

Sixth Plenary Assembly: Workshop Discussion Guide

## **THE STRUGGLE FOR LIFE: ASIAN YOUTH**

by

**LEO PERERA**

### **Introduction**

The Sixth Plenary Assembly of the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences and the silver jubilee of the inauguration of Veritas Radio Asia are significant events relevant to the on-going mission of the Church in Asia.

The host country Philippines will also celebrate the arrival of the Gospel on its shores and the salvific influence of Christianity through the many centuries of its presence and growth in the Philippines.

The celebration of the World Youth Day in an Asian country for the first time in history, and the arrival of the Holy Father in Asia in order to be present with the youth of the world and the bishops of the Asian Church give new vitality to the apostolate to youth and students in Asia.

These important and significant events coming together naturally link up the reflection on the presence and mission of the Church in Asia with the ministry to youth in Asia and the ministry by the youth in Asia today. Basing ourselves on the results of the survey (cf. appendices), conducted by the International Movement of Catholic Students Asia (IMCS), and the International Young Christian Students (IYCS) on behalf of the FABC Office of Laity, this discussion paper will look briefly at the reality of the youth scene in Asia and the progress of the apostolate to youth in Asia, so that it can become one that truly is a life-giving service.

In this workshop guide we attempt to provide a few points for reflection and evaluation as the Asian Church enters a new phase of its exist-

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ence. The results of the survey commissioned by the Office of Laity will be used to provide some relevant data and thought-provoking questions on the present situation and the future thrusts of the youth ministry in Asia.

## **1. The Situation of Youth**

### **1.1 Youth Today Continue to be An Important Sector of Society**

Looking within the parameters of the United Nations' definition of youth as those between the ages of 15 and 30, a large percentage of the population of most Asian countries is composed of youth. As we approach the third millenium, the growth in population will greatly increase the numbers entering this category. However, this is not a homogeneous group. Youth are rural and urban, educated and uneducated, skilled and unskilled, content and frustrated, conservative and revolutionary, secularized and pietistic. In short, youth are at both ends of any spectrum and also can fit in at any given point in-between as well.

### **1.2 The Asian Scene**

Asia, which is one of the fastest growing regions demographically, will feel the increased pressure of numbers in all categories of population. However, since the growth in numbers outpaces the employment and educational opportunities, the situation will grow increasingly volatile, especially in the age groups entering the educational and employment spheres, viz. youth and students. Thus, dioceses and individual Churches experience the fact that youth who constitute a sizeable percentage of their congregations, in order to be served adequately, call for much more effort and expertise than was at their disposal before.

The past few years have also seen many changes in Asia which have had strong impacts on the world of young people. Many countries have seen political changes or the impacts of past political changes. In some instances there has been a movement towards a greater democratic and participatory style of politics, while in others there have been subtle changes of autocratic forms of government. Some countries have also experienced the move towards smaller groupings and growth of states within broadly defined historical boundaries. These changes have created stability for some, but crises of identity and statehood for others.

### **1.3 East Asia**

The situation of young people today also varies according to sub-regional groupings, which have generally similar socio-economic factors. Thus, the East Asian countries, while having a high level of industrialization as well as



economic growth, show also the resultant social trends of high consumerism, individualism, and a weakening of family ties, Youth in such societies often face loneliness, lack of meaning in life beyond the material affluence around them, as well as disinterest in the communitarian aspect of living.

The high technological and industrial development, while bringing an affluence which has increased the independence of young people, also draws them away from the stabilizing influence of family and traditional culture. Thus, while from a superficial perspective all needs seem to be satisfied by the availability of material goods, a deeper hunger for fulfillment of an interior emptiness, and the need for lasting relationships, can be seen. While the values of self-worth, success and family are still held to, these realities themselves take on a change in content according to the context. The peer group is seen to have the most important impact on thought and behavior of such young people.

#### **1.4 South East Asia**

In South East Asia, which is speedily catching up with the rest of the industrialized nations of Asia, the mixture of cultural and familial values can be seen alongside the growing trend towards individualism and materialism, success and social advancement seem important, with an increasing upward social mobility evident especially among the educated youth. Thus, education is highly valued and the competition to enter institutions of secondary or tertiary education is very high. This also places a heavy pressure on youth, as the achievement levels are measured by external norms of success, money-making ability and other visible symbols of advancement on the socio-economic scale. Whatever values that family and culture had imbued in them are often diluted or undermined by the forces of social progress in these rapidly developing societies. At the same time these very forces create increasing numbers of marginalized youth.

Despite rapid development and economic progress, the opportunities do not reach all sectors of youth equally. The large majority of youth in these nations are still in rural areas. Since the patterns of economic development and industrialization in these countries have often been urban-centered, the rural youth face very limited opportunities of economic advancement. However, the pressure to succeed thrust on them by the media creates an artificial system of values which results in a sense of anger and frustration when fulfillment is out of reach. The old values are measured up against the new dreams and images, and are usually found wanting. Thus, youth get uprooted from their familiar bases and contexts. They become a culturally-floating group but at the same time are in search of something solid or lasting to anchor themselves to. This creates an underlying sense of instability and insecurity.

## 1.5 South Asia

A look at the South Asian countries brings out the contrasts much more clearly. The past few years have seen a relative political stability in the region and the opening out of many economies to the free market forces. However, the very policies which may be counted in some quarters as financially progressive or more democratic can also be seen to cause unrest and increase the social disparity of the people. Thus, while the majority of the people are struggling to make their way out of the pit of poverty, on the other hand, the few who have already "made it" enjoy an extravagant lifestyle embellished by all that the consumer-oriented media hold forth as the trappings of the so-called good life.

In these countries almost eighty percent of the population live in rural areas where the traditional economics were largely agrarian. With the changing emphases of the economic growth, rural life and agriculture tend to lose its appeal, and large numbers of youth migrate to the urban areas as the avenue of improving their quality of life. Here too, education is seen to be a key that can open the door to advancement. However, two factors come into play in these situations. On the one hand, there is a struggle to obtain access to the avenues of education, but at the same time there is a realization that the opportunities within the local economies and countries do not offer sufficient scope for the utilization of the education thus obtained. The problem is compounded in the South Asian region by the fact that the prevailing education systems largely follow the pattern set in colonial times. As such, they do not necessarily impart the skills which can readily be absorbed or utilized in modern society.

At the same time there is a growing middle class in these countries which has access to modern education and also the benefits of education. Since these groups tend to be the opinion leaders and also the class most targeted by the media and the market, the norm of living seems to be set by such classes of society. In the case of India, for example, if the upper and middle classes compose around twenty percent of the population, that is already close upon two hundred million people. If just forty percent of that number are youth it means about eighty million persons. The question to be asked then is whether the present systems and structures of society and the economy can adequately cope with and cater to such large numbers. Some Asian countries have already witnessed the social upheavals caused by youth in the face of such seemingly unsurmountable obstacles to their progress.

## 1.6 Common Problems

Besides the problems caused and faced due to the above-mentioned



factors, youth are also the primary victims of many other social ills and evils which have been highlighted in the recent years. The fast growing drug market in Asia mainly targets the youth, both rural and urban. Young people, both the affluent and the poverty-stricken, lead lives that have their in-built need for the release of tensions and the easing of frustrations. This creates an opening for the drug-pushers who prey on the minds of youth, promising release and relief for the different problems through the use of drugs. For the affluent, this is also another step in the constant search for thrills to relieve the boredom of life.

Asia has also been identified by the World Health Organization as an area where HIV-AIDS will take on pandemic proportions within the next decade. Lack of awareness, of education and of the will to combat this disease will lead to Asia soon outpacing the African continent in the incidence of AIDS. Unfortunately, in the widespread sex markets of Asia, youth (boys, girls and children) play a very large role. On the one hand, they are involved due to the struggle to alleviate the poverty of their homes and families. They also enter the sex trade because of the promise of quick riches it holds out. On the other hand, the youth and children of Asian countries, both boys and girls, are increasingly touted as attractions for sex tourism and pedophilia.

A less obvious but more insidious problem is the Westernizing influence caused by the mass media. Serving as tools of the transnational corporations the media present a picture of Westernized affluence and hold it up as the ideal. This appeals very strongly to the susceptible minds of young people. The problem becomes more acute when some sections of the youth population are able to afford such luxuries while others are not. Thus, young people tend to imitate the ways and cultural customs of the West and to absorb as well the consumeristic values and lifestyles portrayed in the press, radio and TV.

### **1.7 Positive Contributions of Youth**

We have so far outlined the problems and conflicts faced or caused by youth in the different sub-regions of Asia. At the same time, it is important to note that in every region there are young people who have had great positive impact on the on-going flow of society, benefiting from it and contributing to its development, as well as to the well-being of others. There are those who have not got entangled in a web of despair or pessimism but have also been able to cause significant and important changes to the society and system they live in. There are those who have gone through the mill and endured the struggle, not born with silver spoons in their mouths but prospering in more ways than in the mere material. They have been able to impact the quality of life and social values of their nations and

regions.

As the FABC document on the "Vocation and Mission of the Laity" (Tokyo 1984) recognizes, these are the ones who have played a substantial role in the social transformations taking place in Asia. Being involved in the struggle, they are able to awaken the consciousness of the people and organize and mobilize groups working for justice and peace. Their work and commitment have been a witness to Kingdom values. Being empowered themselves, they have in turn been able to empower their groups, people and societies.

## **2.0 Asian Catholic Youth**

### **2.1 A Minority Situation**

This is the youth milieu within which Asian Catholic youth live and work. They are not only influenced by the struggle for existence, education and economic growth faced by all youth in Asia. The Catholic youth also live in multi cultural, multireligious, pluralistic societies. Asian religions, some of which have existed for thousands of years, also influence the local cultures, the very lifestyles, thought patterns, values and concepts of the people. Thus, the Catholic youth function within this socio-cultural cocoon. In every country in Asia, other than the Philippines, Catholic youth are a minority. They share in the minority-complex of the Churches of their countries. In some instances, this fact of being a minority can give rise to a spirit of militancy which leads to the stress on the rights of minorities and the corresponding roles and responsibilities of the minorities regarding their place in the general national scene. This can also lead to a positive spirit of reaching out to and joining hands with other minority groups, both religious and secular, existing within the same country or local context. Negatively, this minority-complex can have a debilitating effect, inhibiting any sort of positive or constructive action in the social milieu.

Catholic youth also have to carry a burden inherited from history. They have to share the stigma of Churches which are often seen as foreign, Westernized and not very patriotic regarding national goals and aspirations. They are categorized as being privileged, because of an access to better educational facilities and even employment opportunities, due to an existing very real "old boy" network. While this may seem an advantage generally, in the face of an egalitarian spirit among their peers this can be a burden.

### **2.2 Youth Involvement**

While we have seen the situation of youth in Asia and Catholic youth in general, there are at the same time many Catholic youth involved in



various fields of activity which are related to the mission of the Church. These youth belong to the general category of youth, as well as to the category of Catholic youth. The distinction is made because of the fact that in the area of youth involvement, the participation of non-Catholic youth is a common feature depending on the general environment of the country. This happens since youth in their involvement in different sectors, other than the strictly church-centered, do not often regard religious/denominational affiliation as a criterion.

The survey conducted by IMCS and IYCS projects a picture of satisfaction among these sectors regarding the relationship with the Church, the availability of facilities and the opportunity to involve in or participate in the mission of the Church. However, the survey notes that those surveyed are people who are active within the Church network. There are many Catholic youth who do not take part in Church activities, and so were not reached by this survey.<sup>1</sup>

### **3.0 An Imperative for Involvement**

It is no secret that the Church has been involved in the work with youth at different levels from the very introduction of Christianity into Asia. One of the best known and recognized areas of the apostolate is in education, with the Catholic schools focusing on formal education, and also other institutes catering to non-formal, vocational and technical education. Even from the early centuries of the existence of Christianity in Asia, the activities of priests and religious in all these areas are on record.

Coming to more recent times there has been a growing realization that the presence of the Church in the youth sphere is not only through the activity of priests and religious but also through the involvement of young people themselves in the apostolate and in their role of sanctifying the "temporal" sphere. Thus, the work of organized lay apostolates and youth apostolates have grown and flourished in many countries of Asia. Dioceses too have given place and emphasis to the work of youth apostolate within the structures. These are the groups which form the majority of those who responded to the survey conducted by IMCS and IYCS Asian secretariates.

### **3.1 The Survey Findings**

#### **3.1.1 Increased Awareness**

The overall picture that emerges, when one studies the responses to the survey, is that there is an increased awareness regarding the importance of youth apostolate in the Asian Church, and this has been translated into increased availability of resources, both human and material. Howev-

er, these have also been pointed out as the areas which are not adequately served in some countries. There is also an acceptance of youth as integrally a part of the Church communities, recognized in the favorable response to the pertinent questions in Section D, for example: "Are you able to feel at home and welcome in your parish/diocese?"

All the bishops' conferences that responded to the survey said they have national-level episcopal commissions for youth and students. Most of the diocesan commissions also said they have mechanisms for obtaining feedback from the youth themselves regarding the adequacy and effectiveness of their work. This indicates a practical and active response at the level of bishops' conferences to the expressed position of FABC that: "Full support and acceptance, trust and confidence, presence and availability on the part of other members of God's people will surely empower the youth to become evangelizers, messengers and instruments of God — not only among their peers but also among their elders and in the wider society" (*Vocation and Mission of the Laity*, Tokyo, 1984.)

### 3.1.2 Diverse Responses at Different Levels

However, when the activity closer to the grassroots' level is analyzed, the presence of youth associations, organizations and clubs in parishes ranges from thirty percent to fifty percent. Few countries go as high as seventy percent. This should also be read with the second most commonly-identified difficulty mentioned in the responses to question C. 5, viz: the lack of encouragement from elders, priests, parents and pastors, as well as of funds. Thus, although the statements of FABC are accepted as general policy, in the practical application at the level of the parishes, which are the true nuclei of apostolic activity, the response and degree of emphasis vary.

Action and involvement are also called for in order to carry out the wishes of the Asian Bishops' Meeting of Manila, 1970. The bishops said then: "the People of God in Asia must become in a certain sense the 'Church of the Young,' if it is to transform the 'face of Asia,' 'the continent of the young.'" Twenty-five years after that historic meeting, it is interesting to see the progress which has taken place to make that vision come true. There has been progress in the opening up of the consciousness of the Churches to the reality of the presence of the youth and the activities of youth in the Church. Structurally and in the sphere of the apostolates, there has been a positive impact, on the one hand, due to the above-mentioned conscious effort to reach out to youth; and on the other hand, there has been a growth in the awareness of the youth themselves, especially those involved in the various fields of activity open to the lay people of the Church.



### 3.1.3 Youth's Point of View

However, the impact and the importance of the relationship built up between youth and Church has also to be seen from the point of view of the youth themselves. Although there do exist many groups which are involved and in close relation to the Church's activity in many parts of Asia, youth, both rural and urban, as well as from all points of the social spectrum, continue to feel alienated by the Church.

The feeling has been expressed by young people that, even when they are continuously assured that they are the Church, yet they are not included in planning, decision making or other areas of responsibility. Often the programs planned out for them are irrelevant to them, because they are not planned out by them or with them. They feel that often decisions are made on their behalf, and they are on the receiving end, or even treated as objects or targets of the apostolate or outreach programs. This deprives them of the right to be the subjects of their own decision making. For young people who feel frustrated because they cannot control or be assured of their material future in the world and society, it can be a hard pill to swallow when they find that cannot be in control even of the Church's apostolate that bears their name.

## 4. The Pope Speaks

### 4.1 Bearers of Christ's Mission

In this context it is interesting to listen again to what Pope John Paul II said to young people, when he addressed them once before in Manila: "Dear young people, the mission that Christ gives you is a universal one but at the same time it is to be realized in a unique way by each one of you. It is up to you to discover the right ways to fulfil the Lord's mission in your world" (UST, Manila, February 18, 1981).

The Pope gives recognition to the fact that each young person has been given a mission by Christ, and it is up to them to find the right way to fulfil that mission in their own world of youth, and students. Such an approach fills them with confidence and a sense of responsibility to carry out the mission entrusted to them. It also manifests a confidence in their ability to discern the ways best suited to carry out the mission in the different milieus which form the world of youth. It also shows a deep sense of humility in accepting the fact that, with regard to the world of youth and the apostolic outreach to youth, the youth themselves are the best judges of the appropriate ways and means to proceed in order to fulfil the mission.

## 4.2 Youth — A Treasure

It is also clear that the Holy Father not only has trust and confidence in the youth but he also considers youth as a great treasure. In a message for the International Youth Year the Pope said:

There are reasons for thinking of youth as a special treasure that a person experiences at this particular period of his/her life... This is a treasure of discovering and at the same time of organizing, choosing, foreseeing and making the first personal decisions, decisions that will be important for the strictly personal dimension of human existence. At the same time, these decisions are of considerable social importance (March 31, 1985, Rome).

While youth is understood as a precious treasure, the full potential and growth of the person as an individual and in society is through the exercise of the decision-making processes and choices. Since all apostolate to youth aims at the total development of the person, it goes without saying that making choices and decisions within that apostolate contribute towards this. It is not only the decisions that a person makes that will be important, but more important still is the ability of young people to exercise the power of decision making and to grow in the process. In this way, will youth be empowered to have an impact on society by the decisions and choices they make and by the confidence shown to be reposed in them to make sane and wise decisions.

## 4.3 Life as a Voyage of Discovery

The Pope has also reminded youth that their life is a pilgrimage of discovery and this voyage of personal discovery never ends:

For it is true to say that life is a pilgrimage of discovery: the discovery of who you are, the discovery of the values that shape your lives.... While this voyage is most evident in the time of youth, it is a voyage that never ends. During your whole lifetime you must affirm and reaffirm the values that form yourselves and that form the world (World Day of Peace, January 1, 1985).

The age of youth is the age of discovery, not only of the self and who one is, but also the discovery of values. The values which shape young people are seen as forming not only themselves but also the world they live in. The discovery of self and the growth in personhood, the affirmation of true values that form themselves, are all stressed as important for the very process of development of and for an integral life of the person. Thus, youth apostolate should be at the service of this voyage of self-discovery,



animating the youth to grow in self-awareness and in value-formation. These values are seen as having a very positive impact on the youth and society.

#### 4.4 Act to Give the Church a New Youthfulness

The Holy Father has also indicated to the young people a *locus operandi*, one among others but closer to home, in order to exercise their responsibilities.

The Church should — must be — this fraternal community where we can rebuild our strength, share our joys and concerns, unite ourselves in faith and prayer... True relationships must be renewed in our communities, our parishes... Take your place in your parish communities; be there to give the Church a new youth so that her appearance may always be without stain or wrinkle... And rest assured that the entire Church is counting on you. She needs you in order to develop into what she should be: a great living and fraternal family of believers, open to the Spirit of Christ, witnessing at the heart of the world to the salvation achieved by Christ and manifesting the unfathomable love which unites the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit (Fribourg, June 13, 1984).

The indispensability of the work of youth in order to give a new youthful vitality and energy to the Church is stressed here. Besides the many spheres of involvement within the “temporal spheres,” which is rightly the place of youth action, the local Churches or parishes are also shown to need the growth and development in youthful and fraternal spirit which will rejuvenate them. The enthusiasm and commitment of youth are needed to aid in the transformation of the Church into the true witness of all the salvific love of the Blessed Trinity. Far from being an almost marginalized appendix, which the youth apostolate has become in some places today, the Holy Father clearly states the importance of youth in the life and animation of the Church herself.

#### 5.0 Challenges to Action

The foregoing teachings show the centrality of youth in the different dimensions of the life and growth of the Church. At the same time, it is possible to see today in Asia the active presence and participation of youth groups and the fulfillment of these roles and responsibilities at different levels and varying stages of intensity.

## **5.1 International Catholic Organizations**

The majority of the international youth's and students' lay apostolate movements present in Asia are often the strongest manifestation of youth centrality and active lay responsibility. Most of them have decision-making processes which involve representatives of the whole membership and are mainly lay. The role of the ecclesiastical assistant is to accompany the lay members on their journey of discovery and growth. The process does not encourage clerical domination and ensures the lay character and charism. In these movements the involved laity share equally the responsibility for developing, promoting and witnessing to the Kingdom of God and human values.

## **5.2 Pious Associations**

Many of the traditional pious movements, associations and organizations in Asia are also fields of action for youth. Their traditional categorization as spiritual apostolates is a misnomer, as it creates the impression that these organizations do not operate in the temporal sphere. In actual fact, the involvement in the temporal sphere by all these organizations for the sanctification of the temporal order is the very *raison d'être* of these associations. The dichotomy between spiritual and temporal is artificial and non-theological.

## **5.3 Youth Outreach Groups**

Recent years have seen the rise of charismatic and other similar groups with different aims. These organizations have been also successful in a direct evangelical approach, reaching out to peer groups in colleges, universities and also townships and villages. These offer scope for direct apostolic activity and for an evangelisational witnessing. While they have been very successful in some countries, such as the Philippines, the feasibility of such an approach in the majority of Asian countries is not too clear.

## **5.4 Parish-Based Youth**

Youth organizations and associations existing in the dioceses and parishes have also exercised their apostolate to youth fairly successfully. There has been a steady growth in lay-centeredness, but these associations and clubs are usually more vulnerable to the whims and fancies of the different animators, spiritual directors and parish priests, on whom they unfortunately have to depend fairly heavily.



## **5.5 Apostolate of Youth to Youth**

In spite of the work and involvement of all these types of groups, associations and apostolates, it is also true that the large majority of young people are not catered to, and their needs not met by the existing organizations. It is becoming increasingly evident that the apostolate of youth to youth, or the young evangelizing the young (FABC V, Bandung, 1990), is the key to reaching out to this large group. Clerical-centered activity or structured movements will not ordinarily be sufficiently flexible to approach such groups. It is more the animated and committed young people themselves who will be able to have any impact, if at all, in such areas. In this case, the young people need wise accompaniment by animators and chaplains, who will empower and accompany them but not dominate them or usurp their role and responsibility.

## **6.0 Recommendations**

### **6.1 Sharing in a Common Mission**

In order to do justice to the search for solutions and modes of action in the sphere of youth apostolate and youth evangelical action, the mission has to be looked at from the perspective of a common call to help work for establish God's Kingdom by bearing witness to the values and by a corresponding lifestyle. This is a common standpoint for both clergy and laity, young people and old. It would be a futile exercise of running around in circles, trying to find respectable and face-saving formulas, if the existing structure of a clergy-centered Church is taken as the norm or point of departure. Faced with a common mandate to bear witness to the Gospel and to spread the Kingdom of God, all stand equal. Each will carry out this universal mission in his/her own ways, in relevance to the personal context. This calls for an acceptance of the fact that in a world where all are called to evangelize, youth will be the primary evangelizers of youth, reaching out to their peers in appropriate ways. Thus, youth will have the freedom to seek the ways best suited to their own milieu.

### **6.2 Growth Through Exercise and Decision Making**

This also demands an understanding of the precious nature of youth in Asia today and the invaluable role youth can play in the world of youth. It means recognizing that youth should be the subjects of their own future, discovering their own personhood and growing through the exercise of choices and options. It means realizing that in the work and growth of youth, the Church is made present in diverse contexts and diverse methods. The more young people are able to exercise the freedom to make mature personal decisions, the more that the freedom of the Spirit of God's Kingdom

is served and society gets enriched.

### **6.3 An Accompaniment in Life's Journey**

The need will also exist for the accompaniment of youth on their voyage through life. Their life's journey is often complex and challenging. It has to be faced with strength and courage. Thus, the call for accompaniment, being with the young as they walk along their voyage of discovery. The presence of the priest or Religious should not be a dominating one but almost like being a silent shadow, pointing out the way and going ahead sometimes. It means communicating a spirit of power, thus empowering the person to face whatever is in store.

### **6.4 Youth in Transformation of Church and Society**

Flexibility and the ability to move beyond the traditional role patterns are also assets that youth possess. These should count as being invaluable in the task of transforming the Church into a true witness of all the salvific love of the Blessed Trinity. This calls for a recognition that the enthusiasm and commitment of youth are needed for the Church to be transformed into the image of its founder and be truly at the service of the Kingdom. This also demands the courage to affirm the primacy of the call to proclaim and spread the Good News of God's Kingdom, as being above the urge to build up the realm of tradition and ritual.

### **7.0 In Conclusion...**

To sum up, we have seen some aspects of the situation of youth in Asia, a few of the initiatives to change the situation and some of the indications given by the FABC on some of these matters in the past. We have seen what the Holy Father has said about some of the points raised. It has also been demonstrated that for youth to take up a role in the mission of Jesus Christ traditional mental frameworks or mindsets have to be changed and a spirit of fraternal community restored. In short, to relate to youth in the field of the apostolate it is necessary to act in the Spirit of Christ, as recorded by Mark 10:17-22, to look upon them with love and to challenge them to try just a little bit more.

#### **SOME QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION**

- Have you analyzed the situation of youth in your diocese and country? Do the facts that come up enter into your pastoral plan?
- Have any measures been taken to address the problems of youth in your country/diocese? Who decides on these programs/projects?



- Does the youth apostolate in your country/diocese receive the recognition for the role they have to play in the development of the Kingdom in your area?
- Will it cause you serious mental pain if the old picture of a traditional Church is transformed by youth into a rejuvenated and fresh communion of communities?
- How many dreams of your youthful days been realized? How many have been crushed? And how many do you still continue to hold?
- Since the FABC and the individual bishops' conference have often proclaimed the importance of the youth apostolate at all levels, should there not be an FABC Office for Youth and Students, who after all constitute half of their flock?

## APPENDIX I

### RESULTS OF THE SURVEY CONDUCTED FOR THE YOUTH WORKSHOP OF THE SIXTH PLENARY ASSEMBLY OF THE FABC

#### 1.0 Introduction

#### 1.1 Background of the Survey

IMCS Asia and IYCS Asia were commissioned by the FABC Office of Laity to conduct an Asian-level survey on youth. The results of the survey were to be used at the workshop of the Sixth Plenary Assembly of FABC, which would take place in January, 1995. The Assembly has the theme, "Christian Discipleship in Asia Today: Service to Life." Survey forms were sent out to the various national-level youth organizations, youth commissions and the bishops' conferences in Asia at the end of April, 1994. They were requested to duplicate the forms and extend the survey to other youth groups and dioceses as needed. Below are some of the findings of this survey.

#### 1.2 Limitations of This Survey

Please take note that not all the Asian countries are represented in this survey. The results are based on the survey forms collected from Japan, Taiwan, Malaysia, Singapore, Thailand, Philippines, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, Pakistan and India. Nepal, Indonesia, Korea and Hong Kong did not return the forms sent to them.<sup>2</sup>

Like all surveys, the finding of this one can be subject to much debate. However, we have tried our best to analyze the data collected in an objective way. As a safety measure, the results of this survey were checked against the experiences of some people who are working for youth at the Asian level. As a whole, these people confirmed the findings of this survey.

## 2.0 Some General Findings

2.1 Generally, the survey forms present a very favorable picture of the Asian Church with regards to the youth and student apostolate. All the bishops' conferences that responded to this survey said they have a national-level bishops' commission for youth and students. They also said that they make funds, chaplains, animators and clerical assistance easily available for youths.

2.2 At the diocesan level, almost all who responded to this survey said that they have a mechanism to get feedback from youth. They also reported that personnel were made available for work with the youth. However, a small number did not elaborate on how the mechanism to get feedback from the youth worked and some said that the personnel made available for youth work lacked training.

2.3 Most of the lay apostolate movements which were surveyed said they have a working relationship with, and experienced a general feeling of support from, the youth commission/parish, diocese or national-level youth apostolate coordination.

2.4 From the questions directed to youth and students themselves, 85 percent of the respondents answered favorably the questions of Section D of the survey that asks;

- *Are you happy with youth organizations in your parish/diocese?*
- *Are you able to feel at home and welcome in your parish and parish youth group?*
- *Does the attitude of your Church leaders make you feel that you are truly one of the treasures of the Church?*
- *Do the religious and liturgical services in your parish/group make you feel enriched and your life more meaningful?*
- *Do you realize that you are fully a member of your Church/parish Christian Community?*

2.5 However, it must be noted that those surveyed are people who are active within the Church network. There are many Catholic youths who do not take part in church activities whom this survey did not reach.



### 3.0 Some Reflection — Questions for the Workshop on Youth Based on the Findings of the Survey

This survey did throw up some interesting findings that needs some level of reflection.

#### 3.1 The Question of Priorities

3.1.1 To question B: 5; *How many parishes are there in the diocese and how many of these parishes have youth groups/clubs?*, We found that 54.6 percent of the parishes that responded to this survey had youth groups/clubs. This means that if we visited 100 parishes, the chances are that we will find at least 55 youth groups. However, if we were to remove the data collected from the Philippines (75.7%) and India (71.8%), this number will drop to 30 youth groups for over 100 parishes.

##### *Reflection Question 1*

*The question that has to be asked is this: Are these figures satisfactory? Should not every parish have groups catering to youths, since all parishes have a large percentage of young people?*

3.1.2 From the data collected on *the allocation of funds for youth activities*, a total of 17.8% of the Asian Church diocesan budget is said to be allocated to youth activities. However, 62.3% of the responses related to funding showed that there was no clear policy on funding for youths. Funds are granted only when there is a special request. 37.7% said they give a fixed percentage of their diocesan funds for youth projects. These allocations range from 1% of the diocesan budget to 70%.

##### *Reflection Question 2*

*If indeed youth are a priority for the Church, should there not be a specific allocation of funds for youth activities in the dioceses? Are the financial priorities the same as the pastoral priorities?*

#### 3.2 The Least of Our Brothers and Sisters

Question B:8 asked: *“Who are the youth in contact with you?”* The categories given were university students, young professionals, drop-outs, teenagers and high school students and young workers. From the tabulations of the results to this question we found that most of the respondents were in contact with the teenagers’ group (95.2%). After that came the young workers’ group (80.9%); then came the university group (59.5%),

the drop-outs (54.5%) and last of all, was the young professionals (50%). This would mean that the group the Church is in least contact with is the young professionals.

### **Reflection Question 3**

*In the sociological study, the professionals are seen as very important agents for social change. If the Church is going to contribute to the service of life, in other words be actively involved in the process of transforming Asia to bring about the Kingdom of God, how can we make greater efforts to organize the young professionals in the Church?*

### **3.3 Recommendations from the Lay Apostolate Movements in the Church**

3.3.1 From the questions asked to the lay apostolate movements, the results of question C:5 is worth some attention. The question asks: "What are the most serious difficulties encountered in youth apostolate in the diocese, parishes, schools and working places?"

3.1.2 The most common response was that students and young workers today do not have much time to spend on activities outside studies and work. It was also mentioned that the existing culture of consumerism, materialism and undisciplined lifestyle that is often devoid of moral values is a great obstacle to organizing young people.

3.3.3 The next most commonly identified reason was the lack of encouragement from elders, priests, parents and pastors. Funds too were regarded as a problem, especially by the South Asian region. The other reasons given were the lack of good youth animators, the lack of proper coordination in the Church for youth work; and that the activities organized are often not relevant for the youth.

### **Reflection Questions 4**

*It may be difficult to change the existing culture that is an obstacle to organizing youth.*

*However:*

- a) *Is there anything we can do to get parents, elders, priests and pastors to be more encouraging to lay apostolate movements and youth activities?*
- b) *What can we do to develop good youth animators?*
- c) *What can we do to develop proper coordination for youth work in the Church?*
- d) *What are relevant activities for youth?*
- e) *And how can we develop relevant activities for youth?*



### 3.4 The Areas for Support

To the questions directed to youth and students themselves (section D of the survey), we asked the question: *In what areas do you need more assistance and support?* To this, the most frequent answer was financial assistance and assistance in providing infrastructures for youth activities. After that, came the request for workshops, seminars, formation programs and training sessions. This was followed by the request for better support (moral/spiritual/financial) from the leaders of the Church, namely the priests and bishops. This request was followed by the request for good animators and lay leaders for the youth.

#### Reflection Question 5

- a) *In our diocese/parishes do we try to generate enough funds for youth activities?*
- b) *Do we organize enough formation programs for the young?*
- c) *Do the leaders of the Church (priests and bishops) provide enough support for the youth leaders, youths and for youth-related activities?*
- d) *Are we doing enough to train lay people to be animators for the youth?*

## 4.0 Conclusion

### 4.1 Diagram 1

Lay Apostolate	Youth and Students
<ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. Support of Church leaders</li><li>2. The need for more funds</li><li>3. The need for better/good youth animators and leaders</li><li>4. A more-organized coordination of youth activities</li><li>5. To develop activities which are relevant and interesting for the youth</li></ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. The need for financial assistance</li><li>2. The need for more formation program</li><li>3. The need for support from Church leaders</li><li>4. The need for good youth animators and leaders.</li></ol>

4.2 In conclusion, it can be said that the survey points to the good work the Asian Church has been doing with regards to youth. However, there are areas for development and improvement. It should be noted that the areas for improvement, as suggested by the lay apostolate movement and youth and students themselves, seem to overlap, though their priority

of importance seen to differ (see Diagram 1). Thus, to improve the youth apostolate, questions related to the support the Church leaders give to the youth, the development of good youth animators and a more organized coordination for youth work, and developing more interesting and relevant formation program would be areas to be looked into. The emphasis that parishes give for youth activities, the amount of funds allocated, and having a clear policy on funding youth activities and clarifying the role of young professionals in the Church would be some other areas to be looked at.

4.3 We hope that this Sixth Plenary Assembly of the FABC will be a productive time of search to find better ways of serving the youth of Asia.

## FOOTNOTES

1. The survey questions can be found as Appendix II of this report.
2. Forms collected after the middle of September were not taken into account in the results.
3. Only one case registered in the Philippines.

Compiled and Presented by the Asian Secretariats  
of the International Movement of Catholic Students (IMCS)  
and International Young Christian Students (IYCS)  
October 10, 1994

## APPENDIX II

### QUESTIONNAIRE - SURVEY FOR YOUTH WORKSHOP OF THE SIXTH PLENARY ASSEMBLY OF FABC CARRIED OUT BY THE FABC OFFICE OF LAITY

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Organization/Church/Group \_\_\_\_\_ Country \_\_\_\_\_

#### Questions

##### A) Episcopal Conferences/Chaplains and National Directors

It has been repeated often that youth and students are a special treasure and the hope of the Church. Almost ten years ago the Plenary Assembly in Tokyo made plans and recommendations for pastoral action. These questions are asked within the above parameters.



1. Is there a national-level episcopal commission for youth and students' apostolate?

Yes

No

2. About what percentage of funds is allocated for this commission and apostolate in the past three years?

\_\_\_\_\_ Percentage

3. Is the availability of chaplains and animators, clerical and lay, for the youth, students and young workers a priority for you?

Yes

No

— Or is it left to the discretion of the dioceses and lay apostolate movement?

4. Are the international Catholic lay apostolates recognized and encouraged in the country?

Yes

What international Catholic organizations are recognized? \_\_\_\_\_

No

5. Are young people given space or democratic representation and participation in the episcopal commission for youth?

Yes

No

#### **B) Dioceses**

1. Are there diocesan commission directors/coordinators, diocesan teams, lay animators for the youth apostolate in your diocese?

Yes

No

2. About what percentage of the diocesan budget is allocated for youth and students' apostolate in the past three years?

\_\_\_\_\_ Percentage

3. Are priests and other personnel made available for the youth and students' apostolate in the diocese?

\_\_\_\_\_ Yes

\_\_\_\_\_ No

– If yes, are the priests/personnel involved in youth apostolate in the dioceses trained or provided with opportunities for training in this apostolate?

\_\_\_\_\_ Yes

\_\_\_\_\_ No

4. Is there a mechanism to obtain the feedback and response of youth and students for the youth apostolate in the diocese?

\_\_\_\_\_ Yes

\_\_\_\_\_ No

– If yes, how does this mechanism function? \_\_\_\_\_

5. a) How many parishes in the diocese? \_\_\_\_\_

b) How many of these parishes have youth groups/clubs?

\_\_\_\_\_ Parish(es)

6. Please list the 3 greatest challenges faced regarding youth apostolate in the diocese?

1) \_\_\_\_\_

2) \_\_\_\_\_

3) \_\_\_\_\_

7. What topics has been chosen for the training of youth leaders in the past 3 years?

\_\_\_\_\_ Prayer/Bible Study

\_\_\_\_\_ Leadership

\_\_\_\_\_ Social Analysis and Action

\_\_\_\_\_ Others (Please specify) \_\_\_\_\_



8. Who are the youth in contact with you?

\_\_\_\_\_ University

\_\_\_\_\_ High Schools

\_\_\_\_\_ Young Professionals

\_\_\_\_\_ Young Workers

\_\_\_\_\_ Drop-outs

\_\_\_\_\_ Teenagers

**C) Lay Youth Apostolate Movement**

1. What is the orientation of your movement? Please indicate the key words.

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

2. Is there a working relationship between the lay youth movement, and youth commission/parish, diocese or national-level youth apostolate coordination?

\_\_\_\_\_ Yes

\_\_\_\_\_ No

3. Does the formation provided aim at:

\_\_\_\_\_ Benefiting the parish/diocese as a whole; or

\_\_\_\_\_ The continuity of the movements themselves?

4. Are the views and aspirations of the youth and students incorporated into the goals and objective of the lay apostolate work places?

\_\_\_\_\_ Yes

\_\_\_\_\_ No

5. What are the most serious difficulties encountered in youth apostolate in the dioceses, parishes, schools and working places? Please list 3 constant obstacles:

1) \_\_\_\_\_

2) \_\_\_\_\_

3) \_\_\_\_\_

**D) Youth and Students**

1. Are you happy with the youth organizations in your parish/diocese?  
 Yes  
 No
  
2. Do you feel at home and welcome in your parish and parish youth group?  
 Yes  
 No
  
3. Does the attitude of your Church leaders make you to feel that you are truly one of the "treasures" of the Church?  
 Yes  
 No
  
4. Do the religious and liturgical services in your parish/group make you feel enriched and your life more meaningful?  
 Yes  
 No
  
5. Do you realize that you are fully a member of your Church/parish Christian community?  
 Yes  
 No
  
6. Does being a Christian help you to get more involved in the life of others?  
 Yes  
 No
  
7. What would you like to see happening in your Church?  
1) \_\_\_\_\_  
2) \_\_\_\_\_  
3) \_\_\_\_\_



8. What are the 3 areas where you felt very supported by the Church leaders?

- 1) \_\_\_\_\_
- 2) \_\_\_\_\_
- 3) \_\_\_\_\_

9. In what areas do you think you need more assistance and support?

- 1) \_\_\_\_\_
- 2) \_\_\_\_\_
- 3) \_\_\_\_\_

10. What activities did you have during the last 3 years which were organized together with other religious groups? \_\_\_\_\_

– With which groups did you organize together?

\_\_\_\_\_ Buddhists

\_\_\_\_\_ Muslims

\_\_\_\_\_ Protestants

\_\_\_\_\_ Others \_\_\_\_\_

11. What are 2-3 suggestions would you like to give to our Asian bishops so that youth ministry can be of better service to life in Asia?

- 1) \_\_\_\_\_
- 2) \_\_\_\_\_
- 3) \_\_\_\_\_

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