

**THE BASIC CHRISTIAN COMMUNITY  
IN AN  
ISLAMIC COUNTRY**

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**I. FOREWORD**

by Bishop Anthony Selvanayagam

We are happy to be able to present in this FABC Paper a summary of the results of our Archdiocese of Kuala Lumpur seminar on "Basic Christian Community in an Islamic country," held at Port Dickson, Malaysia, from 21 to 24 August, 1980, on the occasion of the "Triune Celebrations": the Silver Jubilee of the ordination of Archbishop D. Vendargon to the episcopacy, the Silver Jubilee of the Archdiocese of Kuala Lumpur, and my own ordination to the episcopacy.

What is published in this Paper is not conclusive. It is only a stimulant for your reflection on BCC and a goad to urge you on in your efforts to set up the BCC.

Although the material is the outcome of the reflections of our people, the Church of Kuala Lumpur Archdiocese, we feel that other Churches in Asia and in other parts of the world can profit from it. If you study it, you will find a certain amount of convergence of vision. After all, we all take our inspiration from the first Christian community presented to us as an ideal in the Acts of the Apostles.

The documents in this publication contain ideas of what BCC could be, not what BCC actually is. Nevertheless, the ideas are also to a certain extent based on experiences in the fields of concrete efforts made to build Christian communities. As such, the reflections are pointers to "things yet to come."

Because of the nature of this presentation, we would be grateful if readers react to it and send us their reactions. We sincerely hope to learn from the feedback that we hope to get.

At the same time, we honestly hope that our small contribution will help others in their gropings for a more meaningful Christian life that will be lived out in BCC. It might even give you insights as to what a BCC should be in your situation and how to go about building it.

Let us then build our communities for, with and in the Lord.

## **II. THE HISTORICAL BACKGROUND TO THE PORT DICKSON SEMINAR ON BCC \***

by Rev. Ken Williams, C.Ss.R.

The actual option to build "Basic Christian Community" as top priority for the Church in Peninsular Malaysia was taken at the "August Aggiornamento," 1976, held in Penang, Malaysia.

In brief this is its history. In November, 1975, the bishops of Peninsular Malaysia publicized their decision for a renewal program for all priests for the whole month of August, 1976. Its main objectives were "the experience of Christian community, theological updating and pastoral renewal." During the meeting itself, however, the focus was centered mainly on the building of BCC in the "realistic context of the Local Church and the Malaysian scene today." (Of course, other topics were also discussed, but here in this Paper we are only interested in BCC). At a certain point the group was divided up according to dioceses to thrash out their chief concern and their four related needs. Unanimously, the three dioceses opted for BCC as their principal concern.

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\* This section on the history of the "August Aggiornamento" is taken from the article by Fr. Ken Williams, C.Ss.R., published in the brochure, "Report of the Mini Aggiornamento" held at College General, Pulau Tikus, Penang, compiled by Fr. A. Amalanathan.

Although there was a number of overlapping needs, the final consensus of the needs of the three dioceses can be graphically represented in this figure:

Unity among bishops, priests, religious and laity in all fields		Formation as an ongoing process of all groups to produce committed and motivated lay leaders
	Christ-centered communities (at all levels) with concern for:	
Dialogue with Christians and non-Christians, when and where possible		Integral human development of the poor

The result of the *aggiornamento* was a pastoral letter to all Catholics of Peninsular Malaysia.

All 126 of us have arrived at a consensus, that the most important or core need among the Catholics of Peninsular Malaysia is the formation of basic Christian communities, inspired by the early Christian community in the Acts of the Apostles.

By “basic” community we mean groups of people who live in the same area, or who share the same profession, or who belong to the same language, cultural or economic groups. These groups should be Christ-centered in the sense that they accept Christ, his teaching and his way of life in their personal, social and political life, and agree to review their life together in the light of the Scriptures. Such communities should be alive to the needs and aspirations of the people around them and strive sincerely to find ways and means to meet those needs and aspirations.

In relation to the core need, we saw four related needs — all of which call for our attention in the immediate future.

First, there is a need for more communication and dialogue among all of us bishops, priests, religious and laity, on order to achieve unity of purpose and cooperation in building real witnessing Christian communities.

Secondly, we saw the need to stress the formation of Christian leaders at all levels. Our special concern in this area is our youth — the hope of tomorrow.

Thirdly, in our efforts to be true Christians of our time and country, we saw the need for increased dialogue with people of other religious beliefs and ways of life. We rely on you to continue working even more closely with any group aiming at bringing about integral human development and national unity as a basis and starting point for real and effective dialogue.

Finally, in all this we realized how much we have to be aware of the injustices and growing inequalities existing in our society. Our main concern is with the poor, who in one way or another are victims of economic and social structures which cause oppression and do not take into consideration the rights of man and social justice. We think particularly of the urban and rural poor, the dropouts, the frustrated and, in general, of all those whose voice is never heard.

After the aggiornamento in Kuala Lumpur Archdiocese, the implementation of the vision was left more or less to individual parish priests. As a consequence, the degree of execution and success of the plan depended largely on the parish priests. In some parishes priests immediately mobilized the people to carry out the decision; in others, priests either started slowly or never really started the implementation. The reasons for this disparity are numerous. We do not think, however, that it is pertinent to our subject to go into them. Suffice it to say that by 1980 in some parishes the BCC is well on its way and in others it is still nonexistent. A remark, however, is pertinent. In places where priests have launched the program there are also varying degrees of success.

It is found that in rural areas the BCC is more successful. This is due to several factors. In rural areas, generally in the plantation estates, Catholics are more concentrated in one place than they are in the urban areas. There is less distraction in rural districts than in urban places. The Catholics in towns and cities are more mobile and tend to group according to their various interests. This is especially true in cities. Because of these factors and others a number of Catholics do not go to the parish to which they belong. With their cars, distance means very little to them and hence they tend to go to the parish of their own choice. All these realities make it harder to set up BCC in urban areas.

In 1979, at one of the customary monthly meetings of priests, it was quite evident that we would soon be running into great difficulty because of the shortage of priests, due to the fact that foreign priests would have to leave one by one as their visas expired. It was at this session that awareness of the importance of the role of the laity in the Church blossomed. Two days, 21st to 22nd November, 1979, were set aside for priests to look into the matter of training lay ministers (lay leaders) in the Church. After much work of preparation, reflections and discussions the priests agreed that the three main areas in which the training of lay ministers were most needed at that stage for the running of the Church were liturgy, catechetics and community building. A committee was set up to work out in detail the program for the training of lay ministers in these three fields. The committee came up with a program of three years' training: the first year being "common training," i.e., a common program for all; the second and third years being the "specific training" in which candidates would be divided according to the ministries that they have chosen and would be trained for in their respective fields. The training program was launched in Easter, 1980. The response of the laity to this "call" was beyond all expectations.

Trained lay ministers would help not only in the parish but especially in their BCC. Their help would be essential because we would not have sufficient priests to run the BCC that would be set up.

All this was crystallizing in the consciousness of the priests. Then came the "Triune Celebrations" of the Archdiocese: the Silver Jubilee of the Archdiocese, the Silver Jubilee of the Ordination to episcopacy of Archbishop D. Vendargon, and the episcopal ordination of the Auxiliary Bishop Anthony Selvanayagam.

Father Bonnie Mendes of the Office of Human Development of the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences came to ask us in what way they could help us prepare for the celebrations. Unanimously the priests said that they could help us in running a seminar on "Basic Christian Community in an Islamic country." Fr. Mendes accepted our proposal, and the result was our Port Dickson seminar, 21st to 24th August, 1980.

We were supposed to limit the number of participants to 150. But we could not keep out those who were so eager that they came without previous registration. In the end, we had 163. We had to exclude many others who wished to participate in the seminar.

The seminar was composed of all priests of the Archdiocese of Kuala Lumpur, representatives from each parish, a few observers from the dioceses of Penang and Johore-Malacca, and a guest or two from Indonesia and Pakistan. Hence, the necessity of a "live-in" seminar to give participants opportunity to socialize and know each other better. This was an historic event in the life of the Church in the Archdiocese of Kuala Lumpur. It was the first time that priests, religious brothers and sisters, and the laity came together to pray and reflect upon the vision of the Archdiocese and to socialize.

### **III. THE CONCEPT OF BASIC CHRISTIAN COMMUNITIES IN A NON-CHRISTIAN MILIEU**

by Cardinal Joseph Cordeiro

#### **The Early Church**

The concept of the Basic Christian Community, in the etymological sense of the term, goes back to the earliest days of the Church, and that too when the Church lived in a non-Christian milieu. Hence, it would almost seem necessary that we call to mind the nature of the early Christian communities to find out in what way they were basic, Christian and communities.

Both the Acts of the Apostles and the Letters of St. Paul abound in references to the life of the first Christian communities. I understand these to have been basic not just because they were the first but chiefly because they formed the base of the Church in those times. They had to experience many trials and persecutions from outside. They had to assist one another from within as well as come to the assistance of communities distantly located. They had leaders with fairly well-recognized qualities and who were appointed by the Apostles or their representatives. They had to live the paschal faith in a spirit of love, harmony and sharing. It was this virtue of love which made them the outstanding witnesses to Christianity in a non-Christian world, and which was chiefly responsible for the expansion of the Church. The concept of the BCC is not therefore new. But the necessity to explain why the concept has become so alive today is interesting, but not difficult.

#### **Why the Basic Christian Community are Important Today**

However much we may have tried to explain the convenience of BCC in positive terms, I cannot get away from the fact that it is basically a force of circumstances that has compelled the Church in modern times to give life to this essential concept. The place of the laity in the Church,

for example, has received considerable importance in the Vatican Council documents and especially in the years before and after the Council. Still it seems to me that it is not the teaching about the laity in the Church but other prevailing necessities which have compelled us to rethink our theology on the subject. Some of these necessities may be easily recalled to mind.

In many parts of the world the desperate shortage of priests has made it urgent to entrust the care of souls to lay communities, including religious sisters. It has forced us to think about various forms of lay ministries, and to discover the hidden riches in many paraliturgical services. Again, being faced with the struggle against poverty and injustice, the teaching Church has repeated again and again the importance of the role of the laity in promoting justice and peace. This becomes all the more urgent when the struggle assumes a nature that borders on politics. In fact, in some countries BCC has become a little suspect because of its involvement in politics, which could have led to its breaking away from the structure of the Church.

For all the above reasons, I say that BCC has been a by-product of the compelling issues of the times. But I would like to believe that even if BCC has become so important on account of the reasons given, there are far more positive reasons that urge us to go deeper into the concept and that, in an Asian setting. Some of these reasons can be thematized as follows: BCC and evangelization, and evangelization in a decolonized world of the great religions, such as Islam; BCC and a growing industrial society and rural development; BCC and youth, who form such a predominant part of the Asian population; finally, BCC and the socio-cultural environment of our people.

## **The Basic Christian Community In Practice**

### **a) Where the Idea Originates**

It may be useful at this stage to explain what we understand by BCC. This will enable us to evaluate also the difficulties that BCC encounters, and the qualities that are required for setting up the BCC with optimum chances of success in the future. In this task I will be influenced, very much of course by the setting in Pakistan which is a growing Islamic country, the experiences in building BCC that were already carried out, and the difficulties experienced.

To the best of my knowledge there is no handbook technique in the setting up of the BCC. These communities have largely arisen as a result of the initiative of enlightened clergy and religious, men and women. In some instances, these efforts have been supported by enthusiastic lay people; but by and large they have been the efforts of clergy and religious. BCC is not restricted to towns or villages. It does not conform to a particular type of work, such as teaching in school or work in hospital. It has generally grown out of groups already existing, e.g., St. Vincent de Paul, or charismatic prayer groups. Where such groups have formed the base, the BCC has not been exclusive and has generally included others, so that the BCC is larger in number than the original group. I see no objection in this whatsoever. On the contrary it seems to be a natural form of development. I get the impression that in rural areas the BCC has a better chance of formation precisely because there are not many organizations operating, and so it can be truly "un-denominational" and apply itself to a wider variety of goals. In a city, on the other hand, the structures are more rigid; but even then I do not see any objection why a good prayer group in a city cannot become truly BCC. For the matter, even groups involved in school or hospital apostolates can be good BCC, but I feel that their limited range of operations may provide some difficulties.

#### **b) What The Basic Christian Community Has Done (Pastoral)**

Apart from the way the BCC operates in Latin America and other countries, I keep much in mind the experience we have in Pakistan, presuming that it will not be too different from that in other parts of Asia. I relate the experience of one particular diocese which may be considered typical, especially since it is largely rural. There are about eighty-five praying and serving BCC, at different levels of maturity. Some are very responsible, while others are still in the embryonic stage. Some are representative of the whole community, while others form only the nucleus of the community. Some emphasize the charismatic aspect, while others the social development.

Up to 1975 the normal work of the priest was to visit those 266 villages at least once a year and celebrate the Holy Eucharist. Some villages were missed due to rain and others because of unavoidable circumstances. The main parish and some privileged villages received more regular Eucharistic services. During these visits the family records were checked, baptism given, confessions heard, and the work of the catechist checked.



The catechist, however, visited those villages once a week. He collected the annual contributions, taught prayers, prepared for the sacraments and catechized. Very often he could reach only the children, and the method he used was deductive.

Today, although the routine is almost the same as before, attitudes, and the people's attitude in particular, have changed considerably. Wherever there is a BCC, when the Eucharist is celebrated, the participation, enthusiasm and the people's joy are a proof that the Eucharist is now more meaningful to them. Since they are a caring, hearing and sharing community, they find the Eucharist as the symbol and rejuvenation of their own community.

Other sacraments, too, especially baptism, have become very meaningful to the people. In one village the president announced in a ten-minute sermon how the child belongs to the community in Christ. The elders came one by one and gave *piar*, by imposing their hands. Then the child was baptized. Especially on Maundy Thursday, a few communities where a priest could not be present had paraliturgical services, like the washing of feet, agape-meal, etc. The interesting factor is that this came from the people themselves, although it may have been suggested by the catechists the previous year. Some groups dropped the washing of the feet this year, although they did it the previous year. The reason they gave: "We are not ready yet, since we don't serve one another as Christ did."

Shared reflections, shared prayer and adaptation during their meetings and prayer services are admirable. During such occasions catechizing becomes situational and evocative. Often they continue their discussions deep into the night, while lying down to sleep.

#### **e) What The Basic Christian Community Has Done (Economic Field)**

Besides the liturgical and catechetical, the BCC has probably done its best in the economic field, trying to make people self-reliant, whereas formerly the flow of relief material from abroad caused many complications and divisions. BCC has taken over the task of self-help as much as possible. A priest writes:

We have stopped doling out money to individuals or individual families directly. What we can spare we hand over to the Basic Groups. With our donations, together with their own contributions, they help their own communities. In general we find this method more wholesome: the real needy get the aid, and the

increase in people's contribution is a phenomenon. They use most of the money for semi-aid programs, like the sewing centers, adult literacy centers, education in general, and other community projects. Wherever there is a Basic Group, the offerings during the priest's visits and any offerings, like a goat, brought to the priest are given back to this group. This gives them the feeling that what they are going to use is their own contribution.

Whatever is started by them as a community, with their own resources and sacrifices, we try our best to subsidize after a test period of three months. For example, when they run a sewing center for three months with their own contribution, we then subsidize the teacher's salary, and start visiting the center to encourage and advise.

For bigger projects, however, we allow them to go on for a longer period before making any effort to help them. For example, in the parish of Toba Tek Singh the people wanted land for a housing scheme. For three years they held regular meetings; they themselves collected monthly installments, kept their own accounts, before they got their aid. Rupees 225,000 were given to help them, without any obligation to the pastors. They negotiated with the landowner. They distributed the plots. From the money they thus reclaimed they are negotiating to set up a power saw, the proceeds of which will be used for further community projects. All these were done by the people themselves by common decision, without any intervention of the pastor. Even now many of us are apprehensive: Will it be a failure? The people seem to be confident. There were many pitfalls: some tried to cheat, some tried to dominate. So far they have come through. Well, this seems to be the only way to build a healthy community.

#### **d) What Difficulties The Basic Christian Community Has Experienced**

For a successful operation, good leadership, encouragement from experts, regular meetings of leaders and harmonious cooperation are necessary. But it is precisely in these areas that difficulties arise. Some parishes have seen good leadership evolve from the groups, especially among young lay people; but the process is slow. The main difficulties encountered are as follows: leaders are few; some lack motivation and are not able to bear responsibilities, and some, though leaders themselves, are not accepted by their own communities. I have noticed that in some places priests, in their zeal to promote the BCC, have left these communities too much to themselves. Some members of the clergy also show a certain amount of hesitancy about the BCC program,

particularly because it would mean a disruption of the parish structure as it existed before, and partly because there seems to be a fear of delegating responsibilities to others.

How far should priests be involved in BCC? Should their role be somewhat like that of the chaplain with Young Christian Workers or St. Vincent de Paul Society or the Legion of Mary? Should their involvement be structural at all? Or should they leave the BCC alone and watch like supervisors from a distance? My personal thinking is that the involvement should be much closer than that of long-distance watching, chiefly because of the positive spiritual role BCC will have to play in evangelization and the building up of the local Church, to which I shall return later. Admittedly, delegation and coresponsibility are very important for the healthy functioning of Basic Christian Communities but this spiritual aspect of BCC, in my opinion, is also so important that the presence of a priest for counseling and direction is vital. But there are also preventive reasons why I think that the presence of a priest is necessary. To take an example: the danger to the BCC from involvement in politics, not internal but the politics of the country. In small areas local elections can be the cause of great divisions in BCC. Cases have been reported when alignment with contesting candidates has split the BCC and has even made it necessary to close them down. On the other hand, harmony in the presentation of a candidate can work in favor of a smooth election. A case of this kind has also been reported, but then it is to be remembered that it was according to our separate electorates system. How much would the presence of a priest have been helpful in the above situation?

A successful working of BCC requires periodic meetings of leaders, periodic reflection and sharing, periodic evaluation of different areas of operation. Besides, these regular meetings must lead to the formation of a core group. The general impression I get from reports reaching me in Pakistan is that some measure of success has been attained with regard to sharing and prayerful reflection; but even here, though our people are familiar with the Bible, I am afraid that their approach to the Scriptures is still quite fundamentalist and their notion of inspiration is very often erroneous. This false notion of inspiration can be the reason for many mistakes of judgement and decision in public life. The difficulties of regular evaluation are more of a practical nature, such as difficulties of time and distance, and for the same reason a core group has reportedly not been formed in many places.

## **Is The Basic Christian Community Fulfilling Its Role?**

So far our treatment of the BCC would give an independent listener the impression that we are talking about something which is purely an internal affair of the Church, something which is necessary to fill up an internal need, a movement recently developed but inward-looking. In saying this I am trying to bring out the fact that BCC as an instrument of evangelization has not been much developed. I do know that evangelization has also got an internal dimension and that this internal dimension itself can be of two kinds, i.e., one which is more in the nature of catechesis and the other, the formation of good basic community as a witness to Christ in non-Christian surroundings. But there is also evangelization in the positive sense of an outgoing movement, wherein the setting and environment play an important part. It is the direct movement of carrying Christ to the world.

I had said earlier that BCC has so far been more inward-looking. Does this mean that the movement has taken a wrong direction? My immediate answer would be no, because BCC have been trying to do something for which nobody was available and for which they were providentially fit instruments. So where there was no one for catechizing, the BCC undertook the task. Where special ministries were necessary, the BCC has come forward to prepare itself for the task. All this is a necessary part of the building up of the local Church. I strongly feel, however, that the local Church must never forget that it is missionary by nature, and the growth of its internal life must serve to bring the Good News to others.

## **The Basic Christian Community In A Non-Christian Society**

How to set up an ideal BCC in the middle of a non-Christian (Islamic) society? I would lay emphasis on three points:

- a) First, more emphasis on environmental factors rather than institutional;
- b) Second, more emphasis on catechesis which takes the environment into consideration, or in this case, a more positive approach to Islam;
- c) Third, more emphasis in forming a Christian environment through a deeper spiritual formation of the individual and of the community.

### **a) Environment**

I put this emphasis chiefly for the reason that it is necessary to make the BCC missionary in approach. This would hardly mean that

institutional features, such as some form of governing body, a basic set of rules, i.e., limiting the members of the community to a manageable size, some program of activities, etc., are not necessary. But by putting the emphasis on these rather than on environmental features would turn the direction of the BCC inwards rather than outwards. I am inclined to agree with Stephen B. Clark in his *Building Christian Communities* when he says: "Environmental factors are more basic than institutional factors in Christian growth and therefore the primary pastoral concern should be in forming Christian environments rather than in reforming Christian institutions."

What are environmental factors? Rural or urban?; religious or secular?; and if religious, is it theocratic or not?; rich, poor or middle class?; economic conditions, fair or unjust? BCC in any of these surroundings will be compelled to define its Christian way of life if it is to be effective, and involvement of the community in the environment is bound to fill it with a sense of mission, and the effect in the long run is bound to be good.

Let me give you two examples in Islamic society. Two good Christian families live in Muslim surroundings. The effect of a good Christian life has been to establish good relations, so much so that, when Christian festivities like Christmas come around, the Muslims want to join and even inquire into the possibilities of attending midnight mass.

A second example. The Islamic renewal currently taking place seems to show conservative tendencies as far as family laws and the position of women are concerned. The question therefore is: "Could not the pluralism which certain Muslim societies get to know through living alongside Christian societies help them towards the development of a better family legislation?" If the Christian community is good, I think that the chances are also good.

Likewise, I am told that where a disintegration of the family has taken place, such as in certain parts of Latin America, the BCC has an important role to play. Within its framework there is emerging a pedagogy of intra-family love that looks beyond the family. At the same time there is taking place reconstruction of the family: its members are now more equal, more responsible, more free, more respectful of one another. This constitutes a challenge which the Church seems ready to take up. It is in this domain that the Church intends to fulfill its evangelizing mission.

## b) Catechesis

If there is one thing that I would personally emphasize more than others it is the need for BCC to be instructed to take a positive attitude towards the Islamic society around us. The reason for this is that it is becoming glaringly evident that the Islamic revival, with its militancy and return to the rule of law, is having a very depressing effect on Christian communities. I speak largely from a Pakistani background, but I feel almost sure that the same experience must prevail in other Muslim countries. Personally I think that we are providentially placed in such situations to give a Christian witness, by our presence if nothing else, and therefore, how urgent it is that the Church lay down strong roots of faith. On the other hand, I cannot deny the strong anti-Christian forces at work and would even go so far as to say that it requires a real sense of mission to stay and work in such a society.

For all these above reasons it will be understood how necessary it is for BCC to play a positive role and play it well. A little explanation and example of what I mean by positive may be in order. Starting from the premises that the Church has a providential role to play and a mission to accomplish, it is of great importance that BCC maintain a positive and appreciative relationship with their religious surroundings. Experience of past centuries has shown that the Church has almost become extinct in those countries where it was withdrawn into itself.

To illustrate what I mean by positive approach, and one that would also leave a lot for God's action in us, I take an example from one of the most important items of Islamic renewal today, i.e., a return to the Shariat (or Law as a way of life) system. It may sound almost idealistic in the face of the reality but I feel there is a point to make. We in Pakistan are constantly aware of living in the atmosphere of the Old Testament, especially in the month of Ramzam.

In this month of fasting, at dawn and dusk sirens blow throughout the city. All are expected to conform. Eating houses are closed. No open violation of the fast is tolerated. At the evening signal the streets are deserted. Gathered in their homes or shop fronts, the city's millions break their fast at one and the same moment. All this recalls Joel 2:15:61:

Sound the trumpet in Zion  
Order a fast  
Proclaim a solemn assembly  
Call the people together  
Assemble the elders  
Gather the children."

The Old Testament comes alive before our eyes.

For us in the local Church in Pakistan, it has become doubly important to be quite clear on the relation between the Old Testament and the New, quite clear on what exactly makes for the transition from a faith based on the freedom of the Spirit. It is doubly important because: (a) it is the understanding of the New Covenant as different from the Old that will take us to the heart of the Renewal; (b) it enables us to adopt a true missionary stance towards Islam. The transition from the Old Testament to the New is dealt with by Paul in the Letter to the Galatians. Here Paul is reprimanding the Galatians for slipping (on the matter of circumcision) from the New Testament back into the Old, for making him feel, "I have wasted my time." On the occasion of this reprimand, he gives us some valuable teaching on the relationship of the Law to Christian faith:

"Now, before faith came, we were confined under the law, kept under restraint until faith should be revealed. So that the law was our custodian (or pedagogue) until Christ came, that we might be justified by faith (not circumcision). But now that faith has come, we are no longer under a custodian; for in Christ Jesus you are all sons of God, through faith" (Gal 3:23-26).

Put in modern educational terms, Almighty God, starting with the type of human material available at Mount Sinai and thereafter, used a very definite pedagogy through the centuries of Salvation History — the Law of Moses with its "Do's and Don'ts, its severity, its uniformity and regimentation. This role Paul identifies with that of a custodian or pedagogue who in the child's own interest must keep a rigid control and exercise constant guidance over the child's actions, habits, learning . . . until he reaches the age of maturity, the fulness of time when he is able to make his own decisions, handle his own affairs, exercise freedom in a responsible manner. This coming of age is Christianity, the New Covenant, divine sonship, the freedom of the Spirit.

Here Paul points out both the positive value of the Law and its limitation. Its positive value is that it is a necessary preparation, a much-needed taming and disciplining of muddled and sinful man before he is ready for the Gospel and the freedom of the Spirit. Its limitation is that once the Law has completed its role in a particular milieu (be it Palestine, Pakistan or anywhere!) it must give way to the Gospel to find its true completion.

As Christians we have been privileged to observe in the Old Testament this pedagogy at work in one particular nation, the Jewish nation in the Greco-Roman setting. Now there is nothing to prevent the Lord from using a similar pedagogy with diverse nations at diverse times and places. There is nothing to present Islam, as the religion of Law, from playing this role and exercising this pedagogy of the Law for the nations that come within the Islamic fold.

### c) **Spiritual Formation**

Finally, it is my firm belief that spiritual formation in producing deep charity, friendship and service is the most important condition of all required. From a negative point of view it is important, because our countries in most parts of Asia have achieved independence after colonialism. Therefore, Christianity among the great religions is still associated with the West, and consequently with crime and indiscipline. On the other hand, Christianity is face-to-face with revenge, hatred and violence, sometimes precisely after our colonial era. Positively speaking, love and friendship are the very basis of the Christian community. In a non-Christian society I am convinced that BCC will not survive, or survive for long, or be effective unless these are truly communities of friendship and love. All other reforms take second place.

The Church will not overcome its present crisis through reform of the administration of the Sacraments, or from the reform of its ministries. It will overcome this crisis through the rebirth of practical fellowship. The reforms of evangelization and the administration of the Sacraments, and the inescapable reform of the Church's ministries will spring from the rebirth of fellowship and friendship among the rank and file. The one certainly cannot take place without the other, but the starting point lies in the congregation and its form as fellowship. Fellowship in word and Sacrament, fellowship in the profession of faith, fellowship in the institution and the hierarchy, become lifeless and are petrified into formalities with which people can no longer identify themselves, if fellowship among the congregation's rank and file is lost and if friendship is not recovered from the "grass roots." (J. Maltmann, *The Church in the Power of the Spirit*)



#### **IV. THE ROLE OF PRIESTS, RELIGIOUS AND LAITY IN THE BASIC CHRISTIAN COMMUNITY**

by Bishop Julio X. Labayen, O.C.D.

##### **Introduction**

This morning Cardinal Cordeiro gave us an historical background on how the concept and pastoral program of BCC emerged. He mentioned, among others, that the program was occasioned by certain felt needs. Among them were a lack of priests, a need for new ministries, an awareness of the Church's prophetic role today in a world of injustice, a need to clarify the role of the laity. These felt needs eventually brought about a theological rethinking particularly on what we understand of evangelization today, who is Christ today, what is the mission of the Church today in the new understanding of Christ. I may add here that it has also prodded us to pay close attention to the required spirituality that will enable us to cope with the demand and challenge of evangelization today, a spirituality that will postulate openness to the world, the relationship of God's Kingdom and the created world, a new understanding of the universal saving love of God and, finally, a spirituality that will give us the foundation for integrating social action and contemplation.

##### **Some Basic Orientations**

From our understanding of this morning's workshop we realize that we are groping in our efforts to understand what is the BCC for us. There are some shortcomings in our understanding of BCC, if not downright confusion. I would like to continue to pursue our efforts and our gropings to be more clear about the BCC. I offer you some basic orientations.

1) The Church in relationship to mankind. Before the II Vatican Council we had been really church-centered and we had been busy building the Church. Vatican II, I feel, not only challenged our understanding of Church but made a very emphatic shift of our pastoral attention to the world in which the Church finds herself, namely, the created world. "The joys and the hopes, the griefs and the anxieties of the men of this age [including women, of course] especially those who are poor or in any way afflicted, these are the joys and hopes, the griefs and anxieties of the followers of Christ. Indeed nothing genuinely human fails to raise an echo in their hearts for theirs is a community composed for men. United in Christ and led by the Holy Spirit in their journey to the Kingdom of their Father, they have welcomed the news of salvation

which is meant for every man. That is why this community realizes that it is truly linked with mankind and its history by the deepest of bonds" (*Gaudium et Spes*, Preface, 1). I would like to call your attention to two points: the solidarity of the Church with mankind, and the preference for the poor or those who are in any way afflicted.

2) "All men are called to belong to the new people of God" (*Lumen Gentium*, 13). This text is reinforced in *Gaudium et Spes*, 22: all mankind has only one vocation and that vocation is divine. So we share one vocation with our Muslim brothers, the Hindus, the Buddhists, and too, the Marxists in Asia.

3) The role of Christ, the Incarnate Word, provides us with a comprehensive and adequate understanding of what it means to be fully human and fully alive. In Asia we have the struggle of our peoples going on to become fully human and fully alive. To help ourselves and our fellow Asians in the understanding of what it means to be fully human and fully alive we draw from the mystery of the Incarnate Word. "The glory of God is man fully alive" (St. Irenaeus). We look for the glory of God shining through men and women who have attained the goal of the struggle to be fully human and fully alive.

4) The First Plenary Assembly of the Federation of the Asian Bishops' Conferences, which was held in Taipei in April, 1974, defines what it means to be a local Church, namely, an inculturated Church, a Church incarnate in the cultures of peoples. The International Mission Congress in Manila in December, 1979, pursuant to the basic orientation given by Vatican II and that of the Asian bishops, states: "The localization and the concretization of the Church find expression in the BCC. Such Christian communities emerge from the bottom. They spring from the grassroots, inspired and raised by the Spirit who blows where He wills. Where they do emerge we should recognize and encourage them and collaborate with them. As form of a fuller participation in the life of the Church the BCC deserves the sincere support of all. In our contemporary context of non-Christian environment and of ideological struggles the individual Christian can obviously best grow and develop as a Christian person in the midst of a self-nourishing and self-ministering and self-propagating community. These communities and their growth demand everyone's commitment and concern if they are to remain firmly attached to the local Church in which they are born, unsharred by any divisive polarization and maintaining a sincere communion with the pastors whom the Lord gives to His Church."

5) And finally I would just like to refresh your memory on what Bishop-elect Selvanayagam communicated to us the first evening as far as this seminar is concerned. It dates back to that significant month-long aggiornamento of the Malaysian Churches.

So, to summarize the basic orientations, I submit that we have shifted from a Church-centered theology to a Kingdom-centered theology. The Kingdom is here; the subject of this Kingdom is the whole human race, the whole created world, the whole cosmic reality. The Church is conscious of her own solidarity with mankind and its history by the deepest of bonds. A mankind, a humanity, that has one calling with the Church, and that calling is divine. Hence the Church's task of being involved in the joys and hopes, in the griefs and anxieties of mankind, especially those who are poor or in any way afflicted. Involvement also in the historical process of their lives, in the concrete situation, with all that belongs to them. More fundamentally, involvement in their own culture and religion which identify them as a people. The BCC is the Church's response as a strategy for evangelization today. What is significant in the BCC is the preferential option for the poor. And this is recognized as the breath of the Spirit today, whose lead we follow and we hope to follow more effectively after this seminar.

We have here a challenge. In our workshop this morning we have seen that we have grown into introspection within the institution: the parish, the diocese. Our problems are internal. How do we update our institution, our own organizations? What kind of service should they render today? We are hard put to consider as our problem, followers of Christ, the oppression and injustices in the world today in the context of two-thirds of the world's population in an Asia that is non-Christian, sometimes even hostile to Christianity. It seems that we mind the shop to the point of arranging and rearranging the interior while forgetting what the shop was put up for, namely to sell the goods. "Go preach the Good News to all nations." The challenge to us is the shift from introspection to looking outward. Cardinal Kim asks: "Ecclesia pro sua vita aut pro mundi vita?" Is the Church for her own life, her own self-preservation? Or is the challenge not rather that she lay down her life that the world may live? Furthermore, do we have trust and faith in people, knowing that in them also resides the power of God's Spirit? Power in the Church is centralized in the parishes, in the dioceses and in the universal Church. By that fact, we are challenged by the BCC that underlines people's participation. People's participation, to be authentic, must finally arrive at people's participation in decision-making. We cannot get there immediately, we realize, but that should be the goal.

The Church as it exists today is very much classified as middle-class. The challenge is to take a preferential option for the poor. I presented this challenge once to a group of social action directors. One social director from a rich diocese stood up: "If we take a preferential option for the farmers, who will support us? What will happen to the support of our rich benefactors?"

Another challenge to us is a learning process that we hardly become comfortable in, a learning process that is drawn from the historical process of our situations. A learning process that is born of the interaction of relationships among our people. A learning process that comes from below. We have always been used to pronouncement *ex cathedra* and from above.

These are the challenges that we will have to face sooner or later as we move into BCC.

### **Conceptual Framework**

Let me now come to our conceptual framework. I have been asked to talk on "The Role of Priests, Religious and Lay People in BCC."

Role is function, a job definition. Job definition stems from one's own concept or understanding of one's own position and identity, and from the task to be done. There are two points of reference in understanding our role: Who am I? What is the task at hand?

Moreover, the process of doing the task helps me discover my self-identity. Self-identity grows in our consciousness. I am sure that those who have celebrated the silver jubilee of priesthood have something more to say than those who learnt the priesthood from the books. It is because there is a difference of growth in the realization of one's identity through process than through simple definition. Self-identity also grows according to certain conditioning factors: (1) the task to be done; (2) the process in doing the task; (3) the environment (which was mentioned by Cardinal Cordeiro this morning). Environment consists in our personal relationships with people with whom we work and whom we serve, and structure. How do we organize the work that conditions us in our self-identity? How do we design through organization our own personal relationships with one another? In the Church we have a hierarchical relationship. In BCC this is rethought. What is this hierarchical relationship? Is it in terms of first class, second class and third class? Or is it in terms of division and identification of roles? The process of building BCC redesigns our relationships and consequently redefines our roles.

## **Asian Reality**

We now reflect on our Asian reality, conscious of the imperative of being in solidarity with mankind. This mankind for us is Asia, and more specifically for you, Malaysia. What are some of the highlights of Asian reality? I offer two. First is the Third World character of Asia. There are three continents that are classified under the Third World: Latin America, Asia and Africa. Asia is part of this Third World, with its thrust of sociopolitical and total human liberation of the poor, the deprived and the oppressed. If we reflect on what is going on in Tehran today, what stands out is the religious motivation, religious motivation inspired by the Koran of the Islamic religion. The Iranians feel that the presence of the USA and their own sociopolitical project violate and frustrate the religious values of the Islamic religion. They feel that the Shah was the instrument of this American invasion and incursion into their own religious life. As Cardinal Cordeiro mentioned this morning, for the Islamic countries the Islamic law is the way of life. If that is so, then it would be very difficult to distinguish between the political life and the religious life of the nation. In Cambodia, Vietnam, Thailand, the People's Republic of China, the sociopolitical struggle to liberate oneself from what is alien and foreign goes on. Cardinal Cardeiro also mentioned this morning that Christianity has been associated with the West. By this association with the West Christianity also suffers by being regarded as a foreign religion and associated with colonial powers.

A second characteristic of the Asian reality is the peculiar Asian character. Christianity has not penetrated Asia. The reason is simple. Some religions in Asia are older than Christianity. They have stood their own ground.

## **Asian Challenges**

The Asian reality offers challenges to our faith. The first challenge that stares us in the face is the challenge of poverty of the suffering multitudes. I do not need to elaborate this reality. The network of the Church brings us close to the grassroots. We are well aware of the poverty of our peoples and their sufferings.

The second is the challenge of the great religious traditions and "the ways of faith" of our non-Christian peoples. I say the "ways of faith" because of the thinking of our Asian bishops regarding these religions. They are the vehicles of these peoples in their relationship with God.

\* The third is the challenge of inculturation, of making the Asian peoples and cultures truly at home in the household of Christian faith and in the Church of Jesus Christ, and vice versa. We realize that there is an historical background to the animosity that exists between Christianity and Islam. Sometimes we feel negative about the values in the Islamic religion. Cardinal Cordeiro this morning pointed to the many positive dimensions that can possibly be considered in our relationship with Islamic countries and peoples.

### **The Latin American Experience of BCC**

I would like briefly to go over the experience of Latin America. It will help us because almost 50% of the Catholics of the world today reside in Latin America. They are also faced with the same Third World reality as is Asia. I would like to present their experience under three points. The first point: BCC came about as a process of life. The BCC in Latin America, in the span of over thirty years, was very rich in all sorts of experience and the BCC also learnt from its own mistakes. The process of discernment increased sharply in the last ten years, especially after the conference of the Latin American bishops at Medellin in 1968. This discernment focussed on areas such as BCC and popular religiosity, inculturation, ecumenism; BCC as a new model of the Church, starting "from the poor"; BCC and corresponding spirituality; BCC and socio-political action, ideologies, violence, tools of analysis, danger of being manipulated; BCC and prophetic witness, the reality of martyrdom. Without canonizing the man we must have heard about Archbishop Oscar Romero who was assassinated because of his proclamation of the Gospel, exercising a prophetic role. He upheld the poor and those whose rights were violated. He criticized both right and left in their violation of human rights. He was shot and killed whilst offering mass in a hospital. My second point: it is this Latin American experience that is useful for us. Out of this process, (true there were mistakes!) discernment, was strongly emphasized. The Latin Americans moved to a more doctrinal formulation of the BCC. The formulation of doctrine came in the wake of the process of life. And my third point: they are experiencing also the misuse of the formula "BCC." There is sometimes a generalization of the term to call almost anything BCC. Sometimes "BCC" is used to create prejudice, excessive fear and accusations; and other times, the "BCC" is being manipulated.

### **Towards A Clarification Of Roles**

From the start I have not thought at all of giving you a definition of the roles of the priests, the religious and the laity in BCC.

In line with my own conceptual framework, I feel it would not be wise to start with a definition of roles. Such a starting point may preclude the emergence of a BCC that will respond to the people involved and their actual situation. People's participation is an essential element in BCC. They must together — priests, religious and laity — go through the process of forming a BCC. This process will of necessity affect the existing relationship among the priests, religious and laity. The existing relationship emerges from the self-identity created in the consciousness of priests, religious and laity — as a result of the task they have been doing and of the organization/institution in which they have found themselves.

The change of relationship (from a hierarchical one to a more communitarian one) as a result of their common effort in forming BCC will likewise emerge from this task and the concomitant process demanded by it. This changed relationship is the frame that will enable the participants — priests, religious, laity — mutually to define their roles within the BCC.

The main task then that lies ahead of us is to start the process leading to the formation of BCC. A process that will underline the participation of everybody. Tentative roles can be assumed. They will become clearer and be defined in the process.

### **A Pastoral Sharing on BCC**

Let me conclude by sharing with you my own pastoral experience in the Prelature of Infanta. Our pastoral work is "centered on prayer." Prayer is understood to be the covenantal relationship between God and His people: "I will be your God and you will be my people." The forms of prayer vary: silent prayer, biblical sessions, shared prayer, the liturgy, devotions, etc. What is important in the life of prayer is not so much the forms as the God—people relationship. Prayer gradually plunges us into the very heart of God. There we discover what is His plan for this created world.

In our pastoral work we have come up with a way of speaking that we call the "Father's Dream." I was talking to a group of married couples and I asked: "Do you ever dream?", and they answered, "Yes." "What may be the reason of your dreaming?" Spontaneously they replied, "Our children." "And what are you dreaming for them?" "That they may have a decent life according to their own dignity with security." "For how long?" "For the whole of their lives." "How did Jesus reveal to us God?" "As Father." "Do you think that the Father has dreams?" "Yes." "Who is the reason of His dreaming?" "His children." "Who

are His children?" "All of us — all mankind." "And what is He dreaming for us?" "To be a family where truth, freedom love, peace, justice reigns. Where we can look into the faces of one another and in truth call each other a brother and a sister." So instead of saying kingdom, we say the "Father's Dream." Our prayer is centered on our relationship with God who is Father in Jesus Christ. Our prayer should bring us to deepen our understanding of the Father's dream and the challenges that it presents to us as we build a BCC in the context of our situation.

We also feel the need of a spirituality of the laity. The spirituality of the laity more often than not is something that we have put on them. It is either monastic, religious or clerical. As we grow in our BCC we feel we have really not paid attention to the spirituality of the laity. Towards this task we have to rethink our relationship with the laity, their dependency relationship on us, priests, sisters, bishops. Until they come of age and stand on their own we can hardly talk about the spirituality of the laity. Only they can discover for themselves their spirituality. We facilitate that discovery. As our lay people of Infanta have come of age in terms of their participation, moving from liturgy to catechetics to socioeconomic projects to political action, I say with all sincerity they have helped us clarify our own roles.

More significantly, as the laity assume ministries that traditionally were performed by priests, they affirm the role of priests by their realization of what they cannot do. Such is the case especially with the Eucharist.

This realization occasioned the priests' deeper reflection on their own role within the BCC. In the retreat that I had with my priests last July we reflected precisely on our role in our BCC. A saving act is a priestly act. Christ is priest because he is Savior. He is Savior because he is priest. The saving act of Christ is essentially the laying down of his life that we may live (I Jn 3:16). He did this that the Father's dream may be realized. All believers in Christ are called to participate in his one priesthood. Peter calls believers in Christ a royal priesthood. We are called then to live the priesthood of Christ.

What is the relationship of our priesthood to the priesthood of the lay people. The Eucharist is the very reason for our ordination. Why should we as ordained priests make the Eucharist present to the Christian community? Our answer was: So that the believers become and remain authentic priests in the light of faith in Christ and continue his saving action — laying down their lives that the world may live. The Church then becomes authentic in her mission in the world today.



Then we reflected on the Eucharist as the very critique of BCC and the very heart of BCC. Christ came to proclaim the universal saving love of the Father. He laid down his life as priest in order that this saving love may become effective for all mankind. The Eucharist is symbolic as a table to which all mankind is called in order to share the life that will bring them to full humanity and full life and become the glory of God.

When we reflect on our Asian reality, our Philippine reality, the reality of our society, what do we see? Who are seated at the table to share the produce of society? Everybody? Certainly not! A few? Yes. Where are the many? On the floor waiting for the crumbs to fall. Is this mirroring the Eucharist? No! Witnessing the Good News? No! We are in a situation of bad news — the exclusion of the many. What is the task of those who believe in Christ and the universal saving love of the Father? To work so that those on the floor waiting for the crumbs to fall may sit together with the rest of mankind at the table of mankind sharing the goods and products of mankind, goods that God our Father created for all. We take a preferential option for the poor, the deprived and the oppressed. This is to proclaim the Good News which is the inclusion of everyone towards full humanity, towards full life. The preferential option for the poor is one of the basic and essential characteristics of BCC. BCC is a strategy for evangelization that will proclaim effectively and actually in the present situation of our societies the universal saving love of God. Good news is the inclusion of everybody. Bad news is the exclusion of anybody.

## **V. PRACTICAL DIFFICULTIES ENCOUNTERED AND HOW TO OVERCOME THEM\***

by Father Desmond de Souza, C.Ss.R.

Martin Luther King once said: "One of the greatest liabilities of our times is that many people can live through periods of revolutionary change in history and not grasp its significance. We always have our upholders of the status quo and those who are notorious for sleeping through revolutions. In the unfolding riddle of life and history there is such a thing as being too late." As we begin to move from the Church of today — the Church which we know, in which we are confident and secure — towards the Church of tomorrow and the day after, we realize that there is such a thing as being too late. The Church of tomorrow has to be relevant to the world of tomorrow, a world that is rapidly changing. The Church of tomorrow has to be credible. She has to be a symbol of Jesus Christ to the world. So there is such a thing as being too late, of really failing God, if we do not create a Church that is relevant and credible to the world of tomorrow.

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\* Transcribed from the recorded talk.

I shall try to divide my talk into four sections, or problem areas, so that we can tackle them and make the Church relevant: 1) frames; 2) persons; 3) goals; 4) strategy.

### **Frames and Persons**

The first two areas where problems arise are in the areas of frames and persons. These two elements go together; they are complementary. A frame is like that of a picture, an outline through which we look. In the Church we have always thought that persons can act according to their intentions and the actions will reach their conclusion simply because we have good intentions. Let us take a real example. A sister, handling a portable radio for the first time, put in the battery, made the sign of the Cross, tried to start it — but it did not. A priest standing by said, “Sister, you have insulted God. Why? Very simple. You have put the battery in wrong.” A good intention cannot change the frame. There is a certain mechanism, a certain inner logic in things or in society work. Good intentions do not always reach the desired end, precisely because we always operate within a frame. Persons and frames go together.

### **Two Types of Frames: 1) Frames in Society, 2) Mental Frames**

An example of a frame in society. I would like to have the audience up on the stage with me, but there is a constraint under which I have to operate. In the same way, in society there exist certain constraints, and we have to operate within these constraints. Hence we need to understand these frames because they prevent good intentions from reaching the desired objectives. These frames have their own intentions; they have their own logic.

There are two types of persons in our case here: priests and laity. Very often they have the same type of mental frames. Where one group has a certain type of mental frame and another group has another type of mental frame, problems arise. For example, when priests and laity come together, criticisms are levelled against priests that are often also applicable to the laity when they take over from priests. All operate under an old mental frame, e.g., they are parish-church-centered. In this mental frame the Church is the parish church — people need to come to it for everything: to meet the priest, to get their baptismal certificates, etc. The church building becomes the center. Today the need is to move to the community. That is where the Church has to be. There must be a shift from a parish-church-centered frame to a community-centered frame, from a “churchy” frame to a “secular” frame. BCC is going to

move towards community-centeredness, towards a “secular” church. Whether it is priests or laity, whether it is new ministries of the laity, if the people are operating according to this parish-church-centered frame, then I am afraid the BCC will be stillborn; it cannot come to birth. We have to operate within a new frame, where the Church is where the people are, where the action is, where life is lived out, where the struggles and tragedies of human beings are taking place, where human beings are trying to create a new world.

When the people can say to the priest, “Father, thank you very much, you have now made us strong. We don’t want you to go, and yet we ask you to go somewhere else and make other people strong just as you made us strong,” then the priest has done his job well. This would be the ultimate evaluation of the work of a priest. Today the priest is a leader for the people; tomorrow he will help raise leaders of the people.

Secondly, we have old frames of leadership within which we operate. We can very often operate, both priests and laity, under an authoritarian frame of leadership: “I am the boss, . . . my ship, my orders . . . You listen to what I say. I know the answers because I’ve got the answers from the past.” Often we are using yesterday’s solutions for the problems of today, but we still think we have the answers. An authoritarian person, a person who operates within an authoritarian framework of leadership, insists and forces the people to follow. But a shift to community leadership means training leaders of the community. The great sign of a real Christian community is not how many people come to church but how many real Christian leaders we have helped to mature.

Are we constantly able to bring up real Christian leaders? This is the real sign of the strength of a community. But community leadership has to emerge and it has to emerge constantly. These are just some examples of how old frames operate along with new frames, and the tensions and the areas of tensions become obstacles to the birth of BCC. If we operate along the old frames, then BCC cannot be born.

What then are some of the new frames along which we need to operate? We need to operate along a new frame as regards the structure of the Church. We have all been brought up to operate under a hierarchical structure of the Church. The hierarchical structure of the Church is very much like a pyramid. It has the Pope at the top, then the Cardinals, Archbishops, Bishops, priests and finally the laity. (And the sisters? I do not know where the sisters belong!) Somebody has said that

the laity have two postures, two roles: one is to kneel in front of the altar, the other to sit in front of the pulpit. Someone else added: "Another role of the laity is to put their hands into their pockets when the collection box comes around." This pyramid structure gives room for authoritarianism in the Church. What we are saying is that the Church is a community. Vatican II in its decree *Lumen Gentium* brought everybody down to the same level. God is at the top and the Pope has come right down to become the center of unity of the whole Church. Bishops and priests are all unifiers within the community. What we are trying to do in BCC is exactly to make this community structure of the Church a reality.

Even if we want to make the community structure of the Church real, we still operate under different frames of community. We have, for instance, what is called a rational or obedience frame of community. A community of obedience is a community that comes to church on Sundays because the law says so. It really makes little difference who comes and who does not come. Even if I do come, I can stand somewhere at the back and slip out. What is important is that we are all there. I am wondering if BCC can operate under this frame at all.

Another frame of community is called a community of relationships. All of us are interrelated. We build up deep personal relationships, similar to those of a family. We operate on a family model. This model of operation can produce a very closed group: "I help you; you help me." We are all very happy as a result of it. It becomes a very inward-looking group. And this is a big danger in BCC. Although the advantage is that it deepens relationships, its big disadvantage is that it has an inbuilt inward-looking tendency. If we feel happy together, there is no reason why we should look outside at the poor, the oppressed, and the struggles of mankind. We have created here islands of happiness.

There is a third frame along which we can operate. I think BCC should take this frame seriously; it is what I call the "guerrilla" frame. (I hope that you will not accuse me of being a Marxist.) How do they operate? They work in small groups; but the groups are not bothered with person-to-person relationships. The groups are really concerned with their mission: "What are we supposed to achieve?" The mission or the objective is very clearly determined. This keeps them committed and united. I believe that when BCC becomes an inward-looking group, it is not a real BCC. It must also capture the mission of the Church; it must capture this tremendous sense of mission to the world, of creating a new society.

Now, where is the emphasis we find at work today? The emphasis today has moved on from an obedience frame to a relationship frame. I am wondering, however, whether what we have now sufficiently includes a sense of mission, and itself becomes an outward-looking, dynamic group.

Again, it depends within what frame we are operating. BCC could also be a number of small groups operating under one very clear mission. In this sort of group, how do we see the role of leadership? In the Church there are two elements that interplay. There are what we call the institutional element and the prophetic element. These two are in constant tension because the institutional is like a circle with everything in order. The institution gives stability. It gives continuity. It builds on the past. But shot right through the institutional is the prophetic element. These are the people who are bringing about renewal, who are trying to create the new, to bring about change. These people who create the new are the prophets of today. And so there is bound to be tension between those who hold on to the past and the others trying to create the new. Prophetic people have to make mistakes. They have a sense of tomorrow. Those with a sense of tomorrow know that the Church of today will belong to prophetic people who are trying to experiment with BCC to incarnate the Church of tomorrow. The institution of the Church will move on and accept only tomorrow what they are saying. And where will these be? They will have moved on. So we cannot be really very clear about where we are going. All we know is that we have to keep moving on, just like pilgrims moving towards the end point to where God is calling us.

What sort of leadership do we need in this setup? Leadership can be authoritarian. I am not saying that we do not need authoritarian leadership. Sometimes there are situations which demand it. In a situation of calamity, e.g., if a roof is falling in and we cannot call a meeting of people to discuss it, a person has to decide. Such a kind of authority has a role to play at some specific time. Then we have the bureaucratic leader, a person who always follows the "book." Whatever has been said in this book, he will follow it. In times of absolute chaos, confusion and division, when nobody seems to know what to do, he will look into the book to see what it says and try to keep it. There are times also when we need such bureaucratic leadership. But there are also times when we need another type of leadership — a community leadership, a new style of democratic leadership. The leader is meant to articulate clearly what the people think and feel unclearly. This last kind of leadership is what we need in BCC.

In summary, these are the frames along which we need to operate: a new structural frame of the Church, a new community frame and a new leadership frame.

The Basic Christian Community demands new frames, but frames that are always within the Church. The Church is a society. Society is not a group of individuals; it is a group of groups that are structured or stratified. The Church reflects this society: a group of groups. There is the rich group, the middle-class group and the poor group in the Church. If the middle class and the rich really want to join the poor, they have to die to themselves in order to live for a new community. I think it was Fr. Arrupe, the Jesuit Superior General, who, speaking about conversion, said: "I must die to something that is valuable to myself so that I may live for something valuable to other people." We here are of the middle class. We have to die to a number of values according to which we live. Unconsciously and despite all our good intentions of forming BCC, we are obstacles to forming a real BCC which is really the Church of the poor. We really are a Church of the middle class.

#### **FRAMES IN SOCIETY**

We also operate within a number of frames created by society itself. In the Malaysian society, we are operating within a religio-cultural context of Islam. The Islamic religion sets the mentality of the people. We operate also within a religio-cultural context of Buddhism. And I am also told that there are also communists. We are then, also operating within a religio-cultural context of Marxism.

We are also operating under certain socioeconomic frames. There are Chinese and Indian Malaysians who are Christians. How can they work together? How do they exist put together in the whole Malaysian context? How are they put together or stratified economically in the different states, in Peninsular Malaysia and in East Malaysia? These states differ. We have to study how they differ. Whom does the Church really serve? Which class of the people do we serve? We might have to do a similar study at the level of the parish. People who are living in Kuala Lumpur may be different from the people who are living at the outskirts. And so we have to study at the level of the parish how the groups hang together. There is already here a Catholic Research Center. Within this center a group of specialists can be built up.

There is a book I highly recommend, published by your Catholic Research Center. One part is very shocking. It states that the rich are

getting richer, the poor getting poorer. Malaysia is following the same pattern we are following all over Asia. It is good to know the socio-economic conditions of the people. It is good to read about them. We can look at the political frame of Ayotallah Khomeini of Iran in the context of Malaysia. Capitalism, according to him, is doomed and so is socialism. The future is going to be created by the third alternative, the Islamic State. Islam is closely associated with authority and political leadership. This means that the society you live in is changing. We cannot live like an ostrich. We can say that this is too big to understand, too big to study, and we can hide our heads in the sand and pretend that nothing is happening. Or we can take courage. We need to find out the forms of community that are present in Buddhism, Islam and Marxism. What are the forms of organization and operation that are present here and how does BCC then become relevant and credible, a symbol of the Risen Christ to these religio-cultural milieux? Or we can have a BCC that has little relevance to all that are happening around us.

I know that Islam has a very interesting model. Can the Church then be restructured according to a frame in which Islam will be able to understand the role of priests and the role of the laity?

These are some of the questions that have come up because these are the areas where difficulties will arise. BCC is not going to be born if we operate along the old frames and not within frames that are relevant and credible to the people to whom we have to be present, to be the light to the nations as the Church is supposed to be.

### **The Goals of BCC**

There is a lot of confusion about what BCC really means. I have a quotation from someone:

The Basic Christian Community is a spiritual and theological ideal trying to become a pastoral reality. Even though numerous partial realizations of the ideal are to be found and some generalizations from these are possible, the notion still owes more to dream than to science. It has the strength not so much of numbers as of necessity. There is no blueprint which the community builders can follow in order to produce a standardized product. The ideal is closer to an artist's vision and it is easier to say about any given concretization that in this or that aspect it falls short of the ideal than it is to give a satisfying definition of a Basic Christian Community.

It is very difficult to say exactly what a BCC is. Whatever we produce, we have always to say "yes, it is strong in these aspects but it lacks these aspects." How do we incarnate these aspects? This is the process that the BCC has to go through.

In the handout "BCC Typology" I have presented three models of BCC to be found: 1) the liturgical model, the liturgically-oriented BCC which comes together when it celebrates the Eucharist; 2) the development model, a group which becomes self-sustaining and starts its own projects to look after its own economic development, that makes itself self-sufficient economically, politically; and, 3) the liberating BCC, which tries to create a new world. This latter group is very much aware of the trends in society and the way society operates, and what the future is going to be, and therefore how the Church is going to play a role of social responsibility. Pope Paul also spoke of two other models for the evangelization of the world, one that is present in a geographic area and another present sectorally, e.g., a group of doctors. But I wonder whether these can be called BCC, or whether these are rather steps in a process towards the creation of BCC.

In the last analysis, what exactly is crucial? What is essential? What is basic to BCC? Basic to BCC is a Christian dynamic which has four elements that interplay, harmonize and dynamically interrelate. 1) The Word of God. It is a Word that interprets the meaning of human life, not just a Word we transmit to somebody. To live according to the Word means that the Word now is interpreted in the light of human experience. The Word is a light that makes us look at our lives all over again. 2) The Holy Spirit. We may set up a perfect structure of BCC. All of us holding hands; all of us looking at each other; some of us looking out, some of us looking in. But without the Holy Spirit BCC has no soul; it has no life. It is a shell; it is a body without life. 3) The Eucharist. BCC has to be a celebration of the joys, the hopes, the griefs and the anxieties of the people of today. It is supposed to be the thanksgiving. Bishop Labayen has asked us! "How do we celebrate the Eucharist where only some celebrate it?" Only some sit around the table and the others sit on the floor to collect the crumbs. That is often the way it is happening at the moment. So every liturgy is a challenge. It challenges the BCC to improve, to criticize itself. 4) And last of all, BCC has to be a service, service not only towards oneself but to serve those of the household of the Faith. To serve our fellow Christians is important, but we are not only to serve Christians. Jesus Christ came to serve the world. The Christian Church does not have a monopoly on Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ came for the world.



So these underlying dynamic four elements have constantly to interplay, and like a torpedo, like a bomb, they have to explode deep down in the sea and throw up huge waves of Christian communities that are really human communities, where human beings are better human beings because they are Christian. Any Christianity that deforms human beings is hardly the Christianity of Jesus Christ. So they are supposed to throw up human communities: human communities of Christians, human communities of non-Christians, as well as human communities of Christians and non-Christians. We do not want human communities that are divided but communities that incarnate certain human values: values of brotherhood, values of concern, values of self-sustenance, values of the dignity of each human being. These are supposed to appear. This absolutely basic and crucial factor is twofold: the Christian dynamic that is going on at the deepest level — the Risen Lord being made present in the Word, the Spirit, the Eucharist and service — and that Christian dynamic sending shock waves which throw up human communities of brotherhood, concern and responsibility. What is absolutely basic is that this dynamic goes on as BCC is in the process of being born.

### **Our Strategy**

How do we start the BCC? How do we take our first steps, or what are the first steps we take? If BCC is a process, this process has to go on all the time. From my own experience I would say it starts with a core group. Other people's experience may suggest another starting point; still other's experience yet another starting point. There is no one fixed starting point. But wherever we start, the other two elements must also be there and they must always dynamically be interrelated. I am starting from here because it is my own experience. It is in a non-Christian setup that I have a small group, which I call a core group. Whether you call it a BCC or not I do not know. All I know is that it works.

A small group of people, former retreatants of mine, four Catholics and five non-Catholics, nine of us, and three priests came together to look for something deeper in life. Some had given up their work in hospitals to come to the villages to work in preventive health care. In our group there is one non-Christian doctor who was an old retreatant of mine when she was a school girl. There is also a non-Christian teacher who felt that teaching in a school was a total waste of time because she had to follow a fixed syllabus. Then there are ex-Redemptorist seminarians and the three of us priests. It is quite a group! We chose an undeveloped area because our macro-study of Goa, which consists of eleven districts, showed that four districts are profiting and improving at the expense of the other seven districts.

(If you study Malaysia, you will find the same situation. Places like Kuala Lumpur are improving at the expense of the others. Everyone pays taxes but the fruits of the taxes, the investments in improvements and facilities, are all going into cities like Kuala Lumpur.) In the part where we are, agriculture is our main source of income. But the market is in the next district. There are no markets in our area. Hence, no matter how hard the people work, they will never improve their lot. When they sell to the wholesaler, the latter buys the products at the cheapest possible price and sells them at the highest possible price. He knows that the people cannot take their goods back. They have to sell them at the prices that the wholesaler offers. The only way to change this sad situation is to see that this process is reversed, that this group of people who work in the fields will profit. All of us in the core group came from the district that has profited at the expense of the others. So we are trying to pay back. This is not an act of charity that we are doing for these people; for us it is an act of justice. We are returning to them what unconsciously we stole from them.

Our core group is a group of priests, religious and lay people who try to live a qualitatively deeper life. We reflect on the Word. We try to pray to God the Holy Spirit to give us courage to face faithfully opposition and to be laughed at by others who consider us mad. We celebrate the Eucharist, especially our celebrations of failure. I think there is a special role that the priest can play here. He must give meaning to the failure and to the struggles of the people. He might not be trained in social science. He might not be trained in medicine. These are the fields in which lay people are competent. But the priest must be trained in understanding the Word of God, and communicate its meaning to the people.

This core group goes to the community, both Christians and non-Christians. The community may already be organized or may not be organized. The work of this group is to reorganize the community, to organize it more along the lines of justice. This means that we are causing trouble, and we are ready for trouble. Anyone who tries to reorganize an unjust society according to justice is a troublemaker. And out of this whole community, then, we animate and bring forth leaders, real lay leaders of the community, leaders from among the people. We are outsiders; we are not from the people. We are from the middle class; we are not from the poor. Our job is to make a preferential option for the poor and to throw in our lot with them.

We face the consequences. The consequences are to be arrested, to be put into prison, to be rejected by our own friends. But we produce leaders, real leaders of the community with whom we sit and plan. These plans are really theirs. Members from Church organizations also participate as Christians to change their society, to bring about reorganization of society.

Out of these leaders, members were added to our core group. The first one was a non-Christian lady teacher. Now we are getting a number of them. This process has constantly to go on, a process of a small group going to the community trying to reorganize it by training leaders. These leaders will ultimately take up the reorganization of the community themselves. From these leaders we get core group members. All this causes tension, causes struggle, causes a lot of difficulties. But one thing we know and we believe: in the last analysis, we know that all our human efforts will not create a new world but our efforts will be taken up by God to shape a new world. Ultimately, the proud and the mighty will be pulled down from their thrones and the lowly, the humble will be raised up. Those who are hungry will receive their fill. Those who have their fill will be sent away empty.

For this we have taken an option: to get out of our middle-class structure of society and throw in our lot with the poor, to stand with them in their struggle. Out of this struggle we hope that the first signs of a human community, of a new society, will emerge. From this, to develop into a more just society.

Even when you die, there will be injustices in society. True, but we believe that our efforts will be taken up by God and be transformed into His Kingdom. Ultimately the new society, the Father's dream, the Kingdom of God, will not be something that we alone will have achieved, as the Marxists think; it will be something that we will have received from God.

I close now with the same words of Martin Luther King, the words that I want to haunt you with, so that you will keep hearing them all the time: "One of the greatest liabilities of our times is that many people can live through the moments of revolutionary change in history and not grasp its significance. We will always have our upholders of the status quo and those who are notorious for sleeping through the revolution. In the unfolding riddle of human life and history there is such a thing as being too late."

Let it never be said that the Church in Malaysia was too late to grasp this historical moment to create a new society, a new Malaysia, a new Kingdom.

## VI. BCC TYPOLOGY

### The Liturgical-Oriented BCC

Items	Description
Aims	To encourage the people in the community to have regular liturgical celebrations in their "kapilya," e.g., the Word of God, Bible sharing, novena for the Mother of Perpetual Help, novenas prior to their fiesta, and the like.
Scope of Operations	Geographical in emphasis, i.e., small community is where there are natural communities with political boundaries, e.g., barrio. Operates mainly in the rural area.
Understanding of Community	"One Community" understanding, i.e., the community is the One-People-of-God-community that needs salvation through faith, prayers and sacraments. Each person in that community needs to be saved, so there is no focus as to sectors. It opens itself to every person in that community.
Functions of Lay Leaders	For prayer and liturgical purposes. He leads the prayer services, such as novenas, Bible sharing, charismatic sessions. He encourages the people to attend these services and to lead model lives according to this mode of thinking.
Liturgical Celebrations	Structured liturgical guides prepared in the center by the parish priest or staff members. These are distributed to the leaders.
Community Participation	The people attend the liturgical and prayer sessions.
Actions Taken	Leaders remind their members of their religious obligations. People come and share in the liturgical activities.
Decision-making	Parish priest and other staff members in the center.
Formation of Leaders: Content and Process	Vatican II Documents, Church teachings, Bible, faith, sacraments, spiritual life, BCC model.

Logistics	Money mostly doled out from parish center.
Sanctions	No "chapel" organization and/or active "group" will mean the priest does not say Mass on their fiesta. Non-membership in the "chapel" organization will mean no sacraments to the non-members.

### **The Developmental-Oriented BCC**

<b>Items</b>	<b>Description</b>
Aims	To make use of liturgical services and the organization of the "chapel" as structure for the implementation of pastoral and developmental programs.
Scope of Operations	Same as liturgical-oriented, although there is effort to bring the program to the districts of the town.
Functions of Lay Leaders	Also act as prayer and liturgical leaders. However, they are also expected to be "extension workers" of the parish in terms of formation, social action, Family Life (FL) programs that are development-oriented. Thus they act as FL motivators, coordinators of barrio seminars, volunteer catechists, cooperatives educator, health worker, and the like.
Liturgical Celebrations	Same as the liturgical-oriented, although in this model, the leaders are consulted for suggestions on how best to hold their liturgical celebrations.
Community Participation	People give suggestions on how to implement these pastoral and development programs. They also share time, talent and treasure — however, given the frame work of a developmental orientation.
Actions Taken	Continue holding their liturgical and prayer sessions. Implementation of micro-projects, either pastoral (community seminars, volunteer catechists, family life, responsible parenthood) and/or developmental projects that are not based on a structural-historical perspective, e.g., handicrafts, poultry, piggery, gardening, nutrition, etc.

Decision-making	Parish priest and other staff members of the parish. Leaders are consulted in meetings.
Formation of Leaders: Content and Process	Same as liturgical-oriented. Additional input on ideas, methods and strategies related to the pastoral/development project being implemented. Inputs on development, but with a very reformist orientation. With attempts at workshops and little demonstration sessions.
Logistics	Parish funds but with local counterpart.
Sanctions	“Active” barrios get the services of pastoral programs from the parish center. Also chosen as pilot barrios for the development projects.

### **The Liberating-Oriented BCC**

<b>Items</b>	<b>Description</b>
Aims	To facilitate a process towards conscientization, organization and mobilization, leading to the social transformation of society and its liberation from the oppressive structures.
Scope of Operations	Although it works within the geographical realities of communities, nevertheless, its emphasis is on sectoral groupings of farmers, laborers, cultural communities, urban poor and the like. Its focus then is sectoral organizations within contiguous communities.
Understanding of Community	The community is seen from a “Manheim” perspective, i.e., the community is made up of groupings that are separated from one another in terms of horizontal and vertical lines. Since its thrust is sectoral organizing, it gives more attention to the poor, deprived and oppressed sector of the community. This community is seen in terms of its being linked to a bigger society that needs total liberation from oppressive structures.
Functions of Lay Leaders	Catalyzers and facilitators towards conscientization, organization and mobilization. Grassroots leaders that absorb community organization (CO) functions.

Liturgical Celebrations	Leaders and the people develop liturgies suited to their situation and struggles. Liturgy makes use of indigenous cultural forms and are themselves conscientizing and truly linked to the concrete situation of the people.
Participation of Community	Action — Reflection — Action. People involved in discussions and share in the analysis of their situation, active membership in their organization, join Bible reflections, strategy sessions and mobilizations.
Actions Taken	Set up community organization to confront issues on justice and peace, towards transformation of structures, institutions and the people themselves.
Decision-making	The people of the community themselves through collective efforts.
Formation of Leaders: Content and Process	Structural analysis, tools, diachronic analysis of society, social teachings of the Church, biblico-historical reflections, community organization principles and strategies, the Philippines situation today, Gospel values in terms of concrete situation, liberation, etc. Evocative processes that gives emphasis on dialogical, environmental approaches. Learning from the people and from the concrete situation.
Logistics	Emphasis on self-reliance.
Sanctions	None. It's up to the people themselves.

## VII. SUMMARY OF THE REPORTS OF THE SEMINAR WORKSHOPS

**Question 1:** What are the conditions required to form a good BCC?

### Answers from reports

There are three main conditions: (a) physical, (b) human, and (c) spiritual.

#### A. Physical

Location of BCC can be as follows:

- (i) Zones
- (ii) Districts

- (iii) Villages
- (iv) Towns
- (v) Parish groups
- (vi) Family groups.

The venue for the gathering of Catholics should be convenient, accessible and comfortable. Although the size of a BCC is not that important, it is, nevertheless, felt that a BCC should comprise at least more than ten families. The members of a BCC must be relatively of a homogeneous group or groups, motivated to share with and serve each other. They must be committed to a common goal that unifies them. They must be willing to meet regularly, participate actively in meetings no matter how painful it may sometimes be, and co-operate in community projects.

#### **B. Human**

- (i) The parish must drop its authoritative institutional structure to recognize the real needs of the people. It must be willing to play a supplementary and a complementary role to BCC.
- (ii) Focus on "people as Church" rather than on "Church as institution."
- (iii) Interior conversion of man is essential to the breaking away from the institutional Church. Hence, personal renewal.
- (iv) Therefore, leadership must be in the hands of people who are close to God and who are acceptable to others, amiable, self-sacrificing and dedicated. They must be willing to listen and perceive the needs of others. They must not impose their own views.
- (v) BCC must be conscious of its relationship to the society and the world at large for it to be effective in its mission of evangelization.

#### **C. Spiritual**

- (i) BCC must be rooted in Christ.
- (ii) Its members must be people of faith and prayer, deeply committed to Bible study, reflection and "sharing."
- (iii) They should be active "evangelists."
- (iv) They should know what is going on so that they can alleviate the sufferings of the oppressed, fight injustice and uphold freedom of religious practices.

(This statement is made in the Malaysian context of multi-religious, multi-racial and multi-cultural society).



**Question 2:** What is the relationship between BCC and other parish organizations, such as the St. Vincent de Paul Society, Charismatic groups, etc.?

**Answer from reports**

The various existing organizations must support and help in the building of BCC. However, they should not be dissolved. BCC provides members for organizations in the parish which in turn provides services for BCC. These organizations should be encouraged to form their sub-organizations in the BCC.

**Question 3:** What should be the involvement of priests and religious in BCC?

**Answer from reports**

They should be initiators, animators and spiritual guides. Their role is not to dominate in any way but to encourage, support and give spiritual strength to the community. If they "steal the show" from the laity, especially in meetings, BCC will no longer be BCC. They should not interfere in the running of BCC unless it is absolutely necessary. As can be seen, although their role is not that of a main actor, their active involvement as initiators, animators and spiritual guides is essential.

**Question 4:** Is the BCC fulfilling its role as an instrument of evangelization?

**Answers from reports**

BCC is only at its initial stage in the Archdiocese of Kuala Lumpur. As such it is too early to say if BCC is fulfilling its role as an instrument of evangelization.

There are two factors to be considered: (1) Different parishes and areas are at different stages of development; (2) In areas where Muslims predominate, evangelization is greatly hindered. Muslims are in the majority in Malaysia.

However, in areas where BCC has achieved certain success, the following remarks are pertinent:

- (a) There is evangelization going on among Catholics themselves. They are growing to understand better their faith and are more willing to enter into Christian fellowship.

- (b) There is a certain amount of success in evangelizing non-Christians. The non-Christians are attracted to fellowship among Catholics in their common projects, activities, prayer groups, etc.

This is new to them. The Catholics are even able to involve some non-Christians in their activities. However, it was felt that lack of trained BCC leaders is a great stumbling block to evangelization.

**Question 5:** Is BCC a new accretion, in relationship to the parish/dioocese?

#### **Answers from reports**

The answer is a clear "no." It is a rediscovery of the essence of Christianity that was obscured through the centuries. The first Christian community described in the Acts of the Apostles proves the point.

In trying to answer this question, the participants attempted to describe what BCC is:

- (a) BCC is not merely an answer to a felt need; it emerges from the baptism of an individual which demands his/her active role in the Christian community centered on Christ. It is very difficult for a baptized to play his role in the Christian community as institutionalized in a parish because of its size and anonymity. In a BCC, a much smaller group, an environment can easily be generated where the baptized can better play his/her role because of greater opportunities and greater interpersonal relationship.
- (b) Hence, BCC is a shift from institution-centered (parish church) to people-centered Church.
- (c) In this sense of rediscovery, it is a new way of life, a new spiritual dimension in Christian life springing from the grassroots level.
- (i) It is a regrouping of Christians into smaller numbers in specific areas, zones or localities within a parish.
  - (ii) It is the resurgence of a felt need which is grounded on a spiritual awareness of what it means to be a true Christian.
  - (iii) It is characterized by brotherly love, concern for and sharing with fellow Christians.
  - (iv) It takes up Christian living globally through all its services to the people (non-Christians included).

- (v) It reexamines the lives of its members through Bible study, reflection and prayer.
  - (vi) It is the laity who takes the chief role. The BCC is “people of God” orientated; whereas the parish is priest orientated.
- (d) Seen from this point of view, BCC is a face-lift: a reintroducing of the basic morality of the early Christian community.
  - (e) BCC reflects the renewed purpose of the Church inspired by Vatican II, calling for a reexamination of the roles of priests, religious and the laity. Vatican II has called the laity “to be co-creators and to be led by the Spirit with its gifts and graces.”
  - (f) BCC is a nucleus within a parish. Each BCC is a basic unit joined to the parish and operating within it.

The rise in awareness of the need to build BCC stems from the challenges that presented themselves in the lives of the people.

- (i) Lack of priests, brothers and sisters.
- (ii) The hunger for spiritual food — sharing of prayer, faith and love — brought about by the failure of materialism to bring happiness and, by (i) above, etc.
- (iii) The recognition by the official Church that the laity has a divine mission, a vocation to fulfill in the proclamation of the Risen Lord to the world through the BCC and their involvement in the secular world.
- (iv) Lack of Christian environment because the great majority of us Christians work, move and live in a non-Christian milieu.

**Question 6:** Can the BCC be considered as one among the parish organizations?

#### **Answer from reports**

The unanimous response is “no.” Each parish organization fulfills a specific role, i.e., the St. Vincent de Paul Society looks after the poor, the Legion of Mary centers its attention on devotion to our Lady, etc. BCC is more comprehensive. It takes into account all the needs of a community. Wherefore, it is similar to a small parish, with the exception that BCC is more “environmental” than is a parish.

**Question 7:** What pressures will the BCC put on the paschal faith of priests, religious and the laity? What do you anticipate as sacrifices to be made with the emergence of BCC?

## Answers from reports

These two questions were treated together as one:

### A. Pressures felt by and sacrifices demanded of the priest

- (i) To give up some of his authority and privileges.
- (ii) More demands on his humility.
- (iii) Pressures from other authorities like the government.  
(Explanation: Because our government is controlled by Muslims, priests might have to answer for some activities of the people).
- (iv) More demands on his time and creativity.
- (v) To give up narrow preconceived ideas of the Church, the parish, the BCC, etc.
- (vi) To experience insecurity because things will not be completely under his control.
- (vii) Pressure from groups or individuals on priests in their choice of lay leaders for BCC.
- (viii) The setting up of BCC is a long process with slow results; as such it is a test of the priest's patience and tolerance.
- (ix) To change habits, approaches and attitudes that priests are used to, so as to be more effective and outgoing.
- (x) To be more comprehensive in his knowledge, i.e., he should be more aware of what is going on in the country in the economic, political, social and cultural situations.

### B. Pressures felt by and sacrifices demanded of Religious.

- (i) Pressure of time.
- (ii) Change in lifestyle, i.e., a change from a more secluded life to a more involved life with the grassroots Christians.
- (iii) Like priests, they will have to be more aware of the economic, political, social and cultural changes that are taking place in the country.
- (iv) Hence, superiors have to give up a certain degree of control over the movements of their members as they become more involved in the activities of BCC.
- (v) The results of change in lifestyle will automatically bring with it a certain amount of insecurity.

### C. Pressures felt by and sacrifices demanded of the laity.

- (i) Family life can be disrupted as more time must be given to building up BCC. The tension will be felt in varying degrees in different homes. In families of mixed marriages, this conflict is most acute if non-Catholic partners are not sufficiently understanding.

- (ii) More demands on finance as the persons involved will have to spend more in carrying out his activities, e.g., on petrol, drinks at meetings, etc.
- (iii) Willingness to sacrifice to a greater or lesser degree his/her advancement in career.
- (iv) Willingness to cut down on recreational activities and on leisure.
- (v) Willingness to give up a certain amount of self-development according to one's likes, e.g., reading.
- (vi) Pressure to be more Christ-like, a better Christian, since a leader must first give good example.
- (vii) Sacrifices made to be regular and punctual at meetings.
- (viii) Change of attitudes needed, e.g., to mix freely without consideration of status, class or education, to overcome prejudices, etc.
- (ix) Willingness to face pressures and openness to psychological changes.
- (x) Again, with all the changes demanded tensions and a sense of insecurity will set in.

**Question 8:** Which area do you think will present the biggest obstacle to the formation of BCC, and why? (See the speech by Fr. Desmond de Souza)

### Answers from reports

The majority thought that "persons" was the biggest obstacle; others "frames." But some thought that "persons" and "frames" could not be separated as they were closely interrelated.

#### A. Persons

Reasons given:—

- (i) People can obstruct by their non-constructive criticisms, their refusal to co-operate, their refusal to change their lifestyles (frames), their unwillingness to share, etc.
- (ii) Tensions felt within the person himself: how much to "give in" to the change called for; how much he is able to "die" to his own "frames," mentality, customs and status, etc. We are very much imprisoned by our "set frames and structures."
- (iii) A certain level of maturity is required, especially spiritual maturity to accept failures and difficulties. It is difficult to work together, to be submissive to the group and to give in to a group vision. All the defects of a human person are obstacles, e.g., pride, lack of

- generosity, fear of the unknown, fear of change, fear of criticism, etc.
- (iv) We are divided and subdivided by race, language, caste, social status, etc.
  - (v) The spirit of Christian brotherhood in a community — of caring and sharing irrespective of who the neighbour is — has not been inculcated into us. Hence, the difficulty of accepting it now.
  - (vi) Lack of understanding well our faith and hence difficulty in communicating it.
  - (vii) Affected by materialism, it is hard for us to accept the idea of a community centered on Christ where its main values are sharing and caring.
  - (viii) Lack of vision
  - (ix) Lack of sense of mission

For these and other reasons, if people change, they will also change the frames.

## **B. Frames**

Reasons given:

- (i) Society places material acquisition as a top priority in its scale of values. Consequent to this, we have a structure where economic competition is very intense, which breeds greed, corruption and exploitation of fellow human beings. Such a society tends to be impersonal since its objective is “money-making.”
- (ii) An individual or a group of persons working within this framework finds it very difficult to rise above this limitation to change himself or themselves. They are conditioned by the frames.
- (iii) Even if an individual or a group of persons changes, the rotten frame still does not change because it is controlled by a small number of rich and powerful men who control society. This system is made easier to maintain because the majority of the people is also greedy for material wealth. Hence, it makes life difficult for the changed persons who still have to live within the corrupt system. Malaysia, for example, is controlled by a small group of politicians who make laws to suit their purpose. The poor become poorer, the rich richer. The split between the races tends to widen. The situation also lends itself to corruption. All this conditions a changed person. He is not free to say publicly certain things. He is not free to work openly with the oppressed. If he does not follow the corrupt way, his plans are often delayed for years, if not perpetually shelved. This is our daily experience.

For these reasons, a number of participants argued that frames are the major stumbling blocks. After much debate in a plenary session, it was more or less agreed that:

- (i) "Persons" and "frames" cannot be taken in isolation. They are intertwined.
- (ii) It depends on the situation of a place as to which is the more important obstacle.
- (iii) We should always try to work at two levels of "persons and frames," concentrating on one or the other as the situation dictates.

However, the great majority still thought that "persons" are more important than "frames" because even those on top who control the "frames" are persons.

**Question 9:** How would you think of overcoming these obstacles?

#### **Answers from reports**

This questions was tackled at the "person" level only.

- (i) To pray and reflect upon one's limitations and defects.
- (ii) To empty and renew oneself in order to give life to others.
- (iii) To be willing to acknowledge and change one's ideology, prejudices, attitudes, way of life, etc.
- (iv) To be openminded.
- (v) To be willing to sacrifice one's time and energy.
- (vi) To be willing to serve.
- (vii) To set up activities and organizations to re-educate our people in Gospel values.
- (viii) Therefore, to be willing to attend follow-up courses and seminars and other formation programs.
- (ix) To deepen fraternal relationships among priests, within families, and in religious communities.
- (x) To inculcate in our children the spirit of BCC.

In brief, we all felt the need of true internal renewal through a spiritual conversion (*metanoia*) to Christ, in such a way as to open us to new ways of living out faith in BCC.

#### **Summary of some strategies proposed**

A few groups did not discuss this topic because of shortage of time. Of those who did, their reports can be summarized under the following headings: principles, problems, means, achievements foreseen, follow-up mechanism and long term strategy.

## **A. Principles**

- (i) The main principle mentioned by various groups is the need of a deep inner conversion to Christ so that BCC become not self-centered but action-orientated to benefit others, especially the economically poor, the oppressed, the outcasts of society, the lonely, the sick — in a phrase, “the poor of Yahweh.”
- (ii) There must be good interpersonal relationships.
- (iii) The principle of a strong bond with the local and universal Church is emphasized.
- (iv) The necessity of going out to the people, to live with them, to know them and to help them.
- (v) The great importance of knowing the local social structure is stressed.

## **B. Problems**

- (i) Lack of knowledge of the people and the areas.
- (ii) Lack of awareness and interest among our people.
- (iii) Lack of key personnel.
- (iv) Lack of knowledge of some priests.
- (v) Lack of interpersonal relations (fellowship).
- (vi) Lack of unity.
- (vii) Indifference of some people.
- (viii) People going to parishes outside the districts where they live.
- (ix) The BCC cuts across ecclesiastical boundaries.
- (x) Some people prefer other priests to their own parish priests.

Many other problems have already been brought out in the previous reports.

## **C. Means**

- (i) Creating awareness through mass media, the pulpit, circulars, etc.
- (ii) Visiting Catholic homes and getting to know those coming to church and to other gatherings and functions.
- (iii) Giving a new orientation to old organizations and groups.
- (iv) Forming new groups to meet the needs of building BCC.
- (v) Having study days, Bible sessions, Charismatic meetings, mini-seminars of this kind at the local level.

## **D. Achievements Foreseen**

The participants were enthusiastic and optimistic. They hoped to make surveys, to scout around for leaders and give them an opportunity



to be trained. They intended to form core groups. Other achievements foreseen were family prayer groups, monthly masses for the BCC, catechism classes, healthy entertainment for youth, Bible classes, and groups to analyze situations. The BCC would be focusing its attention on: (1) the poor, (2) Christians of other denominations, and (3) dialogue and co-operation with people of other faiths, i.e., Muslims, Buddhists, Hindus, Taoists.

#### **E. Follow-up Mechanism**

The followup mechanism mentioned to ensure continuity was a parish council or a pastoral steering committee. Some said that a supervisory core group would help. One group of participants advocated a sort of secretariate to moderate and animate. Another group, looking beyond the national frontiers, thought of an Asian BCC Center. It was hoped that continual evaluation would be carried out.

#### **F. Long-Term Strategy**

BCC should become a community of mixed groups of different races, languages, cultures, caste, status, etc. BCC should be more democratic, where the people should have powers of decision making. BCC should take care of their own with a good catechesis program.

FABC Papers:

- No. 1. A Christian Alternative, by Alopen, 1976
2. Harmonious Approach of Christianity to Other Faiths, by Pedro S. de Achutegui, 1977
3. Conclusions of the Asian Colloquium on Ministeries in the Church, 1977
4. Pastoral Action in Tertiary Education, by the Secretariat of the Association of Catholic Universities of the Philippines, 1977
5. The Proclamation of the Christian Message in a Buddhist Environment, by Marcello Zago, 1977
6. The Bishops' Institutes for Social Action, by Bishop Julio X. Labayen, et al., 1978
7. The Encounter of the Gospel with Culture, by Parmananda R. Divarkar, et al., 1978
8. The Service of Faith in East Asia, by Robert Hardawiryana, 1978
9. In the Philippines Today: Christian Faith, Ideologies ... Marxism, by Francisco Claver, et al., 1978
10. The Christian Contribution to the Life of Prayer in the Church of Asia, by Ichiro Okumura, 1978
11. Prayer in Asian Traditions, by Ignatius Hirudayam, 1978
12. Second Plenary Assembly: Workshop Discussion Guides
  - a. Evangelization, Prayer, and Human Development
  - b. Christian Prayer and Interreligious Dialogue: Enrichment of Christian Prayer
  - c. Education for Prayer in the Catholic Schools of Asia
  - d. Seminaries and Religious Houses as Centers of Formation for Prayer in the Asian Context
  - e. Prayer as Witness in the Everyday Life of the Church of Asia
  - f. Prayer, Community Worship, and Inculturation
13. Prayer — the Life of the Church of Asia. The Final Statement and Recommendations of the Second Plenary Assembly of the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences, 1978
14. The Growing Church: Amid Various Religious and Cultural Traditions and Contemporary Ideologies, by Robert Hardawiryana, 1979
15. Gospel and Culture, by D.S. Amalorpavadass, 1979
16. The Church at the Service of the Kingdom of God, by the International Service of Reflection and Animation of the Movement For A Better World, 1979
17. The Church at the Service of Kingdom of God (II), by the Movement For A Better World, 1979
18. Evangelizing in Today's World, Fraternity and Poverty: Ways of Evangelization. A Course in Missionary Animation, by the Movement For A Better World, 1979

19. The First Bishops' Institute for Missionary Apostolate of the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences, 1979
20. Consecrated Religious Life in the Church of Contemporary Asia, by Yves E. Raguin and Sister Vandana, 1980
21. Interiority: The Foundation of Spiritual Authority in Asian Religious Traditions, by Francis Acharya and Yves Raguin, 1980
22. Church, Mission and the Kingdom of God, by Bishops Patrick D'Souza, with the Message of the Delegates of the International Mission Congress at Manila, 1980
23. Questions Muslims Ask Catholics, by a Tunis Study Group, 1980
24. The Collegiality of the Bishops for Human Development. The Fourth and Fifth Bishops' Institutes for Social Action, 1981
25. Reaching Out in Dialogue in Asia. The First and Second Bishops' Institutes for Interreligious Affairs, 1981
26. The Basic Christian Community in an Islamic Country. A Seminar in the Archdiocese of Kuala Lumpur, 1981

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