

MARY TRULY A WOMAN OF OUR TIMES

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1. MARY, TRULY A WOMAN OF OUR TIMES

- Bishop Antonio Luis Tagle, DD

Introduction

I will present some points for reflection and eventual action based on the objectives of the conference.

Objectives:

1. *To encourage the Church to look at Mary as a woman who lived through many of the trying situations that women experience today, and to encourage women to draw courage and inspiration from her.*
2. *To provide for the continuing process of awareness of women's role and hence provide a guide to implement this programme in the home diocese of the participants.*

The presentation has two parts. First our concern for the full humanity of woman created in God's image requires a recovery of Mary as woman of our times that is meant to impel us to evangelization. Second, I will attempt to tie up devotion to Mary in the Church and our Mission of Evangelization.

Devotion to Mary is central in the Mission of Evangelization. It is the hallmark of our Catholic faith. Pope Paul VI in *Marialis Cultus*, 37 - indicated how the renewal of Catholic devotion to Mary should be done. "It should be biblical, liturgical, ecumenical, and anthropological and should alert us to human realities." It shows how Mary "can be considered a mirror of the expectations of the men and women of our times," especially of contemporary woman.

This conference has a basis in the encyclical of Pope Paul VI which is very appropriate to our theme, "Mary Truly a Woman of Our Times".

I would like to present some insights from Elizabeth Johnson – how the biblical portrayal of Mary could be re-appropriated by us so that her full humanity could shine out. Also we will get a biblical inspired view of the humanity of Mary and also gain valuable insights for the connection between our devotion to Mary and evangelization.

Part I: Mary in the Gospels & Evangelization

Pope Paul VI issued a post-synodal exhortation *Evangelii Nuntiandi*. Evangelization is a complex reality, bringing the Good News into all strata of humanity and thru its influence transforming humanity from within, so that the transforming power of the Gospel will heal the split between the gospel and culture; between faith and ordinary life, the split also between the structures of society and the conscience of human beings. Pope Paul VI wants that evangelization heal that split.

When we look at Mary as depicted in the gospels we see a picture of humanity which is often forgotten in our devotions. Marian piety shows Mary as the super woman, highly exalted, making us forget she was an ordinary woman. Art forms too come in ways which ordinary women cannot identify with. We do not deny her glory with her Son in the presence of God today. Even Jesus remains human in his glory. True devotion to Mary should lead us to her humanity – rediscovering her humanity – she will help us identify the true experience of women that needs to be evangelized. From Mary we learn how in various aspects of contemporary life we see where that grace should be brought. Not only women, men too can draw inspiration from her. Pope Paul VI says Mary mirrors for us, contemporary men and women, our expectations for a better humanity.

Biblical episodes of Mary's role

I will expand on eight aspects of Mary as woman.

1. **Mary as a youthful disciple** – The Annunciation Luke 1: 26 – 38.

Today, youth are presented as a problem. We do not celebrate youth. Mary was a youth. What type of youth? She coped very well with an extraordinary situation, – the visit of an angel, bringing a message out of this world. This young girl was an image of composure and equanimity. She asked intelligent questions, she knew how to listen; she knew how to discern and acted in faith upon divine invitation. In Mary we rediscover the grace of youth, the grace of youthful discipleship. We need to inspire youth to discover their capacity to cope with mission early in their lives; to affirm their intelligence, to be discerning, to act, to hope, as the character exhibited by Mary. Our young people are vulnerable to exploitation by media and the consumerist world. Part of our mission is to discover the youth manifested in Mary and help our youth to listen, discern, and act.

2. **Mary was a traveling woman** - The Visitation Luke 1: 39 - 45.

Mary seeks out her kinswoman Elizabeth. She kept Elizabeth company in time of need and brought her great joy.

There is a parish Church in Manila dedicated to ‘Mary of the Airways’. I was asked how come there is ‘Mary of the Airways’? We do not need a vision to make her ‘Mary of the Airways’, she was a traveling woman! She traveled with a purpose, out of compassion, to share joy and solidarity. Often we too travel with a purpose to share compassion, to connect with people, relatives and friends.

Traveling helps us enter other worlds, enter history and times, and cultures. But the phenomena of tourism, trafficking, refugees, migrant workers, and sex tourism has reduced women to commodities in the workplace and in the flesh trade, which is the crassest part of tourism. The dignity of travel, bringing joy and compassion to others, has been marred by these sorry phenomena. At airports and seaports, I see women leaving, I say

a prayer for them, that their life's journey will be safe and joyful – like Mary in the home of Elizabeth.

A woman approached me at Manila airport. Are you a priest? Are you a bishop? She asked me to pray for her. She was traveling to Taipei as a migrant worker, to an unknown future. Will she be safe, will this be an act of solidarity with her family for whom she works and endures loneliness and separation. It is a travel into insecurity where Mary can accompany migrant workers.

3. **Mary as a pregnant woman** - Luke 1: 46 - 55.

The '*Magnificat*' was spoken at the encounter of two pregnant women both bursting with life. These two women were in anomalous pregnancies which was the work of God's grace. The pregnant Mary broke into prophecy. Both women broke into prophecy which came with an explosion of the Holy Spirit. Their wombs which were lifeless became life giving. She saw the connection between the life she received to the life-giving action to the poor of Israel. She said "Israel rejoice, I have experienced God's life giving joy". This comes from the experience of being pregnant, which is her life giving mission. She is with child who will be the Son of the Most High.

Pregnancy today has become a very casual thing. There was a lot of excitement in the past, now it is seen as burdensome. Instead of prophecy "The lord has done great things for us", it is "Oh! I am pregnant again". Children are not seen as gifts anymore, they are burdens. Pregnancy has been commercialized. Shopping centers sell things for pregnancy, not even needed. The sense of the privilege of naming of a child has been lost.

4. **Mary as an oppressed & refugee woman** – Matthew 2: 13-23

In her moment of childbirth she followed the orders of the occupying forces. She could not give birth, anywhere she wanted, she was forced to travel and give birth far from home because of

the census ordered at that time. After giving birth, she had to flee the wrath of a jealous ruler. Mary the woman, mother and wife, knows the pain and the sorrow of being a pawn of occupying forces and victim of jealous and insecure rulers. This is an aspect of Mary's humanity, in which we see clearly how she identifies with the refugee, displaced peoples, the homeless. She invites us to bring the Good News and to manifest God's protection of the homeless, the weak and the displaced; to bring peace and justice, so that rulers and power brokers will be compassionate and humble.

5. **Mary as married woman.** - Luke 2: 22-52.

In both episodes of searching for and finding Jesus we find Mary, as wife, collaborating with Joseph in raising their child Jesus. Both are co-responsible for the child, in presenting the child, looking for the child and rearing the child. She could be an image of what marriage and family life needs to recover today. The spirit of collaboration and communion between husband and wife, in seeking out God's will and seeking out each other, when one is lost; like Mary and Joseph remaining with each other when they could not understand what this 12 year old boy was about.

6. **Mary woman of celebration** - John 2: 1-12

At the wedding at Cana she helped to get more wine, which is a sign of celebration. We see in Mary a sign of sensitivity who understood the meaning of celebration with compassion. Most probably the married couple were relatives. Only a relative could do what she did. She saved them from embarrassment and stigma. Mary did something by approaching her son. He probably said something to this effect, "you may be the closest woman to me, but who are you to tell me when the time has come". Yet she wants the celebration to continue so she turns to the men and says "Do whatever he tells you". Her intuition was right, it was his hour. She as mother knew it. The miracle happened. The celebration continued. It was the dawning of the reign of God.

We are supposed to be people of celebration as people of God - to evangelize the world of celebration, where entertainment and recreation, have become the places where men and women are exploited. Places of celebration have become places of exploitation and manipulation. Mary, who knew what true celebration meant, will help us move away from what contributes to exploitation, especially of the young; and types of celebration at the expense of woman's human dignity.

7. **Woman as the victim mother** - Mary standing at the foot of the cross - John 19: 25 - 27

Mary grieved for the violent destruction of her son. She possibly was reviewing the episodes of his life from the visit of an angel, to hiding Jesus from the enemy, to now on the cross. We behold Mary at the foot of the cross grieving at this senseless violence, but it did not destroy her or her faith. She refused to be part of the total victimization. She remained strong and courageous. Though the other disciples did not want to be associated with Jesus, she proclaimed I am his mother, standing at the cross. Mary stands at the foot of the cross with all mothers who have experienced any forms of violence done to their children, to protest such violence by standing with victims and mothers with their children. Mary seems to cry out aloud, no more crucifixion!

8. **Mary as a prayerful community disciple waiting for the Holy Spirit** - Acts 1: 13 - 14

At Pentecost, Mary was a part of the community in watchful prayer, in hopeful expectation of promised power from on high. She is in union with all those who are patiently waiting for a new heaven and a new earth. She accompanies them especially the poor so that their waiting may not lead to despair. Waiting as hopeful expectation is often thwarted when we want things done quickly our own way. Today we live in an age of instant gratification, we have instant coffee and instant noodles. Waiting has become a burden not a virtue. People cannot wait to become

rich, they become corrupt. Instead of waiting for God, we do it our way. It becomes our rule of terror and exploitation.

Mary is in union with those who prayerfully wait for the new heaven and the new earth. Waiting does not have to lead to despair. Mary is with all those who wait hopefully, she teaches us there is no need to despair.

The life of Mary depicts the journey of any common woman, daughter, sister, wife, widow, mother, especially in the concerns of women of today. Aside from opening our eyes to the women of today, she opens our eyes to bring the good news to these strata of society so that they could experience the power of her Son.

Mary experienced the travails of life that women experience. We see parallels in the conditions of life being faced by women of this time.

Part II: The Humanity of Mary

We come to Evangelisation which is human promotion and social transformation.

The humanizing power of Marian piety could be a powerful force in this important aspect of evangelization. We observe that some people who are staunch devotees of Mary shy away from human promotion, human development and social transformation. Marian piety is reduced only to rosaries, processions, novenas etc. On the other hand we have people who are involved in human development and social transformation and look down on Marian devotion as superstition. So we see the split between devotion to Mary and the transformation of society, between faith and involvement in human concerns. The ideal is, the more devoted I am to Mary the more I am impelled to work for social transformation.

Cardinal Ratzinger said, “If there is one thing that shines through Mary it is her faith”. Her faith humanized her and made her the woman she was. Evangelization, as the vision of the Church is witness in faith. It means sharing the Good News of my faith. Personal faith and communal faith in Jesus provides the context and motivation for evangelization. Without faith, evangelization is reduced to development projects, but not evangelizing moments. Even if we use the name of Jesus it becomes merely a programme without the face of Jesus. Jesus, who is the Good News, must be seen in our development programmes.

If we remove the faith component in evangelization the face of Christ disappears. Without faith the Church that evangelizes becomes merely an implementing arm of a project. It becomes a structure set up by policies, rules, networks, and the Church loses its face and identity as the body of Christ, as God’s people, as the living temple of the Spirit. Evangelization gives to the Church, as a community of faith, the face of Christ.

Mary and our devotion to Mary is important here, as Cardinal Ratzinger said - “In her faith, Mary gave a human face to Jesus. The Word became flesh. It was not just a physical event, it was an event of faith. When she said ‘let it be done to me’, she became the mother of Jesus in faith, and in that faith she gave a human face to Jesus. In her faith we find the face of the Church. The titles that were first attributed to Mary, we attributed to the Church. The virgin bride, the immaculate, the community assumed into heaven. In Mary we see the face of the Church. The Church reflects the face of Mary. *Lumen Gentium*, Chapter 8, locates Mary within the mystery of Christ and the Church. Devotion to Mary should lead us to give to the world a witness to the faith of the Church as the body of Christ.

Our evangelizing action, through our devotion to Mary gives to the world, the human face of Christ and the face of the Church.

Conclusion

At the Visitation, the words of Elizabeth, when Mary came to her were, "Who am I that the mother of my Lord should come to me". This indicates that she knew Mary is becoming a mother, filled with the Spirit. So she was able to prophesy that her faith was what made her a mother giving to the Son of God a human form and a human face. In her obedience Mary gives her human and feminine self to God, in giving to God, she gave a human face to her Son in her faith.

That leads to the *Magnificat*. It is a song of praise and profession of faith. In the coming of her Son Jesus - *Redemptoris Mater*, 36 - 37 - Mary recognizes that God is the source of all gifts. Through faith she could recognize the gifts given to her and the people of Israel as gifts from God. She had the mindset of discovering the gifts of life. This mindset is fast disappearing. When we look at creatures and humans, do we see them as gifts? When we see things according to its use, we lose the sense of gift. Seen as objects and commodities to be used, people and creation are seldom respected as gifts. Human development cannot prosper until we rediscover the sense of gift in each one. Not as commodities to be used for profit; so how do we use them?

The integrity of creation cannot be promoted unless we recover the sense of gift. The offertory prayer tells of this gift. Without the sense of gift how can we promote human beings?

The *Magnificat* gives the face of Jesus. When disciples see a gift in a Judas, in an enemy, they show the face of the Church. Mary in the *Magnificat* helps me to recover my sight to see all as gift. As part of the gift of God, Mary sees God's mighty hand, that will raise up the poor, feed the hungry. With the same mighty hand God will send the rich empty away, pull the mighty from their thrones. God is being presented with a face, attentive to those who are deprived of gifts in the world. Mary gives a critique and a warning to those who propagate victimization. This is all part of commitment to preaching the good news. Her prayer of praise,

becomes a recommitment to preach the good news to the poor. I think it was Mary who really taught Jesus. In the *Magnificat* we see in a nutshell what Jesus preached. We see the *Magnificat* in the beatitudes. She gave a face to the teaching of Jesus. In our faith we hope the Church will also be given a face. Mary in solidarity with the poor is the perfect image of freedom and liberation of humanity and the universe.

Mary fully human, fully woman of faith is truly a woman for our times, because our time needs evangelization in different aspects of life. Therefore our faith life would need for us as Church to give witness to Christ.

This paper has been transcribed from the recorded presentation of the paper.

2. MARY, MODEL OF DISCIPLESHIP IN THE CHURCH

- Choi, Hae Young, rscj

1. Introduction

It is my privilege to have a chance to reflect on Mary as a true model of discipleship for our times at this second Bishop's Institute for Lay Apostolate (BILA) on Women in East Asia. Why do we try to have a new understanding of Christian discipleship with a focus on "Mary, truly a woman of this age"? From the beginning of the third millennium, we have often heard the expression that the "Twenty-first century is the era of women". Whenever I hear this, I have the hope that the Catholic Church would see women from a new perspective through Mary, because, it would meet the needs of the changing world.

At the 14th AMOR meeting held in Seoul on April 30, 2006, I made a presentation titled "Blessed are the Women of Faith: Women Religious of Asia/Oceania called to be contemplative prophets". At that time I pointed out three reasons for the

contemporary world, especially women, to have a new understanding of Mary.

The first is anthropological. The idealistic image of the human person who has integrated one's masculinity and femininity, and is balanced in reason, emotion and spirituality, a global citizen beyond a nation or a state can be found in Mary.

The second reason is ecclesiastical. Through Mary, the Catholic Church, with its male dominated, rigid, and hierarchical structures, can show the maternal image of God with love and compassion. When it has recovered its femininity it can become a church which is gift filled with the Spirit.

The third reason is a practical reason for inter-religious dialogue on issues of global peace and gender equality. Protestant female theologians have led women to solidarity and cooperation through Mary. A new understanding of Mary's position and role has a big influence on the dignity and identity of women. They also emphasize that interest in gender equality and world peace plays an important role in ecumenical and inter-religious dialogue.

Today, I would like to consider Christian discipleship and the image of the Church we aim for in Mary through my presentation of "Mary, model of discipleship in the Church". The virtues of Mary as a model of discipleship that Catholics would like to accept and follow are neither abstract nor romantic. She represents those virtues of the whole Church not just a list of partial ones.

2. Mary, Mother and Model of the Church

Traditionally, the Church is identified as "Bride and Mother" signifying a church that generates and nourishes faith, a church that cares for and serves with the ethics of love, and a church continuously giving and fostering life.

The image of Mary is linked with that of women in the Church. The femininity expressed in the identity of the Church is the fundamental aspect to give birth to a new life and bring change in the world as it is seen in the family. This understanding includes deeper love, trust and mutual collaboration towards creation rather than any authoritarian dominance. Early Mary has been the center of the Ecclesia, called Mother, and a symbol of the Church. The image of the Church is also represented by the image of family life and her femininity is expressed as spouse and mother. "The image of spouse and mother presupposes the intimate relationship of God's family."¹

We can see an ideal of living community, in the image of Mary we dream of in the Church, as representative of God. We experience God's femininity, virginity and maternity through and in Mary and the feminine aspect of creation is raised up to God's domain.

2.1. Mary's Femininity: The holistic Church recovering God's femininity

Through Mary, as a spouse of God, femininity is celebrated and reaches an absolute fullness. The mystery of God reveals God's feminine aspects and femininity becomes a dwelling place for God, through the Holy Spirit.

The idea that the Church composes 'God's family' in her identity as bride and spouse of Christ based on the perspective of Mary as model of the Church is considered to be related to the call that traditionally women are to guide Christian families with their motherhood and virginity. It suggests a calling that all the members of the Church, both men and women, should have as children of God.

¹ (c.f. Lumen Gentium #6)

The Church's image of maternity and virginity is far removed from its authoritarian, hierarchical and patriarchal image. Vatican II has continuously aimed for "a church working together", "a participatory church" and "communion as God's people" beyond the existing hierarchy. [The Korean Church has also explored various ways to create a communion of communities through the small community movement, but it still has difficulties in creating communities where all the members experience communion equally because of its structures or individual's lack of awareness. Without raising individual awareness, no structure can bring about change or improvement.]

Society today prefers democracy in politics, mutual collaboration, network in relationships and horizontal structures stressing individual freedom. In this scenario women's potential of care, support and giving life is recognized as an important value to be developed.

The Church identifies women's call as maternity and virginity as she sees it as a call to complement God's masculinity. This signifies that the Church must be born again as a holistic church combining God's masculinity and femininity, a horizontal and equal church, and a life-giving church of generating and nourishing life moving out of the authoritarian, hierarchical and patriarchal church.

2.2. Mary's Virginity: The Church filled with the Spirit that obeys the Word and proclaims faith

Mary devoted her whole life to the call of conceiving, nourishing and accompanying the Savior in God's plan of salvation. Mary, as a person with God's grace, God's favorite (Lk 1:28) agreed to God's favor. "Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord. May it be done to me according to your word." (Lk 1:38) As a result, the word "nothing will be impossible for God" (Lk 1:37) could be realized.

The Holy Spirit comes upon Mary (c.f. Lk 1:35) and makes her God's dwelling place. It is Jesus Christ, holy life of the Savior that Mary conceives. Through the Holy Spirit, God's femininity reaches its fullness and the Holy Spirit makes Mary mother of Jesus. Mary, by proclaiming herself as a blessed one, gives witness to her faith. "For he has looked upon his handmaid's lowliness; behold, from now on will all ages call me blessed. The Mighty One has done great things for me" (c.f. Lk 1:48-49a; Lk 11:27).

Mary's virginity calls for us to listen to God's words and see the world from a contemplative perspective. The discerning attitude of those who seek God's will means openness, ability to respond instantly with a flexible response.

Mary's virginity shows God's omnipotence; how God directs the history of salvation with the help of a woman. It also symbolises the virgin birth of Jesus. Mary's love comes from God's sanctifying grace and demonstrates the love and fidelity of a woman who devoted herself to God. The focus on Mary's virginity does not lie in biological virginity but stresses that the Church as God's people belongs to God and is open to the Holy Spirit. The value of her virginity glorifies her fidelity of faith.

2.3. Mary's Maternity: The Church nourishing life and bringing forth peace and justice

The image of Mary as mother of the Church is already assumed in John's Gospel. In it she is expressed as 'Mother of Jesus' instead of her own name, which clearly shows she is an essential partner in Jesus' Mission. In a wedding ceremony in Cana where Jesus and his disciples were also invited, Mary noticed that the wine ran short and said to Jesus, "They have no wine" (Jn 2:3). Jesus' response to this is quite surprising. He said, "Woman, how does your concern affect me? My hour has not yet come" (Jn 2:4). Mary could advance the time of God's salvation, the time of Jesus' mission by watching the needs of others with sensitivity and making her request. Her openness and creative conformity to

God was extended to neighbors. Her gentle but firm saying “Do whatever he tells you” tells us the nature of Jesus’ discipleship.

At the moment of his death on the cross, Jesus connects his mother with his disciples. “When Jesus saw his mother and the disciple whom he loved, he said to his mother, ‘Woman, behold, your son.’ Then he said to the disciple, ‘Behold, your mother.’ And from that hour the disciple took her into his home” (Jn 19:25-27). As mother of disciples, Mary’s motherhood forms not a blood relation but a new relationship among those who listen to and follow God.

Mary stands in the center of the faith community as a spiritual mother (Acts 1:14). In Jesus’ life, we can imagine, Mary was always a reassuring partner and supporter. It is likely that Mary influenced Jesus and His way of thinking which is strongly reflected in his way of life and public life. It implies that Mary worked in close partnership with Jesus.

The Church is symbolized by the image of mother church and her mission is expressed in her maternity. The Church is considered ‘a mother’ as she increases members of God’s household by continuously giving birth to new children and ‘a teacher’ as she brings them up in the baptismal grace by developing their sense of faith with teachings of the truth of faith (c.f. Catechesi Tradendae # 12).

3. Mary, a True Model of Discipleship in the Asian Church

Today we face an inevitable demand that the world should change from a hierarchical, patriarchal, and vertical paradigm to that of equality; horizontal relationships and networks that move away from the culture of male dominance to that of female care and life-giving. In a hierarchical and dualistic way of thinking, all discrimination comes from sexism. It is against the order of creation to discriminate women just because they are female in spite of the fact that half of humankind is woman. Any kind of differentiation including gender, race, class, culture and so on

should be eliminated and all creation should be in place as image of God (Imago Dei). We should recover the ethics of feminine love to replace the culture of limitless or competitive development. The path to solidarity and unity of humankind is a partnership between men and women. The horizontal paradigm of solidarity and unity among women goes beyond patriarchal culture.

Mary was faithful to her call to be 'the mother of Jesus' as a believer who listened to and lived by God's word. As 'blessed one' in God's grace she played the role of a carrier of life generating, nourishing and bringing up life. In Mary's life we can find a model of Christian discipleship in the Asian context. I would like to suggest this picture of discipleship we Christians should follow in the figure of Mary, mother of Christ and humankind, especially mother of the faithful.

3.1. Mary, Who Tells the Importance and Wisdom of Life

The source of our identity as Christians comes from the belief that we are eligible to be loved by God as God's beloved children and we are so precious that God became human for us. We need to take responsibility for our life by reconciling with our past and being healed of our wounds. It means we should lead a God-centered life. Mary's belief that "Nothing will be impossible for God" (Lk 1:37) as "the handmaid of the Lord", gave her courage and endurance to carry out her mission as mother of Jesus and to follow Jesus to his suffering and death on the cross.

In Mary we can see a brave young woman full of faith who surrenders herself to God. Mary made the choice about her mission independently and was determined to take responsibility for her action. It is wrong to see Mary's response as helpless or as passive obedience without any respect to her free will. Rather, she shows us a type of person who has a new vision of being faithful to God's call apart from any human system or customs, with a freedom far beyond the values of the world. She demonstrates a determination and power to cultivate her own

destiny with creativity freed from others' attention or law with a self-confidence of entrusting the future to God, and freedom of not being afraid of the world's attention. It is a liberated person who submits herself wholly to God.

Christianity that was centered in the western world is no longer the center of the world. It now shares a common mission to make peace and co-exist with other peoples and religions. In this age of disbelief and uncertainty, I think, it is the most important mission for Christians to believe in and give witness to the invisible God. Today there are few who are attracted to religion or commit themselves to their own faith. What is important for Christians in multi cultural circumstances is to have their identity as 'God's beloved children' and to be faithful to their Christian vocation.

Mary as mother of life awakens us to realize the dignity of human life in a world where life is hardly respected. For the jobless young generation or the depressed elderly in an aging society, it is very important to understand and proclaim that they are blessed ones with a mission from God. Women alone are made to carry the burden of problems related to life including contraception, abortion, low birth rate, domestic violence and suicide. In addressing these issues, women are forced to take all responsibility and to get sacrificed. The poor women, in particular, have to suffer more. Like Mary who was told "Blessed are you who believed," when we realize the preciousness of our life as blessed ones, both men and women can be protagonists of Gospel proclamation to give witness to the God of life in this materialistic world that makes light of life.

The present Korean society is materially better off than in the past but there are an increasing number of suicides because they do not have any meaning in life or cannot endure stiff competition or extreme pressure. The percentage of the Catholics is about 10% and that of Christians including Protestants is almost 30% in Korea. But it is very shocking to read the report that Korea's rate of suicide of the elderly and youth is the highest among the nations of the organization for economic cooperation and

development (OECD). I think the point of discipleship is to be persons who give hope to others even in a desperate state with an enduring power of life.

Divine motherhood is very important in Mary's life. In a society where life is made little of, it is quite necessary to make it known that the root of human dignity lies in the fact that all life comes from God and one's value stems not from social success or recognition but from God.

3.2. Mary, Calling for Integrity of Natural Life and Order of Creation

Our mission as disciples of Christ today, is to recover the damaged ecological system and order of creation. Last winter, we were stunned at climate changes, snowstorms, earthquakes and tsunamis throughout the world owing to unprecedented global warming. And we also realized that we had to take measures as quick as possible. We face a sense of crisis that someday in the near future the earth as well as human life may be destroyed. Though geoscientists have kept warning, it is not easy for those who chase economic principles of limitless competition, interests in growth and development to contain modern conveniences and stop this form of development. Environmental crisis is not just an issue of ecological destruction or pollution but also an issue of overall human culture and survival of all human beings.

We sense the threat to the earth community caused by pollution and destruction of ecosystems and realize that we should move from a profit-centered way of thinking to a life-centered one. With the cosmic view of the earth as an organic network of life, we cannot help considering our task of recovering God's order of creation.

In the current interdependent world, it is also a historical mission to live together with those of different religions, races, and ethnicities. In order to survive, each one has to learn how to live together. We also understand that all life on earth shares a

common history and is deeply inter-related. As all creatures as well as humans are interdependent and interrelated. We must move from anthro-centrism to life-centrism and establish ecological justice and ethics for the future. When various life forms on earth are in place with their own purpose as God's creation, then only can earth be fully alive.

The Catholic Church has great power as an organization. So it should be a model for eliminating all kinds of discrimination. We need, not just a partial change but a radical reform. We must take an active part in protecting human life and earth life through the curriculum of Catholic schools as well as in Catholic institutions and parishes. Various pro-life and other ecological movements are critical at this time for protecting all life.

3.3. Mary, Gathering All Humankind into one Family in Multi-cultural Communities

Traditionally, family is understood as a group of people composed by marriage, blood relation or adoption. The Church considers the family to be the first natural community with its own basic rights and placed it at the center of social life. But today the numbers of traditional and nuclear families, are decreasing and they do not have moral dominance because there are various types of families and more and more people experience difficulty in adjusting to the traditional way of family life.

Earlier Jesus suggested an eschatological vision of "God's new household" beyond the category of blood family institutionalized by law. "Who are my mother and brothers? ... whoever does the will of God is my brother and sister and mother" (c.f. Mk 3:31-35; Mt 12:46-50; Lk 8:19-21). He says true family lies in faith beyond blood relation. The Jesus community followed Jesus leaving behind everything, especially families (c.f. Mk 10:28-30). Accordingly the community is open to everyone. Jesus embraced women, children, tax collectors, and even prostitutes as new

family members of God, heirs of God's kingdom. At that time they were not treated as legitimate social members.

Mary shows true motherhood as mother of Jesus and true disciple, who raised God's household of a "faith family". If Mary is to be respected as mother of Jesus, it is because she brought up Jesus as God's person. There was no one except Mary that might have seen Jesus as a person having an intimate relationship with God and of committing himself to God's work. Mary's special position helped her shape a community of disciples of Jesus while she carried out God's words and the faith community gradually extended to God's household.

The genealogy of Jesus shows God's intervention beyond his paternal lineage (Mt 1:1-17). In God's salvific plan of becoming flesh, that lineage is understood relatively. The women in Jesus pedigree - Tamar, Rahab, Ruth, the wife of Uriah, etc - show that God's Providence can be realized through anyone beyond human custom and wisdom. [Tamar and Rahab were Canaanites and Ruth was from Moab. Batsheba, mother of King Solomon, was the wife of Uriah, the Hittite before she became a wife of King David. Tamar gave birth to a son by sleeping with Judas, her father-in-law and Rahab was a well-known prostitute of Jericho.] Those women were helpful instruments whenever God intervened in human history.

Here we have to notice that these women could be saved by God's intervention when they were in difficult situations with no protection from the law. For Tamar and Ruth, levirate marriage helped them (Deut. 25:5-10). The custom in Israel of the time protected young and childless widows and helped them adjust to society. It also played a role of acknowledging a young widow's place in the husband's family in addition to having descendants.

The fact that those women under the threat of death could recover their rights with God's power and play an important role in reviving the household of Israel shows that the history of God's salvation is carried out through weak women. It implies

that God's love and care for the weak is more superior even in the history of Israel that appears to be controlled by patriarchy, and it also shows the law that does not protect the weak can be abolished.

The change of the notion of family requires changes in family ministry of the Church. Until now, the target of ministry has been the so-called "normal family" comprising of parents and children. But society has been extending the concept of family which requires alternative communities that can replace the role of the traditional family. The Church has to take a lead in moving beyond social barriers of blood or religious relations, gender, class or cultural customs to a new family of having God in the center of it and considering all brothers and sisters. Asia has already experienced the phenomena of multi-religious/cultural families forming afresh across various countries beyond boundaries or borders, religions and cultures. When a family is extended to God's household, a family of humankind or further a family of all creation, it can open a way to the future. Therefore we should try to spread various types of community movements including alternative families or homes like 'adoption family', 'foster home' or 'group home' for children, the youth, the disabled or the elderly. The religious communities rooted in the Christian tradition can also widen the horizon of family as an alternative family. The community movement can be spread through various communities like new types of secular order, laity community, the Taize community, Focolare, L'Arch community and so on. These alternative families or home may help deepen communion and unity of people as 'God's household' beyond time and space.

3.4. Mary, Calling for Preferential Love for the Poor

Today humankind is suffering from poverty and disease, injustice and exploitation, discrimination and alienation, violence and war, and the culture of death. In this inhumane situation of hurting human dignity, Mary invites us to open up to the Holy

Spirit, to God and others. The poor live in dire situations so they cannot expect any relief without relying on God.

As Mary had a poor and alienated life and experienced the suffering of the cross deep in her life, she gives comforting strength, enduring the sufferings of people with them. The Canticle of Mary sings the hope of the voiceless and the cry of those who desire peace: God's justice will prevail.

It is natural for mother Church to give priority to the salvific care of the poor. The Synod Fathers called for special interest in migrants, indigenous and aboriginal people, women and children with love for the poor. They point out "In Asia discrimination and violence against women is often found in the home, in the workplace and even within the legal system. Illiteracy is most widespread among women, and many are treated simply as commodities in prostitution, tourism and the entertainment industry" (Ecclesia in Asia, # 34) paying special attention to women in dire situations in Asia.

Not only do women suffer due to human trafficking, as surrogate mothers, domestic violence, and poverty but also as widows and single women who are wounded by social prejudice and become victims of crimes and prejudice in patriarchal structures.

We have to confront with courage the reality of pain and threats in a world wounded with sin and evil to realize the values of God's kingdom by entering into the sufferings of the world and standing against injustice. To be in solidarity with the vulnerable against unjust social structures with our experience as woman and mother is to follow the teachings of the Gospel.

3.5. Mary, Inviting us to be Servant Leaders of Relationship

Today's society requires new paradigms that stress mutual cooperation, networking, harmony, trust, honesty, compassion, intuition and common sense; together with the importance of experience, aiming for equal and horizontal structures. For this,

women's potential to care, encourage and give life is seen as important values to be developed. A paradigm shift towards woman leadership is also quite necessary.

In terms of mutual leadership and from a relational point of view, women's life is a continuous exercise of leadership. Though her presence as wife, mother and member of society was not so conspicuous, her role has been considered important. But her role has been understood passively as virtues of hidden service and sacrifice rather than as leadership. Now it is a demand of the times to make use of women's power as an important resource for the wider community. Woman's leadership is needed for a relational community that minimizes inter-personal conflicts by making communications flexible and encouraging empathy among community members. The qualities of compassion and empathy are directly connected to the practice of leadership.

We can find characteristics of servant leadership in Mary of the scriptures: her ability to listen, her empathy and sensitively to the needs of others, her commitment to others' development with a desire for peace and resistance to injustice, her radical faith in God and the goodness of humans, maturity to learn from Jesus' life, trust, foresight and confidence in the will of God, and the building up of community. These are essential for servant leadership. These leadership qualities are necessary for establishing one's identity and building up a community.

Interestingly, Mary emerges as a new model of leadership in a complex modern society of technology that requires mutual relationship, flexibility, and diversity. Mary was a woman of courage and strength who led her own life independently with a clear identity and mission. She even expanded her personal life to others to shape a community and exert her servant leadership. So she shows the image of an able leader with self-initiative and partnership who can work together towards the goal without wavering in the glare of the public eye.

4. Conclusion: Suggestions for Pastoral Ministry for Women

We have had time to examine what is true discipleship in the Church through the reflection on Mary. The image of Mary is linked to the feminine image of the Church and she is a model of discipleship all the members of the Church should imitate. While Mary's motherhood and virginity is acclaimed as being perfect (eternal feminine), in reality, it tends to divide women into two categories of either mother or single and understand marriage or home relatively.

The model the contemporary Church in East Asia should seek for is a church of recovering God's femininity through Mary's femininity, virginity and maternity; a church filled with the Holy Spirit obeying the Word and proclaiming faith; and a church of peace and justice nourishing life. In addition, Mary, as a true model of discipleship in the Asian Church, calls us to make known the wisdom of life-giving by appreciating life, to value the life of nature and keep the order of creation, to gather humankind as one family, to practice preferential love for the poor and to be relational servant leaders.

The feminine image of Mary should be integrated into an image of woman the Catholic Church strives to recover. Some think that the pastoral work for women is a necessary transitional process to promote awareness of gender equality and to approach various issues fundamentally. But I think that its importance be recognized at all levels of the Church. We need an overall plan for the pastoral work for women promoted as a basic ministry that is supportive of the all the ministries of the Church.

In conclusion, I would like to stress once again what I have proposed for the development of women's ministry in the Korean Church, hoping that the Catholic Church recovers more of its femininity and transforms to a holistic Church that takes an interest in the work for women.

First, ongoing research and study is needed for specialization of the work. It requires a research fund for professional study and to develop education programs and so on.

Secondly, awareness education is necessary to promote women's identity and mission. Taking their age into consideration, a variety of programs is needed in addition to systematic formation programs for leadership.

Thirdly, it is necessary to provide an atmosphere for the priests, religious and laity to work together. Then they can take care of one another through the solidarity of women's groups, active participation of men and women in small group movements and so on.

Last but not least, we have to strive to reform the structures. It would be a good to create a department exclusively responsible for the work for women both at the parish and the diocese. A system in decision making of parish work should be developed which allots a certain percentage of women's participation with more enhanced awareness of the gender ratio. The priests should be encouraged to give homilies and teach the doctrine reflecting women's consciousness. The curriculum of the seminary should open the way for females to teach in some of the programs that would help them understand women better.

3. FINAL STATEMENT

1. Introduction

“My soul magnifies the Lord and my spirit rejoices in God my Saviour”

In this spirit we were drawn to attend the BILA II on Women in East Asia, in Taoyuan, Taiwan from May 3 to 7, 2010 on the theme “Mary, Truly A Woman Of Our Times.” Delegations from Hong Kong, Japan, Korea, Macau & Taiwan comprising of

women, women religious, men, bishops and priests met to encourage the Church to look at Mary as a woman who lived through many of the trying situations that women experience today, and to encourage them to draw strength and inspiration from her as Mary has a universal message for all Christian disciples today.

2. Insights

“The Almighty works marvels for me, Holy is God’s name”

The celebration of liturgies, the talks, silent reflections, sharing from countries in the region and our discussions brought us to a deeper sensitivity of women’s plight and an urgent need for all men and women to follow Mary’s model of femininity (recovering the femininity of God), virginity (filled with the Spirit closely following God’s Word), and maternity (nurturing life through work for peace and justice).

“God has scattered the proud; has brought down the mighty from their thrones and lifted up the lowly.”

In the country sharing

2.1. We heard the cries of women

- 2.1.1. In the environmental problems, as women are closely connected to the earth;
- 2.1.2. In women carrying the double burden of family care and career;
- 2.1.3. In the impact modern day work culture on people - causing stress and conflict in families; resulting in the destruction of the family system, where young women do not want to marry and start a family;

- 2.1.4. In the neglect of human dignity seen in the commodification of the human person in mistreatment of migrant workers, exploitation of women's sexuality in the entertainment and advertising industry, abortion, and human trafficking;
- 2.1.5. In the sexual harassment of women in the Church;
- 2.1.6. In their desperation due to desertion, infidelity, divorce, and family disintegration;
- 2.1.7. In the split between gospel and culture that has allowed the widespread violence to women to continue unaddressed.

2.2. We felt the wounds of women

- 2.2.1. In the migrant and multi-cultural families (with imported foreign brides);
- 2.2.2. In working as care givers, domestic workers;
- 2.2.3. In grappling with inequality of men and women in the Church;
- 2.2.4. In domestic violence;
- 2.2.5. In the impact of globalization seen in the negative attitudes towards the aged and their care;
- 2.2.6. In the phenomena that have affected the family and marriage such as poverty, unemployment, alcoholism, gambling, internet game addiction, and suicide.

“God has filled the hungry with good things and sent the rich away empty”

We are extremely concerned about the influence of unbridled consumerism and greed in our society today. All these in one way or another affect the lives of many, particularly the lives of women in a very profound way. We need to approach these problems from the perspective of women, in order to understand their reality and to respond accordingly.

During Mary's time she too encountered the wounds of women battered, raped, and marginalized in her society.

Mary's Magnificat today would denounce greed, materialistic values, selfishness, unfaithfulness, violence done to women and to all the weak and wounded of society.

She calls us to examine the structures in which we live and the cultures that have formed us as women.

3. Challenges & Recommendations:

"God has shown mercy to Abraham and his descendants forever"

- 3.1. To model equality and mutual respect in relationships between women and men within the Church which would affect the way they relate to each other in life.
- 3.2. To examine the underlying reasons why women in East Asia are choosing not to marry and start a family.
- 3.3. To empower aboriginal women who marry, have children, live in poverty and suffer domestic violence.
- 3.4. To support victims of sexual harassment as well as create awareness on sexuality in the Church for both men and women.

- 3.5. To denounce modern trends such as the mushrooming of casinos, violence to women, mistreatment of foreign workers and the insatiable desire for pleasure
- 3.6. To restore the sacredness of women's bodies and sexuality from its devaluation in popular culture.
- 3.7. To pastor and support immigrant women and foreign spouses in their integration into local society and the parish.
- 3.8. To raise awareness and consciousness of women's issues through the Small Christian Communities.

4. Conclusion

“God has kept the promise he has made to our ancestors and has come to the help of His servant Israel”

We are grateful to FABC Office of Laity & Family, Women's Desk, The Chinese Regional Bishops' Conference, Bishop John Lee and the Hsinchu diocese, and the local organizing committee, for their generous hospitality in hosting the meeting.

With the song of Mary's Magnificat stirring us to action; with the Spirit of God burning in our hearts, we return with expectation and hope and invite the Church in East Asia to consider seriously the challenges and assist in implementing the recommendations, knowing that *God is doing great things for us*.

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127. A Few Theological and Pastoral Perspectives of Inter-faith Marriages, by the FABC Office of Theological Concerns, 2009
128. Seventh Bishops' Institute for Social Communication (BISCOM VII): Social Communication in Catholic Universities of Asia - Facts, Experiences, Challenges, by the FABC Office of Social Communication, 2009
129. Living the Eucharist in Asia: IX FABC Plenary Assembly, 2010
130. Dialogue: Interpretive Key for the Life of the Church in Asia, James H. Kroeger M.M., 2010
131. A Glimpse at Dialogue in Asia by the FABC Office of Ecumenical & Interreligious Affairs, 2010
- 132a. Word of God in the Life & Mission of the Church, 5th FABC-OE & CBF Asia-Oceania Biblical Congress and Bishops' Institute for the Biblical Apostolate (BIBA) III by FABC Office of Evangelization in collaboration with The Catholic Biblical Federation (CBF)
- 132b. Word of God in the Life & Mission of the Church, 5th FABC-OE & CBF Asia-Oceania Biblical Congress and Bishops' Institute for the Biblical Apostolate (BIBA) III by FABC Office of Evangelization in collaboration with The Catholic Biblical Federation (CBF)
133. On Being Human in the Changing Realities of Asia by Fr. Vimal Tirimanna, CSsR, FABC Office of Theological Concerns

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