

## **BEING SCHOOLS, BECOMING EUCHARIST**

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## **INTRODUCTION**

*Fr Vicente Cajilig, OP*

Every time we are in front of the Holy Eucharist, which St. Thomas Aquinas called the Sacred Banquet, we are caught by the mysteries it contains: bread and wine; body and blood; offering and “offerer”; death and life, among other mysteries.

Can we fathom adequately these mysteries? Can we bring clearly the depth of this spiritual reality to young people? The catholic school is a venue where the youth can be given a better understanding of the “unknown” in this mystery of faith.

The people in charged of education gathered in Assumption University, Bangkok, Thailand, on May 25-30, 2008: administrators, chaplains, teachers and others have come to see, reflect, and act regarding the ministry of promoting Eucharist in school setting in Asia. Ten Asian countries and three non-Asian ones made the statement: “Being Schools, Being Eucharist.” The bishops present helped in the reflection on the foundation of the consultation.

It is time for schools to look more deeply on the efforts exerted to understand the reality of the Holy Eucharist. Catechesis should go beyond the acceptance of rites and rituals surrounding this sacrament.

The goal is to encourage all in the catholic learning institutions to work on: *becoming, being, celebrating, and sharing Eucharist*. After the blessing is given in each mass, something has to take place in the realm of mission in the domestic and parish church. What we do, how we live, what we share because of the Eucharist show the way we live this mystery.

## **FINAL STATEMENT**

**Eucharist and Education in Asia**  
**Being Schools, Becoming Eucharist**

*Eucharist and Education*  
*brought us together.*

*Together, we became and pledge to continue to be*  
*Eucharist in Education.*

Called to consultation by the Office of Education and Faith Formation of the Federation of Asian Bishops Conferences, we have come in communion from ten Asian, one European, and two Latin American countries. There are more than thirty of us – bishops, priests, brothers, religious sisters, lay faithful, catechists, teachers and students involved in Catholic education and in non-formal and informal education, a minister of the Christian Conference of Asia, the executive secretary of the Office of Consecrated Life, and the officials of OIEC (Office International de l' Enseignement Catholique). We are gathered in Assumption University in Bangkok, Thailand these final days of May 2008 to reflect on Eucharist and Education in Asia.

*Sacramentum Caritatis* brought us together. It is the Post Synodal Exhortation issued on February 22, 2007, the Feast of the Chair of St. Peter, by our Holy Father, Pope Benedict XVI, and addressed to the bishops, clergy, consecrated persons and the lay faithful on the topic the Eucharist as the Source and Summit of the life and mission of the Church. We are here to consult one another and exchange insights and experiences on the understanding of the Eucharist in education in our respective countries, how we celebrate the Eucharist in our schools, and how we may make the Eucharist a living reality in ourselves and in our educational institutions.

From our discussions we recommend practical and pastoral ways and means to make Catholic Schools and other institutions of learning Eucharistic in the context of Asia, that is, how we may not only celebrate but even more share the Eucharist by becoming Eucharist ourselves.

Our reflections and our sharing are our contribution to the preparation for the 9th Plenary Assembly of the Federation of Asian Bishops Conferences, which will be held under the theme “Living the Eucharist in Asia”.

From the start we took to heart the words of Pope Benedict XVI that *Sacramentum Caritatis*, “the sacrament of charity, the Holy Eucharist is the gift that Jesus Christ makes of himself, thus revealing to us God’s infinite love for every man and woman.” (SC,1.)

We took as framework for our discussions the very format of the Pope’s Apostolic Exhortation, namely, that the Eucharist is a Mystery to be Believed, a Mystery to be Celebrated, and a Mystery to be Lived. Following the venerable pedagogical method of seeing, reflecting, and acting, we divided our days into periods when we could SEE the Eucharist in the context of education in our respective countries, REFLECT on Eucharist in our campuses in the light of the rich tradition of the Church and ACT towards a renewed dynamics of Eucharist in our schools.

We shared our thoughts and experiences from our respective viewpoints in different countries as bishops, priests, nuns, brothers, consecrated persons, and lay faithful; as school administrators, teachers, students, parents, chaplains, catechists, ministers, and media practitioners.

We realized the challenges confronting us. In countries such as Malaysia, Vietnam, Myanmar, and Mongolia, the main challenges come from restrictions placed by the local governments on the administration of Catholic schools and institutions of higher learning. In Malaysia, the administration of schools is largely in the hands of the government. In Vietnam, the government almost completely took over the schools. In Myanmar, the Church does not have Catholic schools. In Mongolia, there is practically no knowledge or experience of the Eucharist, and government law on education prohibits the teaching of religion.

In Sri Lanka, there used to be a dual system of schools – government schools and denominational or religious schools, the latter group being supported by the government. But in 1960, most of the schools were compulsorily taken over by the government leaving only 65 private schools, 25 of which were Catholic. Over the years, regrettably, those government-run

schools deteriorated in standard and discipline. Another problem is that though the government has the policy of making compulsory the teaching of whatever may be the religion of individual pupils, whether the school concerned is private or public, there is a shortage of religion teachers for Christians in public schools. This situation forces some students to take another religion subject if only to prepare themselves for the public examination.

In India, Korea, Thailand and Taiwan, where the running of Catholic schools and universities continue to remain in the hands of the Church, the challenges include creating a greater awareness and appreciation of the Eucharist among the young, especially in the face of globalization.

In the Philippines, a country with a predominantly Catholic population, one of the main challenges remains the shortage of priests. At present, there is practically just one priest for about 35,000 Catholics.

These challenges do not blind us to the elements of hope we continue to see in the Church in Asia.

In Malaysia, the difficulty of having faith formation and the celebration of the Eucharist has meant that parishes are now the main context of catechesis and Eucharistic celebrations.

The Church in the Philippines has made religion the core of the curriculum in Catholic schools. This enables the school community to make the link between the Eucharist and life.

The Korean Church has come to discover the importance of co-existence, that is, living in harmony with people of other faiths and beliefs. The promotion and preservation of human rights is also an essential part of the mission of the local Church.

In Mongolia where the Church is relatively young, though the challenges remain numerous, the Church continues to be hopeful in the task of evangelization.

In India, much is being done to inculcate the Mass so that the celebration of the Eucharist becomes more meaningful for young people.

In Vietnam, the government has allowed the Church to open kindergartens. Together with the pastoral centers recently established for catechism classes, theology, and pastoral activity, this is a sign of hope that eventually the Church will be allowed to start and run schools and institutes of higher learning.

In Thailand, though the Catholic population is very small, the contribution of the Church in the field of education is recognized and highly appreciated. In Taiwan, Catholic schools, and most especially, universities, are seen as places where young people are helped to grow in awareness and appreciation for the Eucharist. In Myanmar, efforts are being made by the Church to provide education. Dioceses are sending students abroad so that they may contribute to the mission of the local Church upon their return.

In Sri Lanka, the rate of literacy and the percentage of women in education are rather high. Moreover, because of the deterioration in the quality in government-run schools, an interreligious group, which includes the Catholic Church, is proposing to the government that the different religions be given more management rights in their former schools. There are high hopes that this proposal will be approved.

With all these shared experiences, we look to the Eucharist as the sacrament that is the source of our inspiration and strength. As it counters the materialistic effects of globalization it gives strength and impetus to evangelization. If we have been taught that *Lex orandi, Lex credendi*, that we pray as we believe, we have learned to add *Lex docendi, Lex educandi, and Lex vivendi*: just as we pray according to how and what we believe, so we live according to what we teach and how we educate.

The format of *Sacramentum Caritatis* thus becomes the framework of our renewed vision of Catholic formation and education: what we believe, we celebrate; what we celebrate and believe, we live.

What is it that we believe about the Eucharist? What do we see as its implications for us in education? What are its consequences for our life?

We accept the principles, direction and spirit of the Apostolic Exhortation. In the Eucharist we receive Christ himself, risen and glorified in the Holy Spirit, who includes us, the Church, in his work. We celebrate the Eucharist in obedience to Christ's command, based on our experience of the Risen Lord and the outpouring of the Holy Spirit (SC 36,37).

We affirm that the Eucharist is the embodiment of God's love and we accept that we must lead our communities to see its link to the Holy Scriptures and to the person of Jesus himself. We need to accept the Bible as the Living Word of God: It is alive. In it, we live. From it and because of it we find life and our mission to share.

We believe that the Holy Scripture, the Eucharist, and Jesus cannot be separated. What we learn from one should lead us to the other. In our persons, communities and institutions they must find no partition or division, only unity.

Where the Catholic community is a minority, which is the situation in most of our Asian countries, the Eucharist is for us the center for togetherness, even for survival. In it we find comfort. Through it we become one.

Where the Eucharist is celebrated in our schools anywhere, we see the need for better preparation for it, and for a more dedicated attempt to relate it to the youth, so that they become more active participants in this Sacrament of Life. Its richness we must learn to appreciate, its wealth we must learn to integrate in the whole educational process: from the rite and ritual to the transformation of the head, heart and soul – the whole of life.

From the perspective of what we have learned and discussed we offer the following recommendations:

1. School administrators, chaplains, campus ministers, and teachers should strengthen their commitment to effective catechesis and Eucharistic celebration in campus.
2. Our students, children and the youth should be invited to take more active part in the celebration of the Holy Eucharist and other liturgies. For this to be effective, chaplains and campus ministers should be trained and dedicated to prepare better for the reception of the Sacrament, always ready to adapt the celebration to the minds and situation of the students, young or old.
3. School administrators should reach out to parents – the first educators in the faith – to help them cultivate the love for the Eucharist in the home so that on Sundays, which are non-school days, the whole family celebrates the Mass.
4. In the face of the shortage of priests and religious, a more concerted effort must be made to train and empower the laity to assist in the education and celebration of the Eucharist.
5. Beyond the liturgical activities, the teaching of morality needs to be stressed – Christian virtues as well as basic human values. Thus would our students learn respect for others, especially the poor and underprivileged, and respect for other religions and cultures.
6. Teachers and administrators of our schools should regularly update and re-train themselves as much in pedagogy and management as in the purpose and spirit of Catholic education

To achieve our dreams and longings to make the Eucharist the source and summit of our life and mission, we need the cooperation of everyone: administrators, parents, teachers and students. This we shall endeavor to do.

When we shall have imbibed the fullness of the Eucharist, we hope to be able to live it as Pope Benedict XVI affirms it should be lived: as a mystery to be offered to the world, as the food of truth and human need, the school at which we learn to assume not just our religious roles in life but our specific political and social responsibilities.

We shall continue to feel for and be one with our suffering brothers and sisters in the world -- in this particular time, the victims of the earthquakes in China, the cyclones in Myanmar and in the United States, and many others who are victims not just of natural calamities but of human injustice and heartlessness.

The Eucharist makes us one with all in sorrow as well as in joy. It gives us hope that Jesus is our companion on our way, our food that satisfies our hunger for truth and freedom (SC,2). It reminds us of what Jesus said when he multiplied the loaves and the fishes: “You yourselves, you give them something to eat “ (Matt 14,16). It tells us that with Jesus we are called to be bread broken for the life of the world.

Eucharist and Education brought us together. Together we became and pledge to continue to be – Eucharist in Education.

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## **Part I: EDUCATORS SPEAK**

### **■ Task of Promoting the Eucharist in Schools: A Case of Doing Theology**

*Fr. Vicente G. Cajilig, OP, SThD*

*Executive Secretary, FABC Office of Education and Faith Formation*

The Master of the Dominican Order has exhorted its members lately, to work for the renewal of their personal and communitarian commitment to their faith during this decade celebrating the 800 years of the foundation of this religious family. This endeavour should first focus on what the Rosary reveals to us. The writer has made efforts to go back to the various mysteries popularly contemplated on by all Christians around the world. The first thing to recognize are the following: The joyful decades reveal the mysteries of Love; the sorrowful decades show the mysteries of faith; the glorious presents the mysteries of hope; the fourth part, the luminous ones contain the mysteries of life (eternal).

This reflection is an attempt to focus on the Eucharist and the mystery of its institution. But this exercise takes place during the Christian formation in a catholic education. The tasks of the schools in promoting the love of the Eucharist presents it as a sacrament of the altar, a “unique, sacrificial priestly reality; as a thanksgiving and praise of the Father; as the memorial of the Paschal Mystery; and the abiding presence of the Lord” (Catechism of the Catholic Church, 1356-1381). This must be made clear and workable.

The catholic schools are where the mind is informed, the heart is moved and formed, the hands and the feet are guided, and, where the whole person is integrally developed. Unless

education does what it is meant for: to form individuals, it will not serve the purpose it is designed to achieve. A catholic school is the choice of parents even in countries that are not populated by Catholics. In countries like Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Thailand, and others, the catholic institutions are the prime choice. This is the honor that we enjoy for reasons the population knows very well.

If such is the fame that our institutions enjoy, where is the place of the Eucharist, the apex of Christian life? There seems to be no difficulties in indicating this when all the students are Catholics, but, not in the ones where very few students are of the catholic faith and ninety percent, if not more, belong to other religions: Islam, Buddhism, Hinduism, etc. In schools where majority are non-Christians, the pressing question, therefore, is how to live the Eucharist in the campus? What tasks are expected of the schools whose mission is to lead all to Jesus?

Living the Eucharist in Asia may not be that easy to achieve. Yet there is a dream that in God's time, in spirit, if not sacramentally, He will permeate if not penetrate the hearts of all in the various school campuses. Whether the Catholics are the majority or not, there seems to be something that has to be worked out: what are these tasks?

The task must be around four areas: becoming Eucharist, being the Eucharist, celebrating the Eucharist, and sharing the Eucharist. From these would unfold a culture, a way of perceiving things, a way of life, and a goal to aim at.

## **1.) Becoming Eucharist**

### ***A Story of a Missionary***

A missionary narrates how one day he started the mass: "Do this in memory of me...today, we gather around the table of the Lord to remember him. We gather together to listen to his word and to partake of his body and blood. We celebrate the Eucharist so that we, in turn, become Eucharist to one another."

This was said in the distant island of Western Samoa. But whether the mass is celebrated in a far away place, in the city, or in the barrio, in the slum area, the idea of becoming should always be there.

The dimension of becoming the Eucharist in fact is what we miss many times. We owe the concept of becoming to the phenomenology philosophers who reacted to the static way of perceiving and beholding reality. The full understanding of a rose includes the process of development from a very small bud turning into a full bloom flower. Apply this to realities and one will have a good grasp of them.

The transformational element of the body and blood received by the faithful seems to be not visible. For the normal believer, who goes to the Church Sunday after Sunday, yet remains a cheater, a liar, a social arsonist, and what not, betrays the value of this gift from the Master. Why so?

There seems to be a need for soul searching. The venue where the story takes place is not really the most important consideration. When a celebrant introduces the mass, using the same words, does it regardless of the where and the when. For every beginning, the mass must bring awareness to both priest and participant what the mass presents to them.

A country populated by Catholics, where graft is rampant, corruption is the way of life, and injustice is the bread of society, shows that the Eucharist has not yet touched the population and caused their true becoming. When the mass is said, it is to remember: remember what it was for, as pronounced in the first Eucharistic celebration some two thousand years ago.

In most countries in Asia, the members of the Catholic Church are few -- *pusillus grex* (small flock). It is a privilege for them to be aiming at becoming a "communion". In a university, or a school run by the Catholics, where the baptized are meager in number, the community still remains, as a *pusillus grex* (small flock).

The chaplain has much to do in these places. One big job may be just waiting for the number of believers to come. Those of the fold have the duty to live a life significant to what the Eucharist stands for: a sacrament of reconciliation. It is a means of healing. It is a rite of repentance that spells out an invisible reality; their meanings are most intertwined in the prayers uttered. The prayers are words of salvation. The signs signify a hidden reality. And the promise to all who participate enhances the feeling of hope.

### ***Becoming by Building***

This does not really refer to the building of a physical structure, making a material space, or strengthening its walls and pillars. When the Church is understood as a pilgrim community, always on the move, journey along the travails of daily life, the building of the communion of communities refer to the daily interaction among the members and the members with the leaders, and the leaders with the members. The basis of relationship is not social status, nor power, profession, nor ethnicity and castes; but the fraternity and the friendship, which the Founder dreams for all his disciples. "Do this in memory of me." "Live this in memory of me". "Become this in memory of me".

This spells of the dream of the Master about the "becoming" of all his followers. Community forgiveness prevails: when forgiveness prevails in a community of disciples, then there really is the Founder present. "Becoming" requires presence. Presence means each in the community is available to be loved and to love.

Love is the only value that will build a peaceful world. But the world does not exist in a conglomeration. It is usually the little world in a village, in the slum, a sub-division, in a religious community, in a school of learning; or a domestic church we call family.

What is to be built is a "house of God." But there will only be a house of God when all hearts in a "communio" are one: in prayer, in concern, in mutual support, in dreams, and in real life situations.

Think about this! Our world environment is one where most of the people around are young people with different family backgrounds, varied economic status, different talents, different ambitions and dreams, different goals in life, and all kinds of differences. The religious persuasions they hold may be just as diverse. Some may even profess to be atheists.

What we long will come for it is written: *See, the days are coming, says the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah.... I will plant my law within them and inscribe it in their hearts. I will be their God and they shall be my people...all shall know me, from the least to the greatest, says the Lord* (Hebrews 7). And this is elaborated in Vatican II: *"It was Christ who established this new covenant, the new testament in his blood, a call into being, from Jews and Gentiles, a people that was to form a unity, not in human fashion but in the Spirit, as the new people of God"* (*Lumen Gentium* 9).

Where is the Eucharist or where is the Eucharistic preparation going on? Do not forget the element of the Word in the gathering of the believers. The Word is part and parcel of the rite. What these diversities can build into one, may be the conviction deeply settled in the hearts of the young people. Look for the "semina verbi" in their conviction, persuasion, and life direction. At the bottom of the inner most part of each person is goodness, which sometimes has been

deeply eclipsed. This could surface in times when greatness is called for: accidents, fire, flood, and other calamities brought about by nature. When the heart is challenged in these situations, greatness prevails.

### ***Becoming by Faith in Action:***

In times of great needs, many heroes come forward. But this does not happen daily. Yes, there are difficult times, like the invasion of waves of tsunami; the moments of earthquakes; the coming of big floods; the eruption of volcanoes, among others. The heroism manifested during such needy occasions is the result of normal development through constant doing good deeds inspired by faith.

The Eucharist brings strength and power to the partakers. The partakers are sent to commit themselves in the name of their faith, shown by actions. St. Paul said: "Show me your faith that does not have fruits in action and I will show you faith with action."

The weakness of our age, even if one fourth of the world population, if not more, are Christians, is that there is a poor translation into action of one's Catholic Faith. There are indeed more than sufficient teachings: Vatican Two, Social Doctrine of the Church, The FABC documents, the teachings in schools, but there is still a lot of things to be desired.

The Eucharist is a *mysterium fidei*. In a mystery, there is always a part that is seen, and there are parts that remain unseen. The people who frequently receive the body and blood of Christ must be helped in their daily becoming by the power that comes from the Eucharist. Yet this is not automatic. The will, the decision of the will, the conviction of the communicants have to enter in the translation of grace the comes from the holy bread into a daily reality.

There is stunting in the becoming Eucharist because of certain treatments and behaviors. Take for instance a country with a population of eighty percent Catholics. The leaders are seen in big celebrations. The highest officials attend the most important fiestas and devotions in different parts of the country. Even in processions such actuations are there. But what happens after the event?

Who surround the parameters of the big officials? What decisions do they make that really inspire closeness with the Eucharist? Have they become more honest? Have they become more attentive to the needs of the victims of injustice? Have they truly become friends of the poor? Or they are friends of the poor only during election?

We have to also address the process of the becoming of pastors and ministers of faith. We have to confess shortcomings. We have to admit that, in a Eucharistic community, weak witnessing stunts the process of "becoming". The witnessing should not only be in approaching a communion rail; but, more so after, when stepping out of the parish church.

The "becoming" of the witnesses is our utmost concern. We often hear that people today listen more to the witnesses than to mere teachers. I remember the story of a friend from Taiwan. She is married; she belonged once to a very strong family following the Confucian way of life. Not that there is nothing good in the original faith persuasion, but the ways of Providence seemed to be very clear. By the grace of God she embraced the teaching of Jesus. Since then, her life was never the same. She was ostracized. Every difficulty she encounters in daily life, like sickness, loss of a good relationship, loss of her job and the like attributed by the mother to her embracing the ways of Catholics.

Her becoming a Eucharistic person followed a very difficult path. When she gave witness of her faith amidst those present in an inter-faith conference, the audiences coming from diverse countries in Asia, Europe and Latin America, could not but immensely admire the

strength and courage in her. She was invited to attend a meeting of educators concerned about moral and religious formation. Certainly her witnessing got the same sentiment of admiration and wonder. Awesome is the story of her becoming a person, embracing her crosses in life, accepting the insults of close friends and relatives, especially keeping faithful to the new way of life given to her by Jesus her Master.

### ***Eucharist Builds People***

We know that prayers bring people to a unity. Apply this to the people who want to be in communion with each other.

First, the Eucharist builds persons. The examples of St. Therese of the Child Jesus, St. Eymard, St. John Vianney, St. Padre Pio, and Blessed Mother Teresa of Calcutta are just a few clear and strong examples of personalities who were built by the bountiful graces that come from the Eucharist. To tell the story of each is wonderful. The details of their conviction and love for Jesus are moving. Their individual story can be turned into good movies.

All mentioned testified that they became what they were, because of their love for the Eucharist. Take one example: the simple parish priest of Ars. Great men like Lacordaire, a well-known preacher of France, would come to listen to this pastor the village of Ars. When asked, what he was doing before the Eucharist, the answer was simple but convincing: "He sees me; and I see him." Under the appearance of the Eucharist, the man who almost did not become a priest got his sole consolation. This is the nourishment he brought to the people around his place, even in winter, to the old and the sick.

Definitely, in the story of holy men and women, one salient aspect of their spirituality is their closeness to the Master who left a memorial, according to St. Thomas Aquinas, and by it, His life and passion are remembered.

It is the transformation of these persons that attract us. It is their stories that we like to listen to. We like to listen to stories of people the saints have encountered, and how their persons were built by the grace of the Eucharist. And this becomes now a story of the becoming of a community. We should recall the most attended rite of canonization that of Padre Pio. The Community of communities was linked by the helped of the modern means of communication. Several big screens were stationed in the patio of big basilicas in Rome, so that all could be united, and so close that they had become because of a friar tried by both ecclesiastical and civil unbelievers when he was enjoying the gifts of blessedness while on earth.

When John Paul II was in the Philippines in 1995, the greatest crowd ever gathered in the whole story of humanity took place in Manila. It was not the person of the Pope that people have gathered from all over the world to see, especially the youth, but what he represented, The Master - Jesus. When the youth shouted, JOHN PAUL II, WE LOVE YOU, they were indeed calling the one whom he represented. The People in a way became a sacrament. This man of God, so engrossed in his love for the priests who daily turn the bread and wine into the body and blood of Christ, is the Eucharistic Pope of the contemporary millennium.

When all were gathered that very day, it seemed that the chance of something going wrong was imminent. This was the case that day when the Pope would be saying the mass to culminate the World Youth Day. The percentage of danger and crime was high and that tragedy seemed bound to happen. According to the newspaper next day however, the previous day was one with zero crime. This is how the Eucharist could build up people in society.

Years back, I witnessed the celebration by Catholics of the *Corpus Christi* in Korea. The place is not so far from Pearon, the small valley that served as the hide out of Christians during

the time when they were persecuted. According to their custom, the people of different parishes gathered that day for the solemnity of the Body and Blood of Christ. As Korea enjoys very few places where there is plain terrain, that time the Eucharistic celebration took place on a hill parish.

The people had gathered earlier. The Eucharistic procession started from the Church to an altar quite distant from the main church. What a community! The women and men, with all solemnity followed the lead in the procession with the Blessed Sacrament. All were singing the Eucharist hymn I used to hear in the Churches in the Philippines composed by the theologian, St. Thomas Aquinas. He wrote so beautifully in his treatises about the Eucharist in Latin, and the all-culminating hymn: "Tantrum Ergo." A portion of this hymn states that "what is invisible" is substituted by the sacrament.

But this is describing the rite and ritual side. The Eucharist is more than a rite and ritual. The Eucharist is a banquet, which gathers the people together. The Eucharistic prayer number two states: "happy is the community though maybe unworthy enjoys the food of life". But when the mass is over, all are sent to perform acts of love and service. Different celebrants would send the faithful present in the liturgical service to go and spread the fruit of the celebration in their familiar ways.

Since the Eucharist is essentially a thanksgiving prayer, the liturgy cannot but be the basis of spirituality based on gratitude. The community of communities, as the Bishops of Asia would like to affirm, this ecclesiological parading, a koinonia, are to go and bring the fruits of the celebration to their household and neighborhood. In ancient times, the one thing brought to those who are sick and hindered joining the celebration, is the food of spiritual nourishment.

Praising together, praying together, eating together builds up the people. Their values of sharing, of unity, of peace, of agape, of fraternity, of harmony is recalled, and imbibed. The catechumen and the youth, then and now, cannot but assume these values so much needed in any period of history and in any place where the disciples of Christ dwell.

### ***People make the Eucharist:***

Of course there is only one who founded the Eucharist. The holy night is sung at the Easter vigil because this is the holy night, the night of nights...of great moment of salvation. But there is no proper appreciation of the Eucharist when there is no constitutive element of the community. For, people make up the body of Christ.

When we say that people make the Eucharist, it is in the sense that the Church is pilgrim. The pilgrim Church stops sometimes to celebrate the great mystery of love. This is the mystery of the body offered. This is the mystery when the divine blood was poured. It is no longer on the itinerant stage, but on a halting stage: for all are to listen to the Word of life; for all are to remember now the great promise of forgiveness of sin of humanity; or all are to sing the divine doxology; for all are to invoke the coming of the Kingdom of the Father; for all are to acknowledge the great life offering of the Lamb of God; for all are to the share at table; and finally, for all receive a mission, being sent, to bring the fruits of the celebration to all direction in the world.

It is not ideal to say the mass in private. But there are cases when this has to take place. But even in a celebration when the celebrant says the mass, he is saying it in union with the universal Church. The presence of the Church in private is recognized. The local leadership of the bishop of the place is acknowledged; and the unity with the Holy Father and all bishops all

around the world is affirmed. For people, shepherds and flock make up the Eucharistic community.

The diversities of the location of people make the Eucharistic community very beautiful. Whether the liturgy is celebrated in the Seat of Rome, or it is celebrated on the side of a high mountain, or in the slum area, a chapel in a hospital, or in a village of a tribe, it is the same Eucharist: the people are the same people of God, not in the sense of same individualities, but the sense that they are gathered in the name of the same faith. The same belief in the Father, Son and the Holy Spirit, the triune God who put as part of the plan of salvation that the Son come down and undergo a passion that ends in a glorious resurrection.

The fruits of the saving acts of the Master, Jesus, are the same for all: salvation. It is the salvation of the people who in turn make the Eucharist in their lives real. The apex of all celebration is made only with the participation of an ekklesia or qahal -- people gathered by God.

### ***Rituals Help Build the Community***

The physical constitution of every man and women requires some visible representation of the hidden reality. In the history of mankind rites and rituals always play a role in worship, starting from the most primitive form.

Rites and Rituals are external manifestation of higher ideas and reality. More than idea it is signifying reality. The simple offering of the shaman done in behalf of somebody else to appease a violated spirit has deep implication. Religious psychology respects this human way, even if it is a most elemental phenomenon. Mircea Eleade dedicated a good part of his life in the study of the History of Religions coupled with the attempt to understand the deepest meaning of belief.

Today belief has its advance form; but even the advance form has its underlying meaning. One who studies comparative religions normally comes to respect the inner sentiment of the belief of peoples. Not that all are fine and acceptable, but that all can be explained and the explanation depends upon culture, familiarity of local histories, anthropology, society in general, and other matters. Relativism seems to be a fact of today. But relativism is only a shallow reading and manifestation. Scholars should go to the religious metaphysics beyond the phenomenon or phenomena.

The reading and assertion of the major religions of the world by peoples-- in Islam, Buddhism, Hinduism, and the like, tell one thing: that religion must be taken seriously. For religious belief affects national society; in fact it now disturbs the universal community.

Without going into details, we return to rites and rituals: but, rites and rituals as related to the Eucharist. Take just one aspect of the prayers as part of the rites. The word used to specially focus on forgiveness. The Eucharist has a lot of details: the penitential beginning asking the Lord to forgive; the reading of the word so that sin maybe forgiven; the washing of hands to wash sin; do this so that sin may be forgiven; proper consecration in four forms, and more: the Our Father that petitions the Father to forgive sin; the lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world; and not to mention the exhortation of the celebration at one time and another to exhort people to do away with sin and be faithful to the gospel.

What really disturbs the person is sin. Consequently, what disturbs the community is sin. During the penitential service (of the Way of the Cross) the minister focused his preaching on what truly disturbs the person and the community. He told the penitents that, for that occasion, they should just focus on the times they had tarnished the name of a neighbor who may be a

brother or sister in a religious community, or a subject, a superior, or a staff in a religious house, or other wrong acts against others.

The rites help and build: for they bring, and hopefully, effect forgiveness. And when a person experiences forgiveness there is normally a positive result in the community to which one belongs. It could be a family as a domestic church; it could be a community of people with vows; it could be an organization; it could be a parish, etc...The mystery of forgiveness removes many undesirable vices, values, direction, and attitudes: the positive results in the family, or in any group are visible.

I remember one time the Master of the Dominicans talked about his experience in Africa. That time he was saying mass in a place where two warring tribes who belonged to a consecrated community. The tried relationship had to be saved. And finally, aware of the struggle, and grasping the positive results in cases when people truly forgive, for him the Eucharist became more meaningful: for all present, and for all who saw the affected and effective change. After all people with vows have to continue living together.

The rites and rituals in the Eucharist spell out meanings beyond the words, gestures and symbols. Do this so that sin maybe forgiven. Do this, because once sin is forgiven, the community will never be the same. The community truly experiences salvation. Henceforth, peace is restored, harmony is built up, and justice worked out. Our hope is that what the rites and rituals signify will take place in current history.

### ***Becoming by Sharing the Cup***

The mystery of creation gives one message: God shares. God gives existence. God maintains existence of all creatures. God assisted humankind in the history of salvation. Let us pay attention to the Jewish and Christian experience.

In the story of creation, at the beginning, man was not to live alone. He must have a companion to share life and share intimately each other to be able to multiply. It is the destiny of all to become sharers.

Sharing the cup means passing the cup; sharing the cup means accepting responsibility. This is the underlying message at Gethsemane: "Let this cup pass away...." If only....it can pass away. But since the mission of the Son is to accept the cup of suffering, he had to fulfill this mission.

The Lenten poster in the church of Sri Lanka spells out the message: "I thirst". For the people, it first means, many are thirsty for real water. The advancing war in the North and East truly deprive people of plain water. Bottles of water have to be distributed.

But more than the thirst of water is the thirst for peace and harmony. What truly happens in the villages, war fields, far and distant, require a solution by way of social thirst. Media does not allow just plain reporting. National media tailor news according to the agenda of self-interested parties. Those who visit those places will convey news, so different from the ones in the newspapers owned by diverse parties. Those in power have the advantage.

The sharing of the cup is more needed in the places like those mentioned above. But the same is also true for Sudan, Nigeria, and many places. The cup of the Eucharist more than anything else has to be shared.

All drinks down to the bottom of the cup have to be shared. It is not only sharing half of the content of the cup. Even the dregs have to be shared. In normal circumstances, dregs are dregs. And dregs are thrown. But not today. Even dregs have to be drunk to satisfy the thirstiest community: the community in thirst for peace.

For the community to turn Eucharistic, we need to reach all of the diverse faith convictions: we hold the same cup, and all of us have to drink from the same cup. To drink from the same cup is a social symbolism of the need for collaboration, cooperation, unity for the suffering society. Each one has to do his/her the utmost, no less than that. One dedicated religious, said with conviction: "if my life is required in the sharing of the cup, then, so be it."

Becoming is a continuous process. This is part of the dynamism of life. Ceasing to become means stagnancy. Even the human cells have to keep changing every seven years, otherwise deterioration creeps in.

Becoming Eucharistic is the mission of every Christian community. For did not the Master say: do this, for the forgiveness of sin. The forgiven community has the better chance to grow.

## **2.) Being Eucharist**

### ***The Language of Bread and Wine:***

The agricultural environment, around which the Master was surrounded, entered into his choice of means and tools his great action is to be commemorated. The Holy Scriptures abounds with other agricultural images related to the Kingdom of God. The parables of the seeds and the weeds, the rock, the yeast, the harvest, the branches, the vine, water and others are truly determinative of the language meant to portray mysterious messages.

Of the agricultural images, Jesus, in the institution of the Eucharist, by divine decision used the meal language. What would embody the memorial of his life, passion, death, and resurrection was the language that is found in the kitchen: food and drink. The chosen food is not meat, but bread; the chosen drink was not milk with honey, but wine. The determinative act of the Master is the foundation why in the liturgy one cannot substitute them for anything else. Some hebdomadal theologians or liturgists would attempt to use other matters, but they only created more confusion. It is not only creating confusion: they, in doing so, tried to act equal to the authority that instituted the Eucharist.

An attempt to read the meaning of the Eucharist in relation to a socio-cultural situation is sometimes done. It is done with risk. But it is done also in order to bring the understanding of the Eucharist into a more concrete situation for the people.

The real presence that is sacramental is made equal to the other mode of presence which Jesus insinuated about himself. To explain: Jesus is also present when two or more are gathered together; Jesus is present in the poor, in the suffering, in the victims of inhumanity. To use the scriptural terms, Jesus is present in the hungry, the homeless, the imprisoned, and others.

Take this reading from an Asian theologian: "Just as the Eucharistic Bread and Wine, so also the poor mediate amidst us in the "real presence" of Christ who is not only our divine Guest sitting at our table to enjoy our hospitality (I" was hungry, homeless.. and you fed me..." but also the divine Host welcoming us to the Banquet of the Kingdom (come, you blessed of my father") and, obviously, our divine Nourishment (Jn 6), the guarantee of Eternal Life promised to those of us who love one another as He had loved us. In the flesh-and-blood language of Jesus, the Bread and Wine point to the Poor." (A. Pieris, SJ in *God's Reign for God's Poor*, Tulana Research Center, 1999, pp. 29-30).

In this reading, the mode of presence is identified with the being. Imagination may allow this attempt to read the Eucharist, as portrayed, yet there is still the need to go back to the very being of Jesus.

Being is anything that carries existence, to go back to metaphysics. Existence may be just mental, or, it is in the mind. Yet, it is a being, but only in the mind. Existence of something could be in reality, or in the real world. It is physical, as we see a neighbor next to us, as we see the sun, as we see the plant. It is something that is beyond the mental existence.

The real presence in the sacramental sphere, as in the case of the presence of Christ in the Eucharist, is distinctively different from the mental presence and the presence that carry reality in the external world. In the case of the Eucharist, as an object of faith, Jesus is present, after the consecration of the bread and wine, but the real appearance of the two elements remains. Our faith tells that the bread and wine do not retain their substance; they are transformed into something else: the body and blood of Jesus. For this is the fulfillment of these very words: this is my body, this is my blood.

### ***Real Presence, Again?***

Yes, real presence, again! There is the need to make this affirmation. For history reduced the real presence into simple signification. The church members gather together in the name of the Master. And the master is there in their midst.

St. Thomas Aquinas, in his *sacrum convivium*, affirms that the sacrament is the “quo” in which the body of Christ is received – *in quo Christus sumitur*. This theological doctrine is supported by history, starting from the living belief of the primitive community. The Acts of the Apostles tells that Eucharist is not only a meal: it is a commemoration of the Lord’s final supper. And the presence of Christ in the said commemoration was the ultimate reason of every Eucharistic gathering. Because Jesus is really present, then the community becomes the *ekklesia*: a gathering where the participants are called not by anybody else but by God.

There is something missing if people just gather to reflect on the holy word of God. There are believers who are satisfied because they come as called by the Word. There are bible services, there are Sunday celebrations, without the Eucharist; there are sessions of the young, hungry for the real meaning of the Word of God, there are altars that honor the holy book, or processions where the holy book is the object of veneration; and there are many other activities that recognize the value of the revealed words. Revelation in the New Testament clarifies what is vague in the Old Testament. All are well taken, but the presence of Christ in the Eucharist is never equal with simply having the gathering with the intention of understanding more deeply the Word.

The uniqueness of the real presence of Christ in the Eucharistic celebration is there to be accepted. The denial of it seems to lessen the presence of Jesus in the world today. The daily mass, celebrated every minute, all over the world, is the one that will save the disturbed humanity. The Eucharist as earlier said is the sacrament of hope.

### ***Real Presence in History***

History and historicity compliment each other. Historicity is the entrance into the living experience of something. This historicity of the existence of our parents is concretely defined in a definite place and in a definite time framework. My father or my mother belongs to a certain period of the recent history of the 20th century. No one of them was born before the end of 1901 or the end of 2001. Their belonging to the world is defined by this temporal parameter. The places of their birth were concrete: nowhere else but in one island in the central part of the country.

The historicity of their existence cannot be questioned. To assign them to another period is a violation of historicity. To assign them to have been born in the northern part of the country is a violation of historicity. When it comes to the historicity of the institution of the Eucharist, the commemoration of the meal where the Master declared what happened to the bread and wine, no one has the power to deny this, because that event has entered into history.

The real presence in history is unalterable. There were twelve witnesses to the fact that the Master said: "this is my body...this is my blood". The same happens today, in a Church in the suburb of Colombo, a priest says the mass, in that particular time, in that particular place, with a specific number of participants.

An event as big as the terrifying tsunami in 2004, or something small, such as a penitent handing alms last Ash Wednesday, these two happenings are beyond question. In the history of mankind, the greatest event that happened, at least for the believers, is the institution of a sacrament that would always remind if not all, at least the followers of Christ, of the greatest mystery that Jesus said: do this in commemoration of me – the Eucharist. In the sacrament what one sees is bread, but the reality is different. When the wine is poured in the cup, that liquid is not wine but another reality.

Maybe the presence of Jesus in the Eucharist is the only inextinguishable presence in the whole of history. All things change. Generation comes after Generation. Forests, even the thickest ones, can perish. The tide of water is never the same. The ice in the Arctic regions is melting. The supply of oil is diminishing. The Green fields are turning into deserts. The water once abundantly flowing in the river is diminishing. Birds come to life via hatching, but they all die. Grasses grow, but suddenly they could turn into ashes. Even volcanoes cease to be active. And inactive volcanoes emit more lahar, fire, and rocks. Even peaceful regions turn into war fields.

The only real presence is believed to be in the Eucharist.

### ***Real Presence of the Invisible***

There is a big gap between being and non-being. The distance is immeasurable in one sense. Being and nothingness are opposites. Metaphysically it is the widest distance that could ever be conceived.

But there are things that are being not in the real world. They are being in the mental sense. Truly they exist. A flying horse can exist in the mental world. But this may not necessarily be in the real world, as the philosophical logician would state.

Another kind of being is that which exist in the real world, but remain invisible. They are not seen but their effects can be perceived somehow by one or another sense. For this we have spirits. The existence of spirits is upheld by people of all times. Even the primitives have a sense of perception of the invisible spirituals. Modern science has exerted effort to fathom this dimension in the realm of the real world. Parapsychology has developed this to a certain extent. Theology has a lot to say about the spiritual world. Yet there are still things that remain unknown and because our ordinary intellect does not understand it fully, we call these mysteries.

The real presence is unique. The belief is that the reality is there, the whole of Jesus, but it is not perceived in the normal way by the external senses. In the world of philosophy, we recognize the element of accidents. Accidents are so called because they accrue to the substance. And specified essence to which accidents are accruing to is called substance.

In the case of the Eucharist, traditionally we say the accidents of the bread remains, but the substance of it is transformed at the uttering of the words of consecration. We see bread, but

there is no more bread in the consecrated host, the substance of bread. One sees wine, but the reality is different: it is the blood of Christ

The invisible in the Eucharist is the historical Christ. And faith says, Christ is truly present. How is this? Well it is because the said sacrament remains very mysterious. But the belief in this mystery has changed the lives of people, transformed vice into virtue, moved one's conviction from unbelief to a strong belief, brings light to a darkened mind, brings healing to sickness, mends disturbed relationships, changes enmity to friendship, and much more.

The real presence of the invisible in the Eucharist is creative, transformative, and even generative. I want to say something about the last affirmation: Who and how many barren women would ask Padre Pio to bring their petition to the "friar of the Eucharist" and have their longing answered?

After all, the Christ who is invisible to one who has no faith is not invisible to one who has the belief that a divine person is indeed hidden in the sacrament of the "corpus et sanguinis Christi".

### ***Real Presence from Sensus Fidelium***

The very primitive church, i.e., the community that listened in person to the preaching of Peter, John, James, Thomas, Andrew, and other disciples knew that the witnesses to the historical Christ could be relied on. Paul whose claims to be the last of the apostles, had the same conviction.

The Acts of the Apostles tells us the ways of life, the mode of celebrating, the commitment to sharing, the instruction to go to all nations, and the authority of the twelve. In all this there was one teaching on the Eucharist: where the Eucharist is celebrated Christ is present.

The third century was quite different. By that time the apostles had died, but there were their disciples who received what were handed to them. People were not ready to accept some things and one of these was the Eucharist. During this period the apologists, like St. Justin, who learned his faith at the feet of John the Apostle, had to play the role of giver of the right explanation. The Christians at that time were accused of human debauchery. They were said to be eaters of flesh, for they "ate the flesh of Jesus".

The guiding spirit of the Lord then inspired the first among Christian theologians, to have courage to write, preach, and teach doctrine of the Eucharist, later handed to the next generation.

The medieval times enjoyed the presence of theologians with wisdom, who in convincing language were able to maintain the purity of understanding the Eucharist. St. Thomas Aquinas was assigned by the Pope to compose the Office of the *Corpus Christi*. (Cfr. text of St. Thomas in the *Office of the Hours*).

The period of the Reformation questioned the number of the sacraments. Other explanations of the presence of Christ in the Eucharist was proposed like transignification versus transubstantiation. This trend influenced the contemporary times to a great extent, even up to today. Our contemporary fellow Christians, a good number at least, professing faith in the same person of Jesus, have different appreciation of the divine presence in the Eucharistic sacrament. They gather as a *koinonia*, like that of older times, yet there is no acceptance of the substantial and real presence of Christ in the divine banquet. The most they could accept is the symbolism of Christ.

This is a pain experienced sometimes when there are gatherings of Christian communions. The disparity of belief causes divisions. The unity Jesus prayed for among his followers is not complete.

The *sensus fidelium* that I am referring to goes beyond the above. I have started to seriously look at the arts, and songs sung by the people in different places. More precisely, I am referring to the popular hymns that spell out in one way or another a belief in the real presence. It is a very interesting study and with equally curious finds.

Here I have selected five hymns: *Anima Christi* or the Soul of Christ, *At the First Eucharist*, *O Lord I Am Not Worthy*, and *Jesus my Lord, My God, My All and Sweet Sacrament Divine*.

*Anima Christi: Soul of Christ, sanctify my breast, Body of Christ, be Thou my Saving Guest...* The singer or the singers, in all cases the faithful who accept real presence, do not take simply the sacrament as a thing, but a person. The divine person is recognized, and his mysterious power is affirmed.

*At the first Eucharist...: before you died, O Lord, You prayed that all be one in you...* Here the one who instituted the sacrament of the Eucharist is said to have prayed for the unity of all who believe in Him: *Ut unum sint*.

*O Lord I am not worthy... that Thou should come to me; but speak the word of comfort, my spirit healed shall be....* I remember two very concrete cases. In one case, a woman in her sixties told the priest that she could not walk. She was indeed helped by her relatives to move a few feet. The priest who just finished the mass, told her. You can indeed walk with the help of Jesus. And there she went. Walking along the long aisle of the cathedral in Kandy City. On another occasion, a woman of almost seventy came to a priest saying prayers of thanksgiving. She told that priest that she has had fever for one week and therefore she felt weak. Truly, when the priest touched her head and neck there was fever. Invoking St. James and believing in that Jesus could work in the Eucharist, the priest prayed over the woman. The fever was gone. The arms and the body feel normal. In the second case, it was not only the spirit that was healed, but also the body.

*Jesus My Lord, My God, my all! O living bread, we Thee adore, O make us love Thee more and more.* Yes, there is an affirmation that the sacrament is bread, and yet there is a transition: *We Thee adore*. From the thing to the person: there is an extraordinary transition. This itself is a mystery of faith.

*Sweet Sacrament Divine...: Tantum ergo, sacramentum, veneremur cernui...* The original text of St. Thomas Aquinas is translated poorly into the English version: *Sweet Sacrament Divine, Hidden in thy earthly home; Lo! Round Thy lowly shrine, with suppliant hearts we come, Jesus, to Thee our voice we raise...* This Catholic faith is what is missed by those who simply gathered, yes, to recognize the presence of God in the holy word but lacking faith in the real presence.

The *sensus fidelium* is beyond question. These songs are sung, even in translation, on the top of the hill, in the cathedrals, in the chapel in slums, in parish churches, in religious houses, in seminaries, and in processions.

### ***Real Presence is beyond Signification***

There are some Christians of other denominations that are sacramentally welcomed. They receive the sacraments in Catholic places, when the service of their denomination is not found in the area. Anglicans may truly share the gift of the body and blood of Christ with the Church. It is because they believe in the real presence.

For those Christian communions which still only accept the presence of Jesus, in the sense of signification, we still have to wait for the day when truly there will be full communion,

including the Eucharistic. We can always dream. We can always pray for unity. We can always work out in the realm of argumentation that truly Christ is present in person in the said sacrament of faith. But in the last analysis this change will be the work of the Spirit.

### **3.) Celebrating Eucharist**

#### ***A return to Jewish Custom***

It is well known that the structure of the liturgy of the mass was influenced by the Jewish custom. The Passover of Jesus was the yearly feast of the Jews recalling the departure of the Hebrews from Egypt. In this rite the youngest child asks: what is the meaning of the celebration and the head of the family would recall the times when Moses as instructed by God to prepare for they were departing. The angel of death would pass, but spare their homes from the scythe of death.

That was for them the moment of great transition. The journey was about to start. Barely a reasonable preparation was done. They were in a hurry. The Egyptians were indeed disposed by God to hurry their departure for Israel. They were driving the race of Abraham to leave the country, lest the Egyptians would all die.

The yearly Passover commemorating the time when Israel had settled in the Promised Land, is a commemoration of the night when the Hebrews were leaving. In that disposition they were with their staff, selective of what to carry, nervous, uncertain, just wondering what was going to happen on the way. And, all these happened with reason. In fact, at a certain stage, the people wanted to turn back.

The yearly commemoration does not have those emotions of the first Passover. It was a remembering, indeed, but it was a static remembering. There was no transition as in the first Passover. The emotions are different. It is regularly commemorated, for it was an order given to them.

It appeared that the Passover of that night, when Jesus was having the last supper, recaptured again, that strong emotion of transition of that night when the people were about to leave. This time, as Jesus knew it, was a transition from life to death and from death to new life. It was almost an immeasurable distance. For the distance between death and life was a distance which only God can bridge.

In the Eucharist, this creative power of God, this mysterious transition happens again. It is the transition from bread to body and from wine to blood.

#### ***What is required in the Celebration?***

The celebration of the Eucharist requires a preparation. Think again of the night the Jews were about to leave. The purgation that God designed to take place was tremendous. The ten plagues brought purgation (See Genesis).

But there was obstinacy in the heart of the Pharaoh. As if the nine signs of wonders and the disadvantages brought to Egyptians were not enough. Hardness of heart had to be melted. Every time there is a Eucharistic celebration, there must be always an appropriate preparation.

At the supper of the Lord, that paschal night, Jesus sent two disciples to prepare the place for the celebration. In the ordinary life of the faithful the preparation takes place remotely and proximately. One who attends the mass to start the week makes a preparation then and there. He

has to bring to the first day of the week the fruits he receives from the Eucharist in the day of the Lord. From the second day until the last weekday, one sets his mind for the coming Sunday to which he brings the fruits of his weekdays' labors. Such is the proximate preparation.

On Sunday, to prepare well for the coming to mass, one should not hurry. This means that the churchgoers come not just upon the start of the mass, but a little earlier so that one could calm down and have sufficient time for recollection. To be late for the start of the Sunday celebration is not good for the spirit. There seems to be a spirit of uneasiness when one catches the attention of fellow churchgoers.

In general, big important events where the mass is the center of the celebration, appropriate steps are done: cleaning, decorating, arranging, assigning of tasks, novenas etc. The more serious people, before a big feast, would make fasting as part of their auspicious preparation.

### ***Celebration and Disposition***

The aforesaid preparation requires some points regarding disposition. In fact disposition speaks clearly of who we are. This refers to the disposition that touches the external and internal dimensions.

There was a time that the mass was seen as a day in the week to meet the Lord; therefore clean and modest attire is worn. To come to mass regularly in sports shorts or the like speaks of the way one values the day of the Lord.

In towns, Sunday is still an important day in the context of social life. It is also the day when villagers would go to town. But mass is the first part of the town visit. Going to market, attending other appointments, visiting particular friends, and doing other things are secondary and done only after the mass.

In the season of advent, the first four Sundays provide part of the time when the faithful have to do their spiritual and personal preparation. Christmas comes then with sufficient enthusiasm to make them ready. Sometimes the preparation is in the externals. But in the real sense, it should be a personal internal preparation that must be prioritized.

In the season of Lent, again, the first four Sundays are set for a gradual liturgical preparation. The readings for these days are well selected. It is done so that the recalling of the story of salvation is unfolded: how the coming of a Christ who will be a suffering servant, to bring people liberation through the cross, is slowly unfolded. All this prepares and leads us toward the apex of the paschal mystery: the resurrection.

We wonder whether the lack of fruits to society from the Eucharist can be traced down to the lack or inappropriate preparation in the area of our disposition. This is asked of both the ministers and the people. It appears that the preparation required does not mean that we should copy all that is liturgically done in big basilicas; after all the means to do so in a local setting may be lacking, but certainly it is in the preparation that belongs to the arena of heart, mind and spirit that we should pay attention to.

### ***Celebration of Equals***

What could destroy the proper celebration is the acceptance of their person. Baptism has given all equal dignity. We are all sons and daughters of God. In theory there is no problem about this. Even the higher ecclesiastics know this. The theologians have no problem about this. All are sons of Abraham, in the lineage of David. Even strangers can acquire the rights to join the celebration provided that they are disposed to the requirements of the rites.

Yet the community of human beings, human as they are, would spoil this assertion of equality. When there is celebration, in a society governed by the caste system, the difference is clearly seen. This is also true in communities where education, property, money, position, party, race, influence, age and gender conditions people.

Women have claimed for equality in rights and dignity with men. In the age of freedom, expect more declarations of rights and more confrontations because it is the right thing to do. Of course women should also recognize the limitation of things they do. Their rights are bounded and limited to certain parameters.

The hierarchical structures of the Church have been challenged by this attitude. Special places give way to the structures of houses of prayer to ones that are expressively communal in arrangement. If the church in Asia pursues that, it is one that is a communion of communities, the houses of worship, at least the latest to be built, should reflect this paradigm.

Old structures of Churches with special places for selected groups have been transformed from one of very limited extent to one that will allow welcoming anybody who comes to join the celebrations to an appropriate location. It is still far from perfect, but that the efforts have been exerted is a reason to be hopeful.

Even houses of formation have slowly made adjustments and proper arrangements so that the idea of basic communities is being promoted in the day to day running of some seminaries.

All the above do not mean lessening the respect for the ordained ministers. The point is more on the attitude-formation, inculturated adaptation, and contextual conditions. The hermeneutical conditioning, explored by one bishop, as necessary and needed steps, in the development of mission, has something to contribute (*Cfr. L.A. Tagle in Eucharist with Mary, Manila: UST, 2005*). It is the idea that our expression of faith is conditioned by what we see at the very beginning of our life, what we witness in the growing stage, and what we do at the stage of maturity. Consider this dimension: The Christian cathedral, visited by a nun, with all the physical conditionings like a cathedral of Catholics will feel a certain absence, when the tabernacle with a host is absent. This is so because of the presence or absence of ways in the practice of her faith.

The attitude-formation in the adoration of the Eucharist, and the disposition required or a more fruitful joining of the Eucharist is a very important catechetical concern. In fact this has to start at home, or rather start with people who accompany the young ones to the Church to join in the weekly celebration.

### ***Celebration in Culture***

The incarnation of Jesus is the foundation for the inculturation of the liturgy. But this area of inculturation follows the reflecting of theological discussion on the topic. Theologians and liturgists in Asia have come together to ascertain where proper inculturation may take place: i.e. how culture prepares the gospel and how the gospel can permeate culture.

It is not our intention to go into the details of discussing approaches like the acceptance of dynamic equivalence and other means but simply to make an affirmation that culture must play a role in the meaningful liturgy. The essentials of the established rites and rules of the liturgy are to be respected, but certainly, the people's wisdom and genius cannot be put aside.

In the aspect of meals, the Asians have particulars to contribute (*Inculturation of Religious Life, Q. Pedregosa et al.*). A person may wait for a day or so just for another who could accompany him for a meal. We welcome people by way of meals shared at the table. In

other parts of the world, if one is taking his meal, he could not be disturbed, but not so in our part of the world.

The historical meal in the last supper has its attending details. Certainly, the style of Jesus was Jewish. The early community that had since made the recalling of the meal because of the desire of the Master – do this in memory of me – has a lot of cultural conditioning. The Constantinian color or adaptation that has reached the present liturgy of the Eucharist is there to reckon with. Creative people will have their resistance, would propose some adaptation, but certainly, conditions will affect the sentiment of people, and affect also the spirit of the celebration.

Take how context and culture play its role in a Eucharistic celebration as Fr. Timothy Radcliff narrates: He was visiting one country in Africa. In one place there was a Dominican community where the members were composed of warring tribes. Yet they had to live together and celebrate the mass. There was a requirement for the celebration as provided by the norms. He had no doubt about the usefulness of the norms, but at that juncture, with consideration of the rites, but modified by situation, they had the liturgy. He said that, that particular celebration of the mass was one of the most meaningful he ever attended when the divided groups come to a unity in the Eucharist.

This is not the place where details and thoughts on inculturated liturgy may be explored, but to just make a statement: that in celebration the cultural and social context play the particular role that is not the same as in other places.

### ***Celebration in Domestic Church***

We can find family settings when the mass is proper and also celebrated for special occasions such as when there are sick persons, family celebration of a wedding anniversary, commemoration of death of a dear one, and other reasons. With due permission from authorities home masses are permitted. In places where to have the cross or a bible is outlawed, a rare opportunity to have mass in a clandestine place is a gift from above.

The family is a domestic Church. In fact the primitive church had the home as a usual setting. This is more so when the communities were persecuted, or just trying to start or to survive. It is interesting to go back to the patristic period, but since this is not the purpose of the article, we just limit this to the Family as we take it in Asia.

The strength of the local churches depends so much on the domestic Church. And the strength of society depends upon the family. The 2004 FABC Plenary Assembly says: “*Social change has to start in the family, through the attitudinal transformation of parents, through the education that they impart to their children, and the parental example that they give regarding the values of justice, peace, personal integrity, and the care of creation.*” (No. 94)

When the family or the domestic church achieves the values narrated above, the family then has bountiful fruits to bring to the weekly liturgical services. And the family is not only a venue of faith. According to the delegates of the 1995 Pan-Asian Conference on Catechesis, much is demanded from parents: “It demands a mature, adult faith in the parents, who are primarily responsible for caring for a formal faith-formation.”

When something ideal happens in the family setting, or when a right opportunity comes, and when the family truly nourishes faith formation among the siblings, the call for domestic celebration is in order.

As such, the mass, either in the Church, or in the family setting, will be of value. This seems to be a return to the times of the early Christians when the narration of the

commemoration of the supper of the Lord in the Acts of the Apostles was the practice, just as the letters of St. Paul are valued (1 Cor. 10-11).

There was mention of a disharmony in those celebrations. But disharmony aside, and when appropriate correction is made, the unity of the family is best served by the commemoration of the last supper where Jesus, according to St. John, prayed for the oneness of his followers.

### ***Celebrating with the Universal Community***

Every mass, even the privately said, because of some appropriate reason, is always universal prayer, and the universal community is always remembered in every mass.

One needs only to read slowly and patiently the four Eucharistic prayers in the Roman missal, where the Pope, the Bishops, the local ordinary, the clergy and other ministers, and the laity are always mentioned. The special need of the local community may be added in invocations, but one should note the universal character of every mass celebrated.

I remember talking to a priest in the Island of Gulanyu years back in China. He was cautious in his language, since there was always somebody who accompanied us, even if our group was an official guest of the Commission of Religious Affairs of Government. He said: "We are always united with the Holy Father."

Was not this unity with the People a help to the faithful in the Church of Silence; that helped them survive from the terrible pains of the life of faith inside prison? I remember the late Archbishop Dominic Tang, bishop of Canton, talk of what sustained him during his years in prison: spiritual unity with the Universal Church. According to that good bishop he kept this unity in spirit as he passed his hands on stones he put aside that help him in the praying of the rosary while in prison.

Just lately, a student in Manila went to China. Not knowing what to expect he visited his bishop who was still in prison. Things were uncertain. Maybe brought by the rare opportunity and the need of the ministry, right there and then the seminarian was ordained in the cell of the bishop; but only in unity with the universal leadership in the Church.

The Eucharist is for unity. The ecumenical movement cannot but be concerned about how difficult the area of *comunicatio in sacris* is. There are no clear details as how to handle this concern. There is still deep pain whenever there is the gathering of Christians but somehow this has to stop somewhere.

Ecclesia de Eucharistia has dreams of that day when fuller unity may be achieved (Cfr. Eucharist and Intercommunion, D. Iniguez). The movement has to move on in order that the prayer of Jesus - *Ut unum sint* - will be one day realized. This is more so if we consider the universality of the prayers addressed during the prayers of the faithful in the mass. The holy Friday rite is most emphatic of this.

The journey is thorny and long. But that the Eucharist always recognizes and mentions the good of all in the kingdom of God is the central interest in the mass for the mass is always invoked to be the prayer of the universal church.

### ***Fruits of Celebration***

Before a mass the priest prays for a more worthy celebration, and for the fruits one desires to obtain. Saints, like St. Anselm composed a prayer as a preparation for mass and such prayers bring out petitions such as: *I seek your protection; I look for healing; I trust in your salvation; I hope in your mercy.*

Moreover, Thomas Aquinas composed a prayer of thanksgiving, mentioning the good fruits of the Eucharist he wants, such as: *“I pray that this Holy Communion may not bring me condemnation and punishment but forgiveness and salvation. May it be a helmet of faith and a shield of good will! May it purify me from evil ways and put an end to my evil passions. May it bring me charity and patience, humility and obedience, and growth in the power to do good.”*

The Anima Christi seems to make explicit a general desire:

*“Soul of Christ, make me holy  
Body of Christ, be my salvation.  
Blood Christ let me drink your wine.  
Water flowing from the side of Christ, wash me clean....”*

Each recipient will have his or her expectation in regard to what to obtain from the reception of Holy Communion. But in general, the above serve as contents of a common dream of our inner spirit. The fruits of the Eucharist after all are free gifts from God.

#### **4.) Sharing Eucharist**

##### ***Sharing on Top of the Mountain***

This took place three years ago. It was a meeting of IMCS with IYSC delegates with chaplains. It took place in Penang, Malaysia. Part of the program was the exposure of the delegates to different social areas, and I opted to join the group that would go to a tribe living about two hours from Penang.

We were six and we arrived in the place to be housed in the home of the village leader. There were about eight houses around and the place where we would stay was the biggest. There were two main parts. One was the big hall of native materials and the next was the dining and kitchen area. The six of us would later meet a few other persons of the village. We did not have provision and the first thing we asked was where we could go and buy things. There were volunteers and since we arrived in the afternoon the next meal would be supper.

For supper we had a can of sardines, rice and vegetable made of the shoots of the cassava plant. At mealtime there were about 23 adults not counting the few children. All shared the sardines and the vegetable with abundant rice. And we survived. When we looked at that experience, we had indeed a kind of symbolism of the multiplication of the bread. We were all satisfied.

The meal of the Eucharist is somehow like that: many share the Eucharist, even if it is meager in form – a little piece of bread, a few drops of wine - to feed all. But this time it is not only with bread and wine but the body of Christ.

One result or fruit of the Eucharist must be the attitude of sharing. For the Eucharist is to be shared first of all, and from there other things are also to be shared: talents, possession, time, opportunities... The Eucharist is an antidote to selfishness. The Eucharist should eliminate greed.

##### ***The Poor Shares***

People, who come from villages, no matter of what country they come from Asia, have great capacity to share. In the case cited above, we discovered that the people lived in utmost

simplicity. But the disposition to share, and feel the need of each other, and the needs of the community was there.

The village had once a big struggle. People with capital got a concession from government for mining. But the people knew later of how their livelihood, dependent on trees and nature, were affected. They formed a group, gave their time, denounced before the court the mining operation, until it was closed down.

Those who have experiences in the squatter areas or in remote towns have the same observation to share. The missionaries have a good grasp of the generosity of the poor people. In my years of formation, I had chances to frequent the people of Tatalon, a slum area in Manila, and in recent times, I have had the chance to be acquainted with those areas in the city exploited by the politicians during elections. One who meets those living there will be surprised at their sense of openness, generosity and availability for the cause of the many.

I remember how one parish priest worked out a plan on how to support the seminarians. In a seminary, rice is always a daily staple. The ingenious parish priest would exhort his barrio folks to set aside a spoon of grain every time they would cook their breakfast, lunch and supper. That means that in a day three spoons of rice have been set aside, multiply this with the seven days a week and then at a designated time, the rice was collected and sent to the seminary.

The Eucharist, which gathers the barrio folk in a small chapel paved the way for people to show their spirit of generosity. A few sacks of rice were sent to the seminary to feed the future priests.

This is again reconfirmed in my visit to a well off subdivision in Southern Luzon. The parish priest who was my former student told me: the contribution from the collection done in the small chapels is much more than what he gets from the main church. The simple people are more generous.

### ***Not easy for the rich to Share***

At the outset, it is good to note that this is not a universal statement. There are some well-off people on whom we can depend. They do help without counting the cost.

But when the heart of the rich is set to get a million, which is a stepping stone to get another million, everything is counted. Even relatives in dire need are abandoned because the goal for the future is to produce another million.

The inability to share seems to be a curse of those who are well off. When food is in abundance the spirit is so satisfied that it cannot feel the hunger of the needy. There seems to be something holding them back. When the well-off are so secure, individuals seem to be incapable of feeling the injustice, and the insecurity of their less advantaged neighbors.

There could be group or family, religious or not, so secure, so well off, with food in abundance, publicly acclaimed and honored, but there is such deep poverty: insensitivity of the corruption around, inability to feel the surroundings full of needy people, so self righteous when personal issues are touched, never minding the ecological repercussions of too much energy consumption, complete sports facilities in the basement or upper room. But the concrete steps to help needy seem to be unheard of in normal conversation. They are too distant from where the ordinary people stand.

### ***Sharing and Mission***

When the celebration of the Eucharist is ended the priest sends the people off with advice to spread love, do the work of peace, promote justice, serve the needy, and others. For the

Eucharist is just never completed upon the sending to a mission. There is the personal or a group mission to be done.

Here the culture of the family enters into the picture. In the family, where the siblings see the commitment to different areas of society of their parents, it is but natural for the children to do the same. Lately, I met a young man who is doing health service in Africa. Why this direction? Because, at home he witnesses his parents who own a medium hospital and apply their energy for health care, especially attending to some of those who cannot afford to pay in a more advanced hospital. Values are caught rather than taught as the saying goes.

It is important to train people to share while young. The Gen 3 (teens from 12 to 17 years of age) of the Focolare Movement seems to be a good example. At a very young age the economy of sharing is already inculcated in the youth in ways available to them. In youth, the value of good work is imbibed slowly, and with determination, as this is exemplified in the elders of the movement.

Young evangelizers of the suffering church in Burma give a unique example. One bishop from Burma cannot but recognize and declare the contribution of the very young catechists who would walk for days to reach villages and stay with the faithful for days. Even some of them would contract sicknesses and die of the same having been in a place where medicine and health care is nil.

The acceptance of a mission that is supposed to be one fruit of the Eucharist is the proof that the mass has really brought meaning to the participants. It is hard to see this for individuals who would come to mass in their sports clothes Sunday after Sunday and then proceed to their golf bouts.

### ***Just What Is Sharing in the Eucharist***

Sharing in the Eucharist means: first repentance, then acceptance of the message that come from the word of God, then consecration of one's being, the identification with the one crucified, communion, mission, and return to the same celebration of the Lord next day.

The communal humble recognition of imperfection, weaknesses, omission, and sinfulness pave the way to the altar of the kingdom. It seems to be the first step. And there seems to be no other proper way of starting.

The acceptance of the message that comes from the word, after listening to it as read and amplified by the homilist, cannot be but taken as the appropriate way of responding. Sometimes the message would demand difficult things like: amendment of false witness, reconciliation with relatives and neighbors, restitution due to injustice done, renouncement of power, and many more. The anomalous circumstances mentioned do not appear to make any or much difference for Christians. This may be because there is no serious response evident to the mentioned challenges.

The consecration is not in canonical sense but in personal sense. After the elevation, the faithful should also internally appropriate the word of Jesus: This is my body to be offered, this is my blood to be shared. Popular prayers have a lot to contribute. There are many acts of consecration to God and service to God and neighbors in circulation. If what is written in them is truly lived out by all who attend the liturgy the world will change sooner.

On the way to visit a place in the north of Luzon one holy week, I saw the people doing their *penetensya* (*corporal penance*). Are they right? Are they wrong in their physical imitation

of what Christ underwent? I would rather say, their acts were edifying. Who are we to say they are overdoing the sense of penitence?

Imitating Christ the Savior is something very personal, and belongs to the inner sanctum of the heart. One of the best known and read books in modern times is written by Thomas A. Kempis – Imitation of Christ. During the times when the world was reading it, there was less war, less injustice, less manipulation. In the times when the book had escaped from the hands of many, there was more war, more exploitation, more hatred, and more greed, to mention a few.

### ***What can be Truly Shared***

We need not invent things that can be truly shared. Even in one's nakedness there is so much to share. Think of the following:

What can you share with an innocent baby in the womb of a mother entertaining the idea of ending the life of the little child? What can you share with naked children scattered in our streets, holding plastic bags and momentarily sniffing that harmful chemical? What can you share with a single mother whose husband is far away, experiencing loneliness in a far away land where he works so he can raise his family decently? What can you share with people in the highlands, whose land is forcibly taken by the politicians, businessmen, military, and international companies? What can you share with a handicapped, a child so different from others, longing to be affirmed and loved? What can you share with an old lady or man, abandoned in the streets, or dying in a house for the elderly?

What can you do for one who is terminally ill with one form of cancer?

What can you do for missionaries in a foreign land, struggling to adjust to a new culture, new types of food, new neighborhood, new authorities?

Just what can you do for your elderly parents?

Just how will you live with people of another faith?

Just how will you handle your child under the influence of drug addiction?

Sometimes when we hear people discussing about high economy, political conflict, positioning in a party or government, or manipulating shrewdly, cheating and what not, we wonder what the Eucharist has done in their life.

### ***It is easy for the Young to Share***

Remember again the story of the young Burmese evangelizers. There are other beautiful stories to tell. We tell the story to celebrate heroism, to proclaim values, to announce good news, and to give what is due to people.

In my years of working in the academic world for some twenty-five years, I have noticed the sense of greatness of young people. They have different talents, they can be generous about their time, they are committed, they are self-sacrificing, they are creative, and they have various kinds of commitments.

In schools, it is just a matter of tapping and topping them. Organizations abound. Even in a school handled by religious, but whose Christian students simply make up 1% of the population, so much can still be done.

What is important is for the elders in the schools, meaning, administrators, teaches, staff and others to show proper direction. Even without the goal of conversion in mind, there is a way to prepare the Eucharist amidst them. The seeds of goodness are inherent, there is a spirit of commitment, and they can come together to share their conviction. For the Catholic and

Christian schools have to aim mostly on humanism, where all stand on equal level. Search for the semina verbi in young women and men.

### ***Sharing in Hope***

Hope is desire for the good thing that is “not yet”. The most that the believers in Jesus hope for is the fullness of belonging to the Kingdom of the Father. The pilgrim church is doing the journey. And all of us are in the journey.

Grounded in faith and in love, the catholic shows in daily living, the color and the flavor of this faith. What he or she has learned in living Christianity is there to share, even if one does not intend it. For one who has a living faith, witness is spontaneous. There may not even be the need to talk about it. Two examples for our times are Ghandi and Mother Teresa. There is no need to proclaim their greatness by themselves, for their greatness is indeed very visible.

When the present Pope, Benedict XVI, talks about hope in Spe Salvi, I think he has touched the right note of the music for our times. Hope is not only the concern of Catholics. Hope is for all peoples of various faith persuasions, for every form of government, for every party, for every age, for every culture and for every body to ponder on.

### ***Eucharist as Sacrament of Hope***

What is hoped for in the Eucharist? There are: forgiveness of the sin of the people and of the world; putting into commitment the message of the Word of God; acceptance of the role of another crucified; coming of the kingdom of God amidst the present; intensifying spirit of communion; and fulfilling a sense of mission.

Finally, the celebration of the Eucharist in the “valley of tears” is an anticipation of the future reality: the joining of all the elect in the heavenly banquet prepared by the Father for them (Vat II). This means all of us that the Father wants to invite.

If the mass is the source of numerous graces, as the Synod on the Eucharist professed, then this sacrament of love should provide wholesome means and ways for Christian growth. The Churchgoers truly become empowered spiritually, and this power helps the believer to live a life that is pleasant to the eyes of the Heavenly Father.

If all the activities in the daily life of the members of the domestic Church lead to the Eucharist as the goal, then, Churchgoers will be conscious about all this daily endeavors. There seems to be no place for sinfulness and omissions. But human as all goers to the mass are, they oftentimes go to the holy meal tarnished. Yet, this is the very reason why this goal is set in life so that the desire and the dream to be close with the Holy One is helped every moment of one's existence.

## **5.) Conclusion: Living Eucharist in Asia**

We start from the end, in order to have a good view of the beginning. Our final goal is communion with the Father, Son and the Holy Spirit. In the nakedness of our humanity and deep in the heart of every catholic is that dreamt of communion.

When we learn how to work: becoming Eucharist, being Eucharist, celebrating Eucharist, and sharing Eucharist, in this vast continent of Asia, this continent of Mission of the Catholic Church gives an evangelizing preference, and then the living Eucharist in Asia becomes the goal of the third millennium. This is conceived, not in order to separate Asia from the other

continents, but for all the other four continents to address and direct their efforts to. Asia, with some four billion people, will no longer be a *pusillus grex*, but vibrant in the love of God and love of humanity.

The office of the readings on Holy Thursday, the day that commemorates the institution of the Holy Eucharist, appropriately introduces this verse: “When I am lifted up from the earth, I will draw all people to myself.” So it is in the mass. When Christ is lifted up during the consecration, He keeps drawing people to Himself.

In the labyrinth of life, with all its conflicts, there seems to be only one thing and one way to rely on. It is in the memory of the night when the Lord instituted the Eucharist, which contains the *mysterium fidei*, that we capture the new sense of hope. This very hope gives meaning to life itself, which starts on earth but to last for eternity.

■ **“Have you eaten yet? Come, visit if you have time”**

**- Eucharist and Education In Philippine Catholic Schools**

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In a chapter called *The Voyagers* in her book titled *Dwellings: A Spiritual History of the Living World*, award-winning Chickasaw poet and novelist Linda Hogan writes about an event that happened in 1977. That was the year when spaceships called *Voyagers* were launched from earth into the vast universe, exact destination really unknown. One of these spacecraft carried what was called *Interstellar Record*, a “hoped-for link between earth and space, that is filled with the sounds and images of the world around us. It carries parts of our lives all the way out to the great Forever. It is destined to travel out of our vast solar system, out to the far, unexplored regions of space in hopes that somewhere, millions of years from now, someone will find it like a note sealed in a bottle carrying our history across the black ocean of space. This message is intended for the year 8,000,000.”

“One greeting onboard from Western India says, “Greetings from a human being of the Earth. Please contact”. Another, from Eastern China, but resembling one that could have sent by my own Chickasaw people, says: “Friends of space, how are you all? Have you eaten yet? Come visit us if you have time.”

My eyes widened and my heart beat faster as I read those lines. For in our present world of so many natural calamities and man-made tragedies, the picture of a spaceship from earth not just hurling through the universe but carrying what we are told it was carrying, in an attempt to introduce ourselves and make links with whatever other creatures there might be out there, was for me just so thrilling. But I felt my eyes nearly popping out and my heart stopping when I came to the last lines. I was just thinking of our meeting here on the Eucharist, and I realized that this was one of the best, even if unintended, lines one could write or read about the Eucharist, what it is for us, and what we may be doing or not doing in relation to it.

Although what Linda Hogan wrote about was an action from earth to the vast unknown, I thought she could just as well have been describing the reverse: a unique act by the Creator of the universe, the message that Jesus Christ came to bring when He was born more than two thousand years ago, and the message He continues to give us even today in the Sacrament of the Holy Eucharist.

For one way of explaining the Incarnation other than our usual way is that Jesus was born because the Father wanted to tell us: Greetings, human beings of Earth. I am sending my Son in the Holy Spirit and through Mary, to make contact with you, actual physical contact. I am sending Him to be one of you, in fact to be born as one of you.

And what the Holy Eucharist is all about since Jesus first talked about it and what it is since He ascended to heaven while continuing to be with us up to today, is that the Eucharist is Jesus saying: Friends, how are you all? Have you eaten yet? If not, here I am, the living bread that came down from heaven; whoever eats this bread will live forever; and the bread that I will give is my flesh for the life of the world. Unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you do not have life in you. Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day. For my flesh is true food, and my blood is true drink.”(John 6: 51 ff).

Is this not what Jesus is saying? His concern is if we have eaten yet. And you might recognize that that concern is very Asian. Though Linda Hogan wrote that that message came from eastern China it could very well have come from any and all of our countries. I know that in the Philippines, whichever region you find yourself, if you chance to come to a home where the family is having a meal, this is what you would hear, “*Kumain ka na ba?* Have you eaten yet?” Or, the family might invite you, “come and join us” – even if evidently an extra mouth to feed unexpectedly might be a problem. You will get invited whether the invitation is a real one or just a matter-of-course phrase. But is that not what Jesus in the Eucharist is asking, is saying?

As for that message, “Come visit if you have time.” Do you not hear it as the voice of Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament? I do. And I will be propagating it and the earlier phrase, in the four campuses of our University of San Carlos.

The Philippines, as we all might know, is a predominantly Catholic country, thanks to the Spaniards who came to our shores more than four hundred years ago. This being so, the celebration of the Holy Eucharist in schools, even in public schools, is not something extraordinary. All the more is the Eucharist part of the life of Catholic schools.

Most, if not all, of our Catholic schools begin and end the academic year with the Holy Mass, the opening Mass usually being the Mass of the Holy Spirit – for light and guidance to start the year right. Next month, June, the official start of our academic year, this will be most evident. In March, when we end, graduations will not be complete without the Eucharist.

During the year, not only is the Eucharist celebrated on the official feast days of the Church or the school but also even when individual classes have an event to commemorate. Wherever possible, chaplains and campus ministers are assigned to schools and individual campuses to take care of the needs of students, teachers and personnel outside the formal religion classes (which have other names: religious education, Christian living, Catholic formation).

During the week the days where there is an obviously bigger congregation are Wednesday, when there is also a novena to Our Lady of Perpetual Help, and Friday, the day usually associated with the Sacred Heart of Jesus.

As far as frequency of the celebration of Masses in Philippine Catholic schools is concerned, there is no doubt that it is regularly high. But because this is so, the quality of the celebration is also affected. Except during solemn feasts where the celebration is expectedly and usually heart-warming and edifying, the weekday masses run the risk of familiarity and boredom. Because Mass is so readily available, its gift-ness is taken for granted. Of this, we all need to be careful.

Certain marks of the Mass being taken for granted is the lack of preparation for the readings and the songs. Many who are asked to be lectors presume that because they already know how to read, one glance at the readings before the mass suffices. It does not. Lectors must be trained to read. For public reading in front of a congregation at prayer is different from private reading. And reading of the Word of God, which is holy is likewise a holy task. "Have you eaten yet?" - should be seen as likewise referring to the eating and digesting and understanding of God's Word.

As for the songs at Mass, the challenge is to choose the proper ones in relation to the parts of the Sacrament and to find fresh new melodies in addition to the tried and tested. For the music enhances the mood of the celebration. It is part of the prayer that is the Mass.

"Have you eaten yet?" is indeed a Eucharistic phrase. But while the response to it is evident in the many who receive Communion, I have a feeling that the sacredness of the Sacrament is not fully appreciated. I have seen students in Catholic schools, my own university included, giggling on the way to Communion, and whispering or talking to a neighbor not long after going back to their pews. Although more often these are the young schoolchildren, it has happened too, among the older ones. I remember that at a Mass during an alumni homecoming in the school where I got my elementary education, I had to stop to remind the congregation to please quiet down because the Mass had not yet ended. Maybe it was the occasion, for some had not seen classmates since they graduated; maybe it was the place, for the mass was held at the gymnasium. Still, I felt a lack of realization of the richness and holiness of the Holy Eucharist. This situation is a matter of concern.

Still connected with the seeming lack of appreciation of the Holy is the phenomenon of so many going to Communion. On the one hand, it looks like a great sign of wanting to receive Jesus. On the other hand, one can ask whether the state of one's heart and soul are at all considered. We know that we have gone a long way since the time when we thought we should not receive Communion unless we had more recently gone to Confession. But we just might also be going to the other extreme of thinking we don't need Confession at all. This too we must consider.

The presence of Jesus in the tabernacle is another. The older ones among us will remember lessons about the Real Presence of Jesus in the Sacred Host even after the Mass, and the value of visits to the Blessed Sacrament.

I have now been working for thirty-three years in our university. I remember seeing many students come regularly for such visits to the chapel. These days, I see only so few. I understand that we cannot expect our students to be like contemplative sisters spending days and nights praying before the Blessed Sacrament. Our students come to us to study. Most of their hours are spent in the classrooms or laboratories or gymnasiums or in the field. But I do long to see just a little more of our students, faculty and personnel drop by the chapel even if only for a few moments.

Come and visit if you have time. This is an invitation of a friend, of someone who is part of you, who is eager to connect, to chat, to spend time together. Perhaps we do not feel that need or that urgency any more. But I know, for my part, I will be encouraging this bit a little more.

Jesus came to visit many years ago. Though we don't see him physically anymore, he remains with us even after the Mass, in the Blessed Sacrament. I hear Him say, Come and visit if you have time.

When we don't visit because we don't have time or simply because we don't make time, chances are that the memory or the awareness that He is with us "all days even unto the

consummation of the world” quickly fades, so much so that while we might regularly attend Mass, its graces we do not consciously bring to our relationship and to our work in the school.

There is where the Eucharist must really be lived -- beyond the church and chapel and in the other places of the school. To act and feel holy for an hour or shorter while attending Mass may be doable. But if the graces of the Mass we do not take to heart or to study and to work, then we may be missing something very vital.

The living of the Eucharist beyond the celebrating is, I see, the deeper and longer task we need to do. To improve the liturgy is important and must be done. To bring the liturgy to our other responsibilities is the bigger challenge.

Have you eaten yet? Come and visit if you have time. To these Eucharistic phrases I pray we add the knowing, remembering, and living of another: Do this in remembrance of me.

Do what? Come together, ask for forgiveness together, read and listen, sing and reflect; offer; remember our Father and our brothers and sisters in the world, commune with them in love. Do all these even outside the chapel or church.

Then we live not only Eucharist and Education but Education in Eucharist, and above all, Eucharist in Education -- in His memory, now and always.

## **Part II: BISHOPS SPEAK**

### **■ Sacramentum Caritatis: Its Pastoral Impact and Challenges to Catholic Education**

*Bishop Carlos Pellegrin Barrera, Bishop of San Bartolomé de Chillán, Chile  
President of the International Organization of Catholic Education (OIEC)*

#### **Introduction**

Dear friends: the presence of this Latin American Bishop, I believe, should be understood in the light of faith; it could be seen as a call to grow in communion with the Universal Church. Our consultation meeting is a real experience of communion and fellowship in the Lord, which finds its culmination each time we celebrate the Holy Eucharist. As president of the O.I.E.C., I greet each one of you, representatives of the thousands and thousands of catholic educators, from different countries and cultures, who faithfully fulfil their ministry of education in many different ways and contexts.

I am the bearer of a warm greeting from the Latin American Church. I visit you while the Church in my continent is being renewed by the call of the last Continental Bishops Conference, which took place in Aparecida, Brazil; and has made a call to the members of our Catholic Church to be “Disciples and Missionaries of Jesus Christ, so that in Him our people may find Life”. My visit is the visit of the faithful in Latin-Americans; those from the north of the continent, people of ancient cultures who have embraced our common faith in the Lord, witnessing to his Word in our present time. I bring you blessings from the Caribbean people, the Central American countries and from our beautiful South America, from joyful people of Colombia, the colourful Brazil, and the Andes from Chile. I am the bearer of a blessing from your sister Church of Latin America. I am here to share with you our sense of unity and catholicity, joyfully to share our common faith and be part of this consultation meeting.

Last year, on the 22nd February, the day when the church celebrates the “Chair of St. Peter”, His Holiness Benedict XVI, signed the Apostolic Exhortation “*Sacramentum Caritatis*”, which offers concrete lines for pastoral actions oriented to remind us of the centrality of the Eucharist. The mission of the Church, everywhere in the world, finds in the Holy Eucharist the source of strength and inspiration for its evangelizing efforts. In Latin America the sacrament of the Bread of Life helps us daily to understand deeply the way to help the poor, to promote just structures, and to proclaim the message of life of Jesus, against every form of death and destruction. Here in Asia, *Sacramentum Caritatis* gives light to the Church’s efforts to promote the way of peace and harmony, justice and reconciliation, prosperity and sharing. Here and there, Jesus walks along the way of evangelization with His Church, and strengthens our certainty that in the sacrament of the Eucharist we are one in the same Lord.

As your way of been Church in Asia, for some years now, you are making efforts in promoting dialogue, which also finds expression in the context of catholic education. In this Consultation you want to focus on the wisdom and challenges of Pope Benedict XVI on the Eucharist, and make it a real source of inspiration to bring about the existence of catholic schools, which are “venues for dialogue” towards moral and religious formation. Your unique contribution and reflection will certainly enrich our efforts on catholic education in other parts of the world.

Kindly receive my humble contribution, which I share with you in the joy and happiness of the Risen Lord, as a fellow pilgrim, missionary and disciple of the Lord Jesus, sustained by grace and daily celebration of the Holy Eucharist.

## **1.). THE EUCHARISTIC DIMENSION OF CHRISTIAN LIFE**

The Apostolic Exhortation “*Sacramentum Caritatis*”, from Benedict XVI, follows the reflections and proposals from the General Synod of Bishops on the topic of the Eucharist, celebrated in 2005.

Just as Pope John Paul II from the beginning of his Pontificate centered his attention on Jesus Christ “*Redemptor hominis*”, Pope Benedict XVI invites us to find in the charity and the love of God the divine light to understand what is most central to our Christian faith: we need to love each other as Jesus loved us. *Deus Caritas Est*, the first Encyclical Letter of Pope Benedict XVI, talks about the unity of the Holy Trinity, its manifestation of the whole human race, in the person of Jesus Christ, who became *agapé* in the Eucharist, *Sacramentum Caritatis*.

The Apostolic Exhortation can help us to find pastoral answers, centered in the Eucharist, where the Lord tells us: “I am the Bread of Life” (John 6, 35). Each time we celebrate the Holy Eucharist we praise and give thanks to God for His blessings; we also present to God our worries, needs and prayers for the Church and the whole of humanity; from the Eucharist we are sent to continue the pastoral services of the Church proclaiming that Jesus is the Lord. From the Eucharist flow the transmission of our faith, and the service of charity to the world.

*Sacramentum Caritatis* is structured in three parts: the Eucharist, Mystery to believe; the Eucharist, Mystery to celebrate; and the Eucharist, Mystery to live out daily. If the Eucharist is the source and summit of the life of the church, its communion and its mission, then our catholic education institutions should be places where we believe, celebrate, and live out daily the love of God, which is offered to everyone.

There is a very strong link between the Church and the Eucharist, between the Eucharist and Christian life; the Church has a very strong Eucharistic dimension. In that sense the

Eucharist gives form to the life of every Christian, thus Christian existence has a strong Eucharistic dimension. *Sacramentum Caritatis (N70)* puts it this way “*the mystery of the Eucharist believed and celebrated contains in itself the dynamism that gives life to the new life and form to Christian existence*”. The Eucharist brings about a new way of being Christians, following the example of the disciples of Jesus; in the most diverse vocations within the Church, in the daily witness to the Lord, in the mission of the evangelizing and serving the whole of humanity. The Eucharist transforms the life of the Church, and should transform our school ministry. How can we live Eucharistic lives in the context of the school ministry?

The Apostolic Exhortation from Benedict XVI tells us that “*the Eucharistic form of Christian life is clearly an ecclesial and communitarian form*” (N76). Sunday, the day of the Lord, is the context in which Christians develop their faith and are sent to mission. The attentive listening to the Word of God and the celebration of the Eucharist brings Christians together, and as a community sends them to the world. Coming together invites to dialogue, opens to the other, renewing our conviction that the Holy Eucharist animates and transforms our Church everywhere. In the context of our diversity, cultures and pastoral situations; the richness of the Eucharist, sacrament of unity, appears with all its depth, when it is celebrated in the way established by the Church.

Coming together to share the Bread of Life, in the parish or school context, is an invitation to remember the suffering of so many brothers, caused by war, hunger, terrorism and injustices, that affects the life of so many fellow human beings. The violence in the Middle East and Africa, the natural disasters like the one which is experiencing our sister country China right now, should challenge us in our efforts for peace, as the Eucharist is an invitation to a greater respect of the human person and to build breaches of solidarity among ourselves.

Each time we celebrate the Holy Mass, with our students or members of the school community, we are invited to recognize the presence of Christ in each human being, to work and promote his dignity, defending life from the moment of conception until its natural end. The school celebration of the Eucharist offers the right environment to form our young people in the need to work in defence of life, making a common effort to create the just conditions of real progress for every human family.

## **2.) “DO THIS IN MEMORY OF ME”**

Before he was given up to death, Jesus took bread, broke it and gave it to his disciples saying “take this all of you and eat it: *this is my Body which will be given up for you*”. Then he took the cup, again he gave thanks and praise, gave the cup to his disciples and said: “Take this all of you and drink from it: *this is the Cup of my Blood, the blood of everlasting covenant. It will be shed for you and for all so that sins may be forgiven. Do this in memory of me*”.

From the beginning of the Church we celebrate the Mass in memory of the Death and Resurrection of the Lord, with the same words and gestures He used in the Last Supper. With the ancient Tradition of the Church we firmly believe and teach that the word of Jesus, pronounced by the priest in the mass, by the power of the Holy Spirit, gives to us the real presence of the Risen Christ. (CCC 1366). The supreme gift of the Eucharist transforms the Church in the one Body of Christ animated by the Holy Spirit (Ephesians, 5,29)

**In the context of the Asian continent the church is called to find in the Eucharist the strength and inspiration to continue the effort to become real witnesses of hope and dialogue.** “Jesus loved his own in the world and He loved them to the end” (John 13, 1). Saint

John presents the deep meaning of the institution of the Holy Eucharist through the narrative of the washing of the disciple's feet (John 13, 1-20) Jesus wanted himself to wash the disciple's feet as a sign of his great love for them. The washing of the feet anticipated his death on the Cross, in which he washed away the sins of the world and washed our souls with His Blood. The Sacred Eucharist is a gift of His love, an encounter with God who loves us and becomes the source of eternal life. In the context of the school ministry we are called to be the first witnesses and followers of Christ through our expressions of love, understanding, and Christian charity.

In the beginnings of the fourth century the Christian celebration of the Eucharist was not permitted by the authorities. But the Christians in northern Africa, deeply believed in the strength given by the celebration of the Day of the Lord, and challenged that prohibition. Many of them died as martyrs of the faith. The challenge of living Christian Eucharistic lives becomes for us a renewed call for a radical answer to the Lord, and unites us to all those brothers and sisters who lived before us and gave witness with martyrdom. We pray to all saints, especially those from Asia, who have given us an example of love and devotion to the Holy Eucharist. May they intercede for us so that we made really became, in our school community, saints of the Risen Lord present in the Holy Mass.

The mission of education in Asia, can find in the Apostolic Exhortation *Sacramentum Caritatis* new ways to work for dialogue and promotion of values. The encounter with the religions, cultures, and traditions, can be enriched by the words of the Holy Father. In number 78 of the Apostolic Exhortation, the Pope says, "the Eucharistic mystery puts us *in dialogue* with various cultures ... promoting the evangelization of cultures, conscious that Christ himself is the truth for every man and woman, and for all human history".

Just as we are one in the diversity of our meeting today, so we are called in our mission on education in Asia to put Christ at the centre of our attention and celebrate the Eucharist as the expression of our faith to be share in dialogue and promotion of values.

### **3.) CATHOLIC EDUCATION AND ITS EUCHARISTIC DIMENSION**

In the context of our catholic education service, from the very first day to the last, our students should find an environment of faith, charity and freedom. Every one should be able to find in catholic education the real presence of Jesus, as "the Master", source of inspiration of the educational institutions.

Many studies on education stress the importance of the environment in which the education process takes place. The education process takes places in the context of certain conditions of space and time, with certain people, well thought programs, and activities, which complement the process of education.

To live out the spirit of the Eucharist in catholic education means to develop the life style where love and charity are at the centre of our relationships. Christian educators, and other significant people in the school community, are the first responsible to create a Christian style in the institution.

The religious dimension of the environment, a family like atmosphere, finds in the theology of the Eucharist motivation and depth, it should appear through the manifestation of Christian values through words, signs, behaviour, and a welcoming attitude to every one. The students will see the witness of Christians and will understand what it means to be a follower of Jesus, which flows from the Eucharist in a powerful experience, which is not only present during the sacramental action.

Some concrete external symbols will be of help in creating the Eucharistic educational community. The image of the crucified Christ in some appropriate places, the statue of Our Lady, the making of the sign of the cross, the clerical or religion dress of priests and religious sisters, give clear witness to the values of the faith we want to share.

The running of the educational institution as a “home for the students” will also be a very strong sign, which can produce friendly attitudes and awaken sympathy on the part of non-Christian members of the community. The location and centrality of a chapel should never be overlooked, there the community celebrate the Eucharist, and from there, the life of the Risen Lord flows to the whole school complex. It has to be an inviting place where peace can be found.

After the Second Vatican Council the Church understands institutions of catholic education as communities. The council itself recovered the vision of the Church as People of God, specially treated in the second chapter of the document *Lumen Gentium*. Catholic institutions of education offer a service in the pastoral field, and should be understood as educational communities, where every one is involved. Students, teachers, administration personal, workers of all types, parents, all together form a community, just as a Parish does. In this diversity the educational community is to be a place where charity is found at all times and situations.

The invitation of *Sacramentum Caritatis* to be witnesses of the Risen Lord in our daily duties becomes a called in a very special manner for our institutions of catholic education. Sent to mission is to repeat once again through words and actions, the greetings of the Risen Lord: “peace be with you”. In the Holy sacrament of the Eucharist, Christ Himself gives His Body and Blood to us and invites us to present joyfully His message to all the brothers and sisters of the world.

May Mary, our Heavenly Mother, help us to answer this call joyfully, finding in the Holy Eucharist the strength to believe the words of Jesus - “I will be with you until the end of the world” (Matthew 28,20)

#### **4.) CONCLUSION**

Supported by the biblical tradition and the teaching of the Fathers of the Church, we have come together from different cultures and contexts to share our faith and our commandment to serve in the field of catholic education.

With the heart full of joy, and thanksgiving, knowing my all limitations, I have shared with you this reflection. Like the disciples of Emmaus, I myself walk as a pilgrim as all of you do, to the House of our Father. This is the pilgrimage of whole humanity, in which the Eucharist calls us to closeness to Christ and one another, and the sharing of His love to all people.

May this Consultation, on the Eucharist and Education, strengthens our conviction that real Eucharistic communities are the fruits of our daily witness as disciples and missionaries of the Lord.

**■ The Reception and Pastoral Implications of Sacramentum Caritatis in Asian Education**  
*Bishop Winston Fernando, s.s.s., Bishop of Badulla, Sri Lanka.*

## Introduction

This Consultation Meeting organized by the FABC-OEFF is an attempt towards preparing the minds of the educators and the Asian student in view of the IX FABC Plenary Assembly with the theme “Living the Eucharist in Asia”. The third Christian millennium begun with the great jubilee year had a Eucharistic dimension. Pope John Paul II of revered memory taught the Church about the centrality of the Eucharist in the apostolic letter *Mane Nobiscum Domine* (2005) and in his last encyclical *Ecclesia de Eucharistia* (2003). We have now the post Synodal Apostolic Exhortation “*Sacramentum Caritatis*” issued in February 2007 following the Synod of Bishops (October 2004- October 2005) by Pope Benedict XVI, which is our source of reflection at this Meeting. Its point of departure in his reflection on “Agape” a term for the Eucharist developed in his first encyclical *Deus Caritas Est* (Dec. 2005). There was then the Instruction of the Redemptionis Sacramentum of the Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments: (March 2004). The stage is now set for the 49th International Eucharistic Congress with the theme “The Eucharist: God’s gift for the Life of the World” to be held in Quebec, Canada in June, 2008.

Whatever the magisterial teaching of the Church a remarkable attempt is made to situate the teaching within the realities of the day. To approach the given subject “The Reception and Pastoral implication of *Sacramentum Caritatis* in Asian Education”, let us take a quick glance at the current Asian realities not withstanding the Asian realities identified by the FABC in 1984 as poverty, religiosity and diversity of cultures with the corresponding path of triple dialogue for evangelization, namely: dialogue with the poor, dialogue with the cultures and dialogue with the other religions. It is presumed that a larger picture of the present day realities in Asia are taken into consideration in addressing the question of education in terms of formation of moral conscience and attitudes. To underline a few of them for our purpose: globalization, materialism, hedonism, fundamentalism, violence, and other factors such as highly developed information technology, the digital revolution, modernization of Asian society, as well as counter-culture movements that challenge scientific and technological view of life (*Itharkhand movement in India, Sarvodaya and Satyodaya in Sri Lanka*) and emergence of number of religious sects etc. The emergence of “Youth Power” in Asia plays a significant role to liberate the society from death dealing forces but it has to be guided pastorally lest it violates the moral principle “the end does not justify the means”.

The Eucharist must be offered to the youth to empower them to defeat evil as courageous disciples of the Master who did overcome the forces of evil by the sheer power of trust, love and obedience to His Heavenly Father. While we cannot turn a blind eye to all the above-mentioned realities our reflection would be limited to draw the pastoral implication of what is presented in the Post Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Sacramentum Caritatis* in Asian education. One bishop asked me “what has education to do with the Eucharist?” The learned Bishop fortunately did not put it the other way about. “What has the Eucharist, to do with education?” He asked the obvious question anybody would ask!

The Eucharist is the source and summit of not only the life of the Church but also of the mission of the Church in the world. It has that potentiality to impact in the society a new set of values and culture of love because the Eucharist is the ‘sacrament of love’ in the world. The Eucharist is the bearer of divine wisdom while the educators are the bearers of wisdom as they share in the divine wisdom. The Eucharist is impregnated with the capacity to transmit values of

life through its three dimensional mystery, namely the Eucharist as mystery to be believed, as mystery to be celebrated and as mystery to be lived. This teaching is found in the Post Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Sacramentum Caritatis* Since the Church's faith is essentially Eucharistic it cannot but be nourished at the table of the Eucharist. Then we are dealing with a sacrament that is the foundation of faith and necessarily meant for an encounter with the risen Lord to take place.

## **1.) EUCHARIST AS A MYSTERY TO BE BELIEVED**

There is no way that education or catechesis in the faith taking place outside the sacrament of the Eucharist which is essentially a rite, a rite that is celebrated by a community. There cannot therefore be a catechesis extraneous to the celebration itself. Nevertheless, the fundamental purpose of education is not to get the ritual right but to get ones life but to get ones life right through the celebration of the Eucharist.

A deeper understanding of the relationship between the three aspects or the dimensions as we saw, namely: the Eucharist as a mystery to be believed, a mystery to be celebrated and a mystery to be lived is integral to education in the faith. The education will be lopsided sans any one aspect and could not stand like a tripod stand. "No sacrament contributes more to our salvation than this, for it forgives our sins, increases our virtues and nourishes our minds with an abundance of all the spiritual gifts" says St. Thomas Aquinas (*Opus 57/1-4*). St. Peter Julian Eymard the apostle of the Eucharist asks "You have the Eucharist what more do you want?"

The Christian message is not only "informative" but "performative" meaning that it is "one that makes things happen and is life-changing...and life-sustaining in hope" (Cf. *Spe Salvi 2,10*). The Eucharist is meant to be performative in the mind of Christ when he said "Do this in memory of me." The young people do not reject the Eucharist as a mystery to be believed but they have not been shown the other two powerful dimensions to make it "performative".

### ***The Holy Spirit and the Eucharist***

The teaching role of the Holy Spirit (John 14/26) into all truth (John 16/13) and the transforming role of the Holy Spirit in the epiclesis during the Eucharist are to be underlined because the Holy Spirit plays an educative role in the lives of worshippers who are called to worship God in Spirit and in truth (John 4:23) and secondly because the Holy Spirit continues to transform the lives of the worshippers in a similar fashion as bread and wine are transformed into the body and blood of Jesus. A truly moral transformation is expected to take place by the power of the Holy Spirit. The Eucharistic Prayer IV explicitly point to moral renewal and an attitudinal change in the worshippers: "And that we live no longer for ourselves but for him, he sent the Holy Spirit from you Father as his first gift to those who believe, to complete his work on earth and bring us fullness of grace".

The pastors/chaplains as celebrants of the Eucharist are called to inculcate this Eucharistic value of self-giving in the worshippers through their catechesis to enable the Eucharist to become "performative" in the life of students .

### ***The Sacraments of Initiation***

The Eucharist is the pivotal point in the life of the Church and all its activities – the source and summit. The Church draws her life from the Eucharist. "In the Eucharist is contained the entire spiritual wealth of the Church". As Vatican II teaches "*All the sacraments and indeed*

*all ecclesiastical ministries and works of the apostolate are bound up with the Eucharist and are directed towards it*” (P.O.5). The Eucharist being one of the three sacraments of initiation the recipients must have “a unitary understanding” (SC 17) of the sacraments of initiation and its central place in the life of a Christian. (cf.SC.79). A good number drops out of sacramental life after Confirmation due to lack of understanding of the power of the Eucharist in their lives. The Eucharist brings out the innate power of love, of selflessness, self-sacrifice, obedience and surrender to God to militate against the death dealing forces of hatred, selfishness and self-reliance independent of God.

As there is a tendency to privatize ones faith, the Eucharist is looked at with suspicion as something that trespasses on the privacy of the individual. There is a reluctance to show ones deep longing and thirst for the eternal as the young man in the Gospel expressed (Mt.19:16), together with others who share the same hunger and thirst. It is ironic in a society where the peer group mentality and doing the done thing in the society is the order of the day. Nevertheless, the presence and the participation of youth in rallies, song festivals and musical shows manifest the vain unfulfilled desire to fill that vacuum.

Involvement of students and youth in ecclesial movements is to be recognized as a positive sign however, in discovering a path towards an encounter with the Lord. In education the concern is not simply to impart knowledge be it informative or instructive, but formative. The goal of education is the formation of mind and heart to live a meaningful and fruitful life. The Lord desires that his act of redemption bears fruit in the lives of the redeemed to give life and that abundantly (John 10:10).

Adequate preparation is generally made in parishes and schools before the first Holy Communion and Confirmation but there is regrettably a notable trend to make these events mere social events. The spiritual and prophetic nature of the sacraments of initiation are often hijacked by competitive and materialistic attitudes of parents and adults. There is a place for family celebrations but at times the celebrations, rather the parties, are found to be counter-productive. When the sacraments of initiation should conform them to Christ and incorporate the recipients into the Church and made children of God empowering them they are initiated instead into those things that are not life-giving. Pastoral programmes to educate the entire family of the recipients of the sacraments are needed.

### ***The Sacrament of Matrimony and the Eucharist***

“The marital love of man and woman is seen in the light of the spousal love of Christ and the Church. The unity and indissolubility of marriage correspond to the indissoluble, exclusive and faithful bond uniting Christ and the Church which finds sacramental expression in the Eucharist” (S.C.28). Pastoral problems of divorce and remarriage have necessary implications on participation in the Eucharist, which reveals the self-giving of Christ entirely to his bride the Church. It must provide the underlying force to live their sacramental wedded life. A good catechesis both on the Eucharist and Matrimony is recommended to enable the partners to grasp the deep spiritual link between the sacraments lest the Eucharist becomes only a ‘social-must’ for a wedding. Pope Benedict XVI examining the “profound bond” between the sacrament of the Eucharist and that of marriage places the celebration of the sacrament of marriage at the heart of the celebration of the Eucharist, couples are to draw inspiration for their behaviour from the example of Christ who “loved the Church and gave himself up for her”. This self-giving love is the power behind the formation of children in a family, the Domestic Church. Therefore, in the preparation for marriage the Eucharistic must find its proper place (cf.SC.79).

### ***The Eucharist and the Sacrament of Reconciliation***

The intrinsic relationship between the Eucharist, the Sacrament of Reconciliation is obvious as the table of the world and table of the Eucharist calls to unity via reconciliation. The superficial understanding of God's love puts one's personal sin in the shadow or the background while its social and ecclesial damage is entirely forgotten. The loss of the sense of sin leads to loss of the sense of the sacred and consequently to a spirituality without reference to God. Is it mere humanism or secularism? There is much work to be done in this area considering the involvement of young people in armed struggle and conflicts.

"A reinvigorated catechesis on the conversion born of the Eucharist; and of encouraging frequent confession among the (students) faithful" (S.C.21) is a pastoral priority. Committed, generous and competent confessors and visible sign of confessionals in chapels and churches would lead to a growing appreciation of the link between the sacraments of Reconciliation and the Eucharist. A growing number of people receive communion without any qualms of conscience, therefore there is a need to educate the young to recognize the importance of conversion in their lives to be united to Christ in the Eucharist.

### ***The Eucharist and the Anointing of the Sick.***

The "unitary understanding" of the sacramental life focuses on the love of Christ shown in his sufferings and death. The Eucharist crystallizes it. The other sacraments manifest dimensions in relation to human condition and state of life. "The sacrament of the anointing of the sick unites the sick with Christ's self-offering for the salvation of all". And the Eucharist as viaticum empowers the seriously ill to enter into the eternal life prepared for those who eat the flesh of the son of man and drink his blood. "Anyone who eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life and I will raise them up on the last day" (John 6/54). A Catechesis on the link between the two Sacraments would help the youth to approach the sick with Christian empathy and recognize Christ in the sick (Mt. 25:35-40).

### ***The Eucharist and the Sacrament of Holy Orders***

The Holy Orders empowers those whom he called to celebrate the Eucharist in the person of Christ the Head in His memory. A priest is a servant of others called to be a "sign pointing to Christ, a docile instrument in the Lord's hands" (S.C.23). Even if some seminaries have adequate numbers there is a shortage of priests even in Asia. Every mission should have a priest. Vocational discernment as well as "pastoral care of vocations needs to involve the entire Christian community in every area of its life" (S.C. 25, Vat. II O. 6).

S.C. mentions the indifference and opposition shown by some to priestly vocations. Christ never fails to call and inspire the young to leave behind everything totally to dedicate to themselves to celebrate the sacred mysteries, to preach the Gospel and to minister to his flock. They are called to be at the service of the Eucharistic Lord. Openness and encouragement given on the part of families to promote vocations to priesthood cannot be over emphasized. There are millions who are deprived of the sacramental encounter with Christ and tens of millions who have yet to be evangelized. The harvest is rich indeed, but labourers are few. Who could break bread except priests, so that like the disciples on the way to Emmaus people who are confused, disappointed and are on the road, may recognize the Risen one at the breaking of bread and return to joyful living and witnessing. Priesthood must be offered to the young students as a

vocation in life; its challenges and opportunities to serve God and man has to be discovered together by the young and their pastors.

## 2.) THE EUCHARIST AS A MYSTERY TO BE CELEBRATED

The Synod of Bishops stressed “the primacy of the liturgical action”. It is a mystery to be celebrated, experiential in character. Being a sacrament the encounter with Christ takes place within the celebration itself as it did with the disciples on the way to Emmaus. Whatever the catechetical programme or lessons and however well done, the actual celebration cannot be replaced. Pope John Paul II spoke of the Eucharist as a time to encounter Christ. More than simply a symbolic enactment of the last supper, on the one hand the whole of paschal mystery of Christ is made present to us through the Eucharist, and on the other hand it puts us in close contact with Jesus in the way he desired. However, students who are all the time dealing with empirical knowledge have to come to terms with the fact that this encounter cannot be empirically verified. It is the faith of the Church. The presence of Christ in the liturgy in a variety of ways is well founded in his own words as we find in the Gospels. His presence in the species of bread and wine as body and blood, in the minister who baptizes in the name of the Trinity, in His word proclaimed and in the assembly or the Church that sings and prays trusting in His promise to be there where two or three are gathered in His name (Mt. 18/20). These are the presences to be recognized (Vat. II S.C. 4). The young students need not grope in the dark when it can be explained and experienced by them.

The youth who are elated and attracted by beauty can be led to see the true splendour behind the liturgical beauty. St. Bonaventure says: “in Jesus we contemplate beauty and splendour at their source”. In the scriptures we read: God’s beauty is reflected in the creation and harmony of the cosmos (Wis.13/5, Rom. 1/19), signs of God’s power and grandeur were revealed in His salvific deeds among his chosen people (Ex. 14, 16/10, Num. 14/20-23), the Father’s glory is manifested in the Son (John 1/14, 17/1) and the disciples behold his glory at the transfiguration (Mt. 9/2). These indicate that “Beauty then is not in mere decoration but rather an essential element of the liturgical action”. The truest beauty Benedict XVI says is the love of God, who definitely revealed himself to us in the paschal mystery (S.C.35). Dignified simplicity in decor, music, singing and the manner of celebration, *ars celebrandi*, truly uplifts the hearts than distract believers from the mystery they celebrate.

This will ensure full, active and fruitful participation of the youth and students. The art, architecture, physical arrangement light and sound must all be conducive to safeguard express and enhance introduce the mysteries celebrated. Therefore symbols, signs, gestures, colours etc. have to be properly explained and nothing be overdone. The Eucharist possesses the basic and fundamental ingredients for education. Its audio visual dimensions communicated through word, signs and symbols, action and gestures, colour and smell, songs and music, eating and drinking should be exploited to communicate values behind them.

Since the Eucharistic liturgy is essentially an “actio dei”, action of God, theatrical experimentation and trendy improvisations are to be avoided. “Let the “subject” of the liturgy’s intrinsic beauty be Christ himself, risen and glorified in the Holy Spirit who includes the Church in his work” (S.C. 36).

The Eucharistic celebration itself educates participants in promoting and fostering unity and love by making them aware of “their own ongoing need to be reconciled and to be artisans of reconciliation”. The rite itself gives that experience. Seeking forgiveness in the penitential rite,

praying for needs of others in the intercessory prayer, offering gifts to be shared with the needy at the offertory, praying to the Father as God's own children, exchanging the sign of peace, desiring to work for peace with one another, sharing in the one bread and one cup expressing closer bond in table fellowship in the Lord's sacrificial gifts of self, the warm exchange of greetings and the fellowship that follows the dismissal outside the church, sharing Communion with the sick in the healing ministry and expressing solidarity with the marginalized and the needy in sharing the offertory gifts with the poor, the discussions and meetings that express solidarity with the poor and the marginalized manifest the deep longing to live out the Eucharistic mystery.

How can man and woman created unto God's image and likeness and ordained to communion with God "find himself except through a sincere gift of himself" or herself (Vat. II G.S. 24). The Eucharist crystallizes the fact and the need for self giving in pursuit of self fulfillment which can be found only to the extent of openness to God, the other and respect for life. However, this is not what education and educators offer to young minds attracted by the materialistic presentation of life through the media today. Sadly, they are left groping in the dark and with a feeling of emptiness. The Eucharist eminently communicates the grave need to live for others and God who alone is the cause of joy and fulfillment in human life.

"Eucharistic Adoration is simply the natural consequence of the Eucharistic celebration, which is itself the Churches' supreme act of adoration." *Sacramentum Caritatis* points out the felt need to encourage Eucharistic adoration in a personal encounter with the Lord "which strengthens the social mission contained in the Eucharist," (cf. SC 66) and breaks down walls that separate people from one another.

Pope Benedict XVI in '*Spe Salvi*' draws our attention to moral formation vis a vis rapid development in scientific and theological progress. "If technical progress is not matched by corresponding progress in man's ethical formation, in man's inner growth (cf. Eph. 3/16, 2Cor. 4/16), then it is not progress at all, but a threat for man and for the world (*Spe Salvi* 22). The moral formation or "conscience formation par excellence" takes place during the Eucharist when scriptures that entail moral truth are read and listened to contemplatively. In the process of reading and listening with the heart one encounters Christ the teacher of truth. Because a worshipper is drawn to the life of God when scriptures are proclaimed during the Eucharist, such listening is described as "mystic listening". Is it too much to expect it from the young students at secondary or tertiary level of education. No! Their capacity for mystic listening should not be undermined. They can be initiated. Study of the Word of God, familiarity with the Word, knowledge of biblical context and its application to today's context would lead them to encounter Christ in the scriptures read at the Eucharist. St. Jerome reminds the faithful that "ignorance of scripture is ignorance of Christ" (Vat. II, D.V. 25). There is a need to ensure that the Word of God is read out by well prepared readers during the sacramental celebration. '*Lectio Divina*', the liturgy of the Hours serves to enrich deeper participation in the celebration.

Today's highly developed information technology and all available tools that the young are so adept and familiar with must be exploited to the maximum to help them recognize the voice of the Lord in the scriptures. Creative, audio-visual thematic presentations based on the Lectionary and on the Eucharist itself are a felt need in the school and campus pastoral ministry. Attention must be given to maximize the potential of such pastoral initiatives with the active and full participation of youth without simply screening these as in a cinema for viewers in order to respond to the youth who are absorbed in today's image-culture. Therefore, formation and

education of chaplains and pastors is a necessity (Ref. Final Presentation: A FABC-OESC Consultation on Dialogue in Moral and Religious formation in Education towards vision 2020).

### 3.) THE EUCHARIST, A MYSTERY TO BE LIVED

In the Eucharist Jesus offers Himself as the “food of truth”. Jesus Christ is the Truth in person (John 14:6) and “in the Sacrament of the Eucharist, Jesus shows us in particular the truth about the love which is the essence of God” (S.C.2,70) His assertions “He who eats me will live because of me” (John 6:57), underlines the intrinsic Eucharistic nature of Christian life. St. Augustine has imagined the Lord saying to him: “I am the food of grown men; grow, and you shall feed upon me; nor shall you change me, like food of your flesh into yourself, but you shall be changed into me”. In the Eucharistic we are drawn into Christ (cf.S.C.70).

A word about Sunday, the Lord’s Day, *‘Dies Domini’* is in order here. There is the supreme exchange of the martyrs of Abitene in North Africa, at the beginning of 4th century who preferred to die rather than live without Sunday. St. Ignatius of Antioch described Christians as “those living in accordance with the Lord’s Day”. On a Sunday “Christians rediscover the Eucharistic form which their lives are meant to have” (S.C.72) during the week. (cf. Foundational Theological Document for the 29th International Eucharistic Congress – 2008 in Canada). While the practice of mutual love is the distinctive sign of Christ’s disciples it needs to be constantly and regularly renewed coming together to celebrate the Eucharist as a community. In Asian countries the Sunday Eucharistic assemblies have always proved effective and been inspiring for the people of other faiths also to be faithful to their own religious practices. The individualistic, materialistic and hedonistic cultures as well as employment are seen to bring pressure on Catholics to treat Sunday Eucharist as dispensable and unimportant. *‘Dies Domini’* in the words of John Paul II is described in its triple form as: *‘Dies Christi’*, *‘Dies Ecclesiae’* and *‘Dies Hominis’* (Cf D.D.) “Work is for man and not man for work”. As the young people enter the world of work and their career after much study and gaining of skills they ought to be educated to understand that work is relative and should not be idolized or be enslaved by it at the expense of human dignity and attainment of fulfillment of life (cf.S.C.73)

The Eucharist gives “form” to Christian life, so much so that the spirituality emerging from it creates a Eucharistic culture. “Eucharistic spirituality is not just participation in Mass and devotion to the Blessed Sacrament. It embraces the whole life”. In this sense “the Eucharistic mystery puts us in dialogue with various cultures, but also in some way challenges them and becomes the criterion for evaluation of everything that Christianity encounters in different cultures” (S.C.78). Secularism penetrating all areas of life is something to contend with. The young people are taught to live “as if God does not exist”.

The moral energy provided by the Eucharist is fundamentally based on the self-giving love of Christ celebrated in the sacrament. However, Pope John Paul II taught that the moral life “has the value of spiritual worship” and it is “not to be interpreted in a merely moralistic way”. The example of Zacchaeus demonstrates the moral transformation as the heartfelt response to the Lord’s love (Lk 19:1-10). The young student will readily see this as being the path towards holiness.

The Eucharist being the Sacrament of love, of peace, unity communicates these values and a host of other gospel values such as patient endurance. To illustrate this we turn to the Letter to the Hebrews where the words hypmone and hypostole are used to mean “patience” – perseverance, constancy – awaiting to receive what is promised, while enduring painful trials.

Hypostole on the other hand means shrinking back due to lack of courage to stand for truth which is risky (Cf. *Spe Salvi*, 9). Since the Eucharist embodies the paschal mystery in its entirety the celebration educates and empowers the participant to face and endure whatever trials or suffering for the sake of and with Christ for the food of truth.

“Worship pleasing to God can never be purely a private matter, without consequences for our relationships with others; it demands a public witness of our faith” (S.C.83). Attention is thus drawn to ‘Eucharistic consistency’ in terms of ensuring that one’s stance on social, political issues and human rights, in short Gospel values is understood to be values which are not negotiable. It commits one to work for justice and reconciliation and “peacemaking in our world scarred by violence and war, and today in particular, by terrorism, economic corruption and sexual exploitation”(Cf. *Spe Salvi*, 89).The Eucharist urges the believers to bring newness to their relations which Pope Benedict calls “sacramental mysticism social in character”. Today’s student who will take tomorrows reins of leadership needs pastoral guidance to become agents of social transformation.

In today’s Asian societies engulfed in so much of violence in ethnic, religious and political conflicts people are being ‘educated’ not in sentiments of tolerance, non-violence, respect of others as the religions of Asia teach but they are schooled in sentiments of hatred, revenge and vengeance. In this context the Eucharist educates people in sentiments and values of compassion, mercy, justice, sacrifice, forgiveness, unity and peace. This is the mission that flows from the Eucharistic. Missionary outreach is an essential part of the Eucharistic form of the Christian life (S.C.84). Pope Benedict XVI calls on all who participate in the Eucharistic to commit themselves to peace making in the world scarred by violence and war terrorism, economic corruption and sexual exploitation (cf.S.C.89) and to denounce the glaring inequalities. “Practical education in charity and justice” as part of the formation of the students in Asia is a felt need (S.C.91).

#### **4.) CONCLUSION**

Since the Eucharist is the Sacrament of our Salvation it proclaims through its worshippers “Jesus as the one Saviour of mankind.” The Immaculate Virgin Mother Mary the “Woman of the Eucharist” is offered to us as the “singular model of Eucharistic life” as she contemplates the paschal mystery of her Son Jesus. The young people under her maternal care are invited to believe, celebrate and live the Eucharistic Jesus’ gift of Himself. May the Risen Lord join the youthful student to explain the scriptures to them and to break bread for them on their journey to Emmaus.

### **Part III: PROFESSIONALS, PARENTS AND YOUTH**

#### **■ The Transfiguration of Education in Catholic Universities through the Eucharist**

*Mr. Glen Chatelier, Director for International Affairs  
Assumption University of Thailand*

In the sphere of education, particularly in the Catholic University, the Eucharist has a central role to play and it has very important meanings in the culture of an academic community.

A Latin etymological implication of education is “to draw out” the intellect and talents, thus, training them in the shaping of the total personality and, in sum, to make the educated person, better and more equipped to face the realities and challenges of life.

The Eucharist on the other hand, has the meaning of “thanksgiving”, according to its Greek etymology. Both words, of nine alphabetic characters each, implicitly address the shaping of human emotions, but also explicitly show the role of the intellect in being developed with Christian virtues, something which all Catholic institutions of higher education aspire towards in the present world. The Eucharistic celebration of the Holy Mass as a ritual of Thanksgiving is loaded with meaning and overtones, particularly with the Biblical motifs from the Old Testament of God’s love for his people and His promise to be with them. In the New Testament the fulfillment of God’s promise comes in the form of Jesus, Emmanuel, “The God with us.” At the Holy Mass, symbolic of the Lord’s Last Supper the worshipping community comes together in just about the same hue and textures of the apostles themselves. Some of the worshippers, like Jesus’ disciples are good, others doubting, others evil. The Last supper table unified all the disciples in God’s compassion, and for that, Jesus, not excluding anybody from the Supper of the Passover, which becomes for us, the epitome of Jesus’ love and sacrifice, incorporates symbolically the reassuring will of God the Father, to include the good and bad alike in His commemoration of Supreme love and sacrifice. The worshipping faithful at each mass, tainted or virtuous, are ipso facto included in the Lord’s celebration of thanksgiving. It is we, through our own shortcomings and unwillingness to confess our sins and enter in God’s salvation, who only physically participate in the Lord’s generous repast, but we spiritually distance ourselves from the Lord, when we do not renounce our sins and enter fully into the thanksgiving at the Holy Mass. The endeavor within the University Community should be to encourage the fallen and weak in spirit to seek the Lord and His forgiveness and enter more fully in to the Eucharistic celebration with humble and willing hearts, more prepared to receive God’s blessings, and remain in the Lord, thereby connecting the promise, through our fulfillment of faith, from the Old Testament God to the immanent Christ, whom we praise in our doxology of Faith, “Through him, with him, in him, in the unity of the holy spirit, all glory and honor is yours, almighty Father, for ever and ever.”

Taken in its context of Christ’s supreme sacrifice, the Eucharist is the only unwavering and unchanging example of Jesus’ teaching of love and sacrifice. The essence of Jesus’ role as Messiah and the Christ is, the teacher. At the last supper, Jesus sets aside all vestiges of human pride and falsity, kneels at the feet of each of the disciple and teaches by his example that a physical act of the washing of the feet is symbolic of a deeper act of the educated mind and that is, to sacrifice. But the sacrifice itself is not to be seen outside the context of thankfulness, ‘the Lord Jesus took bread and, gave You thanks. He Broke the bread gave it to his disciples and said, “Take this all of you and eat it. This is my body which will be given up for you.” When supper was ended, He took the cup. Again, He gave You thanks and praise, gave the cup to His disciples, and said “Take this all of you and drink from it: This is the cup of My blood, the blood of the new and everlasting covenant. It will be shed for you and for all men so that sins may be forgiven. Do this in memory of me.” For us Catholics, at each and every mass we celebrate or attend wheat and wine become “transubstantiated.” The transubstantiation itself can be left at the physical, without our faith. It is when we allow ourselves at each mass, to be re-educated in Christ’s way, that we transubstantiate, through faith, the wheat and wine, into the body and blood

of Christ. The faith of transubstantiation is not vacuous, it is one in which we are called to empty ourselves of the sin we carry with us. If we are humble enough to approach God's throne of mercy and seek his forgiveness, we shall be washed clean, by the blood of Christ, as St. Paul promises us. The rite of penitence within the Holy Mass is a very important aid to us, in that within the worshipping community, we are called upon in public to empty ourselves of sin and then to approach the Lord's word in the liturgy. The importance of penitence is that we sacrifice our hard and stubborn selves, in the presence of, and with the assistance of the community, to give up sin and turn to God. In this we follow our supreme example, Christ, who did not mind his heavenly status, but became one like us and washed the feet of his apostles at the last supper. When we have admitted our sins and asked for God's pardon, then we approach his word as thankful servants, for the Lord speaks to us of love, comfort and reassurance.

In response to the Lord's word, both from scriptural texts and the homilies of the priests, we reaffirm our faith in God through the Apostles' Creed, after which we partake in the community sacrifice. Each time we assemble at the altar of the Eucharistic sacrifice; we celebrate the supreme love of God for us. This realization is not merely at the level of the emotion, but at the level of divine inspiration or knowledge. Our souls and spirits themselves become transubstantiated. Such transubstantiation is simultaneous and parallels the transfiguration of Christ from the physical to the mystical level. The physical gives way to the spiritual, faith is reinforced by belief and we become one like Christ when we eat his body and drink his blood. The Holy Mass is a dynamic opportunity for us to be drawn out of our impurities and be filled with the knowledge that our God is a loving god. The extent of Christ's love has been shown to us through his supreme sacrifice of laying down his life on the cross and dying an ignominious death, for us.

It may appear paradoxical that the ritual of the Holy Mass celebrates the historical death of Jesus, one of the most ignominious deaths recorded in human history to date. But it is not death alone that is emphasized in the Holy Mass. It is a death, which has been defeated through Christ's resurrection which is held up for us as an example which we attest to in the Proclamation of the Mystery of our Faith, "Christ has died, Christ is risen, Christ will come again." This cyclical triune reality in Christ then empowers us within the prayers and meditations during the Holy Mass, to be educated and to accept that all of humankind faces the dynamism of death in life and life in death. However, for the Christian faithful, we are saved from the hopelessness of such realities, through Christ who promises us in St. John's Gospel chapter 14, verse 20: "I am in my Father, and you in me, and I in you" and yet again in St. John's Gospel, Chapter 14, verse 23: "Those who love me will keep my word, and my Father will love them, and we will come to them and make our home with them." The most enunciated promise, of Christ's remaining with His faithful comes in verse 6 of St. John's Gospel, Chapter 14: "I am the way, the truth and life. No one comes to the Father except through me."

For us in the Catholic University, the unity of Christ's reality both in the temporal and spiritual contexts is the inspiration and opportunity for a culture of Christ-centeredness.

The dynamic of the holy mass is to unify us into one body of worshippers, even though we are from different cultural and intellectual backgrounds. But to place our unity only at this level is to be pedestrian in our educational approach, for in God and Christ, there is no east or west, north or south. "Lumen Christi" the light of Christ, at the deeper spiritual level, is the one light in which we all stand at the Eucharistic table. All members of the academic community, whether present or absent, are drawn into Christ's presence and participate either in first person or as represented by the faithful at the table of the Eucharistic celebration. This is, and can only

be, the one true implication of Christ's vision and message for unity, for sacrifice and true learning at the university. It is also, to use the configuration of transfiguring the reality of Christ, the one and same God, into which we are all transfigured. "It is no longer I who live, but it is Christ who lives in me" as St. Paul puts it in Galatians 2.20.

Given the culture of the centrality of Christian reality and learning, the Catholic University is no more seen as effective only through its physical and intellectual components. The catholic university becomes a community in which, "where caring and love is, there God is." *Ubi caritas et amor, Deus ibi est.*" This is of prime and foremost importance to us Catholics in realizing God, for as Jesus said, seek first the kingdom of God and all these things shall be added unto you. The Catholic University has to seek to care and to love, more than aggrandize itself, for Christ to have any significance in its operations.

The Eucharist as an opportunity to learn, to be educated and to be imbued with the spirit of sacrifice is also the best way for academics, professors and students to be open to the Holy Spirit, for it to work God's mission in our lives. As St. Paul in 1 Corinthians 12: 4 puts it, the spirit imbues each of us with many gifts, but it is always the same spirit, that of God, who fulfills us. Whatever our accomplishments in the field of learning, or the progress in our careers, we cannot place these above the power of the Holy spirit which is invoked by the celebrant, when he says, "Let Your Spirit come upon these gifts to make them holy, so that they may become for us the body and blood of our Lord Jesus Christ." As an opportunity within the Eucharist to be drawn to God, to be educated in the mission of sacrifice, care and love, the Catholic faithful would be falling short of the mission of Christ's love for all of mankind, if we do not transfuse the gifts and healings of the holy spirit which we receive through holy communion to our brethren, Catholic or otherwise.

While calling for Catholic University communities all around the world to be more witnessing to the core Christian values of the Holy Mass, as God's gift and as a sacrament of redemption, this paper makes its final point that the transubstantiation of wheat and wine is a model for all Catholic Universities to follow. Here, the "educational values" of university curricula should be made visible through true sacrifice, drawing from the inspiration of the sacrament institutionalized for us by Christ. In other words, having received the body and blood of Christ at the Eucharistic celebration, we should translate the blessings we have received in care and love for all our fellow beings, starting from the university community itself. At the same time, drawing from Christ's instruction to us, "do this in memory of me" should be our opportunity to "eucharist-ize" education by emphasizing Christian values and sacrifice over standards which that world of unbelievers emphasize.

The Eucharist in Education and Education in the Eucharist is the best way one can, within the platitudes of knowledge, explain the essence of Christ's exemplary life and mission of salvation, of hope, love and care.

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▣ **The Liberating Experience of the Eucharist in Education in Asia**  
*Adrian Anthony Pereira, International Movement of Catholic Students*  
*Asia Pacific Coordinator*

## **Introduction of IMCS**

In 1921, during World War 1, students from all over the world came together in Fribourg, Switzerland to discuss Peace while the world was being torn apart by the war. At first, it was indeed a most complex gathering as there were students from countries, which were at war with each other; but as they entered into dialogue, and inspired by the principles and values of Jesus himself, bitterness and conflict turned into peace and reconciliation. It was not a worldly Peace but a Peace that could only be inspired by Jesus himself, the source of the Eucharist and the Eucharist itself. It was at that point of history where Catholic students decided to form the International Movement of Catholic Students (IMCS). It was a peace building effort truly inspired by the personality of Jesus and his sacrifice to humanity; his Body and Blood, the Eucharist. IMCS received International Catholic Organization (ICO) status by the Vatican in 1927 and United Nations (UN) Consultative Status in 1949.

## ***IMCS in Universities***

IMCS continues to play a crucial and critical role in Universities as we strive to educate and re-educate students who graduate from high schools and move to tertiary level education. Most of the time, their basic faith formation needs to be started from scratch and this is indeed one of the challenges IMCS faces. Our main goal is bringing the Eucharist to life in the Campus. Besides personal spiritual development and guidance, we remind our students about the 4 constitutive elements of the Catholic Church: Scripture, Tradition, Sacraments and Social Mission. We specialize mainly in Social Mission as we develop Young Catholics who are able to respond to the various social injustices in society. Different models of formation are used. Some processes start from within while others from external experiences. We work with campus ministries mandated by local Bishops conferences, Catholic social mission organizations, NGOs (regional and local), parishes, BECs, FABC and others who help us achieve our goals. Here in Asia, the Catholic students truly have made the Eucharist, the focal point of their lives. In general, we are mainly University Students from both Catholic/secular and private/government institutions of higher education. Our membership comprises of about 200 000 students from all over Asia Pacific. We are very sensitized and cautious about the nature of globalization and how it has threatened humanity in many ways especially in causing major shifts to the fundamental principles of education.

## ***Student perspective of the Eucharist***

We see the Eucharist as Jesus himself and Jesus himself as the Eucharist. While distinct in form and having different “appearance points” in time (yet converging), to look at both as separate entities in total from one another would dilute the principles they carry and do a great injustice to the greater Liberation in God’s Plan of Salvation for all. We are very careful to not think of the Eucharist as a superficial source of energy for the soul as God still gave us Free Will to use that energy. To think that by merely eating the body of Christ we would be transformed is a most naive thought. True, by Jesus’ death, we are saved but not yet. God’s plan of salvations has only reached a halfway point and there is a long road to travel as we have yet to see the over one billion Catholics in the world, moving as one, making a bigger impact at the global level. While we have fiercely guarded traditional practices and formats, why have we failed to fight general global injustices as one big family? Perhaps reflections and a review of priorities will help wake up this Sleeping Giant. When Jesus broke the bread and said, “do this in

remembrance of me” (Luke 22:19), he was also saying to do the essence of what he did, as in offering our lives to others. And as students, that’s what we will do - offering our lives to others.

### ***Eucharist in the Mass***

The Mass is a celebration of life; a celebration of Humanity - God becoming Human Flesh. God feeds us our spiritual food and gives us cosmic energy to do His Will. We are a global community of life, moving together. Have we been able to ensure that over 1 billions Catholics in the world truly celebrate the Eucharist in the mass beyond ceremonial and routine processes? As we pray together and eat the Eucharist together, so must we respond together on the various attacks on Life by the many forms of evil in the world; let not the Eucharistic Celebration end after the singing of the final hymn but let the Eucharistic Celebration continue outside the gates of the Church.

### ***Liberative Characteristics of the Eucharist***

It has been Catholic Students inspired by the Eucharist that have taken the “Preferential Option for The Poor and the Marginalized”. No doubt Jesus broke bread with everyone from every walk of society, but it is most clear that he had a special preferential treatment for the poor in society. And with this in mind, the Catholic Students consciously choose to dialogue and discourse about issues that affect society. A “liberative spirituality in action” is the result of Jesus breaking the bread, sharing it with the disciples and sending them out.

### ***Education in Asia***

Institutionalized and formal education has indeed become market orientated as it creates input for capitalist mechanisms. The “banking system” continues to be used where knowledge is “banked” in to the students mind with the expectation of high commercial returns. Dreams driven by the media; big jobs, big money, big family, lavish and unrealistic lifestyles drive young people to become individualistic and selfish. Not a very meaningful life indeed in comparison to the teachings of the Gospel. The Eucharist challenges us to look at life in a different way. The Eucharist is a sacrifice of God, sharing his flesh and blood with us. We all know what happens when we lose blood and flesh, we would die. And it is this sacrifice that brings our attention to shift our focus away from the world of materialism and individualism and into a life of service. Jesus lived a life that was not for himself. He was broken and shared. And hence, we seek a reform in the education system that promotes holistic and integral education where positive humanistic principles and values are given priority over market orientated and driven outputs. As Catholic students, we realize that someday in the near future, we will be holding positions of decision makers in governments and corporate companies and we need to ensure our values and principles will be considered in those crucial times especially in order to make ethical and moral decisions.

### ***In Facing our Studies***

The Eucharist gives us energy and a spiritual boost in our attempts to study and do our best. Extreme pressure in the education field has reached a critical point where we find a high percentage of youth suicides in extremely competitive nations like Singapore and Japan. Receiving the Eucharist is a spiritually and emotionally renewing experience. But once again, God only helps those who help themselves. An “A” for a subject we did not study for?

Sometimes, students do try and bribe God, but we will never know, as they say sometimes, the Gods must be crazy.

### ***Minority Catholics in Public Universities***

In many Asian countries, Catholic students are minority, and hence, less emphasis is given on the values and principles represented by the Eucharist in secular institutes of educations. To overcome this, more resources are needed to help boost the presence of the Eucharist in the secular education systems especially in terms of financing. Let's be generous to invest in this for the returns sure to be bountiful. It is at this critical stage of youth formation where vocations are mainly made or discovered. There is a serious lack of full time campus ministers, (lay and religious) in the Campus Ministry all over Asia. How can one campus minister take care of 20 universities by him/her self? We must continuously create, promote and support the Catholic Student Movement in every University, as it will help the Eucharist come alive.

There is also a grave mistake many make by providing Youth Ministry formation for University students. IMCS would like to beg and urge everyone working in the field of education to realize that we can not provide the same level of basic formation for both the Youth and University Students. True, by age, they may sometimes fall into the same category but University students, having educational qualifications and bearing the responsibility of Intelligentsia have their own critical way of Living the Eucharist. We cannot keep feeding the baby the same basic food through life can't we? If we do, the baby will not grow up! Now don't get me wrong, we are not trying to be exclusive but we have identified this "difference" after years and experience of working in the field.

### ***Catholic Institutes of Education***

Jesus broke bread and shared it with the poorest of the poor. In our multi billion dollar education business, how much space have we allocated for the poorest of the poor to experience the Eucharistic Experience of Genuine Liberative Education. This is especially for the Private Institutions of Education owned and run by the many corporate companies and by our own religious congregations. How do we compensate society for being a big and direct player in this field of privatizing a most basic entity? Education, being the most fundamental liberative tool should never have been privatized in the first place as education should remain the primary duty of state governments. The emergence of private institutes of education has cause massive chaos in the education field as cost of education has increased and an unnecessary competition is faced in terms of quality and facilities. Lecturers and good educators hop over to private institutes in order to enjoy the higher salaries. Can the basic government sponsored educational institutes cope with this pressure?

In Catholic Educational institutes, how do we promote the Eucharistic values without proselytizing agendas? Shall we give scholarships only to Catholic Dalits? Or to any Dalit who is deserving? If the Eucharistic values radiate in us through genuine works of peace and love, we will not need to bribe others into becoming Catholics or Christians. We must be clear with our methods and agenda especially in this age of ecumenism and interreligious dialogue.

### ***Ecumensim and Interreligious Dialogues***

The Eucharist has become a source of inspiration to dialogue with our fellow partner Christians. By working together, putting out differences aside, we could become a key

instrumental group in fighting global injustices. The breaking of bread is indeed a common practice of almost all Christian faiths, yet differing in its symbolic definitions in a dogmatic way. We, as young intellectuals have realized that we do not wish to spend too much time debating on dogmatics with our fellow Christians in the University as only when we die and go to the Kingdom shall we know the truth. Meanwhile, we will leave that task of dogmatic discourse to the elder men in the Vatican to seek answers to questions we never ask in the first place. Meanwhile, since 2001, young Catholics in Asia through IMCS and IYCS have formed strategic partnerships with other Christian youth partners (YMCA, CCA, YWCA, WSCF) through the Ecumenical Asia Pacific Students and Youth Network (EASYNet). Besides that, our actions and works have encouraged many Hindus and Buddhist to join the Catholic Student Societies in some countries. We hope that in universities, Catholic chaplaincies will be open to form joint chaplaincies with other Christians in order to facilitate the Unifying Church process.

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### ■ Eucharist and Family – My Personal Experience

*Mr. Ajit David, Sri Lanka*

#### ***Challenges of Neighbors***

A girl of fourteen who lives near my house comes to pick flowers everyday, one day I asked her why she does this. Her answer was that it was an offering to Lord Buddha. I asked her what she expects from this offering. She gave no response. For sometime she was pondering on an answer. I got the idea that she did not really know the meaning of her offering acts. After some time she said to me that “All my sins are washed away when I offer these flowers”.

In general, people in Sri Lanka go regularly to temples to offer flowers, prayers, money and light oil lamps. Or they do these offerings at home. In other words there is a disposition towards the sacred, in their own terms, embedded in the minds and hearts, and ways of people.

My neighbors have therefore a sense of offering, which is common to the local custom or tradition of peoples, in this case, of the Sinhalese population.

How is the Eucharist, which is basically, offering sacrifice, prepared in the culture of peoples?

#### **Challenges in Family**

My normal life is one of constant offering. In the morning, I leave my house to my working place at 6:15 a.m. On the way I take my two daughters and drop them in school, which is about forty-five minutes from home. I do not drive a car. I drive a three-wheeler the one you find most common in India and in Sri Lanka. It is mostly used as local taxis.

I deposit my wheeler in the city of Kandy, in my friend's house, and take a bus to my work place. I need to negotiate the trip in two hours time. My work requires being there in the office to take care of finances for nine hours. I could only leave the office normally at six in the evening, the earliest.

Tired from the transactions of the day, I again pick up my transport bound for home. I arrive home at nine in the evening, just to catch the short time before my children go to bed and be prepared for the hurdle of the next day.

During off days, two days a week, I have extra job: that is designing and making collars of leather for house pets, dogs, in particular. Actually, they are accessories for man's best friends. Other than this, I have to pay attention to other needs: of my wife, my parents, and sick sister.

My offerings are specifically different compared with what the girl and my Buddhist neighbors would offer. And the divine to whom I offer my daily endeavors is a person who calls himself God, not to mention my attendance to church on the day of the Lord. This gives me all the satisfaction in life.

### ***Losing a sense of Offering***

While the little girl in my village still has a sense of the divine, sense of respect, and sense of belongingness to a faith persuasion, this may not be a common case today. Young men and women could lose the sense of respect, either for the being taken as sacred, or respect for parents and other elders. Added to this is the loss of sense of courtesy, which we used to see in the young of yesteryears.

Where is the gentleman? Where is the lady? It seems that these terms are all gone. Have our youth forgotten these terms? What do I mean? We used to offer our seats in the public buses, when we see an old lady, an old man or a pregnant lady or help a needy person to cross the street. At home, we were willing to lend our hands in house chores. Let us listen to this modern day sad story:

One day I met a mother in my place of work. She told me about an event that took place in her house. While the father was working in the field, for he is a farmer, his son was still sleeping late in the morning. The mother feeling hurt asked this son to go out and help his father, but the young man challenged her saying: What will you do to me if I do not leave the bed? The poor mother totally devastated could only cry.

There are so many aimless youth. It is becoming a trend. It is becoming a style of living. With it, is the escaping of sense of sacrifice required in the real life in a normal family?

Eucharist, which is sacrifice incarnated in the domestic church we call family, is losing chance and ground fast.

### ***My dream, my Message***

One of my desires as a parent is to find means and ways how to re-instate the sense of respect for ladies, parents, elders, neighbors, and in general all humans. I do appeal to those who have the prerogatives to work on this dream to put this as par of the agenda in education, formation, and other endeavors for youth.

With the above is the exhortation to all delegates present to surface in all areas of ministry the value of sacrifice. The poor understand what this means. But those who have the privilege to grow in urban areas may find it hard to take in. But what is presented daily is self-centered fulfillment, extreme physical health concern, and other materialistic values. All seems to boast greed and selfishness. Sacrifice has been somehow out of place. The little girl may have better view that a simple offering of flower has positive moral significance.

To discover the joy when one makes an offering is of value: a Christian, a Buddhist, a Hindu, and Moslem and people of primitive faith, will not find hard to understand this. This seems to be the area that has to be nurtured. It is here when the east may meet the Christian west which is the past give meaning to sacrifice, penance, mortification, and the like which are recalled in Lenten period. But this outlook seems to have lapsed by.

Commitment to hard work, dedication, stability, and all this is my Eucharist experience at my household it is my way of living in the domestic church, my family, is what we strive on day to day basis. Schools of formation should cease not to inculcate this in the young.

**Epilogue:**

One special experience of a sort of Eucharist happened years back. I was a student and there was communal violence in the country and my family and I were taken to a refugee camp. On the first day we had nothing to eat. The next day we managed to have a meal of half cooked rice and curry floating in abundance of water. This was the tastiest meal in my life, with deeper meaning.

A short deprivation has led me to understand the meaning of a disposition in life. We should identify ourselves with those who have less rather than those who have more means. If we learn to identify with those with less means, we realize how fortunate we are. But if we see things along with those who have much more than us in life, we will always be feeling sad and sorry for ourselves.

An outlook that will save the world and will always keep us in good and satisfied attitude is to recall all the time the “mini Eucharist”, or “offering” we are all capable of giving to the Divine everyday of our life.