

Sixth Plenary Assembly: Workshop Discussion Guide

**A LIFE-GIVING ASIAN SPIRITUALITY  
FOR THE SERVICE OF LIFE**

by  
**THOMAS H. GREEN**

**I. INTRODUCTION**

In preparing this short paper, I tried to keep in mind its precise purpose: to initiate and to facilitate the discussion of this workshop of the Sixth FABC Plenary Assembly. For this reason, I tried to keep it brief, suggestive, rather than exhaustive, more concerned with clarifying the questions than with providing the answers. The latter, I presume, is the task of the participants of the workshop, and, ultimately, of the whole plenary assembly.

To facilitate the discussion, I have appended two items: the Theme Statement of the Preparatory Commission for FABC VI (Appendix I); and an article which I wrote for *Landas*, the theological journal of the Loyola School of Theology, on "Spirituality in PCP II: Integrated, Scripture-Based, Communitarian" (Appendix II). The PCP II is the Second Plenary Council of the Philippines, which met in 1991, and whose decrees were approved by Rome in 1992. The Philippine situation is the one with which I am most familiar, having first come to the country as a missionary in 1956.

One striking feature of Asia and the Asian Church is its extraordinary diversity. As others have noted before me, it is extremely difficult to say anything which is both specific and true of Asia — the largest continent with the greatest population of any in the world — as a whole. Given my limited field of ministry, I would not even pretend to do so. But perhaps my reflections, in Appendix II, on the part of Asia I know best, the Philip-

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pires, can be a primer (priming the pump, as it were) for the discussion of the Asian situation as a whole. In Part II (Definition of Terms) and Part III (Questions for Discussion and Reflection), I suggest how this move to greater generality and wider applicability might be effected. It will certainly be very helpful to me personally — and, I would hope, to the others as well — to discover which parts of my experience of Asian spirituality are universally shared, and which parts are unique to my own adopted culture.

## II. DEFINITION OF TERMS

### 1. Life-Giving...for the Service of Life

This seems to be the specific focus of the FABC Sixth Plenary Assembly. The general theme is, "Christian Discipleship in Asia Today: Service to Life." And in the preliminary statement of this theme (Appendix I), the following rationale is given:

Life is a precious gift of God; it is the expression of his love. All life, whose author God is, is sacred... We Christians of Asia ought to cooperate with God's plan in our continent... The Church of Asia is called upon to follow and bear witness to this lofty mission of Jesus through its service to life in the Asian world. Our service becomes all the more relevant, urgent and imperative when we observe how the forces of death continue to diminish, corrode, maim and even annihilate life.

The statement then goes on to enumerate four forms which the destruction of life takes today in Asia: foeticide and neglect of proper child care; violence, "which is on the increase in Asia with growing numbers of victims"; the anti-life policies of socio-political and economic systems; and the arms race, "by draining the resources necessary for fostering life."

Thus it seems, as one might expect, that the challenge of abortion was very much on the minds of those who formulated the theme of FABC VI. They situate this, however, within what Cardinal Bernardin would call "a total ethic of life." That is, we must be concerned not only with contemporary threats to the life of the human foetus — serious as these are — but with all the ways (violence, socio-economic and political repression, the arms race) in which human life is threatened, and the quality of that life is compromised. We must not be "single-issue" preachers; and we must attack abortion precisely from the perspective of a concern for all in our cultures that is life-threatening and dehumanizing.

## 2. Spirituality

The Theme Statement (Appendix I) goes on to say: "In order to flourish, life needs a healthy environment. But the forces of death are at work also in the destruction of the environment necessary for sustaining life." The statement distinguishes between an external (pollution, irresponsible technology, etc.) and an internal environment. The latter is described as "a sane inner, moral and spiritual environment." This presumably is where our discussion of a life-giving *spirituality* enters in, although the statement goes on to affirm that "the external environment and the inner environment are very much interconnected and mutually interdependent."

Within this framework, what do we mean by "spirituality"? In Appendix II (page 9), I quoted the definition provided by George Lane, S.J.:

In a broad sense spirituality may be described as a way to holiness; but more technically, spirituality is one's possession by God in Christ through the Holy Spirit. There is, then, only one spirituality because there is only one Christ; but when the means of union with God become concretized, various different styles of approach appear.

It is this latter fact which gives rise to various spiritualities in the Church: e.g., Dominican, Franciscan, lay, that of the diocesan clergy. but in a deeper sense, as I go on to say, we can affirm that there is only one Christian spirituality — because God is one, and Jesus is our one and only way to him.

It seems clear that our concern here is with "spirituality" in this deeper sense. All the great Christian spiritual traditions are represented in Asia, and we wish to speak to all of them at the deeper level common to every one: their commitment to, and possession by, God in Christ Jesus our Lord. At this level, our spirituality must be scripturally based, since we who live in "the age of the absence of Jesus," as the Fathers of the Church often called this time between the two comings, can only come to know him through the Scriptures. We do not walk with him in Galilee or journey with him to Jerusalem. But the Gospels are given to us, as John expresses it so beautifully (20.31), "in order that you (i.e., we "who have not seen and yet believe") may believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that through your faith in him you may have life."

We should also note that our Christian spirituality includes, but is not restricted to, our life of prayer. It includes all the ways — prayer, action, discernment, suffering — in which we relate to God in Christ Jesus. As I experience my part of Asia, there is indeed a real need to teach people to pray: not merely to say prayers (a monologue) but to learn to listen to, to

dialogue with God. But it is also true that there is a need for greater integration of prayer and activity in the life of our people. We will say more of that in the next section. But first, let us also note that our faith is primarily a commitment to a person and not to a body of doctrines. As I like to note, we profess faith “in one God,” and not merely “that there is one God.” Thus, our spirituality must be person-centered, centered on the Person of Jesus as revealed, often mysteriously and paradoxically, in the *whole* of the Gospels and not just in some favorite proof texts.

### 3. Asian

In PCP II, the focus was on the Philippines (Appendix II, page 10), one small part of Asia. Here our concern is broader: the whole of the Asian Church, as represented in FABC. Hence, bishops are generalizable to Asia as a whole. These concerns, as the title of Appendix II indicates (and see pages 11-12), are for a spirituality that is integrated, Scripture-based and communitarian.

*Integrated.* The bishops of PCP II felt that, all too often, there is a divorce, or a gulf, between faith and life in the worldview, and practice, of our people. They need to realize, as I put it above, that our spirituality encompasses all of our lives, the market place as well as the chapel, other persons as well as God.

*Scripture-based.* We have spoken above of the need for every Christian spirituality to be based on our Christian Scriptures. For various reasons, our people, in the judgment of the Philippine bishops, often have a very shallow and superficial knowledge of the Scriptures. And we ministers of the Gospel have to bear much of the responsibility for this sad situation. If their piety, while real, is based mainly on folk-beliefs and popular devotions, it is largely because we — to use the famous distinction of Pope Paul VI — often preach sermons instead of homilies. That is, we exhort and harangue the people instead of opening up to them the riches of the Scripture readings in the liturgy.

*Communitarian.* The PCP II participants also felt that, all too often, our people possessed a “me-and-Jesus” spirituality — and this despite the fact that Philippine society is famously communal. Because of the size of our parishes, and the mechanical way in which the liturgy is often celebrated, and the failure to integrate worship with social action, we have failed to tap into the strong sense of community native to our people.

In general, as the quotation on page 12 of Appendix II indicates:

For most of our people today the faith is centered on the rites of popular

piety. Not on the word of God, doctrines, sacramental worship (beyond baptism and matrimony). Not on community. Not on building up our world unto the image of the Kingdom. And we say it is because the “unchurched,” the vast majority of our people, greatly lack knowledge of and formation in the faith.

They do note the “Lights” as well as the “Shadows.” But their general picture is of a faith that, while compassionate and caring, is too ritualistic (“the rites of popular piety”), and not solidly grounded on Scripture, doctrine and sacramental worship — and also not sufficiently community-oriented, not sufficiently concerned with “building up our world unto the image of the Kingdom.”

The question, then, is to what extent this picture of the Philippine faith community is typical of Asia. As I write, it is clear that there are important differences between, e.g., a country that is 83% Catholic and one that is 98% Muslim — between a majority Church and a “ghetto” Church. Presumably through, what we said of spirituality in No. 2 above would be true everywhere. And perhaps the need for an integrated, Scripture-based, communitarian *aggiornamento* would also be felt everywhere in Asia. Or perhaps the basic needs are different elsewhere. And if so, can we find a common ground among our people in proclaiming a “life-giving Asian spirituality at the service of life”? That is our challenge and our hope.

### III. QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION AND REFLECTION

1. It is worth noting that “spirituality” has been a recurrent theme of FABC assemblies. (See the anonymous discussion guide for FABC IV, 1986 (*FABC Papers*, No. 46b); and that of Adolfo Nicolas, S.J., “A Spiritual Journey through the Asia of the 1990s,” for FABC V, 1990 (*FABC Papers*, No. 57).) Hence, the question can be asked: What conclusions concerning spirituality were arrived at in FABC IV and V? (Perhaps the bishops who were present at these assemblies could enlighten us on this.) And what has been the impact of these earlier discussions and resolutions? And finally, how might they form the basis of the ongoing discussion of spirituality in FABC VI?

2. What, then, remains to be said about the topic of Asian spirituality in general? The points which I made about PCP II (see Appendix II, and the discussion above) also seem to be important in the discussion guides for FABC IV and V. Do they need further elaboration or emphasis? And are there any other points that need to be made now? For example:

3. Specifically with regard to a spirituality which is “life-giving” and “at the service of life,” which of the four attacks on life mentioned in the

Theme Statement (Appendix I) for FABC VI (foeticide, violence, socio-political and economic repression, the arms race) is of particular concern in your own diocese or region? And which do you see as of particular concern for Asia in general?

4. As noted above (Definition of Terms: 2. Spirituality), the Theme Statement goes on to speak of the environment in which life can flourish. Presumably, as I said earlier, "spirituality" would be concerned with the "inner environment." What, then, should FABC VI say to the Catholics (or to the people) of Asia today, concerning the nurturing and the development of this life-giving inner environment?

5. It is said today that Jesus' first followers had to become disciples (be converted themselves) before they could become apostles (converting others). Can we draw a parallel distinction between a "life-giving spirituality" and one "at the service of life"? I.e., must our Asian spirituality first be life-giving for us, before we can be at the service of life for others? If so, how is this relevant to the present teaching mission of the FABC?

## APPENDIX I

### THE THEME OF THE SIXTH FABC PLENARY ASSEMBLY CHRISTIAN DISCIPLESHIP IN ASIA TODAY: SERVICE TO LIFE

"I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly" (Jn 10:10)

#### 1. Focus

Pastoral reflections on the increasing threat to life experienced in Asia today: how the Church can contribute to the defence and the improvement of the quality of life.

#### 2. Rationale

Life is a precious gift of God; it is the expression of his life. All life, whose author God is, is sacred. Every form of life – from the blade of grass to the highest and noblest form of life, the human person – is enveloped in the divine plan of creation and redemption (cf. Rom 8:23). We Christians of Asia ought to co-operate with God's plan in our continent.

"I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly" (Jn 10:10). As a community of the disciples of Jesus, the Church in Asia is called upon to follow and bear witness to this lofty mission of Jesus through its service to life in the Asian world. Our service becomes all the more relevant, urgent and imperative when we observe how the forces of death continue to diminish,

corrode, maim and even annihilate life.

Some of the forms in which life is being destroyed in Asia:

- the unborn and newly born (foeticide, the slow death of infants and children through lack of resources or care);
- the destruction of life through violence which is on the increase in Asia with growing numbers of victims;
- the destruction of life through socio-political and economic systems which have anti-life policies and practices;
- purchase and accumulation of arms by draining the resources necessary for fostering life.

In order to grow and flourish, life needs a healthy environment. But the forces of death are at work also in the destruction of the environment necessary for sustaining life. There is an external as well as an inner environment of life:

a) **External environment**

The wanton destruction of nature, pollution, etc., through growing industrialization, deforestation, irresponsible use of technology and science (for example, the growing technologies of death in Asia).

b) **Inner environment**

For the promotion of wholeness of life, the human being needs a sane inner, moral and spiritual environment. But we find this inner environment of human consciousness, its moral and spiritual fibers being torn apart, destroyed by drugs, pornography, abuse of mass media, etc., which impair freedom and make people slaves. Especially the youth of Asia is very much affected today by these forces of death which inject venom into the interior self of the person.

We should note that the situation of the external environment and inner environment are very much connected and mutually interdependent. If one is affected, there is disharmony which is anti-life in character.

### 3. What Can the Assembly Do?

Under the overall theme of service to life, the Plenary Assembly could go into these and similar issues. It can:

- deliberate, in the light of faith, on the pastoral strategies that could come to grips with the situation;
- inquire into the deeper causes of the present experience of destruction of life and its environment (both external and inner);
- search for fresh avenues and ways for tapping the moral and spiritual energies and harness them in the service of life;
- appeal to Christians in Asia to exercise their Christian responsibility to safeguard life by drawing from the sources of Christian revelation and from the cultural resources of the Asian peoples.
- spell out more concretely what individual Christians, communities of Christians, at the parish, diocesan, regional, national levels, can do to prevent the degeneration of life and improve its quality.

## APPENDIX II

### SPIRITUALITY IN PCP II INTEGRATED, SCRIPTURE-BASED, COMMUNITARIAN

by  
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#### Introduction: A Graceful Camel

It has been said that the camel is an animal designed by a committee. By accommodating everyone's taste you end up with an ungainly, improbable type of beast. In the case of the Second Plenary Council of the Philippines (PCP II), which was in session from January 20th to February 17th of 1991, the committee responsible for constructing the "camel" which is the Conciliar Document was extraordinarily large: there were 479 delegates, including 146 lay persons, from all over the Philippines. And yet the single document which emerged is clear, unified and readable. Much of the credit for this must go to the President of the Council, Archbishop Leonardo Z. Legaspi, O.P., of Naga City — whose firm leadership and listening ear kept the wide-ranging discussions on track — and to the three members of the "ad hoc committee for the final drafting of the document": Archbishop Orlando Quevedo, O.M.I., of Vigan, Bishop Teodoro Bacani, auxiliary of Manila, and Bishop Francisco Claver, S.J., formerly



of Malaybalay. The document was accepted unanimously (with but a few abstentions) — testimony to the drafters' skill in catching the sense and intent of the delegates. At the same time, it reads well, particularly for a beast constructed by a committee.

One of the major themes of PCP II is the importance of a sound spirituality for the Philippine Church today. In the sections to follow, I would like to focus on two central ideas of the conciliar document: the need today for an integrated spirituality; and the importance of prayer as the core and heart of any authentic spirituality for our times. Before doing so, however, let us ask an important preliminary question: Just what is "spirituality"? The term is admittedly vague, in the sense that it can mean, and historically has meant, many things. It can sound very "high" and exalted to the average person. Or it can be identified with a "party line": Dominican spirituality, or Carmelite spirituality, or "creation" spirituality.

While PCP II does not attempt a precise definition, it is clear that they have in mind something down-to-earth and applicable to all Catholics, at least in the Philippines. In teaching a course on "Apostolic Spirituality" at Loyola School of Theology, I find the definition of George Lane, S.J., most helpful in clarifying just what "spirituality is."<sup>1</sup> Father Lane says:

In a broad sense, spirituality may be described as a way to holiness; but more technically, spirituality is one's possession by God in Christ through the Holy Spirit. There is, then, only one spirituality because there is only one Christ; but when the means of union with God become concretized, various different styles of approach appear.

To summarize briefly, we could say that Christian spirituality is one's way of relating to God in Christ Jesus. Since God is one, and Jesus is one, there is really only one Christian spirituality.

But, as Lane also notes, given the diversity of ages, cultures and personalities, "various different styles of approach appear." He cites the great John Courtney Murray, S.J., as having said "that God would have each person wholly to be his witness, but not necessarily a witness to the whole of him. Only the Church, as the community of the faithful, in many-splendored variety can really bear witness to the whole counsel of God." I am reminded of the Buddha's story of the blind men touching and describing an elephant: each describes correctly the small part he is touching; but each is mistaken if he thinks the whole elephant is like that part.

PCP II, then, finds itself in a difficult position. It wishes to proclaim an authentic spirituality for all Filipino Catholics. It does not want to be sectarian or monastic. And yet it must be particular: particular in the sense that

it speaks to this people at this "acceptable time" in their history. In seeking to be authentically Catholic and yet truly relevant at this moment in the faith life of the Filipino people, the Council (as I read the document) focuses on the two themes noted earlier: we need, especially now, an integrated spirituality; and we need a solid, scripturally-based prayer life as the heart and core of that spirituality. Let us consider each of these major themes in turn.

### I. An Integrated Spirituality

#### The Text

PCP II uses the term "integrated" in at least two places. The first is in Part III of the document, "A Renewed Integral Evangelization." In speaking of the characteristics of this renewed evangelization, the Council discusses first "The Goals of Evangelization." The Council says:

Renewed evangelization must aim first of all at the formation of Catholics in a properly integrated spirituality. This integrated spirituality is a response to God who calls us all to be holy as the Father is holy (no. 187).

The desired type of an integrated spirituality may be described in these words:... an integrated spirituality that unites faith in the Lord with justice and charity to his brothers and sisters and joins together a hope for the world to come with an intense commitment to transform the world; a spirituality that seeks the salvation of the total human person;... that seeks for change not only in interior attitudes but in ecclesial and societal structures;... that witnesses through action to the faith... (no. 188)

This spirituality begins with a conversion to the Lord... Without this conversion, evangelization is fruitless<sup>3</sup> (no. 189).

So "integrated" is understood to involve the whole person, mind and will and heart and hands. It opposes any dichotomizing of human life: spiritual vs. material; religious vs. secular; heavenly vs. earthly. As we will see shortly, the bishops in council were aware that such dichotomies have tended to dominate the religious outlook of most Filipinos, even after the strong holistic stress of "The Church in the Modern World" in Vatican II. First, however, let us note the other reference to an integrated spirituality.

It is brief, and appears in the Decrees, formerly Part V of the original document: "Agenda Towards Renewal." There are 132 Decrees, some encompassing several related resolutions, and they are intended to concre-

tize and lead to implementation of the ideals espoused in the four parts of the Conciliar Document. The very first article mandates (in # 1) "forging and implementing a five-to-ten year National Pastoral Plan" for renewed evangelization of the country. Then in # 2 we read: "This new evangelization is aimed (a) at fostering an integrated Christian spirituality and (b) at building a truly local Church in communion with the Apostolic See" (art. 1).

### The Context

This resolution is evidently based upon the section of Part II extensively quoted above. What, then, was the context of PCP II's stress on an "integrated" spirituality for all our Filipino people? The Conciliar Document, as we noted above, is divided into four parts: Part I: Our World — The Philippines: Lights and Shadows, is a situationer; Part II: Envisioning a Church Renewed, which proclaims the ideal presented by the Council to the Catholic people and to the world; Part III: A Renewed Integral Evangelization, in which the means of realizing this renewal are presented under two rubrics: announcing a message of salvation (renewing worship and catechesis), and announcing a message of liberation (renewing and deepening our commitment to social justice and to political maturity — with a special role accorded the laity in both areas). Finally, Part IV discusses The Community of Disciples: Workers of Renewal. It treats in turn of the laity, religious, the ordained ministry, and "other communities of renewal."

Other authors will treat of important areas of this wide-ranging document. For the moment, my purpose is to see the call for an "integrated spirituality" in the total context of PCP II's vision. It is evident, even from the titles, that the document's key idea is "renewal." It intends to take the good that is in our culture and our traditions — not as a fortress to be defended and protected, but as the starting point for a genuine deepening of our faith life as a people. One or two quotations may help to make this clearer.

At the very outset of the Conciliar Document the question of fundamental concern is posed:

We look ahead to the coming millennium, the third since the coming of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. We look ahead. We look back too. And we ask questions: For all who firmly profess that Jesus is the Lord, has he, does he, make any difference in their life, in their world? (no. 2).

For us Filipinos, the first century of the coming millennium will mark the 500th year since we as a people first accepted the faith. And we ask: Has that faith, does that faith, make any difference in our life, in our nation? (no. 3).

The Philippine Church has answered the call (of Vatican II for renewal). Not always faithfully, not always wholeheartedly. But answer it did — still does — in little and big ways (no. 6).

Hence the necessity of the Second Plenary Council: to take stock of where we are; to look where we are going, to reanimate our life in Christ Jesus; to unite all things in him (no. 7).

As the title of this first part, *The Philippines: Lights and Shadows*, already suggests — and as the preceding quote implies — the Council sees both defects and strengths in the present situation of Catholicism in the Philippines. The defects are noted first:

For most of our people today the faith is centered on the practice of the rites of popular piety. Not on the Word of God, doctrines, sacramental worship (beyond baptism and matrimony). Not on community. Not on building up our world unto the image of the Kingdom. And we say it is because the “unchurched,” the vast majority of our people, greatly lack knowledge of and formation in the faith (no. 13).

In a sense they are “nominal Catholics,” although, as the document hastens to add: “To judge them as Christ himself would judge them, we have to ask what they do to one another as simple human beings, whether they feed the hungry, give drink to the thirsty, shelter the homeless.” By this standard the Council finds much room for hope:

There is much of the Gospel that has become part of us — compassion, forgiveness, caring, piety — and makes of us a basically decent people. So even as we speak of change and renewal, we see that we have a solid base to build on — even among those we call the “unchurched”.... There are so many of them because there are not enough priests, religious and other Church personnel to work with them. And the lack of “workers in the vineyard” is due in turn to a lack of Church-going, of catechesis and formation, the very factors that would encourage more vocations of service to the Church. A vicious circle (nos. 15-16).

These few quotations perhaps suffice to give the “flavor” of the situation. It is lengthy (nos. 1 to 33 in the text) but the essential thrust is captured by the lines quoted: There is a solid base of faith in the Filipino Catholic Church. But much needs to be done to strengthen and solidify this sound foundation. The people’s faith needs to be deepened, and a much stronger and clearer integration of the divine and the human, of worship and daily life, of prayer and action is needed. This is the task the Council sets for itself and the Philippine Church as we look forward to the

third millennium.

This is also the context of PCP II's call for an "integrated" spirituality. It was, I believe, a major achievement of the Council to make its own the desire of Vatican II to see spirituality as co-extensive with life lived in Christ Jesus. As PCP II says: "All life is worship" (no. 167). We cannot afford to live, as many have done in the past, dichotomized lives. Since others will discuss various specific aspects of this integrated vision of Christianity, let us focus more specifically in the next section on the Council's vision of prayer as the heart and core of this authentic spirituality. Before turning to that topic, however, one final quotation — this time from the "Message of the Council to the People of God in the Philippines," accepted and published on the final day of the Council, February 17, 1991 — can summarize well the holistic vision of which we have been speaking:

Accompanied by the Spirit of Truth, we can purify our popular devotions and rituals from some of the superstitions that still contaminate them. He, the Spirit of Wisdom, can help our Basic Ecclesial Communities progress from external rituals to internalized values. As the Spirit of Fortitude, he brings us out of our selfish isolation and gives us the courage to be involved in those tasks which lead to the transformation of our society.<sup>4</sup>

## **II. Prayer: The Heart and Core of An Integrated Spirituality Knowing Jesus and Responding to His Call**

One of the difficulties which any apostolic spirituality faces is finding the proper balance between prayer and action. From the time of the earliest apostolic spiritualities of the 13th century — notably the Dominicans, Franciscans and Augustinians, with their stress on prayer and service — there has always been a problem balancing and integrating the two. In theory the balance may be clear, but in practice there is always the danger that service will swallow up prayer. "My work is my prayer" — all the more dangerous because it is half-true — has been the motto of many dedicated apostles who gradually lost their spirit, their very reason for service in the first place.

PCP II was well aware that the same danger lurked in the dark corners of its proclamation of an "integrated spirituality." Thus we find a section ("Title VIII. Spirituality") in the decrees which seeks to strike a balance between work and prayer. The first of three articles, 36, proclaims the basic principle of balance which the Council proposes: "The integration of prayer and action should be a paramount concern in the formation program of seminarians and lay faithful." The following two articles, 37

and 38, address the specific components of this integration.

First of all, article 37 stresses “formation in a work ethic characterized by commitment, diligence, rigorous honesty and Christian love,” as an essential element of any well-integrated spirituality (# 1). It also inculcates (# 2), “a more thorough-going dimension of social responsibility,” as a necessary complement of the personal spirituality of all Church movements. In the same spirit, and strikingly, article 38 # 2 proclaims that: “Service should complement worship in sanctifying Sunday as the Lord’s day.”

A work ethic, social concern, and service: the stress in the foregoing articles is on the action pole of the “integration of prayer and action” for which PCP II calls. In article 38 # 1, however, we read: “Those involved in every form of the apostolate should complement their involvement with continuing growth in the spiritual life and adherence to the laws and guidelines of the Church in their activities.”<sup>5</sup> It is this statement which is of particular relevance to our topic. How does the Council understand this “continuing growth in the spiritual life”? To find the answer, I believe, we have to return to Part II of the document: “Envisioning a Church Renewed.” At the outset of this part, immediately after the situationer in Part I (to which we referred earlier), the Council says:

We are followers of Christ, his disciples. Tracing his footsteps in our times — to utter his word to others. To love with his love. To live with his life. This is why we must move forward. To cease following him is to betray our very identity (no. 34).

And the question, then, that we must ask is: how? How to live as Christians? As Filipino Catholics? In our situation of lights and shadows? How?

The answer cannot be abstract. For it leads us back to the person of Christ, Jesus of Nazareth, who was conceived by the power of the Holy Spirit and born of the Virgin Mary. Jesus who preached and worked miracles. Who was crucified under Pontius Pilate, died and, from the dead, rose again. Jesus who now lives at the right hand of the Father — but continues to be in our midst (no. 35).

How to live as Catholic Christians today? It is to know, to love, to follow Christ in the Church which he founded. This is why we need to contemplate the face — and the heart of Christ. We have to retell his story to ourselves, that we may, more credibly, more authoritatively, tell it to others. This is our belief (no. 36).<sup>6</sup>

This passage expresses beautifully, even poetically, the central impor-

tance of prayer in any authentically Christian spirituality. "We have to retell his story to ourselves," if we are to have any hope of telling it credibly, with authority, to others. We can only proclaim what we ourselves have experienced.

This is what we proclaim to you:  
what was from the beginning,  
what we have heard,  
what we have seen with our eyes,  
what we have looked upon  
and our hands have touched —  
we speak of the word of life (1 Jn 1:1)

In the pages that follow, the Council gives a splendid summary of this experiential knowledge of Jesus Christ, the heart and soul of Christian prayer, which is also the substance of the Good News we preach to others. This is done under two titles: "The Way of Jesus" (nos. 37-61) and "The Call of Jesus Today" (nos. 62-86). While we cannot here survey the full content of these pages, we can note that the first section describes Jesus' sending by the Father, to proclaim and establish the Kingdom here and now, with a message of liberation especially for the "poor" — a message which he, as prophet, priest and king, realized in the Paschal mystery. And the second section, "The Call of Jesus Today," centers on our faith response to Jesus' call. It is a call to the will and the heart, and not merely to the head. And the faith it demands must be "informed and communitarian," "missionary and maturing," loving and inculturated. It must be lived by prayer and worship, by witnessing and by loving service. And, as a sharing in the Paschal mystery, it must join with Jesus in overcoming both personal sin and sinful societal structures.

The crucial element here, from the perspective of prayer as the heart and core of Christian spirituality, is the need to be deeply immersed in the Gospel story of Jesus, and to be truly sensitive (discerning) to the way that story is to be continued and lived out today in our lives — as individuals and as the Filipino people of God. It would be difficult to give a better description of the real essence of Christian prayer.

### **Conclusion: The Perfect Disciple**

The remainder of Part II explores, under the title "Discipleship in Community — The Church," the ways in which this experience of Jesus and our faith response to his call are to be lived out today, in our time and place. Thus, the stress on "integration" is continued: prayer and action, faith experience and good works, must always complement one another if our Filipino Catholicity is to be authentic and solid. We must have the prayer,

or else we have nothing to share. But (like Magdalen and the Emmaus disciples), we can only keep the Lord we have found by giving him away.

It is only fitting, then, that this Part II ends by referring to “Mary, Model of Discipleship” (nos. 145-153). Very much in the spirit of the final chapter of *Lumen Gentium*, the PCP II delegates see her as the perfect disciple of Jesus, her Son. They discuss her role in the drama of salvation under two titles: “Mary, the First to be Evangelized,” and “Mary, the First Evangelizer.” Just as every Christian, and the Church as the community of believers, must first be evangelized — must first encounter the Lord in prayerful openness, and respond to his call in loving faith — before evangelizing others, so too Mary was first “evangelized” herself:

She heard the word of God from the angel and she inquired into its meaning. Through faith she conceived the Son of God in her heart, and by the power of the Holy Spirit conceived him in her body.... She submitted her whole self to God, believing his word, trusting his power, and obeying his will. By that act of faith she committed herself in faith irrevocably to her Savior-Son and his mission for the world’s salvation (no. 146).

The document reviews the references to Mary in the infancy narratives, and concludes: “She treasured in her heart and pondered in faith all that concerned her Son (no. 147). Similarly, after recalling Cana, Calvary and her waiting “in constant prayer together with the disciples of her Son for the promised Holy Spirit,” the section on Mary as first of the evangelized concludes: “She certainly belongs to that group of ideal disciples whom St. Luke describes as ‘the ones who, when they have heard the word, embrace it with a good and generous heart, and bear fruit through perseverance’” (no. 148).

As the last phrase suggests, Mary was also the first evangelizer. From the very beginning, when she hastened to share the good news with Elizabeth, and proclaimed in her Magnificat the word of God both to Elizabeth and to the Lord’s chosen people, Mary was a model of the integrated spirituality which the Council seeks to inculcate in the Filipino people. “She was always a giver of Jesus to people. She gave him birth and presented him to the shepherds and the Magi. She gave him also to the old man Simeon who received him joyfully in his arms” (no. 150).

The Council concludes this Part II of the document with a tying together of a number of conciliar themes:

While many today attack our devotion to her, the Church of the Philippines, as a *pueblo amante de Maria* — “a people in love with Mary” —



will always continue to seek her intercession and learn from her way of life what we need to be as a community of disciples. She is truly what her oldest extant image in the Philippines calls her: *Nuestra Senora de Guia*, Our Lady Guide of the Way (no. 153).

In this brief statement we see the “lights and shadows” of the present state of the faith in the Philippines. There are distortions in popular Marian devotions. But there is also a solid foundation for a deeper understanding of Mary’s role in the drama of salvation — and a deeper appreciation of the way she models for us a truly “integrated” spirituality. She was truly a woman of prayer. This was the heart and center of her life with God. But her prayer was not divorced from her life of service. It is this balanced approach to spirituality, beautifully exemplified in the human life of the Mother of God, which the Council PCP II proposes to us today as we seek to renew our Church and our country in Christ, her Son.

## FOOTNOTES TO APPENDIX II

1. George A. Lane, S.J., *Christian Spirituality* (Allen, Texas: Argus Communications, 1968) 6f. The book was reprinted, with a brief “Afterword” by Robert Sears, S.J., by Loyola University Press in Chicago in 1984.
2. *Acts and Decrees of the Second Plenary Council of the Philippines* 20 January – 17 February 1991 (Manila: Secretariat, Second Plenary Council of the Philippines, Catholic Bishops’ Conference of the Philippines, 1992). (Henceforth *Acts and Decrees*.) The numbers in parentheses within the article refer to the marginal numbers of the Conciliar Document. The Decrees are referred to by the number of the article. — The original text of the part studied here used the word “holistic” which was changed into “integrated” after the review of the Decrees by the Congregation for Bishops. For uniformity purposes the same terminology was adopted in the Conciliar Document, or the doctrinal-pastoral part of the *Acts and Decrees*; the Conciliar Document itself was left untouched during the review by the Congregation.
3. *Ibid.*, Nos. 187-189. Underlining added. The quotation cited in the document is from “One People, One Mission,” Reflection Paper of the Tagaytay Echo Seminar on the 1987 Synod of Bishops.
4. *Ibid.*, XCVII-XCVIII.
5. *Ibid.*, art. 38 # 1. Underlining added.
6. *Ibid.*, no. 36. Underlining added.

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FABC PAPERS is a project of the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences (FABC), designed to bring the thinking of Asian experts to a wider audience and to develop critical analysis of the problems facing the Church in Asia from people on the scene. The opinions expressed are those of the author(s) alone and do not necessarily represent the official policies of the FABC or its member Episcopal Conferences. Manuscripts are always welcome and may be sent to: FABC, G.P.O. Box 2984, Hong Kong.

1. For the text of the Council Document itself, see the enclosed "Annex" to the report of the Commission.
2. Ibid., No. 107 (Emphasis added). The quotation cited in the document is from the "Our People, Our Mission" Resolution Paper of the Tagalog Bishops' Conference on the 1987 General Synod.
3. Ibid., No. 107 (Emphasis added).
4. Ibid., No. 107 (Emphasis added).
5. Ibid., No. 107 (Emphasis added).

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