

Fifth Plenary Assembly: Workshop Discussion Guide**A SPIRITUAL JOURNEY THROUGH THE ASIA OF THE 1990s**

by

Adolfo Nicolas, S.J.

1. INTRODUCTION

The events of the last few months have given enough matter of reflection for years to come. They have also turned a few tables, embarrassed a few "prophets," and reopened a whole series of questions touching almost every area of communal and individual life. The shallow have rushed out to join the cheap preachers of the moment to peddle look-alike gems of instant wisdom. The wise have folded up the old maps and retired to corners of reflection in an effort to re-understand and re-integrate a page of history that needs revision. The Christian, like Mary, keeps all these things in her or his heart. In its depths the new events merge with the old, and with the living God, who speaks through both ... if we only knew how to listen.

Together with the dramatic events of the recent past we are experiencing other changes and developments that are affecting the life of Asia in very radical ways. The Christian reception and integration of such phenomena are slow, often invisible, and done in a great variety of ways, that we can never claim to know or even understand. Discovering these ways might be one of the fruits of the present workshop. At the same time, it will be a relativization of the present reflections, whose only aim is that of being of help. The spiritual, religious, cultural, social variety of situations in Asia has always been a challenging occasion for both wonder at their extraordinary wealth, and humility before any attempt to reflect for the whole region. As a discussion guide, these pages will dissolve into the sessions and drown happily in their new wisdom.

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2. A WORLD OF EXTRAORDINARY CHANGE

At the risk of a certain amount of repetition and overlapping with other papers, we can briefly indicate some of the changes affecting Asia, its life and its spiritual landscape. Something new has been happening to our continent for quite a long time. The changes we are going through seem to have a power well beyond our previous experiences. In spite of the extraordinary differences in culture and religion, in social and political systems, there are trends and transformations that seem as unavoidable as the seasons. The "Global Village" is more and more a living reality and the new developments in the world market seem to find always a way through the thickest of cultural or religious walls, into the life of the people, be they affluent, or less so. Even the poor, who might never enjoy the promises of the "New World," are already suffering the frustration of not having access to it.

We cannot deny that in the face of the new realities of our world (described in other papers of this Assembly), we experience a definite sense of wonder and enthusiasm. The advances are often healing us, empowering, educating, opening for us dream worlds. The prayerful heart is often moved to gratitude and awe in a movement of spontaneous welcome of what appears like a blessing, and of grateful praise of the Lord of all gifts.

And yet the past decades have given us also a sense of caution and suspicion vis-à-vis these unexpected and surprising gifts. In our century we have accumulated repeated experiences of disappointment and self-delusion regarding the fascinating promises of the new. We have grown to a sense of transitoriness and lack of trust in so-called breakthroughs. We have slowly and humbly learned how narrow mere rational reflection can be in any one generation. The optimism of a decade has turned repeatedly into disaster for the next. And thus we have modernity followed by post-modernity, while the sense of isolation in people grows. Secularization has contributed to a human and spiritual "homelessness" and an inability to integrate dimensions of humanity that used to be together. Technology has moved into human spaces of the heart and made out of them copies of the "machine-god" or the "plastic-god." Progress has come and gone to come again in this century and has allured all of us until someone made us think about the high price it demands from the human community, its dreams and Mother Earth. The spirit of our people in the last decades has been tried very harshly. It is only natural therefore that the "spiritual market" has been in disarray and, as we approach the end of the century, we find so many familiar products with a foreign label. The Christian paths to the "Mountain of the Lord" have grown weeds and wild berries. It has become harder to find the Way.

3. THE ASIAN SCENE

In spite of the extraordinary differences among countries, peoples and beliefs in Asia, we are always awed by the dynamic presence of long-standing, great traditions and cultures that have directed and energized the continent for millennia. These traditions and cultures have affected and continue to affect very deeply the identity, values, behavior and relationships of the different peoples. In one way or another their influence has reached and enriched every corner of the continent. It is from this fact that we have to reflect and look ahead to the future. We can sum up the situation in the following four points.

A. The spiritual inheritance of Asia is one of *accumulated wisdom*, a wisdom that has been discovered, gathered, deepened, communicated through millennia and has entered the life ethos of the continent. It is a wisdom of life in the midst of an extraordinary variety of countries, climates and histories. A wisdom that has produced ideas, world-views, values that manifest an extraordinary depth of experience, reflection, insight and committed judgment. A wisdom, on the other hand, that has often come filled with a religious sense of "Presence" of the mysterious in the whole of reality. And at the same time has kept a powerful tradition of the transcendent, the apophatic and unreachable. Silence is as important to Asia as celebration and festival; transcendence as total as immanence; the right side of the brain as cultivated as the left side.

B. But wisdom is never safe and free. It is *always threatened* by bias, nonsense and the infinite varieties of selfish or group interests. This assault against wisdom is particularly fierce in the latter part of our century. We see it now endangered by the overwhelming pressure from present trends:

– Threatened by modernity and the unbalanced claims of on-sided rationality.

– Challenged by technology and a whole new set of scientific myths that promise certitudes, where people have always before respected mysteries. By the time the promises prove false it is too late to recover lost myths.

– Disturbed by the irruption of an avalanche of new inputs coming from outside, without the means or the necessary rhythm for a constructive integration. This puts entire populations in the face of a "pluralism" that is not the creative result of life and its riches, but an artificial imposition that is patterned on the laws of the market.

– The Western ideological wars have also reached Asian shores and taken over the imagination and good will of young and old. The global

and closed character of these ideologies has greatly damaged the wisdom of centuries and contributed to uproot both the “converted” and the disillusioned.

– Underdevelopment, injustice and the new poverty of colonial, post-colonial and technological-industrial times continue to be a deadly threat to a wisdom that used to be a source of inspiration and light for harmony, conviviality and hope.

[N.B. We are not denying in any way the presence of sin or injustice, war, oppression in the history of Asia. When we focus on its wisdom we do it aware of its fragility and of the fact that wisdom is never a possession but an invitation. Its healing role makes sense precisely in the context of human weakness and tendency to lose the Way.]

C. These threats have not been theoretical or only looming in the horizon. They have entered Asian life and changed the human heart of many. The *damages* are considerable and have produced the loss of very important conditions for a meaningful spiritual journey through the decades ahead. Let us point out just a few of them:

– *The loss of old loyalties* might be the most radical one. We do not have to consider here historical loyalties tied up with feudalism and oppressive periods of our past. These occupy only a small fraction of our existence. More important loyalties are those we have had for millennia to our Mother Earth, the land and its well-being, the cycles and needs of nature to remain alive and creative. We think also of loyalty to the family of peoples, to the extended family that has sustained us through famines, floods, poverty and sickness. Other loyalties include relationships with neighboring peoples, races, villages; they include fairness and trust among groups and communities, etc.

– *The loss of a living and shared common sense.* Modernity and pluralism have contributed to the effective and rapid disappearance of old daily and common values and expectations of the ordinary citizens. The generation gap is taking critical dimensions. Communication among people of the same country has become a task that has to be learnt anew.

– *The loss of sense of belonging* has been particularly visible in the mushrooming of new movements and groups that have come to the rescue of a homeless population everywhere.

– A very important *loss* is that of *old traditional therapies* for ailments of body and heart. Rituals that had healing capabilities in the widest sense of the word have been lost or transformed into promotion opportunities for politicians or enterprises. Healing group relationships and activities are also changing and becoming “left-side-of-the-brain” rational interest

groups. Religious references and practices have been discredited and deprived of their ability to cure and soothe sufferings of the soul and of the whole person.

– We can sum up the losses in an *extended inability to integrate self, life, relationships, social responsibility, and the threatening realities of the future*. Cultures and theologies have greatly lost their previous power to help.

D. All of which indicates that we have a whole array of *emerging needs* for a healthy spiritual life in the Asia of the 1990s. These needs are global and we cannot ignore them if we want to contribute “spiritually” to the future. Basically these are needs for:

– A recovery of root loyalties that will reintegrate the coming generations into the most fundamental flow of life, the earth, the wider humanity, basic values that will enhance life, trust, hope, healing, joy, peace.

– A new sense of belonging to culture, to community, to immanence – transcendence.

– A vigorous and consistent system of values that will help us discern through the coming age and contribute to it with creative social responsibility.

– A new justice for all humans regardless of age, race, gender, physical, financial or social capabilities. But also a new justice for the earth and all its living creatures and their habitats. This, in other words, translates into a new justice for the coming generations of Asian peoples who will want to encounter the living God and his marvelous creation in the glorious beauty he so laboriously elaborated through billions of years; and not to be abandoned to a boring search for him through the devastated and exploited wastelands we are multiplying at present.

– We will need more and more depth in order to contribute to new possibilities of healing, of integration, of harmony based on mutual respect and support. Depth also to overcome superficial myths and the approaching flood of “millennial prophecies and promises,” and offer again in all its original freshness and vitality the living word of God.

– We will, finally, need to offer our people a renewed sense of their own worth and the mission they have to contribute to a better future for Asia and from Asia to the rest of the world.

4. RESISTING AN UNHEALTHY IMBALANCE

Spiritual life has always developed at the intersecting point between

the heart and its movements, on the one hand, and the history of people and its important events (positive or negative), on the other. This relationship has been a source of tension and of creative dialogue. The Biblical God of our Judaeo-Christian tradition is a God who speaks to people in the recesses of the heart, in silence and solitude, and at the same time addresses us through the events and vicissitudes of human history. Spirituality is not limited to the professionals of contemplation and mysticism. Kings, beggars, founders, nurses, scholars have lived their Christian vocation to the full in the midst of their busy existence. The prophet is the figure that expresses best both the tension and the integration: fully immersed in reality, while fully immersed in the life of the Divinity. Mary, in the name of the Church, offers a new synthesis "keeping all these things (visits, words, events, promises ...) in her heart."

We can state it differently, saying that spiritual life as well as spiritual interaction with reality has always been a movement *from inside*, from the *wisdom within*. Spiritual discernment has therefore been the Christian method to "be moved and directed from within, in obedience to the Spirit of God working in the heart and life of the person or community." It is a life based on the awareness of the gift and presence of the Spirit of God. It springs from an interior wealth of communion with God. This inner wealth is constantly enriched by the *wisdom around*, the wisdom of the earth and of culture or community that is progressively interiorized and made one's own. It is further enriched by the *religious wisdom* that has been expressed and handed down inside the old religious traditions of Asia.

At the same time, Churches and communities have always been very keen to hear the voice of the Lord in the joys and aspirations as well as in the pains and fears of humanity. What happens in the world is the arena where our communion with God is put to the test. The problem is that the outside circumstances of our world might become too much of a challenge for our spiritual capacities and we run the risk of losing the direction from within. We become then people moved by the first wind, always *reacting*, but seldom in touch with the life and the gift inside.

We have known this tension from the beginning of human life. We have struggled with it from the moment we found ourselves called to live for the Gospel. And yet, this tension becomes particularly critical in our age. The historical developments of the present happen at such speed, the discoveries are so many, the challenges so radical, the possibilities so exciting, that even the most contemplative of persons can find herself or himself out of breath, losing touch with the reality within. That is why in the coming years we are going to risk *being directed from outside* and lose the spiritual core, where true wisdom burns.

We are therefore threatened by a shift from “inside direction” to “outside direction”; from being cocreators of new life with the Spirit, to being reactors to whatever happens about us. The tension should be there as a healthy reminder that God is greater than our hearts. The problem is that the tension might lose sharpness and we might become numb with information, movement and noise, and end up giving up on the task of joining the Lord in the building of his Kingdom.

This unbalanced shift to the “outside” is particularly critical today because the voices and events to which we are continually exposed are not often the spontaneous, creative, wise voices or events that build human persons or communities through pain or joy. Most of the voices we hear today are controlled, provoked, planned and produced by the world of money. (Mammon can be very noisy, indeed. It will keep proclaiming the gospel of the global market,) or of the media or of the ideologies battling for the control of the modern mind. We are being challenged continually by new technological and human possibilities demanding our approval and support. But they hide the real problems they carry with them: Under which model of human or earth life are these possibilities being developed and enjoyed? Is the model one of global sharing in respect for and simplicity of life? Or one of selfish and ruthless use and abuse of resources? Are we building a human world for the next generations? Or loading our grandchildren with debts that will pay for our careless consumption? Such voices, by the way, can also be religious voices promising instant “spiritual fulfillment” and thus stealing from true conversion the long way of discipleship.

We need to give more space to the heart and to life, to the right side of the brain and to the peaceful but painful emergence of compassion from within. There are other voices that have to be heard, that God is always listening to, that only from the depth of the heart can be properly perceived. A Christian spirituality for our age has to open again for us the numbed ears that can hear what God does, (Ephatha, Mk 7:34), and see what he sees. Spirituality is awareness, listening, being moved and energized, being led by the Spirit to Gospel commitments. But we have to start *listening* to the silent voices of those whose very existence is a word from the Lord.

– The *Poor*, in the multiple variety of forms we encounter in our modern world that is more like a race than a global village: – The weak, the sick, the have-nots ... those who cannot even enter the race, because their financial or physico-psychological weakness excludes them from the start. The “losers” in the race. Of those we have more and more all the time, and it looks as if they are going to continue growing in numbers. – The “oppressed wage-earners”: most of them never win and are never de-

clared losers. They have to be kept fit enough to continue running in the never-ending race.

– The *Aged*, the *Children*, the *Young*, that is, those who have lost the intergenerational lifeline that used to keep the whole community sane, fed, cared for, mutually belonging and in a process of reciprocal building up to maturity, responsibility and participation. Today they are the new marginal groups at large and deprived of the chance to grow as individuals in an organic way together with the rest. The aged are diminished by being denied a meaningful contribution to society. The children are boxed into a prefabricated system that will force them to adjust to certain patterns and expectations. The young are fighting their last and only battle to express their frustrated dream of becoming original centers of life and creativity, before they give up and join the labor force or chronic unemployment.

– *Women* are being finally heard in different parts of the world. We can ask ourselves why they do not feel as if they are being heard in the Church. They are not asking for positions, power or token representation. They are clearly asking for *more integral wisdom*. Listening to women is a spiritual activity, a process of learning about God and his kingdom. In this listening we are asked to free ourselves from reductive and oppressing images of both woman and “man.” We are asked to move from spiritual and administrative structures of dependency to living out the new person that has become Christ in all of us; from lack of the deep respect and appreciation women deserve, and which constitutes a form of denial of their person, their capacity to serve and symbolize, to the true family of God where each person contributes out of the gifts of the Spirit. And this needs from all of us a spiritual conversion to “deep listening,” “contemplative perception” and “generous Christ-like affirmation.”

– The *Earth* also has a voice that we have not heard for a long time. We are beginning to hear “the cry of the environment,” the suffering of Mother Earth at the destruction of so much of her life and the threat to the rest. Thanks to a few prophetic persons and groups we begin to realize that we have not been in the least “Godlike” in the way we have behaved as ruthless, inconsiderate, cruel death-carriers to the rest of creation. We reread now the Scriptures and hear the Lord again telling us about companionship, about taking care of his Earth, about being kind to animals, about dreams of peace with the whole creation, so that the lost Paradise would not be lost forever. Saint Paul heard this cry of the universe and saw its dignity linked to the very existence of Christ from the beginning (Rom, Col, Eph). Francis of Assisi and many other mystics have heard and seen it too. We have been and still are tardy and reluctant to listen and convert. We cannot yet see and understand that this cry of the Earth is our own city, a voice from the genetic, cosmic and historical wisdom

that God has patiently built inside the whole of creation with exquisite love and care.

These are times when we have to decide which voices to listen to. We also have to make a choice as to how we are going to listen. The pressure from outside is great and seems to demand immediate responses to the artificial markets of our day. The spiritual wisdom of our Christian and Asian traditions tell us to open more space for the heart and dare to let the spirit take the leadership again into a form of life according to the Heart of God. We have to resist the pressure and continue drawing from the depths “old and new” wisdom to offer our world.

At such a time we have a radical obligation to learn from all the sources of living inspiration. The inner journey of the future has to be a global pilgrimage. The needed light has to come from all sources. We cannot think of a spiritual new age that is not based on a process of dialogue with the cultures and religions of Asia. As our horizons widen, our limiting and reductive categories lose meaning and we are invited to accept as God’s gift not only the so called “great” cultures or “great” religions, but all the cultures and all religions for whatever gift from God that might be hidden, but waiting for us to discover therein.

5. THE EMERGENCE OF A NEW INDIVIDUAL?

Analyses of modernity and change are trying to understand what happens to the individual persons affected by them. It goes without saying that this question is crucial when dealing with spirituality. Who is going to make the journey? Is the modern Asian individual the same as two generations ago? Is the new individual equipped to face the future with all its uncertainties and its challenges? What kind of spiritual being are we thinking about when discussing spiritual ways? Here again the diversity of country, culture and situation makes it impossible to give an accurate robot-image for us to draw conclusions from. We will have to satisfy ourselves at this stage with a few possible common traits and let the workshop discussion unfold variations or contradictions out of local or regional experiences and perceptions. We all know, anyway, that the human person will never fully respond to types and classifications — helpful as they might be. We will limit ourselves here to three aspects.

A. The new individuals emerging in Asia find themselves in a world that provides them with a *wealth of possibilities* unheard of before, and that open for them a totally new range of choices and opportunities. Technology, economy, communications, science, research seem to be faced with a limitless field of involvement and creativity. Obviously not all will share equally in the possibilities, but most will dream of them and

make this dream the driving force of their life.

This means also that these individuals will be confronted with the ongoing need to choose, to decide for one or the other among the open alternatives. They will even have to decide whether they themselves want to make the choice or rather leave it to others — politicians, big companies, or even religious leaders. But less and less things in their lives will be taken for granted, as in the past.

Which means that the new individual will be under remarkable pressure. There will be pressure to make decisions, sometimes about life or death, that no individual before had to make alone. There will be pressure to be kept up-to-date, to be familiar with the new technology, the new computers, the new tools; to absorb mountains of information and be ready to forget them as soon as they become useless, in order to absorb new input. Pressure also to produce, to earn, to compete. In other words, the new individual will be required to be strong, fast, resilient, adaptable, imaginative in order to enjoy the new age.

B. At the same time the emerging person will be *greatly deprived* of many of the things that for ages have given meaning, coherence and purpose to life. Sociologists have spoken of the “homeless mind,” the person without myths to integrate life, to relate to the past or the future. Modern myths are replicas of old ones, but they do not have the weight, the power, the community acceptance that the old had. Modern myths are short-lived like the life-styles and the purposes they incarnate.

The new individuals will have to live with a dearth of convictions. The pluralism and transitoriness of modernity relativize almost everything we hold to be certain. This is not a healthy relativization coming out of a deeper immersion in the mysteries of reality. Often it is the simple inability to scrutinize, to study and reflect, to ponder in silence or in community the deeper truths hidden in much of popular wisdom and secular structures of human life. This will produce new levels of insecurity and sharpen the sense of homelessness for many.

Transcendence will also suffer in the process. Modern Asian societies are already parading the new person, so totally immersed in the demands of production that he cannot find time for the things of the spirit, for depth and silence, for a glimpse of the very transcendence that has been an Asian treasure for the world to respect and desire. With transcendence suffers also the sense of the holy in all things, the immanence of traditional religiosity, and all the healing and energizing powers within.

C. Finally, the new individuals enriched with possibilities like never

before, but deprived of the deeper self, will be a *weaker* person in the face of challenge, manipulation or suffering. We are already experiencing its weakness in the face of propaganda and commercialism; the professional image-builders work with the same passion and dedication, and almost with similar success, at selling a politician and a piece of soap, or a car, or a mosquito killer. Loss of touch with the deeper self lowers one's sense of worth and educates the prospective consumer.

Group pressure from peers, politicians, business or religious associations can take the best of such weakened personalities. The need for belonging can easily become a way to fanaticism. New religions and new myths can become very attractive if they offer immediate gratification or response to the simple questions of modern man.

The fear to make lasting commitments will continue and possibly become stronger. The difficulties of personal relationships combined with the pressures of the age will make growth a goal difficult to attain. Without the support of a community, of a culture, or of one's inner depth, such commitments appear like an uphill journey that many will continue to fear and shun off. Modern individuals are very vulnerable psychologically. For them the invitation of the Lord to come and rest in him takes on a new meaning and importance. But how to make it a way of life? This will be one of the key questions for the Church of the 1990s.

6. A SPIRITUALITY FOR THE NEXT DECADE

A. General Observations

The spirituality we need has to respond to both dimensions of our future needs. On the one hand, it has to face the challenges, problems, shifts and threats that modernity and its accompanying developments bring about. On the other, it has to be meaningful and helpful for the kind of individuals or groups that are emerging in our midst. It has to contribute to a meaningful integration of their needs, their weaknesses and their strong points.

This spirituality has to draw from all the available sources, Christian and Asian, old and new, popular and mystical traditions. We see today with new urgency the importance of the Gospel's praise of the wise man who keeps drawing new and old gems of wisdom from his abundant treasure house (Mt 13:52). The variety of needs, experiences and situations in which people and Churches will find themselves requires that we keep all the channels open for God's grace and guidance to reach us and direct our lives.

The spirituality needed in the coming decades is already around, discovered, created or simply lived by communities and individuals. Spirituality cannot be programmed; it flows from inside, and in Asia it is already flowing, as believers and people of good will respond in depth to the new realities of world and society. This is extremely important because it already indicates certain patterns of behavior to be expected from the leaders of the Church.

1) First, we have to *learn* from the spiritual life of those who are immersed in modern Asia while living a totally committed and creative life of faith. They can be found in the different areas of social life, in some movements, groups or in the simplicity of their daily witness.

2) We have to *be supportive* of those initiatives, movements and projects that with no few difficulties and certain risks are engaging in dialogue with people of other religions or ideologies in a common search for greater depth in prayer, religious insight or compassionate commitment to the earth and its peoples.

3) We are also called to *support* processes and methodologies of Christian discernment in which so many Catholic professionals are involved. How to discern evangelically in issues that range from biogenetical questions to nuclear waste or international business is a question that weighs heavily on many sincere consciences. Maybe we should make discernment one of the central elements of present Church programs of faith education and spiritual formation.

4) Naturally we will have to *continue to support* also the ongoing dialogue with other religions at all levels, and particularly the existing openness towards experiencing in Christ those forms of prayer and asceticism that have led in the past so many Asians to enlightenment, inner freedom and compassionate commitment to goodness and justice.

Needless to say, the above processes will have to be based on good formation programs for spiritual growth. In this light we shall have to revise our catechetical journeys, especially that of initiation; we have to integrate in it a good introduction to prayer, in which people learn how to grow in Christ, how to be transformed, how to interiorize the Gospel by the very doing, the content and the method of prayer itself. We shall have to revise also our sacramental life so that the sacramental journey of memory and transformation incorporates and directs from Christ the historical journey of the coming years.

We will need to reconsider our calendar of feasts in order to offer a more balanced symbolic perspective of the Christian mystery. The depths

of God's Fatherhood-Motherhood, the mystery of creation, the life of the Holy Spirit are not in adequate balance of memory, presence and community awareness with the mystery of the Son, Our Lady and the Saints. The limited awareness many Christians have of these life-giving original mysteries and their relationship to the earth, inner freedom and silent deep contemplation is not unrelated to the fact that they are not brought up to the level of collective memory through feast and celebration.

Similarly, we need to deepen and broaden our reading of the Scriptures. Maybe what we need now is to incorporate into our interest and study of the Scriptures the great and inspiring variety of approaches to the Holy Books that make them sources of light, energy, inspiration and consolation. Preaching would not be a bad starting point for a new offensive in this line.

Finally, the spirituality we are looking for will need an ongoing prayerful and dedicated will to accompany wholeheartedly the many Christians who are deeply involved in the difficult questions of technology, social justice, political transformation, economy, services, work, professional life. How to accompany in the Lord might be one of the most charismatic services needed in our modern Church. Through it both the one to be involved and the one accompanying can learn the way of discernment, while creating in the process new spiritual paths for others to walk along.

B. CHRISTIAN SPIRITUALITY IS TRINITARIAN

We are moving towards a future that goes beyond old limited boundaries of nation, culture, or language. The challenges are global and require from the Church a global response, within which to find concrete paths. This global response has always been the Blessed Trinity. It is here that the deepest sources of Christian life spring forth and where we find our most solid foundations. At the same time it is this global horizon that can protect and bring to full visibility the spiritual traditions of Asian religions and cultures. In the mystery of the Trinity we can be saved from the temptation of narrow categories and frameworks to face the world.

1) *The Father* is mystery in origin, the mystery nobody has ever seen, the source of all, the giver of life. He is the beginning and the fountain, the Creator. Through creation we know that his life is self-giving in an infinite variety of forms. He creates and he makes himself present to every variety of life and existence in the universe. Christian tradition expresses this original mystery in terms of Fatherhood-Motherhood. And we believers are invited to approach it in silence, self-transcendence and contemplation.

Whenever we try to understand what is happening to the Asian continent and all its peoples we should always ask ourselves: "What is happening to the mystery of Asia?"; not, naturally, the romanticized mystery of Western fantasy, but the sense of being immersed in divine life. Are we losing it under the pressure of modern rationality? How can the Christian community contribute to enhance and deepen this sense and bring it to a shared communion in the realm of the Father? We are called today to be true to our faith in the Father and make this faith alive — a spiritual journey — in a renewed sense of contemplation of all that is created, in a responsible stewardship of God's world so that we can go beyond self-interest and shortsightedness and cooperate in the most sacred task of contributing to life in all its forms. To believe in and to do the will of the Father translates into care for others, for the earth, for awe and wonder at the richness of humanity and life we find all around in peoples, races, sexes, and cultures.

A spirituality of the Father can be best defense against any form of superficiality, of verbosity without life, of narrowmindedness, fanaticism or dogmatism. A defense that is strengthened if we are able to broaden our images of God-Father to those, also biblical, that help us relate to God also as Mother. Beyond the present theological struggle to recover our lost feminine dimensions in theology, there is a whole spirituality to integrate in our life. We are going to need it very badly in the decades ahead.

2) Jesus Christ, *the Son*, is the historical and prophetic manifestation of the original mystery of God. The ultimate mystery of the Father takes on historical form in a life of healing and compassion in Christ. Jesus means salvation and this is his mission. What humanity destroyed in the negativity of sin and self-centered pride, the Son restored in the most self-emptying existence that we know. His prophetic realization of the life of the Father became most evident in his merciful concern for and identification with the poor, the marginal, the sinners. Where life was most threatened he poured out his love and this became a new sign for those who believe in him.

The coming future of Asia will bring partial progress and global promises to its peoples. But, no matter how successful some experiences may be, "the poor will continue with us for a long long time." Healing, and justice and salvation in its many forms will be an ongoing need. The invitation of Christ will remain valid and a source of spiritual growth for all of us. The response to the Son has always been memory (which we do through the word of Scripture and the celebration of Sacrament), solidarity and prophetic commitment. These continue to be crucial today and will be more so in the future. The new migrations taking place in Asia,

visible in refugee camps and migrant workers, are raising problems of prejudice, selfishness and irrational nationalisms that will need an overflow of solidarity, compassion and humanity to heal the wounds being inflicted day after day. On the other hand, the growing number of "victims of the race to success" in the more modernized societies is already filling society with massive doses of resentment, frustration and self-loathing. The health of our cities is in serious danger. The Christological invitation to become healing disciples and communities is fully relevant and urgent today.

This spirituality of the Son is also a critical voice against competition and greed as a form of life. The living Christ of the present continues to blame the profanation of human life whenever the world is so disfigured by injustice and destruction that it stops being a house of prayer and becomes a den of thieves. Christology defies also isolationism and self-sufficiency and whatever contributes to build or reinforce a "culture of success." The civilization of love preached by the recent Popes will need many Christlike Asians in order to become reality in our countries.

3) *The Holy Spirit* is the flow of God's life in all things and times. The Spirit is the power of transformation, the re-creation of the universe. The Spirit is wisdom, and joy, and dance, and universal communion. The Spirit is nowhere and fills everything. The Spirit has the mysterious capacity to dissolve itself into goodness, creation, love and feast, healing and peace. The Spirit penetrates the whole of reality and by doing it keeps reality alive, beautiful and inviting us all to freedom, celebration and discernment.

The 1990s are in great need of the Spirit. Let us point out only two areas that are already crying for a more "Spirit-oriented" way of life. The first one is the increase of "negativity" in our world. To the natural disasters and the taken-for-granted reality of human sin, we have been experiencing lately the growing presence of new evils: drugs, terrorism, criminality, unemployment, destruction of the environment to the point of irreversible damage. Not a few authors anticipate a time of "cultural depression." We need more than ever a renewed experience of the "creative Spirit." The world needs the witness of a Church that is in touch with the Spirit and its power to transform what seems irreversible; to change our way of life so that negativity does not become an expanding monster but evokes in believers the healing powers of "re-creation." There is need to show the world that we can "dance our way into the future," because of the surplus of love that the Spirit gifts us with.

The second phenomenon has to do with the psychological and cultural "fears" that the end of a millennium raise. We are already bom-

barded with prophecies of doom. At the same time we are witnessing a recurring of the old search for "signs and wonders," security blankets that will protect us from the coming terrors. We in the Church are invited to offer a fresh and genuine experience of the Spirit who can help us face the future in hope and with courage. We will need to play down signs and wonders, in order to open the hearts to the true signs of the living God in the hearts of people, in the loving concern of the communities and in the justice and peace of our small world.

The spirituality of the Holy Spirit is therefore an antidote to particularism, depression, hopelessness and boredom. It calls people to counteract the forces of destruction with a life out of the joyful depths of communion with every thing alive, in which we discover and celebrate the presence of the Spirit of God. The Holy Spirit gives the lie to those who wanted to make a super-machine out of a world made for birds, flowers and eucharistic meals.

We see therefore that the Trinity expresses and contains in himself the wide avenues for a journey through the coming age. and the greatness of it all is that what we have separated for our consideration in reality is one; and when lived in depth and true communion, there is no dividing line because the three dimensions flow into each other. It is in this mutual penetration that Asian traditional harmony can find new creative possibilities.

C. AT THE SERVICE OF AN EMERGING NEW INDIVIDUAL

Our final reflection is directed to the people with whom we want to journey spiritually in the next decade. If our perceptions are correct, we have a big task in hand. We have to respond to the need for a new framework, a new integrating whole in which to develop Christian life. If modern men and women are becoming more and more "homeless" in the new world, this is the time to offer a new, livable and welcoming spiritual home.

Naturally we are not thinking of a fixed system to take the place of an outdated one. Such systems never really apply and the help they offer is ambiguous, to say the least. Christians are people on the road, pilgrims to the Holy Mountain. The spiritual home we need will have to be very much like a tent for a long pilgrimage with God. But a tent that comforts, protects and becomes the place of encounter with the Lord. It will have to be a spirituality that is flexible, open, alert to all the signs, all the presences of God, and all the possibilities of goodness and light in other traditions.

Such a home cannot be narrow and exclusivistic, unidimensional or

limited by dogmatism. It will have to be comfortable with a pluralism of forms and language, of life-styles and stages of growth. A spirituality for the future Asian individual has to be very much like a "treasure house," from which the community draws according to need, and there is always more there; or like Jesus' eating with the crowds, where after everyone was fed according to their needs, the disciples could still collect twelve baskets full of leftovers.

That is also why this journey cannot be one of the isolated mind, but has to be a journey of the heart, integrating in its communion with God, whatever the mind explores. We will always need recognizable words, symbols, norms, rituals and sacraments when we come together to express our faith, but always knowing that it is the Lord who is our true home. It is not the Law that saves, nor the theological systems, nor even the sacramental festivities of the community. They all have to be filled with the believing heart attuned to the silent voice of the Spirit of God. The home we are talking about is "fullness within," and therefore a source of strength and direction against the alluring and tempting invitations from the superficial developments around.

If we link this need now with all we have said above, we find that what is most needed is a global "sense," a new way of being and feeling in the world and the Church. We can express this need in three headings:

1) A Deep SENSE OF BELONGING:

a. First, to God's family, all those men and women who in many mysterious ways are rooted in and live the communion of the Blessed Trinity. It might be difficult to conceive or imagine this truly extended family, but it is real and it belongs only to God to determine its limits.

b. Second, our belonging to God's earth and the communion with all living beings and the life that from God flows into all of us. We have to overcome whatever narrow individualism enters our cultures with modernization, and also give a cosmic and Christological dimension to the global sense of life that is part of the best Asian traditions.

c. Third, we have to deepen our belonging to the sacramental family of those who believe in Christ. The experiences and learnings from the last years of Basic Christian Communities and other group or community movements can and must help us now to make of our Churches centers of communion, sharing and belonging. This implies also a renewal of our sacramental life in terms of their ability to better integrate the earthly realities of our lives and the mediation of the mystery that fills the world, the believers and the celebration itself.

2) A living SENSE OF THE SPIRIT in faith life:

a. A spiritual home is an "interiorized home." It does not become such through external norms, regulations or personal effort. Home is where one rests, relaxes and is able to find the sources of lost energy. This requires that more and more of our catechesis and spiritual growth be based on "welcoming" the Spirit and experiencing the energizing power of his presence in us.

b. A home without joy is no home. The Acts of the Apostles witness to a surplus of joy, even in the midst of persecution and misunderstanding. The Spirit is the consoler, the advocate, the warmth of the heart, the wellspring of life. But these can remain beautiful words alone, unless we make the reality in a new spiritual thrust for the 1990s.

c. This sense of the Spirit will be the best positive protection against the fever for "signs and wonders" of our end-of-millennium times. We search for signs outside when we are devoid of them inside. The spiritually homeless will want to build a house even in the skies — to overcome the terror of isolation facing the future.

d. That is why in the years ahead we will need to spend much of our pastoral involvement in the ministry of "accompaniment," being and walking with people in the common journey to God and through many misleading phenomena. Maybe new forms of the traditional "spiritual direction," individual and community-based as well, can be one of the answers. In it we touch common traditions of East and West that are asking for renewal.

3) An action-oriented SENSE OF CHRISTIAN VALUES:

a. A healthy, generous, constructive compassion that emerges and grows spontaneously from a heart modeled and formed in close contact with Jesus Christ.

b. A wide ecumenical and cosmic solidarity with all those who suffer, who are in need, who one way or another suffer the unjust oppression or marginalization from life in all its forms: physical, cultural, political, economic, religious.

c. A Paschal conception of self, the Church and the world that brings along a commitment to live for others, to give more than to receive, to forgive rather than to resent, to love in such a way that people are healed and societies become more just, even if this commitment takes us to the Cross.

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QUESTIONS SUGGESTED FOR DISCUSSION

1. About the Spiritual Reality of Your Region

- How far has modernization entered the social and personal life of the people? Is it viewed as a threat to traditional wisdom? Why and How?
- Is modernization changing fundamental values in the local communities? Are those values linked to people's perception of God and mystery?
- Are relationships being changed? Relationships to other persons, between the sexes, or even with the environment, nature, animals, etc.
- Are traditional perceptions of harmony being threatened? How? If so, is there a new understanding of harmony emerging?
- What are the main spiritual gains of modernization in your area?

2. About the Main Influences People Receive

- Which "voices" are most heard and welcomed today? The voices of business and propaganda? Or those of the suffering in our midst? (Not only physically, but mostly spiritually heard and welcomed.)
- Is the cry of the poor, oppressed, marginal sufficiently heard by the Christian community in your pastoral field?
- How willing are our Christian communities to make children, youth and old people the center of their concerns? Is their "voice" welcomed? Or rather silenced for the sake of "other better" goals?
- What is the actual influence of women and women issues in Christian life and spirituality? Is there an adequate effort to welcome their concerns, their insights, the way their Christian perception of faith, love and the Church could change our present practice?
- Are we conscious enough of the earth's plight and willing to search in God's life and message for new light on how to relate to nature and how to heal the wounds we have inflicted on it?

3. About Trinitarian Spirituality

- Do you think the awareness and sense of the mystery of the Father is fully alive and operative in the Christians you work with?
- Which aspects of the mystery of the Father do you consider most important to develop and make people sensitive to in the coming decades?
- Is the awareness of and communion with Christ a living reality? Is

our Christology sufficiently wide and deep to integrate the New Testament dimensions, all the way to the Cosmic Christ of the whole of creation?

– Does the communion with Christ lead people to do the works of Christ, in compassion, healing, fraternity, concern for justice, for the poor, the oppressed, sick, sinners, outsiders?

– How does the life in the Holy Spirit affect and guide Christian behavior, peace of heart, community, joy, hope?

– What manifestations of the Spirit are most common among Asian Christians you know? Are they limited and onesided? Or are they rich and creative in the whole openness of God's gifts?

4. About the New Emerging Individual

– How would you sum up the characteristics of modern Asian individuals in your country? Their strong and weak points, their tendencies and weaknesses?

– How would you express the spiritual priorities for our work in the coming years?

– How would you redefine the need of modern Asians for a spiritual home? How do you see their sense of belonging at present? Their sense of joy and the Spirit? Their living values?

5. What Other Points Do You Want to Underline for the "Spiritual Journey of the 1990s"?