented here in a slightly revised and shortened version. *Journal of Ecumenical Studies*, 20:1, Winter 1983 (September, 1984, *revision*). See also in <http://www.fiu.edu/~religion/Commandments.htm> (Accessed on June 2, 2007).

¹⁹ The Plenary Assembly of the FABC at Tokyo 1986 did speak of “the phenomenon of religious revivalism” with its tendencies “to religious dogmatism, fundamentalism and intolerance in precept and practice,” leading even to “violence and serious conflicts.” Fundamentalism appears as “a defense-reaction which gives religious belief a socio-cultural, and even political role of cohesion in the face of ‘anomie’ that threatens one’s identity. Irrational religious emotions offer a simplistic force of unity and self-defense,” and thus become a source of conflict. Religious revivalism poses its challenge to us Christians towards a deeper renewal of faith.

²⁰ It is in this light that one should listen to the assertion of Pope John Paul II that the action of the Holy Spirit is operative in the lives of non-Christians not in spite of their religious adherence, but rather at its essence and foundation. *Redemptor Hominis*, March 4, 1979, AAS 71 (1979): 275-276.

cultural and religious traditions. The last two things can be a set of richness but at the same time can also be reason for bitter and tiring conflicts. Now, Vincentians must renew “from within” setting up new eyes, new heart and new spirit as the very concrete aims of their formation program.

Shifts of formandi’s mentality:

- Way of thinking: from suspect to understanding.
- Creativity: from creating “one’s own world” to openness.
- Sensitivity: from indifference to concern.
- Commitment: from sluggish to perceiving “clear priorities.”
- Vocation: from tepid to radical.
- Prayer: from self-centered to beyond self-centered.
- Being Vincentian: from idle to genuine.
- End of formation program: from human maturity to cross/multi/pluri-cultural human maturity.

“New spirit” of formandi and formators implies:

- Growth in our experience of God and an on-going familiarity with the poor — their life and their spirit of love.
- New spirit of discernment as one community (formator and formandi are the subjects in formation; formator, be one of them!).

“New eyes” of formandi as well as formators involves taking on new ways of looking at and understanding reality and new paradigms in the world (Asia Pacific):

- Poverty – The emphasis is on poverty by unjust socio-political structure.
- Religion – The shift of emphasis (from a religion perceived as “self-serving” to a religion oriented towards the world, to the suffering people).
- Cultures – Today there is a greater awareness and appreciation of the richness inherent in different cultures. Currently the notion of multiculturalism is claiming more and more attention.
- Collaboration/partnership/networking – The emphasis has been on a more holistic (integral) understanding, i.e., touching on all aspects of life and on taking more seriously concrete contexts (contextualized), inviting others to service of *effective* love to the poor.

“New heart” demands that formandi be sensitive to “new values” in the Church and in the world:

- “New humility” of heart – Spending more time, attention, moment for others (confreres and people involved in apostolates and the poor).
- Partnership – Collaboration with various sectors in the Church and in the world — regardless of religion, race or gender.
- Discernment – In a world filled with a thousand voices all clamoring to be heard, discernment is indispensable for those who, following Christ, do charity.
- “Constant love” & “openness” – Cultivating a sense of love to others, being diligent and perseverant in rendering service for love.

Renewals in formandi and those in formation team:

- New optimism: “You can do that!”
- New enthusiasm: “Have courage and let down the nets again into deeper ocean!”
- New community: “More open... more love, unlock others’ potency.”
- New way of life: “Open to ongoing renewal of the Divine Providence.”
- New way of apostolate: “More involving others with new spirit of love and enthusiasm.”
- New way of being Vincentian: “More energizing others inspired by the spirit and charism of Saint Vincent.”

6. WORDS OF REFLECTION

Let me propose words as my modest concluding reflection hoping that a few of them may hint little inspirations to our aim of formation of our beloved candidates in connection with “political charity.”

The poor and us

We see them, the poor, surrounding us.

We watch them in streets, houses, villages, mountains, poor coasts, television, everywhere.

We talk to and with them. Occasionally.

We share with them. Rarely.

We mingle with them. Only if needed.
 We visit them. For school activities or exposures.
 We share with them. For research.
 We count them. For project proposals.
 We discuss and analyze them. For our own benefit and purpose.
 Thus, they are but merely an object.
 Do we really love them? Affectively? Effectively?

Who are they for us?

One who has a good experience of living with them, not just for research or exposure, would find that the poor have some amazing richness. I am not talking something material as we conceive such as money or good shirts or beautiful houses. In them we find true happiness, or what we may call, true happy detachment despite suffering and unfortunate everyday life.

In them we discover humility;

We learn simplicity;

We see meekness;

We know cheerfulness;

We learn true charity.

In them we meditate what we often call “mortification” and true fasting.

We perceive a true sense of being human;

We discern a true sense of being religious;

We discover true faith;

We learn true love;

We understand being men of hope;

We see human strength.

In them we find wisdom.

We learn true obedience to God;

We experience God’s presence in the world;

We learn true hunger and thirst for divine Truth;

We study to be God’s true disciple.

In their presence we find ourselves “poorer” than what we might think of.

In their poor presence we discover the richness of spiritual life.

But, do we really put into practice our learning from them?

When they get themselves in trouble, we must not close our eyes.

When they cry for help, we must not be idle and close our ears.

When they are voiceless, we must not keep silent.

When they are hungry, we must not be doubtful to haste relief.

When they are persecuted, we should dare to defend them in proper ways.

When they suffer injustice, we defend them and promote human rights.

In brief, we do what we can possibly do for them.

We do in collaboration, in working together with them in the best way possible.