



# FIFTY YEARS OF ASIAN PASTORAL GUIDANCE

Collection of the Statements of the  
Asian Bishops' Meeting  
and the Plenary Assemblies of the  
Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences (FABC)  
(1970–2020)

Edited by Vimal Tirimanna, CSSR



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**Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences**

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**Edited by: Vimal Tirimanna, CSsR**

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**FABC Central Secretariat:**

4/F, Holy Cross Centre 72 Yiu Hing Road, Sai Wan Ho, Hong Kong SAR.  
Tel: (+852) 3904 1121, Fax: (+852) 3904 1124  
Email: fabccentral@yahoo.com www.fabc.org

**FABC Documentation Centre:**

**St. Louis Hospital Compound**

3/F, Bank Bldg., 27 South Sathorn Rd. Bangkok 10120, Thailand.  
Tel./Fax: (66-2) 675 5547  
Email: fabcdocctr@gmail.com

**Publishing House:**

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## FOREWORD

I am delighted to learn that the Central Secretariat of the *Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences* (FABC) is bringing out a book on the occasion of the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Asian Bishop's Meeting in 1970 which was the beginning of the FABC. This anniversary book is the re-edited collection of the Final Statements of all the eleven Plenary Assemblies of the FABC that were held so far. It also includes the valuable documents of the 1970 Asian Bishops' Meeting.

While it is particularly important to compile all of the Final Statements of the Plenary Assemblies for easy reference, it is also very beneficial to have the Message and Resolutions of the 1970 Asian Bishops' Meeting. Since we are commemorating the beginnings of the FABC from that 1970 meeting, it is wise to go back to the very beginning to revisit the foundations on which the FABC was built.

At a time when so many Churches elsewhere are keen to know what is happening in the Churches in Asia, this collection will be a useful guide to the important teachings of the Asian bishops. It is important to note here that the FABC teachings have always been in full communion with the teachings of the Universal Catholic Church while having its own Asian flavor and nuances. The very fact that at each and every Plenary Assembly, there has been a special delegate from Rome, is a clear sign of the healthy relationships between the FABC and the Universal Church.

The total corpus of the FABC documents is enormous. In that sense, it will be very useful to have a separate collection of the Final Statements of the FABC's Plenary Assemblies, because the fundamental orientations to all of FABC activities are given by the Plenary Assemblies through these Final Statements.

I express my gratitude to the principal editor Fr. Vimal Tirimanna, CSsR, the former Executive Secretary of the of the FABC Office of Theological Concerns (OTC), for having re-edited the Final Statements to give them a sense of continuity and consistency. I also express my gratitude to the Central Secretariat and in particular to Ms. Christine Tan for the preliminary formatting and preparing most of this work for publication. I am sure the publication of this special volume of the eleven Plenary Assemblies on the occasion of the golden anniversary of the FABC, will surely serve as a useful tool for those interested in not only studying the teachings of the FABC in a

serious way, but also for those who intend to know what the Churches in Asia stand for, on behalf of their teeming millions of people. May this volume serve as yet another step towards making the FABC and its teachings known far and wide!

✠ **Charles Cardinal Bo**  
**Archbishop of Yangon, Myanmar**  
**President, FABC**

## INTRODUCTION

Since the Second Vatican Council, the role of the local churches within the Catholic Church has been rightly highlighted. It was in that spirit that the Catholic bishops of Asia who had gathered in Manila in 1970 on the occasion of the visit there by Pope Paul VI decided to have closer union among themselves and their churches. With the active encouragement of the Pope himself, the Asian bishops eventually succeeded in laying the foundations for the *Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences* (FABC). Today it represents a good number of the Episcopal Conferences in South Asia, South-East Asia, East Asia and Central Asia, including those ecclesiastical jurisdictions that are not part of a Conference.

For the celebration of the 50th anniversary of the FABC (1970-2020) a Core Group was formed to begin the planning for the FABC 50 – General Conference. (Originally this was referred to as FABC 2020, but with the pandemic the General Conference had to be postponed. So, since the General Conference will not be held in 2020, it was changed to FABC 50 to emphasise the anniversary.) During one of those early meetings of the Core Group, it was suggested that for the 50th anniversary of the FABC that a book of all of the Statements that came from the eleven Plenary Assemblies be produced. These are important statements since these come formally from the bishops gathered for each Plenary Assembly. They are truly statements of the FABC.

During the past 50 years, through the various activities organized by the FABC, such as seminars, workshops, colloquia, .... etc. the dream of the Asian bishops to be in greater solidarity has borne immense fruit. Normally, once in every four years, the FABC holds its Plenary Assemblies. By its statutes, a Plenary Assembly is considered as the body with the highest authority within the FABC structure. Up to date, there had been eleven such Assemblies, the last one being held in Colombo, Sri Lanka, in 2016.

Only the bishop delegates from the Conferences have a vote in such Assemblies, and every such Assembly has issued a Final Statement, voted by the participating bishops. As such, these Plenary Assembly Statements can be considered as formal statements that have the authority of the FABC. Other documents such as the messages, and statements from workshops, seminars or conferences under the auspices of the FABC do not have the same magisterial weight though they surely represent in one way or the other the FABC. All of these

can be found in all of the volumes of *For All of the Peoples of Asia* (FAPA).<sup>1</sup>

The Core Group gladly discovered that after the Tenth Plenary Assembly in Vietnam in 2012, Fr. Raymond O'Toole, SFM, the former Secretary General of the FABC had contacted Fr. Vimal Tirimanna, CSsR, the then Executive Secretary of the FABC Office of Theological Concerns (OTC), and had begun a similar project that, however, was not completed. Fortunately, the present Assistant Secretary General Fr. William LaRousse, MM while going through the FABC files found that unfinished work. So, it only needed to be updated, and the result is the present volume.

As already mentioned above, this special volume is a collection of the official documents approved by the eleven FABC Plenary Assemblies held thus far. Also included in this volume is an appendix containing the Message and Resolutions of the Asian Bishops' Meeting of 1970. Of course, there have already been the series *For All the Peoples of Asia* containing the important documents of the FABC from 1970 to 2016, published in six volumes.<sup>2</sup> But the present work consists only of the official documents approved by the FABC Plenary Assemblies which hopefully can now be readily and conveniently used by those interested in those statements.

It is significant that the documents of the 1970 Asian Bishops' Meeting are also included in an appendix. On this noteworthy anniversary, it is good to revisit the beginnings. To capture the sense

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<sup>1</sup> Cfr., Gaudencio Rosales and C.G. Arevalo (Eds.), *For All the Peoples of Asia: Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences Documents from 1970 to 1991*, Quezon City: Claretian Publications, 1992; Franz-Josef Eilers (Ed.), *For All the Peoples of Asia: Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences Documents from 1992 to 1996*, Vol. II, Quezon City: Claretian Publications, 1997; Franz-Josef Eilers (Ed.), *For All the Peoples of Asia: Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences Documents from 1997 to 2001*, Vol. III, Quezon City: Claretian Publications, 2002; Franz-Josef Eilers (Ed.), *For All the Peoples of Asia: Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences Documents from 2002 to 2006*, Vol. V, Quezon City: Claretian Publications, 2007; Vimal Tirimanna (Ed.), *For All the Peoples of Asia: Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences Documents from 2007 to 2012*, Vol. V, Quezon City: Claretian Publications, 2012; Vimal Tirimanna (Ed.), *For All the Peoples of Asia: Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences Documents from 2012 to 2016*, Vol. VI, Quezon City: Claretian Publications, 2017.

<sup>2</sup> See footnote no. 1 above.

of the enthusiasm and vision of the founders is important.<sup>3</sup> They laid the groundwork for the structure and the vision that the FABC would eventually take.

It is also relevant to mention here that there is a growing interest in the FABC affairs even outside Asia, especially in theological circles. With Pope Francis being elected as the successor of St. Peter and with his repetition of the Vatican-II teaching that theology ought to be incarnated in the local ecclesial contexts, the relevance of FABC theology is also coming to the fore gradually. In a spirit of collegiality, Pope Francis has initiated a trend to quote from different episcopal conferences and continental conferences in his Encyclicals and Apostolic Exhortations. Therefore, the bringing out a volume (a collection) of FABC Plenary statements will surely be a contribution to theology too, especially a contribution that would enable more research on Third World theologies. Besides, this one volume compilation of the Plenary Statements would assist those who research on the FABC documents and endeavour to promote an “Asian” or an FABC Theology. Moreover, this volume will provide easy references to Asian pastors (both bishops and priests) whenever they need to refer to what the official FABC says about certain issues in the pastoral field. Henceforth, it would not be necessary to look for the official FABC sources scattered in other publications. Thus, this one volume would be a great contribution to promoting interest in Asian ecclesial affairs, both pastoral and theological.

Last but not least, I would like to remember with gratitude the enthusiasm of the late Fr. Ray O’Toole, SFM, the former Secretary General of the FABC which laid the foundation for this particular volume of the collection of the Plenary Assembly statements. In the same breath, I also wish to express my sincere thanks to Fr. William LaRousse, MM, who discovered the original draft of this volume in the FABC files, and thereupon took great interest in seeing to it that it be published.

**Vimal Tirimanna, CSsR**  
**Editor**

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<sup>3</sup> For a detailed description of the history of the foundation of the FABC, see Vimal Tirimanna, “A Brief History of the FABC”, *FABC Papers* 139 (December 2013), pp.1-64.



**I FABC PLENARY ASSEMBLY**  
**EVANGELIZATION IN MODERN DAY ASIA**  
*Statement and Recommendations of the I Plenary  
Assembly*

**[Taipei, Taiwan, 22<sup>nd</sup> to 27<sup>th</sup> April 1974]**

**OUTLINE OF THE STATEMENT**

*Editors' Note:* This is the full official text of the statement of the assembly. A brief, "popular" version was also approved. It appears after the text of the recommendations. The outline given here and the subtitles in the text, do *not* form part of the official statement. The reader must bear in mind that this statement *takes for granted* the Message of the Asian Bishops, Manila, 29 November 1970. [See *Appendix*] The editorial board, headed by Bishop Joseph Rodericks of Jamshedpur, India, wished to avoid a *mere repetition* of what was said in that Message. Hence this statement does not supersede that message, but rather presupposes it, and builds on it.

**Greeting (#1-3)**

- I. Introduction: situation of Asia today, vis-a-vis evangelization; the ambivalence of the changes taking place; the need of discernment; the Church and this discernment. (# 4-6)
- II. Emerging quests of Asian man today (a rough descriptive enumeration). We believe that they can be realized in and through Christ and the Gospel. Hence, for Asia today, the urgency and need of the proclamation of the Gospel. (# 7-8)
- III. Proclaiming the Gospel in Asia today. The *focus of evangelization* in Asia today is THE BUILDING UP OF THE LOCAL CHURCH. What is a local church? (# 9-11)  
The local Church must be INCARNATE, INDIGENOUS, that is, LOCALIZED. (# 12) A church of the people.
- IV. In Asia, the local churches must be IN DIALOGUE WITH THE GREAT RELIGIOUS TRADITIONS of the peoples of Asia. (# 13-18) What this dialogue means.

- V. In Asia, the local churches must be in dialogue with “the people”, and for most of our churches, this means being IN DIALOGUE WITH THE POOR, THE DEPRIVED, THE OPPRESSED, because the multitudes of Asia are in this situation. What this dialogue means; a “dialogue of life”, the task of “conscientization.” (# 19-24)
- VI. (Recapitulation) The tasks of localization and indigenization, of dialogue with the great religious traditions of Asia, and service to and work with the poor, the deprived, the oppressed... and the “proclamation of the Word of God”; internal coherence. (# 25-28)
- VII. The demands of mission and evangelization today, on MISSIONARY FORMATION. “Gifts” from the Lord; “tasks” to be undertaken. (# 29-33)
- VIII. The Church and the use of the media of mass communications for the proclamation of the Gospel in Asia. (# 34)
- IX. “Messages” to bearers of the Gospel in Asia (#35-40), to priests, men and women religious; to lay people, especially catechists; to women; to missionaries in Asia from other lands; to Asian missionaries to other lands.
- X. ... to Christians in the “Church of silence.” (# 41)
- XI. ... to our brothers in other Christian churches and communities. (# 42)
- XII. Conclusion: Prayer to Christ, Lord of History, Redeemer of our peoples, Head of the Church. (#43-49)
- XIII. Prayer to Mary, the Mother of God. (#50)

## STATEMENT OF THE ASSEMBLY

1 We, Bishop-delegates from 14 Episcopal Conferences and 18 countries, have gathered in Taipei for the First Plenary Assembly of the *Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences*, to meet on matters of common concern for the Church in Asia, and to prepare ourselves for the Synod of Bishops of 1974.

2 Joined in communion with the Roman Pontiff, Pope Paul VI, whose message to us and whose representative to our assembly we have received with joy, we send our greetings to our brother Bishops

in Asia, to the communities of God's people in our part of the world, and to all those who are joined with us in spirit to ask God's blessings on our meeting.

3 We have sought the guidance of the Holy Spirit as, during these days, we have reflected on the task of preaching the Gospel of Jesus Christ in modern day Asia. We have not attempted to construct in this statement a full theology of the proclamation of the Gospel. Instead we have addressed ourselves, especially in our workshops, to particular tasks which the evangelization of Asia today demands of us.

## I. *Introduction*

4 Modern day Asia is marked today by swift and far-reaching transformation, a continent undergoing modernization and profound social change, along with the secularization and the break-up of traditional societies. Side by side with the undeniable benefits and positive values, these processes have brought most serious problems. Industrialization and all that goes with it violently threatens our peoples with irreparable alienation and the disintegration of patterns of life and social relationships built up over the centuries. Stable meanings and values which have supported their lives are deeply shaken, and Asian peoples today are left in confusion and disorientation, even in despair and darkness of spirit.

5 We who make up the church in Asia today are inextricably part of this new world, since we are bound to our peoples by a common history and a common destiny. With the light which God's Spirit and His Word provide us, we seek to read the signs of the times, and to discern with our peoples what, in their present situation, they must accept and foster, and what they must reject and refuse.

## II. *The Proclamation of the Gospel*

6 We know that in the hearts of our brothers there are quests today: to find new meanings in their lives and endeavors, to overcome destructive forces and to shape a new integration in our societies, to free themselves from structures which have created new forms of bondage, to foster human dignity and freedom and a more fully human life, to create a more genuine communion among men and nations.

7 It is our belief that only in and through Christ and His Gospel, and by the outpouring of the Holy Spirit that these quests can come to realization. For Christ alone, we believe, is for every man "the Way, the Truth and the Life", (Jn 14:6) "who enlightens every man who comes into the world" (Jn 1:9). We believe that it is in Him and in His good news that our peoples will finally find full meaning we all seek, the liberation we strive after, the brotherhood and peace which is the desire of all our hearts.

8 It is because of this that the preaching of Jesus Christ and His Gospel to our peoples in Asia becomes a task which today assumes an urgency, a necessity and magnitude unmatched in the history of our Faith in this part of the world. It is because of this that we can repeat the Apostle's word, and repeat it joyfully, "Woe to me if I do not preach the Gospel," (1 Cor 9:6) for it is "the love of Christ which presses us" (2 Cor 5:14) to share with our peoples what is most precious in our hearts and in our lives, Jesus Christ and His Gospel, the unsurpassable riches of Christ (cf. Eph 3:8).

### **III. *The Local Church: Incarnate and Indigenous***

9 To preach the Gospel in Asia today we must make the message and life of Christ truly incarnate in the minds and lives of our people. The primary focus of our task of evangelization then, at this time in our history, is the building up of a truly local church.

10 For the local church is the realization and the enfleshment of the Body of Christ in a given people, at a given place and time.

11 It is not a community in isolation from other communities of the Church, one and catholic. Rather it seeks communion with all of them. With them it professes the one faith, shares the one Spirit and the one sacramental life. In a special way, it rejoices in its communion and filial oneness with the See of Peter, which presides over the universal Church in love.

12 The local church is a church incarnate in a people, a church indigenous and inculturated. And this means concretely a church in continuous, humble and loving dialogue with the living traditions, the cultures, the religions - in brief, with all the life-realities of the people in whose midst it has sunk its roots deeply and whose history and life it gladly makes its own. It seeks to share in whatever truly belongs to that people: its meanings and its values, its aspirations, its

thoughts and its language, its songs and its artistry – even its frailties and failings, it assumes, so that they too may be healed. For so did God’s Son assume the totality of our fallen human condition (save only for sin) so that He might make it truly His own, and redeem it in His paschal mystery.

#### **IV. *The Local Church: In Dialogue***

**13** In Asia especially, this involves a dialogue with the great religious traditions of our peoples.

**14** In this dialogue we accept them as significant and positive elements in the economy of God’s design of salvation. In them we recognize and respect profound spiritual and ethical meanings and values. Over many centuries they have been the treasury of the religious experience of our ancestors, from which our contemporaries do not cease to draw light and strength. They have been (and continue to be) the authentic expression of the noblest longings of their hearts, the home of their contemplation and prayer. They have helped to give shape to the histories and cultures of our nations.

**15** How then can we not give them reverence and honor? And how can we not acknowledge that God has drawn our peoples to himself through them?

**16** Only in dialogue with these religions can we discover in them the seeds of the Word of God (*Ad Gentes*, 9). This dialogue will allow us to touch the expression and the reality of our peoples’ deepest selves, and enable us to find authentic ways of living and expressing our own Christian faith. It will reveal to us also many riches of our own faith which we perhaps would not have perceived. Thus it can become a sharing in friendship of our quest for God and for brotherhood among His sons.

**17** Finally, this dialogue will teach us what our faith in Christ leads us to receive from these religious traditions, and what must be purified in them, healed and made whole, in the light of God’s Word.

**18** On our part we can offer what we believe the Church alone has the duty and the joy to offer to them and to all men: oneness with the Father in Jesus His Son, the ways to grace Christ gives us in His Gospel and His sacraments, and in the fellowship of the community which seeks to live in Him; an understanding too of the value of the

human person and of the social dimensions of human salvation - a salvation which assumes and gives meaning to human freedom, earthly realities, and the course of this world's history.

**V. *The Local Church: In Dialogue with the People, Especially the Poor***

**19** A local Church in dialogue with its people, in so many countries in Asia, means dialogue with the poor. For most of Asia is made up of multitudes of the poor. Poor, not in human values, qualities, nor in human potential. But poor, in that they are deprived of access to material goods and resources which they need to create a truly human life for themselves. Deprived, because they live under oppression, that is, under social, economic and political structures which have injustice built into them.

**20** This dialogue has to take the shape of what has been called a "dialogue of life." It involves a genuine experience and understanding of this poverty, deprivation and oppression of so many of our peoples. It demands working, not for them merely (in a paternalistic sense), but with them, to learn from them (for we have much to learn from them!) their real needs and aspirations, as they are enabled to identify and articulate these, and to strive for their fulfillment, by transforming those structures and situations which keep them in that deprivation and powerlessness.

**21** This dialogue leads to a genuine commitment and effort to bring about social justice in our societies. In turn, this will include an operative and organized "action and reflection in faith" (sometimes called "conscientization"). This is a process which seeks the change and transformation of unjust social structures. Through it, the deprived and oppressed acquire effective responsibility and participation in the decisions which determine their lives, and thus, are enabled to free themselves. Through it, those who (consciously or unconsciously) maintain these structures may be made aware of them, and hopefully be converted to justice and the freedom of Christian love for their brothers and sisters.

**22** The Synod of Bishops of 1971, in the document *Justice in the World* has affirmed that "action in behalf of justice and participation in the transformation of the world fully appear to us as a constitutive dimension of the preaching of the Gospel, that is, of the mission of the church for the redemption of the human race and its liberation from

every oppressive situation” (Cfr., 1971 Synod of Bishops, “Justice in the World,” Introduction). We affirm this teaching again, for we believe that this, in our time, is part and parcel of “preaching the Good News to the poor” (Mt 11:5; Lk 4:18). It is our belief that it is from the material deprivation of our poor people, as well as from their tremendous human potential, and from their aspirations for a more fully human and brotherly world, that Christ is calling the churches of Asia.

**23** Engaged in tasks of justice in accordance with the spirit and the demands of the Gospel, we will realize that the search for holiness and the search for justice, evangelization and the promotion of true human development and liberation, are not only not opposed, but make up today the integral preaching of the Gospel, especially in Asia.

**24** We pledge ourselves to a continuing and large-hearted encouragement and support for those who are engaged in these tasks, and for those who we believe have a special call from God to identify with the poor, especially when their work meets with difficulty, failure and opposition.

## **VI. *Proclamation and the Triple-Dialogue in Asia***

**25** Evangelization is the carrying out of the Church’s duty of proclaiming by word and witness the Gospel of the Lord. Within this context, we have spoken of these tasks which are of particularly crucial importance for most of the local churches in Asia, for through them our local churches can most effectively preach Christ to our peoples.

**26** Indigenization renders the local church truly present within the life and cultures of our peoples. Through it, all their human reality is assumed into the life of the Body of Christ, so that all of it may be purified and healed, perfected and fulfilled.

**27** Through the second task, the Asian religions are brought into living dialogue with the Gospel, so that the seeds of the Word in them may come to full flower and fruitfulness within the life of our peoples.

**28** Finally, through the “preaching of the good news to the poor” (Lk 4:18), Christ’s renewing life and the power of His paschal

mystery is inserted into our peoples' search for human development, for justice, brotherhood and peace.

## **VII. *The Missionary Formation***

**29** Proclaiming the Gospel today in these diverse ways challenges us then, demands of all of us a competence, dedication and effort which would dishearten us in our inadequacy. But, did we not place our trust in Him who strengthens us.

**30** For to preach the Gospel is first and foremost to communicate the experience of the Risen Christ. "What we have heard, what we have seen, what our hands have touched..." (1 Jn 1:1) It is the encounter with the Lord in our hearts, in the midst of His community, an encounter in faith and in the Spirit, which will in turn awaken faith in those to whom we announce His word. And this encounter, we know, is His gift.

**31** Prayer and contemplation, especially important for contact with the Asian spirit; openness of heart, especially to the young; the capacity to be silent, to listen and to receive from the other; the ability to discern the signs of the times - ultimately all these are gifts which we must beg for from the Spirit, and foster by His grace.

**32** Obviously there is need for renewal in missionary formation if we are to respond to the tasks which we have spoken of. Knowledge of Asian philosophies and especially the ideological currents which captivate the youth of Asia; the contribution of social and behavioral sciences; a serious understanding of the factors, including the political, which enter into the dynamics of national development; the use of modern techniques of personal and group formation, as well as of pastoral action - all of these have to form part of the education for mission in Asia today.

**33** Once again in relation to the tasks we have emphasized, the construction of a genuinely Asian theological reflection must be given a special priority. For the discernment of the theological imperatives and the formation of theological insights and principles, living contact with concrete Asian realities is necessary, and thus the collaboration of the entire local church, in dialogic process, is called for. All this is especially relevant in view of that contemporary search for meaning which we have earlier mentioned.

### **VIII. *Other Means of Proclaiming the Gospel: The Mass Media***

**34** No one today needs to be told of the influence and importance of the media of social communication for effectively proclaiming the God's Word to our peoples. We, therefore, wish to make it our urgent collegial concern as Asian Bishops to place them more fully at the service of the evangelization, education and development of our peoples.

### **IX. *Messages to the Bearers of the Gospel***

**35** We wish we could now address a special message to our priests and the men and women religious who have with so much dedication and courage borne the burdens of evangelization in Asia. We wish to express to them our gratitude and affection.

**36** With large expectations, we turn to our laypeople also, especially to our catechists, for their missionary collaboration; so greatly valued in the past, they will be increasingly called upon in the coming years, to assume more and more responsibility in the tasks of evangelization.

**37** We thank in a special way our religious sisters and laywomen in the churches of Asia, for their service through many decades, a truly evangelical ministry, rendered so generously and so well to our peoples.

**38** And we wish to remember as well the legions of missionaries, priests, brothers and sisters (and lay missionaries as well) who came to our countries from other lands, to bring Christ and His church to our peoples, and to give their lives in the service of the Lord. We and our local churches owe so much to them, and they have indelibly inscribed their spirit in our hearts.

**39** Today, in most of our Asian lands the need continues for missionaries who come into Asia for service, from other local churches. We welcome them from other countries into ours, asking only that they make themselves truly part of the local church and truly one with our peoples. More and more, we trust, our local churches can send some of our best sons and daughters to serve our sister churches, in Asia and in other continents as well.

**40** Last of all, to the young in our Asian nations, who make up nearly two-thirds of this continent, we renew what we said in our

message of 1970: the Church of Asia should be, in them and for them, "the church of the young" (Message, Asian Bishops' Meeting, No: 23). We turn to them as the Lord turned to the rich young man of the Gospel – loving them for all the splendid gifts that are theirs, urging them to place these gifts at the service of their brothers, inviting them to seek their fulfillment in the freedom which Christ offers to them.

#### **X. *Message to the "Church of Silence"***

**41** To our brothers and sisters in the "Church of silence", we extend our thoughts and the embrace of our hearts. In their steadfast faith and suffering, we see also a witnessing to Christ and a proclaiming of the Gospel; such fidelity and constancy we honour. In our prayers and in the Eucharistic renewal of the Lord's sacrifice, we have sought during these days to be one with them in fraternal solidarity.

#### **XI. *Message to Other Christian Churches and Communities***

**42** Our brothers in other Christian churches and communities know how much closer we have come together in the past few years, and how truly we rejoice in this. But it is our earnest prayer and resolve that mutual understanding, collaboration and oneness among us will grow more and more firmly in the years ahead of us, as we bear witness to the Lord to our other Asian brothers and sisters.

#### **XII. *Our Prayer to the Lord!***

**43** As we end our deliberations, we can only turn in humble, trusting, but importunate prayer to Our Lord.

**44** Redeemer of our peoples, it is He who has loved them from the dawn of the ages, and who in the fullness of time made their human condition His own. It is He who gave His life for them, that He might bring them out of shadows and beginnings into His marvelous light (1 Peter 2:9).

**45** Head of the Body which is His Church, it is He who has summoned us to this task of proclaiming His Gospel and raising His Church in the midst of the nations. It is He who summons us again today, and all who with us make up His little flock in this part of the world, to be for our Asian brothers the memory of His coming into our world, the sacrament of His presence in our midst, the sign of His shaping of the future of mankind.

**46** Christ of the peoples of Asia, humbly we beg you to make use of us to reveal yourself more and more to them. You have been present already in their histories and traditions. In hidden ways you have led them, because for them too, you are the *Way*. In ways unknown to us you have enlightened them in their worship, their beliefs, their philosophies, since for them, too, you are the *Truth*. In diverse manners you have already made yourself present in their lives, for you are their *Life*. From the beginning you have called our peoples, and from your Cross you have drawn them to yourself.

**47** Sanctify us, sanctify your Church (cf. Jn 17:17-19), so that we may be less unworthy to speak your Word, more ready to share the faith that is your gift to us, the hope of you that we treasure in our hearts, the self-giving love with which you teach us to offer our lives in service to our brothers, the joy and gladness with which you light up our days.

**48** Let your Church be truly a sacrament for our brothers and sisters, a people ready to share in the mystery of your Cross, so that the light and mercy of the Father may be poured out upon the world.

**49** Lord of history, in the times and seasons known to you, you shall make yourself known in fullness to our peoples. An ancient prayer implored, 'Let your love embrace all the nations.' It is the prayer we make again today. In us and through us, but also before us and beyond us, come to our lands and our peoples. Make them your own. Let your love embrace them, that they may have life, ever fuller life in you (cf. Jn 10:10).<sup>1</sup>

### **XIII. *Our Prayer to Mother Mary***

**50** With our peoples we turn also to Mary, Mother of the Lord. It was she who bore the Word into the world, she who sat in the midst of the Lord's disciples when His Spirit came upon them in the Upper Room, to send them rejoicing to the uttermost end of the earth. In Asia, she has accompanied His heralds, wherever they have preached the Gospel of her Son. We pray to her at this moment as, after the manner of His disciples, we gather to ask the Spirit to descend upon us, and to send us forth with a new commitment "to preach the

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<sup>1</sup> The prayer mentioned in par. 49 is a petition which comes to us from medieval times, particularly beloved by Blessed Angela of Foligno, vid. Henri de Lubac, *CATHOLICISM*, London, 1958, p. 123.

Gospel to every creature" (Mk 16:15). Mother of the Lord, to her too, He has committed our peoples. May she teach us, may she assist us to bring to our brothers and sisters in Asia, in hope and rejoicing, the saving word of her Son!

## **RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE PLENARY ASSEMBLY**

We wholeheartedly reaffirm the Resolutions of the Asian Bishops' Meeting (Manila, 23-29 November) 1970, the Propositions of the First Regional Meeting of the FABC (FABC-CJKV Regional Meeting, Taipei, 26-31 August) 1973, and the Final Reflections of the Office of Human Development's First Bishops' Seminar for Social Action (BISA I, Novaliches, Quezon City, 1-5 March 1974), particularly as regards the Church's loving service to the poor, its full commitment to social justice, and the renewed effort needed to form a clergy equal to the great challenges of today.

In order, however, to work out even more effective and concrete ways of evangelization at all levels of Church life in Asia today, we recommend:

1. That the Members of the FABC seriously review and evaluate how these same resolves have been and can best be implemented in their respective areas.

2. That the National Bishops' Conferences, as a fundamental act proclaiming the Good News, actively cooperate with the various Bible societies in translating and spreading the Bible.

3. That the FABC, in collaboration with the Sacred Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples and the Pontifical Secretaries:

- a) evolve a working concept of evangelization that embraces, as integral to that concept, genuine dialogue with the great living religions in Asia and the other deep-rooted forms of belief such as animism;
- b) be of service to local churches in their efforts to prepare their members to engage in deeper and more active dialogue with men and women of other religions and beliefs, and also with non-believers;
- c) promote organized efforts, including scholarship arrangements to explore the deeper relationship between the

Christian Faith and the Asian religions and beliefs, in order to discover all its implications for a truer integration of spiritual values, and to disseminate the findings of such studies.

4. That the National Bishops' Conferences seek even better ways of forming clergy, flexibly adapted to the social, cultural, and spiritual needs of a given community, and firmly anchored in the context of concrete realities through adequate exposure and apprenticeship.

5. That the social teaching of the Church, especially of the 1971 Synod on Justice, be organically incorporated into the body of Christian instruction and preaching at all levels: in catechisms for children and adults, in courses of formation for the laity and religious, and above all in the theological and pastoral formation and renewal of priests, young and old.

6. That the leaders of the Church support and encourage those who identify with the poor, the marginalized and the exploited, personally showing the way by Christ-like witness of poverty in their own life-style.

7. That, as a concrete sign of our solidarity and collegiality at the Asian level, we recommend Lenten Campaigns in favor of social justice projects in various parts of Asia.

8. That the Members of the FABC and its Offices on Education and University Chaplains promote periodic dialogues engaged in depth between youth of all levels and bishops, students and chaplains and counselors, and, as a first step, that Member Conferences send their reactions to the paper "Pastoral Action in Tertiary Education," by the Association of Catholic Universities of the Philippines at the re-request of the said Office.

9. That every consideration be given toward implementing in the Asian context the teaching of the 1971 synod on the role of women in the Church today. "We...urge that women should have their own share of responsibility and participation in the community life of society and likewise of the Church." (cfr., Synod of Bishops, 1971, "Justice in the World", Section III: The practice of justice)

10. a) That mass communication be given a higher priority than before by the various episcopates, in the allocation of material and

resources, considering its vital importance as an instrument for evangelization;

b) that Catholic institutions offering courses in mass communications be urged to give their Catholic students and trainees adequate theological formation to go with the techniques of mass media, and, conversely.

c) that basic training in the principles and methods of mass communications be part of seminary studies, in preparation for their ministry in a world so profoundly influenced by communication in its myriad of modern forms.

11. That the National Episcopal Conferences of the FABC actively promote and support the Pontifical Missionary Societies as a concrete means of involving the entire people of God in the task of evangelization.

12. That the FABC seek effective ways to keep the local churches well informed of new progress relevant to pastoral work, made in theology, liturgy, pastoral sciences and research of their religious and beliefs, thus giving more life to the existing information service.

## **BRIEFER STATEMENT OF THE ASSEMBLY**

1 It is the task of the Church to preach the Gospel in Asia.

2 Asia, today, is in a period of transformation. The changes are deep, swift, and violent. The age-old patterns of life are disintegrating. The result is confusion, dis-orientation, darkness of spirit, despair.

3 We, the Bishops, are Asians. We have asked God to give us the grace to read the signs of the times, in order that we may help our people.

4 These are the signs that we see:

- Our people, in their hearts, are reaching out to God.
- they are searching for deep spiritual values, in a world dominated by commerce and industry.

- they are not only hungry for food; they are hungry for freedom, for dignity, for a life that is human.

5 We believe that the millions of Asia will find peace, and happiness, and brotherhood, through the message that was preached by Jesus Christ Our Lord. He called this message "the good news."

6 We must bring this good news to our people in Asia. This is urgent, and necessary, now. We have opportunities, at this moment that we never had before, in all of history. We feel that we are faced with a large, important task - placed on our shoulders by God. It is the task He gave to the apostles - to proclaim the Gospel to the poor.

7 Our people - the people of Asia - are poor. Silver and gold we have none, but what we have we bring to them: the riches of the spirit, the message of Jesus Christ.

8 To do this, we must build a local church.

## I. *The Local Church*

9 The local church is one with the universal Church, one with the See of Peter, blessed by the same Holy Spirit, sharing in the same sacramental life, living on the same Body of Christ, believing in one God, one faith, one baptism - but it is a church incarnate in the people. It is native, springing out of the local church, with a reverence for ancient customs and traditions, speaking the local language, dressed in local clothing, expressing immortal truth in images which the common people understand and love.

10 The church must be local in its song, in its artistry, in its architecture, in its thoughts and languages, in its way of life. As God became one of us - to make us His own - His Church in Asia must be Asian.

## II. *Dialogue*

11 The local church must revere the great religious traditions of Asia. We must recognize their profound spiritual values - their power to shape minds and hearts and lives.

12 Down through the centuries the ancient religions of the orient have given light and strength to our ancestors. They have expressed the noblest longings in the hearts of our people, our

deepest joys and sorrows. Their temples have been the homes of contemplation and prayer. They have shaped our history, and our way of thinking. They are part of our culture. For us in Asia, they have been the doorway to God.

**13** In dialogue with these religions, we will find ways of expressing our own Christian faith. This can become a common quest for God. It can be a sharing in friendship, a brotherhood.

**14** The great religious traditions can shed light on the truths of the Gospel. They can help us understand the riches of our own faith.

**15** Christianity, in turn, can offer a new understanding of man, and of human dignity. It offers an eternal vision which gives new meaning to love, to the family, and to life itself.

### **III. *The Poor***

**16** The people of Asia are rich in spirit, but often poor in material things. Injustice – social, economic and political – is built into the structures under which we live.

**17** Dialogue with the poor means real experience of poverty. It means that we must not only work *for* them, in a paternalistic way, but *with* them! We must learn *from* them. We must know their real needs, their real hopes. We must help them to share in the decisions which determine their lives.

**18** “Action for justice is a constitutive element in the preaching of the Gospel” – this was the teaching of the Synod of Bishops, 1971. Since millions in Asia are poor, the Church in Asia must be the Church of the poor. One element in holiness, here in Asia, is the practice of justice. Evangelization and development are not opposed to each other. In Asia today they are integral parts of preaching the Gospel.

**19** Those who identify with the poor must constantly meet with difficulty, with hardship, with opposition, with failure. We, the Bishops of Asia – knowing this – feel that we must identify with the poor.

**20** These are the elements of crucial importance in the task of preaching the Gospel in Asia, today:

- *Inculturation*, which renders the local church truly present within the life of our people.
- *Dialogue* with the great Asian religions, which brings them into contact with the Gospel, so that the seed of the Word in them may come to full flower.
- *Service of the poor*, uniting with them in their struggle for a more human world.

**21** The evangelization of Asia is a challenge, so great and so difficult that it would dishearten us, if we did not place our trust in God. It demands competence, dedication, effort, openness of heart, the capacity to be silent and to listen, the willingness to learn from others, even from the very young. To contact the Asian spirit we must be devoted to prayer, and to contemplation. We must be able to read the signs of the times.

#### **IV. *Renewal***

**22** All of this calls for renewal in missionary formation. Knowledge of Asian religions and philosophies, of the behavioural sciences, of the dynamics of national development, of new techniques in pastoral action - these must form part of the education for mission in Asia today.

**23** Special priority must be given to Asian theological reflection. For this, living contact with the concrete realities of Asia is necessary. Above all, the apostle in Asia must understand those who are young. Asia has more young people than all the rest of the world put together. The average Asian in 1974 is seventeen years old. By the year 2000 we will have as many Asians who would be under seventeen years as there are people on the whole face of the earth, right now.

**24** Asia is young. And so the Church in Asia must be young. The apostle in Asia must speak the language, and think the thoughts, and feel in his heart the emotions of those who are under seventeen. He must be patient when they are impulsive, and understanding when they are unreasonable. Above all, he must appreciate their real contributions: freshness of outlook, vitality, creativity, courage, compassion, integrity, generosity, the open heart and the willingness to learn.

**25** The Church in Asia must keep pace with the swift advance in the media of social communication: radio, television, press, film. We must accept the passion of the young for records, for cassettes - and use it to bring them to God. We must find a place in satellite communication, in cable television, in video-cassettes. We must use these gifts of God for the education and development of our people.

**26** In the past few years we have grown closer to our brothers in the other Christian Churches. Mutual understanding, active collaboration, friendship - these have strengthened the Christian witness in Asia.

**27** To our brothers and sisters from the "Church of Silence" we extend our thoughts, our hearts, our prayers, our fraternal solidarity. In their steadfast faith and suffering, we see also a witnessing to Christ and a proclaiming of the Gospel.

**28** We are grateful to the foreign missionaries who have given their lives to evangelization in Asia. There is a continuing need for missionaries - especially for those who have the humility and courage to adapt themselves, completely, to the culture of the country.

**29** Asia is beginning to send out missionaries of its own. Some nations, which are older and stronger in Christianity, are sending priests and sisters to other Asian countries which have greater need. We feel that the day is fast approaching when Asia will send missionaries to the other continents.

**30** The Lord of history, who controls the destiny of nations, has chosen us for this task of raising His Church in the midst of our people. He makes use of us, to reveal Himself to our brothers and sisters in Asia.

**31** From the beginning he has been present in our history, in our traditions. In hidden ways He has led us - the people of Asia - enlightening our ancient worship, guiding our traditional beliefs, appearing in strange forms in our folklore, speaking to us in our oriental philosophies. Through the quiet centuries, patiently, He has drawn us to Himself.

**32** The Blessed Virgin Mary has long been enshrined in the hearts of Christians as the model of all women. Her modesty, her

purity, her dignity and strength, her endurance of suffering, her quiet leadership – these are the virtues which are most loved, and the most desired, by the women of Asia.

**33** Through her, the Mother of God, we ask the grace that we may be worthy, now, to serve our brothers and sisters.

**34** Through us, may God reveal Himself more fully to our lands, and to our peoples!



## II FABC PLENARY ASSEMBLY

### PRAYER – THE LIFE OF THE CHURCH OF ASIA

#### *Statement and Recommendations of the II Plenary Assembly*

[Calcutta, India, 19<sup>th</sup> to 25<sup>th</sup> November 1978]

#### OUTLINE OF THE STATEMENT

*Editors' Note:* The final statement of the Second Plenary Assembly tried to gather together the rather disparate elements brought forward by the various workshops into one unified text, (with perhaps rather limited success!). The outline which follows indicates the overall structure of the statement, a somewhat loose concatenation of the themes taken up. The various parts of the document, quite rich in content, will repay careful study and reflection. The conclusion (Part V) is a deep and moving act of faith made by the Bishops, regarding the Church's mission and ministry in the Asian countries. This outline does not form part of the statement itself, but was drawn up by a member of the drafting committee as a study-aid.

#### **Introduction (1-3; 4-6)**

The theme, "Prayer – the Life of the Church of Asia",

- in continuity with the 1970 and 1974 assemblies,
- reaffirms the tasks of mission of the Church in Asia as enumerated in those meetings,
- linking them up with prayer as the inner life of the Church of Asia engaged in those tasks.

The theme, Christian prayer: "the prayer of Jesus in the heart of His people" (4)

- at FABC II: place of the assembly, its process and methodology, its spirit (5),
- its message (6).

## **I. Some Aspects of the Present Religious Context of Asia and Its Challenge (7-11)**

The present context of Asia: presence of profound human and spiritual values (7),

Confronted with the present troubled moment of history, when those values are greatly threatened (8),

at a time of “crisis” with its danger and opportunity (9).

The necessary task of handling on the spiritual heritage of Asia creatively, in the lives and communities of believers (10).

A task of “inculturation” (11).

## **II. Confronting this Challenge... the Church’s Response and Resolve: To Become More Fully a True Community of Prayer (12-20)**

The Church in Asia must become more fully a true community of prayer (12).

What is Christian prayer? (13-19)

Elements of authentic Christian prayer:

- Christian prayer and the Trinity (14);
- Christian prayer and the Person of Jesus (15);
- Christian prayer and the community (16);
- Christian prayer and the Eucharist (17);
- Christian prayer and self-gift to others (18).

These elements make up the core of Christian prayer (19). Renewal of Christian prayer, in all its dimensions, in our lives and communities in Asia (20).

## **III. Prayer and Some Areas of the Asian Church’s Concern (21-27)**

Christian prayer must enter into all dimensions of human life, society and history (21).

Some of these dimensions:

- Total human development and social liberation (22-24);
- Education and formation (25);
- Everyday life: Christian witness and service (26-27).

## **IV. Some Means for the Renewal of the Prayer-Life of the Church in Asia (28-38)**

How can the Church be “a sign and sacrament of God’s presence and action” in the world of Asia today? (29).

Some areas for renewal of and by Christian prayer, toward this purpose: (29)

- Inculturation (30-33):  
Integration of all that is best in our traditional Asian ways of prayer and worship into our Christian heritage (30-31); what Asian prayer can give to Christian spirituality (32-33);
- Inter-religious dialogue (34-36);
- Formation in prayer of candidates for the priesthood (37-38).

## **V. Conclusion: Our Commitment to “Prayer – the Life of the Church in Asia”**

*Editors’ note:* In a sense this section constitutes a quasi-separate text, as it enumerates a number of statements, re-affirmations of positions and commitments, seen in the context of the overall theme: *Prayer – the Life of the Church of Asia* within the prayer and life of the Church of Asia as it engages in its mission and ministry at this hour of history.

- Reaffirmation of our *faith* in the presence and action of God in our midst, in our mission and ministry. (40)
- Reaffirmation of *trust* and *confidence* in God’s presence and action. (41)
- Reaffirmation of our *commitment* to the tasks of mission we have undertaken, in obedience to the Lord, in His Spirit. (42)
- Reaffirmation of our deep conviction in faith that prayer *is* truly the life of the Church in Asia and the necessary heart of its mission and ministry. (43)
- Prayer at the heart of the tasks of human development and – liberation – as *Christian* tasks, as tasks of Christians and the Church (43-45):
- “God’s love, the power of God’s love, is the only force which can truly renew the world and history.” (45)
- Reaffirmation of our faith in the prayer of all, but especially of contemplatives and of the poor, the sick and the suffering. (45-46)
- Gratitude for prayers offered for this assembly. (47)

A Final Prayer (50-52)

## **STATEMENT OF THE ASSEMBLY**

**1** We, the Bishops-delegate to the Second Plenary Assembly of the Federation of Asian Bishops’ Conferences, have gathered here

in Calcutta to deepen our knowledge of our local churches, to increase fraternal cooperation and to see the larger context and the common concerns of our pastoral mission in this part of the world.

2 We have chosen to dedicate a full week to a seminar on "Prayer – the Life of the Church of Asia." The theme was chosen, in continuity with the topics of the first gathering of Asian Bishops in the presence of Pope Paul VI at Manila in 1970 on the development of peoples in Asia,<sup>1</sup> and of the First Plenary Assembly at Taipei in April 1974 on the tasks of evangelization in modern day Asia.<sup>2</sup>

3 What was said in the statements which were issued at those conferences remain valid and relevant today. We commend them anew to the prayerful attention of our priests and our faithful. They dealt largely with the tasks which the carrying-out of the mission of the Church in Asia demands: commitment to the up-building of Asian communities in the life of the Gospel; inculturation of Christian faith and life; endurance for total human development and authentic liberation of peoples in justice and love; and commitment to interreligious dialogue and renewed missionary formation.

### **Our Theme: Prayer**

4 In our Second Plenary Assembly we have taken up the topic of prayer. We have done this in the profound conviction that our minds and hearts have to turn, at this time, to that source from which light and energy from the Lord come to us, to that river of life which must water and fecundate, vivify and nourish the entire life and activity of each of our communities and of each one of us. We mean Christian prayer, the prayer of Jesus living on in the heart of His people.

5 It is significant that this assembly was held in India. India is "a land of ancient culture, the cradle of great religions, the home of a nation that has sought God with relentless desire, in deep meditation and silence, and in hymns of fervent prayer."<sup>3</sup> We have been introduced to some Asian approaches to prayer by competent and discerning guides. Thus our meeting has not been one for study and discussion only, but equally a time of contemplation and the search for God's light and grace. These days have been, we believe, not only fruitful in the brotherly interchange of ideas and opinions, a joyous experience of community and friendship, but also filled with the

grace of the presence of the Lord and the working of the Holy Spirit in our hearts.

6 We now offer those reflections in a spirit of simple and joyous sharing to our brother-Bishops in our regions, to our Catholic communities and to those to whom our Christian people look for guidance and example. We invite those who read these reflections, on the role that prayer should have in the life of our Asian churches, to meditate on them with us in the Lord's presence, begging the Holy Spirit to accompany our thoughts.

## **I. Some Aspects of the Present Religious Context of Asia and its Challenge**

7 We recall again the words Pope Paul IV spoke in Manila. Asia, he said, is a continent, the past history of whose peoples manifests "the sense of spiritual values dominating the thoughts of their sages and the lives of their vast multitudes."<sup>4</sup> Manifest, too, have been the discipline of ascetics, a deep and innate religious sense, filial piety and attachment to the family, the primacy of things of the spirit, an unrelenting search for God and hunger for the supernatural.<sup>5</sup>

8 And yet the present troubled moment of the history of our peoples, already referred to with some anxiety by our First Plenary Assembly,<sup>6</sup> threatens precisely those meanings and values which form our precious spiritual heritage. The modern world, despite its undeniably great achievements, brings about the gradual disintegration of our traditional societies and the effects on people's lives which follow on it. The loss of sense of belonging in community, depersonalized relationships, disorientation and loneliness, - these have become part of the lives of so many of our people. With its accompanying secularization, too, with its worship of technology, narrow materialism and secularism, its fever for consumerism, its ideological pluralism - realized in a diverse ways in different societies, - our age quite swiftly erodes religious values and often suffocates the aspirations of the human spirit, especially among the young. The generations growing up in our time tend to lose the sense of God, the sense of His presence in the world, of His providence over their lives. Believers of all religions, including Christians, are not immune from these influences. They, too, are tempted to give up prayer and the things of the spirit.

9 This situation brings to all religious traditions, and to the Church in Asia along with them, a true crisis. A crisis: for, as the ideograms which make up the Chinese word for it tells us, 'crisis' means both danger and opportunity. Danger, of the dying out to these values, the squandering of the precious heritage we have just spoken of. But opportunity as well: for in striving to keep alive and hand on to the future the riches of contemplation and interiority which have been ours, we will be able to offer them as precious gifts to the Church. In already thoroughly secularized societies and in growing areas of unbelief the Church seeks with all earnestness to regain these same values. Many men and women of our time too are coming to the realization, we know, that without contemplation and prayer, human society loses its way. They realize that without contact with the living God, the safeguarding of man's very humanity is not even possible.

10 The handing-on of these values to present and future generations calls for creative assimilation and "translation" into contemporary cultural expression. For they must serve to create or restore "spaces of silence and worship" in the lives of believing men and women, and of renewed communities within contemporary society.

11 This creative labor is, in a genuine sense, what the task of inculturation calls for in many of our countries. It must assume into the full Christian life of our peoples what is good, noble and living in our cultures and traditions - and thus in our hearts and minds. Thus too, it will bring to fulfillment the future harvest of "those seeds which God's own hand has planted in our ancient cultures even before the Gospel was reached to our people."<sup>7</sup>

## **II. The Church's Response and Resolve: to Become More Fully a True Community of Prayer**

12 In the face of this challenge, and in response to this summons to creativity, we believe that the Church in Asia must become more fully a true community of prayer, - a deeply praying community whose contemplation is inserted in the context of our time and the cultures of our peoples today.

## **What is Christian Prayer?**

**13** What does it mean for the Church to become this genuine “community of Christian prayer”? – We might begin by asking ourselves, what is Christian prayer?

**14** Christian prayer is our conscious personal communion with God our Father, in Christ Jesus. It is the fruit of the Holy Spirit working in our hearts (cf. Rom 5:5), enabling us to turn to God and with confidence to call Him Father (cf. Rom 8:16; Gal 4:6). This prayer, we know, is always a free gift of God.

**15** We pray in the name of Jesus (cf. John 16: 24, 26). We pray to Jesus (cf. 2 Cor 12:8; Eph 5:19; 1 Cor 16:22; Apoc 22:20), the one mediator between the Father and ourselves (cf. 1 Tim 2:5). We pray with Jesus, the beloved Son ever turned lovingly to the Father (cf. Mt 11:25; John 17). In a very true sense then, Christian prayer means “allowing Jesus to pray in us, allowing Jesus to be one with the will of the Father in our own hearts.”

**16** Christian prayer is prayer within the community of those who have accepted the Gospel, of those who seek to live their lives in communion with Christ, and who in fellowship work to second (incarnate) Christ’s saving work within history. It is an ecclesial prayer.

**17** Christian prayer is prayer centered around the Eucharist which is the source and summit of a worship that is uniquely sacramental.<sup>8</sup> For in the Eucharist, the prayer of Jesus assumes its fullest expression and embodiment: the presence of Jesus in His dying and rising again for the life of the world. In renewing His self-gift to the Father and His self-gift to us, He makes it possible for our own living and dying to be taken up into the mystery of His redeeming deed.

**18** Christian prayer is a prayer of self-gift to the brethren. It creates the freedom and joy of loving commitment to the others. “This is how we know what love is: Christ gave his life for us. We too, then, ought to give our lives for our brethren” (I John 3:16). It enables us to find Christ in our brothers and sisters, especially in the suffering and the afflicted, in the poor and the powerless, in “the least of these.” In all of them, we are enabled to see Him and serve Him. And thus this

prayer sends us into the world and into history, that we may help to transform them according to the designs of the heart of the Father.

**19** These elements make up the core of Christian prayer. They have shaped the Christian tradition in both the western and eastern churches, in the communities of western Asia and of our regions as well. They have brought into being the treasury of two thousand years of Christian spirituality and of the contemplative and mystical experience of the saints. They are at the heart of the prayer-life and ways of piety and devotion of the faithful in our Christian communities. All these are gifts that Christian prayer offers to the religious life of Asian men and women in their search for the living God.

**20** What does it mean for the Church to become more fully a true community of Christian prayer, then? It means that there must take place a genuine renewal and revitalization of these realities in our prayer-life. By God's grace, the experience of His presence and action must be deepened and intensified in us. Our hearts must be opened to the fresh outpouring of love, of peace, goodness, gentleness – of all the fruits of the Holy Spirit (cf. Gal 5:22). Thus will our lives and the lives our Christian communities express and embody more authentically before our Asian people the Good News we proclaim in joy.

### **III. Prayer and Some Main Areas of the Church's Concern**

**21** From this renewal which we seek to foster in our local churches, we trust the grace of the Spirit will flow to fill with new power and love all those activities to which the mission of the Church in Asian countries summons her today. "For the Church, evangelizing means bringing the Good News" into all the dimensions of human life and society "and through its influence transforming humanity from within and making it new."<sup>9</sup> Some of these areas, to which we have given particular attention in our discussions are: total human development, education, and – in a more general way – the conduct of everyday life.

#### **Total Human Development**

**22 Prayer and Human Development:** Christian prayer is necessary if we are to bring the spirit and power of the Gospel and

the Christ-life into the effort to achieve genuine human liberation and development. This involves the shaping of human persons to the likeness of Jesus. It means bringing them, in all the material and spiritual dimensions of their lives, to their full stature as the children of God they are called to become.

**23** Far from alienating us from sharing in man's responsibility for the world and for the establishment of just and loving relationships among men and groups in society, prayer commits us to the true liberation of persons.<sup>10</sup> It binds us to solidarity with the poor and the powerless, the marginalized and oppressed in our societies. It is prayer which brings us to the understanding of how injustice is rooted in the selfishness and sinfulness of men's hearts. It is prayer which will help us to discern the tasks and deeds which can call on the Spirit to create within us both the courage and the love to bring about conversion in men's hearts and the renewal of societal structures.

**24** Ultimately Christian commitment to the endeavour of human development must be rooted in the Gospel of Christ. It must be realized through the spirit of the Beatitudes, motivated, and directed by the total self-giving of love after the pattern of Christ's own. All of these are possible only through the Faith, Hope and Love which are divine gifts mediated to us through prayer.<sup>11</sup>

## **Education**

**25 Prayer and Education:** The Church in Asia has had traditionally a special commitment to the task of Christian education. For the fulfillment of this work too, especially in our own Catholic educational institutions, prayer and formation in prayer are indispensable. Only if the young learn to dialogue with God in the different situations of their personal lives<sup>12</sup> and to surrender themselves to Him, can they grow into fully Christian persons who strive to overcome selfish individualism and to develop toward that freedom whereby they place their lives at the service of others. Only with prayer will the intelligence truly find its way to Truth and Wisdom, and the heart to Self-Gift and Love. A Catholic school will be able to fulfill its mission to the measure that, joined to fostering the development of competence and skills, it is also able to become a school of faith and prayer where the young are helped to see life with

God's eyes and to love their brothers and sisters with God's own heart.<sup>13</sup>

### **Everyday life**

**26 Prayer and Christian Witness in Everyday Life:** The Christian and the Christian community are made aware of God's presence in and through prayer and are thus enabled to respond to His Word in history, in "the signs of the times" and in the events and vicissitudes of everyday life.

**27** More than ever there is need of integrating our Christian prayer into everyday life: authentic prayer has to engender in Christians a clear witness of service and love. In the midst of growing secularism and unbelief, in the face of man's sense of complete self-sufficiency, it is the service of total self-gift to others, even to laying down one's life for them, which gives the most eloquent witness of the presence of God in the world. This total self-gift, the overflowing manifestation of a life of deep spirituality and prayer, is itself a way of proclaiming the Gospel to others, and an indispensable means of collaborating with the Holy Spirit in furthering the mission of the Church.<sup>14</sup>

## **IV. Some Means for the Renewal of the Prayer-Life of the Church of Asia**

**28** It is sometimes said that we ourselves and our Christian communities do not impress those of other Asian religious traditions as men and women of prayer, as contemplative communities. This prevents the Church from being, for Asian peoples, the sign and sacrament of God's presence in our midst. How can Christian prayer more profoundly and effectively bring the influence of the Gospel into our Asian societies and all of Asian life, - in the areas we have touched on (in the previous section), and in others as well?

**29** All aspects of the Christian community's prayer should be renewed, e.g., its liturgical worship, its popular forms of piety, prayer in the home, in parishes, in prayer groups, among youth, the sick, the handicapped, etc. Because of their special relevance to the present Asian scene, however, we have discussed more fully some means which can help foster Christian prayer and witness in our countries. These are: inculturation, inter-religious dialogue, and the renewed

formation in prayer of all in the ranks of the People of God, but especially of candidates for the priesthood.

### **Inculturation**

**30** In keeping with the economy of the Incarnation, which is the law of the Church's life and mission, the prayer-life of our local churches should "take over the riches of our nations, which have been given to Christ as an inheritance."<sup>15</sup> Important above all, in our present context, are those ways of prayer which have been developed by the native genius of our peoples and have played a vital and honored role in shaping the traditions of our lands.

**31** We are more convinced daily that the Spirit is leading us in our time, not to some dubious syncretism (which we rightly reject), but to an integration – profound and organic in character – of all that is best in our traditional ways of prayer and worship, into the treasury of our Christian heritage. Thus, is a fuller catholicity made possible in this age of the Church.

**32** We have already dwelt on what Christian prayer has to give to Asia. But Asian prayer has also much to offer to authentic Christian spirituality: a richly-developed prayer of the whole person in unity of body-psyche-spirit; contemplation of deep interiority and immanence; venerable sacred books and writings; traditions of asceticism and renunciation; techniques of contemplation found in the ancient eastern religions; simplified prayer-forms and other popular expressions of faith and piety easily available even to simpler folk, whose hearts and minds so readily turn to God in their daily lives.

**33** In the past, the integration of some of these elements has sometimes been the object of hesitancy and suspicion. We believe that with deeper study and understanding, with prudent discernment on our part and proper catechesis of our Christian people, these many indigenous riches will at last find a natural place in the prayer of our churches in Asia and will greatly enrich the prayer-life of the Church throughout the world.<sup>16</sup>

## **Interreligious Dialogue**

**34** Dialogue with other Asian religious traditions was already given special importance by our First Plenary Assembly in its discussions and final statement.<sup>17</sup> We reaffirm even more pointedly what was urged there with regard to interreligious dialogue.

**35** The spirituality characteristic of the religions of our continent stresses a deeper awareness of God and the whole self in recollection, silence and prayer, flowering in openness to others, in compassion, non-violence, generosity. Through these and other gifts it can contribute much to our spirituality which, while remaining truly Christian, can yet be greatly enriched. Sustained and reflective dialogue with them in prayer (as shall be found possible, helpful and wise in different situations) will reveal to us what the Holy Spirit has taught others to express in a marvelous variety of ways. These are different perhaps from our own, but through them, we too, may hear His voice, calling us to lift our hearts to the Father.

**36** We thus further encourage this dialogue. It must be undertaken in all seriousness, accompanied constantly by discernment in the Spirit, fostered and safeguarded by those attitudes which lead to its deepening and its patient, loving growth. These are: openness and sensitivity, honesty and humility of spirit, a sincere disinterestedness and that fraternal love which holds in reverence the feelings of the other and seeks to enter into his heart.<sup>18</sup>

## **Formation in Prayer, especially of Candidates to the Priesthood**

**37** Finally, in keeping with our concern for and resolve to renew ourselves and our Christian communities in prayer, we see the formation of aspirants to the priesthood and the religious life in the ways of prayer and spirituality as of vital importance.

**38** This formation will involve: more careful discernment and purification of motivation; in our houses and communities of formation, a life-style more in keeping with the spiritual traditions of our own peoples; where necessary, a revision of norms for the choice and preparation of animators; the painstaking nourishment of selfless personal commitment through prayer and contemplation; fostering growth to human and Christian maturity and freedom for self-gift; the interaction between prayer, theological reflection, and broadly

human as well as pastoral experience. The entire formation should be directed towards developing men and women of authentic holiness which should be both truly Christian and truly Asian. It should aim at enabling priests, religious and lay ministers as well, in their turn to form others among God's people, especially the young, in the ways of prayer and spirituality, according to the measure of God's grace to us.<sup>19</sup>

## **V. Conclusion: Our Commitment**

**39** As we come to the end of our reflections, there arises in our hearts a sense of deep gratitude to the Lord for His presence among us and a desire for renewed commitment to the tasks He has laid upon us.

**40** It is the duty of a bishop to confess and give witness to his faith. At this moment, in prayer, we wish to affirm our faith in the presence and action of God in the Church, in our world and in the unfolding destinies of our peoples.

**41** We affirm too our obedience to His will for us and for His Church in Asia, our desire to second His designs in the history which so swiftly moves forward in our continent and in each of our countries. In the uncertain future before us, we place our total trust in His goodness and in His wise and faithful love. Our prayer is rooted in this faith and this confidence.

**42** We renew our commitment, too, to the tasks which the Gospel and the Spirit speaking in the "signs of the times" have given to us and our communities. These tasks call us to shared responsibility for justice and brotherhood among men and peoples, to solidarity with the men and women of our time, especially when they are poor and voiceless, marginalized and oppressed, deprived of their rights and their human dignity.

**43** We wish to affirm our conviction that the future of our peoples cannot be built up in truth and justice, reconciliation and peace, unless men and women of good will among our peoples seek the deeper conversion of hearts and the transformation of oppressive structures. It is thus our resolve to "allow Jesus to pray to and live for the Father in our hearts and lives" even more fully, and in freedom to receive and make ours the gifts of Faith, Hope and Love which the

Lord gives to men for their liberation from sin and its consequences in society, for the fulfillment of their earthly tasks, and their pilgrimage to the Kingdom of God.

**44** Our Faith teaches us that ultimately the city of man and all of human history can be saved only by the Passion and the Rising again of Christ entering into our lives. It teaches us that liberation from oppressions which weigh upon our peoples will not be wrought, nor the pain and injustice of the world removed from it, except through our sharing, in prayer and self-gift, in the mystery of the Cross.

**45** We believe that finally the power of God's love is the only force which can truly renew the world. This force is the power of the Spirit; it is given to us by the Lord through prayer. Thus, we turn to our brothers and sisters in contemplative communities, and to all those whose lives are dedicated to loving prayer and sacrifice. We reaffirm our esteem for their vocation, so precious to the Church. We express here the faith and hope we share with them that their lives, given in all fidelity, can be and are fruitful for their brethren, beyond human reckoning. Their worship speaks to us not only of the God on whose mercy and love all of human existence and doing finally depend, but of the God "Who is on the side of man." More than this, their lives of prayer serve to remind us of the God "Who is not for the use of man," the God who is truly God.

**46** We express our confidence too in the prayer and the pain, offered with Christ's, of the sick and the suffering, of the poor, of "the least ones" whom life has seemingly cast aside. "They are the strong ones," Pope John Paul II has said.<sup>20</sup> We are glad to lean upon their strength.

**47** We extend to all the faithful, and to all Christians from other churches and ecclesial communities, too, our gratitude for the prayers they have offered during the past year for God's blessings on this Assembly. We ask them to continue their constant intercession for the Church in Asia as she faces so much uncertainty and so many trials.

**48** Likewise we appeal for prayers for the churches of Asia whose Bishop-representatives, for various reasons, were not able to be with us at this Plenary Assembly. Though they were absent, they have been more than ever present in our meetings and prayer, and in

the celebration of the Eucharist, we have been one with them in fraternal solidarity.

**49** Prayerfully, we unite ourselves in communion with our brother Bishops throughout the universal Church, and above all with Pope John Paul II, who through his representatives has manifested his solicitude for our churches and his oneness with us in heart and spirit. From this Assembly, we wish to express to him the loyalty and affection of all the faithful in our Asian Churches.

### **A Final Prayer**

**50** Finally, while we are still gathered together, much as the disciples were gathered in the supper room, in all humility and trust we insert our prayer in to the prayer Jesus raised to His Father. He prayed for His own, for those who were to come after them. He prayed for the oneness of all who in other times and other places would come to believe in Him. We insert our minds and hearts into His priestly prayer that those who believe in Him might be truly one in their mutual love, through the Holy Spirit: "that the world may believe...". For, finally, the purpose of our prayer is the oneness of our peoples in the kingdom of the Father.

**51** Father, sanctify us in truth. Sanctify us in Your Word. In us and even through our littleness, fulfill Your plan of making our peoples one, of bringing all men and women together in the mercy of Your Heart.

**52** As we end, we raise our thoughts to Mary, Mother of Christ and Mother of the Church. Throughout our assembly we have asked her to pray with us, as she prayed with the apostles waiting for the coming of the Spirit (Acts 1:14). We beg her to teach us and our communities to make our prayer and our lives truly one, so that through us the Spirit might lead the peoples of Asia to the knowledge of her Son.

*Morning Star of the world's salvation, pray for us to your Son!*

### **Endnotes:**

1. *Message and Resolutions of Asian Bishops' Meeting*, Manila, 23-29 November 1970, Follow-up Committee, Hong Kong, 1971, (Cited as MR).
2. *Evangelization in Modern Day Asia*, Statement and Recommendations of the First Plenary Assembly of the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences

- (FABC), Taiwan, 22-27 April, 1974, Office of the Secretary General, FABC, (Manila, 1974). (Cited as FABC I).
3. Pope Paul VI, *Insegnamenti di Paolo VI*, II, 693.
  4. Pope Paul VI, "To the peoples of Asia," MR, 36.
  5. Cf. Pope Paul VI, 1970: MR, 29, 36.
  6. FABC I, par, 4-6, 18-19.
  7. Second Vatican Council, *Ad Gentes*, no. 18.
  8. Second Vatican Council, *Sacrosanctum concilium*, no. 10.
  9. Pope Paul VI, *Evangelii nuntiandi*, no. 18.
  10. *Ibid.*, cf. the section on evangelization and human liberation, nn. 29-39. In the present text, "liberation" has the meaning given in *Evangelii nuntiandi*.
  11. See Workshop Notes (brief summaries of the workshop reports at the Second Plenary Assembly, FABC), I: On Evangelization, prayer and total human development.
  12. Sacred Congregation for Catholic Education, *The Catholic School*, Rome, 1977, No. 45.
  13. See Workshop Notes, II: On Education for Prayer in Catholic Schools.
  14. See Workshop Notes, III: On Prayer as Witness in Everyday Life
  15. Vatican II, *Ad Gentes*, no. 22; cf. Also AG, 11; *Lumen Gentium*, 13-17, and FABC I, par. 9-12, 20-21.
  16. See Workshop Notes, IV: On Prayer, community worship and inculturation.
  17. Cf. FABC I, par. 13-18, 21-22.
  18. See Workshop Notes, V: On Christian Prayer and interreligious dialogue: enrichment of Christian Prayer.
  19. See workshop Notes, VI: Seminaries and religious houses as centers of formation for prayer.
  20. Pope John Paul II, 22 October 1978, cf. Cardinal Lawrence Pichachy's Welcome Address, FABC II, 19 November.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

We wholeheartedly reaffirm the Resolutions of the Asian Bishops' Meeting, 1970, the Recommendations of the First Plenary Assembly of FABC, 1974, particularly those which touch on our sacred mission of evangelization.

Desirous to see a more dynamic and effective interiorization of the fruits of evangelization in the hearts of our people in Asia through

a renewal of the prayer-life of the Church, we recommend to our member National Bishops' Conference that:

1. In recognition of the value of example in encouraging the faithful to a life of prayer: the bishops, priests and religious should give witness to their faith in prayer by being men and women of prayer.

2. Deeply aware of the importance and necessity of prayer and spirituality in the formation of our aspirants to priesthood and religious life, in the selection of personnel of our seminaries and houses of formation, greater importance should be given to dedication to prayer-life and to the ability to communicate this to others.

3. a) In recognition of the vital role of prayer for the attainment for a total human development and for the renewal of Christian life among the people of God, establishment of contemplative communities and centers of prayer and spirituality suitable to our Asian context should be encouraged and promoted.

b) While deeply appreciating the invaluable service being rendered to the Church by existing contemplative communities, they should be encouraged to indigenize their forms of prayer and meditation, and thus, add a new dimension of meaningful witness to the people in whose midst they live and pray.

4. a) Considering the many positive values of Asian contemplative forms of prayer for the enrichment of the life of prayer in the Church, and considering further the need to provide a prudent and solid theological basis for pastoral policies, steps should be taken to undertake in-depth studies of the sacred writings of other religions, of the various Asian forms of prayer and meditation, and of the different authentic forms of popular piety.

b) Where such studies already exist, proper policy guidelines should be drawn up and appropriate catechesis should be given before introducing new forms of prayer and meditation.

5. Aware of the importance of spontaneity and sharing in prayer and promoting community spirit, forms of spontaneous prayer such as prayer groups, should be encouraged especially

among the youth, who easily find their identity and security in groups, and among the sick and handicapped, whose suffering in communion with Christ crucified, is a very efficacious prayer.

6. Recognizing the essential role of prayer for the Christian formation of our students and of those charged to minister to them, programs and activities conducive to the creation of a prayerful atmosphere within the academic community should be fostered in our Catholic educational institutions.

7. In order to comply with Recommendation No. 10.a) of the First Plenary Assembly on Mass Communications, the Office of Social Communications should relate its activities to the promotion of prayer and the life of the Spirit for a more effective evangelization in Asia.

## **BRIEFER STATEMENT OF THE ASSEMBLY**

### **1 Introduction**

In December 1970, we the Bishops of Asia gathered in Manila with our Holy Father, Pope Paul VI, to address ourselves the theme of the development of peoples in Asia.

In April 1974, at Taipei, we discussed our sacred mandate to proclaim the Gospel in the context of modern Asia.

From 19<sup>th</sup> to 25<sup>th</sup> November 1978, at Calcutta, India, we and our experts from 14 national episcopal conferences, studied the theme "Prayer - the Life of the Church in Asia."

### **2 Our Theme**

We chose the topic of prayer, not with the intention of withdrawing in any way from the urgent tasks that we took upon ourselves at Manila and Taipei but in the profound conviction that our minds and hearts have to turn today as always to that source from which light and energy from the Lord come to us.

It is significant that our meeting was held in India, "a land of ancient culture, the cradle of great religions ", as this enabled us not only to

study and pray much, but also to experience some Asian forms of prayer.

We offer these reflections to our brother Bishops in our regions, to our clergy and religious, and to our Catholic communities, as a meditation on the role that prayer should have in the life of our Asian churches.

### **3 The Present Religious Context of Asia**

The peoples of Asia manifest a profound sense of spiritual values...the discipline of ascetics...a deep religious spirit...filial piety and attachment to the family...the unrelenting search for God and hunger for the supernatural...(Paul VI at Manila).

Yet atheism and agnosticism on the one hand, and the materialism and secularism on the other, threaten precisely those values which form our precious spiritual heritage. And so, we notice in Asia today a tendency to forget God and to give up prayer and the things of the spirit.

We must safeguard the wealth of contemplation and interiority that has been ours so as to be able to "offer these values as precious gifts to the Church," for without contemplation and prayer, human society loses its way; and without contact with the living God, it is not even possible to safeguard man's humanity.

### **4 The Church's Response: Prayer**

We believe that the Church in Asia must become a deeply praying community whose contemplation is inserted into the context of our time and the cultures of our people.

What is Christian prayer? It is our conscious *personal communion* with God our Father through Jesus Christ by the power of the Holy Spirit. It is the insertion of our whole selves, of our life and action, into the prayer of Jesus. We pray in the name of Jesus; we pray with Jesus. And this prayer is always a free gift of God.

Christian prayer is prayer *within the community* of those who have accepted the Gospel.

Christian prayer is centered around the *Eucharist*, source and summit of a worship that is uniquely “sacramental” and “ecclesial.”

Christian prayer is a prayer of *self-gift* to the brethren, for it creates the freedom of loving commitment. It enables us to find Christ in our brothers and sisters, especially the suffering, the poor and the powerless. It thus sends us into the world to transform it according to the designs of the Father.

This is the Church’s gift of prayer to Asia!

## **5 Integral Human Development**

Christian prayer is necessary for genuine human liberation and development, and to bring men and women to their full stature as sons and daughters of God.

Prayer commits us to the true upliftment of the poor and the powerless, the oppressed and the marginalized. Prayer also brings us to understand how injustice is rooted in the sinfulness and selfishness of men’s hearts.

It is prayer which calls on the Spirit to create within us both the courage and the love to bring about a conversion in men’s hearts and the renewal of all structures of society.

## **6 Christian Formation**

A Catholic educational institution will fulfill its apostolic mission in the measure in which it is a school of prayer where the young are helped to see life with God’s eyes and to love the world and their brothers and sisters with God’s own heart. For this, prayer and formation in prayer are indispensable. Only if the young learn “to dialogue with God in the different situations of their personal lives” and to surrender themselves to God can they grow into full human and Christian persons, striving to overcome all selfish individualism and to develop toward that freedom whereby they place their lives at the service of God and of their neighbor.

## **7 Witness in Everyday Life**

The Christian and the Christian community are made aware of God’s presence in and through prayer, and thus, they are enabled to

respond to His Word in history, in “the signs of the times” and in the events and vicissitudes of everyday life.

Made aware of the importance of integrating Christian prayer into everyday life, we would like to emphasize that authentic prayer has to engender in Christians a clear witness of service and charity, leading to the total gift of self to others, even to the laying down of one’s life for them. This self-gift will be our eloquent witness to the presence of God in the world and an indispensable means of collaborating with the Spirit in the mission of the Church. The overflowing manifestation of a deep spirituality and prayer-life will itself have an evangelizing and witness value for others, too.

## **8 Inculturation**

The prayer-life of our churches should “take over the riches of our nations, which have been given to Christ as an inheritance,” especially those ways of prayer which have been developed by the native genius of our people and have played an important and honored role in shaping the traditions of our lands.

The Spirit is leading the churches of Asia to integrate into the treasury of our Christian heritage all that is best in our traditional ways of prayer and worship.

Asia has much to give to authentic Christian spirituality: a richly developed prayer of a whole person in unity of body-psyche-spirit; prayer of deep interiority and immanence; traditions of asceticism and renunciation; techniques of contemplation found in the ancient eastern religions; simplified prayer-forms and other popular expressions of faith and piety of those whose hearts and minds so readily turn to God in their daily lives. This is Asia’s gift of prayer to the Church.

## **9 Interreligious Dialogue**

Sustained and reflective dialogue with those who belong to other religious traditions and joining with them in prayer will “teach us what we can receive from them,” what the Holy Spirit has taught others to express in their religious books, in a marvelous variety of ways, different perhaps from our own, but through which we, too, may hear His voice, calling us to lift our hearts to the Father. At the

same time we will find an opportunity to share with them the riches of our own Christian heritage.

We encourage this dialogue, undertaken in all seriousness, accompanied by discernment in the Spirit, fostered and safeguarded by those attitudes which lead to its deepening and patient, loving growth: openness and sensitivity, honesty and humility of spirit, a sincere disinterestedness and that fraternal love which holds in reverence the feelings of the other and seeks to enter into his/her heart.

## **10 Formation in Prayer**

Formation in prayer of aspirants to the priesthood and religious life is of vital importance for the Church in Asia. The spirit of selfless commitment to the Lord, nourished by prayer and genuine contemplation; the interaction between prayer, theological reflection, and pastoral experience; and a life-style more in keeping with the spiritual traditions of Asia, should be inculcated. The entire formation should be directed towards developing men and women of authentic holiness who will be both truly Christian and truly Asian, and towards enabling priests, religious and lay ministers to form others in the ways of prayer.

## **11 Conclusion**

It is the duty of a bishop to confess and to give witness to his faith.

Our prayer is rooted in faith.

Our faith teaches us that ultimately the city of man can be saved only by the Passion and the Rising of Christ entering our lives. The liberation of our peoples will not be wrought, nor the pain and injustice of the world removed, except through our sharing, by prayer and self-gift, in the mystery of the Cross.

That same faith tells us that it is the power of God's Spirit which will renew the world. That power is found especially in contemplative communities. Their vocation is precious to the Church. Their lives, lived in all fidelity, are fruitful beyond human reckoning! They give witness to the primacy of God in human history; their worship speaks to us of the God "Who is not for the use of man," but on Whose mercy

and love all of human existence finally depends – the God Who is at man’s side, but the God Who alone is truly God! We ask them to pray for the Church in Asia. We have confidence in the fruitfulness of their prayer.

We have confidence, too, in the prayer of the sick and the suffering, of those in pain and sorrow, of “the least ones” whom life seemingly has cast aside. “They are the strong ones”, Pope John Paul II has said. We are glad to rest upon their strength!

Likewise, we appeal for prayers for the churches of Asia whose representatives, for various reasons, have not been able to be with us at our Second Plenary Assembly in Calcutta. Paradoxically, though absent, they have been more than ever present in our prayer, worship and discussion. We assure them of our fraternal solidarity!

## **12 Prayer**

Lord Jesus give to Your Church in Asia the gift of prayer, which will draw us closer to You and to one another, “that we may be...that the world may believe”.

Mary, Mother of the Church, Morning Star, lead our peoples of Asia to the knowledge of your Son, Jesus Christ!



## III FABC PLENARY ASSEMBLY

### THE CHURCH – A COMMUNITY OF FAITH IN ASIA

#### *Final Statement of the III Plenary Assembly*

[Sampran, Thailand, 20<sup>th</sup> to 27<sup>th</sup> October 1982]

#### OUTLINE OF THE STATEMENT

*Editor's Note:* The following outline attempts to set up several tables which bring together the main themes and elements found in the Assembly's Statement. It can serve as a convenient summary of what FABC III had to say. The outline was drawn up by a member of the editorial committee and does not form part of the statement itself.

#### **Part One: The FABC 1972-1982. Retrospect and Thanksgiving. (1-5)**

What FABC has done for us (3)

among the Asian bishops and local churches in Asia, better mutual knowledge, understanding, friendship, solidarity; (3.1)

increasingly becoming "sister churches"; (3.2)

joint institutes, seminars, formation-courses have led to greater community of vision, values and priorities; (3.3)

joint reflection and discernment: among Asian local churches; contribution to other local churches; (3.4)

bonds of communion strengthened with the Holy See and among themselves; (3.5)

"toward a one world of Asia": the Church in Asia in a way the sign and instrument of the unity of peoples in Asia. (3.6)

Main concerns of the churches in Asia: (4.5)

- mission and service to Asian peoples; (4)
- the life of prayer, interiority, spirituality of our Christian communities; (4)
- the ministries in our local churches; (4)

- the communities as communities of faith and mission (5).

## **Part Two: The Church – A Community of Faith in Asia (6-8)**

### *Constants in the life of ecclesial communities*

Rooted in the *communio* of the Trinity (essentially a reality of God's giving, of *grace*); (7.1)

Assembled by the summons of the *Gospel* and the Holy Spirit, i.e., (7.2-4)

not merely by bonds of natural friendship or sociability, not by political, ideological, etc. imperatives, etc., but by all-encompassing *discipleship in the Gospel*;

(The *Gospel* as daily source of "light and energy", touchstone for reflection, discernment and decision);

by the *guidance of the Holy Spirit* sought unceasingly in contemplation and discernment.

continually nourished by the *sacraments of faith*, and ecclesial life centered and rooted in the community celebration of the *eucharist*. (7-5)

community of authentic *participation* (sharing of gifts and responsibilities) and co-responsibility (genuine attitudes and practice of mutual listening and dialogue, common discernment, witness, action); (7.6)

community of *oneness with its pastors*; (7.7)

... linked with other communities of faith and the *catholica unitas* of the one and universal Church;

a community of conversion and *reconciliation* and *mission* (*kerygma, marturia, dialogue, diakonia*).

Special notes for ecclesial communities *in Asia*

the context of contemporary Asian history and its demands of human development, reconciliation, promotion and defense of human dignity and human rights; (7.8.1)

the "community-life-realities" of Asian peoples: the multi-religious-cultural pluralism and the work of the Spirit within it: thus, solidarity, listening, accompaniment; dialogue-in-

depth. (Hence, inculturation and inter-religious dialogue.)  
(7.8.2)

**Part Three: In our Communities, Some Inadequacies and Failings  
(9)**

<p>Basically, the Second Vatican Council's ecclesiology on "Gospel-and-Christian community" not sufficiently <i>interiorized</i>, put into practice and action (9)</p>	<p>Growth in interiorization and practice: "being <i>with</i> others and being <i>for</i> others"</p>
<p>Some particular points:</p> <p>Lack of true communion and <i>participation</i> (individualism) in inner convictions and attitudes; (9.2)</p> <p>In our day-to-day living in our communities (less attractive aspects of "institution" rather than community); in <i>effective structures</i> of communion and participation; (9.3)</p> <p>Inadequate personal, theological and pastoral <i>formation</i> in the ecclesiology of Vatican II, especially its understanding of community; (9.4)</p> <p>"We do not pray enough" or help each other grow in prayer; lack of esteem of the spiritual values so highly regarded in other Asian religions and cultures. (9.5)</p>	<p>Exercise of authority in servanthood; co-responsibility among priests, among religious; especially with regard to the laity.</p> <p>Need of structural reforms in church communities to <i>activate lay participation</i> in life, apostolate ministry.</p> <p>Need of "mutual catechesis": within the ecclesial community: bishops, priests, religious, laity being formed <i>together</i>.</p> <p>More prayer; helping especially the laity to <i>grow in prayer</i>; need of praying and contemplative communities.</p>
<p>Vis-a-vis communities of other religions (especially): lack of <i>ecumenical</i> and "<i>dialogal</i>" <i>consciousness</i>, orientation (9.6)</p> <p>Lack of awareness of situations of social injustice, of violations of <i>human dignity</i>, <i>human rights</i>, especially re: exploitation and oppression of Asian women; re: attacks on "<i>dignity of human life</i>"; re: arms buildup, militarization (9.7-8)</p>	<p>"<i>Dialogue of life</i>" on the part of all, including our lay people;</p> <p>"catechesis" on Gospel-demands and in <i>Christian social attitudes and action</i>;</p> <p>Role and action especially of the <i>laity</i> in social, political, "<i>public</i>" dimensions in society.</p>
<p>Lack of <i>missionary consciousness and responsibility</i> (9.9)</p>	<p>Primacy, in Asia, of <i>missionary proclamation</i>: two billions have not heard of Jesus and His Gospel; urgency of mission (laity in mission).</p>

## **Part Four: The Presence of the Spirit and Signs of Hope in our Communities in Asia (10-13)**

From the International Mission Congress (2-7 December 1979):

Signs of the presence of the Spirit... signs of hope (10-13)

- undeniable thirst for prayer and contemplation; (11.1)
- renewed power of the Word of God; (11.2)
- the eucharist as center of life; (11.3)
- greater simplicity of life, practice of evangelical poverty; (11.4)
- increased commitment to development, justice, human rights; (11.5)
- multiplication and growth of grassroots ecclesial communities; (11.6)
- growing missionary initiatives; (11.7)
- growth in the churches; increase of religious and presbyterial vocations; (12)
- fidelity of suffering and persecuted Christians. (13)

## **Part Five: Towards a Renewed Community of Faith (14-17)**

*What is a local ecclesial community?* (14-15):

... must be a community of graced communion rooted in the life of the Trinity,

... a community of prayer and contemplation, and of sacramental celebration and life centered around the Eucharist.

It must be defined by its life of faithful discipleship in the Gospel, patterned on the paschal mystery of Jesus, "a community for others".

It must strive to live and act under the constant guidance, and by the power of His Spirit.

... genuine participation and co-responsibility must be essential elements of its existence, and theological reflection and discernment integral components of its life.

It is a community which strives to remain in unfeigned unity with its pastors, within the bonds of local and universal communion in the one Church.

It is called to give witness of the meanings and values it professes, incarnating these in the ways of life of its own people,

expressing them in its presence, dialogue and praxis in all spheres of its activity as Church in history, within its own real world.

It constantly moves forward in mission, as it accompanies all humankind in its pilgrimage to the Kingdom of the Father.

... *ad extra*. THE CONCERNS OF MISSION ... AND *DIAKONIA* IN THE WORLD (15-17)

The *primacy of evangelization*... and *mission*... in a continent where two billion men and women have not yet consciously come to know Christ and His Gospel in significant ways...

... the Gospel mandate of mission:

- proclaiming the Word through word and witness;
- reaching out to others through ways of dialogue;
- serving in evangelical *diakonia* (in the world, to the human communities that surround it).

The summons and challenge to make known the person and message of Jesus Christ to those who do not know Him is a mandate addressed to even the youngest Christian community. (17.3)

... *Inculturation*, carried out with creativity and discernment, and *inter-religious dialogue* (especially through "dialogue of life") continue to challenge us, as areas for ministry so necessary and urgent in Asia.

- communities of dialogue, with "ecumenical and dialogal" consciousness and orientation, ... reaching out to their neighbors of other religions in their day-to-day relationships ("the dialogue of life"). (15-16; 17-4)

... Christian discipleship must (be made) significantly present and operative in the tasks of human development and the building up of fraternal community, in the promotion and defense of those rights which issue from the fundamental dignity of human persons as sons and daughters of God... (15)

... the *Church's responsibility in the world*, in the public spheres, in the construction of a more fully human future for Asian peoples. "The preference for the poor is a Christian preference." (John Paul II) "It expresses the concern of Christ who came to proclaim a message of

salvation for the poor... the poor who are indeed loved by God who guarantees their rights." (17.1)

...*increasing involvement of lay people*— acting as baptized persons— with genuine Christian freedom and responsibility, especially in the social and political domains...

... greater attention to

- the life and role of women in Church and society,
- the future of the family in our Asian nations. (17.2)

## CONCLUSION (18-24)

### **Prenote**

Towards the end of the visit of the Holy Father, Pope Paul VI, to South and East Asia in 1970, at Manila, in late November, the first definite steps for the organization of the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences (FABC) were taken. These were to be completed at Hong Kong on August 24-25, 1972, when the Statutes of the FABC were accepted, confirmed and submitted to the Holy See for approval *ad experimentum*. This approval, granted on November 16 of the same year, may be said to mark the official establishment of the FABC. With the Third Plenary Assembly at Bangkok, October 20-27, 1982, the Federation completes its tenth year of existence. This meeting has thus provided the participants the opportunity for looking back on ten years of blessing and grace, and thanking the Lord for them. The message which follows, fruit of the reflection and discussion of the plenary and workshop sessions, is addressed by the bishops present at the conference to their brother-bishops and their collaborators in the member churches of the Federation. Through them it is spoken also to all the communities of faith scattered throughout Asia, in the hope that it may be of service to them in their search for ecclesial communion and community.

## I. The FABC: 1972-1982

1 We, the participants of the Third Plenary Assembly of the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences, gathered together at Lux Mundi Seminary, Samphran, Thailand, and joined in communion with Pope John Paul II, whose representatives we have welcomed in our midst, send our greeting to all our brother-bishops and their collaborators in ministry in the local churches of Asia, as well as to all our beloved brothers and sisters in Jesus Christ in their communities. *Pax et bonum.*

2 We begin by thanking God and never ceasing to thank him for all the blessings we have received in these last years, through Jesus Christ our Lord (1 Cor 1:4). For this first decade of our Federation has truly been a decade of his gifts. In the face of serious and significant, sometimes deeply tragic, changes all over the Asian continent, in the political, social and economic spheres, the FABC has yet grown in so many ways, building bridges of communication, facilitating mutual support and collaboration among the churches in our part of the world.

3 We try to enumerate here, briefly and inadequately, what FABC has done for us:

3.1 The Asian bishops have come to know and understand one another better, and bonds of friendship and solidarity have grown among them. Surely, for shaping a community among the churches in Asia, this is a wonderful beginning, full of promise for the future, for unity is first of all a oneness of minds and hearts in friendship. The Asian bishops have come to appreciate better what the episcopal conferences and local churches in each country are doing, what the situations and problems they face are like, so that in a significant way, their joys have become the joys of all, and their setbacks and sorrows, griefs which touch the lives of all.

3.2 We in our local churches have been taught to pray with and for each other; to learn from each other's programs and projects, progress and failure; to share common pastoral and theological concerns; to be similarly reached by great ecclesial initiatives and movements; to work together at common tasks; to lend or give of our material and personnel resources – in brief, increasingly to become

truly sister-churches in the one family of communities of the Gospel which is the Church of Jesus Christ.

**3.3** The Federation's several offices, with their institutes (Bishops' Institute on the Missionary Apostolate, Bishops' Institute on Social Action, Bishops' Institute on Interreligious Affairs, et al.), seminars and formation courses, have taught us to reflect together on the situations which exist in our countries, on the needs of our peoples, and how we might more effectively respond to them. Theologians and other resource persons from the member churches, whose knowledge and skills have been made available to us, have helped us move forward in our understanding, discernment and action as pastors in our communities. They have helped too towards creating a greater community of vision, values and priorities among ourselves.

**3.4** We have also been enabled by our joint reflection and discernment, by pastoral options and policies we have together taken, to contribute to the ongoing reflection and discernment of churches in other continents and to the thinking and policies of the central administrative offices of the Church.

**3.5** As our mutual knowledge, affection and esteem have grown for each other, so has our gratitude for the unity that is the Lord's gift to us. We have also learned to understand better the role of the See of Peter and of him who from it "presides over the Church in love" (LG, 18b), in the visible unity of Christ's Body on earth. And within our growing oneness we have felt all the more keenly in our meetings the absence of our brother bishops from the churches in those countries which have not permitted their participation.

**3.6** The message of the historic 1970 meeting of Asian Bishops spoke of helping to bind together the new world of Asia, as a true family of nations in this part of the earth, linked not only by lines of geography, but by mutual understanding and respect, by the nobler bonds of brotherhood and love (ABM 1970, 26).

That the Church in Asia may in some small way be a sacrament – sign and instrument (LC, 1; *Gaudium Et Spes*, 40) – of this unity of our peoples is surely one of the hopes of FABC, and we believe that, in the Lord's designs, the last ten years have not been without significance for the realization of this hope.

For all these, and countless other gifts, we give our thanks.

4 Looking over previous statements of our plenary meetings and other major assemblies, we see that the concerns of the Asian bishops gathered together in the last decade have regarded:

– our churches' mission and service (*diakonia*) to our Asian peoples, especially in the tasks and dialogues of contemporary evangelization (ABM 1970, FABC I, 1974);

– their life of prayer, in the interiority of persons and in the inner life of our communities, and in the bonds which link our Christian prayer with the prayer and spirituality of other religious traditions in Asia (FABC II, 1978);

– the ministries exercised in our local churches and by them, as collocated within the most varied Asian contexts (ACMC 1977).

5 Our present Plenary Assembly has, in a way, now completed the circle of our reflection with its theme, "THE CHURCH—A COMMUNITY OF FAITH IN ASIA." It has led us to consider the Church as community realizing its communion and mission in its own being and life, and in relation to other communities in whose midst we live in the Asian continent.

## II. The Church — A Community of Faith in Asia

6 Under the guidance of the Spirit of the Lord, we have tried to deepen our understanding of and love for the Church as a community of faith. We have tried to "search the Scriptures" and to meditate on the teaching of the Second Vatican Council, so that we might with a renewed vision of faith realize a little better the mystery of the Church, "a people made one with the unity of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit" (St. Cyprian, cf. LG, 4, in *Patre et Filio et Spiritu Sancto plebs adunata*), and what this mystery must mean for us in our own communities and local churches.

7 We have recalled these constants in the being and life of the Church, in its concrete realizations, ecclesial communities implanted in particular times and places:

7.1 that the Church is at its deepest level a *communion* (*koinonia*) rooted in the life of the Trinity, and thus in its essential reality a sacrament (*mysterium et sacramentum*) of the loving self-

communication of God and the graced response of redeemed mankind in faith, hope and love;

7.2 that it is assembled by the summons of the Gospel and the Spirit of Jesus into one Body;

7.3 whose all-encompassing purpose is *discipleship in the Gospel*, ever proclaimed in its midst, whose imperatives are daily studied in mind and heart, and in whose light the realities of life and history which surround it are constantly discerned;

7.4 whose life and activity are meant to be led by the *guidance of the Spirit*, earnestly and unceasingly sought in contemplation and prayerful discernment;

7.5 that it is a community whose common life is nourished by *the sacraments of faith*, a life begun in the rebirth of Baptism and constantly built up by the Eucharist, whose faithful celebration is “its basis and center” (*Presbyterorum Ordinis* 6), “the very heartbeat of the community of the faithful” (PO 5);

7.6 that it is a community of authentic *participation and coresponsibility*, where genuine sharing of gifts and responsibilities obtains, where the talents and charisms of each one are accepted and exercised in diverse ministries, and where all are schooled to the attitudes and practice of mutual listening and dialogue, common discernment in the Spirit, common witness and collaborative action;

7.7 that it is a community in true *oneness with its pastors*, the bishops and their collaborators in the ordained ministry, whom the Spirit has chosen to govern the Church (Acts 20, 28), and who stand in the midst of the faithful as those who serve;

7.8 that it is a community not closed in on itself and its particular concerns, but *linked* with many bonds *to other communities of faith* (concretely, the parishes and dioceses around them) and to the one and universal communion, *catholica unitas*, of the holy Church of the Lord;

7.9 that, finally, the issue of its discipleship shall not only be *reconciliation* constantly renewed in the midst of the brethren, as sign and promise of reconciliation within human community, but that vis-

à-vis the world it shall fulfill the Gospel mandate of *mission*: proclaiming the Word through word and witness, reaching out to others through ways of *dialogue*, and acting in evangelical *service*, so that the Word and the Spirit may be shared in fidelity and joyfulness with our brothers and sisters in the other human communities which surround it.

8 We have recalled too, what previous gatherings of Asian bishops have repeatedly pointed out:

8.1 that our local churches are to realize their lives and destinies as Church in the midst of the harsh realities of the contemporary histories of our peoples, marked by turbulent political events and traversed by sweeping social transformations and movements, as, e.g., the resurgence of fundamentalist religious forces and of militant political ideologies, and the mechanisms and attitudes which create increasing poverty and injustice. Confronted with these, our communities must make their Christian discipleship significantly present and operative, in tasks of human development and the building up of fraternal community, in the promotion and defense of those rights which issue from the fundamental dignity of human persons as sons and daughters of God, and in other societal and political areas as well.

8.2 Further, that our Christian communities in Asia must listen to the Spirit at work in the many communities of believers who live and experience their own faith, who share and celebrate it in their own social, cultural and religious history, and that they (as communities of the Gospel) must accompany these others “in a common pilgrimage toward the ultimate goal, in relentless quest for the Absolute,” and that thus they are to be sensitively attuned to the work “of the Spirit in the resounding symphony of Asian communion.”

### **III. In Our Communities: Some Inadequacies and Failures**

9 In the hours we have worked together we asked ourselves where we have fallen short (and we readily admit that we have so often fallen short) in, corresponding with the Lord’s grace to become the kind of communities the faith calls us to be. We indicate only some of these inadequacies and failures:

**9.1** In our inner convictions and personal and collective spirituality there has often been insufficient interiorization of, and conversion to, the teaching of the Gospel and the Council on authentic Christian community: e.g., praying together as brothers and sisters one in mind and heart; openness to one another in sharing, mutual concern and self-giving; attitudes of “being *with* others and *for* others,” making the joys and sorrows of the community truly our own.

**9.2** In our day-to-day living with each other we have inadequately manifested true communion and participation: all too often perhaps in the exercise of authority there still persists a spirit of domination, instead of the reality of Christ-like servanthood; even in the presbyteral communities and religious houses often enough true coresponsibility is not manifest; in our parish and diocesan communities—for various reasons, sometimes deriving from resistant structures—not rarely the evident realization of our Lord’s own commandment of love is not to be found.

**9.3** The structures of our ecclesial organization (sometimes so large, amorphous and impersonal) often image-forth “institution” in its less attractive aspects, and not “community”; church groups not infrequently remain individualist in ethos and practice. Sometimes organs of lay participation and co-responsibility have not been established, or are left inactive and impeded, existing only in name. Often enough the gifts and charisms of the laity, both men and women, are not duly recognized, welcomed or activated in significant functions and tasks of ministry and apostolate.

**9.4** In many cases adequate formation—personal, theological, pastoral—in the authentic ecclesiology of Vatican II has not yet been provided, — a mutual catechesis which is of the greatest importance and even urgency for bishops, priests, religious and laity.

**9.5** Although in recent years much progress has been made in formation to, and exercise of, prayer, still much remains to be done toward fostering it in our communities. Sometimes there is little or no prayer even in religious houses. Bishops, priests and religious do not do enough to help their fellow Christians in the practice of prayer. Our ecclesial communities often are lacking that esteem for spiritual values which are so highly regarded in Asia, especially by many Asian religions and their adherents.

9.6 How often too our communities, in relation to the communities of other faiths which surround them, have failed to be communities of dialogue. Lacking in “ecumenical and dialogal” consciousness and orientation, they can be complacent in attitudes of superiority. They can be unconcerned in reaching out to their neighbors of other religions in their day-to-day relationships, seemingly unaware that the “dialogue of life,” through which we interact with one another and become mutually enlightened, encouraged, carried forward in our response to the challenging Spirit, is an indispensable element for the building up of our own Christian communities on all levels.

9.7 How often too, our communities, especially among those more favored in life, have failed to grow in awareness of situations of social injustice, of the violation of human dignity and human rights massively present around them. How inadequate has been our proclamation of the Church’s social teaching, and the formation and transformation of our social attitudes as Catholics in line with that doctrine. How indifferent and hesitant, only too often, has been our involvement in the concerns of human development and liberation: in issues where the rights of women, the poor and powerless are crushed; where the relationships and structures which perpetuate injustice and exploitation in society are extended and reinforced; and where the proliferation of arms (including nuclear arms), oppressive militarization and established patterns of violence grow and spread.

9.8 How little, in Asia, have we spoken or taken action against the oppression and degradation of women, especially among the poor and less educated, for the purposes and profit of various exploitative industries, tourism, the sex-trades, and the like.

9.9 Finally, how insufficient for the most part has been our missionary consciousness and responsibility. We have so frequently forgotten that the summons and challenge to make known the person and message of Jesus Christ to those who do not know him is a mandate addressed to even the youngest Christian community.

#### **IV. The Presence of the Spirit and Signs of Hope in Our Communities in Asia**

10 The consideration of these failures and deficiencies does not dishearten us, for we are only too conscious of, and grateful for, the

presence and the action of the Holy Spirit in our midst, during this first decade of the FABC's life, and in the twenty years which have followed the Second Vatican Council in the life of the Church.

**11** We make ours the words spoken of our Asian churches by the First International Mission Congress, held in Asia, in Manila, in December of 1979:

**11.1** There is today an undeniable thirst and hunger for prayer and contemplation. We see this all around us, but especially among the young. Surely this is a sign of the presence and action of the Spirit.

**11.2** There is the longing to hear and reflect on the word of God, especially with others in a community of prayer.

**11.3** There is the Eucharistic assembly increasingly celebrated and experienced as truly the heart of the Christians' pilgrimage through life.

**11.4** There is the desire in many also for greater simplicity of life and even the experience of poverty as a following of Jesus, and as solidarity with the suffering and powerless poor.

**11.5** There is the increased commitment to tasks of human development and struggles for justice and human rights.

**11.6** There is, in some countries, the rapid multiplication of "grassroots ecclesial communities," so often alive with the freshness and enthusiasm of early Christian times. In these communities an experience of genuine Christian fellowship and love is often found, as well as the emergence of diverse charisms and ministries.

**11.7** There are new missionary initiatives among the former "mission churches," among priests and religious and – most encouraging of all – among the laity.

**12** We can give witness, with joy and gratitude, to the reality of these phenomena in our Asian churches, to the living currents of renewal by the Spirit which traverse most of them. And we may add that in a number of countries and regions the Church grows in remarkable numbers, as do religious and priestly vocations. Religious houses and seminaries in this part of the Church, by God's favor and

not by our merits, are – more often than not – filled with the harvest sown in labor and tears by those men and women of heroic dedication, missionaries who in times past planted the seeds of Gospel and Church in the soil of our Asian lands.

**13** We can speak too, even if poorly, of the life, labor and struggles of our brothers and sisters in Asian countries where they are either relatively isolated, or (in some cases) persecuted and reduced to suffering and silence. In them we believe the Spirit too is powerfully at work, sustaining them in their admirable fidelity and perseverance, planting in their lives and hardship future harvest for the Kingdom of the Father, and fruitfulness for the future of the Church as sacrament of the oneness of all mankind. As our minds, and our hearts, reach out to them, we embrace them in prayer, in solidarity and in love, humble in the presence of brothers and sisters who inspire and strengthen us by their courage and their unshakeable faith and hope.

## **V. Toward a Renewed Community of Faith**

**14** Our reflection at this point leads us to the options we must take, and the ways we must enter upon in the decade before us, if we are to make our local communities more and more authentic communities of faith.

**15** We have seen (in Part Two) how the local church must be a community of graced communion rooted in the life of the Trinity, a community of prayer and contemplation, and of sacramental celebration and life centered around the Eucharist. It must be defined by its life of faithful discipleship in the Gospel, patterned on the paschal mystery of Jesus, “a community for others.” It must strive to live and act under the constant guidance and by the power of his Spirit. We have realized that genuine participation and co-responsibility must be essential elements of its existence, and theological reflection and discernment integral components of its life. It is a community which strives to remain in unfeigned unity with its pastors, within the bonds of local and universal communion in the one Church. It is called to give witness to the meanings and values it professes, incarnating these in the ways of life of its own people, expressing them in its presence, dialogue and praxis in all the spheres of its activity as Church in history, within its own real world. Finally,

it constantly moves forward in mission, as it accompanies all humankind in its pilgrimage to the Kingdom of the Father.

**16** The awareness of our shortcomings in becoming such communities and our acknowledgement of the many ways wherein we have failed point out to us already many avenues for future efforts, and reveal to us how much we need the help and guidance of the Lord. Recent FABC meetings on mission, social action, interreligious dialogue, social communication and the education apostolate have traced major orientations which are to be taken in the years to come.

**16.1** Our theological vision must be turned ever more resolutely to the Church's responsibility in the world, in the public spheres, in the construction of a more fully human future for Asian peoples. We must be beyond merely seconding Pope John Paul's words, that "the preference for the poor is a Christian preference," and that "it expresses the concern of Christ who came to proclaim a message of salvation to the poor ... the poor who are indeed loved by (the) God ... who guarantees their rights"; we must now make them the real pattern of our daily praxis.

**16.2** Increasingly our pastoral concerns must involve Christian lay people as members of the Church and involved in society, and attend to the life and role of women and the future of the family in Asian nations.

**16.3** We must effectively translate the primacy of evangelization into deeds, in a continent where two billion men and women have not yet consciously come to know Christ and his Gospel in significant ways; our word and witness, with the progressively better use of the mass media, must be placed generously at the service of this endeavor.

**16.4** Inculturation, carried out with creativity and discernment, and interreligious dialogue (especially through "the dialogue of life"), continue to challenge us, as areas for ministry so necessary and urgent in Asia; our response to these challenges must likewise be more and more that of actualization of action.

**17** Our workshop reports have also enumerated particular convictions and resolutions which we believe are of special relevance

and urgency at the present time. So that they may be more attentively considered by ourselves and our communities and by others in days to come, we have drawn up a “list of concerns” which itself is meant to form an integral part of this statement.

### **Conclusion**

As we complete this journey which FABC III has taken we offer again our prayer of thanksgiving to our Lord, *lux mundi*. He is the light of the world, and we have turned to him during these days of our being together, for knowledge and understanding, for foresight and wisdom, and for “every good gift which comes down from above.” How graciously he has listened to our prayer!

We thank him for the ten years of the life of this Federation, which he has blessed even beyond our hopes.

We thank him for bringing us and our churches together, in a community of friendship and brotherhood which is in its way sign and sacrament, promise and beginning of the oneness to which he calls our peoples.

We beg him to accompany us, as bishops and brothers, as friends, in the years that are ahead of us: whether they be years of the brightness of dawn and morning, or of the heat and labor of the noontime, the gathering shadows of the evening, or the dreaded darkness of night.

We ask him to bless our communities, our beloved priests, our religious brothers and sisters, the growing ranks of lay ministers – catechists, and other associates, the sick and aged among us, the myriads of young people, children in our Christian families, their fathers and mothers.

We ask him to increase the numbers of our missionaries, who must carry his word to the millions who, in Asia, have not yet heard his name.

We see before us all the faithful people in our local churches, “the saints” whom he has called into his holy Church, and together with them we raise our hearts and hands in praise of his goodness and worship of his glory.

And we pray: Lord, be the light of the world to your faithful, and be the light of the world to those who await the shining forth of your compassion and loving kindness upon mankind. Be the lamp for our paths, lighting up the way which leads to your Father, and to the city where he dwells in light.

Send us your Spirit, that from him we may learn your wisdom, your patience, and the ways of your mind and your heart.

Mary, Morning Star, dawn to your Son's perfect day, lead us and our peoples at last to the blessed Kingdom of your Son. Amen.

## IV FABC PLENARY ASSEMBLY

# THE VOCATION AND MISSION OF THE LAITY IN THE CHURCH AND IN THE WORLD OF ASIA

### *Final Statement of the IV Plenary Assembly*

[Tokyo, Japan, 16<sup>th</sup> to 25<sup>th</sup> September 1986]

#### **1.0 Preamble**

1.1 “May your Kingdom come!” (Lk 11:2). This prayer of Jesus is a cry from the heart of Asia—Asia, an arena of conflict and division, the world’s exploited market place, the continent of suffering humanity; Asia, cradle of culture, birthplace of great religions; a continent awakening to new and gigantic responsibilities.

1.2 May your Kingdom come! The plea is both a vocation and a challenge to the Church.

1.3 The battered condition of Asia is before us. Its poverty, wretchedness and misery bear in themselves the contradictions of humanity. Asia “groans with pain, like the pain of childbirth” (Rom 8:22). It “waits for God” to set its “whole being free” (Rom 8:23).

1.4 Deep in the heart of Asia, the Paschal Mystery of Jesus is being remembered, becomes present and is relived. The immersion into the darkness of suffering, pain, death and despair brings the light of the Resurrection—its hope, justice, love and peace, integral liberation. This, we believe because of the promise of the Father.

1.5 We believe that he is calling us to be instruments of his work of liberation. The Spirit of Jesus enables us to discern his call, and we want to listen to his voice today. Our hope based on the Paschal Mystery of Jesus urges us to discover how we can be the instruments of God, the harbingers of the Good News of integral liberation for Asia.

## 2.0 FABC Background

2.1 Therefore, we bishops of Asia have come together in Tokyo, Japan, with laity, Religious and priests, for the Fourth Plenary Assembly of the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences (FABC).

2.2 This gathering of ours with the laity marks a very important moment in our common journey that began in Manila in 1970. In that meeting, as well as in Taipei in 1974, we directed our gaze to the task of the Church in the world of Asia. Our gathering in Calcutta in 1978 brought us to the realization that prayer and interiority are indispensable ingredients in facing the tremendous challenges in this continent. When we met in Bangkok in 1982 for the Third Plenary Assembly, it became clear to us that we had to respond to the call of the Lord together, as a community of faith.

2.3 This Fourth Assembly has brought us a deeper and renewed awareness of the urgency of the call, and the need to accelerate the pace of our involvement, since we experience a deep crisis in every sector and a threat to human life and dignity. In the face of the manifold challenges of Asia, we have reflected prayerfully on the theme: "The Vocation and Mission of the Laity in the Church and in the World of Asia." These reflections are made in deep communion with the universal Church. The presence in our Plenary Assembly of representatives from the Holy See and from other episcopal conferences and federations has helped us to deepen this communion.

2.4 The contribution by countless numbers of the laity to the life of faith among the People of God in Asia cannot be measured. The saga of the laity themselves, preserving their faith through long centuries of their history, in countries such as Korea and Japan, stirs our imagination and inspires our hearts. Under changed circumstances, today the laity of Asia continues to share zealously in the mission of the Church as a leaven in the world and a sign of the Reign of God. Many laymen and laywomen are also serving as missionaries in countries other than their own, in various continents. We are grateful to the Lord and to our co-workers, the laity, for this ineffable grace.

### **3.0 Challenges of Asia**

3.0.1 We need to confront the dark realities in the heart of Asia – not in order to moan and wail in despair, but in order that we may be challenged by the magnitude of the task and thus place our hope in the Lord who remains, despite our valiant efforts, the ultimate builder of the Kingdom (cf. Ps 127).

3.0.2 A Basic Presupposition. We are keenly aware that the struggle for a full human life is not confined to the Christian community. We acknowledge that there are many great religious traditions in Asia which form the basis of the establishment, growth and development of the many cultures and nations in this great continent. In solidarity with them, we seek the full flowering of the human person and the transformation of the world of Asia into that which pleases the Creator (cf. Gen 1).

### **3.1 Politics and the Community of Believers**

3.1.1 The impact of misguided and selfish power politics on the reality of Asia today in the form of massive poverty and degradation is beyond imagining. Today's Asia has spawned structures and relationships in the political and economic community that are widening the scandalous gap between rich and poor, denying to the latter a fair and just access to the resources of the earth. Repression, oppression and exploitation are realities that result from the greed of vested economic interests and political power. Ethnic, cultural and linguistic conflicts which unleash violence, death and destruction are also linked with economic and political divisions. The political situation in many Asian countries has become volatile, and a sense of insecurity permeates particularly the minority groups.

3.1.2 Politics needs, first of all, to become a purposeful activity which seeks the common good. The entire People of God is called to engage in such "politics," for the task of infusing the Gospel and Kingdom values of love and justice into the political, economic, cultural and social world of Asia; this is an imperative of the Gospel. Participation and involvement are duties that flow from the secular implications of the Gospel and the Reign of God.

3.1.3 The involvement of the lay person in political activity confirms his/her rootedness in Christ, who called his community of

disciples to be a leaven in the world and thus to labor for the common good. A Christian is a member of a God-people and of the wider community, the good of which he/she is called to promote, protect and serve. To shut oneself totally away from the demands of the political transformation of Asia is, surely, in a sense, a denial of Christian identity.

3.1.4 Attitudes of apathy and indifference allow injustice to go unchecked and political powers to become masters rather than servants of the people. Evil is permitted to prevail simply because good men and women do nothing about it.

3.1.5 Hence, we have come to discover with joy that in all parts of Asia the laity are growing in political consciousness. Even in countries where the Church is a minority, they are gradually shedding centuries-old indifference. Protests, processions, vigils, citizen committees, organized for the cause of justice and the rights of the poor, are the signs of this growing political awareness. The people of the Philippines who, in February of this year, were able to achieve a significant political transformation through active non-violence inspired by faith in the Lord have given us much to reflect upon.

3.1.6 The need of the hour in Asia is for competent and principled lay people to enter into the realm of party politics and, from within, influence the philosophies, programs and activities of political parties and personalities for the common good in the light of the Gospel. We commend the lay persons who already have contributed much to this area of public life.

3.1.7 In the past, the Church tended to limit itself mostly to the protection of its interests regarding religious freedom, the family and schools. But now the Church is becoming involved in a wider range of issues pertaining to fundamental human rights and freedom, to labor and business, health, women, the arms race, the international order and other issues of justice and peace that seriously affect the peoples of Asia and especially the poor and the downtrodden.

3.1.8 The response of the Church to the Asian reality has to be communitarian in character, if we hope to respond to the deeply entrenched and widespread network of political, economic, religious, social and cultural injustices. Such a response will clearly indicate the

presence of the creative and transforming power of the Spirit in the community of believers.

3.1.9 The phenomenon of religious revivalism and fundamentalism in various Asian countries is likewise a challenge. The positive aspect of religious revivalism is a challenge to the Christian towards a deeper renewal of his/her own faith. The negative aspect of the phenomenon, tending to religious dogmatism, fundamentalism and intolerance in precept and practice, has even led to violence and serious conflicts.

3.1.10 The positive aspect is represented by the holistic view of reality. Asian religious cultures see human beings, society and the whole universe as intimately related and interdependent. Fragmentation and division contradict this vision. In the light of the Gospel, how does the Christian base the struggle for peace, justice and wholeness in this holistic vision provided by the ancient religions of Asia? The negative aspect of religious fundamentalism challenges the Christian to witness to the radicalism of the Gospel of love, even in the most provocative, intricate and exasperating situations, and to be an instrument of unity and fellowship among various groups.

3.1.11 In every situation, the whole Church is called to a dialogue of life with fellow Christians of other churches, the billions of other religions and the members of various social groups. Since the laity live in a more direct and day-to-day contact with people of other faiths, they are the ones most called to this living dialogue, especially regarding common problems which affect the life of the community.

3.1.12 Among such problems are: issues of fundamental rights, the rights of tribals and other minority groups, problems of political, social, economic and religious development, and of justice and peace. Here, collaboration is necessary at the local, regional and international level.

## **3.2 The Youth of Asia**

3.2.1 The youth of Asia are the mirror of Asia. Of the total population, 60% are between 15 and 24 years of age. The life of the youth reflects Asia's manifold economic, political, cultural, religious and educational problems.

3.2.2 One side of the picture of the life of the Asian youth is more visibly negative. Many are living under wretched conditions, unable because of poverty to liberate themselves from the bondage of ignorance and illiteracy, and are shackled to a life severely limited by inadequate skills and knowledge. They are also vulnerable to the temptations of materialism and consumerism; they become prey to various ideologies that claim to offer liberation from poverty and injustice. And because the doors of education are often closed to them, the sense of social belonging, already eroded by abject material conditions, is even more seriously weakened. Many among those who have had the benefits of education and find themselves unemployed or under-employed, or who see the inconsistencies between what schooling has taught them and what society practices and values, look for security and acceptance in the wrong place and among their often equally confused peers. Anxiety about the future, the apparent hopelessness of the present, alienation and other pressures drive them to seek escape in destructive substitutes like drugs, alcoholism, suicide, vandalism, premarital sex and delinquency.

3.2.3 There is also a positive side to the life of our Asian youth. We have discovered in our gathering that in the present struggles for social transformation in various parts of Asia, the youth are playing a substantial role. They are involved in awakening the consciousness of the people; organizing and mobilizing groups working for justice and peace; serving as community health workers, catechists and leaders of Christian communities, organizers and members of pastoral teams; etc. They live their lives in witness to Kingdom values; they stand out in contrast to those whose lives seem aimless, immature and hedonistic. The idealism of youth, their energy, zeal and determination, their commitment—these are some seeds of the Kingdom within them. The Lord's call to be a leaven in the world resonates in a special way in the hearts of Asia's youth.

3.2.4 Full support and acceptance, trust and confidence, presence and availability on the part of other members of God's people will surely empower the youth to become evangelizers, messengers and instruments of God—not only among their peers, but also among their elders and in the wider society. On the other hand, non-acceptance and lack of support could lead to further alienation. Alienated from their families, from the wider society and from the

People of God, the youth would have no other option but rebellion or despair.

3.2.5 The youth of Asia are the Asia of today. The compulsive struggles for liberation in Asia are reflected in the pains of growth among the youth and in their deepest longings for a new world and a meaning for life. The People of God in Asia must become in a certain sense a “Church of the young,” if it is to transform the “face of Asia, the continent of the young” (cf. Asian Bishops’ Meeting, Manila 1970).

### **3.3 The Laity and the Plight of Asian Women**

3.3.1 International media have highlighted how tourism and the entertainment industries have exploited, degraded and dehumanized Asian women. However, this is but one aspect of the reality of Asian women today. Many are the injustices heaped upon them because of the traditional societies which discriminate against them and because of the new economic and industrial situations. Dowry, forced marriages, wife-beating and destruction of female fetuses weigh heavily on them, driving many to desperation and even suicide. Modern industry exploits their work—for example, paying a paltry sum for their hard labor in quarries and on construction sites of local and multinational companies. There is discrimination against them in the employment policies, and as domestic workers they are also abused. In general, Asian society views women as inferior. Such are some of the tragic realities of Asian women that cry out for transformation.

3.3.2 On the other hand, there is a deep and genuine appreciation of women among Asians. A woman is considered the heart of the family. In times of crisis, she is the valiant one on whose shoulders others lean. The advancement and contributions that women have made in the professions—as doctors, lawyers, managers, accountants, political leaders, teachers, etc.—have been phenomenal, despite the obstacles placed in their path by tradition. In the Church, women contribute significantly in various ministries of teaching, healing, catechizing, organizing, etc. They serve as members of pastoral teams. In our assembly we have listened to them and have been made more aware of some fundamental facts and truths about the role of women in Asia.

3.3.3 A woman is an integral human person, no matter what race, class, tribe or religion she belongs to. She is created in the image and likeness of God. To her, too, was extended the divine call of being responsible for the created world (Gen 1:27). The tragedy is that this image and likeness of God has been degraded and trampled underfoot and she is dominated in various ways. Therefore, women cry out to the Lord for liberation. We have heard this poignant cry from the women themselves, who have articulated here their deepest longings for dignity and freedom. They reminded us that Mary is the Mother of God, that she, a woman, uniquely cooperated with Jesus so that the Reign of the Father may come. It is, therefore, not just a human necessity but a Gospel imperative that the feminine half of the world's population be recognized and their dignity restored, and that they be allowed to play their rightful role in the world and in the Church.

3.3.4 The laity thus have a special responsibility in their respective fields—be it in business, education, mass media, politics or public service—to uphold and defend the dignity of women, and to change attitudes, policies, practices and legislation that lead to the discrimination against and repression of women.

3.3.5 But recognition of woman's full personhood must equally be evident among the People of God, the Church. For the Church cannot be a sign of the Kingdom and of the eschatological community if the gifts of the Spirit to women are not given due recognition, and if women do not share in the "freedom of the children of God." They expect significant responsibilities in the ministries and decision-making processes of the Church.

3.3.6 The entire People of God would then become a credible sign of the dignity and freedom of women in society and in the world. The Church could then speak powerfully about the plight of Asian women and become their voice, with an authority unlike any other.

## **3.4 The Laity and the Family**

3.4.1 Perhaps the greatest challenge to the Church in Asia is that posed by the Asian family. The Asian family is the cellular receptacle of all Asia's problems: poverty, repression, exploitation and degradation, divisions and conflicts. The family is directly affected by the religious, political, economic, social and cultural problems of

Asia, by the problems relating to women, health, work, business, education, etc.

3.4.2 But certain specific problems have been brought to our attention. We have reflected on them in the light of the Gospel. For in the journey towards the Reign of God, the Christian travels not alone but in community, and not only in a general community, but in his/her own family.

3.4.3 The adverse conditions which Asian families have to face today are serious and many. Mothers and children at a tender age are forced to undertake hard labor or migrate to cities—often to alien countries—in search of employment. A hopeless struggle for survival benumbs the conscience, increases the number of unwed mothers and abandoned children, and causes rampant prostitution and abortion. A contraceptive mentality and population control programs insensitive to moral and religious sensibilities have resulted in the systematic termination of pregnancies. As a result of such a situation, family life is disrupted seriously, and traditional family values are progressively undermined.

3.4.4 But we continue to believe that the family as a social unit is a sacred and an important treasure. Most traditions and laws, beliefs and practices are traceable to the family. Closely-knit family ties, filial piety, care and respect of the aged are among the deeply-rooted cultural values in Asia. Such cultural values and traditions are a source of strength for Asian families in deepening their call and providing the most favorable atmosphere for a life of love and communion.

3.4.5 Since grace builds on nature, the centrality of the Sacrament of Marriage for Christian families needs to be underlined. In many Asian countries, the Christian atmosphere also has resulted in a great number of vocations to consecrated life, the priesthood and societies of apostolic life. Christian families have influenced their neighborhood to know and respect the values which Jesus proclaimed, and have produced many lay persons who are true witnesses to the Gospel in their work and professions.

3.4.6 As they listen to the Gospel which calls them to accept their mission in the Church and in the world, the laity will find in the family the most important area for themselves to reflect on.

3.4.7 The first call to be a member of the Church comes normally in the family (cf. *Familiaris Consortio*, 15, 39, 49). Even before the call is heard in the parish, or the mind opens to the catechetical story of the call to growth and maturity in Christ, the child has already seen, heard and experienced at home the reality of belonging to the People of God.

3.4.8 The Christian family is rightly referred to as the “domestic Church,” where members assist one another toward a fullness of life in Christ through the ordinary circumstances and events of life. At home, in the family setting, in the daily events of living and giving, the lay person interiorizes culture as well as belief with an easy connaturality. In the little church of the family, as in the larger Church of the community, the members remain aware of the presence of God, seek to listen to his word in the Scriptures and faithfully practice mutual forgiveness and sacrifice.

3.4.9 The values and attitudes necessary for evangelization of the Asian world are first practiced in the family. Love, justice, peace, truth, freedom, concern for the poor and the needy, faith in God, hope in his liberating goodness and power, responsibility and self-sacrifice and other Gospel values are first learned by precept and example in the family. Here evangelization initially takes place and a “civilization of love” begins. Thus evangelized, the Asian family is enabled to evangelize, reach out to other families and communities, and together with them journey into the Reign of God.

3.4.10 Certainly, the most direct and immediate task of the laity in the community of God is to make prosper within the family this double event, at the same time a grace, of evangelizing and being evangelized.

### **3.5 The Laity in the World of Education**

3.5.1 Two important factors in the educational scene of Asia immediately strike us: the illiteracy of vast numbers of Asians, and the high visibility and reputation of Catholic educational institutions, especially in non-Christian areas. These indeed urge us to reflect not only on the role of the laity, but also on the role of the entire Church in education.

3.5.2 Two of many major negative observations are well known to us: that some Catholic schools seem to cater mostly to the middle

class and to the rich, and that they seem to support traditional structures and values, rather than act as vehicles of change. Such objections are constant reminders of our priorities for the poor and for transformation of society. They should encourage us to undertake regular evaluation, and we should not set these criticisms aside as simply invalid and uninformed.

3.5.3 How, indeed, can our schools reflect the Church's preferential option for the poor? This truly difficult question requires wisdom and evangelical courage. We do not claim to have the answers, but we do wish to make a number of observations.

3.5.4 Undoubtedly, our schools in Asia have contributed significantly to the battle against ignorance and illiteracy, and have prepared great numbers of people to take their place in society and to contribute to the common good through their professions. And here we acknowledge with deep gratitude the great contribution of the laity, who in the field of education greatly out-number priests and Religious sisters and brothers. The large number of women teachers in primary and secondary education may in a certain sense reflect the image of the Church as "*Mater et Magistra*." We may rightly say that the laity in Asia play the major role in the essential task of facilitating the growth and maturity of the human person through formal education. Their role in the educational apostolate arises from their basic baptismal participation, especially in the character of Christ as prophet and servant.

3.5.5 For education in schools to become more effective as a vehicle of transformation in society, a true and proper vision and spirituality among teachers are needed. This vision requires that the task of teaching be viewed as a call from God to share in the teaching ministry of Jesus who announced and taught about the Kingdom, and that teaching is not simply the communication of knowledge but even more importantly, the formation in values. From such a vision flows a spirituality involving sacrifice, other-directedness, concern, love, justice and other Gospel values. As in catechesis, the more effective is not the one who simply teaches, but the one who also witnesses (cf. *Evangelii Nuntiandi*).

3.5.6 The school has become the setting where it is possible for peoples of different faiths, races, backgrounds, social classes and tribes to become a community. It is also where concern for the poor

and the needy and the values necessary to transform the wider society into a true community are actually formed and shared. This kind of community will have to involve the collaboration of the teachers and the families. In a non-Christian environment, such a school community becomes a sign of the peace, justice and love of God's Reign.

3.5.7 We look beyond the formal school system and ask how the laity can carry out the ministry of teaching among out-of-school youth in urban and rural areas. This is not an easy task. Yet we see its beginnings in literacy programs, training in skills and leadership programs through non-formal education. This is particularly true of the educational work that is taking place in basic ecclesial communities. Here again the laity play a major role. In both tasks, we see the need of innovative programs of education for the lay educators.

3.5.8 Some creative programs to prepare lay teachers for holistic teaching, such as Christian Maturity Formation Seminars and Colloquia on the Ministry of Teaching, are now being implemented in some Asian countries. We believe such formation will enable lay educators to become more effective in their response to the Lord's call to share in his ministry of teacher and servant.

## **3.6 The Laity and Mass Media**

3.6.1 This is the hour when the laity of Asia are called to evangelize their milieu through those most powerful instruments of mass media which modern technology has created. Pope Paul VI has drawn attention to "the growing role being assumed by the media and their influence on the transformation of mentalities and of society itself" (*Octogesima Adveniens*, 20).

3.6.2 Finance and the mass media determine to a very large extent the destinies of nations; in fact, finance uses the media to this end. Those in power are well aware of the potentialities of the mass media, which they manipulate to mold public opinion and to consolidate and perpetuate their positions. One test of the freedom prevalent in any society today is the degree of autonomy enjoyed by the mass media.

3.6.3 Today, the mass media in Asia are predominantly controlled by authoritarian governments or by a handful of

economically and politically powerful persons, while the vast majority of the Asian people are passive recipients. It has been noted that the impact of Church-supported media on the masses of Asia is minimal. While the consumer society exploits the mass media to further its materialistic ends, the Church in Asia still lags behind in taking full advantage of these most powerful means of proclaiming the liberating word of God to the Asian peoples. Many of us are still not sufficiently acquainted with the idiom and impact of the media.

3.6.4 Still, we happily note the advances of media directly under the care of the Church or influenced by the Church through the laity. The establishment of mass media centers in various parts of Asia, the efforts to educate Church leadership regarding the complexities and power of media, the training of personnel for this specific apostolate have made great strides. Many of the laity in the secular media are faithful to Gospel values and are witnesses to these values – not only as individual Christians, but also in their professional lives where they exercise a positive influence on their peers and the recipients of their work. An admirable example of collaboration of the People of God – with the laity carrying most of the burden – is the crucial role that Radio Veritas has played in the struggle for truth, justice and freedom.

3.6.5 The power of the media within a plurality of cultures is to be recognized and appreciated. Within such a situation the Asian Church sees its task first of infusing Gospel values, then of drawing out more explicitly “the seeds of the Kingdom” found in diverse cultures and religions. Through the mass media, it thus may bring these values to bear upon all efforts at collaboration, unity and fellowship among various peoples in view of the common good.

3.6.6 This vision will require of the People of God, and especially of its leadership, a supportive stance toward the systematic formation and training of the laity to assume even greater responsibilities in the media. This is a pastoral priority in the light of our Asian situation, where the People of God must reach out to millions struggling for social transformation, a struggle that requires an interfaith collaboration.

## 3.7 Laity in the World of Work

3.7.1 When we turn our attention to the world of work, we come to recognize that through work of every kind we are participating in God's own ongoing process of recreating and transforming our world. We are responding to the deep aspirations of vast masses of Asian people for liberation from sin and its consequences.

3.7.2 Nonetheless, we likewise recognize that these dreams and efforts for integral liberation are being shattered by complex, mutually reinforcing powers that are often beyond the control of workers: the dominance of transnational corporations and large local companies in traditional industries and their incursion into agribusiness, taking advantage of cheap labor or appropriating the land of small landowners; the banning of strikes and trade unions and so repressing legitimate protest; the exodus of rural workers into already overcrowded urban slums as the cities' cheap labor; the lack of supportive organizations among the vast majority of urban workers, small landowners and landless peasants; long hours of work, harassment, job insecurity and accident hazards; deterioration of health; unemployment and underemployment. Clearly, political, economic and agricultural structures have made both urban and rural workers cogs of an anonymous productive machine, their work a dispensable commodity depending only on the law of supply and demand.

3.7.3 Reflecting upon this tragic situation, we recall the Church's rich social doctrine of work, the dignity and inherent worth of work, and the workers' fundamental rights and responsibilities. We do not intend to dwell on these at this time. The participation of the laity at our assembly has directed our attention to the spirituality of work, an area of reflection which has been largely neglected.

3.7.4 Work is often considered an obstacle to our life with God, as something worldly or secular with no religious meaning. Prayer and spirituality seem to begin only when work ends. A fundamental mission of the laity in the world of work is to recover the religious meaning of human work as an expression of human creativity and a participation in the work of the Creator. The task of transforming the present dehumanizing situation of work begins when the worker rises above the routines and monotony of day-to-day labor and questions the whole of life experience: Why work? What is the

meaning of work? What is the meaning of life? These are basic religious questions, expressing deep human aspirations for a happy life, liberation and respect of the person.

3.7.5 Rooted in the Spirit of God, these aspirations cannot be stifled by any work system. So when workers struggle to create a work system more conducive to an authentic spiritual life, their efforts are, in the light of the Gospel, really religious acts (cf. *Laborem Exercens*, 24-27). This is especially so when these acts are consciously subsumed into the dynamic movement that makes work a participation in the healing, transforming and redeeming activity of Jesus Christ, the Alpha and Omega of all endeavor.

3.7.6 It is necessary, therefore, that workers look at the activities which promote and defend their rights within the context of such a spirituality. Some of these activities are the formation of trade unions or agricultural associations, efforts to participate in decision-making processes, and mass action for cheaper agricultural fertilizers. The worker will find the meaning of life in such a spirituality of work.

3.7.7 In the light of the Church's preferential option for the poor, our attention is further directed to certain sectors of Asian workers: children forced to work endless hours in shops, restaurants, farms, etc.; young female workers coming from rural areas and often subjected to sexual harassment, inhuman working and living conditions; domestic workers in countries other than their own, who are exploited as cheap labor; migrants from villages to cities and other countries, who are uprooted and forced to struggle for survival under the most adverse conditions; vast numbers of Asian workers, who remain unemployed or underemployed.

3.7.8 The whole Church has to listen with compassion to the problems of the poor and needy workers, and to direct its pastoral concern and programs to their benefit. The cooperation of all Christians with other groups in society at the local, regional and international levels is imperative so that present exploitative and oppressive work systems can be transformed.

### **3.8 Social Responsibility in the World of Business**

3.8.1 Likewise, the transformation of the social structures of the work process is the mission not only of the workers but also of

business people, government officials, managers and policy-makers. Cooperation among the different sectors of society is indispensable. This cooperation has to exist at national and global levels, and supposes that all sectors of society believe that the resources of this world belong to the entire human family and that social responsibility means stewardship of the goods of this world.

3.8.2 The countries of Asia have been following either a system of free enterprise or a system of centrally-controlled economic development. We realize that neither system exists in its pure or ideal form. Both systems, as they presently operate, have serious drawbacks which prevent people from consciously and creatively shaping the work situation. Free enterprise, or capitalism, proved its ability to organize labor for higher productivity and to unleash the modern technological imagination. Though it has considerably liberated the entrepreneurial and managerial classes, it has also degraded the working class to being a dispensable commodity. It has failed to recognize what Pope John Paul II has called the “principle of the priority of labor over capital” (*Laborem Exercens*, 12).

3.8.3 By contrast, centrally-planned economies, or socialism, have rightly stressed that it is the workers who create the economy, but they have mediated workers’ control and solidarity exclusively through a centralized state. The workers are left with a new form of social domination, viz. the State. Thus neither capitalism nor socialism, despite their contributions, can provide a new model for the social structuring of the whole process of production.

3.8.4 The future, it would seem to us, lies in pioneering new forms of worker participation in industry – ranging from the renewal of the cooperative movement to worker cooperation in mixed or privately-held appropriate technology that prevents the concentration of power in the hands of a few, and supporting the use of technology in the service of labor and not the reverse. Such a model means developing small-scale technology that workers can own and control, at least as a cooperative.

3.8.5 In this context the laity, belonging to the world of business, hears the call of God to live out their faith according to Gospel values and the needs of others. This involves a number of options in their businesses—from the simple exercise of the values of truth, justice and love to their active participation in transforming the social

structure of the whole process towards greater worker participation, more discerning consumer guidance, more responsible interventions by governments and a more equitable society.

3.8.6 There is need for principles guiding the conduct of business, something like a code of ethics for business, to enable people in business to permeate their dealings with Gospel values.

### **3.9 Laity and Health Services**

3.9.1 At our assembly, the laity have communicated their concerns for the world of health. We thank the Lord for the marvelous advances of medicine, the product of human creativity and endeavor in the war against disease. But we are confronted every day with serious problems rising from the application of modern medicine: the prohibitive cost of medical services, the overconcentration of medical health delivery systems in urban areas, the inadequacy of preventive medical services, to name only a few. More seriously, we are today witnessing the emergence of bioethical problems significant not only by their extent but also by their growing complexity. All these confront the entire Church, but more particularly the laity in medical services.

3.9.2 The most significant challenges are: abortion; negative attitudes towards Natural Family Planning; the extensive use of artificial contraception; confusion over moral norms on euthanasia; the high incidence of suicide, particularly among our youth; addiction to alcohol and drugs; and other moral issues arising from biomedical advances, particularly in genetics. The laity in the field of health services, physicians, nurses and other medical personnel, in both Catholic and non-Catholic hospitals, have to live day in and day out with these bioethical issues. The entire Church is called upon to support them.

3.9.3 Beyond professional competence, they need to sharpen their understanding of the moral dimension of modern medicine and its practice. They should recognize the Lord calling them to bring the saving power of Christ that can transform the world of health care and make it wholesome.

3.9.4 They have expressed the need and desire for moral formation, so that they may discern what is morally right or wrong

according to the Gospel. A genuine moral formation of the laity in all the health services is imperative.

3.9.5 Our medical schools should not spare any effort to teach medical ethics. At the same time, Catholic physicians should be encouraged and assisted positively to become qualified bioethicists. Centers for bioethical studies should be given a high priority by our Catholic higher institutions of learning, particularly our schools of theology. Such centers can provide a network of competence that will facilitate the formation of the laity in the field of health services. Wherever in the health services such Catholic organizations exist, we need to show positive interest and support, and provide guidance in the field of bioethics.

3.9.6 But even greater than the concern for the renewal of our traditional health institutions should be our concern for the great masses of the poor in rural areas who are very often deprived of the basic benefits of modern medicine due to their poverty and the lack of adequate medical services.

3.9.7 The forgiving Christ is also the healing Christ who reached out to the poor and marginalized to bring them the healing power of God. God's People, especially the laity in health services, must likewise reach out to farmers and workers, the landless and slum dwellers, so that through them the healing touch of God may be felt. This is why the resources of the Church in health services must be channeled to outreach programs that are community-based and community-oriented. It is with joy that we note the increasing number of Churches in Asia which are responding to this serious need.

## **4.0 Moving Ahead as Community**

4.0.1 The challenges of Asia are "the signs of the times" to be discerned by Christians and the Church of Asia. It is in the faith response we give these challenges that we shall discern and discover the vocation and mission of the laity for the salvation of Asia.

### **4.1 Communion with Jesus**

4.1.1 In order that we may discover our genuine and specific place in the multi-religious cultural context of Asia, we need to

rediscover Jesus Christ as the Liberator of Asia, and his Church as the servant and instrument of that liberation.

4.1.2 The Spirit of the Lord is upon us and the thirst for liberation wells up from within us (cf. Lk 4:42).

4.1.3 Hence, the call today for us Asian Christians is to become a Church deeply committed to Jesus the Liberator. Such a commitment by all Christians will make the Church a communion of committed disciples—be they clergy or laity—working for the liberation of Asia. Such a communion with Jesus Christ and among ourselves is no alienation from the peoples or realities of Asia. On the contrary, our communion is strengthened when we become truly Asian Churches, rooted among our peoples and in solidarity with them.

## **4.2 Communion of Liberation**

4.2.1 The communion of liberation is not lived in a static manner as a calm, composed Body of Christ in the sharing of all spiritual and material gifts among ourselves. Rather, it is lived within the dynamism of life in the Church and the dynamism of challenges from outside the Church.

4.2.2 This dynamism implies that we, within the Church and among ourselves, recognize all members of the Church as mature subjects and persons with dignity and freedom, with their gifts and powers as well as rights and responsibilities. Any defect in these basic attitudes will impair our dynamic communion and weaken our liberative thrust.

## **4.3 A Messianic Mission**

4.3.1 The concrete manner of becoming effective agents of liberation is to recall and activate the spiritual characters and functions we possess by Baptism as disciples of Christ. Jesus, who leads us forward on our journey to liberation, envisions the mission as priestly, prophetic and royal. We share his vision and imbibe his character. We nourish ourselves for this journey with him by constantly hearing his word and recalling his memory through his sacraments within our Churches. In this way, we are enabled to actualize the triple function conferred by Baptism in relation to the realities we encounter on our journey.

4.3.2 If we take our journey to liberation with due awareness and seriousness, then we cannot afford to be merely an inward-looking Church. We have to be outward – looking and forward – looking as we go along with him. In the past, we have directed our efforts in a way that has suited an inward-looking Church. We need now to rearrange our priorities and redirect our ecclesial energies to undertake our journey as an outward-looking Church.

#### 4.4 Messianic Functions

4.4.1 Following Christ as the messianic leader of our journey, we have to actualize our messianic functions.

4.4.2 The priestly function belongs to the whole People of God. The Asian realities themselves urgently demand that this priestly function be exercised by all of our Church. Our proper concern for the ministerial or ordained priesthood – either to improve the quality and number of priests or to meet the problems of formation – must not diminish or distract us from interest in and concern for the common priesthood of the faithful. This latter, though general in the sense of being shared by all Christians, is a real priesthood of life. It has its origins in Christ himself. The Christian disciple lives and participates by his/her day-to-day life in all the mysteries of redemption, viz., suffering, death and resurrection. The ministerial priesthood has meaning and fullness only in relation to the common priesthood. Hence, the clergy have the obligation to live the common priesthood of all before enacting the sacrifice of the Eucharist sacramentally.

4.4.3 The prophetic function of the Church must not be limited to the teaching function of the hierarchy. It must be a witness and a service of the whole community to the saving truth of Christ and his Church. The *sensus fidelium*, or faith-instinct, of the whole People of God is a gift of the Spirit to all as a body. It demands that the leadership should not overlook the spirit and the prophecy of the believing community. Due listening to and consultation of the People of God to discern the spirit and wisdom of God in the people must be undertaken, especially in matters relating to their life in the world and consequent problems.

4.4.4 The royal function which is linked to the royal priesthood must be understood within the background of our human history as leading to the realization of God's Reign. It cannot be seen merely as

a basis for our leadership's guiding and governing. The laity too participate in their own way in the building up of the Kingdom. Their actions within and outside the Church have a constructive value in the building up of the Kingdom (cf. *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, 70). Such an understanding will provide new insights into the apostolate and ministry of the laity in the world.

#### **4.5 Renewal of Structures: Communion, Collegiality, Corresponsibility**

4.5.1 In our efforts to give a faith-response to the challenging call of Asian realities we are guided and strengthened in our convictions by the teaching of Vatican II. The Council called for a renewal of inner structures on the basis of collegiality, communion and co-responsibility; and it recognized the values of subjectivity, and the maturity, dignity and freedom of all the members of the Church. Concretely, it asked for a shift of emphasis so as to recognize the laity of our Churches as full-fledged members, with their own gifts and charisms, their rights and duties.

4.5.2 The principles of communion, collegiality and co-responsibility stressed by Vatican II demand that we re-examine our ecclesial structures with respect to their purpose and thrust and reorganize them to yield optimum benefit. The renewal of inner ecclesial structures does not consist only in strengthening and multiplying the existing parochial and diocesan organizations, nor in creating new ones. It consists in creating the right atmosphere of communion, collegiality and co-responsibility for an active and fuller lay initiation, participation and action.

#### **4.6 Lay Apostolate**

4.6.1 Though our needs have become more challenging, some lay structures and their orientation remain unchanged and consequently unproductive. Especially with respect to lay apostolate groups and international organizations, whose inspiration and structures are given from outside, a re-examination is called for.

4.6.2 The lay apostolate of our Churches still remains basically parish-oriented, inward-looking and priest-directed. The need of our Asian context and the thrust of Vatican II to make the apostolate world-oriented or Kingdom-oriented must be increasingly emphasized. The apostolate must involve more lay initiatives and the

power of decision-making; and it must respond to the real needs of the people. The ordained leadership need not fear or be over-concerned about juridical problems in starting newer forms of lay apostolate or ministries relating to the contextual realities of their Churches. Instead, they should encourage and promote more vigorous, world-oriented forms, initiated and directed by the laity themselves. Such initiatives will help the laity to mature, and consequently make the whole Church more effective and relevant in its mission to Asia.

## **4.7 Pastoral Concerns**

4.7.0 In the light of the above challenges and theological reflection we urge our local Churches in Asia to undertake some pastoral actions, particularly with respect to the following:

### **4.7.1 Clergy-Laity Relationship**

4.7.1.1 There is no one-sided renewal of clergy or laity. In a Church of communion, we, clergy as well as laity, are mutually related and mutually conditioned. We feel the need for a basic change of mind and heart.

4.7.1.2 In a Church which is a communion that tries to liberate others from oppression and discrimination, collegiality and co-responsibility are urgent. We cannot afford to destroy our communion by words or acts of domination and discrimination. A magnanimous spirit of understanding and a recognition of the gifts of the other must be promoted. In this respect, the clergy-leadership has a duty to make the initial moves to foster lay involvement and to recognize the emerging leadership of the laity.

### **4.7.2 Formation of and for the Laity**

4.7.2.1 Formation is not a molding of one by the other but a collaboration of persons in the Church with the Spirit of the Church, using appropriate structures. In light of the Asian challenges and theological reflection, three levels of formation appear as necessary:

4.7.2.2 General formation of all the Church, especially the laity. This entails an effort to conscientize all the faithful through preaching, teaching, catechesis, adult education, etc., about the new

vision of Vatican II with respect to their vocation and mission in the Church and in the world.

4.7.2.3 Particular formation is needed for volunteers and selected leaders of our Churches: from lay apostolate groups, parish and diocesan organizations and special professional fields (work, education, health services, etc.). Seminars, weekend courses or block courses can be the main forms of the formation programs. Bishops are already promoting this type of formation. However, in the euphoria about an awakening laity, we must avoid feeding these groups with mini-courses of seminary theology, but rather give them courses suited to their lay context.

4.7.2.4 Ministerial formation is needed for those who enjoy the charisms for stable ecclesial service. The clergy, who have the responsibility to encourage, welcome and help these charisms prosper for the benefit of Christian Churches and their mission in the world, must offer assistance in accordance with what is needed. By reason of the lay character, formation should be done on the basis of the laity's own experience of the realities of the world. A secular context and a job-oriented formation must be encouraged.

4.7.2.5 The formation programs depend for their support on the local Churches. While we are spending great sums of money to educate and form our clergy in large houses of formation and with well-organized programs, we cannot allow the formation of the laity, as particular groups or as lay ministries, to be neglected. The support of our sister Churches from the West is appreciated. But the local Churches must be encouraged to appreciate and support lay formation programs. Remuneration of lay persons for their stable services must respect the demands of justice and charity. Much could be improved in their programs of formation by an exchange of personnel and resources.

## **4.8 Lay Spirituality**

4.8.1 We have seen the complexities of challenges that the People of God face in Asia. We have reflected theologically on the vocation and mission of the laity and on some pastoral concerns that flow from this theological vision. At our assembly the laity have asked us in many ways and different forms the age-old question of the rich young man in Scripture: "Teacher, what good things must I do to possess

eternal life?" (Mt 19:16). While the words of Jesus were simple enough, his real demand required a radical following by the rich young man.

4.8.2 Discipleship, the following of Jesus – that is the simple answer to the eternal question. This “radicality of the Gospel” is shown in the radicality of his own life. We wish now to communicate to you the reflections that the laity, Religious and priests have shared with us on lay spirituality.

4.8.3 Discipleship in Asia is rooted in the realities of Asia. Christian spirituality must be incarnated. It grows and matures in the midst of continuous tensions and struggles with the destructive powers of sin and its consequences, of conflict and injustice. Christian spirituality must also be Christocentric and inspired by the Spirit of Jesus, the Liberator. It is a “*living in the Spirit*” of Jesus (cf. Rom 8, 1-17), urging us to be his disciples through a dynamic process of being incarnated into the realities of the times, as Jesus was, and of discerning in the Spirit those realities that lead to death and those that lead to life. Jesus was Spirit-led (cf. e.g., Lk 4, 1), and full of the Spirit (e.g., Lk 4, 14); so too should be the Christian. Our spirituality is one of discerning the movement of the Spirit who re-enacts in us the mysteries of Jesus Christ in the contextual realities of daily living and struggling. Here is seen the value of the contemplative dimension, of Asian peoples who discern the movement of God in mundane events and activities. Such a prayerful attitude is immersed in life.

4.8.4 Intermingling with reality and inseparable from it, discipleship is lived in the community of the Church. Christian spirituality is ecclesial and communitarian. It emerges out of our incorporation into the Body, the People of God, realized and expressed in Baptism and Confirmation. Communion with Christ moves from an individual sharing in his suffering, death and resurrection to the Paschal Mystery as lived concretely by the community – a community that is struggling against evil, suffering the pains and anguish of a people, dying and reaching out for new life. Rootedness in Christ means communion with him and his people.

4.8.5 To be rooted in Christ and the community, Christian living and action must be based on the word of God. Christian spirituality is biblical. It is through the word of God that we meet Jesus. It is also

the word of God that gathers us together. We need to listen to Christ as the Word, in the Scriptures and in the Church, but we need also to listen to the Word in persons and in events, in the ebb and flow of life; to listen to the poor and the needy and to reach out to them as Jesus did, for they are the least of his brethren. Here is where a preferential option for the poor, after the example of Jesus himself, demands a spirituality of incarnated “otherness,” all that is meant by the simple words “love of neighbor.”

4.8.6 Discipleship of Jesus, becoming a memory of him, is also based on the sacraments of the Church. Christian spirituality is sacramental. We have already mentioned Baptism and Confirmation as the gateway to Christian discipleship and Church membership. By these two sacraments Christians are not only destined by Jesus to become his witnesses, but are sent by him on his mission. However, at the heart of the Church’s sacramental life, and consequently of Christian spirituality, is the Eucharist, by which the Paschal Mystery of Jesus becomes sacramentally present in our life. Here is found the summit of the Church’s sacramental economy and the source of the power of activity, for here Jesus himself becomes sacramentally present among us in his act of utter self-gift for the world.

4.8.7 The memory of Jesus brings the disciple to seek the Reign of God (cf. *Lumen Gentium*, 31) in the world, to be poor, to thirst for justice, to trust completely in the Father as little children do, for of such is the kingdom of heaven. Seeking the Kingdom that Jesus proclaimed is really to build it in the concrete experiences of the social, political, economic, religious and cultural world of Asia. In Jesus, the Reign of God began; he came that we might have life to the full. The struggle for fullness of life in Asia is a seeking of the Kingdom. Discipleship then is not at all a withdrawal from the world, but an immersion into the wellspring of Asian reality so that it might have life. Communion, solidarity, compassion, justice, love are keynotes of a spirituality of discipleship. And since Jesus came to reconcile sinners with the Father, to remove divisions among people—that all may be one—this impulse from the Spirit of Jesus to be reconciled, to be one, is an essential ingredient of the spirituality of the People of God.

4.8.8 Incarnational, Christocentric, biblical, sacramental, ecclesial and communitarian, the spirituality of the People of God is a journey in the Spirit of Jesus into the Kingdom of the Father; it is a journey of

discipleship, of love and service, after the pattern of the dying and rising of Jesus himself. From the above, it is clear that fundamentally there is but one Christian spirituality, namely that which is common to all disciples of Jesus in his Church, whether lay or clerical, priests, bishops or Religious. If a specific lay spirituality can be identified, it is in the sense that lay people are called to live their discipleship of Jesus and share in his mission according to their proper lay state in the Church. Stress must be laid here on the secular character of the lay vocation and mission. While through various charisms and ministries lay people are increasingly called today to share in the Church's inner life, this must not overshadow the specific character of their witness and action in the world. Lay people are sent by Jesus himself to infuse the Gospel values into earthly realities and human society. The Christian witness and action must penetrate the various dimensions of their life—familial, social, professional and political. Only then will they respond to their vocation and mission according to the spirit of the Gospel. To give such a response is what lay Christian spirituality is all about.

4.8.9 Some of the practical suggestions that we have heard in this assembly are the following: the deepening of our baptismal commitment, our incorporation and communion with Christ; growth in meaningful and inspiring ways of reading the Scriptures and of making the word of God the guiding and integrating norm of our daily life; exercising the mission of reconciliation out of a deep life of communion with God and with others; molding mind and heart towards a Christian-like sensitivity to the cries and sufferings of the poor in order to respond generously and courageously to their needs; joining these poor and those who struggle for a full life in committed solidarity; discovering forms of prayer transformative of values and attitudes and undivorced from life; integrating traditional practices and devotions from popular religiosity into a spirituality of involvement; becoming more deeply aware of the Paschal Mystery, the cross and resurrection of Christ as the basic paradigm of Christian life and of the struggle towards God's Reign; the deepening of our appreciation of the sacraments as a participation in the memory of Jesus, becoming alive and active in the realities of our lives; assuming a discerning way of life.

4.8.10 Fullness of life, while being a gift from God, is then also a hazardous task for the People of God. It implies the challenging task of becoming involved in the transformation of Asian realities. The

two dimensions, the divine and the human, though not identified with each other, involve each other. We thus reiterate our determination to exercise our service of the word of God and of building up the community in such wise as will provide for our laity a more dynamic spirituality.

4.8.11 This will involve a deeper formation of the laity, but it will also require training the clergy for mutuality and service and team ministry. We are hopeful that there will then result a deeper integration of the priests' ministry and lay services for a better service of our Churches to the peoples of Asia.

## 5.0 Conclusion

5.1 We now wish to conclude our sharing with you, dear brothers and sisters. We are thankful to the Spirit who opened our eyes and led us in these days to share with one another, bishops, priests, Religious and laity, the anxieties and joys of Asia, its sufferings and its hopes (cf. *Gaudium et Spes*, 1). Even more vividly than before, we realize that the path we all have to take as God's people is similar to the Paschal Mystery of Jesus, a journey to life through the cross in courage and hope. The following of Jesus is the following of him "whom they have pierced," the Alpha and Omega (cf. Jn 19:37; Zech 12:10; Rev 1:8) of all journeys undertaken in faith.

5.2 We believe that God, who promised us his Kingdom, is with us in the midst of darkness. Within the Paschal Mystery the cross of Jesus is both death as well as victory over death. He is saying to all of us: "It is I. Do not be afraid" (Jn 6:20).

5.3 As the laity, Religious, priests and our fellow bishops spoke to us at our assembly, it was as though the Risen Lord were speaking to us on the road to Emmaus, and we can only wonder: "Wasn't it like a fire burning in us when he talked to us on the road and explained the scriptures to us?" (Lk 24:32). Let our hearts remain warm and our spirits vibrant in the certainty that the Lord is walking with us as we move ahead grappling with the challenges of Asia.

5.4 Journeying in faith through this great continent of Asia and among its peoples, we repose our hope in Mary who is for all of us Mother and Guide on this journey. We commend to her the Church

in Asia and ask her to be with us as she was with the first community of disciples (Acts 1:14).

*May glory and honor be to Jesus Christ, the light of the East, the Sun that never sets.*

*May his Kingdom come!*

## V FABC PLENARY ASSEMBLY

# THE EMERGING CHALLENGES TO THE CHURCH IN ASIA IN THE 1990s: A CALL TO RESPOND

### *Final Statement of the V Plenary Assembly*

**[Bandung, Indonesia, 17<sup>th</sup> to 27<sup>th</sup> July 1990]**

#### **1.0**     *Introduction*

1.1       Gathered together at Bandung, Indonesia, for the Fifth Plenary Assembly of the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences, from the 17<sup>th</sup> to the 27<sup>th</sup> of July, 1990, we, the bishops, priests, Religious and laity, experienced a communion which resembled our Asian Church in miniature. We were united in prayer, asking for an outpouring of the Holy Spirit on all the Church, imploring his grace also for those who were not able to be present. In an atmosphere of mutual sharing and dialogue, we considered the theme: "The Emerging Challenges for the Church in Asia in the 1990s: A Call to Respond." We reflected on the time in which we find ourselves in Asia, and tried to see the way on which we must walk as the Church in this vast continent. The time, the way and the place are deeply related to the mission of Christ which we as his Church must continue.

1.2       We sought to understand and appreciate the critical importance of the present time and to hear what God is calling us to do as we complete the last decade of the second millennium and come to the threshold of the third, remembering that all times are embraced in the hour of Jesus.

1.3       Being at Bandung, we remembered that it was here that the Non-Aligned Movement was born 35 years ago as a Third Force in between the first world of capitalism and the second world of communism. And today, with the collapse of the Berlin Wall, symbolizing the dawn of a new era, we see an opportunity opening up for the Church to present its social doctrine. We feel even more the challenge to work for a new and just international order, where even the small states can make a contribution, and all nations can

participate with dignity, and live in peace with one other. We discussed the theology and motivation which should inspire us at this critical time.

1.4 We searched together for a way along which the Asian Church must walk. A father of the Church has said: "Walk in man and you will arrive in God." This is possible because the Word of God became flesh and called himself the Way (John 14:6). As Pope John Paul II says in *The Redeemer of Humankind*: "This man is the way for the Church—a way that, in a sense, is the basis of all the other ways that the Church must walk, because man — every man without any exception whatever — has been redeemed by Christ, and because with man— with each man without any exception whatever — Christ is in a way united, even when man is unaware of it."

1.5 Finally, with regard to this huge land mass of Asia and our own "teeming millions," we tried to understand our Asian realities. This is the context of God's creative, incarnational and redemptive action, the theater within which the drama of Asia's salvation is enacted.

1.6 We tried to see the new way of being and becoming Church in Asia and also the spirituality which must inform it.

1.7 We regret that there are many situations and structures, groups and persons in Asia where justice and peace, love and compassion, equality and brotherhood, and religious freedom do not always find a sufficient place for existence. Our challenge is to proclaim that Good News of the Kingdom of God: to promote justice, peace, love, compassion, equality and brotherhood in these Asian realities. In short, it is to work to make the Kingdom of God a reality. We wish, then, to share with our Asian sisters and brothers and with all men and women of goodwill the journey in faith that we experienced in these days when we were together at Bandung. Our challenge is to cooperate with all people of goodwill in God's action in the world in the service of justice and peace.

## 2.0 *Challenges and Hopes*

### 2.1 **The Challenge of Ferment and Change in Asia**

2.1.1 The past year has been a time of extraordinary change and desire for change. The face of Eastern Europe appears transformed. There is new hope for a just society in Southern Africa. Here in Asia, popular movements for participation in society are emerging.

2.1.2 We are conscious that the Asian reality is increasingly part of the global reality. Our world is becoming progressively interdependent, with mutual interests and concerns. This situation holds out great opportunities. The old order dominated by the two power blocs has broken down. A new order is emerging, in which even the smallest nation can play its role: in this new order, Asian countries, too, can be influencing, as well as being influenced by, the rest of the world.

2.1.3 Change is the most constant factor in our societies. Some changes are clearly beneficial—we think, for instance, of the disappearance of many old animosities between nations. Other changes are full of promise but are also uncertain of the outcome—we think of the growing desire for participation in society, dramatically apparent in the democracy movement which has made itself felt in a number of Asian countries. Other changes again are at best of ambiguous value. There is new economic prosperity in many of our societies, but it has benefited mainly a tiny elite—old power structures remain substantially unchanged.

2.1.4 A striking change in many of our societies is the breakdown of the nation-state. The nation-state in Asia was usually the creation of the colonial powers; boundaries were set up with little regard for traditional ethnic and cultural groupings. Hence, it is not surprising that we now witness a variety of “secessionist” movements, and, tragically, widespread ethnic and communal conflict and violence.

2.1.5 One reaction to this situation is the growth of “statism”—the imposition of artificial harmony through oppressive state power. Elsewhere, the struggle for power spawns militant fundamentalism, by which a majority group or a powerful minority imposes its values on the rest of society. Religious fundamentalism has its attraction for some believers for primarily religious reasons. But such an attraction

is too often exploited by persons and groups whose motive is political power and social control, or economic greed. Here we see how valid Pope John Paul II's analysis of social problems is in his encyclical *On Social Concerns*. He points out that the desire for profit and the desire for power are the root causes of social problems all over the world.

2.1.6 Modernization offers bright promise for our future. Even so, the whole process of modernization is fraught with ambiguity. Modernization often leads to social and cultural dislocation. Traditional values and attitudes are called into question. Traditional symbols lose their power. The beneficiaries of modernization are too often infected with secularism, materialism and consumerism. In some countries, there has arisen a new middle class which is highly consumeristic and competitive, and in general insensitive and indifferent to the overwhelming majority of poor and marginalized people.

## **2.2 The Challenge of Continuing Injustice**

2.2.1 We are deeply conscious, therefore, that within our context of change there is the unchanging reality of injustice. There remains in Asia massive poverty. Hundreds of millions of people are debarred from access to natural resources. Exploitation of the environment destroys precious resources and thus destroys the material and spiritual habitat of many of our peoples. Militarization involves the wasting of scarce resources on armies and armaments rather than using of these resources to meet genuine and pressing human needs. Traditional patterns of discrimination against women continue in force. In situations of poverty and injustice it is usually women who suffer the most. We see this in the flourishing of exploitative tourism, where women and children are driven into prostitution – this is both a matter of sexual morality and also a matter of structural injustice. Poverty likewise drives both men and women to become migrant workers, often destroying family life in the process. Political conflict and economic desperation have driven millions to become refugees, to live for years in camps that are sometimes in effect crowded prisons. Within many Asian societies, graft and corruption remain a source of serious injustice.

2.2.2 Asia is home to vast numbers people. But too many of them face a future of unemployment and consequent frustration. The most basic and fundamental human right to life is denied to the unborn

child by the practice of abortion. Child labor (even bonded labor) is still prevalent. Our youth, who are 60% of the Asian population, tend to be influenced by an education, the media and social pressures which perpetuate this reality of injustice, and youth themselves are often victims.

2.2.3 Connected, too, with these injustices are other violations of human rights. We see forms of cultural imperialism, with the imposition of majority values, or of values of an assertive minority, on the rest of society. Access to education and employment is denied or limited on the basis of religion, caste, political stance, economic status, or ethnic origin. Those in these societies and elsewhere who speak and act in the name of justice are subject to imprisonment and other forms of punishment. All of these injustices are interconnected. Taken together, they amount to a crisis of survival.

## **2.3 Hope at the Crossroads**

In the face of the massive problems engendered by social change and in the face of massive injustice, we can discern, however, many signs of hope.

2.3.1 There is a new consciousness on the part of the marginalized that the situation is not an inevitable fate but something to be struggled against. Coupled with this is a new consciousness of solidarity—people are not isolated in the struggle against injustice. The growing desire for and growing sense of solidarity cross national, ethnic and class boundaries, boundaries of religion and sex—indeed, the boundary between the human and the rest of creation.

2.3.2 We see, in other words, the promise of movements for democracy, participation and human rights, of ecumenical and interreligious dialogue, of the women's movement, of ecological movements, of the search for spirituality and spiritual values. We see the vitality of our young people and the potential that they provide for positive change. These movements converge in a desire for community which at its best is a desire for inclusive community, community which seeks to cross boundaries, to break down walls rather than artificially strengthening itself by building barriers.

2.3.3 The desire for solidarity is present on both sides of the old boundaries. Ecumenical and interreligious dialogue, for example, has

come about because both Christians and those of other faiths desire to learn from one another, to search together for a better understanding of the meaning of life, to work together for a new world which is at once more human and more divine. It is an enterprise full of hope and also of challenge. We are all being challenged to appreciate the other, to learn from the other, even to be corrected by the other—and at the same time to remain faithful to what is best in our own tradition. By doing this, we run counter to all forms of fundamentalism.

2.3.4 Dialogue between religious traditions, the ecological movement, and aspects of the women's movement offer hope for a more holistic spirituality. This hope and desire is present within, and beyond, the Catholic community. We live in Asia, the home of great contemplative traditions. The Catholic Church is often perceived as not sharing in these contemplative traditions, as being primarily concerned with the external, with rituals and festivals. Central, however, to the Catholic tradition is incarnation, sacramentality. And genuine sacramentality is the antithesis of empty ritualism. It is about finding the mystery of the Divine in everyday reality—a deeply contemplative task—and then celebrating that mystery. At the heart of the ecological movement, likewise, can be found a theology of creation, or better, a spirituality of creation—creation as the divine handiwork and the place of divine presence. Desire for spirituality, for the contemplative, on the one hand, and the possibility of convergence of the sacramental tradition, of the contemplative tradition in other faiths, of concern for the environment, of respect for the feminine, on the other—these for us are great signs of hope.

2.3.5 They are instances where those who are blessed with power and wealth, animated by the spirit of the Gospel, work to promote the common good and are generous in sharing their gift and talents.

2.3.6 A further sign of hope is the desire for community. We have spoken of this at the global level as the desire for solidarity. More locally, it is seen in the growth of Basic Ecclesial Communities, of neighborhood groups, of groups that come together to defend human rights, or that come together for prayer or Bible-sharing. Of course, these groups overlap and interlock. In part, they are motivated by a healthy reaction to the breakdown of traditional structures of community, and more positively, they stem from a concern with human persons rather than with impersonal structures, a concern

above all with those who are small, neglected or despised. In cities, the caste system is gradually weakening.

2.3.7 Desire of community goes together with desire for dialogue. It goes together, too, with the desire for participation, the longing to share in shaping one's personal and communal destiny. We have noted this desire in society. It is felt passionately, too, in the Church, and is beginning to find its flowering in greater lay involvement in the Church's life and ministry.

2.3.8 We can, therefore, speak of a time of "crisis" in the Asian continent, a moment of history opening out to both danger and opportunity. The very same historical situation holds out possibilities of sin as well as grace. It is up to the local Churches in Asia to walk with their people, to accompany them in their journey toward a world that is more Spirit-filled. For in all this ferment we sense the stirrings of the creative Spirit, a Spirit sometimes disturbing, but ever surprising, challenging and hope-giving.

2.3.9 We began by looking at the changing face of Asian societies, the change with much danger of dehumanization. The danger is all too often realized. But the signs of hope that we have discerned offer the potential for humanized and humanizing change. The truly human can, moreover, never be divorced from the rest of divine creation. And when the truly human is discovered and deeply contemplated, it reveals to us the mystery of the Divine, of that creative Being who loves all creation in ways beyond even our deepest hopes and imaginings. So, though there may be negative and dangerous things occurring, the movement in Asia toward modernity calls for a joyful response from the Church as it accompanies our Asian people, as partner with them in all positive movements of the human spirit. The challenge for the Church is to work for justice and peace along with the Christians of other Churches, together with our sisters and brothers of other faiths and with all people of goodwill, to make the Kingdom of God more visibly present in Asia.

### **3.0**      *The Evangelizing Mission of The Church in Contemporary Asia*

The vastness of the Asian continent, the number, complexity and tenacity of its problems could cause in Christians a paralyzing discouragement. But seen with the eyes of faith, these difficulties,

together with the signs of hope that accompany them, are as so many challenges to mission. God speaks to us from the travails and the progress of our countries, and bids us from the contemporary challenges of our world to renew our sense of mission.

### 3.1 A Renewal of the Sense of Mission

3.1.1 1) A renewal of our sense of mission means, first of all, renewal of our faith that God so loved the world that he sent his Son to be the savior of all. This Son, through whom all things were made (Jn 1:3; Heb 1:2), became like us in all things, sin alone excepted (cf. Heb 4:15). He went about doing good and healing all who were in the power of evil (cf. Acts 10:38). Filled with the Spirit, he preached the Good News of the Kingdom of God, and commanded his disciples to do the same. Lifted up from the earth, he draws all peoples to himself through his Church, and through other ways unknown to us. He is the light that enlightens every human being (Jn 1:9). He has imprinted traces of his revelation in the world which exists in him (Col 1:16), and in the “seeds of the word” found in cultures and in other religious traditions. The Spirit, sent by the Father and the Son, and ever-present and active in the Church, in the world and in human heart, leads all to their unity and fulfillment.

3.1.2 From this perspective, mission, being a continuation in the Spirit of the mission of Christ, involves a being with the people, as was Jesus: “The Word became flesh and dwelt among us” (Jn 1:14). Therefore, mission includes: being with the people, responding to their needs, with sensitiveness to the presence of God in cultures and other religious traditions, and witnessing to the values of God’s Kingdom through presence, solidarity sharing and word. Mission will mean a dialogue with Asia’s poor, with its local cultures, and with other religious traditions (FABC I).

3.2 2) Renewal of the sense of mission will also require a renewal of our motivations for mission. There has been perceived in some a weakening of these motivations so necessary to persevere in this demanding task. Why, indeed, should we evangelize?

3.2.1 a) We evangelize, first of all, from a deep sense of *gratitude to God*, the Father “who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing” (Eph 1:3), and sent the Spirit into our hearts so that we may

share in God's own life. Mission is above all else an overflow of this life from grateful hearts transformed by the grace of God.

That is why it is so important for us Christians to have a deep faith experience of the love of God in Christ Jesus (Rom 8:39), that love which has been poured forth in our hearts by the Holy Spirit who has been given to us (Rom 5:5). Without a personal experience of this love received as gift and mercy, no sense of mission can flourish.

3.2.2 b) But mission is also a *mandate*. We evangelize because we are sent into the whole world to make disciples of all nations. The one who sends us is Jesus, who has been sent by the Father, and to whom has been given all authority in heaven and on earth (Mt 28:18). He sends us on a mission which is part of the epiphany of God's plan to bring all things together under Christ as head (Eph 1:9-10). We cannot fulfill this mission apart from him (Jn 15:4-5). But he assures us that he will remain with us all days till the end of time (Mt 28:20), and he has sent us his Spirit so that we may be his witnesses to the ends of the earth (Acts 1:8).

3.2.3 c) We evangelize also because we *believe* in the Lord Jesus. We have received the gift of faith. We have become Christians. "The Christians vocation is by its very nature a vocation to the apostolate (Vatican Council II, *Decree on the Apostolate of the Laity*, 2). That is why Pope Paul VI emphatically states: "It is unthinkable that a person should accept the word and give himself to the Kingdom without becoming a person who bears witness to it and proclaims it in his turn" (*Evangelization in the Modern World*, 24).

Unfortunately for many Catholics, faith is only something to be received and celebrated. They do not feel it is something to be shared. The missionary nature of the gift of faith must be inculcated in all Christians. All must be helped to realize that God has called us to be Christians not only so that we may be saved but that we may collaborate in the work of the world's salvation, and invite those whom God draws to the Church to share in our faith.

3.2.4 d) We evangelize also because we have been *incorporated by baptism into the Church*, which is missionary by its very nature because it is the result of the missions of the Son and of the Holy Spirit (Vatican Council II, *Decree on the Church's Missionary Activity*, 2). The Church exists in order to evangelize (*Evangelization in the Modern World*, 14); and each member, by virtue of the sacraments of baptism and

confirmation, has received the right and duty to the apostolate from the Lord himself (Vatican Council II, *Dogmatic Constitution on the Church*, 33).

3.2.5 e) And finally, we evangelize because the Gospel is *leaven* for liberation and for the transformation of society. Our Asian world needs the values of the Kingdom and of Christ in order to bring about the human development, justice, peace and harmony with God, among peoples and with all creation, that the peoples of Asia long for.

3.2.6 Yes, for Asia and its teeming millions also we must affirm: "The Lord is the goal of human history, the focal point of the desires of history and civilization, the center of humankind, the joy of all hearts, and the fulfillment of all aspiration" (Vatican Council II, *Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World*, 45).

3.2.7 We look forward to the day when daughters and sons of the Church, imbued with these motivations, will see in their evangelizing mission not only a duty that they must fulfill but a privilege they can be thankful for, and a right they will faithfully safeguard. Christians formed in a missionary spirituality will be joyful witnesses of the values of the Kingdom, and of Christ whose disciples they are.

3.3 3) The renewal of our sense of mission will mean, thirdly, that the acting subject of mission is the *local Church* living and acting in communion with the Universal Church. It is the local Churches and communities which can discern and work out (in dialogue with each other and with other persons of goodwill) the way the Gospel is best proclaimed, the Church set up, the values of God's Kingdom realized in their own place and time. In fact, it is by responding to and serving the needs of the peoples of Asia that the different Christian communities become truly local Churches.

3.3.1 This local Church, which is the acting subject of mission, is the people of God in a given milieu, the whole Christian community—laity, Religious and clergy. It is the whole diocese, the parish, the Basic Ecclesial Community and other groups. Their time has come for Asia.

3.3.2 Hence, we can see from the point of view of mission how vital is the formation of *fully participatory* Christian communities where people experience that they "belong" to and that together they

are the Church. On the other hand, such communities become fully Church, only when they accept their share in the Church's mission.

#### 4.0 *The Mode of Mission in Asia*

4.1 Mission may find its greatest urgency in Asia; it also finds in our continent a distinctive mode. We affirm, together with others, that "the proclamation of Jesus Christ is the center and primary element of evangelization" (*Statement of the FABC All-Asia Conference on Evangelization*, Suwon, South Korea, August 24-31, 1988). But the proclamation of Jesus Christ in Asia means, first of all, the witness of Christians and of Christian communities to the values of the Kingdom of God, *a proclamation through Christlike deeds*. For Christians in Asia, to proclaim Christ means above all to live like him, in the midst of our neighbors of other faiths and persuasions, and to do his deeds by the power of his grace. Proclamation through dialogue and deeds – this is the first call to the Churches in Asia.

4.2 Mission in Asia will also seek through *dialogue* to serve the cause of unity of the peoples of Asia marked by such a diversity of beliefs, cultures and socio-political structures. In an Asia marked by diversity and torn by conflicts, the Church must in a special way be a sacrament – a visible sign and instrument of unity and harmony.

4.3 But we shall not be timid when God opens the door for us to *proclaim* explicitly the Lord Jesus Christ as the Savior and the answer to the fundamental questions of human existence. We shall proclaim the Gospel in the manner of the Lord Jesus, who expressed his mission in these terms:

The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed, to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord (Lk 4:18-19).

4.4 Despite the goodwill and sometimes heroic efforts of evangelizers, our deeds have often proven inadequate. What was lacking?

4.5 It seems to us now that in confrontation with Asian realities we have preached about values which ought to be pursued, but have often failed to follow through with *effective actions* that would help

dismantle structures of sin that are oppressive of our peoples. We now recognize the need to plan and do appropriate deeds consequent upon dialogue and prayerful discernment.

4.6 Our minority status does not deter us from patiently working out in collaboration with Christians of other Churches and peoples of other religious and persuasions the steps needed to liberate our people from the bondage of sin and its societal manifestations, and to inscribe the values of the Kingdom in Asian society. For the Lord assures us: "Fear not, little flock, for it has pleased the Father to give you the Kingdom" (Lk 12:32).

## **5.0      *The Role of the Lay Faithful***

5.1 The renewal of Asian society which the Lord bids us to accomplish in dialogue and collaboration with peoples of other religious traditions and persons of goodwill requires the effort of the whole Church. While bishops and priests should be active in the Christian formation of lay people (Pope John Paul II, *Message to FABC V, Bandung*), the lay faithful should take upon themselves as their specific responsibility the renewal of Asian society according to the values of the Gospel. They are the primary evangelizers of culture and of cultures, and of the whole fabric of life in society. Hence, there must not be in Catholics what Vatican II has described as a "pernicious opposition between professional and social activity on one hand and religious life on the other" (*Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World, 43*).

5.2 This calls for a thorough education of Catholics in the social doctrine of the Church, as well as the formation of their hearts toward just and compassionate living in present-day Asian society. Christians formed in this manner will be evangelizers of their own—the young evangelizing the young, workers, evangelizing workers, professionals, government officials evangelizing government officials, families evangelizing families—and will be leaven for the transformation of Asian society.

## **6.0      *The Face of the Church in Asia***

6.1 We have up to now emphasized deeds. But mission is more than deeds. It involves the very being of the Church.

Therefore, we ask: “What should the Church *be* in and to this changing Asian world marked by so much diversity, poverty, suffering and injustice, and with so many movements for social transformation?”

6.2 The Christian community, it seems to us, must live in *companionship*, as true *partners* with all Asians as they pray, work, struggle and suffer for a better human life, and as they search for the meaning of human life and progress. Because the human person, created in Christ, redeemed by Christ and united by Christ to himself, is the way for the Church, the Church must walk along with him/her in human solidarity.

6.3 But it is as *servants of the Lord* and of *humanity* that we Christians share the same journey with all the Asian peoples. The Church was not sent to observe but to serve—to serve the Asian peoples in their quest for God and for a better human life; to serve Asia under the leading of the Spirit of Christ and in the manner of Christ himself who did not come to be served but to serve and to lay down his life as a ransom for all (Mk 10:45)—and to discern, in dialogue with Asian peoples and Asian realities, what deeds the Lord wills to be done so that all humankind may be gathered together in harmony as his family. As servant of Yahweh and of humanity, the Church will seek above all faithfulness to God and to the Asian peoples, and will also invite to full participation in the Christian community those who are led to it by Spirit of God.

6.4 This service will be done in *compassion*, the compassion of Jesus himself who, like the good Samaritan, came to bind the wounds of humanity. It will be a compassion that makes the Church weak and powerless with those who are weak and powerless. But it will be a compassion that will denounce, in deeds, if it is not possible to do so in words, the injustice, oppressions, exploitations and inequalities resulting in so much of the suffering that is evident in the Asian situation. Such compassion will see as fellow members of the one human family under the Fatherhood of God all exploited women and workers, unwelcome refugees, victims of violations of human rights, and in fact every needy human person. This compassion will see even deeper, and will welcome in each human person—but especially the poor, deprived and oppressed—the very person of Christ who has united himself to every human being, though he/she may be unaware of it (*The Redeemer of Humankind*, 14).

6.5 Such a Church will not boast of human power but will serve with the power of the Lord Jesus who emptied himself and took the form of a servant (Phil 2:7), but is, for all who believe, the Wisdom and Power of God (1 Cor 1:23-24).

6.6 This Church, witnessing by its very being and deeds to the values of the Kingdom of God, will then be credible when it proclaims with its lips that Jesus is the Savior of the world and answer to all its longings.

## 7.0 *Living in The Spirit: Pastoral Responses*

### **Our Process**

7.1 Our reflection on the Asian situation in the light of our mission of evangelization has led us to realize the enduring validity of a process of: (a) *dialoguing* with the realities of Asia from within; (b) *discerning* the movement of God's Spirit in Asia; and (c) *translating into deeds* what the Spirit bids us to accomplish. This process has to be the general approach for our total response as Church in Asia.

### 7.2 **Pervading Pastoral Imperatives**

#### *At the Level of Discernment*

From our sharing of experiences and reflections, six pervading pastoral imperatives have constantly emerged:

1. The necessity for Christian mission to keep *Christ at the center* of our proclamation, behavior and relationships.
2. The imperative of considering with the utmost concern and sensitivity the relationship and interaction between the mission and pastoral thrust of the Church and *pluralism* of Asian societies.
3. The imperative of *empowering people* for mission, ministry and the task of integral liberation.
4. The need to encourage, initiate and facilitate *micro-level initiatives* with ripple effects, especially at the grassroots level.

5. The indispensable necessity for the Church in Asia to be *credible* in its lifestyle and deeds in proclaiming its faith and in acting for justice and human rights.

6. The imperative of *re-envisioning* and *re-planning* formation processes, with particular attention being given to cultural values and structural factors.

### **7.3 Specific Pastoral Directions**

#### *At the Level of Doing*

Having discerned the way the Holy Spirit is leading us to respond to the challenges emerging in Asia, for specific pastoral initiatives and processes we urge:

#### **7.3.1 Proclaiming the Faith**

1. That appropriate formation processes for mission and proclamation be developed, with emphasis on the laity's participation.

2. That an integral catechesis and the promotion of Bible study and reflection toward the building of word-centered communities be undertaken.

3. That serious concern and care, through intensive inculturation and catechesis, be given toward a meaningful and joyful celebration of the sacraments and liturgy, especially the Eucharist, that would be creative of fellowship and community.

4. That effective measures be taken by episcopal conferences to develop and communicate a process of regular faith discernment that everyone could easily use and share in.

5. That the content and programming of Catholic media implement a "ministry of compassion" for the sick and poor of Asia, thus making itself a more effective instrument of evangelization.

6. That a commission for the Biblical Apostolate be set up in every episcopal conference to promote an understanding and a love of the Scriptures among our people.

## 7.3.2 **Serving Asian Societies**

### 7.3.2.1 *Mediated by the Social Doctrine of the Church*

1. That social analysis be integrated with cultural analysis, and both be subjected to faith discernment.
2. That the social doctrine of the Church be part of formation in faith for everyone, at all levels of laity, Religious and clergy.
3. That the formation of a faith-inspired social conscience be a priority task in catechesis, media, schools and other apostolates of formation.
4. That the Church, consistent with its social doctrine, investigate and remove from within its own structures and practices whatever obstructs human rights and justice.
5. That, wherever possible, specialized institutions be set up to provide, from a faith perspective, competence for lay persons in the socio-economic and political field, including the civil service.

### 7.3.2.2 *In Quest of Justice, Peace and the Integrity of Creation*

*("There is no peace without social justice, and little social justice without peace.")*

1. That episcopal conferences effectively incorporate into their Justice and Peace programs a vigorous defense and promotion of human rights, especially those of women and children, born and unborn.
2. That Catholic schools integrate into their curricula the formation of values necessary for peace and social transformation, and study how Gospel values can positively influence culture, science and technology.
3. That the Justice and Peace commissions of episcopal conferences develop and implement a program of forming men and women dedicated to the Gospel value of active non-violence, and facilitate the organization of peace groups (e.g., peace cells, zones of peace) at the grassroots level.

4. That the FABC set up contacts with other regional associations of episcopal conferences in order to raise and discuss both the interlocking character and also the moral dimensions of issues of justice, peace and the integrity of creation.

### 7.3.2.3 *In a Situation of Pluralism*

1. That episcopal conferences develop a formation process for clergy, Religious and laity toward the formation of “persons of dialogue,” who would be sensitive to other faiths and persuasions, and to social and cultural diversity in the Church and in the world.

2. That the collaboration of the appropriate FABC Offices to facilitate at the grassroots level ecumenical and interreligious dialogue for integral development be continued, and that such dialogue be further promoted by episcopal conferences in their own areas.

3. That the episcopal conferences identify cultural attitudes and grassroots structures, including interchurch and interfaith groups, and set up leadership-training programs that would promote ecumenical and interreligious dialogue.

4. That episcopal conferences explore closer relationships with international Catholic organizations and with government and non-government organizations to promote integral development.

5. That efforts to have a dialogue of life at the grassroots level be facilitated and promoted so that people of different Churches, religious traditions and persuasions, become aware of shared human and spiritual values, may act together for the common good.

6. That the Church, as the sacrament of unity of all humankind, promote communion with the Church, and peace and harmony in the world, especially when pluralism becomes a cause for division.

### 7.3.3 **Deepening the Faith**

1. That episcopal conferences promote the establishment of centers of prayer; and the development of seminaries into centers of deep spirituality for priests and other ministers of the Church.

2. That episcopal conferences promote the development of the spiritual depth and possibilities of pilgrimages, which could also serve as events of ecumenical and interreligious encounter.

3. That episcopal conferences foster the inculturation of the sacraments and liturgy, especially the celebration of the Eucharist.

4. That the ways of prayers be integrated into all catechetical programs, especially of Christian initiation.

5. That episcopal conferences explore approaches to a spirituality that would be relevant to youth.

6. That religious orders and congregations in Asia exercise leadership in living the Gospel prophetically and radically, thus providing depth and spiritual inspiration for the up-building of the Body of Christ.

7. That events and exercises which would help bishops come into deeper contact with the inner journey of the Spirit be planned and promoted.

## 8.0 *A New Way of Being Church in the 1990s*

### **Response at the Level of Being**

(For principal features of this "new" way of being Church, see *FABC III, 1982, "The Church: A Community of Faith in Asia"*; and the *FABC Asian Colloquium on Ministries in the Church, 1977*.)

8.1 The above recommendations of the Fifth Plenary Assembly envision alternative ways of being Church in the Asia of the 1990s. But these alternative ways share some major dimensions.

8.1.1 1) The Church in Asia will have to be a *communion of communities*, where laity, Religious and clergy recognize and accept each other as sisters and brothers. They are called together by the word of God which, regarded as a quasi-sacramental presence of the Risen Lord, leads them to form small Christian communities (e.g., neighborhood groups, Basic Ecclesial Communities, and "covenant" communities). There, they pray and share together the Gospel of Jesus, living it in their daily lives as they support one another and work together, united as they are "in one mind and heart."

8.1.2 2) It is a *participatory* Church where the gifts that the Holy Spirit gives to all the faithful—lay, Religious and cleric alike—are recognized and activated, so that the Church may be built up and its mission realized.

8.1.3 3) Built in the hearts of people, it is a Church that faithfully and lovingly *witnesses* to the Risen Lord Jesus and reaches out to people of other faiths and persuasions in a dialogue of life toward the integral liberation of all.

8.1.4 4) It is a leaven of transformation in this world and serves as a *prophetic sign*, daring to point beyond this world to the ineffable Kingdom that is yet to come fully.

## 9.0 *A Spiritually for Our Times*

### **Response at the Focal Point of the Spirit**

(For major features of this spirituality, see FABC II, 1978, "*Prayer--The Life of the Church of Asia*"; and FABC IV, 1986, "*The Vocation and Mission of the Laity in the Church and in the World of Asia*.)

9.1 At the center of this new way of being Church is the action of the Spirit of Jesus, guiding and directing individual believers as well as the whole community to live a life that is Spirit-filled--that is, to live an authentic spirituality. It is nothing more and nothing less than a following of Jesus-in-mission, an authentic discipleship in the context of Asia.

9.2 If people are convinced more by witnessing than by teaching, this is most true of the peoples of Asia whose cultures hold the contemplative dimension, renunciation, detachment, humility, simplicity and silence with highest regard. We would have a message for Asia only when our Asian sisters and brothers see in us the marks of God-realized persons. Credibility is the fruit of authenticity. The sharing of what our lived spiritual experiences are, is of incalculable necessity and importance in the tasks of evangelization and integral development.

9.3 Our spirituality has, therefore, to integrate every aspect of Christian life: liturgy, prayer, community living, solidarity with all and especially with the poor, evangelization, catechesis, dialogue, social commitment, etc. There has to be no dichotomy between faith

and life, or between love and action, unless we wish simply to be like clanging cymbals, noisy and distracting, without depth and direction. In all things, we need to have a profound sense of the holy, a deep sense and awareness of God, his presence and mystery.

9.4 We require a return to the very sources of Christian life, to the Scriptures, to the living traditions of our Church, to the spiritual wisdom of our ancestors. And this return would have to be in dynamic interaction with a pervasive sensitivity to the aspirations of all, and especially of the poor peoples of Asia.

9.5 For the spirituality of the new way of being Church is the spirituality of those who place their complete trust in the Lord. It is the spirituality of the powerless, of the *anawim*. Renunciation and simplicity, compassion for and solidarity with all, and especially with the poor, meekness and humility – virtues promoted by active non-violence – are some of the significant features of the spirituality we need, and these Gospel values resonate deeply with the cultures of Asia. It is a spirituality of harmony. It expresses our intimate communion with God, our docility to his Spirit, our following of Jesus, as we challenge the disharmonies of our Asian world. It moves us away from images of exterior organization, power or mere secular effectiveness to images of simplicity, humble presence and service.

9.6 Its depth prepares us for ecumenical and interreligious dialogue. It stirs up in us a faith and hope in the Lord of history, a sense of wonder at his mighty work, a hunger for the saving message, and beckons all to share in the ultimate goal of all human striving, which is the inner life of God.

9.7 By itself, then, such spirituality is already a living proclamation of Jesus, the Lord and Savior, unequivocal in its meaning, powerful and far-reaching in its impact.

## 10.0 *Conclusion*

10.1 We began by emphasizing deeds as a response of the Church to the challenges of Asia and we have ended by pointing out that responding with the very being and heart of the Church has primacy over doing. This must be so, for effective doing can only result from the very depths of the Church's being and authentic living. The Church has to become what it really is for the doing to

begin, for the Church in Asia “to act justly, love tenderly, and walk humbly with your God” (Micah 6:8).

10.2 With a prayer on our lips and a hope in our hearts, we entrust ourselves to Mary, the Mother of Jesus. She is our guide for the Way. She will help the Church in Asia to keep us on the right *path* even if this proves to be the Way of the Cross. She will assist us to be faithful to God’s plan for the Church in Asia till the *time* comes when her Son will return to take us to that *place* described by Isaiah:

“On this mountain, he has destroyed the veil which used to veil all peoples, the pall enveloping all nations: he has destroyed death forever. Lord Yahweh has wiped away the tears from every cheek; he has taken away his people’s shame everywhere on earth, for Yahweh has spoken” (Isaiah 25:7-8).



**VI FABC PLENARY ASSEMBLY**

**CHRISTIAN DISCIPLESHIP IN ASIA TODAY:  
SERVICE TO LIFE**

*Final Statement of the VI Plenary Assembly*

**[Manila, Philippines, 10<sup>th</sup> to 19<sup>th</sup> January 1995]**

**Introduction**

1. To our God of love and life, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, we give praise and thanks!

In the same city of Manila, where 25 years ago in the inspiring presence of the revered Pope Paul VI, the dream of actualizing the communion of Asian Churches began, we, the bishops-delegate of twenty-one countries and territories, gather in Manila for the Sixth Plenary Assembly of the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences. We are deeply blessed by the active participation in our Assembly of a number of dedicated lay persons, priests, religious sisters and brothers.<sup>1</sup>

On this occasion a singular grace for us is likewise the moving presence of Pope John Paul II. With him we not only celebrate the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the resolution to form a structure that would later become the FABC, but also the 25<sup>th</sup> year of Radio Veritas Asia, the 400<sup>th</sup> year of the Archdiocese of Manila and its 3 historic suffragans, Cebu, Caceres, and Nueva Segovia, and especially the 10th World Youth Day. Indeed these festivities are peak moments of God's grace to the Church in Asia, in communion with one another and with the Holy Father – at the service of life.

2. Remembering with gratitude the beginnings of FABC, we are impressed by the vigor of the creative energies that gave it birth and life. We also recognize that the history of FABC is but a short

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<sup>1</sup> We note with pain the absence of delegates from some countries. We hope for the day when conditions would allow them to celebrate with us our ecclesial communion in a fuller way.

chapter in the continuing saga of the Asian Churches' solicitude for life, whose individual and collective stories are about promises already realized, if yet waiting to be fulfilled.

This remembrance of blessings past is both comfort and strength. For we realize that the spring from which FABC draws its vigor is the God who has blessed us in Jesus Christ with every spiritual blessing (Eph 1:3). We thank our God in our remembrance (Phil 1:3).

#### **A. 25 YEARS OF FABC COMMITMENT TO LIFE**

3. Through its past five plenary assemblies, FABC tried to discern the current "life-context" of the Asian pastoral situations that inevitably consist of death-dealing as well as life-serving realities. The initial bishops' meeting in Manila in 1970 already indicated the expectations of Asians for "a better and fuller life for themselves and their children" (ABM, 10). For this reason, the Church in Asia must foster a threefold dialogue: with the many different faiths of Asia, with the cultures of Asia, and with the poor multitudes of Asia. We believe that fullness of life can be realized "only in and through Christ and his Gospel, and by the outpouring of the Holy Spirit" (FABC I, 1974).

For the Church and its mission in Asia whose peoples are characterized by traditions of deep religiosity, prayer has to be "the river of life." Prayer is absolutely indispensable if the Christ-life is to indwell Christian participation in life-giving liberation and development (FABC II, 1978). This inner life of prayer builds the Church into a credible community of faith, rooted in the life of the Trinity and turned resolutely toward the construction of a fully human future for Asian peoples (FABC III, 1982).

This is why the laity must act as an evangelizing and liberating force in the struggle for fullness of life (FABC IV, 1986). Our unique contribution is our vision of Jesus Christ, and our Christian spirituality manifested through dialogue, discernment and deeds. As Church, we need to walk in compassion and humility, in accompaniment with all the peoples of Asia "as they pray, work, struggle and suffer for a better human life, (in their) search for the meaning of human life and progress" (FABC V, 1990).

Through the years FABC has addressed various concerns that promote social, economic, religious and ecclesial life. Such concerns are: the promotion of justice and integral development particularly in relation to women, migrant workers and indigenous peoples; the building of basic ecclesial communities and basic human communities; the promotion of interreligious dialogue, especially the dialogue of life; leadership formation and specialized formation of priest-formators, youth chaplains, bishops and lay leaders; the conscientization and organization of basic sectors of society; and a more effective use of media for evangelization.

The overall thrust of activities in recent years has been to motivate the Churches of Asia towards “a new way of being Church,” a Church that is committed to becoming “a community of communities” and a credible sign of salvation and liberation.

4. Yet on this the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of FABC, we have to confess humbly that the goal of conscientizing the local Churches and building a communion of our Asian Churches is still far from being reached, despite the truly remarkable advances already made in this regard.

We are glad to recall, even if only briefly, the extraordinarily rich story of FABC. It is the story of a listener attentive to the perils of life, to the visions of life, to celebratory songs of life and who wants to share the singular wealth one has, which is the memory of the person named Jesus who is for us the Way, the Truth and the Life.

5. The theme for this Sixth Plenary Assembly of FABC is most fitting. We take as our theme “Christian Discipleship in Asia Today: Service to Life,” in order that we may recommit ourselves to the promotion of life in Asia.

## **B. A VISION OF LIFE AMID ASIAN REALITIES**

6. “Life. Vibrant life pulsating from the fecundity of Asia” (FABC International Theological Colloquium, 1994). How do the disciples of Jesus in Asia view this life that is welling up from the depths of Asian peoples, their histories, their habitats and their cultures? What service can the disciples of Jesus in Asia offer to affirm, enhance, defend and promote this life?

Our response begins with a rapid scan of Asian realities not so much to repeat the already substantive analyses that previous FABC assemblies and a great number of FABC seminars and workshops have done, as simply to situate more clearly the struggle of Asia for life.

7. We turned our attention to whatever threatens, weakens, diminishes and destroys the life of individuals, groups or peoples; whatever devalues human beings, conceived, born, infant, old; whatever socio-cultural, religious, political, economic, or environmental factor that threatens or destroys life in our countries. We identified some of these forces of death at work in Asia. And we concluded that as promoters of life, we could only denounce them.

We were alarmed at how the global economy is ruled by market forces to the detriment of peoples' real needs. We considered the insecurity and vulnerability of migrants, refugees, the displaced ethnic and indigenous peoples, and the pain and agonies of exploited workers, especially the child laborers in our countries.

We became more aware of the forces of death depriving women and the girl child of their dignity, freedom, personhood and fuller humanity. We realized how the same forces undermine the family, the basic cell of society and the Church, through liberalist, anti-life, anti-child, anti-woman, anti-family policies and values and pose many threats to wholeness of life in the area of health care, especially of the poor.

We recognized the growing violence, terrorism, conflicts and nuclear proliferation fueled by the arms trade and greed for profit, all of which violate people's rights. They threaten participative democracy, humane governance and a just and peaceful society. We also noted with pain that our sisters and brothers in some countries are still denied their right to religious freedom.

In the area of religious pluralism, we reflected on the growing fundamentalist extremism and fanaticism discriminating and excluding people who belong to other religious traditions, thus destroying the harmony of peoples' lives and their solidarity already witnessed to in a dialogue of life.

As we reflected on these negative areas, we could not ignore the immense damage to the ecosystem of our planet which offends justice and the rights of people.

We say “no” to these death-dealing forces.

8. In this scenario of shadows, we were also encouraged by areas of light. We became aware of the many signs of hope in the histories and cultures of our peoples, as seen in peoples’ movements and the initiatives of groups, peoples, and the Churches in Asia for the service of life. We identified with great joy these expressions of life powerfully at work in Asia. We resolved to affirm them, encourage them, celebrate them, and unite our efforts to them.

Noteworthy among them are the growing consciousness regarding human dignity and empowerment of the poor, the growing voices of groups and peoples for humanized development, and the cries of the marginalized groups for participatory and democratic governance.

We dwelt also on the movements for the protection of the environment and ecosystem linked to justice, and the solidarity of committed groups and peoples in the struggle for the rights of women, children, especially the girl child, and those of indigenous peoples. Truly remarkable is the increasing number of young people moving towards solidarity and community, and seeking a deeper spirituality. We were consoled by efforts of many groups to foster dialogue with people of other faiths.

We did not miss the value of the discovery of mass media for the promotion of values and support of peoples’ movements and rights.

To these life-giving forces, we give a resounding “yes.”

9. From the dynamic forces at work within Asian realities a basic vision of life emerges. In the living heritage of cultures and religious traditions of Asia we discern values and their expressions in symbols, stories and art forms, that embody a vision of life; while we are critically aware of the distortions that have entered into these traditions. In these cultural and religious traditions we also discover the responses to life given by past generations of Asian peoples, which in turn become resources for our contemporary response.

We Asians are searching not simply for the meaning of life but for life itself. We are striving and struggling for life because it is a task and a challenge. But life is a gift too, a mystery, because our efforts to achieve it are far too short of the ultimate value of life. We speak of life as a becoming—a growing into, a journeying to life and to the source of life.

10. So what might this vision be?

In the rich diversity of ancient Asian cultures and faiths is a vision of *unity in diversity, a communion of life* among diverse peoples. In this context we seek to become persons of dialogue.

Ours is a vision of *holistic life*, life that is achieved and entrusted to every person and every community of persons, regardless of gender, creed or culture, class or color. It is the fruit of integral development, the authentic development of the whole person and of every person.

We envision a life *with integrity and dignity, a life of compassion* for the multitudes, especially for the poor and the needy. It is a life of *solidarity* with every form of life and of *sensitive care* for all the earth. It is thus a life that unites us Asians among ourselves and with the whole of creation into one community of life.

For us to live is to live with integrity and dignity, in peace and justice, in freedom and participation, in mutuality and complementarity. It is to live in simplicity and friendship.

At the heart of our vision of life is the Asian *reverential sense of mystery and of the sacred*, a spirituality that regards life as sacred and discovers the Transcendent and its gifts even in mundane affairs, in tragedy or victory, in brokenness or wholeness. This deep interiority draws people to experience *harmony and inner peace* and infuses ethics into all of creation.

11. Such is a broad sketch of an Asian vision of life. With the eyes of the heart, with our faith, we need to understand it as the work of the creative Spirit of the God of Life, who in all things and among every people is healing, renewing, and recreating in ever new, ever mysterious ways.

What can we, and how can we, as disciples of Jesus, contribute to the shaping and achieving of such a vision of life in Asia, with our Asian peoples and for Asian peoples? How can the Churches of Asia participate, as Churches and as Asian, in the common global search for life? What does Christian discipleship in Asia mean, if it is to truly serve life?

Our response leads us to Jesus, the Life whom we are following and whom we share with others.

### C. TO LIFE IN THE FOOTSTEPS OF JESUS

12. All life is related to the active presence of the Creator Spirit. No wonder Jesus, confessed as Messiah and Lord, is Spirit-filled. He who is The Life is dependent on the Spirit. Conceived in the virgin's womb by the Spirit's power (Lk 1:35, Mt 1:20), anointed by the Spirit at his baptism in the Jordan (Mk 1:10), driven to the wilderness by the Spirit to be prepared for his mission (Mt 4:1), sent to preach the good news of salvation by the Spirit's action (Lk 4:18-19), Jesus ushers in the new creation, the fullness of life in God. As the Risen One, he breathes the Holy Spirit on his disciples (Jn 20:22f), making them partakers of his life and mission.

What vision of life emerges from the Spirit-filled Jesus?

13. JESUS AND THE KINGDOM OF THE GOD OF LIFE. "I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly" (Jn 10:10). With these simple words, Jesus describes his mission. But it is also depicted as the mission of announcing and inaugurating the Kingdom of God (Mk 1:15), the hope of subjugated Israel for the fullness of life in God. Jesus teaches what life in the Kingdom consists in.

13.1. *Communion with Abba.* Jesus identifies the ultimate source of life, the God whom he intimately calls Abba. In Abba Jesus finds his whole life. "I am in the Father and the Father in me" (Jn 14:11). In Abba he finds the resting place of his life's journey. "Father, into your hands I commend my spirit" (Lk 23:46). Who Jesus is, what he does, where he ends up, are all found in a passion for communion with Abba.

13.2. *Liberating and Recreating Communion among Neighbors.* In compassionate love, Jesus makes his own the struggles and

aspirations of Israel for life. Assuming their humanity, he incarnates Abba's life-giving actions of old: creation of all the living out of sheer love, liberation of the chosen people from the bondage of Egypt, mutual belonging within the covenant. Like Abba, Jesus brings life through a new creation, a radical liberation and a renewed communion.

At his word, demons flee, sinners are liberated. At his touch, the sick are healed. He frees the victims of society from the evil and sin that shackle them. He restores them to communion. He breaks down barriers set up by greed, pride, discrimination, lopsided social norms and even religious distortions. Outcasts become sisters and brothers. Sinners are worthy of compassion. The hungry, the thirsty, the prisoners, the naked bear the divine presence. And God is our Father. In the freedom and communion that Jesus offers, a new creation dawns. The human community is reborn. Indeed the time of fulfillment has come. Life in abundance is in our midst. The Kingdom is here (Lk 17:21).

13.3. *Death for the Life of the Many.* In his passion for life, Jesus courageously confronts death. But like all defenders of life, he catches the wrath of the "friends of death" and suffers humiliating death. In the meal he shares with his friends before being crucified, he portrays his death as an act of self-giving for the life of others: "my body is given for you" (Lk 22:19), "my blood is to be poured out for the many" (Mk 14:24). And he commands his disciples to remember this supreme act of love. On the cross, Jesus unites himself with every person seeking life. On the cross, life is poured out from the love and strength that dare to be weak for Abba and neighbors. On the cross, Jesus wins life by offering his own life in death.

13.4. *The Risen One Conquers Death.* Jesus' rising from the dead the whole of humanity and creation that God is the Master of life. In the resurrection of Jesus, death has been stripped of its definitive role in shaping history. History belongs to life! The whole of creation is propelled by life! God offers hope to the whole world and its teeming millions searching and struggling for life through the Risen One, Word of Life, the Bread of Life, the Author of Life.

13.5. *The Gift of the Spirit of Life.* Jesus promises and gives the Spirit, "the Lord, the Giver of Life." The Spirit that enabled Jesus

to be the life-giving Messiah, will enable the community of disciples to remember him, to follow him, to participate in his life. The followers of Christ, individually and corporately, are to be comforted and rejuvenated in their following of Jesus by the Spirit of Life.

This image of Jesus—man of the creative Spirit, friend of God, person of interiority, bringer of harmony, lover of the poor, healer and liberator, bold prophet, suffering companion, victor over death, sharer of his Spirit—resonates with the Asian peoples' vision of life.

#### **D. DISCIPLESHIP IN THE SPIRIT OF LIFE**

14 It is the Spirit of Jesus that creates the disciple-community. And it is in the power of the Spirit that we believe in him (1 Jn 4:2f), remember him (Jn 14:26), communicate him (Acts 8:39) and live by him (2 Cor 12:13). Discipleship is living by the Spirit of the Risen Lord and by the demands of the Kingdom of Life. The peoples of Asia will be drawn to Jesus if his disciples abide in his life (Jn 15:4).

14.1 *"Solidarity" with God.* As Jesus immersed himself into the depths of Abba's life and love, so the disciple-community has to immerse itself totally in the life of the Triune God and live by communion with God. Through this communion, the disciple-community, can more credibly share the love and life of God with others and more effectively bring the forces of God's Kingdom of Life to bear on the death-dealing realities of Asia.

To be in solidarity with God, prayer is indispensable. Prayer expresses our inner spirit and impels us towards ever deeper communion and intimacy with God. This communion is at the core of life-giving spirituality. In Jesus' own example, mission and service draws their energy and power, their very life, from solidarity with Abba and leads back to this solidarity. If the disciples of Christ are steeped in prayerful encounter with and service of Abba, they will strike a chord in the heart of Asia where traditions of spirituality and prayer abound.

14.2 *Liberating and Recreating Communion Among Neighbors.* Like Jesus, we have to "pitch our tents" in the midst of all humanity building a better world, but especially among the suffering and

the poor, the marginalized and the downtrodden of Asia. In profound “solidarity with suffering humanity” and led by the Spirit of life, we need to immerse ourselves in Asia’s cultures of poverty and deprivation, from whose depths the aspirations for love and life are most poignant and compelling. Serving life demands communion with every woman and man seeking and struggling for life, in the way of Jesus’ solidarity with humanity.

Our solidarity requires a resolve to work with our Asian sisters and brothers in liberating our societies from whatever oppresses and degrades human life and creation, most especially from sin. We offer the radical freedom of life in Christ. In a special way, we will follow Jesus in his “preferential journey” with the poor and will assist in the liberation of the materially poor, of indigenous peoples, displaced persons, victims of misguided economic and political development, victims of wars and divisions, victims of sex tourism. We will more actively assist in the integral development of women, children and the youth, who cry out for liberation from many dehumanizing and oppressive situations and for their rightful place in society and in the Church’s mission to serve life.

With our Asian sisters and brothers, we will strive to foster communion among Asian peoples who are threatened by glaring economic, social and political imbalances. With them we will explore ways of utilizing the gifts of our diverse religions, cultures and languages to achieve a richer and deeper Asian unity. We will build bridges of solidarity and reconciliation with peoples of other faiths and will join hands with everyone in Asia in forming a true community of creation.

14.3 *Dying for the Many.* Immersion in Asia’s cultures of poverty is a dying to ourselves so that we may live for God and for others. It is a dimension of the spirituality that stems from Jesus himself for whom the giving of life to others happens in the giving of the very self. That is why the love of the Father, Son and Spirit, the self-giving of God to all humanity, especially on behalf of the poor, is at the heart of all genuine service to life.

It is this love that impels us as the disciple-community of Jesus to confront and act against death-dealing realities, oppression and injustice, discrimination and exploitation, the

destruction of ecosystems, the tampering with life. As disciples we cannot serve both life and death! Just as Jesus worked as a prophet of new life and died to usher it in, so we in Asia today must prophesy on behalf of the God of life. Refusal to prophesy and speak against the forces of death is to fail in serving life!

We may hesitate because we are minority group. Indeed we are a little flock in Asia. But it is from this position of weakness that God's gift of divine life in Jesus Crucified, the power and wisdom of God, is most significant. Triumphalism and displays of pomp and human power do not witness to the abnegation of Jesus on the Cross. It is often from our weakness that God's love as life-giving grace is more clearly made manifest.

We memorialize Jesus' total self-gift around the Eucharistic table. We partake of the very life of Jesus, the Bread of Life broken and shared. We drink of the Cup of the new covenant with God. We join Jesus in serving life by washing the feet of our neighbors. We celebrate the new creation when simple fruits of the earth and work of human hands become the presence of Jesus in our midst. We look to that promised banquet where all will sit as brothers and sisters around the God of Life.

14.4 *Living in the Risen One.* Faith in the Risen One demands that his disciples in Asia be symbols of hope. Because Jesus is risen, we realize that the promise of life is not empty. Our common search will not end in senselessness but in life. The resurrected life, proclaimed in word, deeds, presence, community and service by the disciples of Christ, can help assure Asians that in the various arenas of death, life still pulsates and flows, life is a promise that is being realized and will be fulfilled in Jesus and His Spirit.

14.5 *Walking by the Spirit of Life.* The gift of the life-giving Spirit makes men and women disciples of Jesus. "Living by the Spirit, walking by the Spirit," (Gal 5:25) is concretely seen in a life marked by the fruits of the Spirit: "love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control" (Gal 5:22f). These values, which are opposed to the "fruits of the flesh," need to be infused into the Church's lifestyle, policies, programs and communal life.

The Spirit is the powerful breath animating the mission of the disciples of Christ. Whether in explicit proclamation of the Gospel or in the silence of prayer, whether in the warmth of personal contact or the burden of liberative action, the Spirit of life guides, sanctifies and unifies the disciple-community for the world and humanity. The deepest communication of the Church to Asia is its Spirit-filled and multiform mission of sharing Christ as the Way, the Truth and the Life.

14.6 Our reflection on discipleship cannot be complete without invoking Mary, the woman who gave Jesus to the world. She who is the Mother of Life is also the foremost disciple of Life. Her example teaches us that discipleship involves attentive listening to the word of God and the freedom to respond to it (Lk 1:26-38). She regards herself a servant in solidarity with her people Israel, celebrating God's mercy for the lowly and the hungry (Lk 1:46-55). She courageously suffers with her Son at the foot of the cross and from that wood of life becomes the mother of us all (Jn 19:25-27). With the early disciple-community, she prays, awaiting the promised Spirit of Life (Acts 1:12-14). Now with her son in glory, she enlivens the hope of all for eternal life. In Mary we find not only a mother but also a model and companion in our pilgrimage to life.

14.7 In the final analysis to the question that we have asked about our Christian contribution to the struggle for full life in Asia, our answer is brief, but profoundly committed. Our answer is Jesus and his Gospel of Life. Our answer is the sharing of Abba's liberating and reconciling life and love with others. Our answer is authentic discipleship in the creative Spirit of Jesus, the Spirit of Life.

15 Major Pastoral Areas of Discipleship. The above reflection on a theological-pastoral basis of discipleship leads us to its concrete implications to our pastoral mission. Many, indeed, are our pastoral concerns: dialogue with peoples of other faiths, dialogue with the poor, dialogue with the cultures of Asia; justice and integral development mediated by the social teachings of the Church, formation and education, the apostolate of the media and the arts. We have deliberated on all these very important and interconnected concerns. The results will be published.

But in the light of our faith-reflection, we believe that five concerns require special pastoral focus:

15.1 *The Asian family* is a microcosm of Asian society. It is bombarded on all sides by anti-family forces of dehumanization and disintegration, ranging from material and moral poverty to secularistic values and external pressures leading to anti-life types of bioethics and practices of abortion and contraception. Children, as in many other areas of life, become the unwilling and innocent victims. Young girls and boys are also exploited through illegal labor practices and sex tourism. Discipleship in Asia then has to denounce such anti-life and anti-family pressures, policies, and practices and foster bioethics that is in accord with God's law and the Church's teachings in order to promote the family as a "sanctuary of life" and a school of life.

15.2 The complex issue of *women and the girl child* in Asia has to be one of the major concerns. Already our Fourth Plenary Assembly, in Tokyo, 1986, raised the issue to the level of the whole Asian Church. We cannot effectively promote our Christian vision of full life unless the Church as a communion of communities will credibly expend its moral and spiritual energies to the conversion of mentalities, the transformation of structures, and the eradication of practices that deny women and the girl child in Asia their God-given dignity. An urgent pastoral imperative is for women to exercise their right to co-responsibility and mutuality with men—in society and in the Church.

15.3 On the occasion of the 10th World Youth Day, the Church likewise confronts the reality of Asia as the continent of *the youth*. As in other FABC forums, we stand in solidarity with their struggles for authentic life. We share their concern and alarm in the face of misguided policies and structures that are already laying the foundations of their future. We wonder with them if the earth will still be preserved for them and their children at the rate it is being misused now. We commit ourselves to accompany their life-giving movement in their aspiration to transform themselves and our societies towards fuller life.

15.4 *Ecology* is once again brought to our pastoral attention. And urgently so, since we see in the countries of Asia the continuing and unabated destruction of our environment—waters, forests,

plant and animal life, air – and the support systems of all created life. Life, especially in a Third World setting, is sacrificed at the altar of short term economic gains. The Lord, the Giver of Life, calls our discipleship in Asia into question on the time bomb issue of ecology. Choosing life requires our discipleship to discern and act with other faiths and groups against the forces of ecological destruction.

15.5 Special attention is given to *the displaced* in our societies: political and ecological refugees and migrant workers. They are marginalized and exploited by the system, denied of their place in society and must go elsewhere to seek a dignified life. In welcoming them we expose the causes of their displacement, work toward conditions for a more human living in community, experience the universal dimension of the Kingdom (Gal 3:28) and appreciate new opportunities for evangelization and intercultural dialogue.

Though our pastoral directives for action touch on many issues of concern, we appeal for a particular pastoral focus on these five major challenges.

## **Conclusion**

16 As we end our deliberations, we do so as we began – with a prayer of thanks, hope, and commitment.

## **Prayer of Service to Life in Asia**

Loving and life-giving God, at the beginning you called us in Asia into life, enriched us with an astonishing variety of cultures, ways of living, believing, and worshiping. As sisters and brothers in your one Asian family, we thank you and praise you. Among us are the poorest of the poor, the poor with their many faces of misery and pain, millions who seek not only a better life but the full Life that only you can give. We hear your call to serve them, the way your Son Jesus served others in total love, in utter selflessness, eucharistically.

Send us your Spirit of Life, that together with other communities, we may respond to the anguish of our sisters and brothers with

courageous and generous love, and with them come to the Life that never ends.

May our Mother, Mary, the voice and Mother of the Poor, who announced the liberation of the lowly, be our companion. May she as the mother and model of all disciples lead us to the Way, the Truth, and the Life in your Kingdom forever and ever. Amen.



## VII FABC PLENARY ASSEMBLY

# A RENEWED CHURCH IN ASIA: A MISSION OF LOVE AND SERVICE

### *Final Statement of the VII Plenary Assembly*

[Samphran, Thailand, 3<sup>rd</sup> to 13<sup>th</sup> January 2000]

### Introduction

I shall pour out my spirit on all humanity. Your sons and daughters shall prophesy, your old people shall dream dreams, and your young people shall see visions (Joel 3:1).

Prophesying, dreaming dreams, seeing visions – at this moment of the Great Jubilee, the words of the prophet Joel animate our hearts. We, the bishops of the FABC General Assembly,<sup>1</sup> stand at the threshold of a new century and a new millennium, the third since the birth of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, born of Mary, an Asian Woman. The marvels that we see impel us to give thanks to our loving God, Father, Son and Spirit.

We give thanks because God's own Son has realized for us the dream and vision of full life (see Jn 10:10). We give thanks because "the love of God has been poured into our hearts by the Holy Spirit which has been given to us" (Rom 5:5) through the Special Assembly for Asia of the Synod of Bishops. We give thanks for that great Pentecostal event of our century, the Second Vatican Council, and for the fellowship and pastoral creativity that the regular gathering of the Churches in Asia has engendered. At this moment we are filled with gratitude for the ecclesial event of the continental Synod – the Special Assembly for Asia and the Apostolic Exhortation "The Church in Asia", *Ecclesia in Asia* (EA).

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<sup>1</sup> The Plenary Assembly, with 193 participants, included five cardinals, 95 bishops (from 14 Episcopal Conferences and participants from associate memberships: two bishops, one apostolic prefect and one superior of a *missio sui juris*), clergy, Religious and laity.

We look back on a century that has seen the most phenomenal scientific and technological progress in the story of humankind. In this century Asian peoples have thrown off the yoke of colonialism and taken their place in dignity and freedom, center stage, in the human drama. We look back on a decade of development that promises a new and wonderful world of human solidarity and progress. Women are emerging from their traditional roles and now claim their rightful place in society and in the Church.

Yet, for the poor, and especially for women, freedom, progress, globalization, and other realities that now affect Asian peoples are not unmixed blessings. They are ambiguous. Furthermore, as we look back on the century that has passed, we remember it as one of the bloodiest in history with its two World Wars and countless lesser wars. Globalization, unregulated by juridical and ethical norms, increases the millions who live below the poverty line. It accelerates the process of secularization. It brings consumerism in its wake and threatens the deeper values of Asian cultures. Within Asian societies themselves one finds other oppressive structures such as the caste system, dictatorships, exploitation of indigenous peoples and internal strife. Widespread corruption at various levels of both government and society are facts of daily life.

Thus we gather here in the Year of the Jubilee at Samphan in Thailand to pause and discern. Like Mary, we keep all these things in our hearts. Again, from the depths of Asia's hopes and anxieties, we hear the call of the Spirit to the local Churches in Asia. It is a call to renewal, to a renewed mission of love and service. It is a call to the local churches to be faithful to Asian cultural, spiritual and social values and thus to be truly inculturated local churches. The call of the Spirit is daunting. But what better time to recall the sacrifices of our Asian martyrs who heeded Christ's mandate to his Apostles to go and not to be afraid, "I am with you always" (Mt 28:20)? What better time to recall His words, "Fear not, little flock, for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the Kingdom" (Lk 12:32)?

We heed the call of the Spirit coming to us through the Special Assembly for Asia of the Synod of Bishops in Rome in 1998 and the Apostolic Exhortation, *The Church in Asia*. We dream of sharing our faith in Jesus. We dream of faith in Jesus through whom God saves. We dream of empowering our communities to be men and women who, indeed, give life by sharing with their sisters and brothers in

Asia the abundant life given by Jesus, whom we believe is “the Life.” We dream of reconciliation between Asian brothers and sisters divided by wars and ethnic conflicts. We express our solidarity with all our brothers and sisters in China and other countries where they do not experience the freedom necessary for living the faith and fulfilling their mission. With joy we welcome the representatives from the countries of Central Asia which have recently gained their independence.

## **PART I.**

### **RENEWAL OF THE CHURCH IN ASIA - VISION, MEANING**

#### **A. A Vision of Renewal**

The dawn of the new millennium is a time of crisis. Yet a time of crisis, as Scripture and the whole history of the Church show us, is a time of new beginnings, of new movements. The thirty year history of the FABC has been a concerted series of movements toward a renewed Church. We observe eight movements that as a whole constitute an Asian vision of a renewed Church:

1. A movement towards a Church of the Poor and a Church of the Young. “If we are to place ourselves at the side of the multitudes in our continent, we must in our way of life share something of their poverty,” “speak out for the rights of the disadvantaged and powerless, against all forms of injustice.” In this continent of the young, we must become “in them and for them, the Church of the young’.” (Meeting of Asian Bishops, Manila, Philippines, 1970).

2. A movement toward a “truly local Church,” toward a Church “incarnate in a people, a Church indigenous and inculturated.” (2 FABC Plenary Assembly, Calcutta, 1978).

3. A movement toward deep interiority so that the Church becomes a “deeply praying community whose contemplation is inserted in the context of our time and the cultures of our peoples today.” Integrated into everyday life, “authentic prayer has to engender in Christians a clear witness of service and love” (2 FABC Plenary Assembly, Calcutta, India, 1978).

4. A movement toward an authentic community of faith. Fully rooted in the life of the Trinity, the Church in Asia has to be a

communion of communities of authentic participation and co-responsibility, one with its pastors, and linked "to other communities of faith and to the one and universal communion" of the holy Church of the Lord. The movement in Asia toward Basic Ecclesial Communities expresses the deep desire to be such a community of faith, love and service and to be truly a "community of communities" and open to building up Basic Human Communities. (3 FABC Plenary Assembly, Bangkok, 1982).

5. A movement toward active integral evangelization, toward a new sense of mission (5 FABC Plenary Assembly, Bandung, Indonesia, 1990). We evangelize because we believe that Jesus is the Lord and Savior, "the goal of human history, ... the joy of all hearts, and the fulfillment of all aspirations" (GS, 45). In this mission, the Church has to be a compassionate companion and partner of all Asians, a servant of the Lord and of all Asian peoples in the journey toward full life in God's Kingdom.

6. A movement toward empowerment of men and women. We must evolve participative church structures in order to use the personal talents and skills of lay women and men. Empowered by the Spirit and through the Sacraments, lay men and women should be involved in the life and mission of the Church by bringing the Good News of Jesus to bear upon the fields of business and politics, of education and health, of mass media and the world of work. This requires a spirituality of discipleship enabling both the clergy and the laity to work together in their own specific roles in the common mission of the Church. (4 FABC Plenary Assembly, Tokyo, Japan, 1986). The Church cannot be a sign of the Kingdom and of the eschatological community if the fruits of the spirit to women are not given due recognition, and if women do not share in the "freedom of the children of God." (4 Plenary Assembly of FABC in Tokyo 1986).

7. A movement toward active involvement in generating and serving life. The Church has to respond to the death-dealing forces in Asia. By authentic discipleship, it has to share its vision of full life as promised by Jesus. It is a vision of life with integrity and dignity, with compassion and sensitive care of the earth; a vision of participation and mutuality, with a reverential sense of the sacred, of peace, harmony, and solidarity. (6 FABC Plenary Assembly, Manila, Philippines, 1995).

8. A movement toward the triple dialogue with other faiths, with the poor and with the cultures, a Church “in dialogue with the great religious traditions of our peoples,” in fact, a dialogue with all people, especially the poor.

This is the vision of a renewed Church that FABC has developed over the past thirty years. It is still valid today. Yet we keep searching for the deeper challenges of renewal – its meaning and scope in our life and mission in Asia.

## **B. The Meaning of Renewal**

“Behold I make all things new” (Rev 21:5). In Asia we discover again and again that renewal is the work of God’s Spirit. It is the Spirit of the Lord “that has filled the world” (Wis 1:7) and “renews the face of the earth”. We need to be attentive and open to the mysterious stirrings of the Spirit in the realities of Asia and of the Church. In the Scriptures, renewal is the shaping of what is qualitatively new, totally new. Renewal refers principally to the salvation wrought through Jesus Christ in the Holy Spirit. It extends to everything and to all times--until the Spirit has refashioned a new heaven and a new earth. (Rev 21:1; Is 65:17).

We are caught up in the dynamism and tension of what is already here and still awaits its full realization. Renewal is both God’s gift as well as our own task. God has already accomplished it as the fruit of the mission of Jesus and the Spirit. It is now impacting on our world. Yet, renewal is a gift waiting to be made our own, to be incarnated in the life of the world, in the life of the men and women of Asia, in the life of the Church. The Church is always in need of an intense renewal of her life and mission. We are a holy Church in need of purification. We do acknowledge that we have, in many ways, fallen short of our vocation to the mission of love and service.

As Church in Asia we choose:

- A renewal of which the author is God, who recreates us anew in the Spirit of his Son. For God in Christ has made us a sacrament of a new humanity, a sign and servant of newness. Heeding the words of St. Paul, we embrace the ethical demand of renewal to

discard the old self and move forward to witness to new life in Jesus by selfless love;

- A renewal then toward a profound and holistic spirituality and an interiority that mirrors our newness of life in the Spirit of Jesus, our new way of being Church;
- A renewal which is missionary engagement, taking up with renewed vigor and spirit the mission of the Church, in creative interaction with the realities of Asia;
- A renewal that respects tradition but is courageous enough to embrace a future that grows in creative fidelity to that tradition;
- A renewal that enables us to dare tell the story of Jesus and announce his gift of new life to our Asian world of lights and shadows;
- A renewal that must include, given our human condition, not only conversion of minds and hearts but also a conversion of structures in which those marginalized by society are given a wider participatory role;
- A renewal that is the project of two poles, of the clergy plus lay men and lay women creatively working together - from above and from below - so that newness is a sign of authentic communion;
- A renewal that celebrates communion-in-diversity, giving witness to the wonder of the Church's catholicity;
- A renewal that does not count merely on numbers and crowded churches nor on the numerous services we render. What counts inestimably more is our ecclesial identity and the quality of our witness as servants and disciples of Jesus and the Kingdom of God for the peoples of Asia.

For us in Asia, to renew the Church is to be open to the mystery of the Spirit, to welcome the arriving presence of the God of surprises who will capture our hearts in wonder. We need, therefore, to be more than mere workers of renewal. We need to have the creative imagination of poets and artists, of wonderers and dreamers as befit those who are gifted by the Spirit of God. It is in the doing of renewal that the Church experiences the surprises of God. Discerning and knowing God, communing with God through contemplative experience, the Church experiences the mandate of the gospel as on-going, as dynamically interacting with the complex realities of Asia.

**PART II.**  
**ISSUES AND CHALLENGES IN THE MISSION OF LOVE AND SERVICE**

**A. Globalization**

We view the Asian economic scenario with great pastoral concern. A critical awareness on our part of the diverse and complex socio-economic realities of Asia is essential (EA 5). While the process of economic globalization has brought certain positive effects, we are aware that it “has also worked to the detriment of the poor, tending to push poorer countries to the margin of economic and political relations. Many Asian nations are unable to hold their own in a global market economy”. (EA 39) The phenomenon of marginalization and exclusion are its direct consequences. It has produced greater inequalities among people. It has enabled only a small portion of the population to improve their standards of living, leaving many to remain in poverty. Another consequence is excessive urbanization, causing the emergence of huge urban conglomerations and the resultant migration, crime and exploitation of the weaker sections.

We are aware that “cultural globalization” through the over-saturation of the mass media is “quickly drawing Asian societies into a global consumer culture that is both secularist and materialistic,” undermining or causing the erosion of traditional social, cultural and religious values that have sustained Asia. Such a process is a great threat to Asia’s cultures and religions resulting in “incalculable damage”. (EA 7)

Therefore, globalization is an ethical and moral issue which we, as Church, can ill afford to ignore.

**B. Fundamentalism**

We are painfully aware of the rise of religious fundamentalism, or better, extremism, which continues to bring division to Asian societies and suffering to our people. A renewed Church will encourage Christian men and women to participate fully in social and cultural activities at the local as well as the national level to bridge the gaps between communities and build harmony. In Asia Christians live in multi-religious societies; and in all countries of Asia, except the

Philippines and East Timor, they are a small minority. The Church should share with other religious leaders the Vatican II vision of a return to roots, and help them to draw nourishment from their own roots in this time of globalization which is causing wide-spread chaos and confusion among people. We must endeavor to promote the human rights of all people, regardless of caste, color, creed or religion by raising our voices against all such violations.

### **C. Political Situation**

Though Asia is free from external colonization, and most Asian countries have some sort of democratic government, they do not follow the same model of democracy. The results of elections are at times questionable. Frequently, after elections, the governed have very little say in governance. Some would even characterize the situation as a hijacking of democracy. A common feature is that those who are elected pursue their own interests. Most of the governments come to power through the alliance of various parties, often without a clear mandate from the people. Further, there is a tendency towards centralization of power and decision making. Pervasive corruption is a reality at various levels of government. In certain countries, the whole life is politicized, affecting every sector, making implementation impossible. Governments are forced to adopt policies and practices such as the Structural Adjustment Policies (SAP) dictated by the IMF, WB and the WTO. These policies are devoid of a human face and social concern. The model of economic development promoted by the trans-national corporations in Asia is not acceptable.

### **D. Ecology**

As we look at the development being promoted in Asia and its impact on our environment, we see a steady, ongoing deterioration of our environment as a result of uncontrolled pollution, degrading poverty, deforestation, etc. The effect worsens when some Asian countries become dumping grounds for toxic wastes, production platforms for hazardous industries and industrialization proceeds without any environmental standards. Even if there are standards, government agencies of environmental control are often slack in enforcing accepted norms of the right to a clean environment.

## **E. Militarization**

The increasing militarization of societies, fostered by governments and the “death merchants,” is another challenge. Peace building, including disarmament, becomes imperative, calling for urgent responses to such issues as the banning of land mines, trade in small arms and nuclear proliferation. Given the nature of armed conflicts in many Asian countries, conflict prevention as well as conflict resolution constitute a critical challenge. Asian religions, including Christianity are called to contribute to the building up of peace. This is a central area for dialogue with religions and culture leading to reconciliation.

### **PART III. THE CHALLENGE OF DISCERNING THE ASIAN WAY**

Asia is a cultural mosaic shining with its rich diversity. This is also true of the Catholic Church. The local Churches in Asia present a splendid variety in their origin, historical, social-political and cultural situations, ecclesial identity and growth. Obviously, the pastoral challenges facing the Church in Asia are equally diverse. Yet, one common mission unites all: to proclaim “the Good News of Jesus Christ through Christian witness, works of charity and human solidarity... The many positive elements found in the local churches... strengthen our expectation of a new springtime of Christian life.” (EA 9)

In the face of such a challenge, we recognize with hope “a growing awareness throughout Asia of people’s capacity to change unjust structures,” with an ever-growing awareness and demand for social justice, for more political and economic participation, for equal opportunities, and the determination to safeguard human dignity and rights. Long dormant minority groups are seeking ways to become agents of their own social advancement. In this we see the Spirit of God at work in people’s struggles and efforts “to transform society so that the human yearning for a more abundant life may be satisfied as God wills” (EA 8).

Renewal for a mission of love and service requires fresh understanding and emphases. As we have been listening to each other we have realized that something new is happening. For thirty years, as we have tried to re-formulate our Christian identity in Asia,

we have addressed different issues, one after another: evangelization, inculturation, dialogue, the Asian-ness of the Church, justice, the option for the poor, etc. Today, after three decades, we no longer speak of such distinct issues. We are addressing present needs that are massive and increasingly complex. These issues are not separate topics to be discussed, but aspects of an integrated approach to our Mission of Love and Service. We need to feel and act “integrally”. As we face the needs of the 21<sup>st</sup> century we do so with Asian hearts, in solidarity with the poor and the marginalized, in union with all our Christian brothers and sisters and by joining hands with all men and women of Asia of many different faiths. Inculturation, dialogue, justice and the option for the poor are aspects of whatever we do.

We are committed to the emergence of the Asianness of the Church in Asia. This means that the Church has to be an embodiment of the Asian vision and values of life, especially: interiority, harmony, a holistic and inclusive approach to every area of life. We are also convinced that only by the “inner authority” of authentic lives founded on a deep spirituality will we become credible instruments of transformation. This is important, because our contacts with those of other religious traditions have to be at the level of depth rather than just the level of ideas or action. We are aware that this Asian-ness, founded on solid values, is a special gift the world is awaiting. For the whole world is in need of a holistic paradigm for meeting the challenges of life. In this task, together with all Asians, the Church, a tiny minority in this vast continent, has a singular contribution to make, and this contribution is the task of the whole Church in Asia. We believe in:

the innate spiritual insight and moral wisdom in the Asian soul; and it is the core around which a growing sense of “being Asian” is built. This “Being Asian” is best discovered and affirmed, not in confrontation and opposition, but in the spirit of complementarity and harmony. In this framework of complementarity and harmony, the Church can communicate the Gospel in a way which is faithful both to her own Tradition and to the Asian Soul. (EA 6)

## A. Pastoral Concerns

Since the contexts of people's life are so diverse in the Asian continent, it is each ecclesial community under the leadership of its episcopal conference which discerns the pastoral priorities for its area. However, in this Plenary Assembly, we identified certain sectors of people to whom we need to especially direct our mission of love and service and who are, at the same time, equally partners in the that mission. These are: the youth, women, the family, indigenous peoples, sea-based and land-based migrants, and refugees.

1. **The Youth.** Asia is generally described as the continent of the youth, since youth constitute the majority of Asia's population. The youth are the reality of today, not only the hope of tomorrow. They are a source of energy and vitality in society and in the Church. At the same time, they are the most vulnerable and are victimized by structures of exploitation in our world. The situation of the youth should be understood against the background of the complex realities in which they live. The swift and drastic changes taking place in our world: globalization, political changes and the media explosion, radically affect the life of the youth in every part of Asia. Youth of all backgrounds, urban and rural, poor and rich, educated and uneducated, employed and unemployed, the organized and unorganized are all being tossed by the waves of contemporary culture. The problems faced by youth need to be tackled collectively, along with the youth leaders.

The new millennium awaits us with hope, openness and optimism because of the very resources of our youth which enable them to deal with the concerns of evangelization, leadership, unemployment, women's empowerment and communal harmony in order to establish the Reign of God based on justice and peace. If the Church journeys with youth, many new horizons of love and service will evolve and the objectives of the Youth Ministry itself (i.e. fellowship, formation and service) will be realized. The new way of journeying with the youth are: to see the youth as resources and not as problems; to facilitate their learning from their experiences and not from ready-made answers; to involve the youth more in the decision making process, not only ask them to implement the decisions taken by others. Only when the youth are recognized as agents and co-workers of the evangelizing mission of the Church will their full potential blossom forth.

2. **Women.** We acknowledge that the cultures of Asia value the family and family relationships. Yet there is a widespread discrimination against the girl child, destruction of the unborn girl child, violence against and abuse of women and girls in the family, and a general lack of respect for life. Certain cultural prejudices and traditions have a strong influence on the way society and communities treat women. The Church can address herself to these issues by creating effective structures for awareness building, advocacy, empowerment, and for dealing with issues of violence to women. We take Jesus to be our exemplar for a new way of mission for and with women. Against the prevailing culture of his times, Jesus courageously accepted and recognized women's equality, dignity and giftedness. His great sensitivity and respect for women are an invitation for a deep conversion for the church and society.

3. **The Family.** The family embodies for its members the mystery of Trinitarian love in the heart of our world. It can be called a "sacrament" of God's love and is, in fact, the domestic church. It is the school and sanctuary of love where human beings first experience love and learn the art of loving and praying. Asia has a millennial tradition of great respect for the gift of the family. The family is the bearer of the heritage of humanity; and the future of humanity passes by way of the family. It is also the cradle of faith formation and the school for imparting Gospel values, the first arena for socialization and development of the child. "The family is not simply the object of the Church's pastoral care; it is also one of the Church's most effective agents of evangelization" (EA 46) Renewal in the Church, therefore should begin with the family.

At this juncture of history, we painfully witness the breakdown of the family in many places in our continent, especially in the urban centers. Many are the forces arrayed against the sanctity and the endurance of the values of family life. Individualism, hedonism, materialism, consumerism, interference from the state, a contraceptive mentality and a technological life style all adversely affect the stability of marriage and family life and endanger the stability of our society and its values.

4. **Indigenous People.** Indigenous peoples form a significant section of Asian society and of the Church in Asia. These communities are ancient and well-knit communities, and have preserved many important human and social values. Today, in many

countries of Asia, their right to land is threatened and their fields are laid bare; they themselves are subjected to economic exploitation, excluded from political participation and reduced to the status of second class citizens. Detribalization, a process of imposed alienation from their social and cultural roots, is even a hidden policy in several places. Their cultures are under pressure by dominant cultures and "Great Traditions". Mighty projects for the exploitation of mineral, forest and water resources, often in areas which have been the home of the tribal population, have generally worked to the disadvantage of the tribals.

In our contemporary society, where there is a steady erosion of traditional Asian values, indigenous Asian communities can play an important role. Close to nature, they retain the values of a cosmic view of life, a casteless, sharing, and democratic society. They have preserved their simplicity and hospitality. Their values and cultures can offer a corrective to the culture of the dominant communities, to the emerging materialistic and consumeristic ethos of our modern societies.

**5. Sea-based and land-based Migrants and Refugees.** Among the rapid changes that are taking place within Asian societies we view with great concern the phenomenon of unprecedented migration and refugee movements. It is "a major social phenomenon, exposing millions of people to situations which are difficult economically, culturally and morally. People migrate within Asia and from Asia to other continents for many reasons, among them poverty, war and ethnic conflicts, the denial of their human rights and fundamental freedoms" (EA 7). Other reasons are the establishment of giant industrial complexes with an eye to cost-efficiency and profit, solely for the economic interests of national and transnational corporations. Migrants experience the destructive effects of migration in their personal and family life, social and cultural values.

The alarming number of migrants, refugees, returnees and internally displaced persons and the emerging economic, cultural, religious and moral issues are certainly a pastoral challenge for the Church demanding an adequate and urgent pastoral response. In the light of the teaching of the Church, we affirm that migration and refugee movements, which result in depersonalization, loss of human dignity and the breakup of families, are moral issues confronting the conscience of the Church and that of our Asian nations. As for the

Church in Asia, these pose urgent pastoral challenges to evolve life-giving, service-oriented programs of action within the pastoral mission of the Church. The Church should join hands with all who are concerned with the rights of the migrants and their situation, keeping in mind that the migrants themselves are to be the primary agents of change.

## **B. The Thrust of our Response**

When we turn to a consideration of the response of the Church to these and other challenges, a credible and integrated approach emerges as imperative. If we would dare add anything to the words of Saint Paul about the beginnings of Faith, we would add, from the perspective of Asia: "faith comes from the 'hearing' and the 'seeing'". We could easily trace the source of many conversions to the living witness of genuine Christians, be they clerical or lay. The Asian search for the Ultimate has been felt and voiced frequently in our meditations and discussions. We will be credible witnesses to our Asian sisters and brothers only if they sense that we have experienced the Ultimate.

Our approach must be integrated. Our Churches are coming to the renewed conviction that the agents of service and ministry cannot be isolated any more in specialized groups. The whole community, every group, every person, with whom we relate in service, is an agent of Evangelization. We realize that, precisely because it is the Spirit that ultimately invites, directs and energizes each of us for mission, this mission cannot take place except in mutuality and exchange. Moreover, the issues and needs, that we are facing have reached a volume and complexity that go well beyond the skills, capabilities and resources of individuals, communities and Churches. Ecumenism and Interreligious dialogue have become essential to any ministry we undertake. This shared understanding has equally underlined the participatory and mutual character of our ministry and service. No real service takes place that is not collaborative, that is not actively involving the other person or community, that does not become a real "exchange of gifts" – the true meaning of the charismatic theology of St. Paul. One of the best ways to help and to empower the "other", whoever he or she is, will always be our ability to recognize their gifts and wisdom and the deep and hidden capabilities of humanity they carry within themselves in the midst of their search, suffering, poverty or segregation.

Thus we recognize with gratitude and admiration the ever present and generous contribution of women, the young and consecrated persons. Furthermore, in this continent of Asia where we cherish and reverence elders; we also recognize the elderly as energetic, experienced and mature persons of faith and humanity. We invite them to put their capabilities at the service of the mission of Christ in the Church and society

### **C. A Few Practical Directions**

1. The most effective means of Evangelization and service in the name of Christ has always been and continues to be the witness of life. The embodiment of our faith in sharing and compassion (sacrament) supports the credibility of our obedience to the Word (proclamation). This witnessing has to become the way of the Gospel for persons, institutions and the whole Church community. Asian people will recognize the Gospel that we announce, when they see in our life the transparency of the message of Jesus and the inspiring and healing figure of men and women immersed in God.

2. We consider the formation of all evangelizers – laity, priests and religious – as pivotal and crucial in the process of our becoming Asian and in fulfilling our mission in an Asian way. “In the past, formation often followed the style, methods and programs imported from the West...” (EA 22). What is being done and still needs to be urgently pursued is “to adapt formation to the cultural contexts of Asia” and to the social, economic and religious milieu, where ministry has to be exercised. Formation that will facilitate the emergence of ministers and evangelizers capable of promoting a new way of being Church in Asia should take place in the local church, contextually and within the wider community. It should be undertaken with active involvement and participation of the different sections of the Church. Worthy of special attention is the question of ongoing formation for all evangelizers: bishops, priests, religious and lay people. In formation programs for the laity there should be lay women and men along with priests and religious.

Similarly in the formation of future priests, and religious, and in their on-going formation, the partnership of competent lay persons needs to be ensured in order that such formation is geared towards the realization of a participative Church. Unless the entire community is creatively involved in the formation process, we cannot achieve the

goal we have set for ourselves: An Asian image of the Church. (Such an Asian image of the evangelizer is spelt out by John Paul II in *The Church in Asia*.)

Further, people in Asia want to see their pastors, not as administrators of institutions and providers of services “but as persons whose minds and hearts are set on deep things of the Spirit”. (Rom 8:5) The Church must respond to the reverence which Asian people have for those in authority by a clear moral uprightness on the part of those with ministerial responsibilities in the Church.” (EA 43) The formators should promote “a profound understanding of the elements of spirituality and prayer akin to the Asian soul, and to involve themselves more deeply in the Asian people’s search for fuller life. ....” (EA 22). The primacy of the Spirit, which characterizes Asia, needs to find concrete expression in all formation programs. “In Asia, home to great religions where individuals and entire peoples are thirsting for the divine, the Church is called to be a praying Church, deeply spiritual even as she engages in immediate human and social concerns. All Christians need a true missionary spirituality of prayer and contemplation.” (EA 23)

3. The Church’s evangelizing mission is deeply affected by the impact of the mass media and new information technologies, nevertheless, the media can assist greatly in the proclamation of the Gospel to every corner of the continent, as it is done by the FABC initiative, Radio Veritas, Asia. However, it is not enough to use the media simply to spread the Christian message and the Church’s authentic teaching. It is necessary to integrate that message into the “new culture” created by modern communications. (EA 48)

4. Serious and faith inspired involvement of professionals in public life is crucial for the building of society. Thus, the professionals become witnesses among their own ranks and counterparts, their clients, customers and beneficiaries. The Church’s task of promoting justice, peace and human development as well as safeguarding human rights will be more effective when policy makers, planners and executives are properly informed about the human and moral side of their professional career or service. It is here that Catholic professionals, politicians, business persons, technocrats, executives and others have their special mission. Let the Catholic professionals open the doors of their boardrooms or chambers of commerce to Christ to renew and sanctify the temporal order. The Pastors must

also allow them to enrich the Church by their expertise, guidance and experience.

On the other hand, specialization in various fields has left most of the Catholic professionals with a knowledge of the faith inadequate to their level of education – many are hardly aware of the Social Teaching of the Church. Therefore there is a “need especially for lay men and women with responsibilities in public life, to be well informed in these teachings so that they can inspire and vivify civil life and its structures with the leaven of the gospel” (EA 32).

5. **Advocacy** has emerged as a powerful method and means to respond to the issues and challenges that have surfaced at this 7<sup>th</sup> Plenary Assembly. Civil society in Asia is already doing it. Bishops have an important role in advocacy and should take it up as a pastoral priority. Based on the ethical and moral imperatives that are found in the Social Teachings of the Church, the process of advocacy should articulated effectively. Particularly, the emphasis on the common good could form the basis for advocacy as we join hands with men and women of other faiths. The Bishops Conferences that constitute the FABC should take up advocacy for the common good, depending upon the prevailing circumstances.

6. **Education** in its different forms—formal, informal, parochial, public and private—has contributed much for human growth and personality formation. In every problem and challenge we face, there are dimensions of Christian humanism, of mental and spiritual growth and liberation that a Christian perspective can help develop. Catholic educators, in professional and creative dialogue with members of other religions and other Christian Communities, are called to be companions and guides in the ongoing process of becoming persons. This extends to every stage in human growth and is also a dimension of the pastoral service of the Church, which should be articulated in relevant programs of ongoing formation for its own members and the public at large. Furthermore, educators must remember that an essential element of any holistic educational program is formation in values.

7. Other effective means for our mission of love and service will continue to be **the Basic Ecclesial Communities (BECs), Small Gospel-Based Communities and Ecclesial Movements**. The Vision of a New Way of Being Church (AsIPA), promoted by the FABC is

proving to be a very good help in the growth and development of the BECs and deserves our attention and support. Ecclesial Movements, duly discerned by the local church with its hierarchy, can also offer specific and creative contributions to the being and ministry of the Church.

8. In this varied, demanding and global ministry of love and service the presence and promotion of specific groups who dedicate themselves to the service of God, His Kingdom and the Church, will continue to be an important task of the hierarchy. Here we mention the different groups of Consecrated persons, the Asian-born Missionary Societies, and the many lay persons who offer important years of their life to missionary or other volunteer work.

9. Lastly, **exchange of personnel** and other resources in its different forms, such as *Fidei Donum* priests, “twinning” of dioceses, sponsoring formation-education opportunities, and the like, are forms of support for the overall mission of the Church.

## Conclusion

As we celebrate the Great Jubilee of the birth of Jesus Christ our Savior, and the Holy Doors of churches are being opened, we look at the image of the door and are gladdened to rediscover our calling to enter into the community of Christ’s disciples and to share in his life and mission. It is there beyond the doors that we hear His reassuring and empowering word. During these days it was so for us: we have heard His whisper in all that we have shared. It is through the door that we now go out into the world of the peoples of Asia and into their struggles and joys, which are also ours.

Here in Samphan, we have shared our lives, hopes and difficulties and have been strengthened by the Spirit, mutual love and friendship in our gathering. In the Scriptures and the Eucharist we put all our memories together as we open our hearts to Christ and to each other:

Trusting in the Lord who will not fail those whom he has called, the Church in Asia joyfully makes her pilgrim way into the Third Millennium. Her only joy is that which comes from sharing with the multitude of Asia’s peoples the immense gift which she herself has received – the love of Jesus the Savior.

Her one ambition is to continue his mission of service and love, so that all Asians may have life and have it more abundantly. (EA 50)

In this mission, we draw inspiration and strength from Mary, the Mother of the Church, who with haste went to the house of Elizabeth to proclaim the Good News – Jesus Christ the Savior.



**VIII FABC PLENARY ASSEMBLY**

**THE ASIAN FAMILY TOWARD A CULTURE OF  
INTEGRAL LIFE**

*Final Statement of the VIII Plenary Assembly*

**[Daejeon, Korea, 17<sup>th</sup> to 23<sup>rd</sup> August 2004]**

**INTRODUCTION**

**The Hope of the Asian Family for Life in Fullness**

1 The hope, the aspiration, the dream of the Asian family for life in fullness in the Reign of God is one that never fades. Even in the midst of seemingly insurmountable misery and poverty, Asian families live this hope not without reason with vibrant, even exuberant joy. The positive experiences of Asian families who find continuing happiness and well-being by being family are signals of the Spirit of God at work. Sustaining this hope is the profound Asian sense of the sacred and Asia's rich spiritual resources. God, the ultimate Being and Creator of Life, is the reason for this hope. It is God's Spirit working in the cultures of Asia that sustains and explains the closeness, harmony, resiliency, relative stability and many other positive values that endure in Asian families. It is God's Spirit that provides a vision of the Asian family on a journey of communion, solidarity and mission to the Reign of God. All these are reasons for hope.

2 To reflect on the Asian family and its hope for life in fullness, the Bishops of Asia have come together for the 8th Plenary Assembly of the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences (FABC) on the theme "The Asian Family toward a Culture of Life." They realize that their gathering as shepherds of God's "little flock" in Asia from August 17 to 3, 2004 is a great blessing from the Lord.<sup>1</sup> Only last year,

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<sup>1</sup> Since its inception in 1974 the FABC in plenary session has presumed the major role of the family in evangelization. Only the 4th FABC Plenary Assembly on the Laity in 1986 gave more than just a passing mention of the family, devoting 10 paragraphs to the challenges

2003, for the first time on Asian soil, in Manila, the Fourth World Meeting of Families pressed upon the Church the crying concern for the Family and its utmost significance in the divine plan of salvation.

3 Especially is this concern urgent in the light of world developments. For the past two decades rapid cultural, scientific and technological developments alongside economic and political developments have been impacting human society heavily. At the very center of this social ferment is the Family, the cellular receptor of emerging cultures as well as initiator, for good or for bad, of influential cultural forces. Even today we refer to the Family as a point of reference for social, political, economic and religion-based ideal relationships. As a world body the United Nations continues to consider the family as the basic unit of society though some neo-liberal trends in the West have questioned it. The social teaching of the Church has always accepted the family as the first basic cell and community of society. Undoubtedly the first and fundamental structure for human ecology is the family.

4 The universal Church consistently insists on the paramount importance of the Family as the way by which all history passes and as the domestic church or the church that is the home.<sup>2</sup> The Acts of the Apostles reminds us that the faith spread “from house to house” (Acts 20:20).<sup>3</sup> Pope John Paul II has already convoked the World Meeting of Families on four different occasions in order to underline the indispensable role of the Christian Family in charting the destiny of humankind in the light of faith and the Gospel. It is in the background of world developments and the general response of the universal Church that the reflection of FABC on the Asian family takes on both universal and local meaning. There is no doubt that global developments have an impact even on the remotest rural Asian family.

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confronting the family, its indispensable role in evangelization and in the formation not only of the laity, but also of the Church as a whole.

<sup>2</sup> *Lumen Gentium* (LG), 11; *Apostolicam Actuositatem*, 11; *Familiaris Consortio* (FC), 21. From the Latin word *domus*, home, the term domestic church shall be used throughout the paper although it might conjure up related words such as “domesticated,” “domestic worker” that can evoke images of inferiority, passivity, submissiveness, and timidity.

<sup>3</sup> Unless otherwise noted all scriptural quotations are from The New Revised Standard Version.

5 As Bishops in Asia we hope that the following reflection would contribute toward even deeper reflection on the Asian family in view of relevant and effective pastoral care. We also hope that it would serve as a reference document for Asian Episcopal Conferences and dioceses toward a vision of family ministry and its general pastoral orientations. We begin our reflection on the pastoral challenges that the Asian family confronts.

## **PART I. PASTORAL CHALLENGES TO THE FAMILY IN ASIA.**

### **1. Family Traditions and Values**

6 In the midst of swift, sweeping, and even revolutionary changes in the world, Asians continue to value marriage as sacred. Children are cherished as treasures and gifts of God. To show love for their children, parents are willing to undertake all kinds of sacrifices in providing for their health, their education and general welfare. Nuclear families remain close-knit. Such closeness of relationships is also true in the extended family. The elderly, retired members of the family, parents and grandparents still receive great respect and care within the family setting, notwithstanding the many difficulties and sacrifices involved. They are listened to, honored, and loved. It is the elders that assure the family's cohesiveness. The hospitality of Asian families, even of the very poor, is proverbial. Despite many serious difficulties from within and without, Asian families have relatively high stability. They are resilient and ready to sacrifice in the face of great hardship. With their deep religiosity and sense of the divine, they are effusively optimistic. Most Asian families being rural, they have a natural closeness with God's creation. These values are especially exhibited by indigenous peoples, considered as generally among the poorest in Asia who are relatively untouched by technological culture. Many other values endure in Asia as part of family tradition and are bright hopeful spots in the Asian landscape.<sup>4</sup> It is tradition that sustains the resilience of the Asian family in the face of poverty and of different death-dealing forces in today's world. The positive values in the Asian family tradition are seeds of God's Word and can help serve as the "rock" on which we build our Asian homes,

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<sup>4</sup> See The International Social Survey Program (ISSP), 2002; cited by the Bishops of South Korea, Intervention on the Working Paper (CBCK, IWP), July 22, 2004, p. 1.

as in Jesus' parable of the wise man (see Mt. 7: 24-25; Lk. 6: 47-48). It is, therefore, imperative that families consciously practice and develop these positive values, so that their great worth may not diminish but is enhanced.

7 Still some values are ambivalent. Strong kinship and family-centeredness, for instance, has also its downside. Graft and corruption, nepotism, political and economic cronyism in Asia are often due to inordinate concern for family, to the dominant and selfish desire to serve the interests of the family, of kin and cronies— at the expense of the common good. This might even lead to strong clannishness that would divide rather than unite the whole community or society. Today, however, pervasive realities, some old, many others quickly emerging are making Asian families vulnerable to profound social changes, especially under the impact of globalization. These social changes are reshaping moral and religious beliefs, self-concepts of individuals and families, even the very structures of marriage and family.

8 While we need to be aware of the different cultural situations in Asia, we can recognize major commonalities in the situation of Asian families. Admittedly, a rather different and especially difficult situation is that of the family in the former Soviet Republics. With a small Catholic minority, a generation seems to have been lost because of long years without the free exercise of religion. Beliefs regarding marriage and family are quite far from the Christian norm.<sup>5</sup>

## 2. A Variety of Family Forms

9 Almost common now in Asia are family situations that are certainly different from what Asians consider the "traditional" and even "ideal" family. Intercultural families and inter-faith families that result from "mixed marriages" abound. In such marriages couples might find adjustment to each other much more difficult than if they

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<sup>5</sup> For instance, in Kazakhstan it is "difficult to speak of 'Catholic' or even 'Christian' families due to the many mixed marriages with non-practicing Christians, with Muslims, or non-believers." In fact, "Kazakhs who become Christians are often ostracized or even threatened with death by their relatives or co-nationals." Thus Family Ministry has to start from the beginning with the training of suitable personnel. See Report of the Conference of the Bishops of Kazakhstan for the 8th Plenary Assembly of the FABC, pp. 1-2.

were of the same faith. Also increasing in number are families with single parents, families with separated parents and cases of remarriage for one or both partners. Some parents are separated permanently while others temporarily because of work. No longer rare are children whose parents are divorced and children living with grandparents. There are families where only the father or only the mother is around with the children, families where parents only come once or twice a year and families where children do not have common fathers or mothers. There are also many families where the parents are not married and are not able to offer stability to their children. And there are homes where parents do not wish to have children or delay having children. Less and less do we see the traditionally close-knit Asian “extended family” of parents, their children, their grandparents, their sons-in-law or daughters-in-law and grandchildren. “Nuclear families” tend to have lesser communication with other members of the extended family. Further, within the extended family are conflicts, e.g. with in-laws, that need a process of conflict resolution and the healing power of forgiveness.

**10** With the advance of new liberation movements and growing neo-liberal and post-modern thinking, other forms of “families” are slowly beginning to emerge in more secularized and liberalized Asian countries, albeit, with great disapproval, such as families with same sex partners. Some of these family forms are deeply disturbing. They challenge our traditional understanding of the “Christian family” where the sacramental marriage between man and woman is the norm as well as the beginning of the family. We might even raise the question whether couples really believe in marriage as a sacred covenant or merely as a legal contract. Moral questions could also be raised about a common practice of having a civil marriage first and at a later time a church marriage. In some societies this may be due to a family’s lack of available funds or due to clan law or customs and traditions.

**11** How to consider in the light of faith this varied situation of families, how to help married couples and families reflect on these situations in the light of their commitment to the Reign of God, how to assist families in order to be pro-active, and thus generally how to provide pastoral guidance – these are challenges of great magnitude to every parish in Asia.

### 3. The Poverty of Asian Families and Economic Globalization

**12** The first major challenge confronting the vast majority of Asian families is massive poverty. It is the tragic reality of poverty that they must contend with everyday and are unable to escape from. Many poor young people have difficulty to think of marriage and start a family because of the lack of basic means of support and sustenance. But today's Asian poverty has a new dimension. This is the process of neo-liberal economic globalization that is producing a new world order to which every country has to be conformed lest it be left behind on the road to economic progress as defined by developed countries. But globalization is ambivalent at best. Yearly United Nations Human Development reports regularly observe that economic globalization has aggravated the situation of poor people and of poor countries - and particularly of the poor in poor countries. The effect of globalization on the poverty may be noted in at least three areas:

**13 The Poverty of Rural Families.** Slowly many farm products of agricultural families are less in demand as economic liberalization and deregulation - the twin requirements of economic globalization - enable the freer entry of imported farm products, sold at even cheaper prices than local products. Unable to be competitive, deprived of government safeguards or safety nets to shield such farm products from unfair competition, rural families experience a new economic poverty-causing factor beyond their control. Similarly, the great majority of Asian farmers do small-scale farming. They cannot compete with the increasing trend of big business venturing into corporate farming, even as the technology of Genetically Modified Organism or GMO is increasingly becoming widespread, making Asian small farmers dependent on corporations and technology often beyond their understanding and financial reach. Moreover, often saddled with problems of land ownership, rural families find their land becoming unproductive in the light of such emerging conditions. Aggravated by migration to urban centers, the above situation results in the stagnation of rural communities. Noteworthy is the observation that "the problem of the Japanese rural families is not economic poverty, but the collapse of the agricultural villages

themselves”.<sup>6</sup> Finally, in situations of poverty, families are sometimes driven to the extreme of selling bodily organs so as to survive.

**14 The Poverty of Urban Families.** The phenomenon of urbanization in Asia is not recent. But the migration of the rural poor to urban settings has never been as rapid and as numerous as in the past few decades. Globalization has not only caused in poor countries an inability to compete even in the agricultural field. It has also increased an exodus of the poor from rural areas in search of jobs that are scarce because of the level of economic development in most Asian countries. The growth and proliferation of slums in urban centers attest to this rapid urbanization. Poverty conditions of the urban poor are even harsher in terms of habitat, family living conditions, family space and privacy, safe drinking water, sanitation and hygiene. Since slum dwellers stay on either government owned or privately owned properties, they run the risk of being ejected and rendered homeless. These are inducements sometimes in desperation to criminality, abuse in the family, and family break-up.

**15 The Phenomenon of Asian Migration.** In the light of the economic situation of Asian families, literally millions of Asians leave their families behind to look for jobs that often are not commensurate with their knowledge and skills. Certainly, the more economically developed Asian societies such as those of Japan, Korea, Hong Kong, Taiwan, Singapore, Malaysia, and Thailand as well as the oil-rich Middle East countries are favorite destinations. Tragically migrant workers often labor in circumstances of grave discrimination and exploitation. Asia is the great exporter of cheap labor. It is true that salaries they earn abroad are significantly much more than they can earn in their home countries, but at the price of the stability of their families, the proper education and maturation of their children, who are deprived of the presence, the guidance, and love of both parents at their most formative and impressionable age.

**16** Moreover, indigenous peoples who migrate for purposes of work face a greater cultural dislocation than do other groups of the population. They lose many of the positive values so cherished by their own indigenous communities. They experience great difficulties

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<sup>6</sup> Catholic Bishops Conference of Japan, Intervention on the Working Paper (CBCJ, IWP), July 1, 2004, p. 1.

in re-entry as well. Thus we see a close link between the two priorities of FABC VII, namely migrant workers and indigenous peoples.

17 In sum, migrant workers and their families urgently need great pastoral care from the churches of sending and receiving countries. Pastoral care for migrant workers is, in fact, one of the five pastoral priorities of the Church in Asia.<sup>7</sup>A careful and compassionate implementation of the guidelines and directives of the recent Instruction, *Erga Migrantes Caritas Christi*, would demonstrate the Church's great pastoral concern.<sup>8</sup>

18 Cutting across these dimensions of Asian poverty is a new phenomenon which development reports call "the feminization of poverty." A realization is dawning that much of the burden of poverty is borne by women. In most cases it is the husband who might be providing the resources necessary for the family to survive, but it is the wife who has to cope with making both ends meet as she tries to feed and clothe the children, cook for them, take care of them when they are sick, care for old members of the extended family. There does not seem to be any timetable for her. Housekeeping is not a job simply from 7:30 A.M. to 5:00 P.M., with a couple of hours for a noon break. The daughters have to pitch in whenever they can. Oftentimes mother and daughters have to help earn a few more amounts outside the home, whenever possible. It would appear that poverty hits women more than men.

#### 4. Landlessness and Loss of Ancestral Domain

19 Compounding the poverty situation of Asian families is the fact of landlessness. Millions of families in Asia do not own or till their own land. Large estates owned by the few show the great imbalance in the distribution of Asia's resources, one more sign of the social injustice that deprives the many poor of a real chance for a better future. Land reform in many Asian countries remains a problem, especially where wealth controls political power and prevents legal opportunities for a more balanced land distribution.

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<sup>7</sup> See FABC VI, Manila, 1995.

<sup>8</sup> From the Pontifical Council for the Pastoral Care of Migrants and Itinerant People, Rome, 2004.

**20** Land is life – this axiom is especially true for the indigenous families. They have from time immemorial considered the land, the rivers and the forests as their own even without any legal ownership paper to show. Exploiting this indigenous understanding of ownership as well as the law, loggers, miners, farmers from lowland areas encroach into the ancestral domain of indigenous peoples and reduce their boundaries year after year. Often indigenous communities have to uproot themselves and retreat farther into the mountains to avoid conflict. But certainly their rights to land and to their own economic and cultural development are violated. Moreover patterned on the neo-liberal model of development that is promoted by economic globalization government development projects in indigenous ancestral domain sometimes work against the integral development of indigenous peoples.

## **5. Cultural Globalization and Its Impact on the Family**

**21** Of even greater value significance, economic globalization is also bringing cultural globalization in its wake. Since the middle of the 20th century Western secularism has been strongly influencing Asian societies. But at no time has the secularizing process, now with a significant post-modern spirit of individualistic sense of freedom, been more rapid and effective in reshaping the value systems of Asian families than in the last two decades of the 20th century. The bearers of this change are economics, as we have seen, and the on-going revolution in mass global communication that has truly made the world a global village.

**22** The technological revolution has, indeed, many positive features. It is bringing into Asia a deeper awareness of individual dignity, autonomy, and human rights so characteristic of the West. It creates and promotes global solidarity almost instantaneously in times of great disaster. It has made knowledge of the world and of the human person to grow by leaps and bounds. The application and sharing of that knowledge has generally and significantly improved human life.

**23** But there is terrible downside to this process of cultural globalization. A technological culture is rapidly emerging that is uprooting families from their traditional cultures and creating anonymous societies in urban areas. Its spirit, informed by neo-liberalism, secularism, materialism, hedonism and consumerism, is

alien to the religious-oriented cultures of Asia. Relational, interconnected and interdependent lifestyles of Asian peoples are also undermined. Many values of the technological culture run counter to Asian family values. A growing techno-mindset is weakening marital and familial relations of intimacy and love. Many no longer see marriage as a lifetime commitment. Thus cohabitation without marriage is no longer very rare in urban areas where anonymity takes away some of the traditional stigma connected with this. Even now there are attempts to change the traditional concepts of marriage and family, and even the value of life. So pervasive and enticing is this post-modern and secular spirit in the tools of social communication, especially mass media, that it has managed subtly and insidiously to capture the souls of many Asians.

**24** Since families are both the repositories and channels of culture, the impact of the emerging secular culture in Asian families is, indeed, very disturbing. Frequently it is the elite of Asian families that are the first receivers of such secular culture, for it is among them that the tools of social communication are most available. But the emerging culture also reaches down to the grassroots since local TV, radio, and cinema ape the media programs served by the West whose values and portrayal of family and life gradually become normative for viewers and listeners. Ironically, tools of social communication such as television, computers and internet, mobile phones, that are meant to enhance communication and reinforce family ties become hindrances to family relations as the members spend less quality time with one another. Family rituals, meals and recreation together are less. No doubt such negative influences contribute to the increase of divorces, family break-ups and the juvenile crime rate as well as the breakdown of family discipline.

**25** Moreover, cultural globalization is also creating new forms of poverty. New technologies and the ways by which they are improving learning and even ways of modern living are simply beyond the reach of poor families. Thus in addition to material poverty, a new form of poverty, a poverty of knowledge and of access to knowledge, is further marginalizing poor families. Pope John Paul II has called this phenomenon the poverty, not of the “have-nots”, but of those who *do not know*. If the wealth of industrialized nations is based much more on “the possession of know-how, technology and

skills” than on natural resources,<sup>9</sup> then the poverty of other nations may be construed as due largely to the absence of this new kind of wealth. In addition we need to recognize that more than economic and technological poverty is spiritual poverty, a poverty of moral and religious convictions and values.<sup>10</sup>

**26** We also have to note that one of the responses of some sectors to the unsettling cultural changes made by globalization is recourse to fundamentalism. This seems to provide for their adherents clear and definite answers to the problems of life, such as complex issues of justice and love, marriage, the family, inter-faith relationships, politics and governance. In its extreme form, fundamentalism has given rise to intolerance and even terrorism, increasingly a source of tension in Asian societies.

## **6. Patriarchy in Asian Families and Societies**

**27** With regard to the roles of women and men in the Asian family and in the wider society, patriarchy remains sadly the determining factor. Rooted in the Latin word, “pater” or father, patriarchy has become a pejorative term. But in early Christianity the word “pater” was used in the light of Jesus’ Abba experience, his filial relationship of love with God and hence it was emptied of its dominative and oppressive elements. There is, indeed, a need of retrieving for our times the Gospel significance of “pater,” as shown in the generous and forgiving love of the father in Jesus’ parable of the prodigal son, or the dominion of love that the prayer to “Our Father” expresses, or the servant-headship that Jesus himself exemplified for his disciples at the Washing of the Feet. In this sense, one can have “paternal love” or “paternal authority” without being paternalistic. Today as in earlier Jewish and Graeco-Roman societies, patriarchy is understood with its negative meaning. As such the social attitude of patriarchy is embedded in social structures and has fundamentally determined gender inequality and the superior role of men. The world view of patriarchy lies deep in the cultural and religious subconscious of Asia and dominates politics, economics, human relationships, childrearing views and practices, stereotypes about men and women, community roles, etc. Patriarchy defines man

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<sup>9</sup> See *Centesimus Annus (CA)*, 32

<sup>10</sup> The Japanese Bishops state that while other Asian families face economic poverty, “the major poverty confronting Japanese families is spiritual poverty,” CBCJ, IWP, p. 1.

in terms of prowess, brawn, authority and domination. It is at the basis of male chauvinism in society and of men's authoritarianism in the family. On the other hand, patriarchy defines woman in terms of meekness, submissiveness and subordination. It regards women as subordinate human beings and generally establishes a double standard to govern the behavior of men, women, boys and girls. For instance, based on such patriarchal world-view the infidelities of a husband against his wife and his irresponsible behavior to his children are more likely to be condoned and tolerated than those of the wife.<sup>11</sup>

**28** In some countries patriarchy reveals its evil features in sex selection procedures during pregnancy. In those countries, the preference for the male child has created a tremendous imbalance of sex ratio in the population. Science has tragically assisted this evil feature of patriarchy through pre-natal sex identification and selection resulting in the abortion of thousands of female fetuses.

## **7. Woman and the Girl-Child**

**29** The acknowledgement of equality in fundamental dignity, the achievement of parity in educational advancement and attainment and in supporting the family have slowly challenged the traditional authority role of husbands in Asian families. Indeed in recent years the role of women has slowly and gradually shifted. For women from the poorer sectors of society, professional education is not so much the psychological choice but the result of economic pressure to seek work outside the home in order to help the family care for the children or assure their family's survival especially in situations when husbands or sons do not earn enough for their families. Hence much of the traditional home-role and child-rearing role of mothers and daughters has been passed on to others. Unfortunately such changing roles often simply involve a mere transfer of the traditional home role responsibility to persons at a lower economic level, such as domestic helpers or poor relatives. This is the case of mothers who work full time in schools and in government offices. This shift in women's home-role responsibilities is especially demonstrated in urban settings where nurse-maids,

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<sup>11</sup> Even as the authority of fathers has weakened in Japanese families with mothers managing the household, "we still find sexism in society (especially in the companies)", CBCJ, IWP, July 1, 2004, p. 2.

domestic helpers and even grandparents take care of the children and the home while wives do full time work in their chosen professions as doctors, nurses, engineers, teachers, lawyers, business managers, etc.

**30** However, the slow shift toward equality and partnership in husband-wife relationships has not prevented cases of battered wives and other forms of discrimination and oppression against women at home and at work. In a few Asian countries tradition sadly justifies violence against wives and girl children especially in rural areas. In such countries, in addition to the onerous and oppressive dowry tradition, wives bear the added burden of trying to prove themselves truly worthy of becoming part of the immediate and extended family of their husbands. While the boy-child is favored, the girl-child suffers discrimination in her early years.<sup>12</sup> She might even become the victim of infanticide. Finally, in many parts of Asia women-trafficking for commercial sex either locally or abroad is not an infrequent phenomenon and does not even spare children. All these pastoral challenges cry for appropriate pastoral response.

**31** We note the positive developments that various forms of women's liberation movements have achieved in Asia. They have drawn public attention to the issues of violence within the family, female fetus abortion and to the need for more egalitarian relationships between men and women, husbands and wives, sons and daughters. In all countries of Asia are women, especially mothers, working for social emancipation through social and political advocacy, cooperatives, Grameen banking, appropriate technology, literacy and health programs, etc.

## **8. Youth in the Family**

**32** Given the intrusiveness of information technology and mass media, there is no doubt that the emerging and ambivalent post-modern culture is seeping into the family sanctuary. It is especially affecting the youth. With usually greater opportunities for education than their elders, the youth also have greater access to the world of communication. This may be both a blessing and a curse, the world of communication being ambivalent. The youth communicate with

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<sup>12</sup> According to international sociological categories, "girl-child" and "boy-child" refer to children below four years of age.

one another in the new language of a technological culture. This is why quality time in the family is so necessary. It is the time of owning and exploring their identity. It is the family that provides them with stability. When they lack the guidance of their parents, they imbibe the values of the new culture, at times uncritically. As a result the emerging culture establishes value gaps between old and young. The young themselves might even experience a crisis of values. They are torn between the values treasured in their traditional homes that may not always be positive and the secular values in the extra-domestic fora that may not always be negative. As family relationships deteriorate there could be a resort to escapism, sometimes through drugs that victims mistakenly believe would help them forget their tribulations.

**33** Yet as other FABC assemblies have noted, the youth of Asia are often at the vanguard of social and religious transformation in many countries, leading various social emancipation and advocacy movements, participating in movements of renewal in the Church, and emerging as leaders in the Church's pastoral programs and in Basic Ecclesial Communities. Identifying the Youth of Asia as one of the five major pastoral priorities<sup>13</sup> reinforces the hope of the youth and in the youth. Asia being the continent of the youth, the youth are not simply the future of the Church in Asia but the present.

## **9. Child Labor**

**34** Yet another phenomenon affecting Asian families is the widespread practice of child labor. Driven by poverty and social inequalities, millions of children are engaged in labor. The phenomenon might even stem from a cultural view that parents consider their children as "properties" to be used for the welfare of the whole family. Thus, parents themselves allow or even encourage their children to pick up odd jobs in the streets, in factories and shops in order to supplement the family income, provide more food at the table, and help support their own education.<sup>14</sup> But the necessary consequences of child labor are the lack of integral growth and development of children, high illiteracy rates, malnutrition, the

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<sup>13</sup> See FABC VI, Manila, 1995.

<sup>14</sup> While Japan strictly follows the prohibition of child labor, it is of record that Japan is a destination country for working children from other countries, see CBCJ, IWP, p. 2, citing the annual report of the U.S. State Department, June 2004.

phenomenon of abandoned or “street children” without their parents and homes, and high incidence of juvenile crime and delinquency.

## **10. Ecology**

**35** Environmental degradation in Asia also impacts Asian families negatively. The long term ecological balance is sacrificed for short term economic gain in the systematic and sometimes unbridled destruction of forests and water resources. Droughts and floods often result from such destruction and soil productivity is altered. The agricultural efficiency of rural families is thus significantly reduced. In the sprawling urban areas of Asia, environmental degradation takes another form. Air pollution and inefficient waste management are major problems and cause many illnesses, especially respiratory, particularly for the urban poor families, reducing further the quality of their lives.

## **11. Population Programs**

**36** Moreover, government population programs are especially targeting poor families. The over-all objective, as usually claimed, is a healthy population and the reduction of population to meet decreasing food production. The Malthusian doomsday thesis is still very much a part of official government thinking despite the scientifically valid alternative views of economists who see the thesis as basically a myth that has been regularly disproved by population and food production trends in the past three decades.

**37** The political and economic agenda of developed countries with regard to the populations of poor countries do not seem to be well known. Yet it is clear that foreign aid for development requires developing countries to legislate population reduction measures. These measures emphasize artificial contraception and advocate the legalization of abortion, at least in certain cases. Grounded on the secular and neo-liberal ideology of economic development, these measures obviously promote a “culture of death.” A contraceptive mentality and the rise of premarital sex among the youth and the increasing pervasiveness of the global secular culture are not unconnected.

**38** Moreover in the population control agenda is a belief that the migration of many Asians to other countries for the proverbial

greener pastures is an economic and sometimes security threat. On the other hand many Asian observers believe that in targeting the poor the population reduction programs of governments conveniently sidestep the more difficult task of social and structural reforms toward poverty reduction, required by a more just distribution of resources and more equitable access to the fruits of development. In contrast to the above is the situation of South Korea and Japan whose very low birth rates and ageing populations are creating major problems of decreasing labor force and deteriorating public pension services. They are presently striving to increase their populations.<sup>15</sup>

**39** Through government population programs and other means, powerful lobby organizations with linkages to official international organizations and to private and semi-government organizations in Asian countries are influencing governments and public opinion to accept secular and liberal ideas about human life, family, children, and marriage. Thus the moment of the conception of human life, the termination of unborn human life, the nature of marriage as that of man and woman and as a lifetime commitment, the meaning of woman's health, the notion of "human right" over the human body in relation to human choice—all these are being redefined. These philosophical ideas now introduced into all Asian countries through certain strands of various emancipation movements in the West with their local counterparts, through mass media and legislation run counter to some of the most fundamental doctrines of the Church.

## **12. The Family and HIV/AIDS**

**40** The specter of HIV/AIDS in Asia is yet another reason that government population programs adduce in order to emphasize the idea of "safe sex" and the use of artificial contraception. Thus, the population control campaign has strategically transformed the issue of "safe sex" into a health and political issue with the use of the ambiguous term "the right to reproductive health." In this way, the moral dimension of the problem has been conveniently ignored.

**41** Indeed, we need to recognize that HIV/AIDS as a disease is hitting many Asian countries severely. It is still on the rise with

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<sup>15</sup> See CBCK, IWP, p. 2; CBCJ, IWP, p. 2.

ominous signs of becoming an Asian human catastrophe of epic proportions. Consequently the Church in Asia has to confront the disease on several pastoral fronts – medically through compassionate care for HIV/AIDS victims and their families, politically through principled influence on national legislatures, and morally through teaching and unceasing advocacy of the Church’s moral doctrines particularly in the social sphere related to the issues involving HIV/AIDS. On each of these fronts Asian families have a major role to play that the whole Church has to discern, support and promote. But other than confronting the issue of HIV/AIDS, families also have to contend with other issues of health that have moral, medical and pastoral implications. Therefore, the Church is challenged, for instance, to provide adequate holistic health care for those with addiction problems.

### **13. Families in the Midst of Conflict**

**42** In many parts of Asia hundreds of thousands of families are affected by armed conflicts of various origins. Thousands of families are regularly displaced from their homes by sporadic or sustained military skirmishes. Fears, tensions, anxieties, insecurities are often the lot of parents concerned about the safety and future of their families. The education of their children is seriously interrupted and jeopardized. Diseases prey on displaced families trying to fend for themselves in the miserable conditions of many evacuation camps. At a more profound level, displaced families bitterly harbor in themselves the prejudices, biases, viewpoints, attitudes, and values that are at the heart of political, economic, ideological, ethnic and religious conflicts in Asia. Communalism and fundamentalism are dimensions of these conflicts. Children of war grow up with the real possibility that they would be bearers of future wars, carrying into the future the roots of conflict that their fathers and mothers had borne in their own minds and hearts. It is heartening that in some conflict-ridden countries, mothers who are the most vulnerable to the burdens and sufferings of conflict have organized themselves as peace advocates. Strongly nurturing and caring, sensitive to in-depth needs, keenly irenic, women—indeed, mothers—have played a special role in waging peace, not war.

## 14. Bio-Genetic Threats to Life

43 Today the incredibly rapid advances of science have expanded our knowledge of human life and continue to provide valuable scientific information. The Human Genome Project is potentially of immense benefit for humankind. There is a future where the most serious ills that have hitherto no known cures could be cured. In the light of faith these advances have immensely increased our awe of God's infinite creative power. On the other hand, from these tremendous scientific and technological developments have emerged profound bioethical issues regarding the sacredness and dignity of life from its very beginning and regarding human stewardship of God-given life.

44 When the production of embryonic stem cells through human embryonic cloning was first announced their therapeutic potential to cause the healing or replacing of diseased body parts was immediately recognized. Embryonic stem cells are derived from human embryos that are either produced for therapeutic purpose or for reproductive purposes from in vitro fertilization. Thousands of human embryos are destroyed in order to produce embryonic stem cells. Since then some researchers in Korea have reportedly succeeded in producing embryonic stem cells. In 2003 the Catholic Bishops' Conference of Japan submitted a comment to the government's Panel on Bioethics and protested against the production of human embryos for research purposes and therapeutic human cloning. Passionate debates continue among scientists, moral theologians, ethicists, and religious leaders. These developments are not foreign to Asia, because experiments are now going on in some Asian countries. More disturbing is the fact that ideas contrary to Church teachings are now being used to justify the production and destruction of human embryos such as the idea that human embryos are human beings but not human persons. The specter of genetics becoming eugenics, selectively and scientifically producing super-humans or "designer babies" and a super-race, is looming over humankind trying to play God.

45 Clearly human embryonic cloning and the production of embryonic stem cells by way of destroying human embryos are serious affronts to human dignity and the sacredness of human life. Even when their intentions, i.e., for therapeutic or reproductive purposes, might be good, the production, manipulation and

destruction of human embryos to obtain suitable embryonic stem cells are not morally acceptable.<sup>16</sup> “The Holy See supports research on stem cells of post-natal origin since this approach—as has been demonstrated by the most recent studies—is a sound, promising, and ethical way to achieve tissue transplantation and cell therapy that could benefit humanity.”<sup>17</sup> In a pro-active stance, the Church has to be vigilant about these developments entering the doors of Asia.

## 15. Families and Basic Ecclesial/Human Communities

46 A truly positive development in Asia is the growing awareness of the place and role of the family in the building of Basic Ecclesial/Human Communities toward a new way of being Church. The family is the basic cell of society and the fundamental ecclesial community, the Church that is the home.<sup>18</sup> In Asia today there is a growing realization that the family has to be the focus of integral evangelization and the essential building block of the BEC/BHC and even of the local Church as a whole. In other words, the Church begins in the home, not in the parish. In the light of this perspective a rethinking of pastoral programs has to be done. Already in many approaches to the building of small communities that make up the parish, much attention is given to the family and to clusters of families, such that all the pastoral programs of parishes are aimed at building up family life.

## 16. Summing Up

47 We have discerned many forces in the pastoral situation. They may be death-dealing forces or life-giving forces. The emerging secular, post-modern culture is at best ambivalent. It possesses many positive features that contribute to the positive development of a culture of integral life. Cultural, economic, political, religious factors—including structures—influence the Asian family for good or for worse. However, other forces such as Asia’s massive poverty, divisions, conflicts, exploitation and oppressive structures are

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<sup>16</sup> See Intervention by the Holy See Delegation at the Special Committee of the 57th General Assembly of the United Nations on Human Embryonic Cloning, 23 September 2002.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.* The Holy See refers, for instance, to stem cells developed from adult bone marrows.

<sup>18</sup> To be noted is the observation of the Bishops of Japan who believe that in Japan “it is not possible for the family to be the basic cell of the ecclesial community” since “we can often find only one Catholic in so many families”, CBCJ, IWP, p. 2.

facilitated by the process of economic and cultural globalization and are death-dealing. They threaten not only the quality of life but also the very survival of many Asian families. Even life itself is threatened by genetic developments. Certainly caste-ism, patriarchy and gender inequality, poverty, child labor, land problems, ecological degradation and social conflicts are major death-dealing forces. Such threatening forces lead to the devaluing of positive values that have traditionally characterized Asian families such as close kinship inclusive of extended families, love of children, respect and care for the elderly, harmony, a deep moral and religious sense, a deep respect for life and care for the life in the womb, a profound reverence for the sacred. They threaten our religious understanding of the origin and nature of life as well as the nature and structure of the family and marriage. They contradict responsible stewardship of human life considered seamless from conception to death, the sacramentality of marriage between man and woman and its God-given purpose. In a word, the pastoral situation in Asia, negative or positive, profoundly affects the life, the unity and harmony—communion and solidarity—of Asian families, values of God’s Reign that once characterized the whole of creation, flowing as it did from the love and life of God and the covenant that God made with humanity. These biblical values will be the themes of our theological-pastoral reflection.

**48** The pastoral situation is truly a great challenge to the Church’s family ministry in Asia. Almost 20 years ago the Asian Bishops said:

Perhaps the greatest challenge to the Church in Asia is that posed by the Asian family. The Asian family is the cellular receptacle of all Asia’s problems, poverty, repression, exploitation and degradation, divisions and conflicts. The family is directly affected by the religious, political, economic, social and cultural problems of Asia, by the problems relating to women, health, work, business, education, etc.<sup>19</sup>

**49** Hence these are the overarching pastoral questions that we wish to address: Can the Church in Asia, particularly the domestic church, respond adequately to the pastoral challenge so described? In

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<sup>19</sup> Final Statement of the 4th FABC Plenary Assembly, Tokyo, 16-25 September 1986, no. 3.4.1, in *For All the Peoples of Asia*, Rosales and Arevalo, eds., 1992, p. 184.

what way can the Church reflect pastorally and theologically—and relevantly—on the death-dealing and life-giving forces in Asia that affect the life, the unity and communion and solidarity of Asian families? How can the Church be effective through relevant pastoral programs for the Asian family?

## PART II. THEOLOGICAL-PASTORAL REFLECTION

### A. A Framework and a Process of Reflection

50 It is the purpose of this theological--pastoral reflection to help provide the response of faith to the above questions. It does this by meditating on the data of Sacred Scriptures and the Teachings of the Church,<sup>20</sup> keeping always in mind the major elements of the pastoral situation that challenge the evangelizing mission of the Church. Its framework will generally be: Life, Communion, Solidarity, and Mission. It follows this thematic process:

- (a) To the culture of death in the Asian situation, we respond by presenting a vision of a culture of integral life with a particular orientation to marriage and the family. We envision a culture of integral life that is centered on covenant life with God, where the values of the Reign of God, such as love, communion, and solidarity among individuals, families, and societies reign.
- (b) We present this culture of integral life as a gift as well as a task given by God in and through Jesus who raised human life to the divine and shared it with us in the Church through the Holy Spirit.
- (c) We reflect then on the Church itself as the Family of God that serves as a sign as well as a promise of integral life in the Reign of God. Jesus and the Reign of God that he proclaimed are our faith response to the culture of death that threatens every gospel value that the family was ordained to have from the very beginning. We consider this perspective as significant in the light of the pluralistic nature of many Asian families.

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<sup>20</sup> E.g., *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 1994, nos.1601-58.

- (d) Further meditating on the Christian vision, we reflect on the God-given nature of marriage and of the family in the light of the fundamental values of covenant, love, communion, and solidarity. The thrust of our reflection is to consider the family not merely as an object to be evangelized and led to discover its identity but more importantly as a subject of internal mission (*missio ad intra*) within itself and external mission to others (*missio ad extra*)—toward the culture of integral life in the Reign of God.
- (e) To be certain that our meditation is far from being abstract and sterile, we apply it to some of the major social, cultural, and ecclesial challenges in Asia.
- (f) The final stage of our meditation on the family-in-mission toward a culture of integral life integrates all the above stages. It is on the spirituality needed by the family in Asia to realize its identity and fulfill its mission.

## **B. A Culture of Integral Life**

51 While the emerging culture has certainly many positive contributions to our world, it is a challenge to Asian families to evangelize it and liberate by transforming it into a culture of integral life so that it may not be inimical to integral human life. In understanding a culture of life and the gravity of the threat against it, the ancient religious and philosophical traditions of Asia would most certainly be helpful. And surely there would be many convergences in the understanding. Our pastoral and theological reflection, however, will be from the perspective of our own religious faith. From this perspective, we need to understand and appreciate human life in a holistic sense, i.e., life in itself and its inherent dignity, life as a gift of God<sup>21</sup> and a sharing of God's life,<sup>22</sup> life lived today in unceasing struggle toward fullness which is its eternal destiny,<sup>23</sup> life in fullness<sup>24</sup> in the Reign of God to come. From this holistic view, with the universal Church we condemn everything that dehumanizes, exploits and oppresses human life. Any situation, relationship, structure, situation, behavior, or action that threatens and diminishes

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<sup>21</sup> See Gen. 2:7; Acts 17:25.

<sup>22</sup> See Rom. 6:23; Jn. 4:10, 14; Rev. 21:6. 20

<sup>23</sup> Rom. 6:22.

<sup>24</sup> Jn. 10:10.

life is death-dealing<sup>25</sup>—part of a culture of death. It is against God’s will and the Reign of God. A culture of integral life on the other hand respects, nurtures, enhances, promotes and serves human life in all its dimensions, from the very finality of the procreative act and the moment of conception, through its earthly struggles to its return to God full life at the end of time<sup>26</sup> in the Reign of God. This perspective of integral life has profound implications on the meaning of “pro-life” and the extent of family ministry.

## 1. Covenant Love and Life, Communion and Solidarity

52 At the basis of the culture of integral life, according to the Sacred Scriptures, is God’s love as the Creator and Giver of all life, and especially of human life.<sup>27</sup>In the Book of Genesis we even find a certain intimation of a Trinitarian sharing of communion with humanity: “Let us make humankind in our image... so in the image of God he created them, male and female he created them”.<sup>28</sup> Thus human life began, only because of God’s love. Formed according to the divine image, life is God’s gift. For this reason the life of every person, no matter how poor and degraded, remains precious and sacred. Undoubtedly, the Scriptural creation stories place the creation of the human person as the climactic point. But we need to acknowledge that by virtue of God’s creative act the whole cosmos is truly a web of interdependent relationships over which the human person exercises a duty of stewardship, reflecting God’s own dominion of loving care. For this reason in the original design of God, there was solidarity of all creation characterized by interdependence and harmony. For human beings, such solidarity was always by free choice, thus preventing the artificial establishment of solidarity by naked power.

53 The New Testament adds the integrating apex of this divine design. At the pinnacle as well as at the heart of all creation is Christ, “the image of the invisible God, the first-born of all creation; for in him all things were created.... through him and for him.”<sup>29</sup> Through him “God was pleased to reconcile to himself all things, whether on

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<sup>25</sup> See *Gaudium et Spes* (GS), 27.

<sup>26</sup> 2 Tm. 1:10; 4:1; Heb. 9:27-28.

<sup>27</sup> See Gen. 1: 26-28, 2:7; Wis. 15:11.

<sup>28</sup> Gen. 1: 26, 27.

<sup>29</sup> Col. 1:15-16.

earth or in heaven." Through him all broken relationships are reconciled, "by making peace through the blood of his cross."<sup>30</sup>

**54** The covenant between God and the chosen people in the Old Testament is one definitive moment of the culture of integral life. Yahweh as Lord stipulates what has to be done in order to ensure life; the people as subjects assent, in free obedience, to Yahweh's will. But it is also very significant that the covenant relationship is often described in terms of intimate family, even spousal, relationships. Thus the most tender and ineffable affection with which God cares and provides for the chosen people: "I took them up in my arms. ... I led them with cords of compassion, with the bands of love and ... I bent down to them and fed them."<sup>31</sup> "As a mother comforts her child, so I will comfort you."<sup>32</sup> Even the language of communion between bridegroom and wife is used.<sup>33</sup> The following words exemplify the tenderness of God's life-giving love for the people: "I have called you by name, you are mine...you are precious in my sight, and honored, and I love you."<sup>34</sup> God's familial covenant relationship with the chosen people is characterized by limitless patience, kindness, constant summon to renewal, mercy and forgiveness.

**55** Because of God's loving providence over them, the covenant people are told to be in active solidarity with everyone. This requires mission to serve others especially with the needy, the orphan, the widow, and the stranger.<sup>35</sup> Finally, when the covenant relationship seems to be radically broken because of stubborn infidelities, God's life-giving love promises a radical transformation in terms of a "new heart" that is malleable to God's re-shaping.<sup>36</sup>

**56** For the Old Testament the culture of integral life would clearly include these four major emphases: life as God's gift of love, communion and solidarity with God and with others, including a mission of service especially to the poor and the needy, as covenant-demand, and God's promise of full life. This perspective would find

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<sup>30</sup> Col. 1: 20.

<sup>31</sup> Hos. 11:3-4.

<sup>32</sup> Is. 66:13.

<sup>33</sup> See Hos. 2: 16, 19-20.

<sup>34</sup> Is. 43:1, 4.

<sup>35</sup> Ex. 22:22-23; Dt. 24:17-22; Is. 1:17; Jer. 22:3; Zech. 7:10.

<sup>36</sup> See Ez. 11:19; 36: 26.

completion in the key Old Testament theme of the Reign of God in the end-time in which, finally, the upright life is saved and human desires fulfilled.<sup>37</sup>

## 2. Jesus the Life: Shared Love, Communion and Solidarity

57 When finally viewed, as it should be, in the light of the mystery of Jesus, life takes on its full revealed meaning as a sharing in the very life of God. The love of God is nowhere as overwhelming and surpassing as when he sends his only begotten Son to assume our humanity except its sinfulness – in order that we might have eternal life.<sup>38</sup> We believe that Jesus Christ is the Word of Life.<sup>39</sup> Master of life, he can lay down his life for the sake of others and can “take it up again.”<sup>40</sup> In ultimate self-disclosure, Jesus declares, “I am the way, and the truth, and the life.”<sup>41</sup> He then speaks of believing, of keeping his word, and of intimate communion of love. “Those who love me will keep my word, and my Father will love them, and we will come to them and make our home with them.”<sup>42</sup> He who is life itself describes his mission on earth as life-giving, as salvific solidarity with others, “I have come so that they may have life and have it to the full.”<sup>43</sup> Again and again he relates his mission of life-giving to the Reign of God, a Reign he speaks about in a radically different way in favor of the lowly and the humble,<sup>44</sup> even about a “new birth” without which one cannot see the Reign of God.<sup>45</sup> “Life,” integral life, is what the first disciples experience in and through Jesus. John graphically describes their experience. What they had “heard,” “seen,” “looked upon,” and “touched with their hands” was not one with mere physical existence, but one with a radically different – transcendent – quality of life. To them Jesus is the one who has come to bring life to fullness.

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<sup>37</sup> See, e.g., Ps. 97:11-12; 145:13, 17-21; Wis 4:7-14.

<sup>38</sup> See Jn. 3:16.

<sup>39</sup> 1 Jn. 1:1. 1 Jn. 1:1

<sup>40</sup> Jn. 10: 17-18, see also Jn. 5: 26.

<sup>41</sup> Jn. 14:6.

<sup>42</sup> Jn. 14: 23.

<sup>43</sup> Jn. 10:10 (The New Jerusalem Bible).

<sup>44</sup> See, e.g., the Beatitudes in Mt. 5:3-10.

<sup>45</sup> Jn. 3:3-8.

58 It is at Baptism that this new life is given. By baptism the believer passes from death due to sin to life in Christ.<sup>46</sup> From Christ comes “living water” that becomes “a spring of water welling up to eternal life.”<sup>47</sup> He is moreover “the bread of life”<sup>48</sup> that has come “from heaven and gives life to the world.”<sup>49</sup> Jesus speaks here of Communion in the Sacrament of the Holy Eucharist, his own body and blood: “I am the living bread that came down from heaven; whoever eats of this bread will live forever; and the bread that I will give for the life of the world is my flesh.”<sup>50</sup> “Those who eat my flesh and drink my blood have eternal life, ... Those who eat my flesh and drink my blood abide in me and I in them.”<sup>51</sup> That is why the apostle Paul would exult: “For to me, living is Christ.”<sup>52</sup> In his turn the evangelist John would proclaim: “And from his fullness have we all received, grace upon grace.”<sup>53</sup>

### 3. Covenant Life in the Spirit: the Family of God, the Church

59 Yet there is more to the life-giving love of Jesus than just a personal relationship between believers and Jesus. Once again covenant love and life, now “sealed by the Blood” of Jesus, is at the core of a new relationship between God and a new people of faith who are given a new commandment. The new commandment is also mission: “I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.”<sup>54</sup> There is no deeper communion of love and life than this—the sharing of Jesus own Body and Blood, his whole life, with believers. His sacrificial love gives rise to a new community, a family of faith born in the Spirit. “But when Jesus dies and ‘gives up His Spirit’ to God, He ‘hands on’ his Spirit to the Church in the same

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<sup>46</sup> Rom. 6:4; Col. 2:12.

<sup>47</sup> Jn. 4:14.

<sup>48</sup> Jn. 6: 34, 48.

<sup>49</sup> Jn. 6: 33.

<sup>50</sup> Jn. 6:51.

<sup>51</sup> Jn: 6:54, 56.

<sup>52</sup> Phil.1:21.

<sup>53</sup> Jn. 1: 16.

<sup>54</sup> Jn. 13:34-35.

act.”<sup>55</sup> Thus the Church is born as a new creation,<sup>56</sup> God’s “household”, his own family<sup>57</sup> born of the Spirit of Jesus, the Spirit of Life.<sup>58</sup>

**60** Life in Christ then is life in the Spirit.<sup>59</sup> Only faith knows of such a life. But there are certain signs a life of the Spirit is, indeed, being lived. “The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control.”<sup>60</sup> Paul brings the language of love to the perspective of life in the Reign of God when he writes: “...for it is not eating and drinking that make the kingdom of God, but the saving justice, the peace and the joy brought by the Holy Spirit.”<sup>61</sup> In contrast to the life of the Spirit is life in the flesh which is demonstrated by “works of the flesh” – “fornication, impurity, licentiousness, idolatry, sorcery, enmities, strife, jealousy, anger, quarrels, dissensions, factions, envy, drunkenness, carousing, and things like these I am warning you, as I warned you before: those who do such things will not inherit the kingdom of God.”<sup>62</sup> Avoiding these “works of the flesh” is a fundamental requirement of the new covenant. Paul summarizes the covenant relationship in terms of in terms of mission to love and serve one’s neighbor:

“For you were called to freedom, brothers and sisters; only do not use your freedom as an opportunity for self-indulgence, but through love become slaves to one another. For the whole law is summed up in a single commandment, ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself’.”<sup>63</sup>

**61** To live in the Spirit, therefore, is to lead a life of communion and solidarity with and for all. This communion and solidarity become even more awesome when Paul speaks of the Church as the

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<sup>55</sup> *Dictionary of Biblical Theology*, ed., Xavier Leon-Dufour, updated 2nd ed., 1982; Jn. 19:30.

<sup>56</sup> 2 Cor. 5:17.

<sup>57</sup> Eph. 2:19; 1 Tm. 3:15.

<sup>58</sup> The church as the family of God was the special focus of the Special Assembly of the Synod of Bishops for Africa. See Pope John Paul II, *Ecclesia in Africa*, 199.

<sup>59</sup> See Rom. 8: 1, 9-10.

<sup>60</sup> Gal. 5:22.

<sup>61</sup> Rom. 14:17 (The New Jerusalem Bible).

<sup>62</sup> Gal. 5: 19-21.

<sup>63</sup> Gal. 5: 13-14.

Body of Christ where every member is important and complementary. There are different members, but the Body is one. In the Body is unity in diversity, complementariness amid differences, and co-responsibility for the building up of the whole.<sup>64</sup>

**62** As in the Old Testament, so in the New Testament the major realities that emerge are God's gift of Life, God's promise of Full Life, Love, Communion, Solidarity and Mission. They are fundamental dimensions of a culture of integral life. God is Life. God is Love. Because God is love, we live. If we live, then we have to love. If we love, we have to act toward communion and solidarity—and serve others. In the light of the above reflection, we can understand why the Gospel of Jesus may be called the "Gospel of Life" and why the Reign of God proclaimed by Jesus as "now here and yet to come" is the Reign of Life in its fullness.

### **C. The Family: Sanctuary of Love and Life, Covenant and Communion**

**63** The life of God's family on earth, the Church, is both a gift that anticipates full life in the Reign of God that is now here and is yet fully to come and also a task that is to be done on the journey to full life. The reality of the Church is both actual experience and longed-for realization. In the context of the Church's life as both gift and task, the family as the domestic church takes on a deeper significance. Pope John Paul II has said, "In the face of the so-called culture of death, the family is the heart of the culture of life."<sup>65</sup> From the family the culture of integral life is to be rediscovered, given renewed energy, and re-expressed in our new contexts. Deeper reflection on covenant life, communion, solidarity and mission tells us why this is so.

#### **1. Jesus' Experience of Family with Mary and Joseph**

**64** Christians have always considered the family of Jesus, Mary and Joseph at Nazareth as the family par excellence, the model of Christian families. His Nazareth home is Jesus' primordial experience of human family. It began with the divine call to Mary and Joseph to be husband and wife. As narrated in the Gospels,<sup>66</sup> Mary and Joseph

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<sup>64</sup> Rom. 12:4-5; 1 Cor 12:4-7; 12:12; Eph. 4:16.

<sup>65</sup> CA, 39.

<sup>66</sup> See Mt. 1:18-2:23; Lk. 1:26-2:52.

had to probe with faith the mystery of their call to be parents and to know the mystery of their only Son. Every day they had to cope with these profound mysteries. Mary “treasured all these... and pondered them in her heart.”<sup>67</sup> These are not the ordinary lot of man and woman falling in love and getting married. But their life together as husband and wife was ordinary, indeed, simply that of a carpenter and his wife. Still they experienced what was extraordinary: inability to find a suitable place for the birth of their child, yet exultation when finally the child is born. Joy as they offer their child to God in the Temple, yet suffering as they hear prophetic words that indicate future suffering for both child and mother. Joy as the family succeeds in seeking refuge in a foreign land, yet sorrow as children are killed because of their son. Distress and confusion as they “lose” their son for three days, and great relief when they find him in the Temple, yet wondering what he really means about ‘being in his Father’s house.’ Still, all these simply strengthen the bond of love, of communion, between parents and son, between family and God in the covenant that Mary had obediently and freely accepted in faith: “Here am I, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word.”<sup>68</sup>

65 From the Scriptures then, we know that Jesus was born and reared within a Jewish family whose fundamental religiosity arose from the home. There he experienced the love and care of parents and learned spiritual values so characteristic of Judaism: a passion for God and an intense concern for others. “He learned obedience,”<sup>69</sup> says the Letter to the Hebrews, that is, how to live in accordance with God’s will—but not without suffering and struggle, like so many families then and now. Although he would eventually challenge those who followed him to think of family beyond natural ties, he never forgot the value and importance of family relationships he kept referring to: “Who are my mother and my brothers?”<sup>70</sup> or “Whatever you do to the least of my brothers and sisters....”<sup>71</sup> Up to the very end he would commend the familial way of relating when he entrusts a “son” to a “mother” and a “mother” to a “son.”<sup>72</sup> In Jesus’ experience of family, we once again encounter the recurring theme of covenant

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<sup>67</sup> Lk. 2:19, 51.

<sup>68</sup> Lk. 1:38.

<sup>69</sup> Heb. 5:8.

<sup>70</sup> Mk. 3:33; Mt. 12:48.

<sup>71</sup> Mt. 25:40.

<sup>72</sup> Jn. 19:26-27.

love and life, communion “unto death,” solidarity and mission, a mission that extends from the limits of the nuclear family to the family of faith and beyond. The way of the family of Jesus, Mary, and Joseph is the way of every Christian family.

## **2. Marriage: A Sacred Covenant between Man and Woman**

**66** At the beginning of the family is a sacred covenant between man and woman. In their sexual difference they are fundamentally “oriented toward communion.” Marked “with the sign of masculinity and femininity” they have from the very beginning “a nuptial attribute, that is, the capacity of expressing love, that love in which the person becomes a gift.” Thus “man and woman are called from the very beginning not only to exist ‘side by side’ or ‘together’, but they are also called to exist mutually ‘one for the other’...The text of Genesis 2:18-25 shows that marriage is the first and, in a sense, the fundamental dimension of this call.”<sup>73</sup> Marriage then from which the family springs is a covenant of love and life between husband and wife whereby they “give themselves to each other and accept each other,”<sup>74</sup> hold on to each other lovingly and faithfully until death<sup>75</sup> in a total reciprocity of self-giving. This is an awesome truth on the meaning of marriage – total self-giving, until death.

## **3. A Sacrament of Christ’s Love**

**67** For the Church, communion in marriage is sacramental. It makes visible and palpable the invisible and hidden love of Christ for people. At the same time “Christ’s own union with the Church” is the model of conjugal communion.<sup>76</sup> The sacramental bond of communion between husband and wife reflects the profound reality of the bond of love between Christ and the Church. Hence, the love of the husband needs to be like Christ’s own love for his bride, the Church, faithful and sacrificing covenant love. So must the love of the wife be for her husband. Husband and wife are a sacrament of

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<sup>73</sup> See Congregation of the Doctrine of the Faith, *Letter to the Bishops of the Catholic Church on the Collaboration of Men and Women in the Church and in the World*, May 31, 2004, no. 6 – citing a reflection of Pope John Paul II on the human body based on Gen. 2:4-25.

<sup>74</sup> GS, 48; see Gen. 2: 24.

<sup>75</sup> Mt. 19: 6.

<sup>76</sup> LG 48.

Christ's love as well as sacrament of Christ's love of the Church. Christ's love becomes an inner presence in their love, relationships, and family life as well as the source of their spiritual sustenance and growth. If then we want to know concretely what this love of Christ is all about, all we need to do is to look at a loving married couple. This is the "great mystery"<sup>77</sup> of love and life that is signified by the nuptial vow that husband and wife pronounce to each other and is symbolically expressed by the nuptial rings, or by other symbols as in some Asian cultures.

68 When St. Paul admonishes the husband to "love" his wife, the full meaning of such spousal love is revealed when he instructs the wife to "respect" her husband.<sup>78</sup> That St. Paul, in a patriarchal setting, tells husbands to love their wives as Christ loved is truly revolutionary. Husbands are not just called to model their love for their wives on the conjugal love of Christ for the Church but the text in Ephesians 5:25 also implies that because Christ has loved us, we must love one another. Christ's love thus becomes for the couple the source and strength of their love for one another. In this context, the full semantic meaning of "to respect" is "to look deeply into" the true good of the other. It is "a search for all that constitutes the good of the person who is loved."<sup>79</sup> Hence, even if St. Paul speaks about seemingly different duties, e.g., husbands to love their wives and wives to respect their husbands, such values in their full meaning are identical and are mutually given. Husband and wives are to respect—love—one another. Complementariness and mutuality are essential to spousal love.

69 By loving each other, husband and wife grow together towards human and Christian maturity as they live their conjugal life and face the challenges of their responsibilities. Such love spills over to the rest of the family and is marked by patience, kindness, respect, trust, forgiveness, sacrifice and mercy, enduring in times of pain and sorrow as well as in times of joy. Thus the family bond is strengthened and delighted in every child who is born. Blessed with new life, parents often stand in awe at the giftedness of life beyond their own

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<sup>77</sup> See Eph. 5: 21-33.

<sup>78</sup> Eph. 5:33.

<sup>79</sup> Salvatore Fisichella, "The Christian Family in a Time of Cultural Change," Acts of the International Theological-Pastoral Congress, *The Christian Family: Good News for the Third Millennium*, Fourth World Meeting of Families, Manila, January 22-24, 2003, p. 46.

making. This experience of life invites them to recognize the God of life present in such family reality and to look forward to the future. Happiness spills over to dreams and hopes that the tomorrows of their life will somehow be better. Truly, because of its divine inner riches the great mystery of the family is Good News.

#### **4. Covenant Love in Marriage: Parenthood and Children**

70 As “the author of marriage”<sup>80</sup> God mandated marriage from the very beginning to be indissoluble<sup>81</sup> and radically open to God’s gift of procreated life. Motherhood and fatherhood are gifts implied from the beginning in the complementariness of male and female as image of God. “By its very nature the institution of marriage and married love is ordered to the procreation and education of the offspring and it is in them that it finds its crowning glory.”<sup>82</sup> Inseparable, therefore, from the gift given by God for husband and wife to become “one body”<sup>83</sup> is their unity of love and of life, not only of their own life together but also of any new life that God creates through them. Indeed, they have to be radically open to any new life, because God’s love does not discriminate and does not exclude anyone, a boy child or a girl child, a handicapped baby or a totally healthy baby, rich or poor. Every child is a gift of God. This does not in any way stigmatize infertile couples for in the physical inability to have children the radical and fundamental moral openness to any life that God might give is already a blessing and a grace from God.

71 Christian couples have to work together to educate their children in the ways of the faith and of the Reign of God. They are the first teachers of faith of their children. In this regard parents are to seek ways to make their children grow in faith, help them express it in their lives and share it with others, especially children of their age through the varied opportunities offered by the Church, or through their own creativity guided by the Church. Like the family of Jesus, Mary and Joseph, the Christian family has to be a home, a school of holiness and discipleship, where the ways of God and the values of the Gospel are learned and lived, where listening to and heeding the Lord is a daily norm, where the children first experience the presence

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<sup>80</sup> LG, 48.

<sup>81</sup> Mt. 19:5-6.

<sup>82</sup> LG, 48; see also 50.

<sup>83</sup> Gen. 2: 24; Mt 19: 3-9.

of God. In the pluralistic societies of Asia where Christians are a small minority and where religious education in schools may not be accessible, the mission of husband and wife to educate their children for God and lead them to missionary consciousness is absolutely necessary. A family of deep religious faith is a sign of the Church and of the Reign of God. In ecumenical and inter-religious families, such deep religious sense is a countersign to the increasingly irreligious sense of a secular culture.

72 Clearly God sows into the very nature of the family the seeds of the future through children as well as the grateful memories of its past through the elderly. Gratitude, hope, awe and reverence are the responses of both old and young for the transcendent gift that God gives in marriage when husband and wife share in the awesome creative act of God. Thus truly the family is a trove of concern and respect, of care and love, of God-given treasures old and new.

## **5. Human Relationships in the Family and the Reign of God**

73 When we abstract from the uniquely Christian particularities of our reflection and view marriage, the family, and human relationships within the family from the perspective of the Reign of God a new and significant dimension is added. We discover that ecumenical and inter-religious marriages and families analogously and truly share the values of covenant life, communion, solidarity, complementariness and mutuality of self-giving. For this reason, the Christian partner brings into the covenant of marriage and family the distinctive riches of her/his beliefs while growing together and journeying together with the other partner and their children toward the Reign of God.

74 The fundamental theological dimensions of covenant life, communion, solidarity, and mission within the family are not as abstract as they seem to be. The actual human relationships within the family in daily life, the harmonious loving and caring relations between spouses, between spouses and their children, and among the children, especially when the family is experiencing great distress, their family journey to full life through suffering and joy – these make communion, solidarity, and mission concrete. Belongingness, intimacy, warmth, joy, friendship are the more familiar signs of profound communion in the family. The key to such human relationships, family counselors often state, is the total quality of

communication, verbal and behavioral, among family members. Hence, it is imperative that family ministry in Asia has formation in human relationships as a principal pastoral concern.

#### **D. Vocation and Mission: "Family, Become What You Are!"**

75 Built into the very nature of the family is a divine vocation and mission. Every Christian is called to seek above all else the Reign of God. This is the one and common vocation of all. Married couples have responded to this call by way of marriage and family life. They have embraced the Reign of God by becoming married. The way they live their marriage and family life indicates their fidelity to God's Reign. In their love for one another, in the expression of that love in the conjugal act, in their rearing of children, in their use of material resources, they express their commitment to the Reign of God. Indeed, marriage is in a true sense a fundamental orientation toward the Reign of God.

76 The call for the family to mission is: "Family, become what you are!" This mission is sacramentally rooted in Baptism and Confirmation. Drawn by God's unconditional love, their very identity as a married couple impels them to mission. Their experience of God in and through marriage missions them. Precisely as married couples they have a particular ecclesial ministry to carry out within and outside the family.<sup>84</sup> They minister to each other. They seek the Reign of God together. They teach their children to opt for God's reign above all else. The members of the whole family minister to one another. In ordinariness, in anxieties and in joy, through the cross and resurrection of daily marital life, mutual evangelization takes place. It takes place through the mutual loving, caring and serving of husband and wife, inspiring and encouraging each other to fulfill their responsibilities in faithful love, through loving and caring for their children as well as through the love and obedience of their children. Specifically for the Christian family, it is in the family "where the Gospel is transmitted and from which the Gospel radiates.... all the members evangelize and are evangelized."<sup>85</sup> The family is the place where people can be themselves and grow integrally. It is the place where the sense and passion for service in

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<sup>84</sup> See LG 11.

<sup>85</sup> *Evangelii Nuntiandi*(EN), 71.

different ways of living are fostered, including missionary vocation.<sup>86</sup> In the daily interaction of human relationships within the family the members witness to the Reign of God and to the death and resurrection of Christ the Good News of salvation. This is truly a catechesis of life. Such is the internal mission (*missio ad intra*) of husbands and wives and their families.

77 But not only to one another do family members proclaim the Reign of God and Christ's saving death and resurrection. They are likewise called to do so to others.

"Family, become what you are!" These words also call the family to external mission (*missio ad extra*). The loving relationships that are developed within the family - between husband and wife, between parents and their children, between the children, and between members of the nuclear and extended families - have a missionary dimension. They fulfill the words of the Lord, "It is by your love for one another that everyone will recognize you as my disciples."<sup>87</sup> The whole family is likewise called to illustrate in a unique way the reality that is the Church. Marriage and becoming family are a way of being and becoming church. By fostering human intimacy and commitment to the personal well-being of all its members, the family promotes in word and deed the reality and importance of loving, life-bringing relationships within the Church and its structures.

78 The family provides flesh and blood to the Christian conviction that God is Self-Giving Love. It sacramentalizes the gracious goodness of God, particularly so in the context of excessive and widespread human suffering. Committed, faithful and nurturing love (intimacy) within the family without any betrayal of love makes more credible the Gospel value of total trust in God's unfailing concern - in Christ's unfailing, faithful, forgiving and nurturing love for us, the Family of God. This sign value of Christian marriage and the family has a powerful message to marriages and families that are being broken by selfishness and insensitivity, pettiness and dishonesty or by excessive economic, psychological or social concerns.

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<sup>86</sup> See *Redemptoris Mission* (RM), 80; *Familiaris Consortio* (FC), 54.

<sup>87</sup> Jn. 13:35.

79 When God said of creation, “It is good,” God did not only refer to the physical beauty of creation. The whole world is good because it came from God’s design and images his goodness and love. It is marked by God’s loving dominion. God reigns over all creation. Such moral and spiritual dimension may be specifically applied to the words that God addressed to Adam and Eve, the first husband and wife and our first parents. “Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it”.<sup>88</sup> More than just the physical implications of the command, they were also to fill the earth with the goodness and beauty, justice, and love of God – and bring it under the Reign of God. The experience of our first parents of the reality of sin and human limitation made them understand the painful process of human growth and maturity. But human limitations and failures are no obstacles to the fulfillment of family vocation and mission because of God’s promise of continual fidelity.<sup>89</sup> It is thus in the midst of challenge that God calls families to help to restore spread the original moral and spiritual brilliance of humanity throughout the earth so that it could fittingly, even if finitely, mirror the divine goodness once again.

80 The family’s mission to others extends, therefore, to the social, cultural, political, and educational fields. The family “is one of the of the Church’s most effective agents of evangelization.”<sup>90</sup> This really raises the question as to what church leadership can do to strengthen family presence and relationships—that is, to build a family that is truly a transforming sign of God’s Reign or to build it truly as the domestic Church. It is a challenge of empowering the family for mission by helping the members to live out their marriage and family life in accord with the values of God’s Reign or the teachings of the Gospel and of the Church. How this empowerment takes place has to be a principal concern of family ministry.

## 1. Mission and Economic Globalization

81 As we have already seen, the task of every family to reflect the goodness, justice, and goodness of God is nowhere more urgent and imperative than in the moral and social spheres of life. Our pastoral and reflection on the mission of the family thus brings us to

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<sup>88</sup> Gen. 1:28.

<sup>89</sup> Is. 38:19; Jer. 31:3.

<sup>90</sup> *Ecclesia in Asia* (EA), 46.

address the phenomenon and process of globalization and its host of problems. Indeed, globalization has made more actual the buzzword of two decades ago that the world is a global village. We might even say that globalization could be a principal tool by which the various peoples, races and cultures of the world are to live together in peace and harmony, that the rich and the poor in this world are to share fairly and equitably the goods of creation and the benefits of development, that the whole world is one harmonious human family under God where there is no room for war and divisive conflict, prejudice, discrimination, exclusion, oppression, isolation, and marginalization.

82 However, the present results of globalization are sadly far from the theological utopia that is envisioned. Social justice and peace, stewardship of creation, being responsible for one another, the common good of the one human family remain illusions. In many instances globalization has even aggravated injustice, poverty, exploitation, oppression and the destruction of the environment in most Asian countries. The drive toward competitiveness has left hundreds of millions of Asians behind in a global economic and cultural Darwinism where the mighty prevail. Reflection on the situation in the light of faith tells us that the current path that globalization is taking is terribly wrong for the human family and that an alternative must be sought.

83 Pope John Paul II has rightly pointed out that for globalization to work toward world social justice, it must be “globalization *in solidarity*, a globalization *without marginalization*.”<sup>91</sup> This would demand the just regulation of free market forces that are now effectively in the control of the better off and powerful economies of the world. Globalization must be regulated by international juridical norms and universal ethical principles that govern the use and development of the goods of creation and the distribution of the benefits of development. Certainly in the light of the Church’s social teachings among such principles would be: the preservation of the integrity of creation, universal destination of the goods of creation, human development that is integral, equitable distribution of the benefits of development, and option for the poor, and their participation in development. These principles have been

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<sup>91</sup> Pope John Paul II, *Message for the World Day of Peace*, 1 January 1998, no. 3. 34

insistently taught by the church in Asia especially through the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences, particularly by the various Bishops' Institutes of Social Action and Faith Encounter Institutes of Social Action.

## 2. The Family and Cultural Globalization

84 We should also come to grips with the issue of cultural globalization and the growing onset of a culture of post-modernism. Rightly today individual autonomy and individual human rights are fostered and defended. These fundamental values are indispensable for the common good. Thus in the face of a prevailing culture of patriarchy it is necessary to emphasize and promote the rights of women in Asia. On the other hand, we might perhaps perceive that there is today less emphasis on the family as "a community of love and life" and perhaps an overemphasis in some instances on certain individual rights at the expense of the community, more emphasis on the individual rights of spouses and children over against the good of the family and community. In every case virtue would urge a right balance between poles in tension.

85 However, at stake is the very nature of freedom regarding marriage. Instead of being a "capacity for realizing the truth of God's plan for marriage and the family" freedom is understood in its post-modern sense "as an autonomous power of self-affirmation, often against others, for one's own selfish well-being."<sup>92</sup> Such understanding of freedom may be seen today in various attempts to legislate new practices and values that are directly contrary to the tradition of our faith, such as divorce, same-sex union as marriage, abortion, and many of the ideas that the ambivalent term "reproductive health" implies as understood in various conferences of the United Nations. Thus it is necessary to be profoundly discerning regarding new "rights" that the emerging culture might press for universal recognition.

86 The Church has perennially held that there are universal truths, though admittedly expressed with the limitations of language and culture. On the other hand, doctrinal and moral relativism devalues such truths and holds that truth changes with the times. Consequently, critics deride as "outmoded" Church doctrines that affirm marriage as a sacrament and that reject same-sex unions,

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<sup>92</sup> FC 6.

divorce, contraception, abortion, etc. They declare ironically with dogmatic certainty that Church doctrines must change with the times, "if the Church were to remain relevant." It is this doctrinal and moral relativism of the emerging culture that we need to confront in family evangelization. Indeed, we have to share the anguish of people who suffer the terrible pains of divorce, of broken marriages, the loss of life in abortion, etc. Therefore, the teaching of the truth has to be done with great humility, compassion and love.<sup>93</sup> This is required of a genuine caring and nurturing pastoral ministry for couples and their families.

87 Evangelization of culture involves different dimensions. We need to know more in depth our own cultures that are rich expressions of God's presence in our midst. Further we need to evangelize our own cultures and take away from them traditions, beliefs, customs, and practices that do not seem to be in consonance with the divine plan as understood by our Christian faith. The family where culture is first encountered and internalized is the setting for both its enhancement and purification. It has the opportunity to hand on a culture that is imbued by the spirit of the Reign of God. We need reciprocally to understand our own faith in the light of the Spirit-given seeds of the Word in other religious and faith-traditions. We have to forge a symbiosis of these gifts of the Spirit so that our faith may be expressed, understood, and celebrated in the language and ethos of Asian cultures. Finally we need to confront the new cultural threat posed by globalization that seeks to impose a new materialist and relativist ethical code.

### 3. The Family and the Means of Social Communication

88 The principal channels of the new world culture are the means of social communication. Their power to communicate and to influence either for good or for bad is almost incredible. Even poor people have some access to one or two media resources. The world of communications is the "first Areopagus", of the modern age<sup>94</sup> and has a moral dimension. Its tools provide "unlimited opportunities for information, education, cultural expansion, and even spiritual growth."<sup>95</sup>

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<sup>93</sup> Eph. 4:15.

<sup>94</sup> RM 37c.

<sup>95</sup> Pope John Paul II, *Message for World Communications Day 2004*, "The Media and the Family: A Risk and Richness", no. 2.

89 For many, particularly for the younger generation, the means of social communications are the chief means for information and education, guidance and inspiration. Hence, the Church has to understand these tools and to have the competence and skills to use them effectively for its mission to evangelize. “Yet these same media also have the capacity to do grave harm to families by presenting an inadequate or even deformed outlook on life, on the family, on religion and on morality.”<sup>96</sup> Therefore, it is the mission of the Church to evangelize them, to purify them and bring to conform to the values of the Gospel and of God’s reign. Much of the power to evangelize the media lies in parents and their families. “Dialogue between families and those responsible for social communications”<sup>97</sup> would be beneficial to every family. Regulating the use of media in the home, pressing public authorities to provide guidelines for media based on the criteria of truth and human dignity would be necessary. An effective family ministry has to harness the power of the family and direct it to this important task.

#### 4. The Family and Social Transformation

90 By its very nature as the basic cell of society, every family has a social role. But this is especially true for the Christian family. The sacrament of marriage gives “to Christian couples and parents a power and a commitment to live their vocation as lay people and therefore to ‘seek the Reign of God by engaging in temporal affairs and by ordering them to the plan of God’.”<sup>98</sup> The work then of “ordering temporal affairs to the plan of God” or assisting at social transformation is part of the service or kingly mission of the family. Such mission, however, is likewise the mission of every family, Christian or otherwise, for no family is ever isolated from this world that is always in need of transformation. And the journey to the Reign of God is the journey of every family.

91 In Asia social transformation is most needed in at least three key areas: the quest for social justice and peace, integrity in public service, and the integrity of creation. Injustices are often built into the social structures, including the family structure as in the case of patriarchy. Cultural, ethnic, political, and economic differences erupt

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<sup>96</sup> Loc. cit.

<sup>97</sup> Pope John Paul II, *Message for World Communications Day*, 1980.

<sup>98</sup> FC 47, quoting LG 31.

into violent conflicts. The disease of corruption in public service is not simply attitudinal, it has also become structural as the idealism of young public servants becomes hopelessly eroded and finally trapped by “the system.” The destruction of the environment goes on unabated.

92 Social change has to start in the family, through the attitudinal transformation of parents, through the education that they impart to their children, and the parental example that they give regarding the values of justice, peace, personal integrity, and the care of creation. At the same time, children do evangelize their parents for children have the sensitivity to intuitively recognize actions that are just, transparent, fair, kind and generous. Moreover, parents and their children in solidarity with other families can play a strong advocacy role in society through “family politics”<sup>99</sup> or political intervention in promoting transparency and accountability among public servants, or fostering mediation and reconciliation among conflicting parties.

93 Such family politics should also be exercised in the defense of their own family rights,<sup>100</sup> rights that are sometimes trampled by the State. For this reason Asian families should become familiar with, defend, protect and promote the Charter of the Rights of the Family that the Holy See has proposed to intergovernmental and international organizations.<sup>101</sup> These rights are not peculiar to Catholic belief. They flow from the very nature of marriage and family and can easily be the object of inter-religious collaboration.

## 5. The Family and Inter-Religious Dialogue

94 In Asia, the birthplace of the world’s great religions, it is in the ordinariness of daily life that the encounter with peoples of other faiths takes place. It is at this juncture of daily living that witnessing to Gospel values is foremost in the Christian mission of evangelization. The teachings of the Scriptures as interpreted by the Church reflect the values that Christian families have to live in their daily lives. To fulfill the mission of evangelization, Christian families should always keep before their minds their distinct identity as Christian, be faithful to their Christian commitments, and live by

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<sup>99</sup> See FC 44.

<sup>100</sup> See the enumeration of such rights in FC 46.

<sup>101</sup> The Charter is appended to this present document.

their Christian values. For Christian families only through fidelity to the Christian identity and responsibility can dialogue of life with peoples of other faiths be possible and fruitful.

95 Pope John Paul II observed: "Each member of the faithful and all Christian communities are called to practice dialogue, although not always to the same degree or in the same way."<sup>102</sup> Many indeed are the ways by which inter-religious dialogue can take place at the level of the family. In the first place is the witness to Gospel values that Christian families must give daily in our times. Among these Gospel values are: the sacredness of life from conception to natural death, the dignity of the human person, the sanctity of marriage between man and woman, family and marriage as divinely instituted, acceptance and love of children, chastity according to each one's vocation, solidarity with the poor, the sick and the needy.<sup>103</sup> Mutual respect for common values will lead to mutual collaboration to protect and promote them.

96 In particular, solidarity with the poor is a social value that should certainly lead Christian families to act together with families of other faiths in the promotion of social justice, the quest for peace and reconciliation, and in the care for the environment. It would not be farfetched likewise to imagine that at a certain point of inter-religious relationship Christian families could share with others their own God-experience, their religious experience of faith and love of Jesus, not in order to proselytize but simply in order to share of themselves in transparent friendship and unity.<sup>104</sup> Finally, one should not dismiss as impossible that Christian families could bring the Good News of salvation to people who wish to hear and freely welcome it.<sup>105</sup> The Christian family needs to do this proclamation at least through the catechism of its members and the witness of their lives.

97 But it is especially in a marriage of peoples from different religions that inter-religious dialogue is both a dialogue of word, of love and life.<sup>106</sup> At the beginning of the loving encounter of man and

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<sup>102</sup> RM 57.

<sup>103</sup> See GS 51, *Evangelium Vitae* (EV) 58-67, FC 16.

<sup>104</sup> See *Dialogue and Proclamation*, 57.

<sup>105</sup> Cf. Rom. 10:14-15.

<sup>106</sup> See the situation given by St. Paul in 1 Cor. 7: 12-16.

woman of different faiths, the consideration of religious differences as well as reconciliation already begins. The dialogue of word and of love proceeds through courtship and marriage, matures into a loving dialogue of life in the ordinary and daily events of married life. The values and attitudes of such dialogue flows to their children. Despite religious differences, a bridge of love and reconciliation is built, a reality so significant in societies plagued by religious strife. There is likewise no doubt that in the anxieties, sorrows, joys, hopes, and love of marital and family life, there are opportunities offered by the Spirit for the humble, respectful, silent but eloquent proclamation of Christian faith.

## **6. The Family and the Basic Ecclesial/Human Community**

98 The domestic church is the most fundamental community form of the Church and must be taken seriously as an ecclesial reality. It must be part of the total ecclesial reality of the locality. Pope John Paul II has noted with approval the pastoral emphasis that the Bishops of Asia have given to BEC's "as an effective way of promoting communion and participation in parishes and Dioceses and as a genuine force for evangelization.... and are, therefore, a solid starting point for building a new society, the expression of a civilization of love."<sup>107</sup> There is no doubt that the family as the domestic church has a central place in the pastoral thrust of building Basic Ecclesial Communities in Asia. The family is the most fundamental community component of the BEC. In most cases the BEC is made up of clusters of neighborhood families that come together regularly to pray, read and reflect on the Word of God, and apply it to their daily lives. In like manner clusters of inter-religious families in Basic Human Communities gather for inter-religious prayer, reflection, fellowship and common action for the good of the neighborhood.

99 May it not even be said that focal point of evangelization should be the family as object and subject, to which all parish pastoral programs are geared? The BEC would then be a community of families, and the parish truly a community of communities.<sup>108</sup> The solidarity of families in all aspects of human life in the BEC's as well as in the BHC's would, indeed, be the micro-level response to the

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<sup>107</sup> EA 25.

<sup>108</sup> Cf. Acts 4:32.

phenomenon of economic and cultural globalization. It is these communities, at the level of the family, where the “globalization of charity and solidarity” begins.<sup>109</sup> This in turn would require a renewal of parish structures and pastoral programs as well as a reorientation of priorities in ministry, lay and ordained. Faith formation in the family leading to family empowerment in the BEC/BHC mission toward a culture of life would become the overarching pastoral priority.

## **7. The Family as Prophetic**

**100** From all these reflections on the family, a very important dimension powerfully emerges. The family is authentically prophetic. Endowed by God with communion, solidarity and called to assist in building a culture of integral life, its very nature points to the values of the Reign of God, eminently human values that it is called to share. As a sign of God’s Reign, the family is a prophetic community in society. It calls society to renew itself profoundly, given the many death-dealing forces that wantonly destroy God’s gift of life, love, justice, harmony, and peace.

**101** Faithful to its identity and vocation as the church in the home, the family is likewise a prophet to the whole Church. When the Church fails to live according to its identity as the sanctuary of covenant love and life, as communion and solidarity; when its energies weaken in its mission of integral salvation; when its pastors behave as less than shepherds after the heart of God; when equality in dignity, co-responsibility, participation, and self-giving generosity no longer animate the Church; when power, selfishness and discrimination threaten its inner structure—it is the family that prophetically calls the Family of God to the road of profound renewal. In this way, through the witness of the domestic church, the whole Church is “nuptialized,” i.e., influenced by the experience of married couples. For this reason, the family has to live always in union with God in a dynamic spirituality of communion and discipleship.

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<sup>109</sup> The Pope has referred to the globalization of charity and solidarity in his World Day of Peace Messages.

## **E. Family Spirituality Toward a Culture of Integral Life<sup>110</sup>**

**102** The crucial question that parents and their families ask is: What does my faith tell me about the meaning of our marriage and of our family? Unless they have a response that integrally connects faith and life and which becomes operative in their lives, marital and family life would lose its most fundamental guide in coping with the various challenge that confront it. The first level of response is in the meaning of marriage and family we have reflected on in terms of a covenant of love and life, communion, solidarity and mission. At a much deeper level of response, at the very center of one's being, is spirituality, a spirituality of communion, a spirituality of discipleship, a Eucharistic spirituality.

### **1. Spirituality of Communion**

**103** At the heart of marriage is love, God's love drawing man and woman to each other in a union of love—communion—in marriage, a love radically open to life in their children. Marital spirituality is founded on this communion of love. For marital spirituality to be a spirituality of communion, the whole person of the wife or husband is involved, including emotions, feelings, the heart and body, the elements of sexuality that make man and woman different and fundamentally oriented to each other. This means that in marriage a singularly peak moment of profound communion of mind and heart indeed takes place through the mutually self-giving conjugal act, truly a wondrous gift and mystery from God. The profound sense of oneness that married couples experience in the conjugal act, the deep feeling of self-giving love for the beloved, points to a conjugal mystical experience where one loses oneself completely for the other. They are drawn to and by the goodness of life and are led to comprehend more profoundly God's very nature as Self-Giving Love (Agape). Hence, rather than weakening spirituality as in a dualistic perspective that denigrates the human body, the loving communion of mind and heart expressed in the conjugal act vivifies, supports and strengthens marital spirituality as

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<sup>110</sup> Complementing this reflection on family spirituality are the reflections of FABC 4th Plenary Assembly on the Vocation and Mission of the Laity in the World of Asia, Tokyo, Japan, 1986, on Lay Spirituality, nos. 4.8.1 – 4.8.11. Their emphasis on a Kingdom of God spirituality applies even more forcefully to Asian families that are inter-faith. See also FABC 5th Plenary Assembly, Bandung, Indonesia, 1990, on A Spirituality for Our Times, nos. 9.1-9.7.

a spirituality of communion. Moreover, in fulfilling its very nature as open to fertility, conjugal love enhances communion. The birth of a child and the image of father, mother and child evoke Trinitarian Communion. Children are God's precious gifts and God's image. They bring joy to parents. They strengthen conjugal and family relationships. They challenge the parents to mature as parents.

**104** As in marriage, so at the heart of the family is Communion, communion with God, communion of the spouses, communion of young or elderly parents and their children, communion with grandparents and other members of the extended family. Such relational communion goes beyond simply living under one roof, or being physically related by blood. It is also a union of hearts and minds<sup>111</sup> that in a human way reflects the communion of God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit – the Triune God from whom the family came to be. By definition a culture of life traces its ultimate roots to the love and life of the Triune God. Hence a spirituality of communion leads the family to become an agent of a culture of integral life.

**105** Communion within the family, however, reaches out to the wider community and impels the family toward a mission of service<sup>112</sup> for the sake of the Reign of God. This outward movement enables the family to share the Trinitarian communion that it is gifted with. A spirituality of communion infuses vigor and enthusiasm – life – into the dynamics of the family, the relationships between spouses, between parents and children, between members of the extended family. It extends in ever widening concentric circles to include the neighborhood, the whole community. Without this spirituality the family will fail to measure up to its identity and mission.

## **2. Spirituality of Discipleship and the Way of the Ordinary**

**106** For Christian families a spirituality of communion is a spirituality of discipleship, of belonging to and following Christ. Family discipleship begins with listening to Christ and heeding his word in their ordinary experiences as couples and families in the light of the Gospel. What Mary told the servants at Cana at the beginning

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<sup>111</sup> Jn. 17:21; Acts 4:32; Phil. 2:2; 1 Pt. 3:8

<sup>112</sup> Jn. 17:14, 18, 20.

of the married life of a new couple is likewise addressed to the family: "Do whatever he tells you."<sup>113</sup> It is a matter of listening to Jesus and discerning his will in family relationships, at work, or in the everyday events that impinge on family life. Indeed, it is through ordinary events, including joys and the hopes, the grief and the anxieties, the troubles and afflictions that the family experiences, that it discovers what pleases God and what does not, what leads to integrity, justice, unity, harmony, peace and love and what does not. It is also through the ordinary ways of loving and caring, of serving and of doing one's responsibilities in the family that sanctification is achieved through the grace of God. Done in loving fidelity to discipleship, the ordinary is the way of the family towards the culture of integral life. The manner by which they live in this very ordinary setting is the way they show their commitment to God's reign. For married couples and families steeped in faith it is precisely in the ordinary that the Extraordinary is experienced and recognized; in the ordinary, God is made visible and palpable.

**107** In discerning what values or practices need to be espoused and realized, married couples and families need to recall God's intimate presence in their lives. The Spirit speaks to them and through them. Hence, the whole Church has to take seriously the faith experiences of married couples and their families as a significant component in ecclesial discernment.

**108** Acknowledging the incomparable uniqueness and richness of the Christian sacrament of marriage and its demands on the spirituality of Christian families, we need to expand our horizon. The same values that are important in the spirituality of Christian families are similarly the values needed in the human relationships within ecumenical and inter-religious families. They are values of the Reign of God – life, communion, solidarity, mission, service, fidelity, integrity, justice, unity, harmony, peace, love, listening to God and heeding God's will – values lived in the ordinariness of everyday family life. There is a discipleship of the Reign of God. What is also said below about conscience formation, prayer, love fortified by mutual sharing in sorrow or in joy, the faithful fulfillment of responsibilities, "eucharistic" self-giving and mutual sanctification in the family are likewise necessary for a spirituality of the Reign of God.

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<sup>113</sup> Jn 2:5.

### 3. Conscience Formation and the Grace of Marriage

**109** The role of conscience is indispensable in family spirituality. God has imprinted into the heart of every person a law that has to be obeyed as God's voice -- to do what is good and to avoid what is evil. Conscience "is in the core of being", "in the sanctuary of the heart." Conscience is God's gift for men and women to be truly human, and to be persons of God-experience. When every member of the family follows conscience "aided by objective moral norms",<sup>114</sup> the family unites in love with God's own will. Communion with God is strengthened. It guides families in the common search for truth. In following conscience, members of families should not merely follow the current opinion or their own desires and wants. Their lives and their behavior have to be ruled by God speaking through their conscience in the light of the teaching authority of the Church as the "authentic interpreter of the divine law".<sup>115</sup> Especially is this significant when we realize that sin has caused the disordering of human freedom and God's grace is needed to direct it to the good.<sup>116</sup> In these days of increasing secularism God is becoming an afterthought and His Church a "voice in the wilderness." Hence, conscience has to be "conformed to the law of God" which "throws light on the meaning of married love, protects it and leads it to truly human fulfillment."<sup>117</sup> To form an upright conscience, docile to God's law, is therefore a necessary dimension of conjugal and family spirituality. This certainly magnifies the work of parents in educating their children and forming in them a right conscience. At the same time when children see their parents exemplify fidelity to responsibility, they are inspired and encouraged to emulate what they observe in their parents. They would be more able to learn and live filial piety, reverence and obedience.

**110** Always and in all things, ordinary or extraordinary, the reliable, gracious and transforming presence of God in the family is a sure source of strength in the journey to holiness. Our faith tells us that Christian spouses are "fortified and, as it were, consecrated for the duties and dignity of their state by a special sacrament; fulfilling their conjugal and family role by virtue of this sacrament, spouses are

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<sup>114</sup> GS 16. 43

<sup>115</sup> LG 50.

<sup>116</sup> GS 17.

<sup>117</sup> LG 50.

penetrated with the spirit of Christ and their whole life is suffused by faith, hope, and charity; thus they increasingly further their own perfection and their mutual sanctification, and together they render glory to God."<sup>118</sup> In prayer or at work a vibrant awareness of this special grace of marriage will surely bear great spiritual and temporal fruit for the family and will constantly remind the family of the living presence of the Triune God.

#### **4. Prayer, the Paschal Mystery, and the Eucharist**

**111** Prayer is at the center of this spirituality, “prayer by the family, prayer for the family, and prayer with the family.”<sup>119</sup> Families need to be both encouraged and trained to pray regularly as a family, and not only on special occasions such as birthdays and other anniversaries. Family prayer has to link in creative ways the family’s present everyday experiences with the values of the Gospel. Reading and reflecting on the Word of God as in *Lectio Divina* should become a regular feature of family prayer. Likewise fruitful for family life as experience shows is devotion to the Blessed Virgin Mother of God, Queen of the Family, especially the regular and prayerful recitation of the Rosary. Creating new prayer forms in the home as well as renewing rituals and devotions that they have grown accustomed to would be beneficial. Most evocative of God’s dominion of love is the prayer that the Lord Jesus taught his family of faith. The Our Father is truly a universal prayer and pre-eminently a prayer of the family whose ultimate Father is God.

**112** A prayerful family is able to walk with the Spirit, live in the Spirit, remain in the Spirit and follow Christ in faithful discipleship. Fidelity in marriage, the strength of marriage, the ability of spouses and their children to respond adequately to the challenges of everyday life are graces of the Holy Spirit asked for in prayer, though indeed they flow fundamentally from the sacrament of marriage. “Outstanding courage is required for the constant fulfillment of the duties of this Christian calling: spouses, therefore, will need grace for leading a holy life: they will eagerly practice a love that is firm, generous, and prompt to sacrifice and will ask for it in their prayers.”<sup>120</sup>

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<sup>118</sup> LG 48.

<sup>119</sup> Pope John Paul II, *Letter to Families*, no. 4.

<sup>120</sup> GS 49.

**113** Finally we should be deeply aware that while the sanctifying role of the Christian family is grounded on Baptism and Confirmation, it finds “its highest expression in the Eucharist.”<sup>121</sup> For the Eucharist is the memorial of the Passion, Death, and Resurrection of Christ, the Paschal Mystery, the font of our salvation. Even as Christ rose from his suffering and death, so through the Paschal Mystery sacramentalized in the Eucharist families are empowered to rise from the daily trials, anxieties, discouragement, even hopelessness -- the many kinds of “death” that daily marital and family life is heir to. Certainly joy, hope, forgiveness, reconciliation, and strength for couples and their families come from the Eucharist.

**114** The Eucharist represents the covenant of love between Christ and his Church. Thus it is in the Eucharistic sacrifice that husband and wife encounter the source of their own covenant love. For this reason, both husband and wife should not look at the Eucharistic sacrifice merely as a matter of obligation but of celebration, at which they come face to face with the sacramental wellspring of their communion as well as a celebratory event with their children for renewing their spousal and covenantal love. Pope John Paul II reminds us: “The Eucharist creates communion and fosters communion”.<sup>122</sup> It is at the Eucharist that husband and wife and their entire family celebrate the mystery of their oneness in the Body of Christ, and their oneness with one another. As St. Augustine said: “If you are his body and members of him, then you will find set on the Lord’s table your own mystery. Yes, you receive your own mystery.”<sup>123</sup> In this context would it not be desirable to celebrate the Eucharistic Year of October 2004 to October 2005 as a year likewise of the Family so that the Family could more faithfully heed the words of Pope John Paul II: “Family, Become What You Are!”? The spirituality of communion and discipleship needed by families is also a eucharistic spirituality, involving everything that the Eucharistic act of Jesus implies: total self-emptying, self-giving love. For this reason it the celebration of the Eucharist should be a family event with the

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<sup>121</sup> FC 57.

<sup>122</sup> *Ecclesia de Eucharistia* (EE), 40.

<sup>123</sup> Sermo 272: PL 38, 1247, quoted in EE 40.

participation of all members of the family, including children and infants.<sup>124</sup>

### PART III. PASTORAL RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE FAMILY MINISTRY

#### A. A Vision of Family Ministry in Asia.

**115** In the light of the pastoral situation and of the theological-pastoral reflection on the family in Asia, certain directions of ministry to family are imperative.

- Family ministry has to be holistic, both in depth and in breadth. It should take into consideration the comprehensive understanding of a culture of integral life that we have discussed;
- Therefore, in breadth family ministry should include but also extend beyond our usual concerns about contraception, abortion, euthanasia, natural family planning, pre-marriage and post marriage catechesis, and family enrichment seminars.
- In the light of the emerging secular values regarding the family, family ministry should seek to defend and promote vigorously our faith-convictions:
  - \* that “the family is based on marriage, that intimate union of life in complementariness between a man and woman which is constituted in the freely contracted and publicly expressed indissoluble bond of matrimony and is open to the transmission of life”;<sup>125</sup>
  - \* that “marriage is the natural institution to which the mission of transmitting life is exclusively entrusted”;<sup>126</sup>
  - \* that Christian marriage is a divinely instituted sacrament.
- Given the social, cultural, and religious realities in Asia, family ministry should also aim to prepare couples and families to meet

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<sup>124</sup> Where children regularly have their own Holy Mass by themselves, the celebration of Holy Mass as a family event should be done, even if only once a month, see CBCK, IWP, p. 6.

<sup>125</sup> Holy See, *Charter of the Rights of the Family*, October 22, 1983.

<sup>126</sup> *Ibid.*

the challenges of poverty, migration, gender, youth, indigenous families, environment, politics, economic and cultural globalization;

- It has to care for families with special needs.
- In depth, family ministry should make the inner resources of our faith (the sacraments, liturgy, prayer, day-to-day spirituality) available to couples and their families in their striving toward a culture of integral life;
- Family ministry should empower families to become evangelizers, such that ministry is not only for families but by families.

**116** From what may be observed it would seem that family ministry in some Episcopal conferences in Asia has strong programs on pre-nuptial catechesis and on-going marriage formation. They are also quite well set on programs of Responsible Parenthood with emphasis on Natural Family Planning. Not quite strong are the deployment of financial resources for family ministry and the training of lay personnel for family ministry, especially at the parish level. However in view of the above-mentioned directions of family ministry required by the over-all pastoral situation in Asia, we may envision Family Ministry in Asia with the following general program directions, other than the pastoral directions already being taken by family ministries in the Episcopal conferences:

## **B. General Program Directions / Orientation**

### **117 A Family Ministry that Forms and Empowers:**

#### **(a) The Family as the Focal Point of Evangelization –**

- giving the family the highest priority as the focal point of evangelization which every pastoral program should assist and to which they should be geared;
- reorienting all pastoral programs so that they may contribute to strengthening and empowering the family for mission;

**(b) Faith-Formation in the Family -**

- promoting integral faith formation in the family, including missionary formation, leading toward a spirituality of communion, discipleship and mission;
- promoting the formation of parents to accept children as gifts of God and train them for citizenship;
- empowering parents through proper faith formation, family counseling, marriage enrichment, and other means to fulfill their calling as the primary educators, catechists, and missionary formators of their children;
- on-going faith formation of husband and wife, parents, and children toward a culture of integral life;
- strengthening Catholic values of marriage while remaining open to respectful dialogue with the beliefs and values of other religions;
- training for family prayer, bible reading and reflection or Lectio Divina in the family;
- promoting functional knowledge of the Charter of the Rights of the Family as an essential component of family ministry;

**(c) Roles of Husband and Wife in the Family -**

- restoring equality of dignity, complementariness, and co-responsible partnership of husband and wife in various roles in the family;
- eradicating the evils of patriarchy and liberating women from oppressive and traditional values and structures that do not recognize their equality of dignity with men;
- providing adequate formation regarding the role of male and female sexuality in human and family relationships;
- educating and forming both men and women so that they may be able to assume a complementary and partnership role in sustaining and fostering marital life as well as the integral care of the children;

- ensuring that a program for women empowerment be a fundamental component of ministry at the diocesan and parish levels;

**(d) Resources and Personnel for Family Ministry -**

- providing the ordinary resources, personnel and finances, necessary to run full time diocesan and parish family ministries, priority being given to the recruitment of lay personnel;
- providing intensive and appropriate training for all personnel in family ministry; particularly urgent is the recruitment and training of women counselors and of "couple counselors";
- encouraging and recruiting men and women in the various professions related to the welfare of the family to be part of diocesan and parish family ministries;

**(e) Family Ministry and Vocations -**

- raising the awareness of families regarding the various vocations in the Church, including the vocation to family;
- forming young people for vocation to family to include proper discernment in choosing their life-partners in marriage;
- on-going faith formation of husband and wife, parents, and children toward a culture of integral life;
- forming the young for vocation to family to include on-going faith formation of husband and wife, parents, and children toward a culture of integral life;
- on-going faith formation of husband and wife, parents, and children toward a culture of integral life;
- providing the dimension of vocation animation in the family ministry so that families participate not only in supporting vocations to the priestly and religious life but also in discovering, animating, nourishing, and recruiting them;

**(f) Approaches, Support Groups and Programs for Family Ministry -**

- establishing support groups in the parish to help in all aspects of integral mission;
- using the couple to couple approach and family to family approach for mutual assistance, support and encouragement;
- raising the awareness of couples regarding anti-natal and anti-life approaches to population control and organizing them for "family politics" while promoting the Church's teachings on Responsible Parenthood;
- producing materials for sex education, moral issues in conjugal relationships, Christian parenting, missionary formation of children, and family catechesis for the use of schools, Basic Ecclesial/Human Communities;
- incorporating family ministry in the curriculum of seminaries and other houses of formation;
- incorporating the mass media into the Church's pastoral planning and activity and integrating the Christian message with the "new culture" that is promoted by modern communications so that families may be assisted to proclaim the Gospel.

**118 A Family Ministry that Cares and Serves:**

**Special Programs for the Family Ministry -**

- setting up holistic programs for the care of single parents, inter-cultural marriages, ecumenical marriages, and inter-religious marriages;
- setting up programs for the compassionate care of families in difficult situations - such as divorced parents, divorced and remarried parents;
- setting up programs for families with migrant workers abroad and helping migrant workers before they leave and when they return;

- addressing the problems of violence and abuse in the family, marriage of minors, arranged marriages, substance addiction, and HIV related problems;
- providing counseling to families, including vocational counseling for youth;
- setting up child care programs;
- providing opportunities for families of different faiths to come together in sharing religious experiences toward mutual understanding and respect;

**119 A Family Ministry that Promotes Social Transformation:**

- promoting the subsidiary role of the State and of church institutions regarding the family;
- setting up integral human development programs for families through Basic Ecclesial/Human Communities, beginning with social awareness that enables them to mobilize themselves for social and political advocacy and action;
- integrating gender perspectives into the task of social transformation in accordance with the “new feminism” that Pope John Paul II has advocated;
- enlisting, organizing and training women for the task of promoting social justice and peace;
- providing skills training, establishing networks and building family solidarity among inter-religious families in Basic Ecclesial/Human Communities for social and political advocacy, including vigilance over the means of social communication and cyberspace (the globalization of family solidarity at the grassroots);
- fostering family ministry in Catholic schools in order to care for ecumenical and inter-religious families especially since schools act *in loco parentis*;
- setting up competent multidisciplinary groups of lay people and couples for social and political advocacy on behalf of Gospel values threatened by media and legislation;

- stopping the use of children and minors in war;
- stopping child and women trafficking for all forms of activity, particularly sex tourism;

**120** The fundamental dynamic force of family ministry in Asia has to be a relevant and engaged Family Spirituality of Communion and Mission and a family spirituality of discipleship that is ecclesial, sacramental, and Christocentric. Given the multi-cultural and multi-religious situation of Asian families, this spirituality has to give particular attention to a Reign of God spirituality that would serve as a common denominator for mission and aim at assisting Asian families establish a genuine culture of life in Asia.

### **C. SOME PRIORITIES AND PLANS DRAWN UP BY**

#### **REGIONAL GROUPS AT 8TH FABC PLENARY ASSEMBLY:**

##### **121 General Orientations:**

- a. The Family as Evangelizer for a New Evangelization in a New Century;
- b. The Family as the Focal Point of Evangelization in the diocesan plan;
- c. Family as Domestic Church:
  - Church witnessing to family life through education reform, support of right social policies, etc.;
  - Creating awareness of the family’s role in social transformation;
  - Preparing families for dialogue of life and action through neighborhood involvement, collaboration with the like-minded;
  - Developing Family Life Liturgies and Prayer Books for celebrations like eve of wedding (“roce”), anniversaries, First Holy Communion, etc.

## 122 Programs:

- Promoting systematic and holistic Love and Life / Family Enrichment programs
  - \* at all levels (children, youth, adult);
  - \* for ecumenical, inter-religious, intercultural families;
  - \* for other forms of families (single parent families, families of divorced, remarried, migrants, etc.)
- Providing specialized Healing and Pastoral Care for families in special situations (divorced, addiction / violence-affected);
- Providing special care for children of deprived families;
- Setting up a Ministry for Men:
  - \* Developing Spirituality for Men;
  - \* Transforming distorted, corrupted, deformed masculinity and fatherhood so that men may radiate their own beauty and splendor as willed by God' divine plan;
  - \* Bringing them back to assume a responsible role in family life.
- Encouraging public witnessing to values of good and stable marriages at family milestones (e.g., wedding anniversaries, birthdays) through liturgies
  - \* Institutionalizing contact programs for couples in first five years of marriage.
  - \* Promoting programs that families would see as beneficial - like better parenting, relationship-building with siblings, parents, in-laws, conflict resolution.

## 123 Structures:

- Reorganizing Family Ministry to affirm, encourage and enhance the environment for Family Life with Mentor

Couples as Leaders, Priests as Collaborators and Professional Counselors as Facilitators;

- Establishing structures of Faith Formation:
  - \* Home Missions / Family Councils / Cells in parishes and dioceses;
  - \* BECs / BCCs / SCCs / sharing in small groups;
  - \* Bible Study groups in Families / family groups, to counter Pentecostal cults and keep families together;
  - \* With Pastors, undergoing formation as animators in Family Ministry.

**124 Research and Action on:**

- Status of women;
- Families of migrant workers / white collar and other professionals facing frequent separations because of job demands.

**125 Issues / Concerns for FABC Suggested by Regional Groups:**

- Develop an Asian Theology of Marriage and Family – vocation, mission and conjugal communion;
- Create a Family Office / Desk in FABC;
- Explore ways of affirming Asian family values;
- Promote Ministry for Ecumenical, Inter-Religious, Intercultural Marriages to inculcate mutual respect on religious practices and transmission of values to children;
- Study social systems of indigenous peoples and how they can contribute to enrichment of family life;
- Watch for inroads being made through trends / new civil laws that erode Christian concept of family

(euthanasia, abortion, same sex marriages / contract marriages / living-in, "Double Income No Kids (DINK) / Single Income No Kids (SINK) cultures;

- Promote studies on impact on family life of emerging Information, Entertainment and Communications Technologies (not just pornography but isolationism - 'do your own thing');
- Encourage discernment and critical evaluation of media content and promotion;
- Special pastoral concerns:
  - \* Marginalized / vulnerable groups;
  - \* Families of migrant workers (encourage employers to adopt family-friendly attitude towards domestic helpers);
  - \* Elderly / senior citizens by developing neighborhood extended-family support;
  - \* Trafficking in women and children;
  - \* Marital break-up and Domestic violence
  - \* Pastoral care for Same Gender Oriented (SGO) persons to respond to the universal call to holiness and service and to live as faithful members of the Church.

## **THE ASIAN FAMILY TOWARDS A CULTURE OF INTEGRAL LIFE**

*Message of the VIII FABC Plenary Assembly*  
**Daejeon, Korea, 17<sup>th</sup> to 23<sup>rd</sup> August 2004**

### **To the People of God in Asia and People of Good Will**

Gathered in Daejeon, Korea for the 8th Plenary Assembly of the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences, we bishops, together with priests, religious and laypeople from various countries in Asia, reflected on the theme *The Asian Family toward a Culture of Life*, in the

spirit of listening to God and to the voices of Asian families.<sup>1</sup> As this assembly comes to a close we are confirmed in the conviction that the family is truly God's gift and blessing to Asia!

We celebrate the signs of hope that abound in the Asian families. Inspired by religious and cultural values and traditions, many families strive to remain committed to the ideals of family life. They draw strength from Asian values like a profound reverence for life, closeness to and respect for nature, strong family ties, personal relationships, hospitality, the spirit of welcome, respect for elders, filial piety, caring for the young. The enduring spirituality and religiosity in the family and the sense of the sacredness of marriage, family and children are a cause for joy and have made many families the cradles of vocations. Faced with great odds, they manifest resilience and endurance. The Asian family is strengthened by and also transmits these values. We marvel at how the values of indigenous peoples and other religions enrich Asian families. Intercultural and inter-religious marriages also provide opportunities for spiritual enrichment, and become symbols of unconditional love in the midst of complex cultural and religious issues these marriages face. We thank you, families, for safeguarding genuine values and we encourage you to persevere.

We also share the anxieties of the Asian families. New realities impinge on the well-being of many families. An emerging global neo-liberal culture that propels individualism, selfishness and greed, with lifestyles and mindsets inspired by materialism and secularism, poses a threat to the family. Elite globalization has caused untold poverty and migration. Wars and conflicts also displace people from homes. Families face the impact of the means of social communication and coercive population programs on family values. The spread of HIV/AIDS, illegal drugs, and pornography has harmed families, especially the youth who are most vulnerable. The rise of marital divorce and break-up signals the dwindling cohesion of the family. Abortion and other attempts to manipulate human life present a severe problem. A contraceptive mentality is undermining genuine conjugal love. The continuing oppression of women and children is lamentable. Values that have served as foundations of the family are

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<sup>1</sup> The 181 participants from 22 Asian countries were made up of 6 Cardinals, 24 Archbishops, 56 Bishops and priests, religious men and women, and laypeople. We note with sadness the absence of delegates from China.

vanishing at an alarming rate, one result being the diminishing number of vocations in some countries. We cannot also ignore the complex situation of families with single, separated, or remarried parents and the effects on the children. We unite ourselves with you, Asian families as you courageously struggle with these difficult issues.

As followers of Jesus Christ, we envision all families living by Love that comes from God, for only Divine Love strengthens and nurtures Life. God is love (1 Jn 4:8) and out of love God sent the Son to bring us life (1 Jn 4:9). In God's plan of salvation, the Son became incarnate through the Holy Spirit and became part of the family of Mary and Joseph. We desire that the values of the Reign of God taught by Jesus (Mt 5:7) may take root in Asian families and bloom into a culture of life. A culture of life respects and protects God's gift of human life in all its dimensions from conception to death. A culture of life vigorously opposes the forces that destroy, exploit and oppress human life. A culture of life actively promotes responsible parenthood and the primacy of human life and dignity over efficiency, capital and profit. A culture of life promotes family values from indigenous people and other religions. We believe that families, steeped in the prayer and spirituality, are sanctuaries where love is faithfully shared and life responsibly generated, enriched and defended. By their shared love, communion and mutual service, Asian families can help foster communion and solidarity in faith communities and in society as we work towards forming one family of humankind.

As pastors of the Church convinced of God's unfailing love, we bishops will look for every opportunity to promote the good of families. We commit ourselves to strengthen Family Ministry so as to assist and accompany all families, especially those in dire need, on their journey towards fullness of life. In a particular way we would like to express our affection and concern to the Catholic families in China and North Korea. We are one with our Catholic brothers and sisters in China as they meet the challenge of transforming the Church into one family of God.

As builders of communities, we appeal to our governments, groups concerned for the welfare of families, educational institutions, mass media producers and promoters, our brothers and sisters of other religious beliefs, and all people of good will to join us in

strengthening the family as the focal point for the promotion of a civilization of love and a culture of life.

We entrust Asian families to God, the Fountain of Love and Life. We pray that you may “put on love, the perfect bond” (Col 3:14). Families of Asia, become what you are – God’s gift of love and life for Asia!



## IX FABC PLENARY ASSEMBLY

### LIVING THE EUCHARIST IN ASIA

#### *Final Statement and Message IX Plenary Assembly*

[Manila, Philippines, 10<sup>th</sup> to 16<sup>th</sup> August 2009]

#### INTRODUCTION

The theme of the IX Plenary Assembly of the FABC is “Living the Eucharist in Asia.” It was attended by the Papal Envoy & the Secretary of the Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples, 66 Bishops including 6 Cardinals from 17 Episcopal Conferences and 6 associate members. There were 5 fraternal representatives from 5 non-Asian Episcopal conferences. Invited were the Bishop-Chairmen of the FABC Offices, priests, men and women Religious, and representatives from the laity. The choice of this theme, which is of perennial and crucial importance for the Church, situates this assembly within the context of significant developments in the Church since the VIII Plenary Assembly in Daejeon, South Korea in 2004.

On April 17, 2003, Holy Thursday, John Paul II published the encyclical letter *Ecclesia de Eucharistia* to help the Church appreciate again the life that she draws from Christ in the Eucharist. On October 7, 2004 he issued the Apostolic Exhortation *Mane Nobiscum Domine* where he declared the Year of the Eucharist to be celebrated from October 2004 to October 2005. He convoked the XI Ordinary Assembly of the Synod of Bishops in October 2005 to close the Year of the Eucharist. The theme of the Synod was “The Eucharist: Source and Summit of the Life and Mission of the Church.” Upon his holy death, his successor, Benedict XVI promoted the preparations for the Synod, presided over it and issued the Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Sacramentum Caritatis* on February 22, 2007. Hence the following reflections which constitute the Final Document of the IX Plenary Assembly of the FABC benefit from a wealth of insight and teaching from the papal magisterium. The Episcopal conferences of the FABC and its associate members contributed their valuable observations and comments. Studies on the theme of the Assembly

by various offices of the FABC provided valuable information and theological-pastoral insights. Finally the workshops in regional and interregional groups and the lively discussions at the plenary sessions, significantly enriched this Final Document.

Building on the Church's Magisterium, this Document aims to help Episcopal Conferences and dioceses. We commend it to our Priests and Religious in Asia for their on-going formation on the Eucharist. We also endorse it to diocesan ministries related to the Liturgy, Catechesis and Faith Formation, the training of lay leaders, the formation of Basic Ecclesial Communities and other faith communities. We believe that this Final Document would be a very useful guide in reflecting and acting on how the Eucharist might be better understood, celebrated, and lived in the context of Asia.

For this reason each section includes contextualized pastoral implications that Christian communities would find helpful towards living the Eucharist in Asia.

### *General Asian Pastoral Context*

The reflections of the IX Plenary Assembly arise from the realities transpiring in various parts of Asia. From one perspective, these phenomena could be interpreted as the Asian search for life, the Asian celebration of life and the Asian struggle for true life. We rejoice to see in Asia signs of vibrant life in the fecundity of creation, the wealth of cultures, the depth of religious and ethical traditions, the strength of new economies, the progress in technology, and the promotion of human dignity and peace. We discern the Holy Spirit's lively presence in the religious, social, cultural, political and economic movements that safeguard the rights of the poor, children, women, migrants, laborers and the integrity of creation. But we are also deeply aware of the ambivalence of some developments that at first glance promise life, but ultimately deal death. The increasingly open economies, with concomitant rapid industrialization, have devastated rural agricultural communities. New forms of poverty have caused migration and the break up of families. With the unrestrained flow of capital came the unabated entry of information, new mindsets and priorities that are altering the cultures of Asia, especially the youth, but not always for the good. In many parts of Asia, political power still remains a tool to dominate rather than to serve. We lament the merging of repressive politics with economic

prowess, and of religious affiliation with cultural chauvinism. In the midst of the ruins of life brought about by wars, violence and displacement of peoples, we are amazed at the Asian capacity to celebrate life and to hope for a better life. The Church journeys with the peoples of Asia as they search for true life.

Rooted in the living Tradition of the Catholic Church, especially in the recent papal magisterium and the realities of life in Asia, our reflections will focus on living the Eucharist in the context of Asia. "Living the Eucharist" springs from and in turn nurtures "believing in the Eucharist" and "celebrating the Eucharist". Our discussion on "living the Eucharist" is deliberately set within the framework of a living faith and a living celebration. Although Church teachings and liturgical sources are not always quoted in this document, they serve as the wellspring for the Eucharistic form of life proposed to believers and the Church. But far from neglecting the concerns of life in Asia, we bring and relate them to our faith in the Eucharist and to its celebration. We never leave behind the dreams, hopes and pains of our people when we come to the Eucharist. In fact, our communion with Jesus in the Eucharist renews our engagement with the realities of life in our world and gives form to Christian life in the world. Thus our present reflections attempt to follow the methodological "circularity" of life-belief-celebration-life.

## A. THE THEOLOGICAL-PASTORAL FLOW OF THE EUCHARISTIC CELEBRATION

### 1) The Eucharist: The Life of Jesus as our Life and Communion

Living the Eucharist is not a mere appendix to Eucharistic faith and celebration. The Eucharist is the very life of Christ given to us to become our life. In the Bread of Life discourse in John 6:22-60, Jesus declares that he is the Bread come down from above. He is the *gift* of the Father, with the *mission* to give *life*, eternal life. His gift is the very life of God being shared with humanity.

But this requires from us a response of faith inspired by the Holy Spirit. In "eating his body and drinking his blood," we forge a *communion of life* with the Triune God, a new *covenant* in the blood of Christ (cf Lk 22:20). In Asia, where the characteristic mode of the Church's existence is that of dialogue, the Eucharist is a unique

experience of God's dialogue with us and our response to God: a dialogue of life, a dialogue of love.

This dialogue of life and love takes on a liturgical form in the Eucharist. We see, hear and touch the life of Christ and its dynamism in the celebration of the liturgy. Its various parts enable us to share in the rhythm of Christ's life offered for our salvation. We realize that the Eucharist is not a sacramental memorial of only one part of the life and ministry of Jesus Christ. His whole life, culminating in the Paschal Mystery of His suffering, death, resurrection and final glory, was a pleasing sacrifice or offering of love to the Father for the salvation of the world. His sacrifice is both an act of obedience to the Father and compassion towards weak sinners. His was a sacrifice of adoration and service. His life was Eucharist.

Every Eucharist embodies in a sacramental way the life of Jesus so that we who celebrate it may live as Jesus lived. The Holy Spirit frees our hearts so that Christ may live in us as we journey towards the fullness of the Reign of God. We give thanks to God for making us share in Jesus' life in the Eucharist.

Following the flow of the Eucharistic celebration, we shall look at the Eucharistic life offered to us by our Eucharistic faith.

We recognize that in Asia there are major ancient eastern Eucharistic rites, such as the Syro-Malabar and Syro-Malankara, both of which we celebrated during the Plenary Assembly. For purposes of simplicity and pastoral understanding this Final Document follows the sequence of the Latin Eucharistic celebration.

## **B. INTRODUCTORY RITES**

### **1) Gathered as a Family in God: A Countersign to Divisions**

The first moment in the Eucharist is the gathering of a community or a family. We believe that it is the Lord *who* calls, invites, and convokes. The initiative belongs to God. Therefore, we acknowledge that the coming together happens in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. It is God who "hosts" this sacrificial meal, the memorial of Jesus' saving Pasch and the pledge of the heavenly banquet in the Reign of God. As evidenced in the life of

Jesus, meals were one of the privileged occasions to gather a people, not just to taste food but also “to taste” the Reign of God.

God’s invitation, unlike ours, gathers for the Eucharistic meal people from different economic, social, political, cultural, and ethnic backgrounds and even of different geographic and time zones. A new family of God’s children, constituted by grace and faith, happens in our midst. This is *ecclesia*. The fruit of God’s encompassing love is a community of brothers and sisters, sharing the common dignity of being God’s children. God’s presence in grace generates brotherly and sisterly presence. This is a foretaste of the new humanity that we are longing for. We become a family because we are responding to a call beyond us. The Eucharist teaches us that if we are able to go beyond our petty concerns, if we only heed the call beyond us, then maybe we can communicate with one another a neighborly, brotherly and sisterly presence.

### *Contextualized Pastoral Implications*

One of the strong characteristic features of Asian cultures is belonging and loyalty to one’s family, clan, community and ethnic group. This is celebrated most often in meals. Never only about food, meals in Asia foster and renew bonds that last for generations. Significant moments in life like birth, naming, marriage and farewells are marked by meals through which the community shares in these “life moments”. The practice of Buddhist monks of begging for food and sharing it with the community conveys values worth emulating.

As communities gathered in the Eucharist, Christians are called to live as a gathering rather than as a scattering community. We are to contribute to the strengthening of community life in Asia amidst the threats to it. Individualistic and pragmatic lifestyles inhibit frequent family meals and their capacity to generate community. In some Asian cultures, meals reflect a rigid caste system that prevents sharing of food and life with people of another caste. Loyalty to family, ethnic group, nation or faith community has often led to rejection of, discrimination and violence towards “outsiders”. Migrant workers, refugees, and multitudes of displaced peoples search for welcoming communities as much as for food.

Living the Eucharist involves a new way of coming together as a family because it is God who gathers. We commend and support small Christian communities, basic human communities, ecclesial movements, religious communities, parishes, dioceses and other committed people that sustain the Eucharistic life of gathering God's children in situations of fragmentation. Formation in Eucharistic faith and spirituality needs to highlight the community-forming aspect of God's action in the Eucharist and to avoid a narrow individualistic view of participation in the Eucharist. Priests are called to live their Eucharistic faith by developing a sense of family in the communities they are serving so that the faithful, especially the poor and neglected may find a home in the Church. Religious communities, by their international character, are to witness to the power of the Holy Spirit to gather peoples of different nations, tongues, and cultures.

## **2) Recognizing God, Acknowledging our Sinfulness (Penitential Rite)**

Born anew as a response to God's call and grace in the Eucharist, the Church is the icon of the Trinity: the People of God, the Body of Christ and the Temple of the Holy Spirit. But the grateful recognition of this reality intensifies our sense of being a community of sinners. Even during Jesus' ministry, it was God's love manifested in Him that made people like Simon, Levi and Zacchaeus realize their sinful situation. Much like the prodigal son in Luke 15, we also waste our inheritance.

So we come back to the Father, bearing the burden of sin, as we say, "I confess to Almighty God..." "Lord, have mercy." We admit our sinfulness, however, not only to God but to our brothers and sisters as well. We appeal to them "to pray for us to the Lord our God". No one pretends to be holier than the other. We recognize our participation in the common brokenness of humanity. Ours is a community of needy supplicants before God and each other. We are all poor. We all need God's mercy. We all need our neighbors' prayers. We dialogue with God and neighbors in humility.

## *Contextualized Pastoral Implications*

The Asian soul is often characterized by its search for the Divine and for life. Such a search, present in the religious and philosophical traditions that originated in Asia, is at the root of humility, non-violence, non-aggression, patience and harmony. An ethic that covers relationships, governance and lifestyle flows from the wisdom of these traditions. But we are also fully aware of the temptations posed by delusions of power and deceptions of self-righteousness. The violence, discrimination and wars that are destroying the natural and human landscapes of Asia show how much we have succumbed to lies and pretensions. When we start thinking of ourselves as the source and guardian of goodness while viewing “the others” as the cause of evil and error, we are deluded. Domination starts replacing the sense of community.

Living the Eucharist includes seeing the presence of God’s action and grace in other people. Given the plurality of cultures and faiths in Asia, the Eucharist opens our eyes to the manifestations of truth and goodness among those who are different from us. At the same time we rejoice at the truth that has been entrusted to us.

Prejudice has no place in a Eucharistic life. It does not follow, however, that truth is to be sacrificed in a facile accommodation of others. On the contrary, we hold on to truth but in charity and humility, with the awareness that in spite of the truth we profess, we also have contributed to the misery and problems of the world. So we will not ruin each other. We will not be agents of discrimination. We will share our blessings as we share our sorrows. We will extend mercy as we plead that it be given to us. Ecclesial communities and movements that untiringly promote reconciliation and dialogue in conflict-laden parts of Asia disclose a vital aspect of the Eucharistic life.

A community that lives up to the call to be the seed of redeemed and reconciled humanity renders fitting praise to God: “Glory to God in the highest and peace to God’s people on earth.” A community fully alive gives glory to God.

## C. LITURGY OF THE WORD

### 1) Listening to the Story of Jesus

The gathered community will now be fed with the Word of God for “human beings do not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God.” The Bread of Life, Jesus, is received from the table of the Word and the Eucharist (cf. DV 21). It comes as no surprise that the Eucharist involves listening to the Word of God. Jesus, during his public ministry, taught and preached the Word of God. He continues to instruct us and we listen to Him, the Son of God who possesses the words of eternal life (cf. Jn 6:68-69).

At this point we ask: what does the Word of God awaken in us? It is faith. Faith is born out of and strengthened by listening to the Word of God. St. Paul states: “Faith comes from what is heard, and what is heard comes by the preaching of Christ” (Romans 10:17). In an age where the printed word and “visual” word of mass media and information technology play a significant role in shaping beliefs, opinions, mentalities, trends and lifestyles, we should all the more explore the power of the Word of God in generating a life of faith.

In 2006 the Asian Mission Congress held in Chiang Mai, Thailand, dwelt on “Telling the Story of Jesus in Asia” as a mode of mission. We can, therefore, consider the Liturgy of the Word as a storytelling moment of the Eucharistic memorial. God speaks. God always initiates a dialogue. God tells God’s story of love for us. God’s Word acts. God’s Word is alive. God’s Word effects life. In the Liturgy of the Word, the story of God’s revealing and saving action in history is proclaimed through the readings from the Old Testament, the New Testament and especially the Gospel of Jesus who is the fulfillment of God’s revelation.

The response to the living memory contained in God’s Word is faith. Faith is needed to encounter the Risen Lord in the sacramental signs and in ordinary life. But it is only in the Holy Spirit who guides us into truth (Cf. Jn 16:13) that we come to faith in Jesus as Lord (cf. I Cor 12: 3). Human wisdom is insufficient for us to come to faith in the Word of God. We need to realize that faith involves listening to the Word, accepting it in one’s life, allowing it to transform one’s life, acting on it and sharing it with others. Faith goes beyond intellectual

assent. *It is equated* with obedience to God, an obedience that entails radical conversion. Faith changes one's life. It becomes one's life.

### ***Contextualized Pastoral Implications***

In Asia, the sacred writings and books of various religions are never treated merely as reading materials. They are meant to draw from one's heart a response of adherence at the very least. The reverence with which sacred books are approached and listened to reveals a belief that more than human words are involved. This Asian character blends well with the openness to the Word necessary for the Eucharist to become a true experience of living faith. But even outside of their religious usage, words mean a lot to Asian peoples. People are expected to be true to their words. When uttered with sincerity, words evoke trust and foster relationships. In the same way, the Word of God proclaimed especially at the Eucharist is meant to strengthen the bond between Christ and the Church. When the attentiveness to words characteristic of Asian peoples is brought to the liturgy of the Word, then hearts would be rekindled in faith and love (cf. Lk 24:32).

Moments of silence can help the community be open to the workings of the Holy Spirit as the Scripture readings are proclaimed. Contemplating the Word of God, the minds of the faithful are transformed by spiritual wisdom. Time for reflection and thanksgiving can allow the heart to savor the faith that is renewed by the God's Word. Formation in faith should inculcate the spirituality of listening to God's Word that leads to acts of justice and goodness.

Readers or lectors should also be formed both in spirituality and skills so that they could serve the Word of God and the community in a worthy manner. We also praise God for the growing numbers of small or basic Christian communities centered on the Word of God. In their neighborhoods or gatherings, they do not only pray the Word of God but they also make it the principle of discernment for personal and communal action.

The homily is a matter of urgent concern for the faithful. They rightly expect to be nourished by the life-giving Word through

the homily. The preacher *is engaged* in the dialogue between God and the community. In some sense, the homily is the preacher's dialogue with the community after he has listened to God's Word. A fellow believer to whom has been entrusted a pastoral charge, the preacher presents a testimony of faith. Prayer, study, reflection and familiarity with the situations of life encountered by the community must go into the preparation and preaching of the homily. The preacher's witness of life can never be divorced from the effectiveness of his preaching.

As the evolving cultures of Asia are bombarded with words promising life, a good and easy life, the most vulnerable victims of empty promises are the youth and the poor. Our Eucharistic celebration teaches us to be attentive so that we may be able to discern from the many words around us what word we would choose to live by. Through the homily, the Table of the Word can become a school for discerning the life-giving Word from words that deal death.

## **2) Building a Common Memory (Retelling the Word)**

The Scripture readings at the Eucharist come back according to cycles and feasts. After a certain period of time, the readings become repetitive. The recurrence of the same texts might bore some of the faithful. But the repetition is necessary for the faith. The recounting of the story of God's action in salvation history is not meant to be a sheer transmission of information. Rather it is a living memory that is passed on with the Holy Spirit as sure guide. When the hearer freely accepts the living Word in faith, he/she becomes a part of the Church's living memory of God and God's saving action.

The Eucharistic memorial is not confined to the narrative of the Supper. The Liturgy of the Word is keeping memory as well. Every time the story is told, we are invited again to respond to the God who has loved and saved us. And by remembering, we are united by the Holy Spirit with the communities of the past who remembered before us and transmitted their memory to us. By the same token, we are in communion with Eucharistic communities all over the world that remember God's marvelous deeds through the same Word. We are also already in union with the future generations of Christians who, by listening to the Word of God, will remember the same things.

The faith generated by the Word of God is not simply personal and individual. It is also communal faith. As we receive and transmit memory, we constitute our community as a community of faith. Social scientists emphasize the vital role of common memory in the survival and strengthening of families, clans, communities, nations and even business corporations. It is interesting to note that people are usually gathered in family or community meals, on which occasions their stories are also gathered into a “reservoir” of common memory. So the Word of God does not only evoke faith in the hearts of believers, it also makes of believers a community of faith centered on common memory of the good things the Lord has done.

### *Contextualized Pastoral Implications*

The traditional societies of Asia put value on the telling of stories and narration of epics. Aside from fostering cohesion among the members of a clan or tribe, these memories are effective bearers of community identity, values and belief. The initiation of adolescents into adulthood often includes long hours or days of listening to the living memory of the community. But due to various social factors and constraints, members of the same community do not hold the same memories anymore.

The infrequency of family meals, the massive migration of peoples, the dispersal of victims of armed conflicts are just a few phenomena that have greatly hindered the flow of stories into the communal stock of memory. There are many people whose personal stories will never be shared. People who do not become part of a community’s memory lead lonely lives.

### **3) God’s Authorship of the Word**

Every Eucharistic community can find joy and solace from the common memory that it shares with past and present generations of Christians. Thanks to the Word of God, no Christian is alone. This consolation, however should lead to Christian sensitivity towards people who have been erased from the memory of the world, those who are not remembered and cannot remember. Our memory of God’s graciousness impels us to live in solidarity with the forgotten, so numerous that we wonder why they do not come to mind. Our faith proclaims they will always be part of God’s story and memory.

Far from being mere sentimentalism, remembering the forgotten is an act of living faith in God in whose saving memory they always remain.

We believe that the Sacred Scriptures are truly God's Word consigned into writing through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. The Word of God, the story of God's action in salvation history comes in the form of human words and stories. So the Psalms, the Book of Isaiah, the letter of Paul to the Philippians are truly God's Word. After the proclamation, we do not hesitate to respond, "Thanks be to God!" But there is no denying that it was David, Isaiah, Paul and other human authors who put the Word of God in written form. So real is their authorship that the writings bear the marks of their unique circumstances, styles and temperaments. It is faith that makes us see God's authorship in humanly composed writings. The Church's faith, guided by the same Holy Spirit of scriptural inspiration, has led her to discern God's true authorship. We are before the mystery of divine communication here. God communicates His word through simple human instruments and their stories.

#### **4) Suppressing Stories in Asia**

This important experience of faith teaches us to listen constantly to God's communication through the stories of other people. The faith that comes from listening involves the human stories and words through which God speaks. In some parts of Asia simple but threatening human stories are being suppressed. The truth they contain frightens those whose self-interests might come to an end if the truth prevails. Suppression of stories takes various forms like dictatorial rule, crackdown on media, arrest and killing of those branded as subversives, alteration of the results of elections, and revision of history books. But what do we fear in those stories? We are afraid of what God wants to communicate. The Eucharistic faith gives us the courage to listen to and even welcome these stories into our common memory. Listening to God speaking to us in the signs of the times, we discern how God's story is unfolding before us through these human stories.

#### **5) A Joyful but Risky Act (Professing a Common Faith)**

The Lord has spoken. We now respond. On Sundays and solemnities or feasts, the recitation of the Creed follows the

proclamation of the Word and the homily. There is no better response. The profession of faith has a Trinitarian structure, the focus of which is the mystery of Jesus Christ. The formula highlights the economy of salvation already revealed in Scriptures. It nurtures the living relationship of the believers with the God who saves. Doctrinal precisions present in the Creed reflect the discernment that the Church has undergone through the centuries in order to settle and propose the authentic content of the Christian faith. The Creed therefore is also another form of the Church's common memory that binds us to the communities of earlier ages. In union with the Church of generations past and with the believers of the future, a Eucharistic community joyfully professes its faith in the Triune God. By such a confession of faith, they also hold on to a renewed understanding of the world, of human beings and of human destiny.

### *Contextualized Pastoral Implications*

The Creed as a response in faith to the Word of God and as a bearer of the Word of God should be taught to the faithful, particularly to children and the youth, not only as a set of formulations of truth to be believed in but also as a vision of life arising from one's faith. Presented that way, catechesis on the Creed would integrate content with worship and ethic.

It is unfortunate that in some parts of Asia, professing one's faith can be a dangerous act. Aside from facing the rejection coming from relativism that denies an objective basis to faith or from various forms of practical atheism, we encounter disquieting incidents of religious intolerance, disrespect for religious freedom and outright persecution of Christians. The Asian martyrs and missionaries from other lands who met martyrdom in Asia on account of their profession of faith in Jesus Christ witness to the extraordinary strength that faith could give. The Christian communities would be greatly enriched by getting to know their lives and testimony.

We address to regimes that suppress the Christian faith and to religious groups that discriminate against people of religions different from theirs an appeal to respect this most fundamental of human aspirations and rights, namely to profess one's faith openly in word, worship and life. To Christians and people of other religions who face persecution,

rejection and discrimination, we send a message of hope and solidarity.

## **6) Imploring God Who Listens (Prayers of the Faithful)**

The community now addresses God with its prayers for the needs of the Church, of the world, of suffering and poor people and of the community itself. The spiritual tradition of the Church, rooted in Sacred Scriptures, extols the prayer of petition as an act of faith. It expresses our faith in a God whose Providence continues to guide creation, humanity and history towards the fulfillment of God's saving design. At the same time, it articulates our self-understanding as creatures in constant need of God's love and protection. We unite ourselves with the whole of humanity in turning to the source of life for the sustenance of that very life. The petitions, uttered in the spirit of adoration and acknowledgement of the true God, express our communion with all peoples whose needs we make our own. Finally, in the prayers of the faithful the Church declares its belief that God does not only speak but also listens, especially to those in need and to those who are not heard in society. God is truly a God of love-in-dialogue.

### ***Contextualized Pastoral Implications***

One of the alarming situations in Asia is the systematic silencing of people's voices coupled with a deliberate self-imposed deafness on the part of those who should hear. Living the Eucharistic faith involves the Church's listening to the voiceless the way God listens to them with predilection. The readiness to listen to the poor manifests the Church's preferential love for them.

Furthermore, the Church should lend its voice to be the voice of the muted peoples of Asia. Through her their cries and petitions reach the ears of the God who can accomplish more than any human being could. The Church should not tire of invoking God's help to make the power brokers of society hear the weeping of the weak. But the Church should realize that before she could be the voice of the voiceless, she should be a good listener to them. Then the prayers of the poor become the prayers of the Church.

## 7) Signs of Hope in a World of Injustice (Offering of the Gifts)

The Bread of Life, Jesus, has fed his community with the words of everlasting life. The Eucharistic celebration now moves to the Table of the Body and Blood of Christ. We will link this portion of the liturgy from the Preparation of the Gifts until the closing Doxology of the Eucharistic Prayer with living in hope.

Christian hope concerns the fulfillment of human life and creation in the Reign of God. In the Paschal Mystery of Jesus' death and resurrection, we are certain that our quest for life and meaning will not be in vain. The victory of God over sin and death has been sealed in Jesus Christ. Our hope is not based on a wish or an empty promise. We can hope because what we hope for is true and is at work now. Absurd and meaningless situations are often the privileged settings for living and witnessing to the virtue of hope.

The preparation of the gifts celebrates hope in Jesus' transforming power for creation and human labor. Holding the bread, the priest says, "Blessed are you Lord God of all creation! Through your goodness we have this bread to offer, fruit of the earth and work of human hands. It will become for us the Bread of life." A similar prayer of thanksgiving is rendered for the wine, "fruit of the vine and work of human hands that will become our spiritual drink."

As bread and wine are prepared, we recognize them as the fruits of creation and work of human hands, all signs of God's continuing gift of life. In the power of the Holy Spirit, these symbols of creation and human labor will become the Bread of Life and the "Work of Salvation" that would inspire us to share these gifts to humanity. The Eucharist brings to the fore a world filled with gifts. God the Creator shares His gift of love concretely through bread and wine. But it is not only the God of creation that is acknowledged. The earth is God's partner in providing us with bread and wine. The human hands that worked to transform the fruit of the earth into bread and wine are incorporated as well into the great action of love and sharing of gifts.

The simple bread and wine we use at the Eucharistic celebration do not deserve to be present on tables prepared for exquisite dining. But we are gathered around a different table. The Eucharist is the proper place for the purity of the gift present in plain bread and wine to shine forth. Scripture attests to the workings of God's grace in small

and ordinary persons, people or events, bringing hope to the lowly and the poor (cf. Lk 1:46-55). The transformation that the Holy Spirit will effect on these simple gifts brings sure hope to creation, to the earth and to laborers. Their gifts will become the Bread of Life and the Cup of Salvation, the Sacrifice of Jesus Christ that re-creates the world and humanity.

### *Contextualized Pastoral Implications*

The Eucharist opens our eyes to the giftedness of existence. Living in the Eucharist impels us to retrieve this key vision. In Asia, as in many parts of the world, the mindset of commodity has replaced that of gift. Human beings, relationships, work and meaning have been subjected to untold suffering due to the “commodification” of life. Helplessness and meaninglessness often result from this tragedy.

Creation and human labor have become victims as well. The Eucharist restores belief in the Creator and respect for creation and human labor as gifts, not as commodities to be manipulated for consumerist goals. Disrespect for creation and human labor leads to destruction and death. Only in the recognition of their giftedness will they become truly signs of the Creator’s life and love.

Greed has robbed creation of its mystery. Profitability has supplanted a sense of awe before the grandeur of God’s work in nature. Human labor does not command the respect due to God’s partners in administering the world. One of the most abused sectors of society is that of the laborers. Denied just wages and dignified working conditions, workers are sacrificed on the altars of avarice and revenue. The earth cries out to God. Laborers cry out to God. In the Eucharist, we are certain that God hears them and through the Holy Spirit’s re-creating action, God will transform the earth and human work again.

Paradoxically bread reminds us not only of the gift of food but also of hungry and malnourished people, of scandalous gaps in the lifestyles of the rich and the poor, of exorbitant prices of goods beyond the buying capacity of the poor, and of the helplessness of working parents to provide a bright future for

their families. It is puzzling that wine, sign of the festive character of life, calls to mind images of wild drunkenness, of wives beaten up by alcoholic husbands, of victims of intoxicated attackers and of families going bankrupt due to vice.

But there is hope in the Holy Spirit's action and in our appreciation of simplicity. There is hope in the healing of creation through the Paschal Mystery of Christ. Mary is a witness to hope. God looked upon her lowliness. Through the grace of His presence, she would be called blessed by all generations.

An urgent concern for the Christian churches is how to bring stewardship of creation to the core of Christian spirituality and discipleship. While caring for the earth is universally recognized as necessary for the survival of the planet and the human race, it is often perceived as nothing more than a worthy cause. Catechists, biblical scholars, theology professors, spiritual directors, pastors, religious communities and basic ecclesial communities should work together to provide formation in stewardship of creation as constitutive of Christian discipleship. The way we deal with creation influences our dealings with human beings too. There is much to learn from the wisdom and practice of other faiths with regard to caring for the earth.

#### **D. THE EUCHARISTIC PRAYER**

##### **1) The Institution Narrative: From Betrayal to the Sacrifice of Self-Giving and Service**

The Eucharistic Prayer is ushered in by the Preface and hymn to the triple holy God. This is a fitting introduction to the great Thanksgiving prayer of the Church where we recall the Supper Jesus took with his disciples before He died. It is in the Holy Spirit's power that we remember and "remind the Father" of the sacrifice that has made our peace with Him. Jesus is our peace! By the same Holy Spirit, the gifts of bread and wine become the gift of Jesus' abiding presence among us. The Supper sheds light and meaning on the death of Jesus.

What do we remember? The Church is admirable in its courage to remember. She could have glossed over embarrassing details but she chooses not to. So we declare, "On the night he was betrayed, he took bread..." (cf. Eucharistic Prayer III). The Eucharistic Memorial is an invitation to humanity to a healing and purifying remembrance so that we can foster true communion among peoples. Humanity is wounded. It wants to forget its wounded past. It suppresses memories that disturb. The Eucharist teaches us to bravely confront even painful memories. For in every dark memory, we see the action of God transforming nights of betrayals into dawns of reconciliation. Neglect or denial of shameful memories does not make them disappear. Rather they erode our peace and hope.

Remembering Jesus' commitment to and perseverance in His life-giving mission, we are filled with "memories of the future promise", already begun but awaiting fulfillment. The Eucharist enables us to confront the darkness of the past with the hope provided by the victorious love of God in Jesus. Betrayal and death can be the spring of life for oneself and for others, if like Jesus we offer a sacrifice of life acceptable to the Father.

The world is torn apart by betrayals. The race for more wealth, power and might makes traitors of people and nations. Blinded by false promises of life, we cease to see the gift of friends. The victim is tempted to retaliate. But the swift satisfaction that it brings quickly turns into bitterness that in turn breeds future betrayals.

In the Supper before he died, Jesus transformed the betrayal of his life into a gift of life. His gift was not an object or thing but His very body and blood. He was teaching the disciples that His humiliating death on cross was truly a loving offer of life. True life and salvation comes from self-giving, the sacrifice of self-donation so that others may live. Betrayal kills others while self-gift makes other truly live. Self-giving, however must be life-giving to the giver himself or herself. This happens only when there is full freedom and love in the giving and a worthwhile cause to which one gives. "No one takes my life from me. I lay it down freely," Jesus says (Jn 10:18). The Eucharistic faith affirms that the way to life is not to sacrifice others for one's ambitions, but to freely and lovingly offer one's life as a living sacrifice to God and the good of others. We see in Jesus' sacrifice of self in freedom and love the ethic of non-violence. Love

does not victimize, but transforms victimization into self-donation. Victimization stops because love has conquered it.

At the Evening Mass of the Lord's Supper on Holy Thursday, we re-enact or memorialize the washing of the feet recounted in the Gospel of John (cf. Jn 13). During the time of Jesus, the lowliest of slaves performed this act not out of love but out of a duty sometimes brutally imposed on them. Jesus, however, did it freely. His giving of His Body and Blood was not only a deed of love but also a deed of service. His death was the culmination of His earthly service. Jesus, the Teacher and Lord, transformed Himself into a servant so that His disciples may also be transformed into servants washing each other's feet (cf. Jn 13:13-15).

### *Contextualized Pastoral Implications*

The Institution narrative of the Eucharistic Prayer enables us to live in hope: hope for those oppressed by bitter memories and for victims of betrayals. Jesus has shown the way. The histories of Asian peoples and nations speak of greatness, valor, wisdom and self-sacrificing love. We should keep these memories alive. We should proclaim them from generation to generation. Yet, we also need purification or healing of memories especially between Asian nations that have had experiences of betrayals and conflicts. We cannot allow bitterness to dictate human and international relations and public policy. Christians who live in Eucharistic hope can serve as catalysts in such healing. The good will generated by regional and continental gatherings of bishops, priests, religious and youth, ecumenical meetings and inter-religious fellowship is like a balm that soothes wounded memories. Small Christian and human communities that forge sentiments of peace among neighbors give us hope. We call on Catholic schools and institutes of learning to help in the healing of memories through a truthful yet balanced teaching of history to the youth. Ultimately our witness to Jesus' self-giving, non-violence and service would rekindle hope that the seeds of a more humane society already exist on Asian soil. Transformation can happen because it has happened and continues to happen.

We need to mention the disturbing spread of violence all over Asia. Homes, schools, streets, places of worship and recreation spots have not been spared. As a cult of youthfulness and beauty spreads, their disciples delay aging and death at all cost. Yet, the arms race, poverty, abortion, domestic violence, illegal drugs and environmental pollution deal death with incredible ease. Living in hope in Jesus who died so that others may live, the Church must defend life in all its stages and untiringly work so that an ethos of life may pervade our land.

We also lament the growing sex tourism, sale of body organs, unbridled experimentation, prostitution, human trafficking, and mail-order brides that desecrate the human body. Equally abhorrent is the mutilation of the body as a method of criminal investigation. People with a missing arm or foot or eye remind us of the inhumanity of war. Jesus showed that the dignity of the human body is in its being a gift for the life of others. Our Eucharistic hope urges us to resist all forms of objectification of the human body, especially that of women and the girl-children. The Church's educational and catechetical ministry should form among the faithful a deep conviction about the noble vocation of the body. We gladly share it with the wider public so that legislation and media practice could benefit from it. Church communities should intensify its ministry to the differently-able. Lest we become arrogant, we remind ourselves that in all of these endeavors it is the Holy Spirit's action that effects transformation.

## **2) Communion with the Living and the Dead**

We invoke the Holy Spirit twice in the Eucharist Prayer. The first instance is over the bread and wine so that they will become the Body and Blood of Christ. The second moment is when we call on the same Spirit of Jesus to transform the community "nourished by the Body and Blood Christ" into "one body, one spirit in Christ." The Church cannot become the communal Body of Christ through its own efforts alone. Helpless in effecting that transformation, she relies on the initiative of the Holy Spirit of Pentecost (cf. Acts 2) who showers various gifts on the members for the good of the one body (cf. 1 Cor 12). The communion that is generated by the Holy Spirit is not confined to the local congregation. By virtue of the one Eucharist and the one Spirit of the one Lord, a local community is brought into the

communion of the Universal Church. Our unity goes beyond ethnic, cultural, economic, or political identities. The mention of the names of the Pope and local ordinary testifies to that universal communion.

The Eucharistic Prayer includes a memorial of the living and the departed. The belief in the communion of saints comes to mind. We remember the saints who now share in the triumph of Christ's resurrection. Our remembrance of them inflames the hope that our earthly journey will find its completion in Jesus. By remembering the departed, we hope in God that they may share in the reality of Christ's resurrection as the saints do. Our Eucharistic communion transcends human boundaries, even those set by death.

### *Contextualized Pastoral Implications*

As we have indicated earlier in this document, Asia continues to search for a new way of being one people amidst diversity. The danger of turning diversity into an occasion for division and conflict is real. Living in Eucharistic hope means, living by new standards inspired by the Holy Spirit in fostering community. Christians add to despair if we are party to the divisiveness in Asia. A living hope sustains our efforts in ecumenical, inter-cultural and inter-religious dialogue. If Christ's resurrection and gift of the Holy Spirit could surmount even the barrier set by death, we can hope for a transformed community in the continent.

In remembering the dead we need to be aware that many of the victims of different forms of violence in Asia are unnamed and forgotten. The Eucharistic memorial of the departed is our invocation of God's mercy and justice for the victims who will be buried in oblivion. Eucharistic hope refuses to forget especially those who are united with Jesus in suffering. He transformed victimization into victory. We have reason to hope for those Jesus died for. God remembers them and will restore justice on earth. We are sustained by our remembrance of the saints of Asia who suffered yet by their fidelity attained to the joy of God's presence.

In hope we cry out, "Amen!" to the Father who deserves all glory and honor for the new life that is offered to us in Jesus the Son in the power of the Holy Spirit.

## **E. THE RITE OF COMMUNION**

### **1) Love is Communion and Peace (The Lord's Prayer and Exchange of Peace)**

The climax of the next moment of the Eucharistic celebration is the reception of the Body and Blood of Jesus Christ in Holy Communion. The Table of the Word and of the Body and Blood leads up to the singular grace of receiving Jesus' gift of Himself so that we would live in communion with Him. Communion is love. As a prelude, the community addresses God the Father in the words Jesus taught us. In the Latin rite, the giving of peace follows the prayer. The exchange of peace retains its full significance as an act of communion and love even when it is located elsewhere as in the liturgy of other rites.

Addressing God as 'Abba' was a distinctive mark of Jesus. It caused scandal to people who believed that reverence precluded a familiar approach to God. Yet Jesus was expressing the reality of who He was in relation to God. "The Father and I are one" (Jn 10:30). They belong to each other. They give of themselves totally to each other in their mutual love called the Holy Spirit. Jesus taught His disciples to pray to God as their Father too (cf. Mt 6:9-13). But we cry out, "Abba" only by the Spirit of adoption that makes us children in the Son Jesus (cf. Rom 8:15-16). The reception of the Body and Blood of Christ is the fruit of our being brought into the inner life of the Trinity who is the God of love, of self-giving, of communion.

We address God as Our Father. We believe that God is the Father who will provide for our needs, especially our daily bread. Jesus is our daily Bread who will soon be given to us in communion. But belonging to the Father means belonging to the other children of God in God's family and breaking bread with them. Baptized into the one faith in Christ Jesus, we become one body of Christ, brothers and sisters to each other (cf. Gal 3:26-29; I Cor 12). There is no true love of the Father without a genuine love of our neighbors. St. Paul says that receiving the Body of Christ in the Eucharistic sacrificial meal without discerning the presence of the Body of Christ in the community is eating and drinking judgment on oneself (cf. I Cor 11:29).

The sign of peace after the Lord's Prayer puts in symbolic action the love of the Father that binds us to one another. Peace is the gift of

the Risen Lord. He gives us His peace so that we could give it to others too. Receiving peace from the Father and from neighbors prepares us to receive Jesus who is our peace (cf Eph 2:14-16). The peace of Christ reconciles us to God and to one another. He breaks down the barriers of hostility that keep people apart (cf Eph 2:14).

### ***Contextual Pastoral Implications***

To live the love that we believe and celebrate in the Eucharist is to live in communion. There is no communion without peace. There is no peace without reconciliation. The quest for this type of love begins in the home. We stand on a sturdy tradition of family life in all cultures and faiths in Asia. The efforts in and outside the Church to strengthen the Asian family are signs of the Father's love at work in us.

But we are fully aware of forces that undermine the home. Poverty, war, abusive parents, and vices destroy loving communion. Even in the wider home of society, we see aggression, rivalry, competition and intolerance. There is a dire need for reconciliation, mercy and forgiveness in Asian societies so that we may finally live in peace. The Church lends its resources to peace building in Asia, urged on by the love of the Father who seeks to reconcile humanity to Him and to each other.

## **2) Superabundant Love (Receiving Communion)**

In the Lord's Prayer we asked the Father to give us our daily bread. The Father gives us Jesus, the Bread of Life, our daily Bread in our journey to the Kingdom yet to come. So we dare to approach the Communion Table, but only after confessing that we are not worthy to receive Jesus. We rely on His invitation, on His word of mercy and compassion to gain the strength and courage to approach Him. His welcoming love increases our desire to be one with Him by eating His flesh and drinking His blood. No loftier desire exists in our hearts than that of welcoming the life of Jesus Christ to be our life. He first loved us. We love Him in return and love our neighbors with His love in our hearts.

This communion is more than what we deserve if the norms of strict justice were to be observed. We taste the extravagant love of

God in Jesus who gives to His very life. This gift we do not deserve. As gratitude wells up from our hearts, we thank and adore the God who is love. Thanksgiving deepens our desire to love in return. Fed by Jesus, the Bread come down from the Father, we share Jesus with others, especially those who are deprived of love.

Asia has been blessed with bountiful natural and human resources. The lack of bread is due to the insatiable greed of a few that imposes poverty on the many. The cry for daily bread emanates from many homes and parts of Asia. Eucharistic love makes us hear and act on it the way the loving Father would. But as we work for a just society, we do not retreat from our duty to share the word of God as bread for those who are constructing a loving and compassionate society. Motivated only by love, we will not hesitate to critique the misguided desires of our times and the cravings for bread that is poison underneath.

We know that no amount of success and achievement would satisfy the hunger of humanity for love. Many affluent people in Asia hunger for love and companionship. So as we receive Jesus in the Eucharist, we also welcome Him who is present in the poor, the lonely, the lost, the weary, and the persecuted. Like Jesus, we give to them not only what is due to them but also what is truly ours - our love and life.

### **3) "Amen!" To the Bread of Love: Commitment to Mission**

After the closing prayer of thanksgiving, the liturgy is brought to its conclusion. The rite is not just a declaration that the liturgy is over. Neither is it simply a dismissal of a group. It is a sending. This is a beautiful development in liturgical theology where a simple rite has become a "missionary moment." God sends missionaries into His harvest. It is significant to note that the God who gathers a new family now sends this same family as His workers in the vineyard, for indeed the harvest is rich.

We can draw inspiration and insight from the sending of the apostles to the lost sheep of Israel, to the sick, the dead, those afflicted with dreaded skin diseases and those possessed by demons (cf. Mt 10:6-8). This is the great harvest of the apostles of Christ: the poor, the neglected and the lost. They are the true wealth of the Church. Every Eucharistic community is driven by the Holy Spirit to go to them for

the Kingdom of God is promised to them. Like the apostles who were chosen to go forth and bear fruit (Jn 15:16), so is the Church sent to bear much fruit.

But this will happen only if we remain in His love (cf Jn 15:4). The one who is called to abide in God is sent by God. This is the mystery of mission: abiding as we go and going as we abide. It is not a “separation” from Jesus but a companionship achieved through participating in His mission.

Living the Eucharist in Asia calls us to a more attentive listening to the God who sends us as witnesses to His saving design. It requires, however a zealous availability to respond and a joyful going forth wherever God sends us. With eagerness, we go to the bountiful harvest of the teeming masses of the poor, the tired and the lowly in the vast world of Asia. All their lives, they hear only bad news. They experience bad news. Some of them consider their lives as bad news. To them we bring the Good News of a God who saves in Jesus who became poor out of love for us. We are saved by love – that is the Good News. But does our Eucharistic faith make our hearts burn with missionary ardor? Does mission move and inspire us, especially our youth? To what worthy “causes” do we make ourselves available? Are Christians in Asia more enamored of the “harvest” promised by individualist and materialist systems than the “harvest” of the blind recovering their sight, the cripples walking again, the lepers getting cured, the deaf hearing once more, the dead being raised to life and the poor having the good news announced to them? (cf. Lk 7:22).

We state clearly that worldly conquest or ambition is not the motivation for the Church’s engagement in mission. Eucharist is mission. The Eucharist is the presence of Jesus. It is Jesus himself loving and serving. The Eucharistic offering of himself, the joy of having found life in Jesus and the duty to share it to others – these impel us to mission.

#### **4) A Mission to Witness to Jesus Christ**

Jesus sent his disciples in order to witness to the Gospel of the Reign of God. John the Apostle epitomizes the mode of such testimony when he wrote, “This is what we proclaim to you: what was from the beginning, what we have heard, what we have seen with our eyes, what we have looked upon and our hands have

touched – we speak of the word of life” (I Jn 1:1). The apostle can witness to Jesus only if he has first seen, heard, touched him. During the Eucharist, we have gathered and touched the presence of God in the community. We have heard God speaking to us the Word of life and hopefully have made it part of our memory. We have looked with awe at the hope offered to creation, human labor and painful memories by the sacrifice of Jesus’ self-gift. We have tasted the Bread of Life full of love and peace. What we have seen, heard, looked upon and tasted, we now witness to. Participation in the Eucharist brings with it a mission of testifying in word and deed to the life we have been graced to experience. Spirituality, contemplation and mission meet. The Good News experienced in the Eucharist begs to be shared. The gift we have received brings with it the responsibility to share with others the Lord we have encountered.

### *Contextualized Pastoral Implications*

Every Eucharistic celebration renews the Church in its missionary calling. By its very nature as the bearer of the Good News of Jesus Christ, the Church is missionary. Only by being true to its mission can it remain true to its identity. In the Eucharist, we receive Jesus who sends us as the Father has sent Him for the life of the world (cf. Jn 20:21).

Even as a small minority in most of the Asian countries, the Church continues to share the gift of Jesus with others. That is her life. And the celebration of the Eucharist nurtures the Church’s missionary life. Where explicit missionary activity is forbidden, the Church can and must witness to Christ even in her silence. The quality of our joy, simplicity, compassion, and communion testifies powerfully to the truth of Jesus.

There is no chaining the Word of God. There is no stopping the fire of the Gospel and the Presence of Christ from emanating even from weak and frail witnesses. We are in great awe and deep gratitude for the heroic witness of many Asians who in many difficult political and religious situations suffer silently for the sake of the faith. Their testimonies speak of the power and the presence of the Lord in the Eucharist. Through spiritual communion or through secret celebrations, the Eucharist comforted and strengthened in their incredible witness of the Christ.

Many peoples and communities in Asia are in need of witnesses to the truth that in Jesus their quest for life will not end in vain: the migrants separated from their homes, women and children living in constant terror, broken families, those imprisoned and detained for crimes they did not commit, the differently-able and mutilated, and people contemplating suicide. The Church is sent to them. The Church, renewed as the Body of Christ in the Eucharist, bears Christ to them. Every member of the Body shares in the common mission of witnessing to Christ. We can mention a few examples: parents are witnesses of Christ's love to each other and to their children; the youth are missionaries to their fellow youth of the joy of having found Christ; public servants must witness to the humble service of love that Jesus exemplified.

Called to missionary witnessing, the Church in Asia must examine its credibility as a witness to Christ. In a continent where the consistency of wisdom and life is highly valued among teachers and religious institutions, the Church needs to review the quality of its communal witnessing to Christ. A Church community should become what it celebrates and receives in the Eucharist. The Church learns true mission in the Eucharist.

## **5) A Gift and Promise of Presence**

When we go to fulfill the mission entrusted to us, we believe that Jesus goes with us. He promised to his first disciples: "Know that I am with you always, until the end of the world!" (Mt 28:20). The pledge of His abiding presence in the Church's mission is the real presence of Christ in the Eucharistic species that remains even after the liturgical celebration. The rite may end but the gift of presence endures. Thus Holy Communion could be given to the sick after the rite and the community that has celebrated can continue to adore the Blessed Sacrament. The promise of presence in mission already happens as a gift of presence in the Eucharist. We are consoled by the fact that the presence of Christ in the Eucharist already fulfills His promise of presence to those whom He sends out on mission. In Eucharistic spirituality, adoration goes hand in hand with mission. Genuine mission leads to adoration. Authentic adoration leads to mission. This gift and promise of presence sustains the Church as she charts rough roads and stormy seas.

The abiding presence of Christ in the Eucharist and in mission reminds us of His presence in our neighbors, especially the hungry, the thirsty, the strangers, the sick, the prisoners, the lonely, the abandoned and the victims (cf. Mt. 25:31-46). The Spirit of the Risen Christ hovers over creation and the events in history. As we testify to Christ's presence, we also discover and behold Him present in the poor, in creation, and in history. Mission is never without contemplation. But the more we engage in missionary contemplation, we realize that the presence of Christ is often "veiled" by the very signs that cannot fully capture the mystery they convey. The sinfulness of the world and of humanity, including the followers of Christ, also clouds the manifestation of Christ's life. Our mission and adoration happen in the tension of the "veiled presence" that makes us long to see the full revelation of the Reign of God and of the freedom of God's children (cf. Rom 8:19). In the meanwhile, we press on to make the gift and promise our own (cf. Phil 3:12), strengthened by the presence of Jesus - a gift already given and a promise waiting to be fulfilled.

## F. CONCLUSION

The Church as the Body of Christ makes present in signs and mission the saving presence of Christ in history. In Asia, the missionary witness of the Church is a way of living the Eucharist. Living the Eucharist involves 1) becoming God's family as a counter-witness to divisions, 2) recognizing God as we acknowledge our sinfulness, 3) listening to the story of Jesus in human stories, 4) building a common memory, 5) professing the faith in joy in the midst of risks, 5) listening to the voiceless in the way God listens, 6) celebrating the gift of creation in a world of commodification and injustice, 7) transforming betrayals into self-giving and service, 8) being in communion with the living and the dead, 9) living in peace, 10) being deeply grateful for Jesus' superabundant love, 11) working as missionaries in God's bountiful harvest, 12) courageously witnessing to Jesus and 13) confident journeying in hope towards the fulfillment of promise of the Everlasting Banquet. This is the form of life we receive in the Eucharist. This is the life that we pray and work for in Asia. The dynamism of the Eucharist becomes the rhythm of life of the followers of Christ. The Eucharist forms the Church. The Eucharist is the life of the Church.

Mary, the bearer of God by the power of the Holy Spirit, experienced Christ's life in her and lived as a disciple of her Son. Hailed as the ark of the New Covenant, she is the exemplar of the Church. Listening to the Word and acting on it, she is the Woman of the Eucharist who followed her Son until the end with much love and hope. She now lives with her Son in the glorious presence of the Father. She adores the Triune God, intercedes for the Church and the world until we all share in the Banquet of Eternal Life. Mary lived a Eucharistic life because Jesus was her life. Mother of Life and Mother of Asia, pray for us now and always!

## **G. SOME PASTORAL RECOMMENDATIONS:**

### **1) Formation towards Eucharistic Life**

- 1.1. Programs of integral catechesis, faith formation, and liturgical formation on the Eucharist and its implications for daily living should be conducted at the diocesan, parish, and BEC levels;
- 1.2. Where such tools of social communication are readily available, TV or radio should be set up in village chapels for catechesis and faith formation;
- 1.3. Basic ecclesial communities or Small Christian Communities should be formed as Eucharistic communities that share with one another with the wider community in a service of transforming love;
- 1.4. In seminary formation, Eucharistic life and lifestyle must be emphasized;

### **2) The Celebration and Adoration of the Lord**

- 2.1. The faithful should be trained in Lectio Divina with lessons in silence and contemplation;
- 2.2. The custom of having adoration chapels and Holy Hour should be widely promoted;
- 2.3. At an appropriate early age the faithful should be taught to demonstrate reverence before the Blessed Sacrament and deep sense of the sacred;

- 2.4. The inculturation of the Liturgy should be promoted according to the instructions of the Magisterium with the wise guidance of the local Bishop;
- 2.5. With the guidance of their pastors and facilitated by liturgical committees, parishes should make the celebration of the Eucharist more attractive and beautiful;
- 2.6. Bishops and priests are to improve the quality of the preparation and delivery of the homily;
- 2.7. Prayers of the Faithful are to be contextualized and inclusive of the wider community;
- 2.8. Instructions should be given with respect and kindness on the reasons for not giving Holy Communion to non-Catholics when Holy Mass is celebrated with them present, as in weddings; an alternative gesture of welcome could be given;

### **3) Living the Eucharist**

- 3.1. Bishops and priests should instruct the faithful on doing the traditional corporal works of mercy as the fruit of the Eucharistic celebration;
- 3.2. Part of the collection from the faithful at Masses should be allocated for charitable purposes;
- 3.3. The formation of parish communities of forgiveness, reconciliation, and equality help significantly towards the living of the Eucharist;
- 3.4. Priests are to be models of the Eucharistic attitude of welcoming to all, of being for all people and of living a Eucharistic life of love and service;

### **4) Missionary Orientation**

- 4.1. Catechetical and faith formation programs should incorporate modules of value formation to combat individualism, materialism, prejudices, and inequalities;

- 4.2. Diocesan and parish ministries should collaborate in defending and promoting life from conception to death;
- 4.3. The pastoral care, including counseling, of victims, abused women, children and youth, the lonely, the desperate, the poor, and the elderly should be given adequate attention;
- 4.4. The special needs of the youth require a corresponding pastoral care in listening to them and speaking their language;
- 4.5. Episcopal conferences should actively promote peace-building and reconciliation in the wider society with special attention to ecumenical and inter-religious collaboration;
- 4.6. We should appeal to leaders of nations to stop the arms race;
- 4.7. Episcopal conferences and dioceses should establish pastoral programs focused on the stewardship of creation.

## **LIVING THE EUCHARIST IN ASIA**

*Message of the IX FABC Plenary Assembly*  
Manila, Philippines 10<sup>th</sup> to 16<sup>th</sup> August 2009

We, the 117 participants – Catholic Bishops of Asia, together with the Papal Envoy, Francis Cardinal Arinze, Archbishop Robert Sarah, the Secretary of the Congregation of Evangelisation of Peoples and the fraternal delegates from other Conferences of Bishops (Australia, Canada, U.S.A, Spain and the Federation of the Catholic Bishops’ Conference of Oceania), and FABC Offices and representatives of our funding partners (Missio, Misereor and Stichting Porticus), Christian Conference of Asia – gathered in Manila for the IX Plenary Assembly of the FABC (August 10 – 16). With great pastoral concern, we came together to celebrate, pray, reflect and discern, and to provide pastoral orientations and recommendations on the theme: “Living the Eucharist in Asia.”

## Call to Community

The theme of the Plenary Assembly is of great importance for the entire Church in Asia, for our life and mission. Therefore, every effort must be made to have on-going reflection on its significance. This, we hope, will result in a new fervour to make the Eucharistic celebration first and foremost an encounter with Jesus, the Risen Lord, leading to communion. Active and prayerful participation by hearing the Word and sharing in the breaking of the Bread will lead us to that personal and intimate encounter.

In this sacrament, the God of unity comes to permeate and envelope our life – personal and societal, bringing the gift of union with him and with one another. We should also keep in mind that Asia cherishes family, common meal and community celebrations to foster and promote unity. The Eucharist, both sacrifice and meal, was first referred to as the “Supper of the Lord”, and then as the “breaking of the Bread”. These names express two important demands (dimensions): intimacy with Jesus and family-like union among those who share the bread. Our celebrations should generate in everyone the courage to build authentic communities that reconcile, forgive, minister to the poor and the marginalised.

Love made perfect in self-sacrifice by Jesus, and renewed in the Eucharist, calls forth nothing less than a life-style of sacrificial love. This alone can bring about true harmony and peace. Asia’s soul thirsts for universal harmony. The Eucharist responds to this quest. Each and every Christian and every community must become what they celebrate: unity in diversity. St Paul shows the gift and the task that the Eucharist is in these memorable words: “Because there is one bread, we who are many are one body, for we all partake of the one bread” (1 Cor 10:17). The Eucharist should indeed be the school where we grow in harmony and are empowered to promote it.

We cannot celebrate the Eucharist and at the same time maintain, practice or tolerate discrimination based on religion or race, culture or language, caste or class. If we are grafted into the Eucharistic Lord, we will reach out and become bridge-builders in a world that is becoming increasingly divisive.

## **The Call to hear the Word**

To celebrate the Eucharist is to live in faith, a faith planted, nurtured and nourished by the Word. It demands that we become contemplative listeners and ponderers of the Word, like the Virgin Mary, our Mother. Our brothers and sisters of other religions in Asia have great devotion to their sacred books, and they chant and interiorize the Word. This culture of listening is a further invitation to become men and women who cherish and devote themselves to the Word and to the breaking of the bread. Such listening will certainly issue forth in living in the light of the Word. An ideal context where intense listening to the Word can take place is the Small Christian Communities (SCCs) that dot the map of the Church in Asia. We remind all those who are entrusted with the ministry of animating the Eucharistic communities, especially priests, that they have a great responsibility to make the Eucharist a transforming event, by adequate preparation, and effective celebration, and in particular by relevant and nourishing homilies.

There should be devout listening to the Word every day at home as a family, especially on the eve of Sundays to prepare for the Eucharist by reading and praying the Word to be proclaimed on the Day of the Lord. Such a practice will certainly bear fruits of renewal of Christian life. It will bring about a culture of listening to the Word in our parishes and communities.

## **Call to faith and hope**

We are pilgrims on earth, walking in lights and shadows, journeying with anxieties and uncertainties, pains and sufferings, oftentimes, imposed upon on us. We cherish the Eucharist, for in it we receive the Word of life and light that opens our eyes and the Bread of life that warms up our hearts. The unity of the Word and Bread in the Eucharist invite us to treasure and live both these aspects.

Without this gift we would be just groping in the dark, walking through a tunnel without even a glimmer of hope. With both these gifts we shall discover, like the disciples on the way to Emmaus (Lk 24:13f), the deeper meaning and the divine call to hope in the midst of all that we go through in life: sudden economic chaos, increasing global warming, natural disasters, persecutions, untold sufferings of

people everywhere, especially of women and children, refugees and of those deprived of freedom in different countries of Asia.

To those who experience life as meaningless and (worthless) not worth living, we must bring the memory of Jesus crucified and risen, the memory made alive in the Eucharist, a memory capable of healing the trauma of hopelessness. The Paschal mystery contains the power to interpret our life experiences. For in Jesus not only God is revealed, but also the meaning of our human life with all its richness and vulnerability. His Word can enlighten every experience we go through.

### **Call to mission**

Asian celebrations are marked by joy, simplicity and participation. Asian heart is energised by **contemplating** beauty in nature. Our Eucharistic celebrations need to touch the hearts of Asians who love colour, flowers, symbols, music and contemplation. Asian symbols, Asian melodies, and even more Asian values, should make our celebrations create a resonance in the depths of Asia's heart. How great a witness of our faith - Christ has come not destroy but to perfect- would such a celebration of the Eucharist be! The appeal of Pope John Paul II to show forth the **Asian face of Jesus** to our brothers and sisters echoes afresh in our ears. (*Ecclesia in Asia*)

We are convinced that meaningful, contemplative, experiential and prayerful celebration of the Eucharist has the potential to render the Christian communities of Asia powerful witnesses of Jesus, witnesses who are bearers of his presence, his love, and his healing power. The celebration of the Eucharist end with the call to mission: "Go, you are sent forth." The Eucharist must be lived by becoming communities of loving concern, hospitality, selfless service to the poor, the excluded, and downtrodden. The breaking of the Bread must continue. That is the sign that we live the Eucharist (Jn 13:1-17).

Mary is the "woman of the Eucharist" (*Ecclesia de Eucharistia*). To her, on the Feast of the Assumption, we entrusted the Church in Asia. May she accompany us in our commitment to live the Eucharist in Asia.

16<sup>th</sup> August, 2009 - Manila, Philippines

**X FABC PLENARY ASSEMBLY**

**FABC AT FORTY YEARS:  
RESPONDING TO THE CHALLENGES OF ASIA  
A NEW EVANGELIZATION**

*Final Statement and Message X Plenary Assembly*

**[Xuan Loc & Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam,  
10<sup>th</sup> to 16<sup>th</sup> December 2012]**

## INTRODUCTION

1 In mysterious and invisible ways from time immemorial to the present day the creative and renewing Spirit of God continues to stir among Asian peoples and cultures as it hovers over the Asian continent. Deep in the heart of Asia's teeming millions, expectancy, vibrancy and energy pulsate, as Asians struggle for self-identity and a free development space in the social, political, economic, cultural and religious fields. Asia is a continent experiencing the hopes and joys of constant rebirth in the Spirit.<sup>1</sup>

2 Led by the same Spirit we, Bishops from Asia, have gathered together in this beautiful country of Vietnam forty years after the official foundation of the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences (FABC) in 1972, the year in which the Holy See approved the Statutes of FABC. Our gathering this year is marked by great joy, celebration and thanksgiving, even more blessed as we celebrate the Year of Faith from 11 October 2012 to 24 November 2013, declared by our Holy Father Pope Benedict XVI<sup>2</sup> so as to deepen our faith in view of the New Evangelization. Moreover, the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the opening of the Second Vatican Council (1962-65) and the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* taking place this

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<sup>1</sup> See Pope John Paul II, *Ecclesia in Asia*, November 6, 1999, no. 15 for the work of the Holy Spirit in creation; no. 18 for his work in Asia. A very enlightening Asian elaboration of the work of the Holy Spirit is that of the FABC Office of Theological Concerns (OTC) in *Sprouts of Theology from the Asian Soil* (STAS), *Collection of TAC and OTC Documents, 1987-2007*, ed. Vimal Tirimanna, CSSR, 2007, chapter 5, "The Spirit at Work in Asia Today," pp. 167-98.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. *Porta fidei*, October 11, 2011.

year are also providential events offering us a fresh clarion call to live, celebrate, proclaim and witness to our faith in the context of Asia.

3 We come together then to express our deep gratitude for God's blessings on the Church in Asia, to listen to the renewing Spirit and discern the pastoral situation that confronts us. We gather in dialogue among Local Churches and, with the grace of God, to respond with a deepened faith, with trust and daring to the emerging challenges of the Asian situation. With immense hope we place the future of the Church in Asia in the hands of God.

"... do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him" (Col 3: 17).

#### A. REMEMBERING, WE GIVE THANKS TO GOD

4 In remembering the past, we rejoice at accomplishments in deep gratitude to the Lord and his wonderful ways, for the extraordinary flame of renewal that the Holy Spirit enkindled at the Second Vatican Council. Through it the renewing Spirit revitalized and rejuvenated the whole Church so that it may face the world with wisdom, boldness and hope. The Spirit stirred up the Church in Asia with great energy. To this day the energizing vision of the Council – the people of God, the Kingdom of God, integral evangelization, communion, co-responsibility, collegiality, participation, dialogue, liturgical renewal, clergy and religious renewal, engagement with the modern world – continue to catalyze the renewal of the Church in Asia. It was, in fact, to prepare for the 1974 Synod on Evangelization that the FABC first gathered.

#### FABC Plenary Assemblies

5 We thank the Lord for the nine Plenary Assemblies of the FABC which provided the principal themes of renewal for the Local Churches in Asia. At their first FABC Plenary Assembly in Taiwan in 1974 the Asian Bishops sought to discover how the Church, only a little flock of less than 3% of the total Asian population, could more effectively and credibly announce the Good News of Jesus. With the guidance of God's Spirit the Bishops identified three significant and all-pervasive Asian social phenomena: the massive poverty of Asian peoples, their rich mosaic of ancient cultures and religious and philosophical traditions. The Asian Bishops responded with a vision of evangelization by way of **living Triple Dialogue**: dialogue with

the poor of Asia (integral liberation and option for the poor), dialogue with their cultures (inculturation) and dialogue with their religious and philosophical traditions (inter-religious dialogue). They affirmed that the acting subject of mission is **the local church**, incarnated and rooted firmly in the culture of its people, taking up their strength as well as their weaknesses in the light of the healing and redeeming grace of Christ.<sup>3</sup>

6 In the subsequent Plenary Assemblies, the Bishops examined the internal requirements of a Church for credible integral evangelization and probed into the nature of the Church as a **community of prayer and contemplation** which is its very life, animated in all its being by the Spirit of God.<sup>4</sup> They explored the Church as a **community of faith** in communion with the triune God, a **communion of communities**, fundamentally characterized by participation and co-responsibility.<sup>5</sup> They discerned the indispensable **evangelizing role of lay people** in the Church particularly in the vast field of secularity which is especially their own and they strongly urged and committed themselves to the activation of their baptismal gifts, in the building up of the Church and the transformation of Asian society.<sup>6</sup> Realizing the increasing demands of mission and the diminishing sense of mission, with the approach of the third millennium, they firmly reiterated **the centrality of Jesus in evangelization**. They provided a renewed justification for mission as an imperative from the Lord Jesus and as the inevitable consequence of the gift of faith, thus providing a strong impulse to the missionary spirit while re-affirming **dialogue as the mode of mission in Asia**.<sup>7</sup> Nevertheless they maintained that the proclamation of Jesus as the Lord and Savior of the world remains as the very heart of evangelization – a faith conviction that the Church in Asia firmly holds as non-negotiable.

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<sup>3</sup> See *Final Statement* of FABC I, "Evangelization in Modern Day Asia," Taipei, 1974, in *For All the Peoples of Asia* (FAPA), vol. 1, FABC Documents, 1970-1991, eds. Gaudencio B. Rosales and C.G. Arevalo, 1992, pp.11-25.

<sup>4</sup> See *Final Statement* of FABC II, "Prayer – the Life of the Church in Asia," Calcutta, 1978, in FAPA vol. 1, pp. 27-48.

<sup>5</sup> See *Final Statement* of FABC III, "A Community of Faith in Asia," 1982, in FAPA, vol. 1, pp. 49-65.

<sup>6</sup> See *Final Statement* of FABC IV, "The Vocation and Mission of the Laity in the Church and in the World of Asia," Tokyo, 1986, in FAPA, vol. 1, pp. 177-98.

<sup>7</sup> See *Final Statement* of FABC V, "Journeying towards the Third Millennium," Bandung, 1990, in FAPA, vol. 1, pp. 273-89.

7 In announcing the Reign of God and the Good News of Jesus, the one Lord and Savior, the Church has to be a humble servant. She is a **community-in-mission, a disciple-community** in the footsteps of the Lord Jesus who came to serve and not to be served. Christian discipleship in Asia, the Asian Bishops affirm, has to be a **service to life**, the full life of unending communion with God promised by the Lord Jesus. Such communion is to be reflected on earth by the solidarity of peoples with one another and solidarity with all creation.<sup>8</sup> The Church-in-mission has always to be open to the renewing Spirit. All its members have to renew themselves continually in mind and heart towards a holistic spirituality and missionary engagement in a **mission of love and service**.<sup>9</sup>

8 Evangelization and renewal in Asia take the **family as the focal point**. The Asian family is the cellular receptor of everything that impinges Asian societies for good or evil. A renewed Asian family is a renewing family that strives **towards a culture of integral life** in the midst of death-dealing forces. For this purpose, a renewed holistic family ministry in the local church is required, a ministry that develops a family spirituality that is built on the **spirituality of communion**, the communion between husband and wife. Communion in the family is rooted in the communion of unending love between God the Father, Son and Spirit, a communion that flows inexorably to the children born of the love between husband and wife, and reaches out in solidarity with others regardless of religion or culture.<sup>10</sup>

9 Nowhere is such communion of love most deeply and dramatically expressed than in the **Holy Eucharist**. Communion is at the very heart of the Eucharist, the communion of Jesus with the Father in the Spirit and our communion with Jesus who in sacrificial redeeming love gives his own Body and Blood to us. In the offering

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<sup>8</sup> See *Final Statement* of FABC VI, "Christian Discipleship in Asia Today: Service to Life," Manila, 1995, in FAPA, vol. 2, FABC Documents from 1992 to 1996, ed. Franz-Josef Eilers, pp.1-12.

<sup>9</sup> See *Final Statement* of FABC VII, "Renewed Church in Asia: a Mission of Love and Service," Samphran, 2000, in FAPA, vol. 3, FABC Documents from 1997 to 2001, ed. Franz-Josef Eilers, SVD, 2002, pp. 1-16.

<sup>10</sup> See *Final Statement* of FABC VIII, "The Asian Family towards a Culture of Integral Life," Daejeon, 2004, in FAPA, vol. 4, FABC Documents from 2002 to 2006, ed. Franz-Josef Eilers, SVD, 2007, pp. 1-51.

of Jesus' own Body and Blood in the form of bread and wine, communion radically flows towards all humanity and the whole of creation. At the Eucharist we recognize and confess our brokenness, plead for forgiveness and reconciliation. There we pray for a Culture of Life in Asia, remembering the life-giving memories with which God has blessed Asian societies in movements of peace and freedom, of truth and justice, of love and service. The full significance of the Eucharist as the love of Jesus poured out for integral salvation impels us to act **towards social transformation**.<sup>11</sup> There is no other way to be truly and profoundly thankful or Eucharistic but to **live the Eucharist in its personal, communitarian, and social dimensions**.

### **Radio Veritas Asia**

**10** We thank the Lord for inspiring the Asian Bishops to set up Radio Veritas Asia even before the FABC was born. Through the years RVA has gained a well-earned reputation that Blessed Pope John Paul II called it "the voice of Asian Christianity." Its voice reaches remote areas of Asia that are not otherwise accessible to missionaries.

### **A Vision of Church in Asia**

**11** We thank the Lord for a challenging **vision of Church in Asia**. This vision of Church has been the over-all objective of the pastoral reflection, discernment, prayer, and pastoral action of the FABC through the years.<sup>12</sup> We envision a Church that is:

- *truly Asian, in triple dialogue* with the religions, cultures and peoples of Asia, especially the poor;<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> See FABC VII *Final Statement*, "Living the Eucharist in Asia," Manila, 2008.

<sup>12</sup> Useful for understanding this FABC vision as mirrored by the Local Church is the work of FABC TAC, now OTC, in STAS, chapter 2, "Theses on the Local Church: A Theological Reflection in the Asian Context," pp. 19-68.

<sup>13</sup> An enlightening Asian elaboration of inter-religious dialogue by the FABC Theological Advisory Commission, now known as the Office of Theological Concerns (OTC), is "Theses on Interreligious Dialogue: An Essay in Pastoral Theological Reflection," 1987, in STAS, chapter 1, pp. 1-18.

- a *humble servant of the peoples of Asia*, accompanying them to the Kingdom of God;<sup>14</sup>
- a *credible herald of the Gospel, a disciple-community sent on mission of integral evangelization* to tell the story of Jesus to Asians in season and out of season;<sup>15</sup>
- *in herself the bearer of the Asian face of Jesus, the God who became Man*, who was compassionate, loving, forgiving, self-sacrificing; a teacher, servant, healer, prophet, life-giver, ennobler of the poor;<sup>16</sup>
- a *communion of communities, reflecting the Trinitarian communion*;
- a *participatory Church* of renewed servant-leaders, of prophetic Religious and empowered laity;
- a *Church of the Poor* where the sick and the needy are at home;
- a *Church of the Youth* where they find solidarity in their struggle for authentic life;
- a *Church in solidarity with the whole of creation*.

### **Asian Methodologies: Pastoral Discernment, Building Basic Ecclesial/Human Communities, Theological Reflection**

**12** We thank the Lord for the FABC **methodology of pastoral discernment (Pastoral Spiral/Cycle)**. The Pastoral Cycle begins with immersion-exposure in the life situation of a group of people, proceeds to situation analysis and reflection in faith on the situation, results in pastoral decisions and planning to implement the decisions and all this leading to effective implementation. An elaboration of the classic see-judge-act methodology, it is used by the FABC Offices in

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<sup>14</sup> See *Final Statement*, FABC V no. 6, Bandung, 1990 in FAPA, vol. 1, pp. 283-84; see also Statement of FABC International Theological Colloquium, Thailand, 1994, in FAPA, vol. 2, "The Face of the Church in Asia," pp.224-226].

<sup>15</sup> Following up the Special Assembly for Asia of the Synod of Bishops, 18 April to 14 May 1998, the FABC Office of Evangelization organized the First Asian Mission Congress on the theme, "Telling the Story of Jesus in Asia: A Celebration of Faith and Life," Chiang Mai, Thailand, 8-27 October 2006. The proceedings have been published with the same title as the theme by Office of Evangelization, Goa, India, ed. Fr. Mario Saturnino Dias, undated, 504 pp.

<sup>16</sup> See *Final Statement* of the FABC International Theological Colloquium, Thailand, 1994, "Being Church in Asia: Journeyming with the Spirit into Fuller Life," in FAPA, vol. 2, "The Face of Jesus in Asia," pp. 222-24. Cf. Pope John Paul II, *Ecclesia in Asia*, no. 20.

some of their Bishops' Institutes.<sup>17</sup> Without the component of immersion-exposure, this methodology has consistently been used by the FABC Plenary Assemblies as the Bishops analysed and reflected on contextual realities in order to arrive at pastoral decisions that would advance the mission of the Church.

We are likewise thankful to the Lord for the ever-growing **Basic Ecclesial Communities or Small Christian Communities** in Asia. They are biblically oriented, formative, participatory and designed to build Word-centered communities of faith. One of the approaches – the **Asian Integral Pastoral Approach**<sup>18</sup> – is used in Asia. Adapted to the Asian situation from the Lumko method of South Africa, it has also attracted interest of some churches outside Asia. A similar method, with adaptation, is used by local churches in building *basic human communities* where Christians and people of other religions live together.

We thank the Lord for an **experiential and contextualized method of theological reflection** that is at the service of mission and pastoral ministry. The method relies first on Sacred Tradition and Sacred Scripture which form the one sacred deposit of the Word of God<sup>19</sup> that is interpreted authentically by the Church's magisterium. But it takes in Asian realities as resources insofar as God's presence and action and the work of the Spirit are discerned therein.<sup>20</sup> It is a method of "liberative integration, interrelatedness and wholeness" and "emphasizes symbolic approaches and expressions, and is marked by a preference for those in the periphery and 'outside the Gate'."<sup>21</sup>

### **The Renewal Work of FABC Offices**

**13** We thank the Lord for the **FABC Offices** that spearhead the implementation of FABC orientations for a renewed Church in Asia. Through Bishops' Institutes they assist Episcopal conferences, clergy,

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<sup>17</sup> See "Final Reflections," 7<sup>th</sup> Bishops' Institute for Social Action, Hua Hin, Thailand, 1986, in FAPA vol. 1, pp. 231-32.

<sup>18</sup> See Report of the First ASIIPA General Assembly, "Asian Integral Pastoral Approach, Message to the Churches of Asia," Thailand, 1996 in FAPA, vol. 2, pp. 137-39; see also Report on Consultation on Integral Formation, "Asian Integral Pastoral Approach towards a New Way of Being Church in Asia," Malaysia, 1993, in FAPA, vol. 2, pp.107-11.

<sup>19</sup> *Dei Verbum*, no. 10.

<sup>20</sup> See STAS, chapter 6, "Methodology: Asian Christian Theology, Doing Theology in Asia Today," p. 280.

<sup>21</sup> *Heb.* 13:3; see STAS, p. 343.

religious and laity to understand Asian pastoral issues *more deeply* and articulate pastoral approaches and directions. They help in pastoral envisioning and initial pastoral planning, in the areas of evangelization, social communications, integral human development, ministry to indigenous peoples and migrants, lay empowerment, inter-religious dialogue, priestly and religious renewal, seminary formation, education and faith-formation, formation of families, women and youth. Many of the results of such Institutes are incorporated in the theological reflections of the Office of Theological Concerns.<sup>22</sup>

### **The Contribution of Church Leaders, Clergy, Religious, Laity, Theologians**

**14** We thank the Lord for the invaluable contribution of **many great leaders of the Church in Asia** who conceptualized, planned, and brought the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences into being.<sup>23</sup> They were joined by many others who nurtured the Federation to what it is today. Asian prelates, theologians, expert Clergy, Religious and Lay People have collaborated in this enormous pastoral undertaking. They have contributed their talents and time to build up communion within the Church for mission.

### **Dialogue between Episcopal Conferences and Local Churches**

**15** Finally, we thank the Lord for the **Episcopal Conferences and Local Churches** that constitute the FABC, their Bishops, Clergy, Religious and Laity – from Central Asia to Southeast Asia, from

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<sup>22</sup> The FABC Offices are: Office of Evangelization, Office of Social Communications, Office of Human Development, Office of Education and Student Chaplaincy, Office of Laity and Family (Women's Desk, Youth Desk, ASIIPA Desk), Office of Ecumenical and Inter-religious Affairs, Office of Consecrated Life, Office of Clergy and Office of Theological Concerns. For a detailed elaboration of the contribution of FABC Offices to the over-all vision of the Church in Asia, see Report of Secretary General, FABC IX Plenary Assembly, Manila, 2009.

<sup>23</sup> After the historic meeting of Asian Bishops with Pope Paul VI in Manila in 1970, the idea of an Asian regional conference was conceived. At a meeting at the Jesuit Provincial House in Manila, participating were Cardinals Valerian Gracias (Bombay), Stephen Kim (Seoul), Justin Darmojuwono (Semarang), Bishops Stanislaus Loquang (Taipei), Francis Hsu (Hong Kong), Mariano Gaviola (Philippines), and Fr. Horacio de la Costa (Jesuit Provincial). The mind and pen of the eminent Asian theologian Fr. Catalino Arevalo SJ synthesized the Asian Bishops' reflections at the FABC Plenary Assembly, Taipei, 1974. We remember with deep gratitude Fr. Edward Malone, M.M., who with great competence and generosity served as Assistant Secretary General until 2005 and contributed significantly to the growth of the FABC.

Kazakhstan to Timor Leste. Through the years, they have generously contributed to the growth of FABC from its humble beginnings in 1972. The FABC process has been truly a dialogue among local churches, where Bishops in communion, solidarity and affective collegiality collaborate to announce the Good News of Jesus and of God's Kingdom. The communion of local churches is marvelously enriched with the active presence of those that are *sui iuris* of the Eastern rite that trace their origins back to St. Thomas the Apostle. The Lord has, indeed, blessed FABC through and in each of its members for the mission of evangelization that he has entrusted to the Church in Asia.

### **Confession of Shortcomings**

**16** Yet while thanking the Lord for countless blessings, we are sadly aware that our decisions and actions do not always match our words and intentions. Renewal of values and mind-sets, of agents of evangelization and of church structures towards a "new way of being Church" has not been adequate and consistent. The FABC vision and its key ideas, its programs and projects have not yet impacted the grassroots to the extent that we had desired. The mega-trends themselves indicate the inadequacies of Church response that reflect in turn mega-trends *in* the Church. We have progressed but we still have a long journey towards the realization of the vision of a new way of being Church. For this we humbly say to the Lord, *mea culpa, mea maxima culpa*.

"The New Evangelization requires personal and communal conversion."<sup>24</sup> It calls us to holiness, to the "following of Christ expressed in a life of faith active in charity, which is a privileged proclamation of the Gospel."<sup>25</sup> Holiness begets credibility. In this year of anniversaries for the Church, we recommit ourselves with greater resolve to the mission of New Evangelization.

### **B. DISCERNING THE SIGNS OF THE TIMES, WE PRAY FOR WISDOM**

**17** As we thank the Lord, the Spirit calls us again to discern the signs of the times as did our brother Bishops in 1974.

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<sup>24</sup> *Final List of Propositions*, Synod of Bishops on the New Evangelization for the Transmission of the Christian Faith, Rome, 2012, *Propositio* 22, "Conversion."

<sup>25</sup> *Propositio* 23, "Holiness and the New Evangelizers."

## Mega-trends in Asia and Ecclesial Realities

Among the signs of the times are positive and negative mega-trends that will shape the evangelizing mission of the Church in Asia. They are pastoral challenges with new faces, new forms, new facets and emphases. In responding to them we note ecclesial realities, both lights and shadows, which in themselves are mega-trends in the Church. We need to view them with the pastoral concern and compassion that Jesus had for the people of his day.

### *Globalization*

18 The overarching mega-trend that impacts all dimensions of Asian life is globalization.<sup>26</sup> It is an ongoing, inexorable, complex and ambivalent process that impacts as both bane and blessing the world of politics, economics, communications, education, environment, technology, religion, culture, family, and values. Driven as an **economic process** by neo-liberal capitalism it emphasizes free-markets and free trade in order to maximize economic growth. It has led to “free competition” which many critics deem to be detrimental to poor countries whose very poverty makes them unable to compete in the global market.<sup>27</sup> The result is an ever widening gap between the rich and the poor.

As a **cultural phenomenon** using the means of social communication, globalization is quietly and relentlessly disseminating a relatively new culture that threatens cherished cultural values.

### *Culture*

19 The ancient cultures of Asia, once the dominant catalysts of civilizations, are facing the formidable challenge of a globalizing and homogenizing culture that is **secular, materialist, hedonist, consumerist, and relativist**. Driven by a **postmodern spirit** originating from the West, it dismisses the sacred as hardly relevant to truth, claims to unravel the mysteries of the cosmos without any reference to the Divine Creator, ignores religious and ethical norms, and usurps God’s authority over life in all its forms. Unfortunately

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<sup>26</sup> For a concise presentation of Church teachings on globalization, see *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church* (CSDC), Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2004, Chapter 5, esp. nos. 361-367, “Globalization: Opportunities and Risks.”

<sup>27</sup> Pope John Paul II, *Message for World Day of Peace*, 1 January 1998, cited in *Ecclesia in Asia*, no. 39. See also Pope John Paul’s *Homily* in Havana, Cuba, 1998 and his *Address* to the Pontifical Academy of Social Sciences, 2003; Pope Benedict XVI, e.g., *Sacramentum Caritatis*, no. 90.

many sectors of Asian societies have embraced various elements of this culture, most notably consumerism that is catered to by proliferating and sprawling giant shopping malls all over Asia. The post-modern spirit of the 20<sup>th</sup> century is transforming human values and relationships for better or for worse. It is subverting cherished family and Gospel values, such as the sacredness and dignity of human life from the moment of conception, marriage as a lifelong relationship only between man and woman, marriage as a sacrament, and the biblical vision of family. The postmodern spirit clashes with the pervasive Asian sense of the sacred and transcendent.

On the other hand the emerging global culture is admittedly replete with blessings. It has re-emphasized human freedom, human rights and equality. Scientific and technological knowledge is now shared more widely among the peoples of the world. The tools of social communication disseminate information more rapidly than ever imagined and provide new avenues of dialogue and human formation. A new hope for interdependence, interconnectedness and solidarity among the families of the world is rekindled in the midst of conflict, human greed and selfishness.

How the bane and blessings of economic and cultural globalization can be made opportunities of grace through New Evangelization is the over-riding challenge to the Church in Asia. The goal is “globalization without marginalization, globalization with solidarity”<sup>28</sup>

### ***Poverty***

**20** Regional economic disparities mark the economic landscape of Asia. We see high development levels in some of the countries of Asia such as South Korea, Japan, Hong Kong, and Taiwan, rising development in Thailand and Malaysia, and the countries of Central Asia, while most countries in South and Southeast Asia generally lag far behind, mired in wide-spread poverty. Exacerbated by globalization, poverty is heightened by corruption, economic and political imbalances and injustices. The underdevelopment of agriculture which makes up the main production and livelihood of Asian countries contributes to this economic malaise. A new form of poverty has also emerged in the wake of globalization, *the poverty of those who do not know* and are being left behind by the rapid advance

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<sup>28</sup> See *Caritas in Veritate*, no. 42, for some positive possibilities of globalization.

of scientific and technological knowledge. In all these we see the need to promote a culture of evangelical poverty in the Church.

But we also perceive the creative work of God's Spirit in the solidarity of some of the more wealthy sectors of society in the struggle of the poor for a better future and in the increasing participation of the poor in the mission of evangelization and social transformation. All over Asia communities of poor people are becoming more aware of their God-given power to liberate themselves in solidarity with others. Their power to announce God's good news of blessedness for the poor is becoming more deeply embedded in the self-consciousness of a Church that strives to be a Church of the Poor. At the same time Asian economies are being transformed by the drive for sustainable development.

### *Migrants and Refugees*

21 The phenomenon of migrant workers and refugees in search of better work and security – a better future – has been a continuing concern of the FABC<sup>29</sup>. Many Asian migrant workers and refugees often work under most inhumane conditions. They are exploited and abused; their human rights violated. No wonder that the plight of many migrant workers is considered as the “new slavery.” In recent times a new facet has emerged. The concern for internal security, the war on terrorism, the ethnic, cultural, and demographic changes in Western societies due to migration have brought about restrictive measures of migration. The ongoing global economic crisis has sent home literally millions of Asian migrant workers with no assurance that they would be called back to work.

Yet we also discern the work of the Holy Spirit in the phenomenon of Asian migrants. In their places of work they are witnessing to the Asian sense of close family relationships. In the midst of developed secular societies Asian migrants demonstrate their deep spiritual sense. Catholic migrants witness to their faith in Christ and by

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<sup>29</sup> Cf., e.g., “Pastoral Care of Migrants and Refugees: A New Way of Being Church,” OHD Faith Encounters in Social Action V (FEISA), in FAPA, vol. 4, pp. 89-133. The Vatican document *Erga Migrantes Caritas Christi* (The Love of Christ towards Migrants), by the Pontifical Council for the Pastoral Care of Migrants and Itinerant People, 3 May 2004, provides doctrinal, juridical, and pastoral guidance for the ministry to migrants and deserves to be read and reflected on by a wider audience. It is providential that the document is signed by the Council President, the late Stephen Fumio Cardinal Hamao, who had been the distinguished Chairman of the FABC Office of Human Development.

example lead others not only to question their secular spirit but also, by the grace of God, to return to Christian prayer and devotion.

### *Indigenous Peoples*

**22** In the past 15 years the FABC has urged local churches to focus on indigenous peoples as a major pastoral priority. As a social group indigenous peoples remain among the poorest of the poor in Asia. There are about 300 million indigenous peoples in the world and make up only 4.4% of the global population, but they account for about 10% of the poor. And nearly 80% of indigenous groups live in Asia. China and India account for two-thirds of the indigenous peoples of the world.<sup>30</sup> Generally indigenous groups face a triple challenge: economic survival, cultural survival, and threats to their land and environment. Impoverished and marginalized, indigenous peoples are nonetheless gifted by God with distinctively rich cultures, marked by communion with nature. Option for the poor and the vision of becoming a Church of the Poor impel the Church towards a deep concern for indigenous peoples and their marginalization.

### *Population*

**23** The global population in mid-2011 was estimated at seven billion people. Over 60% live in Asia. India and China account for 37% of the global population.<sup>31</sup> With respect to population growth, the policies of Asian governments tend to follow the position of international bodies and developed secularist countries that poverty and “overpopulation” are directly related. The neo-Malthusian theory that population growth is outracing food supply is the reason for controlling population through “reproductive health” concepts and measures that advocate means of birth control contrary to Catholic teaching. We shall continue to insist that population control by such means is not merely a demographic and economic issue but a moral issue.<sup>32</sup> How the Church in Asia will proclaim the Gospel of Life more persuasively in a world where secularist, materialist, and relativist thinking usurps authority over human life from conception to death is a perennial challenge.

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<sup>30</sup> World Bank Study, *Indigenous Peoples, Poverty and Development*, 2010, presented by Harry R. Patrinos.

<sup>31</sup> Data from *World Population Prospects, 2010 Revision*, UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs.

<sup>32</sup> See *Ecclesia in Asia*, no. 7.

## *Religious Freedom*

24 Already besieged by secularism, our faith and our Catholic identity face violent reaction from religious intolerance and extremism that reject religious freedom.<sup>33</sup> In several Asian countries the persecution of Christians is on the rise. Terrorist bombings, abuse and violence against Christians, burning of churches, discrimination, forced conversion of Christians into the dominant religion, anti-Christian laws, create terror and insecurity. Partly because of the inter-active relationships of extremist religious groups, terrorism perpetrated in some parts of the world has repercussions in Asian countries. The rise of religious extremism and violence plays havoc on the Church's vision of inter-religious dialogue.<sup>34</sup>

On the other hand, we also perceive in Asia an increasing awareness of the need for inter-religious dialogue to understand and respect one another. We discern a positive inclination to go beyond dialogue of life in order to collaborate with one another in common social promotion. More and more people believe in dialogue as the principled option to resolve disputes, tensions and conflicts and promote peace and harmony. Surely the FABC experience of inter-religious dialogue for the past 40 years is one of our major contributions to the whole Church.

At the same time the **political ideological threat to religious freedom** is readily observable in some Asian countries that officially profess religious unbelief and want to impose political authority on religious groups. Christians do not have total religious freedom and suffer excessive constraints and sometimes violent repression. In some instances, there is non-recognition of church leadership. The lack of religious freedom because of political ideology causes untold suffering among millions of believers, separated from their own believing communities. Its demise is sadly unforeseeable in the near future.

### *Threats to Life*

25 Increasing threats to life are most disturbing and frightening. Ethnic conflicts, violent repression of ethnic rights, the killing of those who struggle to protect the environment, killings in

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<sup>33</sup> See *Caritas in Veritate*, no. 29.

<sup>34</sup> A very informative background to this megatrend of religious extremism and violence is the work of the FABC Office of Theological Concerns "Religious Freedom in the Context of Asia," 2004, in STAS, chapter 7, pp. 345-76.

the name of national security, arms build-up and even nuclear threat, the lack of medical and social services due to endemic corruption – all these and other threats to life are taking place, sometimes with impunity. As today so in years to come, threats to life will come from continuous arms trade, arms production and build-up, territorial disputes and geopolitical tensions. In cooperation with governments, civil society, other religions and all peoples of good faith we need to search for creative ways towards peace.

Most tragic are the many threats to life against the helpless – the unborn, the hopelessly sick who are considered “burdens” of society. Pre-natal diagnosis is being used to determine gender and possible deformities. Millions of abortions or the destruction of unborn children take place every year, simply because they are female fetuses, or are possibly deformed or simply unwanted. The use of contraceptives, many of which are abortifacients, for reasons of “reproductive health” is becoming official government policy in many Asian countries. Genetic engineering threatens the life of human embryos and considers them as simple objects of experimentation rather than as divinely gifted with human life and dignity.<sup>35</sup> All the above are death-dealing forces that we, on the basis of our faith, strongly condemn. At the same time, the increasing incidence of suicide and euthanasia in some countries points to a perceived emptiness of life, to the loss of meaning and of any motivation for life. All these are abetted by secularism and utilitarianism that ignore moral norms.

### ***Social Communications***

**26** A mega-trend that is developing in quantum leaps with enormous potentialities is Social Communications.<sup>36</sup> The means of social communications now seem to be the primary formator of values especially among the young. Because social communications have a grip on eyes, ears, mind, memory and imagination, their power to form attitudes and values is immeasurable. We strongly inveigh against the secularist, materialist, consumerist, and relativist values that they often impart. But looking beyond the negative is a

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<sup>35</sup> See *Caritas in Veritate*, no. 28; for a valuable pastoral theological reflection on “Respect for Life in the Context of Asia,” see STAS chapter 8, pp. 377-418.

<sup>36</sup> Noteworthy are the *Final Considerations* of the 1999 meeting of Bishops sponsored by the FABC Office of Social Communications that reflected on the implications of John Naisbitt’s *Megatrends Asia* (New York, Simon & Schuster, 1997), on the Church’s work in Social Communications, see FAPA, vol. 3, pp. 165-70.

tremendous opportunity for evangelization. Social communications is a bewildering and exciting new *areopagus* of proclaiming the Good News. Social networking facilitates and creates relationships. The e-generation has emerged, with a free spirit, new interests, new attitudes, and new values. The potentialities of this mega-trend for the mission of new evangelization are incalculable.<sup>37</sup>

### *Ecology*

27 Natural disasters in various parts of Asia and especially the monumental disaster in Japan brought about by a destructive earthquake, tsunami, and nuclear power breakdown on March 11, 2011 bring the ecological question unto the world stage. The old challenge to the integrity of creation had consisted of rapid, indiscriminate and irresponsible deforestation leading to floods, droughts, soil erosion, and loss of life-support systems. Today the ecological question has to do with a far more urgent and destructive issue – that of global warming and climate change. The whole world is experiencing the disastrous signs of climate change. Our world is warming up with the uncontrolled emission of carbon dioxide into the atmosphere particularly in the developed world through the use of fossil-fuel. This creates a greenhouse effect that raises sea temperatures and water levels, breaks up glaciers, melts polar ice, results in extraordinary rainfalls, floods, and extreme weather changes and even the loss of species of animals and plants.

Even now hundreds of thousands are ecological refugees as they search for safer places away from floods and rising sea levels. Climate change is wreaking havoc on agricultural production and on sources of livelihood.

We in Asia are becoming increasingly aware and concerned regarding the ecological problem and its ethical implications.<sup>38</sup> Local churches are collaborating with civil society to care for the integrity of creation. The local concern against polluting the atmosphere, irresponsible mining and logging, destructive fishing, indiscriminate use of pesticides, dumping of e-waste, etc., now extends to the macro-issue of global warming and climate change as well as to the need for

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<sup>37</sup> A Church response to the challenge of Social Communications comes from the FABC-OSC Bishops' Meet 2000 and 2001. See FAPA, vol. 3, pp. 171-77, especially the Bishops' Institute for Social Communications (BISCOM II), "Modern Communication Technologies: Challenge for the Church in Asia?" Bangkok, 1999, see FAPA, vol. 3, pp. 193-96.

<sup>38</sup> See *Final Statement*, FABC-MISEREOR Symposium, "Church Response to the Challenge of Climate Change in Asia: Towards a New Creation," Bangkok, 20 October 2011.

intergenerational justice. This awareness, concern and action on the ecological challenge are being brought down to the level of the grassroots.<sup>39</sup>

### *Laity*

**28** Although we continue to be truly concerned about the lack of informed faith among the laity, the passivity and non-participation of many, we are encouraged by the movement of lay “empowerment,” or the activation of lay charisms that are gifts of the Spirit at Baptism and Confirmation. This empowerment is taking place in local churches all over Asia. The seminal ideas of Vatican II on communion, co-responsibility, and participation have been brought down in Asia to the level of Basic Ecclesial Communities, ecclesial movements, and other faith communities, enabling lay people to participate actively in the mission of the Church, in decision making, and in action for social transformation.<sup>40</sup> The BEC movement is strongly needed in Asia where members of parish communities live very far from parish centers. Most of all intensive faith formation of the laity is imperative and will require a renewed catechesis that the Year of Faith is urging us to do.

### *Women*

**29** For more than a decade now the Church in Asia has considered women as a major pastoral priority. Of most serious concern are discrimination against women, abuses against women and girl-children as in domestic violence, sex tourism and human trafficking. Traditional and cultural practices that exploit and repress women’s rights, sometimes considering women as second class citizens cause utmost distress. We strongly denounce the abuse of women, migrant workers and the abortion of millions of unborn human beings simply because they are female or unwanted. At the same time, we observe in Asia a rising consciousness regarding the mutuality and equality of dignity and rights of man and woman, of gender awareness and sensitivity and the “empowerment” of women. Young women are at the vanguard of movements of freedom

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<sup>39</sup>For illustrative Church responses to climate change, see Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace – MISEREOR, Rome South – South Dialogue Declaration, “Climate Change: A Call to Justice,” 1-2 October 2010; Final Statement of FABC – MISEREOR Seminar, “Church Response to the Challenge of Climate Change in Asia: Towards a New Creation,” Bangkok, 19-20 October 2012.

<sup>40</sup>The Bishops’ Institute for Lay Apostolate (BILA), first organized by the FABC Office of the Laity in 1984, has been significant in promoting lay empowerment.

and peace, of the care for the integrity of creation. They actively participate in the Church's ministry of catechesis, liturgy, family life and youth, health, and social action.

This mega-trend calls the Church in Asia to deeper discernment, compassion and wisdom towards women. Not only do we need to recognize the objective equality of men and women before God but we also have to implement *relational* equality in daily life for a more effective and credible mission of evangelization and integral social transformation.

### **Youth**

**30** It is more than 40 years since Asian Bishops gathered in Manila and, inspired by the message of Pope Paul VI, called the Church to be a "Church of the Poor" and a "Church of the Young".<sup>41</sup> Granting regional differences Asia remains to this day a continent of poor people and of young people. On the one hand, we observe young Asians who are seemingly restless, without direction, drifting into a sub-culture of the easy life, chemical dependency, rebellion, and despondency over meaninglessness and busy-ness. Deeply influenced by secularism and its loss of a sense of transcendence they think of the future as without hope and many just want to give up.

On the other hand, young people are at the forefront of social change, active in movements of freedom, justice, peace, human rights, and the care of the earth. In the Church they are taking their role as subjects of evangelization most seriously. They serve as catechists, lectors, peer counselors, social action workers, promoters of pro-life, and health workers. In a continent of the young, the challenge of the youth is full of hope for the Church in Asia.<sup>42</sup>

### **Pentecostalism**

**31** Recent statistics show a certain decline in Church membership and at the same time a significant increase of membership in so called "born-again, bible-believing" Christians. We tend to console ourselves and say that numbers do not matter as much as quality. Yet the loss of a good number of the faithful to sects and other religious groups is undoubtedly a matter of serious

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<sup>41</sup> See *Final Statement of Asian Bishops' Meeting*, Manila, 1970.

<sup>42</sup> The gatherings of Asian Youth at the regularly held Asian Youth Day are a source of joy to the Church in Asia. They are organized by the Youth Desk of the FABC Office of the Laity. See, for example, *Final Statement of 4<sup>th</sup> Asian Youth Day*, "Youth, Hope of Asian Families," Hong Kong, 30 July – 5 August 2006, in FAPA, vol. 4, pp. 167-71.

concern. The question often asked is why? Why do so many of the flock go over to different religious sects? Why do religious sects attract them? These questions should make us reflect on how we evangelize, how we form the faith of the faithful, and what quality of fellowship our churches have. Providentially the challenge of Pentecostalism is being met with the phenomenal rise and spread of **Catholic renewal communities** such as charismatics, covenant communities, ecclesial movements in Asia, and especially Basic Ecclesial Communities (BEC or Small Christian Communities), parish or diocesan wide. BECs and SCCs as well as many other renewal communities are Asian-born. They witness to the hunger of people for the Word of God and the Eucharist. They provide faith formation, the experience of joyful worship, fellowship and belongingness. They demonstrate the zeal and dedication of lay people to celebrate and witness to their faith in the Lord.

### *Vocations*

**32** Although there may be a certain decline of vocations in more affluent sectors the Church in Asia, as in Africa, is enjoying a springtime of **vocations** to the priestly and religious life. For many decades now, despite our "minority status" in the Asian continent we have become a "sending Church." Dioceses and religious congregations, both indigenous and foreign-born, are now sending lay people, religious, and priests as missionaries from their centers to other Asian countries and to all the other continents of the world. The depth and richness of the Asian spiritual sense is a firm basis for a culture of vocation and is certainly a factor for the great number of young men and women who respond to God's call to the priestly and religious life and to mission.

### *Sub-Conclusion*

**33** These mega-trends are the lights and shadows of an Asian world stirred to profound renewal by the Spirit of God. They offer immense possibilities and hope. Indeed, the positive mega-trends are moments of grace while the negatives are opportunities of grace. They all remind us of our God-given task to mend our Asian world, its broken relationships, the lack of harmony and peace between men and women, between ethnic, cultural and religious groups, between Asian humanity, creation and God. The ever active sanctifying Spirit of God is calling us to cooperate in the task of renewing our Asian world towards justice, integrity, unity, reconciliation, peace and

harmony, and love. The call of the Spirit is a call to New Evangelization.

On these mega-trends in the social, political, cultural, economic, religious and ecological situation we Asian Bishops offer a guide reflection in the light of our faith. How does our faith generally explain the root causes of mega-trends? What directions does our faith offer in order that the Church may address these mega-trends?

### **C. REFLECTING IN FAITH ON THE PASTORAL SITUATION, WE PRAY FOR GUIDANCE**

In the beginning God created the heavens and earth. Everything that came from God was good. There was love, goodness, harmony and peace, a divinely created order.<sup>43</sup>

#### **The Story of Creation**

##### *God's Word and Creative Spirit - Love, Goodness, Harmony*

**34** The two wonderful narratives of creation and the tragic story of sin in chapters 1-3 of the Book of Genesis express God's absolutely gratuitous love. Here we discover profound fundamental truths:

- The heavens and the earth had their origin in and through the word of God. At the very beginning the creative Spirit of God was at work (*Gen 1:1-3*, "a wind from God swept over the face of the waters"...and "God said...");<sup>44</sup>
- God's creative word brought forth into being everything in heaven and earth, light and darkness, the land, seas and skies, all vegetation, night and day, every living creature that moves in the water and on land and God declared everything as "good" (vv. 3-25);
- At the pinnacle of this ordered creation is the human person. God uttered his creative word to bring man and woman together into being - in God's image. Between man and woman there was the joy of communion: "bone of my bones,

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<sup>43</sup> Useful material for this entire faith reflection is the work of the FABC Theological Advisory Commission, now called the Office of Theological Concerns (OTC), "Asian Christian Perspectives on Harmony," in STAS, chapter 4, pp. 111-66, especially pp. 139-46.

<sup>44</sup> Like many biblical scholars Pope John Paul II perceives the Holy Spirit in the "mighty wind," see *Ecclesia in Asia*, no. 15.

flesh of my flesh,” man and wife “become one flesh” (vv. 26-27; *Gen 2:21-25*);

- God blessed man and woman to multiply and fill the earth, to care for it and to have everything on earth for their responsible use. To have dominion over creation is to be responsible stewards of creation. This is the first mandate of solidarity between humankind and the rest of creation. It is at the root of the social and moral principle of the universal destination of created goods (vv. 28-30; *Gen 2:18-20*);
- Having shared his goodness and love with creation and humanity God unconditionally declared all creation as “indeed very good” and affirmed the “integrity of creation” (v. 31);
- The story of creation is, indeed, the story of God’s purely gratuitous love.

### ***Rupture by Sin***

**35** This pristine goodness of creation and of relationships among all creatures, between humanity and God was radically ruptured by the sin of disobedience to God the Creator due to human pride and overweening self-interest.<sup>45</sup> Brokenness entered the relationship between the Creator and humanity. Members of humanity began to blame one another, and the harshness and pain of caring for one another and for the earth began (*Gen 3*).

Yet even after the Fall the magnificence, beauty, order and harmony of the heavens and of the earth and the power of natural forces continue to strike us with awe and move us to humility and reverence. “O Lord our Sovereign, how majestic is your name in all the earth!” (*Pss 8:1, 9*). How truly marvelous God is! Even in the midst of sinfulness in *Genesis 3* humanity receives a *protoevangelium*. To the serpent, the Lord said: “I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; he will strike you and you will strike his heel” (*Gen 3:15*).

### ***Fundamental Principles***

#### **Communion and Solidarity of All Creation**

**36** Thus at the time of Creation God already established the fundamental relationship of communion and solidarity between

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<sup>45</sup> See CSDC, nos. 115-16.

humanity and divinity, between man and woman, within the family, between family and community, and between humanity and the rest of creation.<sup>46</sup>

### **God, the Source and Sustainer of Communion**

37 At the center of these relationships and holding them together is God. These fundamental relationships are in truth overarching religious, moral, and social principles that address major dimensions of the pastoral situation in Asia. The deep Asian sense of the sacred and religious is a basic acknowledgement of the pervading sacred horizon of God as Creator, the source of everything that exists. This Asian religious sense certainly serves as a powerful buffer to the subtle but powerful onslaught of a materialist, secular and an a-religious culture.<sup>47</sup>

### **Centrality of the Human Person and Universal Communion**

38 As the very image of God, *imago Dei*, the human person is central in creation and has inviolable dignity and worth.<sup>48</sup> The centrality of the human person and the original solidarity of the human family directly address situations where human freedom, human dignity and human rights are violated, abused or repressed. The same fundamental principles likewise address such death-dealing forces as the caste system, the inhumane treatment of many migrants, minority-majority cultural, political, economic and religious conflicts, violent and terrorist extremism in the name of religion, and the repression of human freedom by totalitarian and dictatorial regimes.

39 The love, unity, complementarity, and solidarity of man and woman in the Garden of Eden, their divine gift of intimate communion,<sup>49</sup> challenge today's broken family relationships, the disregard of marital vows, the disrespect given to the God-willed marriage as between man and woman. These fundamental principles denounce gender discrimination, the various forms of abuse and exploitation of women, and the evils of social customs and practices that categorize women as subservient to men.

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<sup>46</sup> See CCC, nos.340-44, 360-61.

<sup>47</sup> See CCC, no. 301-02.

<sup>48</sup> See CCC, nos. 356-57; CSDC, nos. 111-14, 132-33.

<sup>49</sup> See CCC, nos. 369-72.

## The Universal Destination of Created Goods

40 The original communion and solidarity that existed at the beginning between humanity and the rest of creation – a situation declared by God as “good,” and implied as well in God’s mandate to cultivate and care for the earth – are moral and social principles that are urgent in our day. “God destined the earth and all it contains for all men and all peoples so that all created things would be shared fairly by all mankind under the guidance of justice tempered by charity.”<sup>50</sup> These are the social and moral principles of the universal destination of created goods, based on the communion and solidarity of all creation. They strongly indict the power of the few to control the use of natural resources that at the time of creation God destined for the use of all humanity. These same principles denounce the continuous destruction of our natural resources, forests, seas, fauna and flora where the common good of the present and future generations is sacrificed for short-term economic gains. It is most tragic that in many cases such destruction is now irreparable and irreversible.

## Responsible Stewardship of the Integrity of Creation

41 In the covenant of creation, God’s mandate for humanity to subdue creation and have dominion over it is nothing more and nothing less than to cultivate the earth and care for it for the sake of all (*Gen* 2:15).<sup>51</sup> Humanity is the steward of God’s creation responsibly making use of creation for the good of humanity. When the principles of stewardship and the “goodness” or integrity of creation, including its beauty and harmony of order, and the universal destination of created goods are wantonly violated we do grave injustice to creation and to generations yet to come. Such are the ethical implications of global warming and climate change. The words of King Solomon are most relevant. He rightly understood that to have dominion over the creatures God had made is to rule over it “in holiness and righteousness.” And so he prayed to God for wisdom (see *Wisdom* 9, 1-3).

42 As a final note, since the time of Genesis the understanding of the origin and development of the universe has changed, for example, by “heavens” today we understand a vast universe of stars, planets and galaxies beyond our ken. Our faith in God as Creator

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<sup>50</sup> *Gaudium et Spes*, no. 583; see also CCC, nos. 299, 2402-03; CSDC, nos. 171-72.

<sup>51</sup> See CCC, no. 373; CSDC, nos. 460, 467, 470.

would certainly include all these and all the worlds not yet discovered – the entire Cosmos as God’s creative handiwork.

### **Telling the Story of Jesus – God’s Gratuitous Love**

**43** Our faith reflection goes further – into the heart of Sacred Scriptures. How does the pristine goodness of the created world and of humanity as well as its rupture by sin relate to the event of salvation wrought by the Lord Jesus? This question is best answered by telling the magnificent story of Jesus.

#### **Proclaiming the Kingdom of God**

**44** The gratuitous love of God manifested in Creation is never as dramatically demonstrated as in the Jesus-event. This is the story that we tell in Asia – Jesus the Compassion of God.

In the very first chapter of the Gospel of Mark, Jesus appears quite suddenly like a meteor flashing through the skies. He is in the prime of his life, energetic, peripatetic, and prophetic. A poor man from Galilee, he begins proclaiming what people had been dreaming of for ages: “The Kingdom of God is at hand. Repent and believe in the Gospel” (*Mk* 1:15). This is both promise and fulfillment. He promises God’s justice and truth, God’s peace and love – the restoration of universal harmony long craved for by a broken world. His message goes far beyond the understanding of his contemporaries. For them the coming of the Kingdom was simply the triumphant return of a Davidic kingdom. He begins to fulfill the promise of God’s Reign through his own example, his parables and miraculous deeds.

#### **Human Dignity, Solidarity and Communion, Preferential Love of the Poor**

**45** Born of poor Asian parents from an obscure Asian village he takes the side of the poor. He is Spirit-filled, Spirit-driven (*Lk* 3:22; 4:1, 14, 18-21). He proclaims the poor blessed (*Lk* 6:20). He reverses the order of values of this world thereby restoring the human dignity of those considered by society as social outcasts and sinners. His extraordinary statement of Beatitudes (*Lk* 6: 22; *Mt* 5:3-12) for those in the underside of history and those who with their minds and hearts pursue righteousness and peace is a veritable charter of God’s Kingdom. He forgives sinners (*Mk* 2:5; *Mt* 7:48, 50), heals the sick with his touch and words (*Mk* 1:40-41; 2:10-11; 3:1-5; 5:25-34), he raises the dead to life (*Mk* 5:35-42; 6:53-56; 7:22-26), he expels unclean spirits

(*Mk* 1:21-27; 5:1-13; 9:14-28). The power of the Kingdom is irrupting into our space and time, forgiving, making whole, and restoring life.

Jesus calls the poor to fellowship with him, thus affirming their human dignity as well as God's preferential love of the poor. He raises his disciples to communion with God whom he calls endearingly in love, "Abba, Father." He extends this communion to all who believe in him, telling them to call upon God in prayer as "Abba" (*Lk* 11: 1-4). It is in faith and total trust in the Father that we are to pray. In his encounters with the needy, Jesus insists on faith and rewards faith (*Mt* 8:13; 17:19). "If you have faith the size of a mustard seed, you will say to this mountain, 'Move from here to there,' and it will move; and nothing will be impossible for you" (*Mt* 17:20-21). "Your faith has saved you" (*Mt* 7:50). With his words and deeds, he leads men and women, the poor and the rich, the sick and the healthy, the outcast and the powerful to have faith and thus to love. And he weeps over the unbelief of Jerusalem (*Lk* 19:41).

### **God's Universal Love, the Harmony of Creation, the Centrality of the Human Person**

**46** He teaches the most profound truths in simple stories and parables. His listeners are rapt in attention as he describes God's providence for the beautiful lilies of the field and the blithe birds in the skies. But he insists that God's benevolent care of the human person is central and transcendent (*Lk* 12:22-29; *Mt* 6:25-34). He tells of the seed sown on different kinds of soil (*Lk* 8:4-15; *Mk* 4:2-9; *Mt* 13:1-23), seeds quietly growing unnoticed (*Mk* 4:26-29), the smallest seed growing into the biggest of trees where the birds of the sky make their nest (*Lk* 13:18-19; *Mt* 13:31-32; *Mk* 4:30-32), the treasure found in a field (*Mt* 13:44), the pearl of great price (*Mt* 13:45). He tells them of cosmic order and of the portents of the skies, the signs of imminent good or bad weather (*Mt* 16:2-3) and of coming rain and heat (*Lk* 12:54), of sun rising and rain falling upon both the good and the bad (*Mt* 5:45). He demonstrates his mastery over creation, stilling the storm at sea (*Mt* 8:23-27; *Mk* 4:35-41; *Lk* 8:22-25) and walking on the water (*Mk* 6:47-52; *Mt* 14:22-33; *Jn* 6:16-21).

From these stories and events and from many others scattered in the four Gospels, the thousands who listened to Jesus learned of the nature of God's Reign and its growth from small beginnings, the universal loving providence of God, the beauty and harmony of

creation, the centrality of the human person, love of one's enemies, God's special love of the poor and the needy.

The Kingdom is for Jesus of paramount and irreplaceable priority, "Seek first the Kingdom of God and everything else will be given to you" (*Lk* 12: 31). Finally Jesus speaks of communion with him and with God his Father in the imagery of the Vine and its branches (*Jn* 15:1-6).

### **Justice, Integrity and Service Beyond Conventions**

**47** Jesus' words and his actions bespeak of astonishing authority that amazes people (*Mt* 7:29). He scandalizes and infuriates the self-righteous when he heals a man on the Sabbath (*Lk* 6:6-11; *Mt* 12:9-14; *Mk* 3:1-6; see also *Jn* 5:16). Breaking the conventions of the times, he speaks freely with a Samaritan woman (*Jn* 4:7 ff, 27) and blesses those who do not seem to count in society, widows, orphans and strangers. He drives out merchants and moneychangers from the place of prayer (*Mk* 11:15-18; *Jn* 2:13-22; *Mt* 21:12-13; *Lk* 19:45-46). He teaches that one cannot serve both God and mammon (*Mt* 6:24; *Lk* 16:13). He approaches and touches lepers and heals them. He courageously denounces the attitudes of religious and political leaders as hypocritical (*Mt* 23). They have neglected, he says, "the weightier matters of the law," the sacred values of justice, mercy, and faith (*Mt* 23:23).

His teaching is neither mere words nor empty action. His very life is a witness to what he teaches. As a teacher of extraordinary personal integrity he is totally credible and effective. Yet while his disciples call him teacher and Lord he is the one who serves (*Jn* 13:3-16) and goes about doing good (*Acts* 10:38).

By his words and actions Jesus brings back his hearers to the fundamentals of faith – love, compassion, justice, integrity, the priority of the spirit over the body, the priority of people over rules, regulations and traditions, the priority of the interior heart over externals. His integrity, justice, and selfless service address the lack of a sense of the public good, the authoritarianism, and the endemic corruption in our Asian societies.

### **Paschal Mystery, Redemption, New Creation**

**48** The totally gratuitous love of God at Creation reaches its climax in Jesus' Passion, Death and Resurrection. In the *kenosis* of his Passion and Death Jesus demonstrates the depth of his love for us,

utterly emptying himself taking the form of a slave. Such love the world has never seen! It is the infinite love of God. Jesus himself told Nicodemus of this indescribable love: "For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life" (*Jn* 3:16).

The manner of Jesus' sacrificial love becomes more and more explicit in the Gospel according to John: "And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself. He said this to indicate the kind of death he was to die" (*Jn* 12: 32-33). As in the act of Creation, so in the mystery of Redemption, the initiative of the Father is the reason for humanity's bond with God: "No one can come to me unless drawn by the Father who sent me" (*Jn* 6:44).

But Redemption is not only about humanity restored to God. It is also about the whole of Creation. Creation is in travail as it waits to share in the "glorious freedom of the children of God" (see *Rom* 8:19-22). The Paschal Mystery of the Word made flesh heals all broken relationships including the disorder of Creation due to humanity's primordial sin. "For in him (Jesus Christ) all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell and through him God was pleased to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, by making peace through the blood of his cross" (*Col* 1: 19-20). Indeed, God's plan in "the fullness of time" is "to gather up all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth" (*Eph* 1:11; *Col* 1:20).

**49** Paul speaks about those who believe in the Lord and are in him as a "new creation... everything has become new!" (*2 Cor* 5:17). The imagery looks back to the words of Isaiah the prophet: "I am about to do a new thing; ... I will make a way in the wilderness and rivers in the desert. The wild animals will honor me..." (*Is* 43:19-21). The imagery looks forward to the *eschaton*: "Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away... And the one who was seated on the throne said, 'See I am making all things new'" (*Rev* 21: 1-5).

Through the Paschal Mystery of Jesus, all broken relationships between individuals and people, between cultures, and ethnic groups, between humanity, Creation and God are restored in him, transforming the entire world into a "new creation." Cosmic harmony is established by the Cosmic Christ so that "God may be all in all" (*1 Cor* 15:28; see *Eph* 4:6).

**50** But human freedom does not always conform to Christ's redemptive grace. Pride, selfishness, and greed continue to destroy creation, disrespect the human person, violate or suppress human rights, discriminate against others, cause wars, perpetrate violence, break the harmony of human relationships, oppress the poor and the needy, etc. Still, in the midst of this chaos of sinfulness and standing over it, is the Risen Christ, our Life and Light, Lord of the Cosmos, who gives us hope of continuing Redemption.

This is the stupendous story of Jesus, the poor Asian, Healer, Teacher, the Suffering Servant, Redeemer, Restorer of Harmony, Solidarity, and Communion, our Peace and Reconciliation, Savior and Lord. In this jubilee year the Spirit of the Lord bids the Church in Asia to recommit herself to the mission of the Lord, to tell his story, be a credible witness to the Risen Christ and be a sign and sacrament of His redeeming work.

#### **D. RESPONDING TO THE PASTORAL CHALLENGES, WE PRAY FOR GENEROSITY AND COURAGE**

**51** For this perennial mission we reaffirm our conviction that the proclamation of Jesus as the Lord and Savior of the world is the very heart of evangelization. We reaffirm the enduring validity of the initial insight of FABC in 1974 that our mode of evangelizing is by way of dialogue, particularly the triple dialogue with the peoples of Asia, especially with the poor, with the rich and ancient cultures of Asian peoples, and with their many religious and philosophical traditions.<sup>52</sup> Our overarching pastoral priority remains that of building the Local Church as the subject of evangelization.

#### **Basic Postulates of the Church's Response**

To respond credibly and effectively to the mega-trends in Asia and within the Church that affect our faith and its proclamation we return, in a spirit of renewal, to our basic identity as Church-in-mission and disciples of the Lord. This identity includes the following fundamental and inseparable dimensions:

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<sup>52</sup> The Bishops of Myanmar have raised the idea of a "quadruple dialogue," that would include a dialogue with atheism, the product of either radical secularism or of political ideology.

## The Prophetic Role of the Church

52 The Risen Lord bequeathed to the Apostles and disciples a prophetic identity such as that of the prophets of old – to teach all nations what he has commanded. The prophetic identity requires a mind-set and a worldview. The mindset is to be totally conformed to the mind of Christ, as St. Paul reminds us: “Have among yourselves the same attitude that Christ Jesus had” (*Phil* 2:3). The worldview is to regard discipleship and apostolicity as being immersed in and engaged with the world while adhering to values that are not of this world but are of the Reign of God (*Jn* 17:11, 14, 16, 18). As Paul reminds us: “Do not conform yourselves to this age but be transformed by the renewal of your mind; that you may discern what is good and pleasing and perfect” (*Rom* 12:2).

The Church is a prophet who receives and proclaims the word of God and serves as a countersign to the prevailing values of today’s secularist and materialist spirit.<sup>53</sup>

### A New Evangelization

53 In most of Asia, as in Mongolia where Catholic presence is only 20 years old, the paramount need is for “first proclamation”.<sup>54</sup> It is noteworthy that with only a few hundred Catholic families, the local church in Mongolia looks towards a catechumenate faith formation program and the building of Basic Ecclesial Communities as a pastoral vision. However, given the worldwide influence of the secularist and materialist spirit on the cultural, social, economic, social communications, scientific and technological, civic and political sectors of life,<sup>55</sup> a renewed faith is necessary. A New Evangelization is imperative. Recalling the axiom that no evangelization can be authentic without proclaiming Jesus, “new in its ardor, methods and expression”,<sup>56</sup> We do recall that from its very beginning the FABC has been promoting a new evangelization by its vision of a Church in Asia becoming a “*new way of being Church*.” The New Evangelization has to take in the whole of creation, which the post-modern mind is emptying of its sacredness, its divine origin, its

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<sup>53</sup> See *Propositio* 8, “Witnessing in a Secularized World.”

<sup>54</sup> Cf. *Propositio* 9, “New Evangelization and First Proclamation.”

<sup>55</sup> See Synod of Bishops on the New Evangelization for the Transmission of the Christian Faith, *Instrumentum Laboris*, nos. 51-67.

<sup>56</sup> John Paul II, *Discourse* to the XIX Assembly of C.E.L.A.M, March 9, 1983.

religious and moral dimension, and its divine destiny. The New Evangelization has to insist on the religious and moral character of God's Creation where God dwells in many and various ways. Like Christ driving away the vendors and moneychangers from the Outer Court of the Temple, the Church in Asia has to have a restless zeal for the Father's house (cf. *Jn* 2:17) where worship of the Creator, Redeemer, and Sanctifier is unending and where heartfelt gratitude for God's handiwork is "right and just."

### **The Word of God, the Mystical and Liturgical Dimension of Our Pastoral Response**

**54** Our pastoral response must come from the heart, a heart that listens to the Word of God and proclaims the Word.<sup>57</sup> A deep personal encounter with Jesus, the Word of God, is basic to the New Evangelization. "This is the 'contemplative dimension' of the New Evangelization which is nourished continually through prayer, beginning with the liturgy, especially the Eucharist, source and summit of the life of the Church."<sup>58</sup> Despite the inroads of the post-modern world the peoples of Asia still have a strong "mystical" dimension, a lively sense of God the Absolute One, a lived experience of transcendence, and consequently a constant recourse to prayer. How inspired we were, indeed, by a sharing in this Assembly that when there were no priests and no sacraments it was the prayer of the faithful, especially the Rosary, which kept their faith alive! Just as Paul VI,<sup>59</sup> Benedict XVI emphasizes prayer:

Development needs Christians with their arms raised towards God in prayer, Christians moved by the knowledge that truth-filled love, *caritas in veritate*, from which authentic development proceeds, is not produced by us, but given to us. For this reason, even in the most difficult and complex times, besides recognizing what is happening, we must above all else turn to God's love.<sup>60</sup>

Previous FABC Plenary Assemblies have pointed out the need for *holy evangelizers, men and women of deep God-experience*.<sup>61</sup> If, indeed, in many places in Asia the silent witness of one's Christian life is the

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<sup>57</sup> See *Propositio* 11, "New Evangelization and Prayerful Reading of Sacred Scriptures."

<sup>58</sup> *Propositio* 36, "Spiritual Dimension of the New Evangelization."

<sup>59</sup> Cf. *Populorum progressio*, nos. 20, 75.

<sup>60</sup> See *Caritas in Veritate*, no. 79.

<sup>61</sup> E.g., FABC V, *Final Statement* in FAPA, vol. 1, pp. 288-89.

only way of proclaiming Jesus as the Lord and Savior,<sup>62</sup> one can see how such God-experience is necessary and crucial.

### **Spirituality of Communion**

**55** A spirituality of communion is the spirituality for our times. It is a spirituality of discipleship, of following in the footsteps of Jesus, whose communion with *Abba* his Father meant a mission of love for humankind and the cosmos. It is rooted in the Trinitarian communion of love that flows into communion with one's neighbor, with creation, communion in the family, and the Church as communion. It is a spirituality that responds from the depths of the spirit to the brokenness and disharmonies of our Asian world. With such spirituality we become persons of God-experience, credible and effective in telling the story of Jesus to Asia.<sup>63</sup> A pastoral and practical demonstration of a spirituality of communion would be the solidarity and cooperation in the mission of evangelization at various levels of the Church, within the local church and among local churches.

### **The Holy Spirit and New Evangelization**

**56** Just as Jesus was Spirit-filled and Spirit-driven as he journeyed through the length and breadth of Palestine preaching the coming of the Reign of God, so must his disciples be filled with the Spirit and led by the Spirit. Jesus promised them the Holy Spirit. "When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you to all the truth... he will take what is mine and declare it to you" (*Jn* 16: 12-14). "The Holy Spirit whom the Father will send in my name, he will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you" (*Jn* 14:26).

It was a promise fulfilled on Pentecost day. Gathered in prayer with Mary, the Mother of the Lord, the Holy Spirit descended upon them and transformed their fear and timidity into courage, daring, and zeal. Spirit-filled and Spirit-driven they went forth to evangelize the world, proclaiming the Risen Lord as the Savior of the world. The Holy Spirit is the Spirit of the New Evangelization. He awakens our faith and communicates to us the new life which is "to know the

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<sup>62</sup> See *Ecclesia in Asia*, no. 23.

<sup>63</sup> On spirituality of communion see FABC V, *Final Statement* in FAPA vol. 1, pp. 288-89; FABC VI, *Final Statement* in FAPA, vol.2, pp. 6-8; FABC VIII, *Final Document*, 2004, in FAPA, vol. 3, pp. 39-40; see also OTC paper "Asian Christian Perspectives on Harmony," 1996, in STAS, Chapter 4, pp. 151-64; Pope John Paul II, *Ecclesia in Asia*, no. 24.

Father and the one whom he has sent, Jesus Christ". It is the Holy Spirit who makes a new evangelization credible and effective. Through him we pray, in him we are united with Christ, with him we evangelize with new fervor, creativity, and zeal.

Ultimately it is the Triune God, Father, Son and Spirit who builds his house - the Church and the Cosmos. With his grace we are co-builders in the religious, cultural, social, scientific and technological, civic and political, economic, social communications and ecological spheres of Asian life.

## **CONCLUSION: PRAYER TO OUR BLESSED MOTHER**

57 Attaching the resolutions of this Assembly we close our reflections by invoking the assistance of our Blessed Mother:

O Mary, our Blessed Mother,  
You listened and said "Yes" to the word of God.  
And thus in Asia you brought forth Jesus, the only begotten  
Son of God.  
Help us, O Woman of the Word, to listen and say "Yes" to  
God's word  
that summons us to proclaim your Son as our Lord and Savior.

Overshadowed by the Holy Spirit, you reflected and pondered  
on God's word.  
Intercede for us that the Spirit may grant us a discerning heart  
so that we may discover His presence and activity  
amid the daunting challenges facing us in Asia.

You were the first of the Lord's disciples.  
O Mother of all Disciples, pray for us  
that we may follow Jesus more closely and be conformed  
to his mind and values rather than to those of our secularized  
world.

Your faith in God and in your Son brought you bravely to the  
Cross.  
Help us, O Woman of Faith, to know, deepen and live our faith  
that we too may bear our cross in the suffering and sorrows  
of Asian peoples and guide them to the light of the  
Resurrection.

At Pentecost you were in the midst of the Apostles in prayer. Assist us that we may be filled with the Holy Spirit and be united with your Son in holiness through the Eucharist, prayer and “faith working through love,” (Gal. 5:6) ready and eager to tell the story of your Son with new fervor and zeal.

We entrust ourselves and our mission of New Evangelization to you, O Mother of Asia, our Star of Evangelization. Remember us before the Lord today and always. Amen.

## **PASTORAL RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE X FABC PLENARY ASSEMBLY**

Our Plenary Assembly has proposed a number of recommendations for New Evangelization, on knowing, living and sharing our faith in Asia. We have selected a few of them to address the megatrends and ecclesial realities in Asia and we recommend them to the entire Church in Asia:

### **ON THE GREAT PRIORITY**

1. That every local church at all its levels discern a concrete plan of action to develop and nurture a deeper sense of urgency for new evangelization. That practical steps are taken for such formation of all sections of the Church especially of the laity making use of the Small Christian Communities as the milieu for such an effort.

### **ON FAITH FORMATION**

2. That all our institutions from Diocesan to Parochial, particularly educational institutions make special effort for the faith formation and value education of all people especially the young so that they will be able to respond with Christian maturity to the process of secularization. That the long cherished Asian values be fostered among the younger generation.

## ON MEGATRENDS AND ECCLESIAL REALITIES

### *Poverty*

3. That local churches, keeping in mind the Asian pastoral preference for living dialogue with the poor, promote a culture of evangelical poverty and foster among all pastoral agents, particularly among bishops, priests and religious, a deep concern for the poor so as to credibly witness to the Lord Jesus who himself had a preferential love for the poor.

### *Threats to Life*

4. That Episcopal Conferences and local churches promote a “culture of life” in response to the growing “culture of death”, to the issues of abortion and to all other unacceptable initiatives for reproductive health and inculcate responsible parenthood and natural family planning. Such concern needs to be expressed in supporting movements and organizations in Asia that engage in the defense of life. That we also need to keep in mind that the ‘culture of death’ extends to the lives of millions of Asians threatened by hunger, malnutrition, unemployment, criminal activities, environmental exploitation, violence, war, terrorism and other similar causes.

### *Dialogue and Peace*

5. That in view of the 50th Anniversary of *Pacem in Terris*, the Episcopal Conferences, local churches, and FABC offices intensify their efforts in building a culture of peace using distinctly Christian approaches such as dialogue, reconciliation and forgiveness, and especially by establishing better relations with other cultures, religions and also with secular movements in order to achieve their noble goals.
6. That in view of the positive experience of the X FABC Plenary Assembly in Vietnam, FABC encourage a continued dialogue between the Church in Vietnam and the government and indeed between all Churches in the FABC territory and their respective governments. A similar dialogue between the Holy See and China is also encouraged with a hope that a future FABC Plenary Assembly may soon take place in that great country.

### *Ecology*

7. That the entire Church in Asia inculcate a new sense of environmental responsibility among all its members making it

part of spirituality, Christian practice and ministry. That the FABC Offices collaborate and network with one another and with other concerned groups on the burning issues related to ecology and climate change. The teaching of the recent popes and of FABC on this important and urgent issue should form part of the formation of Christians. Disseminating the FABC Climate Change Declaration may be one concrete step towards this goal.

That the Office of Theological Concerns develop a Theology of Creation taking into account the urgent concerns of contemporary Asian realities.

### *Migrants and Itinerant Peoples*

8. That a network of pastoral care for migrant workers and itinerant people and their families be established by the sending and receiving communities.
9. That a systematic faith-formation program for migrant workers be developed so that they could be effective witnesses to the Gospel and evangelizers themselves in their places of work.

### *Indigenous Peoples*

10. That the Episcopal Conferences and local churches provide effective spiritual and pastoral assistance for the integral growth of indigenous peoples and the preservation of the values in their cultures. That since openness of indigenous peoples to the Gospel is one of the signs of the times it should be matched by a greater commitment to their evangelization.

## **ON ENGAGEMENT WITH THE MODERN WORLD**

11. That we promote a prophetically critical and at the same time a discerning approach to the emerging trends of post-modernism and forces of secularization and globalization in Asia, avoiding any form of pessimistic, condemnatory or aggressive stance which might prevent the Christian community from entering into a constructive dialogue with them, upholding the centrality of God and religion in human life and preserving a sense of the sacred.

## GENERAL RECOMMENDATION

12. That Episcopal Conferences, particular and local churches make available the FABC Plenary Assembly documents in local languages so that the thinking of Asian Bishops regarding the renewal of the Church in Asia may be accessible to our people. Furthermore, these documents should be resources for initial and on-going formation programs for pastoral agents.

## COMMITMENT

In this Year of Faith and on the occasion of the 40th anniversary of the FABC we firmly commit ourselves and our resources to the Church's mission of New Evangelization – to proclaim Jesus as the Lord and Savior and to tell his story to the peoples of Asia with 'new ardor, new methods and new expressions' – in triple dialogue.

## RENEWED EVANGELIZERS FOR NEW EVANGELIZATION IN ASIA

*Message of the X FABC Plenary Assembly*  
Xuan Loc and Ho Chi Minh City,  
Vietnam, 10<sup>th</sup> to 16<sup>th</sup> December 2012

“We declare to you what we have seen and heard” (1 *John* 1:3).

We, the Bishops representing member-Episcopal Conferences and Associate Members of the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences (FABC) were gathered together in Xuan Loc and Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam, from 10 to 16 December 2012, for the X FABC Plenary Assembly. With us were: the Holy Father's Special Envoy, Gaudencio Cardinal Rosales; the Secretary of the Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples, Archbishop Savio Hon Tai-Fai SDB; the non-resident Pontifical representative to Vietnam, Archbishop Leopoldo Girelli; fraternal delegates of the continental Federations of Episcopal Conferences of Oceania, Latin America and Europe; representatives of a few funding and donor partners; the Bishops and Secretaries of the FABC Offices; and invited guests. There were a total of 111 participants (7 Cardinals, 69 Bishops, 35 priests, religious and laity).

## Gratitude

We thank the Lord for the historic approval of the *Statutes* of the FABC 40 years ago. What extraordinary blessing it is for us that four important events converge with the FABC ruby anniversary: the Year of Faith, the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the opening of the Second Vatican Council, the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the publication of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, and the just concluded XIII Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops on the New Evangelization for the Transmission of the Christian Faith.

All these events awaken us to our deepest identity – we are a community of faith called by the Lord to a mission of evangelization in the world. We thank the Lord for blessing the FABC in its ongoing work of renewing the mission of love and service in Asia.

We are deeply grateful for the exceedingly warm welcome and hospitality extended to us by the Church in Vietnam, particularly in Xuan Loc and Ho Chi Minh City. We thank the Government of Vietnam for its openness to, and support for, our gathering in this country blessed with rich cultures and traditions. We wish God's special blessings upon the Church in Vietnam and all the people of Vietnam.

We also express our communion and solidarity with, and encouragement for, the Catholic Church in China. We missed the presence of its representatives in our Assembly and we dearly hope that one day we would have a wider fellowship with their active participation in the FABC. We are united with them in prayer that the peace, joy and hope that Christ came to bring may reach all in that great country.

We convey our deep gratitude to all the Laity, men and women in Consecrated Life, Priests and Bishops who carry out the mission of evangelization in the most difficult situations even at the risk of their lives. Their courage for the Lord's Gospel and their dedication greatly edify and inspire us.

This has been truly a Week of Faith. Our faith in the Lord has been stirred into flame by the deep and lively faith of the people in the Church in Vietnam and by the story of their martyrs. Through the

supreme witnessing of martyrs, the power of faith and hope shines forth.

In the light of the Word, our Plenary Assembly discerned the paths of mission to which the Spirit of God is beckoning us. Guided by the Spirit we read the signs of the times, the social mega-trends in Asia and our own ecclesial realities, and analyzed the unfolding challenges and opportunities so that we might respond to them from the depths of our faith. We have the daunting mission of proclaiming Jesus as the Lord and Savior amid rapid changes in Asia. For this reason we are ever more aware that we need to be a more Christ-experiencing and Christ-witnessing community. At the core of the New Evangelization initiated by Blessed Pope John Paul II and reiterated by Pope Benedict XVI is the clarion call to be authentic and credible witnesses of Jesus the Lord and Savior.

The same Spirit who animated Vatican II now summons us to become **renewed evangelizers for a New Evangelization**. It is the Spirit who can fashion this newness in our Church and in each one of us. It is the Spirit who enables us to respond credibly and effectively to the social mega-trends and ecclesial realities that our Assembly has discerned.

To be renewed as evangelizers we have to respond to the Spirit active in the world, in the depths of our being, in the signs of the times and in all that is authentically human. *We need to live a spirituality of New Evangelization.*

For such spirituality, we offer you some fundamental dimensions:

**1 Personal encounter with Jesus Christ.** New evangelizers need first and foremost a living faith that is grounded in a deep, personal, and transforming encounter with the living person of Jesus Christ, an encounter resulting in personal conversion and discipleship of Jesus in word and deed. In the final analysis, we proclaim the one whom we have seen, whom we have heard and touched (see *1 John* 1:1-3). This personal encounter and discipleship is indispensable. Without it none will be able to touch the soul of Asia.

**2 Passion for mission.** If we exist for mission, we need to have a passion for mission. The story of the Church in Asia is intertwined

with the story of missionaries and martyrs – laymen and women, consecrated persons and clergy – who dared to risk their lives for the sake of Christ. Their story inspires and emboldens us. They epitomize the passion for mission in a manner that is impossible for human beings, but possible for God (cf. *Luke* 18:27). Blessed Pope John Paul II affirmed, “A fire can only be lit by something that is itself on fire... (we) have to be on fire with the love of Christ and burning with zeal to make him known more widely, loved more deeply, and followed more closely” (*Ecclesia in Asia*, 23). The words of St. Paul move our hearts: “the charity of Christ urges us” (*2 Corinthians* 5:14) to share the unique love of Jesus with the whole world. For we firmly believe that the aspirations of Asian peoples find their ultimate fulfillment in Jesus, who is Life.

**3 Focus on the Kingdom of God.** The proclamation of Jesus affects every aspect of life and stratum of society – the whole of human life. Hence the spirituality of the new evangelizer does not separate our world from God’s Reign. It does not separate the material from the religious, nor does it divorce faith-life from the task of transforming the socioeconomic and political life. Above all, the spirituality of the new evangelizer does not separate Jesus Christ from the Kingdom, nor detach the values of the Kingdom from the Person of Jesus. To focus on the Kingdom of God is to commit oneself to Jesus and His vision of a new humanity patterned after Him.

**4 Commitment to communion.** Jesus prayed for us that we might be in communion with the Father, with him and with one another (cf. *John* 17:20-22). Through his Passion, Death, and Resurrection, he restored all things to himself and brought humanity and all creation to communion with the Father and the Spirit. Like Jesus, new evangelizers should be men and women who live and promote communion. *The spirituality of communion is, in truth, the spirituality of the New Evangelization.* Blessed Pope John Paul II reminds us that “communion and mission are inseparably connected.” Communion with the Triune God is “both the source and fruit of mission: communion gives rise to mission and mission is accomplished in communion” (*Ecclesia in Asia*, 24, citing *Christifideles Laici*, 32). This then should be our motto: “communion for mission” and the “mission of communion” (*Ecclesia in Asia*, 25). Evangelizers will be effective to the extent that they live a deep contemplative communion with Jesus and commit themselves generously to being

witnesses and promoters of communion with God, with one another, and with creation.

In the Asian quest for harmony amid increasing tensions and conflicts, all members of the Church – clergy and laity, men and women, youth and children – are called to be evangelizers, heralds of the Word, peacemakers, and builders of communion. Such a communion expresses itself in a vibrant communion of communities in our parishes and dioceses.

**5 Dialogue, a mode of life and mission.** The New Evangelization calls for a spirit of dialogue that animates daily living and opts for a unifying, rather than adversarial, relationship. Dialogue has to be a hallmark of all forms of ministry and service in Asia. It is characterized by humble sensitivity to the hidden presence of God in the struggles of the poor, in the riches of people's cultures, in the varieties of religious traditions, and in the depths of every human heart. Such dialogue is our mode of life and our mode of mission. It is fundamental to a spirituality of communion for the renewed evangelizer.

**6 Humble presence.** We believe that everyone in Asia is a partner and co-pilgrim in the journey to God's Reign, that the fields of mission are grounds of the mysterious presence and action of God's Spirit. In the vast mission in Asia the silent but eloquent witness of an authentic Christian life requires a humble presence, a mode of dialogical living that includes a prayerful and "contemplative" way of life. This is imperative for renewed evangelizers amid cultures that value self-effacement and prayer. Humble presence must be matched by simplicity of life and communion with the poor.

**7 Prophetic evangelizer.** To be prophetic is to be aware in the light of the Holy Spirit of the contradictions of our Asian world and to denounce whatever diminishes, degrades and divests God's children of their dignity. The renewed evangelizer has to protect the human dignity of all, especially of women and children and of those reduced to the condition of living almost as non-persons in our Asian society. By so denouncing injustice, the renewed evangelizer announces the love of God, "the weightier matters of the law" which are justice, mercy and faith (*Matthew 23:23*), and Jesus' preferential love of the poor.

**8 Solidarity with victims.** We have noted in our Assembly that the number of victims of globalization, injustice, natural and nuclear disasters, and of attacks by fundamentalists and terrorists, is growing by the day. Jesus took the side of victims of disasters and injustices. He was in solidarity with those cast out of the social mainstream. Solidarity with and compassion for victims and the marginalized has to be an essential dimension of the spirituality for renewed evangelizers.

**9 Care of creation.** Our Assembly has likewise noted the unabated abuse of creation due to selfish and shortsighted economic gains. Human causes contribute significantly to global warming and climate change, the impact of which affects the poor and the deprived more disastrously. The ecological concern, the care for the integrity of creation, including inter-generational justice and compassion, is fundamental to a spirituality of communion.

**10 Boldness of faith and martyrdom.** From the beginning of Christianity until now Asia's soil is marked by the blood of martyrs. If today we are called to give witness to our faith by supreme sacrifice, we are not to recoil. Jesus has forewarned us that such a sacrifice is the ultimate sign of total fidelity to him and his mission. Let the martyrs of our lands, many of whom are celebrated at our altars, inspire us by their example and empower us with their intercession. We are grateful to Blessed Pope John Paul II and Pope Benedict XVI for proclaiming many Asian witnesses to Christ as martyrs of the Church. Indeed, "*the blood of martyrs is the seed of Christianity.*"

## **Conclusion**

In this Year of Faith, in the second decade of the new millennium, and on the occasion of the 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the FABC, we appeal to all in the Church in Asia to nurture a special passion for New Evangelization.

We should not be led into lethargy or pessimism by Asian social mega-trends which threaten the fabric of our society, the stability of the family and the faith-vision of the Christian community itself. Hidden in them might be the inner resources of the Spirit veiled within Asian values, the seeds of a new humanity hungering for fullness of life in Jesus.

The mission of new evangelization, new in its ardor, its methods and its expressions, is urgent. It calls for renewed evangelizers with a renewed spirituality, the spirituality of communion, of mission, of new evangelization. Every parish, every community, every family should be a school of this spirituality. It requires the new evangelizer to experience deep conversion, a change of vision as well as conformity with the attitude and the mind of Christ, and communion with God. It requires a living faith in the Lord, the entrustment of oneself to God, a following of Jesus in mind, heart, and deed.

The “small flock” of Jesus should not be timid or fearful among Asia’s billions, more than 60% of the world’s population. For we have the singular resource of our faith, Jesus Christ himself, the unique gift of God to humanity. He journeys with us just as he did with his disciples on the way to Emmaus (*Luke 24:13-32*). At every Eucharistic celebration, he keeps opening our eyes and warming our hearts with the fire of love for a New Evangelization in Asia.

May Mary, the Mother of Jesus and our Mother, accompany us as we walk the roads of Asia, to “tell the story of Jesus.” We are not to fear. We have the Lord’s assurance, “Take heart, it is I; do not be afraid” (*Matthew 14: 27*). And we have his guarantee, “remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age” (*Matthew 28:20*).

Xuan Loc & Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam  
16 December 2012

**XI FABC PLENARY ASSEMBLY**

**THE CATHOLIC FAMILY IN ASIA:  
DOMESTIC CHURCH OF THE POOR  
ON A MISSION OF MERCY**

*Final Statement and Message XI Plenary Assembly*

[Colombo, Sri Lanka,  
28<sup>th</sup> November to 4<sup>th</sup> December 2016]

**INTRODUCTION**

**To the Church in Asia**

1. Gathered at the XI Plenary Assembly of the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences in Colombo (Sri Lanka), we Asian Bishops proclaim the Joy of the Gospel of Mercy to the Asian Family.<sup>1</sup>

The Extraordinary Jubilee Year of Mercy has officially ended, but the merciful and compassionate God continues to shower his blessings upon us.

2. We share with you our reflection on the Asian family. We begin with the prayer with which Pope Francis concludes his post-synodal apostolic exhortation *Amoris Laetitia* on love in the family (2016):

*Jesus, Mary and Joseph, in you we contemplate  
the splendor of your love; to you we turn with trust.*

*Holy Family of Nazareth, grant that our families too  
may be places of communion and prayer,  
authentic schools of the Gospel and small domestic churches.*

*Holy Family of Nazareth, may families never again experience  
violence, rejection and division;*

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<sup>1</sup> We note with sadness the absence of representatives from the Church in China. We express our solidarity with all the suffering Church.

*may all who have been hurt or scandalized  
find ready comfort and healing.*

*Holy Family of Nazareth, make us once more mindful  
of the sacredness and inviolability of the family,  
and its beauty in God's plan.*

*Jesus, Mary and Joseph, Graciously hear our prayer.  
Amen. (AL 324)*

A truly beautiful prayer. A prayer of the family for all seasons. It reminds us of God's plan for the family to be a shrine of prayer and a sanctuary of life in communion. It recalls to us the inviolability of marriage, its sacredness and beauty. These are gifts of God's mercy and impel us to move forward in the renewal of the Catholic family in Asia.

### **FABC Vision of the Family - Major Lines**

3. Renewal is not rudderless or direction-less. For the Spirit of Jesus has inspired the Church in Asia to fashion a vision for the Catholic family. The family is nothing less than the "focal point of evangelization towards a culture of integral life" (VIII FABC Plenary Assembly, Daejeon, 2004). The family is "to live the Eucharist" in Asia and be "Eucharistic" by loving, sharing and serving especially the poor and the needy (IX FABC Plenary Assembly, Manila, 2009). The Holy Spirit is calling the Asian Family to a mission of "New Integral Evangelization" (X FABC Plenary Assembly, Xuân Lộc, 2012).

Recent Ordinary Synods of Bishops on the Eucharist (2005) and on the Word of God (2008), the Extraordinary (2014) and the Ordinary (2015) Synods of Bishops on the Family, the International Eucharistic Congress (Cebu, Philippines, 2016), and recent pronouncements by Pope Francis (e.g., *Evangelii Gaudium*, 2013; *Misericordiae Vultus*, 2015; *Laudato Si'*, 2015) have abundantly enriched the Asian vision of family.

Renewal of the Catholic family in Asia is oriented towards this vision. We wish to journey on the road to renewal by reflecting on the theme: The Catholic Family in Asia, Domestic Church of the Poor on a Mission of Mercy.

## **FABC Vision of a Church of the Poor**

4. Church of the Poor is a vision where all members of the Church, be they materially poor or enormously rich in the goods of this world, live in a spirit of evangelical poverty, characterized by detachment from material possessions. They acknowledge that everything is a gift of God.

The Church of the Poor is one where before the Lord we confess our poverty of spirit, the poverty of our sinfulness, as well as our total dependence on God. It is a Church that pledges option for the poor, is in solidarity with them and strives to defend their rights and dignity. It is a sharing and serving Church that promotes social justice for the poor with their many faces. Its Lord is Jesus of Nazareth, who made himself poor that we might become rich with his grace.

On our journey towards that vision, we recall the Letters of John to the Seven Churches in Asia in the Book of Revelation. The Letters speak of daunting challenges to the churches as well as the promise of hope. Discernment and conversion are necessary for hope to be realized. We hear the plaintive refrain in the Letters: "Whoever has ears ought to hear what the Spirit says to the churches" (*Rev* 2:7,11,17,29; 3:8,13,22). We, too, listen and discern.

### **Questions for the Journey to the Vision**

5. The Asian Family is at the crossroads. We are faced with a barrage of questions. Besieged by a thoroughly secularist, individualistic and materialist culture which is at the heart of the postmodern spirit, will the Asian family succumb to the spirit of "global indifference"? Or will it preserve that human and Kingdom value so characteristic of the Asian spirit - a deep dynamic sense of community as well as of mercy and compassion?

We raise these questions as we face a world full of contradictions. Battered by images of human suffering through natural disasters, the world's compassion flows out in steady streams of relief aid. But the silent scream of millions in teeming poverty is literally ignored, like collateral damage in the uneven war of economic globalization. When millions of refugees flee from political and ideological wars, the world takes notice. But when hundreds of

Christians are massacred and thousands of families flee for their lives, their homes and churches burned, hardly any protest is heard.

## **PART I - PASTORAL CONTEXT OF THE FAMILY**

### **A. Family - Asianness**

6. A significant Asian character of Catholic families is the fact that they are a very small minority in this massive continent of great ancient religions. Also an Asian character is the great number of interfaith marriages in most countries.

But Catholic families share values and characteristics that cut across the rich variety of Asian cultures, ethnicities, and religions.

We observe the close intergenerational family kinship in Asian families. This is palpably true for the nuclear Asian family of parents and children but also includes the extended family of cousins, nephews, nieces, grandparents and grandchildren. We see the great respect and honor, nay, affection that families give the elderly. Asian families typically love children and have the great desire to have children, for children are God's gifts and blessings.

We ourselves testify to a culture of caring for family members who are physically or mentally disadvantaged, the welcoming hospitality of Asian families despite their poverty, their support of one another in times of need, of grief, of disaster. For Catholic families, parents and children are participating together more frequently in the celebration of Holy Mass and praying more together.

7. These rich family characteristics are fundamentally due to a deep Asian sense of the sacredness of marriage and of family life, a deep sense that is culturally passed on from generation to generation. A general sense of the sacred is in fact a pervasive value in Asian cultures. It helps Asians to value and protect life from conception to natural death as well as preserve the stability of marriages.

Still, the minority status of Catholic families in Asia impacts their pastoral responses to the challenges that they face. Collaboration with families of other faiths would be absolutely necessary.

## **B. Major Pastoral Challenges to the Family**

The Asian family faces challenges of far-reaching proportions. Among them are the following:

### *Persecution - Religious Freedom under Siege*

8. The variety of races, ethnicities and cultures in Asia from Central Asia through South and East Asia and down to Southeast Asia, from the plains to the mountains, should be a great source of pride and joy. They are a rich mosaic of the human tapestry that God our Creator has gifted Asia.

But harmony and peace do not always reign. Violent clashes of culture and ethnicity, often with religious and political overtones, dot the Asian landscape.

In some parts of South Asia and Southeast Asia, Christian families have fled their homes for safety, literally driven away by religious bigots and radicals. Families have been massacred. Churches have been razed to the ground. Christians live in fear, in anxiety and insecurity, under the sword of anti-Christian laws that do not welcome religious pluralism. Numerous are the cases of abducted Christian girls, forcibly converted and forced into marriage.

And sadly, we see an increasing level of aggressive and militant religious intolerance in many Asian countries.

### *Poverty, Migration and Dislocation*

9. While there are certainly regional economic differences – note for instance the level of economic development in the East Asian region, as well as in Singapore and Malaysia – pervasive and massive poverty is the condition of millions of families in South Asia and Southeast Asia. The evils of human trafficking, the lure of the sex industry for children, youth and adults, the willingness of many to be involved in child pornography are mainly due to poverty and deprivation.

The negative effects of economic globalization on poor families that cannot compete fairly against the rich and more powerful in a regime of free liberalized markets cannot be overestimated. Unable to access the sources and benefits of economic development that flow directly to the upper levels of Asian societies,

poor families are of necessity drawn to seek a better future in urbanized centers in their own countries or serve as migrant workers in more developed countries as in Singapore and Malaysia and in the East Asian region, and especially in the Middle East and in Europe.

Such internal and external migration of family members is often to the social detriment of the families left behind. Conjugal bonds and family relationships are broken by prolonged absences. Children grow up without the guidance of both parents. Love cannot be expressed merely by remittances sent to support families.

Moreover, many migrant workers suffer inhumane treatment and the phenomenon has been called a “new slavery”. Their dislocation often results in the breakdown of families and the dysfunctional growth and development of children.

10. Sometimes the drive for a better quality of life begets a craving for higher lifestyles and for luxury goods and results in a narrow utilitarian one-child view of family.

Further, the materialistic self-fulfillment view of husband and wife in pursuit of their respective careers weakens conjugal bonding and, aside from the economic motive, convinces the spouses that only one child is the ideal. Their procreative gift from God is lost in careerism and economic ambition.

### *Political, Ideological, Cultural Conflicts and Divisions*

11. Of enormous implications is the situation of families affected by internal armed conflicts, such as wars, political rebellions, terrorism and violent cultural, ethnic, and religious clashes. Such violence and conflicts result in temporary or permanent dislocation, internal and external migration of thousands of families to safer areas, regions or countries.

We now have the growing phenomenon of political, economic, cultural, climatic and religious refugees in various Asian countries - a phenomenon that has stirred international concern. The phenomenon of Asian refugees exacerbates biases and prejudices that are constant sources of division and conflict.

The most affected victims of conflict and war are children, traumatized by evacuations, and the roar of weapons. They grow up as “children of war”, their growth and development and their formal

education seriously interrupted. Many are even recruited forcibly as “child soldiers”.

### *Ideological Colonialism and Cultural Values*

12. In the wake of economic globalization, a secular, materialist and relativist postmodern spirit is insidiously creeping into the Asian psyche. It runs counter to treasured Asian traditional values of the family. Its emerging dominance is in reality a form of ideological colonialism, whereby the values of secular ideology impose themselves subtly and, almost inexorably, replace Asian treasured values in a new form of colonial mentality.

Ideological colonialism has introduced “a culture of the ephemeral” (see AL 39). New forms of love relationships and new forms of families alien to the Asian ethos, such as same sex unions, are developing. The new cultural ideology devalues marriage and life-long commitments. It promotes instead the practice of co-habitation, transitory love and passing commitments. Political international bodies, in giving grants to developing countries, support this ideology by demanding conditionalities to promote contraceptives and abortion in the guise of reproductive health. The sexual revolution and the fear of overpopulation are causative factors (see AL 42).

Further, in the internet lurk many dangers to impressionable minds with regard to human sexuality, such as pornography and the commercialization of the body (see AL 410).

On the other hand is the challenge from within cultures, such as the discrimination against and exploitation of women in some extremely patriarchal Asian societies. The thousands of female fetuses aborted yearly and the practice of girl-brides indicate the extent of women’s subservient situation as well as a low attitude towards marriage.

We likewise note that there are many instances of ideological colonialism of local sources when we label products as excellent (or poor) because of their Asian country of origin.

Bishops from East Asian countries, as in Japan, also perceive a significantly declining birth rate, an aging population and the loneliness of the old in the light of weakened family linkage.

We also discern the rising number of separated couples marrying other partners to the detriment of the children. Single parent families are also on the rise. They struggle hard to maintain and educate the children, but the desire and longing for the presence of the absent father or mother is always a source of anxiety for growing children.

### *Global Warming and Climate Change*

13. The effects of natural disasters and extreme weather changes resulting from global warming and climate change on Asian families are enormous.

Asia is experiencing as never before stronger and more frequent typhoons, floods, land erosion, more severe droughts, prolonged El Niño and La Niña effects. These bring about the destruction of farm crops and the loss of livelihood. They dislocate thousands of families who are driven to look for a better environment for themselves and their children. They drive thousands of Asian families into deeper poverty and deprivation. They are the new “climate change refugees”.

### *Tensions within the Family*

14. Asian families experience serious tensions from within that threaten the relationships between spouses themselves as well as among the members of the family. The environment of love is commonly broken by domestic violence that sometimes ends up in the hands of police. Children cower in fear and anxiety as their parents do violence on each other not only by words but also by action.

The inadequacy of decent housing among poor families, especially among urban poor, is a health and sanitation hazard. The lack of privacy is also a strong temptation to sexual crimes within the family. Undoubtedly, even though subtly, the gay or lesbian orientation of a member of the family leads sometimes to a silent discomfort and alienation. In some countries, the dowry system becomes a source of great tension at the very beginning of marriage. The harsh treatment of domestic workers is not uncommon.

## *Deterioration of Religious Faith and Spiritual Values in the Family*

15. The creeping emergent global culture of secularism negatively impacts cherished Asian family values. It weakens religious faith, as it has already done in many developed countries in the northern hemisphere.

In some countries, the drive for higher standards of living results in less respect for the elderly and the disabled as they are considered burdens to the family. Consumerism replaces Gospel values of simplicity and responsible stewardship of created goods. In the language of Pope Francis, we are seeing the emergence of a “throw away” culture.

We recognize the positive contributions of the digital revolution to family and social life. But the digital revolution is ambivalent. Together with lights there are shadows. For we perceive the weakening of family bonds in this digital age. It is not unusual to see members of the same family gather together, but each one busy with the mobile phone, texting messages to friends. In the past, the family would gather and watch TV together. Now, mobile phones and iPads have replaced the TV. The sense of family togetherness is gradually being eroded.

Moreover, individualism, a fundamental attribute of the postmodern spirit, is luring the youth away from the family. With this is a gradual reduction of a sense of the family as sacred space of intimacy and love. As family bonds and family support weaken, young people today with even greater frequency than before find love and intimacy among peers and thus result in more teenage pregnancies.

16. We also observe that families do not have an adequate faith formation. Nor do they have the training to transmit their faith to others or exercise their faith in social engagement. Adult faith formation is lacking, making Catholic families vulnerable to the attraction of mushrooming religious sects.

Given the religious and cultural pluralism of Asia, there is a great percentage of interfaith marriages, often to the detriment of the Catholic party.

Yet the weakness of faith and the lack of faith formation of families are not entirely due to outside factors. We must humbly confess that we as leaders and shepherds of the faith have not evangelized our flock adequately that as a result there is a dichotomy between faith and life. Moral teachings are not followed. We need to examine our methods, approaches and language of evangelization in the light of this failure.

### *The Example and Challenge of Good Families*

17. We cannot simply dwell on challenges as problems confronted by Catholic families in Asia. All over Asia are families from different cultural, social and economic backgrounds, families belonging to different religious traditions, interfaith families and families in difficult situations.

In varying milieus, many such families are examples of families that live according to the plan of God. They are parents striving to serve not only their own members but also others especially the poor and the needy, with the assistance of God's ubiquitous grace, on the journey to God's Kingdom. They edify other families and from them other families find support. How to support and maintain such families is a challenge.

### *Summarizing Questions*

18. With these formidable pastoral challenges, we raise vital questions: How can the Asian family respond effectively to the challenges that it confronts? How can the Asian family reflect the communion of participatory communities that the Church envisions itself to be? And still a deeper question: how can the Asian family be a domestic church of the poor that can credibly proclaim from within itself the mercy and compassion of God?

## **Part II – REFLECTION IN THE LIGHT OF FAITH**

Hence, we need to reflect from the perspective of our faith about what the Catholic family in Asia should *be* in order to respond effectively and credibly to Asian pastoral challenges.

## **Fundamental Postulate: Communion of Love, the Ground of Conjugal and Family Love**

19. In the fourth chapter of *Amoris Laetitia*, Pope Francis reminds us that “marriage is the icon of God’s love for us” (AL 121, citing John Paul II, *Catechesis*, 2 April 2014, in *L’Osservatore Romano*, 3 April 2014, p. 8). This implies that love in marriage is a reflection of God’s own love. Divine love is at the heart of conjugal and family life. This is our basic faith-insight.

God’s love is fundamentally a communion, the communion of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit in perfect charity and unity. So must conjugal and family love be communion.

In conjugal communion man and woman become one, “in a single existence”. Similarly, Tertullian noted with deep insight: “How wonderful the bond between two believers with a single hope, a single desire, a single observance, a single service! They are both brethren and both fellow servants; there is no separation between them in spirit or flesh; in fact, they are truly two in one flesh and where the flesh is one, one is the spirit” (*Ad uxorem*, II, VIII, 6-8: CCL I, 393; cited in *Familiaris Consortio* 13).

Such communion of husband and wife in marriage deepens the equality between them. St. Ambrose declares to the husband: “You are not her master, but her husband; she was not given to you to be your slave, but your wife.... Reciprocate her attentiveness to you and be grateful to her for her love” (*Exameron*, V, 7, 19: CSEL 32, I, 154; cited in *Familiaris Consortio* 25).

In family communion, the members of the family are united together, indeed through natural physical generation, but more profoundly through interactive reciprocal love and service of one another – an indescribable gift of God to the family.

### **A. The Catholic Family in Itself, *ad Intra*.**

#### ***Eucharistic Family***

20. The faith-reality of Communion with the Triune God and especially with Jesus in the Eucharist was a central emphasis of the Ordinary Synod of Bishops on the Eucharist (2005), the Manila FABC Plenary Assembly on Living the Eucharist in Asia (2009), and the recent International Eucharistic Congress in Cebu (2016). The

Eucharistic Congress reawakened our fading consciousness of the abiding and loving presence of the Eucharistic Jesus in our lives, in joy or in suffering, or in the ordinary seasons of life.

The Paschal Mystery of Jesus – His Passion, Death and Resurrection – draws everything and everyone to himself as the event of Salvation and Reconciliation (see *Jn* 12:32; also *Col* 1:20). Sacramentally memorialized in the Eucharist, the Paschal Mystery draws together the members of the family to the Lord Jesus and to one another. It is at the beginning of conjugal and family communion.

Undoubtedly, Eucharistic communion is first of all our communion of love with the Triune God. The Johannine biblical texts (see *Jn* 15:10; *1 Jn* 2:24; 3:24) on love and abiding in the Lord Jesus, in the Father and in the Holy Spirit (see *Jn* 14:16-17), speak of divine indwelling in the one who loves God and obeys God's commands.

Indeed, there is no doubt that the triune God is present in every baptized member of the family. Baptized in water and in the power of the Spirit, members of the family are children of the Father, brothers and sisters of Jesus. They are infused with new life and transformed into a new creation by the Spirit, and co-heirs of the Kingdom of God.

Into the Catholic family God has sacramentally poured forth his love and life, making it a "sanctuary of love and life", an icon of God's mercy and compassion.

The divine presence impels the family to be Eucharistic in the manner of the Eucharistic Jesus who sacrificed his very life "for the many" and then bequeathed his own Body and Blood to us in the Sacrament of the Eucharist. By this total sacrifice, he demonstrated for us how to love, share and serve others, especially the poor and the needy. The family has likewise to have a spirit of sacrifice as it mightily struggles daily for a better life and strives to respond to the needs of others.

The lesson of sharing and serving is what Paul wanted to teach the Corinthians (see *AL* 118-27). He observed a division among them (*1 Cor* 11:18). He noted abuses in the Eucharistic liturgy. It was tainted by greed and neglect of the hungry and needy (*1 Cor* 11:21). The Corinthians had forgotten the meaning of the breaking of the bread and drinking of the cup. These were meant to be signs of

communion with the Lord, signs too of the unity of the various households or families. The Eucharist was meant to be a liturgy of worship, prayer, and mission.

For this reason, the family that is nourished continually in the prayerful celebration of the Eucharistic worship and enlivened by the Word of God in the Eucharistic liturgy has to be a school of prayer and worship. It is from a Eucharistic life of prayer and worship that the Holy Spirit sends the family to a mission of mercy and compassion in the world.

### *A Family of Faith, Domestic Church of the Poor*

21. We recall the challenge of Jesus to families. When he was told that his mother and brothers were looking for him, he asked: "Who is my mother? Who are my brothers?" He pointed to his disciples and said: "Here are my mother and my brothers. For whoever does the will of my heavenly Father is my brother, and sister and mother" (*Mt 12:46-48*).

He referred to his new family, a family not of blood but of faith. The example of the first disciples dramatically illustrates how they left their families to enter the disciple-family of Jesus. At the end, it is when "biological families" open themselves to Christ and to others that they become "domestic churches".

In his Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium*, Pope Francis, reminds us of the beginning of the Church. At the root of the Church's identity is "the Church of the Poor". It is a Church where rich and poor alike live a spirit of evangelical poverty and are in solidarity with the poor. Pope Francis himself has this vision: "I want a Church which is poor and for the poor" (*EG 198*).

The Lord Jesus wanted his community of disciples to follow his way of life, a way of poverty and simplicity, a way of humility.

"Blessed are the poor, for theirs is the Kingdom of heaven" (*Lk 6:20*, see also *Mt 5:3*). The first of the Beatitudes required the disciples to live evangelical poverty and recognize the utter gratuity of God's gift of life and possessions. This required for the whole community of the faithful, for every household and family, a life of simplicity and sharing (see the life of the early Jerusalem community, in *Acts 2:42-46* and *4:32-35*).

Jesus identified himself with the poor and the needy, the least of his brothers and sisters (see *Lk 6:20; Mt 5:3*). In many ways, in words, attitudes and action, he expressed his preferential love of the poor. He was in solidarity with them, walked with them, ennobled them, called them to his side. He recognized the rich who were “poor in spirit”. He denounced greed and indifference to the plight of the poor and the needy (see the Parables of the Rich Man and Lazarus, *Lk 16:19-31*; also the Rich Fool and his barns, *Lk 12:13-21*).

The poverty of his life and death, the values of poverty and simplicity and dependence on God that he taught, his prophetic relationships with the rich and with the poor – these are the values that the Lord wants the Church and each household of faith to have and to live – simply to be a “Church of the Poor”. The Catholic family has, therefore, to be a domestic church of the poor.

Poor in fact was the Holy Family of Nazareth – Jesus, Mary, and Joseph. Mary and Joseph could only give the offering of the poor, a pair of turtle doves (*Lk 2:24*), when they presented Jesus in the Temple. They became refugees in Egypt (*Mt 2:13-15*). Joseph was only a carpenter (*Mt 13:54-55*). The Holy Family of Nazareth is the prototype of a domestic church of the poor.

### *The Family – “Missionary Disciple”*

22. Vatican II (*Lumen Gentium* 1964, *Ad Gentes* 1965) and the papal magisterium (*Evangelii Nuntiandi* 1975, *Christifideles Laici* 1988, *Redemptoris Missio* 1990) have consistently taught that the whole Church is missionary. More recently and more forcefully in *Evangelii Gaudium* (see nos. 20-21, 24), Pope Francis has insisted on the identity of the Church as one “sent forth” to be a herald of Jesus and his Gospel, especially to the “margins” and “peripheries” of humanity, to the poor and the needy with their many faces.

How dramatic and vivid his vision of the Church as a “missionary disciple”! “I prefer a Church which is bruised, hurting and dirty because it has been out on the streets, rather than a Church which is unhealthy from being confined and from clinging to its own security” (*EG 49*).

If the whole Church, so also the domestic church, the family. The Catholic family is by identity a “missionary disciple”. Mission is the birthright of the Catholic family.

The Daejeon FABC Plenary Assembly succinctly enunciated an emerging Asian ecclesial maxim: "The family is the focal point of evangelization". It is to be evangelized and at the same time it is sent forth to evangelize, to tell "the story of Jesus".

Telling the story of Jesus is not in religious triumphalism but in humility, not with gloom but with joy, not with noisy words but with deeds. Such is authentic missionary discipleship.

### *The Family as Seedbed of Vocation*

23. Although vocation to the priestly and religious life sometimes emerges from broken or irregular families, we cannot forget the fact that it is often in the family that the vocation to the priestly and religious life is sown and nurtured by the Lord usually in a family environment of religious faith.

### **B. The Catholic Family for Others, *ad Extra*.**

#### *Jesus-in-Mission: Mercy and Compassion*

24. The Catholic family as a missionary disciple follows in the footsteps of Jesus. His was a mission of mercy and compassion, as he journeyed to the villages of Palestine, "doing good". Jesus simply described himself as the "One who serves" (*Lk* 22:27).

With compassion, he taught the multitudes (*Mt* 9:36), hungry for the word of God. With compassion, he forgave sinners (e.g., *Lk* 7:48; *Mt* 9:6; *Mk* 2:9; *Lk* 5:24), healed the sick (e.g., *Jn* 4:43-54; *Mk* 1:21-28; *Mt* 8:14-17; *Lk* 5:17-26) and gave bread to the hungry, even promising them the food that does not perish, the Bread and Drink of Eternal Life, His own Body and Blood (see *Jn* 6:54). He insisted on the primacy of compassion in the practice of the Sabbath Law (see *Mk* 2:27), compassion for the untouchables, the unclean of Jewish society, for those who had no rights of their own, foreigners, widows, and orphans. He accepted those rejected by society such as lepers (see *Mt* 8:1-4; *Lk* 7:11-17), the blind and the lame (*Mt* 15:30; 21:14), even tax collectors such as Zacchaeus (*Lk* 9:1-10). His compassion and mercy transcended borders of race, gender, ethnicity, social and economic class. Whoever was poor and needy was the least of his brothers and sisters. They were all welcomed by Jesus and his table fellowship was with them (see *Mk* 2:13-17; *Mt* 9:11).

### *The Family-in-Mission: Doing the Mission of Jesus*

25. In the footsteps of Jesus and as his faithful disciple, the Catholic family is likewise sent forth by his Spirit on mission. It is a mission of mercy and compassion to tell and share with others the values that Jesus lived, the values of the Gospel and of the Kingdom that he proclaimed.

Even as the Extraordinary Year of Mercy ended this November on the Feast of Christ the King, the boundless gifts of God's mercy continue to pour like rain on a parched earth. The Catholic family is a receptacle of God's love, "*misera et misericordia*", misery with Mercy, so to speak (see St. Augustine's commentary on the encounter of Jesus and the adulterous woman, *Jn* 8:1-11, when "*misera* - the wretched woman" stood alone with "*misericordia* - God's Mercy"). At the same time the Catholic family has to become an icon of God's love for the suffering and the needy, *misera et Misericordia*.

Recalling and paraphrasing the words of St. John Paul II in *Ecclesia in Asia* (see no. 23), it is by the silent witness of genuine and faithful Christian life, of authentic discipleship of Jesus, that the Catholic family most eloquently tells the story of Jesus, the compassion and mercy of God, to other families.

Discipleship and mission - these would surely make a difference wherever the Catholic family is located.

### **PART III - PASTORAL IMPERATIVES FOR THE CATHOLIC FAMILY**

26. Our general pastoral imperative is one of discerning, accompanying, and doing.

When we discern the challenges that the Asian family faces and reflect in faith on the Catholic family in itself and *ad extra*, the consequence is ineluctable. The Catholic family has to respond with mercy and compassion, with the joy of the Gospel, to the pastoral challenges.

Yet we have to present a caveat: the minority status of Catholic families in Asia impacts the kind of response they can give to the pastoral challenges they face. Their influence in a society that is predominantly Muslim or Hindu or Buddhist would not be as

powerfully felt as in the predominantly Catholic societies of the Philippines and Timor Leste. To face the challenges effectively, collaboration with families of other faiths would be necessary.

#### **A. Responding to the Challenge of Religious Extremism and Violence**

27. In view of violent extremism in various parts of Asia, the situation of Catholic families is undoubtedly fraught with the gravest danger. Massacres and burning of homes and churches are perpetrated by a minority group.

#### *The Ever-Present God, Constancy of Hope, Fidelity to Dialogue of Life*

But the Gospel is always one of bright hope. God is present in every nook and corner of our world, in every culture and race, tribe and nation. But God is especially present where the cry for freedom and peace, for mutual understanding and respect is raised, where the suffering feel alone and helpless.

The virtue and spiritual gift of prudence urges families to seek safety and refuge from mortal danger. The Spirit-given virtue of courage calls families not to fear but always trust in the Lord. Vulnerability is part and parcel of missionary discipleship – to be lambs in the midst of predators. In such situations, the Spirit of the Lord strengthens Catholic families against paralyzing fear, insecurity and hopelessness. It is in darkness that hope must thrive. Our God is not one who abandons his people; He is with us even when we think he is distant and does not hear the cry of the suffering.

Hence, even as it becomes increasingly difficult to pursue the task of interreligious dialogue, the Catholic family in the midst of a hostile environment needs to persevere in a dialogue of life. Fellowship, solidarity for the common good, friendship, a welcoming of the “other”, respect and understanding are required Gospel attitudes even when they do not seem to be reciprocated.

Christians and members of other religions have biases and prejudices against one another. But, except for a very small minority, they are not agents of radicalism and violence. They are fundamentally oriented towards peace and harmony in a social context of religious pluralism, where there are minorities and

majorities. Hence we have to recognize the profound importance of a dialogue of life.

### *Solidarity with Victims*

28. At the same time, Catholic families need to be in active solidarity with all victims of violent religious radicalism. Solidarity calls for advocacy, material and prayer support. Centers of refuge can be established in collaboration with other religious groups.

### **B. Responding to the Challenge of Poverty, Migration, and Dislocation.**

29. The massive poverty of a great number of Asian families is a call by the Holy Spirit for the family to be truly a domestic Church of the Poor. It has to reach out to families in need. Love is not love when it keeps within itself.

### *Sharing, Defending the Rights of the Poor*

From their own poverty and driven not only by the Asian trait of sharing with the needy but also by the Christian option for the poor, Catholic families share the little they might have, in generosity and joy, with others who are equally poor. And, *noblesse oblige*, the rich most especially have to share from the abundance of God's gifts to them and not only from their surplus.

Everyone in the Church of the Poor is called to defend the rights of the poor. Social teachings call for the creation of jobs, humane conditions of work and family living wage.

### *Promoting Social Justice, Removing Economic Imbalances and Corruption*

30. Most urgent in the Asian poverty situation is for the whole Church, especially rich and powerful members, to promote social justice, remove economic imbalances and corruption that aggravate the poverty situation. Yet each family can contribute towards removing corruption by instilling in the children an abhorrence of bribery and refusing to sow seeds corruption in the family.

Economic imbalances are often entrenched in social structures. Concerted efforts by all citizens of various social, political, or religious groups would be necessary. Networks of collaboration

among families in the grassroots, civil society, reform-minded business and political groups, and religious institutions would be effective in uprooting corruption from Asian social structures.

### **C. Responding to the Challenge of Asian Migrant Workers and Refugees**

#### *Conscientization*

31. Asian families need to become more aware of the daunting problems that thousands of economic, political, religious, cultural and climatic refugees face. They also have to be more aware of the millions of migrant workers and the families they leave behind. There is a need to conscientize families and the general public in order to remove indifference that is temporarily shed off when media reports on heinous crimes committed by or against refugees and migrant workers.

#### *Collaboration - Departure and Arrival*

32. Families from countries of departure and of arrival need to collaborate. In countries of departure, through mediation of various organizations, clusters of families of refugees and migrant workers can be organized at local levels for mutual encouragement and support in the light of dislocation, separation and loneliness, of children growing up in the prolonged absence of parents or older siblings. Civil society, church groups, and government agencies can mediate and facilitate the organization of such clusters of support-families.

Similar local clusters in countries of arrival need likewise to be organized. The welcome that they can express to refugees and migrant workers, the active concern that they have for their legal, economic humanitarian needs and the moral support that they can provide will counteract exploitation and abuse, unfulfilled contracts, and inhumane working conditions.

Yet it is quite true that Catholic refugees and migrant workers and their families provide dynamism to the countries of arrival. Bishops from Japan assert that the future of the Church in Japan is in the hands of Catholic migrant workers.

#### **D. Responding to the Challenge of Political and Cultural Conflicts and Divisions**

33. The variety of cultures and ethnic groups within countries often carries mutual prejudices and biases. They find their way into the political sphere, where divisions occur along ethnic and cultural lines, as in minority-majority relationships. Indigenous peoples are often at the losing end. When armed conflicts occur, dislocation of hundreds or thousands of families take place.

Families from different religions and cultures need to come together and work for peace and harmony. There are interfaith groups in the conflict areas of Southern Mindanao (Philippines) called “Mothers for Peace” or “Kids for Peace”. They are peacemakers, “children of God” as the Beatitudes of Jesus would call them (see *Mt* 5:8).

##### ***Reducing Biases and Prejudices***

34. It is in the family that biases and prejudices are reduced if not eradicated. Parents do the first catechizing of the children. They should set before their children the example of the Lord Jesus in the Gospels.

They need to tell their children the stories of Jesus welcoming and embracing with love all those discriminated upon or set aside by society, such as the daughter of the Syrophenician woman (see *Mk* 7:25-30; *Mt* 15:21-28), the daughter of Jairus (see *Mk* 5:21-43; *Mt* 9:18-26; *Lk* 8:40-56), the sick old man at the pool of Bethesda (see *Jn* 5:1-15).

The faith formation agencies of the local church have to provide systematic support to the efforts of Catholic families.

But formation in anti-discriminatory living should not only be among Catholic families. Families of interreligious marriages should similarly embark on the same formation journey. The support of their own religious groups, of civil society and the government is necessary.

##### ***Promoting and Sustaining a Dialogue of Life among Families***

35. Ghettoism, isolationism or flight from a multicultural and multireligious social context are not the solution. At the beginning of

peaceful and harmonious relationships among families in such social context is the ordinary dialogue of daily life, in the neighborhood, in markets and places of work, in offices and schools, in streets. Where such a dialogue of life is taking place, there is considerably less likelihood that violent cultural and political conflicts could arise or be abetted.

### **E. Responding to the Challenge of Ideological Colonialism**

36. Ideological colonialism is the gradual domination of alien ideological values, without moral and religious roots, regarding the origins and final destiny of human life, regarding birth and death, gender and alternative forms of human relationships and of family. These are ideological secular values that are alien to the Asian spirit as well as to the doctrinal and moral teachings that should guide Catholic families. Such moral teachings instruct us to respect persons with alternative gender orientations and to provide pastoral care for them through apostolates like COURAGE.

In particular, we need systematically to promote responsible parenthood and natural family planning. This is not merely to counteract the support of international bodies and governments for reproductive health that promotes artificial contraception and abortion. More importantly, we believe that Responsible Parenthood and Natural Family Planning demonstrate our fidelity to the will and plan of God for the family. They are a countersign to purely secular values.

The main agents of ideological colonialism are the tools of social communication that report on or display the trivialities and ephemeral nature of new family values and relationships.

#### ***Necessity for Families to be Evangelized about Media***

37. There is first the necessity of making families, especially parents, aware of the negative power of the tools of social communication in the communication and formation of secular materialist values. Modern communication gadgets can put aside family conversation and bonding as well as develop a throw away culture as gadgets are quickly overtaken by new versions. Tools of social communication are often the instruments of pornography and sexual allurements.

Families can learn together the good and the bad of the tools of social communication.

### *Necessity of Evangelizing Media*

38. In a similar way, families can also discern together on how through media they can expand their knowledge of God, of their faith, the world of the poor; how they can use media in accord with the Gospel values of simplicity, sharing, solidarity with the poor, in defense of their rights and dignity.

Together, families can put pressure on the powers that control media, on the government and on media practitioners so that media could be truly channels of Kingdom values, of truth, integrity, peace and harmony, and development.

In a very practical way, the tools of social communication can be instruments in keeping the bonds of family and kinship firm and solid by keeping migrant workers and refugees in touch with their relatives and friends.

These are some of the ways by which families can evangelize media.

## **F. Responding to the Challenge of Climate Change and Global Warming**

39. The over-all response of families to the ecological challenge does not stem from any scientific reason but from *missio Dei*. God's mission for families is to take care of and be stewards of the integrity of creation. This is the message of the papal encyclical *Laudato Si'* on the care and stewardship of creation, our common home.

We observe that States and international organizations are striving to agree on protocols to reduce the emission of greenhouse gases (GHGs) that cause global warming and climate change. Scientists point to human responsibility as the main cause of GHG emission.

Hence individuals and families have a significant role to play on climate change mitigation.

### *Becoming Aware of the Reality of Climate Change*

40. With the assistance of government and church institutions, of civil society, especially NGOs, processes of educating families about the reality, the causes, and the effects of global warming and climate change have to be initiated and supported.

It is in this way that families will become more concerned about the impact of day to day activities on the environment as well as about the care of the earth.

### *Simple ways of Mitigating Climate Change*

41. Families are not entirely helpless before the universal scientific complexity of global warming and climate change. In truth, the cleansing of creation from the pollution that has endangered its life-support system should start from the family. The old adage “Cleanliness is next to godliness” is admittedly trite but never trivial.

Families can do ordinary things to mitigate global warming by reducing in their own homes the emission of GHGs. Some of these ways are saving water, changing electric bulbs to those that are brighter with less consumption of energy, switching off electric gadgets when not in use, using cold water for laundry, using motor vehicles with better gas mileage, having less beef for meals, not burning dry leaves and waste materials, reusing and recycling used materials, investing finances in ethically, socially and environmentally responsible investments.

In sum, living a simple but decent lifestyle is a call of the Holy Spirit that the family can easily respond to. And surely, our own pastoral programs can help mobilize families to act locally and think globally.

Acting together, families from different religions can make known their various concerns about the environment, pressure policy makers to enact environment-friendly public directives and laws. It is by acting on behalf of the care of the earth that families can give intergenerational justice to future generations.

## **G. Role of Government, Church, Civil Society and Non-Government Organizations**

42. For families in Asia to respond effectively to the pastoral challenges, they need strong support from the public.

### *Raising Awareness*

Government and church institutions, civil society and NGOs need to collaborate with parents in educating their families and making them aware of the challenges that confront them. They have to help families know the nature of the challenges and realize their impact. Strong collaboration is needed particularly to dismantle the mindsets of patriarchy that discriminates and exploits women as subservient to men.

### *Organizing and Empowering Families*

They have to assist in organizing them into networks of families and providing them with necessary resources for their tasks. With such organizing and resource support, families can be properly empowered to meet the challenges.

### *Distinctive Role of the Church – Doctrinal and Moral Formation and Guidance*

43. A fundamental task for church institutions is to provide families with the doctrinal and moral formation and guidance that would assist them in responding effectively to the challenges.

Such formation can be done most effectively in Basic Ecclesial Communities, where families themselves can initiate concrete action to address the pastoral challenges they confront.

## **PART IV – RECOMMENDATIONS TO EPISCOPAL CONFERENCES AND LOCAL CHURCHES**

44. At the Daejeon Assembly on the Family, recommendations were made on establishing a family ministry towards a culture of integral life (see VIII FABC Plenary Assembly, *Final Statement*, 118-127). Such family ministry was meant to include but also go beyond the traditional family ministry that was mainly concerned with “pro-life” issues.

The question can rightly be raised: a decade or so after Daejeon, how far have family ministries moved towards the promotion of “integral life”?

In view of the Asian pastoral challenges that we have discerned and of the necessity of assisting families to respond to them effectively, we need to expand the Daejeon recommendations.

**A. The Family as the Focal Point of Pastoral Programs**

45. If we believe that the Family is the Focal Point of Evangelization, it is recommended that the pastoral programs of the local church be oriented to the development of God-fearing families, steeped in the values of the Gospel and of the Kingdom so necessary for society.

**B. Establishing a Family Ministry towards a Culture of Integral Life**

46. Episcopal Conferences and local churches should set up:

1. “A Family Ministry that Forms and Empowers” the Family for Mission;
2. “A Family Ministry that Cares and Serves”
  - a. single parents, intercultural and interreligious families.
  - b. families in difficult situations – broken, remarried, families with drug or alcohol dependent members.
  - c. families with physically or psychologically disadvantaged members.
  - d. families of migrant workers and refugees.
  - e. families of indigenous peoples, tribals, etc.
  - f. parental and youth counseling.
  - g. child care programs.
3. “A Family Ministry that Promotes Social Transformation”
  - a. Fostering Integral faith formation.
  - b. Promoting social awareness in the family.

- c. Collaborating with families of other faiths in addressing social justice and peace issues
- d. Pressuring governments to respect religious freedom when conditionalities for economic grants are imposed that run counter to doctrinal and moral teachings
- e. Stopping the threat of religious violence
- f. Rejecting the use of children and minors in war
- g. Forming families into families of dialogue and peace
- h. Stopping child and women trafficking, sex tourism.
- i. Implementing the recommendations of the FABC seminars on climate change.

### **C. Formation of Conscience**

47. Formation of Conscience has to be a special concern for the family ministry. Husband and wife make critical decisions together with regard to their marriage, their children, and their future together. It is most necessary to form an enlightened and right conscience when today individual freedom of conscience, totally independent of the will of God, is becoming a global norm. Doctrinal and moral guidance for parents is an imperative. They themselves have to provide such guidance to their growing children.

### **D. Youth Ministry**

48. In the formation of God-fearing families, the pastoral care of the youth is of critical importance. They are “millennials” with values, ways of thinking, interests and skills that are quite different from the youth of 30 years ago. They are young men and women of a very secular digital age. Youth Ministry has to address their search for meaning, their restlessness, their psychological alienation and drifting away from their parents, their inner hunger for their ideals to be realized.

### **E. On the Formation of Pastoral Agents of the Family**

49. Episcopal Conferences and Local Churches are to design modules of formation by which priests, deacons, religious sisters and brothers and their lay collaborators take on attitudes and skills so

necessary for the family ministry, such as pastoral discernment and accompaniment.

Even going back to seminary formation, the Plenary Assembly recommends that candidates to the priesthood be introduced into the pastoral care and accompaniment of different forms of families through pastoral exposure and theological reflection on the sacrament of marriage.

Likewise noted by the Assembly is the need for foreign missionaries to be inculturated so as to provide more effective pastoral accompaniment for Asian families with their rich variety of cultures and ways of life.

Of great significance in Asia would be the encouragement and support of episcopal conferences for lay movements dedicated to the sacrament and the life of marriage, and related to issues, such as Marriage Encounter Movement, Catholic Family Movement, Retrouvaille, Couples for Christ, Focolare Movement, movements dedicated to single parents and the like. They promote spirituality in marriage and family and are outstanding collaborators in Family Ministry.

## **F. Collaborative Efforts**

50. Moreover, we recommend that episcopal conferences and dioceses work in partnership towards the formation and development of holistic family ministries. They should exchange information, share resources, even come together for family formation, the formation of lay leaders for participation in the renewal of families.

A notable example of this collaborative effort was the Asian Seminar on “Shepherding Families in Asia”, organized jointly by the FABC Office of the Clergy and Office of the Laity and Family in Hua Hin (Thailand) on 16-20 May 2016.

## CONCLUSION - SPIRITUALITY OF COMMUNION FOR THE FAMILY

### A. In the Depths of Being - Communion of Love

#### *Communion with the Triune God*

51. The fundamental response of the family to Asian challenges springs from the heart of the family. For it is in the heart of the family that we find the very center of its giftedness - the immeasurable joyful love of our God of mercy and compassion.

The Triune God loving the family, the family loving the Triune God - this has to be the lifegiving spring from which gushes forth every response, attitudinal or active, that the family provides.

#### *Communion in the Family, Mutual Shepherding*

52. Let husband and wife be ever aware that the fundamental ground of their communion with one another is the sacred bond of their marriage covenant by which they commit each other before God and the community to be united forever in a single conjugal existence. Ultimately grounded in their communion with God, this is at the heart of a spirituality of communion.

Wife and husband demonstrate in the concrete the depth of this spirituality by a daily decision to be faithful in love for each other. They shepherd each other, minister to each other, in the way of virtue and righteousness in the midst of daily challenges. And many and varied these challenges are in the Asian situation of religious and cultural pluralism, especially in interfaith marriages so common in Asia. Thus do they grow in grace before God in a communion of love and service, growing old together in God through trials and testing in the love and care of each other (see AL 19). At bottom, the vocation of marriage is a vocation to holiness, to communion with God.

Communion between parents and children is daily demonstrated in the love, care and service they have for one another. It grows through mutual shepherding. Parents shepherd their children to deeper communion with other members of the family and with God. Parental counseling helps in educating the children towards faithful love, but the most important factor is not precept but the living example of faithful love.

Conjugal and family love is a generous, patient, and forgiving love. Spouses and their children need to forgive one another for theirs is a love that is never perfect, never free from human fragility and weakness. It is through daily mutual, patient, kind and forgiving love, through loving care and service that an “interior freedom” for God and for one another is built. That interior freedom becomes connatural with communion (see AL 320).

## **B. Prayer – Building Communion with God and in the Family**

53. Prayer is the absolute *sine qua non* for the family to build communion with God. Popular devotion, such as the Rosary, prayer before and after meals, novenas, especially devotion to the Holy Family and Benediction of the Blessed Sacrament.

More importantly family devotion has to be directed to the Word of God. One of the most commendable practices of Basic Ecclesial Communities is for families to read the Bible and pray with the Bible. We pray that Episcopal Conferences conduct a campaign to provide a Bible for every family.

Prayer helps build up family togetherness. It strengthens the marriage covenant. It gradually transforms the family into a school of prayer and worship.

Special effort must be made by family ministries to encourage husbands to be prayer leaders. In many countries, readily observable is the minimal participation of men in prayer.

Prayer is more than external devotions. The young have to be taught in simple “contemplative” prayer as in Taizé forms of prayer and in Eucharistic Holy Hour devotions.

54. The family can choose a Saint to be the patron of the family and invoke the name of the Saint in devotional prayers and have a family novena of prayers to prepare for the annual fiesta of the Family Patron.

Parents need to build up the faith of their children by telling stories of holy men and women who have become saints through the ordinary ways of being family, such as Saints Louis Martin and Marie-Azélie Guérin (the parents of St. Thérèse of Lisieux), canonized recently by Pope Francis, as well as the husband and wife team of

Luigi Beltrame Quattrocchi and Maria Corsini, beatified by St. John Paul II.

They should especially tell and retell the ultimate Christian witnessing of many lay martyrs in Japan, Korea, China, India, Vietnam, Cambodia, Thailand, Myanmar, and recently in Laos, family men and women, lay catechists and teenagers. They constitute a treasury of heroes of the faith that made their families a domestic church. They should not forget the thousands of unrecognized martyrs in various parts of Asia who were killed because they believed in Christ.

55. Although many people from other religions join popular devotions, such participation cannot be presumed in interfaith marriage. Here loving dialogue before and after marriage on the necessity of religiously following the practices of one's faith for the common good of the family is necessary. It is about the exercise of religious freedom and the optimum religious tolerance necessary for a happy marriage.

Such observation is also true for participation of the family or of the Catholic partner at the Eucharist in interfaith marriages.

### **C. Eucharistic Spirituality of Communion**

56. At the summit of family prayer and worship is the Holy Eucharist. It is the sacrament *par excellence* of communion with God. It is the sacramental memorial of the Passion, Death, and Resurrection of the Lord – the ultimate saving event of reconciliation and communion with God, with our neighbor, with the whole of creation.

Participation of the family, led by the father and mother, at the celebration of the Eucharist, bonds the family in a supreme act of prayer and worship, in the sublime total self-giving of Jesus on the Cross. The family in piety and devotion has to feel with the heart the Eucharistic act of Jesus, his body broken for the family, his blood poured out for the family.

In the Eucharist, communion of the Family with the Triune God, with neighbor, with society and with the environment is complete, especially when the family makes it a regular practice to receive the Lord in Holy Communion.

The joy of love, *amoris laetitia*, is the indispensable ground of a family spirituality of communion that is Eucharistic.

#### **D. From Communion to Mission**

57. A Eucharistic spirituality explicates the reaching out in love and service that the spirituality of communion requires.

Love of God impels the family to imitate the Eucharistic Jesus, to live and share the meaning of the Eucharist, to “shepherd in mercy” each member of the family and to look beyond itself and reach out in communion with others to meet Asian challenges.

Together with other families they help evangelize the Asian world and transform it to an ever-closer reflection of God’s reign.

#### **E. Family-in-Mission of Mercy, Sent by the Holy Spirit**

58. From the heart of the family, the inner energy, the impelling inspiration, the driving force of the Holy Spirit impels the family to mission.

A family that is “spiritual” is alive in the Spirit and is energized into a mission of mercy. It is thus that the Catholic family tells the story of the compassionate Jesus to other families and to Asian society.

A family that is united to the Triune God, united within itself among its members, united with others and with creation is stirred into life by the spirituality of communion.

#### **F. Gratitude to Families**

59. We, in this XI FABC Plenary Assembly, rejoice that there are many Catholic families in Asia who live the faith in the midst of a multireligious environment. We thank the Lord for them and commend them for their perseverance and witness in love, hope, and joy.

We offer our support to the families facing different problems within and outside their homes. We pray with them and for them that they continue to feel the blessings of our God of Mercy, be filled with hope, ever inspired by the example of the Holy Family of Jesus, Mary, and Joseph.

## **G. Consecration to the Holy Family of Nazareth**

60. May we always realize that Mary, Mother of Mercy, Queen of the Family and the Morning Star of New Evangelization, constantly accompanies Catholic families in Asia in this journey of transformative evangelization.

At the Manila FABC Plenary Assembly, we consecrated Asia to Mary our Mother. Today in Colombo we consecrate the Catholic Families of Asia to the Holy Family of Nazareth. Under the guidance of his parents, Mary and Joseph, the Child Jesus learned obedience, the virtues of moral living, the ways of Jewish prayer and devotion, and grew in wisdom and knowledge. The Holy Family of Nazareth is the iconic Asian family for all times.

May Jesus, Mary, and Joseph be the companion of the Catholic Family in Asia to become in word and in deed a domestic church of the poor on a mission of mercy.

*Approved this third day of December in the year of our Lord 2016, the feast of St. Francis Xavier, Patron Saint of Missions, Apostle to Asia.*

### **'THE CATHOLIC FAMILY IN ASIA: DOMESTIC CHURCH OF THE POOR ON A MISSION OF MERCY.'**

*Message of the XI FABC Plenary Assembly  
Colombo, Sri Lanka, 28<sup>th</sup> November to 4<sup>th</sup> December 2016*

To All the Peoples of Asia,

*'The Catholic Family in Asia: Domestic Church of the Poor on a Mission of Mercy.'*

## **INTRODUCTION**

We, the delegates to the XI Plenary Assembly of the Federation of the Asian Bishops' Conferences gathered in Colombo, Sri Lanka from 28 November – 4 December, give praise to God for having given us this opportunity to come together as Church in Asia. This is indeed an

expression of our communion and solidarity not only with the universal Church but also with the particular Churches in Asia. We missed the presence of our brethren from the Church in China but it is our hope that this will change soon and that a gathering such as this in the future may truly represent a greater diversity and uniqueness of Asia.

We are deeply thankful to the government and the Church in Sri Lanka for having extended a cordial welcome and hospitality during our stay. Being present in a country that has in recent times been working persistently and constructively towards reconciliation, it is our prayer that God's peace may truly reign in this land and in the hearts of everyone.

### **Ongoing Dialogue on the Family**

In the last couple of years, Pope Francis, recognizing the importance of the family to the Church and society, has initiated a "series of conversations" on the family in the Church namely, the Third Extraordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops on the Pastoral Challenges of the Family in the Context of Evangelization (5-19 October 2014), the Fourteenth Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops on the Vocation and the Mission of the Family in the Church and in the Contemporary World (4-25 October 2015), the Extraordinary Jubilee Year of Mercy (8 December 2015 - 20 November 2016) and the publication of the Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Amoris Laetitia* (19 March 2016). Recognizing that the impact of these conversations is varied from place to place since our "cultures are in fact quite diverse and every general principle... needs to be inculturated, if it is to be respected and applied" (AL, 3), the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences has chosen to continue this conversation at its XI Plenary Assembly with the theme *The Catholic Family in Asia: Domestic Church of the Poor Mission of Mercy*.

### **The Joys in Family Life**

During the days that we have spent together, we once again recognised how important the family is to the Asian ethos. For centuries, the family has been the foundation on which societies and nations have been and will continue to be built. The beauty of our families is that we are not only made up of the nuclear family but we live in and care for the extended family which is the bedrock of our existence. Children, young people, and the elderly further enliven

and strengthen family relations. It is from this inter-connectedness that many of us have learnt the value of faith and community living in a spirit of unity and respect for one another. The interfaith and intercultural families, though not without challenges, have also enriched the life of the Church and promoted the values of understanding and harmony in society.

We celebrate the fact that the sense of the Divine exists in many of our families. This certainly provides direction, support, and inspiration to remain faithful despite challenging times. We are glad that many Asian families give life and sustain the faith in many communities and countries where they have chosen to begin a new life for they are indeed our missionary disciples. We listened not only to one another but also the testimonies of some families expressing the varied experiences of family life and views from other religious leaders. We are grateful to God for the gift of families to the Church in Asia for we know that the Church is indeed a communion of families modelled after the communion of the Holy Trinity.

### **The Challenges to Family Life**

Even though we recognise the joys of family life, we are not oblivious to the challenges faced by many of our families. Every country in Asia is not spared of the rapid changes that are affecting the family. At this crucial time of our history, we in Asia are confronted with realities that affect the heart of family life in the areas of poverty, migration, corruption, human trafficking and prostitution, new forms of colonialism, gender inequality, violence against minorities, ecological degradation, religious extremism, broken and dysfunctional families, and the numerous other situations that are equally complex and multifaceted. These pose great strain on our families as they strive to remain faithful and many families have also been left hurt and wounded. Some of these challenges are aggravated given the greater accessibility to the numerous forms of media that seem to be changing gospel values that Asian families have given great importance to through the centuries.

Recognising the countless challenges that confront us in Asia, we acknowledge that family life has been impoverished in various ways. Though in many parts of our continent, economic poverty is a widespread reality, we are also concerned with the other forms of "poverty" - emotional, spiritual, relational, cultural, intellectual, physical and social. These new forms of poverty have been brought

about due to the fast-changing landscape of Asia. Though these forms of poverty can often cripple one's outlook of life, families must not be afraid to embrace the gift of life.

## **Moving Forward**

In these days of being together, we realized again that given the complexity of the situation before us, we do not have answers to all these challenges. However, what became clear is that we in Asia need to put our minds together, consolidate our efforts and resources, and strategize constructively together for the sake of our families. In the words of Pope Francis, "we are not living in an era of change but a change of era" (*Decennial National Conference of the Italian Church, 2016*). This 'change of era' is profoundly affecting our families – the domestic Church. We not only need to work together but also support one another in this mission. We must together seek a 'spirituality of the family' that is founded on a personal encounter with Jesus Christ so that we can assist and sustain each other during these changing and challenging times. Many families are already rooted in our rich tradition of family prayer and bible sharing. The Holy Eucharist is central to the family for living a prophetic way of life. We strongly encourage and support this journey.

We also call on families to nurture the gift of children in the family for "the family is the setting in which a new life is not only born but also welcomed as a gift of God" (AL, 166). Let us be mindful that ultimately "each new life allows us to appreciate the utterly gratuitous dimension of love, which never ceases to amaze us." (AL, 166).

Though the contexts from which we come are different, the changing Face of the family is a phenomenon that affects us all. A concrete fruit of the XI FABC Plenary Assembly is the document *The Catholic Family in Asia: Domestic Church of the Poor on a Mission of Mercy* which we humbly offer to all Asian families. We invite local churches and families to study and reflect on this document. It is our hope that those engaged in ministering to the family will lead the way in celebrating the joys of family life, promoting the sacredness of life, marriage and the family, accompanying, supporting and sustaining families.

May the Holy Family of Nazareth inspire the Church in Asia and our families to be missionary disciples of mercy.

✠ Oswald Cardinal Gracias President – FABC

Fr. Raymond L. O’Toole, SFM Secretary General – FABC

*Given in Colombo, Sri Lanka on 4 December 2016*

## APPENDIX

### *Asian Bishops' Meeting*

#### *Message and Resolutions of the Asian Bishops' Meeting*

*[Manila, Philippines, 23<sup>rd</sup> to 29<sup>th</sup> November 1970]*

### MESSAGE OF THE CONFERENCE

#### INTRODUCTION

**1** We, the bishops of Asia, assembled in the City of Manila, thank God for bringing us together at this time, at the beginning of the second development decade which has been given the name "the angry seventies" - in view of the grave crises that are foreseen during it. For surely the coming decade will be of crucial significance for Asia.

**2** In the spirit of collegiality and dialogue so earnestly urged on us by the decrees of the Second Vatican Council, joined to earnest prayer for the guidance of the Holy Spirit, we have sought to discover new ways through which we may be of greater and more effective service - not to our Catholic communities only - but to our own peoples and to the future, pregnant with both fear and promise, which opens up before us.

**3** With special rejoicing, gathered around the Holy Father, Pope Paul VI, whom we welcome as Peter in the midst of his brothers in the apostolate, we have made every effort to open our minds and our hearts to the needs and aspirations of our peoples, so that we might make these truly our own also, and so that we might bring to them the wisdom that the Gospel teaches us, as well as the self-giving love which He places in our hearts, who had compassion on the multitudes, and who came to bring to all men a fuller and more abundant life.

## I. *The Changing Faces of Asia*

4 In our meetings and discussions, we have tried to look upon the face of Asia – or, perhaps more rightly, upon the many faces of today’s Asia and contemporary Asian man.

5 For there is, first of all, the face of Asia, continent of the teeming masses. Asia is nearly two billion people, almost two-thirds of mankind. It is a face largely marked with poverty, with under-nourishment and ill health, scarred by war and suffering, troubled and restless.

6 There is, secondly, the face of Asia, continent of the young. Nearly sixty percent of its people are below twenty-five years in age: the world of youth of mankind.

7 There is, too, the face of the Asia that is the continent of ancient and diverse cultures, religions, histories and traditions, a region like Joseph’s coat of many colors.

8 Most prominently in our time, there is the face of Asia in its hour of reawakening, of the continent where the history of the next age of mankind is already being written.

9 With the era of colonialism now a moment of the past, we witness throughout Asia today the emergence within each of our nations, both old and new, of a new consciousness and a new self-understanding. This new consciousness (of which an assertive nationalism is one aspect) seeks to discover and affirm an identity in continuity with the heritage of its own past, but also resolutely turned toward the future; it is joined to the firm will to take up the life and destiny of the nation more fully in its own hands.

10 We witness the awakening of the masses, and the ending of the long ages of resigned fatalism and passive acceptance of poverty, ignorance and sickness, of injustice and exploitation, of mismanagement and corruption among those responsible for the conduct of public affairs. We witness their expectations of a better and fuller life for themselves and their children, for more rice on their tables, knowledge for their sons, their yearning for greater freedom and dignity, recognition and acceptance, for a life more truly worthy of man.

11 We witness above all the awakening of our youth, idealistic, aware and concerned, impatient and restless – even rebellious – in the face of social and economic conditions, of political structures in their countries, which cry out for urgent reforms and bold transformations.

12 Last of all, as part of this awakening, we see the face of an Asia at long last coming to birth as a true community of peoples. For barriers which have so long isolated our nations from one another are falling one by one, and the desire grows among us to know each other and to find each other as Asian, sister-nations among whom relationships of friendship and trust, of collaboration, sharing and genuine solidarity may be firmly lastingly wrought.

## II. *The Church's Response of Service*

13 We look upon these many faces of Asia, we as bishops, together with those committed to our solicitude, with the deepest sense of solidarity. We are proud to be part of this continent of tomorrow: for we Asian Catholics desire – as Catholic communities – to be increasingly integrated within the larger communities around us, culturally part of that Asia which is coming to slow but certain birth in the present moment.

14 As we affirm this, we ask ourselves how we may more truly be at the service of our peoples. We ask how we may more fully engage ourselves in the common task wherein all men of good will must be joined, of building up within our nations societies which respond to the deepest aspirations of our peoples as well as to the demands of the Gospel: societies “grounded on truth, guided by justice, motivated by charity, realized in freedom, and flowering in peace.”<sup>1</sup>

15 We know that the first task must be the renewal of ourselves in the light of Christ. We must begin always with a return to the Gospel. This renewal must be rooted in prayer and in the vivifying of “that profound religious sense which characterizes the spirit of the Asian world.”<sup>2</sup> In our development efforts we must continue to treasure the resources of the spirit found among our peoples. We realize too that we must deepen in ourselves the spirit of servanthood taught to us by Him who lived in our midst “as one who serves” and who came “to give his life for the redemption of all.”

16 In the past, by God's grace, we have endeavored to be faithful to the demand of service even with great sacrifice: many of those who have preceded us have, through school and hospital, through various forms of community service and charitable work, helped the progress of our countries. Not insignificant either, has been the contribution made to their growth in culture and in the ways of the spirit.

17 But we must acknowledge too, with regret, where we have been found wanting; where we have tended to foster only narrow and "domestic" interests; where we could have shown more compassion and solicitude for the poor and have not been sufficiently vigorous in speaking out for justice and the defense of human rights; where we have not incarnated the Christian life and enfleshed the Church in ways and patterns of our respective cultures, and thus kept it an alien in our lands; where we have not sought understanding of, reconciliation and collaboration with our brothers of other Christian Churches and of other faiths.

18 Before Christ and our brothers, we commit ourselves with all earnestness "to whatever concerns the dignity of man." For "it is far from true that because we are committed to our Christ we are diverted from the duties and tasks of this earth. On the contrary, faith, hope and the love of Christ compel us to serve our brothers, knowing that as He laid *down His life for us, we too, ought to lay down our lives for our brothers.*"<sup>3</sup>

### III. *Concrete Tasks*

19 It is our resolve, first of all, to be more truly "the Church of the poor." If we are to place ourselves at the side of the multitudes in our continent, we must in our way of life share something of their poverty. The Church cannot set up islands of affluence in a sea of want and misery; our own personal lives must give witness to evangelical simplicity, and no man, no matter how lowly or poor, should find it hard to come to us and find in us their brothers.

20 We resolve also to have the courage to speak out for the rights of the disadvantaged and powerless, against all forms of injustice no matter from what source such abuse may come; we will not tie our hands by compromising entanglements with the rich and the powerful in our respective countries.

21 Resolutely we commit ourselves to the concern for the total development of our peoples. We believe that man's humanity is God's gift and making, and its promotion a task and duty laid on all of us by Him.

22 "Where the sick are healed, the hungry are fed, and captives set free, where individuals and communities are reconciled and nations live in peace and co-operate with one another, we see the hand of God at work. He is also at work in science, technology and culture where these serve the welfare of mankind."<sup>4</sup>

23 It is our resolve also, in this continent of the young, to become, in them and for them, the "Church of the young." We wish to be, in them and for them, a Church that they shall see as worthy of their devotion and hope: which seeks to understand and trust them; which is responsive to the needs and demands of men in contemporary society; a Church not "established" in the world and which lives out in deeds, day by day, the convictions of her faith and the imperatives of her compassion. We know this is the Church they seek, and with the courage with which Christ shall support our weakness, we shall endeavor to rise to this demand.

24 In the inculturation of the life and message of the Gospel in Asia, there have been hesitations and mistakes in the past, but we are more than ever convinced that dialogue with our fellow Asians whose commitment is to other faiths is increasingly important. We also urge on all a deep respect for the culture and traditions of our peoples, and express the hope that the catholicity of the Church, the root of our diversity in the oneness of faith, may serve to help Asians remain truly Asian, and yet become fully part of the modern world and the one family of mankind.

#### IV. *Towards the New World of Asia*

25 Gathered together, then, in Christ's presence, we turn to the other Christian churches and communities in Asia, seeking to collaborate with them in our efforts for the development our peoples, for freedom, justice and peace. It is our earnest hope that these common endeavors may themselves increasingly draw us together into the unity which is God's will for us.

26 *Populorum Progressio* has traced the broad vision of human progress and the peace and thus placed in our hands the mandate for the task before us. We rededicate ourselves, with all the earnestness at our command, to this endeavor. It remains for us, in the days and years to come, more resolutely to engage, with all men of good will, in the effort to direct men's desires and purposes away from narrow egoisms and particularist interests, from systems which set man in hatred against his brother and turn him away from God who alone is the true source of human brotherliness. We earnestly seek the just ending of the strife and warfare which has torn our countries and brought untold suffering to our brother Asians.

27 It remains for us to gather the needed knowledge for the difficult planning in which we must henceforth participate, and to muster the effective will to eradicate entrenched injustice and replace oppressive structures, thus bringing to realization in each of our nations of that society which is the substance of the expectations of our peoples. It remains for us, with both patience and decision, to help bind together the new world of Asia, as a true family of nations in this part of the earth, kinked not only by lines of geography, but by mutual understanding and respect, by the nobler bonds of brotherhood and of love.

28 These resolves and desires we, the bishops of Asia, in communion with the Holy Father Pope Paul VI, touchstone of our unity and our love, place with sincerity today before all our brothers in part of the world. We make ours, in the most solemn ways, their hopes and aspirations for a new Asia which shall be worthy of the future that is laid up in the heart of Asian man.

29 We ask the Spirit to lend us a largeness of vision, wisdom and courage to realize what would otherwise be only unfulfilled hopes and empty promises. We turn to the Christ whose concern for the multitudes was made visible in another Asian land, the Christ who is also the Lord of the future of man. We ask Him, by His presence beside us and within us, to help us raise up the city of brothers - a city which shall mirror, in hope and promise, the kingdom whose foundations He laid, reconciling all men in Himself, by His blood on the cross, and whose lines He reveals already in the love which is His gift to us.

30 Our brothers in Asia, we are small in numbers, with little of human resources, with little – even – of human wisdom and power; with almost no influence, in our great continent, on the councils of the nations. But in our poverty and lowliness we are not disheartened by the massive problems which confront all of us in this decade because we find resources of faith and courage, in Him who in His cross and dying proved Himself the great lover of men. And as the Lord's arm is not shortened, so is His love ever poured out upon us and thus our hope, and the courage born of it, even if constantly threatened and broken, is yet ever constantly renewed.

31 In the power of the Risen Christ, then, we lay the foundation of our hope. And we have confidence that if men of good will and sincere purpose will labor together, we can build this new society. Only we must have the humility to depend on God and on His will that His sons shall come to the fullness of the stature of Christ Jesus our Lord.

#### ENDNOTES

1. John XXIII, *Pacem in Terris*.
2. Cf. Pope Paul VI, *Message to the Asian Bishops' Meeting*, 28 November 1970.
3. *Message to Mankind of the Council Fathers*, Vatican II, 20 October 1962.
4. From the Conference Message, Asian Ecumenical Conference for Development, Tokyo, 22 July 1970.

#### RESOLUTIONS OF THE MEETING

The discussions we have held in both the Plenary Assembly and in the various Working Groups have been fruitful, first and foremost, in helping to strengthen our own convictions and clarifying our objectives. It is these convictions and resolves which we will bring home with us to our dioceses and our countries. The more salient of them we have tried to formulate in the texts which follow: they may serve to inform those who have followed our deliberations and give some indications of the lines of action and collaboration which, with God's assistance, we desire to open up. May the Spirit give us the energies to implement these with all deliberate speed.

1. It has been agreed:

THAT THE EPISCOPAL CONFERENCES HERE REPRESENTED ARE URGED TO AUTHORIZE AND SUPPORT A PERMANENT STRUCTURE FOR THE EFFECTIVE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE DECISIONS OF THIS MEETING.

2. Along with men of other faiths, other Christians and all men of good will, we resolve to uphold and promote the realization of human rights and defend them wherever, whenever, and by whomsoever they are violated.

3. We resolve to make our special concern the lot of the workers and peasants, in particular to assist in their education and organizations in order to enable them to exercise and defend their rights in society, according to the teachings of the Church.

4. We resolve to help secure the basic means of livelihood for all. In this context, we strongly commit ourselves to an equitable distribution and socially responsible use of land and other resources within our nations, as also among the nations of the world.

5. Being fully aware of the problems of population pressure, we resolve to impress on all the duty of responsible parenthood by legitimate means.

6. While expressing our appreciation to the nations of the world and the bishops of the world for their expansion of brotherhood towards Asia, we affirm that a highly desirable form of mutual aid between nations is trade on an equitable basis. We urge a greater openness of the markets of the affluent world to the fruits of Asian labor and the upholding of justice in international commodity prices.

7. We support the struggle against atheistic communism and imperialism of every kind. We uphold peace by which we mean peace with justice and freedom.

8. To avoid unnecessary reduplication of efforts and for the maintenance of national priorities, we urge support and cooperation with government agencies and other religious and civic bodies, and all men of good will, in development work.

9. We recognize and appreciate the positive work done by previous ecumenical conferences organized by the World Council of Churches, Caritas Internationalis, Sodepax, Misereor etc.

10. We commend wholeheartedly the recent recommendations on development by the UN and also by the Report of the Pearson Commission, the Tinbergen Report and the Reports of UNCTAD.

In particular we urge that the affluent nations reach the goal of at least 1% of GNP as aid to the developing countries at the earliest possible date. In consideration of the burdens of interest and capital repayments, we also strongly appeal that at least 70% of the aid be in the form of grants. In the case of aid loans, we request the progressive untying of aid.

11. While we acknowledge the inadequacies of our efforts hitherto in this field we would strongly press for:

- i. The elaboration of a theology of development inclusive of the role of the Church in situations of conflict.
- ii. A clarification of the roles of the priests, religious and laity in such a theology.

12. We pledge ourselves to an open, sincere, and continuing dialogue with our brothers of other great religions of Asia, that we may learn from one another how to enrich ourselves spiritually and how to work more effectively together on our common task of total human development.

13. We also pledge ourselves to develop an indigenous theology and to do what we can so that the life and message of the Gospel may be ever more incarnate in the rich historic cultures of Asia, so that in the necessary process of modernization and development, Asian Christianity may help to promote all that is "authentically human in these cultures."

14. We urge that Episcopal Conferences establish suitable procedures for fostering a continuing dialogue between the theologians and specialists in religion of our Asian churches and their counterparts belonging to other Asian religions.

15. We recognize the dynamic and prophetic role that Asian students are playing in the development and transformation of our society. We also recognize that the university chaplains can and must

meet the university students in a frank and open dialogue and with them confront the problems and issues posed by the university communities and our changing society.

**16.** It is proposed that one member of each national episcopal conference be appointed to have special care of student affairs; and it is imperative that the student chaplaincy is provided with an adequate number of full-time and well-trained chaplains who with the students will endeavor to identify themselves closely with the poor and underprivileged masses of Asia.

**17.** It is recommended that the proposed Standing Committee of the Asian Bishops' Conferences do all in its power to facilitate and coordinate the work of university student chaplains.

**18.** Appreciative of the importance of education and of the contribution our educational efforts can make in the whole process of human development in our lands we urge our Catholic educational institutes and educators to put increasing emphasis on education for total development, and that for this purpose, adequate arrangements be made for the active involvement of our teachers and students in spiritual leadership training, social welfare, and community development programs.

**19.** We gratefully acknowledge the initiative and guidance that the Asian Regional Secretariat of the International Office of Catholic Education (OIEC) has already given in this and other regards and pledge the Asian section of the OIEC all necessary support.

**20.** In order to make the voice of Christ heard more relevantly on such current problems in Asia as social justice, education and political freedom; and in order to coordinate existing activities of the Church in Asia in the fields of radio, television, press and film; and in order to harmonize the mass media activities of the Church with other existing channels of the media, it is suggested that the proposed Central Committee of the Asian Bishops' Conferences establish a three-member Episcopal Commission for Mass Media as early as possible. (UNDA-ASIA meets in Manila in February 1971).

**21.** It is recommended that the proposed Central Committee of the Asian Bishops' Conference establish an Asian news agency and publishing house and in this connection investigate the suitability of locating these in Hong Kong.

*(The proposal, made during an earlier meeting on Nov. 28, 1970, is as follows:*

*It is proposed that the Central Committee of the Asian Bishops' Conferences establish an Asian news center or a central information agency which will gather and distribute news of interest and importance to and for the Church).*

**22.** It is proposed that the Episcopal Commission use UNDA-ASIA as its extension arm for radio and television for an experimental period of one year. It is proposed that the Episcopal Commission or similar structure with the help of experts and the cooperation of all the Episcopal Conferences work out ways and means for the effective use of Radio Veritas regarding overseas broadcasting.

Resolutions of the Meeting

Approved at the Closing Plenary Session Asian Bishops' Meeting  
November 29, 1970

## RESOLUTIONS ON STRUCTURES

The General Assembly of this Meeting adopts the following resolution, namely:

THAT THE EPISCOPAL CONFERENCES HERE REPRESENTED ARE URGED TO AUTHORIZE AND SUPPORT A PERMANENT STRUCTURE FOR THE EFFECTIVE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE DECISIONS OF THIS MEETING; THIS PERMANENT STRUCTURE TO BE SUBSTANTIALLY AS FOLLOWS:

**1** The Episcopal Conferences of Asia represented in this Meeting shall create a Central Committee of the Asian Bishops, consisting of the President of each Conference or his episcopal representative. The function of this Central Committee is to foster and coordinate the efforts of the Episcopal Conferences to implement the resolutions of this Meeting.

**2** The Central Committee shall constitute a Standing Committee composed of three Bishops, from different part of Asia, who if they are not already members of the Central Committee will become such members ex officio, chosen as the Central Committee shall decide. The function of the Standing Committee is to provide

more direct guidance and support to the principal instrument of coordination of the Asian Bishops, namely, a Central Secretariat.

3 The Central Secretariat of the Asian Bishops shall be constituted by the Central Committee and shall function under the guidance of the Standing Committee.

4 It is highly desirable that the Standing Committee meet every six months and the Central Committee every 18 months.

5 It is also highly desirable that the Central Committee be empowered to call a General Assembly of the Asian Bishops' Conferences, whenever necessary, for the transaction of urgent business. The delegates to this General Assembly need not be all the Bishops of Asia, but a specified member of, or representatives elected by, them.

6 In any case, it is suggested that a General Assembly be convened by the Central Committee in three to five years' time.

7 Considering the limited resources of the Asian Bishops the Central Secretariat shall be a very modest affair to begin with, consisting of one Secretary General assisted by a small clerical staff.

8 The functions of the Central Secretariat shall be as follows:

- to be an organ of continuing cooperation among the Episcopal Conferences of Asia;
- to be an organ of exchange of information concerning needs in Asia of both the Christian communities and the national communities; an organ of sharing of experience of the various communities of the Catholic Church and the Christian Churches; a center for information regarding personnel resources and personnel needs for the Church in this region;
- to be a center which will set up consultations, conferences, and the like on specific theological and ecclesiological issues; which will program and undertake, in cooperation with other bodies, studies (especially in matters concerning justice, development and peace) which may be needed or helpful for the Episcopal Conferences and the Catholic communities of the region; which can stimulate thought, concern, and consensus among the Bishop of Asia and their

communities regarding major religious, social, educational issues affecting the region; which can help in the preparation of regional meetings and consultations of the Bishops in the area, or of committees and other bodies set up for the various specific objectives;

- to serve as a channel of dissemination of the thought, on social questions especially, of the Holy See, but also of the Conferences of Bishops all over the world, for the benefit of the Bishops' Conferences of Asia;
- to study the possibilities of mutual aid between the various Catholic communities in Asia and also between the Catholic communities of the West and those of Asia;
- to promote the formation of a common mind and a common voice in the Catholic communities of Asia in the matter of positions to be taken and formulated on questions of justice, development and peace;
- to serve as liaison with the East Asian Christian Conference (EACC) especially in matters of church involvement in development efforts;
- to serve as liaison between the Christians of Asia and their brethren of other faiths, likewise in development efforts as well as in all constructive forms of intercultural exchange.

9 It should be emphasized that the Central Secretariat is a service agency, with no juridical competence to issue directives to, or in any way to infringe on the authority and autonomy of, the Episcopal Conferences. However, since the Central Secretariat will not be able to perform these tasks without the full cooperation of the Episcopal Conferences, this Meeting urges on them, and on their various Episcopal Commissions, the advisability of supplying the Central Secretariat promptly and fully with needed information and assistance.

10 The Central Secretariat shall be located in an Asian city which is, as far as possible, geographically central to the region, and at the same time where the Secretary General will have easy access to the specialists and the international agencies upon whose collaboration he will depend. In the opinion of the Meeting, the city which best meets these specifications is Manila.

**11** The Secretary General of the Central Secretariat shall be appointed by the Central Committee for a term of two years, although this is open to revision.

**12** It is a highly desirable that at least one of the three Bishops of the Standing Committee be easily accessible to the Secretary General.

**13** The Episcopal Conference of Asia shall contribute yearly to the expenses of the Central Secretariat in the manner specified by the Central Committee. It is suggested that a fund of US\$30,000 for the first year is an absolute minimum with which to make a start. Because of the poverty of many Asian dioceses, donations from more affluent dioceses will be appreciated, and efforts should be made to seek other sources of funding.

**14** The formation of this central structure for all Asia shall not preclude, but on the contrary encourage the setting up of sub-regional cooperative arrangements between Episcopal Conferences with common problems, needs and interests.

**15** Thus, the Episcopal Conferences of a geographical and/or cultural sub-region (such as those of Korea, Japan, Taiwan-Hong Kong, and Viet-Nam) could proceed to set up a Sub-regional Central Committee with its own Standing Committee and Sub-Regional Secretariat. Operational connections would then be established between these sub-regional agencies and the central agencies.

**16** The first meeting of the Central Committee of the Asian Bishops at which the structure described above shall be set up, will be held in March 1971 in Hong Kong.

Resolutions on Structures

Approved at the Closing Plenary Session Asian Bishops' Meeting  
November 29, 1970



In the Philippine city of Manila, from the 23<sup>rd</sup> to the 29<sup>th</sup> of November 1970, 180 bishops from all over Asia gathered for what has been called the Asian Bishops' Meeting. St. Pope Paul VI was with them for the last days of the meeting. It was at this meeting that the bishops authorized and supported the establishment of a permanent structure for the bishops. They formed the Central Committee (Presidents of the Episcopal Conferences) of the Asian Bishops and called for its first meeting in Hong Kong in March 1971 under Bishop Francis Xavier HSU Chen-Ping of Hong Kong. From this, the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences (FABC) had its beginning.

The year 2020 is the fiftieth anniversary of that momentous meeting and beginning of the FABC. To celebrate this anniversary, the FABC has called for the first ever General Conference. The FABC 50 General Conference is to revitalize the whole Church in Asia and to find new pathways.

## About the Editor

**Vimal Tirimanna, CSsR**, is a Redemptorist priest from Sri Lanka teaching moral theology at the Alphonsianum in Rome and at the National Seminary of Our Lady of Lanka in Kandy, Sri Lanka. Since 1997 he was the Sri Lankan representative of the Office of Theological Concerns (OTC) of the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences (FABC) He was the Executive Secretary of OTC from 2002 until 2012. He is the editor of the recent volumes of *For All the Peoples of Asia*, a compilation of the documents of the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences.