

**Fifth Plenary Assembly: Workshop Discussion Guide****THE CHURCH IN ASIA AND MISSION IN THE 1990s**

by  
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**PART ONE**

The theme assigned to this workshop is: "The theological self-understanding of the Church's evangelizing mission in the presence of contemporary trends in Asia and the challenges they place before the Church."

Before addressing that "exact focus" (if it can be termed that: the topic seems to me immense!), I thought it would be useful to reflect on the response of the Church, as articulated in the FABC texts themselves, to these challenges, in the past 20 years or so. I hope I may be excused for sharing with the workshop participants some of my own reflections on "Mission in the 1990s" which (at the request of the editors) I set down in the article for the *International Bulletin of Missionary Research*, published in that journal's 40th anniversary issue.<sup>1</sup>

**I. AGENDA FOR MISSION**

The last two decades have produced so many discussions on the theology of mission and of the Church's missionary activity, so much soul-searching and debate on the role of missionaries and on the tasks of Christian mission as we move toward the third Christian millennium, that we can only repeat, or pick up and choose from, the positions already taken and the agenda already drawn up by countless conferences, seminars and individual theologians. The essays already published in the *International Bulletin of Missionary Research* on "Mission in the 1990s" have done us

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This discussion guide has been prepared for the workshops of the Fifth Plenary Assembly of the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences (FABC), convening in Bandung, Indonesia, July 17-27, 1990. the theme of the Plenary Assembly is: "The Emerging Challenges to the Church in Asia in the 1990s: A Call to Respond."

the service of summing up much of the enormous contemporary literature on the subject of Christian mission and the questions it raises today.<sup>2</sup> This contribution thus cannot be expected to say anything new. It will try instead to present "Mission in the 1990s" from a rather specific Roman Catholic viewpoint and from a definite context: East and Southeast Asia.

For twenty years, Roman Catholic bishops and theologians have struggled with the subject of Christian mission — more precisely with the mission of the Church — in what might be called the "FABC region" (Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences), that part of Asia that Europeans call "the Far East." ("Far from whom?" the renowned Filipino historian, Horacio de la Costa, used to ask.) The years following the Vatican Council II saw in Latin America the remarkable emergence of CELAM (Consejo Episcopal Latinoamericano) and the significant movements in theology and ecclesial life and praxis that the names of Medellin and Puebla evoke. In a lower-profile way the FABC assemblies and workshops represent in East, Southeast, and South Asia what CELAM II and CELAM III have meant for the Churches in Latin America. It is appropriate, therefore, to give readers a summary of FABC thought and directions on the theme of Christian mission.<sup>3</sup> It is my conviction that mission in Asia, as far as the Catholic Church is concerned, will be in continuity with these directions, that the 1990s will spell out these orientations in more concrete ways and deepen the theological understanding of these areas of ecclesial thought and practice.<sup>4</sup>

1. Always the point of departure in the thought and texts of the FABC conferences has been the vision of a "new world being born" in Asia since the end of the colonial period in our part of the earth. In "this vast and varied, restless and swiftly-changing world" of nearly three billion people (almost two-thirds of humanity), we see an ever-widening, ever-increasing search, "new today in its breadth, restlessness and urgency," for the reshaping of national societies and human communities "in the midst of so much social change, conflict and struggle, suffering and oppression, inhumanity and death." This search "defines the turbulent history of our time." FABC documents clearly and explicitly affirm that the Church's missionary proclamation and activity must be in close dialogue with the realities of this context and must seek to respond to the "signs of the times."<sup>5</sup>

This perspective, on the part of Roman Catholic Church leaders in Asia, is a relatively new one. Vatican II, especially its pastoral constitution *Gaudium et Spes*, provided the necessary intervening moment toward the acceptance of this perspective. If we may draw wisdom from a perceptive remark of Cardinal Newman, however, it will take another generation before this point of view becomes universally accepted by

church leadership. But the establishment of this new perspective is henceforth irreversible and decisive.

2. From 1971 onward it has been affirmed — most clearly by the FABC General Assembly of 1974 at Taipei — that the “basic mode of mission in Asia” must be dialogue. *Missionary* dialogue, of course. We must explore the interface of the Gospel’s meanings and values with the realities of Asia and its many peoples — its histories and cultures, religions and religious traditions, and especially its “poor masses” in every country. These realities — cultures, religions, life-situations of poverty — make up the ambience and context wherein the Gospel is to be proclaimed; these realities define the “place” for the localization of the Church and the inchoate “real-ization” of God’s kingdom.

This overarching program of dialogue with the cultures (i.e., inculturation), with the religions and religious traditions (i.e., interreligious dialogue), and with “our peoples, especially the poor multitudes in Asia” (i.e., development/liberation), has been the thematic background of both the pastoral and missionary activity of the local Churches of Asia in the past twenty years. In the 1979 International Mission Congress (Manila) it was used as the overall framework for reflection on mission and the tasks of mission in the 1980s. For the 1990s these dialogues remain the headings under which the concerns and activities of Christian mission are collocated. It is in the endeavor to bring these dialogues into life and practice, and in the ongoing reflection on the processes they have initiated, that the way of theologizing on mission must surely be constructed in the decade to come.

3. The “acting subject” of this missionary work and dialogue must be, concretely and in the first instance, the “local Church.” The local Churches and Christian communities constitute the responsible historical subject of mission today in Asia (again, in the first instance). It is they who can discern and work out the way the Gospel is best proclaimed, the Church set up, the values of God’s kingdom realized in their own place and time. The local Christian community “becomes Church” largely through interrelationship with the milieu that is its place and context of mission.

4. The local Church means the entire Christian community, the “entire people of God” in this given time and place. Here the participation in the Church’s missionary activity of laypeople is especially to be stressed. This total ecclesial community is, in the first instance, “the self-acting and self-realizing subject of the Church’s mission”; the proclamation of the Gospel by word, witness and work, within the concrete realities of a people’s life, is a common task shared by all Christians and involving the

entire community of faith.

Once again, if the language is not new, the living out in practice of these principles is new and has hardly begun to get off the ground. Here is where one of the most important realities, perhaps the most important reality that has emerged in Christian Churches in Asia in the past twenty years, must be named: the grassroots ecclesial communities, or Base Ecclesial Communities (BEC), involving Christians "where they are and where they are at." We may note that although the BEC notion has gained very wide attention and encouragement in official texts and documents, the concrete emergence of BEC in Asia is only at the beginnings, except perhaps in a few areas (e.g., on Mindanao island in the Philippines). Similarly, the wider, fuller participation of laypeople in ministries, called for repeatedly in the past twenty years, is only in its early stages, even if these beginnings are significant enough to invite widespread attention and advocacy.<sup>7</sup>

5. "[In] practice ... mission is no longer, and can no longer be, a one-way movement from the 'older Churches' to 'the younger Churches.' ... Every local Church is and cannot be but missionary. Every local Church is sent by Christ and the Father to bring the Gospel to its surrounding milieu and to bear it also to all the world. For every local Church this is a primary task. ... [Every] local Church must be a sending Church, and every local Church (because it is not on earth ever a total realization of the Church) must also be a receiving Church. Every local Church is responsible for its mission, and coresponsible for the mission of its sister-Churches. Every local Church, according to its possibilities, must share whatever its gifts are, for the needs of other Churches, for mission throughout mankind, for the life of the world."<sup>8</sup>

These words, written in 1979, have already been remarkably verified. Exact figures still have to be gathered, but from general information we know that already "missionaries from the two-thirds world" have taken up the tasks of mission in all continents, and "the internationalization of the missionary movement is the great new fact of our time."<sup>9</sup>

6. "The proclamation of Jesus Christ is the center and primary element of evangelization, without which all other elements will lose their cohesion and validity. In the same way, evangelization will lead to gathering together a believing community, the Church."<sup>10</sup>

Bishops and pastoral leaders in the FABC region, and the theologians who work most closely with them, have never wavered in the primary role they give to the proclamation of the Gospel and of Christ. It is no secret that much theological writing in our area in the past few years has raised

radical questions about the uniqueness of Christ in the history of salvation. A good deal of current thought on this matter focuses on "the myth of Christian uniqueness" thesis. If it is true that a few Asian theologians (in agreement with some of their Western counterparts) propose a full-blown pluralistic theology of religions whose bottom line is finally a parity of religions, still the Asian Roman Catholic bishops in their statements on mission and interreligious dialogue have been consistent in holding on to the "traditional" view on the uniqueness of Jesus Christ as the one mediator of God's salvation in history.

The agenda outlined above received remarkable confirmation in the SEDOS Seminar on the Future of Mission (Rome, March 8-19, 1981), which identified the directions foreseen for the coming decades as proclamation, dialogue, inculturation and liberation of the poor. The final conclusions insisted on "the central place of the local Church." Whether or not the FABC texts had a strong influence on the SEDOS seminar is not really important; what is significant is the near-total agreement regarding the directions for the future of mission.<sup>11</sup>

## II. THE DOING REMAINS

In the theology of mission, then, it is clearly on this same FABC itinerary that the interaction of praxis-reflection-policy-action must move. And "all the doing remains."<sup>12</sup>

*Inculturation* has been very much present in theological discussion since the 1960s, but its implementation has not really moved forward in a genuinely significant or decisive way. The *liberation theology* breakthrough and subsequent vigorous debate on it now have been in the forefront of attention for more than fifteen years. This movement without doubt has been a major dimension of the ecclesial/missionary life of our time; the contribution of the Latin American Churches has been invaluable for a rethinking of mission. Liberation theology's energies are not spent, and for the decade to come we await continuing development and greater participation by other sectors (Asia, Africa, etc.)

*Interreligious dialogue* has gradually but steadily been moving toward front-and-center in the past few years. It will surely assume larger proportions in the coming decade. The debate on "the myth of Christian uniqueness" is already productive — not only of unsettling questions — but of a deepening reexamination of the person and the message of Jesus and of the salvation found in him. In this discussion of the very meaning of Christianity, the caution must be repeated that constant contact needs to be maintained with those *actually engaged* in missionary life and action and with "practicing believers" in other religious traditions. A mere ex-

change of ideas largely elaborated in academic circles begs to become a game of chess instead of a genuine service to mission in our time.

The Asian Theological Advisory Commission (TAC) of the Asian Bishops' Conferences, constituted in 1985 to advise the FABC, after informally sounding out the Asian episcopal conferences to find out what the pastoral leaders in the region believed were the most crucial and most urgent theological concerns, placed two themes — the theology of inter-religious dialogue, and the theology of the local Church — as the top items on its agenda.

The concern for the local Church is an attempt to understand the situation of Church communities on various levels in the present period of the Church's history in Asia. In many ways it is an effort at coming to grips with what the mission and task of each local Christian community must be, in the most concrete manner possible, as it tries to live the imperatives of the Gospel and insert the Gospel's meanings and values in the human milieu whose common history it shares. This will obviously mean a deepening understanding, not only of the milieu of proclamation, witness and service, but of the concretion (or incarnation) of the Gospel's meanings and values in a given time, place, history and culture. Hence the concern that inculturation and dialogue, as well as human and societal development and liberation, become concrete in "the living out of its own particular mission, by the local Church." The fulfillment of Christian mission is the way to self-realization of the Church as authentic bearer of the Gospel in its being and life, in its own place and time.

Our planning for mission activity should start from below. What we should do in a particular situation cannot be determined *a priori* from above. It should be the fruit of an analysis of the situation, of the kind of people with whom we are working, of their real needs. It is by involving ourselves with them and experiencing life with them that we shall be able to discern the will of God in that situation. Mission is not bringing God to a place where he is not present, but helping people to discover and listen to God who is there, perhaps hidden or dimly perceived or seen differently, but who is calling them all the time towards a dialogue leading them to fuller life.

Such a mission can be best accomplished only by a local Church. ... Each Church is on mission and is coresponsible for mission all over the world. So instead of the more familiar concept of "foreign mission" we will have to be accustomed to the concept of collaboration in mission. ... The vision of the Church Universal as a communion of local Churches will also be manifested as a communion in mission.<sup>13</sup>

### III. SOME ENDURING "MUSTS" FOR MISSION

At this point I would like to recall yet older, more traditional things. They center around the spirituality of mission.

1. The thrust of grassroots ecclesial communities is a return to the most fundamental of Christian basics: *koinonia*, the trinitarian life experienced and shared with the community of faith, hope and love. Mission today must be about the creation of Christian community, about the building up of human solidarity, beginning on the grassroots level. Hence the continuing importance of "base communities" and what they concretely mean for communion and participant.<sup>14</sup>

The realization of community, sociologically speaking, will differ from place to place, from society to society, from culture to culture, from "level to level." Community is not a univocal term, and its realization will take on diverse concrete expressions. Perhaps the word *solidarity*, so frequently in the vocabulary of John Paul II, best translates what is meant here.<sup>15</sup>

2. In his mission letter issued in 1975, Pope Paul VI spoke of the need of radical Christian witness for our time: the witness of totally given, self-sacrificing love. In the surfeit of words in our age, he said, only those teachers who teach by deed will be heard, or who join the witness of their lives to their words.<sup>16</sup> This will be more valid, if possible, in the 1990s than it was in the 1970s. The names of Archbishop Romero and Mother Teresa most readily come to mind. In the history of Christian mission, the witness of life has always been the most effective vehicle for the Gospel. If this sounds like a platitude, it is a platitude that bears repeating today, when the outreach and power of ministry in media would seem sometimes to be saying something to the contrary.

3. Lastly, and in the same vein, we must affirm what a work on the theology of mission published not too long ago calls "mission as mystic itinerary."<sup>17</sup> Today it is the sense of God as *mystery*, beyond human concepts and formulations, rooted in the personal experience of faith, that characterizes the search for God, for the hidden God of our age. Face to face with the radical challenges to Christian mission, the bearers of the Gospel in the midst of any society — of other faiths or of unbelief — must speak from an authentic experience of God, personal or within community, or it will fail to gain a hearing. This experience must arise today and in the decades to come, as it has always arisen, from a living out of the Paschal Mystery in one's own life — in prayer and contemplation, in the labors of witnessing to the Gospel, in discernment in the Spirit, in the fundamental dedication to and involvement with the poor, the suffering, the

broken, and the powerless in this world — “to the uttermost limits of loving” (John 13:1). This has always been the authentic way of Christian mission; in the end, there is no other way.

The work of mission is finally the work of the Spirit of God.<sup>18</sup> In the 1990s, as in the past, we will seek to discern both the signs of the times and the ways by which we must respond to them. But in all this we must seek to be obedient to the Spirit, for in that obedience alone can we second God’s renewing of the face of the earth.

## PART TWO

From what has been said in the previous section, we may (I believe) legitimately conclude that there is really no need for “a new ecclesiological vision,” in the sense of something hitherto not attended to, something hitherto not discovered. The present series of FABCV discussion guides gives us several papers (we may mention, at random, the guides written by Frs. Amaladoss and Hardawiryana)<sup>1</sup> which spell out in some detail the responses called for by contemporary situations in the FABC region. These are, inter alia, renewed and ongoing proclamation, participation in the tasks of human development and in the creation of new human community, the enactment of the solidarity which John Paul II’s *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis* calls for, and so forth. The “models” (so much used in North American ecclesiology) of Church as “companion-on-the-way,” as servant, as prophet, as itself “dialogue,” as community of disciples, etc., are recalled too, as diverse modes of response. These perspectives are surely not new.<sup>2</sup> These have been in our conceptuality and language for some years now, even if their more exact significance and relevance are sharpened for the present and its developing concerns.

Is there some way of thinking on the Church-in-mission which might be especially useful for our reflection? Is there some way that might bring us “beyond” even the preferred models of the Church in the last two decades, and which might enable us to see ecclesial *praxis* as deriving from a unified conception?

### I. “BUILDING UP OF THE LOCAL CHURCH”

We might go back to the first FABC plenary assembly in Taipei 1974, to find there our point of departure.

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



For the local Church is the realization and the enfleshment of the Body of Christ in a given people, a given place and time (FABC I, FAPA I, 29).<sup>3</sup>

In a sense, our task, twenty years after FABC's first "conception," is to return to the prophetic insight of our first beginnings. A fuller, richer grasp of what "local Church" means, what this calls for from us in our communities today provides us with some sort of unitary vision, and (properly understood) even traces an itinerary for FABC V. From such an understanding, projected onto our context(s) and interfacing with them, we can reimagine the kind of Church we want to build, by the power of the Spirit of Jesus, in the years ahead of us.

The fact that the Theological Advisory Commission (TAC) of the FABC has just completed its *theses on the local Church* is a providential gift. This document will introduce us somewhat fully to the *theology of the local Church* as it is being developed and formulated by contemporary theological study.

## II. "FIELD THEORY" OF THE LOCAL CHURCH [AN EXCURSUS]

Those among our participants who are "up" on theology of the local Church may dispense themselves from reading this section. We will reproduce a rather longish citation from a presentation of the theology in question, for those who have not been able to follow developments in this area of systematics. This excerpt takes as its initial problem the question: Should we perceive the Church as "*something we make*," something that is *ours*, or is it rather "*something we receive*," something that comes from God, that is *Christ's*. "Is the Church *God gift*, or is it rather *our task*?" The Council's view does not accept such an "either-or"; no Catholic view can.

The Council's own statement on the fundamental issue was far more balanced:

The society structured with hierarchical organs and the mystical body of Christ, the visible society and the spiritual community, the earthly Church and the Church endowed with heavenly riches, are not to be thought of as two realities, but as one complex reality which comes together from a human and a divine element (LG, 8).

This text is the equivalent for the Church of the statement of the Council of Chalcedon about Christ. Two sets of statements must be made about the Church: It is clearly a human community, with structural and societal elements, subject to the conditions and laws of human life here on earth, like many other human communities in its features. But it is also the people of God, the body of Christ, the temple of the Spirit. And just as the two sets of statements about the humanity

and the divinity of Christ must be asserted of one and the same Jesus of Nazareth without confusion or division, so also it is of one and the same Church that the two sets of statements, without confusion or division, must be asserted which describe its human character and its unique transcendence. And the chief task of the ecclesialogist is to try to understand how both statements can be made intelligibly about the same reality, how it is, to return to my title, that the Church is *both* God's gift — the mystery of his life communicated to us in word and grace — *and* our task — a human community constituted by the faith, hope and love of its members and by the social and interpersonal relationships those founding acts presuppose and engender. Or, in still other terms, how is an integral ecclesiology *both* supernatural *and* sociological?

Without becoming highly technical or explaining all the methodological options which lie behind it, let me at least attempt a way of thinking about the Church which I believe offers some hope for going beyond the facile dichotomies and also for intelligibly relating the two necessary elements in any solution, whether theoretical or practical.

First of all, the Church is a creature. If it is the people of God, the body of Christ, the temple where the Spirit dwells, it is not itself God, Christ or the Spirit. The Church lies on this side of the creature-Creator gulf.

The Church exists only because of what God has done in Christ and continues to do in the Spirit. Its distinctiveness lies precisely in its transcendence, in its permanent origin out of the word and grace of God. God acted and spoke freely in Christ, and he loves and gives himself freely in the Holy Spirit. Whether the Church comes to be anywhere and whether it continues to exist anywhere, then, depends initially and finally on what God does and gives.

In the Catholic view of the Church what God has created and given is also the instrument of what he continues to create and to give. The Church is the sacrament, the sign and instrument of God's continued saving presence and action in the world. And this instrument God himself has fashioned in Christ and guides by his Spirit. However difficult they are to define in their unchangeable features, the apostolic creed, ministry and liturgy are irreplaceable elements of this social and historical instrument, elements which we today *receive* from those who were the Church before us.

This sacrament of Christ is his sign and instrument precisely as a human community, an assembly of men and women. The transcendent origin of this community does not withdraw it from the category of human communities so that no comparisons are possible between it and other human groups. On the contrary, just as the Son of God incarnate was a fully human being, like us in all things but sin, just as God's grace creates a new, conscious human freedom in the justified person, so also God's word in Christ and his grace in the Spirit create in the world a new human community all too like the other communities among which it lives.

For that reason we must consider what human community is and how it is

constituted. I have found it helpful for this to turn to the heuristic description of community elaborated by Bernard Lonergan. For Lonergan, a community is an achievement of common meanings and values. A group of people has some common field of experience, which they talk about and reflect on together, which they come to understand in common or at least complementary ways, about which they make common judgments, so that out of their common experience, understanding and judgments they can act in common in pursuit of common goals. Without this common experience, understanding, judgment and commitment, there is no community, but just an aggregate of men and women linked only spatially or temporally.

I think this analysis can be helpful in understanding how the Church is constituted by the word and grace of God. The historical origins of the Church provide a paradigm. Once there was a group of Palestinian men and women who came together only because of the preaching of one Jesus of Nazareth. They stumbled along behind him as he proclaimed the message that the reign of God was near. They wondered who he was and how what he taught was related to the faith they had learned as Jews and to their own religious ideas and hopes. They came to hope that he was the one through whom God would rescue Israel. When he was arrested and condemned to death, that hope was shattered and almost all of them abandoned him. But they were brought to believe that he was delivered from death, and their belief in his resurrection brought them back together again, now assured that what he had said was true, now experiencing in their own transformed existence that the reign was breaking in a powerful manifestation of the Spirit. The Church had come to be.

What came to be in one sense was not their creation. Of themselves they were not able to be faithful to Jesus, and their inability to trust and to hope had made them once again a simple band of disappointed individuals. It had only been the powerful words and force of Jesus himself which had made them a community of disciples. And it was only the renewed encounter with a Jesus now recognized to be Lord and Messiah and the experience of his Spirit that reconstituted them as the community which now called itself the Church. In St. Paul's words, no one of them could have said that "Jesus is Lord" except in the power of the Spirit.

And yet that is what they were given to say and did in fact say. And their saying it together made them a new and distinct community in the ancient world. No other group of men and women experienced what they experienced or came to understand and believe what they understood and believed or spoke of Jesus as they spoke of him. Their faith was utterly dependent on the word lived and spoken, and on the Spirit of love poured out in them; and yet *they* believed, *they* began to hope and *they* learned how to love. What God had created and given was the new fellowship in the Spirit constituted by their common faith, hope and love.

And what they had received they undertook to share with others. The beginning of the First Epistle of John has a paradigmatic statement:

*What was from the beginning, what we have heard, what we have seen with our own eyes, what we looked upon and our hands touched — the word*

of life. And this life has appeared, and we saw it and we testify and proclaim to you the eternal life which was with the Father and has appeared to us. What we have seen and heard we proclaim to you also so that you may have fellowship with us. And our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son, Jesus Christ. And we are writing these things to you so that our joy may be complete (1 Jn 1:1-4).

The Church created by the encounter with Christ became the instrument of a new encounter with him for those who themselves cannot see and hear and touch what that first generation of believers experienced. That first generation of the Church spoke so that the fellowship created out of its originating experience could continue to generate the same joyful fellowship with God and his Son.

Such was the historical genesis of the Church; and ever since, this is how the Church has been generated down to our own day. Under God, as the Venerable Bede said, "Every day the Church gives birth to the Church." God gives birth to the Church, but God does not give it birth as Father except through the maternal acts of the Church's proclamation, worship, love and service. The Church does not exist unless we contribute what we can — our faith, our hope, our love, our service, by which the Church is built up. And a new generation of believers is not born as the fellowship unless our community and our actions within it provide a living and powerful matrix for the birth of their faith. We are the Church as the people gathered into the fellowship of the Spirit, the *ecclesia congregata*; and, children of the preceding generation, we are the Church which must gather a new generation into God's people, the *ecclesia congregans*.

The Church, then, is always and everywhere at once God's gift and our achievement. If there were no believers, no one who hoped in Christ and the Spirit, no one in whom the love of God for us had created love for God and for our fellows, there would be no Church. We are the body of Christ, incorporated into him by the Spirit of God; but we ourselves also build up the body of Christ. We are brought into the temple of the Spirit, but we are ourselves the living stones of which it is constructed.

The two dimensions of the Church as God's gift and our achievement can also be discerned in considering the two moments in the genesis of the Church. There are two elements of this genesis, an objective one and a subjective one. The objective element is constituted by the Gospel of Jesus Christ as mediated through the Scriptures and fellowship of the Church. It is objective in the sense that it stands over and against every new generation of men and women as the representation of God's self-gift to us in Christ and the Spirit, for us to receive or to reject. This is the dimension of the Church that is not ours to refashion, but which we can only receive. And this objective dimension is what constitutes the unity of the apostolic Church across the centuries of history and across the diverse cultures of our own day.

But this objective element by itself does not constitute the Church. Of itself it is only the potential form of an actual community of believers. The actual Church comes to be only when it is received and appropriated by and in the faith, hope and love of a group of men and women. This living faith, hope and love of

the members thus enter in as constitutive dimensions of the Church's genesis. The word of God itself does not constitute the Church; the Church exists only where the word is believed. God's love for us does not itself constitute the Church; the Church exists only when that love creates the loving fellowship in the Spirit. God's gift does not constitute the Church without the individual and communal acts which that gift enables us to accomplish.

*This is why the genesis of the Church always occurs locally. The Church is born out of the communication and appropriation of the word of Christ and the grace of the Spirit. But the word is always communicated and received in concrete situations in which it is presented and received as light for the questions of existence asked by specific communities of men and women. The grace of God is always offered and received by individuals and communities of believers whose need for forgiveness and new life are displayed in quite specific threats of sin and death. The fellowship of love emerges in communities which specific kinds of alienation have divided. Because there is no word of faith in the abstract, no grace or forgiveness in the abstract, no reconciled fellowship in the abstract, there is no Church in the abstract; there are only local communities of believing men and women. And this explains the remarkable interest since the Council in the theology of the local Church.*

The Church is, of course, catholic or universal. But the Church Universal is not some other Church, existing somewhere over and above the local Churches. The Church is universal because everywhere the same Gospel and the same Spirit have created the same fellowship of faith, hope and love. The one and universal Church is precisely what is realized in the variety of the local Churches. Its unity is assured by the common reference to the same founding Gospel and engendering Spirit, its catholicity by the reception and appropriation of Gospel and Spirit in the various communities of faith in all the many varied situations of the world. The Church Universal is constituted in and out of the local Churches: It is the communion of the local Churches.

I have tried here to draw your attention to what happens when the Church is generated every day in quite specific communities of men and women. The mystery of the Church does not occur in some ethereal place, halfway between us and God. It is realized here, among us, through us, in human history and as part of its dialectic. And it is not some purely transcendent achievement in which only God is at work and we are only passive recipients. The mystery, rather, is precisely in what God effects, in what his word and grace enable us to accomplish through our faith, hope, love and service. As grace does not destroy but creates genuine human freedom in the individual, so also the gift we receive as the Church is the Church we build by our common acts.<sup>4</sup>

Certain "corollaries" are drawn from this "field theory" of the "self-constitution of the Church," for the tasks involved in serving this self-constitution, this "genesis" of the Church. 1. That since it takes place when the mystery of God transforms the mystery of man, we are merely servants of mystery. 2. That everything, everything in the Church is to be measured by its reference to the genesis of the Church out of the word and love of God. 3. That because the genesis of the Church is the genesis of a human community, any serious study of the Church

may not ignore the contribution of the human sciences of community. 4. Over this entire "process" stands the cross of Jesus Christ and his Paschal Mystery.

The fifth and sixth considerations are particularly relevant to our reflections and we may be allowed to conclude this lengthy *excursus* by citing them.

Fifth, the Church always comes to be locally. It does not occur on some abstract universal level or in diocesan or parochial planning offices. It occurs when, perhaps as a result of our efforts, the word of God is preached pertinently and effectively, when the liturgy is celebrated joyfully and attractively, when a genuine community of reconciliation appears in our broken world. The real action takes place outside our offices, where the drama of sin and grace is played out in the lives of people.

Sixth, what we are to think about and plan for in our work, therefore, is how to help the genesis of the Church to occur in the particular times and places over which we have some responsibility. That should be our focus. And the kinds of questions we need to ask are: What are the specific questions of meaning, individual and social, that a proclamation of the word of God needs to address? What light do they throw on the Gospel and the Gospel on them? What are the temptations to resignation or despair to which the Christian message of hope must be addressed? What personal and social addictions do people need to be freed from? What are the recurrent sins that need forgiveness, the egoisms and group biases that love needs to overcome? What are the divisions among people that need to be healed? Who are the contemporary equivalents of the Jew and the Greek, the man and the woman, the freeman and the slave whom Paul said were all one in Christ? And these are just particular ways of expressing the one great and basic question: What must we do in order for the world to see in and through our communities what God has already done in Christ and promises us in the Spirit?<sup>5</sup>

### III. LOCAL CHURCH AND INCULTURATION COMMUNION, PARTICIPATION, MISSION

For many Asian theologians "building up the local Church," or the "genesis" of the local Church, is seen as another way of describing the process of *inculturation*, seen in its wider meaning. For this "self-realization of the local Church" in each of our diverse "places" will mean the actualization of a Church not "for" all peoples and cultures only, but truly "of" all peoples and cultures: of each people, with its own history and tradition, with its own concerns and questions, its own project in history.<sup>6</sup>

This means making "total ecclesiology" actual in each of our communities: i.e., that every one of the faithful, to the extent of each one's possibilities, participates in the life and activity of the community of faith. "Communion and participation," so often spoken of with regard to ecclesial communities, must move from word-and-concept merely, to real life, in interchange, in action, in mission. Only through the ever fuller activa-

tion of communion and participation — especially with regard to lay-people — does any community *become Church* (in the sense given above).

Another way of saying this might be taken from Jurgen Moltmann, writing on the “servant Church” in 1979:

My thesis is a simple one: *The local congregation is the future of the Church.* The renewal of the Church finally depends on what happens at the grassroots level. And renewal at this level awaits, it seems to me, the conscious reclaiming of the gifts of the Spirit on the part of the laity. These gifts, which in the New Testament are always identified as signs of the coming Kingdom of God, are given to the whole people of God for ministry, for *diakonia*.<sup>7</sup>

This same demand for “communion and participation” was central in FABC II in Bangkok, in the plenary assembly of 1982. (Here we see once again that the past assemblies have consistently sounded the right notes and formulated the right imperatives.)<sup>8</sup>

In our day-to-day living with each other we have inadequately manifested true communion and participation. ... (9.2)

Sometimes organs of participation and coresponsibility have not been established, or are left inactive and impeded, existing only in name. Often enough the gifts and charisms of the laity — both women and men — are not duly recognized, welcomed or activated in significant functions and tasks of ministry and apostolate. (9.5)

We have seen ... how the local Church must be a community of graced communion rooted in the life of the Trinity, a community of prayer and contemplation, and of sacramental celebration and life centered around the Eucharist. It must be defined by its life of faithful discipleship in the Gospel, patterned on the Paschal Mystery of Jesus, “a community for others.” ... We have realized that genuine participation and coresponsibility must be the essential elements of its existence, and theological reflection and discernment, integral components of its life.<sup>9</sup>

We will note that FABC III stressed that what our treatises on the Church call “communion” must become each day a *reality* in its life. How? Through finding and activating all the charisms of the community, through creatively bringing these charisms into action, in mutual collaboration and coordination, in effective coresponsibility. (The final responsibility for this rests with the ordained ministry, true, but even here there are ways and ways of exercising this responsibility. We are to remember that the bishop and priest embody not “a synthesis of ministry but a “ministry

of synthesis.”) In a way, the whole point here is “empowering the faithful” — making above all of our laypeople *active subjects, acting subjects*, in the full sense of that term in contemporary thought.

FABC III was clear-sighted and insistent too in saying that local communities cannot “become Church” except in and through mission. If, according to Pope Paul VI’s *Evangelii nuntiandi*, evangelization is the very definition of the Church’s task, no Church can “come into being” without mission. As with human persons, so with the Church, “it is our praxis which makes us what we become.”

#### IV. A RETURN TO IMAGES/MODELS

Having tried to understand the dynamic of “building up the local Church” or of “serving the genesis of the local Church,” we may be allowed at this point to return to models-and-images. Given our present-day context(s) in our various regions, and the signs of the times we discern in them, what sort of image of the Church should we keep before our eyes to “charge our imagination” in the years ahead of us (if we have not *already* kept our eyes on it in the years past)?<sup>10</sup>

##### A. THE CHURCH AS “FELLOW WAYFARER,” AS COMPANION ON THE JOURNEY

For our basic premise, I believe we can take Pope John Paul II’s master principle in ecclesiology, “Man is the way that the Church must walk” (*Redemptor hominis*, 14).

... man is the primary route the Church must travel in fulfilling her mission; he is the primary and fundamental way of the Church, the way traced out by Christ himself ...

This man is the way for the Church — a way that, in a sense, is the basis of all the other ways the Church must walk, because with man — every man without exception whatever — Christ is in a way united, even when man is unaware of it.<sup>11</sup>

From that premise, to speak of “being with” as the basic stance of the Church, i.e., to be companion, *acompañar*, on the journey of history, is only to transpose the principle in terms of a cognate image.

*Acompañar* is thus “being with” on the journey, walking with, and — as in the Emmaus narrative — sharing the fellow-wayfarer’s story or situation, his sorrow or joy, disappointment and disillusionment, expectation and hope. It means also speaking the word of meaning which enkindles the heart (“Were not our hearts burning within us?”), and it leads, in the



end, to community — in faith, hope and love.

During the last years of the Marcos regime in the Philippines, when an increasingly all-pervading sense of hopelessness became present, and more and more people began opting for violent solutions, priests and religious were urged simply to keep alive a sense of hope among people, the sense that — with God's help — with prayer and patience, with persevering effort to foster change, things could still be turned around: that it was still possible to raise up a future for our people. Perhaps only then did many of us understand what a duty and service hope itself could be, grounded on our Christian faith.

## B. THE CHURCH OF THE SUFFERING SERVANT

There are not a few among us who believe that the Asian situation(s) of today — situations of great poverty and suffering, of deprivation and oppression for so many multitudes — demand a “more dramatic” stance from the Christian community. This response, it would seem, is present already in many statements from Christian groups (e.g., religious men and women, episcopal conferences, etc.) in Asia, and even explicitly or implicitly present in some of the FABC texts. *Acompañar* (which can suggest even going along on a holiday excursion) seems to some not to summon that sense of urgency, of tragic circumstances present around us, pressing down on our poorer people. Thus some believe that we are compelled as Church to turn rather to the biblical image of the Suffering Servant in the Second Isaiah for a model of “the Church we must become.”

The “servant model” is often merely that of the *diaconal* Church, which is ordinarily taken to mean that all the faithful participate in the Church's ministry: a Church in its entirety a ministerial Church. But the “Church of the Servant” is the Church of the Suffering Servant, with all that that name implies.<sup>12</sup>

1. The Suffering Servant is seen as “the figure of those who correspond to God in history . . . , i.e., those who refuse to meet evil with evil, . . . who participate rather in God's redemptive action for the healing of the world, overcoming evil with good.” “The Servant does the unthinkable thing. He shows that the way forward is for the people to take on their own shoulders the burden of historical evil and creatively turn it around.”

2. The formula given us in the Scriptures of the Suffering Servant is God's own solution to the problem of evil; the Church is asked to identify with it. The operative image to nourish in our minds here is not that of “divinely-empowered Rambos,” whose energies are fired by hatred, but rather that of the Servant who absorbs the evil in himself without retaliation or violence. “The Songs of the Servant suggest that the people called by God should find their destiny in this role. The Church only exists in order

to embody this divine solution to historical evil.”

The Servant is to carry out his mission “not in a world where evil has been abolished; it is to be lived in a world of continuing evil. If the Servant is not prepared to carry out his mission under these circumstances, there will be no historical salvation.” “In the living of the Servant who stands only for life, never death, who does not condemn and refuses to retaliate with evil for the viciousness of the people, they saw how a space for life could be opened up for everybody, a space for peace.”<sup>13</sup>

3. Jesus came to *realize* the servanthood of the Isaian Servant in himself. He came to fulfill the Servant’s task in his own life, and above all in his passion, death and resurrection.

The Church, in turn, is in history to follow the path of the Servant, of Jesus, for the life of the world. “The Church is the movement within history of those willing to suffer for the sake of life, confronting evil and injustice ... until justice be established on earth.”<sup>14</sup>

4. What does this mean for the Church in the concrete? In varying degrees of clarity this has been (as noted above) implicitly or explicitly articulated in statements and pronouncements by Christians and by the Churches in the last twenty years or so. It has been formulated by the Latin American Bishops (CELAM II and III) as “the preferential option or the preferential love of the poor,” a position substantially confirmed by the present Holy Father many times over. It has been called also “solidarity with the poor, with the outcast, the victims.”<sup>15</sup>

5. Perhaps one way, more generally acceptable, of spelling out how the Church in Asia can become “the Church of the Servant” is by affirming that the most important imperative for us is to develop in our communities a living out of a Christology of compassion, a *discipleship of Jesus as the compassion of God*, an ecclesial spirituality of compassion.

### C. THE CHURCH OF JESUS THE COMPASSION OF GOD: AN ECCLESIOLOGY AND SPIRITUALITY OF COMPASSION

Much, perhaps too much already, has been written on all this, and we need not develop this theme in greater length here. It might be suggested, however, that we might be able to draw together many themes present in various workshops of FABCV with this ecclesiology and spirituality of compassion. Many strands of thought and praxis which will undoubtedly surface (again, here at FABCV) could be pulled together by this vision.

For this reason it might be worthwhile to end this study guide with a few paragraphs on “Jesus as the compassion of God.” Many may find a key here which could open doors to a perspective that we are seeking.

Compassion is a broad term and a broad concept whose connotations and further possibilities keep reverberating. We commonly use it as synonymous with pity and it certainly means that but also more than that. It implies a movement towards the other to help, but also a movement into the experience of the other to be present in solidarity and communion of experience. It implies sensitivity, vulnerability to be affected by the experience of the other but it also implies remedial action against suffering and oppression. Most of all, it implies involvement in the situation.<sup>9</sup>

To speak of Jesus as the Compassion of God is to reflect on contemporary Christian praxis and on the realization that the following of Jesus in our times confronts us constantly with human suffering on a massive scale, caused by structures of society which are the solidified deposits of the consequences of evil deeds in the world. As we face these massive problems of humanly produced human suffering, there is always a sense of our own powerlessness and insignificance. Yet there is also the experience that where social sin abounds, there also “social grace” abounds even more. As Christians we do experience the rebirth of hope and courage and we do witness in our own times in places of greatest oppression and deprivation the inexplicable transforming power of basic Christian communities. We realize that the power and presence of this transformation is that of the living Risen Christ and that its quality is compassion in all the dimensions mentioned above. Then we realize that we must name Jesus Compassion, but a Compassion which in its range and power and discernment is divine.

In the contemporary Christian reflection on Christian praxis there is an ever-threatening possibility of a deep schism of affections and loyalties between those who see the liberation of the oppressed in concrete historical dimensions as central to the redemption and those who see the conflictual quality of liberation movements as contrary to the redemption which they envisage as primarily a matter of communion with and surrender to God in individual lives. The representation of Jesus as the Compassion of God seems to offer a mediation between these two perceptions of what is at stake in our practical response to the redemption, for compassion is essentially non-violent, tending to communion and community, and yet is also essentially active, tending to redress injuries and injustices.

... The Compassion of God, like the Word and the Life and the Light, refers to “activity” in God. That is to say, it enables us to imagine the one God in dynamic ways. Moreover, it pictures God in “activity” that relates God to the creation and to creatures as well as to the redemption of the human race and its history. It identifies Jesus with that outreach into creation which makes God present in it, participant in it, entering into the human experience in solidarity with human suffering, history and destiny. It is a way of saying that in the person of Jesus, God truly enters into creation, into the human dilemma in all its tragic dimensions.<sup>16</sup>

From Jesus, the Incarnate Compassion of God, we take the steps to his *re-presentation* in the Church of Jesus the Compassion of God, with its calling to faithful discipleship in the "places" where the Church is in Asia, and where we must fulfill our own discipleship.

### CONCLUSION: "THE DOING REMAINS"

This study guide (for Workshop II) has been a long journey. We began with a backward glance on key texts from the Asian Bishops from 1970 to the present, to find the directions discerned in the last twenty years: directions which are imperatives still quite valid for the Church's mission in Asia, as we move toward the Third Millennium.

The *local Church*, FABCI so prophetically saw, stands at front-and-center of our concerns, as throughout Asia, it becomes more and more "the acting subject" through realized communion-and-participation, mission-and-service. The 1990s will more urgently call for the "self-realization" of these local Churches, if the Church will become in our time, not only the Church "for" all peoples, but the Church truly "of" all peoples. What this self-realization calls for, the themes of "*acompañar*," of "the Church of the Servant" and of "the Church of Jesus the Compassion of God" invite us to consider in all conscience.

The past twenty years of the common journey of the Asian Bishops in FABCI have been years of growth for our local Churches, hopefully "in wisdom, age and grace." In the years ahead, the tasks discerned for mission remain in front of us as challenges which we have only begun to meet. *Their doing remains.*

### FOOTNOTES:

#### Part One:

1. From *International Bulletin of Missionary Research*, published by Overseas Ministries Study Center, 490 Prospect St., New Haven, Connecticut 06511 U.S.A. 40th Anniversary Issue, Vol. 14, 2, April 1990, pp. 50-53. I have made some minor corrections in the text, and have revised some of the footnotes for this FABCI Paper.
2. "Mission in the 1990s: I. Arthur F. Glasser and II. Michael Amaladoss, *International Bulletin of Missionary Research* 13, no. 1 (January 1989). The present contribution owes much to Fr. Amaladoss' more comprehensive treatment of the theme. Cf. also his book, *Mission Today* (Rome: Centrum Ignatianum Spiritualitatis, 1988).
3. Cf. *For All the Peoples of Asia, Vol. 1: The Church in Asia: Asian Bishops' Statements on Mission, Community and Ministry, 1970-1983* (Manila: International Mission Congress, 1984) and Vol. II: *Further Texts, 1974-1986* (Manila, 1987). Also, Gaudencio B. Rosales et al., eds., *Toward a New Age in Mission: International Congress on Mission, 2-7 December 1979, Books I-III*, 2 vols. (Manila: International Mission Congress,

- 1981). For this entire area, see Carolus Putranta, *The Idea of the Church in the Documents of the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences (FABC) 1970-1982*, Rome, 1985, two volumes, 585 pages (an S.T.D. dissertation written under Angel Anton, ecclesialogist of the Gregorian University faculty as moderator). Cf. "A Reflection on the FABC texts, 1970-1982," by C.B. Putranta, appended to this paper.
4. E.g., for India: Felix Wilfred, *The Emergent Church in a New India* (Tiruchirappalli, 1988), and for the Philippines, Brendan Lovett, *On Earth as in Heaven: Corresponding to God in Philippine Context* (Quezon City, Philippines: Claretian, 1988). See also Lovett's *Life Before Death: Inculturating Hope* (Quezon City, Philippines: Claretian, 1986).
  5. Words included within quotation marks are taken from FABC texts, but especially from the "Final Statement of the International Congress on Mission, Manila, 2-7 December 1979." Cf. n. 2, above.
  6. FABC Papers, No. 42, Joseph A. Komonchak, *Towards a Theology of the Local Church* (Hong Kong: FABC Secretary General's Office, 1986). The Theological Advisory Commission (TAC) of the FABC intends to issue its study paper on the theology of the local Church in the Asian context in the Spring of 1990.
  7. Cf. Niall O'Brien, *Revolution from the Heart* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987), a remarkable account of base ecclesial communities (BECs) in the diocese of Bacolod, Negros island, Philippines, which deserves an even wider audience than it has already reached.
  8. Cf. the "Final Statement of the IMC, Manila, 1979." See n. 3, above.
  9. Cf. Arthur Glasser, in the article in *International Bulletin* cited above in n. 2.
  10. "Evangelization in Asia Today," Statement of the FABC All-Asian Conference on Evangelization, Suwon, South Korea, 24-31 August 1988. FABC Office of Evangelization, Shillong, India, 1988, No. 6. FABC Papers, No. 50, *The Urgency of Christian Mission* (Hong Kong: FABC Secretariat, 1988), pp. 74-78.
  11. Cf. part 3: Agenda for Future Planning, Study and Research in Mission, from the Research Seminar on the Future of Mission, March 8-19, 1981. Rome, Italy. Mary Motte and Joseph Lang, eds., *Mission in Dialogue* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 1982), pp. 633-49. Also James Scherer, "Roman Catholic Mission Theology: The Impact of Vatican II," *Gospel, Church and Kingdom: Comparative Studies in World Mission Theology* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1987), esp. pp. 196-232.
  12. John Wijngaards, "New Ways for Mission," in *Tablet* (London), 22 October 1988, pp. 1208-9. Recent and stimulating, on the implementation of these principles and policies, is Vincent J. Donovan, *The Church in the Midst of Creation* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 1989). Cf. also Walbert Buhlmann, *The Church of the Future: A Model for the Year 2001* (Slough, England: St. Paul, 1988).
  13. Joseph A. Komonchak's "field theory" on the "self-realization" of the local Church is surely a most important contribution to the discussion on the theology of the local Church (FABC Papers 42, Hong Kong, FABC Secretariat, 1986). We will refer to Fr. Komonchak's work in the second part of our paper. Fr. Komonchak participated in the discussions preceding the final formulation and publication of the Theses on the Local Church issued by the Theological Advisory Commission (TAC) of the FABC. Some excellent material will also be found in the book of Severino Dianich, *Chiesa Estro-*

- versa. *Una ricerca sulla svolta dell'ecclesiologia contemporanea* (Torino: Edizione Paoline, 1987), esp. pp. 110-22, and in Michael Amaladoss, *Mission Today* (cf. n. 1, above), pp. 164-66, from which the quotation is taken.
14. Niall O'Brien's book, cited in n.7, above, spells out the revolution of hope that these base ecclesial communities can awaken. Cf. also Marcello de C. Azevedo, *Basic Ecclesial Communities in Brazil. The Challenge of a New Way of Being Church*, trans. John Drury, Washington DC: Georgetown University Press, 1987.
  15. On diverse realizations of community, see "The Church as a Community of Faith," FABC Papers no. 29, 1982, p. 15. On Pope John Paul II and "solidarity," cf. his encyclical *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis* for the twentieth anniversary of *Populorum Progressio*, 30 December 1987, Vatican City, 1987.
  16. Pope Paul VI, *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, on evangelization of the world in our time, United States Catholic Conference, Washington, D.C., 1975.
  17. Pierre Schouver, *L'Église et la Mission, Croire et comprendre* (Paris: Centurion, 1977), pp. 140-42. Cited in *Toward a New Age in Mission* (cf. n. 2, above), vol. 1, book 2, pp. 152-53.
  18. See Lesslie Newbigin, *Mission in Christ's Way: Bible Studies* (Geneva, World Council of Churches, 1988).

#### Part Two:

1. Robert Hardawiriyana, *The Church Before Changing Asian Societies of the 1990s*. FABC Papers 57a, and Michael Amaladoss, *The Church and Pluralism in the Asia of the 1990s*, FABC Papers 57e, Hong Kong, 1990.
2. Cf. Avery Dulles, *Models of the Church*, Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1974 (First edition).
3. First Plenary Assembly FABC, *For All the Peoples of Asia*, Volume I, Manila, IMC Publications, 1984, 29 (FAPA).
4. Joseph A. Komonchak, "The Church: God's Gift and Our Task," in *Origins*, NC Documentary Service, Washington D. C., 2 April 1987, 735-741.
5. *Ibid.*
6. Cf. Joseph A. Komonchak, "The Local Realization of the Church," in *The Reception of Vatican II*, G. Alberigo, J-P Jossua, J. A. Komonchak, editors, Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 1987, 77-90 (77-90). Also Karl Rahner, "Basic Theological Interpretation of the Second Vatican Council," in *Concern for the Church*, Theological Investigations XX, New York: Crossroad, 1981, 77-89.
7. Jurgen Moltmann, "The Diaconal Church in the Context of the Kingdom of God," *Hope for the Church*, Nashville: Abingdon, 1979, 21-36, at p. 21.
8. Cf. *FAPA I* (cf. fn. 3, above) 89-102, Final Statement, nn. 9.2 and 9.5.
9. *Ibid.*, no. 15.
10. Some remarks worth noting here are made by J.A. Komonchak in the article cited,

- “God’s Gift and Our Task.” “As commonly received both by theologians and lay people, however, I believe that the models approach has not proven adequate either for ecclesiology or for Church life.” Komonchak points out that the danger of “theological reductionism” has not been absent in the use of these models: “... the rightful stress on these theological notions has sometimes not been accompanied by any serious effort to show they apply to the quite concrete groups of men and women which constitute the Church,” art. cit., 737-738. He also notes that “Father Dulles appears to be convinced that it is neither possible nor desirable to transcend the plurality of models, on which I would disagree with him.”
11. Pope John Paul II, *Redemptor hominis*, 14.
  12. Brendan Lovett, *On Earth As In Heaven, Corresponding to God in Philippine Context*, Quezon City, Metro Manila, Philippines: Claretian, 1988, “The Servant,” 13-15. Fr. Lovett’s entire book (a slim one of only 79 pages) deserves careful study: it is difficult, but rewarding. For the theme of the Suffering Servant and its meaning for the Church, vid. writings by Jon Sobrino and Ignacio Ellacuria for the Latin American context, e.g., Sobrino, *Jesus in Latin America*, Maryknoll, N. Y.: Orbis 1987, for a briefer presentation of themes more fully developed in his longer works, and Ellacuria, one of the Jesuits killed a few months ago in San Salvador, e.g., *Conversion de la Iglesia al Reino de Dios, Para anunciarlo y realizarlo en la historia*. Santander, Sal Terrae. “El pueblo crucificado,” 21-63.
  13. Lovett, *On Earth ...* (cf. fn. 12, above), 13-15.
  14. *Ibid.*
  15. Donal Dorr, *Option for the Poor. A Hundred Years of Vatican Social Teaching*, Maryknoll, N. Y., 1983, and Matthew Lamb, *Solidarity With Victims, Toward a Theology of Social Transformation*, New York: Crossroad, 1982. For the two instructions from the Congregation for the Doctrine of Faith, “*Libertatis nuntius*,” On Certain Aspects of the “Theology of Liberation,” 1984 and “*Libertatis conscientia*,” On Christian Freedom and Liberation, 1986.
  16. Monika Hellwig, *Jesus the Compassion of God*, Wilmington, Delaware: M. Glazier, 1983, 121-123.

### PART THREE

#### Questions for Workshop Two

*Workshop participants are asked to choose one (or two) questions from the ones given below, questions which interest them most and (for the given group) give most promise of fruitful discussion.*

1. Are the “signs of the times” discerned in the texts issued by Asian Bishops of the FABC region still the most significant signs we discern today, as the 1990s are upon us? (Cf. especially the Plenary Assembly statements in *For All the Peoples of Asia*, I, pp. 11-83 and II, pp. 311-341.)

2. Note how the “upbuilding of the local Church” is seen as the issue of the “three dialogues” enumerated in FABC I (the dialogue with the cultures, with the religious traditions, with “our peoples” especially the poor). “Dialogue” is stressed as “the privileged mode of mission” (echoes of Pope Paul VI’s encyclical, *Ecclesiam suam*, where the Church itself is seen as “dialogue”). “Dialogue of life” is given an important role (once again reflecting the perspectives of Pope Paul VI). Would you think the twenty years which have elapsed since the 1970 Asian Bishops Meeting in Manila have borne out the value of this insight? What about the future?
3. What is your understanding of “local Church”? See the new “Theses on the Local Church” issued as a study and discussion paper by the FABC’s own Theological Advisory Commission. For FABC V and the future of the FABC meetings, a fuller and deeper understanding of “local Church” would seem to be of primary importance. (The present study guide gives a thumbnail sketch of this theology, but this can serve only as an introduction.)
4. On the “*Enduring Musts*” for Mission as enumerated in the paper: Would it be a fruitful exercise to take up each point and see its consequences for “Mission in the 1990s”? What concretely would it mean for our communities?
5. “Inculturation can be given as another name for building up the local Church.” Some authors give a narrower and wider meaning to inculturation. The “narrower” sense includes “belief, value and symbol system”; the “wider” meaning includes also “livelihood and power systems” (economic and political areas of culture). Discuss these two senses, and ask what consequences the “broader definition” would have for “local Church and its genesis.”
6. “*Images and Models*” in relation to the theology of “the Church as God’s Gift and Our Task.” Is the theology present in the understanding of Church as Gift-and-Task one which transcends the “models approach”? Does it go beyond a mere multiplication of “aspects of the Church” to the “actualization” or “real-ization” of these aspects/models in the historical life of ecclesial communities? (Cf. footnote 10 in Part Two, above.)
7. The understanding of “*Church as Fellow-Wayfarer ... Acompañar*,” of “Church of the Suffering Servant,” and of “Church of Jesus the Compassion of God” will only come clear if we try to “tell stories” relating how each of these images becomes a reality in the life of the community. It is the stories which will reveal the meaning of these



“models.”

Hence a fruitful exercise in the workshop would be to call up stories (real experiences!) which concretize the meaning of each of these images.

8. Does “the Church of Jesus the Compassion of God” say anything especially relevant to your Church communities? Can it be the overarching paradigm that could bring together much of what emerges from the discussions of FABC V in its various workshops, etc.?
9. After this discussion, read over FABC I (Taipei 1974). That final statement has, in a true sense, been the overall program of FABC from 1974 to the present. (The SEDOS meeting on *Mission and Dialogue* in Rome in 1981 almost point-by-point took up the same program for “the future of mission.”) Do you think it is still an operative program for the missionary task in Asia for the 1990s. If not, what changes are called for?

## APPENDIX

### A BRIEF SURVEY OF THE FABC DOCUMENTS, 1970-1982

by

Carolus B. Putranta

The present summary/survey which takes up and analyzes the principal FABC documents issued during the first twelve years of existence and life of the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences does not pretend to be an exhaustive one. It is based on a doctoral dissertation written in Rome, for the Pontifical Gregorian University, during a period covering the years 1983/1985.

#### I. MAJOR THEMES COVERED IN THE FABC TEXTS

- 1.1. *Mission*: a renewed sense of mission; a spirituality of mission for the Church in Asia.
- 1.2. *Ministries*: ministries demanded by the demands of mission in Asia.
- 1.3. *Community*: what Christian community must be, in the Asian context.

#### II. BASIC THEOLOGICAL ASSUMPTIONS WHICH UNDERGIRD THE REFLECTION PRESENT IN THE FABC TEXTS

- 2.1. The universality of the grace of Christ.

- 2.2. The “inseparability” of Jesus (the Jesus of the Gospel) and the Cosmic Christ.
- 2.3. The final stage of the history of salvation is underway.
- 2.4. The “relativity” of the Church; its reference to Christ.

### III. SOME POINTS “ARRIVED AT” IN THE FABC DOCUMENTS

- 3.1. Mission in Asia and “dialogue” as its mode. Dialogue with the cultures, with the living religious traditions, with the multitudes of the Asian poor.
- 3.2. The local Churches as historical bearers of mission in Asia today.
- 3.3. Participation and coresponsibility as principles of intra-communitarian organization and life.

### IV. SOME POINTS WHICH REMAIN “OPEN” IN THE DOCUMENTS

- 4.1. Relationship with other Christian Churches in Asia (the ecumenical dimension.)
- 4.2. A synthetic ecclesiological vision.
- 4.3. Method for truly local theological reflection.
- 4.4. The Church’s presence in situations of conflict: what is her role?
- 4.5. How the missionary directions of the FABC texts are to be concretely realized in forms of community and community life.

### V. SOME CHARACTERISTICS OF THE FABC DOCUMENTS ANALYZED

- 5.1. Non-doctrinal in character, generally, dealing mainly with themes of mission, expressed in broad orientations.
- 5.2. Genre: a sharing of the learning-process, of the acquired awareness of the bishop-participants.

### VI. THE IMPACT OF TEXTS AND DOCUMENTS ON THE LIFE OF THE ASIAN CHURCHES

#### I. Major Themes Taken Up in the FABC Documents

##### 1. Mission: a renewed sense of mission; a spirituality for mission

The resolutions arrived at in the 1970 Asian Bishops’ Meeting in Manila to place the Church in Asia at the service of the peoples of Asia are reaffirmed and more firmly articulated in FABCI (*in Taipei*). The Gospel must be proclaimed “in dialogue with the rich variety of cultures in Asia, with its living religious traditions, with its multitudes of poor people.

*FABC I (Taipei 1974)* remains decisive for all subsequent reflection

carried out in FABC meetings. Christians form a small minority in Asia, in the midst of enormous masses. To these masses, and to every aspect of Asian reality, the Gospel must be proclaimed, and in all dimensions of Asian life the Gospel must be inserted.

*FABC II in Calcutta (1978)* took the *spirituality of mission* as its special concern. Missionary labor in Asia should flow from a deep and living Christian prayer life and must be constantly nourished by it. It must also ever return to prayer and the life of the Spirit as to its perennial source. Spirituality is filial participation in the reality and life of the Triune God constantly at work in the history of mankind as its underlying Mystery.

## **2. Ministry and Ministries**

The *Hong Kong Colloquium on Ministries (1977)* took up possibilities for Asian Churches to create new ministries truly adapted to the missionary demands of the region. Broad possibilities are opened especially for laymen and laywomen to exercise active service and take up diverse tasks in a mission-conscious local Church.

## **3. Christian Community (FABC III, Bangkok, 1982)**

The 1982 Plenary Assembly (FABC III, Bangkok) discussed the constituent realities of Christian community in the Asian context: a community of disciples of the Gospel, a community which realizes this discipleship not only within the intercommunitarian life, but above all, in opening itself to the demands of the Gospel as it faces the harsh realities of Asia today.

## **II. BASIC THEOLOGICAL ASSUMPTIONS PRESENT IN THE REFLECTION FOUND IN THE FABC TEXTS UNDER STUDY**

### **1. The universality of grace**

In various ways, Christ has already been present among the peoples of Asia even before Christian evangelizers came to fulfill the mandate of mission. In his Spirit, Christ continues to awaken and foster peoples' aspirations towards the fullness of life. As the Christian and the Church in Asia encounter the Spirit's activity, there must be an attitude of respectful listening and discerning: the role of the Christian in proclaiming the Name and Gospel of Christ is a "seconding" — a participation — in this presence and action of the Spirit in the world.

## **2. The Jesus of the Gospel and the Cosmic Christ are one: “they” are not separable**

The eternal Word of God, who has been living and active among our Asian peoples, has manifested himself fully in the person of Jesus of Nazareth, in his words and deeds, in his history and destiny. It is the same Word, the same Jesus of the Gospel who — at this present stage of history — wishes to reveal his Name and share his Glory with mankind, with Asian peoples, bringing humanity to the fuller manifestation of his reality and his life.

## **3. The final stage of the history of salvation is now underway**

The very presence of the Christian community, marked by Christ's Name and filled with his Spirit, and the signs of Christ's activity in the world at large, are features of the final stage of the plan with which God wishes to bring all peoples and all mankind to unity, and to lead them to loving one another and thus sharing in the divine way of life. God's plan does not summon men and women to an impersonal and blind destiny for which man has no responsibility. No, this is a history which all mankind shares in shaping and making, calling on everyone's freedom and responsibility interrelating and interacting. The main agent in this “creating of the history of salvation” is the Holy Spirit. The Church is asked to exercise her freedom with wisdom and courage, discerning the Spirit's guidance and following it with decisiveness and constancy.

## **4. The “relativity” of the Church**

The Church does not exist for herself. She derives her very being and *raison d'être* from Christ and from his mission. The Church does not labor for her own self-preservation, but for the fulfillment of the ultimate destiny of mankind, *pro mundi vita*. The Church exists for the realization of the Kingdom of God, proclaimed by Jesus and brought to actualization by his Spirit.

## **III. SOME POINTS ARRIVED AT IN THE REFLECTION FOUND THESE FABC DOCUMENTS**

### **1. Mission in Asia: its challenge and mode**

The present situation of Asian peoples urgently calls for a faithful and ardent proclamation of the Gospel, a proclamation to be carried out with “dialogue as its basic mode.” Dialogue, that is, with *these* Asian realities: the cultures, the living religious traditions and the poor masses of Asia. These make up the ambience in which and through which the

Gospel is to be announced and the inchoation of God's Kingdom is to be realized.

Dialogue with cultures or inculturation takes place when the local Church lives its faith and the Gospel in terms of the cultures of its people, the church being enriched internally by these cultures and in turn transforming them from within, bringing them closer to the foreshadowing of the Kingdom of God.

Dialogue with the Asian religious tradition leads Christians to a real and living experience, not rarely a painful one; experience of the breadth of the mystery of God, of the riches and the depth of his saving action; experience of the growing manifestation of the mystery of Christ and the freedom of the Holy Spirit at work among peoples.

Dialogue with the poor masses of Asia means first of all living in genuine solidarity with them, and together with them realizing the Good News by transforming unjust social structures and building up patterns of relationship more conducive to safeguarding human dignity and human rights and promoting human community and brotherhood.

## **2. The Local Church**

Mission, thus understood, can be concretely realized only within and through local Churches in Asia. The local Churches are then the historical bearers of mission. The local church is the responsible agent, the living ambience and the visible manifestation of the interaction between the Gospel and a concrete human milieu. That the local Christian community "becomes Church" is determined largely by its relationship with the world which surrounds it. The local Churches must thus continually renew themselves in view of their mission and its demands on them.

## **3. Participation and coresponsibility as principles of intra-communitarian organization and life**

Part and parcel of this renewal is the way the Christian communities are built up and organized. Whatever form it may take on, and at whatever level it may be realized, a Christian community must ensure participation of all its members — especially of laymen and laywomen — in its life and activity. The responsibility of each member and the vivacity of small communities will constitute the real strength of the Church at large.

#### **IV. MATTERS WHICH REMAIN OPEN, QUESTIONS, AND ELEMENTS MISSING IN THE DOCUMENTS**

##### **1. The “ecumenical dimension”: relationship with other Christian Churches and communities**

In spite of some remarks made about other Christian Churches and communities, the ecumenical problem does not appear, in these texts, as inherently pertinent to the tasks of evangelization. The ecumenical dimension of evangelization is insufficiently attended to. An adequate vision and workable policies for collaboration with other Christian Churches is needed, not only at the national level, but also on the Asian-wide level.

##### **2. Wanted: a synthetic theological vision, an organic ecclesiology**

The missionary orientations and directives which are delineated in these documents finally call for an organic and integral theological/ecclesiological vision in which elements such as the still-pressing urgency for evangelization, inculturation and interreligious dialogue and the promotion of justice will find their proper place, as necessary dimensions of a missionary local Church in Asia.

##### **3. Toward a method for Asian theological reflection**

Part of the task of building up a truly local Church is genuine local theological reflection. If this means reflection upon a living faith, then it will involve taking up the local situation and local experience as constituents of that reflection. Hermeneutics are here directed toward the Christian Tradition (the past, handed down), and the present Christian and ecclesial experience. How can we develop criteria and categories which truly correspond to Asian ways of perceiving reality, to Asian questions, etc.? How can we give a hermeneutical value to *praxis* (especially religious praxis), something which seems to be one authentically Asian path to real knowledge?

##### **4. Guidelines for the Church in situations of conflict**

Also needed: guidelines in reply to this question: How should a local Church play its role in situations of conflict? Some Churches in Asia have had concrete experiences in this area. Can we draw some imperatives and principles from these concrete experiences?

##### **5. Regarding forms of community for the local Church**

Are there existing forms of community and community life which can

be seen as examples of how the missionary orientations found in the FABC texts are being concretely realized and embodied?

## V. SOME CHARACTERISTICS OF THESE FABC DOCUMENTS

The FABC documents (1970-1982) have, by and large, a non-doctrinal character. They do not manifest any tendency to follow or impose a definite doctrinal direction. Rather, they deal mainly with missionary themes and concerns, and these are set down in broad orientations and in general guidelines. Thus they constitute a sharing of the experience and learning process, of the acquired awareness, of the bishop-participants, rather than laying down and rigid directives.

## VI. IMPACT OF THE FABC DOCUMENTS ON THE CHURCH

1. The real impact of these FABC documents on the awareness and praxis of the local Asian Churches and communities has been seen and felt throughout the FABC region. The extent of this influence remains, however, a matter for future research. This impact does not need to be thought of in terms of "the magisterial value" of these documents. Rather, we can see a living process of "reception" being worked out and revealed — an ongoing "reception" both of the FABC documents and of the Vatican II decrees which these Asian texts are trying to articulate in the Asian context and with a view to Asian situations and realities.

2. These documents may thus play the role of "conscience" within the local Churches of Asia, immersed as these Churches and communities are in the routine of day-to-day institutional life, or in the pressures of many problems and difficulties.

3. They may have the merit of bringing to the Asian-wide level Christian and ecclesial experiences and reflection which otherwise would have remained merely national, regional or parochial. They bring Asia and the Church in Asia, its life and its thought, to the rest of the Church and the rest of the world.

4. A final question: Who benefits most from these documents? The bishop-participants who have themselves reflected on these themes? The non-participant bishops and church leaders? The faithful at large? Priests, religious and other pastoral agents? Local Churches in other continents? The central administration of the Church in Rome? Not least, theologians?

Note: It is our hope that the newly-constituted FABC Theological Advisory Commission may take up, with these texts as points of departure, "more formal theological reflection" for the local Churches of Asia.

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