

New Christianity in Asia

Peter C. Phan on the
Example of Asian
Catholicism

“A New Christianity: But What Kind?”

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A critique of
Philip
Jenkins' *The
Next
Christendom*

- Jenkin's thesis:
- Christianity in the global South, with its focus on charismatic healing, prophecy, Biblical literalism is a return to a Pre-Tridentine form of Christendom

- The evolution of Asian Catholicism belies his thesis
- The focus of Asian Catholicism is on
 - Liberation
 - Inculturation
 - Interreligious dialogue

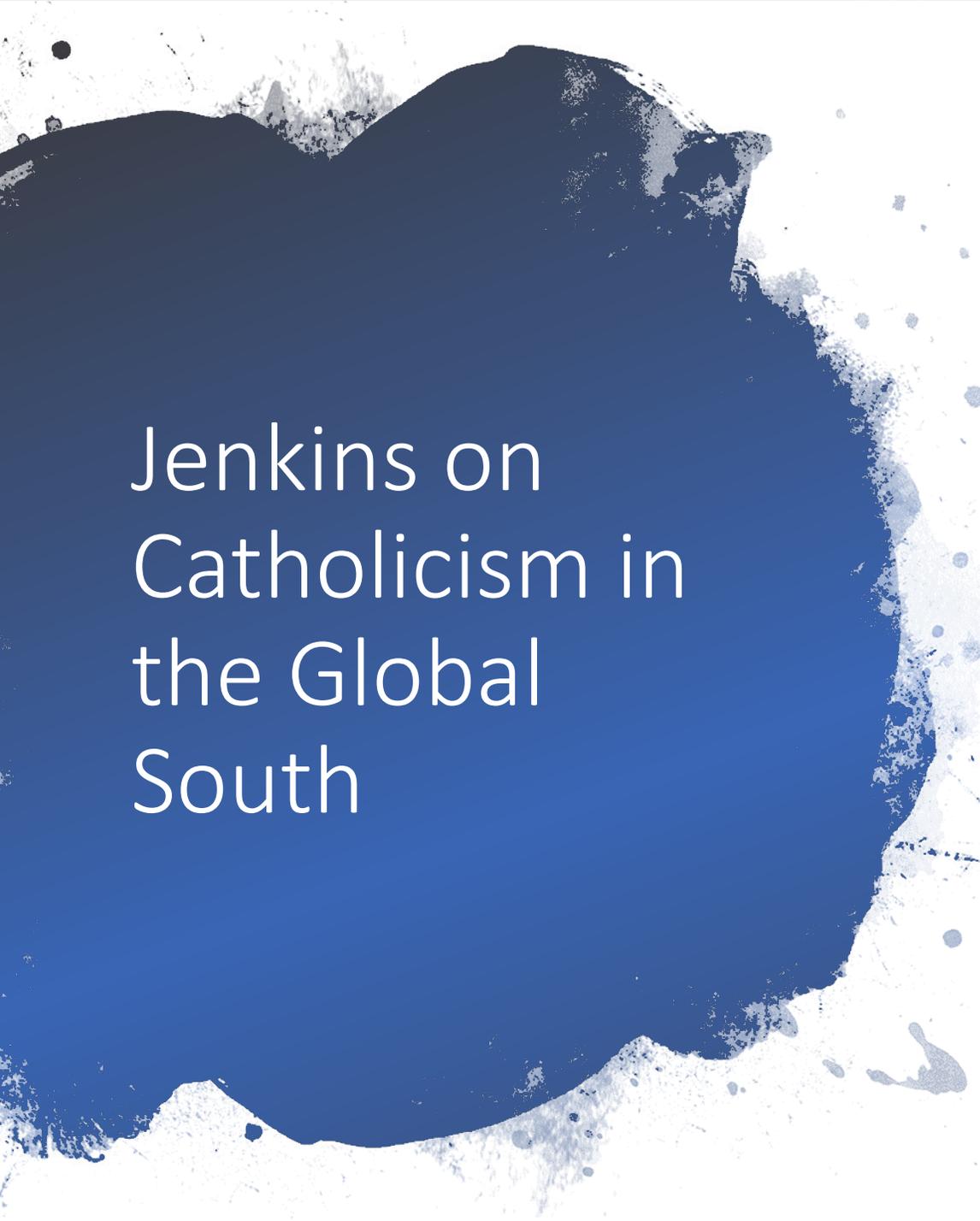
Contrast: Christendom vs. Christianity

- Christendom (Jenkin's term)
 - A medieval model
 - Christian dominance over society and culture (politico—religious order)
 - Symbolized in the medieval text of the “dictatus papae” and its monarchical model of the papacy - a “universal bishop” able to depose bishops and emperors; claims that the Roman Church has never and never will err (“Caesaropapism)
 - A unified, “Western” Christianity, defending itself against Islam through the crusades
- Christianity (Phan)
 - Christians collectively
 - Not a Christian “world”
 - There are many forms of “Christianity”
 - Many “Christianities” or forms of Christianity co-exist in the world church



Features of Southern Christianity according to Jenkins

- Great majority are economically and socially poor, often persecuted
- In geographic locations where they are likely to come into conflict with other religions – Islam, Hinduism
- Prefer a literal interpretation of the Bible, making use of prophetic and apocalyptic books
- Conservative in moral teaching – reactionary by standards of economically developed nations
- Religiously traditional, orthodox, supernatural – emphasis on faith-healing, exorcism, and dream-visions



Jenkins on Catholicism in the Global South

- “The Catholic faith that is rising rapidly in Africa and Asia looks very much like a pre-Vatican II faith, being more traditional in its respect for the power of bishops and priests and in its preference for devotions”
- Reflects the legacy of “Counter-Reformation” missionaries from the 16th century on



Phan's observations on the Asian reality

- 50 countries, 30% of world's land mass
- Home to 60% of the world's population (3.7 billion people)
- From 1950 to 2000, human population of Asia increased by 104%
- 10.3% of global Catholic population live in Asia – only 3% of the overall Asian population
- 7/10 Asian Catholics live in Southeast Asia – Philippines, East Timor

Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences (FABC)

- plenary assemblies (every 4 years)
- To foster solidarity, co-responsibility, mutual support
- Statements: provide theological and pastoral orientations
- John Paul II, "Ecclesia in Asia" (1999)
- Asian bishops insist that they not only learn from, but they have something to teach the Church of Rome and the universal church



A Kingdom- centered church

- The church is not at the center of mission – the life and activities of the church
- The church sees itself as servant to humanity
- The kingdom/reign of God is promoted through dialogue
- “no longer is the church considered the pinnacle or center of the Christian life. Rather it is moved from the center to the periphery and from the top to the bottom”



Mission – service of God’s reign

- “The only reason that the church exists is to serve the reign of God, that is, to help bring about what has commonly been referred to as the “kingdom values.” It is these values that the church must promote and not its self-aggrandizement or reputation or institutional survival.”
- The church is not an end in itself, but exists only to serve others
- Goal is not expansion of membership, institutional prosperity, “church growth”



Kingdom values

- The saving presence of Jesus and the power of the Spirit
 - Forgiveness
 - Reconciliation
 - Re-establishing peace between peoples, between humanity and God, between humanity and creation
 - Includes a preferential option for the poor
 - Promoting human dignity and human rights

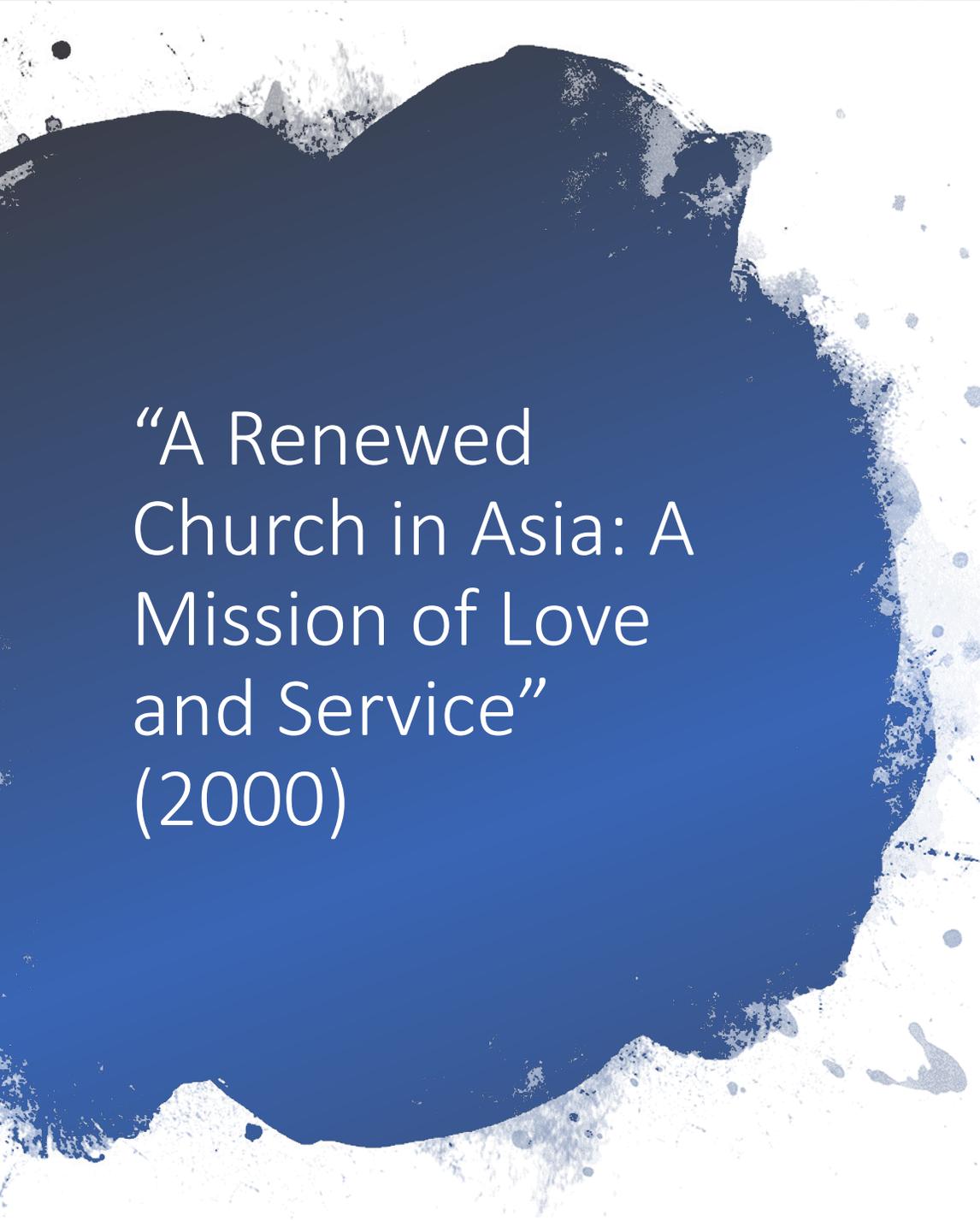
Local Church – Community of Equal Disciples

- “community of communities” : organized in grassroots “small Christian communities”
- Emphasizes the fundamental equality of all the baptized – this must be complemented by structures and procedures of governance that assure accountability
- “discipleship of equals”: a participatory model recognizing the gifts of all the baptized
- “pastoral priority” of co-responsibility in mission
- Church is to be a “prophetic sign” in society, pointing toward the kingdom



Mission as dialogue

- 3 complementary and interrelated dialogues:
 - With Asian cultures (inculturation)
 - With Asian religions (interreligious dialogue)
 - With Asian peoples, especially the poor (liberation)
- Through common life, common action, theological exchange, sharing religious experiences



“A Renewed
Church in Asia: A
Mission of Love
and Service”
(2000)

- a church of the poor and of the young – sharing in their poverty
- A “truly local church”: “incarnate in the people, indigenous and enculturated
- Deep interiority: fostering a culture of prayer – leading to witness
- A “community of communities” – linked to other local churches
- Missional: “a compassionate companion and partner of all Asians”
- Participative structures for empowerment of all (laity, women)
- Serving life: dignity, compassion, care of the earth, vision of mutuality
- Triple dialogue: other religions, peoples, especially the poor

FABC approach
undercuts any
return to
model of
“Christendom”

- Fosters empowerment and participation of laity in decision-making
- Does not denigrate non-Christian religions, but promotes respect
- “No Asian bishop would ever imagine that he could ordain conservative foreign priests so that they can go back home and propagate a Christendom version of Christianity”
- Where there is interest in popular devotions and healing, these are not “privatistic or individualistic piety of the Counter-Reformation or the pre-Vatican II era.”



Northern vs Southern Christianities?

- Phan suggests we need to see them not in opposition, but as “communities in solidarity because both need each other to be fully church and to liberate themselves from possible excesses.”
- An opportunity for mutual learning
- An opportunity for “growth into catholicity”