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A Challenge to the Modernizing Elite*

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IN response to the scholarly paper of Dr. Emerito P. Nacpil, "Modernization and the Search for a New Image of Man," I wish to quote two passages:

First: "None of these [Asian] societies have ever known what spring is: they have never experienced a sense of refreshment and renewal. . . . Asian history is the history of inert being, without sufficient resilience to defy destiny." (p. 1)

And the second: "The image of the traditional Asian is that of a poor emaciated, sluggish, but contented cow — a patient and pathetic victim of circumstance." (p. 5)

I quote these two passages with respect but at the same time with a certain sadness, because I seriously doubt whether it serves the purpose — to help the Asian in his attempt towards modernization and a new image of himself — to onesidedly stress and overstress the negative aspects of his personality and cul-

* This short note constituted Rev. Francis Senden's observations concerning a paper by Emerito P. Nacpil which, though read elsewhere on another occasion, developed in greater detail the significant theses offered in his comment on the AECD report. Since Father Senden read this at the Echo Seminar, we reprint it here with other papers and comments made there.

ture. On the contrary, I sincerely think that people *are* what others keep on thinking and saying what they are (Charles Cooley), as man builds up his self-image in relation to and with the help of others, whom he uses as his looking-glass or mirror. Consequently, if the "Modernizing Elite" repeatedly states that "Asia never found what Europe discovered — man — individual, self-conscious, expansive; seeking, acquiring, and tormented" (p. 1), and in addition condemns what is highly positive in the Asian, namely: "... [that he] has always been part of a group, at all times subordinated to ends larger than himself, willing to lose himself in something immense..." (p. 1), the Asian will endlessly keep searching for self-identity, and never find himself. A purely negative, abstract approach, completely divorced from the cultural context, from the social system the Asian is living in rather obstructs his modernization and "self-discovery" than promotes it. If no positive points from which he can take off are indicated, the modernization of the Asian will amount to self-destruction, to creating a vacuum that has to be filled with the Western man who is efficient, diligent, orderly, punctual, frugal, scrupulously honest, rational, prepared for change, alert to opportunities, energetic and enterprising, full of integrity and self-reliance, cooperative, willing to take the long view.

The Asian to my mind, is caught in a social system, created, maintained and promoted by the modernizing elite, a system that is greatly responsible for the negative aspects of his personality and culture, and does not allow the positive aspects which he undoubtedly possesses to erupt. The Asian is basically religious, intelligent, rational, alert to opportunities, sensitive, refined, open to change, efficient, diligent and honest. He possesses all these qualities if not in a superior then at least in an equal degree with the Westerner. But he is pushed back behind a wall of self-defense erected by the modernizing elite. There in utter insecurity, he acts rationally and meaningfully; sharpens his intellect, strengthens his energy, and becomes alert to opportunities. However, in this atmosphere of extreme insecurity, the positive qualities of the Asian take on negative appearances: religion used for the immediate solution of his material problems is called magic; family solidarity based on self-defense be-

comes individualism; the grabbing of opportunities in the struggle for survival is called lack of value-synthesis; the self-provision of the exploited becomes dishonesty; the non-acceptance of monopolous transactions is dubbed as resistance to change; the perpetual consideration of possibilities is called ambivalence, indecision, inaction, laziness; the disregard of an uncertain future is termed anticipation, orientation to the present moment or lack of planning.

And so the social system based on an unbalanced social structure maintained and promoted by the modernizing elite forces the Asian to act against his inner nature which is one of other-directedness and social awareness. As long as this social system is kept in existence and allowed to distort the inner nature of the Asian there is no foundation or at least little foundation for Christianity which means a total concern for our fellow-men, love and justice for all who have been made in the image of God. Then also, it doesn't make much sense to cite figures of the Bible as examples to the Asian as long as the main road-block has not been removed. The main concern of the modernizing elite should therefore be the change of social structure, of the social system, so as to give the Asian a chance to open himself to modernization ideals.