What Can be the Role of Christian Social Ethics in Inter-religious Development Cooperation by the Asian Churches?

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Introductory Remarks
Pope Benedict XVI in his speech to the new Korean ambassador to the Holy See on 21 October 2010 in Rome: ”The concentration on economic growth can all too easily bypass ethical considerations, with the result that the poorer elements in society tend to be excluded from their rightful share of the nation’s prosperity”

1. The Role of Social Engagement of Christian Churches in Asia
Reflection on the theological presuppositions and motivations of development work, and the need of inter-religious cooperation within the different study programmes of the FABC.

2. Obstacles in Inter-religious Cooperation in the Field of Development
Christianity has the negative image of having received a preferential treatment by the former colonial masters and even today to profit from the neo-colonial structures.
The growth of fundamentalist and radical currents in several religions as obstacle.
Aggressive missionary activities by fundamentalist and evangelical groups.
in spite of the radical tendencies in some religions there is no real alternative to dialogue.

3. Criticism of the Church’s Social Teaching in Asia
The Social Encyclicals fail to develop new models of development and the social order.
Three characteristics of Christian Social Teaching:
   a) The dignity of the human person
   b) The principle of natural law respectively on the principle of rationality.
   c) The principle of the preference of the common good before the rights of the individual person

4. Basic Human Communities
Only concerted activities together with partners of other religions can be successful. The inter-religious aspect, that is of engaging in dialogue on faith issues, takes second place.

5. Cosmic Religiosity – a Resource of a pan-Asian spirituality?
The values contained in the traditions of the tribal and indigenous peoples are acknowledged.
And the Church is obliged to preserve these cultural and religious traditions.

6. Christian Social Work an Inspiration for Hinduism and Buddhism?
Christian engagement in the fields of social work, health care and societal development has initiated corresponding developments within Hinduism and Buddhism.

7. Inter-Religious Cooperation within the FABC
The close connection between poverty and religiosity in Asia constitutes the need of Christians working together with the members of non-Christian religions.
8. The Seminars: “Working Together for Harmony in God’s World
The series of seminars with the overall theme of “Working Together for Harmony in God’s World” (BIRA V) were organised by the Office for Ecumenical and Inter-religious Affairs (OEIA) between 1992-1996. Each seminar was dealing with one of the major Asian religions, with Muslims (Pakistan 1992), with Buddhists (Thailand 1994), with Hindus (Delhi 1995), and with Daoists and Confucianists (Taiwan 1996).

In the concluding seminar held in Indonesia in 1996 most participants in the previous seminars came together to analyse the results of the preceding seminars. There was agreement that the results of the conferences had to be concretised in order to become effective.

9. Evaluating the Program of Inter-Religious Cooperation within the FABC
In a sober assessment one has to admit that the results do not reach the faithful at the grassroots.

Appendix: Areas of Inter-Religious Cooperation in Asia
1. Cooperation in the case of natural catastrophes, such as earth-quakes, tsunami, etc.
2. Assistance for migrants and refugees, e.g. Cambodia, Vietnam and other.
3. Inter-religious cooperation in the fight against the HIV/AIDS Pandemie e.g. in Thailand
4. Inter-religious cooperation against discrimination and violence
   - In the Philippines: ‘Bishops’- Ulema-Forum, Silsilah Movement in Zamboanga.
   - Malaysia: Malaysian Consultative Council of Buddhism, Christianity, Hinduism and Sikhism
   - India: Cooperation between Christians, Hindus and Muslims in Rajasthan for the defence of human rights.
     In Madhya Pradesh the National Secular Forum (Rashtriya Secular Munch) was formed from members of different social groups to defend the rights of the minorities in 2006.
   - Indonesia: Peace-Building Courses were held for young Christians and Muslims from the problem areas of Sulawesi and the Moluccas in Bali in 2006.
   - Philippines: Seminar “Cebu Dialogue on Regional Interfaith Cooperation for Peace, Development and Human Dignity” with Christian, Buddhist, Muslim and Hind participants was held in Lapu-Lapu City in 2006.
5. Inter-religious Cooperation in human rights issues e.g. in Thailand, Bangladesh and other Asian countries.
6. Inter-religious Cooperation in the field of international tourism
   e.g. ECPAT (End Child Prostitution/Child Pornography and Trafficking of Children for Sexual Purposes).