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Sixth Plenary Assembly: Position Paper

JESUS CHRIST: HIS SERVICE TO LIFE

DISCIPLESHIP IN THE SPIRIT OF LIFE

by
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INTRODUCTION

1. The final statements of the Asian Bishops' Meeting of 1970 (Manila) and of the past five FABC plenary assemblies (1974-Taipei, 1978-Calcutta, 1982-Bangkok, 1986-Tokyo, 1990-Bandung) characteristically opened with a "reading" of the life situation of Asian peoples at the moment each assembly was being held. Each of these statements can be considered the fruit of a collective discernment on the part of the delegates on the mutual interaction between the life of Asians and the demands of the Gospel. Although not one of these assemblies took *life* as its main theme, attentiveness to and concern for life consistently pervaded the bishops' theological and pastoral reflections. The words issuing from the initial meeting of 1970 in Manila would be variously echoed in subsequent assemblies:

> We witness their (the masses of Asian peoples) expectations of a better and fuller life for themselves and their children, for more rice on their tables, knowledge for their sons, their yearnings for greater freedom and dignity, recognition and acceptance, for a life more truly worthy of man.

The Sixth FABC Plenary Assembly (1995, Manila), which coincides with the twenty-fifth anniversary of the foundation of FABC, will explicitly deal with the Church's service to the authentic life being sought by the Asian peoples. In many ways, this assembly will simply be an occasion to reflect on how the Church in Asia has fulfilled this mission the past twen-

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ty-five years and how it is being invited to persevere in the quest for life in the face of new realities in Asia.

2. The position paper at hand is a theological reflection on Christian discipleship from the optic of service to life. Based on the experiences of people who have tried to determine the precise definition of *life*, we can say that any such attempt ends up robbing the term of its significance and depth. Life escapes rigid conceptualization. Life, after all, is not one object alongside other realities. It is the profound source of all living beings which is only slowly and ever incompletely discovered. Life is experienced in its expressions, in the expressions of life itself. Instead of asking of asking how life is to be circumscribed conceptually, we ask how life is expressed in the "living" of Asian peoples.

2.1. It is the task of the other position paper on the Asian situation to describe the contemporary experience of life in Asia. It is sufficient to note here that no depiction of life in Asia will be complete without attention to the challenges and possibilities, the threats and hopes brought by recent Asian experiences of industrialization, economic globalization, changing work patterns, modernization, technological advances, and multi-media. We cannot dismiss the accumulation of arms, the pollution of the environment, the increasing violence, the disregard for the unborn and newly born, religious fundamentalism and ethnic intolerance that are becoming commonplace in Asia. At the same time, we witness the upsurge of movements among women, youth and the poor grassroots communities calling forth new forms of societal life based on equality, free communication and participation. These phenomena, in their unique "Asian color," need to be evaluated in terms of their consequences for community life, values, lifestyles, cultures, families, women, youth, politics and international relations, and the environment.

2.2. Just like the rest of humanity, Asian Christians experience life actively and passively. On the one hand, we "make" life happen, but on the other hand, life "befalls" us. Life is both a project and a gift. Humans also generally experience life as more than purely physical, to include questions of meaning and authenticity, of permanence and immortality. But we can still ask how the Christian faith effects one's very experience of life.

When confronted with the question of service to life in Asia, the Church needs to respond from the depths of its experience of *Christian life*. In other words, life will be approached as a religious question, a Christian question. In this paper, we want to explore the Christian contribution to the quest of Asian peoples for true life. We want to remember the rich story of Christian experiences of the *God of life* who embraces all

experiences of life. We want to share with our Asian brothers and sisters how the Christian life of faith provides the imperative to serve life in all its dimensions and manifestations. We want to understand how for Christians experiences of life encompass experiences of God. We want to remind ourselves, the Christians of Asia, that activities at the service of life are not pragmatic appendices to the faith but are constitutive of that very faith.

This paper will not be a strictly "scientific" presentation of the theme. (Footnotes are deliberately omitted.) Rather, it will take the form of a meditation on the God of life revealed by Jesus and experienced by his disciples in the spirit and in community.

Part I. The God of Israel: The God of Life

The Hebrew Scripture professes faith in God as the fount and Lord of life (Job 12:9-10, 1 Sam 2:6, Dt. 32:39). This confession of faith is not the product of mere speculation but of a long history of encounter with the God of life. We shall indicate the main lines of this faith experience.

3. God Liberates

3.1. The Exodus event provides a singular experience of and insight into God. God liberates from oppression (Ex 15:1-18) in order to lead the people to a land flowing with milk and honey, a place of plenty, freedom and dignity (Ex 3:8). Any form of oppression stands for death. In the Exodus we learn that God wills only life, life expressed in freedom. God liberates because God can never stand for death but desires life for all.

God did not make death (Wis 1:12-13), and believers in God cannot profess love of God while dealing death to others through injustice. Exploitation of others, especially of the weak and the poor, is the act of ungodly people, called the friends of death, (Wis 1:16, 2:10-12). The practice of justice, on the contrary, is immortal (Wis 1:15), because it finds its source in the God of life.

The divine acts of liberation manifest God's holiness (Is 47:4). The practice of liberation by God's people symbolizes and prolongs God's holy action in history (Lev 22:31-33). Liberation, holiness and life blend in God.

3.2. God desires life for all, even for evildoers. This life-giving mercy of God is pure gift, a mark of the gratuitousness of life that comes from God. But this gift demands a behavior that is equally life-giving to others. People open themselves to God's mercy by abandoning evil ways and

embracing justice and righteousness (Ez 18:21-23).

The mercy and compassion of God exhibits God's will to win over even those who made a pact with death through sin. Forgiveness offers life to one dead in sin. Forgiveness liberates the sinner from the clutches of death. Forgiveness confronts death from the root. But forgiveness exacts from the sinner life-promoting relationships and actions. Mercy, forgiveness, responsibility and life harmonize in God.

4. God of the Covenant

The Hebrew Scripture often calls God *the living God* (1 Sam 17:26, 2 Kgs 19:16, Is 40:28). For God to live is always to live-with, to live-for the other. Life is always relational. Life is communion; death is isolation. The life-in-relationship that God wants to share with humanity finds expression in the covenant.

4.1. The God who liberates forges a covenant, a relationship of mutual belonging and possession with the liberated people (Hos 2:21-23). Within this relationship, the people acquire an identity precisely as God's very own people (Ex 6:7). Life means receiving the gift of dignity from Someone greater than ourselves. Life is discovering who we are in relationship to the living God. We find ourselves, our life, by our conscious response to God and by following the divine way (Pss 9, 119).

4.2. Life, possessed in an ongoing relationship of covenantal love with God, generates community. The covenant of God is with a people, with Israel, and not simply with individuals. While the fidelity of individuals is essential, God's "covenant pedagogy" includes the formation of families, clans, communities, and peoples as bearers of God's holy name. Those who are faithful to God do not choose life only for themselves but also for their posterity (Dt 30:19). Life is not simply life with and for God but equally life with and for God's people.

4.3. In the covenant, God is so intimately joined to the people that Israel and its history have become the dwelling place of God's Spirit (Is 63:14). The Spirit no longer dwells solely in the temple but in the historical people that bears God's name. Dwelling within them as their Lord, God is experienced as Israel's "Lord-servant." Better still, God expresses the divine life by being a servant of Israel, guiding it in its arduous journey, providing for its needs, bearing its sins (Is 63:9). A distinguished theologian rightly observes: "So Israel's shame is God's shame too. Israel's exile is God's exile, Israel's sufferings are God's sufferings; for everyone who attacks Israel attacks God's honor and the name which God allows to be sanctified in his people." Life is experienced as the gratuitous solidarity of

the God of the covenant who comes to serve.

4.4. This covenant is not imposed by God. It is a gift, a gratuitous offer which confronts Israel with a choice for or against God. This choice is expressed in a choice for life or death (Dt 30:15, 19-20). To choose life is to obey God's command, to listen, to love, to be loyal to God. To choose death is to cut oneself off from God through stubborness of heart. The covenant, therefore, is located, according to one theologian, within a dialectic of death and life (Ez 36:33-36). Life engages human freedom to choose God and the ways of God.

More concretely, the preservation or loss of life depends on a number of choices.

– Paramount among them is a person's attitude to the Word of God. Life does not depend on bread alone but on the Word of God (Dt 8:3).

– Life in the covenant also hinges on fidelity to God. Faithfulness comes mainly through remembering the things God has done and the promises of a future in God. Forgetfulness is death.

– Finally, life is worship of the true God, idolatry is death. Serving the true God brings life not only to oneself but to others. Idols like money, prestige, power, the "works of our hands" are murderous gods that exact sacrifices even to the shedding of the blood of poor innocent victims. God is life, idolatry is death.

4.5. Covenantal life is witnessed also in God's hope for the people who do not always tread the path of fidelity (Hos 11). God manifests this divine hope in the liberality of forgiveness. God's mercy is stronger than sin and death. God's fidelity to the covenant broken by human frailty is life-giving, because it overcomes the death hastened by sinfulness. The narrow world of retribution cannot imprison God's largesse. God's hope for humanity eludes the claws of death. God's forgiveness denounces infidelity through an offer of a new covenant, a new start in life.

5. God Creates

On the experience of the God who liberates and offers a covenant the Hebrew Scripture bases its faith in the God who creates. God is the creator, the source of life (Ps 36:9), who "kills and makes alive" (Dt 32: 39).

5.1. Israel is not really interested in explaining the origins of life. What matters the most is its relationship to God who is Lord of life and

death (Job 12:10). This covenant relationship evokes a deeply-held conviction in faith that God's unmerited love is the foundation not only of the covenant but of the world (Job 38:4-11). The whole of creation turns around the axis of God's gratuitous love. The creative love of God is the "heart" of God (Jer 31:20), which is similar to a woman's womb where life is received and nurtured. Belief in God, therefore, entails recognition of God's will to life for all (Gen 9:15, Jonah 4:10-11). One cannot cling to God while destroying the life God's love creates.

5.2. The Hebrew Scripture portrays God's creative love in various images. First, God's Spirit (*ruach*) is the Creator's power. To say that God created through the Spirit is to claim that God is a tempest, a storm, an irresistible creative force. Israel believes that God shows killing wrath and life-giving mercy through this creative Spirit (Ez 13:13-14). When God withdraws the Spirit, God simultaneously hides the divine face, a concealment that spells out death for human beings and for everything else (Pss 139, 104). Second, God's Spirit or Tempest is closely associated with God's Word (*dabar*). God's creative activity is mediated by the divine voice that accomplishes what it utters. Finally, Wisdom (*sophia*) is a power that orders the world (Prov 3:19). Through creation, Wisdom addresses human beings so that they may be in harmony with the whole of the universe. Spirit, Word, Wisdom speak of the divine energy to bring to existence, life and harmony the elements of creation.

5.3. Belief in the Spirit of God as the wellspring of life (Job 33:4; 34:13-14; Ps 104:29-30) provides the possibility of contemplating God immanent in all things and of seeing all things in God. Every experience of life, of creation, can be a disclosure of the living source of everything. Thus, reverence for life is integral to reverence for God whose Spirit, Word and Wisdom underlie creation. Respect for life in all its forms, human and non-human, becomes an indispensable aspect of true worship of God. In this sense, regard for human beings created in the divine image (Gen 1:26, Ps 8:5-8) cannot be isolated from regard for the wider community of creation.

Part II. Jesus Christ and the Kingdom of Life

In Jesus Christ, God's will to life took flesh in history. In the person, ministry, death and rising of Jesus, we see the dawning of the Kingdom of Life.

6. The Kingdom of God: The Kingdom of Life

It is universally accepted that the central message of Jesus's preaching and ministry is the Kingdom of God. As the embodiment of his own mes-

sage of Jesus's preaching and ministry is the Kingdom of God. As the embodiment of his own message, Jesus himself is considered the personification of the Kingdom. Our interest lies in seeing how Jesus is truly the Life (Jn 11:25) and the Kingdom of God the Kingdom of Life.

6.1. The history of Jesus of Nazareth shows his dependence on the Spirit, the "creative Tempest of God." His incarnation in the womb of a virgin, a "barren womb" incapable of producing life by itself, is the act of the Creative Spirit (Lk 1:35, Mt 1:20). The Spirit descends upon him at his baptism in the Jordan (Mk 1:10) and drives him to the wilderness to be tested and purified for mission (Mk 1:12, Lk 4:1, Mt 4:1). He inaugurates his prophetic ministry with an appeal to the action of the Spirit who anoints for the preaching of the Good News to the poor (Lk 4:18-19). He casts out demons by the Spirit as a sign that the Kingdom has come (Mt 12:28). At his death, he gives up his spirit (Jn 19:30) but upon rising breathes the Holy Spirit of reconciliation on his disciples (Jn 20:22-23). So historically and theologically, the Creator Spirit determines who Jesus is and what Jesus accomplishes. No wonder, Jesus and his mission will be characterized by the mark of the Spirit: life, new life.

6.2. The hope of Israel indicates that the Messiah will be Spirit-filled. As such, he will work for the renewal of Israel and the coming of new life for the whole cosmos (Is 11:2, 42:1, 11:6ff, 61:1). The Messiah is associated with a new and radical creative act on the part of God (Is 43:19), a restoration of justice and harmony, truly a new creation (Lev 26).

Jesus, acclaimed in the faith of Christians as the awaited Messiah, says that God gives life (Jn 3:16, 14:6). Indeed, the manifestations of death, like indignity, captivity, sickness, isolation and oppression, die away at his Spirit-filled preaching. It is in the power of the Spirit that he drives out demons, welcomes outcasts, draws out the hidden ones, recognizes the forgotten. The "Tempest of God" at work in him creates new life for the sinners, the poor, the dying. History is truly reaching its fulfillment. The hope for the Kingdom of God is already being fulfilled as the Kingdom of Life.

6.3. The Kingdom of God is the revelation of the God of life in Jesus. Because God is life, the Kingdom is the experience of how God makes all things new in Jesus. Jesus himself affirms that he comes to bring life in abundance (Jn 10:10). This is synonymous to saying that the Kingdom of God is at hand (Mk 1:15). How is this Kingdom concretely experienced in the preaching and ministry of Jesus? Let us give a few indications:

– The Kingdom is *communion* among people and communion with God. Manifested in the concern of Jesus for the least and insignificant in

human history, communion "prefers" dialogue and partnership with the absent and forgotten people of history, or those whom history wants to conceal but whom God seeks out, those whom history wants to bury but whom God resurrects, like women, lepers, children.

– The Kingdom is *assuming the story of humanity*, "pitching one's tent" in the brokenness of humanity, especially as experienced by the suffering victims of society. Jesus proclaimed life as one who walked the stony and dangerous path of the marginalized and the martyred.

– The Kingdom is *healing* from physical and social sickness. It is liberation from whatever incapacitates and isolates from human community. It is liberation from sin. In the Kingdom there is no room for illness, only life, full abundant life.

– The Kingdom is *blessedness in being poor in spirit* and *being persecuted* for righteousness (Mt 5:3, 10). It is not a matter of food and drink but of justice, peace and joy in the Spirit (Rom 14:17).

– The Kingdom is *wholeness of life* as children of God because we are peacemakers (Mt 5:9). The lover of peace, like Jesus, fights for life and justice. Vigilant care for peace is a mark of childlikeness in the Kingdom.

– The Kingdom is a life expressed *in love and self-giving* to others, the hungry, the thirsty, the stranger, the naked, the sick, the imprisoned (Mt 25:14-30). God receives this active love of neighbor as love rendered to him.

– The Kingdom is *fascination with God, Abba*, in the fulfillment of whose will Jesus finds the meaning of his life (Mk 14:36). He wants his disciples to share this experience of life in *Abba*: he taught them to pray that the Kingdom may come and that God's will be done (Mt 6:10).

In a nutshell, the Kingdom is the way to life primarily through the unity of love of God and love of neighbor, which are the greatest commandments of the Kingdom (Lk 10:28). As the personal Symbol of the Kingdom, Jesus makes known the depth of the gift of life already offered by the God of Israel in liberation, creation and the covenant, as well as the demands of that life.

7. Dying and Rising to Life

God's life shone in Jesus ultimately and uniquely in his cross and resurrection (Rom 5:10).

7.1. The temptations of Jesus, marked by the irresistible force of the Spirit (Mk 1:12, Lk 4:1-13, Mt 4:1-11), are in some ways a foreboding of the cross. In the wilderness he is taught that his life-giving messiahship will be fulfilled in helplessness, without bread, without fanfare, without violence. He assumes his kingship by surrendering in weakness, even to the forces of death that he comes to conquer. This is the way indicated to him by the Creative Spirit early in his mission: new life in dying.

From the destiny of Jesus we learn that offering life to others can trigger the violent wrath of those who have chosen death. Life is rejected too often (Jn 1:11). Prophets of the Spirit of Life suffer death on account of life.

7.2. The resurrection of Jesus is *Abba*'s unwavering commitment to the gift of life incarnated in the Son. This response of the Father to Jesus' fate on the cross all the more confirms the divine will for life. *Abba* lifts up the downtrodden agents of the Spirit, the protagonists of the Kingdom, as a reminder or even a warning to the friends of death that God takes the side of life. The rising of Jesus is the death of death. It is the ultimate disclosure of God's mercy and hope for the sinner, for in the resurrection, sin and its wages are vanquished (Rom 6:23, 1 Cor 15:54-57). Life is affirmed but only by passing through death. Life triumphs but only by confronting death.

The resurrection of Jesus is also viewed as the work of the Spirit (Rom 1:1-4, 1 Tim 3:16, 1 Pt 3:18). The Spirit's activity in raising Jesus is the beginning of the new creation, the world of eternal life, the End Time. From the Spirit, all who believe in Christ expect to be raised from the dead or brought to eternal life. From the Spirit we anticipate the promise of new heavens and a new earth (2 Pt 3:13).

In the rising of Jesus, the God of life makes it known that life has the final word in history. Where the might of death seems to overwhelm, the resurrection of Jesus constitutes an experience of hope that we memorialize and long to participate in.

7.3. It is only in Jesus' victorious passage from death to life that we can adequately understand his designation as High Priest of the New Covenant, who is both sacrificial victim and sacrificing priest (Heb 3:1, 4:14ff, 5:1ff, 7:11ff). As priest he opens life for all in reconciliation or communion with God. We also begin to grasp the import of Jesus' self-consciousness as the only true Shepherd who lays down his life for his sheep (Jn 10:11ff). In the Paschal Mystery, we begin to know Jesus as the author of life (Acts 3:15), the pioneer of life (Heb 2:10, 12:2), leader and savior (Acts 5:31), indeed the bread of life (Jn 6).

7.4. Because the resurrection of Jesus is the conquest of death, it is an affirmation and promise of life for all human beings, as one theologian rightly comments. The message of life contained in Jesus' resurrection is universal because it defeats the greatest threat plaguing all human beings, namely death. The Paschal Mystery uncovers the gratuitous love of God shown in the fulfillment of the common human longing for definitive life. Every human being who longs for an abiding authentic life will be consoled by the promise already realized in the resurrection of Jesus.

In the person, ministry, teaching, dying and rising of Jesus, the God who liberates, the God of the covenant, the God who creates, the God of life is revealed. In Jesus and his message of the Kingdom, God liberates, God establishes a covenant, God creates, God lives, but as a member of the human family and of the created universe that strive for fuller life. Jesus is the human voice of God's cry for life.

Part III. Discipleship in the Spirit of Life

Jesus rose from the dead in the power of the Spirit. He is experienced as living Lord by the community of disciples only in the Spirit. The living presence of Jesus in the Spirit animated the community that understands itself as the seed of the Kingdom, the presence of the Kingdom of Life in mystery (*Lumen Gentium,* 3). The life of the Christian community of disciples is an expression of the life that the Spirit brings.

8. The Spirit of Life

Let us engage in a quick review of the experience of the Spirit.

8.1. We have seen that the Spirit is God's creative power, the wellspring of life immanent in the universe and in all the living. The Spirit is the life-force of the history, mission and message of Jesus. The Spirit is the living source of the new creation that the death and rising of Jesus offers to all.

8.2. As the divine power of life, the Spirit is experienced where human beings become fully alive because of the *freedom* that the Spirit gives. The eschatological life that the Christ has won is expressed in experiences of the Spirit of freedom. Let us indicate a few characteristics of this life.

– Openness to *Abba* (Gal 4:6, Rom 8:15-17) characterizes a life liberated from the spirit of slavery. It witnesses to the spirit of adoption that makes us children of God.

– Openness to neighbor points to the freedom to be servants of others (Gal 5:13-15, like Yahweh, the servant of Israel and Jesus, the suffering servant. Love, which dispels self-conceit and envy, is the opposite of existence according to the flesh where people are turned in on themselves (Gal 5:19-21, 25-26).

– When people are not prevailed upon by the "compulsions of death," the Creator Spirit reigns. Walking the path of life concretely signifies reaping the fruits of the Spirit: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control (Gal 5:22). Where people combat the fruits of the "flesh" in society and history, the Spirit of liberation acts.

8.3. The Spirit of Life is the Spirit of Pentecost.

– The Spirit has reversed the curse of Babel. In Babel death took the face of division and confusion in community. The Spirit, on the contrary, assumes human differences in order to make them life-giving through communion and mutual understanding. The Spirit does not negate the various tongues, for that itself would mean annihilation and death; rather the Spirit brings about understanding, that which really matters (Acts 2:6-7). When people proclaim the God of life, there is *communion*.

– The Spirit enables believers to *prophesy*, to speak in God's name, in the name of life. At Pentecost the vision of the prophet Joel comes to fruition (Joel 2:28-32). The Spirit of life is experienced in the capacity to dream and to see visions through the eyes of the God of life. As one theologian notes, without dreams, plans, and utopias, history remains motionless, dead. The spirit pulls history towards life by raising a prophetic people, a people who dream God's dream, who see God's vision, who proclaim God's life.

– The Spirit drives believers to *mission* just as the Spirit accompanied Jesus' own ministry (Acts 8:39-40). The Good News of the Kingdom of Life which has been received freely impels the recipient to communicate, especially to the poor.

– The Spirit operates *universally*. Wherever there is freedom, a turning from selfish interests to God and neighbor, there is life, there is the Spirit. Humans are able to choose life only by participating in the power of life, whether they are aware of it or not. The Spirit works freely, infusing life wherever its "tempest" blows. One theologian comments, "Everywhere, therefore, where men take upon themselves the risk of their existence, recognize the obligation to seek for truth and with evident seriousness accept responsibility, especially, however, where they abandon self and open themselves in love to God and their neighbor, the Spirit of God

is at work."

– The Spirit is experienced not only in human and societal communion. Every experience of *nature's harmony* is made possible by the presence of the Spirit (Wis 1:7). Humans, who have received the first fruits of the Spirit, should emphasize with the groaning of the whole of creation, the groaning of the immanent Spirit, awaiting liberation from decay and the manifestation of the freedom of God's children (Rom 8:18-23).

– The Spirit of God, the Spirit of Jesus, is experienced as *eternal life* in freedom, in universal communion (covenant) and in the new creation of the End Time.

9. The Community of Christ's Disciples: Sacrament of the Spirit of Life

It has been proposed by a respected theologian-bishop that the Church be seen not only as the sacrament of Jesus Christ but also as the sacrament of the Spirit. From our presentation we find a justification for such a proposal.

Discipleship is a following of Jesus in the creative power of the Spirit. Discipleship is equivalently a following of the God of Life, a praxis of the Kingdom of Life, a participation in the new creation of the Spirit of Life.

9.1. For the disciples of Jesus life is living in God's presence within the community of other disciples. We cannot stress enough that this life is a relationship. Eternal life is to know the one true God and Jesus, the one sent by God (Jn 17:3). Knowledge here implies a loving relationship.

The disciples are recognized by their *faith* in Jesus Christ. Faith is embracing new life. They, however, cannot confess Jesus as Lord except in the Spirit (1 Jn 4:2-3). By faith the life of Jesus is opened to believers (Rom 1:17, Gal 3:11, Heb 10:38). But disciples are able to keep the memory of Jesus alive and to further their attachment to his life due to the activity of the Spirit of life, the Advocate sent in his name (Jn 14:25-26).

For those who believe in Christ, life is communion with Jesus' life, death and resurrection, sacramentally celebrated in baptism. Baptism, as the sacrament of faith, binds disciples so intimately to the death and resurrection of Jesus that they can say that they have been buried and raised with him (Rom 6:3-4).

The disciples share in Christ's sacrifice. They offer themselves as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God (Rom 12:1). They literally follow

behind him wherever he goes, even to Calvary. He himself declares that whoever does not bear his own cross and come after him cannot be his disciple (Lk 14:27). Jesus' disciples will find new life by confronting death on the cross.

The disciples of Jesus profess faith in and witness to the resurrection of Jesus. They struggle against death and its manifestations, a struggle continuously engaged in by their Risen Lord (Rev 12:8). They seek him among the living committed to the poor and lowly, whose life is constantly violated. As disciples of the Risen Jesus, they may not be able to offer silver and gold but they can give what they have: life in the name of Jesus Christ (Acts 3:6). Then the many lame people of our history will leap and praise God for the experience of new life (Acts 3:8). Through their witness and life, the disciples keep alive the universal hope that God will bring to fulfillment a new world of abundant life. As living testimonies to the risen life, the disciples of Jesus speak to everyone, touch everyone, reach everyone because the life promised in the resurrection is what everyone hopes for.

So far we have described Christian discipleship mainly in terms of a relationship or communion with Jesus in faith, leading to witness to the same Jesus in faith. We need to recall that within integral witness, the proclamation of Jesus the Christ occupies a special place. Faith, which is the source of discipleship and its constitutive core, comes from hearing the word about Christ which is simultaneously the word of Christ (Rom 10:17). No one becomes a disciple without first having been a hearer and recipient of the proclamation of Jesus by another disciple. In turn, every disciple becomes an evangelizer, inviting others to faith in and communion with Jesus. We find in the Apostle Paul basically the same idea. He asks: "How can they hear unless there is someone to preach? And how can men preach unless they are sent? (Rom 10:14-15). Disciples of Jesus are at the same time apostles of Jesus, sent to proclaim the Jesus, the Word of Life, whom they have heard, have seen with their eyes, have looked upon, have touched (1 Jn 1:1). The disciple-apostle proclaims not an idea but a life experience of Jesus who is Life. Every experience of Jesus is for sharing as Good News.

Down through the ages, the Christian community grows through this simple process of proclamation — reception or discipleship — apostleship. It is not any Jesus that is the content of proclamation; rather it must be the Jesus of the apostolic experience, if such witness is to qualify as true evangelization. Again, down through the ages, apostles have shared their experience of Jesus so that the listeners could participate in their experience of life with Jesus, or in the words of John; "So that you may share life with us." (1 Jn 1:3). Apostolic witness or evangelization bears fruit in ecclesial

communion, a communion of life centered on Jesus, the Word of Life.

9.2. Discipleship is relationship with Jesus Christ in the Spirit. It also involves a praxis of the Kingdom of life in community.

Within the community of disciples, the Spirit is experienced in the continuous sanctification of the disciples. The sanctifying work of the Spirit is directed toward communion with God and communion among brothers and sisters. It is in the Spirit that disciples pray to God (Rom 8:26); it is in the Spirit that freedom in Christ comes (2 Cor 3:17); it is by the Spirit that spiritual gifts are raised and blended in wondrous harmony; it is in the Spirit that service becomes the hallmark of the community of disciples (1 Cor 12). Prayer, freedom, sharing of gifts, and mutual service render the community of disciples a foretaste of the Kingdom, an experience of life for the disciples themselves.

Faith in the God revealed by the crucified and risen Lord leads to solidarity with other human beings. One who has received and tasted life gives it to others. Of special attention to the disciples are the poor, the privileged members of the Kingdom (Lk 6:20). Solidarity with them means adopting a way of life that seeks to destroy oppression, hunger, selfishness, sickness, injustice, sin and death. The disciples build up the Kingdom of life in feeling and living with the weakest in society, the victims of death. In our time one helpless but forgotten victim is the earth. Through the practice of Christian stewardship, the disciples of Jesus cultivate solidarity with victim earth.

Just as the Paraclete keeps the memory of Jesus stamped in the disciples' hearts, the Paraclete also transforms the disciples into a community of memory of the suffering masses. Even in the history of Israel, memory nourishes faith in the God who liberates (Dt 6:20-25). Someone or something lives on in another's memory; forgetfulness is death. But remembrance of God demands walking in the path of life (Dt 8:11). As the disciples of Jesus remember the Kingdom, they also recollect the suffering of victims and the liberating truth that comes from such remembrance. The disciples unmask the deceptions that cause so much pain to the poor. By allowing the memory of what *Abba* and the Spirit have done in the resurrection of Jesus to converge with the memory of victims, the disciples act as agents of hope for new life.

Among many Christian disciples, the way to promote the life of others, the earth and themselves is through their own death. In martyrdom they witness to the life that comes through death. They announce that God is truly the living God and that their trust is in the divine promises of life in the Risen One. They can face death because as disciples of

life, their goal is to serve, not merely to survive.

9.3. The community of disciples, which the Church is, is the sacrament of life in the world. It serves life and it effects that very life. Life is not its exclusive possession. Rather, it recognizes that life is what we share with the whole community of creation. It is the GIFT that all have received. But as the disciples of Jesus, who in the power of the Spirit reveal the God of life, bring the Kingdom of life, and realize the Spirit's promise of new life, we contribute our experience of that life deriving from our faith. We discern and celebrate its manifestations, even outside the community of disciples. We interpret them according to our faith, and we accept the DEMANDS that come with the gift as imperatives of the faith. We are called by that same life to collaborate with all men and women who promote life.

Conclusion

10.1. Our "extended" meditation brings us to some discernible patterns:

– The expressions of life arising from our encounter with the Trinitarian God revolve around the poles of liberation, covenant/communion and creation.

– Life is held in tension by its gratuitousness and its demands.

– Life is discovered in dialectic with death. We truly live in our choice for life against death.

10.2. Some themes are worth pursuing:

– The main contribution of Asian Christians to the quest for fuller life is our living experience of the Trinitatian God of Life. How much is this encounter part of our spirituality?

– Divine Life is associated with the creative Spirit; the Spirit is present in expressions of true life. How do we deepen a sense of contemplation and discernment in the promotion of life? How much of contemplation and discernment goes into the analysis of manifestations of death in our history?

– The God of Life confronts death. Are our Church programs sufficiently courageous in battling with death, especially oppression? Are our programs for the promotion of life coming from the imperatives of faith in God or from mere convention and pragmatism?

– Life is hope for victims. How can we witness to hope more effectively in our societies? How can we promote reconciliation and mutual forgiveness?

– Community is the embodiment of life. What is the quality of our Church communities? Are our Church structures, policies, practices and relations such that they become "sacraments" of the Spirit of life?

APPENDIX

BEING CHURCH IN ASIA: JOURNEYING WITH THE SPIRIT INTO FULLER LIFE

FINAL STATEMENT OF FIRST FABC INTERNATIONAL THEOLOGICAL COLLOQUIUM

April 10-16, 1994 Pattaya, Thailand

INTRODUCTION

1. Life. Vibrant life pulsating in the fecundity of Asia. The promise and hope of full life in our Sacred Scriptures. Life in the Kingdom of God. What Jesus came for — that we might have life and have it abundantly (cf. Jn 10:10). Life as gift and task. The journey into this Life, the struggle for this Life was the overarching theme that integrated our discussions at the International Theological Colloquium sponsored by the FABC's Theological Advisory Commission at Pattaya, Thailand, April 10-16, 1994.

2. Gathered by the Spirit of God, we prayed and discerned by the Spirit; worked, reflected, resolved and celebrated in the same Spirit. It is by the Spirit that we, coming from various races, languages, existential situations and cultures of Asia, grew into a unity of heart in our concern for Asia and for the Church. Life comes in the Spirit. Life is refreshed and renewed — reborn — in the Spirit.

NOTE — The colloquium dealt with the theme "Being Church in Asia in the 21st Century." It intended to achieve two general objectives:

(a) To evaluate the theological papers of the Theological Advisory Commission of the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences, and

(b) To make a theological contribution toward the 1995 FABC General Assembly to be held in Manila.

Fifty-six participants (laypeople, Religious, priests and bishops, theologians from Europe and Asia) attended the colloquium. While the FABC has explored the theme "Being Church in Asia" at various seminars, such as BIMA, BIRA, BISA and BILA, and at its plenary assemblies, this was the first time a meeting with a mainly theological focus was held.

3. With this faith in the Spirit of Jesus, we dared to explore difficult questions. How can we as Church be truly of Asia and be truly of Jesus? What is the face of Jesus in Asia? How can we, in a palpably minority situation, fulfill the mission of announcing to one and all that Jesus gives life, that he is Life? What service can our theology provide to promote a more just, a more loving life? What can we do to promote a life more human in a vast suffering continent of widespread marginalization and deprivation? How must we be as Church at the service of life, radiating hope to our Asian peoples?

4. We know that we may have posed the questions inadequately and even inappropriately. We know that our answers hardly touch the mystery that is Asia, much less the mystery of Jesus and of ourselves as his followers. But we offer the fruit of our reflection at the service of the Church in Asia, so that all may know Life and rise to Life.

Part I New Phenomena in Asia as Challenge and Possibility

Our Reflection Begins with an Overview of the Asian Reality

5. As Asia moves into the 21st century, new and exciting developments are overtaking Asian countries. The phenomenon of the technological age has truly made our whole world a global village. The emergence of freedom and justice in one corner of Asia catches the attention of countries in the other continents in a matter of seconds through the communication media. This vast world has become a village where encouragement, inspiration and hope can quickly be communicated to people who suffer disasters. Knowledge is exploding beyond our imagination. The secrets of the universe are captured in small electronic gadgets that make learning more accessible, serving and loving others more readily given. The phenomenon of women's movements is yet another positive development. They are increasing in Asia, making women aware of their potentialities and resources, challenging centuries of subordination to men, enabling them to claim their rights — such as their right to land, property, equal wages, equal opportunities — and full participation in public life. The Spirit of God is present in these developments (cf. *Gaudium et Spes,* 26). From a Biblical point of view of ongoing creation, we could attribute all these wonders to God and exclaim with the Psalmist: "How marvelous are your works, O Lord!" (Ps 139:14).

6. Developments in science and technology and economics are facilitating various movements that past FABC assemblies (see FABC V, Bandung) have noted: the movement toward community in various Asian countries, the movement toward participation and the striving toward a deeper sense of the divine. Hopeful, living movements that speak of Asia's strug-

gle toward a fuller life.

7. Yet our optimism has to reckon with the undeniable ambivalence of the changes that are taking place. Let us, therefore, look more deeply into the Asian reality.

Economic Growth and Industrialization

8. The phenomenon we read or hear about almost every day is in the economic field, the dream of economic growth.

9. An inexorable process of industrialization is taking place in Asia. It is strongly linked to and dependent upon a process of economic globalization. The flow of foreign capital both from the West and the more developed East Asian countries allows for methods of production and introduction of technologies way beyond the present capabilities of some of our Asian countries to absorb without trauma. Neocolonialism becomes more entrenched.

10. Fundamental changes in work patterns, in the basic structure of our economies, and in the very nature of relationships among individuals and communities are occurring. People become a mechanical part of the production process and as a result work becomes exploitative, dehumanizing. This is especially true of women workers. Atrocities committed on women, their lives, their work and on children are intensified. Women are often the first to feel the impact of economic retrenchment and inflation. They are often the last to be protected and cared for.

11. Although the majority of our economies are still rural and agricultural, the gross neglect of this sector has obvious negative and devastating impact on the lives of individuals and communities. The rural sector remains stagnant.

Modernization, Secularization and Media

12. Together with the process of industrialization has come the need to modernize the commercial sector. The process strengthens the consumeristic lifestyles into which even now the poor are being initiated. Through commercialization of education and control of mass media, economics has become the dynamo of all aspects of life. Just as there is no "value-free" technology, there are no value-free media. Through dissemination of information and entertainment, media are creating values both good and bad, and promoting a whole new way of looking at life. A serious discernment is needed on this. The children and the youth of Asia are the most exposed to these "alien" notions of the meaning of life itself. The image of women as portrayed in the media maintains and reinforces the view of

women as inferior to men and objects of pleasure. Accompanying the thrust of modernization is secularization. The traditional close-knit relationships within Asian families are beginning to erode, but new forms of intimacy are being explored and fostered. The deep religious and community sense that characterizes most Asian people is, indeed, dissipating.

Politics and Peoples' Participation

13. We perceive the dominant role of industrial and business conglomerates that virtually control major portions of the economy and especially those closely related to traditional oligarchies, modern industrialists with political connections, as well as those closely affiliated to the military in most of our countries. A subtle repression of the rights of individuals and communities to participate meaningfully in processes of decision making is tragically taking place. On the pretext of national security and political stability, human rights are being curtailed. Sadly, politics is for power to dominate and not for service to the vast majority. Religious resurgence is taking place in many countries of Asia and is often a very positive movement. But the merging of religious fundamentalism and narrow ethnicity is creating new forms of violence, hatred and divisions.

The Impact of New Phenomena

14. Expected changes in almost every facet of life in the 21st century, concomitant with and perhaps because of developments in sciences, technology and communication media, will surely have a significant impact on the cultures and peoples of Asia for good or ill. People need to be rooted in the deeper meanings of life if they are to be truly human. Should these roots be weakened (or worse, destroyed) cultural dislocation and dehumanization take place.

15. Mass production made possible by high technology will democratize the availability of a bewildering multiplicity of goods and services. Sophisticated means of communication will offer new possibilities of sharing and coming together of peoples of different cultures and religions. But the formation of a mass society will most likely be also characterized by the dissolution of traditional links, by anonymity and marginalization. This needs to be critically assessed in the light of the freedom and cultural identities of peoples.

16. In Asia the politically-powerful elite, who are usually in the minority, are the bearers of a dominant sub-culture. Popular sub-cultures are those of the poor and politically marginalized majority. The foreseen societal changes leading to globalization in the 21st century will probably impoverish and further weaken the sub-culture of the poor.

17. The above projections are now being confirmed. In our view, progress and advancement of the few have created false hopes among people who believe that "abundance" will trickle down to the whole of the Asian community.

18. The once self-sustaining economies and rural communities, both traditional and tribal, are the most affected by these trends. The depreciation of the rural economy and the decreasing dependence on the primary commodities of foreign exchange have depressing implications for the future of rural communities.

19. Even as individuals and entire communities become victims of this process, so also the environment and nature. The destruction of rain forests and the pollution of the environment are just two of the negative consequences.

20. The nature of work in the modern industrial sector has also affected family life and health. New patterns of work relationships are attacking the unity and stability of the family. Women and children become the most obvious victims. Already the victims of the myth of male superiority, women are subject to new forms of violence and cultural alienation.

21. The obseessive drive toward economic and material achievement, the quest to satisfy needs created by media and the new technological culture are subtly leading people to a life without moral and religious roots.

A Fundamental Perspective and Option of the Church in Asia

22. In light of the above context, the Church in Asia will have to reformulate its role. This requires a renewed Vision and a revitalized sense of Mission, a deeper awareness of its human resources. Among these resources are: (a) The human person: gifted with a God-given dignity from the first moment of life and endowed with boundless potentialities to promote fuller life, the human person is the first resource; (b) Family: the Asian family is traditionally close-knit, caring, serving, hospitable, religious. It is the hope of the Church at its most basic level. (c) Youth: energetic, filled with idealism, highly capable of committing themselves to the cause of justice and freedom, they are the untapped resources for mission and life. (d) Women: in partnership with men, they are at the heart of the Asian family, enduring symbols of compassion and caring, harmony and love; life-giving and life-nourishing, in mutuality with men, they are even now at the forefront in the struggle for justice and freedom. With these and other human resources, the Church has to challenge the ambivalence of Asian realities, harness their positive elements toward human development.

23. In the midst of massive changes in Asia, the Church has to announce with greater renewed vigor the God-given meaning of life and an alternative way of life and existence, through its Word, Deed and Being. The Incarnation of the Gospel calls for a new quality of life that consists not just in "having more" but in "being more" and sharing more.

24. This means for us in the context of Asia a deeper awareness of the meaning of Church. We are a little flock in Asia. We are but one community among a vast multitude journeying to full life. Our special contribution in this journey is our striving toward a "Communion of Communities" beginning with the family, a New Way of Being Church that brings the new face of Christ into the workings of Asian society.

Part II The Face of Jesus in Asia

25. How the Church responds to challenges posed by the new phenomenon depends fundamentally on how it understands discipleship. But to answer that question, the Church first has to understand who Jesus is in the Asian context.

Jesus the Lord

26. If Jesus were to ask us today in Asia, "Who do you say I am?", we would boldly confess as did the early Church: "You are the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation" (cf. Col 1:15). You are the Messiah, the Savior, the Lord! "You are the Word in the beginning, You are with God, You are God" (cf. Jn 1:1). Ours is the faith of the Apostles in the Risen Christ.

Jesus and the Poor: Preferential Option

27. Yet when we reflect on the harsh underside of suffering Asia, the image of Jesus that captures our imagination is his human portrait in the Scriptures. Born of woman (Gal 4:4), he is the God who pitches his tent among us (Jn 1:14). He empties himself to be in solidarity with the little ones, those treated as non-persons — the poor and deprived, the outcast and marginalized, the oppressed and downtrodden, the sick, those who do not count, children and women. He strikes at the natural upward mobility of humankind and goes down to the downtrodden, walks among them, lives with them, takes up their burdens, calls them his friends (Lk 4:18; 15:2). This predilection for the poor we now call his preferential option.

Breaking Down Barriers

28. He breaks down social barriers encrusted in customs and tradi-

tions and entrenched in social structures. He challenges religious exclusivism that divides Jew and Samaritan, and announces a radically new worshipping of God "in Spirit and Truth." He dares to touch the untouchables, calls women as his close disciples. His love touches the miserable lives of the outcast, unshackles their chains of non-dignity and insecurity, and leads them into the freedom and joy that he shares with his Father. He speaks to them of his Father, "our Father," who cares not only for the birds of the air and the lilies of the field but, even more, for persons (Mt 6:25-32; Lk 12:22-30). He forgives and reconciles. He is the person of harmony. He is peace. (Jn 14:27; 20:21-23; Eph 2:14).

The Kingdom of God

29. He speaks confidently and authoritatively about God and his reigning. The Kingdom is here, in your midst! (Lk 17:21). He is most compassionate over the multitude. He weeps for an individual (Jn 11:35-36), he weeps for a whole city (Lk 19:41-44). He wants to give them life. He calls the poor blessed, the Kingdom of God is theirs! (Lk 6:20). The homeless, the hungry, the naked — the little ones — bear his face. Uncompromising in defending the little ones, his healing touch, forgiving words, signal the compassionate irruption of the Kingdom of God into our space and time.

Bold Prophecy

30. For their sake he boldly confronts the powers that be and denounces their greed, their hypocrisy (Mt 23:13-36; Lk 12:1), corruption and oppression, their leadership, their forgetting the weightier matters of the law, like justice, mercy and faith (Mt 23:23). Bold and daring, thirsting for justice, the prophet of the ages, his words and actions subvert the values of this world. He speaks of reconciling with one's enemies, praying for them, loving them and forgiving them (Mt 5:43-48; Lk 6:27-36). Such a radical love beyond all telling!

A Countersign in Economics and Politics

31. He enters the realm of economics, relativizes wealth, places all material possession at the service of the Kingdom, condemns slavery to mammon, the greed and the selfishness that characterize the idolatry of wealth (Lk 12:13-21; Mt 6:24). He is the Way (Jn 14:6). As Master, he serves. He shows what power is for, not to dominate and oppress but to serve (Jn 13:13-15; Lk 22:27; Mk 10:45). He does not hesitate to confront the powers that be. It is by serving that one rules. As Teacher, he lives by his words. He is authenticity, transparency, credibility, the Truth. He is killed because his view of truth runs counter to religious claims and the ruling elite's idea of the common good.

The Cross and the Eucharist: Love and Life

32. The free giving of his own self to death by the cruel and brutal execution on the cross demonstrates what loving, sharing and serving mean. Because he loves, he dies for our sake. Because he loves, we live.

33. The Eucharist that he celebrates with his followers on the night before he dies, sacramentally memorializes this total love (Mk 14:22-25; Mt 26:26-29; Lk 22:14-20; cf. Jn 13:1-5). This is what it means to be the Anointed, the Christ, the Person who by dying gives life to humanity. The bitter cup of suffering he accepts (Mk 14:36; Mt 26:39, 42; Lk 22:42). Absurd, yes, but in this most cruel and most total vulnerability, in this most irrational of human experiences, is the power and the wisdom and the love of God (I Cor 1:24).

34. By his suffering and death, Jesus conquers death, restores life. His rising from the dead makes of him "the Victory of Suffering Humanity." This is part of the Easter joy that has to pervade our struggling and hoping. He is the bread and the drink of life, life-giving water (Jn 6:51; 4:10, 13; 7:37-38). He ls Life. He fulfills the deepest aspirations of humanity for full life, a person totally for others and totally for God.

35. This is the Jesus we have heard, have somehow touched and looked at in the mysteries we celebrate (I Jn 1:1). This is how we see Jesus with an Asian face.

36. He is then the Word of Life (cf. I Jn 1:1) that we must share with our fellow Asians. For as he was Good News to the poor of his time, so today he cannot but be Good News to the "teeming millions" of Asia. This human image of Jesus, born of woman, God-made-poor, God-with-us, our peace, teacher and prophet, healer, a person of harmony, suffering servant-leader, liberator, life-giver, is one that powerfully resonates with Asia's situation of servitude, with Asia's struggle toward justice and harmony — with our struggle for life.

The Face of the Church in Asia

37. And if the Master, so the disciple-community, the Church. Only when our words, actions, lifestyle flow from what we believe in Jesus can we invite people to "come and see." The face of Jesus will attract the peoples of Asia in and through the face of the Church.

The Disciples of Jesus the Lord

38. The confession "Jesus Christ is Lord" (Phil 2:11) gives birth to a

community of disciples. As a community that recognizes Jesus as Lord, our very *being* as disciples is marked by service, a being then toward the other. This makes us continually seek, contemplate and behold the face of the living Lord. We, the disciples of Jesus *the Lord,* are invited to present to Asia the face of a confessing, serving, discerning and contemplating Church.

39. But even as we say this, we are also aware of our sinfulness both as people and as institution. It was Peter the disciple who, facing the Lord, confessed, "Lord, depart from me for I am a sinner" (Lk 5:8). Triumphalism, discrimination, clericalism, domination, exclusivism, accommodation at the expense of truth and justice are but a few of the attitudes that may have been built into our structures. A confession of sinfulness leads to conversion, and a deeper discipleship.

The Disciples of Jesus the Poor

40. As the human portrait of Jesus attracts the peoples of Asia, especially its suffering and marginalized masses, our community is being called upon to assume a truly human face: a Church that does not resist being incarnated in weak humanity; a Church that will not turn away from the crosses of history; a Church that does not hold back in emptying itself; a Church that is not scandalized in being poor; a Church that dares to be the Church of the Poor. Through this Church, the face of the Jesus who loves the poor with predilection will shine forth in Asia.

The Disciples of the Jesus of Communion and Harmony

41. In Asia the face of Jesus as reconciliation and peace has a special appeal. As a Church community, we are called to be the sacrament, the sign and instrument, of the communion with God and with humanity that Jesus brings (cf. *Lumen Gentium,* 1). Because our inner life as Church community is the Spirit of communion, we can ignore our mission of breaking down all barriers only to the negation of our own identity.

42. We are not only called to communion as individuals. We are also called to a communion of peoples and of ecclesial communities, and to overcome the divisions of Christian churches. By this do we dramatize that the disciple-community is, indeed, God's own people.

43. In the context of religious fundamentalism, interreligious violence, societal fragmentation and ecological destruction, we affirm the validity of the FABC's insights into being a Church of dialogue. Dialogue is the primary mode for the Church in Asia in the promotion of harmony. But like our Master, we will be able to foster harmony only by taking the path of a love

of preference for the poor.

The Disciples of Jesus, Servant of the Kingdom of God

44. As Jesus expended his whole life for the Kingdom of God, we are being invited to deepen our relation to this fundamental vision of our Lord. It requires the stripping of all triumphalism in Church life and structures, because the Kingdom is greater than ourselves. It urges us to glory only in being the humble servant of the Kingdom, since apart from it we lose the meaningfulness of our community. It impels us to be truly missionary, for the life that the Kingdom promises must be discovered in and shared with other. It subjects us constantly to the judgment of the Kingdom because the values of the Kingdom will ultimately unite us to our Lord.

The Disciples of Jesus, Prophet and Countersign

45. Jesus served the Kingdom of God primarily through prophetic counter-witness. There is no other face that the Church in Asia can take. Through our proclamation, lifestyle and presence, we must expose the false values so easily embraced by the Asia of today and their dehumanizing effects, particularly on the poor. In the midst of manipulation, we have to be the announcers of truth and freedom. In the midst of gross consumerism, opulence and materialism, the symbol of evangelical simplicity and moderation. In the midst of gross consumerism, opulence and materialism, the symbol of evangelical simplicity and moderation. In the midst of grinding poverty and destitution, the advocate of justice and liberation. In the midst of obsession with prestige and power, the embodiment of compassion, caring, mercy, selflessness and love.

46. To project such a face, we must be willing to strip ourselves of mentalities, categories and human structures that blur the face of the Prophet and Sign of Contradiction that we call our Lord.

The Disciple of the Crucified Lord

47. The face of the naked Jesus on the cross does not fail to attract the peoples of Asia. The darkness of faith in the midst of abandonment felt by our Crucified Lord is sometimes our own experience as disciples. For us, the face of the Crucified Lord means total and selfless love of God and neighbor. The face of the Church must be the face of pure love, especially in the darkness of unloving. But we know that the cross is a symbol, too, of the Risen Christ. Our love then has to help fill our world with joy and hope, with great optimism in the midst of suffering.

PART III THE RESPONSE OF THE CHURCH IN ASIA

A. Theology at the Service of Life

48. We see the work of theology in Asia as a service to life. It has to reflect systematically on themes that are important: to the common journey of life with other peoples in Asia, to the life of Christians and their Churches in Asia, and to the work of the Asian episcopal conferences.

49. To do this service in a way that is pastorally relevant and fruitful to the life, spirituality and mission of the disciple-community, theology has to start from below, from the underside of history, from the perspective of those who struggle for life, love, justice and freedom. The life-long experiences of living the Christian faith by the various Churches in their Asian context are the starting points. Theologizing thus becomes more than faith seeking understanding, but faith fostering life and love, justice and freedom.

50. It is in this way that theology becomes a dynamic process giving meaning to and facilitating the Asian journey to life. It becomes part of the process of becoming and being Church in Asia.

B. Pastoral Orientations

51. Discipleship is a new paradigm for understanding the Church. It requires that the Church be missionary. The Church is therefore called to a renewed evangelization, as the proclamation of Jesus. In the Asian context, renewed evanglization requires new expression, renewed methods and renewed fervor. Pastoral creativity is needed for this.

52. Discipleship within the Church calls for a radical conversion from death-dealing ways and structures toward a life-giving praxis, a conversion which presupposes the change of mind-set. This means creating an inclusive community that does not discriminate in terms of culture, social class or gender when it comes to the question of equality and mutuality within the Church. It implies the promotion of a genuine sense of belonging, whether this be in the form of facilitating reflection on the word of God in small groups or communities, taking concrete steps to make the liturgy meaningful for a variety of groups, strengthening the sense of being Church among families where values of the Kingdom are first handed on, empowering the laity toward their participation in the Church's life and mission which is theirs by right of baptism and confirmation, promoting mutuality and partnership between men and women in every sphere of family, of society and of Church life. As a disciple-community, we will have to explore more deeply the question of the place and role of women in the

Church.

53. Other pastoral implications include the rectification of unjust or discriminatory practices, particularly toward women within ecclesiastical structures; the acceptance of the youth as equal partners in mission and as worthy of respect; the implementation of a serious theological education program for the laity and clergy that communicates to them up-to-date developments and helps them to respond more effectively to the challenges posed by daily life.

54. Discipleship in the promotion of life also calls for engagement in social transformation. Today this is to be expressed through a committed solidarity with all those who are deprived of life economically, by grappling with the issues of justice and peace, struggling with them and creating programs geared toward economic upliftment. It also means a respectful acceptance as the Church's own of the culture of the people with whom it searches for what is truly life-giving.

55. To this end, the Church initiates and develops a process of inculturation that makes it confident to draw up its own pastoral letters and synodal documents, and to share them with other local Churches.

56. As a community of disciples, the Church will work with Churches and other Christian communities and other people of good will, even those whose religious vision differs from its own by involvement, particularly through the laity, in secular movements that promote life. To be credible in the area of economics, not only is the Church to promote economic literacy through critical examination of economic models and government policies, but it must also encourage viable alternatives as well as adopt a simple lifestyle. Relationships with others are to be person-oriented on the part of Church leaders rather than office-oriented. There is a serious need to rectify the images of pomp and power, of authoritarianism within the Church that are contrary to the images of a Church of the Poor and a Church of Dialogue.

57. Because the Church is communication (of the Gospel), it must cultivate good relations with media professionals and become more aware of the power of the media, understand its processes and gain real competence in the discerning use of them.

58. In its search to be responsive to the Gospel imperative, the Church is to make sure that its human structures are created "from below," in tune with the demands of the time and in harmony with the culture of the people. Through these diverse ways and in solidarity with one another, the Church can reflect the face of Jesus in Asia for Asia.

Conclusion

59. We are witnessing the birth of a new world in Asia. This great, massive continent, rich not only in cultures and faiths, but also with limitless possibilities, yet battered by incredible degradations on her lands and peoples, is groaning with the pangs of childbirth. From out of the divisions, conflicts and violence, environmental destruction, innumerable injustices and cultural erosion that wrack the soul of Asia comes a cry of deep anguish. It is the anguish of the poor. The millions of Asian poor are groaning for a re-birth, a recreation, which only the Spirit of Jesus can achieve.

60. Impelled by love, the love of the peoples of Asia and the love of Jesus, we have no option but to heed the cry. New life is aborning. And the form and quality of the new creation cannot be left to the machinations of political and economic forces. Like the prophet of old, the Church today must answer: Send me, Lord, I am your servant.

61. We take up this mission, not alone, but with the peoples of Asia themselves, the various faiths and cultures, their enduring values that come from the Spirit and the Word of God breathed and spoken from the beginning of time. It is ultimately the God of all peoples that calls the disciple-community, and it is the same God in Jesus who accompanies us. Led by the Spirit we embark on this mission.

62. Loving and Life-giving God, at the beginning you called us in Asia into life, enriched us with an astonishing variety of cultures, ways of living and believing. As sisters and brothers in your one Asian family, we thank you and praise you for your gifts.

63. Among us are the poorest of the poor, millions who seek not only a better life but the full Life that only you can give. We hear your call to serve them, the way your Son, Jesus, served others in total love, in utter selflessness, eucharistically.

64. Send us your divine Spirit that we may respond, together with other communities, to the anguish of our sisters and brothers with courageous and generous love, and with them come to the Life that never ends.

65. May our Mother, Mary, the voice and Mother of the Poor, who announced the liberation of the lowly, be our companion, leading us to the Way, the Truth and the Life in your Kingdom forever and ever. Amen.

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