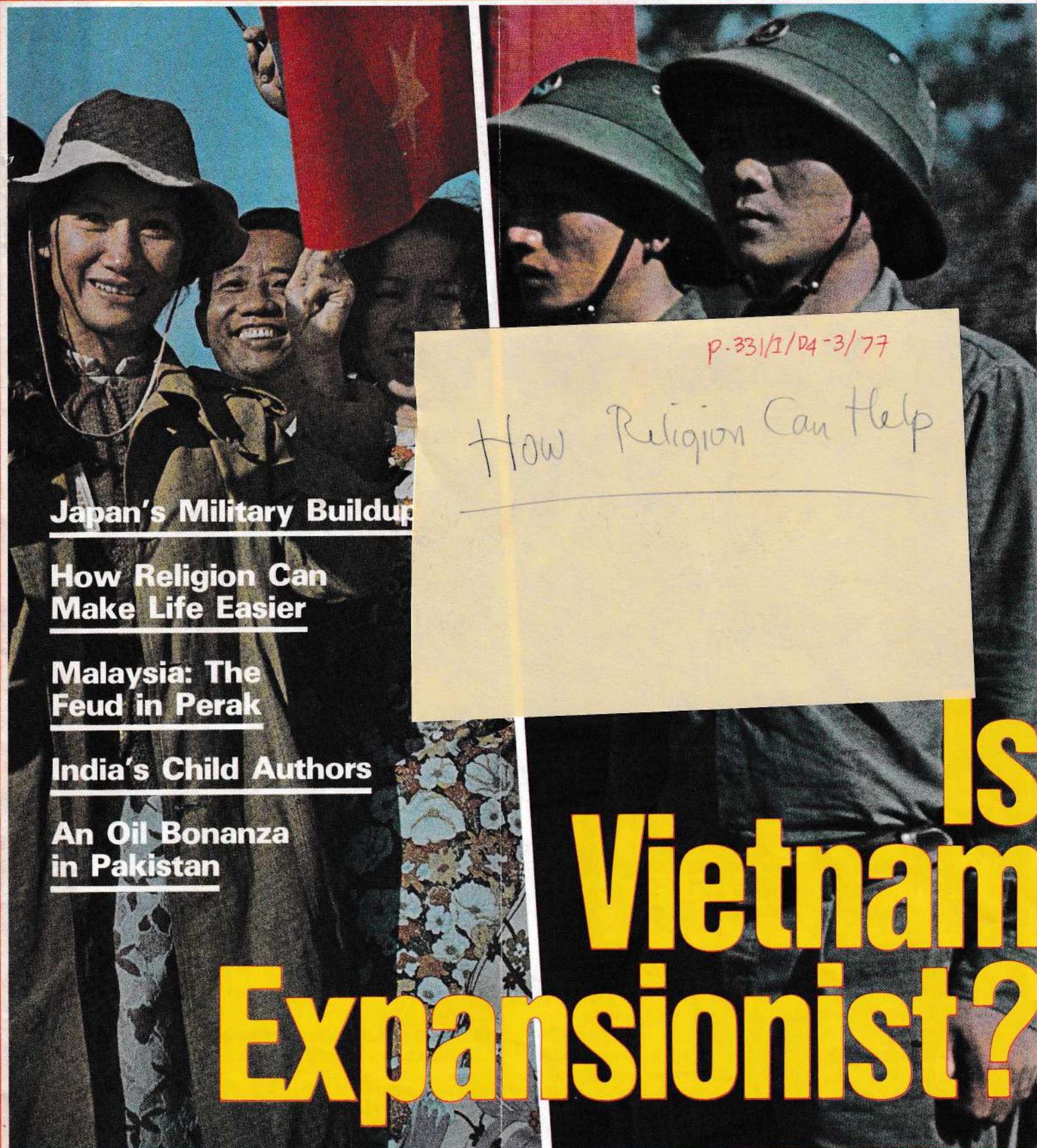


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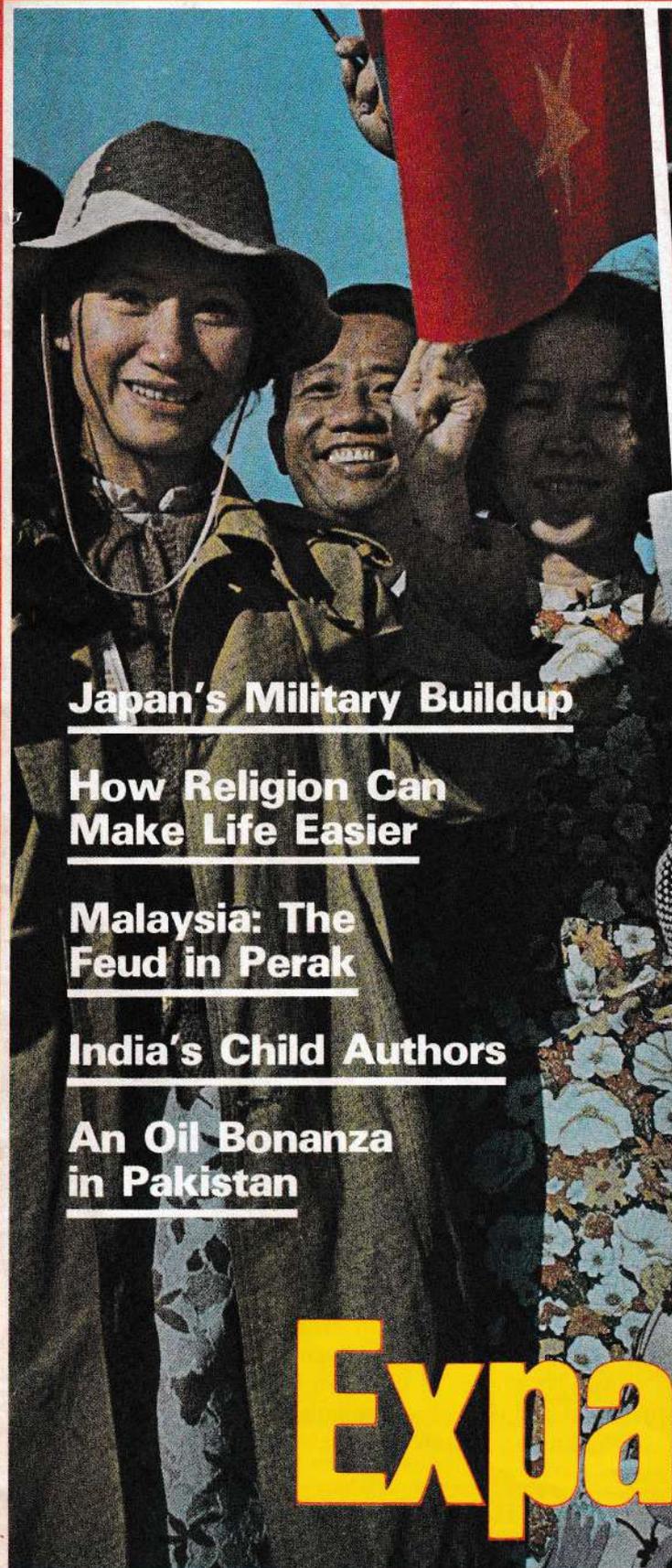
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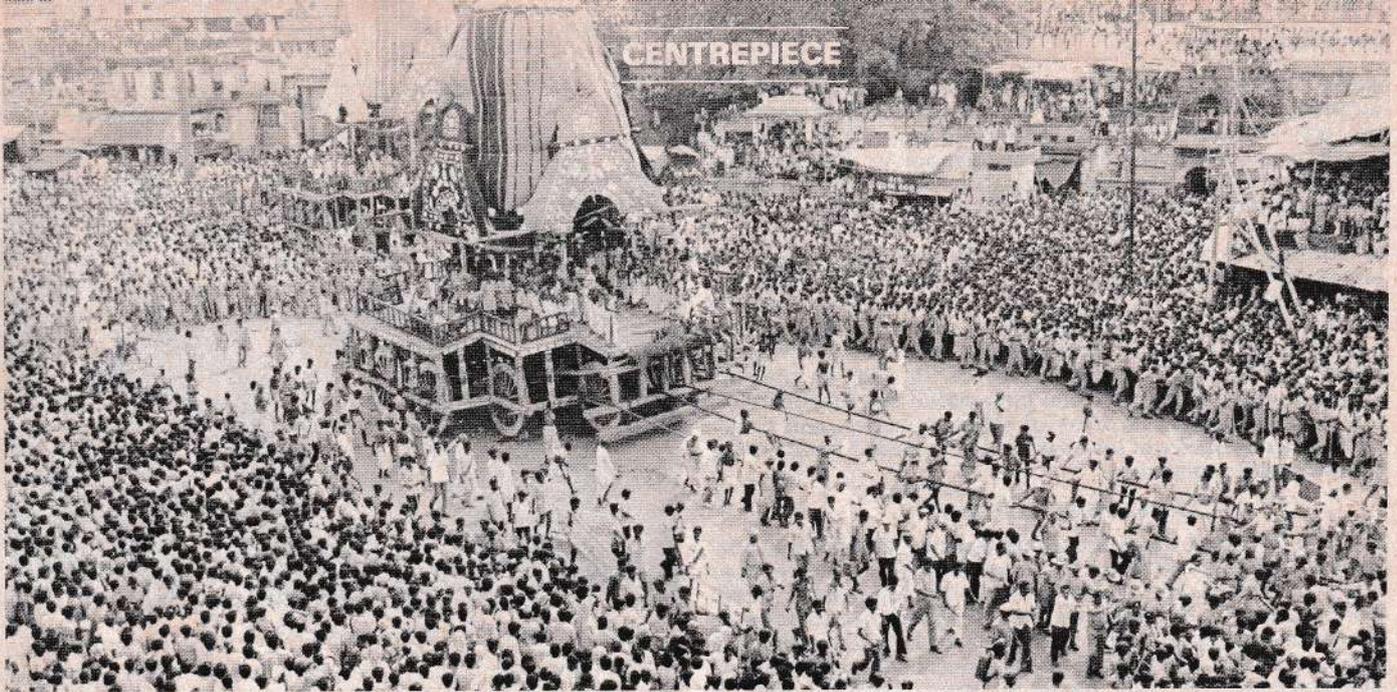
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'Asia's population is in the process of doubling...Development efforts are already inadequate'

How Religion Can Help

PROBLEMS of international peace and domestic security have assumed a central place in our awareness of the situation in Asia, for inner tensions are inherent in the processes of development and self-renewal now going on in the region. By mobilising their spiritual resources, Asia's religions can enhance our capacity to deal with these problems.

Our dream of a new structure of peace after the attainment of nuclear parity between the superpowers and the ending of the cold war was shattered on the rocks of new international realities. These realities brought the Vietnam War to a close, but left unresolved the problems of divided Korea and China. The reduction of tensions between the Soviet Union and the U.S., which has come to be known as detente, may prove to be limited mainly to Europe. Already there are signs that the Third World will remain an area of continued big-power rivalry.

We are now at the beginning of attempts by the Third World to bring about a new international economic order, based not on the structural dualism that has kept the Third World in dependency for centuries, but on a more equitable and democratic order. What we are witnessing at present are the Third World's attempts to organise itself for that struggle through what some people have called the "unionisation" of the developing nations. It is a struggle that may lead to a prolonged period of international tensions, possibly even breakdowns in the international order. And it is not likely to end before a major redistribution of power has taken place across the globe.

International peace is bound to be affected also by the last stages of the long and painful process of decolonisation. Here too are to be found the seeds of conflict that may become a threat to peace. A violent resolution of the decolonisation process in southern Africa, with direct or indirect superpower involvement, for instance, will have serious repercussions for the rest of the world, including Asia.

Below the level at which the superpowers are trying to redefine their relationship with each other in the lands and oceans of Asia, economic rivalries among major industrial nations are affecting the conditions of peace in Asia. The

Soedjatmoko, the well-known philosopher, served as Indonesia's ambassador to the U.S. from 1968 to 1971. Since then he has been involved with the development planning agency in Jakarta, Bappenas.

unrestrained sale of arms to Third World countries, and competition in the sale of nuclear power-generating plants, are creating new threats to peace in Asia. It would be unrealistic to close one's eyes to the fact that this particular flow of resources to the Third World has already rekindled old fears and old rivalries — and old as well as new dreams of regional hegemony.

Ironically, it was both the process of decolonisation and the dissolution of the cold war blocs that made it possible for these rivalries and disputes, resulting from the arbitrariness of the old colonial boundaries, to emerge. They also made

By Soedjatmoko

possible the surfacing of domestic social tensions as problems of communal or religious conflict, often with serious international implications.

The almost inevitable transnational impact of national economic policies today, the permeability of national borders for international economic transactions and capital flow, and the impact of modern electronic communications, make it impossible for any nation to pursue its national interest in total disregard of the legitimate interests of other nations. Each nation will have to learn to define the domestic economic or environmental problems it faces, not only in terms of its own national interest but in terms of the possible international impact of its sovereign decisions.

There is, of course, another dimension to the search for peace, security and human dignity in Asia, which no balance of forces and no set of international arrangements can ignore. The population of Asia is in the process of doubling within the next 20 years, with the number of young people larger than ever, in absolute numbers as well as in proportion to the total. Development efforts, especially in the populous countries, have already become inadequate to prevent the growth of the poor, the illiterate, the unemployed, and those whose minds are permanently damaged as a result of infant malnutrition. It is obvious that the fundamental challenge posed by the concept of human dignity calls for a much more adequate capacity to come to grips with these problems on the national as well as international level.

All this forces us to think about peace and international security in new ways. Obviously it is no longer sufficient to think of peace only as the absence of violence in relations among nations, or as the condition of military stalemate at

either the nuclear or conventional level. A peace that is incapable of overcoming the structural dualism that stands in the way of the successful pursuit of the Third World's development efforts could at best be temporary. Peace will be durable only if the international order supporting it is capable of the peaceable management of structural changes within itself.

Also in this world of interdependence, no nation can any longer define and safeguard its security in its own terms. All nations, including the most powerful, will have to learn to live with an unprecedented degree of vulnerability as a permanent condition of the international order. This will require a much greater willingness and a greater capacity on the part of each country to perceive and understand the legitimate interests, aspirations and fears of other countries, and to accept a greater degree of tolerance in the pursuit by each of its interests and aspirations.

JOINT WORKS OF PEACE

Peace will also depend on our capacity for international cooperation on a hitherto unprecedented scale and level of intensity. To this end, we will have to develop more effective instruments of multiple coexistence, as it will be necessary to encompass in these efforts nations with widely differing social systems, ideological orientations and approaches to development. We will have to start thinking not of alliances for war or defence, but of the undertaking of joint works of peace: joint regional river-basin development, joint industrial projects, joint projects to secure adequate food production and supply, joint environmental management, protection and improvement, common efforts to control the indiscriminate sale of arms affecting regional balances, and the joint development of the poorest regions in the world.

Peace in Asia from now on will depend to a much larger extent on the capacity of Asian nations to develop their own perceptions of the course of world history, and Asia's common future within it. Asia will have to be able to perceive its problems in its own terms — not those derived from perceptions developed by, and serving the interests of, the major powers outside the region.

All this requires attitudinal changes, on the national level, of a rather fundamental nature. In the first place there is the need for a much greater capacity for empathy with other cultures, religions and political ideologies, requiring deeper level of intercultural understanding than have been apparent so far. We will have to build the institutions that will enable us to do so. But we will also need to build on the personal-level institutions within each of our own societies; this will nurture interest in people different from one's own group. In the past, it was usually religious institutions that nurtured such sensitivity, albeit within the confines of one's own faith. Now we will have to go beyond that.

Secondly, we will all have to learn to manage our fears more effectively and constructively. The management of fear may well be the hinge on which human dignity in Asia will depend. Permanent vulnerability in an interdependent world will require greater courage to take risks for peace and necessary social change and political adjustment, and to accept the deep uncertainties as part of modern international reality. It is the kind of courage that only faith and the clarity of a global moral vision can give.

THE EMANCIPATION OF PEOPLE

The continuing tensions between the need for public order, stability and security on the one hand, and for continuing social change (with all its dislocations, uncertainties and anxieties) are to some extent an extension of the inner contradictions within the development process itself. Development is in part the managed transformation of a society, its reorganisation and restructuring, enabling it to pursue new goals and to meet new challenges. As such we are dealing with policies of change from above, with mobilisation and national discipline.

On the other hand, development is also the emancipation of people, their liberation from obsolete traditional and hierarchical social structures and institutions. Development in this sense is concerned with human growth — with human self-fulfilment, initiative, voluntary participation and the free assumption of new responsibilities. In short, develop-



'A need for empathy with other cultures'

ment in this sense centres on people and their individual and collective capacity to respond creatively to, and to organise themselves for, new tasks and opportunities. It is the process of a society's self-renewal from below.

These two essential elements of the development process have different requirements and dynamics which are often contradictory. This contradiction is the source of much of the inner tension of the development process, and these tensions — even under the best of circumstances — often are aggravated by the anxieties and frustrations that accompany intended as well as unintended social change (especially in relation to the heightened expectations of the young).

In addition, the transition from a first priority to a second one in the development process, for instance from growth to social justice, after the first phase of growth, has turned out to be much more difficult than expected. Growth apparently creates its own system of power, and the re-allocation of the fruits of growth for purposes of income redistribution and for broadening the social base of development is often seen as a threat by those who have benefited directly from it.

A FLOWERING OF FREEDOM AND DIGNITY

As a result, some developing nations failed to make this transition and were therefore incapable of preventing the total polarisation of their societies; they have gone into a pathological tailspin of escalating violence. Thus the capacity of developing nations to deal effectively with shifting priorities, as they progress on their developmental trajectory, seems to hinge on the maintenance of a precarious but essential balance between three points of a triangle: growth, stability and security, and social justice. The experience of a number of countries suggests that this balance is an essential precondition for the observance of human rights, and for the flowering of individual freedom and human dignity over and beyond meeting basic human needs. Only when such a balance exists are national discipline, social solidarity and voluntary self-restraint compatible with freedom and human dignity.

In the light of these observations, it is obvious that no religion can any longer avoid coming to grips with profound social changes and the scale of attendant problems in Asia. There is growing awareness of the immorality of poverty and injustice — awareness that poverty and injustice are not problems on the individual level only, to be dealt with through the traditional channels of religious charity, but are the consequences of structural relationships. If religions in the past have avoided dealing with these problems in those terms, by paying exclusive attention to single individuals and their individual salvation, an understanding of the structural nature of these problems now brings these religions face to face with the problems of power and the eternal tension between power and morality.

This creates a range of moral dilemmas requiring a heightened capacity for moral reasoning on the part of

these religions. None of these problems lends itself to simple moralistic solutions, with choices between black and white; nor has history shown itself to be a morality play. No social movement, no social class or group — no nation, for that matter — can be considered the exclusive or preferred vehicle of historical morality. All movements, and all groups of people, reflect man's inadequacy and are a mixture of good as well as evil, however noble and moral their motivations.

No religion therefore can fully identify with any particular social movement for change. All religions are called upon to be part of morally desirable and justifiable change. Still, they can only do so to the extent that they do not lose themselves in it.

On the other hand, they will have to recognise the moral impulse behind the drive for development, and to identify with it. They will have to recognise that the headlong pursuit of economic development may at some point become destructive of the very human dignity, freedom and human rights in whose name the development effort was launched in the first place.

EVENTS BEYOND RATIONAL COMPREHENSION

There is, then, a need for the religions of Asia to learn to live with the conflicting demands of development as managed social transformation. They will have to assume part of the responsibility for increasing a nation's overall capacity to manage the tensions inherent in the development process, thus preventing total polarisation and self-destruction. They will have to learn, while taking the moral positions which they inevitably will have to take, to mediate in the often conflicting demands of public order and social change, by relating them to a moral context that transcends the political and ideological passions of the day; by subordinating the state, its interest and our subservience to it, as well as the pursuit of justice and equity, to a transcendental structure of meaning in which the broader values and purposes of society and mankind are rooted.

The cataclysmic events that have taken place in several countries in Asia in the past decades, the intensity of the emotions of hope (but also of hatred, anger and fear) and the scale of the violence that has accompanied these events, inevitably make us realise that the magnitude of the changes through which Asia is going is, to a large extent, almost beyond rational comprehension.

In the face of events of this magnitude, the social scientists, development planners and technocrats are humbled. One senses that one is confronted with — and, as Asians, subjected to — forces in the tide of history as primordial and elementary as the process of motion below the crust of the earth.

Still, the comparison with the blindness of natural forces, and the random nature of their impact on human life, does not absolve the human being from his responsibility, however limited his powers. We try to look for the meaning of history as it unfolds, and to place ourselves within the context. Only in this way can a human being define for himself the social responsibility from which he cannot escape; he is not only an observer but a participant, an actor, in that process.

Beyond any commitment to particular change, therefore, no religion can escape the responsibility of trying to reduce as much as possible the social and human cost of change, humanising those processes as much as possible. This means an insistence on due process, on democratic procedures, on the rule of law and human rights, wherever change is brought about. One wonders whether, in periods of convulsive change, one of the major contributions the religions could make might not be simply through their caring about human beings, their concern about human cost, even when change is non-violent, and about civility.

It will require a greater capacity to articulate the moral problems of our time in ways that are relevant to the policy options realistically available to both government and the governed.

No nation can survive for long unless it is certain of the righteousness of its course and the morality of its essential purposes. Especially in periods of transition and

transformation, the need to keep in touch with what might be called the moral core of the nation is exceedingly strong. There is also the yearning for certitude which only a clear religio-moral framework can provide, even when the state has organised itself on a secular basis.

Here lies the constant and continuing challenge religion faces in periods of social transformation, with their passionate absolutisms and inclinations towards violent action: to provide a structure of meaning that reaches beyond politics; to relate the course of human events and man's responsibility and action to moral purposes; to remind him of man's inherent inadequacy and thus to teach him the humility of the mind.

Much will also depend on the willingness of the various religions in Asia to refrain, directly or indirectly, from trying to convert adherents of other religions, and on their willingness to subordinate proselytising to the need for greater solidarity among themselves in their common efforts to secure the minimum needs for the maintenance of civility and human dignity. Religions in Asia will also have to work towards the mutual acceptance of, and trust in, a sense of the basic humanity that we all share — even with those whom we fear or despise.

The necessity of sharing this small globe, and of sharing a common future with 4 billion other people (with 8 billion during the next generation and, at some point in the future, with 15 billion) forces us to rethink the cultural



'The human is not only an observer but an actor'

and social arrangements with which we live and work together, quarrel and make up, love and hate. And many in Asia will look to their religion to help them find answers.

In this search it may be very important for religions in Asia to look into their rich individual and collective heritage of the past. As man redefines his relationship with his natural and social environment, and tries to overcome the inner fragmentation that modernisation often leaves him with, he may find again old notions of harmony, balance and proportion.

THE NEED FOR SECULAR WISDOM

This could lead to the rediscovery and revitalisation of our awareness of the transcendental dimension in human life and in society and in the unfolding of human events that we call history. For it is only in God that man becomes himself.

The question before all of us is this: Can the religions of Asia, or rather their adherents, find within themselves, individually and collectively, the strength, the moral vision and the secular wisdom to help secure peace with human dignity in the decades to come? To nurture within each of our nations the courage and the political will to develop our societies into more humane ones, through the use of more humane means, despite the greater risks? We can only hope and pray that we are not found wanting.