

CHALLENGES FOR THE CHRISTIAN MISSION IN INDONESIA 20 Years after *Ecclesia in Asia* – PART I

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In 1998, Pope John Paul conducted the synod on Asia and, a year later, published the exhortation *Ecclesia in Asia*. This was one of the continental synods called by John Paul II to mark the celebration of 2000 years of Christianity. Now, twenty years later, it is interesting to see how the synod and the exhortation were accepted by Asian Catholics and how they respond to the challenges which confront them as they heed the missionary call today. In this paper, I concentrate on the situation in Indonesia. First, I will give a brief overview of how the Asian synod and the exhortation *Ecclesia in Asia* of John Paul II were received by the Indonesian Catholic Church. The second part of my presentation will look at the present challenges which confront the Christian mission in Indonesia. In doing so, I propose the notion of Christian mission as participation in the Triune God's reaching out to the whole creation to bring all into communion with God—following

the example of Jesus and empowered by the Holy Spirit. Mission has its origin and its objective in God. Mission is therefore sharing the liberating experience of God with others and letting oneself be enriched by the same experience of others.

1. Reception of the Synod on Asia and the Exhortation *Ecclesia in Asia* in Indonesia

The Indonesian delegation at the synod of Bishops on Asia in 1998 was composed of 12 participants: one cardinal, eight bishops, one religious Sister, and two laypersons. A special honor was given to this delegation, since Julius Cardinal Darmaatmadja was elected one of the three President Delegates of the synod. Because of his election Cardinal Darmaatmadja was chosen to deliver the last words of the synod to the Pope.

After the synod, Anicetus B. Sinaga OFM Cap, the bishop of Sibolga, North Sumatera wrote eleven articles on the synod for the Indonesian Catholics, which were published in the bi-weekly magazine *HIDUP Katolik* (Catholic Life) from June to September 1998. The articles were written in an informative way, seasoned with spices of humor and combined with some personal and enriching notes. Bishop Sinaga reported the interventions of the members of the Indonesian delegation with some comments from the authors indicating how the interventions were received by other synod fathers.

The report says that two Indonesian bishops and one from Timor Leste already delivered their intervention on the second day of the synod, which was a privileged opportunity, since everybody's mind was still fresh and alert to give them full attention. One of the bishops talked about the relationship between the local ordinary/bishop and the Pope, referring to the notion of ecclesial collegiality and the other about mission and interreligious dialogue. Bishop Belo from Dili focused on the issue of human rights and social justice. Other interventions from the Indonesian delegation on the following days concentrated on liturgical inculturation, human

promotion, family, and the empowering of the laity to participate in the mission.¹

Very interesting was the intervention of the bishop of Sorong-Manokwari, F. X. Hadisumarta, OCarm, who, in the name of the Indonesian Bishops' Conference, spoke, among others, on the ordination of *viribus orati probati* as a solution for the want of celibate priests who serve in ecclesial communities and the dioceses. Bishop Hadisumarta lamented that this proposal was already presented by the Indonesian Bishops' Conference to the Vatican 30 years before the synod. But until now, no meaningful response is forthcoming from the Vatican.² Besides, he also stressed the urgency and importance of the need for the Vatican to give more competence to the local bishops and the bishops' conferences to decide on certain local issues.

Bishop Sinaga made comments on the critical reactions of some officials of the Roman dicasteries to certain statements of the bishops, especially on the doctrine which upholds the singularity and proclamation of Jesus as the only Savior, the dialogue with other Asian religious traditions, and the issue of inculturation of liturgy.³ A stronger reaction to the preparation documents and the attitude of the Roman Officials can be found in a book published a year after the synod, edited by John M. Prior, SVD, who served as the English Communications Coordinator of the synod.⁴ The book presents selected interventions of the Asian bishops and observers, which are divided into 11 themes. Bishop Sinaga himself, in his Introduction for the book, describes the synod as a courageous event in which the Asian bishops and representatives

¹Anicetus B. Sinaga, Tiga Uskup Bicara, Termasuk Belo, in HIDUP July 12, 1998, p. 15.

²Anicetus B. Sinaga, Kritis Terhadap Nilai-Nilai Asia, in HIDUP, July 19, 1998, p. 15.

³Anicetus B. Sinaga, Otonomi Relatif Gereja Partikelir, in HIDUP, August 23, 1998, p. 15.

⁴John M. Prior and Georg Kirchberger, eds., *Yesus Kristus Penyelamat. Misi Cintadan Pelayanan-Nya di Asia*, LPBAJ, 1999.

expressed their ideas and impressions without fear. Bishop Ignatius Suharyo Hardjoatmodjo points out the tensions that existed during the preparation as well as the conduct of the synod between the desire to have the synod as the forum to deepen the reflection on how to continue Jesus' mission in the specific Asian context and the need to use the synod to emphasize the dogmatic claim that Jesus Christ is the only Savior of the world. John Prior notes that he experienced two different synods: the synod in the first week where Asian Bishops presented their experiences of living the Christian faith in their contexts in a clear but humorous language and the synod of the ensuing weeks, which was filled with reports and discussions in the plenum following the agenda of the synod Secretariat.⁵

Two years after the synod, the Indonesian Catholics organized a gathering called SAGKI (Sidang Agung Gereja Katolik Indonesia)—the Grand Assembly of the Indonesian Catholic Church—to mark the Jubilee Year 2000. The participants during the meeting were the bishops, priests, religious and lay people representing the dioceses. The interesting title of the meeting was “Indonesian Catholic Church”, not “the Catholic Church in Indonesia,” as the title of the synod would suggest. Surprisingly, although the statement of the bishops on that occasion was focused on the Basic Christian Communities, no reference was made to the exhortation which came after the synod, in which John Paul II explicitly mentions the basic ecclesial communities: “With the synod, I encourage the Church in Asia, where possible, to consider these basic communities as a positive feature of the Church’s evangelizing activity” (EA, 24).

In the years 2003, 2004 and 2006, the Indonesian Bishops’ Conference, in their annual assemblies, discussed and then published three *Nota Pastoral* (Pastoral Notes) focusing on the

⁵John M. Prior, “Seputar Sinode,” in John M. Prior and Georg Kirchberger, eds., *Yesus Kristus Penyelamat*, op. cit., p. 28.

theme of Social Justice: “Social Justice for All” (2003), “Public Civility: Towards a New National Habitus” (2004), and “Economic Justice” (2006).⁶ These are three important documents giving orientation to the Indonesian Catholics in their commitment to collaborate with other citizens to promote justice. Again, here, we do not find any mention of the synod or the exhortation. The Bishops’ conference made a statement on the Catholic Education in 2008, on Ecology in 2013, and on the Youth in 2018. The statements did not refer to the synod or the official documents published by the Vatican after the synod despite the fact that these issues were dealt with as synodal themes. Chapters five and six of EA deal explicitly with the question of social justice and human development.

Another observation is that the synod and the exhortation do not attract much attention from lecturers and students of theological faculties in Indonesia. I taught at the Catholic Institute of Philosophy and Theology (STFK) Ledalero in Flores from 2001 to 2012. Every year during that span of time, around 100 students wrote their theses as a requirement for obtaining their diplomas. I never encountered any thesis dealing with the synod. There was also no special course dedicated to the synod and the exhortation. There was a thesis that focused on the Asian Church, which made just one reference to EA, but the main idea was derived from the theology of Alois Pieris, SJ. I gathered the same information from some other faculties in Indonesia such as STF Drijarkara in Jakarta. In the STF Malang, there were three theses which dealt with the Church in Asia, but only one focused explicitly on the exhortation. The theological faculty in Yogyakarta carries similar records. Three master-program students did their final work on the Church in Asia; only one took the exhortation as his main reference. In their efforts to develop inculturated theologies, the Catholic theological

⁶John M. Prior and Alle Hoekema, “Theological Thinking by Indonesian Christians, 1850–2000,” in Jan Sihar Aritonang and Karel Steenbrink, *A History of Christianity in Indonesia*, Brill, 2008, p. 784.

and philosophical institutes do not draw inspiration from the exhortation. When talking about inculturation John Paul II writes: “The synod expressed encouragement to theologians in their delicate work of developing an inculturated theology, especially in the area of Christology” (EA 21).

It is quite obvious that the synod was just a separate event celebrated in Rome for four weeks, and the exhortation serves as just another ecclesial document struggling for recognition and acceptance. These facts remind us of the observation of a cardinal quoted by John M. Prior in his article published in SEDOS. In referring to the methods used during the synod, the cardinal says: “Yes, they have filtered out our proposals, but why become overexcited? When we return home, we shall continue to filter theirs.”⁷ The Indonesian bishops did not make a big capital out of the synod and the exhortation for the revitalization of the Church’s mission in Indonesia and the theological institutes. The experience in Indonesia explicitly demonstrates that not much consideration was given to the synod and its documents though the synod, as John Paul II mentions in the exhortation, was meant to “be a providential opportunity for the Church in Asia to reflect further on this mystery and to make a renewed commitment to the mission of making Jesus Christ better known to all” (EA, Introduction).

I have no records about the echo of the synod and the exhortation in other Asian countries. However, it is true that the points discussed and mentioned by the participants during the synod have been for decades in the agenda of FABC. Therefore, more references are made to the documents of FABC than to the synod and the exhortation. Besides, we can also say that although the letters do not bring us to the synod, the Spirit of the synod was present and continues until now to inspire the Indonesian Catholics and the rest of the Asian faithful. This is the Spirit of

⁷John Mansford Prior, SVD, “A Tale of Two Synods: Observations on the Special Assembly for Asia. A Synod in Rome,” *SEDOS Bulletin* 30 (August/September 1998), p. 222.

Jesus that inspires and encourages the believers and all people of goodwill to promote respect for every human being regardless of the culture, religion and ethnicity, and to care for Nature as our common heritage and home. This Spirit has encouraged the synod fathers to talk openly and courageously about Christianity's relationship with other religious traditions and worldviews, the autonomy of the local ecclesial communities in finding ways to express and celebrate their faith, hope and love to God, humanity and nature, and the Church's active participation in promoting human and environmental rights.

These issues remain the main challenges for the Christian mission in Indonesia, and the same Spirit leads the Indonesian Catholics to respond to these challenges. In the following, I shall present three main challenges for the Christian mission in Indonesia: the existence of a minority amidst the Moslem majority in a multi-religious setting; the question of inculturation or the tension between the local pastoral needs and the Roman directions and restrictions; and the ambiguous attitude towards the political and economic injustices suffered by the poor people and the depressed regions of Indonesia.⁸ While presenting these challenges, I shall also mention some opportunities and signs of hopes emerging in the Indonesian Catholic Church as it responds to its challenges.

2. Challenges for the Christian Mission in Indonesia

2.1. Being a minority: an ambivalent existence

2.1.1. The increasing influence of fundamentalist religious groups

According to 2018 data provided by the Central Statistical Office, the total population of Indonesia was 267,002,779. The data does

⁸Raymundus Sudhiarsa lists three challenges for the Asian Church: an indigenous and inculturated church, interreligious dialogue, and the option for the poor. All this simply describes that the Church in Asia has taken dialogue as integral to her mission. See "Research on a New Way of Being Church-in-Mission: A Personal Missiological Inquiry in the Indonesian Context," *Verbum SVD*, 54:2 (2011), p. 470.

not specify the membership of religions. Only the population census in 2010 provides detailed information on the affiliation of the Indonesians to the six officially recognized religions in Indonesia. The rundown of percentages is as follows: Moslems comprise 87.18% of the total population, Protestants 6.96%, Catholics 2.91%, Buddhists 0.72%, Hindus 1.69%, and Confucians 0.05%.⁹

In general, there is good harmony among the different religions in Indonesia. *Pancasila* as the philosophy of the nation serves as a common platform for all religions.¹⁰ Besides *Pancasila*, the commitment to the Unitary State of Indonesia, the acceptance of the General Norms of 1945, and the slogan *Bhineka Tunggal Ika* (Unity in Diversity) are considered the main pillars of unity of the nation. However, since the political reformation in 1998 opened up opportunity to every citizen to mobilize political support, the situation changed. Ethnic belongingness or religious identity is oftentimes used as political capital to gain votes. Religion as a human discourse is in danger of being employed as an instrument of politics, and therefore becomes a plaything or marble in political games.¹¹ This is one of the reasons that in some provinces and districts, the application of “sharia law” based on Islamic teaching is part of the political changes that have occurred since the collapse

⁹In Indonesia, the Protestant Churches and the Catholic Church are seen as two different religions. The affiliation to a religion is one of the personal data included in the identity card. In 2017, the High Court decided to allow people who do not belong to the above mentioned six officially recognized religions to write “Penghayat Kepercayaan kepada Tuhan yang Maha Esa” (that is, “Practitioner of the Faith in the One God”). These are the members of the traditional religions. Despite resistance from the Council of the Indonesian Ulama, the government started implementing the decision in 2019.

¹⁰*Pancasila*, a Sanskrit word, means ‘five principles’. The five principles, which constitute the civic ideology of Indonesia, are: i) The Principle of One Lordship, ii) A Just and Civilised Humanity, iii) The Unity of Indonesia, iv) The Principle of Peoplehood Guarded by the Spirit of Wisdom in Deliberation and Representation, and v) Social Justice for all Indonesian citizens.

¹¹The bloody tension between the Christians and the Moslems in Poso, Sulawesi, was caused by the political elections.

of Suharto regime in 1998, although the country does not implement “an Islamic ideology” as a state policy.¹²

As the biggest Moslem country, Indonesia is strongly affected by the Moslem renaissance in the Middle East. Several fundamentalist groups who attach themselves to the teaching of *Wahabbi* have recruited their followers in the country. While liberal and moderate Moslem groups such as *Nadathul Ulama* (NU) and *Muhammadiyah* find it more and more difficult to keep their privileged status as the main moral compass for the people on the questions of ethics and politics, the fundamentalist groups are gaining more rabid supporters. In the last three years, since the election of the governor of Jakarta, the politics of religious identity has become more popular.¹³ The last presidential election is seen as the political event with the most powerful demonstration of the misuse of religion for political purpose.¹⁴ Groups like *Front Pembela Islam* (the Islamic Defenders’ Front - FPI) and *Hizbut Tahir Indonesia* (HTI)¹⁵ that were almost pushed to the side are now enjoying more sympathy. People openly declare themselves members of such groups. The survey conducted by Mata Air Foundation and Alvara Research Center in 2017 shows a rise of membership of the Moslem fundamentalist groups such as FPI and HTI: FPI ranks third place after NU and Muhammadiyah. About 2.6 and 1.4% of young Indonesian professionals identify themselves with one or two radical Moslem groups. The FPI and

¹²Max Regus, “A Pseudo-Secular Space, Religious Minority and Reasons for Exclusion: The Ahmadiyya Minority Group in Contemporary Indonesia,” *Journal of Politics and Religion Politologie des Religions*, 11: 1 (2019), p. 40.

¹³Poltak Partogi Nainggolan, *Ancaman Isis di Indonesia*, Obor Indonesia, 2018, pp. 147-151.

¹⁴The former Indonesian President, Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono, made the statement that the General Election in 2019 was the worst in the history of the country due to the misuse of religion in politics. This evaluation was seconded by the ruling party, PDIP. See <https://www.merdeka.com/politik/pdip-satu-pandangan-dengan-sby-soal-pemilu-2019-terburuk.html>, accessed on December 15.

¹⁵HTI was officially banned as an organization in 2018 because it promotes an ideology contrary to the universal principles of *Pancasila*.

other affiliated groups are successful in organizing several gatherings of people to manifest their political intention.¹⁶

Some of the groups are closely associated with the international terror groups. According to Poltak Partogi Nainggolan, since March 2014, the following are the groups which support the idea of Islamic States (IS) in Indonesia: *Jama'ah Tauhidwal-Jihad* (JTJ), *Jamaah Anshorut Tauhid* (JAT) under the leadership of Abu Bakar Ba'asyir/Dulmatin, *Mujahidin Indonesia Timur* (MIT) with Santoso or Abu Wardah as leader, *Mujahidin Indonesia Barat* (MIB) under Bachrum Syah/Abu Roban, and Muhajirun, splinter groups that branched out of *Hizbut-Tahri*. Besides, there are clusters like the *Tauhid Wal Jihad* with Aman (Oman) Abdurrahman on the top of the leadership, the *Terror Group Bima Iskandar*, the *ISIS Indonesia Banten* under Iwan Rois, and the *Laskar Jundull* with Agung Hamid as their leader.¹⁷ Other radical groups are the *Majelis Mujahidin Indonesia* led by Abu Bakar Ba'asyir, the *Laskar Jihad*, and the *Front Pembela Islam*. Poltak in his studies shows that from 2000 to 2009, 302 died as victims of terror acts of fundamentalist groups.¹⁸

What causes serious concerns is not only the number of terror acts that have taken place but the spread of the fundamentalist ideas, especially among the young people and young professionals as well as students. A survey of The Wahid Foundation in 2016 shows that 7.7% of the Moslems are ready to be involved in terror acts, and 0.4% are already part of these terror acts.¹⁹ Another study reveals that 27% of young professionals support the introduction of Sharia, 29.6% agree with the idea of Islamic State for Indonesia, and 23.4% of the civil servants endorse the idea. About 15.5% of the people want to change the State's

¹⁶Mata Air Foundation and Alvara Research Center, *Potensi Radikalisme Dikalangan Profesional Indonesia – Research Report* (ms), 2017.

¹⁷Poltak, op. cit., p. 33.

¹⁸Ibid., p. 11.

¹⁹Ibid., p. 93.

Ideology *Pancasila* to Islamic Sharia, and another 19.6% are ready to go for Jihad to establish an Islamic state.²⁰ Around 34.4% of the respondents signified their preference to help the Palestinians rather than the non-Moslem Indonesians during a natural calamity. Poltak listed three main reasons of the fast spread of the fundamentalist ideas: the poverty of the large group of the Indonesian population, the success of propaganda on radicalism, and the lack of an effective system of justice.²¹

2.1.2. The dwindling dominance of the Catholic Church in education and health care

For decades, the Indonesian Catholic Church was known for its services in education and health care. Religious congregations, dioceses, and lay institutions are running schools and universities, as well as health care centers. In the past the service of the Catholic Church in these two areas belonged to the best in the country. The name 'Catholic' stands for quality. The Catholic Church has a significant contribution to the fact that nowadays 97% of the young people in the age group of 15-19 years can read and write Bahasa Indonesia.²² At present, the Catholic educational institutions and health centers have been relegated to the secondary rank and role.

There are two reasons for this development. The first is the fact that the state and other institutions, especially Moslem groups, have started building structures with good facilities and services. Government schools are no longer synonymous with low-quality institutions. The public schools and the Moslem universities and educational foundations like Muhammadiyah are counted among the best ones. The same obtains in the area of health care. Government projects and subsidies make it possible for more

²⁰Mata Air Foundation and Alvara Research Center, *Potensi Radikalisme Dikalangan Profesional Indonesia – Research Report*, op. cit.

²¹Poltak, op. cit., p. 25.

²²C. Kuntoro, *Tantangan Penyelenggaraan Pendidikan Katolik yang Unggul, Inovatif, Bermutu*, (ms), Prosiding Seminar Nasional Reforming Pedagogy 2016, p. 4.

people to have access to the healthcare centers. Other Moslems and Christian denominations provide good healthcare services for the people. The competition is getting harder. The second reason is the policy of the government on education and health is stricter and leaves not much room for the Catholic institutions to grow. The state regulations create a lot of difficulties for the private schools and health care institutions to cope with the present demands of bureaucratic red tape. In the area of education, Catholic schools are no longer the best ones, although the Catholic hospitals are still providing better services than the hospitals of the Moslem foundations. However, they are also more expensive and therefore serve fewer poor people.²³ Free education provided by the government via the public schools has the consequence that the private schools, including the Catholic ones, are mainly frequented by the middle and upper class families. Oftentimes, the educational foundations are held down by the exorbitant economic cost of supporting the Catholic mission in serving the poor and the needy. They also have the obligation to meet other requirements which are costly. The government and other religious institutions are running better schools with more financial and human resources.

The statement of Bishop Leo Laba Ladjar at the synod that our Catholic healthcare and educational institutions will slowly disappear may sound too pessimistic.²⁴ However, it is an urgent call for the Indonesian Catholic Church to reassess their presence in these areas of ministry to be able to continue their mission to serve others and to serve God. The service of the Catholic Church in these two areas is still very important.

As regards education, Indonesia is facing three problems. The first is that the census in 2010 showed that almost 50% of

²³Karel Steenbrink, *Orang-Orang Katolik di Indonesia Era Kemerdekaan 1945-2010*, translated into Bahasa Indonesia by Yosef Maria Florisan, Ledalero, 2018, p. 205.

²⁴Leo LabaLadjar, "Menghayati Makna Minoritas," in John M. Prior and Georg Kirchberger eds., op. cit., p. 141.

the population between 16-18 years stopped going to school. Secondly, 85% of those between 19 and 24 years of age did not go to tertiary education. And lastly, the quality of education is also quite low according to different international ranking institutes such as Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS), Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS), and Program for International Student Assessment (PISA). To improve this situation, in the last years, the government has implemented the requirement of the Constitutions to allocate at least 20% of the national budget for education. And yet, a big chunk of the budget is allocated to the salaries of teachers.²⁵

2.1.3. Re-defining the status of a minority

As a minority, Indonesian Catholics find themselves in an ambiguous situation, which has something to do with the history of the Church's mission in Indonesia. The Indonesian Catholic Church suffers from a twofold drawback: its mission is associated with the history of colonization and its being a minority in a vastly Moslem dominated country. One consequence of this twofold disadvantage is that Christians are viewed with skepticism that they are not fully committed citizens of the Indonesian nation. On the one hand, there is a strong commitment among Christians to be part of the nation building and to contribute to the development of the country. On the other hand, they feel the psychological pressure to always prove their nationalism. The notorious repetition of the slogan, 100% Catholics – 100% Indonesians, can be seen with this lens.²⁶ This catchphrase sounds dubious because it can

²⁵C. Kuntoro, op. cit., p. 4.

²⁶Such an understanding of minority is very dangerous if given a kind of theological legitimation; for instance, when incarnation is used to promote an understanding of Christendom as “pendatang” (incomers) to the pribumi (locals). Regarded as ‘incomers,’ the Christians have no choice except to incarnate themselves in the midst of the *pribumi* (people of the soil, locals). This principle goes with the idea of “being in the world, with the world and for the world.” In this case, Jesus’ life, death and resurrection become an imperative for every Christian and for

be interpreted to mean that being a Catholic and being an Indonesian needs to be legitimized. Although people like Abdurrahman Wahid—the former President of Indonesia who, in his address to the Catholics at the closing celebration of the SAGKI 2000, took pains to reassure them, saying: “You are not strangers in this country; you are integral part of its history, present and future”—assure the Catholic faithful of their legitimate identity as Indonesians, the fear is still there among Christians.

It is important to make a clear distinction between the origin of the mission history and the Catholic identity as a religious minority. History has proven that the sense of nationalism of Catholic Indonesians is incontrovertible and unquestionable. The question of nationalism is already resolved. Indonesian Catholics are not more and less incomers (*pendatang*) than believers of other religions. With this distinction in mind, one can proceed to deal with the question respecting the status of Catholics as minority and use it as a springboard for theological reflections on mission and dialogue.

Such a distinction would also help overcome the minority complex under which the Indonesian Christians in general are suffering. What the Protestant theologian Th. Sumartana—who is one of the more eloquent advocates of an open inter-religious dialogue—says about Indonesian Christians in general is valid for the Indonesian Catholics. He refers to the minority complex of Christians as hindrance to positively engage in dialogue with other religious groups in Indonesia: “With such a minority complex it is impossible to develop a productive dialogue with other groups, especially with Muslims.” According to him, the shadow of a futile and marginalized life causes the Christian community to suffer from

the Christian incarnational mission, namely, mission from within a given culture. St. Paul argued that Jesus showed his mission by emptying himself of his lordship and becoming one with humankind in everything but sin (Phil 2:7). This is what really means by enfleshment that the churches have to follow. See Raymund Sudhiarsa, *op.cit.*, p. 469.

the political suspicion of the Moslem community as a whole.²⁷ An open way of dealing with the social political issues of the country is the way J. B. Mangunwijaya has chosen. He dedicated himself to social activities and using his influence as a writer, he worked to change the general outlook of Indonesians by enlightening their hearts and minds.

In his intervention at the synod, Bishop Leo Laba Ladjar from Jayapura points out that the status as a minority is a privileged position to do mission in a distinctive way. This situation urges the Christians to be humble and to fight against any tendency of superiority and triumphalism. Conversion is needed in this respect. As a minority, Catholics have to be aware that they have to collaborate with others. A genuine collaboration requires the willingness to give up the spirit of competition and the ambition to prove oneself as the best. This is regarded as the Asian way of doing mission—that is, “dialogue of life at the level of human experience.” Concretely, “[t]his is about what we have to do as the living message of salvation in Jesus Christ and open ourselves and invite others to join the *communio* of the disciples that is the Church.”²⁸ John M. Prior makes the point: “The Asian bishops did not see doctrine per se as a major concern; their anxiety was with authentic experience and witness. Jesus and the Bible are welcomed in Asia; a rich, foreign church is not.”²⁹ Such approach emphasized the concrete witness of Christians in their lives—not so much articulating the articles of faith as doing works of love and solidarity.

The above mentioned statement is the Asian way of implicitly questioning the declaration of EA that the third millennium be the era of Asia: “With the Church throughout the world, the Church in Asia will cross the threshold of the Third Christian Millennium

²⁷John M. Prior and Alle Hoekema, op. cit., p. 788.

²⁸Leo LabaLadjar, “MenghayatiMaknaMinoritas”, in John M. Prior and Georg Kirchberger, op.cit., p. 141.

²⁹John M. Prior, A Tale of a synod, op.cit., p. 222.

marvelling at all that God has worked from those beginnings until now, and strong in the knowledge that just as in the first millennium the Cross was planted on the soil of Europe, and in the second on that of the Americas and Africa, we can pray that in the Third Christian Millennium a great harvest of faith will be reaped in this vast and vital continent” (Introduction). For the Asian Catholics, including the Indonesian Catholics, preaching God’s Reign is not about “conquering” the Asian continent.

The witnessing character of mission is given more importance than the dogmatic teaching. Bishop Ignatius Suharyo said: “In Asia, people believe in what they see. People appreciate more the concrete persons and interpersonal relationship than the doctrines.”³⁰ Everywhere, not only in Asia, people are more convinced and attracted by examples shown in concrete lives than words, written or spoken. However, we do not underestimate the importance of teaching to the Catholic faithful. The intensified interaction of believers with other religions and Christian denominations brings oftentimes the Catholics to situations where the teachings of the Church and religion are seriously questioned. To persist in giving witness and to continue the dialogue of hearts and life, the Indonesian Catholics also need to be accountable to the teachings of their Church. Adult catechesis or theological formation is of great help to animate them to persevere in their mission of love and service. In the diocese of Jakarta, courses on deepening faith and courses on personal evangelization enjoy good acceptance among the Catholics. In other dioceses, like in the Nusa Tenggara, basic Bible course are well-organized and appealing to the faithful.

³⁰Ignatius SuharyoHardjoatmodjo, PolaEvangelisasi, PolaKerjaSama, in, John M. Prior and Georg Kirchberger (eds.), op.cit., p. 340.

