

FOURTH PLENARY ASSEMBLY: WORKSHOP DISCUSSION GUIDE**THE ROLE AND RELATIONSHIP
OF THE LAITY IN THE CHURCH****I. PRESENT SITUATION**

After the Second Vatican Council there was a certain 'boom' in ecclesiology, which generally pushed forward the line of the Council. Not only at the level of theory, but also at the level of praxis, the Church began to change herself. She began to reform many fields like liturgy, ecumenism, lay apostolate, church administration, etc. It was the whole people of God, beyond any distinction between lay and clergy, who carried this reformation along. The faithful also wanted to understand how the Church's interests entered into close connection with the social, economic and political interests of the contemporary world. The contemporary phenomenon that embodies these two tendencies most clearly would be the Basic Christian Community (BCC) which has spread rapidly in many places throughout the world. Such a development gives us hope for the future of the Church, but if we consider the present situation somewhat more attentively, we cannot be overly optimistic.

Today it is recommended that lay people actively participate with their own creativity in the work of the service of the Church in order that the Church become what she ought to be. However, we cannot overlook the fact that such an active participation has not been realized in most parts of the Church. Even today, over twenty years after the Council, it is normally clergy or theologians who speak of and insist on the central meaning of lay people in the Church, while the lay people themselves, who are accustomed to being instructed and to obeying, are rather in distress.

This discussion guide has been prepared for the workshop sessions of the Fourth Plenary Assembly of the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences (FABC), convening at the Major Seminary, Tokyo, Japan, September 16-25, 1986. The theme of the Plenary Assembly is: "The Vocation and Mission of the Laity in the Church and in the World of Asia."

Before thinking about and discussing the ideal of the lay person, we should begin by seeking the way to realize this ideal, and, as a first step toward this, seek to remove present obstacles. Where does the confusion experienced by the lay man and woman come from? For now, perhaps, we have spoken enough about the meaning, mission and role of the laity but too little has been done. Our priority must be to get at the causes and, accordingly, to ask what practical steps are necessary in order that the lay person can willingly carry out his/her own role. This is more important than constructing many theories and inventing catchy slogans.

II. HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

The main theme of this assembly is "the laity." Our goal is to clarify and to seek for ways to realize the meaning and the mission of lay people in the Asian Church today. While the present situation needs to be understood in the light of the changes in the Church and society in the last twenty years, it will be beneficial to give our discussion a fuller context by briefly looking at the development of the concept of "laity" in the history of the Church. It is helpful as a starting point to recall one thing: the concept "laity" is not a neutral word in itself, because it has been accumulatively conditioned in the course of the concrete history of the European Church. Therefore, without taking into account its historical background — whether it has been good or bad — we cannot appropriately enter into the problematic of the laity. The contemporary question of the role of the laity is nothing but a result of the historical development of the Church.

A. Historical Background — Until Vatican II

The Christian use of *laikos* occurred only as counter-concept of *kleros*. In fact, this first word began to be used from about the third century to designate the faithful who were not of the rank of clerical ministries. In the mid-second century the bishops, as the successors of the Apostles, gained general acceptance in the Church. Bishops were in charge of keeping and interpreting the apostolic deposit, of sacramentally realizing the salvific work of Christ, and of caring for the faithful. Their rights and duties were official ones in the Church. This mission of the episcopate was executed effectively through the diocesan system, Church councils, etc. Together with these developments, a hierarchical clerical institution, which was supposed to participate in and help the episcopate, grew and took shape rapidly, even to the extent of instituting minor orders as part of that expansion. The concept of "laity" appeared in this context, and had a simple negative meaning, that of *not* belonging to the clerical state.

The early Church, then, clearly distinguished lay people from clerics. One thing which is important to remember, however, is that this was an (almost inevitable) structural distinction within the Church and contributed to the unity and growth of the Church in her teaching, worship and praxis of faith, rather than causing any difficulties between the two groups. Most theologians at that time were bishops or clerics and the content of their theology conspicuously pastoral, so that their theological concern was for the urgent problems which occurred in the concrete praxis of the faith. The clerical office, therefore, was viewed and carried out solely from the pastoral point of view. So its status and power were for the service of the whole Church. There was no simple identification of Church with hierarchy; nor were lay people considered as second-class citizens in the Church. The distinction between lay and clerical was at the level of Church structure, but it did not affect the essential self-understanding of the Church as the total community living in the salvific power of Christ. In the ancient Church we do not find the tendency to set off clerics from laity, but rather only to set off the Church as a whole from the world. The history of the persecution simply reflects this unitive tendency.

From the time of Constantine up to the Middle Ages various additional elements grew onto this functional and structurally legitimate distinction between cleric and lay person. We note these additional components. Juridical elements: in accordance with the rationale and development of canon law, the functional distinction between the two becomes also a juridical distinction. The relationship between the laity and the clergy is understood in terms of rights and duties, and the laity often becomes the "underprivileged class." Political elements: State and Church overlapped in boundaries and they borrow similiar structures from each other, although there was a continual tension between them. The clergy began to have honors, gain, position, life-style, etc., as those belonging to the ruling classes. The social position of the high-ranking clergy showed especially a remarkable resemblance to that of the feudal lord. Consequently, lay people found themselves "the oppressed class" in the political order. Cultural elements: the intellectual strata of society coincided with the clergy (and the monk). Lay people were stamped as illiterate and ignorant, without an appreciation of higher human values. In this way, sometimes the concepts *carnales et spirituales* were used to distinguish lay people from clerics, with *spirituales* in this context not merely meaning one who lives in the spirit of the Christian faith, but having a noble-mindedness, which a worldly scale of values would lessen.

After the Reformation Catholic ecclesiology tried to look at the Church chiefly from the viewpoint of its being the mediator of revelation and sacramental grace. Thus, the Church was identified almost entirely with the hierarchy as the subject of the jurisdictional and magisterial rights and administrator of the seven sacraments. The Church was primarily understood to be an institution. Especially from the time of the First Vatican Council on, the centralizing power of the pope was onesidedly stressed, and appreciation of the mission of the whole episcopate for the whole Church tended to decline. In such a view, the Church was considered as something totally distinguished from the lay people themselves. The Church was primarily considered as a supernatural institution where lay people went to get the grace necessary for their salvation. They followed her leadership in dogma and morality, but did not think of themselves as the Church. Understanding the Church as the "Mystical Body of Christ," which was the dominant concept from the second half of the 19th to the first half of the 20th century, did not change this situation. It only gave an occasion for the proclamation that one cannot reach salvation unless one adhere (dogmatically and sacramentally) to the "Mystical Body." The four marks of the Church (one, holy, catholic and apostolic (legitimate in themselves) were narrowed in their meaning and used only to designate the institutional Roman Catholic Church.

B. Historical Background — Vatican II

1. Ecclesiology in General

The Second Vatican Council brought a fundamental correction to such an understanding of the Church. Just a listing of some of the models found in the Constitution of the Church makes this clear: the Church as the work of the salvation of the Trinitarian God; the Church as the sacrament of the salvation for humankind; the Church as the People of God; the Church as the Body of Christ; the Church which travels through history to her eschatological completion. There is no need here to explicate these concepts, but it is apparent that the Church is not considered solely as an institution but in her totality and her essence. In her totality, because the Church is considered as the congregation of the faithful, and the distinction between lay and cleric in her internal structure is seen only within such a presupposition of one congregation. In her essence, because the Church is seen not simply in her external appearance, but in her origin, purpose and *raison d'être*. Furthermore, with this understanding of the Church's essence and totality, the Council tried also to understand the Church in her relationship to the whole world. The Council's fathers felt

that the true meaning of the Church could only be grasped when it is viewed not simply as an internal affair of Catholics but as opening out to the whole of humankind. The Church does not exist for herself but for all the people of the world. Not only did the Council try to renovate the Church's relations with the world; it also attempted to reform the relationships within the Church. One of the necessary consequences of this change of viewpoint is that lay people are, properly speaking, the subject of the Church and not only recipients of her activity. Because of this, after many discussions, in *Lumen Gentium* the chapter about the people of God was placed before the chapter on the hierarchy. Also the Council prepared one chapter on the proper understanding of the laity.

2. Definition of the Laity

The Second Vatican Council (as well as the new Canon Law) describe the laity: 1) as one who is Christian through baptism; 2) and not clergy; 3) having secularity as his own proper quality (cf. LG 31; CIC c.204, 1; c.96; c.224; c.225, 1-2). This terminology originated from the distinction between clergy and other Christians, but if we wish to consider the meaning of the laity merely from this aspect, it becomes theologically very problematic.

“A Christian Through Baptism”

The laity—and therefore also their meaning in the Church—should be considered beginning from what it means to be a Christian, which is a more fundamental reality than the distinction between clergy and laity. If we take this into consideration, it becomes clear why the Constitution on the Church described lay people with the term *omnes christifideles* (LG 31) as their first and general attribute. There is in fact no such thing as the “essence” of the laity. The essence of both the cleric and lay person is to be Christian. The vocation of the layman is nothing but that of the Christian. The New Testament does not speak of the vocation of layman beyond the vocation of those who participate in the salvation of Christ. Therefore, the expression, “the role of the laity in the Church” has a certain danger of being misunderstood from the very beginning. There are not the mission of the laity *and* the mission of the clergy in the Church. The mission of the laity is nothing but the mission of the Christian, i.e., of the Church. Therefore, it is impossible to speak only about the role of the laity without considering the meaning of being a Christian.

What is the essence of the Church as the congregation of Christians? It is the People of God, which is gathered by the love of the Father. It is

the Body of Christ, the existence of which is preserved by the presence of Christ. It is the creation of the Holy Spirit, which makes the life of God the Church's own principle of life. The Church is the new mankind, which is vivified and led by the Trinitarian God. Thus, the mission of the Christian is to do the will of the Father in heaven and the only way to do that is to imitate and follow Christ.

To do the will of God the Father means to "become perfect as the Father in heaven is perfect." The Father of Christ is a God of love and forgiveness, who graces not only the just but also the sinner. And it is this perfection of God that the Christian must imitate, so that "people see their good works and give praise to the Father in heaven." The way to this is following Christ. To follow him, we must "serve people and give our own life" like he did. This is the Christian mission, i.e., the mission of the Church. If a Christian begins to live as the new man according to the principle of divine life, only then does he reach his own salvation and only thus can he witness to the Gospel of Christ to others. For the Christian, vocation and mission are fundamentally one reality. And we can find the mission and vocation of the laity in no other place than here. Thus, to be a lay person means to be a disciple of Christ.

Therefore, it is more central for the lay person to live the vocation of the Church than to play a special role as "laity" in the Church. Concretely, he should live his life as an individual, as a member of a family and of society according to the spirit of Christ. This is not just a matter of course, as one might take it. It cannot be achieved by only following the normal principles of society. As it is said: "Be in the world, but do not follow the world." The realization of family and social life of the "new man" according to the will of God, especially in a non-Christian situation, demands the whole body and spirit of the individual. All the members of the Church are called to sanctity. How far are lay people really conscious of this? To live daily life according to the Spirit of Christ is already an enormous challenge. If one really lives in this way, it would give an excellent testimony to the Gospel for the surrounding society, because then the sense of a value as coming not from the world but from God would appear and appeal there. The Christian must occasionally stand and fight against some of the worldly habits of society. If the praxis of the Kingdom of God really brings salvation to the world, then it cannot be homogeneous with the rule of human society, for it is precisely this human society which longs for its salvation.

“Not a Cleric”

As noted above, the Constitution on the Church speaks of the laity not only as *omnes christifideles*, but also gives the further negative description of “not clerical,” and finally speaks of “secularity” as the proper attribute of the laity (cf. *ibid.*). Presupposing what has been said above, if we speak about the role of the laity, we should consider these second and third descriptions. At first, not belonging to the clerical state has neither a positive nor a pejorative meaning, because it neither adds anything to nor subtracts anything from the fundamental mission of the Christian as outlined above. Here we need to reflect on the peculiar mission imposed on the clergy, since lay people are practically the same as the Church itself, but the clergy fulfill a specific role in the Church. They have the mission and the responsibility to propose clearly the teaching from God and also to mediate his grace sacramentally, to give practical guidelines for the Christian life and activity and also to lead Christians institutionally. This makes it obvious that the characteristic of the clerical state is to serve the whole Church, i.e., the lay people. It is, therefore, urgent to ask anew whether this service is being rendered in accordance with the needs of the lay people who live in the contemporary world or is being determined merely by the weight of former traditions. If we want to look for the role of the laity, we ought to begin with that of the clergy.

“A Secular Quality”

The third description, namely, “a secular quality is proper and special to laymen,” needs to be properly understood. It is not only lay people who have to be in and engaged with the world. If we take the proclamation of *Gaudium et Spes* seriously, to be in and with the world must be a fundamental attitude of the Church, and therefore also of the clergy. If the clergy does not share this same interest, they cannot accomplish their own duty. The distinction between the spiritual and the worldly (or material) realm that has been dominant in both in the ecclesiology of the Middle Ages (“two swords”) and in modern ecclesiology (*societas perfecta materialis et spiritualis*) is very questionable. And so is the distribution of roles of clergy and laity on the basis of this distinction. It does not belong to Christian faith to presuppose a purely spiritual realm which is not mediated by human affairs, i.e., by the political, economical and cultural life in the world, for Christ himself announced the love and mercy of God by his realization of them exclusively in the concrete context of the life of his time. Therefore, “secularity” should be the attribution of all Christians who want to follow him. The clergy have to be interested in this

world in order to be able to lead lay people properly and efficaciously. In a sense, lay people will be involved in the realities of the world more directly because of their circumstances and occupations. It is often they who live and realize the spirit of Christ in the reality of this world. To this extent we can say that secularity is proper to the laity, but we should not forget that is true of all Christians.

To draw a few conclusions from our foregoing considerations:

1) The word 'laity' is not totally free of pejorative associations such as "secondary for the Church," "subordinate or lower class," or at least "essentially different from the clerical state," even in contemporary theology. Does not, then, our question about the "role and relationship of the laity in the Church" itself sound somewhat tendentious? The mission of the laity is nothing but that of the Church. What is peculiar to the laity is proper to the Church, while it is the clergy who participate in the mission of the Church in a peculiar form. Should we not begin with the conscientization of this fact, both on the part of the clergy and of the laity?

2) The second conclusion follows from the first. All that has to do with the essential self-realization of the Church belongs to the laity. They are the subject of the worship, of the praxis of the faith and of ministerial service. The "role" of the laity cannot be restricted to a "part" of the mission of the Church. Therefore, to give prescriptions on the role of the laity in the Church runs a risk of narrowing the understanding of the Church's mission itself. The conscientization of the great mission and responsibility of the laity should be rather fostered.

3) When our topic asks what is "the relationship of the laity" it can only mean its relationship to the clergy. However, it would be better — especially in this assembly of FABC — to reverse the question and to think about the relationship of the clergy to the laity. The clergy has its special duty to accompany, help and lead the lay people; this duty should be examined from the viewpoint of whether and how the lay people receive help on the way to realizing and fulfilling the proper mission of the Church which rests on all the baptized. The function of the leadership of the clergy is oriented to and is dependent on the laity. Therefore, to ask the peculiar relationship of the clergy to the laity is more proper than to ask the peculiar relationship of the laity to the clergy.

III. RECENT DEVELOPMENTS

A. FABC's Positive Accomplishments

We do not begin at point zero. The FABC has laid out the way for the Asian Church through theological and practical reflections and research. This has been closely connected with the essential importance of the laity. In the last three plenary assemblies (on "evangelization," "prayer" and "community of faith"), the central meaning of the laity in the Church has always been stressed. FABC also issued a very important publication in 1977 in Hong Kong:— "Conclusions of the Asian Colloquium on the Ministries in the Church." When dealing with the question of the laity, we should not forget where we have already arrived and begin again from there. We summarize now what FABC has said.

1) **Incarnational Christology.** The salvific work of God was realized in the very way in which the Son of God was incarnated in this world. Therefore, the Church, to which the continuation of the salvific work of God in Christ was committed, should realize her mission in the same way as Christ, i.e., in the concrete interest of the world and humankind.

2) **Servant Church.** FABC has been consistent in looking upon the Church — which has various aspects — primarily as the one that serves humankind. Without this the Church does not have her *raison d'être* any more. To serve is understood here not as an introverted interest of the Church but as a service directed to the people around us and rendered in their circumstances.

3) **Asian Context.** Concretely, the service of the Church should be oriented to the Asian people and their societies. FABC has remained concrete, thinking about the mission of the Church in Asia.

4) **Priorities for the Church Ministry.** From an analysis of the Asian situation FABC has now set the following priorities for Church ministry: evangelization; protection of human rights, especially freedom, for which political stability is indispensable; remedy of social problems, especially poverty; inculturation (including dialogue with other religions); elevation of the rights of women.

5) **Ministeriality.** These four points show that when the FABC thinks about all the questions in and of the Church the fundamental criterion is "ministeriality."

6) **Laity.** The subject — or agent — of the servant Church is the laity. Therefore, the central importance of the laity in the Church should be realized in our consciousness as well as in our praxis. As a matter of course, the laity are the most important interest of the FABC. In fact, past FABC plenary assemblies always reached the same recognition: for the proper understanding of any given pastoral problem, it is crucial to know how it is to be realized among lay people.

7) **Basic Christian Community.** FABC pays ample attention to the phenomenon of BCC. It is a community of lay people who spontaneously come together when urged by faith. FABC sees here a possible starting point and model for the realization of the Church which is vivified by the laity.

8) **New Ministers.** To deal with the question of the "laity" FABC begins with ministry in the Church. This is not by accident. The gap between the meaning of the laity in the Church and the reality of the present Church comes chiefly from the fact that the Church has long been considered almost exclusively as an institution. A review of Church ministry is central for the confrontation with this traditional viewpoint. FABC has insisted on the necessity of new forms of ecclesiastical ministries which are carried out by lay people, who lead a normal family and social life. The Hong Kong report speaks in detail about some of the concrete forms of these ministries and possibilities for their formation. The report stresses the importance of the new ministries for pastoral leadership.

FABC and its associated offices and people have achieved quite a lot already. This assembly should try to go ahead from what has already been done.

B. Areas that Need Development

What FABC has already considered about the laity involves theological and practical problems which ask to be examined further. Only some are referred to here.

1) **Theological Problems.** It is not by accident that FABC's considerations about the laity take off from the New Testament. The New Testament tell sus of a Christianity that does not yet have a distinction between laity and clergy. It is legitimate in itself that FABC pays attention almost exclusively to 'personal charisms, which are found abundantly in the primitive Church and often forgotten in the subsequent history of the Church. FABC seems to look upon the subsequent development of the

Church negatively or to ignore it, and we question this approach. Although the history of the Church contains what might seem to have some queer developments and are certainly historically-conditioned developments, there is also the legitimate self-realization of the essence of the Church. The Church itself is a living tradition and we stand in the line of this continuity. It is, therefore, not realistic to try to go back to the source, skipping over the whole tradition which the Church has developed up to now.

As for the three-tier ministry, FABC merely acknowledges it. It is necessary, however, to ask anew about its role and relationship for the Church today. The circumstances of the present Church are essentially different from those of the primitive Church. Our Church has opted to find the meaning of her existence primarily by being in the midst of the world, while the primitive Church found her way of survival by staying out of the world. The role and meaning of clergy and laity have changed in the course of history in accordance with the relationship of the Church with the world and this world itself has always changed.

It is a fact that the concrete understanding of the Church changes sociologically. For instance, the hierarchical system of the Church has been strengthened especially in modern times. Today, people speak of the hierarchy almost negatively but it has a positive side also. If one reads the Constitution of the First Vatican Council, *Pastor Aeternus*, carefully, one will also find in the description of ecclesiastical jurisdiction the principle of subsidiarity, which is indispensable for a contemporary social system. The superior has rights and duties over the inferior, but the inferior carries out the work. So a decision at a higher level is consolidated by the idea and praxis of the lower level. The superior usually does not intervene in the affairs of the lower level without consulting with those who are directly under him, and still he retains his rights since he is responsible for everything under him. Such a hierarchical order fosters most efficaciously the leadership from above as well as the spontaneous initiative from below. Thus it functions pragmatically to achieve its set purpose efficaciously. Further, such a hierarchical social system does not exist for itself, but is only a structural means for the realization of a purpose imposed from the outside. A hierarchy in this sense is characteristic of contemporary society and a fundamental pattern for political, economical, military and administrative activities. We should not simplistically criticize the clerical system but also understand its proper meaning and efficacy. We should then ask and examine how the laity should be incorporated into this Church system, what responsibility each has for the whole Church, and how each level of the hierarchy should be interrelated so that the Church as a whole realizes herself as the sacrament of salvation of the world.

2. Practical Problems. While there is the ideal of having the positive participation of the laity in the mission of the Church, there is also the reality of a passive laity. Many words have been spoken, chiefly from above, to try to overcome this gap. The ideal, however, is not realized by mere words. For its realization, effective action is postulated from both above and below. Leadership from clerics is important and necessary in order to overcome the present situation, simply because lay people are accustomed to obey them and clerics must first help them to begin. The leadership must be concrete though. It should make clear what now belongs to the laity even though many activities were previously considered to be the exclusive responsibility of the clergy. Further, it should show how these activities can be done by the laity. By way of example, if the decision is made to introduce a pastoral council and an administrative council into a parish, what duties are to be entrusted to these councils, and what remain the prerogatives of the parish? What decision-making and executive power do they have? There are lay people who want to do something for the service of the Church. It is important to give them concrete and clear possibilities to put their good will into practice.

In contrast with social systems of old, it is rare today that a creative initiative comes from "above." Lay people should experiment courageously with new movements, organizations and praxis that witness to the Kingdom of God. Only the people who are in the actual situations can judge what should be done and by what means it should be done. Clerics, who remain their leaders in a sense, should be attentive, sensitive and supportive of such developments. They should discern what will serve the building up of the Church of the future. Then they should foster it and give substantial support to it. BCCs can play a great role in this respect.

FABC has been talking about the meaning of the laity in the Asian context and its priorities. It also has acknowledged regional differences in the situations within Asia. The problem of poverty, for instance, does not always have the same importance in every country and so the ways of dealing with it are also different. Many problems cannot be simply articulated under the common word "Asia"; they often need differentiation. Therefore, each country should tackle the problem first in close contact with its local reality and show understanding of and respect for the differences of countries. Of course, different situations can still be related to one another. For instance, an industrial country and a developing country are interrelated by the same thread of international economy. In this context, each country should reflect on the one problem of poverty from its own standpoint. In this way, the differences in the situation do not always result in indifference on the part of some countries.

IV. CHALLENGES AND RECOMMENDATIONS

A. Challenges

How broadly do we understand the term “laity”? Supposing what has been said above, to speak about the laity today is to speak about the Church. Also a view of the Church as simply an institution seems predominant for most of the membership of the Church (both on the part of the clergy and of the laity). To speak about the Church in this context means to speak about the policy of the clerical establishment; the laity remains a secondary or subordinate theme for the Church. However, insofar as we understand the Church as the congregation of the faithful, who participate in the salvation and mission of Christ, we cannot identify the Church with her institutional form, although this institution is indispensable. A radical reflection on the Church today leads us necessarily to the question of the laity, for most of her members are laity. Concretely, the following areas are now at stake.

1) **Conscientization.** First, we need a change in “feeling” about the Church, both in the laity and the clergy. Under the influence of a long tradition, lay people are not aware enough that they are responsible for the Church. Our reflection should start from the fact they do not have a consciousness either that they themselves are called or that they have the corresponding responsibility to push forward the mission of the Church. As long as the lay people’s fundamental attitude is one of submission to the leadership of the clergy, their spontaneous imagination and active participation will not come forth.

The conscientization on the side of the laity can only be realized in parallel with that of the clergy. It is not a “natural” process that one existing order of things is destroyed and a new order established. The existing order follows, so to say, the law of inertia, to maintain itself as it has been. A change can be expected only from a conscious will of those who have been directing the order of things. Therefore, the clergy, who have promoted — perforce — the traditional understanding of the Church, must play a leading role in this conscientization. Many clerics, however, do not have any understanding of their clerical existence other than the traditional one and, therefore, cannot play an meaningful role in the desired conscientization process. It is indispensable that the clerics themselves become conscious that lay people are the Church and that she cannot realize the meaning of her existence without them. It is quite important in this respect that the conscientization should begin with the bishop and the clergy. Vatican II’s Constitution on the Church tries to give a positive understanding of the laity in the Church, but its description of the laity’s role and place in the Church is not really free of the old thinking. We still need a conversion at the level of our thinking.

2) **Re-examination of Ecclesial Institutions.** The second problem area is connected with the first. It concerns the re-examination and the reformation of the institutions of the Church. If we really want to get to the sources and the purpose of the Church and regain her authentic existence, we should also seek for changes in her structures. First of all, a re-examination of the meaning of the traditional three grades of ministry (bishop, priest, deacon) is required. Each clerical order will have a fairly different meaning today than it once had. We need to examine them carefully and precisely. In this respect, FABC's consideration of ordained ministries also is still too general and conventionally stereotyped. Going beyond the framework of mere traditional theological terminologies and explanations, we should ask again, radically and concretely, what are the mission and function of the three clerical orders (including the diaconate) today.

About the ministry of the laity in the Church, FABC has already made a good contribution. We should proceed from there. However, the role and relationship of the clerical ministries to the "new ministries" or BCCs are not sufficiently reflected upon. Insofar as the conventional ministries are not adequately comprehended in the new context, we will have difficulty finding an institutional place for the lay ministry.

3) **Identification of the Concrete Implications of Being a Lay Person.** The third problem area involves discovering the implications of being a Christian lay person in the concrete life-situation. Lay people are often told today: You are the Church; you are the bearer of the mission of the Church; your active participation is expected, etc. However, most of them do not know what they should or could or may do practically. Such urgency must not only mean taking part in a charitable association. It is customary to distinguish between the vocation of the laity *ad intra* and *ad extra*. The vocation *ad intra* means the worship and communion of the Church community, and it is possible for each to play a role in it. The vocation *ad extra* means participating in and contributing to society at political, economical and cultural levels. FABC has often reflected on what this means and what priorities there are in the Asian context. We have also reached a certain consensus.

The urgent question today is not to point out to lay people what mission they should pursue in their lives, but how they can actually to it. For many faithful, who are so-called "Sunday Christians," their life as Christians is divorced from their daily life, jobs and relationships to society. And this is the real problem. Faith is not a part of one's life; it demands the whole existence of man. Faith should permeate every sphere of one's life; every Christian must live out his faith in the concrete situation of his

life. As the faith is not of the world, faith must necessarily have a certain “shock-effect” on its surroundings. A Christian must give witness “about sin and truth.” If the Christian attitude of dialogue is transformed into a conformism, the salvific dynamism of Christianity will be lost. To live the Christian existence in one’s whole life without losing its authenticity requires one’s whole body and spirit. The considerations of FABC hitherto did not clarify the relationships between the mission of laity in the Church and their mission in society. Much less can the FABC say, as a conclusion from the laity’s so-called characteristic of secularity, that the main mission of the laity lies *ad extra*. If a person were to have such a dualism, his contribution to the Church (perhaps also his contribution to the society) would become finally only an accidental addition to his own life and it would not be taken seriously by the society either. Lay people are Christians, who are called to sanctity through baptism and confirmation; this, therefore, is their fundamental mission, to live their whole life in the Spirit of faith. To recognize and realize this is more important than to discuss the structural role and the place of the laity in and outside the Church.

B. Recommendations

For the procedures of this plenary assembly the following is recommended: the participants report the present situation of the laity in their countries; then examine in what way and how far the past FABC proposals (especially the content of the Hong Kong paper) have been put into practice; then they evaluate and revise these proposals in light of the results and experience up to now. Finally, then look for the practical and practicable possibilities to develop the Church of the laity. It is desirable that all such communication of information and discussion be done on a practical level rather than on the theoretical level. Some questions here may be of help for this.

1. Communication of Information in General

a) Conscientization

- What kind of new consciousness of their mission do the lay people of your diocese have? What led them to this consciousness? If they have not developed it, what are the hindrances?
- Do the clerics of your diocese have a renewed understanding of their own role in accordance with the renewed understanding of the laity in the Church or not? What kind of help is needed for such a change of thinking?

b) Present Situation

- In what areas of concern, and how do the lay people participate in the mission of the Church in your diocese? What areas of her mission are yet to be undertaken by them in your judgment? Do you have a concrete plan to bring this about?

- What kind of organizations and movements of lay people do you find existing alongside the diocese? What are their strong and weak points? Are active direction and support given for their continuation, development and renewal?

- Does your diocese have a concrete plan to bring about active participation of the laity? Especially, what parts of what has been traditionally considered to belong to the clergy is your diocese ready to transfer to the laity? What kind of structure or process have you considered for this handover?

c) Plan

- What proposals from the lay people do you get for the Church of the future? Are they practicable?

- What renewal plan does your diocese have in order to focus the Church first on the laity? Or does it have the will to foster such a Church?

2. Communication of Information in Particular

Basic Christian Communities

- Are there BCCs in your diocese? How are they organized? If not, is there a possibility that BCC, or something similar, will develop in the future?

- Do the BCCs help the faith of the lay people, and if so how? Do BCCs contribute to the other parishes and to society?

- Do the BCCs have any proposals for and expectations from the corresponding parishes, clerics and diocese? Are they practicable?

- How does the diocese help the BCCs? How should the BCCs fit into the diocese without losing their special character?

b) Lay Ministry

- What lay ministries have been realized in your diocese of what were proposed by FABC, and what were not put into effect (cf. Hong Kong paper, 58-70)?

- What concrete method did your diocese use to form these “new ministers”?

- Do you have a proposal about lay ministry other than what was proposed by FABC?

- How do you think the “new ministries” can be interrelated with the clerical ministries? Especially, what understanding of their own ministry do bishops and priests have in relation to the “new ministries”?

- What help to the lay ministries can be given by the clergy?

- What is the relationship between the lay people who have the “ministry” and those who do not have it?

Has there been any progress in the understanding or praxis of the diaconate in your diocese? What does the diaconate concretely mean in terms of the spirit of ministry?

- What position will you take about the question of priestly ordination of married people who play a leading role in a community.

c) Local Church (especially, the Parish)

- What kind of cooperation between clerics and lay people do you find in your country, diocese and parishes? Are the possibilities given by the new Canon Law, such as preaching by lay men (c. 766), pastoral conferences (c. 492,537) at the level of the diocese and the parish, participation of lay people in a synod of the diocese or of several dioceses (cc. 460-568), etc., made use of?

- What kind of difficulties in community-building, pastoral work and lay participation do your parishes have? Are the difficulties different according to the scale (big or small) or region (urban or rural)?

- How does your diocese manage to overcome the situation where the lay people do not have enough opportunities for communion and

confession due to the "shortage of priests"?

- Do the parishes and the BCCs keep in contact with and support each other?

- Besides the parish, which is based on the principle of locality, are there gatherings of lay people on the basis of their position, interests, profession, etc? What value do the existing systems and movements (e.g., Catholic Student Association, Catholic Medical Association, JOC, CLC, BWM, etc.) have? Can you think of any new possibilities?

3. Evaluation

Give an objective evaluation about the present state of the laity, of its role and relationship in your local Church. On the basis of your judgment, examine how far the proposals of FABC about BCC, new ministries, their formation, etc., are a meaningful reality. How should they be revised? Use the priorities set by the FABC as the criterion for the evaluation.

Think over what initiatives should and can still be taken on the part of the bishops to foster an active laity. Especially, what kind of institutions, organizations, guidelines and support from the diocese will be valuable for fostering the concrete contribution of the laity to society and culture?

V. CONCLUSION

At the level of general principles FABC has considered the role and relationship of the laity in the Asian Church. It is not advisable for this meeting to construct further theories about the laity. It would be more meaningful for us to examine to what extent the theory has been put into practice. What starting points and means should be taken for its realization? According to our experience, are there not some deficiencies or possibilities for improvement in the guidelines about lay ministry set by FABC? Are there not some new proposals from our own experiences? Such questions will enable us to reaffirm the practical aim of our efforts for the near future. It is not the time for a lot of talking, but to do what has already been said, and to search for a realistic way to carry out our ideas and ideals.

Published September 1986

