

**A PERSISTENT VISION: THE PRIMACY OF PROCLAMATION
IN FABC STATEMENTS**

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**I. FABC Focus on the Church's Evangelizing Mission in Asia Today
by J. Dupuis**

The Fifth Plenary Assembly of the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences (FABC) met at Bandung, Indonesia, from July 17th to 27th, 1990. It issued a final statement entitled "Journeying Together toward the Third Millennium."

The title itself is indicative of a mission program for the Churches in Asia in the 1990s. "Journeying Together" opens up the perspective of Christians and the "others" being on a joint pilgrimage, building together the Kingdom of God which, though it is already present among them, must continue to grow unto its fullness in the End Time.

Such a perspective, stirring as it certainly is, may nevertheless raise questions: Does not its "regnocentrism" run the risk of underestimating the role of the Church in relation to the Reign of God and, ultimately, that of Christ, in whom it has been inaugurated by God in history?

Moreover, with the stress laid on interreligious dialogue and cooperation between Christians and others in building the Kingdom, does it not lead to overshadowing the Church's mission of proclaiming Jesus

Christ as universal Savior and of inviting the others to become his disciples in the Church?

Added to these is a third question: Is the perspective opened up by the last FABC Plenary Assembly really new? Or does it link up with the original focus of the FABC's theology of mission, even while presenting it with a new emphasis and urgency?

This paper will show that such is the case. It will, moreover, show the constancy of the FABC theological tradition on mission, through other official documents published over the last two decades.

1. The Mission Perspective of FABC's Fifth Plenary Assembly

The third part of the above-mentioned document is entitled "The Evangelizing Mission of the Church in Contemporary Asia."¹ Mission, the document says, involves "being with the people, responding to their needs with sensitiveness to the presence of God in cultures and other religious traditions, and witnessing to the values of God's Kingdom through presence, solidarity, sharing and word. Mission will mean a dialogue with Asia's poor, with its local cultures, and with other religious traditions." (3.1.2).

As motivations for mission, the document mentions: gratitude to God, the mandate from Christ to make disciples, faith in the Lord Jesus, the Church's missionary nature; and adds: "Finally, we evangelize because the Gospel is a leaven for liberation and for the transformation of society. Our Asian world needs the values of the Kingdom and of Christ in order to bring about the development, justice, peace and harmony with God, among peoples and with all creation that the peoples of Asia long for" (3.2.5). Christians must be "joyful witnesses of the values of the Kingdom, and of Christ whose disciples they are" (3.2.5). The acting subject of mission is the local Church; she it is who can "discern and work out (in dialogue with each other and with other persons of good will) the way the Gospel is best proclaimed, the Church set up, the values of God's Kingdom realized in their own place and time" (3.3.1).

Mission "may find its greatest urgency in Asia" (4.1). The document makes its own the statement of the All-Asia Conference on Evangelization, organized by the FABC Office of Evangelization, August 24-31, 1988, in Suwon, Korea, according to which "the proclamation of Jesus Christ is the center and primary element of evangelization" (4.1).² But it explains what a distinctive Asian mode of proclamation would consist of at the present time:

The proclamation of Jesus Christ in Asia means, first of all, the witness of Christians and of Christian communities to the values of the Kingdom of God, a proclamation through Christlike deeds Proclamation through dialogue and deeds — this is the first call to the Churches of Asia (4.1).

Mission in Asia will also seek through dialogue to serve the cause of unity of the people of Asia marked by such a diversity of beliefs, cultures and socio-political cultures. In an Asia marked by diversity and torn by conflicts, the Church must in a special way be a sacrament — a visible sign and instrument of unity and harmony (4.2).

But we shall not be timid when God opens the door for us to proclaim explicitly the Lord Jesus Christ as the Savior and the answer to the fundamental questions of human existence (4.3).

The document repeats that the Church must work in collaboration with Christians of other Churches and people of other religions and persuasions to “inscribe the values of the Kingdom in Asian society” (4.6). This the Christian community must do in companionship, “as true partners with all Asians as they pray, work, struggle for a better human life and progress” (6.2). “It is as servants of the Lord and of humanity that Christians share the same journey with all the Asian peoples....” For “the Church was not sent to observe but to serve ... and to discern, in dialogue with Asian peoples and Asian realities, what deeds the Lord wills to be done so that all humankind may be gathered together in harmony as a family (6.3). Only such a Church, “witnessing by its very being and deeds to the values of the Kingdom of God, will be credible when it proclaims with the lips that Jesus is the Savior of the world and the answer to all its longings” (6.6).

It was necessary to quote at length before attempting an answer to the questions formulated above. The latest FABC Plenary Assembly undoubtedly stresses the Kingdom of God perspective at the service of which the Church is placed; but without undermining the Church’s sacramentality or the foundation of God in Jesus Christ. It likewise insists on dialogue and cooperation with others in building the Kingdom of God and fostering its values in Asian society, but without underestimating the centrality of the proclamation of Jesus Christ. It points to three dimensions of dialogue — with the poor, with cultures, and with religious traditions — but without reducing mission to action for social liberation, inculturation and inter-religious dialogue. Can the document be seen as continuing and prolonging the FABC tradition on mission theology?

For an answer we may take our clue from an Asian theologian who, in

an article published three months before the FABC Bandung Plenary Assembly, described what he thinks characterizes the mission perspective fostered by FABC since its beginning in 1970; that is: "mission dialogue." He writes:

From 1971 onwards 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 "realization" of God's Kingdom.

The 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.³ 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.⁴

"Missionary dialogue," with a threefold dialogue with the poor, with cultures and with religions, is thus clearly traced back to the First FABC Plenary Assembly, held in Taipei, April 22-26 1974. It will be worth showing how it was understood by the Taipei assembly.⁵ The theme of the assembly was designed to coincide with that of the 1974 Synod of Bishops on Evangelization of the Modern World. In its communication to the Synod, entitled "Evangelization in Modern Day Asia," the Taipei assembly stresses from the outset the abiding need and urgency of the proclamation of Jesus Christ:

We believe that it is in (Christ) and in his good news that our peoples will finally find the full meaning we all seek, the liberation we strive after, the brotherhood and peace which is the desire of all our hearts.

It is because of this that the preaching of Jesus Christ and his Gospel

to our peoples in Asia becomes a task which today assumes an urgency, a necessity and magnitude unmatched in the history of our faith in this part of the world (7-8).

The document goes on to point out that “to preach the Gospel in Asia today we must make the message and life of Christ truly incarnate in the minds and lives of our peoples. The primary focus of our task of evangelization then, at this time in our history, is the building up of a truly local Church”(10). The local Church is “a Church incarnate in a people, a Church indigenous and inculturated. And this means concretely a Church in continuous, humble and living dialogue with the living traditions, the cultures, the religions — in brief, with all the life-realities of the people in whose midst it has sunk its roots deeply and whose history and life it gladly makes its own”(12). In Asia especially, the document insists, a local Church must be a Church in “dialogue with the great religious traditions of our peoples” (13-18) and “with the poor” (19-24).

Having decribed the threefold dialogue without which the Church cannot become truly incarnate in Asian reality, the document goes on to show the relationship of this threefold task to the Church’s mission evangelization:

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

In the light of these texts it will be clear that for the Taipei assembly the threefold dialogue of the local Church with cultures, religions and the poor are distinct aspects of its true embodiment in the concrete reality of a people, without which it cannot fulfill effectively its evangelizing mission. In this sense the three dialogues are essential tasks and priorities. They do not, however, dispense the Church from her duty to proclaim Jesus Christ; rather, “through them our local Churches can most effectively preach Christ to our peoples” (25) ... “a task which today assumes an urgency, a necessity and magnitude unmatched in the history of our faith in this part of the world” (8). It would be a mistake to conclude from the Taipei statement that the assembly reduces the Church’s evangelizing mission in Asia to inculturation, interreligious dialogue and the involvement in human liberation, to the exclusion of the proclamation of Jesus Christ.⁶

As for the Kingdom of God perspective, it remains absent in the Taipei document, which focuses instead on the local Church. The second part

of the present paper will show how the Kingdom of God perspective has entered into the thinking of subsequent documents of FABC; the third will likewise show that, this broader perspective notwithstanding, proclamation continues to be affirmed as an indispensable expression of the Church's evangelizing mission.

2. Building the Reign of God as Focus of the Church's Mission

The Reign of God, as we have shown above, constitutes an important aspect of the mission perspective of the Fifth FABC Plenary Assembly (1990), which was absent in the first (1974). Where and when has that new focus been introduced in official FABC documents and how did it develop? To answer this question, it is not enough to take into account the final statements of FABC plenary assemblies. It is also necessary to consider the conclusions of the Bishops' Institutes organized over the years by the various Offices of FABC: the Bishops' Institutes for Missionary Animation (BIMA), for Interreligious Affairs (BIRA), and for Social Action (BISA).

The perspective of the Reign of God first appears in the documents of the Bishops' Institutes for Social Action.⁷ BISA III (1975)⁸ speaks of the involvement of the local Church in "building God's Kingdom on earth" (8), by fostering Gospel values (8), together with adherents of other religious faiths and people of good will (6). BISA IV (1978)⁹ warns that we must be "prepared to risk everything for the growth of God's Kingdom" (11). BISA VI (1983)¹⁰ hopes that, by becoming "the Church of the poor," the Church in Asia may be "a sign and sacrament of the Kingdom of God" (19). BISA VII (1986)¹¹ summarizes the previous meetings. It notes that "the Gospel of the Kingdom is being shaped in the reality of (the) lives (of the poor) and the Spirit of Jesus the Liberator is at work among them" (11).

The BIRA meetings, too, offered an opportunity to bring out the theme of the Kingdom of God present and at work among people of other faiths.¹² BIRA II (1979)¹³ affirms that the Church's task is "always to proclaim the Reign of God, to bring the proclamation of this message into every aspect of human life, and to seek the fulfillment of all things in Christ" (11). "The purpose of (its) proclaiming the message of Christ, which is its central mission — is to call man to the values of the Kingdom of God" (13). Such values being present also in people of other faiths, they, together with Christians, may "turn anew to God's Kingdom" through dialogue (13). BIRA III (1982) in its turn recommends "common action for the promotion of integral human values" (recommendation 3), and concludes that dialogue is a challenge to the Churches in Asia "in their growing commitment to the building of the Kingdom" (conclusion).

The BIRA IV/1-12¹⁴ meetings, held over the years 1984-1991, had as a common general theme, "The Theology of Dialogue." This offered the opportunity to insert the other religious traditions and the practice of interreligious dialogue within the broad reality of the Kingdom of God. BIRA IV/1 (1984)¹⁵ remarks that "the relationship of the Church to the Kingdom" is in need of clarification (9), and that "the Spirit's action, his presence and ministry can — and must — be discerned both in other religions and even in secular movements that may be shaped and leading to the Kingdom of God" (10). The clarifications desired are provided by the final statement of BIRA IV/2 (1985)¹⁶ to which ample reference needs to be made here. The special theme of the meeting was "The Church at the Service of God's Reign"; its aim, that the Church of Asia may become "a better sign and an instrument of the Reign of God." The "values of the Kingdom," it is said, are present in people of other religions, in their beliefs and persuasions; the Church must emerge from her self-centeredness to reach out to them (3). There follows an important statement:

The Reign of God is the very reason for the being of the Church. The Church exists in and for the Kingdom. The Kingdom, God's gift and initiative, is already begun and is continually being realized, and made present through the Spirit. Where God is accepted, when the Gospel values are lived, where man is respected, ... there is the Kingdom. It is far wider than the Church's boundaries. This already-present reality is oriented towards the final manifestation and full perfection of the Reign of God (8.1)

The Church is an instrument for the actualization of the Kingdom. In this process of continual renewal and actualization, she empties herself and dies like her Master (Phil 2:7), through transforming and suffering and even persecution, so that she may rise to a new life which approaches the reality of the Kingdom (8.2)

The document notes further that the Reign of God is "best proclaimed by an authentic witness to the Gospel values" — "witness in being and in deeds," which is the first expression of dialogue (8.4). Dialogue "is based on the firm belief that the Holy Spirit is operative in other religions" (8.5). The Church has received from God her vocation to be "a sign of the Kingdom;" but she must constantly heal herself to become "a more authentic sign of the grace of the Kingdom" (11), "a servant of all in God's Reign" (recommendation 2). In conclusion, the hope is expressed "that men and women of faith and good will, strengthened by the experience of common humanity, will join in the building of God's Kingdom, whose completion he alone can bring about" (15).

BIRA IV/3 (1986)¹⁷ repeats that the Church must “move out of herself and into fellowship with all people of good will as an effective way to work for the Reign which Christ proclaimed” (5). The Spirit is active among the nations, religions and peoples of Asia today, as clear signs of his presence testify (6); the fruits of the Spirit (Gal 5:22-23) which “embody the values of the Reign of God of which the Church is the visible sign” must serve as constant guide in discerning the presence of the Spirit in others (10). The action of the Spirit, however, is bound to that of Christ: “What the Spirit does, and continues to do, is inseparable from what Christ said and did” (11). The statement ends up advocating as the correct attitude in view of the working of the Spirit beyond the boundaries of the Church, that of “receptive pluralism” by which “the many ways of responding to the promptings of the Holy Spirit (are) continually in conversation with one another”(16). It reiterates the hope that the Churches in Asia, together with others, “will jointly make the Reign of God more visibly present, a Reign of freedom, justice, love and peace” (17).

BIRA IV/4 (1987) acknowledged that “interreligious dialogue flows from the nature of the Church, a community in pilgrimage, journeying with people of other faiths towards the Kingdom that is to come” (2). It called on Christians to cooperate with the members of other religious traditions for “the transformation of our country [the Philippines] into one that reflects more closely the Kingdom of God”(8). BIRA IV/6 (1987) took the shape of an ecumenical consultation jointly organized by FABC and the Christian Conference of Asia (CCA) on “Living and Working Together with Sisters and Brothers of Other Faiths.”¹⁸ The joint statement of the consultation notes that “God’s recreating activity is prior to and more comprehensive than the Church’s mission, and it directs our attention beyond the Church to the Kingdom” (5), towards which neighbors of other religions are moving with us as our “fellow-pilgrims,” and of which the Church is called to be “an effective sign and symbol” (6). BIRA IV/7 (1988), continuing the theme of BIRA IV/6, affirmed that “for us, Christians, dialogue demands a total Christ-like self-emptying, so that, led by the Spirit, we may be more effective instruments in building up God’s Kingdom” (16).

The Kingdom of God theme figures again prominently in BIRA IV/10 (1988)¹⁹, which had for its special theme “The Theology of Harmony.” An important statement was made by that meeting which it is necessary to quote:

Through Christ and in Christ the Kingdom of God has come and is now progressing to its fulfilment. It is a force transforming the world. Necessarily, the Kingdom of God confronts the forces of injustice,

violence and oppression Hence, solidarity with the poor is a response to the Good News of God's Kingdom. Where this solidarity exists, there the power of Christ's Spirit is working. The work of the Spirit appears in the struggle for a better world in all its forms. We see people of all faiths participating in that struggle (7).

The coming of the Kingdom requires of us Christians a genuine conversion. We need to recognize first our failures; and we need to abandon our self-image as sole possessors of the Kingdom ... (8).

As Christians, the document goes on to say, we are called to share the Kingdom of God with others by our life, witness, and proclamation (9). BIRA IV/11 (1988)²⁰ took up the same theme of harmony. It noted:

It is this grand design of God for universal harmony which we Christians experience in the person, life and teaching of Jesus Christ. His proclamation of the Reign of God embodies God's plan in creation. For it points to the gathering of all peoples and nations into one family as brothers and sisters under the fatherhood of God ... By undergoing (the) paschal experience in the footsteps of Christ, we will be able to taste and savor justice, peace and joy (2Cor 14:17), the fruits of God's Reign ... (9).

It is our conviction that the Spirit of God, bestowed on all the peoples of different nations, races, cultures and languages, as represented in the event of Pentecost (Acts 2:1-12), continues to weave bonds of unity among them today, and guides them towards wholeness and integrity ... (10).

At for the Church, she is created by the Spirit as "a fellowship or communion in Christ in service of the unity of the entire humankind" (11).

BIRA IV/12 (1991), the last of the series, marked both an end and a new beginning. Its theme was "Interreligious Dialogue: Fresh Horizons for Communion and Cooperation Today." Returning to the Reign of God theme, the conclusions of this meeting²¹ see it as "God's dream for the world": "Jesus' mission was to share the Good News of God's dream for the world. He spoke of the dream through the image of God's Reign We may describe the dream as one of people and communities fully alive. That fullness of life is ultimately communion of life among individuals, among communities and with God" (2.1). Human values, such as "life, dignity, equality, justice and social order" (6.9), are values of the Reign of God (6.10), which Christians and others can cooperate in promoting together. "We are called to cooperate with all believers and other people of good

will who work to uphold human values. As Christians we see such work as proclamation of and preparing the way for the coming of the Reign of God" (6.10). The Church must "work with other believers and believing communities for a world where people and communities are fully alive, for a communion of all life, for the final coming of God's dream" (9.8). The document ends up hoping that the Church may become "more effectively a sign of reconciliation, a sign of the Reign of God, a sign of the love of God in Asia" (10.3).

The various BISA and BIRA meetings, as the references above amply show, laid increasing emphasis over the years on the Kingdom of God theme as a focus for mission in the Asia context. They saw the Kingdom of God as a reality already present in history and extending beyond the Church's boundaries; they saw it as being built by Christians and others together, especially through their common involvement for human liberation and the practice of interreligious dialogue. There remains to show how the FABC plenary assemblies have reflected progressively the same concern, thus leading to the perspective of the Fifth Plenary Assembly exposed earlier.

The Third FABC Plenary Assembly, held at Bangkok, October 20-27, 1982, had for its theme "The Church — A Community of Faith." Its statement²² notes that "our Christian communities in Asia must listen to the Spirit at work in the many communities of believers who live and experience their own faith ... and that they ... must accompany these others 'in a common pilgrimage toward the ultimate goal, in relentless quest for the Absolute'" (8.2). The Church, it is added, "constantly moves forward in mission, as it accompanies all humankind in its pilgrimage to the Kingdom of the Father" (15). As for the Fourth FABC Plenary Assembly, September 16-25, 1986, held in Tokyo, its theme was "The Vocation and Mission of the Laity in the Church and in the World of Asia." Its statement²³ sees the "seeds of the Kingdom" present in the youth of Asia (3.2.3), as well as in diverse cultures and religions (3.6.5). Within this plurality of cultures the Church's task consists on the one hand in infusing Gospel values, and on the other in "drawing out more explicitly" the "seeds of the Kingdom" already present (3.6.5). She must "reach out to millions struggling for social transformation — a struggle that requires an interfaith collaboration" (3.6.6). She must "rediscover Jesus Christ as the Liberator of Asia, and his Church as the servant and instrument of that liberation" (4.1.1). More explicitly, while outlining the main lines of lay spirituality, the statement says:

Seeking the Kingdom that Jesus proclaimed is really to build it in the concrete experiences of the social, political, economic, religious and

cultural world of Asia. In Jesus the Reign of God began; he came that we might have life to the full. The struggle for fullness of life in Asia is a seeking of the Kingdom. Discipleship then is not at all a withdrawal from the world, but an immersion into the wellspring of Asian reality so that it might have life. Communion, solidarity, compassion, justice, love are keynotes of a spirituality of discipleship ... (4.8.7).

... The spirituality of the People of God is a journey in the Spirit of Jesus into the Kingdom of the Father; it is a journey of discipleship, of love and service, after the pattern of the dying and rising of Jesus himself (4.8.8).

3. "Mission Dialogue" and Proclamation of Jesus Christ

We have shown earlier that the last FABC plenary assembly at Bandung (1990), while laying stress on the local Church's threefold dialogue with cultures, religions and the poor, as constituting the missionary thrust of the Asian Churches, in no way underestimates the importance of the proclamation of Jesus Christ. We have traced this missionary integral perspective to the First FABC Plenary Assembly of Taipei (1974). There remains to show how the same perspective has been constantly maintained and developed through the years, not only in the plenary assemblies but also in the various BISA, BIRA and BIMA meetings.

Little is found on this point in the BISA meetings. However, BISA VI (1983)²⁴ notes that "in Asia where Christians are an insignificant minority in terms of numbers compared to the masses in the non-Christian religions, the dialogue of life with the poor referred to in the FABC plenary assembly statement in 1974 is paralleled with a dialogue of life with members of non-Christian religions. This dialogue studies the positive elements in these religions in order to make all people, both Christians and non-Christians, respond together to the poor, irrespective of caste or creed" (10).

The various BIRA meetings held over the years offered ample opportunity to stress the place of interreligious dialogue in the Church's overall mission and its relation to the proclamation of the Gospel. BIRA I (1979)²⁵ already noted that dialogue, understood as mutual encounter after the model of the Incarnate Word "spoken into human history," is "intrinsic to the very life of the Church, and the essential mode of all evangelization" (8, 9). BIRA III (1982)²⁶ expresses the relationship between interreligious dialogue and proclamation as follows: "As God's pilgrim people, the Church shares the longings and desires of all to come closer to the Father, while as God's eschatological people, it announces Jesus Christ and his Good News to all and calls them to radical conversion ... and to belong to

the community of Jesus in his Church”(3). Thus, “dialogue and proclamation are complementary”; for, unlike proclamation, “sincere and authentic dialogue does not have for its objective the conversion of the other,” but “promotes mutual understanding and enrichment” (4-5). The meeting concludes that “dialogue is a crucial challenge to the Churches in Asia in their growing commitment to the building of the Kingdom” (conclusion).

The relationship between dialogue and proclamation is amply reflected upon in the series of BIRA IV/1-12 meetings (1984-1991), with their general theme on “The Theology of Dialogue.” According to BIRA IV/2 (1985)²⁷ “the Reign of God will be best proclaimed by an authentic witness to the Gospel values” (4). The FABC-CCA Joint Consultation which took the place of BIRA IV/6 (1987)²⁸ affirmed that “dialogue and mission have their own integrity and freedom. They are distinct but not unrelated. Dialogue is not a tool or instrument for mission and evangelization, but it does influence the way the Church perceives and practices mission in a pluralistic world” (5); in the Asian context, moreover, dialogue is “an urgent priority for the Churches” (2). BIRA IV/7 (1988) further explains the autonomy of dialogue and its relation to proclamation, saying that “dialogue must be open to proclamation” (13). BIRA IV/10 (1988)²⁹ speaks of the Christians’ duty to “share the Kingdom of God by (their) life, witness and proclamation” (9). According to BIRA IV/11 (1988),³⁰ to be promoters of “harmony,” Christians and others must see the “complementarity which exists between peoples, cultures, faiths, ideologies, world-views, etc.,” and “cultivate an all-embracing and complementary way of thinking,” “characteristic of Asian traditions which consider the various dimensions of reality not as contradictory, but as complementary (*yin-yang*)” (20).

Ending the series of BIRA IV, BIRA IV/12 (1991)³¹ called Asian Churches to “a new way of being Church” — Churches of dialogue. “Such a Church is never centered on itself but on the coming true of God’s dream for the world. It seeks not to exclude others but to be truly catholic ...” (9.1-2) It “stands with sisters and brothers of other faiths in confronting issues of life and death ...” (9.3). “In this model of Church, dialogue, liberation, inculturation and proclamation are but different aspects of the one reality” (9.4). Characteristically, in this last sentence the threefold dialogue incumbent on Asian Churches is recorded conjointly with proclamation.

As would be expected, the BIMA meetings stressed the abiding need and urgency of the proclamation of Jesus Christ. BIMA I (1978)³² noted that it had reached the same conclusions as did the First FABC Plenary Assembly of Taipei (1974) on special “areas to be explored,”

namely “those of inculturation of the Christian faith, the encounter with Asian religions, and the challenge posed to the Church by the poverty of the vast majority of our people” (6). It insisted that “religious dialogue is not just a substitute for, or a mere preliminary to, the proclamation of Christ, but should be the ideal form of evangelization where ... we seek together with our brothers and sisters (the) fullness of Christ which is God’s plan for the whole of creation” (10). It nevertheless welcomes “with a sense of urgency the task of making Christ known, loved and followed by the vast multitude of our brothers and sisters” (2), and “the urgent duty of proclaiming the Good News to the peoples of Asia,” which is the “primary task of the Churches” (19). BIMA II (1980)³³ affirms that the promotion of integral human development and witness to justice (12), as well as interreligious dialogue (14), are “integral parts of evangelization”; while BIMA III (1982)³⁴ urges that “the necessity of first proclamation has lost none of its urgency in Asia, where Christians constitute a very small minority” (9); proclamation remains “an essential element” of the Church’s mission (6).

The last in the series of BIMA meetings took the shape of an All-Asia Conference on Evangelization, already referred to above, which was held in Suwon, Korea (August 24-31, 1988). Its general theme was “The Urgency of Christian Mission.”³⁵ The statement of the conference reaffirms in unequivocal terms the primacy of proclamation among the various aspects of the Church’s evangelizing mission. This important text needs to be quoted:

The ultimate goal of all evangelization is the ushering in and establishment of God’s Kingdom, namely, God’s rule in the hearts and minds of our people. While we are aware of, and sensitive to, the fact that evangelization is a complex reality and has many essential aspects — such as witnessing to the Gospel, working for the values of the Kingdom, struggling along with those who strive for justice and peace, dialogue, sharing, inculturation, mutual enrichment with other Christians and the followers of all religions — we affirm that there can never be true evangelization without the proclamation of Jesus Christ (5).

The proclamation of Jesus Christ is the center and the primary element of evangelization, without which all other elements will lose their cohesion and validity ... (6)

... We also affirm that the primary task of the Church is the proclamation of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, calling to personal faith in him, inviting to membership in the Church those whom God has chosen, and celebrating salvation through Christ in our belonging to the Church.

Every other task of the Church flows from and is related to this proclamation and its acceptance in faith. The Gospel fulfills all hopes, a Gospel which Asia and the whole world direly need (7).

Nothing could be more explicit. As for the FABC plenary assemblies which intervened between Taipei (1974) and Bandung (1990), while affirming that involvement in human promotion and interreligious dialogue are authentic expressions of the Church's evangelizing mission, they too did not fail to state the lasting value of proclamation. Thus, the Bangkok Third Plenary Assembly (1982)³⁶ affirmed that the Asian Churches must fulfill "the Gospel mandate of mission," by "proclaiming the Word through word and witness, reaching out to others through ways of dialogue, and serving in evangelical diakonia" (7.9). It reminded the Churches that "the summons and challenge to make known the person and message of Jesus Christ to those who do not know him is a mandate addressed to even the youngest Christian community" (9.9). Similarly, the Tokyo Fourth Plenary Assembly (1986),³⁷ whose general theme was "The Vocation and Mission of the Laity in the Church and in the World of Asia," called on the Church to be not inward-looking, but "outward and forward-looking," as "we go along with Jesus" on our journey to liberation (4.3,1-2). The Church's function is priestly, prophetic and royal. Her prophetic function must be "a witness and a service of the whole community to the saving truth of Christ and his Church" (4.4.3).

A last document may be examined before concluding. Recently, the FABC Office of Evangelization called a consultation on "Mission Theology Today," which took place at Hua Hin, Thailand, November 3-10, 1991. Admittedly, this consultation of theologians belongs to a category of meetings distinct from the assemblies of bishops to which this study has been devoted. However, its conclusions³⁸ may provide a useful confirmation of the FABC thrust on mission, of which they resume the salient features. In a first part, the conclusions of the theological consultation make an analysis of the social, cultural and religious situation of Asia (2-11), as well as of the situation of Asian local Churches (12-16). At the end of this section, it is observed that "there is a gap between the vision statements of FABC on the triple dialogue with the poor, with cultures and with religions, and the everyday life of the Churches" (15). The second part, entitled "A Call to Conversion," spells out what dialogue with the poor (17-19) and with cultures and religions (20-22) should really entail. It further explains what would make a Church a truly "servant Church" (23-25): "Servant of God, servant of Christ, servant of his plan of salvation; servant also of the Asian peoples, of their deep hopes, longings and aspirations; servant of the followers of other religions, of all women and men, simply and totally for others" (23).

The third part proposes “some theological reflections on the Asian context of evangelization.” Jesus Christ is at the center of Christian faith: “The paschal mystery in which the Christ-event culminates ... ushers in the renewal of creation and marks the decisive step in the establishment by God of his Kingdom on earth. It has cosmic implications and universal significance” (28). “The Kingdom of God is therefore universally present and at work” (29). “The Reign of God is a universal reality extending far beyond the boundaries of the Church. It is the reality of salvation in Jesus Christ, in which Christians and others share together” (30). “Seen in this manner,” the document explains, “a ‘regnocentric’ approach to mission theology does not in any way threaten the Christocentric perspective of our faith; on the contrary, ‘regnocentrism’ calls for ‘Christocentrism,’ and vice versa, for it is in Jesus Christ and through the Christ-event that God has established his Kingdom upon the earth and in human history” (30).

For the “unique and irreplaceable” role of the Church at the service of the Kingdom, the conclusions refer, on the one hand, to the “Theses on Interreligious Dialogue” (1987) of the FABC Theological Advisory Commission (TAC),³⁹ and, on the other, to Pope John Paul II’s recent encyclical letter *Redemptoris Missio* (1990) (RM 18). The conclusions explain: “If the Church is the sacrament of the Kingdom, the reason is that she is the sacrament of Jesus Christ himself who is the mystery of salvation, to whom she is called to bear witness and whom she is called to announce. To be at the service of the Kingdom means for the Church to announce Jesus Christ” (33).

Coming to the “evangelizing mission of the local Churches” (36-37), the conclusions note, after the document “Dialogue and Mission” (1984)⁴⁰ of the Secretariat for Non-Christians, that the evangelizing mission is “a single but complex and articulated reality” (DM 13). Speaking of the relationship, within this single mission, between dialogue and proclamation, the conclusions observe, following the more recent dicasterial document on “Dialogue and Proclamation” (1991),⁴¹ that “dialogue ... does not constitute the whole mission of the Church; it cannot simply replace proclamation but remains oriented toward proclamation insofar as the dynamic process of the Church’s evangelizing mission reaches in it its climax and fullness (DP 82; cf. RM 55)” (37). While in the Asian context “the Church is called upon to be committed to dialogue in a special way” (39), at various levels which the conclusions explain at length (39-46), proclamation remains, nevertheless, “necessary and urgent” (47). The theological reasons for this are as follows:

The Holy Spirit, in ways known to God, gives to all human persons the opportunity of coming into contact with the paschal mystery of

Jesus Christ, and thus to obtain salvation (GS 22). The Church, as the visible sign and sacrament of the mystery of salvation, is in a unique position to offer them the opportunity of sharing in this mystery in a fully human way. She alone can convey to them the explicit knowledge of Jesus Christ their Savior and Lord and invite them to celebrate in joy and thanksgiving the mystery of his passover at the eucharistic table. Only in the life of the Church is found the full visibility of the mystery of salvation. Only there do the children of God come to the full realization of what it means to share in the Sonship of the Son. Thereby the Church's proclamation meets the deepest longings and aspirations of the human heart for liberation and wholeness of life. There the seeds of the word contained in the religious traditions of the world grow to maturity and come to fulfillment. In this manner the Church shares with others "the fullness of the benefits and means of salvation" (RM 18) which she has received from her Lord and Master (49).

Conclusion

The recent encyclical letter of Pope John Paul II, *Redemptoris Missio*, on "The Permanent Validity of the Church's Missionary Mandate" (1990), while recognizing the "positive aspects" of a Reign of God perspective on mission, has drawn the attention to possible dangers and shortcomings. "Regnocentrism" may not be allowed to substitute either for "Christocentrism," or "ecclesiocentrism" (17). The Reign of God, as we know it from revelation, "cannot be detached either from Christ or from the Church" (18). For, on the one hand, it is in Jesus Christ that the Reign of God "became present and was fulfilled"; on the other, "Christ endowed the Church, his body, with the fullness of the benefits and means of salvation ... Hence the Church's special connection with the Kingdom of God and of Christ" (18). While focusing on the Reign of God may legitimately broaden the perspective of the Church's mission, it cannot be made to result in a "change of paradigm" that would undermine the centrality of Christ and the sacramental function of the Church.⁴²

The same encyclical considers the "inculturation" of the Christian life and message as a need which today is particularly urgent (52); it recognizes interreligious dialogue as "part" and "an expression" of the evangelizing mission of the Church (55), and the promotion of man and of all men as "closely connected" with it (59). But it stresses "the central and irreplaceable role," even "the permanent priority," of the proclamation of Jesus Christ (44).

The evidence put forward in these pages will have shown that the official documents of the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences over the last two decades are on both counts in substantial agreement with the papal encyclical. There are, no doubt, between the one and the other distinct shades of meaning and different emphases, as indeed similar differences exist between the various FABC documents themselves, not all of which have the same focus or the same authority. But, these differences notwithstanding, the Reign of God perspective, which in recent years has received increased emphasis, has broadened and deepened the thrust of the FABC theology of mission. As for the "mission dialogue," with its threefold dimension, which the FABC documents have consistently stressed to be an urgent task of the Asian local Churches, it is affirmed without prejudice to the irreplaceable role of proclamation in the Church's evangelizing mission.

Footnotes

1. The document is published in *FABC Papers*, No. 59, pp. 25-43. The numbers between brackets are those of the document. So too for all documents quoted here subsequently. For comments on the document, see F. Wilfred, "The Fifth Plenary Assembly of FABC, *Vidyajyoti Journal of Theological Reflection*, 54 (1990), pp.583-592.
2. See "The Urgency of Christian Mission," *FABC Papers*, No. 50, p. 75. The quotation is from the statement of the conference (6).
3. See *Towards a New Age in Mission*. International Congress on Mission, December 2-7, 1979, 2 vols., Manila: IMC, 1981. The Congress indicated the "continued building up of the local Church as the focus of the task of evangelization today, with dialogue as its essential mode, through ... inculturation; through interreligious dialogue ...; through solidarity and sharing with the poor and the advocacy of human rights ..." (19). *Loc. cit.*, vol. 1, p. 26.
4. C.G. Arevalo, "Mission in the 1990s: Agenda for Mission," *International Bulletin of Missionary Research*, April 1990, p.50.
5. The text is found in *For All the Peoples of Asia* (FAPA), vol.1, Manila: IMC Publications, 1984, pp.25-41.
6. In an article entitled "Evangelization in Asia: A New Focus?" published in *Vidyajyoti Journal of Theological Reflection*, 51 (1987), pp.7-28, M. Amaladoss, commenting on the Taipei document, remarks that according to it the activity of building up the local Church — in which evangelization consists — "finds expression in a threefold dialogue with the local cultures, with the religions and with the poor of Asia" (p.7). Again he writes: "Taking into account the situation in Asia, the Asian bishops analyze the building up of the local Church in terms of a threefold dialogue with the cultures, with the religions and with the poor of Asia. The dimensions of evangelization in Asia are therefore spelt out as inculturation, interreligious dialogue and liberation, all of them contributing to the building up of the local Church" (p.11). According to the author, adding proclamation to the list would result in breaking the totality of the "one task of building up the local Church as the focus of evangelization" (p.11). "While Asia sees inculturation, dialogue

and liberation as various aspects or dimensions or forms of proclamation of the Good News in concrete ways, corresponding to various situations of reality, the addition of proclamation as a fourth term (would) break up this unity and (make) all of them various tasks that a missionary engages in according to the situation" (p.11). Again he writes: Inculturation, interreligious dialogue and liberation are "three integral dimensions of one activity that is evangelization" (p.13). The same article appears also in Id., *Making All Things New: Mission in Dialogue*, Anand: Gujarat Sahitya Prakash, 1990, pp. 15-41.

In his inaugural address entitled "Missionary Challenges to the Theology of Salvation," delivered at the International Missionary Congress held at the Pontificia Università Urbaniana in 1988, Cardinal J. Tomko disapproved of a certain "global" view of evangelization, with the building of the Kingdom of God as its focal point. Evangelization, according to that view, would consist in building a new humanity in which all men are united in love, justice and peace. To this mission "the Church must collaborate through dialogue, inculturation and liberation." "Strangely but significantly," the Cardinal added, "proclamation or announcing is omitted" (*La salvezza oggi*, Roma: Pontificia Università Urbaniana, 1989, p.24). Cardinal Tomko returned to the same topic in an address delivered at the Cardinals' consistory of 5th April, 1991: "Evangelization in the global sense, with its 'new focal point' as the building up of the Kingdom or of the new humanity, would consist only in *dialogue, inculturation, and liberation*. Strangely but significantly, announcing or proclamation is omitted" (*Osservatore Romano*, April 6, 1991, p. 4). — For reactions to various aspects of Cardinal Tomko's Missionary Congress inaugural address, see P. Mojzes — L. Swidler (eds), *Christian Mission and Interreligious Dialogue*, Lewiston: The Edwin Mellen Press, 1990, where the inaugural talk is found in English translation.

7. The conclusions of various BISA meetings are found in FAPA, vol. 2, Manila: IMC Publications, 1987, pp. 345-393.
8. *Ibid.*, pp.357-361.
9. *Ibid.*, pp. 368-370.
10. *Ibid.*, pp. 379-385.
11. *Ibid.*, pp. 387-393.
12. The conclusions of BIRA I-III are found in FAPA, vol. 1, pp. 181-204.
13. *Ibid.*, pp. 189-195.
14. The conclusions of BIRA IV/1-IV/3 are found in FAPA, vol. 2, pp. 415-436. Those of BIRA IV/4-12 are not found in FAPA, vol. 2; unless otherwise indicated they are quoted from manuscript form.
15. *Ibid.*, pp. 415-420.
16. *Ibid.*, pp. 421-427.
17. *Ibid.*, pp. 429-436.
18. Its proceedings are published under the title "Living and Working Together with Sisters and Brothers of Other Faiths," in *FABC Papers*, No. 49. The Joint Statement of the consultation is found on pp. 57-60.

19. Text in *Bulletin. Pontificium Consilium pro dialogo inter religiones*, n.71; 24 (1989/2), pp. 151-154.
20. Text in *Bulletin. Pontificium Consilium pro dialogo inter religiones*, n.71; 24 (1989/2), pp. 155-163.
21. Text in *Bulletin. Pontificium Consilium pro dialogo inter religiones*, n.76; 26 (1991/1), pp. 24-35.
22. Text in FAPA, vol.1, pp. 89-102.
23. Text in FAPA, vol.1, pp. 311-341.
24. Text in FAPA, vol.2, pp. 379-385.
25. Text in FAPA, vol.1, pp. 181-187.
26. *Ibid.*, pp. 197-204.
27. Text in FAPA, vol.2, pp. 421-427.
28. See *FABC Papers*, No. 49, pp. 57-60.
29. Text in *Bulletin. Pontificium Consilium pro dialogo inter religiones*, n.71; 24 (1989/2), pp. 151-154.
30. Text in *Bulletin. Pontificium Consilium pro dialogo inter religiones*, n.71; 24 (1989/2), pp. 155-163.
31. Text in *Bulletin. Pontificium Consilium pro dialogo inter religiones*, n.76; 26 (1991/1), pp. 24-35.
32. Text in FAPA, vol.1, pp. 155-159.
33. *Ibid.*, pp. 161-167.
34. *Ibid.*, pp. 169-177.
35. See "The Urgency of Christian Mission," in *FABC Papers*, No. 50. The statement of the conference, entitled "Evangelization in Asia Today," is found on pp. 74-78.
36. Text in FAPA, vol.1, pp. 89-102.
37. Text in FAPA, vol.2, pp. 311-341.
38. They have been published by the FABC Secretariat, Hong Kong. The papers contributed by the participants at the consultation are to be published in volume form.
39. *FABC Papers*, No. 48, p. 16.
40. Text in *Bulletin. Secretariatus pro non-Christianis*, n.56; 19 (1984/2), pp. 126-141.
41. Text in *Bulletin. Consilium pro dialogo inter religiones*, n.77; 26 (1991/2), pp. 210-250.
42. See J. Dupuis, "The Kingdom of God and World Religions," *Vidyajyoti Journal of Theological Reflection*, 51 (1987), pp.530-544.

II. Evangelization in Asia Today. The Statement of The FABC All-Asia Conference on Evangelization, August 24-31, 1988, Suwon, Korea

1. The All-Asia Conference on Evangelization, held in Suwon, South Korea (August 24-31, 1988) and organized by the Office of Evangelization of the Federation of Asian Bishops Conferences (FABC), brought together sixty of us: bishops, priests, religious and laity. We came from fourteen Asian countries for eight days of prayer, reflection, listening and discussion on the word of God and the Christian message today.

2. We strove to understand the signs of the times, and to search for fresh ways to announce and share the Good News of God's Kingdom in Jesus Christ with all our Asian brothers and sisters. We listened to what each Church has to share about itself and what the Spirit has to say to the Churches of Asia.

3. As we are at the threshold of the third Christian millennium, we became more deeply aware than ever of the Asian peoples' providential hunger for a more profound human dignity, liberation from all oppressive structures, peace, reconciliation, and the fullness of salvation, which find their fulfillment in Christ, the Savior of humanity.

4. While some are open to the Gospel message, many are unable to see the true countenance of Jesus Christ in the Church. We see an increasing commitment to evangelization by all Christian Churches, and the new missionary movements among traditional Asian religions. We are also faced with the pervasiveness of the mass media which create a challenging new language and mentality in our culture, calling for the inculturation of Christ's message in contemporary society. In these situations, we need to look more deeply into the meaning and method of evangelization today.

5. The ultimate goal of all evangelization is the ushering in and establishment of God's Kingdom, namely God's rule in the hearts and minds of our people. While we are aware and sensitive of the fact that evangelization is a complex reality and has many essential aspects — such as witnessing to the Gospel, working for the values of the Kingdom, struggling along with those who strive for justice and peace, dialogue, sharing, inculturation, mutual enrichment with other Christians and the followers of all religions — we affirm that there can never be true evangelization without the proclamation of Jesus Christ.

6. The proclamation of Jesus Christ is the center and the primary element of evangelization without which all other elements will lose their

cohesion and validity. In the same way, evangelization will gather together the believing community, the Church, through faith and baptism. In the Church all men and women can find grace, reconciliation and new life, and through the Church we share these with others.

7. We are glad that Vatican II affirmed the presence of salvific values in other religions. We are grateful for the timely insights and the individual as well as community action of those calling for liberation from human misery and oppression. We also affirm that the primary task of the Church is the proclamation of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, calling to personal faith in him, inviting to membership in the Church those whom God has chosen, and celebrating salvation through Christ in our belonging to his Church. Every other task of the Church flows from and is related to this proclamation and its acceptance in faith. The Gospel fulfills all hopes, a Gospel which Asia and the whole world direly need.

8. In the context of the above, we asked ourselves: What is the Spirit calling us to do now as a response to the signs of the times? In prayer and discussion it once again became evident that, before all else, we need to be evangelized ourselves; we need to become more fully identified with Christ and the Gospel we proclaim. It also became evident that our message should be embodied in committed witness and authentic dialogue, shared with a knowledge and understanding of Asian religious experience and deep aspirations for salvation, on the one hand, and an adequate comprehension of the Asian realities of poverty and injustice, on the other.

9. The reports from the fourteen countries, talks by experts, prayer, and dialogue increased our awareness of the presence and saving power of God in all our Asian faith communities. He calls us to witness to Christ. He encourages us to enter into dialogue with the peoples of other religions of Asia. He asks us to face the poverty and growing pluralism of Asian societies, to respect and even enrich our traditional cultures, to contribute toward a more humanized Asian man and woman, to grow more deeply into Asian spiritualities, including the process of self-purification, and to present our local Churches as places of contemplation and grace. We concluded that all this cannot be achieved without serious prayerful reflection and action based on discernment of the word of God. With this, we will be in a good position to collaborate among ourselves and with all peoples in building the Kingdom of God.

10. Our prayer, reflection, and reports, moreover, left us with the strong conviction that evangelization belongs to the whole People of God. The laity should be encouraged to assume their role and responsibility in the evangelization of Asia. Empowered by baptism and confirmation,

nourished by the Eucharist, and given adequate formation, the laity are a vital, irreplaceable force to carry forward the task of evangelization.

11. The generosity and potential for leadership among women, as well as the dynamism and enthusiasm of youth, are indispensable resources for the growth of the Church.

RESOLUTIONS

We agreed on the following resolutions which are in the form of goals and means.

A. Goals

1. To strive for ourselves and foster in others a dynamic and theologically-based understanding of the Gospel message, a sense of mission, and a personal zeal to share with the people of other faiths the Good News of God's Kingdom in Jesus Christ as our specific contribution to the peoples of Asia, in response to their providential yearnings and aspirations.

2. To create new opportunities, strengthen existing ones, and provide effective education for the laity to carry out their mission in the Church and in the world of Asia today. They have a full share in the mission, especially to evangelize the people of Asia through their personal testimony in their daily lives, professions and respective apostolates. Their formation should include a spirituality of the laity and the evangelization skills proper to our times and cultures.

3. To develop in all an understanding and practice of the various forms of Asian spiritualities so as to make the Gospel better accepted and assimilated in Asia, where contemplation and simplicity of life are highly valued.

B. Means

In order to achieve the above goals, the experience of our conference prompts us to suggest the following means as especially effective.

1. Make every parish and institution of the Church centers to form evangelizers.

2. Promote greater knowledge and use of the Bible, both as a source of grace and inspiration and as an effective instrument for evangelization. Establish needed organizations and agencies at the parish, diocesan and national levels to spread the use, knowledge and love of Sacred Scriptures.

3. Form basic faith communities to strengthen their commitment to the Kingdom of God and evangelizing of others. These communities will be a visible sign of love and compassion in our societies.

4. Strive for a deeper understanding of modern means of communication as constituent elements of modern culture, to seize all opportunities to use mass and group media for evangelization, and learn how to do so effectively, and in particular to minister to and foster Christian values among the men and women working in the media industry.

5. Use the mobility and migration of the faithful as an opportunity to spread the Gospel of Christ. We should inspire, educate, and organize our migrants to be witnesses of Christ, wherever they may go.

6. Create in our educational institutions an atmosphere conducive to evangelization, shared Christian living, and concern for justice and peace.

7. Create and support centers of prayer and contemplation where the Asian forms and experience of prayer can flourish.

8. Give our seminarians and candidates for religious life a formation which reveals the need and opportunities for evangelization, and which provides pertinent knowledge and skills.

CONCLUSION

We are at a critical moment in the history of evangelization in Asia, when the Asian Churches assume their own responsibility to be evangelized and to evangelize. It is a moment of call to personal and community holiness through experience of God in Jesus Christ and the sharing of it with others. We are confident that the Risen Lord and his Spirit are at work in us and the world of Asia, assisting us to bear witness to God's Kingdom of peace and justice, love and fellowship. In this context we affirm our solidarity with the silent and suffering Churches of Asia, and we pray for reconciliation and unity among our divided peoples. We turn to Mary, the Mother of Jesus, to be with us as she was with his disciples, as we enter a new and uncharted course of Christian mission in Asia.

As we return to our various countries, grateful for the experience of the Korean Church and its eloquent witness to Christ, we pray for the spiritual success of the forthcoming Eucharistic Congress in Seoul and for all the people of Korea.

III. Conclusions of the Theological Consultation of the FABC Office of Evangelization, November 3-10, 1991, Hua Hin, Thailand

1. We were called together in Hua Hin Thailand, November 3-10, 1991, by the Office of Evangelization of the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences (FABC) to reflect upon the theological issues raised by the Asian situation where the Church is a religious minority. In prayer and reflection, in listening and discussion we have tried to clarify the question of the relevance of Jesus Christ in the context of evangelization, dialogue and proclamation. We continued the ongoing theological reflection of various FABC consultations and assemblies, in particular focusing upon ecclesial and theological problems in evangelization.

I. The Social and Religious Situation in Asia

2. Asia is an immense and extremely complex continent. Nearly two-thirds of the world's population lives in Asian countries, with about 60% of them living in China and India. This Asia is characterized by rapid social change, overwhelming poverty, cultural and religious pluralism. Thus, it is extremely difficult to make accurate observations which are applicable everywhere.

The Social-Political Situation

3. Asia is undergoing dynamic economic development. New economic centers are arising, such as Japan, Taiwan, Korea, Thailand. A middle class is emerging in many countries. There is great technological change. Nevertheless, for most people the first priority in life is still the struggle for survival. For the majority there is no substantial improvement.

4. Local economies are caught up in a global economy which exercises excessive and aggressive trade exchanges sucking out much of Asia's assets. Thus, economic structures are characterized by dependence, exploitation of cheap labor, destruction of resources and the environment, unfair prices in trade, also illiteracy, problems connected with migrant labor, exploitation of women, child labor, landlessness, problems of peasant farmers, poor working conditions, inadequate salaries, unemployment and underemployment. All these lead to mass poverty. There is no obvious way out of this socio-economic predicament.

5. In this apparently intractable situation, the most common political response is authoritarian and oppressive. One of the most clear effects of this development is the culture of silence, a people not able to express them-

selves. Politically, everything is now in the hands of governments with no clear separation of powers among the legislative, the economic and the political. Many Asian countries are governed by dictatorial, military or theocratic regimes, marked by a denial of human and civil rights, political murder, the curtailing of freedom of expression and of the press. There is an underground world of vice, drugs and arms trade. All too frequently, there is only lip service to democracy and human rights. In this situation modernization is bringing about increasing socio-cultural dislocation.

6. Clearly in this complex situation there is great difficulty in attempting to live the values of the Kingdom. However, there are signs of hope in a growing awareness about, and concern for, social questions. There is a commitment to remove illiteracy, to improve health care, and prepare people for self-reliance. With the Fifth Plenary Assembly of the FABC we acknowledge that "the number, complexity and tenacity of (Asia's) problems could cause a paralyzing discouragement. But seen with the eyes of faith, these difficulties... are so many challenges to mission" (3.0).

The Cultural-Religious Situation

7. The religious situation in Asia largely reflects the social situation as described above. This is the case because of a strong interrelation in Asia between religion and culture. Ethnic and communal conflicts are frequently mixed up with religious fanaticism. Asia tends to identify nationality, religion and culture. Thus religious, ethnic and regional differences are easily manipulated politically. The state often sponsors a particular religion. Religious fundamentalism has arisen as a short-cut response to the complexity of socio-political life.

8. This situation is found in Asia's world religions, in its ethnic religions and cosmic religiosity. Generally speaking, the world religions relate more to the public or civic sphere, while cosmic religiosity informs the more private or personal and family sphere. Commonly, world religions are experienced in the personal, family sphere as popular or cosmic. There we meet with "syncretism" or "spontaneous interculturalism."

9. Religion as faith experience belongs to the private or personal sphere, while religion as social institution belongs to the public or civic sphere. For that reason religion as a social institution also reflects the oppressive structures of socio-cultural life. However, religion as faith experience is often largely concerned with "asking for help," thus reflecting the position of the poor in society. Among mobile classes in society new religious movements have arisen, as well as indifference to formal religious observance.

10. While there are some remarkable exceptions, on the whole in the public sphere world religions in Asia seem to be almost impenetrable to each other. The Christian Churches have met with some success among cosmic religions, tribal peoples, the socially marginalized and minority groups. Such Churches are often strongly influenced by cosmic religiosity and closed in upon themselves. This is a real challenge to the Christian mission.

11. In this situation we also recognize signs of hope. There is a greater openness to Asian philosophies, cultures and spiritualities. Some are engaged in interfaith prayer and meditation and are cooperative in the struggle for peace, justice and the integrity of creation.

Local Church in Asia

12. Generally speaking, our Churches in Asia reflect what holds true for religion in general as described above. In the public sphere the Church presents itself as a powerful social institution. The Church is an effective organization but is not often seen as a spiritual guide, especially on a continent where the religious and spiritual are so much a part of public life. In the private sphere faith is experienced in personal and family life and in basic communities, although at the same time there are strong syncretistic elements from cosmic religiosity.

13. Prejudices are very much alive in Asia. As a social institution the Church is perceived as a foreign body, colonial in origins, while other world religions are not. The lingering colonial image survives in its traditional ecclesiastical structures and economic dependence on the West. This gives ground for suspicion. The Church is even sometimes seen as an obstacle or threat to national integration and religious and cultural identity. Alignments between the Church and socio-political elites often legitimize and preserve the socio-political status quo and do not succeed in obviating this image. The Church remains foreign in its lifestyle, in its institutional structure, in its worship, in its Western-trained leadership and in its theology. Christian rituals often remain formal, neither spontaneous nor particularly Asian. There is a gap between leaders and ordinary believers in the Church; a fortiori with members of other faiths. The Church has created a powerful priestly class, with little lay participation. Seminary formation often alienates the seminarian from the people. Biblical, systematic and historical theology, as taught, are often enough unpastoral and un-Asian. We need a new hermeneutic suitable for the Asian idiom.

14. In this complex situation there are once again many signs of hope. In line with general population movements (urbanization, migrations, ref-

ugees), the Churches are moving out of their traditional areas and mixing with majority populations. Also there are religious women living close to the people. There is increasing involvement in interreligious dialogue. The local Churches are engaged in the evangelization of their own countries. There are increasing numbers of local vocations. There is an increasing communion and communication between Churches, shown for instance in the sharing of resources and personnel. The hierarchies are mostly indigenous. Theology has long been taught in local languages. There are creative efforts at contextualization. Some areas have become known for their theological productivity. In particular, through the theological outreach of FABC Asian voices have become known in the world Church. The role of FABC in linking Churches has been very positive. Theology is open to the laity, a vast potential source for evangelization. Greater attention is given to serious formation of the laity. In areas where political regimes obstruct the life of the Church, perseverance in the faith has become the primary witness. Often enough in the face of oppression only Catholics have held out hope. The Church is appreciated for her profound social concern and charitable works, such as schools, hospitals, orphanages.

15. Although there are many seeds of faith and hope, nevertheless it still holds true that the Church is often giving a counterwitness to its evangelizing mission. This is most notable in its lack of practical identification with the poor, its lack of concrete involvement in interfaith dialogue, and its lack of real interest in interculturalism. In many cases the Church fails to raise a prophetic voice in matters of injustice because of her minority situation as a community. The Church is also still divided, lacking a practical ecumenism. There is little real communion between Churches, let alone with other religions. Lack of conviction seems to make the Church fearful of interculturalism; proclamation still has little reference to local culture, history and philosophy. We are still reluctant to study Asian languages, cultures and arts. Often enough, the Church exculturates new converts from their own societies. In short, there is a gap between the vision manifested in the statements of FABC on the triple dialogue with the poor, with cultures and with religions, and the everyday life of the Churches. The Church is an institution planted in Asia rather than an evangelizing community of Asia.

II. A Call to Conversion

16. In responding to the situation in which she lives, the Asian Church is invited to a serious discernment about her presence and place in society. The Church is called to partake in the Paschal Mystery, and die to herself in order to be raised up with the Lord. The Church is in need of continual conversion and needs to "pass over" with Christ to the poor, to Asian cultures and other religions.

Churches in Dialogue with the Poor

17. Most local Churches of Asia, as they are now constituted, came with the colonial traders, beginning with the sixteenth and later in the nineteenth centuries. These Churches were transplanted from the "old world" to "new" lands. Notwithstanding their remarkable apostolic zeal, those missionaries came with a great sense of cultural and religious superiority. In complete contrast, the primitive Church, under the inspiration of Pentecost, invented and reinvented her "way of being Church" in each of the new situations she encountered. To respond to the socio-political situation which we have described above, the local Churches of Asia should be more in line with the primitive Church and recreate themselves, growing anew from the local turf. In particular, the Churches should be making a living option for the poor, aligning themselves with the lower classes and the marginalized.

18. For this to happen, the Churches would no longer be largely dependent upon their institutions, wherever they are hindering their prophetic function. Often enough the Church is afraid to take a stand in defence of the poor because of a vested interest in her institutions. Like David, the Church cannot move, she is weighed down with the armor of Saul. We have to assume the consequences of the prophetic function of the Church, imitating Jesus himself. We need to create not powerful but flexible service structures. Thus, we would free ourselves from the claims of money and power, and experience evangelical freedom. We would become a self-reliant Church with a simple lifestyle.

19. We acknowledge that our institutions have rendered positive help in the past, and can still do so today, as long as they are used for prophetic, evangelical activity on behalf of the poor. We question them today insofar as they implicate us in an alignment with the rich and powerful. Institutions, such as schools, hospitals, clinics, orphanages and old folks' homes, were established out of a spirit of charity. Now they often survive as competitive businesses. A decision needs to be made as to which institutions may be kept and which not. Those that are kept should be easily accessible to people in general. They should be open for the celebration of local festivals and public gatherings and as centers of service to the local communities.

The Churches in Dialogue with Cultures and Religions

20. The Fathers of the Church were well-acquainted with their Greco-Roman traditions. And so we dream of an Asian Church which feels at home in her own culture: well-educated and ensouled in the cultural traditions of their country. By culture is meant the emergent cultures of Asia, a

combination of many diverse elements of modern civilization, yet still rooted in local traditional values. Seminarians and religious in formation should not be taken out of their cultural environment, but be in continual contact with their living traditions. Formation is not so much information about the past as an introduction into new possibilities for the future. The local Churches should be entrusted to announce the message of the Gospel in their own social and cultural idioms.

21. Our minority communities should be able to empathize with the people of majority faith traditions, having the same feelings, the same hopes, the same reactions. Our Churches should be in tune with the rhythm of society at large, knowing what is going on, conversant with the values, ideas and conceptions of society. As Asian, she is unthreatening, while challenging in her witness to Gospel values. In this sense, interculturalism means creative communication using the available living symbols. In this effort we need courageous and creative initiators rather than detailed directives and norms. To this end the Churches must be free to exercise their legitimate autonomy in making important decisions, without undue interference from higher authority.

22. Interreligious dialogue is also first of all a matter of human communication. Therefore, in the first place, it is a dialogue with the people with whom we live. Such a dialogue presupposes that we prepare ourselves. Preparation involves religious education with appropriate material at hand. However, the most important factor is not the imparting of accurate information, important as that is, as much as the giving of encouragement and inspiration.

A Servant Church

23. We dream of a servant Church: servant of God, servant of Christ, servant of his plan of salvation; servant also of the Asian peoples, of their deep hopes, longings and aspirations; servant of the followers of other religions, of all women and men, simply and totally for others. A servant Church has no pretensions and no exigencies. A servant Church does not insist upon its rights; she offers her services, without getting offended when they are not accepted. A servant Church keeps silent when bypassed, forgotten or unfairly treated.

24. In a servant Church the structures of the Church herself are at the service of the Gospel and of the people. Church structures were developed to support the mission of the Church. Thus, structures are for the Church, not the Church for structures. Not canon law, but the Gospel is the guide and guard of the Church. The Church is a community and her laws and social structures should not stand in the way of her faith communication.

25. A servant Church is not afraid of being a minority. She is a pilgrim Church on the way to the Kingdom. She is primarily a faith community, expressing and proclaiming Kingdom values. She does not place herself at the center. Thus, in theology she is not centered upon herself but on Christ. In her teaching she clearly distinguishes between the Gospel and her own doctrinal understanding of it. In daily life she puts doing the truth before formulations of doctrine, reflecting the values of the Kingdom rather than those of the local elite. There is no split between public role and personal faith, no social division between ordained leadership and the Church community.

III. Some Theological Reflections on the Asian Context of Evangelization

26. In the first part of these conclusions we reviewed the Asian scene and asked what image our Asian Churches are projecting; in the second part we indicated some lines along which the Churches need to undergo a conversion in order to respond more adequately to the situation in Asia. This third part is a short attempt to reflect theologically on the questions which arise when the Church's evangelizing mission is confronted with the Asian context.

27. The main questions are the following: How do we understand the centrality and decisiveness of Jesus Christ in the context of religious pluralism? What is the role of the Church if the Kingdom of God is present and operative beyond her boundaries? What does the mission of the Church consist in, if salvation in Jesus Christ is available to members of other religious traditions in the concrete circumstances of their lives? If interreligious dialogue is by itself an expression of the Church's evangelizing mission, why does announcing Jesus Christ and inviting people to become his disciples in the Church remain urgent? If people can be saved through Jesus Christ outside the Church, what motivation remains for proclaiming the Good News? Why, in the last analysis, must the Asian local Churches be poor and inculturated?

Jesus Christ at the Center of our Faith

28. Jesus Christ, the Son of God made man, is at the center of our Christian faith. In him God's agelong self-manifestation through human history has come to a climax. In Jesus God has personally entered human history and become a member of the human race. This total identification with us of the Son of God is ordained to sharing with us his Sonship of the Father. Jesus accomplished this mission throughout his earthly life, and singularly through the Paschal Mystery of his death and resurrection and

the outpouring of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost. The Paschal Mystery, in which the Christ-event culminates, thus ushers in the renewal of creation and marks the decisive step in the establishment by God of his Kingdom on earth. It has cosmic implications and universal significance.

The Kingdom of God

29. The Kingdom of God is therefore universally present and at work. Wherever men and women open themselves to the transcendent divine mystery which impinges upon them, and go out of themselves in love and service of fellow humans, there the reign of God is at work. As BIRA IV/2 puts it: "where God is accepted, where Gospel values are lived, where man is respected.... there is the Kingdom." (II/1, FAPA II, 423). In all such cases people respond to God's offer of grace through Christ in the Spirit and enter into the Kingdom through an act of faith. The document "Dialogue and Proclamation" (DP) explains that, "concretely, it will be in the sincere practice of what is good in their own religious traditions and by following the dictates of their conscience that the members of other religions respond positively to God's invitation and receive salvation in Jesus Christ, even while they do not recognize or acknowledge him as their savior" (cf. AG 3,9,11; DP 29). Thus, they become sharers of the Kingdom of God in Jesus Christ unknowingly.

30. This goes to show that the Reign of God is a universal reality, extending far beyond the boundaries of the Church. It is the reality of salvation in Jesus Christ, in which Christians and others share together; it is the fundamental "mystery of unity" which unites us more deeply than differences in religious allegiance are able to keep us apart. Seen in this manner, a "regnocentric" approach to mission theology does not in any way threaten the Christocentric perspective of our faith; on the contrary "regnocentrism" calls for "Christocentrism," and vice versa, for it is in Jesus Christ and through the Christ-event that God has established his Kingdom upon the earth and in human history, (cf. RM 17-18).

The Role of the Church

31. In this universal reality of the Reign of God the Church has a unique and irreplaceable role to play. This has been well indicated by the Theological Advisory Commission (TAC) of FABC in its "Theses on Interreligious Dialogue" (1987) when it said: "the focus of the Church's mission of evangelization is building up the Kingdom of God and building up the Church to be at the service of the Kingdom. The Kingdom is, therefore, wider than the Church. The Church is the sacrament of the Kingdom, making it visible, ordained to it, promoting it, but not equating itself with it" (6.3, *FABC Papers*, No.48, p.16; cf. also BIRA IV/2 II 1; FAPA II, 423).

32. The encyclical *Redemptoris Missio* (RM) explains the reason for this unique and irreplaceable role of the Church in relation to the Reign of God at whose service she is placed: "It is true that the Church is not an end unto herself, since she is ordered towards the Kingdom of God of which she is the seed, sign and instrument. Yet, while remaining distinct from Christ and the Kingdom, the Church is indissolubly united to both. Christ endowed the Church, his Body, with the fullness of the benefits and means of salvation. The Holy Spirit dwells in her with his gifts and charisms, sanctifies, guides and constantly renews her (LG 4). The result is a unique and special relationship which, while not excluding the action of Christ and the Spirit outside of the Church's visible boundaries, confers upon her a specific and necessary role" (RM 18).

33. Thus, it is seen that if the Church is the sacrament of the Kingdom, the reason is that she is the sacrament of Jesus Christ himself who is the mystery of salvation, to whom she is called to bear witness and whom she is called to announce. To be at the service of the Kingdom means for the Church to announce Jesus Christ. For this task she is endowed with special gifts and charisms and guided by the Spirit. Due to such endowments the Reign of God is sacramentally present in the Church in a special manner; "she is the seed, sign and instrument" of the Reign of God to which she is ordained (RM 18).

Servant Churches

34. Nevertheless, the Church as a pilgrim in history belongs to the order of signs, and as such needs to be conformed to Jesus and his Reign, lest the quality of her witness be impaired and her signifying power obscured. This is why the Church must reproduce in herself the model of her master who became poor that we might become rich. The "self-emptying" of the Son of God in Jesus Christ is the decisive theological reason why the Church must be a poor Church; his identification with the figure of the "Servant of God" is the reason why she in turn must be a servant. The preferential option for the poor, which the Asian context demands from all local Churches, is in deep harmony with the nature of the Church herself as the sacrament of Jesus Christ, who for us became poor and made himself a servant. In order to be an effective sign and bear a convincing witness, the pilgrim Church, not only in her members but "insofar as she is an institution of men on earth," is constantly in need of renewal and reform (cf. UR 6; DP 36).

Inculturated Churches

35. The same conformity of the Church to her master is the decisive theological foundation for the inculturation of local Churches. The Son of God became man in Jesus in a particular place at a particular time of history, two thousand years ago in Palestine. Jesus was a Jew, deeply inserted in the culture of his people. The revelation he conveyed of the mystery of God, as well as the way in which he accomplished his messianic and saving mission, are steeped in the religious tradition of Israel, even while they fulfill it in an unforeseen manner. The mystery of the Incarnation and the Paschal Mystery are at once the foundation and the model for the deep insertion of local Churches in the surrounding cultures, in the aspects of their life, celebration, witness and mission.

The Evangelizing Mission of the Local Churches

36. Local Churches, servant and inculturated, are the subject of the evangelizing mission. This mission, as the Secretariat for Non-Christians explained in a document of 1984, "is a single but complex and articulated reality," of which, while not claiming to be exhaustive, it mentioned the "principal elements" as follows: 1. Simple presence and living witness; 2. "concrete commitment to the service of humankind and all forms of activity for social development and for the struggle against poverty and the structures which produce it;" 3. liturgical life and that of prayer and contemplation; 4. "dialogue in which Christians meet the followers of other religious traditions in order to walk together towards truth and to work together in projects of common concern"; 5. "finally," there is proclamation and catechesis in which Jesus Christ is announced as savior and people are invited to become his disciples in the Church. "The totality of the Christian mission embraces all these elements" (Dialogue and Mission 13).

37. Speaking of the relationship between dialogue and proclamation, DP wrote: "dialogue... does not constitute the whole mission of the Church ... it cannot simply replace proclamation but remains oriented towards proclamation insofar as the dynamic process of the Church's evangelizing mission reaches in it its climax and fullness" (DP 82; cf. RM 55).

38. In response to the questions raised by the Asian context it seems important to expand further on dialogue and proclamation, and to indicate the relationship which obtains between those two forms or expressions of the one evangelizing mission of our Churches.

Dialogue

39. In the pluralistic socio-political, cultural and religious context of Asia, as delineated in the first part of these conclusions, the Church is called upon to be committed to dialogue in a special way. The Church, being committed to the Gospel of the Kingdom of God, should acknowledge the same Kingdom at work in socio-political situations and in cultural and religious traditions and enter into dialogue with them.

40. The foundation of such a commitment to dialogue is not merely anthropological but primarily theological. In Christ God has entered into a dialogue with human beings, offering them salvation. It is in faithfulness to this divine initiative that the Church should be committed to a dialogue of salvation with all women and men (DP 38). Moreover, this dialogue is founded on the fact that Christ, the new Adam, is at work through his Spirit in all human persons to bring about a new humanity (DP 15).

41. The local Churches of Asia have to be committed to dialogue with socio-political movements and forces working towards integral development, social justice and peace. Possessing the same cultural heritage, we commit ourselves to dialogue with the various cultural traditions of Asia, for the construction of a more humane society. We engage in dialogue with the different religious traditions of Asia and collaborate with them in promoting human and spiritual values. We extend our commitment to dialogue to all those involved in preserving the integrity of creation.

42. The prophetic role of the local Churches in Asia urges them to act also as catalysts in facilitating dialogue between different socio-political forces, religions and cultures, so that they work together in building up a better society based on the values of the Kingdom.

43. Interreligious dialogue is of special importance in Asia where the great religious traditions continue to inspire and influence the lives of millions of people. The religious traditions of Asia command our respect because of the spiritual and human values enshrined in them. These are expressions of the presence of God's word and of the universal action of his Spirit in them. For the Churches in Asia, therefore, to establish positive and constructive interreligious relations with individuals and communities of these religious traditions is an integral part of their evangelizing mission. Such a dialogue with other religions will also prepare the ground for inter-religious and common actions for justice and peace, which will enable the local Churches of Asia to fulfill their prophetic role more effectively.

44. In order to have an authentic dialogue between the Church and

other religious traditions, there should be a real dialogue between the different local Churches and other Christian communities in Asia. A divided Christianity can never enter into a real dialogue with people of other faiths. Hence, it is of utmost importance that the different local Churches of Asia foster dialogue and communion among themselves. In this context practical ecumenism, common witness and concerted action become vital.

45. Dialogue leads the partners to inner purification and total conversion, if pursued with docility to the Spirit (RM 56). An authentic dialogue on the socio-political, cultural, religious and cosmic levels will help the Churches of Asia to be purified of their sin and to grow in their commitment to the Spirit of the Risen Lord who is universally present and active. In the same way such a dialogue will also make a demand on the other partners for a deeper commitment to the values of the Kingdom.

46. This ongoing process of dialogue, effecting a deeper conversion to the Kingdom of God and commitment to the Spirit of the Risen Lord, will purify the local Churches more and more from sin and enable them to fulfill more effectively their evangelizing mission in Asia. At the same time, the multifaceted dialogue among all human groups, in whom the power of the Kingdom of God is at work, will eventually lead the Asian peoples to a fuller communion with God and among themselves, which is the ultimate goal of all evangelization.

Proclamation

47. Having recognized the universal reality of the Kingdom of God in which Christians and others belong, and which they are called to promote together through interreligious dialogue, we are faced with double question: Why then does the proclamation of Jesus Christ remain necessary and urgent? Which motivation will spur the Asian local Churches to invite others to become Jesus' disciples in his Church?

48. The Church has received from the Risen Lord the commission to proclaim his Good News and to make disciples of all nations (cf. Mt 28: 18-20; Mk 16:15-16; Lk 24:46-48; Jn 20:21; Acts 1:8). This commission takes on various shades of meaning in the different texts: "announcing the Good News," "witnessing," "making disciples," "baptizing" and "teaching." Meanwhile, the apostle Paul on his part stresses the urgency of such proclamation when he writes, "Everyone who calls on the name of Lord shall be saved, but how are they to call... without someone to proclaim him?" (Rm 10:13-15). The same urgency of proclamation has been expressed by recent popes, especially in the apostolic exhortation *Evangelii Nuntiandi* (22) and the encyclical *Redemptoris Missio* (1-3).

How are we to understand and implement the Lord's commission to his Church in the light of the Asian situation?

49. The Holy Spirit, in ways known to God, gives to all human persons the opportunity of coming into contact with the Paschal Mystery of Jesus Christ, and thus to obtain salvation (cf. GS 22). The Church, as the visible sign and sacrament of the mystery of salvation, is in a unique position to offer them the opportunity of sharing in the mystery in a fully human way. She alone can convey to them the explicit knowledge of Jesus Christ their savior and Lord, and invite them to celebrate in joy and thanksgiving the mystery of his passover at the eucharistic table. Only in the life of the Church is found the full visibility of the mystery of salvation. Only there do the children of God come to the full realization of what it means to share in the Sonship of the Son. Thereby, the Church's proclamation meets the deepest longings and aspirations of the human heart for liberation and wholeness of life. There the seeds of the word contained in the religious traditions of the world grow to maturity and come to fulfillment. In this manner the Church shares with others "the fullness of the benefits and means of salvation" (RM 18) which she has received from her Lord and Master.

50. Motivation behind the Church's proclamation of Jesus Christ flows indeed from obedience to the mandate received from the Risen Lord. However, a clearer perception of the Church's mission in the context of the Asian reality helps us discover even deeper motivations. Members of other religious traditions already in some way share with us in the mystery of salvation. If the Church is in love with her Lord, she will feel the urge of sharing with them what she alone can offer: the Good News that the human face of God and his gift of salvation are found in Jesus of Nazareth. "Here we are at the heart of the mystery of love" (DP 83).

51. The local Churches of Asia will proclaim Jesus Christ to their fellow humans in a dialogical manner (DP 70e; cf. 77). The proclaiming Church encounters people among whom the rays of that Truth, which enlightens everybody coming into the world, are already present. This hidden presence is the starting point for the Church's proclamation. Thus, in announcing the Good News, both the proclaimers and the hearers will grow into the fullness of the mystery of salvation in Jesus Christ.

IV. Conclusion

52. We have reflected upon and tried to clarify some of the theological issues raised by the Asian situation where the Church is a religious minority, in particular upon the question of the centrality of Jesus Christ in

the context of evangelization, dialogue and proclamation. We do not claim to have fully succeeded. Our response remains tentative and open. In this reflection it has become clear that there are more questions than answers. Documents of the Church from Vatican II (LG, AG, NA, GS, UR), to the present time (RM, DP), have been a first prophetic attempt at formulating the crucial problem of the relationship between dialogue and proclamation. Yet they are not the last word. They are open to new horizons. "Interreligious dialogue and proclamation, though not on the same level, are both authentic elements of the Church's evangelizing mission. Both are legitimate and necessary" (DP 77). The implications of this statement remain to be more fully investigated.

53. Since doing the truth comes before the formulation of doctrine, the Churches in Asia should not await a satisfactory theological answer before going further in the praxis of dialogue and proclamation. It is in the systematic reflection on sustained praxis that we shall discover what God is saying to the Churches. Therefore, everybody has to be encouraged to become more and more involved in the threefold dialogue and in proclamation at grassroots level. In the meantime, theologians should be given the freedom to work creatively on these issues, reflecting upon the dialogal praxis of the local Churches.

54. We are aware that deeds speak louder than words and that it is better to love than to preach about love, to dialogue rather than to write about it. Clearly both are necessary, yet love is the greatest gift of all, the one charisma that perseveres to the end (1Cor 13:13). The Asian Churches have to overcome their fear of the unknown, and have the courage to leave the one sheep in the fold to seek out the ninety-nine outside. And so we dream of a Church without conditions or calculations, at the service of the followers of other faith traditions, a reconciling Church at the service of human communities in conflict, an open Church at the service of the poor. This service entails risk, the risk of losing our life in order to find it (Mk 8:35). Have we the courage to ask the Lord that we may follow him until the end?

IV. Message of the FABC Asian Congress on Evangelization, November 16-20, 1992, Manila, Philippines

Filled with faith and hope in our Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God and Savior of the world, who is for all human beings the only way that leads to the Father and fulfills the longings and aspirations of the human heart, we came to Manila to participate in the Asian Congress on Evangelization. Gathered together from diverse cultures and occupations, we celebrated our common faith and realized more intensely that God in his mercy chose us to belong to Christ not only so that we might be blessed in him but that

we might reach out and share him and all his blessings with all of our brothers and sisters in Asia, who journey with us as partners in the same human pilgrimage to the Father.

Now our grateful hearts burn with a passion and commitment to make Christ known, loved and followed. His mandate rings in our hearts and in our midst: "Go, ... make disciples of all the nations" (Mt 28:19). "Woe to us if we do not evangelize!" (1 Cor 9:16). We must proclaim to others this Jesus, whose unsurpassable riches fill our hearts (Eph 3:8). For us in Asia, "to proclaim Christ means above all to live like him, in the midst of our neighbors of other faiths, and to do his deeds by the power of his grace" (FABC V, Bandung). Evangelization entails for us a dialogue with our Asian neighbors in the concrete situation of their lives, with their religious traditions, their cultures, and so often, their material poverty and deprivation. In this dialogue we realize how rich are the cultures of our peoples despite their deprivation, how close to God they often are and how much we can learn from them. Often they already share the values of Christ that we strive to bear witness to.

But we cannot be satisfied merely with silent witness and wordless deeds. Our very love for Christ and for our brothers and sisters in Asia impels us to tell his story and the great things he has done for us. "Because we believe, therefore we speak" (2 Cor 4:13). We know that our evangelization is incomplete until we proclaim Christ as the offer of God's grace inviting people freely to believe in him. And we cannot rest until he is proclaimed to all our Asian brothers and sisters, because every person and every nation needs the Lord Jesus Christ, who alone can bring us to the fullness of humanity, human community and harmony with all creation. Yes, we "may not keep hidden or monopolize this newness and richness which has been received from God's bounty in order to be communicated to all mankind" (*Redemptoris Missio*, no. 11).

We are not daunted by the magnitude of our task, the smallness of our numbers and resources, and the sacrifices that our mission entails. For the Lord has sent us. Weak and sinful though we be, he is with us. He has poured forth upon us his Spirit who is the power from on high (Lk 24:49). This Spirit lives in the hearts of the faithful and in the Church. He is already active in the hearts of all persons to whom we proclaim the Good News. The Spirit it is who emboldens us to speak, supplies us the words, strengthens us to endure, and makes our work bear fruit. If we welcome him in prayer, he will turn even our weaknesses, sufferings and death into life for the Kingdom of God.

We want to share this passion for evangelization with you, our brothers and sisters of the Church in Asia. Let us all receive anew the Gospel in our hearts and let it shape our lives. Let us together join in the grand enterprise of new evangelization which has its origin in the love of the Father, the grace of Jesus Christ, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit (2 Cor 13:14). With boldness and a creativity born of the Spirit and dictated by love, let us all together witness to the Gospel anew with a new fervor, with new methods and new expressions that will reach and touch the hearts of our fellow Asians. Let us trust that the Gospel remains as ever "the power of God for salvation to everyone who has faith" (Rom 1:16).

Mission is only beginning in this great continent which is home to two-thirds of humankind and the birthplace of the Savior and his Church. We stand at the dawn of a new missionary age! The harvest is great and awaits us. Let us respond "with generosity and holiness to the calls and challenges of our time" (RM, 92).

We beg Mary, star of evangelization, the first to be evangelized and the first evangelizer, to obtain for us from her Son the grace to proclaim him to our nations and to lead our nations to him until with all redeemed humanity we are gathered into God's Kingdom.

* * *

Proclaim the word; be persistent whether it is convenient or inconvenient ... (2Tm 4:2)

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