

FOURTH PLENARY ASSEMBLY: WORKSHOP DISCUSSION GUIDE

LAY SPIRITUALITY**I. INTRODUCTION**

The question of lay spirituality arises in the context of a Church that for historical circumstances and developments of the distant and near past has become heavily clericalized. The participation of the laity in reflection and spirituality was reduced practically to some extraordinary and charismatic figures. The weight of spiritual tradition, writing, teaching in spiritual matters was consequently carried by religious, monks, friars and the clergy in general. Even reflection on the laity and their spirituality was done matter-of-factly by the same agents within the clergy. They have been the ordinary interpreters of lay spirituality up to the Second Vatican Council.

The counterpoint to this fact has been the ironic reality of finding so many dedicated and committed lay Christians who have had to search in the spiritual traditions of religious life channels of inspiration for their own involvement in faith growth and development. The theological and even biblical sources had become too complicated and technical for them to handle and explore on their own. They had become dependent on the "professionals" of spirituality.

Maybe the most important phenomenon in this history has been the appropriation on the part of the religious and clergy of Christian spirituality, its sources, its depth, its content, as something of their own. This led them to the point of practically reducing the laity to a lower category of Christian ("*duo sunt genera Christianorum ...*"). Basic Christian insights and directions — like poverty, missionary zeal, contemplation, chastity, etc. — have been treated as specific virtues of the religious, when not of a particular group in the Church.

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."

This problem takes two forms:

a) On the one hand, it makes it very difficult for the laity to develop and live fully their own Christian spirituality without dependence on clerical interpretations.

b) On the other, it has given rise to an identity crisis for clergy and religious when they come in touch with a rediscovery of the Christian vocation of all to sanctity, service, spirituality and identification with Christ in the world. What was considered a particular patrimony — and was even used as one of the motives for recruiting vocations — is now recognized as the Christian heritage of all the faithful. Thus many priests and religious keep asking themselves where they fit in relationship to the “new laity.”

c) Consequently, the priests-laity-religious relationship has become a new area of discoveries in spiritual terms. We are all somewhat uncertain how to relate, what kind of sharing to foster, even what kind of language to use (e.g., in the fostering of vocations ...).

All this indicates the serious limitations of this paper. It comes from this kind of background and is directed to an assembly of clerics. These facts should be kept in mind and help us be clear that our reflections are meant to be only reference points and, at most, a framework for discussion.

II. THE CONDITIONS FOR LAY SPIRITUALITY

1. Some Basic Theological Presuppositions

Other papers in the Plenary Assembly will take care of theology. We wish to mention only four important changes that have taken place in the theological awareness of the Church, and as these directly affect our present concern here. They are an integral part of the theology of Vatican II.

a) **Change of General Framework in Ecclesiology.** The basic concerns have become more acutely missionary, the concerns of the Church “for the world,” totally oriented to the Kingdom of God. There is an overcoming of the narrow sociological reality of the visible Church, resulting in a broadening of the sense of mission, of mystery and the horizon of God’s salvation affecting all things.

b) **Change of Leading Images of the Church.** The Church is more and more understood as communion, as sacrament, as People of God, as mystery, as a servant Church, as a “participatory” community of disciples. These images carry a need to rethink traditional roles and relationships, especially those of the clergy vis-a-vis the laity and the world.

c) **The Ongoing Search for a Trinitarian Ecclesiology.** The rediscovery of a pneumatic ecclesiology that gives a new value to gifts and charisms, to participation and harmony in communion, goes hand in hand with a new integration of the humanity of Jesus in christology. The Holy Spirit and christology speak of a Church of compassion and commitment, of justice and the transformation of society, of the love of God and the neighbor, all the way to the Cross. Hand in hand with this goes a discovery of the mystery of the Father “whom nobody has ever seen” (Jn 1:16). Especially in Asia this “mystery” dimension of the Trinity and the accompanying silence, the relativization of images, etc, become extremely rich for the understanding of the Church and spirituality.

d) **A Sacramental Theology of Community and Christian Life.** There is a new sense of wholeness in the perception of the mystery present in the sacraments — the reality of God’s life inside and outside the Church, in and beyond the sacramental celebration. Sacramental life expresses itself in far wider dimensions than the limited theologies of the past two centuries allowed. The relationship between Christian life and sacrament have taken new depths and opened new spiritual possibilities. This applies particularly to baptism, confirmation and the Eucharist.

2. A Few Presuppositions about Spirituality

a) The first is that spirituality is *a way of life*. It is not a set of theoretical statements but a way of being Christian, a way of responding to God’s call in the light of the Scriptures and under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, in a given social and cultural environment.

b) Spirituality is *a long journey*. It is a search for meaning, truth, fullness, communion, the will of God. In Christianity it is a following of Christ that takes the form of discipleship. It is thus a long process and every aspect of the process has a bearing on it.

c) Spirituality can best be expressed as *a lived network of relationships*. It is a relationship to the living God, to the world and society, to people and community, to the poor and lonely, to the joys and sufferings of humanity.

d) Spirituality is a *commitment*. It is the fruit of an encounter with God, with Christ, with reality, with the Church, with the word of Scripture, and brings with it a response of the person. Spirituality is self-implicative; it leads to involvement and action: "Love consists more in actions than words," or good intentions, or beautiful explanations.

e) Spirituality *takes place in culture and history*, under the influence, both positive and negative, of traditions, value systems, insights and prejudices. Consequently, it remains always open and to being created. All the systematic efforts at finding clarity are helpful, but radically inadequate.

f) That is why spirituality *is more a method than an ordered theory*. As such, it is open to a great variety of experiences and models. We can rightly say that, spirituality being the way of Jesus Christ, it is one and the same for all Christians. And yet, because it happens in history and human culture, it takes infinite shapes and varieties.

3. The Life-Field of the Laity

These reflections and presuppositions also encourage us to think that a living spirituality is the outcome of a creative encounter of Christian insight and conversion with the concrete life-field and context of the believer. The definition — if at all possible — of this "life-field" can be the determining factor in focusing in more accurately on what is lay spirituality.

a) We can discern three fields of human and faith-existence and involvement:

i) The world (society, the future, justice, progress or liberation, political, economic or anthropological realities, culture, thought, the arts and sciences ...), and its transformation towards a more human and peaceful global existence.

ii) The Church as the community of believers anticipating and living out in their exchange and communion the realities of the Kingdom of God ... the Church as the Sacrament of the Future, of Salvation.

iii) The symbolic and ministerial dimensions of the Christian community, particular ministries and sacramental celebrations that express, educate, support and feed spiritually the realities of faith and commitment.

b) The distinction of fields does not give us yet the answer to the question of what is specific to the laity — in spite of widespread oversimplifications about assigning the secular field to the laity and the symbolic to the clergy.

i) Transformation of the world can rightly be called the primary mission of the Church, and this comes directly out of the Holy Scriptures, describing this as God's plan, purpose, will, or with equivalent expressions. The repeated and explicit concern of popes and bishops for the realities of the human person, the family, society, and even the order of nature and the universe, is but a confirmation of this Christian sense. The very purpose of evangelization and the preaching of the word of God is to produce such a transformation in hearts, lives and relationships that will express finally the reality of God being all in all things (1 Cor 15:28). We can thus say that the secular realities of the world are a responsibility for the whole Church, whether clergy and laity, and that no dichotomy of roles should isolate this field from the deepest core of any Christian existence.

ii) Church life is also a responsibility of the whole Christian community, and it has become part of Vatican II common sense that no Christian is supposed to be more or less responsible for the Church simply for being a lay person or a cleric. The demands, challenges and depths of a life of agape, koinonia and reconciliation are equally shared and taken up in life by all those who believe with a sincere heart. A participative Church is so at every level of its life. No Gospel domain is put out of reach for any Christian. The experience and the work of salvation are lived in a sacramental way in the Christian community wherever and in whatever form the true disciple opens the heart to God's Spirit and allows oneself to be moved and directed by the same Spirit into service, communion and love.

iii) The symbolic and ministerial dimensions of Church life point certainly in the direction of a specific involvement that structurally demands roles and distinction of roles. This cannot be denied, and will be the element constituting any diversification in the Church. But this diversification of roles is to be affirmed only after we have accepted the Church's present awareness of the open and universal ministeriality of all in the Church. Before we speak of distinctions which are to be structured and coordinated, there is an affirmation of common responsibility to memory (salvific memory of God's deeds), to worship, to unity, to celebration of grace and salvation. This common responsibility makes all Christians active and involved in the sacramental and ministerial life of

the Church. Moreover, it is this double dimension of ritual and ministry that will greatly contribute to the other two wider and more radical dimensions of faith-life in the transformation of the world and the life of the Church.

c) It is evident that the laity live immersed in the demanding and difficult tasks of transforming society — no matter how important or unimportant their actual work or range of responsibility might appear. Likewise, it is obvious that the clergy have been assigned a primary role in the ministerial and symbolic dimensions of Christian existence. The distinction of roles does not separate them from each other. We can even say that an undue separation in the past might have contributed to the mutual alienation that has been felt in many regions and times between clergy and laity.

Both are involved in all three areas of faith-life. Both have particular roles and differences in context that will necessarily affect their identity vis-a-vis the whole community, their concrete tasks and, consequently, their spirituality.

If the clergy have a deeper involvement in the symbolic to the degree of identifying with it and becoming themselves symbols for the community, it does not mean that they can keep aloof of social and world problems, needs and suffering. And likewise, the fact that the laity are busy with the arid and complicated issues of social change, politics, work relations, and such, does not mean that they are only observers or “receivers” in the symbolic drama of salvation that Christian ministry and liturgy reenact.

d) If, therefore, we can say that, without excluding any area of responsibility in the Church, the laity in its overwhelming majority are totally immersed in the difficult task of transforming the world (all the way from the little kindness offered to another human being in need to the high decisions of world politicians), we can say that their spirituality will have to emerge from this immersion as it is affected by the word and the Spirit of Christ. In other words, secularity and their concrete responsibilities of work, family, political and cultural life are the context and conditioning, the place where their faith-life and their spirituality will take shape and are the truest and yet always changing expression of Christian discipleship. Secular responsibility in the name of Christ and under the inspiration of the Spirit is part of spiritual life and growth.

Lay spirituality is thus a way of being immersed in the world and a way of exercising the responsibility of transforming it in Christ.

Lay spirituality is a way of relating to nature, to society and people, to work and science, to public order and social justice, to poverty and wealth, to international relations and family questions.

Lay spirituality is the loving and ongoing interpretation of events, exchanges and structures that produces responsible action for the good of all, especially the weak and poor of the world.

In lay spirituality there is a deeply prophetic role that develops from the very heart of the social reality in which the laity live and work. Seeing, listening, interpreting, doing are conditions of human life in the world. When they are carried on in the light of the Gospel and inspired by Christian memories of Jesus' death and resurrection, we are dealing with spiritual existence in the full sense of the word.

e) All this implies a similar reflection for the clergy, that we can only hint at here. Their primary life-field is the symbolic and the specific ministry that the good of the Church requires. The secular continues to be their deeper concern and it cannot be set aside; and yet the clergy can approach it mostly in an indirect way. Secularity and ministry are not separated. But the human person being limited, and the needs of the community being so deep and important, this specific ministry entrusted to the clergy absorbs all the energy and life-orientation they are capable of. This service will, therefore, be a determining factor of their spirituality, and in this sense, while sharing with the laity the basic Christian inspiration, still they concentrate in and draw from the symbolic field they serve elements and inspiration of a very deep spirituality, as our Christian history has made evident at different periods.

A note about consecrated religious should be added to complete the picture. They belong to a different line of spiritual development. They are not clerics — per se — and yet they have made concrete choices that often distinguish them from the laity. The New Code of Canon Law tries to give a rationale, with certain ambiguities still unsolved. Religious belong to the field of charismatic existence. The variety of choices and traditions is such that it is practically impossible to englobe them all in one formula, in spite of obvious commonalities. The two polarities that can serve to locate them in relationship to the laity are that of specific services. on the one hand, and that of particular witness, on the other. They share both the secular and clerical reality of Church life in witness and service. Their services are mostly people-oriented and in response to human needs (hospitals, schools, social welfare, counseling, development ...). Their witness has a double concern: for the Church, as expression of Christian dimen-

sions that are central to the experience of faith; and for secular society, as counter-cultural reminders of deeper values and of the challenge of human alternatives and divine possibilities.

4. The Sources of Lay Spirituality

From the proceeding reflections it becomes more and more clear that lay spirituality is not so much a matter of content as it is a question of method, of ways of living and responding, a creative process of growth in very complex and different situations where the answers are not ready-made and the believer has to learn his/her own life. It is therefore extremely important to facilitate the awareness of and the access to the Christian sources of spirituality, the supports, processes and points of reference that any Christian can go to in order to find help in his/her living out of faith. We can divide these sources into five categories:

a) Sources of inspiration and challenge brought down to us in the Tradition of the Church: the spiritual *depositum* we have inherited:

i) The word of God as it took form and expression in the Holy Scriptures, especially the Gospels, read and shared in the community of faith, contemplated in the openness of the heart, studied in the context of our own history.

ii) The Gospel images that have been communicated through the ages in the spiritual teachings and forms of life that Christian life has produced — images like the ones created and given to us by the martyrs, the great charismatic saints like Francis of Assisi, the mystics, etc., which continue to inspire and affect the lives of many.

iii) The secular experience of the Christian mysteries as it is communicated from generation to generation of believing communities and kept in the form of doctrines, dogmas and Church teaching at the service of the faith of all. They become sources of living spirituality whenever we are able to move from the repetition of formulas to the original experience of their origin. The recovery of these is one of the pastoral priorities of the Church of the present. We can certainly say that the way of spirituality has to do precisely with the total integration of traditional doctrine into a life-changing experience, beyond mere theoretical speculations.

iv) The common memories of the Church as these are kept and re-enacted in symbol and sacrament. The sacraments can very well be considered the best tools of spiritual education in that they mediate the inner

journey, the life-passage from self and diminished horizons to the heart and fullness of Christ. The whole sacramental system is a dynamic set of memories in action that reinterpret our life in the light of the Paschal Mystery and have the capacity to inspire commitment and conversion.

Other symbolic memory-aids are feasts and calendars, devotions, liturgical years and the ongoing repetition in time and space of the salvific action of God that goes beyond space and time.

v) Naturally these symbolic sources go beyond memories and embrace the whole range of possibilities of liturgy and celebration — both privileged places of the heart and spirituality. The fact that so often they have not been spiritually fruitful should not be blamed on the lack of understanding of the laity but rather on the clerical inability to treat these events as creative sources of life and the accompanying reluctance to involve the laity in them.

vi) Finally, the life of the Church itself is a very important source of spiritual learning, more effective than the classrooms and deeper than sermons and books. The characteristics of Christian community life are the best school for a Christian heart and the best supporting context for a meaningful and inspiring reading of the Scriptures (agape, community, reconciliation, witness, sharing, compassion ...).

b) The social context is also a source of spirituality. If the context in which we live our faith affects it deeply even to the point of determining many of its features and often even the basic commitment of many a charismatic life, we cannot speak of it simply as “the place” or the occasion of spirituality. It forms part of it; it serves as challenge, inspiration; it is the reality that makes our hearts particularly sensitive to dimensions and depths in God’s word that could otherwise go easily unnoticed. That is why the Beatitudes have a totally different ring when they are read in the comfortable environment of a villa in the suburbs or in the unhealthy corner of a city slum.

Lay spirituality therefore is born in the place of work, in the middle of the tasks and services that a person performs in order to make a living, or in order to develop a particular gift or at the service of economic development for a better living situation for all. Only situations that are unjust and sinful can block the Christian response and thus make spirituality impossible. And yet these very situations become in another sense true sources of Christian spirituality. They raise the awareness of God’s will and mercy towards the victims of injustice and change the natural

anger and dejection into a new responsibility of service to the suffering and of transformation of the oppressive structures.

Suffering, poverty, injustice, social conflicts, loneliness, alienation are all visible and extremely provocative challenges to Christian concern and response; they are part of a spirituality that takes the world of human beings seriously, as the world that God loves and wants to redeem in Christ. The needs of others can be a much deeper and more enriching source of asceticism and communion with the Suffering Christ than many a private effort at personal growth. "The poor you will always have with you ..." is an invitation to continue doing to and with them what Mary did to Jesus and the disciples did not understand. The experience of sin itself, especially in its social, interpersonal and cosmic manifestations, can be a very powerful factor in the development of deep and Christian response to earthly reality in the name of God. There is no human experience that is not open to the redeeming power of Christ. Sin and evil have been, in fact, very powerful factors in many a Christian movement in history.

c) In the same way we can speak of culture and its transformation through modernity. The historical experience of change, social integration or disintegration, cultural loss or cultural manipulation, the demands of international contacts and the needs of cultural minorities to live meaningfully their own values and beliefs, the threat of nuclear war and the urgency of world peace — all of these are areas of extremely demanding and difficult responsibilities for the person of today. To contribute to such enormous enterprises requires depth of spirituality and a personal and community integration that cannot be separated from the tasks themselves. It is the whole person that is at stake. We are dealing with a global confrontation of values, a new way of feeling and being human that is not part of our faith alone, but that rather affects it in its entirety. Responsibility and spirituality merge. The word of God, the Inner Christ living in our hearts, the directions of the Spirit are fully active and present when we face the tasks of our world and the creation of a new history for humankind — no matter where we happen to be and at what level we participate.

To this we should add the new and overwhelming list of pastoral urgencies in our modern cities: the alienation of work, unemployment and despair, anxiety and the sense of marginalization that affects more and more citizens, loss of family bonds, manipulation of the media, the monolithic structures of governments, educational systems, business and entertainment.

We are coming to an age where living meaningfully and responsibly in society is in itself a giant task and requires all the spiritual and human resources we can muster. It has always been somehow like this but our age has made us sharply aware of the immensity of the task. A real source of spirituality in the world.

d) The Asian spiritual traditions are in our region a very important source of spirituality for all Christians, a source of great depth and which has been at work in the laity, affecting their hearts, minds and life, even before they become aware of it.

But it is not only at this level of implicit influence that the Asian traditions can help us all. It is also at the level of explicit awareness, forms of contemplation, religious holy books, forms of asceticism and spiritual growth, values and relationships, and many other forms of support and spiritual structures that can help us in our spiritual quest for the fullness of Christ in us and our lives.

As more and more Christian Asians study their own traditions and unearth hidden dimensions that lead to the same Christian vision and mystery, we will be enriched by new spiritual processes of growth that will facilitate and strengthen the sought-after integration of Christianity and its Gospel with Asia and its immensity in time, space and humanity. This integration will prove to be the greatest boost to a creative, expanding spiritual life for the Asian laity (as well as clergy, naturally).

e) The final source is the human heart. Not because we take refuge again in the isolated individual as the ultimate source, but because all other responsibilities will confront the human heart and it is in this encounter that we can come in touch with and hear the inspiration of God's Spirit at work. No human or historical structure can take the place of this inner core of the person where the global decisions are faced and where conflicting interests and values provoke the deepest and truest discernment.

The heart as a source implies the ability to discern the influence of different forces within ourselves and outside of our own selves. It implies also the need of a "spiritual method" to help us be present to world and God, to self and community; a method to distinguish good and evil, justice from injustice, manipulation from service, exploitation from rhetoric.

The heart of the Christian faithful is in fact the most accurate source of Gospel decisions. It is helped, educated, affected by all other sources; it grows in the community but it is in the deeper recesses of freedom and commitment that responsible decisions or cowardly compromises will take place. When all the information is gathered, when all is carefully studied, when all the conflicting interests are taken into account, when the most threatening feelings of fear, anxiety, selfishness or greed are sorted out, when the person is exposed to compassion, selfless love and the call to serve, what will finally decide the life and spiritual journey of a person will be the quality of the heart, the depth of its communion with Christ, the transparency it has to the influence of the Spirit.

5. Lay Spirituality: Fundamental Directions

We have reflected all along with the conviction that spirituality is more a method, a way of life rather than a systematic content. The variables affecting the life of a lay Christian in Church and society are too many for us to pretend that we can summarize such a rich world of possibilities within a system, no matter how complete we try to make it. Consequently, when we come to the point of searching for more concrete determinations of lay spirituality, we have to be content with indicating a few fundamental directions, without prejudging the concrete developments the laity themselves will make and bring to new stages of awareness, life and praxis.

The paragraphs that follow emerge from the experience of the Church, the product of centuries of Christian spirituality and thus are offered here as guiding possibilities for our theme. We are convinced that they have to remain open, to inspire directions for Christian life.

a) The *reading of the Scriptures* is in itself the most solid and dynamic process of spiritual growth in Christ. The Scriptures not only educate the heart with the Christian attitudes and values but they do change the person who approaches the word of God with a searching heart and the hard questions of life in the human community. The oldest traditions of the Church give testimony to the ongoing experience of spiritual transformation in and through the reading of the Scriptures. Many schools of spirituality and religious families have coined their own particular ways of reading, meditating or contemplating the Holy Books. They only express in their own way the universal encounter with the Power that comes to us every time we make ourselves vulnerable to depth, goodness and the deeper mysteries of Jesus Christ. Reading the Scriptures is a spiritual journey, as the middle part of the Gospel of Luke — the so-called Journey

Narrative — so dramatically communicates. It is never an abstract enterprise. It is a journey in the company of the invisible Pilgrim — Jesus Christ himself — who opens our hearts to the true meanings, the deeper challenges, the life-giving fire.

The laity who live at the crossroads of so many ideologies, plans and programs, as well as peoples and their criss-crossing of cultural, religious, and social experiences, need a word of direction, a story that brings puzzlement and questioning, new horizons, a global framework — that of the Kingdom of God — to help them integrate so much information, so many experiences, doubts, crises and questions they encounter in their struggle for dignity and justice.

On the other hand, a lay spirituality that is not inspired in the Scriptures becomes extremely vulnerable and weak in the face of the pluralism of ideas, opinions and theologies. Without the depth of the word of God, good will turns frequently into superficiality; without the movement of Jesus' life in parable and action, spirituality can always become an enclave of individual abstractions and elitist self-confidence; without obedience to the text demanded by faith, we are always tempted to seek refuge in pet theories or dogmatic schools of particular masters.

a) The *sacraments* in general have always been moments and actions in which the Church expresses and asserts its very being in the light and under the power of the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. They are not just moments of grace, alone; they are also “definitions” of the Church, expressions of its spirituality, programmatic actions that give direction to those who participate in their life with each other and in society. Christian sacraments are symbolic syntheses — each in its own situation and in its own way — of the life of the believing community; they are spirituality-pointers for behavior and prayer. The sacrament does not end with the celebration; it overflows from it into life; in the same way that the celebration in turn is the high point of a faith and a commitment that reaches its maximum awareness-index when the Christian community gathers in Christ to express itself in liturgical symbol.

The lay person does not have to make the search for spirituality a complicated one. The sacraments are providing us with abundant inspiration as to how to be a Christian in the world of today. If this is not often the case, then we have to ask ourselves very earnestly why not. How is it possible that something (ritual symbol) so old in human history and so important in Christian tradition (like the sacraments) could have stopped inspiring and enriching the spiritual life and social concerns and involve-

ment of Christians?

Christian spirituality has always been sacramental, expressing in body and action the depth of faith and at the same time educating and forming that faith in the ritual body and action of the Church. The circularity of life, commitment, faith, on the one hand, and ritual, word of God, sacrament, on the other, is a symbolic circularity that nourishes the heart, affects our values, challenges our imagination and helps the individual and the community towards the kind of integration that constitutes mature spirituality, and yet does not take us away from full social involvement, but rather strengthens and inspires it.

c) *Baptism* (united to which, we consider confirmation) is the sacrament that best expresses the beginnings and the inner power of the spiritual journey. It brings faith and conversion to the center of Christian life in the world. It underlines the dynamic aspects of faith as surrender, as trust, as commitment, as fellowship and following of Christ to the end.

In a baptismal spirituality, renewed periodically in the reading of the Scriptures and in the liturgical cycle, we can find the ongoing affirmation of our identity as Christians in the midst of conflicting values, ambiguous situations, difficult decisions, massive manipulation, etc. The reality of baptism, expressed symbolically in the ritual, reaches beyond the ritual itself and continues to exert in us a challenging influence, as we can see so eloquently clear in the letters of St. Paul, who draws light from the experience of baptism in order to face and take a stand before personal, community or cultural crises. To develop the whole range of baptismal implications and to make it operative in daily life, while at the same time bringing our own life into a fuller liturgical expression of baptism in its many possible forms, will be one of the challenges of lay spirituality. It is worth noting here that a few of the most enthusiastic Christian movements of the present Church are basically committed to a renewal of baptismal life, its experience and its concrete developments in society. It is through these experiences and new creative processes that we will hopefully overcome in practice the historical reduction in the recent past of the theology of baptism to a theology of "infant baptism."

d) *Confirmation* and dynamic growth in *the life of the Spirit* are still to be developed as extraordinarily creative possibilities for spirituality. The present insistence of the Church on the existential as well as liturgical integration of confirmation and baptism as part of the initiation process, together with the new awareness of the life and power of the Spirit in all areas and dimensions of Christian experience, constitutes a providential

confluence of forces and insights that will guide and inspire our life in Christ in the midst of our complex and disturbed world.

e) Intimately bound up with baptism and confirmation is the *priesthood of all the faithful*. Through baptism we are incorporated into the Body of Christ and share in his mission to transform and save the world. Being priest with Christ is not a definition of abstract roles but a commission for global tasks. Jesus brought the old cultic worship to an end and inaugurated a new way of priestly life based on the total identification of heart and body, victim and sacrifice, person and community. This opens new perspectives to Christian spirituality in the midst of history: a spirituality founded in the integration of all the tasks we humans have to carry on, within the priestly task of transforming and saving the world.

The priestly "mediation" of the Christian is not any more a cultic but a *real* mediation. The Christian is the mediator (in community with Christ and with other human beings) of the new world emerging according to God's will. Social, academic, family, labor responsibilities are part of a priestly mediation that takes place unceasingly in our midst and that have high spiritual and human challenges for the disciples of Christ.

The priestly *consecration* is not a setting apart for specific purposes. In the New Testament it is rather the total dedication to Christ and his Kingdom that baptism (and confirmation) expresses. The lay person is a consecrated person from the start and from the core of his being, all the way to his activities and work. The mediation of a new world cannot take place fully unless the Christian agent is consecrated in truth to the pattern, the presence, the model of this new world, made person in Jesus Christ. The inner transformation of the heart by the Spirit of Jesus is the source of energy for a wider transformation that has otherworldly dimensions, but that takes concrete shape in our own history.

Finally, priesthood expresses itself in *sacrifice*. In Christian life, sacrifice is Christian action when it is transformed in such a way that it becomes a gift, an offering to God and to others in him. That is why Paul speaks of "spiritual sacrifices" (Rom 12, et al.), making it possible that the whole of Christian life can turn into such a living act.

Here we have an area of Christian tradition and theology that has to be developed so that the wealth of insight of the New Testament comes back again to occupy the space in daily, social, personal and cosmic life that it was meant to have. It is in this development that Christian lay spirituality will be able to move away from a dependence on clerical

sources that have centered much of the life of grace around cultic and ritual performance. A rediscovery in practice of very old Scriptural horizons is in order here.

Moreover, it is precisely in the service and dedication to this wider priestly identity of the whole community that the meaning and identity of the specific ministry of the bishops, presbyters and other clerical roles will find a new depth and sense. The particular vocation will find its meaning in the wider perspective; it is there that it will find its importance, its direction and its irreplaceable tasks. Spiritualities will not be opposed but will indicate complementarity, intensification of certain aspects, mutual service, in the common ground of Christ's priesthood.

f) The *Eucharist* brings to fullness what baptism began, and offers the final figure of Christian sacrifice as the total offering in Christ and with Christ. What the sacrament celebrates is a whole and very concrete program for presence, reconciliation and transforming communion in a world that so badly needs it.

The Eucharist contains in germ, and as "exploding possibilities," the most important elements of Christian spirituality. It has community, sharing, reading and listening, silence and meditation of the word of God; it has ritual action that expresses a dialogue of life between God and his people, a spirit of sacrifice as an exchange of gifts in which our life and God's are given over for communion and transformation. The Eucharist has the power of the memories of the Church and the active presence of the Spirit. The Eucharist is communion and mission, participation and confession, trust and prayer, awe at the depth of the mystery, and thanksgiving for the gift of Christ and all other gifts in him.

These reflections are not about what actually happens in so many jejune, insipid, "purely ritualistic," flat repetitions of the Mass. These reflections are about the Eucharist that Jesus gave his disciples and that he filled with his life, ministry, death and resurrection. They are about the Eucharist that the Church cherishes and that can never be reduced to a few norms and the uncreative situation of minimalistic theologies that stop at the ritual requirements for validity and canonical norms. The Eucharist is so rich in spiritual depth and so open to infinite possibilities of living and celebrating the mystery of Christ that it is here where lay (and clerical) spirituality should draw most of its inspiration and directions.

We need a lay contemplation of the Eucharist in order to see beyond theories, philosophical explanations, ritual norms, permissions and limited issues. We need to see in the Eucharist the structure of a Church alive and servant; the pattern of interpersonal relationships in cultural or labor environments; the model of economic and academic sharing; the measure of self-giving love for one another and for enemies as well. We need a fresh contemplation of a foundational reality for life and work.

g) The vocation of the *Church* to continue on earth the role of *servant* in the footsteps of Jesus Christ is another fundamental direction for lay spirituality. St. Paul takes this servanthood of Christ as the very criterion for solving community conflicts (Phil 2:1-11), for challenging superficial claims in the apostolate (1 and 2 Cor), for proclaiming the radicality of Christian freedom (Gal). In the Gospels themselves this servant image of the Son of Man becomes the crucial factor in the difficult process of forming his disciples and will always remain as the crisis point of every spirituality that traces its origins to Jesus.

Servanthood is particularly central for a Church that understands itself in terms of communion and mission. We can say that communities grow through the self-gift of persons or groups who disappear, who die to selves in order to make others live. We have plenty of evidence that mission cannot subsist in Christian terms without an equal spirit of self-emptiness and service.

These two realities are the daily bread of lay life in family and society. The demands of others, the limitations of the environment, the inadequacy of resources, all militate for a society of selfishness in which each one secures his or her well-being. To move from this temptation to the open service of building others in community and transforming what tends to be a battlefield into a convivial ground requires all the Christian conviction and depth a believing person can muster.

This becomes all the more important and necessary if we look at the realities of injustice, poverty, suffering and dejection that humanity is afflicted with. The Christian vocation to communion and mission cannot ignore these realities but on the contrary has them as its very object, its primary concern. Thus the need of a deep spirituality of Christian servanthood. This spirituality can be also called a spirituality of *compassion*, that deepest of human feelings, so much part of the Christian ethos and of the Great Asian religions. (Other authors have written about compassion and spirituality. We are not going to repeat here what they have said better. Suffice it to state the need of such spirituality for our purposes.)

h) *Contemplation* in the midst of events and work will have to be one important process of growth for lay spirituality. There is much contemplation implied in the six directions mentioned above. Monks, and to different degrees religious and priests, have special training to enable them find times and methods of contemplation that help them integrate and be in communion with reality and God. The lay person will not often find the time, the occasion, the facility to enjoy those forms of contemplation. He or she will be immersed in a thousand small or big events and businesses that form the greater part of their life with others. In such a context the need becomes very acute for another type of contemplation, for a heart that can see through and beyond those events and come in touch with the source of all life, with the loving God who remains present and supportive — in spite of everything — or with the God who is there suffering with the victims of the earth.

The realities of life, the encounters that affect us for good or for evil, the reactions we see emerging in us in the face of daily chores ... they are all matter for integration, for depth, for discoveries and reflection. They can bring within themselves a chance for new disclosures. But the real chance is not so much in outside factors as in the heart of the person — a contemplative heart that can meet God in the simplicity of a child, or in the generosity of a social worker, in the integrity and compassion of a businessman or a politician, or in the creative impulse of a social activist. Life in the midst of society without this inner look can be a source of such frustration and emptiness, as we so often come across in the encounter with lay persons eager to find meaning in a life they cannot make sense of.

i) Christian *discernment* can be our eighth direction. The ability to understand, decide and act with such a refined Christian sense that the perception of reality, the decision taken and the following action can be truly considered to be according to the will of God.

A lay person involved in a responsible participation with people and in events of society is continually faced with choices and decisions. These range from the trivial to the most important life-decisions for self, family or for many others for whom somehow or other we may be responsible. There was a time when it was considered normal for the lay person to consult a priest for most of those decisions. Quite often the priest had an opinion about the problem that could be helpful. Today, on the other hand, few lay persons would go to a priest for such questions and few priests would have anything intelligent to say about the complex questions of modern life. And yet the decisions are important and often become a source of anxiety, guilt, or, on the opposite side of the spectrum,

are taken without any deeper or integral awareness of Christian values or anthropological factors.

Discernment is the Christian virtue, the Gospel method to remain attuned to Christ while fully immersed in the technical and secular dimensions of important choices that have to be made. A lay spirituality will necessarily have to flourish into a discerning process, so serious that it can make full sense in the midst of secular realities and social responsibilities, and yet so transparent and simple that the Christian sensitivity can come forward in conformity with the Spirit of Christ.

Discernment requires method. But it is more than method; it is a true spiritual process. It forms part of a genuine Christian way of being; it is a constituent part of an integral spirituality. Such a spirituality will bring forth always the ongoing experience of Christian tension, so much part of the New Testament vision. Christian discernment protects us against the tendency to oversimplify and leaves us open to the human and spiritual search, away from sectarian and fanatical "blind and dehumanizing" choices.

A spirituality that fosters discernment will challenge the faithful to involvement with the world, and yet with a detached heart; incarnation in earthly realities, but in the upward movement of the redemption of reality from evil, prejudice, injustice; acceptance of society and its necessary shortcomings, together with a sense of prophetic criticism in the name of God's Kingdom. Discernment is the religious formula for integrating being busy and being aware of God's mystery and reality in the midst of the most hectic timetable; it encourages political and social involvement, participation in the struggle for a better society, realism in the concrete tensions of power, planning, international dialogue, and at the same time it calls for truthfulness and concern for all, especially the weak ones, for freedom and respect for all, for the good of the people over and above limited interests. Discernment calls for involvement, production, efficiency, development, while challenging it all from the Christian perspective of compassion, respect and human dignity. It militates for freedom and autonomy in art, culture, communications, while inviting in the same breath to serve goodness and beauty in harmony with deeper human and life values. Life in society is a reality in tension; discernment is the Christian virtue of creative search in the middle of tension itself.

j) A brief comment is in order here regarding the specific depth and spiritual possibilities of women in the Church. We are not qualified to develop this point in any meaningful way. And yet we are convinced that

this particular dimension of human life and Christian spirituality has to be taken very seriously if we want to respond to the deepest questions of lay spirituality. Lay women can help the whole Church in rediscovering, deepening and integrating religious dimensions of life, ministry, spirituality, faith and commitment. It is to them that we must turn for help and for the recovery of the lost dimensions of the totality of Christ in the Church.

This observation does not mean a reduction of the contribution of women to the specifically feminine, but rather a particular enrichment of the whole over and above their full participation in all the other aspects expressed so far.

6. Formation for Lay Spirituality

There is no need to underline the urgency of formation in order to support and facilitate the emergence and development of this spiritual process in the Church at large. The questions are not why and whether but rather how to go about it and what form or forms this formation should take. We are not talking here of the formation of lay leaders but of the reality of Christian life in the community of believers as a larger reality, and thus something that cannot be reduced to a few scattered courses.

a) Formation for lay spirituality should have the community as its basis and framework. We are not aiming at particular elite groups but at the reality of Christian life in context. The formation and development of a participative, responsible and ministerial community are the best foundation for our purposes. (We leave the details to others.)

b) This formation has to take place in the midst of family and secular life and concerns. Without challenging in the least the value of special seminars, retreats and courses, we have to stress the need of making the daily questions and problems of social involvement the battleground on which our faith grows and takes concrete shape in Christ.

c) This formation should not be "clerical." We have to move as soon as possible to a situation where formation for lay spirituality can rest overwhelmingly in the hands and care of the laity, i.e., a formation that is oriented, controlled, directed by them and facing without reservations their questions in their own way and at their own rhythm of faith growth and life-needs. The complementary assistance of religious and clergy will always be welcomed as part of the Church's wider ministry, and the help of experts — lay or clerical — will be accepted as a matter of course. But the danger of clericalism in such formation processes has to be kept at bay, if we want it to be a real service to lay needs.

d) Therefore, formation should not be centered on the symbolic dimensions of Christian life but rather open to the whole range of Christian involvement, from the most secular to the most symbolic. Integration of ministry and symbolic celebration with the secular responsibilities will be essential to a meaningful formation process.

e) In the planning and programming of formation processes the person of the believer is the most important factor to consider. It is the person that will face the challenges and will be in the position of creating new responses to life and community. The Christian community will have to grow together in an ongoing

i) *formation of the heart* for Christian attitudes, Christian perception of reality, compassion and servanthood; in other words, developing in its midst what St. Paul calls "having in yourselves the feelings of Jesus Christ" (Phil 2).

ii) This will need to be accompanied by a *formation of the mind* that searches for meaning and sense in the midst of events, crises and service to others; with capacity for depth, critical judgment and creative participation.

iii) *formation for unity*, for harmony, for sharing, for cooperation and community will be absolutely necessary for a Christian integration of spirituality and life, for Christian as well as Asian needs.

iv) And naturally, all this needs to be accompanied by *the formation of skills* as we indicate in the following few lines.

f) Areas that require formation for a deeper lay spiritual involvement and growth.

i) *Faith life* in the midst of all the challenges that Christian commitment has to face: (relationships, work, suffering, social change, poverty and justice, the conflicts of war and peace, development and ecology, future-oriented planning, power and authority, etc.

Formation of faith life requires depth and method. How to continue deepening the life of faith when all conspires to absorb our energies into secular or limited purposes? How can we be totally immersed in the world and yet continue to grow in Christ?

ii) This takes us to the urgency of formation in *prayer* and a meaningful *reading of the Scriptures*. Catholic scholarship has made extra-

ordinary progress in the study and research of the Scriptures. But we have not gone really half as far in the spiritual training of the Christian community to read, reflect about and live by the word and Spirit of the Scriptures. The bridge between scholarship and spirituality in the reading of the word of God is still being crossed only partially. Christian imagination is still untrained as far as familiarity with the Bible and contemplation go. We have overstressed information "about" the Bible and neglected the "spiritual technologies" (method – meditation – contemplation) or reading at the pastoral level. We need to overcome the superficial tensions between technicalities, on the one hand, and simplistic over-pious reading, on the other. We have to recover the living, insightful, open ways to come in touch with the word of God. Only thus will secular life be illuminated by the Scriptures in a responsible encounter.

Similar reflections can be made about the need to train people in the multiple forms of Christian and Oriental prayer that can help them put their whole life in a dynamic process of integration, or that can help them live in the awareness of God's presence in daily realities and concerns.

iii) *Christian presence in secular professional life* may probably be the most urgent area of reflection and formation for lay Christians. Formation to make this presence a sacramental reality that brings God into the midst of life and at the same time that makes their work, concerns and decisions a meaningful and prophetic contribution to finances, politics, labor, family or research. The methodology of discernment and analysis is part of a lay spirituality formation, as well as the responsibilities of Christian witnessing and transformation on inhuman or manipulative structures or processes. A spirituality of Christian presence in the world needs formation in prophetic critical consciousness, in processes of reconciliation that create new relationships, in the recovery of lost hopes through the overcoming of personal, spiritual or social impasses, in the symbolic restructuring of lost possibilities for social sharing and broken structures of love and family.

iv) Serious attention has to be given to a dynamic formation in *liturgical sense and participation*. Here we refer not so much to technical knowledge of rites and historical details as to the sense of community celebration, mediation of mystery in liturgical action and the attuning of the heart to the spiritual reality that is done and produced through the ritual passage.

Formation of the laity for liturgy is not an extension of clerical formation for the same. It is a reconsideration of the whole liturgical event from

the perspective of mystery as well as from the perspective of secular involvement and the deeper and pastoral needs of the community to find in the ritual encounter a spiritual place of inspiration, a source of ultimate meanings and a direction to continue in their daily concerns the process of the Paschal Mystery—memory and new creation at the same time. This needs a creative flexibility on the part of the celebrant — much more important, and certainly more difficult, than simple solemn repetition of set ritual regulations. This requires also a meaningful training of the whole community to take part, to bring to the liturgy the realities of life so that the Christian mystery through the liturgy can reach and anticipate the transformation of these same realities.

v) We need, finally, formation for the spirituality that animates the *service to community needs and ministry*. Service in the area of prayer, health, education, discernment, family, housing, etc., have to be supported and enriched by a corresponding spirituality. Training and formation for a meaningful method that allows for the emergence of such spirituality is and will continue to be one of the greatest needs of many committed Christians.

g) It might be useful at this point to underline the fact that our insistence on clericalizing the formation for lay spirituality has a double purpose. On the one hand, it shows respect for the need of a lay spirituality that is not dependent on or narrowed down by the particular orientation of one group in the Church; on the other, it aims at giving due acknowledgment to the specific requirements and meaning of priests and religious.

The clergy can rediscover the depth of their own vocation and ministry, the spirituality that supports and nourishes them, precisely in the context of a fully recognized open spirituality for all Christians. The very meaning and call to the ordained ministry has as its function the well-being and growth of the whole community of believers in Christ. The clergy are part of that community and it will be in its context and as ministers (servants) of its needs, that particular aspects, dimensions and insights will emerge as the backbone and support of their special vocation and life. It would take too long to elaborate on such requirements, conditions and elements here. Suffice it to say that from the open and inexhaustible wealth of Christian spirituality the clergy will be able to continue drawing for themselves the treasures of spiritual life and ministry they need. And this will thus happen without the need to appropriate or monopolize for themselves what has been given by Christ to the whole Church. All of us in the Church know that all we have received is a gift,

but that the source from where the gift comes, the Spirit of God himself, remains open, mysterious, always greater than the particular gift we have received. To be at the service of all those who draw from God the same, or even greater gifts than those we have, is one of the greatest joys the clerical ministry can offer — a part of the specific spirituality indeed.

For such a ministry and spirituality the clergy will need a formation in depth for a wider and better service to the Church; a formation in spiritual direction for a more enlightened discernment of charisms and spiritual growth; a formation in the Scriptures and prayer; a formation in the spirit of service for the benefit of others; a formation in community-building and unity so that all the gifts find concrete and historical harmony in the development of the Body of Christ which is the Church. Clerical spiritual formation will, therefore, need to be integrated in harmony with the formation of the wider Christian community. This is a truly futuristic challenge to all of us.

III. SOME WORKSHOP QUESTIONS

1) Overall Concerns

- In the long-range planning of the diocese, what resources of personnel, programs, budget are assigned to the spiritual development of the faithful?
- Is this an area of concern that receives as much attention from the part of the clergy at large, as do institutions, finances, administrative needs, expansion, etc.?
- Who are the animators and resource personnel for spirituality in the communities?
- Are you satisfied with the spiritual formation the seminarians receive, and that it will enable them to help and contribute to fostering and developing lay spirituality with the lay men and women of the parishes?
- Are Asian traditions of prayer and spirituality introduced to the laity for experience and reflection and for an eventual integration in Christian prayer and growth?

2) The Wide Field of Social Transformation of Society

- How high is the awareness of the laity of their primary mission

in society, both in terms of evangelization and in terms of transformation of society through their life, work, services, relationships, etc., no matter where they are?

- How much reflection on this twofold mission and responsibility takes place in church gatherings, liturgy, small groups, in order to develop out of this reflection and experience a Christian spirituality and involvement?

- Is Christian discernment in the midst of secular life a pastoral concern of the diocesan and parish life? Does it form part of the concrete ongoing formation of the laity?

- Are the laity helped to discover their own ways of prayer in the midst of conflict, work, action, suffering, etc.?

3) The Field of Church Life

- Do you feel that your Church is fully participative and open to the laity at all levels of cooperation and responsibility?

- What is the actual level of participation of lay people in the life of the diocese and the parishes?

- What processes of Christian formation accompany this participation in the life of the Church?

- Are ministry and responsibility developed as a spiritual task as well as a community service?

- Are shared responsibilities carried out as part of a wider program of community-building?

- How do priests facilitate and encourage spiritual growth among the laity?

- Are priests and religious in your diocese willing to learn and grow spiritually with the laity, and to learn from them?

4) The Field of Symbolic-Sacramental Life

- How do liturgy and sacramental life sustain and educate Christian commitment and community-building?

● What programs of formation develop through the liturgical year that are integrated with liturgical and sacramental processes of instruction, initiation, follow-up, etc?

● Is there an organic pastoral spiritual process that takes place through the Sunday liturgies or other regular community events?

● How do the daily problems and concerns of the laity enter the liturgical celebration?

● In what concrete ways does the pastoral of the sacraments in your diocese contribute to a spirituality of the laity in the world?

Published September 1986

