

**SEARCHING OUT THE FUTURE FOR THE CHURCH
IN ASIA**

The Statements and Recommendations of the Major Pan-Asian
Assemblies of the Bishops of Asia

- I. The Asian Bishops' Meeting. Message and Resolutions of the Bishops of Asia, Manila, 29th November, 1970.
- II. Evangelization in Modern Day Asia. Statement and Recommendations of the First Plenary Assembly of the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences, Taipei, 27th April, 1974.
- III. Prayer—the Life of the Church of Asia. Final Statement and Recommendations of the Second Plenary Assembly of the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences, Calcutta, 25th November, 1978.

**I. The Asian Bishops' Conference Message and Resolutions of the Asian
Bishops' Meeting, Manila, 29th November, 1970****A. Message of the Conference****Introduction**

1. We, the bishops of Asia, assembled in the City of Manila, thank God for bringing us together at this time, at the beginning of the second development decade which has been given the name "the angry seventies" — in view of the grave crises that are foreshadowed during it. For surely the coming decade will be crucial significance for Asia.

2. In the spirit of collegiality and dialogue so earnestly urged on us by the decrees of the Second Vatican Council, joined to earnest prayer for the guidance of the Holy Spirit, we have sought to discover new ways through which we may be of greater and more effective service — not to our Catholic communities only — but to our own peoples and to the future, pregnant with both fear and promise, which opens up before us.

This Paper has been prepared as background documentation for the Third Plenary Assembly of the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences, held at Lux Mundi Seminary, Sampran, Thailand, near Bangkok, 20th-27th October, 1982. The theme of the Plenary Assembly is: "The Church — a Community of Faith in Asia."

3. With special rejoicing, gathered around the Holy Father, Pope Paul VI, whom we welcome as Peter in the midst of his brothers in the apostolate, we have made every effort to open our minds and our hearts to the needs and aspirations of our peoples, so that we might make these truly our own also, and so that we might bring to them the wisdom that the Gospel teaches us, as well as the selfgiving love which He places in our hearts, who had compassion on the multitudes, and who came to bring to all men a fuller and more abundant life.

The Changing Faces of Asia

4. In our meetings and discussions we have tried to look upon the face of Asia — or, perhaps more rightly, upon the many faces of today's Asia and contemporary Asian man.

5. For there is, first of all, the face of Asia, continent of the teeming masses. Asia is nearly two billion people, almost two-thirds of mankind. It is a face largely marked with poverty, with under-nourishment and ill health, scarred by war and suffering, troubled and restless.

6. There is, secondly, the face of Asia, continent of the young. Nearly sixty percent of its people are below twenty-five years in age: the world of the youth of mankind.

7. There is, too, the face of the Asia that is the continent of ancient and diverse cultures, religions, histories and traditions, a region like Joseph's coat of many colors.

8. Most prominently in our time, there is the face of Asia in its hour of reawakening, of the continent where the history of the next age of mankind is already being written.

9. With the era of colonialism now a moment of the past, we witness throughout Asia today the emergence within each of our nations, both old and new, of a new consciousness and a new self-understanding. This new consciousness (of which an assertive nationalism is one aspect) seeks to discover and affirm an identity in continuity with the heritage of its own past, but also resolutely turned toward the future; it is joined to the firm will to take up the life and destiny of the nation more fully in its own hands.

10. We witness the awakening of the masses, and the ending of the long ages of resigned fatalism and passive acceptance of poverty, ignorance and sickness, of injustice and exploitation, of mismanagement

and corruption among those responsible for the conduct of public affairs. We witness their expectations of a better and fuller life for themselves and their children, for more rice on their tables, knowledge for their sons, their yearnings for greater freedom and dignity, recognition and acceptance, for a life more truly worthy of man.

11. We witness above all the awakening of our youth, idealistic, aware and concerned, impatient and restless — even rebellious — in the face of social and economic conditions, of political structures in their countries, which cry out for urgent reforms and bold transformations.

12. Last of all, as part of this same awakening, we see the face of an Asia at long last coming to birth as a true community of peoples. For barriers which have so long isolated our nations from one another are falling one by one, and the desire grows among us to know each other and to find each other as Asian, sister-nations among whom relationships of friendship and trust, of collaboration, sharing and genuine solidarity may be firmly lastingly wrought.

The Church's Response of Service

13. We look upon these many faces of Asia, we as bishops, together with those committed to our solicitude, with the deepest sense of solidarity. We are proud to be part of this continent of tomorrow: for we Asian Catholics desire — as Catholic communities — to be increasingly integrated within the larger communities around us, culturally part of that Asia which is coming to slow but certain birth in the present moment.

14. As we affirm this, we ask ourselves how we may more truly be at the service of our peoples. We ask how we may more fully engage ourselves in the common task wherein all men of good will must be joined, of building up within our nations societies which respond to the deepest aspirations of our peoples as well as to the demands of the Gospel: societies "grounded on truth, guided by justice, motivated by charity, realized in freedom, and flowering in peace."¹

15. We know that the first task must be the renewal of ourselves in the light of Christ. We must begin always with a return to the Gospel. This renewal must be rooted in prayer and in the vivifying of "that profound religious sense which characterizes the spirit of the Asian world."² In our development efforts we must continue to treasure the resources of the spirit found among our peoples. We realize too that we must deepen in ourselves the spirit of servanthood taught to us by Him

who lived in our midst "as one who serves" and who came "to give his life for the redemption of all."

16. In the past, by God's grace, we have endeavored to be faithful to the demand of service even with great sacrifice: many of those who have preceded us have, through school and hospital, through various forms of community service and charitable work, helped the progress of our countries. Not insignificant either, has been the contribution made to their growth in culture and in the ways of the spirit.

17. But we must acknowledge too, with regret, where we have been found wanting: where we have tended to foster only narrow and "domestic" interests; where we could have shown more compassion and solicitude for the poor and have not been sufficiently vigorous in speaking out for justice and the defence of human rights; where we have not incarnated the Christian life and enfolded the Church in ways and patterns of our respective cultures, and thus kept it an alien in our lands; where we have not sought understanding of, reconciliation and collaboration with our brothers of other Christian Churches and of other faiths.

18. Before Christ and our brothers we commit ourselves with all earnestness "to whatever concerns the dignity of man." For "it is far from true that because we are committed to Christ we are diverted from the duties and tasks of this earth. On the contrary, faith, hope and the love of Christ compel us to serve our brothers, knowing that as *He laid down His life for us, we too, ought to lay down our lives for our brothers.*"³

Concrete Tasks

19. It is our resolve, first of all, to be more truly "the Church of the poor." If we are to place ourselves at the side of the multitudes in our continent, we must in our way of life share something of their poverty. The Church cannot set up islands of affluence in a sea of want and misery; our own personal lives must give witness to evangelical simplicity, and no man, no matter how lowly or poor, should find it hard to come to us and find in us their brothers.

20. We resolve also to have the courage to speak out for the rights of the disadvantaged and powerless, against all forms of injustice no matter from what source such abuse may come; we will not tie our hands by compromising entanglements with the rich and the powerful in our respective countries.

21. Resolutely we commit ourselves to the concern for the total development of our peoples. We believe that man's humanity is God's gift and making, and its promotion a task and duty laid on all of us by Him.

22. "Where the sick are healed, the hungry are fed, and captives set free, where individuals and communities are reconciled and nations live in peace and co-operate with one another, we see the hand of God at work. He is also at work in science, technology and culture where these serve the welfare of mankind."⁴

23. It is our resolve also, in this continent of the young, to become, in them and for them, the "Church of the young." We wish to be, in them and for them, a Church that they shall see as worthy of their devotion and hope: which seeks to understand and trust them; which is responsive to the needs and demands of men in contemporary society; a Church not "established" in the world and which lives out in deeds, day by day, the convictions of her faith and the imperatives of her compassion. We know this is the Church they seek, and with the courage with which Christ shall support our weakness, we shall endeavor to rise to this demand.

24. In the inculturation of the life and message of the Gospel in Asia, there have been hesitations and mistakes in the past, but we are more than ever convinced that dialogue with our fellow Asians whose commitment is to other faiths is increasingly important. We also urge on all a deep respect for the culture and traditions of our peoples, and express the hope that the catholicity of the Church, the root of our diversity in the oneness of faith, may serve to help Asians remain truly Asian, and yet become fully part of the modern world and the one family of mankind.

Towards the New World of Asia

25. Gathered together, then, in Christ's presence, we turn to the other Christian churches and communities in Asia, seeking to collaborate with them in our efforts for the development of our peoples, for freedom, justice and peace. It is our earnest hope that these common endeavors may themselves increasingly draw us together into the unity which is God's will for us.

26. *Populorum progressio* has traced the broad vision of human progress and peace and thus placed in our hands the mandate for the task before us. We rededicate ourselves, with all the earnestness at our

command, to this endeavor. It remains for us, in the days and years to come, more resolutely to engage, with all men of good will, in the effort to direct men's desires and purposes away from narrow egoisms and particularist interests, from systems which set man in hatred against his brother and turn him away from God who alone is the true source of human brotherliness. We earnestly seek the just ending of the strife and warfare which has torn our countries and brought untold suffering to our brother Asians.

It remains for us to gather the needed knowledge for the difficult planning in which we must henceforth participate, and to muster the effective will to eradicate entrenched injustice and replace oppressive structures, thus bringing to realization in each of our nations of that society which is the substance of the expectations of our peoples. It remains for us, with both patience and decision, to help bind together the new world of Asia, as a true family of nations in this part of the earth, linked not only by lines of geography, but by mutual understanding and respect, by the nobler bonds of brotherhood and of love.

27. These resolves and desires we, the bishops of Asia, in communion with the Holy Father Pope Paul VI, touch-stone of our unity and our love, place with sincerity today before all our brothers in this part of the world. We make ours, in the most solemn of ways, their hopes and aspirations for a new Asia which shall be worthy of the future that is laid up in the heart of Asian man.

28. We ask the Spirit to lend us a largeness of vision, wisdom and courage to realize what would otherwise be only unfulfilled hopes and empty promises. We turn to the Christ whose concern for the multitudes was made visible in another Asian land, the Christ who is also the Lord of the future of man. We ask him, by his presence beside us and within us, to help us raise up the city of brothers — a city which shall mirror, in hope and promise, the kingdom whose foundations he laid, reconciling all men in himself, by his blood on the cross, and whose lines he reveals already in the love which is his gift to us.

29. Our brothers in Asia, we are small in numbers, with little of human resources, with little — even — of human wisdom and power; with almost no influence, in our great continent, on the councils of the nations. But in our poverty and lowliness we are not disheartened by the massive problems which confront all of us in this decade because we find resources of faith and courage, in him who in his cross and dying proved himself the great lover of men. And as the Lord's arm is not shortened, so is his love ever poured out upon us and thus our hope, and

the courage born of it, even if constantly threatened and broken, is yet ever constantly renewed.

30. In the power of the Risen Christ, then, we lay the foundation of our hope. And we have confidence that if men of good will and sincere purpose will labor together, we *can* build this new society. Only we must have the humility to depend on God and on His will that His sons shall come to the fullness of the stature of Christ Jesus our Lord.

B. Resolutions of the Asian Bishops' Meeting

The discussions we have held in both the Plenary Assembly and in the various Working Groups have been fruitful, first and foremost, in helping to strengthen our own convictions and clarifying our objectives. It is these convictions and resolves which we will bring home with us to our dioceses and our countries. The more salient of them we have tried to formulate in the text which follow: they may serve to inform those who have followed our deliberations and give some indications of the lines of action and collaboration which, with God's assistance, we desire to open up. May the Spirit give us the energies to implement these with all deliberate speed.

1. It has been agreed:

THAT THE EPISCOPAL CONFERENCES HERE REPRESENTED ARE URGED TO AUTHORIZE AND SUPPORT A PERMANENT STRUCTURE FOR THE EFFECTIVE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE DECISIONS OF THIS MEETING; THIS PERMANENT STRUCTURE TO BE SUBSTANTIALLY DESCRIBED IN ANNEX "A" TO THIS DOCUMENT.

2. Along with men of other faiths, other Christians and all men of good will, we resolve to uphold and promote the realization of human rights and defend them wherever, whenever, and by whomsoever they are violated.

3. We resolve to make our special concern the lot of the workers and peasants, in particular to assist in their education and organization in order to enable them to exercise and defend their rights in society, according to the teachings of the Church.

4. We resolve to help secure the basic means of livelihood for all. In this context, we strongly commit ourselves to an equitable distribution and socially responsible use of land and other resources within our nations, as also among the nations of the world.

5. Being fully aware of the problems of population pressure, we resolve to impress on all the duty of responsible parenthood by legitimate means.

6. While expressing our appreciation to the nations of the world and the bishops of the world for their expression of brotherhood towards Asia, we affirm that a highly desirable form of mutual aid between nations is trade on an equitable basis. We urge a greater openness of the markets of the affluent world to the fruits of Asian labor and the upholding of justice in international commodity prices.

7. We support the struggle against atheistic communism and imperialism of every kind. We uphold peace by which we mean peace with justice and freedom.

8. To avoid unnecessary reduplication of efforts and for the maintenance of national priorities, we urge support and co-operation with government agencies and other religious and civic bodies, and all men of good will, in development work.

9. We recognize and appreciate the positive work done by previous ecumenical conferences organized by the World Council of Churches, Caritas Internationalis, Sodepax, Misereor, etc.

10. We commend wholeheartedly the recent recommendations on development by the UN and also by the Reports of the Pearson Commission, the Timbergen Report and the Reports of UNCTAD.

In particular we urge that the affluent nations reach the goal of at least 1% of GNP as aid to the developing countries at the earliest possible date. In consideration of the burdens of interest and capital repayments, we also strongly appeal that at least 70% of the aid be in the form of grants. In the case of aid loans, we request the progressive untying of aid.

11. While we acknowledge the inadequacies of our efforts hitherto in this field we would strongly press for:

i. The elaboration of a theology of development inclusive of the role of the Church in situations of conflict.

ii. A clarification of the roles of the priests, religious and laity in such a theology.

12. We pledge ourselves to an open, sincere, and continuing dialogue with our brothers of other great religions of Asia, that we may learn from one another how to enrich ourselves spiritually and how to work more effectively together on our common task of total human development.

13. We also pledge ourselves to develop an indigenous theology and to do what we can so that the life and message of the Gospel may be ever more incarnate in the rich historic cultures of Asia, so that in the necessary process of modernization and development, Asian Christianity may help to promote all that is "authentically human in these cultures."

14. We urge that Episcopal Conferences establish suitable procedures for fostering a continuing dialogue between the theologians and specialists in religion of our Asian churches and their counterparts belonging to the other Asian religions.

15. We recognize the dynamic and prophetic role that Asian students are playing in the development and transformation of our society. We also recognize that the university chaplains can and must meet the university students in a frank and open dialogue and with them confront the problems and issues posed by the university communities and our changing society.

16. It is proposed that one member of each national episcopal conference be appointed to have special care of student affairs; and it is imperative that the student chaplaincy is provided with an adequate number of full-time and well-trained chaplains who with the students will endeavor to identify themselves closely with the poor and under-privileged masses of Asia.

17. It is recommended that the proposed Standing Committee of the Asian Bishops' Conferences do all in its power to facilitate and coordinate the work of university student chaplains.

18. Appreciative of the importance of education and of the contribution our educational efforts can make in the whole process of human development in our lands we urge our Catholic educational institutes and educators to put increasing emphasis on education for total development, and that for this purpose, adequate arrangements be made for the active involvement of our teachers and students in spiritual leadership training, social welfare, and community development programs.

19. We gratefully acknowledge the initiative and guidance that the Asian Regional Secretariat of the International Office of Catholic Education (OIEC) has already given in this and other regards and pledge the Asian section of the OIEC all necessary support.

20. In order to make the voice of Christ heard more relevantly on such current problems in Asia as social justice, education and political freedom; and in order to coordinate existing activities of the Church in Asia in the fields of radio, television, press and film; and in order to harmonize the mass media activities of the Church with other existing channels of the media, it is suggested that the proposed Central Committee of the Asian Bishops' Conferences establish a three-member Episcopal Commission for Mass Media as early as possible. (UNDA-ASIA meets in Manila in February 1971).

21. It is recommended that the proposed Central Committee of the Asian Bishops' Conferences establish an Asian news agency and publishing house and in this connection investigate the suitability of locating these in Hong Kong.

(The proposal, made during an earlier meeting on Nov. 28, 1970, is as follows: It is proposed that the Central Committee of the Asian Bishops' Conference establish an Asian news center or a central information agency which will gather and distribute news of interest and importance to and for the Church).

22. It is proposed that the Episcopal Commission use UNDA-ASIA as its extension arm for radio and television for an experimental period of one year. It is proposed that the Episcopal Commission or similar structure with the help of experts and the cooperation of all the Episcopal Conferences work out ways and means for the effective use of Radio Veritas regarding overseas broadcasting.

**Approved at the Closing Plenary Session
Asian Bishops Meeting
Radio Veritas Center, Quezon City
November 29, 1970**

C. Annex A: Resolution on Structures

The General Assembly of this Meeting adopts the following resolution, namely:

THAT THE EPISCOPAL CONFERENCES HERE REPRESENTED ARE URGED TO AUTHORIZE AND SUPPORT A PERMANENT STRUCTURE FOR THE EFFECTIVE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE DECISIONS OF THIS MEETING; THIS PERMANENT STRUCTURE TO BE SUBSTANTIALLY AS FOLLOWS:

1. The Episcopal Conferences of Asia represented in this Meeting shall create a Central Committee of the Asian Bishops, consisting of the President of each Conference or his episcopal representative. The function of this Central Committee is to foster and coordinate the efforts of the Episcopal Conferences to implement the resolutions of this Meeting.

2. The Central Committee shall constitute a Standing Committee composed of three bishops, from different parts of Asia, who if they are not already members of the Central Committee will become such members *ex officio*, chosen as the Central Committee shall decide. The function of the Standing Committee is to provide more direct guidance and support to the principal instrument of coordination of the Asian Bishops, namely, a Central Secretariat.

3. The Central Secretariat of the Asian Bishops shall be constituted by the Central Committee and shall function under the guidance of the Standing Committee.

4. It is highly desirable that the Standing Committee meet every six months and the Central Committee every 18 months.

5. It is also highly desirable that the Central Committee be empowered to call a General Assembly of the Asian Bishops' Conferences, whenever necessary, for the transaction of urgent business. The delegates to this General Assembly need not be all the bishops of Asia, but specified members of, or representatives elected by, them.

6. In any case, it is suggested that a General Assembly be convened by the Central Committee in three to five years' time.

7. Considering the limited resources of the Asian bishops, the Central Secretariat shall be a very modest affair to begin with, consisting of one Secretary General assisted by a small clerical staff.

8. The functions of the Central Secretariat shall be as follows:

— to be an organ of continuing cooperation among the Episcopal Conferences of Asia;

— to be an organ of exchange of information concerning needs in Asia of both the Christian communities and the national communities; an organ of sharing of experience of the various communities of the Catholic Church and the Christian Churches; a center for information regarding personnel resources and personnel needs for the Church in this region;

— to be a center which will set up consultations, conferences, and the like, on specific theological and ecclesiological issues; which will program and undertake, in cooperation with other bodies, studies (especially in matters concerning justice, development and peace) which may be needed or helpful for the Episcopal Conferences and the Catholic communities of the region; which can stimulate thought, concern, and consensus among the bishops of Asia and their communities regarding major religious, social, educational issues affecting the region; which can help in the preparation of regional meetings and consultations of the bishops in the area, or of committees and other bodies set up for the various specific objectives;

— to serve as a channel of dissemination of the thought on social questions, especially of the Holy See, but also of the Conferences of Bishops all over the world, for the benefit of the Bishops' Conferences of Asia;

— to study the possibilities of mutual aid between the various Catholic communities in Asia and also between the Catholic communities of the West and those of Asia;

— to promote the formation of a common mind and a common voice in the Catholic communities of Asia in the matter of positions to be taken and formulated on questions of justice, development and peace;

— to serve as liaison with the East Asian Christian Conference (EACC) especially in matters of church involvement in development efforts;

— to serve as liaison between the Christians of Asia and their brethren of other faiths, likewise in development efforts as well as in all constructive forms of intercultural exchange.

9. It should be emphasized that the Central Secretariat is a service agency, with no juridical competence to issue directives to, or in anyway to infringe on the authority and autonomy of, the Episcopal Conferences. However, since the Central Secretariat will not be able to perform these tasks without the full cooperation of the Episcopal Conferences, this Meeting urges on them, and on their various Episcopal Commissions, the advisability of supplying the Central Secretariat promptly and fully with needed information and assistance.

10. The Central Secretariat shall be located in an Asian city which is, as far as possible, geographically, central to the region, and at the same time where the Secretary General will have easy access to the specialists and the international agencies upon whose collaboration he will depend. In the opinion of the Meeting, the city which best meets these specifications is Manila.

11. The Secretary General of the Central Secretariat shall be appointed by the Central Committee for a term of two years, although this is open to revision.

12. It is a highly desirable that at least one of the three bishops of the Standing Committee be easily accessible to the Secretary General.

13. The Episcopal Conference of Asia shall contribute yearly to the expenses of the Central Secretariat in the manner specified by the Central Committee. It is suggested that a fund of US\$30,000 for the first year is an absolute minimum with which to make a start. Because of the poverty of many Asian dioceses, donations from more affluent dioceses will be appreciated, and efforts should be made to seek other sources of funding.

14. The formation of this central structure for all Asia shall not preclude, but on the contrary encourage the setting up of sub-regional co-operative arrangements between Episcopal Conferences with common problems, needs and interests.

15. Thus, the Episcopal Conferences of a geographical and/or cultural sub-region (such as those of Korea, Japan, Taiwan, Hong Kong, and Viet-Nam) could proceed to set up a Subregional Central Committee with its own Standing Committee and Sub-regional Central Committee with its own Standing Committee and Sub-regional Secretariat. Operational connections would then be established between these sub-regional agencies and the central agencies.

16. The first meeting of the Central Committee of the Asian Bishops at which the structure described above shall be set up, will be held in March 1971 in Hong Kong.

**Approved at the Closing Plenary Session
Asian Bishops' Meeting
November 29, 1970
Radio Veritas Center, Quezon City**

1. John XXIII, *Pacem in terris*.
2. Cf. Pope Paul VI, Message to the Asian Bishops' Meeting, 28 November, 1970.
3. Message to Mankind of the Council Fathers, Vatican II, 20 October 1962.
4. From the Conference Message, Asian Ecumenical Conference for Development, Tokyo, 22 July 1970.

II. Evangelization in Modern Day Asia.

**Statement and Recommendations of the First Plenary Assembly
of the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences, Taipei,
27th April, 1974.**

A. Statement of the Plenary Assembly

1. We, bishops-delegate from 14 Episcopal Conferences and 18 countries, have gathered in Taipei for the First Plenary Assembly of the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences, to meet on matters of common concern for the Church in Asia, and to prepare ourselves for the Synod of Bishops of 1974.

2. Joined in communion with the Roman Pontiff, Pope Paul VI, whose message to us and whose representative to our assembly we have received with joy, we send our greetings to our brother bishops in Asia, to the communities of God's people in our part of the world, and to all those who are joined with us in spirit to ask God's blessings on our meeting.

3. We have sought the guidance of the Holy Spirit as, during these days, we have reflected on the task of preaching the Gospel of Jesus Christ in modern day Asia. We have not attempted to construct in this statement a full theology of the proclamation of the Gospel. Instead we have addressed ourselves, especially in our workshops, to particular tasks which the evangelization of Asia today demands of us.

I. Introduction

4. Modern day Asia is marked today by swift and far-reaching transformation, a continent undergoing modernization and profound social change, along with secularization and the break up of traditional societies. Side by side with undeniable benefits and positive values, these processes have brought most serious problems. Industrialization, and all that goes with it, violently threatens our peoples with irreparable alienation and the disintegration of patterns of life and social relationships built up over the centuries. Stable meanings and values which have supported their lives are deeply shaken, and Asian peoples today are left in confusion and disorientation, even in despair and darkness of spirit.

5. We who make up the Church in Asia today are inextricably part of this new world, since we are bound to our peoples by a common history and a common destiny. With the light which God's Spirit and His Word provide us, we seek to read the signs of the times, and to discern with our peoples what, in their present situation, they must accept and foster, and what they must reject and refuse.

6. We know that in the hearts of our brothers there are these quests today: to find new meanings in their lives and endeavors, to overcome destructive forces and to shape a new integration in our societies, to free themselves from structures which have created new forms of bondage, to foster human dignity and freedom and a more fully human life, to create a more genuine communion among men and nations.

II. The Proclamation of the Gospel

7. It is our belief that only in and through Christ and His Gospel, and by the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, that these quests can come to realization. For Christ alone, we believe, is for every man "the Way, the Truth and the Life," (Jn 14:16) "who enlightens every man who comes into the world" (Jn 1:9). We believe that it is in Him and in His good news that our peoples will finally find the full meaning we all seek, the liberation we strive after, the brotherhood and peace which is the desire of all our hearts.

8. It is because of this that the preaching of Jesus Christ and His Gospel to our peoples in Asia becomes a task which today assumes an urgency, a necessity and magnitude unmatched in the history of our Faith in this part of the world. It is because of this that we can repeat the

Apostle's word, and repeat it joyfully, "Woe to me if I do not preach the Gospel" (1 Cor 9:6), for it is "the love of Christ which presses us" (2 Cor 5:14) to share with our peoples what is most precious in our hearts and in our lives, Jesus Christ and His Gospel, the unsurpassable riches of Christ (cf. Eph 3:8).

III. The Local Church . . . Incarnate, Indigenous

9. To preach the Gospel in Asia today we must make the message and life of Christ truly incarnate in the minds and lives of our peoples. The primary focus of our task of evangelization then, at this time in our history, is the building up of a truly local church.

10. For the local church is the realization and the enfleshment of the Body of Christ in a given people, a given place and time.

11. It is not a community in isolation from other communities of the Church one and catholic. Rather it seeks communion with all of them. With them it professes the one faith, shares the one Spirit and the one sacramental life. In a special way it rejoices in its communion and filial oneness with the See of Peter, which presides over the universal Church in love.

12. The local church is a church incarnate in a people, a church indigenous and inculturated. And this means concretely a church in continuous, humble and loving dialogue with the living traditions, the cultures, the religions — in brief, with all the life-realities of the people in whose midst it has sunk its roots deeply and whose history and life it gladly makes its own. It seeks to share in whatever truly belongs to that people: its meanings and its values, its aspirations, its thoughts and its language, its songs and its artistry. — Even its frailties and failings it assumes, so that they too may be healed. For so did God's Son assume the totality of our fallen human condition (save only for sin) so that he might make it truly his own, and redeem it in his paschal mystery.

IV. In Dialogue with the Religions of Asia

13. In Asia especially this involves a dialogue with the great religious traditions of our peoples.

14. In this dialogue we accept them as significant and positive elements in the economy of God's design of salvation. In them we recognize and respect profound spiritual and ethical meanings and

values. Over many centuries they have been the treasury of the religious experience of our ancestors, from which our contemporaries do not cease to draw light and strength. They have been (and continue to be) the authentic expression of the noblest longings of their hearts, and the home of their contemplation and prayer. They have helped to give shape to the histories and cultures of our nations.

15. How then can we not give them reverence and honor? And how can we not acknowledge that God has drawn our peoples to Himself through them?

16. Only in dialogue with these religions can we discover in them the seeds of the word of God (*Ad Gentes*, c. I,9). This dialogue will allow us to touch the expression and the reality of our peoples' deepest selves, and enable us to find authentic ways of living and expressing our own Christian faith. It will reveal to us also many riches of our own faith which we perhaps would not have perceived. Thus it can become a sharing in friendship of our quest for God and for brotherhood among His sons.

17. Finally, this dialogue will teach us what our faith in Christ leads us to receive from these religious traditions, and what must be purified in them, healed and made whole, in the light of God's Word.

18. On our part we can offer what we believe the Church alone has the duty and joy to offer to them and to all men: oneness with the father in Jesus His Son, the ways to grace Christ gives us in his Gospel and his sacraments, and in the fellowship of the community which seeks to live in him; an understanding too of the value of the human person and of the social dimensions of human salvation — a salvation which assumes and gives meaning to human freedom, earthly realities, and the course of this world's history.

V. In Dialogue with the People, Especially the Poor

19. A local church in dialogue with its people, in so many countries in Asia, means dialogue with the poor. For most of Asia is made up of multitudes of the poor. Poor, not in human values, qualities, nor in human potential. But poor, in that they are deprived of access to material goods and resources which they need to create a truly human life for themselves. Deprived, because they live under oppression, that is, under social, economic and political structures which have injustice built into them.

20. This dialogue has to take the shape of what has been called a "dialogue of life." It involves a genuine experience and understanding of this poverty, deprivation and oppression of so many of our peoples. It demands working, not for them merely (in a paternalistic sense), but *with* them, to learn from them (for we have much to learn from them!) their real needs and aspirations, as they are enabled to identify and articulate these, and to strive for their fulfillment, by transforming those structures and situations which keep them in that deprivation and powerlessness.

21. This dialogue leads to a genuine commitment and effort to bring about social justice in our societies. In turn this will include an operative and organized "action and reflection in faith" (sometimes called "conscientization"). This is a process which seeks the change and transformation of unjust social structures. Through it the deprived and oppressed acquire effective responsibility and participation in the decisions which determine their lives, and thus are enabled to free themselves. Through it those who (consciously or unconsciously) maintain these structures may be made aware of them, and hopefully be converted to justice and the freedom of Christian love for their brothers.

22. The Synod of Bishops of 1971, in the document *Justice in the World*, has affirmed that "action in behalf of justice and participation in the transformation of the world fully appear to us as a constitutive dimension of the preaching of the Gospel, that is, of the mission of the Church for the redemption of the human race and its liberation from every oppressive situation" (1971 Synod of Bishops, *Justice in the World*, Introduction). We affirm this teaching again, for we believe that this, in our time, is part and parcel of "preaching the Good News to the poor" (Mt 11:5; Lk 4:18). It is our belief that it is from the material deprivation of our poor people, as well as from their tremendous human potential, and from their aspirations for a more fully human and brotherly world, that Christ is calling the churches of Asia.

23. Engaged in tasks for justice in accordance, with the spirit and the demands of the Gospel, we will realize that the search for holiness and the search for justice, evangelization and the promotion of true human development and liberation, are not only not opposed, but make up today the integral preaching of the Gospel, especially in Asia.

24. We pledge ourselves to a continuing and large-hearted encouragement and support for those who are engaged in these tasks and for those who we believe have a special call for God to identify with the poor, especially when their work meets with difficulty, failure and opposition.

VI. These Tasks and the Proclamation of the Gospel

25. Evangelization is the carrying out of the Church's duty of proclaiming by word and witness the Gospel of the Lord. Within this context we have spoken of these tasks which are of particularly crucial importance for most the local churches in Asia, for through them our local churches can most effectively preach Christ to our peoples.

26. Indigenization renders the local church truly present within the life and cultures of our peoples. Through it, all their human reality is assumed into the life of the Body of Christ, so that all of it may be purified and healed, perfected and fulfilled.

27. Through the second task, the Asian religions are brought into living dialogue with the Gospel, so that the seeds of the Word in them may come to full flower and fruitfulness within the life of our peoples.

28. Finally, through the "preaching of the good news to the poor" (Lk 4:18), Christ's renewing life and the power of his paschal mystery is inserted into our peoples' search for human development, for justice, brotherhood and peace.

VII. Missionary Formation

29. Proclaiming the Gospel today in these diverse ways challenges us then, demands of all of us a competence, dedication and effort which would dishearten us in our inadequacy, did we not place our trust in him who strengthens us.

30. For to preach the Gospel is first and foremost to communicate the experience of the Risen Christ. "What we have heard, what we have seen, what our hands have touched . . ." (1 Jn 1:1) It is the encounter with the Lord in our hearts, in the midst of his community, an encounter in faith and in the Spirit, which will in turn awaken faith in those to whom we announce his word. And this encounter, we know, is his gift.

31. Prayer and contemplation, especially important for contact with the Asian spirit; openness of heart, especially to the young; the capacity to be silent, to listen and to receive from the other; the ability to discern the signs of the times — ultimately all these are gifts which we must beg for from the Spirit, and foster by his grace.

32. Obviously there is need for renewal in missionary formation if we are to respond to the tasks which we have spoken of. Knowledge of

Asian philosophies and especially the ideological currents which captivate the youth of Asia; the contribution of social and behavioral sciences; a serious understanding of the factors, including the political, which enter into the dynamics of national development; the use of modern techniques of personal and group formation, as well as pastoral action — all of these have to form part of the education for mission in Asia today.

33. Once again in relation to the tasks we have emphasized, the construction of a genuinely Asian theological reflection must be given a special priority. For the discernment of theological imperatives and the formulation of theological insights and principles, living contact with concrete Asian realities is necessary, and thus the collaboration of the entire local church in dialogic process, is called for. All this is especially relevant in view of that contemporary search for meaning we have earlier mentioned.

VIII. Other Means for Proclaiming the Gospel: Massmedia

34. No one today needs to be told of the influence and importance of the media of social communication for effectively proclaiming God's Word to our peoples. We therefore wish to make it our urgent collegial concern as Asian Bishops to place them more fully at the service of the evangelization, education and development of our peoples.

IX. Messages . . . To Bearers of the Gospel

35. We wish we could now address a special message to our priests and the men and women religious who have with so much dedication and courage borne the burdens of evangelization in Asia. We wish to express to them our gratitude and affection.

36. With large expectations, we turn to our laypeople also, especially to our catechists, for their missionary collaboration, so greatly valued in the past, will be increasingly called upon in the coming years. More and more they must assume responsibility in the tasks of evangelization.

37. We thank in a special way our religious sisters and laywomen in the churches of Asia, for their service through many decades, a truly evangelical ministry rendered so generously and so well to our peoples.

38. And we wish to remember as well as the legions of missionaries, priests, brothers and sisters (and lay missionaries as well) who came to our countries from other lands, to bring Christ and his Church to our

peoples, and to give their lives in the service of the Lord. We and our local churches owe so much to them, and they have indelibly inscribed their spirit in our hearts.

39. Today, in most of our Asian lands the need continues for missionaries who come in service from other local churches. We welcome them from other countries into ours, asking only that they make themselves truly part of the local church and truly one with our peoples. More and more, we trust, our own local churches can send some of our best sons and daughters to serve our sister churches, in Asia and in other continents as well.

40. Last of all, to the young in our Asian nations, who make up nearly two-thirds of this continent, we renew what we said in our message of 1970: the Church of Asia should be, in them and for them, "the Church of the young" (Message, Asian Bishops' Meeting, 23). We turn to them as the Lord turned to the rich young man of the Gospel — loving them for all the splendid gifts that are theirs, urging them to place these gifts at the service of their brothers, inviting them to seek their fulfillment in the freedom which Christ offers to them.

X. To the "Church of Silence"

41. To our brothers and sisters in the "Church of silence" we extend our thoughts and the embrace of our hearts. In their steadfast faith and suffering, we see also a witnessing to Christ and a proclaiming of the Gospel; such fidelity and constancy we honor. In our prayers and in the eucharistic renewal of the Lord's sacrifice we have sought during these days to be one with them in fraternal solidarity.

XI. To Other Christian Churches and Communities

42. Our brothers in other Christian churches and communities know how much closer we have come together in the past few years, and how truly we rejoice in this. But it is our earnest prayer and resolve that mutual understanding, collaboration and oneness among us will grow more and more firmly in the years ahead of us, as we bear witness to the Lord to our other Asian brothers.

XII. Prayer to the Lord

43. As we end our deliberations, we can only turn in humble, trusting, but importunate prayer to Our Lord.

44. Redeemer of our peoples, it is He who has loved them from the dawn of the ages, and who in the fullness of time made their human condition His own. It is He who gave His life for them, that He might bring them out of shadows and beginnings into His marvelous light (1 Peter 2:9).

45. Head of the Body which is His Church, it is He who has summoned us to this task of proclaiming His Gospel and raising His Church in the midst of the nations. It is He who summons us again today, and all who with us make up His little flock in this part of the world, to be for our Asian brothers the memory of His coming into our world, the sacrament of His presence in our midst, the sign of His shaping of the future of mankind.

46. Christ of the peoples of Asia, humbly we beg you to make use of us to reveal yourself more and more to them. You have been present already in their histories and traditions. In hidden ways you have led them, because for them too, you are the *Way*. In ways unknown to us you have enlightened them in their worship, their beliefs, their philosophies, since for them, too, you are the *Truth*. In diverse manners you have already made yourself present in their lives, for you are their *Life*. From the beginning you have called our peoples, and from your Cross you have drawn them to yourself.

47. Sanctify us, sanctify your Church (cf. Jn 17:17-19), so that we may be less unworthy to speak your Word, more ready to share the faith that is your gift to us, the hope of you that we treasure in our hearts, the self-giving love with which you teach us to offer our lives in service to our brothers, the joy and gladness with which you light up our days.

48. Let your Church be truly a sacrament for our brothers, a people ready to share in the mystery of your Cross, so that the light and mercy of the Father may be poured out upon the world.

49. Lord of history, in the times and seasons known to you, you shall make yourself known in fullness to our peoples. An ancient prayer implored, 'Let your love embrace all the nations.' It is the prayer we make again today. In us and through us, but also before us and beyond us, come to our lands and our peoples. Make them your own. Let your love embrace them, that they may have life, ever fuller life in you (cf. Jn 10:10).

XIII. . . . To Mary, the Mother of God

50. With our peoples we turn also to Mary, mother of the Lord. It was she who bore the Word into the world, she who sat in the midst of the Lord's disciples when his Spirit came upon them in the Upper Room, to send them rejoicing to the uttermost ends of the earth. In Asia she has accompanied his heralds, *wherever* they have preached the Gospel of her Son. We pray to her at this moment as, after the manner of his disciples, we gather to ask the Spirit to descend upon us, and to send us forth with a new commitment "to preach the Gospel to every creature" (Mk 16:15). Mother of the Lord, to her too, he has committed our peoples. May she teach us, may she assist us to bring to our brothers in Asia, in hope and rejoicing, the saving word of her Son.

Taipei, 27 April 1974

Note: The prayer mentioned in par. 49 is a petition which comes to us from mediaeval times, particularly beloved by Blessed Angela of Foligno, vid. Henri de Lubac, *Catholicism*, London, 1958, p. 123.

B. Recommendations of the Plenary Assembly

We wholeheartedly reaffirm the Resolutions of the Asian Bishops' Meeting (Manila, 23-29 November), 1970, the Propositions of the First Regional Meeting of the FABC (FABC-CJKV Regional Meeting, Taipei, 26-31, August) 1973, and the Final Reflections of the Office of Human Development First Bishops' Seminar for Social Action (BISA I, Novaliches, Quezon City, 1-15 March) 1974, particularly as regards the Church's loving service to the poor, its full commitment to social justice, and the renewed effort needed to form a clergy equal to the great challenges of today.

In order, however, to work out even more effective and concrete ways of evangelization at all levels of Church life in Asia today, we recommend:

1. That the members of the FABC seriously review and evaluate how these same resolves have been and can best be implemented in their respective areas.

2. That the National Bishops' Conferences, as a fundamental act proclaiming the Good News, actively cooperate with various Bible societies in translating and spreading the Bible.

3. That the FABC, in collaboration with the Sacred Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples and the Pontifical Secretariates:

a) evolve a working concept of evangelization that embraces, as integral to that concept, genuine dialogue with the great living religions of Asia and other deep-rooted forms of belief, such as animism;

b) be of service to local Churches in their efforts to prepare their members to engage in deeper and more active dialogue with men of other religions and beliefs, and also with non-believers;

c) promote organized efforts, including scholarship arrangements, to explore the deeper relationship between the Christian Faith and the Asian religions and beliefs in order to discover all its implications for a truer integration of spiritual values, and to disseminate the findings of such studies.

4. That National Bishops' Conferences seek ever better ways of forming the clergy, flexibly adapted to the social, cultural, and spiritual needs of a given community, and firmly anchored in the context of concrete realities through adequate exposure and apprenticeship.

5. That the social teaching of the Church, especially of the 1971 Synod on Justice, be organically incorporated into the body of Christian instruction and preaching at all levels: in catechisms for children and adults, in courses of formation for the laity and religious, and above all in the theological and pastoral formation and renewal of priests, young and old.

6. That the leaders of the Church support and encourage those who identify with the poor, the marginalized and the exploited, personally showing the way by a Christ-like witness of poverty in their own life-style.

7. That, as a concrete sign of our solidarity and collegiality at the Asian level, we recommend Lenten Campaigns in favor of social justice projects in various parts of Asia.

8. That the Members of the FABC and its Office on Education and University Chaplains promote periodic dialogues engaged in depth between youth of all levels and bishops, student chaplains and counselors, and, as a first step, that Member Conferences send their reactions to the paper "Pastoral Action in Tertiary Education," by the Association of Catholic Universities of the Philippines, at the request of the said Office.

9. That every consideration be given toward implementing in the Asian context the teaching of the 1971 Synod on the role of women in the Church today. "We . . . urge that women should have their own share of responsibility and participation in the community life of society and likewise of the Church" (Synod, 1971, Justice in the World, III: The practice of justice).

10. a) That mass communications be given a higher priority than before by the various episcopates, in the allocation of material and human resources, considering its vital importance as an instrument for evangelization;

b) that Catholic institutions offering courses in mass communications be urged to give their Catholic students and trainees adequate theological formation to go with the techniques of mass media, and, conversely,

c) that basic training in the principles and methods of mass communications be part of seminary studies, in preparation for their ministry in a world so profoundly influenced by communication in its myriad modern forms.

11. That the National Episcopal Conferences of the FABC actively promote and support the Pontifical Missionary Societies as a concrete means of involving the entire people of God in the task of evangelization.

12. That the FABC seek effective ways to keep the local Churches well informed of new progress relevant to pastoral work, made in theology, liturgy, pastoral sciences and research of other religions and beliefs, thus giving more life to the existing information service.

III. Prayer the Life of the Church of Asia. Final Statement and Recommendations of the Second Plenary Assembly of the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences, Calcutta, 25th November, 1978.

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

2. We have chosen to dedicate a full week to a seminar on "Prayer — the Life of the Church of Asia." The theme was chosen, in continuity

with the topics of the first gathering of Asian Bishops in the presence of Pope Paul VI at Manila in 1970 on the development of peoples in Asia,¹ and of the First Plenary Assembly at Taipei in April 1974 on the tasks of evangelization in modern-day Asia.²

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

Our Theme: Prayer

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

5. It is significant that this assembly was held in India. India is "a land of ancient culture, the cradle of great religions, the home of a nation that has sought God with relentless desire, in deep meditation and silence, and in hymns of fervent prayer."³ We have been introduced to some Asian approaches to prayer by competent and discerning guides. Thus our meeting has not been one for study and discussion only, but equally a time of contemplation and the search for God's light and grace. These days have been, we believe, not only fruitful in the brotherly interchange of ideas and opinions, not only a joyous experience of community and friendship, but filled too with the grace of the presence of the Lord and the working of the Holy Spirit in our hearts.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

What is Christian Prayer?

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

21. From this renewal which we seek to foster in our local churches, we trust the grace of the Spirit will flow to fill with new power and love all those activities to which the mission of the Church in Asian countries summons her today. "For the Church, evangelizing means bringing the Good News" into all the dimensions of human life and society "and through its influence transforming humanity from within and making it new."⁹ Some of these areas, to which we have given particular attention in our discussions are: total human development, education, and — in a more general way — the conduct of everyday life.

...total human development

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

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

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

...education

25. (Prayer and Christian education). The Church in Asia has had traditionally a special commitment to the task of Christian education.

For the fulfillment of this work too, especially in our own Catholic educational institutions, prayer and formation in prayer are indispensable. Only if the young learn to dialogue with God in the different situations of their personal lives¹² and to surrender themselves to Him, can they grow into fully Christian persons who strive to overcome selfish individualism and to develop toward that freedom whereby they place their lives at the service of others. Only with prayer will the intelligence truly find its way to Truth and Wisdom, and the heart to Self-Gift and Love. A Catholic school will be able to fulfill its mission to the measure that, joined to fostering the development of competence and skills, it is also able to become a school of faith and prayer where the young are helped to see life with God's eyes and to love their brothers and sisters with God's own heart.¹³

...everyday life

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

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

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

28. It is sometimes said that we ourselves and our Christian communities do not impress those of other Asian religious traditions as men of prayer, as contemplative communities. This prevents the Church from being, for Asian peoples, the sign and sacrament of God's presence in

our midst. How can Christian prayer more profoundly and effectively bring the influence of the Gospel into our Asian societies and all of Asian life,—in the areas we have touched on (in the previous section), and in others as well?

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

...inculturation

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

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

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

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

...interreligious dialogue

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

35. The spirituality characteristic of the religions of our continent stresses a deeper awareness of God and the whole self in recollection, silence and prayer, flowering in openness to others, in compassion, non-violence, generosity. Through these and other gifts it can contribute much to our spirituality which, while remaining truly Christian, can yet be greatly enriched. Sustained and reflective dialogue with them in prayer (as shall be found possible, helpful and wise in different situations) will reveal to us what the Holy Spirit has taught others to express in a marvelous variety of ways. These are different perhaps from our own, but through them we too may hear His voice, calling us to lift our hearts to the Father.

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

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

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

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

V. Conclusion: Our commitment

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

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

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

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

43. We wish to affirm our conviction that the future of our peoples cannot be built up in truth and justice, reconciliation and peace,

unless men and women of good will among our peoples seek the deeper conversion of hearts and the transformation of oppressive structures. It is thus our resolve to "allow Jesus to pray to and live for the Father in our hearts and lives" ever more fully, and in freedom to receive and make ours the gifts of Faith, Hope and Love which the Lord gives to men for their liberation from sin and its consequences in society, for the fulfillment of their earthly tasks, and their pilgrimage to the Kingdom of God.

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

45. We believe that finally the power of God's love is the only force which can truly renew the world. This force is the power of the Spirit; it is given to us by the Lord through prayer. Thus we turn to our brothers and sisters in contemplative communities, and to all those whose lives are dedicated to loving prayer and sacrifice. We reaffirm our esteem for their vocation, so precious to the Church. We express here the faith and hope we share with them that their lives, given in all fidelity, can be and are fruitful for their brethren, beyond human reckoning. Their worship speaks to us not only of the God on whose mercy and love all of human existence and doing finally depend, of the God "Who is on the side of man." More than this, their lives of prayer serve to remind us of the God "Who is not for the use of man," the God Who is truly God.

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

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

48. Likewise we appeal for prayers for the churches of Asia whose Bishop-representatives, for various reasons, were not able to be with us

at this plenary assembly. Though they were absent, they have been more than ever present in our meetings and prayer, and in the celebration of the Eucharist, we have been one with them in fraternal solidarity.

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

A Final Prayer

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

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

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

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

25 November 1978

Vigil of the Solemnity of Christ the King

Morning Star College, Barrackpore

Calcutta

Footnotes:

1. *Message and Resolutions of Asian Bishops' Meeting*, Manila, 23-29 November 1970, Follow-up Committee, Hong Kong, 1971. (Cited as MR)
2. *Evangelization in Modern Day Asia*, Statement and Recommendations of the First Plenary Assembly of the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences (FABC), Taiwan, 22-27 April, 1974, Office of the Secretary General, FABC, (Manila, 1974). (Cited as FABC I).
3. Pope Paul VI, *Insegnamenti di Paolo VI*, II, 693.
4. Pope Paul VI, "To the peoples of Asia," MR, 36.
5. Cf. Pope Paul VI, 1970: MR, 29,36.
6. FABC I, par. 4-6, 18-19.
7. Second Vatican Council, *Ad Gentes*, no. 18.
8. Second Vatican Council, *Sacrosanctum concilium*, no. 10.
9. Pope Paul VI, *Evangelii nuntiandi*, no. 18.
10. *Ibid.*, cf. the section on evangelization and human liberation, nn. 29-39. In the present text, "liberation" has the meaning given in *Evangelii nuntiandi*.
11. See appended Workshop Notes (brief summaries of the workshop reports at the Second Plenary Assembly, FABC), I: On Evangelization, prayer and total human development.
12. Sacred Congregation for Catholic Education, *The Catholic School*, Rome, 1977, no. 45.
13. See Workshop Notes, II: On Education for Prayer in Catholic Schools.
14. See Workshop Notes, III: On Prayer as Witness in Everyday Life.
15. Vatican II, *Ad Gentes*, no. 22; cf. also AG, 11; *Lumen Gentium*, 13-17, and FABC I, par. 9-12, 20-21.
16. See Workshop Notes, IV: On Prayer, community worship and inculturation.
17. Cf. FABC I, par. 13-18, 21-22.
18. See Workshop Notes, V: On Christian Prayer and interreligious dialogue: enrichment of Christian Prayer.
19. See Workshop Notes, VI: Seminaries and religious houses as centers of formation for prayer.
20. Pope John Paul II, 22 October 1978, cf. Cardinal Lawrence Picachy's Welcome Address, FABC II, 19 November.

Recommendations

We wholeheartedly reaffirm the Resolutions of the Asian Bishops' Meeting, 1970, the Recommendations of the First Plenary Assembly of

FABC, 1974, particularly those which touch on our sacred mission of evangelization.

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

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

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

3. a) In recognition of the vital role of prayer for the attainment of a total human development and for the renewal of Christian life among the people of God, establishment of contemplative communities and centers of prayer and spirituality suitable to our Asian context should be encouraged and promoted.

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

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

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

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

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

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

FABC Papers:

No. 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 Hardawirana, 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