

An Asian perspective

Addressing the Faces of Exclusion

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It is not possible to elaborate on all the exclusion taking place in a continent as large as Asia in the few lines that we are limited to here. On the one hand there is a certain similarity with Latin America and, on the other, the bishops have always emphasized the varied and diverse faces of the excluded in Asia.

In Asia, exclusion takes on the face of abandoned children, abused women, underage workers, indigenous peoples driven from their lands for political and economic interests, migrants who sacrifice much by leaving their families in search of greater opportunities in large cities or abroad for the good of their relatives, and finally, all those people who are extremely marginalized because of their social and economic status.

The systemic causes of exclusion depend on the context of each country, but there are several identifiable factors. These include government corruption, lack of state capacity, economic dependency due to control of national resource being in the hands of the richest, social injustice and the exploitation of those living in extreme poverty.

In searching for solutions, with a view to a transformation of the community, a number of avenues become evident. Here, I can point out only two.

Resilience of the people as an extended family. In Asian cultures, the family is not limited to the narrow confines of the family unit but expands to the community. It thus becomes an important reference point and model for inclusion. An example: Recently, with the struggle brought about by the pandemic in the Philippines, a woman started a community pantry in her neighborhood, a food pantry to assist hungry neighbors. It had a handwritten sign: 'Give what you can, take what you need'. The initiative has had such an enormous effect that it has seen more than 300 similar food pantries spring up across the country. By returning to the basic fabric of one community where members live for each other, the structure of dependency is subverted and the chains of indifference, apathy, governmental ineptitude and despair are broken.

The maternal figure as a model of harmony. In many Asian contexts, a patriarchal system regulates social structures and institutions. Against this backdrop, a significant fact appears:

Harmony as a worldview in Asia is not based on an absence of inequalities and crises, but on trust in the maternal figure who finds ways to overcome any difficulties. Here, too, an example: During the pandemic, many Asian migrants living in Rome, especially men, found themselves unemployed. In this difficult situation, it is the mothers who keep families together -- even if they only have odd jobs -- and they also create solidarity within the community. Thus, family members do not become a burden on society's limited resources and powerlessness turns into a relationship of mutual solidarity and selfless love.