

**PRAYER — THE LIFE OF THE CHURCH  
OF ASIA****THE SECOND PLENARY ASSEMBLY OF THE FEDERATION  
OF ASIAN BISHOPS' CONFERENCES**

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**PART I. INAUGURAL ADDRESS OF THE PLENARY ASSEMBLY  
by  
Archbishop D. Simon Lourdasamy**

This Plenary Assembly of FABC is a privileged occasion for me. It provides me with an opportunity of meeting the Bishops and other Prelates who, in their respective ecclesiastical territories have the pastoral charge of those who form "the community of faith, hope and charity," which is the Church founded by Christ as a visible structure (cf. *Lumen Gentium*, no. 8).

It is with sentiments of warm appreciation, therefore, that I thank all of you for the invitation you have kindly extended to me to be present here on this very important occasion.

I am here in your midst, as you all know, as the Special Representative of the Holy See.

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This Paper presents the official Statement and Recommendations of the Second Plenary Assembly of the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences (FABC), held at Morning Star Regional Seminary in Barrackpore, India, near Calcutta, 19th-25th November 1978. The theme of the Plenary Assembly was: "Prayer — the Life of the Church of Asia." A volume of the complete proceedings is in preparation.

I am representing, in a very special way, the Sacred Congregation for the Evangelisation of Peoples, being its Secretary, and also the Pontifical Mission-aid Societies in my capacity as their President. Our Dicastery is specially concerned with the life and activity of the Church in this part of the world, as it has been entrusted with the care of most of the territory represented in this Federation. To all of you present here, to the other members of your respective Episcopal Conferences, as well as to the Clergy, Religious and Laity entrusted to your pastoral care, I bring the sincere greetings and prayerful best wishes of His Eminence the Cardinal Prefect and all our devoted collaborators in the Sacred Congregation and in the Pontifical Mission-aid Societies.

I have also brought you good wishes from the Council for the Public Affairs of the Church, and from the Sacred Congregations for the Bishops and for the Oriental Churches, all the three of which are directly connected with the Federation and are keenly interested in the success of your Assembly.

I bring you, besides, the greetings of His Eminence Cardinal Knox, Prefect of the Sacred Congregation for the Sacraments and Divine Worship, who, because of his service as Apostolic Pro-Nuncio in India for ten years and also because of the nature of the theme chosen for discussion at this Assembly, feels intimately united with us.

The Apostolic See wishes to encourage you all in your earnest efforts to worthily continue to serve the people in Asia, proclaiming the Good News, building and consolidating Christian communities and searching for an identity of your own: Christian and Asian at the same time. With the rich experience I have gained and the impressions I have gathered by my working at your service in Rome for nearly eight years, and by my visits to various countries in this vast continent, I am fully convinced that the Church in Asia has such a vitality and reached such a maturity that it can forge ahead, with courage and determination, hope and optimism, in close and full communion with the centre, in the initiatives it takes and in the attempts it makes to face and solve successfully the various problems which concern the particular Churches in this part of the globe, and also to contribute thereby largely in many respects to the Church Universal and add to its rich patrimony.

The Church in Asia is giving a remarkable lead in moving its many countries, with different historical backgrounds, cultural heritages, political patterns, and socio-economic conditions, to work together for the common and greater good of all.

It is relevant here to call to mind what the Second Vatican Council has said in its Decree *Christus Dominus*, no.38: "Contacts between Episcopal Conferences of different nations should be encouraged in order to promote and safeguard their higher welfare."

This applies to all territories in the world. Added to it, the Apostolic Letter—*Motu Proprio Ecclesiae Sanctae* of Pope Paul VI, dated 6th August 1966, says something specific to the mission countries in Part III, no.18: "Since it is desirable that Episcopal Conferences in the missions should be united into organic groups following the lines of social and cultural patterns ... the Sacred Congregation of Propaganda Fide (no.29) should encourage such co-ordination of Episcopal Conferences," and goes on to give in detail the work of these Conferences, in conjunction with our Sacred Congregation.

Like CELAM (Consejo Episcopal Latino Americano), CCEE (Concilium Conferentiarum Episcopaliū Europae), SECAM (Symposium of Episcopal Conferences of Africa and Madagascar), the FABC (Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences) came into existence at the right time to serve the needs that are common to the Church in Asia, working together in a concerted manner for the all-round development of the continent.

The establishing of the FABC was a labour of apostolic love for the founding Fathers. They saw in it an effective instrument for quickening a sense of pastoral concern and solidarity in the Christian community in the whole of Asia. The work that the FABC has accomplished down through the years is an ongoing tribute to the ecclesial sense of those who felt the need of placing at the service of the Church in this part of the world such an organ of close and effective co-operation and co-ordination. It has contributed much to fostering and deepening in the hearts of all a new awareness of the Church as a communion. We have to continue in the same direction, with increased vigor and enthusiasm, promoting, at every level, that fuller insight into the mind of the Council. For the greater the sense of ecclesial communion in the hearts of the members of the Church, the clearer will be their vision of the implications of that communion in all its significance.

The Church in Asia should become more and more a genuinely mature and relevant local Church, conscious of its mystery and mission, capable of reflecting in faith on its concrete Christian experience in the Asian context, within its cultural and religious universe. Herein comes

most fittingly the theme you have chosen for this Plenary Assembly: "Prayer—the Life of the Church of Asia."

The theme of prayer is always one of perennial actuality, primarily because of its intrinsic value — it unites us with God — being the means for making our Christian life grow and mature, and being one of the most efficacious tools for accomplishing the mission of the Church in the world. In today's circumstances, this theme is of still greater actuality, when the world is undergoing profound changes, where we find other elements that substitute for prayer, such as the ideology of "practices," and the strong attention which is paid to immediate and visible results. In this context, prayer might be considered as ineffective and unreal, a sheer waste of time, even as belonging merely to the realm of the "sacred."

Pope John Paul II in the sanctuary of Mentorella he visited on the 5th of this month, said: "We have to keep reminding ourselves that prayer, which expresses in various ways the relationship of man with the living God, is also his first task."

The theme of prayer is again of actuality in the present circumstances since we are speaking of Asia, where it is almost the heart of the continent. To the whole of Asia one can readily apply the words which Pope Paul VI, of happy memory, addressed to the people of India in 1964 on the occasion of his audience to the representatives of various groups of Non-Christian Religions at the time of the Eucharistic Congress: "Yours is a land of ancient culture, the cradle of great religions, the home of a nation that has sought God with a relentless desire, in deep meditation and silence, and in hymns of fervent prayer" (*Insegnamenti di Paolo VI*, II, 693). At the same time, the Pope recalled how we must be very careful not to lose this religious tradition of prayer, which is today in crisis because of so many cultural and ideological changes.

Certainly, in prayer, we find the place for an encounter between Christianity and Asia, an encounter where Christianity has something specific to give to Asia and where Asia also has something unique to offer to the Church. Thus, in the life of prayer, there is an opportunity for mutual enrichment.

### I. Christianity's Gift of Prayer to Asia

But what is Christian Prayer? Perhaps we can describe it as the "conscious and personal communion of ourselves with God Our Father, in and through Christ Jesus." We should recall that every communion

carries with it a prologue, a conversation and a dialogue with a personal God Who listens to us, and at the same time speaks to us and gives us His gift, all within an atmosphere of friendship.

a) In this description we find a first element which Christian Prayer can give to Asia. For Christian Prayer, in all its forms—from contemplation to simple petition—is not an opening to the Void or to an Absolute Being. Christianity underlines the “personal” character of all prayer, the contact with a God Who is Our Father. Christian Prayer is the fruit of the action of the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of Christ, to Whom we pray, and with Whom and through Whom we direct ourselves to the Father; in accordance with the teaching of St. Paul who writes that “through Him we both have access in one Spirit to the Father” (Eph 2, 18).

Speaking of this “personal” character of Christian Prayer, one can assert that its most important note is its *Christological dimension*. We pray in the name of Jesus, or rather, after having known Him and accepted Him in Faith, we pray to Jesus, in Whom “are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge,” since all other forms of wisdom have only a relative and even at times a seductive value (Col 2,4ff); and we pray united to Jesus, Who continues in us His own prayer. This explicitly “Christological” character of prayer is one of the most precious gifts which Christianity can offer to Asia in search of Christ.

Together with this aspect, we should not forget that prayer for us Christians is not the fruit of our own human efforts, nor even of our life of asceticism and renunciation; it is always a gift and a grace from God. Christian Prayer, then, is by its very origins rather *passive*, in the sense that God always takes the initiative and God always accompanies our response. Christian Prayer, therefore, always demands for its foundation an attitude of humility.

b) Christianity offers to Asia a form of prayer that is not very common among the numerous methods of meditation and prayer that are traditional in the continent. And that is liturgical prayer or community worship, the prayer of the Church. Liturgical prayer consists in the prayer of that same Christ, Who one day began His existence on earth, and Who today continues as the same Christ present in the Church. The Church, then, is a praying community, a community that is composed of the faithful who are united to Christ. It is for this reason that the Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy mentions that “the Liturgy is rightly considered as an exercise of the priestly office of Jesus Christ. In the liturgy

the sanctification of man is manifested by signs perceptible to the senses, and is effected in a way which is proper to each of these signs; in the liturgy full public worship is performed by the Mystical Body of Jesus Christ, that is, by the Head and His members. From this it follows that every liturgical celebration, because it is an action of Christ the Priest and of His Body the Church, is a sacred action surpassing all others. No other action of the Church can match its claim to efficacy, nor equal its degree" (SC, 7). One participates fully in this liturgical prayer only when there is an interior capacity which harmonizes with what the Church does and lives; such a capacity is the fruit of personal prayer.

In the liturgy the Church, in an active and communitarian manner, makes the mysteries of our Redemption living, not only that of the Cross, when one celebrates the Sacrifice of the Mass, but also those mysteries of the life of Christ, during the celebration of the liturgical cycle. The liturgical year, over and above its psychological value, as Paul VI remarked in an address given on February 27, 1974, becomes a renewal of the history of Salvation.

c) Christian Prayer has as its prime requisite and consequence, *charity*. For prayer is truly Christian when the person praying goes forth with greater love, or rather, with the decision to love more, as a son/daughter of God, and as a brother/sister, and to be the servant of one's fellowmen. The yearning and capacity for prayer, the mystical temperament, the possibility of spending long hours in contemplation are not sufficient. The specifically Christian Prayer is distinguished from every other form of religious experience by the fact that it is inseparable from its relationship with other persons. Consequently, prayer does not bring about only a communion with the historical Christ and with Christ living today in heaven and in the Eucharist; it also brings about a communion with Christ present in one's brothers and sisters. It moves us out into the world to transform it. It enables us to foster and promote better relationship with people around us.

We do not believe, then, that prayer alienates or distances us from the world which we ought to build. Rather Christian Prayer, while making us no longer "of the world," makes us more effective for working in the world, involved in that work of the integral salvation of man which should begin always with the conversion of structures themselves (*Evangelii nuntiandi*, 18, 36). Whence it was that Christ in His priestly prayer prayed for the fruit of all those sent into the world, but who were not to be "of the world" (Jn 17).

d) Asia desires Christ and it is in need of Him, and it needs to become explicitly aware of Him in its life and religious values. Yet every day it seems that the means of evangelisation do not correspond to this desire, hope and need of Asia. The number of non-Christians grows faster than that of Christians. Perhaps this should cause us to take stock and to re-think the means being used for the evangelisation of Asia. There is the danger of insisting principally on mere humanitarian services, as is mentioned in the *Evangelii nuntiandi*: "Techniques of evangelisation are good, but even the most advanced ones could not replace the gentle action of the Spirit. The most perfect preparation of the evangeliser has no effect without the Holy Spirit" (n.75). In prayer we find the principal means for collaborating with the Spirit in the evangelisation of Asia. We must believe in the promise of our Lord "whatever you ask in my name, I will do" (Jn 14, 13). We can surely recall the examples of St. Therese of the Child of Jesus. Thus today, Christian Prayer offers to all those who work in Asia an indispensable means, often forgotten, to labour effectively for the evangelisation of Asia.

## II. Asia's Gift of Prayer to Christianity

a) Today within the Church we hear many speaking and writing about prayer and various forms of meditation. Everywhere groups of prayer are being formed. All this, certainly, is a nostalgic sign of interest for a reality that is lacking and of which there is a great need. Contemplation is not only an integral element of a Christian life but also it constitutes its core and essence, goal and ideal.

However, even though discourse on prayer is abundant, we can ask ourselves if today, in fact, we are praying more, or, perhaps better, with greater depth and intensity. Surely, with all sincerity, all accept the fact that in the Christian life and in the Consecrated Life (that of priests and religious), the reality of prayer is overlooked, and more specifically, that form of it which is personal prayer. In part, this is due to the fact that many wish to pray but they do not adopt the "necessary means" for prayer, such as an atmosphere of silence, detachment from worldly things, spirit and practice of sacrifice, the value of time dedicated to prayer, etc.

In this context, Asia can and should help Christians recover the value of time that is consecrated to prayer without any hurry, the significance of external and interior silence in a world that lives under a

spell of din and noise. In fact, these values have lost their relevance to a large extent in some of the countries of the West but they still remain very much alive and actual, woven almost into the fabric of the religious tradition of Asia. Only the recovery of these values will give to Christianity the possibility of truly living that prayer which so many seek and about which so many speak. Even in Asia there exist to some extent the same temptations as in the West, but Christian Asia must do all that is in its power to maintain and guard these values and so offer them as a precious gift to the Church.

While we admit that the contemplative life is still highly esteemed by the Church, and especially by the living Magisterium, there is a whole current afloat that wishes to reduce Christian life and commitment to a mere historical-cultural phenomenon. The example of Asia, both non-Christian as well as Christian, can help much to discover the profound significance which the contemplative life has in the Church as a sign in this world of transcendental values, and as an eschatological sign of the Kingdom of God.

A spirituality or prayer of immanence is characteristic of the Asian continent. The awareness of God and the awareness of others and of the universe include an awareness of self. Even St. Augustine tells us that to arrive at a gratuitous experience of God, one can legitimately go through the stage of the "*memoria sui*," the intimate experience of the self. This has great value and importance for humanity and the Asian Church. Virtues like non-violence and its fruits and allied virtues, such as compassion, good will, generosity, arise from this awareness of the ground of being. It embraces the whole cosmos. Such an experience is a plunge into the depths of the "silence of being." If this immanence does not close itself in self-sufficiency, it is already an experience of the presence of transcendence. The techniques developed in Asian religious traditions, for example, yoga and zen, are of great service to the prayer experience of the immanence.

The spirituality of immanence can lead us to newer insights into theology. It can further help us to an Asian spirituality for Christians.

The aspects of interiority, recollection and silence, characteristic of the spirituality and prayer of immanence, can contribute much to a more authentic Christian spirituality in our lands. The religious experience of the self and of the Absolute is primarily our expression of God's fidelity and graciousness to man, of God's way of touching those who seek Him. God has touched us precisely as the immanent One Which is



transcendence itself. The *marga* of the spirituality of immanence has much to teach us.

The real encounter between the Church and our ancient religious traditions will take place at a deeper level of contemplative experience.

The best means to assimilate the riches of Eastern religious values, and one of the most important ways to contemplation, is in the traditions of ashrams. This will be a specific contribution of Asia to the treasure of the spiritual life of humanity at this stage of the growth of the Church.

The Asian prayer-forms are also characterised by a spirituality of *bhakti*, i.e., loving and total devotion to the Divine and Personal Reality. The element of transcendence and the distinction of soul and God are also shared in this current.

These currents in prayer and spirituality of Asia must be understood and experienced from its sources. This will make us more aware of their great contribution to Christian experience of prayer.

b) In order to nourish and facilitate this contemplation, there are many means which have been found helpful and even indispensable.

*Renunciation* is also a characteristic of the prayer/spiritual tradition of the East. A *sanyasi* is by definition one who renounces. His self-surrender to loving providence is total.

*The symbolic character* of Asian spiritual experience is to be rediscovered. The yearning of man to be total in his expression of communion with God is so much expressed in our traditions through the use of symbols in prayer experience.

*Bodiliness* is another dimension of our Asian prayer. The Asian spirit with its grasp of the total man and emphasis on unity (rather than duality of body and soul) has expressed itself in prayer, etc., through bodiliness. Hence, body worships just as the soul, in such a way that the unity of being, which is a characteristic of prayer experience, is a basic condition and medium.

The *verticality* of the prayer experience of Asia is not clearly appreciated. The awareness of the "Other" as transcendent has expressed itself in even deeper awareness of the presence of immanence.

*Cosmic Dimension.* The experience of God is also linked with the experience of the cosmic reality — the cosmic presence. Prayer is experiential for it is cosmic. The biblical tradition of psalm prayer (Ps 28) is very much an Asian expression.

*Prayer and Freedom.* In Asia prayer is *mukti* or liberation-oriented. A total liberation is the goal and crown of deep prayer experience. The Asian spirit yearns for all-round freedom and total liberation, and hence the Churches will have to be imbued with this spirit of prayer as liberation. Finally, *ananda* (blissful joy) and *shanti* (peace) are considered as the authentic signs and expression of a man of God in contemplation.

c) Today the Spirit and the Church are directing us towards a *dialogue* with non-Christian religions. And we believe that this dialogue finds in the life of prayer, especially in that of Christian and non-Christian monasteries, its most adequate search for truth, for the Absolute which manifests itself in the different forms of prayer. This fact opens the door to an encounter, to an exchange of “spiritual experiences,” to a true dialogue. We are aware that dialogue in the field of what we might call intellectual “notions” or concepts is not only difficult; it is somewhat far off and hazy as well. And while spiritual experience in itself seems incommunicable, its manifestations, through the language of prayer, render it the object of mutual dialogue. And this encounter and dialogue should be characterized by a careful analysis, and in a kind of “second moment,” by a spiritual discernment.

d) Together with dialogue, today the Church is insisting on the theme of “inculturation.” It is, therefore, in this context, that we can add a word about the methods of prayer and, in particular, about the methods of meditation and contemplation.

In the life of prayer it is not sufficient merely to begin; there is need to find a path to follow, and it is the methods, *sadhanas*, that become these ways and paths to advance ahead. There are, of course, different methods, as the history of Christian spirituality recalls to us. Just as in the Father’s house there are many mansions (Jn 14, 2), so also are there many paths to arrive at a genuine communion with the Father. At the same time, no one method has a universal value. Methods of prayer should be sought for in the order of the means of prayer, not in those of its ends or Its End. They should be sought after, so that man can reach God.

With these premises we can begin to think about the great gift which Asia can offer to Christianity in the field of prayer; or rather, the great diversity of methods, of concentration, of expression which are the fruit of a religious tradition of thousands of years, often new for Christianity. A life of Christian Prayer with these methods becomes certainly a life that is 'inculturated' in Asia. As the *Evangelii nuntiandi* remarks once again: "The individual Churches, intimately built up not only of people but also ... of ways of praying, of loving, of looking at life and the world which distinguish this or that human gathering, have the task of assimilating the essence of the Gospel message and of transposing it, without the slightest betrayal of its essential truth, into the language that these particular people understand, then of proclaiming it in this language" (n.63).

In the movement of action (the *karma-marga*), characterised by rites, there appear new channels and forms of expression to live the Christian liturgy, that "newness" or novelty of which we have already spoken. In this movement, there are not lacking diverse techniques, such as the recitation of the *mantra*, or sacred formulas, which assist so greatly in the concentration of the mind. Also within this movement of knowledge (the *jnana-marga*), Asia offers us a great diversity of methods of meditation, which are the fruit of a search for true wisdom, which can help us in making our way to the Father, through the freeing of the spirit. The fruit of these methods lies in the interior liberation or freedom which they produce, and in the orientation of all the powers of man towards a concrete, absolute and transcendental goal or end.

e) *Challenges of Asian Prayer.* Still more radically, in the reading of the "signs of the times," many persons, and not a few theologians, are pointing to the advent of a "new man," one who ought to live in a new post-Christian and post-religious epoch, an epoch that is "secularised," where "*prassi*," or practices, will occupy the first place in both life and society. This "secularised" man will remain open to change, to revolution, or tragically subjected to fate. In this new structure the life of prayer loses all its importance, and those who aspire to this new society do not even wish to hear anything said about prayer, because they know that where there is prayer, there remains alive a religious sense, a supernatural sense and dimension. Yet theology and Tradition show us that prayer is an element that will remain always, without changing, wherever there is an authentic human life that is truly free and fully realised. God is the Lord of history, and human changes do not distance Him from the world. All should strain every nerve to maintain in the world and in our epoch this religious dimension of man; and the best means to achieve

this is to give back to prayer its proper value. Certainly, in this struggle to which Christianity is committed, one of the principal helps will come from Asia. For Asia shows us how society and man are developed in prayer, by retaining all the values which prayer carries along with itself.

The implications of the Asian reality are frighteningly real for our prayer life. The political, social, economic, ideological and cultural challenges are to bear upon our experience of God, if it has to be genuine. The oppression of the masses, the exploitation and injustices should lead us to an experience of God as liberator and enable us to share His experience as Jesus, i.e., Yahweh liberates.

The prayer life of Jesus is at the root of His resurrection and, consequently, at the root of God's new creation of a new just society, of a humanity that is being liberated.

The whole of creation awaits the all-round transformation and total liberation of man (Rom 8: 19).

The Churches in Asia will become effective liberators to the extent that they experience the liberating presence of God in their lives.

### III. Conclusion

To conclude, we can affirm that either we raise up our ecclesial communities to the category of truly "praying" communities, or we shall not have authentic Christian communities. In the early Church we find that the communities were in a continual attitude of prayer, beginning with that community that awaited the coming of the Holy Spirit, where "all devoted themselves to constant prayer" (Acts 1, 14). After Pentecost, when the Holy Spirit had given a true physiognomy of form to these communities, "they devoted themselves to the apostles' instruction and the communal life, to the breaking of bread and to prayer" (Acts 2, 42). The Apostles clearly understood that to render their activity effective and authentic, they first of all had to "concentrate on prayer and the ministry of the Word" (Acts 6, 4). And in tense moments, the communities found in prayer the means for overcoming their difficulties. When Peter was in prison, "the Church prayed fervently to God on his behalf" (Acts 12, 5); and in fact, when he was freed, he returned to the community "where many were gathered in prayer" (Acts 12, 12).

Today, both in the Churches of the West, as well as in those of Asia, all wish to return to the early Church, to origins. This fact is an authentic

sign of the Spirit. But if we wish to be consistent, there is no other alternative than to labour so that the entire ecclesial community becomes a genuine praying community.

## **PART II. FINAL STATEMENT AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

1. We, the Bishops-delegate to the Second Plenary Assembly of the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences, have gathered here in Calcutta to deepen our knowledge of our local churches, to increase fraternal cooperation and to see the larger context and the common concerns of our pastoral mission in this part of the world.

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

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

### **Our Theme: Prayer**

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

5. It is significant that this assembly was held in India. India is "a land of ancient culture, the cradle of great religions, the home of a nation that has sought God with relentless desire, in deep meditation and

silence, and in hymns of fervent prayer.”<sup>3</sup> We have been introduced to some Asian approaches to prayer by competent and discerning guides. Thus our meeting has not been one for study and discussion only, but equally a time of contemplation and the search for God’s light and grace. These days have been, we believe, not only fruitful in the brotherly interchange of ideas and opinions, not only a joyous experience of community and friendship, but filled too with the grace of the presence of the Lord and the working of the Holy Spirit in our hearts.

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

#### **I. Some aspects of the present religious context of Asia and its challenge**

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

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

from these influences. They too are tempted to give up prayer and the things of the spirit.

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

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

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

## **II. The Church's response and resolve: to become more fully a true community of prayer**

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

## What is Christian Prayer?

13. What does it mean for the Church to become this genuine "community of Christian prayer"? — We might begin by asking ourselves, what is Christian prayer?

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

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

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

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

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



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

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

### **III. Prayer and some main areas of the Church's concern**

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

#### **...total human development**

22. (Prayer and human development). Christian prayer is necessary if we are to bring the spirit and power of the Gospel and the Christ-life into the effort to achieve genuine human liberation and development. This involves the shaping of human persons to the likeness of Jesus. It means bringing them, in all the material and spiritual dimensions of their lives, to their full stature as the children of God they are called to become.

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

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

#### ...education

25. (Prayer and Christian education). The Church in Asia has had traditionally a special commitment to the task of Christian education. For the fulfillment of this work too, especially in our own Catholic educational institutions, prayer and formation in prayer are indispensable. Only if the young learn to dialogue with God in the different situations of their personal lives<sup>12</sup> and to surrender themselves to Him, can they grow into fully Christian persons who strive to overcome selfish individualism and to develop toward that freedom whereby they place their lives at the service of others. Only with prayer will the intelligence truly find its way to Truth and Wisdom, and the heart to Self-Gift and Love. A Catholic school will be able to fulfill its mission to the measure that, joined to fostering the development of competence and skills, it is also able to become a school of faith and prayer where the young are helped to see life with God's eyes and to love their brothers and sisters with God's own heart.<sup>13</sup>

#### ...everyday life

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

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

#### **IV. Some means for the renewal of the prayer-life of the Church of Asia**

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

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

#### **...inculturation**

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

of our peoples and have played a vital and honored role in shaping the traditions of our lands.

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

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

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

#### **...interreligious dialogue**

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

35. The spirituality characteristic of the religions of our continent stresses a deeper awareness of God and the whole self in recollection, silence and prayer, flowering in openness to others, in compassion, non-violence, generosity. Through these and other gifts it can contribute much to our spirituality which, while remaining truly Christian, can yet be greatly enriched. Sustained and reflective dialogue with them in prayer (as shall be found possible, helpful and wise in different situa-

tions) will reveal to us what the Holy Spirit has taught others to express in a marvelous variety of ways. These are different perhaps from our own, but through them we too may hear His voice, calling us to lift our hearts to the Father.

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

#### **...formation in prayer, especially of candidates to the priesthood**

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

38. This formation will involve: more careful discernment and purification of motivation; in our houses and communities of formation, a life-style more in keeping with the spiritual traditions of our own peoples; where necessary, a revision of norms for the choice and preparation of animators; the painstaking nourishment of selfless personal commitment through prayer and contemplation; fostering growth to human and Christian maturity and freedom for self-gift; the interaction between prayer, theological reflection, and broadly human as well as pastoral experience. The entire formation should be directed towards developing men and women of authentic holiness which should be both truly Christian and truly Asian. It should aim at enabling priests, religious and lay ministers as well, in their turn to form others among God's people, especially the young, in the ways of prayer and spirituality, according to the measure of God's grace to us.<sup>19</sup>

#### **V. Conclusion: Our commitment**

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

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

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

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

43. We wish to affirm our conviction that the future of our peoples cannot be built up in truth and justice, reconciliation and peace, unless men and women of good will among our peoples seek the deeper conversion of hearts and the transformation of oppressive structures. It is thus our resolve to "allow Jesus to pray to and live for the Father in our hearts and lives" ever more fully, and in freedom to receive and make ours the gifts of Faith, Hope and Love which the Lord gives to men for their liberation from sin and its consequences in society, for the fulfillment of their earthly tasks, and their pilgrimage to the Kingdom of God.

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

45. We believe that finally the power of God's love is the only force which can truly renew the world. This force is the power of the Spirit; it is given to us by the Lord through prayer. Thus we turn to our brothers and sisters in contemplative communities, and to all those whose lives are dedicated to loving prayer and sacrifice. We reaffirm our esteem for

their vocation, so precious to the Church. We express here the faith and hope we share with them that their lives, given in all fidelity, can be and are fruitful for their brethren, beyond human reckoning. Their worship speaks to us not only of the God on whose mercy and love all of human existence and doing finally depend, of the God "Who is on the side of man." More than this, their lives of prayer serve to remind us of the God "Who is not for the use of man," the God Who is truly God.

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

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

48. Likewise we appeal for prayers for the churches of Asia whose Bishop-representatives, for various reasons, were not able to be with us at this plenary assembly. Though they were absent, they have been more than ever present in our meetings and prayer, and in the celebration of the Eucharist, we have been one with them in fraternal solidarity.

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

### **A Final Prayer**

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

through the Holy Spirit: "that the world may believe..." For, finally, the purpose of our prayer is the oneness of our peoples in the Kingdom of the Father.

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

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

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

25 November 1978

Vigil of the Solemnity of Christ the King

Morning Star College, Barrackpore

Calcutta

**Footnotes:**

1. *Message and Resolutions of Asian Bishops' Meeting*, Manila, 23-29 November 1970, Follow-up Committee, Hong Kong, 1971. (Cited as MR)
2. *Evangelization in Modern Day Asia*, Statement and Recommendations of the First Plenary Assembly of the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences (FABC), Taiwan, 22-27 April, 1974, Office of the Secretary General, FABC, (Manila, 1974). (Cited as FABC I).
3. Pope Paul VI, *Insegnamenti di Paolo VI*, II, 693.
4. Pope Paul VI, "To the peoples of Asia," MR, 36.
5. Cf. Pope Paul VI, 1970: MR, 29,36.
6. FABC I, par. 4-6, 18-19.
7. Second Vatican Council, *Ad Gentes*, no. 18.
8. Second Vatican Council, *Sacrosanctum concilium*, no. 10.
9. Pope Paul VI, *Evangelii nuntiandi*, no. 18.
10. *Ibid.*, cf. the section on evangelization and human liberation, nn. 29-39. In the present text, "liberation" has the meaning given in *Evangelii nuntiandi*.



11. See appended Workshop Notes (brief summaries of the workshop reports at the Second Plenary Assembly, FABC), I: On Evangelization, prayer and total human development.
12. Sacred Congregation for Catholic Education, *The Catholic School*, Rome, 1977, no. 45.
13. See Workshop Notes, II: On Education for Prayer in Catholic Schools.
14. See Workshop Notes, III: On Prayer as Witness in Everyday Life.
15. Vatican II, *Ad Gentes*, no. 22; cf. also AG, 11; *Lumen Gentium*, 13-17, and FABC I, par. 9-12, 20-21.
16. See Workshop Notes, IV: On Prayer, community worship and inculturation.
17. Cf. FABC I, par. 13-18, 21-22.
18. See Workshop Notes, V: On Christian Prayer and interreligious dialogue: enrichment of Christian Prayer.
19. See Workshop Notes, VI: Seminaries and religious houses as centers of formation for prayer.
20. Pope John Paul II, 22 October 1978, cf. Cardinal Lawrence Picachy's Welcome Address, FABC II, 19 November.

### **Recommendations**

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

Desirous to see a more dynamic and effective interiorization of the fruits of evangelization in the hearts of our people in Asia through a renewal of the prayer-life of the Church, we recommend to our member National Bishops' Conferences that:

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

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

3. a) In recognition of the vital role of prayer for the attainment of a total human development and for the renewal of Christian life

among the people of God, establishment of contemplative communities and centers of prayer and spirituality suitable to our Asian context should be encouraged and promoted.

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

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

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

5. Aware of the importance of spontaneity and sharing in prayer and promoting community spirit, forms of spontaneous prayer, such as prayer groups, should be encouraged especially among the youth, who easily find their identity and security in groups, and among the sick and handicapped, whose suffering in communion with Christ crucified is a very efficacious prayer.

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

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

### PART III. SUMMARIES OF THE WORKSHOP REPORTS

#### I. Prayer and Human Development

Most of Asia is in much need of human development, since it is made up of multitudes of poor, not so much in human values, qualities and potential, but poor in that they are deprived of access to material goods and resources necessary to create a truly human life for themselves, deprived, because they live under oppression, that is, under social, economic and political structures which have injustice built into them (FABC I, V). At the base of this poverty, deprivation and oppression of so many of our peoples is sin and evil, not to be solved only by ideologies or efforts in the economic and political fields.

What we need in Asia is the growth of the human person towards his full material and spiritual stature, the fulfilment of man's aspirations to equality and participation in keeping with his dignity and freedom. Deep down the hearts of our peoples are stirred by the desire for a loving relationship between God and His people in their daily lives, in their concrete situation: religio-cultural, socio-economic, political (cf. Workshop Report).

Integral human liberation and development, therefore, is in the end achieved in and through the redemption of Christ, the presence of the Risen Lord Who by the power of His Spirit transforms us all into His living Body.

Christian prayer, far from alienating us from the world we ought to build, is necessary in order to be committed as *Christians* to human needs and suffering. While making us no longer of the world, "prayer renders us more effective" for working in the world, more involved in the integral salvation of man, which should begin always with the conversion of the heart to Christ, and will finish with the conversion of structures and situations which keep our peoples in that deprivation and powerlessness (cf. *Evangelii nuntiandi*, 18, 36). Christian prayer helps us to remain within the healthy tension between wholehearted dedication to the cause of the prosperity of society on earth and the expectation of the coming of God's Kingdom at the end of times. Christian prayer preserves our complete openness to the Spirit who fills our hearts with charity, and keeps us alert to discern what actions to take in order to meet the real human needs of our peoples.

## II. Education for Prayer in the Catholic Schools of Asia

Another important area for the prayer-life of the Church in Asia is the school, particularly, our Catholic schools. Next to family education, school education is given high priority in Asian society. For the young population of Asia — the object of special concern of the Church today — the school is a major agent of personalization and socialization.

For most of our Catholic schools in this part of the world, this is realized by forming “the young to dialogue with God in the different situations of their personal life... stimulate them to overcome all individualism and to discover, in the light of faith, their specific vocation to live responsibly in solidarity with other people” (Catholic School, n. 45).

Prayer plays an indispensable role in the realization of this vital mission. For it makes us aware of our dependence and relationship with others under the fatherhood of God. Through prayer a wider concern is created; love for and acceptance of every human person is heightened. Indeed, without prayer Christian formation, which aims for the formation of the entire person, is impossible.

Those responsible for the functioning of our Catholic schools should therefore strive to educate for prayer. They should create an atmosphere of recollection and praying in the life of the academic community. Under the guidance and example of administrators and teachers, let our students reflect on themselves, their environments, the living force in society, dig deeper and find their roots in the Supreme Being, Creator and Giver of life.

## III. Prayer as Witness in the Everyday Life of the Church of Asia

The Church as the People of God is to be the God’s saving action in Asia. Like her Master and Lord Jesus Christ, a man of prayer, the Church must be in union with the Heavenly Father through continual prayer. She must be a praying community, so that the mystery of the Church will be evident, and her mission fulfilled when she is and appears as a praying and worshipping community, as a ministering and serving community, and as the servant Church.

In prayer the Church helps men and the world in realizing themselves and reaching their destiny to transcend the present and themselves, and to go beyond and become something more. In prayer the

Church becomes a witness to the fullness of salvation, that is, the union with God. Prayer gives us an awareness of ourselves and of God's presence.

The awareness of God's presence in our prayer invites us to respond to His saving word in our everyday life by total self-gift and surrender. And this, we feel, should be also our response towards all men, in family life, in the Christian community, in society. Prayer induces an attitude of self-gift to others in various forms capable of creating a society of justice and love.

Prayer cannot be limited to our persons, but must expand to the problems and the concerns of our life today, so that they are imbued with prayer. We draw strength and inspirations for our daily life from our personal and community prayer. In this way prayer has a value as witness, is recognized as meaningful to our life, and becomes also a service to society.

#### IV. Prayer, Community Worship, and Inculturation

The II Vatican Council urges all Christians to be "familiar with their national and religious traditions, and uncover with gladness and respect those seeds of the Word which lie hidden among them" AG 11. At the same time, "just as happened in the economy of the Incarnation, the young churches which are rooted in Christ and built on the foundations of the Apostles, must take over all the riches of the nations which have been given to Christ as an inheritance, and borrow from the customs, traditions, wisdom, teaching, arts and sciences of their people everything which could be used to praise the glory of the Creator" AG 22.

It is in pursuance of this incarnational economy that our assembly feels the urgent need to recommend that the prayer-life of our churches be lived more in keeping with the genius of our peoples and the religious traditions of our countries.

We are daily more and more convinced that the Spirit is leading us not to some nebulous syncretism but to an organic integration of all that is good, true and beautiful in the traditions and cultures of our nations, into the vast treasures of our Christian heritage.

Christianity has much to offer Asia in the realm of *personal prayer*, centred on the historical Jesus Christ as the way to the Father; and of *liturgical prayer* which gathers the community of believers around the

same Jesus Christ in the Eucharist as He gives Himself in sacrifice to us that we may give ourselves in service to others.

But Asia likewise has a great deal to give to the Church: the prayer of immanence; the specific techniques of contemplation as found in Zen and Yoga; simplified prayer forms like the nam-japa (name-prayer) and bhajans (repetitive chanting of short prayers); a characteristic insistence on interiority, renunciation and the "wholeness" of the human person, body-psyche-spirit.

Many of these spiritual traditions emerging from our local cultures, though good and useful in themselves, have at times been looked upon by some in our churches with suspicion, hence there is need of a well-coordinated policy of education and catechesis of the entire people of God that will help to remove obstacles and answer objections, so that slowly but steadily indigenous elements will find a natural place in the prayer-life of the churches of Asia.

Our pioneers, past and present, who have attempted to make the Church in our lands more truly Christian and more authentically Asian, deserve our grateful thanks. We would like to encourage them all, but especially the local people of our own churches who should now be taking the initiative and playing a role of leadership in this vital area which will help the people of our lands to recognize the face of Christ in the prayer-life of the churches of Asia.

#### **V. Christian Prayer and Interreligious Dialogue: Enrichment of Christian Prayer**

The many religious traditions of our peoples contain significant and positive elements in the economy of God's design of salvation. They are bearers of profound spiritual and ethical meanings and values which for many centuries have been the treasury of the religious experience of our ancestors, from which our contemporaries do not cease to draw light and strength. They have helped to give shape to the histories and cultures of our nations, and continue to be the authentic expression of the noblest longings of their hearts, and the home of their contemplation and prayer (FABC I, IV).

When Vatican II enjoins on us "in witness to Christian faith and life, to acknowledge, preserve and promote the spiritual and moral goods found among adherents of various religions, as well as the values of their

society and culture” (cf. *Nostra Aetate*, no 2), it demands that, according to our capabilities, we make our own this religious experience through prayer and personal reflection. We must assimilate these religious values into our prayer-life.

A spirituality of prayer of immanence is characteristic of the Asian continent: awareness of God and awareness of others and of the universe, including an awareness of self, blossoming in virtues such as good will, generosity, non-violence, compassion. The aspects of interiority, recollection and silence, characteristic of that spirituality and prayer, can contribute much to a more authentic Christian spirituality in our communities (Archbishop Lourdasamy); while making us keenly aware of the immanence of God in ourselves, it will open our hearts for God’s presence in all things, especially in our neighbours. For two reasons we should look at the positive aspects of prayer in the religions of Asia, namely, because by the providential working of the Holy Spirit the seeds of the Word had already been planted by God in ancient cultures prior to the preaching of the Gospel (AG, 18), and because the indigenous quality of their prayer-forms stems from the cultures and habits of our peoples.

In dialogue we must learn to go beyond a simple external acceptance to the deeper meanings and intentions of the participants adhering to other faiths and beliefs. We are to recognize in them, none the less when expressed in religious forms alien to our own, the voice of the Spirit bearing witness to the marvellous variety of God’s Self-revelation to man, and able to influence the way we lift up our hearts to the Lord.

The attitude of authentic prayer is necessary for interreligious dialogue. The awareness of God’s presence in our neighbour will draw us ever closer together and make us approach others from a deep religious motivation. Prayer is the very soul of interreligious dialogue, where we meet at the level of the heart. This will deepen our ability to enter the spirit and mind of others, to feel with them, and to allow the full impact of their spirituality to reach us.

In view of mutual enrichment in dialogue through prayer, we must have a great sensitivity to each other’s feelings; any expression of superiority should be avoided, as should anything that would be likely to hurt or be misunderstood by others. Moreover, we must be honest and engaged in dialogue, to share, in a spirit of sincerely disinterested brotherly love, the treasures of our faith.

## **VI. Seminaries and Religious Houses as Centers of Formation for Prayer in the Asian Context**

To build up and nurture His Church community, God continually sows the seeds of the priestly and religious vocation in the hearts of those whom He has chosen. These seeds of vocation must be carefully discerned and fostered in such a way that with pure motivation and thorough single-mindedness these chosen young men and women may strain every nerve to become "holy" according to the pattern of their Lord Jesus Christ.

Prayer, therefore, in the life of the aspirant is simply the daily and conscious living out of the initial covenant between him and the Lord. And as such it must be the atmosphere in which he lives and grows, with the Eucharistic sacrifice and the Eucharistic presence being the core and source of all his aspirations, consolations and solutions.

In the Asian context the future priest or religious will search for his self-identity, truly Christian and truly Asian, by recognizing God's saving presence, and thus he will be open to be aided by the methods of prayer and spiritual life to be found in these surroundings.

Recognizing the presence of the Risen Lord Who through His Spirit animates, purifies and strengthens also those noble longings by which the human family strives to make its life more human (GS, no 38.), he will grow into a true man of God and man for others in the Asia of today.

Along with modern methods for personal growth in maturity, tools must be available for checking and evaluating genuine growth in priestly holiness.

The life-style of an aspirant to priesthood or religious life must be that which agrees with the Asian ideal of a man-of-God and a man-for-others in the world of today. Simplicity, contentment, renunciation and concern for others, which are the Oriental characteristics of a man of prayer, will easily be acquired by periodic exposure to actual life-situations, followed by theological reflection on them and on their future ministry.

Religious and priestly formation must not only include the practice of prayer but also its pedagogy, so that prayer-life can be effectively communicated to all levels of the People of God, especially to youth, according to the measure of God's grace.



## **PART IV. BRIEFER VERSION OF THE FINAL STATEMENT**

### **1. Introduction**

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

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

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

### **2. Our Theme**

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

It is significant that our meeting was held in India, "a land of ancient culture, the cradle of great religions," as this enabled us not only to study and pray much, but also to experience some Asian forms of prayer.

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

### **3. The present religious context of Asia**

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

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

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

#### 4. The Church's response: Prayer

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

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

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

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

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

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

#### 5. Integral human development

Christian prayer is necessary for genuine human liberation and development, and to bring man to his full stature as a son of God.

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

It is prayer which calls on the Spirit to create within us both the courage and the love to bring about a conversion in men's hearts and the

renewal of all structures of society.

## **6. Christian formation**

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

## **7. Witness in everyday life**

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

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

## **8. Inculturation**

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

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

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

## **9. Interreligious dialogue**

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

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

## **10. Formation in prayer**

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

## **11. Conclusion**

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

Our prayer is rooted in faith.

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

That same faith tells us that it is the power of God's Spirit which will renew the world. That power is found especially in contemplative communities. Their vocation is precious to the Church. Their lives, lived in all fidelity, are fruitful beyond human reckoning! They give witness to the primacy of God in human history; their worship speaks to us of the God "Who is not for the use of man," but on Whose mercy and love all of human existence finally depends — the God Who is on man's side, but the God Who alone is truly God! We ask them to pray for the Church in Asia. We have confidence in the fruitfulness of their prayer.

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

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

## 12. Prayer

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

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

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## PART VI. A DAILY PRAYER FOR ASIA

Jesus,  
My Lord and dearly beloved brother,  
Teach me to adore God my Father  
    to acknowledge my sinfulness before him  
    to offer him the sincere desire of my heart  
        to belong to him,  
        to serve him fully in his Church.

In a special way today  
    make me faithful to your teaching:  
    just, truthful, honest, hardworking;  
one who serves all his brothers and sisters kindly for your sake.

Today,  
as every day of this year,  
I come before you  
in the name of all my brothers and sisters of Asia  
those who know you,  
and those who do not.

May they all today  
rejoice in your love.  
Give peace to every home.  
Let no one remain hungry today;  
may no sick person lack necessary medicine;  
may no one's heart be closed by pride, hatred or jealousy,  
to the needs of his brothers and sisters.

Lord Jesus,  
You were born in Asia.  
Grant that all peoples of Asia  
come to know you and to love you.

So that  
one day  
all of us  
may praise the Father in your Church  
in the sacrifice of the Mass  
which you have given us  
as a memorial of your love.

Mother of Jesus  
You who love us, the people of Asia,  
protect us,  
lead us,  
till you gather us all  
into the everlasting kingdom of your Son.  
Amen.

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