

LOCAL CHURCH, DIALOGUE AND CONVERSION

by

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- I. THE THEOLOGY OF LOCAL CHURCH
FABC PERSPECTIVES**
- II. THE CHURCH'S DIALOGUE COMMITMENT
INTERRELIGIOUS DIALOGUE MILESTONES**
- III. NAMING THE CONVERSION WE SEEK
MISSION AND PASCHAL PERSPECTIVES**

INTRODUCTION

"The contribution of the FABC, since its founding in 1970, to the renewal of the local Churches throughout Asia, is truly remarkable. As one searches the FABC documents and imbibes their creative and inspiring spirit, one discovers the great breadth, hope and courage they represent.... Indeed, the spirit of the Second Vatican Council is 'alive and well' in the Asia of the Third Millennium."

These few sentences taken from *For All the Peoples of Asia III* accurately describe the "Asian Pentecost" that has been emerging and blossoming over the last three decades. Numerous articles, books, studies and doctoral theses have explored the wide variety of diverse themes inherent in the ever-expanding corpus of FABC theological reflection.

This Paper includes three thematic presentations by one author on specific topics relevant to the ongoing life of Christian communities in Asia. The selected bibliographies attached to each essay are not limited only to the paper itself; they are designed, using 40-50 authors and sources, to be a current panorama of some of the best literature on the specific subject under discussion.

The first essay presents the theology of local Church, based on FABC sources; it includes a thematic recapitulation by an eminent Asian theologian. The second presentation captures the Church's growth in interreligious dialogue; FABC consistently identifies dialogue as the "distinctive mode" of mission in the Asian continent (FABC V: 4.1). The final essay explores the question of "conversion" and its proper place in the Church's mission today; the topic is explored from a "paschal perspective."

It is the hope of the author that these three modest essays may contribute to a deeper appreciation of the "Pathways of the Spirit" in the dynamic life of the local Churches in Asia. JHK*

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I. THE THEOLOGY OF LOCAL CHURCH FABC Perspectives

Explore any major document that has emerged from the reflection of the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences (FABC) during its three-decade existence, and you will find creative insights on the local Church in the Asian context. Historically, it was the 1970 Asian pastoral visit of Pope Paul VI that gave the impetus for the local Churches to begin formulating a vision of Church and mission adequate to the "new world being born" in Asia in the post-colonial period. They asked themselves: "How would local faith-communities respond to the grace that was the Second Vatican Council? How would the Churches incarnate a decisive "turning to history," and a "turning to the Gospel" within history, "for all the peoples of Asia"?

AN EMERGING THEOLOGY. Consistent, prolonged, pastoral and theological reflection on the Church and her mission of evangelization has enabled the FABC to articulate an overall vision that captures what "being Church in Asia today" truly means. The insights have grown out of a belief that the Spirit was speaking to the Churches. Without doubt, many creative FABC ecclesiological insights center on the meaning, theology, and the lived experience of local Church.

FABC pastoral-theological reflection is decidedly inductive, emerging from life's concrete realities. Therefore, an ecclesiology with local Church as its focal point most adequately captures the hopes and aspirations of local peoples. As the community of Jesus' disciples in Asia, the Church consistently links her identity with Asia's peoples and their life situations. She seeks to be in fact — not only in theory — the "Church of the poor," and the "Church of the young." She shares the vicissitudes of the "Church of silence" in several parts of Asia. Her pastoral priorities concern the displaced (refugees and migrants), women and the girl-child, youth, families, the poor, the followers of Asia's great religious traditions. She actively fosters increasing communion among Asia's local Churches in filial oneness with the See of Peter, which presides over the universal Church in love. She promotes authentic catholicity.

In a word, the theological thematic of local Church provides an appropriate, integrating center for the life of Asia's faith-communities. This fact helps explain why internationally some of the very best theological reflection on local Church has emerged in Asia and through the FABC. Telling the story of local Church in Asian/FABC theological reflection — with all its depth, richness, and inspiration — is the central focus of this modest essay. Methodologically, this presentation of FABC material on the local Church is unfolded chronologically; the format lends itself to greater clarity. In addition, quoting the FABC materials directly and extensively avoids diluting the freshness, creativity, and insightfulness of the original documents.

FABC I. The First FABC Plenary Assembly was held in Taipei, Taiwan in April 1974; it focused on the theme: "Evangelization in Modern Day Asia." (It was also a preparation for the Synod on Evangelization to be held in Rome later that same year.) The Asian Churches through their bishops defined the central and most urgent mission duty incumbent upon them: "The primary focus of our task of evangelization, then, at this time in our history, is the building up of a truly local church. For the local church is the realization and the enfleshment of the Body of Christ in a given people, a given place and time" (FABC I, 9-10).

"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" (FABC I, 11).

"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" (FABC I, 12).

ASIAN COLLOQUIUM ON MINISTRIES IN THE CHURCH. Three years later in 1977, during the Asian Colloquium on Ministries in the Church (ACMC) held in Hong Kong, the theme of local church received another impetus: "...the decisive new phenomenon for Christianity in Asia will be the emergence of genuine Christian communities in Asia — Asian in their way of thinking, praying, living, communicating their own Christ-experience to others. The consequences will be tremendous, not only for the ministries the Asian Churches will have to perform, but also for all aspects of their life. We should beware of seeing our future mission in categories that belong to the past, when the West shaped the Churches' history. If the Asian Churches do not discover their own identity, they will have no future" (ACMC 14).

"Each local Church is determined by her human context and lives in a dialectical relationship with the human society into which she is inserted as the Gospel leaven.... Each local Church, in order to be viable, needs to become fully responsible and must have the legitimate autonomy which her natural and harmonious growth demands" (ACMC 25).

"Asian Churches then must become truly Asian in all things. The principle of indigenization and inculturation is at the very root of their coming into their own. The ministry of Asian Churches, if it is to be authentic, must be relevant to Asian societies. This calls on the part of the Churches for originality, creativity and inventiveness, for boldness and courage" (ACMC 26).

"Since Christ's mission is universal, all local Churches are called to live in communion with each other. This bond of unity, visibly expressed in the college of bishops presided over by the Bishop of Rome, implies that the search of each Church for ministries adapted to her needs is subject to verification and testing

by the other Churches. In this bond of union lies the guarantee of the true apostolicity and catholicity of each local Church" (ACMC 27).

FABC II. The Second FABC Plenary Assembly (Calcutta, India, 1978) was organized around the theme: "Prayer – The Life of the Church of Asia." The bishops-delegate noted that an important motive for their assembly was "to deepen our knowledge of our local churches" (FABC II, 1), And they addressed "the tasks which the carrying-out of the mission of the Church in Asia demands: commitment to the upbuilding of Asian communities in the life of the Gospel, to inculturation of Christian faith and life, to the endeavor for total human development and authentic liberation of peoples in justice and love, to interreligious dialogue and to renewed missionary formation" (FABC II, 3).

INTERNATIONAL MISSION CONGRESS. The successful International (though predominantly Asian) Mission Congress (IMC) held in 1979 in Manila once again strongly affirmed the centrality of the local Church for a "new age of mission" in Asia.

"What is the newness of this 'new age of mission'?" First, the realization in practice that 'mission' is no longer, and can no longer be, a one-way movement from the 'older churches' to the 'younger churches,' from the churches of the old Christendom to the churches in the colonial lands. Now – as Vatican II already affirmed with all clarity and force – every local church is and cannot be but missionary. Every local church is 'sent' by Christ and the Father to bring the Gospel to its surrounding milieu, and to bear it also into all the world. For every local church this is a primary task. Hence we are moving beyond both the vocabulary and the idea of 'sending churches' and 'receiving churches,' for as living communities of the one Church of Jesus Christ, every local church must be a sending church, and every local church (because it is not on earth ever a total realization of the Church) must also be a receiving church. Every local church is responsible for its mission, and co-responsible for the mission of all its sister-churches. Every local church, according to its possibilities, must share whatever its gifts are, for the needs of other churches, for mission throughout [hu]mankind, for the life of the world" (IMC 14).

"Once again, what is the newness of this 'new age of mission'? We believe that the Spirit of the Lord calls each people and each culture to its own fresh and creative response to the Gospel. Each local church has its own vocation in the one history of salvation, in the one Church of Christ. In each local church, each people's history, each people's culture, meanings and values, each people's traditions are taken up, not diminished nor destroyed, but celebrated and renewed, purified, if need be, and fulfilled (as the Second Vatican Council teaches) in the life of the Spirit" (IMC 15).

Two workshop papers (V and VII) of the Manila Mission Congress spoke eloquently of the local Church. The participants of Workshop VII noted: "We recognize that the local church is the center and source of evangelization" (1). "Just as it is the responsibility of the Christian to work for the growth and development of the local church, in the same way he must become aware of his responsibility toward churches in other parts of the world" (9). This means: "Each local church is co-responsible with its sister churches everywhere, Rome being the foundation and center, for the building up of the kingdom of God throughout the world" (9).

The same document of Workshop VII affirms that "Missionaries from sister churches are not only living signs of the universality of the Church and the existence of co-responsibility, but because of their different cultural and Christian background, they enrich and fruitfully challenge the local church. The local church should welcome, accept and help integrate them into its life" (10).

FABC III. The Third FABC Plenary Assembly (Bangkok, Thailand, 1982) chose "The Church-A Community of Faith in Asia" as its central theme. Again, one finds enlightening words on the local Church. The final FABC III statement noted: "We have seen ... 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.' 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" (FABC III, 15).

THESES ON THE LOCAL CHURCH. The centrality of the local Church in the theological-missiological thought in the Asian area is highlighted by the FABC commitment to study the question in depth. The FABC has promoted indigenous Asian theological reflection since its early years; the formal establishment of the Theological Advisory Commission (TAC) of the FABC came in the 1980s. A five-year period of extensive study and consultation culminated in a comprehensive document entitled "Theses on the Local Church: A Theological Reflection in the Asian Context" (TLC). This is one of the longest documents ever produced by the TAC (well over 50 closely printed pages); it was released in January 1991. In the opinion of this author, worldwide it is probably the best and most comprehensive document to date on *local Church*.

The FABC-TAC document on the local Church contains several sections. After a lengthy contextualized introduction and clarification of terms, the fifteen theses are presented in two thematic sections: "Biblical Foundations" (Theses 1-4); and "The Birth, Life and Mission of the Local Church" (Theses 5-15). Next, a concluding section follows; finally, a wide variety of practical "Pastoral Corollaries and Recommendations" are presented. Some salient quotes serve to capture the spirit of this insightful piece of Asian theological reflection on the local Church.

"Already, as we have noted, the First Plenary Assembly of the FABC spoke of building up of the local Church as the present focus of the Church's mission in Asia. That discernment remains valid today [1991].... More and more, the local Churches in Asia must see themselves as responsible agents for the self-realization of the Church" (TLC: C, 3-4).

"We see the emergence of the world of the Third Millennium

already upon us.... Whether the Gospel shall be present in this new age with its unpredictable turnings and its manifold diversity will depend greatly on whether local Churches fulfill their vocation in the historic moment which is now upon them. We grasp something of the significance of local Church and inculturation in this context; those who cannot understand this fail to resonate with the signs of our time, and the heartbeat of our peoples" (TLC: C, 5).

"We must surely be grateful that we experience today the 'rush of the Spirit' in our Churches. For it is a privileged moment for local theological reflection and discernment, for the gathering and spending of energies, for the upbuilding of authentic local Churches in our part of the world.... We can only pray that we may listen and be obedient to the Spirit, that we may be guided by his creative power and be filled by the commitment and courage which are his gifts" (TLC: C, 6-7).

FABC V. Most major documents of the FABC refer explicitly to the role of the local Church in mission and evangelization. The Fifth Plenary FABC Assembly held in Bandung, Indonesia (July 1990), with the theme "Journeying Together toward the Third Millennium," added new clarity and focus by asserting that it is the local Church which is "the acting subject of mission."

"The renewal of our sense of mission will mean ... 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" (FABC V, 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" (FABC V, 3.3.2).

FABC VI. The Sixth FABC Plenary Assembly, held in Manila, Philippines in 1995 in conjunction with the visit of Pope John Paul II for the World Youth Day, summarized key themes of the 25-year history of FABC. The final statement entitled "Christian Discipleship in Asia Today: Service to Life" noted that: "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" (FABC VI, 3). "It is the Spirit of Jesus that creates the [Church as a] disciple-community" (FABC VI, 14).

Many are the challenges of being an authentic local Church in Asia. Asian Catholics admit: "We may hesitate because we are a 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" (FABC VI, 14.3). Most local Churches in Asia continually discover and live their identities as minorities within their national societies.

ASIAN SYNOD ECHOES FABC THEMES. A short excursus provides interesting insights into key FABC themes about local Church that resounded in the Special Assembly for Asia of the Synod of Bishops ("Asian Synod") held in Rome from April 19-May 14, 1998. As Cardinal Stephen Kim Sou-hwan of Korea greeted the Holy Father and the Synod participants in his opening address on April 20, he described the realities of Asia which "is made up not of various nations but, one may say, many worlds."

Kim noted the endeavors and accomplishments of the FABC "for the past 27 years"; in building up a truly local Church in Asia "continual and quite serious efforts have been made to listen to, learn from, and reflect and act upon today's lived Asian realities in faith and prayer. And, we have felt called to an ever renewed self-understanding of the Church and her mission, not so much from abstract thought, but in the face of given pastoral situations and their exigencies" (OR-EE: April 29, 1998: 5).

Bishop Josef Suwatan, MSC, of Indonesia asserted that the

"peoples of Asia need the witness of 'being Church'." He pointed out how "the Fifth Plenary Assembly of FABC in 1990 in Bandung speaks about 'a new way of being Church' in Asia, as a 'communion of communities'." He reiterated: "Note well, it speaks about 'being' Church!" (OR-EE: April 29, 1998: 15). Again, Archbishop Petrus Turang of Indonesia echoed the same theme and focused on the growth of the local Churches: "The Churches of Asia need to take advantage of the vision of a new way of being Church" (OR-EE: May 20, 1998: 8). This new approach will also achieve, according to Bishop John Cummins, "the desired communion among local Churches"; this means accepting "the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences as a vehicle to do this" (OR-EE: May 20, 1998: 13).

The missionary dimension of the local Churches of Asia emerged strongly in the Synod. Father Edward Malone, FABC Assistant Secretary General, emphasized several crucial points: "Asian Christians and local Churches have a deep sense of gratitude for the gift of faith.... With the renewal of ecclesiology a wide variety of mission initiatives must necessarily emerge from within each local Church...." Concretely, specific actions must help promote "the emergence of missionary local Churches"; thus, "pastoral care is not to derail the local Church's mission effort"; and "the actual foundation of Asian-born missionary societies is to be fostered in each local Church" (OR-EE: May 13, 1998: 14).

Several Synod interventions focused on the challenges of this FABC-inspired "new way of being Church." Bishop Pakiam of Malaysia captured the essence of this commitment to "be witnesses of the Gospel as a community of the local Church in a multiracial, multicultural, multilinguistic country"; note that this description reflects the reality of most Asian countries. Bishop Pakiam recommended following FABC directions so that local Churches become "a communion of communities, a participatory Church, a dialoguing and prophetic Church" (OR-EE: June 17, 1998: 8).

In the final session of the Synod on May 13, Cardinal Darmaatmadja of Indonesia again referred to the task of "being Church in Asia." For him all local Churches must struggle to be "a Church with an Asian 'face' [and an] Asian appearance"; they must avoid ap-

pearing "foreign to Asia's traditions and cultures" (OR-EE: June 17, 1998: 10-11). In a word, they must emerge as truly *local Churches!*

FABC THEMES IN ECCLESIA IN ASIA. The Apostolic Exhortation *Ecclesia in Asia*, promulgated by Pope John Paul II in New Delhi, India on November 6, 1999, echoed the ecclesiology of the Asian Synod Fathers of the FABC region. Although the document develops the "ecclesiology of communion" extensively, significant insights on the local Churches of Asia are found within the papal exhortation.

Ecclesia in Asia notes that "the Synod Fathers were well aware of the pressing need of the local Churches in Asia to present the mystery of Christ according to their cultural patterns and ways of thinking" (20h). It is necessary that "each local Church should become what the Synod Fathers called a 'participatory Church,' a Church, that is, in which all live their proper vocation and perform their proper role" (25b). The pope's exhortation praises the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences by name, because it has "helped to foster union among the local Churches," and has "provided venues for cooperation in resolving pastoral problems" (26b).

In *Ecclesia in Asia* Pope John Paul II identifies important responsibilities of the local Churches in Asia: "where possible the local Churches in Asia should promote human rights activities on behalf of women" (34g); "local Churches, for their part, need to foster awareness of the ideal of the religious and consecrated life, and promote such vocations" (44c); mission is the task of each local Church, and the pope recommends "the establishment within each local Church of Asia, where such do not exist, of missionary societies of apostolic life, characterized by their special commitment to the mission *ad gentes, ad exteros* and *ad vitam*" (44d).

John Paul II continues: "the local Churches in Asia, in communion with the Successor of Peter, need to foster greater communion of mind and heart through close cooperation among themselves" (24d); while unity in the Church is essential, it also re-

spects "the legitimate diversity of the local Churches and the variety of cultures and peoples with which they are in contact" (25a).

FABC VII. The Seventh FABC Plenary Assembly, the first major Church gathering of the Jubilee Year 2000, was held in Samphran, Thailand, January 3-12, 2000. The assembly of 193 participants (cardinals, bishops, clergy, religious, and laity) explored the theme: "A Renewed Church in Asia: A Mission of Love and Service." Once again, the integrating theology of local Church came to the fore in the final statement.

The participants asserted: "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" (FABC VII: Introduction).

The assembly reflected: "The thirty-year history of the FABC has been a concerted series of movements toward a renewed Church." Of the eight movements noted, one pivotal initiative has been the "movement toward a 'truly local Church,' toward a Church 'incarnate in a people, a Church indigenous and inculturated'." The assembly statement boldly affirmed: "This is the vision of a renewed Church that the FABC has developed over the past thirty years. It is still valid today" (FABC VII: I-A).

THEMATIC RECAPITULATION. This presentation has briefly sketched the development of reflection on the local Church in Asia over the past three decades. The eminent Asian theologian, Catalino G. Arévalo, SJ, has reflected on the growth of Asian local Churches in the *Jahrbuch für Kontextuelle Theologien 1995* [1995 Yearbook of Contextual Theologies]. His insights in this document are worthy of extensive citation.

He notes that since the renewal of Vatican II "the Church in the FABC region was seeking increasingly to 'become Church'.... It was an exciting time to awaken minds and hearts of Asian Christians to the real endeavor of the 'self-realization of the Church'" (31). Arévalo asserts: "For me, behind the desire for

constructing local theologies [ecclesiologies] lies the 'dream of catholicity.' The catholicity of the Church has been a passion, in a way, in my mind and heart since my first contacts with ecclesiology.... It is a consequence of Incarnation and Paschal Mystery; it is the meaning of Pentecost, that (rightly understood) the realization of *catholicity* is the meaning of the Church's mission" (32).

Arévalo continues: "That means that every people, every place in Asia, has a vocation to the realization of the catholicity of the Church. Christ is 'not yet complete' until all of humanity, each part of it, has made its contribution to the 'Christ of all peoples.' Every people has its gifts and riches, and the Father has a place for all these gifts, in the Kingdom, in the Body of His Son. Equality and participation are a calling for each people in the human family. Until each people has made the contribution to the Church's unity-in-diversity, which it has a right and duty to make, the work of mission of the Church has not been fulfilled" (32-33).

"My growing conviction has been that each place and region in Asia has to make its specific contribution to the mosaic which constitutes the catholicity of the Church, which in my mind is one of the most important principles of our faith. Every people has a right to find its place within the church. Every local church can only contribute to this *dream of catholicity* when it is given a status of equality and participation, because every people in the eyes of the Father is equal to all the others and has a right to be loved for themselves and for the gifts and particular contribution it can make" (33).

"Catholicity implies that we all have need of one another. That is the ultimate meaning of local church for me. A local church is never a means in itself, but in equality and participation every local church helps to bring forth the catholic communion as the ultimate aim of being church" (34).

"The Church catholic is a communion of local churches. Every local Church is a Church in a given time and place, but it is also in communion, both diachronically and synchronically, with the Church in all times and in all the world. Unless every

local Church shares in the *koinonia* that is the Church universal, in true equality, in authentic participation, in the interchange of gifts and blessings, the dream of catholicity has not yet been realized. It is part of our deepest duty, as Catholics especially, to help bring this to pass" (34).

An interviewer framed this question for Arévalo: "You concentrate on the *local Church in Asia* as the operative agent of mission; ... do you see Asian local Churches living up to the ideal that every local Church is called to be a missionary, called to be a 'sending Church'?" (35).

Arévalo responded: "On the local Church, this I believe must be said again and again: the concrete, operative meaning of inculturation is the process of letting the local Church be the local Church, assuming responsibility, within the *koinonia* of all the Churches in the *catholica*, to 'realize itself' in its own life and mission.... Until the local Churches see their own self-realization as their duty and task, and strive to bring this about, they have not yet 'become Church' in the truest, fullest sense. Yet here in Asia, we are still a long way from that!" (35).

"The operative center of the Church's mission today is the local Church; it must discern for its own time and place what the concrete tasks of its own mission are.... We will make every effort at a renewed evangelization, but one that is truly inculturated and integral (in all dimensions of our common life). Most of our local communities are far from accomplishing these objectives" (35).

Arévalo continues in an optimistic vein: "The past twenty years of the common journey of the Asian Bishops in FABC have been years of growth for our local churches, hopefully 'in wisdom, age and grace.' In the years ahead the tasks discerned for mission remain in front of us as challenges which we have only begun to meet. *Their doing remains*" (*FABC Papers 57b: 20*).

CONCLUSION. The experience of the pilgrim local Churches in Asia since Vatican II has been an exciting and inspiring faith-journey. It has been an experience in ecclesiogenesis, the birthing and development of local Churches. It has verified

the ancient adage that the Church is always *in via*, on the road, in process – as she awaits her Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. The road has not been a well-trodden path; Asian Churches are making the pilgrim way in the very process of walking it – under the guidance of the befriending Spirit. Asian Christians are enthusiastic pilgrim-disciples; a renewed local Church for a new world is being born in Asia.

Local Churches, full of vitality through faith and the power of the Holy Spirit, will engage in reading the "signs of the times" (GS 4) and responding to concrete social, political, economic, religious and cultural realities. They will foster their own inner life (inculturated faith) and be better equipped to dialogue with other Christians (ecumenism) and the followers of other faith traditions (interreligious dialogue). In short, they will experience self-actualization and "see themselves as responsible agents for the self-realization of the Church" (TLC: C-4). They will experientially know that they are "the acting subject of mission" (FABC V, 3.3.1). They will rejoice in their "new way of being Church" (FABC VI, 3).

Each local Church in Asia has received abundant and diverse gifts from the Holy Spirit. Each Church is to give freely because it has received freely (cf. Mt. 10:8). In this manner each local Church contributes to the realization of the catholicity of the Church. To cite Arévalo: "Unless every local Church shares in the *koinonia* that is the Church universal, in true equality, in authentic participation, in the interchange of gifts and blessings, the dream of catholicity has not yet been realized. It is part of our deepest duty, as Catholics especially, to help bring this to pass" (*Jahrbuch*: 34). Thus, the entire Church becomes, as noted by Vatican II, the *corpus ecclesiarum* (LG 23), the body of the Churches, the corporate body of local Churches.

The Church catholic is a communion of local Churches; the Church catholic is built upon the "principle of communion" as John Paul II noted in his message to the Catholics of China, from Manila, in January of 1995 (OR-EE: January 18, 1995: 1). Or again, in the Catholic experience, the more that each local Church becomes truly inculturated, indigenized and localized, the more

this same Church through the power of the Holy Spirit becomes universal. And, the dream of vibrant local Churches within an authentic catholicity continues to grow and take on flesh. Christians frequently meditate on the wondrous mystery that in the power of the Spirit the Church is for believers *donum Dei atque officium nostri*, at one and the same time, both God's gift and our task!

ABBREVIATIONS

- ACMC** – *Asian Colloquium on Ministries in the Church* (Hong Kong, 1977), in FAPA I: 67-92
- EA** – *Ecclesia in Asia (The Church in Asia*, November 6, 1999)
- FABC** – Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences
- FABC I** – *Evangelization in Modern Day Asia*, (Taipei, Taiwan, 1974) in FAPA I: 11-25
- FABC II** – *Prayer – The Life of the Church in Asia* (Calcutta, India, 1978), in FAPA I: 27-48
- FABC III** – *The Church – A Community of Faith in Asia*, (Bangkok, Thailand, 1982) in FAPA I: 49-65
- FABC IV** – *The Vocation and Mission of the Laity in the Church and in the World of Asia*, (Tokyo, Japan, 1986) in FAPA I: 177-198
- FABC V** – *Journeying Together Toward the Third Millennium* (Bandung, Indonesia, 1990) in FAPA I: 273-289
- FABC VI** – *Christian Discipleship in Asia Today: Service to Life* (Manila, Philippines, 1995) in FAPA II: 1-12
- FABC VII** – *A Renewed Church in Asia: A Mission of Love and Service* (Samphran, Thailand, 2000) in FAPA III: 1-16
- FAPA** – *For All the Peoples of Asia: I [1970-1991]*. edited by Rosales, Gaudencio and Arévalo, Catalino. Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books; and Quezon City, Philippines: Claretian Publications, 1992, *For All the Peoples of*

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II. THE CHURCH'S DIALOGUE COMMITMENT

Interreligious Dialogue Milestones

Addressing the entire Church "at the beginning of the new millennium" which opens "a new stage of the Church's journey," Pope John Paul II presented pivotal areas of Church life requiring that she "take up her evangelizing mission with fresh enthusiasm" (1, 2). The purpose of the Pope's *Novo Millennio Ineunte* (January 6, 2001) focused on enabling the Church to "shine ever more brightly in the variety of her gifts and in her unity as she journeys on" (3).

The Pope addresses more than three dozen individual subject areas in this apostolic letter. Most themes are discussed rather briefly. However, five topics receive more lengthy treatment – extending to three numbered sections. "Interreligious Dialogue" is addressed in sections 54-56 under the heading "Dialogue and Mission." This comparatively lengthy treatment appears to emphasize the importance the pope allots to dialogue in the Church's mission of integral evangelization.

John Paul II asks the faithful to consider "the great challenge of interreligious dialogue to which we shall still be committed in the new millennium, in fidelity to the teachings of the Second Vatican Council.... This dialogue must continue.... [it] will be especially important in establishing a sure basis for peace.... The name of the one God must become increasingly what it is: a name of peace and a summons to peace" (55). This Pope has clearly renewed the Church's mandate to sincerely engage in dialogue in fulfillment of her missionary vocation.

LOCAL CHURCH COMMITMENT. The Church in the Philippines, in her discussions and documents connected with the Jubilee Year and Church Renewal, reemphasized the importance of interreligious dialogue. Two sources illustrate this fact; they are: (a) the Pastoral Letter of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of the Philippines (July 5, 2000) entitled: "'Missions' and the Church in the Philippines"; and, (b) the Message of the National Pastoral Consultation on Church Renewal (January 27,

2001) entitled: "Behold I Make All Things New."

The Philippine bishops' "Mission Letter" notes: "Mission in Asia will call for new consciousness and knowledge regarding other religious traditions here in this continent in which almost all the great religions of humanity have been born. One of the 'new things' of mission in Asia will be the demand for a deepened understanding of other religious communities (specially the Islamic), their religiosity and their theologies. Attitudes of genuine respect and reverence for others' beliefs and spiritualities must precede and accompany all interreligious dialogue and all mission" (IV, 6).

The January 2001 consultation on Church Renewal stated: "We shall undertake our renewal efforts in fidelity to Jesus' will for unity among believers. Rooted in Christ, we shall strive to eradicate prejudices and to grow in deeper understanding and appreciation of other ecclesial communities and religious traditions, especially the followers of Islam. We shall engage in a dialogue of life, faith, prayer and common action with them. As a way to healing, reconciliation and national unity, we shall encourage dialogue among all sectors of society" (7-H).

SIGNPOSTS ALONG THE DIALOGUE ROAD. The renewed dialogue commitment by the local Church at the turn of the new millennium has an important history that is worthy of a brief examination. The Church would never have arrived at its present appreciation of dialogue without the innovations begun by Pope John XXIII; in his call for *aggiornamento* and his convocation of the Second Vatican Council he envisioned a wide and encompassing renewal of the whole Church. Today, from the vantage point of nearly four decades of experience after the close of Vatican II in 1965, a keen observer can readily identify the "path of dialogue" along which the Spirit has led Christians; local Churches can readily discern a "mandate for dialogue" in recent Church experience and reflection.

The Church's forty-year journey on the dialogue road reveals key milestones where growth and understanding have been achieved. Each milestone noted in this essay contains a brief

description of the event itself, the progress it contributed, and the paths it noted for future growth in dialogue. On the one hand, the Church's milestones or signposts have been clear and encouraging; however, on the other hand, the general Church membership has been a reluctant pilgrim in walking the dialogue road. This succinct overview of significant milestones aims to encourage a fuller integration of dialogue within the Church's mission and ministry, an objective that both recent popes and local Churches have consistently promoted.

I. Secretariat for Non-Christians. On Pentecost (May 17) 1964, in the climate of the Second Vatican Council, Pope Paul VI instituted the Secretariat for Non-Christians as an entity distinct from the Sacred Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples. Renamed the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue in 1988, it was to serve as an institutional sign and structure of the Church's desire to meet and relate to the followers of other religious traditions of the world. Its task, as noted by Paul VI, was "to search for methods and ways of opening a suitable dialogue with non-Christians ... in order that non-Christians come to be known honestly and esteemed justly by Christians, and that in their turn non-Christians can adequately know and esteem Christian doctrine and life."

II. Encyclical: *Ecclesiam Suam*. Pope Paul VI published his programmatic encyclical letter *Ecclesiam Suam* on August 6, 1964 (between the second and third sessions of Vatican II). This "*magna carta* of dialogue" introduces the term "dialogue"; this is the first time that the term is used in an encyclical (over half of the document is devoted to a discussion of the need, source, characteristics, modes, partners, challenges and goals of dialogue): "The Church should enter into dialogue with the world in which it exists and labors" (67). "The dialogue of salvation was opened spontaneously on the initiative of God: He [God] loved us first" (74). We "need to wait for the hour when God may make our dialogue effective" (79).

"Dialogue is, then, a method of accomplishing the apostolic mission" (83). "The Church is not unaware of the formidable dimensions of such a mission" (99). It is also directed towards "the

followers of the great Afro-Asiatic religions" (111). We "recognize and respect the moral and spiritual values of various non-Christian religions, and we desire to join with them in promoting and defending common ideals of religious liberty, human brotherhood, good culture, social welfare and civil order" (112).

III. Second Vatican Council. Five documents of Vatican II contain important elements for understanding the Church's role vis-a-vis world religions (*Nostra Aetate*, *Lumen Gentium*, *Ad Gentes*, *Gaudium et Spes*, and *Dignitatis Humanae*). Some general themes are: the need to recognize within religions "elements of truth and grace" (AG 9); "treasures which the bountiful God has distributed among the nations of the earth" (AG 11); "a ray of that Truth which enlightens all men" (NA 2); recognition of the work of the Holy Spirit (GS 11; AG 4); the presence of treasures of the ascetical and contemplative life (AG 15, 18); and the presence of "Seeds of the Word" (LG 17; AG 11).

The Council promotes an attitude of profound respect toward all world religions (AG 10), specifically primitive and traditional religions (NA 2), Hinduism (NA 2), Buddhism (NA 2), Islam (NA 3; LG 16), and Judaism (NA 4; LG 16). It encourages dialogue and collaboration (NA 2); it is through dialogue that Christians can "receive the inspirations of the Spirit and follow them ardently" (GS 92). The Council challenges all Christians: "we are obliged to hold that the Holy Spirit offers everyone the possibility of sharing in the Paschal Mystery in a manner known to God" (GS 22).

IV. FABC First Plenary Assembly. The Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences (FABC) met in Taipei, Taiwan (April 22-27, 1974) to prepare for the international Synod on Evangelization. Their landmark document *Evangelization in Modern - Day Asia* spoke of "the integral preaching of the Gospel" (23), "the building up of a truly local church" (9), and the triple dialogue with peoples, cultures, and religions (12). The Church in Asia especially needs to engage in "a dialogue with the great religious traditions of our peoples" (13), which are "significant and positive elements in the economy of God's design of salvation" (14); "they have been the treasury of the religious experience of our ances-

tors" (14). "And how can we not acknowledge that God has drawn our peoples to Himself through them?" (15). FABC recommended the need to "evolve a working concept of evangelization that embraces, as integral to that concept, genuine dialogue with the great living religions of Asia" (3a).

V. Synod on Evangelization of the Modern World. The short declaration at the end of the 1974 Synod proclaimed: "Confident in the action of the Holy Spirit which overflows the bounds of the Christian community, we wish to foster dialogue with non-Christian religions, so that we may reach a better understanding of the Gospel's newness and of the fullness of revelation; and thus may be in a better position to show to others how the salvific truth of God's love is fulfilled in Christ" (11).

VI. Apostolic Exhortation: *Evangelii Nuntiandi*. One year after the Synod, Paul VI published *Evangelii Nuntiandi* (December 8, 1975). Evangelization is seen as the "vocation proper to the Church, her deepest identity. She exists in order to evangelize" (14). The understanding of evangelization in EN is a broad one: "evangelizing means bringing the Good News into all the strata of humanity" (18). "Any partial and fragmentary definition which attempts to render the reality of evangelization in all its richness, complexity and dynamism does so only at the risk of impoverishing it and even of distorting it. It is impossible to grasp the concept of evangelization unless one tries to keep in view all of its essential elements" (17).

EN speaks of the Church's esteem and respect for non-Christian religions (53), because "they are the living expression of the soul of vast groups of people ... they have taught generations of people how to pray ... they are all impregnated with innumerable 'seeds of the Word'; and can constitute a true 'preparation for the Gospel'." The Church needs "to offer to the missionaries of today and of tomorrow new horizons in their contacts with non-Christian religions" (53).

VII. *Dialogue and Mission*. On Pentecost (June 10) 1984, the twentieth anniversary of the creation of the Secretariat for Non-Christians, the Church published "The Attitude of the

Church towards the Followers of Other Religions: Reflections and Orientations on Dialogue and Mission." Approved by the Pope, the document expressly places interreligious dialogue within the purview of the Church's evangelizing mission: "dialogue finds its place within the Church's salvific mission; for this reason it is a dialogue of salvation" (John Paul II: Introduction, 5; cf. *Ecclesiam Suam* 74).

The document gives interreligious dialogue a broad definition: "It means not only discussion, but also includes all positive and constructive interreligious relations with individuals and communities of other faiths which are directed at mutual understanding and enrichment" (3). Its main concern is "the relationship which exists between dialogue and mission" (5). The document presents the five dimensions of integral mission / evangelization and notes how they are understood "in the consciousness of the Church as a single but complex and articulated reality" (13). Both local Churches and missionaries are "responsible for the totality of mission" (14), because "Christian mission embraces all these elements" (13). Four forms of dialogue are presented in detail (25-35).

VIII. World Day of Prayer for Peace at Assisi. In the context of the International Year of Peace, on October 27, 1986, John Paul II invited representatives of other Christian Churches and Ecclesial Communities and of the major World Religions to come on pilgrimage to Assisi to pray and fast for world peace. Explaining the event, John Paul II noted: "The event of Assisi can be considered as a visible illustration, a concrete example, a catechesis, intelligible to all, of what is presupposed and signified by the commitment to ecumenism and to interreligious dialogue which was recommended and promoted by the Second Vatican Council" (7). He added: "Either we learn to walk together in peace and harmony, or we drift apart and ruin ourselves and others" (5).

IX. Theses on Interreligious Dialogue (FABC). In April 1987, after two years of study and consultation by the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences (FABC) Theological Advisory Commission (TAC), the document *Theses on Interreligious Dialogue*:

An Essay in Pastoral Theological Reflection was released. The aim of the document was to "facilitate a new insight into the identity of the Church in a religiously pluralistic world and a renewal of its mission" (0.9). The document presents a comprehensive vision of interfaith dialogue in seven closely reasoned theses with extensive commentary. They address important theological-missiological questions, consistently asserting that dialogue "is an integral dimension of the mission of the Church, which is the sacrament of the Kingdom of God proclaimed by Jesus" (Thesis 2). This document is illustrative of the holistic FABC vision that consistently identifies dialogue as the "distinctive mode" of mission in the Asian continent (FABC V: 4.1).

X. Encyclical; *Redemptoris Missio*, John Paul II's mission encyclical, dated December 7, 1990, addresses the "Permanent Validity of the Church's Missionary Mandate." Within the fourth chapter "The Paths of Mission" a specific section addresses "Dialogue with our Brothers and Sisters of Other Religions" (55-57). It is an exceedingly rich section: "Interreligious dialogue is a part of the Church's evangelizing mission; ... dialogue is not in opposition to mission *ad gentes*; indeed, it has special links with that mission and is one of its expressions; ... the Church sees no conflict between proclaiming Christ and engaging in interreligious dialogue" (55). "Each member of the faithful and all Christian communities are called to practice dialogue.... I [John Paul II] am well aware that many missionaries and Christian communities find in the difficult and often misunderstood path of dialogue their only way of bearing sincere witness to Christ and offering generous service to others. I wish to encourage them..." (57).

XI. *Dialogue and Proclamation*. On Pentecost (May 19) 1991 the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue and the Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples jointly issued "Dialogue and Proclamation: Reflections and Orientations on Interreligious Dialogue and the Proclamation of the Gospel of Jesus Christ." The document explicitly affirms the holistic and integral nature of the evangelization process and mentions five principal elements of mission (2). Discussing "the relationship between dialogue and proclamation" (4), the document quotes John

Paul II: "Just as interreligious dialogue is one element in the mission of the Church, the proclamation of God's saving work in Our Lord Jesus Christ is another.... There can be no question of choosing one and ignoring or rejecting the other" (6). "Both are legitimate and necessary" (77).

There are many "signs of the times" (social, cultural, religious and political) and a *religious* sensitivity and attentiveness is an important avenue to hear "the Spirit of God [who] is speaking, teaching, and guiding" (78). "All Christians are called to be personally involved in these two ways of carrying out the one mission of the Church, namely proclamation and dialogue" (82). "Yet more than tasks to be accomplished, dialogue and proclamation are graces to be sought in prayer" (89).

XII. Continental Synods and Apostolic Exhortations. As part of the celebration of the Jubilee Year 2000, John Paul II convoked a series of continental synods. In those areas of the world where a variety of religious traditions are found and form an integral dimension of people's indigenous culture and faith, interreligious dialogue necessarily became a key dimension in understanding the Church's presence and ministry.

On the Feast of the Triumph of the Holy Cross (September 14) 1995, John Paul II released the Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation, *Ecclesia in Africa*. In reference to dialogue (65-67), the document notes: "Commitment to dialogue must also embrace all Muslims of good will" (66). "With regard to African traditional religion, a serene and prudent dialogue will be able ... to foster the assimilation of positive values.... They can be seen as a *preparation for the Gospel*.... The adherents of African traditional religion should therefore be treated with great respect and esteem, and all inaccurate and disrespectful language should be avoided" (67). This is a task given to the Church in Africa in fulfillment of "her evangelizing mission towards the year 2000" (8).

The Church in Asia (home to more than 85% of the world's non-Christians) celebrated the "Asian Synod" in 1998; the final apostolic exhortation *Ecclesia in Asia* was released on November

6, 1999 during a pastoral visit of John Paul II to India. As expected, one finds rich insights into dialogue in this document (29-31): "From the Christian point of view, interreligious dialogue is more than a way of fostering mutual knowledge and enrichment; it is a part of the Church's evangelizing mission, an expression of the mission *ad gentes*.... It is therefore important for the Church in Asia to provide suitable models of interreligious dialogue – evangelization in dialogue and dialogue for evangelization – and suitable training for those involved.... Communion and dialogue are two essential aspects of the Church's mission.... Only if the People of God recognize the gift that is theirs in Christ will they be able to communicate that gift to others through *proclamation and dialogue*" (31).

XIII. PCID Religious Forum and Assisi Day of Prayer for Peace. On November 18, 2001 during his Angelus Prayer, Pope John Paul II announced another Church endeavor to promote dialogue and peace: "I wish to announce that I intend to invite representatives of the religions of the world to come to Assisi on 24th January 2002 to pray for the end of conflict and the promotion of true peace, and to come together, especially Christians and Muslims, to declare before the world that religion must never become a source of conflict, hatred and violence." Seizing this opportunity when so many religious leaders would gather, the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue (PCID) organized a "Forum on the Contribution of Religions for the Cause of Peace" on January 23, 2002 in the Vatican. Thus, a two-day event unfolded during which eminent religious leaders appealed for peace in the world and committed themselves to work together to heal the wounds of humanity.

The Day of Prayer for Peace in Assisi on January 24, 2002 proved to be another landmark in the religious history of humankind. When the Holy Father addressed the assembly, he spoke of two "pillars" of peace, namely, commitment to *justice* and readiness to *forgive*. The Pope said: "*Justice*, first of all, because there can be no true peace without respect for the dignity of persons and peoples, respect for the rights and duties of each person and respect for an equal distribution of benefits and burdens between individuals and in society as a whole. It can

never be forgotten that situations of oppression and exclusion are often at the source of violence and terrorism. But forgiveness too, because human justice is subject to frailty and to the pressures of individual and group egoism. Forgiveness alone heals the wounds of the heart and fully restores damaged human relations."

The religious leaders who gathered in Assisi forged and signed a powerfully worded ten-point "Common Commitment to Peace." The first statement captures the tone and spirit of the document: "We commit ourselves to proclaiming our firm conviction that violence and terrorism are incompatible with the authentic spirit of religion; and, as we condemn every recourse to violence and war in the name of God or religion, we commit ourselves to doing everything possible to eliminate the root causes of terrorism." With evident emotion, John Paul II concluded the Assisi event with these words: "Violence never again! War never again! Terrorism never again! In the name of God, may every religion bring upon the earth: Justice and Peace, Forgiveness and Life, Love!"

POPE JOHN PAUL II. This essay opened with a citation from the Pope's programmatic apostolic letter *Novo Millennio Ineunte*, where he affirms the importance of interfaith dialogue in the new millennium; he views commitment to dialogue as an imperative demanded of all local Churches: "It is our task to follow with great fidelity the Council's teaching and the path which it has traced" (56).

Commitment to the promotion of dialogue is one hallmark of his pontificate, now extending well over two decades. He repeatedly emphasizes the role that dialogue plays within the evangelizing mission of the Church; in his missionary journeys he constantly seeks opportunities to interact respectfully with the followers of various religions and faith traditions. From his voluminous statements on the panorama of interreligious themes, some representative quotes – in addition to those already presented – manifest the variety of his unique insights.

"Christians will, moreover, join hands with all men and women of good will [and] work together in order to bring about a

more just and peaceful society in which the poor will be the first to be served" (Manila, Philippines; February 21, 1981).

"Christians and Muslims, in general, have badly understood each other; and sometimes, in the past, we have opposed and even exhausted each other in polemics and in wars. I believe that today, God invites us to *change our old practices*. We must respect each other, and also we must stimulate each other in good works on the path of God" (Casablanca, Morocco; August 19, 1985).

"By dialogue we let God be present in our midst, for as we open ourselves to one another, we open ourselves to God" (Madras, India; February 5, 1986).

"Interreligious dialogue is 'a Christian work desired by God' and 'one element in the *mission of the Church*'; the commitment of the Catholic Church to dialogue with the followers of other religions remains firm and unchanged" (Rome, Italy; April 28, 1987).

"Throughout my Pontificate it has been my constant concern to fulfill the apostolic and pastoral task of both dialogue and proclamation. On my last visit to Africa, I met leaders of African traditional religions and witnessed their awareness of God's nearness and their appreciation of the ethical values of a godly person" (Rome, Italy; April 28, 1987).

"Respectful dialogue with others also enables us to be enriched by their insights, challenged by their questions, and impelled to deepen our knowledge of the truth. Far from stifling dialogue or rendering it superfluous, a *commitment to the truth of one's religious tradition* by its very nature *makes dialogue with others both necessary and fruitful*" (Jakarta, Indonesia; October 10, 1989).

"Interreligious dialogue at its deepest level is always a *dialogue of salvation*, because it seeks to discover, clarify and understand better the signs of the age-long dialogue which God maintains with humanity" (Vatican City; November 13, 1992).

"It is a sign of hope that the religions of the world are becom-

ing more aware of their shared responsibility for the well-being of the human family. This is a crucial part of *the globalization of solidarity* which must come if the future of the world is to be secure.... To choose tolerance, dialogue and cooperation as the path into the future is to preserve what is most precious in the great religious heritage of mankind" (New Delhi, India; November 7, 1999).

"I address today a heartfelt appeal to those lands experiencing the upheavals of conflict, which are bringing unspeakable suffering for their defenseless peoples. *Everyone must be committed to peace.* But it must be true peace, based on mutual respect, on the rejection of fundamentalism and every form of imperialism, on the pursuit of dialogue as the only effective means of resolving tensions, so that entire nations are saved from the cruelty of violence.... *No one has the right to call upon God to justify their own selfish interests.... I ask religious leaders to reject all violence as offensive to the name of God,* and to be tireless promoters of peace and harmony, with respect for the rights of one and all" (Baku, Azerbaijan; May 22, 2002).

CONCLUSION. This essay has attempted to manifest the clear "dialogue mandate" that the local Churches have received in the Vatican II era. It highlighted thirteen pivotal moments within the Vatican II era and added additional, pertinent citations from John Paul II. All this material portrays the Church's thought and direction vis-a-vis dialogue and evangelization – as she continues her pilgrim journey in a new millennium.\

In addition, at the heart of recent Catholic literature on dialogue is an operative vision of evangelization that is broad, comprehensive and holistic; it is often termed "integral evangelization." Several elements – including interreligious dialogue – are seen as constitutive dimensions of this evangelization process. The Church consistently affirms her commitment to "integral evangelization," realizing that evangelization culminates in the proclamation of the Good News of Jesus Christ – whenever, wherever, and however this is practically and respectfully possible.

Within integral and holistic evangelization, dialogue remains an essential and fundamental commitment – yes, a *mandate* – for the universal Church as well as for each and every local Church. In fulfilling her mission, the Church engages the followers of various faith traditions, because she believes that *in this encounter all dialogue partners will experience a mutual evangelization under the influence of the Holy Spirit.*

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III. NAMING THE CONVERSION WE SEEK Mission and Paschal Perspectives

Christian missionaries and evangelizers seek the "conversion" of the people they encounter and with whom they share their lives. However, in light of recent Christian and Catholic missionary experience and theological development, it is necessary to "name" or identify the type of conversion that is desired. What is the vision and goal that motivates Christian missionaries to go forth to the nations, to the ends of the earth? How do missionaries authentically respect people's freedom of conscience, their experience, their religions and cultures? And how, at the same time, do evangelizers in the local Church remain people of integrity who are committed to propagating their Christian faith? Treating the topic of "conversion" demands a carefully nuanced, updated and holistic ecclesiology and missiology.

The theology of mission and conversion must be anchored in reality, and is best approached in a concrete manner. Allow me to narrate the following experience which has helped shape my views on conversion and mission.

A BANGLADESHI BEGGAR. During the Lenten season some few years ago, while I was a visiting professor in Dhaka, Bangladesh, I had a "graced moment," a "defining experience," in my missionary awareness and perspective. It has remained seared in my consciousness and has forced me to ask many foundational questions about mission and my own commitment. It involves a Bangladeshi beggar woman.

I saw her on the road, in front of the large walled compound of a wealthy family dwelling. I could not clearly see her face, as she was several hundred feet ahead of me. Her tattered clothes covered a malnourished body; she was alone, although other beggars were walking ahead of her on the road. I was proceeding along the same path, leisurely taking a late afternoon walk.

Suddenly a luxury car approached with its horn blowing. The driver probably wanted the beggars to disperse and also wanted the gate of the compound opened by the servants. The woman

appeared startled as the car turned sharply in front of her and the gate swung open. Within seconds two large dogs emerged from the compound and jumped at the woman, knocking her to the ground. She screamed and cried both from fear and the pain caused by the dogs nipping at her. I stood frozen, horrified at the sight.

A well-dressed madam promptly emerged from the chauffeur-driven car. She ordered the driver to bring the car into the compound; the dogs were called to return inside; the servants were commanded to close and lock the gate. And the beggar woman? She was left alone on the ground – outside the gate (cf. Heb 13:12). I stood helpless, gazing at this appalling scene.

Only the other frightened beggars came to the aid of the woman. Only they showed mercy and compassion. I stood at a distance and wept at this scene of crucifixion. I admitted to being a guilty bystander. My fears and inadequacies left me paralyzed. I had not one *taka* coin in my pocket to give; I could not offer one word of consolation in the Bengali language, which I did not speak; I did not approach the woman for fear of misinterpretation that a foreign man would touch a Bengali woman in public in this strictly Islamic culture. I simply wept in solidarity. I wept long and hard. And, in succeeding years, I have frequently returned to that scene and prayed to God: "Do not let me forget that experience. Allow it to shape my life and mission vision. Permit it to remain a 'defining moment' in understanding my mission vocation."

EMBRACING A BROKEN WORLD. This experience of the Bangladeshi beggar-woman has forced me to look closely at the large scale of suffering in the contemporary world. Often such human misery is reduced to cold statistics; still the numbers are staggering.

It has been noted that "40,000 children under the age of five die every day due to lack of basic vaccines that prevent childhood diseases; each day 500 million people go hungry; over one billion people live in extreme poverty; 40 million people die yearly

of malnutrition and hunger; ... the list of such concrete sufferings and their devastating consequences goes on" (Tsfai 1).

My experience on the road in Dhaka, Bangladesh with the beggar-woman no longer allows me to view people as statistical abstractions or faceless victims. All Christians – all members of the local Church – are called to embrace the world and suffering humanity. Christians must recognize "the existence of a crucified people" and strive to "take them down from the cross" (Sobrinó vii).

Suffering and the reality of a broken world are existentials of the human situation. No one escapes these common and universal realities; they are not borderline phenomena; they are at the center and depths of human existence. As Pope John Paul II notes: "The reality of suffering is ever before our eyes and often in the body, soul and heart of each of us" (LR 316).

The suffering that is inherent in human experience impacts the situation of the local Church as she concretely lives out her missionary calling. It affects one's view of mission praxis as well as mission theory. The traditional dialogue partner of mission theology has been the unbeliever; today the unbeliever/non-Christian still remains the dialogue partner. However, particular attention is focused on humanity's concrete experience of disaster, weakness, and suffering. Thus, human brokenness becomes a clear point of insertion for contemporary missiology. The local-Church-in-mission is to embrace suffering humanity, just as Christ "pitched his tent among us" through the incarnation.

John Paul II has noted that suffering is that "universal theme that accompanies humanity at every point" (SD 105) of human existence. "The Church has to try to meet humanity in a special way on the path of his suffering" (SD 106). Missionary by nature, each local Church must look squarely at the fundamental realities of the world today, allowing them to impinge upon her and disturb her in their naked reality. The Christian community must not join with those who fall into escapism and denial of the world's harsh realities.

HUMAN AND CHRISTIAN PERSPECTIVES. Humanity has a common origin and unity in its creator; it also is meant to be united in solidarity as it faces life's vicissitudes and sufferings. This mystery of human unity in the cycles of life and death is affirmed by Christian tradition; it is also a common theme in all the world's great religious traditions (cf. Fernando 23-29; Peiré 410-414; Tesfai 63-66).

All human life has a paschal configuration; its pattern continually moves through death to renewed life. Life's paschal paradigm, universally shared by all people, (although varying terminology may be used), sees people struggling to move through darkness to light, through captivity to freedom, through dryness to growth, through alienation to union, through suffering and brokenness to wholeness. Or again, life has an internal dynamic focused on the movement through death to life in all its dimensions; individuals and communities struggle to move "from falsehood to truth, from apathy to responsibility, from marginalization to participation, from loneliness and isolation to universal communion, from sin to grace" (Kroeger 1994, 57-58). Becoming a missionary local Church today demands an engagement with humanity's experience of life and death realities. Christians appreciate that paschal dimensions are characteristic of all life situations, and that they find an immediacy and poignancy in the reality of human brokenness and suffering.

Catholic theology asserts that the Spirit of God is present and active within the lives of all peoples – even in their experience of brokenness. God's grace is always present and operative. The Second Vatican Council forcefully stated that, as Christian believers, "we must hold that the Holy Spirit offers to all the possibility of being made partners, in a way known to God, in the Paschal mystery" (GS 22). This is the only quote that is used three times in the Pope's mission encyclical *Redemptoris Missio* (RM 6, 10, 28). In his writings, John Paul II uses the phrase repeatedly; certainly, it is one of his guiding missiological principles.

This text of Vatican II affirms the action of the Holy Spirit in the hearts of all people. Christians believe that "the Spirit of

God is constantly at work in ways that pass human understanding" (WCC 446). The universal work of the Spirit serves to enlighten people's experience of their paschal realities of dying and rising; life itself, including suffering, has the possibility of opening all peoples to experience God's salvation through the paschal mystery.

Note that GS 22 "declares unambiguously that there is only one way which leads to everlasting salvation, a way which is valid for Christians as well as non-Christians; and that is: association with the paschal mystery" (Moling 291). The redemptive grace of Christ is available for all who in their own way, and even without knowing it, obey the law of the paschal mystery, and take it as a guiding norm for their consciences and lives. This astonishing assertion has important consequences regarding the approach to conversion that contemporary mission pursues.

The Christian faith is, at heart, a paschal faith. Thus, if all reality has a paschal paradigm, and all life is shaped by rhythms of life through death, then Christian mission will continue to find elements of this very mystery hidden in the history and lives, cultures and religions, of peoples of diverse faiths. These paschal elements will probably be most evident when seen through life's limit situations of suffering and brokenness. Missioners are continually experiencing the unique ways that the Holy Spirit brings people into direct encounter with the paschal mystery, and, yes, with God's salvation in Christ.

The cross of Jesus is the paramount Christian symbol, because it reminds Christians of the centrality of the paschal mystery in their faith lives (Sivalon 381-382). Kosuke Koyama notes: "If Jesus Christ of the cross stands at the center of Christian theology, the Christian Church, the body of Christ, must be called the Church of the cross" (Koyama 1994, 3). All Church missionary activity will focus on the paschal nature of life, of faith, of salvation. Mission is always cruciform, always signed by the cross. *Crux probat omnia.*

Saint Paul spoke of his missionary consciousness, in writing to the Corinthian community: "For I decided to know nothing

among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified" (I Cor 2:2). To Jews who demanded miracles, and to Greeks who searched for wisdom, Paul proclaimed a crucified Christ. This message was offensive to the Jews and nonsense to the Gentiles (cf. I Cor 1: 22-25). All the synoptic gospels affirm that the cross is the only path whereby one follows Jesus (Mt 10:38, 16:24; Mk 8:34; Lk 9:23, 14:27). The cross is central to Jesus' act of kenosis (Phil 2:5-11); it is pivotal in our salvation from sin (I Pet 2:24).

Pope John Paul II has written: "The mission of the Savior reached its culmination in the Paschal Mystery" (EA 12c). Thus, the cross is not an accidental of Christian faith and mission. As David Bosch writes, the Gospel affirms that "in the suffering Jesus, God embraces the suffering of the world for the sake of humanity.... Moreover, in Christ, God does not necessarily save us *from* suffering, but *in* and *through* it.... Christ suffers when we suffer. The pain people suffer is the pain of Christ himself" (Bosch 585). Christians are called to live into the mystery of the cross, "to live into the image of Christ *on* the cross" (Johns 25). Christian missionary activity must not fail "to keep the cross at the center of salvation and the death of Jesus at the center of the cross" (Frazier 1992, 400).

Roman Catholic missionary communities have a mission-sending ritual during which the new missionaries receive a large crucifix; a cord is attached so it can be worn around the neck. This missionary cross "is no mere ornament depicting Christianity in general. Rather, it is a vigorous commentary on what gives the gospel its universal appeal. Those who receive it possess not only a symbol of their mission, but a handbook on how to carry it out" (Frazier 1987, 44-45). Missionaries who receive the cross in their mission-sending ceremony soon starkly realize that in their direct field experience there is "nothing attractive, easy, secure, comfortable, convenient, strategically efficient, economical, or self-fulfilling about taking up a cross" (Bonk 118).

MISSION AND CONVERSION AS IMPERATIVES. Having noted the reality of suffering in our broken world, and having outlined the paschal nature of all reality and of the Christian faith in particular, it is important to state a Christian conviction:

mission remains a necessary mandate for the Church in today's world. David Bosch expresses his conviction: "I wish to state unequivocally that I endorse the mission enterprise. I say this because I believe that the Christian faith ... is intrinsically missionary, that the Church – as Vatican II put it – is 'missionary by its very nature'" (Bosch 590).

The document of the World Council of Churches "Mission and Evangelism – An Ecumenical Affirmation" expresses the mission obligation in this manner: "Christians owe the message of God's salvation in Jesus Christ to every person and to every people" (WCC 445). John Paul II affirms "the urgency of missionary evangelization" because "it is the primary service which the Church can render to every individual and to all humanity in the modern world" (RM 2).

The Church is linked to mission and evangelization "in her most intimate being" (EN 15); mission is *not* "an optional contribution for the Church" (EN 5). Quoting Vatican II (AG 29), John Paul II reaffirms that missionary activity is "the greatest and holiest duty of the Church" (RM 63). For Paul VI, the entire Church – and each local Church – realizes her "deepest identity" and "her very nature" when she is in mission (EN 14). She is to be always and everywhere "the universal sacrament of salvation" (LG 48; AG 1). For her, to live is to be missionary!

The Church's mission always bears a Christological focus. *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, the apostolic exhortation of Paul VI, asserts that: "There is no true evangelization if the name, the teaching, the life, the promises, the Kingdom and the mystery of Jesus of Nazareth, the Son of God, are not proclaimed" (EN 22; see EA 19b). This means: "Evangelization will also always contain – as the foundation, center and at the same time summit of its dynamism – a clear proclamation that, in Jesus Christ, the Son of God made man, who died and rose from the dead, salvation is offered to all, as a gift of God's grace and mercy" (EN 27).

A natural corollary of strongly affirming the Church's missionary nature is to affirm the pursuit of conversion through the Christian message she preaches and to which she gives witness.

As Church, she "seeks to convert, solely through the divine power of the Message she proclaims" (EN 18). For some persons, conversion as an imperative in Christian mission has slowly gone out of favor. This is unfortunate, because conversion, properly understood, is a necessary part of mission. Conversion has not been detrimental; it has had tremendously beneficial effects on converts (Mondal 13). However, at the same time, it remains crucial to assess the motives, processes, and goals of all conversion; it is crucial to name the conversion process that Christians seek and promote.

NAMING CONVERSION. An impressive body of literature exists on the conversion process. However, totally capturing the nuances and levels of the dynamics of conversion exceeds the scope of this presentation. Many authors use the foundational insights elaborated by Bernard Lonergan who has shown how conversion occurs on various levels (Carroll 1-22; Cronin 19-24; Dulles 1981, 175-185; Gelpi *varia*; Lonergan *varia*; Mueller 13-20; Navone 27-35; Rambo 1993, *varia*). Other authors take a biblical-theological approach to conversion (Beernaert 369-379; Gittins 1993, *varia*; Haqq 84-93; L_ ffler 24-45; McBrien 7-9; McMahon 56-64). Still others present the psycho-social perspective (Archer 180-190; J. Smith 187-193; P. Smith 62-73). Using selective insights from many sources, this presentation focuses on the *missionary and paschal* dimensions of conversion.

Filled with Christian faith convictions, missionaries seek the conversion of people they encounter. Evangelizers desire that people will shift their horizons, perceive the world in a new way, experience a personal and social transformation. Conversion demands "a radical shift in a person's apprehensions and values, accompanied by a similar radical change in oneself, in one's relations with other persons, and in one's relations to God" (Dulles 1981, 176).

Authentic conversion, in Lonergan's framework, "takes place on four levels related to the four levels of the act of understanding: affective (experience), intellectual (understanding), moral (judging), and religious (deciding). Like the act of understanding, these four conversions are interconnected and dynamically

related. To be an integrated person requires a fourfold conversion" (Mueller 16).

Loneragan notes the all-encompassing nature of the conversion process; it is "a transformation of the subject and his world"; it is "a resultant change of course and direction"; it is "existential, intensely personal, utterly intimate." Conversion "affects all of a man's conscious and intentional operations. It directs his gaze, pervades his imagination, releases the symbols that penetrate to the depths of his psyche. It enriches his understanding, guides his judgments, reinforces his decisions" (Loneragan 130-131). Authentic conversion lays total claim to the individual; it "incorporates the totality of our life, because God's love is concerned with that totality" (WCC 433). As Paul wrote to the Ephesians, conversion demands that "your hearts and minds must be made completely new and you must put on the new self..." (Eph 4:23-24).

Such a total transformation is nothing less than the work of God's grace and the action of the Holy Spirit. It is impossible to "conceive of authentic religious conversion apart from the gracious self-communication of God" (Dulles 1981, 178). All missionaries and evangelizers repeatedly experience the fact that "the Holy Spirit is the principal agent of evangelization (EN 75; cf. RM 21, 30). Mission belongs to God; it is "God's project." Only in the power of the Spirit do mission and conversion progress and bear fruit.

True religious conversion under the action of the Spirit will mean "being grasped by ultimate concern. It is other-worldly falling in love. It is total and permanent self-surrender without conditions, qualifications, reservations" (Loneragan 240). Or, again, it is "unconditional falling in love. It is a love of God with one's whole heart and mind and strength. It is the love of God without restrictions, conditions or reservations. It is moving from a this-worldly horizon to an other-worldly horizon" (Cronin 20). Religious conversion "sets up a new horizon in which the love of God will transvalue our values and the eyes of love will transform our knowing" (Loneragan 106).

The center of this Spirit-inspired conversion and transform-

ation is a loving God; all becomes focused on God's love poured out in the person of Jesus through the paschal mystery. It embraces "the mystery of salvation realized by God for all in Jesus Christ by the power of the Spirit" (DP 10), which is nothing other than the central mystery of Christian faith: the paschal mystery.

The paschal mystery becomes the integrating focus of all mission and conversion. It is foundational because all life has a paschal paradigm – as exemplified in the brokenness of the world in which we live. The "passion of humanity" ever present in wars, famine, oppression, poverty, sickness, hatred and death is to be the ground in which the seeds of new life, hope, resurrection, and ultimately salvation germinate and bear fruit. This paschal nature of all life and experience (poignantly illustrated by my personal experience with the Bangladeshi beggar-woman) continually provides openings for a deep missionary encounter – and an authentic conversion and transformation into the mystery of God's love.

Recall that illuminating Vatican II quote: "we must hold that the Holy Spirit offers to all the possibility of being made partners, in a way known to God, in the paschal mystery" (GS 22). Thus, every human person – without any exception (RH 14) – has an opportunity to encounter the saving paschal mystery which emerges in and from his or her own life experience which itself have a paschal form. All life, all human experience, all salvation has a paschal character. This is a fundamental human, religious, and Christian insight. All is filled with "paschality." Mission, conversion and redemption follow this same paschal structure of life.

This is the basic conversion that missionaries and evangelizers seek, the radical transformation desired, the total and permanent self-surrender demanded: unconditional falling in love with God! Human values become transvalued; all is centered on a radical acceptance of the paschal nature of reality. Such a conversion means embracing a broken world and a crucified humanity through the optic of the omnipresent paschal mystery. Christianity seeks a transforming conversion to the paschal view of life. This is the focus of all mission service rendered by the local Churches to humanity in today's peace-starved world.

LEVELS OF MISSIONARY CONVERSION. It has been stated earlier that this presentation focuses on the *missionary and paschal* dimensions of conversion. The experience of field missionaries reveals three interacting levels of conversion into the paschal mystery. The first conversion is centered on the person of the missionary. The second conversion is a call to all persons of faith and good will to embrace a paschal perspective in their lives and consciences. Finally, the third conversion takes the form of an invitation for people freely to join the paschal community of the Christian Church.

Conversion of the Missionary. Christian missionaries begin the conversion process in their own lives and attitudes. They seek to personalize the fact that in the words of John Paul II: "the Church's vocation and missionary commitment spring from the central mystery of our faith: the Paschal Mystery" (WYD 2). They embrace the fact: "The Paschal Mystery of Christ's cross and Resurrection stands at the center of the Good News that the apostles, and the Church following them, are to proclaim to the world" (CCC 571).

Evangelizers accept that every missionary begins by entering a personal process of conversion (EN 15). It is true that "the call to conversion should begin with the repentance of those who do the calling, who issue the invitation" (WCC 434). Before crossing any borders of culture or religion to announce the paschal mystery, missionaries seek their own transformation into the same paschal mindset of Jesus (I Cor 2:16; Phil 2:5). Their missionary outlook reflects attitudes of poverty, powerlessness, and vulnerability; they seek personal conversion "according to the image of the serving God in the serving Christ" (Navone 33). To the extent that any missionary embodies the suffering Messiah's self-transcending way of the cross, that person achieves authentic paschal conversion.

It is only with a paschal attitude that the missionary can perceive reality correctly and insightfully. The converted missionary finds in the cross and resurrection of the suffering Messiah the strength and wisdom to address both suffering humanity, as well as those who are rushing along the road of individualism,

materialism, and consumerism. Paschality becomes the measuring rod for all missionary endeavor, for the life of the local Church.

Conversion to a paschal mentality is a long, continuous, complex process of spiritual growth for every evangelizer. It demands hearing the Gospel repeatedly; it requires renunciation of sin. Conversion "is always a more gradual process than it might seem on the surface" (Schreiter 124). "Conversion is a continuous process demanded at every stage of the Christian life ... for no believer has faith fully and securely in hand" (Dulles 1981, 177). Christian life itself is an ongoing conversion, dynamically lived and developing; such an ongoing conversion (and not just a one-time conversion) "is the manner by which we live authentic lives" (Mueller 16). There is no other path to becoming a paschal-centered person ["paschal animal" – Frazier 1992, 400], and to adopting a "crucified mind" rather than a "crusading mind" (Koyama 1974, 117). The individual missionary and the local Church as a missionary community require continual conversion to paschality.

Conversion to a Paschal Worldview. From the paschal perspective operative in the Christian evangelizer's own life, one arrives at a second moment of conversion in the missionary dynamic. Emerging from the common experience of life and death realities, Christian missionaries and all peoples of faith soon recognize the paschal communalities of their shared existence. All peoples – whether Christian, Buddhist or Muslim – share the vicissitudes and challenges of existence in a broken world. All world religions and primal faith systems address with varying degrees of emphasis the mystery of suffering and evil, the reality of wounded humanity (Tsfai 63-66). It is precisely within this shared human existence and mystery that the Christian evangelizer announces paschal perspectives of life through death.

Engaging in a dialogue of life experience, the missionary aims at "deepening the religious experience of all the people involved, at extending the awareness of God's love and human sinfulness, and of motivating everyone involved to eliminate what hinders God's love" (Mantovani 54). The missionary is definitely inviting his or her dialogue partners to a deeper God-experience; this

is a spiritual conversion, but not necessarily to Christianity (see DP 11; Burrows 131).

Such a heart-to-heart encounter is a direct effect of the Holy Spirit's action in bringing peoples through their own life situations into a sharing of the paschal mystery. The grace of God is at work everywhere and the fundamental act of faith and conversion is within reach of every human being. The Holy Spirit continually penetrates the concrete lives and histories of people from within and offers them a real mutual participation in the Paschal Mystery. Yes, for the Christian it will certainly be explicitly Christological. However, the identical experience, although often in an inchoate form, is continually available to all peoples – whatever their particular religious affiliation (see Kroeger 1994, 58).

The missionary calls peoples of all faiths to be converted to this paschal perspective and a concomitant commitment to alleviate the ongoing passion of humankind and the suffering of "crucified peoples" in all times and places. The paschal paradigm "has the power to illumine the truth of the suffering that is omnipresent in creation and history as well as the truth of God in relation to suffering" (Kroeger 1994, 58). At this juncture, it is important to note that the Christian missionary will often find his or her own explicit paschal faith enriched by the implicit paschal faith of his or her Muslim or Buddhist friends.

From a missionary perspective, this presentation has struggled to name the type of conversion sought through efforts of evangelization. It is valid to assert that exemplary missionaries who enable others to embrace a paschal perspective and a selfless servant response to their suffering neighbors have truly accomplished the task of conversion to Gospel values and perspectives. Yes, local Churches have been accomplishing the goal of conversion in several parts of the world, even when, for example, in Asia, the number of baptized Christians does not reach three percent!

Christian missionaries through selfless service of the sick, the poor, and victims of injustice have clearly announced the es-

sence of Gospel faith. They have shown the Church to be a caring community of compassion (McCahill 8). They have challenged people to be converted to the paschal mystery and to a deeper love and experience of God. They offer people a paschal perspective in the midst of suffering, challenging them not to become embittered or resentful toward life, people, or even toward God (cf. Sivalon 379-380).

When questioned about the lack of conversions to Christianity in Hindu India, Mother Teresa replied: "Numbers have nothing to do with it. But the people are putting prayer into action by coming and serving the people. Everywhere people are helping. There may not be a big conversion like that, but we do not know what is happening in the soul.... If people become better Hindus, better Muslims, better Buddhists by our acts of love, then there is something else growing there. They come closer and closer to God. When they come closer, they have to choose" (Kroeger 1990, 105).

Conversion to the Christian Faith Community. All persons are called to conversion, which is "the humble and penitent return of the heart to God in the desire to submit one's life more generously to Him" (DM 37). In the course of this process "the decision may be made to leave one's previous spiritual or religious situation in order to direct oneself towards another" (DM 37). In this conversion process, freedom of conscience is sovereign; "no one must be constrained to act against his conscience; nor ought he to be impeded in acting according to his conscience, especially in religious matters" (DH 3).

Admittedly, mission also has explicit Christian conversion as its goal: "that non-Christians be freely converted to the Lord under the action of the Holy Spirit who opens their hearts so that they may adhere to Him" (AG 13). Christians nourish in their hearts the desire to share their full experience of the paschal mystery and faith in Christ with brothers and sisters of other religions. Missionaries sensitively aim at "guiding people to explicit knowledge of what God has done for all men and women in Jesus Christ, and at inviting them to become disciples of Jesus through becoming members of the Church (DP 81).

One notes the triple dynamic of conversion operative in this missionary process: (a) the converted missionary centers his or her life on the paschal mystery; (b) the Christian missionary calls other people of faith to discover the paschal paradigm of life and to adopt paschal values in their lives, consciences, and service; (c) based on a free decision inspired by the Spirit, others are directly invited to join the community of the Christian Church, where they can fully practice their paschal-mystery-centered faith.

The paschal nature of life, faith, and redemption integrates the entire conversion process. Awareness of and participation in the paschal mystery often unfold in the lives of people in an evolutionary and progressive manner. The evangelizer finds the paschal mystery operative and recognizes conversion both outside and within the Church. Affirming the action of the Spirit beyond the borders of the Church "does not cancel the need for having a community of the disciples, the Church, that has experienced the all-inclusive love of the Father in Jesus and commits itself to continue his mission" (Kavunkal 187). This wide, inclusive view of mission and the workings of the Holy Spirit adds further meaning to the reality of the missionary local Church as the "universal sacrament of salvation" (LG 48; AG 1).

ADDITIONAL MISSION COROLLARIES. This presentation has strongly affirmed the validity of centering mission and conversion within the framework of the paschal mystery. It is a "paschal missiology" and challenges all missionaries to become "paschal evangelizers" in their own lives and through their approaches to the Church's missionary activity. In the context of today's broken world, the enormous afflictions and sufferings of humanity, and the need to maintain eschatological hope, paschal missiology appears particularly insightful, necessary, and relevant.

In this concluding section of this presentation, other missiological themes and their intimate relationship to paschal mission approaches are noted. The insights, flowing from a paschal-mystery-centered missiology, are numerous. These "corollaries" are only mentioned very briefly (a full elaboration exceeds

the scope of this presentation). Their relationship to paschal mission perspectives is also highlighted:

(1) Paschal mission emerges from the unity of all humanity in its sharing of the common paschal experience of rising through dying. All peoples face questions of suffering, as well as the mystery and meaning of life.

(2) Paschal mission uses an inductive approach based on experience to understand the Church's call to mission. Each local Church is called to be active in "reading the signs of the times and of interpreting them in the light of the Gospel" (GS 4); human suffering and brokenness constitute a missionary challenge today.

(3) Paschal mission strongly affirms the active presence of the Holy Spirit in the world, both in and beyond the boundaries of the Church. The Spirit is constantly directing people to a God-encounter through their sharing in the paschal mystery.

(4) Paschal mission embodies the virtue of Christian hope based on the firm belief in the resurrection. Eschatological hope, not suffering, is the integrating perspective of Christian mission. That hope continually breaks into the world through missionary witness and service.

(5) Paschal mission clearly allows missionaries to be people of integrity. Their proclamation begins with their own paschal experiences, and links them with people who share identical experiences. Mission is not something superimposed upon reality; mission emerges from the commonly shared realities of missionaries and their dialogue partners of various faiths.

(6) Paschal mission demands a radical conversion of the missionary to the values of a crucified-risen Lord; mission begins only when personal transformation has been initiated. Only the converted missionary can authentically call others to conversion.

(7) Paschal mission requires the integration of contemplation into missionary praxis. No one can authentically address the "passion of humanity" without possessing a deep contempla-

tive faith; one must live into the paschal mystery.

(8) Paschal mission emphasizes that the work of the missionary involves both listening and speaking. Listening for the Spirit's action within the hearts and lives of people is a prerequisite for speaking of God's paschal love and saving deeds.

(9) Paschal mission lays bare the sinfulness of today's world, which is so often enslaved in materialism, consumerism, individualism, greed, and pride. A paschal mentality challenges both personal and social sin; it demands true conversion.

(10) Paschal mission respects the free will and personal conscience of everyone; at the same time it is a call to conscience for generous people (Christians and non-Christians alike) to be committed to addressing the sufferings of humanity.

(11) Paschal mission easily enters into dialogue with the followers of other religions. All religious traditions face identical human questions and mysteries. Dialogue enables peoples of faith to mutually explore and respond to questions of life and death.

(12) Paschal mission connects intimately with today's challenges of peace, justice, development, and ecology. It invites all to live in solidarity with their neighbors and to be prepared to suffer and die so that others may live. Again, such a paschal lifestyle demands profound conversion.

(13) Paschal mission can be lived in all cultural contexts and situations. As a missionary approach it easily finds an inculturated home among diverse peoples. Paschal mission is also clearly transcultural.

(14) Paschal mission aims to be a holistic approach to mission, integrating the personal and social, the human and divine, the material and spiritual. It is an incarnational approach to being in mission.

(15) Paschal mission emphasizes humble and self-effacing approaches to missionary activity; it consciously seeks to avoid any pitfalls of paternalism or colonialism. Missioners, believing

in the beauty and truth of their message, seek to offer it with generosity, sincerity, and authenticity.

(16) Paschal mission is at heart a scripture-based missiology. It follows the teachings and example of Jesus who came "not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many" (Mt 20:28).

(17) Paschal mission embodies an emphasis on witness and even a willingness to endure suffering, persecution and martyrdom. Contemporary missionaries knowingly and willingly embrace vulnerability, because in Christ God reveals himself precisely in weakness rather than in power.

(18) Paschal mission is at heart a soteriology. Following the paschal path in mission brings both evangelizer and people into a direct experience of salvation in Jesus Christ, who "bore our sins in his own body on the cross; ... through his wounds [we] have been healed" (I Pet 2:24).

(19) Paschal mission integrates well with the sacramental dimension of the Church. All Christians are missionary by virtue of their baptism into Christ's death and resurrection (Rom 6: 3-4). The Eucharist is the paschal meal that celebrates the death and resurrection of the Lord until He comes (I Cor 11:23-26). The Eucharist remains the "ongoing sacrament of mission" for Christians.

(20) Paschal mission transforms the individual missionary into an attractive and credible witness. Missioners of the caliber of a Mother Teresa manifest the transforming effects of the Paschal Mystery in their lives; and today's world welcomes such authentic witnesses, icons of Paschal faith and service.

CONCLUDING REFLECTION. This presentation began with a narration of an encounter between a missionary and a Bangladeshi beggar-woman. That "defining experience" has produced much depth reflection on the nature of mission and conversion. This missionary remains filled with gratitude for that God-given experience of grace. More reflection needs to be given to the wealth of insights that can still emerge from viewing mis-

sion through the optic of the paschal mystery. And finally, relying on God's grace, this missionary looks forward to meeting that Muslim Bangladeshi beggar-woman once again in the resurrected life with Christ the Lord in heaven. I am confident she will be there!

ABBREVIATIONS: CHURCH DOCUMENTS

- AG** – *Ad Gentes* (Missionary Activity: December 7, 1965)
- DH** – *Dignitatis Humanae* (Religious Liberty: December 7, 1965)
- DM** – Dialogue and Mission (Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue: June 10, 1984)
- DP** – Dialogue and Proclamation (Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue: May 19, 1991)
- EA** – *Ecclesia in Asia* (The Church in Asia: November 6, 1999)
- EN** – *Evangelii Nuntiandi* (Evangelization in the Modern World: December 8, 1975)
- GS** – *Gaudium et Spes* (The Church in the Modern World: December 7, 1965)
- LG** – *Lumen Gentium* (The Church: November 21, 1964)
- LR** – *La Realta* (The Reality of Suffering / John Paul II: April 27, 1994)
- RH** – *Redemptor Hominis* (Mystery of Redemption and Human Dignity: March 4, 1979)
- RM** – *Redemptoris Missio* (The Mission of the Redeemer: December 7, 1990)
- SD** – *Salvifici Doloris* (The Christian Meaning of Human Suffering / John Paul II: February 11, 1984)
- WYD** – World Youth Days IX and X Message (John Paul II: November 21, 1993)

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