When Blessed John XXIII called a Council just 90 days after he was elected Pope, the World was taken by surprise. Most expected it to be no more than a tame affair, a clerical get-together of marginal interest to the wider society. Even Catholics placed rather low expectations from the event. But when the Bishops of the world actually came together, the unexpected happened: they spoke for the entire Human Race. The Spirit had clearly taken over. Thinking people right round the globe began to look up when the Council Fathers made it clear that their concern was the whole of Human Society, and declared that “nothing genuinely human fails to raise an echo in their hearts” (GS 1); that the Church identified herself with the anxieties and hopes of the ‘one’ human family of which they were all members; that she felt a deep sense of responsibility towards humanity (GS 2). “For the human person deserves to be preserved”, the Council said, and “human society deserves to be renewed” (GS 3). It was moving!
1. Openness to the World

You know how to interpret the appearance of the sky, but you cannot interpret the signs of the times (Mt 16:3)

To be one with the world is wisdom (Tirukkural)

The tone of the discussions in the Council too was unique: they revealed a deep concern for the World as it was, with all its strengths and weaknesses; and expressed wholehearted commitment to it. They manifested an amazing understanding of emerging realities: of new thoughts, new discoveries, new social trends. They affirmed whatever was positive in everyone and everything: other Churches, other religious traditions, other civilizations (AG 18), other schools of thought, other groups in the field of action. There was appreciation even of opponents (GS 44). Doors for dialogue were thrown wide open. There was a desire to learn from everyone who had a worthwhile message to give and to join hands in a common effort (GS 43).

What we noticed in particular was an affirmation of the human spirit and an encouragement to reach to his/her full potentiality, to keep searching further, widening interests, deepening thought, raising ideals; analysing problems, seeking collaboration, confronting evil, plunging into the service of the weaker, and keep gazing to the Ultimate. The intellectual ferment stimulated during the last half a century and its benefit to Church life and its wider impact on society cannot easily be measured. Fresh energies of the mind set in motion a tidal wave of thought and action, evoked the most radical spiritual commitment unforeseeable in earlier times, and gave birth to institutions of high calibre. Church personnel of great erudition have been dialoguing with scientists and philosophers; innovators in the area of technology, intellectuals in every field, movements leaders of every ideology, visionaries of diverse inspirations.
2. Dialoguing and Collaborating with “Men of All Shades of Opinion” (GS 43)

The Spirit’s presence is shown in some way in each person for the good of all (1 Cor 12:7)

Do not speak harshly to anybody; those who are spoken to will answer thee in the same way. Angry speech is painful, blows for blows will touch thee (Dhammapada X,133)

The Council Fathers were not blind to serious human weaknesses either. The experiences of World War II must have been fresh in their memory when they referred to the attempt at the extermination of an entire people or of an ethnic minority. The Cold War was on. The Bishops were conscious of the intensity and extent of human ambition that keeps exacting heavy toll from human society relentlessly: through extreme forms of violence, savagery, guerrilla warfare, deceit, subversion. They could see that the urge for subjugating other nations was not yet dead in stronger communities (GS 79). They alerted us even in those days against weapons of mass destruction which was to become a major anxiety in later times (GS 80). They invited those at the helm of affairs to act responsibly in situations where equations of power-balance were so precarious that an un-reflected decision could lead to an inexorable chain of events with atrocious consequences (GS 80). They warned leaders against building a society on militaristic calculations alone, counting solely on the accumulation of arms and being engaged in a competition in weaponry. They cautioned them against the danger of ignoring global authority (GS 81). They maintained that it was not right to seek to impose one’s own ideologies on others (GS 85). We realize how timely those warnings were, though they largely remained unheeded. Peace, the Council added, was not merely the absence of war or a balance of power, but depended on the goodwill between communities. They emphasized the need to
keep working for peace ceaselessly (GS 78) and educating the wider society through a public opinion favouring peace (GS 82).

As it is evident, these are gigantesque propositions, not easy of achievement. They cannot be taken up by the Church singlehandedly. Christians will need to join hands with people of every rank and condition, every culture and civilization, in order to build up a global society committed to the cause peace and to the ‘common good’. In this effort Christians will have to learn to profit from the contribution even of those who oppose them (GS 44). They will need to enter into “dialogue with the world and with men of all shades of opinion” (GS 43). And “Believers and unbelievers alike, ought to work for the rightful betterment of this world in which all alike live” (GS 21).

3. The Need to Awaken One’s Social Consciousness (GS 30)

No one should be looking to his own interests, but to the interests of others (1 Cor 10:24)

There is none high or low amongst you. You are all brethren and therefore strive altogether to attain prosperity (Rig Veda 5,60,5)

The Council Fathers had even more things to say when they went on to enumerate the anxieties of humanity in the social field: the problems of the refugees, foreign labourers, orphans, the old, the hungry. Their hearts went to the victims of murder, genocide, abortion, euthanasia, self-destruction, mutilation, and torture; imprisonment, deportation, slavery, prostitution, human trafficking. They were deeply pained when they thought of large numbers living in subhuman conditions (GS 27). They were shocked when they observed social and cultural discrimination in different parts of the world:
based on sex, race, colour, social condition, language or religion. They were perceptive of the hidden forms of slavery that had survived even into our own times. They were alarmed at growing economic differences between individuals, regions, nations and societies and pleaded for greater equity. They urged people to go beyond the concerns of individualistic morality and awaken their own social consciences (GS 30). They reminded society that those in extreme need had a right to attention and care (GS 69).

What shocked the Council Fathers most was the reality that “Extravagance and wretchedness exist side by side”, combined with a contempt for the poor. They noticed that such attitudes strengthened themselves in an atmosphere where “entire personal and social life is permeated with a certain economic way of thinking” (GS 63). They saw that, on the contrary, where the worth of the human person was recognised, there was an evident concern for the needs of others, especially of the neediest. The Council urged, “Every social group must take account of the needs and legitimate aspirations of other groups, and of the general welfare of the entire human family”. Then they descended to details, emphasizing e.g. the right to food, clothing, shelter, education, employment, reputation, information, privacy and freedom (GS 26).

They conceded that the proper mission of the Church was not in the political, economic or social order, but they were convinced that the right fulfilment of her function gave her “a light and an energy” to structure and consolidate the human community... to promote the common good, especially serving the needy and engaging herself in works of mercy (GS 42). Thus through her individual members and her whole community, “the Church believes she can contribute greatly toward making the family of man and its history more human” (GS 40).

Subsequent events have proved that this is possible. Christian activists, in fact, have risked everything in defence of justice, human rights; women,
children, *dalits*, tribals, the *downtrodden*, and of *God’s creation*. Our people are in universities, in the media, in the streets and in relief camps. They are in courts, jails; and not a few, urged by the Gospel, have given their lives for the most noble causes. These things were achieved not by Catholic members alone. Our people have joined hands with others and worked in collaboration with them. **Bridges** have been built across denominational divides, religious prejudices, ethnic distrust, and ideological distances; even with those who do not acknowledge God, and “oppress the Church and harass her” (*Gs 92*). For, ultimately we belong to the same **human family** and serve the same human causes. We are all God’s children.

4. “Every Day Human Interdependence Grows” (*GS 26*)

*This plan, which God will complete when the time is right, is to bring all creation together, everything in heaven and on earth, with Christ as head* (*Eph 1:10*)

*You have become a disciple in order to benefit the world (Silabhadra, the Buddhist Professor at Nalanda University, India, to Hiuen Tsang from China)*

For Christians, this desire for **unity is a gift of God**. It is part of the cosmic design He has willed. Even in our troubled times, Jesus gives us assurance that the effort to establish a universal brotherhood is not a hopeless one (*GS 38*), that we shall one day succeed to “unify under one Spirit all men of whatever nation, race or culture” (*GS 92*) by the power of the Gospel.

There is no denying the fact that “Every day human interdependence grows more tightly drawn and spreads by degrees over the whole world” (*GS 26*). “The Church by her very universality can be a close bond between diverse
human communities and nations, provided these trust her”; she can offer assistance to overcoming strife between nations and races (GS 42).

Catholic associations can contribute to the building up of a peaceful and fraternal community of nations, cultivating a “universal outlook” in people, and creating an awareness of “genuine universal solidarity and responsibility” (GS 90). The Church continuously keeps reaching out to “every man of our time, whether he believes in God, or does not explicitly recognize him” (GS 91).

5. Togetherness without Destroying “the Wisdom Received from Ancestors” (GS 56)

Let the ancient wise men teach you; listen to what they had to say (Job 8:10)
Cultivate the friendship of the good, cultivate the friendship of the noble ones (Dhammapada 6.3)

The interactions that the Church seeks to promote are aimed at the enrichment of all concerned communities, cultures, and civilizations, fully aware that she herself will also be a beneficiary (GS 58). She insists that such exchanges should not weaken or destroy “the wisdom received from ancestors”, or disturb the life of the communities, or place in danger the character proper to each people (GS 56). Such sensitive expressions of concern about indigenous cultures undoubtedly come from very perceptive persons! Even in those days, the Council Fathers had noticed that “many nations, poorer in economic goods, are quite rich in wisdom and can offer noteworthy advantage to others” (GS 15). How true! How thought-provoking!

That is why the Church considers loyalty to one’s civilizational heritage as a positive contribution to humanity itself; in this she follows the same logic
which prompts her to encourage patriotism, not narrow-mindedness (GS 75). After all, we belong together. We are all in search of genuine solutions to the numerous problems that are before us today (GS 16). The only desire that Christians have in all these matters is to serve human destinies with “mounting generosity” (GS 93).

6. Turning Attention to the Realities of the Present Day in Asia

*Look around and see what is happening! (Is 49:18)*

*When a ruler’s personal conduct is correct, his government is effective without the issuing of orders (Analects 12,5)*

The world keeps changing continuously. May be it is good that we at this stage turn our attention to the changed scenario in the world today and ask ourselves what our mission should be in the new situation. We should also turn to the ‘grievs and anxieties’ of our fellow-Asians amidst emerging realities, seeking inspiration from the ‘wisdom of our ancestors’ to which the Council repeatedly paid tribute. We should all these in relation to our Faith.

**a. Post-colonial Complexes.** Let us have a quick look at our recent past. By the 1960’s, when Vatican II was taking place, much of Asia had just emerged from colonialism. The exertions of a newly independent nation tends to be one of reaction: self-assertion, sometimes exaggerated; criticism of former colonial masters, not rarely more than required; recounting of injuries received, often inflated; pretentions to greatness, often unrealistic and in bad taste; allegations of neo-colonialism, true/not-true but often motivated. This list can be lengthened. This is what may be called the ‘post-colonial complex’. Sometimes theological reflections also have been
excessively influenced by this line of thought. Understandable, excusable, sometimes helpful, but in the long term unproductive.

b. **Political Use of Religion.** The leaders who, tried out the above stratagems, mostly in order to keep their flock together by flattering the self-esteem of the nation and its culture, saw that these cheap tactics did not yield the desired results. Convictions could not be carried beyond what was true. Besides, people wanted to look to the future, eager to see performance from their leaders not to hear narcissistic rhetoric. When caught in this dilemma, some of those leaders developed a new formula. If national fervour did not yield results, *religious fervour* might. And it did. It was only gradually did they realize that the lower classes had largely remained religious. Secularized vocabulary would not help. The secularized leadership that had been successful in dialoguing and debating for independence with their colonial masters on Western terms were not on the wavelength of the masses. Once independence was won, they didn’t have the formula to inspire the less enlightened classes. It was then that there arose a new type of leadership that knew how to win the support of the religion-driven masses. With this begins the ‘political use of religion’ promoting exaggerated faith expressions that have come under the popular name ‘Fundamentalism’ today. Some regions of Asia have seriously fallen under its charms. Dubbing them as ‘terrorists’ and going for them have only sent their fanaticisms to astral heights.

c. **Search for an ‘Enemy’.** Leaders who felt that they could not project a convincing religious image, developed another stratagem: they developed an eye for discerning an ‘enemy’ in the neighbourhood. Some leaders discovered an enemy in other political parties to which they gave names
like ‘anti‐nationals, anti‐socials, extremists’. Others found enemies among voluntary agencies, organizations, NGO’s fighting for human rights, including Christian missionaries. But some others realized that there was additional gain if a neighbouring state could be identified as an ‘enemy’. National fervour built up in confrontation would come handy before elections, or for diverting attention from public scandals, leadership blunders or policy failures. Further, for most of Asia, the West was always available as a whipping boy at any time. But these and similar tactics, in the long term, proved to be counter‐intuitive.

d. Slowness in Accepting Responsibility. After all, half a century has passed. It is time that we take responsibility for ourselves, e.g. for the violence that we have caused within the state, or taken out against neighbouring states, the harshness that we have shown to each other, sometimes far exceeding the cruelties of our colonial masters; civil wars, inter‐ethnic strife, inter‐religious conflicts; waves of fundamentalism, cultural nationalism; ineffective populism; failure to offer justice to the less privileged, protection to minorities, women, children; the growth of greed, corruption, deepening of unfair practices, unethical business; exploitation of one community by another; re‐emergence of unfair structures that had been weakened during the colonial period; development of new exploitative structures linked with the new economy; making the economy the be‐all and end‐all of everything; damage to the environment; bad governance; abuse of democracy, abuse within democracy; political vindictiveness, dynastic rule... and many other things that keep embarrassing us. As sense of mission is due.
e. Having admitted these failures let us learn also to look at the situation with a measure of sympathetic and realistic understanding. Many of the nation-states were a haphazard combination of disparate ethnic groups that were in mutual rivalry or conflict, and had irreconcilable memories; religious, linguistic, regional differences not rarely complicated matters. The leadership was inexperienced. The democratic styles imposed by a westernized elite did not always correspond to the historic experience or the ethos of different societies; the structures and the functioning of democracy were unfamiliar to people of low literacy. People found it difficult to move hurriedly from pre-industrial economic systems to modern ones. Rapid population growth and urbanization (internal migration, refugees) gave rise to highly inflammable and impersonal masses in cities searching for self-expression. Inexperienced leaders had additional anxieties about limited resources (oil, raw materials, water), market unreliability, unhappiness linked with uneven and unsteady growth, political rivalry, high expectation with regard to healthcare and educational opportunities, shortage of capital, overdue land-reforms. The economy went into the hands of a new middle class that proved to be increasingly exploitative, causing the widening of gaps, the elite isolating themselves in cities. Opposition rose from dissident minorities, local loyalists. Rapid social changes led in some places to chaotic situations. Leaders in response resorted to populism, manipulation of the masses, dead set on economic success even at the cost of the people. Sectarian leaders played with local, ethnic, linguistic, religious and regional loyalties, and fostered anger against slow development, poor infrastructure, mixed successes. These problems have no ready answers. Can we look for solutions under inspiration from the wisdom of our ancestors and from our Christian convictions? Can we
preserve sobriety and balance as we look for answers from our various sources of inspiration.

f. Preserving Sobriety and Balance. At this stage if I did not refer to the recent achievements of the Asian nations, I would be incomplete. Asia is not what it was at the time of the Council. The hardships that our colonial masters imposed turned out to be the ‘stimulus of blows’ that awakens a somnolent society about which Arnold Toynbee wrote in his “A Study of History”. And Asia has been fully awakened; and we have made much progress. And even of late, ‘globalization’, against which Third World NGOs were rattling the sabre for fear of ongoing exploitation by the more developed countries, is turning to the advantage of the weaker nations, especially with the new trend of outsourcing; and the nations that led globalization in the past are going on the defensive. Further, today Asian leaders are prominent in world assemblies, they lead international bodies (e.g. the UN), their counsel and assistance are sought in times of international crises, their economic groupings exert weight at decision-making gatherings. It is precisely when we are successful that we need to preserve sobriety and balance. The age of responsibility has come.

g. An Invitation to a Heightened Sense of Responsibility. Therefore our prayer today is that all these advantages that have come on our way through the sacrifice of an earlier generation of Asians awakens in us a “Heightened Sense of Responsibility”; that we do not make the same mistake that the powerful have always made in periods of success, exploiting weaker communities and nations. Will we outgrow styles of confrontation and outsmarting, or press ahead in ‘Macho’ fashion threatening each other like Epic Heroes. Both epics themselves and written histories tell us that the
winners in such short-lived achievements ended up being caught into a feeling of emptiness and meaninglessness. Suicide remains a powerful temptation; it has power to pull both in times of total failure and meaningless success.

Suicide, personal or collective, is an unwillingness to seek deeper answers to serious questions about life. For, the human being is a questioning creature (GS 3-4). He/she knows that achievement does not consist in what he/she possesses, but what makes meaning. This hunger for meaning calls for a deeper search. Will we seek good counsel from the Wise Men from the East (Mt 2:1), the wisdom of the Asia, in this time of transition? Will we allow our Christian Conscience to remind us of some duties? Can we put our energies together in an effort to take in hand these mighty problems together?

A sense of mission is due. “I neither stood still, nor sat nor lay down until, pacing to and fro, I had mastered that fear and terror” (the Buddha)

7. An Inner Voice

Be careful how you think; your life is shaped by your thoughts (Prov 4:23)

It is because he (the sage) is free from striving that no one in the world is able to strive with him (Tao Te Ching 22)

Let us return to the theme of a ‘Heightened of Sense of Responsibility’. We make or mar our own destinies as fellow Asians. It is true, in the globalized world today our fates are not in own hands alone. We are interdependent. That makes it easy for us to continue shifting responsibility to others, until we learn that it does not help. Our destinies are our own, not theirs. The Council itself has sought to evoke in us a greater Sense of
Responsibility by opening out of all doors to us, to new paths, thoughts, ventures and relationships. Act as adults, judge of yourselves! Jesus had said centuries ago, “Why don’t you judge for yourselves the right thing to do?” (Lk 12:57). And centuries earlier still, Buddha advised his disciples not to go by hearsay, tradition, the authority of the Vedas, argumentation, or the prestige of a holy man. “But know for yourselves,” he said (Anguttara Nikaya I, 189).

A deep sense of responsibility involves weighing things before one’s Conscience. GS 16 speaks at length about this hidden force within. It refers to a law written in the heart of the human person by God Himself. We Asians love to undertake this inner journey, making our way to the most ‘secret core and the sanctuary’ of our spiritual existence seeking to remain ‘alone with God’. There we hear a voice that whispers what we should and what we should not. It is in this area I wish to dwell for a while.

Here I may seem to take a different path from the traditional justice fighters. Not that justice is not important. The theme “Justice” has dominated public debate during half century or more, each person making it respond to his/her own need, or that of his community/society/ in diverse situations. It has promoted a great cause. But it has also led to difficulties, especially when the perceptions of ‘justice’ of two communities differed sharply. Many ethnic/religious conflicts have been caused by persons radically committed to a cause which they hold as absolutely ‘just’ and right. When justice collides with justice, we are helpless. We may need to trace our way back to where we began.

But the need still remains for struggling for justice and for affirming the rights of persons and communities, especially of the weakest. For, justice is all-important. However, the main limitation of this approach is that the instinct for ‘shifting responsibility’ gets rooted in us. The pointed finger is always against
the ‘other’ (if you remove ...the pointed finger Is 58:9). We keep handing on responsibility for evil in society to others: imperialists, former colonial masters, the West, stronger nations, stronger corporations, the ‘powers that be’, leaders in society, decision-makers, high caste people, privileged individuals and communities. Ultimately we end up by saying that the responsibility for building a better world belongs to ‘the other’; or to me, to the extent I can blame it on others, on structures, traditions, the past. Thus the energy needed for ‘taking responsibility’ gets enfeebled. History tells us that it was only when an individual, a society, or a nation, took responsibility for its destinies in its own hand, that it made a real breakthrough and new beginning.

First establish yourself in the good; thereafter you should counsel others. The wise man who acts thus will be above reproach (Dhammada 12,2)

8. A New Beginning Starts with ‘Conscious Wholehearted Forgiveness’

Forgive one another, as God has forgiven you through Christ (Eph 4:32)

You shall speak to men good words (Quran 2,83)

May be, I myself will slip into the mistake what I warned you against. But I would be sorry if I failed to call for combining it with a ‘strong sense of responsibility’. For example, let us ask ourselves why colonial grievances have remained rooted in the minds of our fellow-Asians even after half a century. Any responsible person would have said that the ‘lamentation-period’, is over. A new beginning is due. But a new beginning never takes place without ‘conscious, whole-hearted forgiveness’. Forgiveness brings healing, collective healing even for an entire society.

For instance, a collective sense of guilt for injustices inflicted on others can keep harassing the ‘collective unconscious’ of entire societies and give
rise to collective self-hatred. Cardinal Ratzinger used to say that the self-hatred of the West was nothing less than pathological. But there are remedies.

Forgiveness, of course, is easily sought and easily given, but for conscious whole-hearted forgiveness, we need to generate spiritual energies. And it is the energy that we gather up for holding out total forgiveness that also stirs up in us the vigour and stamina needed to make an outright breakthrough to a ‘meaningful success’. We need to listen to a ‘soft little voice’ that whispers to us what we ought to be done to that end. Can we give utterance to this soft voice?

It is this voice that we wish to revive in this era when cultural value-systems are collapsing and moral and ethical traditions are being eroded. The Inner Counsellor, which we call Conscience, keeps consulting two sources for Inspiration: 1. our own individual (cultural) civilizational heritage, and, 2. our Faith. We little realize, how in moments of crisis, even quite unconsciously, we fall back on our own culture. Our basic instincts are built on that genius. But we, as Christians, also lift our eyes aloft looking for the strength that comes from Above. God is there. Christ intercedes with the Father. The Council referred respectfully to those who “preserve in their traditions precious elements of religion and humanity” (GS 92). It only counselled them to listen in addition to tradition also to the “many voices of our age” (GS 44).

9. We Need ‘Great-Souled Persons’ (Mahatmas) to Bring Civilizations Together (GS 31)

*The wise leaders will shine with all the brightness of the sky. And those who have taught many people to do what is right will shine like the stars for ever (Dan 12:3).*
O Lord, grant me such qualities of head and heart as would endear me to the enlightened and learned among us, to the ruling class and to all that have eyes to see (Atharva Veda 19,62)

Thus, we are never helpless. We make ourselves helpless only by isolating ourselves from each other or wasting energies in constant rivalry. As someone has said, “We live immersed in a sea of energy”. This energy primarily belongs to the community, and a big portion destined for each person is to be found in the other. It has to be discovered and tapped, not by violent snatching, but by drawing it forth gently from each other: sharing thoughts, evoking emotional support, eliciting collaboration. It is for this that we need to reach out to the other heritages on this Continent or elsewhere which too have a proud history deserving our attention.

We are mutually dependent. Our destinies are interlinked. Historians tell us that civilizations that grew side by side were always locked in relationships that were mutually acknowledging and mutually sustaining, even when their nations were in conflict. It is hard for any civilization to maintain high standards in isolation (Fernandez-Armesto 19). In this era of historic transition “We desperately need Great-Souled Persons (Mahatmas)” that the Council longed for to bring people of the World’s diverse heritages together (GS 31). This then is our vocation.

Aside from the great civilizations of Asia, there are also little traditions (of tribal groups, ethnic minorities, indigenous communities) which hold immense treasures within their heritages. They have something unique to contribute to modern societies, when the so-called advanced “civilizations” are either 1. on a collision course (Samuel Huntington’s thesis), or are, 2. disintegrating from within (Oswald Spengler’s thesis). These indigenous traditions have the advantage that they are nearer to people and respond to the needs of the deeper psyche of their respective communities. Being closer to the original
state of humanity, they reveal something deep and elusive about human nature itself. They have a validity of their own, proven over centuries, even before the rise of sophisticated civilizations. They had a cosmic vision of reality and have retained a ‘primal’ view of things closer to nature. They had a communitarian outlook, shared a sense of belonging, were habituated to non-confrontational styles of equalizing wealth, and had a sense of the mystery about life.

Each of the World Religions drew certain core values from the ‘primal’ community from which it arose (e.g. justice, mercy and honesty Mt 23:23; equality, care for the weak; respect for nature, for life, for the family and community) which were very visible at the early stages of its development. The growth of these religious movements was spontaneous and normal as long as they were able to preserve such values. Later when they were transformed by contact with other cultures (and civilizations) that had accepted vested interests as the main prop to their collective existence, their history changed. Anthropologists today are beginning to look to such primal communities and cultures as a rich resource for the values and ethical principles that the modern society sorely stands in need of.

10. Some of the ‘Griefs and Anxieties of the People of our Age’ (GS 1)

_ I will make you well again; I will heal your wounds (Jer 30:17)_

_ There is a way to get the people: get their hearts and the people are won over (Mencius 4:9)_

Let us turn our attention for a while to some of the most serious problems of our times, in search of solutions guided by the inspirations we have referred to.
**a. Violence.** What is truly alarming in the world today is the way violence has taken root in so many regions. It has become a lifestyle in some places. And it keeps growing and spreading: nation against nation, class against class, ethnic group against ethnic group, majority against minority and vice versa. Violence may be in the name of religious claims, ethnic concern, territorial integrity, human rights, or social justice. The strong usually have their way. No wonder that dominant nations and groups are perceived as exploiting the weaker. Those who feel that they are unjustly treated take to violence in response. Rather than becoming judgemental, can we give aggrieved groups a hearing, and reduce their anger? Rather than Christening them ‘terrorists’, could we study the history of their grievances with sympathy and search for answers? Could those who manifest extraordinary zeal in ‘imposing’ democracy and human rights within states also show a sense of fairness in dealing with weaker nations and building up a balanced economic order among different states?

On the other hand, there are enough people to foster anger against every perceived injustice. And when a group of poverty-stricken people are brought together, organized, and made to feel they are fighting for a good cause, *acts of terror seem to empower them* amazingly and help them in a new way to discover a new emotional identity (*Lott 20-21*). Our mission is something different. Let us help people not to remain in anger, lest they be led into sin (*Eph 4:26*).

These are times when one should ‘stand out’ of one’s own self-chosen stand and distance oneself from the immediate issue and listen to a *sober voice*, whoever is able to give it. We remember these words addressed to Cain, “Why are you angry?” (*Gen 4:6*). Working for anger-reduction has become a mission in itself. It will only be after tempers are down that we will succeed in bringing logic into discussion, good sense into conversation,
persuasion into discussions, and fairness into conclusions. Many serious problems like regional conflicts, clash of economic interests, ethnic and ideological self-affirmation will call for higher levels of thought, deeper sense of justice and surer forms of mutual solidarity among the makers of the world today. A pedagogy of persuasion could be developed.

b. Arms Race. One may think that challenging the enemy with an impressive stock of arms will overawe the opponent. It may happen that way; but it may also happen the other way. It may provoke the enemy into a desperate action at a moment the provoker is not expecting. And the damage he inflicts can be fatal. As we well know, the atom bomb was discovered by scientists who had been desperate refugees from Nazi oppression (Hobsbawm 545). Is it possible to choose a strategy to adapt your role to complete and complement that of the opponent (in Yin-Yang manner), the competitor or the enemy... rather than compete, confront, and eliminate? Can we opt for the reconciliation of opposing interests (Be at peace among yourselves 1 Thes 5:13)? Can we foster thoughts about care for the poor, the weak, the environment?

c. Corruption. Thinkers in Asia consider Corruption at every level and every sphere of activity as the most troubling evil in society today. During the years of our struggle for justice in the past, a perception grew that moral norms were merely tools used by the ‘Upper Classes’ to keep the labour class down, and that they would eventually be transcended. There was too little talk those days about personal responsibility, ethical consciousness, moral principles, much less about Conscience (Mahatma Gandhi spoke of the Inner Voice). Thus, a space was created for the expansion of the Plague that we call Corruption today; and it has taken roots.
Corruption is not about the **wrong use of money** alone, but also about the **wrong use of power**. It is not only about taking bribe in government offices, but also about **various forms of manipulation and blackmailing**, political arm-twisting, pushing a particular party’s or ethnic group’s political interests through underhand ways, unfairness of dominant classes and castes to weaker sections, the imperceptible manner of bulldozing or marginalizing legitimate claims, silencing the voices of the weaker communities, physical elimination of political opponents or commercial competitors, interfering with election processes, using ‘strong men’ for vacating land or realizing bills, influencing matches, selling drugs. Corruption also has reference to hidden transactions, unpaid salaries, underpaid employees, unfair pressure.

The **globalized world has become a hiding place** for corrupt business. The global market provides distances, creates anonymity, gives opportunities for dishonest deals, enables one to take advantage of the weak, evade laws, and make an unfair proportion of profit. Can our Christian conscience be taken to such situations? The Bible says “Be honest and just when you make decisions” (Lev 19:15), “Do not accept a bribe” (Ex 2:8).” Defend the rights of the poor and the orphans” (Ps 82:3). Can we invoke our other Asian traditions?

d. **Economy being made the Ultimate Goal.** We agree that economy has its own importance. It plays a central role in world affairs today. Anyone who neglects economy will have to pay for it in due time. However, economy is not everything. Economic success cannot be made the ultimate goal in human affairs. It cannot be allowed to **entice and enslave** human beings, **wipe out cultures**, and ruin the environment. Just as the political empires of the past brought some advantages to subject people even when they exploited, the commercial empires of multi-national corporations too
bring some advantages to people (cheaper goods and efficient dispatch of affairs). But they exploit. As the political empires of old took advantage of weaker nations, in the same way the present commercial empires take advantage of weaker people (sometimes the customers, sometimes the workers, and at other times the shareholders, smaller business concerns, generally the uninformed society). The book of Ecclesiastes laments the frustration coming from making money the chief goal of one’s life (Eccles 5:10).

e. Damage to Environment. Unquestionably the technological age has brought us many blessings. But along with these blessings it has also brought the destruction of ecosystems, erosion of traditional cultures, and undermining of the quality of life (Hathaway 17). We may well recall how the great empires of Mesopotamia, Crete, Greece, Rome, Maya, and the Indus Valley collapsed because they ruined the very environment that had brought them into existence. Deforestation has had disastrous consequences. Felipe Fernandez-Armesto says “…civilizations commonly exploit their environments, often to the point of self-destruction” (Fernandez-Armesto 5).

Lester Brown’s “Mobilizing to Save Civilization” referring to consequences of violence to nature speaks of poverty, depletion of resources, falling of water tables, drying up of wells, shrinking of forests; of collapsing fisheries, eroding soils, grasslands becoming deserts. The list of disasters can be made longer: release of carbon dioxide, hole in the ozone layer, undermined the fertility of the soil, chemicals in the air, soil, water; wiped out species; overuse energy (Hathaway 6). This is an hour when we need to educate the public about the impending disaster if humanity continues this form of callous destruction. It is time that we developed a common strategy. It is God’s creation that we are destroying. The believer rejoiced
in God’s creation when he said, “How clearly the sky reveals God’s glory!” (Ps 19:1). Today we cannot rejoice, we can only shed tears.

f. Failure of Governance. Many of these problems would have found solution if the leaders were alert, conscientious and committed; if they fostered civic virtues and had concern for the common good. Their goals would not have been merely economic prosperity, but also social justice and environmental sustainability. If they were determined to create a set of values in society that are motivating and unifying, it would bring long-term benefit to that society. Unfortunately today governments are too closely linked with private interests, with the families of the leaders, with business groups and corporations that remunerate them for their services. God has nothing to do with corrupt leaders, “who make injustice legal, who plot against good men...” (Prov 17:23).

g. Failure of the Media. Media could be a powerful force for educating the public, promoting values, spreading of information. Investigative journalism has often highlighted specific cases of unfairness or corruption to be set right. But media men also can bend to mammon, and sell their services for money: cooking up stories to defame or defend a party leader, distorting facts to press an argument, presenting allegations as proven truth for minor favours. Plagiarizing, pirating cassettes, and violating intellectual property rights are very common these days. What does our inner voice say?

11. From Conflict to Complementary Roles

*He will settle disputes among great nations. They will hammer their swords into ploughs and their spears into pruning-knives. Nations will never again go to war, never prepare for battle again (Is 2:4)*
Those who lead others in harmony with the Tao (Way) do not use force to subdue others, or attempt to dominate the world through force of arms. For every force there is a counterforce. Violence, even when well intentioned, always rebounds upon oneself (Tao Te Ching 30).

Even stubborn opponents can come together after a serious conflict; in recent years, ongoing violence has led to the hardening of hearts and a compassion-fatigue. We are caught into a series of vicious circles: violence—counter-violence—desperate response—violence in return. Ideological fanaticism—religious fanaticism—political fanaticism—ethnic fanaticism. Is there any way of wriggling out of this helpless situation. Can Christian convictions propose solutions?

Having been dragged into situations of ethnic conflicts during the last 16 years, I know the meaning of ‘collective anger’. I have seen it with my own eyes in contexts where hundreds of people had been killed and thousands of homes destroyed. I still keep a bullet in my drawer as a ‘holy reminder’ of a peace-venture in Assam and Manipur with my Ecumenical friends. In those contexts I considered ‘anger-reduction’ as the first step to peace negotiations. And I used to pray that we might become the lambs of God who take away the anger of the World! I am currently busy with the 8th distinct instance of peace negotiation in a conflict in which Muslims and a local tribal community are involved. I attach great importance to Peace, because I have experienced the absence of it.

At the end of World War II, the leaders of countries that had for centuries been in conflict (France, Germany and others) decided they would no further adopt the path of war to resolve problems. That was to become a historic decision. In them humanity itself was taking a new direction. And they succeeded. Many other countries joined them, and today we have the
European Union. The impossible became possible. Christian convictions may have had something to do with this ability to forgive and make a new start.

Let us now look at our own Continent. International tensions keep several Asian nations continuously on the defensive against each other. Deterrence only adds to the anxiety. It is a repetition of the European drama of the early 20th century. Toynbee called an excess of nationalism ‘tribalism’, each nation claiming to be a universe in itself, ‘self-contained and self-sufficient’. Such attitudes had disastrous consequences. Asian nations are tempted to make the same mistake that Europe made during the last century, easily becoming over-ambitious, moving on to belligerent positions, and hastily making mutually provocative statements. Arms-selling nations and companies are the main beneficiaries. The leaders who assume aggressive postures with little thought consider themselves Heroes! So, international tensions continue to mount. These and other social tensions within individual countries leave many things unpredictable for Asia’s future. Is there an intelligent and far-sighted role that we can play in this context?

12, Alertness against Erosion of Cultures

The wisdom of the righteous can save you (Prov 11:9)

The word of someone who thinks matters through is accepted (Prov 21:28)

Our cultural stamina is exhausted, because an economy-driven worldview has been fast eroding our indigenous cultures for years. That is what makes our society yield easily to temptations towards violence, corruption, damage to environment, and poor governance. When we have allowed the Market to define our identity and shape our destiny, we have made of our cultures the prime victims; we have allowed the weakening of our social bonds, sense of
common belonging, inherited traditions, and commitment to shared values and ideals. When prime motivations for existence vanish, we are left high and dry. The **entire value-system** of our Civilizations stands in danger of giving way. Our moral fibre will not stand the test tomorrow. But we know we can start re-building even from ruins.

A time has come for us to stand aside and develop a detached view of things, withdraw for a while and reflect, move apart and meditate. This we do, not develop another ideology, but draw profit from collective human wisdom. **Time has come for bringing the wisdom of the world together and drawing all human civilizations into communion.** In this cause we must build up our inner resources. Mahatma Gandhi said, “Such power as I possess for working in the political field has derived from my experiments in the spiritual field”. No wonder he conveyed his message as much through **religious silence**, as by political intervention.

It is precisely when we feel helpless that we begin to pay greater attention to the ‘inner voice’, a soft whispering. A **new inspiration** awakens in our minds. A new insight is churned out from the running stream of the cultural wisdom that comes to us from our ancestors who were a little closer to the origin of things than we are. It is a spark that flies out of a mysterious collective mind (collective psyche, **collective unconscious**). It takes shape in some form of **co-thinking**. These are the ways in which our lives are shaped and our societies led forward. We cannot be blind to this **Higher Energy** that guides the course of history even amidst the ordinariness of our daily lives. For, He is Almighty.

13. The Mission of Bringing All Human Thought and Experience Together

*Wisdom is in every thought of an intelligent man (Prov 14:33)*

*We include those who cultivate outstanding qualities of the human spirit (GS 92).*
These are times when we Christians must play a bridge-building role between the old and new orders of things, one civilization and the other. Time has come for the East to meet the West, and the North the South. Similarly ancient wisdom must dialogue with the “many voices of our age” (GS 44). All must feel an obligation to prevent the destruction of the wisdom of their ancestors or the weakening of the character proper to each people (GS 56). As every community is proud of its own individuality and heritage, it should respect similar sentiments in others. Noticing differences between different communities, we also see that they are of complementary nature.

Some value freedom, others discipline; some give importance to wisdom, others to happy relationships; some insist on frankness, others on courtesy. Greeks look for wisdom, Jews for miracles (1 Corinthians 1:22). The West may insist on the freedom of the press, the East on respect for religious sentiments. It is unfair to impose one’s own perceptions or priorities on others, ignoring the path of history that different people have trod. We ought to allow each community to walk at its own pace towards the goals that it has set for itself.

Similarly, one field of human activity must be respectful of other fields as well. Commerce must be attentive to ethical values, and scientific and technological research must draw inspiration from spiritual search. Thus we must promote harmony between the more widely accepted general culture and individual cultures, between different branches of sciences, and work out an intelligent synthesis out of them for the sake of developing a holistic view of things and promoting an intelligent contemplation of all reality (GS 56). In the same manner, people at various levels of social life (different castes, classes, leaders of industry and labourers, simple peasants and fortune-makers) must begin to realize that their destinies are interlinked. They will have to search
for a non-confrontational manner of bringing their ambitions together. But above all, the painful memories of the past (colonial, inter-national, inter-ethnic, inter-societal, inter-religious) need to be healed and collective mental equilibrium restored, in order to construct a future of harmony together.

As the material world is made up of an inseparable network of linkages, and as the human body and nature itself are self-regulating systems, in the same way we belong to each other in an intimate fashion within the human family. Therefore, what we need to make of life is not a competitive struggle, but a cooperative venture, each person and community playing a complementary role with the other, like musicians in a concert. We see that whatever happens in society speaks of connectedness, relationship, interdependence...giving expression to a common, shared spiritual experience.

That is what makes of:

- Individualism and Altruism,
- Self-care and Social commitment,
- Practical consideration with Theoretical wisdom,
- Emphasis on Matter with Concern for the Spirit

not mutually exclusive but complementary.

And when it does turn out that way, something surprising happens, just as we notice the creative forces in nature continuously causing the emergence of something new in the universe.

At the civilizational level the ‘miracle of a new creation’ does not take place through a ‘clash of civilizations’ in which the strongest will emerge on top to solve problems, but through a dialogue that will lead to a communion of civilizations. That is the only way that all communities and cultures, all societies and civilizations will be able to make a rightful contribution to
human destiny. That is where persons with a **Christian sense of mission** can play a most helpful role.


*God completes all things everywhere* (Eph 1:23)

*Oh men, direct your energies to promote the good of all mankind. Let your relations with all be characterized by love, peace and harmony. Let your hearts beat in unison with human hearts* (Rig Veda 8,49,4)

The true meaning and purpose of life is to realize the potential of every human being as a creative, active life-enhancing participant in life’s festivity. The **deeper the interiority** of an individual and the clearer the collective identity of a community, the stronger the society to which they belong. Such persons know that they are participants in the subtle mystery of an unfolding cosmic destiny. They know that when they do what is good they are in **harmony with the Universe**, and that they are fulfilling a plan formed long ago (Eph 1: 9-10) even when they do not realize it. They will not allow any narrow self-interest to limit, diminish or trivialize this perception of reality.

When several scientific discoveries take place at the same time, we know that they come from the **collective unconscious** of humanity where those ideas had been floating for some time. An awareness of this truth itself translates into energy. Today’s science tells us that subatomic particles are more like waves of **information and energy** than matter. **Collective thought and energy**, when used for positive purposes (in a human assembly, a team, a group, a community, country, in the world at a particular moment or era), the future is being built up. When we develop a **holistic outlook**, we see clearly how one
discipline or activity completes another, and how one vision of life enhances another. It is for this reason that we combine:

- Economy with Ecology,
- Physics with Psychology,
- Scientific research with Spiritual search,
- Technology with Mysticism,
- Social struggle with Self-realization

Thus we see that one gleam of truth or human effort is not complete without the other.

So there should be balance between:

- Work and Leisure,
- Saving and Consumption,
- Self-interest and Compassion (Sachs 161)
- Self-assertion and Affirmation of others,
- National interests and the long-term good of the Human Race.

Under this light, self-renunciation in behalf of others is not the destruction of the ego, but self-realization (fulfilling) in the true sense.

When one forgets oneself in service to others, one wins the same joy as when one:

- Composes a poem, or
- Produces a piece of music, or
- Makes a marvellous discovery, or
- Accomplishes an impossible task, or
- Shares the Good News with someone when he/she sorely needs it

When a person is lost in his/she concern for others, he/she has:

*an intense feeling that he/she is loved and cared for!*

In this broken world today (broken families, damaged communities, fragmented society, divided humanity) we must return to the spirit of **primal**
communities which were characterized by love, relationship and solidarity. We should invite each other into a fellowship of co-belonging. We need to construct new narratives to strengthen the bonds of our togetherness, building on what we have inherited.

15. A Heightened Sense of Mission

Let my life be a life of dedication, let my vital breath, eyes, intellect and spirit be dedicated to service; let my love and my understanding, my prosperity and my knowledge be dedicated to service. Let the service be made in a spirit of utter sacrifice (Upanishads).

Recently, the Church has fallen victim to a trend that began in civil society a little earlier. The scandals caused by leading persons in public life had been weakening the credibility of persons holding offices of responsibility in society. There emerged a feeling that things like public truth telling and ethical business were on the way out. As a result, even the most solemn public statements (including UN declarations, reports to the parliament on the financial state of the nation, government accounts with regard to military expenses, or impressive advertisements) were finding few takers. The actual failure of some of these public agencies began damaging the image of others as well. This has led to a general distrust of banks, corporations, news media, the entertainment industry, unions, government and its agencies (Sachs 12), and of public organizations in general... and of Church-related bodies as well. We are going through hard times in consequence.

Persons with a sense of Christian mission must help humanity to regain its balance. People must be helped to look at things in objectivity and to put the squabbles of the day before cultural wisdom of the world to gain a valid perspective. In times of persistent troubles, there emerge spontaneously persons
with a strong sense of mission, revealing the godlike seed in them (GS 3). Old-sounding social norms need to be re-interpreted and made relevant and capable of addressing the problems of our times: e.g. with reference to nuclear arms, abortion, euthanasia, genetic engineering, exploitation of minorities, regional or international imbalances, destruction of nature. Some Christians may feel they have a vocation to go into the “very noble art of politics” to be of assistance (GS 75). But everyone with a sense of vocation does what is possible from where he/she is.

A new beginning takes place when believers go into the inner chambers of their hearts and stay for a while deep within themselves, where they discover the true nature of things. Yes, that depth is within the reach of everyone. That is why self-reflection can be extremely educative, to which Asian sages have attached great importance. Persons who cultivate their interiority pass on the waves of their thoughts to others, far and near. The Universe vibrates with them and takes unforeseen steps forward in its process of self-creation.


May my life, each breath of life, the eyes, the ears, the speech, the mind, the soul and all other acts and deeds, be put to the service of humankind (Yajur Veda 18,29).

This is my servant, whom I uphold; my chosen one, in whom I delight. I have put my spirit upon him. He shall teach the true way to the nations. He shall not cry out or shout aloud, or make his voice heard in the streets. He shall not break the bruised reed, or snuff out even a dim wick. He shall bring forth the true way. He shall grow dim and be bruised till he has established the true way on earth (Is 42:1-4).
a. Encounter with Christ during an Inward Journey. Sharing that Experience with others. The entire thrust of this paper is about sharing the Good News. And we have come a long way. We have sought to study the core message of Vatican II and identified it as a responsibility to the World. We realized that we need to strengthen our sense of responsibility further and offer the gift of the Gospel to humanity, both in word and in deed, amidst life’s complex challenges. This service cannot be adequately fulfilled except by persons who have been inwardly transformed by Christ: people who have ventured on an Inward Journey, heard an Inner Voice, felt the Godlike Seed within awakened by an Encounter, developed a Sense of Responsibility, and Committed the self totally to the Mission of sharing that experience. And this encounter is with Christ. We Christians have no doubt about. The Synod on New Evangelization is about the tapping the resource of that Encounter and making it bear fruit. I quote below two passages from the Instrumentum Laboris:

1. Encounter, Conversion, Transformation, Witness. No. 19 : “This encounter with Jesus, through his Spirit, is the Father’s great gift to humanity. We are prepared for this encounter through the action of grace in us. In such an encounter, we feel an attraction which leads to our transformation, causing us to see new dimensions to who we are and making us partakers of divine life(cf. 2 Pet 1:4). After this encounter, everything is different as a result of metanoia, that is, the state of conversion strongly urged by Jesus himself(cf. Mk 1:15). In a personal encounter with Jesus Christ, faith takes the form of a relationship with him and in remembrance of him, especially in the Eucharist and the Word of God, and creates in us the mind of Christ, through the Spirit, a mentality which makes us recognize our brothers and sisters, gathered
by the Spirit in his Church, and, in turn, see ourselves as **witnesses and heralds** of this Gospel. This encounter equips us to **do new things and witness to the transformation of our lives** in the works of conversion as announced by the prophets” *(cf. Jer 3:6; Ex 36:24-36).*

2. **A Gentle Appeal. Determination. Resourcefulness.** *No.49:* “In this regard, the **new evangelization** takes the **form of an appeal,** a question which the Church raises about herself, so that she might muster her **spiritual energy** and **be determined** in this new cultural setting to take a clear and active role by acknowledging whatever is good in these new areas, while giving renewed **vitality to her faith** and her **duty to evangelize.** The adjective ‘new’ refers to a cultural situation which has changed and the need for the Church, with **renewed energy, determination, resourcefulness** and newness, to look at the way she lives and **transmits the faith.”**

b. **The Context of Diverse Heritages.** One other emphasis of this paper has been to render this service within the **“cultural setting”** *(IL 49)* where we are. All cultures are in fast erosion. If we are to serve humanity, we need to know more about it and learn to love it in its cultural rootedness. It is among these diverse heritages that we witness to Christ. It is when we love and esteem what people love and esteem that we will win a hearing. It is only when they see that what we want to do is to work for their common wellbeing and prosperity with **“mounting generosity”** *(GS 93)* that we gain persuasiveness and develop convincing power. In this connection these words of Arnold Toynbee may sound relevant, “We shall, however, have to do more than just understand each other’s **cultural heritages,** and more even than appreciate them. We shall have to value them and love
them as being parts of Mankind’s common treasure and therefore ours too …” (Toynbee 47).

c. “Be Gentle as Doves” (Mt 10:16). There is a way of teaching that cannot fail. Jesus is proposing to us the way of persuasion. Instrumentum Laboris 49 says, New Evangelization is a gentle appeal. It is an expression of the gentleness and kindness of Christ (2 Cor 10:1). It

- Will fall like showers on young plants, like gentle rain on tender grass (Deut 32:2)
- She speaks with gentle wisdom (Prov 31:26)
- By the gentleness and kindness of Christ I beg (2 Cor 10:1)
- You must do it in a gentle way (Gal 6:1)
- Show a gentle attitude towards everyone (Philip 4:5),(Tit 3:2)
- We were gentle when we were with you (1 Thes 2:7)
- A good and patient teacher...is gentle as he corrects his opponents (2 Tim 2:25)
- He is able to be gentle with those who are ignorant and make mistakes (Heb 5:2)
- Do it with gentleness and respect (1 Pet 3:16)

For the meek shall persuade the world.

d. The Power of Gentle Action. If the content of the Gospel is important, the manner of presentation is equally important. The Gospel comes alive when it is presented in life-contexts. It becomes relevant and meaningful when it is offered after deep reflection and with a ‘holistic sense of responsibility’. It becomes acceptable when it is offered in gentleness. The gentleness I am referring to stands for respect, sobriety, balance, moderation, a holistic view of things, universal outlook, self-criticism and self-correction, awareness of consequences, acceptance of the complementary nature of things, and openness to the wisdom of the ‘other’. And we never give up; we are ever at our mission of teaching. Confucius said, “But if even
simple peasant comes in all sincerity and asks me a question, I am ready to thrash the matter out, with all its pros and cons, to the very end” *(Analects IX,7).*

e. Surprisingly, the Physicist David Peat has these amazing words about the power of ‘gentle action’: “**Gentle action** is global… It addresses itself not just to practical issues, as the price of oil or the efficiency of a given factory, but also to values, ethics, and the quality of life… Like the ripples around the point, it moves inward to **converge on a particular issue.** Gentle action works not through force and raw energy but by modifying the very processes that generate and sustain an undesired or harmful effect… Gentle action… gives a new dimension to the whole idea of social action… It suggests that the origins of effective action can lie in **ordinary people,** both as individuals and as members of a group—and with their values, ethics, goals, and desires” *(Hathaway 387).*

f. “Learn from me”, Jesus said, “because I am **gentle** and humble in spirit” *(Matthew 11:29).* This manner of sharing the Gospel in life-contexts cannot fail.
References

Gaudium et Spes (The Church in the Modern World, a Document of Vatican II).
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