

**THE SPIRIT AT WORK IN ASIA TODAY**

A Document of the Office of Theological Concerns  
of the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences

**INTRODUCTION**

"Come, Oh Creator Spirit" (*Veni Creator Spiritus*) today is a hymn that swells up from the heart of Asia and finds expression on the lips of millions of its daughters and sons. As we Asians are facing the marvellous new things unfolding before our eyes today in every realm of life, we experience the irresistible power of that Spirit "blowing where it wills" crossing in one divine sweep, across all kinds of barriers and boundaries. The Spirit moves on, and in its movement it wants us to follow it, so that we may see, experience and savour the sublimity of the divine realities for which Asia has always been longing. It leads us, at the same time, to the arcane mysteries of all life in its every shade and form, filling our quest for the human and the cosmic with a new vigour and force.

On the face of the Spirit, coming fresh upon us today, we recognise the power with which generations of our foremothers and fathers have been familiar during the millennial history of this continent. It is especially, the life and experience of the poor and the marginalised peoples of Asia that has been much attuned to the world of the Spirit as we find in their many religio-cultural beliefs, rites and expression. The Spirit binds us in a marvellous way with all those who have left the indelible imprint of their spirit,

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This theological pastoral reflection has been prepared by the Office of Theological Concerns (formerly called the Theological Advisory Commission) of the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences (FABC). The working group of the Office is composed of members from the bishops' conferences and associate members of FABC. This presentation represents the work of study and consultation of the members over a period of two years, finally approved in their meeting in Sampran, May 1997. The document is offered solely as a basis of a continuing discussion with the wider community of pastors and professional scholars. The members of the Office of Theological Concerns earnestly invite their readers to share with them their observations and criticisms in the interest of advancing the concerns of theological and pastoral reflection. Comments can be sent to FABC, 16 Caine Road, Hong Kong.

heart and mind in innumerable forms on our cultures and on our traditions. It is the same Spirit of God that Asia wants to rely on in shaping its future destiny. At the threshold of a new millennium, our Asian local Churches invoke the Spirit, knowing that its transformative and creative power is what we need most to be able to respond to the new and unprecedented challenges the continent is facing, and thus become truly Churches of the Spirit.

As disciples of Jesus Christ in Asia, we want to follow his path as one filled with the power of the Spirit of God. It is the same Spirit which opens our eyes and leads us to experience and confess its singular presence in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus. "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me . . ." (Lk. 4: 18). The more we follow the leading of the Spirit, the deeper and closer will also be our understanding of the mystery of Jesus Christ. It also helps us to relate in a harmonious and integral way the universal plan of God manifested in Jesus Christ with our Asian history and experiences. This broad and open vision is what we find running through the numerous reflections and statements of FABC.

This modest document of the Office of Theological Concerns is an attempt to deepen further the insights and orientations of FABC on the Spirit, with a view to help the Asian Churches in their pastoral commitment and renewal. In a way, this document continues our earlier work, in as much it seeks to bring out the implicit pneumatology in our previous documents relating to inter-religious dialogue, local Church, Church and politics, and the theology of harmony. During our deliberations on the above themes, we were often led to widen our horizons so as to be able to follow the working of the Spirit of God both in our experiences within the Church as well as in those of our context.

We want our reflections to be in communion with the local Churches the world over who will all be celebrating the Year 1998 as the Year of the Holy Spirit, in preparation for the new millennium. On this occasion, it is our wish that the document serve the Church, particularly the Asian local Churches, to bring about a renewed awareness, acknowledgement and experience of the mystery of the Holy Spirit who accompanies our journey of faith, hope and love.

The first two chapters of the document reflect respectively on the working of the Spirit in other religio-cultural traditions and in the socio-political realities of our continent. The third chapter is devoted to the study of the Spirit as we experience it through the Biblical tradition. It is followed by a kind of survey of the Spirit's working in the Church and throughout its history. In the light of all these reflections, the final chapter highlights certain perspectives which appear to us to be very significant from an Asian theological perspective. The document concludes with a few pastoral recommendations.

## 1. THE SPIRIT AT WORK IN VARIOUS RELIGIO-CULTURAL TRADITIONS OF ASIA

The Second Vatican Council spoke of “all people of good will in whose hearts grace works in an unseen way. For since Christ died for all, and since the ultimate vocation of humanity is in fact one and divine, we ought to believe that the Holy spirit in a manner known only to God offers to everyone the possibility of being associated with this Paschal mystery.” (GS 22) In our reflection on the Spirit at work in various religio-cultural traditions of Asia, we try to discern the presence of the Spirit as experienced, believed, imaged and symbolised by believers themselves of these traditions.

### 1.1 Hinduism

In this section, we turn first to Hinduism. We briefly review concepts that are very much part of Hindu belief and practice and which at the same time evoke resonances with the understanding of the Holy Spirit in Christianity.

1.1.1 *Atman*: In Hinduism *atman* means “the Self”, “the ultimate Divine subject”. Some point to the meaning of breath contained in *atman*. This Hindu concept of *atman* rooted in the Vedas, but mostly Upanishadic and Vedantic, signifies the ultimate Reality, the Absolute, and hence does not resonate with our understanding of the Holy Spirit in Christian faith. However, it is interesting to note that Indian Christians, especially in North India, have used the Hindu term *atman*, with the adjective *pavitra*, for the Holy Spirit.

1.1.2 *Prana (Breath)*: This is an interesting concept that reminds us of the Hebrew idea of *ru'ah* which literally means breath and *pneuma* in Greek signifying the same. In the Bible, the latter two terms are used for the spirit.

*Prana* (used both as singular and plural) means “breath of life”. It is pre-upanishadic in origin and signifies life. In early Hinduism its meaning is metaphysical. It is identified with life. Later *prana* is used in its literal sense in the yoga exercise *pranayama* — control of breath. The earlier metaphysical meaning gets lost. There is another word for *prana*, namely *asu*. In its earlier meaning *prana* evokes resonance with the biblical meaning of the Holy spirit as breath and as breath of life or life itself. It is strange that Indian Christian theology did not consider this term in the theology of the Holy Spirit.

There are four more concepts of Hinduism which evoke rich resonance with the Spirit as understood in Christianity, namely, *antarayamin*, *ananda*, *sakti* and *agni*.

1.1.3 *Antarayamin* (“the inner controller” or “indweller”). It is an Upanishadic concept, signifying the being who is immanent. It means “inner controller” or “inner director”, “inspirer”, one who leads the individual soul to salvation. Sometimes it is identified with the Supreme Spirit as guiding and regulating humankind. *Antarayami* indwells, directs and regulates all changes and motions in the world. This concept is more dynamic than *atman*. It resonates well with Christian understanding of the Holy Spirit, especially, with the way St. Paul speaks of the Spirit (cf. Rom. 8). This term is used in Christian hymnology (Hindi).

1.1.4 *Ananda*: *Ananda* means bliss or joy. In all Hindu religious and philosophical traditions *ananda* is ontological, characteristic of Brahman, the Absolute, with other characteristics such as *sat* (being) and *cit* (consciousness). It is an outflow of reality beyond categories of knowledge. This concept belongs to the long tradition of the Upanishads. The human being is supposed to be made up of five coverings or sheaths called *koshas* of which the innermost *kosha* is *ananda*.

In the Christian tradition, joy is associated with the Holy Spirit. The spirit is the joy of God (see the writings cf. Brahmabhandav Upadhyaya). The Christian tradition has accepted the expression *saccidananda*, as present in late Vedanta and medieval Hindu *bhakti* literature, giving it a fuller meaning to signify the mystery of the Trinity. In this formula *sat* (meaning “being of existence”) comes to signify the Father, *cit* (meaning “consciousness”) to signify the Word, the Son and *ananda* (bliss) comes to signify the Holy Spirit.

*Ananda* belongs to the Absolute (Brahman) on the ontological level. It is not contingent on the Absolute. Even in the human being it resides in the core of his or her existence. Hence *ananda* resonates richly with the Christian understanding of the Spirit as joy (cf. Lk, Jn, and St. Paul in the NT).

The western tradition, both Greek and Christian, concentrated on *bonum*: the Indian (Hindu) tradition on *ananda*. In this sense in the thought of the *Bṛhadaranyaka Upanishad*, creation is participation in *ananda*. *Ananda* belongs to the heart of reality. It is one of the most interesting concepts of Hindu theology which evoke deep resonance and bring enrichment to the Christian understanding of the Holy Spirit.

1.1.5 *Sakti*: *Sakti* means “power”, “energy” and like *rua’h* is feminine. Its occurrence is frequent in popular Hinduism, Saivism, Vaisnavism, and also in the Dravidian and Brahmanic traditions. The origins and development of the concept of *sakti* as a cosmogonic and cosmological principle of power or energy are complex. Its development and articulation as a cosmogonic and cosmological concept is quite late and is primarily outside the

mainstream of the Vedic-Brahmanic tradition. In Hinduism, as referred to above, *sakti* is often mythologised, but the myth is rich in metaphysics and theology.

a. *Sakti* is the female principle or consort or aspect of a male divinity, particularly manifesting his ability to create. It is creative power, female consort of Siva and inseparable from the one reality of Siva. Siva-*Sakti* is one reality (binitarian).

b. There is also the idea of *sakti* as a cosmogonic power possessed by a single deity (Deva/Isvara). It signifies the embodiment of power, of ability to create the world without its being identified as female.

c. There is also the notion of *sakti* being an abstract, all pervasive power inherent in creation.

In our consideration of Hinduism and the Holy Spirit, *sakti* as power and energy, an inseparable principle (though imaged as a female consort) of the deity (Siva) is fruitful and evokes a new resonance with our understanding of the Spirit. In the *Svetasvatara Upanishad* (4.1) God, who is one, is described as bringing about the manifestation of the diverse world by the application of this power *sakti*. In the same Upanishad, *sakti* is used to denote God's power (*devatma sakti* [1.3]). Though *Sakti* is mythologised, it is an inseparable ontological principle of the Deity signifying power which is dynamic, creative and feminine. In Tantric literature arising out of the Vedic Brahmanical tradition, a fully articulated conception of *sakti* as a cosmogonic and cosmological power identified as an omnipresent and omnipotent goddess develops.

The Absolute is thus polarised as female and male. The female pole is energy, *Sakti*. The male aspect of God is conscious, but non-active without the female energy principle *Sakti*. It is the supreme *Sakti* without whom God cannot act. It is the aspect of the Godhead responsible for the creation of world.

In Saivism, Siva (the male) is united to *Sakti*, called either Parvati or Durga forming an inseparable unity. In the Vaisnava tradition, *sakti* becomes the female consort, Sri or Lakshmi (Goddess of wealth). In the same way, Sarasvati, as symbol of learning and wisdom adorns the seats of learning in general and centres of Hindu educational institutions in India. The important point is that *sakti* as creative power and energy forms inseparable part of the Deity responsible for creation and the activity of God. It resonates with the creative dynamism of the Holy Spirit in Christianity: for Paul *dynamis* is attributed to the Spirit.

In later Saivite *bhakti* tradition, we have a story of Thiru, Gnanasambandar, according to which *Sakti* as Parvati or a Uma comes to feed the hungry child

Sambandar with the milk of wisdom. Fed by the milk of wisdom, Sambandar pours out his mystical sentiments in the poetry of Thevaram. This story evokes in us a resonance with the spirit of wisdom which the Spirit pours into the heart of believers. Thus the feminine *Sakti* is not only creative, liberative energy and power but also source of wisdom finding expression in the mystic poets of the Saivite tradition.

1.1.6 *Agni*. At the level of symbols in Hinduism, the concept of *Agni* (fire) as *pavaka* (purifier) is very significant. In Vedic terms, *pavaka* could mean both fire and wind. Here we just point to the potential of *Agni* as *pavaka* to symbolise the Spirit in Christian Tradition.

### 1.1.7 Conclusion

Reflecting on the Holy Spirit and Hinduism, one finds concepts such as *atman*, *prana*, *antarayamin*, *ananda* and *sakti* that evoke resonance in meaning with the Christian understanding of the Holy Spirit. Of the above mentioned concepts, *antarayami(n)*, *ananda* and *sakti* have deeper resonance with the Christian concept of the spirit of God.

However, one can ask: was the Spirit (apart from *concepts* congenial with the Spirit) present in the Indian Tradition? Yes. If we are able to discern the signs of the Spirit we can read the history of Hinduism as a Holy history, where the Spirit has led our brothers and sisters to the depths of the mystery of God and leads them towards Christ. The Second Vatican council in *Nostra Aetate* no. 2. speaks of "that hidden power which hovers over the course of things and over the events of human life." (Here see also Gal. 3:23-26; Jn. 4:38; Wisdom 1:7; Rom. 11:32-36; Acts 14:16f). The early nature symbolism and apparent polytheism of the Vedas becomes purified by the strong affirmation in the Upanishads of the above without a second (*ekam eva advitiam*). The metaphysical depth is imbued by an ethical concern and a spirit of detachment characteristic of Buddhism and Jainism. Out of this encounter the monotheistic creeds of a personal God (Vaisnavism and Saivism) emerge, with a relation of love to the world. The devotional trend and the monotheistic faith are strengthened by the arrival of Islam and the later *bhakti* trends. Meanwhile the knowledge and love of the name of Jesus was present in India from the earliest century: That name is received with devotion by the Hindu tradition in the Renaissance of the 19th and 20th centuries. The actual teaching of Jesus enters, more and more, the centre of the Hindu and national consciousness and finds an articulation in the Preamble of the Indian Constitution where the people of India affirm their faith in justice, freedom, equality and fraternity of all citizens.

Surveying the contemporary scene of Hinduism, we see both positive and negative signs of Hindu revival. Many Hindu religious leaders, thinkers and artists move in the direction of a humanist renaissance of Hinduism

suiting to the religio-cultural pluralism of India. Christians can discern the Spirit at work in these movements and aspirations and become open to generous co-operation with the stirrings of the Spirit who blows where He wills. Harmony and communion between religious believers is also a fruit of the Spirit.

## 1.2 Buddhism

### 1.2.1 The Approach

One cannot talk about a concept of the "Spirit" in Buddhism and any attempt to do so, or to try to "find the idea of the Spirit in Buddhism", would be an exercise in distortion of the very essence of Buddhism. Buddhism must be taken on its own terms and understood within the framework of its own concepts. Buddhists insist that one must approach a study of Buddhism with a Right Motive, and this motive is ultimately desire to attain Enlightenment. *Dharma* is a vehicle of emancipation. It has been compared to a raft that ferries one across of the waters of birth-and-death to the farther shore of *Nirvana*, a vehicle which carries one across to the transcendent. Hence *Dharma* is something that must be experienced rather than studied. Ultimately to understand what Buddhism is all about one must walk the way, one must experience. Yet there is an intellectual content which can form a legitimate subject of study provided one remembers that the spatial and temporal forms which one studies are mere pointers veiling the reality. Further, one must realise that there are important differences between Christianity and Buddhism which stem not merely from problems of religious language, but from deep structural differences; and one must respect the differences.

Above all one must not approach Buddhism with pre-conceived theories of the nature of the transcendent and the nature of phenomenal reality. These would preclude any understanding. As a path to be walked, as a way to be experienced, Buddhism does not have dogmas; but there are two basic concepts that run through all of the various schools of Buddhism and which are essential to even the most rudimentary understanding of Buddhism. The first of these is *anatma*, the idea that things have no "own being", no permanent identity or unchanging selfhood. The Mahayana philosophers would use the term *a-svabhava* for all of phenomenal reality, that is to say, nothing is "self-existent". This applies to all phenomena, including the human person, human consciousness and human mental processes. The Buddha would accept the Brahmanical concept of rebirth (*karma-samsara*) but insist that the great illusion is that there is a permanent, enduring self (*atman*) which passes from one life to the next. Secondly, Buddhism does not admit a personal God. The Buddha in fact taught that belief in a personal God and an enduring, unchanging self were rationalisations of desires, of our craving for love and protection, our

attachment to our own personalities and our thirst for life. If one sets out to “find God” in Buddhism, the result will be either frustrated disappointment or distortion of the tradition.

Where then is the meeting point? Not on the level of these concepts, but rather on the level of experience of human life and the human quest for the transcendent. The fact that a Christian also belongs to a tradition which affirms the transcendent, the existence of a spiritual world beyond the world of physical senses and the rational mind, should make the Christian open to a different conception and experience of that reality. A Christian should be willing to give consideration to the Buddha’s claim that he had achieved an experience of the transcendent himself and that by following his teaching others too might achieve it. The meeting point will be beyond concepts, dogmas, symbols and rituals at the level of experience.

### 1.2.2 The Four Noble Truths

The Buddha’s claim is that as he sat under the tree in Gaya he had an experience, an awakening or *enlightenment* in which he experienced the true meaning of human life. He explained this experience to his followers in the “Four Noble Truths”. The first of these truths was *sarva dukha*, “all is *dukha*”. *Dukha* is usually translated as “suffering”, hence human life is basically “suffering”. The word does mean suffering and would include all of the things we would ordinarily include under this term: physical suffering, pain, death, the loss of a loved one, poverty, social and economic oppression, etc. But it is much more radical than this. It is the realisation that human life ends in a kind of existential frustration. One spends one’s life acquiring, but no matter how fortunate one may be in his or her possession of material goods, fame, friends, family, intellectual attainments one never seems to have enough and ultimately one will grow ill, old and finally lose it all in death. The second truth is the realisation that one experiences this frustration because there is an all consuming “desire” burning at the core of our being which is insatiable. The word the Buddha actually used was “thirst” (*trnsa*).

Thirdly he said that he realised that this burning desire at the center of one’s being does finally come to an end. He compared this desire to the flame of a candle or a small oil lamp. Finally the oil runs out and the flame simply goes out — *nirvana*. The term is a negative term and means quite literally “extinguishing”. Further definition the Buddha refused to give. People, of course, asked for a definition, and scholars ever since have tried to give a definition, but the Buddha did not, and this is important to remember. What happens is that this thirst, which is the root cause of all human suffering and hence the cause of the series of births, finally comes to an end. Then there is no more re-birth and no more suffering. People asked if *nirvana* was something and he responded “it is not something”. “Ah,”



people would reply, "then *nirvana* is nothing." He responded "No, *nirvana* is not nothing." This second response is often forgotten with the result that Buddhism is described as "a negative religion". It is not a negative religion; the same Buddha who described this ultimate state as "extinguishing" went on to further describe it:

There is, monks, the stage where there is neither earth nor water nor fire nor wind nor the stage of infinity or space nor the stage of the infinity of consciousness nor the stage of neither consciousness nor non-consciousness; neither this world nor the other world nor sun and moon. There, monks, I say there is neither coming nor going nor staying nor passing away nor arising. Without support or going on or basis is it. This indeed is the end of pain.

There is, monks, an unborn, an unbecome, an unmade, an uncompounded; if monks there were not here this unborn, unbecome, unmade, uncompounded, there would not here be an escape from the born, the become, the made, the compounded. But because there is an unborn, an unbecome, an unmade, an uncompounded, therefore, there is an escape from the born, the become, the made, the compounded.

(*Udana*, VIII 11 and 3)

There is nothing negative about this; it is rather a middle way between the affirmation of the absolute existence of phenomena and nihilism. It is this concept of a "middle way" that would characterise the Buddha's teaching and also the practice he would advocate (a "middle way" between a luxurious life style and an unreasonable asceticism that destroys health). He has not given a definition of *nirvana* but rather a description of the subjective state one experiences when he reaches this state. A definition or further positive description of *nirvana* he felt would be pure speculation. Since one who has attained this state and finally dies does not return; there is no one who has experienced ultimate *nirvana* and returned to give a definition. Why speculate about what one has no experience of?

The fourth truth he experienced was the fact that there is a way, a path one can follow to attain this enlightenment or experience of *nirvana*. This is the famous "Eight-Fold Path" of Buddhism, so called because there are eight aspects to the practice. These eight can be summarised under three headings: knowledge (*prajna*), discipline or morality (*sila*), meditation (*samadhi*). Hence one needs experiential knowledge of these four truths and of the transitory nature of all phenomena, a good moral life, and a disciplined mind leading to ultimate realisation of these truths in meditation.

This is what one might call basic or essential Buddhism; and all Buddhists of whatever school will accept these "Four Noble Truths" and "The Eightfold Path" as the bedrock of Buddhism. Differences are mainly differences in the means used to attain the ends of Buddhism and the understanding of some of these key concepts.

First and foremost, then, Buddhism is a way of liberation. It is not a way that disdains or contemns this material world or “the flesh”, but rather a way which leads one to a realisation of the essential transitoriness of all phenomena and hence frees one to engage life, to come to grips with the world, freed from the need to ever acquire and hence free from the compulsions which ordinarily cloud one’s mind and judgement. It is not a flight from the world but an invitation to reach out to the world. The Buddha’s life was a long one, and he spent the next forty years or so after his enlightenment, not secluded in a monastery, but walking the whole of North India to share with others, to point out to any who were interested the way which leads to this ineffable experience.

### 1.2.3 The Four Sublime States

As one walks the way one begins to experience *upeksa* (a tranquillity, a peace of mind, an equanimity) which frees one of the habit of blind reaction flowing from desire. Then one can take positive action which is creative, productive and beneficial for oneself and for all others. Along with this peace of mind arise three other qualities of a pure mind: good will, a love (*maitri*) that seeks the benefit of others without expecting anything in return, *karuna* (compassion) for others in their failings and sufferings and *mudita* (sympathetic joy) in their success and good fortune. The key is *maitri*; for without love, compassion turns to contempt, sympathetic joy to vicarious satisfaction, and equanimity to heartless indifference.

This active aspect of Buddhism reached its deepest expression in the Mahayana tradition which evolved the ideal of the *bodhisattva* (“enlightened being”), one who is bent on attaining Supreme Enlightenment, not merely for his own sake, but for the sake of all sentient beings. He refuses to simply enjoy his attainment and pass from this world but returns aeon after aeon to be of service to sentient beings as long as there are those who need his assistance:

Like a fire his mind constantly blazes up into works for others;  
At the same time he always remains merged in the calm of the trances and  
formless attainments (*Ratnagotravibhaga, 1:73*)

The *bodhisattva* takes a series of solemn promises which are often summarised as four:

1. To save all beings (from difficulties)
2. To destroy all evil passions
3. To learn the Truth and teach others
4. To lead all beings towards Buddhahood

Though the *bodhisattva* is usually considered an exclusively Mahayana concept, it is precisely this concept which provides the link with

the earlier tradition and its insistence on Compassion as the necessary complement to the attainment of wisdom through the practice of the eight-fold path.

#### 1.2.4 Devotional Buddhism

The later schools of devotional Buddhism, so popular in China, Korea and Japan, gave rise to a series of transcendent Buddhas and *Bodhisattvas* to whom the people have great devotion. The most well known of these Buddhas, Amitabha (or, Amida Buddha) is addressed in the following terms:

Oh Amitabha, incomparable light,  
Oh Amitabha, infinite splendour  
so pure, so tranquil,  
so sweet and consoling,  
Oh how we desire to be reborn in thine abode!

Thou whose power is limitless  
Thou to whom the beings of every world have recourse,  
How beautiful is thy Kingdom,  
Where the wind strews flowers beneath the feet of the blessed!  
Oh how we desire to be reborn in thine abode!

How beautiful is thy kingdom,  
Where sweetest music is heard  
Where most precious perfumes emit their fragrance  
Where all beings are holy!  
Oh how we desire to be reborn in thine abode!

Madly, through countless existences  
Have we renewed the karman which binds us to earth  
Oh look upon us, kindly light, Henceforth!  
That we may no longer lose wisdom of heart!

We exalt thy knowledge and thy works,  
We desire that all things may progress towards thee!  
That no obstacle may prevent any being  
From being reborn in peace and happiness in thy abode!  
We offer thee all that we have, all that we are.  
In exchange, grant that we may be reborn in thine abode.  
Hail, Oh inscrutable splendour!

With all our heart and with all our confidence we bow down before thee!  
(see L. Weiger, *Historie des croyances*, p. 594-5.)

Pre-eminent among the *bodhisattvas* stands Avalokitesvara, the embodiment of compassion (*karunamaya*). He ranks as a great object of

devotion and as a kind of savior who leads one through the suffering of this world to the heaven of Amitabha. His origin is traced to the compassionate gaze of Amitabha Buddha:

The Lord Amitayus [Amitabha] makes a smile of thirty six nyutas of kotis of rays, which rays having issued from the circle of his mouth light up the thousand kotis of Buddha countries. And all of these rays having returned there again settle on the head of the lord; gods and men produce (perceive) the delight, because they have seen there the light of him. There rises the Buddha-son, glorious, he indeed the mighty Avalokitesvara. (F. Max Muller, ed., *The Sacred Books of the East* Vol. 49, p. 48.)

His two most important characteristics are his compassion through which he reaches out to help all those who invoke his name and his assumption of different forms according to the needs and dispositions of people in various places and ages in order to help and lead them to the Truth. In Avalokitesvara the Mahayana Buddhists have a personal saviour whom they can invoke and in whom they can take refuge. Devotional works call upon him to save people from all sorts of dangers: arson, murder, captivity and slavery, forest fires, enraged animals, snakes, shipwreck, disease and death. Wherever Mahayana Buddhism spread he is found. In Cambodia the king was once looked upon as an incarnation of Avalokitesvara. At Angkor Tom the images of Avalokitesvara bear the face of the King Jayavarmana VII. The rulers of Yunan from the tenth to the thirteenth century worshipped Avalokitesvara whom they believed to have been incarnate in the Indian monk of the seventh century credited with the introduction of Buddhism into that country. They firmly believed that Avalokitesvara puts on the cloak of flesh and blood, and walks the earth in human form for the sake of suffering humanity.

To this very day, throughout the far east, he ranks as an object of devotion second only to Amitabha. Chinese Buddhism emphasised the maternal characteristics of Avalokitesvara to such an extent that he was eventually metamorphosed into a female figure known as Kwan Yin. In Japan he is known as Kannon — the “Regarder of the Cries of the World”. In Tibet, of course, he is paramount as Chen-ra-zi. The Dalai Lama himself is a manifestation of the form of Avalokitesvara known as Sadaksari Lokesvara, the personification of the constantly repeated prayer “*Om mane padme Hum.*”

### 1.2.5 Conclusion

For so many centuries Buddhism has nourished the spiritual life of almost the whole of Asia bearing the fruits of sympathetic love, compassion, joy, and peace of mind in the lives of millions of Asia's people. As Christians come to share something of the vision and experience of the Buddha as lived out in the lives of the people with whom they share the

Asian heritage, what can they perceive but the work of the Spirit which they too have experienced?

### 1.3 Confucianism-Taoism

#### 1.3.1 Confucianism

##### 1.3.1.1 Master Confucius (551.479)

Confucius lived in the Chou dynasty which shaped the characteristics of the Chinese empire but which was weakened in Confucius' time by the division of the empire into several powerful states. Master Confucius was convinced that if he became a minister of one of these states he had the necessary qualities and preparation to restore the Chou dynasty, but no head of state wanted to give him such power and dignity. Then he went his way of educating people for government office. According to the Se Machien's book *Shih Chi* ("Record of History") Confucius had 3000 disciples among them 72 closely related to him. These disciples had long and extensive contact with the Master and later on recorded their conversations with him in a book called today *Analecta Confuciana* (*Lunyu*). The most important contribution of Confucius to Chinese culture has been the education of every kind of people and the spread of learning not only of morality, but also of liberal arts, history, poetry and human behaviour. The famous eulogy attributed to Confucius in most Confucius temples consists of four Chinese characters *you chiao wu lei*, i.e. teaching any one without discrimination. The respect and veneration paid by Confucius' disciples after the Master's death surpassed by far all other school founders. In this sense *Lunyu* is similar to the Christian gospels both in content, mainly the relationship of a master with his disciples, and in the way of becoming a book, a living memory of deeds and words recorded and preserved by a group of faithful disciples. That is why a reading of *Lunyu* in a way similar to the reading of the gospels is inspiring and mutually enriching. It is mutually enriching in the sense, that as the Old Testament is not only fulfilled by the NT, but also illuminates and complements the NT (Vat. II, *Dei Verbum*), so *Lunyu* is saying many things about teacher-disciples not said in the gospels. This is made possible because the same Spirit was and is working in the OT, in the Gospels and in the ancient sages, especially before the Christian era.

When Confucius reached the age of seventy he said, with a little pride but much sincerity, that he was able to act according to the dictates of his heart without transgressing any commandment (*Confucian Analects* or *Lunyu* II 4. Recall St. Augustine's "*Ama et fac quod vis*".) Confucius' life and teaching have influenced China's history for 2,500 years and its influence has somehow spilled over into the neighbouring countries also. It is unthinkable that such a human spirit did not have the Spirit working in him.

### 1.3.1.2 Confucius' Sense of Mission

In his lifetime Confucius twice narrowly escaped being killed. Precisely in such critical moments of life and death he expressed the fearless confidence that he would be saved because of the mission entrusted to him: "If Heaven has given me power, what can this man called Huen Tsei do to me." (VII 22) Or again, "After the death of Wen Wang, is not *wen* (the spirit) here in me? If Heaven wanted *wen* to perish, then posterity would not see *wen*. If Heaven doesn't want this to happen what can the people of Kuan do?". (IX 5) Happily in both cases Confucius played the role of a true prophet; he and his disciples came safely out of the danger.

### 1.3.1.3 Confucius' Openness to a Continuous Process of Learning

The first three sentences of *Lunyu* are quite revealing. The Master says: "1) What a joyful thing to learn and to repeat what one has learned from time to time. 2) What a pleasure to have a friend coming from afar. 3) What a gentle person is that man who is ignored but bears no resentment at all." The first sentence can be interpreted as referring to oneself, the second to one's relationships with others, and the third to Heaven, because, in another passage, Confucius says: "It is Heaven who know me." (XIV 37) Again, in another context, he says, "In a village of ten families it is not hard to find someone as faithful as I, but not easy to find one so eager to learn as I am." (V 28)

### 1.3.1.4 Confucius' Humility in Acknowledging his Limitations

One of his most famous sayings goes: "When you know something, say you know it. When you do not know something, say you do not know it. That is wisdom." (I 117) In fact that was what Confucius did himself as, for example, when a disciple asked about the service of ghosts and spirits. His answer was, "If I am not able to serve human beings properly, what use is it to speak about service of ghosts and spirits.?" The disciple insisted, "What about death?" The Master answered, "I have not sufficient knowledge of life, how can I have it about death?" (XI 11) One of Confucius' aspirations was expressed in this way, "If in the morning I hear the Tao (*way*), in the evening I shall die peacefully." (IV 8) This statement shows his consciousness of and acknowledgement that he had not yet heard the Tao, and at the same time his readiness to depart from the world once he has heard the "way", like old Simeon of Luke's Gospel.

### 1.3.1.5 Confucius' Discernment of Spirits among his Disciples and his Utter Honesty in Dealing with Them

In countless conversations with his disciples and in answering questions addressed to him, Confucius revealed himself as an accomplished master in discerning the spirits within himself and in his disciples. It is not

hard to discover similarities between the disciples of Confucius and those of Jesus. Tzu Lu is like Peter: courageous and outspoken but with a tendency to speak before reflecting. He became a minister later and was killed, as foretold by the Master. (XI 12) Yen Yuan was like John, often praised by the Master as a perfect disciple but unfortunately he died young. There was even a Judas among his disciples, Jan Qiu, who was the financial administrator for a rich minister. He was repudiated by Confucius because of his lack of compassion towards the poor (XI 16).

### 1.3.1.6 Confucius' Respect for Divinity and the Afterlife

Confucius spoke seldom about divinity, because he was conscious of not having direct revelation from God (after the manner of the Old Testament prophets). Hence, he usually avoided the issue, but on some ten occasions, when he could not avoid speaking about Heaven, he showed great respect. We have seen this twice when he was in danger of death. Once when he was sick and close to death, his disciples told him they were praying for him. He answered, "Is that so? I have been praying now for a long time." (VII 34) SelfóothersóHeaven are interrelated in the following saying of the Master, "I want to stand by myself and make others stand; I want to reach the goal myself and help others reach the goal; learning here below and reach the goal above, I am known only by Heaven." (XIV 37) A minister had a beautiful wife who was sick and Confucius visited her and talked with her. The disciples gossiped about the master, and Confucius said, "If I had some ulterior motive, Heaven punish me, Heaven punish me!" (VI 26) When his beloved disciple Yen Yuan died, Confucius cried bitterly, "Such a man died at such an age! It is Heaven who makes me perish! It is Heaven who makes me perish!" (XI 8) Regarding the afterlife Confucius said nothing; but he paid great respect to the dead and composed himself duly when he saw a funeral passing by (X 160). He helped financially for the burial of a poor man in the neighbourhood (X 15). Such a humble and open Spirit was all ready to receive One who is "Way, Truth and Life" (Jn 14:6). No wonder Matteo Ricci and his companions found Confucianism most adaptable to Christianity. Master Confucius can be seen as an agent of the Spirit before the coming of Christ.

## 1.3.2 The Taoist Tradition<sup>1</sup>

### 1.3.2.1 The Founder

According to tradition, Taoism originated with a man named Lao Tzu born about 604 B.C. However, the historicity of Lao Tzu is uncertain

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<sup>1</sup> All quotations from the book of *Tao Te Ching* are taken from Herrymon Maurer, *Tao The Way Of The Ways*: Translation/Commentary (England: Wildwood House Limited, 1986), pp. 45-81.

because all we have is based on legends about him. He was a solitary recluse and remained practically unknown. Nevertheless, his influence has been enormous. His ideas are contained in the book *Tao Te Ching* which continues to inspire those who seek for an authentic spiritual liberation through a different way of looking at life. The philosophy of Taoism reflects the workings of the Spirit in humankind's attempts to seek for harmony and meaning in existence.

### 1.3.2.2 The Way Of The Tao

The opening verse of *Tao Te Ching*, reads "If Tao can be Taoed, it's not Tao. If its name can be named, it's not its name." (Ch 1) Indeed, "He who speaks does not know. He who knows does not speak." (Ch 56) Thus, the first difficulty in speaking about the Tao is the problem of language and meaning. The Tao which is the ineffable and the ultimate is beyond language. At best, it can only be described in imagery, metaphors, paradoxes and in cryptic terms.

What then is the Tao? The word *Tao* literally means the Path or the Way. But more specifically, it is the Way of the Cosmos. It has a twofold aspect, namely, Wu (non-being) and Yu (being). Hence Tao is the Mystery, both transcendent and immanent.

Being transcendent, Tao as the Wu is first and foremost the way of Ultimate Reality. Being formless and hidden, it cannot be conceived. It is also fathomless and beyond human understanding. Nevertheless, this nameless, ineffable and transcendent Tao is the ultimate source of all, the ground and origin of everything and the Unoriginated. This is expressed thus: "Tao bore one, one bore two, two bore three; Three bore the ten thousand things." (Ch 42) It is the Mystery of all mysteries.

Being immanent, Tao as the Yu manifests itself in the universe. As the manifestation of Tao in form, Yu is derived from Wu. It incarnates itself in the world by giving life to all things and hence can be called the Mother of the World, the Eternal Law of the World and the Spirit of the universe. It must be noted that the Tao does not 'create' but things emerge as a result of Tao.

Yu in turn is the product of two forces or principles, Yin and Yang which together are called Qi. Hence, we say that the One gives birth to Two. These forces are complete opposites. In their eternal interaction, they generate energy (qi) which becomes a life-giving force in the entire creation, causing all to come to birth. It is of divine origin; it vivifies and unifies the world. Two then gives birth to the Three, namely, Heaven, Earth and Humanity. This triad is the form by which all living things come into actual existence. By understanding this cosmological progression of the origin of life and by returning to it, the Taoist arrives at the Ultimate. From



the Taoist cosmology, the whole Taoist approach to the way of life; who we are and our purpose in life is derived.

### 1.3.2.3 Living Out The Tao In One's Daily Life

#### 1.3.2.3.1 Seeking Unity With The Ultimate Reality

*Union With The Tao:* The Taoist seeks to find the fullness of life by following the Way of Tao which ultimately leads to a union with the Ultimate Tao beyond the One. Turning to Tao is innate in every person; it brings life. On the other hand, separation from Tao would be unnatural; it brings death. As the Kingdom of heaven and earth, the Tao is both within and outside us. Since, the Way is within us, we have only to follow the inner prompting of the Spirit. Being outside us, we must simply travel the path, for the path is as life-giving as reaching the end of it. By so doing, a person achieves fullness of life and union with the Tao.

*Union With Nature:* Since all things are linked to the Tao, the corollary of this is that all things are inter-related. The fundamental unity of all in and through the Tao is central to Taoism. Deriving from this truth is the principle of a harmonious relationship of the world with the Tao. Nature is not an object to be conquered nor dominated. Rather, nature is our valued friend which we should be attuned with. The Taoist's approach to nature is ecological. By co-operating with the forces of nature, Tao works through them. Taoism therefore favours the natural and the ordinary.

*Union In Immortality:* The Taoist is not only concerned about this life but is equally concerned about the immortality of life. The Taoist idea of immortality entails the transformation of the whole body into an eternal vehicle for the soul. Without the body, there could be no immortality. So, the immortality that is sought is that of the entire human being, body and soul.

*Union In Mysticism:* In Taoism, the mystical element is also evident. Taoist philosophers retreat from the world, not because the material world is evil but for the sake of freedom and preserving life. The joy of the Taoist lies within; for it is within that he finds the whole cosmos and the meaning of life. As such, the Taoist abandons the pursuits of the worldly since they bring only strife. The Taoist is a reclusive sage who meditates and develops his/her spirit and lives a life in union with the Tao and the whole universe.

#### 1.3.2.3.2 Living A Life Of *Wu Wei* (Non-Action)

##### *An Altruistic Life*

A real union with the Cosmos, however, requires one to live a life of *wu wei*, the way of non-action or selfless action. This entails, a withdrawal

from the world of temptations and illusions. But *wu-wei* must not be misconstrued as a mere physical withdrawal, nor living a life of idleness and non-involvement. Rather, it is to live life unselfishly and to do things for purely altruistic motives. *Wu wei* could be rendered as a life of creative quietude; a life that is fully active and yet in a relaxed and non-ambitious way. By surrendering one's ego and self-will, the Tao works in and through us in a natural and spontaneous way. Action which flows from being is always authentic, creative and new. That is why, the way to act is simply to be. With such an approach to life, one lives above tensions because one lives effortlessly responding to the tune of nature.

#### *A Peaceful And Non-Violent Life*

As an illustration, water is chosen as the prototype of *wu wei*. "Nothing beneath heaven is softer and weaker than water. Nothing is better to attack the hard and strong, and nothing can take its place." (Ch 78) The qualities of water, namely, its flexibility and its softness empower it to overcome all things hard and inaccessible. These virtues of water are precisely those of *wu wei* as well. The persons who adopt such qualities "conquer without competing"; "answer without speaking"; "attract without summoning" and "get results without hastening." (Ch 73) There is indeed great strength in weakness; and weakness in strength. Consequently, Taoists are basically peacemakers and averse to violence. This pacifist attitude is reflected in the following passages: "He who uses Tao to guide rulers does not force beneath-heaven with arms. Such things recoil on their users. Where armies are, briars and brambles grow." (Ch 30) "Fine weapons are tools of ill fortune; all things seem to hate them. Whoever has Tao does not depend on them. . . . Peace and quiet he upholds; Victory he does not enjoy. To enjoy victory is to like slaughter. Whoever likes it cannot thrive beneath heaven." (Ch 31)

#### *A Non-Ambitious But Creative Life*

Necessarily, Taoists also reject all forms of self-assertiveness, ambition and competition. "On tiptoe you don't stand. Astride you don't walk. Showing yourself, you don't shine. Asserting yourself, you don't show. Boasting yourself won't get you credit." (Ch 24) Instead of competing, one must live in selfless love and service in humility like the water. "True goodness is like water; Water benefits the ten thousand things but does not compete with them. . . . If you do not compete, you will not be faulted." (Ch 8) The true values of life are not what the world pursues but what the world rejects as useless. One tends to see only the superficial and not the hidden. Indeed, Taoists say that the value of cups, windows, and doorways lies in their emptiness.

Hence, success for the Taoists is but an illusion since it provides one with no peace and lasting joy. The search for success is but a vain and futile

attempt to overcome one's insecurity and to fulfil one's ego. Rather, real success is to see the failure of success. Once that is realised, then we can just simply be and allow the Tao to flow in and through us. "The great Tao flows everywhere . . . The ten thousand things draw life from it; and it does not deny them. It completes its work, but takes no title. It clothes and feeds the ten thousand things, but does not own them. You can call it small. The ten thousand things return to it, but it does not own them. You can call it great. Because it does not seek to be great, its greatness is accomplished." (Ch 34)

### *The Relativity Of All Values And The Embracement Of All Values*

If a Taoist could give up the pursuit of success and competition, it is only because all values are seen as relative. This principle of relativity is expressed by the traditional Chinese yin/yang symbol which sums up all the polarities of life: good/evil, active/passive, positive/negative, light/dark, summer/winter, male/female. Taoism teaches neutrality with regard to the polarities. "When all beneath heaven know beauty as beauty, there is not beauty. When all know good as good, there is not good. For what is and what is not beget each other. Difficult and easy complete each other; long and short show each other; high and low place each other; noise and sound harmonise each other; before and behind follow each other." (Ch 2) All opposites are therefore complementary not competitive. The *Yang* initiates but it is the *Yin* that completes. Both find their wholeness in each other, producing a harmonious state.

The implication of this principle is that we are mutually inter-dependent. Just like the *Yang* and *Yin* which are held in tension, one must not dichotomise the realities of the world. Nothing is absolute, especially values and concepts which are conditioned by our environment and interpretations we give to them. By transcending the distinctions between good and bad; self and the universe, all are gathered together in the Tao where everything is one. This is the final vision of reality as well.

Once this realisation is attained, detachment easily follows because like the sage, one "does not shun the ten thousand things; rears them without owning them; works for them without claiming them; accomplishes but takes not credit. Because he does not take credit, it cannot be taken from him." (Ch 2) One also learns to trust in divine providence because the *Yin* and *Yang* will somehow achieve its own equilibrium and restore the balance of nature. Everything in life that happens can then be taken in stride, in an attitude of equanimity. However, to arrive at this mystical union with the Tao, and to trust in its graciousness, entails the emptying of the senses and the mind itself.

### *A Life Of Docility To The Tao*

If life is to surrender oneself to the Tao, then peace and contentment could only come from a life of nothing-doing. Yet, nothing-doing is actually

a way of getting things done efficaciously and spontaneously. Nothing-doing is not doing nothing. To do nothing itself is already a doing. It is adopting an attitude of non-interference and non-manipulation of people and things and situations. It has nothing to do with self-will or one's efforts because that would be violating the process of nature.

Nothing-doing calls for a total openness to all of reality, to the universe and to the Tao, placing no obstructions but always co-operating with the flow of the *Qi*. And because one responds to the rhythm of nature totally, one becomes a powerful instrument of nature. Nothing-doing thus surpasses doing something because it is the work of Tao not the vain efforts of man. Such is the hidden and dynamic power of Tao for "the softest things beneath heaven overcome the hardest. Nothing alone penetrates no space. Hence I know the use of nothing-doing." (Ch 43)

Furthermore, docility equally demands an attitude of nothing-wanting, that is, an attitude of non-attachment and non-desire. "Keep to simplicity. Grasp the primal, reduce the self, and curb the desire." (Ch 19) This virtue is necessary lest our involvement with people and their affairs spring from our ego-centricity. Attachment is detrimental to our well-being; but so is attachment to detachment. Instead, we are exhorted to live a life of simplicity and contentment without any craving of any sort. "No calamity is greater than not knowing what is enough. No fault worse than wanting too much. Whoever knows what is enough has enough." (Ch 46)

However, a life of nothing-doing and nothing-wanting presupposes that we have become intimate with the Tao. This intimacy with the Tao is forged not via knowledge but through experience. That is why, "the wise are not learned; the learned are not wise." (Ch 81) Experiencing the Tao is to allow ourselves to be totally absorbed by it, for the Kingdom of Heaven is both within and without us. "Without going out of the door, you can know beneath-heaven. Without looking out of the window, you can see heaven's way. The farther you go, the less you know. Thus the Sage knows without walking, sees without looking and does without doing." (Ch 47) Truth to be whole cannot simply be the work of the intellect or the will. Truth is an experiential knowledge. Truth ultimately is an event.

Finally, this basic attitude of docility and emphasis on the *yin* element gives rise to the assertion that Taoism favours the feminine over the masculine. "Know the masculine; keep to the feminine" (Ch 28) Such claims can be further substantiated for the Tao is spoken of as the mother of all things and of the world. "Beneath-heaven has a beginning: The mother of beneath-heaven. Knowing the mother, we may know the children. Knowing the children, we may keep to the mother." (Ch 52) The feminine element of the *Yu* indeed highlights the importance of total receptivity to providence, a receptivity that nurtures natural growth.

#### 1.3.2.4 Conclusion

##### *The Effortlessness Of Following The Path*

To many people, this way of life as proposed by Taoism seems to be only for the reserved few. Nay, this way of life is available to all. If the path of Tao is perceived as difficult if not impossible, it is because one has not come to the realisation that such is the truth of life. The path can easily be followed when one comes to an experiential realisation that the world's life-style cannot offer true peace and freedom. In order to give up worldly pursuits, one must come to the realisation of the vanity and emptiness of such pursuits. Indeed, to follow the path of Tao, the effort that is required is as little as one who instantly moves his hand away from a hot stove. In the words of *Tao Te Ching*, "Only by being sick of our sickness, are we not sick. The sage is not sick. He is sick of his sickness and therefore not sick." (Ch 71)

Such awareness leads one to the true emptiness of Tao, an emptiness that liberates. "Tao is empty! Use it and it isn't used up." (Ch 4) Tao liberates because Truth liberates. Joy and freedom does not come to the self-centred person but to a self-less person who follows the Way. "Therefore the sage puts himself last, finds himself first; abandons his self, preserves his self. Is it not because he has no self that he is able to realise his self?" (Ch 7)

##### *The Way Of Divine Providence And Love*

In recapitulation, to follow the Tao is to simply trust in the Way, or the Way of the Cosmos, as shown to us in the natural operations of the universe. When we align ourselves to the Way, we walk the way of a selfless love. "The sage has no fixed heart. He finds his heart in the hundred families' heart. He is good to the good; He is also good to the not-good, for virtue is good. He is faithful to the faithful; He is also faithful to the unfaithful, for virtue is faithful." (Ch 49)

To walk the Way is to live the Kingdom of Heaven in our lives, not only at the end of time, but already as we journey along. Indeed, we will always be on the Way for the Way is eternal and inexhaustive. The Way is the Tao and the Tao is the Way. The Way is the Goal and the Goal is the Way. Comprehending this sublime truth will free us from undue anxiety about our life; enabling us to live in utter trust and simplicity. Indeed, Taoism is a remedy for the sickness of humankind today. By following the Path, people can recover their innocence and enjoy a newness in their ordinariness because the Tao makes all things new.

## *Confucianism And Taoism As Complementary Paths*

Just like the *yin* and *yang*, Taoism and Confucianism represent two opposite but complementary ways of looking at life. Taoism being more akin to the *yin* element stresses the virtues of docility, receptivity and withdrawal; whereas Confucianism as the *yang* element gives emphasis to social responsibility and action. Still yet another difference is that whilst Lao Tzu promotes ordinariness and spontaneity, Confucius teaches discipline and character. Thus, if Confucius forms our human spirit, then Lao Tzu leads us beyond our human spirit to the universal spirit. Indeed, the Chinese says that Confucius roams within society but Lao Tzu wanders beyond.

## *Confucianism And Taoism As Human Attempts To Live The Life Of The Spirit*

In the light of the above study on Confucianism and Taoism, we cannot but recognise the lofty moral and spiritual values that these two philosophies of life offer to humankind's search for peace, harmony and meaning. In many ways, they reflect the workings of the Holy Spirit in the Cosmos and particularly in humanity and its history. The Taoist virtues of docility, trust, humility, non-violence, detachment, equanimous love; and the Confucianist virtues of responsibility, honesty, loyalty and fidelity are but manifestations of the fruits of the one Spirit of God working in all sorts of different ways in different people in the world.

### **1.4 Primal Religions**

Primal religions in general have a clear belief in One God or a Supreme Being, called by different names as the Great Spirit, the Great One, Heaven, the One who lives above or other designations. There is also a belief in other beings which are above humankind but are less than the Supreme Being. They are sometimes called spirits and considered to be part of the divine world. Cult or worship in primal religions is directed to the spirits and the ancestors in the form of prayer, worship at shrines and communal sacrifices. The attitude towards the world of the Supreme Being and the spirits is on the one hand awe and confidence, but there is the other element of fear of the evil spirits present as well. Thus we find different religious rituals of venerating the well-meaning spirits and asking for their protection and blessings, as well as practices of exorcisms to ward off the influence of the evil spirits. Primal religions generally do not have sacred scriptures or theoretical statements about their doctrines and beliefs. The riches of their traditions and moral values are more often found in their celebrations, myths and proverbs, and conveyed through attitudes towards the cosmos, sense of the sacred, customs and codes of conduct.

The difficulty in describing the role of the primal religions in Asia lies in the fact that these religious traditions have been superseded by the major religious traditions of Buddhism, Hinduism, Islam, and Christianity which have superimposed their traditions, their sacred scriptures and liturgical/ritual practices on the many forms of traditional religiosity of various tribal societies. In many Asian societies the adherents of the primal religions are not only numerically minorities but are considered to be culturally inferior, less developed, and, because of the lack of written sources, their religious traditions and practices are deemed to be of less value. Indigenous peoples are often referred to as tribals or aborigines, terms they reject as perpetuating stereotypes depicting them as backward. In various Asian countries the adherents of primal religions are living in remote areas, isolated from the urban centres. As regards their possibilities of having access to education and participation in the economic processes these people are marginalised and disadvantaged. In most Asian countries the growing industrialisation and urbanisation, coupled with an exploitation of the natural resources in mining and ecological destruction of local forests, seas and wildlife, threatens the existence and livelihood of indigenous peoples who are used to traditional ways of life based on symbiotic relationships with nature.

#### 1.4.1 The Role of Primal Religions

The primal religions normally do not have organised structures such as education facilities for their ministry, fixed forms of administration and documentation, and other aspects of organised religious life found in the major religions. Nor do primal religions have structures to propagate their beliefs in forms of organised missionary endeavours. Their beliefs and religious practices are handed down as a matter of custom and way of living within the family structure among people bound together by community or kinship ties. With their festivals, cycles of annual observances, rites of passage, ceremonies of exorcism and the like, primal religions put the greatest emphasis not on ideas but on rituals. Among the rituals, particularly numerous are those that serve the aim of securing tangible benefits such as fertility, growth, prosperity, protection from danger, healing of diseases, that is, immediate, concrete benefits in this world. The role of primal religions can best be described as providing the matrix for many phenomena of popular religiosity. Very often one has only to scratch certain forms of piety and religiosity which are found within the religious life of members of the major religions to discover the heritage of the primal religion which may no longer be extant in any organised form, but which exercises a lasting influence on the religious world of the ordinary people. Many basic ideas regarding the world, the human condition, the whole realm of the Spirit, or rather the spirits, the relationship with the dead in ancestor veneration, the role of religious practices to restore health and prevent sickness can be traced to images, ideas, concepts, myths originally found in the primal religions.

## 1.4.2 Examples of Asian Primal Religions

The cult of the spirits and cosmic forces as the Bons (Tibet), Devas (South-Asia), Nats (Burma), Phis (Thailand, Laos, Cambodia), the ancestral spirits (in the Confucian cultures of China, Korea, Vietnam, the Kalash in Pakistan) and the Kami (Japan) are an essential element of the spirituality of primal religions. The most persistent influence of primal religions on religious ideas and popular religious practices can be found in the many expressions of ancestor worship or veneration in the various Asian countries. The attitudes towards life and death are heavily influenced by beliefs which stress the permanent relationship of the living with the dead and the many obligations which result from it. The belief that the dead ancestors are actively influencing the fate of their living descendants can be seen in the many forms of burying the dead and caring for the upkeep of their graves which have to be selected in strict observance to prescriptions deriving from geomancy (*fengshui*). In the home the altars with the name-tablets of dead ancestors and/or the urns with some of their bones have a place of honour, and on special days and occasions gifts of food and incense are made to them. Major events in the lives of the descendants are reported to the ancestors, and during the feast of the dead (O-Bon-Festival, Spring Festival) their temporal presence is noted with reverence and fear. The influence of ancestor veneration can be seen as a work of the Holy Spirit in as far as it fosters the sense of honouring the parents, of gratitude to former generations who have made their contributions to the prosperity of their descendants. The insight that every generation depends on the achievements of the preceding one is a good simile for the lasting dependence on the grace of God and the Holy Spirit which is at the essence of Christianity. On the other hand there are negative elements in ancestor worship which can enslave people to a conservative outlook on life and bring them into opposition to the stirring of the Holy Spirit to new forms of life and constant change. In the history of the Christian mission in Asia the controversy about ancestor worship has been a major hindering influence, because of the decision taken by the major authorities in the Church to consider all forms of ancestor worship as belonging to the realm of superstitious and idolatrous practices, condemned by the Church as idol worship. The negative decision regarding the problem of rites and ancestor worship was revised only in the thirties of our century. The Roman authorities gave permission to Catholics in Japan and Korea to take part in burial ceremonies and ancestral rituals, as long as these could be considered as civil ceremonies, common in the cultural society to express respect and gratitude to the ancestors.

In Asia a widespread form of primal or popular religiosity can be found in Shamanistic religious expressions, especially in Korea, but also in Japan, China and other Asian societies. In Korea most of the Shamans are women (*mudang*) who are considered to be in contact with the world of the spirits and who conduct ceremonies (*kut*) for healing, for protection against



evil spirits and for the rest of the souls of dead relatives. In Japan Shintoism has had a deep influence on Japanese religiosity and the understanding of the Holy. As a religious system Shintoism does not have a corpus of defined tenets of faith. That makes it difficult to discern the traces of the work of the Spirit in its many forms of worship, prayer, intercessions, divinations and sacrifices. There are elements like the belief in the uniqueness of the Japanese people, the special relationship of the Japanese emperor to the Sun Goddess Amaterasu which have to be seen as idolatrous beliefs or practices. On the other hand we find precious elements in the sense of awe of nature and creation, respect for ancestors and elders which can be seen as coming from the Holy Spirit.

In the Philippines we can find remnants of primal religions among the indigenous population in the mountainous areas of Luzon, in different parts in Mindanao and other islands which have had, and still have, a deep influence on the lives of the indigenous peoples and which influence the popular religiosity in the whole country. Similarly in various parts of the Indian subcontinent in the different countries of India, Bangladesh, Pakistan, and Nepal we find many forms of living primal religions. Among the various groups of *adivasi* or indigenous peoples there is a sense of the sacred, religious forms of world-view and understanding of the destiny of humankind which preserve age-old traditions and customs which give witness to the work of the Holy Spirit throughout the ages. In the countries of Southeast Asia Hinduism and Buddhism have become the dominant religious forces, but within popular religiosity we find many influences from the tradition of primal religions, as e.g. the belief in various spirits, ceremonies of healing, traditions of the sacredness of the earth, ceremonies for planting and harvesting and other elements which influence the world-view and the understanding of the destiny of humankind.

#### 1.4.3 The Holy Spirit at Work in Primal Religions?

In the past it has been primarily ethnologists who have taken an interest in the phenomena of primal religions rather than theologians. In missionary practice and theory the primal religions, their leaders and adherents were normally considered to have been under the influence of evil spirits rather than under the influence of the Holy Spirit. The primal religions were often accused of propagating idolatrous and satanic practices. Their members were called people living in “darkness and far from God”, because they were considered to believe in a world full of evil spirits and powers and to depend on the intercession of dubious magicians, witch-doctors, healers and exorcists. The Christian message was presented to them as the liberating force, which, with the power of the Holy Spirit, brought light into the darkness and delivered these people from an age-old oppression and slavery to religiously false ideas which could only be called superstitious and idolatrous. The new outlook towards other religions and their

values, advanced in the first place by the Second Vatican Council and then taken up especially by Asian Christian theologians, brought about a rescinding of these negative general judgements with regard to the primal religions and a re-thinking of their beliefs and their religious and moral practices. In 1995 the Office of Ecumenical and Inter-religious Affairs of the FABC organised a conference on the Church's attitude towards the indigenous peoples of Asia in which Christian theologians from ten Asian countries, many of them members of indigenous peoples, reflected on the theological significance of the heritage of Asian primal religions and proposed new ways of responding to them. For the first time the Christian churches in Asia acknowledged that in the past the religious traditions and practices of indigenous peoples were treated unjustly and their adherents marginalised within the Church.

The need for a new approach was expressed in order to come to a more profound encounter between the core values of indigenous peoples and the Biblical faith. The Asian churches reflected on the fact that the Christian church has grown and continues to grow especially among indigenous peoples. Christians are not only called to evangelise indigenous peoples but must be evangelised by them and learn from them new insights in areas such as ecology, community life and the celebration of life's joys and tragedies. Since much of the indigenous people's world view and ethos is compatible with the Christian faith, traditional beliefs, rites, myths and symbols of indigenous peoples provide material for developing indigenous theologies and liturgical ceremonies. There was a call for a more consistent way of dealing with the phenomenon of primal religions in Asia by, for example, setting up a special commission within the Office for Inter-religious Affairs of the FABC exploring further steps of entering into dialogue with the religious heritage and values of Asian primal religions. A demand was made also to make the concerns of indigenous peoples and their cultural and religious heritage a priority for the Special Assembly for Asia of the Synod of Bishops to be held in 1998.

## 1.5 Islam

The Divine Spirit, who works unceasingly to renew the face of the universe, is also active in the religion of Islam to produce the Spirit's inimitable fruits in the lives of Muslims. In recognising the signs of the Spirit's activity in Islam, as elsewhere, Christians praise and glorify the Holy Spirit for its wondrous works.

### 1.5.1 The Fruits of the Spirit's Activity

"By their fruits you will know them", says the Lord. "A good tree does not bear bad fruit, nor a bad tree good fruit." St. Paul notes the fruits of the Spirit in the lives of people, without claiming that his list is exhaustive.

They are: "love, joy, peace, patience, goodness, kindness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control." Christians who observe these qualities in the lives of their Muslim neighbours must ask themselves where Muslims learned the religious value of these human characteristics and what has motivated them to produce these traits in their lives.

A study of the Qur'an, the Sacred Book of Islam, shows a constant effort to sow in the lives of believing Muslims those qualities that Christians recognise as the fruits of the Spirit. In the Qur'an, love is *mahabha*. Joy is *sara'*, patience is *sabr*, and *musabara* is long-suffering endurance. Kindness is *ihsan*, faithfulness is *sidq*, and so on. A few example's of Qur'anic teaching must suffice.

"Virtue does not mean that you turn your faces towards the East or the West, but virtue means to believe in God, the Last Day, the angels, the Scriptures, and the prophets. And to give your wealth away, out of love for Him, to relatives, orphans, the needy, the traveller, and beggars, and towards freeing captives. And to keep up the prayer and pay the poor tax. And those who keep their word whenever they promise anything and are patient under suffering and hardship in time of violence. Those are the people who are loyal to God. They are the ones who are mindful of His teachings" (Qr 3: 200).  
You who believe, be patient, show long-suffering endurance, and hold yourselves in readiness.  
Heed God so that you may prosper" (Qr 28:77).  
"Those who act with kindness will find kindness and even more besides, and neither grief nor any disgrace will line their faces. They will be inhabitants of the Garden and will live in it forever (Qr 10: 26).  
"Act kindly, just as God has treated you kindly (Qr 28: 76).  
"Do not sneer down your cheek at others nor walk arrogantly on the earth. God does not love swaggering boasters (Qr 31: 18).

Love is evident in Muslim families when family life is lived according to Islamic teachings. The Qur'an teaches Muslim parents to raise their children conscientiously, to pray for them, to be gentle and patient with them, and to teach them by good example. Children are taught to love and honour their parents and to care for them in their old age. Love is seen as well in the self-sacrificing hospitality offered to strangers, in the strength of friendships, and in the strong commitment to the poor of the community.

Joy can be found in the way Muslims perform the difficult Ramadan fast without complaining, in the happiness with which the Feast of Breaking the Fast (Id al-Fitr) is celebrated, in the celebrations to mark sending off and receiving back the pilgrims to Mecca, and in the calm assurance and faith with which death of loved ones is faced.

The Islamic term for peace is *salam*. It indicates the wholeness that comes from handing over one's life, hopes and future to God and is expressed in a union of fellowship with others and an acceptance of nature, life, and oneself. Peace is not only offered to one another (*al-salam ʿalaykum*) at the end of their formal prayers five times a day, but is also the normal greeting with which Muslims address one another in daily life. Peace is the eternal promise granted to those who have been faithful in this world.

“Those will be rewarded with the Mansion because they have been so patient, and welcomed there with greetings of Peace! (Qr 25: 75).

“Whenever those who believe in Our signs come to you, say: ‘Peace be with you’” (Qr 6: 54).

“Be servants of the Compassionate One who walk on the earth in humility and who, whenever the ignorant address them, answer ‘Peace’ (Qr 25> 63)”.

Faithfulness, *sidiq*, shows the common font of the Spirit which inspires Arab Christian and Muslim spirituality. Before the time of Muhammad, Syrian Christians called the monks who had faithfully bound themselves to God *siddiq*. The Qur’an applies the same term to holy persons outstanding for their faithfulness (e.g. the patriarchs Abraham and Joseph and the Virgin Mary). One Qur’anic passage brings together many fruits of the Spirit:

“Hasten towards forgiveness from your Lord and a Garden broader than Heaven and Earth which has been prepared for the heedful, who spend themselves for others in joy and hardship, and suppress their anger and overlook what other people do. God loves the kindly and those who remember God and seek forgiveness for their offences when they commit an indecent act or harm themselves. Who forgives offences except God? — and do not knowingly persist in what they have done. They will find forgiveness from their Lord” (Qr 3: 133-135).

In their approach to Muslims, Christians must not allow themselves to be blinded by prejudices, political issues, or confessional tensions, but must be vigilant to observe the ways in which the Spirit is still producing these fruits in the lives of Muslims. The vast majority of faithful Muslims want nothing more than to live according to the will of God and to raise their children in tranquil, peaceful environments.

St. Paul also mentions the fruits of the flesh that are opposed to those of the Spirit: “idolatry, sorcery, fornication, gross indecency, sexual irresponsibility, drunkenness, orgies, and similar things”. Down through the centuries Muslims have, as a community, energetically opposed these evils and have a vision of society in which the fruits of the Spirit, not those of the

flesh, predominate. One need only think of the breakdown of love and harmony in millions of families around the world and the social retardation of entire ethnic groups and economic classes, due to alcohol-related commerce and habits to realise the blessing Islam has brought to a wide sweep of humanity through its successful opposition to “drunkenness, orgies, and similar things”.

### 1.5.2 Love and Compassion

Another point of departure for discerning the action of the Spirit in Islam is the words of Christ in the parable of the Last Judgement: “When I was hungry, you gave me to eat” etc. It is significant that in the Gospel parable both those who accepted Jesus and those who rejected him are unaware that it was He whom they have met. It is not correct to say that some people have never met Christ, for everyone meets him repeatedly in the person of the neighbour in need. In each encounter, Christ offers the grace of salvation, which each person either accepts or refuses, depending on one’s response to the neighbour. Applying this criterion to Islam, we must ask, first, whether Muslims respond in love and service to the neighbour in need and, secondly, whether it is their Islamic faith that prompts them to do so. Throughout Asia, one can point to countless examples of Muslims who, in response to the exhortations of the Qur’an, have expended their energies and material goods for the welfare of those in need.

“Show kindness to your parents and to relatives, orphans, the needy, to the neighbour who is close to you as well as the neighbour who is a stranger, to the companion at your side and to the wayfarer, and to anyone who is under your control” (Qr 4: 36).  
“(Believers) offer food to the needy, the orphan, and the captive out of love for Him: ‘It is for God’s sake we are feeding you; we look for no reward from you nor any thanks’ (Qr 76: 8-9).

Two institutions in Islam are particularly directed towards this work: *waqf* and *zakat*. A *waqf* is a religious benefice to be used for the good of the community. For centuries, schools, hospitals and clinics, leprosaria, refugee centres, traveller’ hostels, and students’ scholarships have been built and maintained by *waqf* donations. *Zakat* is better translated “poor tax” than almsgiving. It is not a voluntary donation which may be given or withheld, but rather an obligatory tax on a percentage of each Muslim’s income to be used specifically for the poor of the community. The goal of *Zakat* is distributive justice and ensuring that each member of the community be provided with the essentials for life.

“*Zakat* is (not for the rich but) only for the indigent and the poor, for those who collect the tax, those whose hearts are to be won over, for (ransoming)

prisoners of war, for the relief of those who are in chronic debt, and for the 'cause of God' (*jihad* and social welfare purposes), and for the wayfarer." (Qr 9: 60).

In addition to *zakat*, which is stipulated for the poor of the Islamic community, almsgiving (*sadaqa*), which may be given to Muslims or non-Muslims, is highly encouraged. Christians of Cabo Verde recall with gratitude that during the drought in Saharan Africa, when the Organisation of the Islamic Conference distributed millions of dollars of *zakat* relief funds to Muslim countries they also donated more than a million dollars in *sadaqa* to that predominantly Christian nation.

The Qur'an and the *hadith* teachings of Muhammad regard any religiosity that does not include concrete assistance to the poor as hypocrisy.

"Did you see the one who gives the lie to the Faith? It is he who maltreats orphans and works little for feeding the poor. Woe betide those who pray yet, neglectful of their prayers, pray for show but refuse even the use of their utensils (to the poor)" (Qr 107: 1-7).

The *hadith* sayings from Muhammad reinforce the Qur'anic message, and often remind Christians of Jesus' teaching in the Sermon on the Mount:

"Love those among you who are weak, and you will receive sustenance because of them." "If you give alms openly, that is good, but if you give them to the needy in secret, it is even better, and will atone for some of your bad deeds. God is aware of all you do." "No one of you is truly a believer unless he loves his brother as he loves himself."

### 1.5.3 Submission to the Will of God and *jihad*

The concept of *Islam*, after which the religion is named, more broadly indicates the act of submitting the whole of one's life to God. One who does Islam, a "Muslim", seeks only to do God's will, to desire nothing but that which God desires, to allow God to reign over his or her life. The act of *Islam* means acceptance of God's sovereignty over every aspect of life — the personal, familial, social, economic, even political sphere. For Christians, the "Reign of God" indicates neither a place nor heavenly realm, but the concrete, active, and prayerful transformation of human society in accord with the will of God. Those who pray daily "Your kingdom come, Your will be done on earth as in heaven" can see the same Spirit at work in the Islamic concept.

One who bears witness to the Islamic profession of faith (There is no god but The God, and Muhammad is the Messenger of God) is a member of

the Islamic community. But to accept fully God's sovereignty over every aspect of one's life is a lifetime struggle, a continual striving that ends only in death. Muslims call this struggle *jihad*. A widely misunderstood concept, *jihad* has three aspects. The first is the "greatest struggle" (*al-jihad al-akbar*), and indicates the lifelong effort to submit every aspect of life to God's will. Muslim Sufis have developed this aspect of *jihad* into a comprehensive, subtle, spiritual program.

The second aspect is the struggle to make God's will be done in social life. Parents who strive to raise their children to be upright, God-fearing believers know the struggle this involves. Dedicated school-teachers, medical and development workers, and conscientious scholars, honest businessmen and civil servants, are all involved in the second type of *jihad*. The third aspect is the necessity for Muslims to oppose actively all forms of injustice and oppression even, when necessary, by force. It is this last and, in actual practice, rarest form of *jihad* which has erroneously given rise to the misconception of "holy war" in Islam.

Obviously, not everything done by Muslims is inspired by the work of the Holy Spirit. Muslim and Christian spiritual writers often pointed out that it is the very virtues and aspirations of believers that the Evil Spirit uses to try to destroy and negate the work of the Divine Spirit. This is true in Islam, as it is in Christianity and other religions. Thus, in their commitment to serve God and to make His will done on earth (*jihad*), Muslims have often been guilty of intolerance, disrespect for the rights of others, and oppression. Like Christians, Muslims are no strangers to the fruits of self-indulgence: sexual irresponsibility, feuds and wrangling, jealousy and envy, resentment and anger, and factionalism.

However, in recognising the many profoundly beautiful and good elements of the religion of Islam, Christians are neither compromising nor belittling their own faith. Rather, they are discovering some of the many and varied gifts so lavishly bestowed by the Spirit on the human family. By forming friendships with Muslims, by coming to know better their faith and practices, and by working together with them for good, it is God's Holy Spirit who is praised and worshipped.

## **2 THE SPIRIT AT WORK IN SOCIO-POLITICAL REALITIES**

### **Introduction**

The vast Asian continent with its teeming population, its many cultural and religious traditions presents a colourful and bewildering kaleidoscope of socio-political realities. In describing some of these situations and the responses by various groups of people and institutions it will be necessary to present a picture which preserves the full variety of the many spiritual

forces operative in these often contradictory realities. The presentation of these various phenomena might lead to bewilderment and bring about a feeling of helplessness, or on the contrary, kindle a spirit of hope and expectation for a brighter future. As in the parable of the wheat and thistles (Mt. 13:24-30), there is the need to be patient, to restrain from passing quick judgements, and to forego the urge to hastily discern the many spirits at work in these realities. There is no exalted stand-point from which to view the many facets of the Asian socio-political realities, which would enable us to separate the good elements from the bad, without entering into life situations and letting ourselves be exposed to and immersed in them. Out of this immersion and the readiness for compassion, there might result the insights necessary to begin to discern which elements in these processes are fostering wholeness, integrity, peace and justice, and other fruits of the Kingdom.

Looking at the socio-political realities of contemporary Asia provides a bewildering picture, full of contrasts and contradictions. There are Asian countries where the economy is growing on a scale to be found nowhere else in the world. There are other areas in Asia where the plight of natural calamities like earthquakes, floods, cyclones are causing havoc year after year. We find countries where recently the political situation has changed from an authoritarian military government to more participatory forms of political life. And again, there are other countries where corruption is rampant, where human rights are violated, where people are forced to go abroad to work as migrant workers, where tourism is threatening family life, the dignity of women and children. There are signs of religious revival in many of the old religious traditions in Asia which give rise to hope and which are responding to the challenges of modernisation and technology invading nearly all spheres of individual and communal life in Asia. The pattern of development is different from that of the West, where a widespread secularisation can be observed. In Asia, too, religions are threatened by the forces of a secular world view and value system. But there is another phenomenon as well, that of religious revival in various forms. There are, in addition, new forms of religious "fundamentalism", understood as a simplistic affirmation of one's own religion and world view as the only true one, and, "communalism," that is, the idea that people who share the same religious belief also have the same economic and political interest — both of which threaten the peaceful living together of people of different faiths and cultures.

## **2.1 Movements For Liberation/Socio-Economic-Cultural Movements**

### **2.1.1 Social & Political Movements**

In this century Asia has experienced many political and social movements for liberation in the various struggles for national independence



and liberation from colonial rule. In India it is fifty years since the long struggle of the “*Swaraj*-Movement” succeeded in winning the independence of the sub-continent from British rule. There was the shining example of non-violence (*ahimsa*) as practised and lived by Mahatma Gandhi. In China the long struggle against Western and Japanese colonialism ended after a bloody civil war in the establishment of the People’s Republic in China which accepted Marxism, Leninism and the Mao-Zedong-Thought as the guiding ideology. Indonesia emerged from the struggle for its independence from the Dutch as a new nation which looks to the ideology of *Pancasila* as a means to preserve unity in plurality. The people of Vietnam had a long road to independence and finally overcame the division of their country, but only after wars and the loss of many lives. Korea, too, has experienced many obstacles to national independence and freedom and is still looking forward to the re-unification of the two parts of the country. In South Korea the various movements of farmers, fishermen and students brought an end to the military dictatorship and the beginning of democratically elected government. Ten years ago the phenomenon of “People’s Power” in the bloodless *Rosary Revolution* in the Philippines succeeded in toppling the regime of Ferdinand Marcos. In Taiwan the process of democratisation has brought to an end the many years of one-party government which were accompanied by the imposition of martial law, and prepared the way for the emergence of a multi-party system with free election of the president.

### 2.1.2 Ecological Movements

As a reaction to the growing destruction of nature and the ensuing ecological crisis there have arisen several ecology movements in Asia. In Taiwan an ecumenical group of theologians and sociologists has been studying the growing ecological problems of the island. The results of this study on the quality of life in the bio-region of Taiwan, published by the *Taiwan Area Research Group on Theological Issues* (TARGTI), have been widely noticed. In the Philippines the national bishops’ conference has taken up the issue of an ecologically minded spirituality and called on all Catholic Christians to work for the protection of nature in the islands of the Philippines.

A special form of the ecological movement for the protection of nature and integrity of creation is eco-feminism which advocates feminist spirituality as-an antidote against the patriarchal destruction of nature and the environment out of an andro-centric perspective and world view. There is for example the *Chipko*-Movement of Asian women struggling for the protection of trees, which had its origin in the conflict about forest resources, i.e. an unlimited deforestation of the Himalayas and other areas in India with disastrous consequences for the environment in the form of landslides, floods and erosion, and the accompanying shortage of drinking water. The demands of the *Chipko* Movement are of an ecological nature

pointing out the natural inter-relatedness between the preservation of the forests and the preservation of the soil and water resources.

### 2.1.3 Womens' Movements

There is a rising consciousness among women and movements of women in various societies against the injustice that has been heaped upon them which strive for full participation in the life and transformation of the social order.

Feminist theologies are, in a certain sense, also an answer to a special problem of poverty, that is the problem of the inequality of the sexes, of discrimination and oppression of women, especially of the poor women who are victims of physical poverty, of ethnic and racist discrimination. Feminism is less a theoretical movement than a liberation movement of women with the aim of social changes in the society and churches as well.

Feminist Theology in Asia has a cosmic approach which is very different from the secularist approach of Western feminist theologians, because it has its origin in the religiosity of the Asian poor and the religious myths. The commitment of women from the oppressed castes and groups, therefore, constitutes a specific form of Asian feminism. There is the development of a distinct Asian women's spirituality, as faith experience and awakening of the Asian women's soul to their concrete historical reality of poverty, oppression and suffering in many cases, and a response and commitment of their souls infused by the Spirit, to the challenge for human dignity, freedom and a new life of love. Such a spirituality will be integral, outgoing, community-oriented, active, holistic, and all-embracing. Asian women's spirituality emerges from the common experience associated with the creative process, in partnership with the God of life, to co-create, sustain, and nurture life. This creative process also involves care and concern for others (final statement of the 1987 Asian Women's Conference in Singapore). The emerging Asian feminist spirituality has been called a spirituality of empowerment. Indian feminist theologians use the ancient term of *sakti*, meaning power, force, the feminine energy, as an apt expression of the primal creative principle underlying the cosmos. Asian women are aware that most Asian cultural and religious traditions contain elements which in the past have been used to downgrade women and to keep them in an inferior position. In trying to maintain their specific Asian way of being women, they, therefore, see the necessity to critically purify their Asian religio-cultural heritage.

### 2.1.4 Workers' Movements

In the urban centres, there are workers' struggles and movements for justice and equity. In varying degrees the workers' struggles continue to

prosper in the various Asian countries despite all the controls imposed upon them. In the countryside there are movements of peasants which fight for a change in the old feudal system of landholding, demand control over the harvest of their work, and ask for a just share in the revenues. In the big cities of Asia we see the growth of slums where people from the rural areas, the so-called unorganised labour, are forced to live in sub-human conditions.

#### 2.1.5 Child Prostitution

An ecumenical movement called End Child Prostitution in Asian Tourism (ECPAT) has been formed in several Asian countries to fight the evil effects of modern tourism. In the Philippines *GABRIELA*, a national organisation of women's groups, is working for the provision of alternative jobs for prostitutes and more stringent laws against vice establishments. Similar work is done by women's groups in Thailand which set up New Life Centres for prostitutes.

#### 2.1.6 Minority Group Movements

Several groups of people like the tribals, the outcasts and other minority groups are deprived of their fundamental human rights and in need of advocates who at the local, regional and international level join in their fight for justice. In India we have the *Jharkhand Movement* in tribal Bihar which fights against mining, industrial and economic exploitation of their ancestral land and ethnic discrimination. It is a liberation movement of the deep human spirit enshrined primarily in the tribal vision of life and experience, and in this sense, it is a counter-culture movement challenging the modern, scientific and technological view of life. There are other tribal liberation movements in India and other Asian countries. On the Indian sub-continent the system of bonded labour is still operative and thousands of men, women and children are kept in inhuman situations of dependency, deprived of their individual freedom.

#### 2.1.7 Mass Media

The role of the mass media for development and education of the peoples in Asia is of immense importance. Today, mass media in Asia and elsewhere in the world are predominantly controlled by authoritarian governments, or by a few economically or politically powerful persons, while the vast majority of Asian peoples are passive recipients. There is a need to foster a spirit of responsibility and greater participation of a variety of people and talent to make use of the vast potential of cultural, artistic and linguistic values among the Asian peoples. In various Asian countries "Street Theatre" is used to highlight social injustice.

### 2.1.8 Co-operatives

The movements of the co-operatives in agriculture, in fishing, in handicraft, in marketing, in banking and various other fields are an expression of Asian solidarity and signs of hope. Internationally known are the examples of the Grameen Bank in Bangladesh, the inter-ethnic and inter-religious *Satyodaya* Movement in Sri Lanka and others.

### 2.1.9 Education

Education in all the variety of different schools and training programmes plays a vital role to foster spiritual values and to help to bring about a more humane society. All Asian countries have made progress in setting up more effective and numerous educational facilities without, however, succeeding in providing education for the multitudes of young people in all Asian societies.

## 2.2 The Process Of Modernisation, Technology, Signs Of The Times

2.2.1 Asia is an immense and extremely complex continent which at present is characterised by rapid social change, by overwhelming poverty in most countries and economic growth in others, as well as by cultural and religious pluralism. The whole process of modernisation is experienced in many Asian societies as a crisis for the individual in the search for his own identity and for society at large. The “signs of the times” point to the necessity for change. The question is, however, what of the old value system can be saved, transformed and applied to the new pattern of society emerging? Does modernisation necessarily imply taking over the life-style of the so-called modern Western nations wholesale? Is it possible to adopt certain forms of modern technology and, at the same time, preserve the essentials of Asian ways of living? How to find a new national and Asian identity, by blending ancient and modern values so as to be able to face the challenges of the future?

2.2.2 In the eyes of many Asians, the Japanese people have been able to bring about the change from a traditional culture to a modern industrial country, which is able to compete in the field of modern technology with the most advanced Western countries and, at the same time, manages to continue living basically in the traditional Japanese way. The Japanese model, however, is tinged with the history of Japan’s aggression on its neighbour countries, when the Japanese tried to enforce their model of the “Greater East Asian Prosperity Sphere” by the use of military force upon several Asian countries. The new Japan emerging after the Pacific War developed into a gigantic economic power which again in many ways continues to dominate its neighbours.

2.2.3 The People's Republic of China, on the other hand, has followed a different way by accepting the alien imported ideology of Marxism-Leninism with the addition of Mao Zedong Thought in order to transform the whole of Chinese society. The disasters of the "Great Leap Forward" in 1957, and the Cultural Revolution during the period 1966-1976 have led to widespread wreckage of the old society and, at the same time, to chaos and confusion. The young people, who as Red Guards were in the fore-front of this revolutionary drive, were the ones to pay the price for this ill-fated attempt to create a completely new society and change human behaviour by the way of force and mass-education. From the ideological extreme leftism the People's Republic of China has been moving into the pragmatism of Deng Xiaoping by discarding more or less all ideological baggage but keeping political authoritarianism and opting for a crude form of capitalism, euphemistically called "Socialism with Chinese characteristics". The attempts to discard the one-party system of the Chinese Communist Party by the Democracy Movement were brutally suppressed in the crackdown at Tiananmen in June 1989.

2.2.4 In the aftermath of independence from colonial powers most Asian countries have yet to find stable political structures in accord with their history and culture. The process of modernisation entails for many Asian societies serious problems of political structures and forms of government. Most governments in Asia pursue a policy which gives the highest priority to providing a peaceful and conducive atmosphere for economic growth rather than encouraging people's participation. Forms of participative, Western style democracy have been tried in several Asian societies but have often given way to forms of military government, autocratic ways of governing or other oppressive systems. In several Asian countries the military has played and plays a disastrous role in suppressing human freedom, violating human rights and ruining the economic and political processes. Oppression and exploitation are realities that result from the greed of vested economic interests and political power. Ethnic, cultural and linguistic conflicts, which are rampant in several Asian societies, are also linked with economic and political divisions. Many Asian countries are still in a process of political growth and looking for an appropriate way of political life suitable to their Asian tradition and identity.

2.2.5 Whereas some Asian countries are experiencing great economic growth and increasing wealth, the majority of Asian societies is still suffering from massive poverty and inequality in the distribution of wealth. There is a distinct lack of a spirit of solidarity with the poor and readiness to share in order to give everyone a fair chance to live a life of human dignity and self-respect. There is a need for a fundamental change in the framework of economic market conditions on the national, continental and global scale in order to pave the way to greater social justice. The dominance of trans-national corporations and the forces of the emerging global market

threaten the livelihood of small farmers, traditional fishermen and urban workers at the local level. Thus, economic structures are characterised by dependence, exploitation of cheap labour, destruction of natural resources and the environment, problems connected with migrant workers, exploitation of women and child labour.

2.2.6 The unjust political and economic structures are also partly responsible for the problems in social life where growing urbanisation, migration and industrialisation are threatening the old values. The inimical implications of the Western style of life with consumerism, hedonism, drug addiction, break-up of family life, alienation of the individual in the big cities, homelessness are widely felt in Asia.

2.2.7 Against these powerful, anonymous forces there is the need to mobilise a new spirituality of life and work by going back to traditional cultural and religious values. All religions are called to co-operate in this endeavour to develop a new form of economy, commerce, agriculture and industry which leaves room for justice and equity. Faced with the phenomena of material poverty in many Asian societies, there is a need to be reminded of the distinction made at the very first Bishops' Institute for Social Action in 1974 where it was stated: "The overwhelming majority of our people are poor, but let it be clearly understood what we mean by *poor*. Our people are *not* poor as far as cultural tradition, human values, and religious insights are concerned. In these things of the spirit, they are immensely rich" (BISA I, Final Reflections No. 2, in: *For all the Peoples of Asia*, p. 199).

2.2.8 The specific Christian contribution to the discussion on development can be seen in advocating the concept of an "integral human development". The Asian bishops have been speaking about a "liberative spirituality for social action" among the poor and by the poor. The church's social teaching is based on three principles: the centrality of the human person, the human rights language and the primacy of the common good which constitute the Christian theory of justice in which commutative, distributive, legal and social justice are interconnected, with the last mentioned form of justice serving as the all-embracing and determinant component.

2.2.9 The work for Justice and Peace of the Office for Human Development of the FABC and its series of special seminars (BISA or FEISA seminars) have helped to shape and articulate the thinking of the Asian bishops and the Churches. There is the work of the Asian Partnership for Human Development, an association of 23 national Catholic development agencies in Asia-Pacific, Europe and Canada. The Protestant counterpart within the Christian Conference of Asia (CCA) is the Urban Rural Mission (URM) and the Asian Committee for People's Organisation (ACPO) in Hong Kong.

2.2.10 The emergence of inter-religious co-operation in the field of development and liberation is a hopeful sign. There is a growing understanding of the necessity of inter-religious dialogue as dialogue of life.

In Asia most societies are religiously pluralistic, that is, members of different religions share the same socio-cultural and socio-political order. In living and working together in the social, economic and political field the people, who hold different religious beliefs and draw their inspiration from them, will have to agree on common human and spiritual values and some forms of common action. The necessity to respond to the deepest aspirations of the Asian cultural and religious traditions is expressed repeatedly by the FABC. "We will need to relate more fully with the ancient cultures and religious traditions of Asia and their deep spiritual heritage. We accept, therefore, that the task will call for greater dialogue, openness to ideas, acceptance of a relevant liturgy, and adaptation to the needs and exigencies of the local community" (BISA III). A vision of harmony is referred to at BIRA V/2 in 1994 where Buddhists and Christians were exploring the possibilities of living and working together when it is said: "In the cultural and religious traditions of Asia, harmony is a characteristic of the Reality that all of us are called to experience and realise. Through our ignorance and egoism, craving and sinfulness are often causes of division and conflict, harmony, as liberation and fullness, joy and peace, realisation and *nirvana*, remains a desired goal for our effort through life. Pluralism and diversity are seen not as a problem but as richness. Even conflict and tension can be creative in the perspective of harmony that is not static, but dynamic as life and movement" (BIRA V/2, Pattaya 1994).

2.2.11 There is need for a dialogue between religion and society as a critical and prophetic challenging of the political order by the presentation of an alternative vision of a new social order and way of life by recurrence to the various religious traditions. Such a dialogue with the socio-political and economic world is mediated by culture and by appropriate social, political or economic theory. It is, therefore, interdisciplinary in nature. The second kind of dialogue is that between believers of various religions with the focus on the common concern for humanity and its development.

In the field of inter-religious dialogue there is a shift from a theocentric view to a spirit-centred dialogue which stresses that the Spirit works in all peoples. The "Spirit" could be understood as the human or the divine Spirit. In non-theistic religions, such as Buddhism, Jainism or Taoism, it stands for the "given" human potentiality to speak, seek and find total human liberation. But in the biblical, and some other theistic, traditions, this potentiality tends to be regarded as the divine Spirit operating immanently in the human person. In either case the diversity of tongues which defines the activity of the Spirit, argues for religious pluralism. The connection between Asia's religio-cultural heritage and human development has been pointed out by the FABC in BISA VII:

Culture, religion and society are interdependent, interacting and mutually transforming. In our Asian continent, which is the cradle for all the great world religions, culture and religion are integrated. Religion is the dynamic element of culture. Together they form the religio-cultural system which interacts with the socio-economic-political system of society, permeating every sphere of human life. Asian poverty is not a purely economic concept, neither is its religiosity merely cultural. Poverty and religiosity are interwoven in the Asian ethos, in such a way that at a certain point they seem to coalesce in order to procreate the specific character of Asia (BISA VII, No. 6).

2.2.12 It will be the common task of all religions in Asia to set free the liberative elements in their respective traditions and to combat the enslaving forms within religious traditions in Asia which strengthen the many forms of discrimination of people according to their caste, gender, ethnic belonging or religious beliefs.

There are many examples of inter-religious co-operation in Asia to be found, such as the trans-national and trans-confessional Asian Cultural Forum on Development (ACFOD) which tries to strengthen and extend the liberative potential within all religious and cultural traditions in the Asia-Pacific region and to foster co-operation. On the local level there is the Thai Inter-Religious Commission for Development which brings together the members of different faiths in the field of development. There is the emergence of Socially Engaged Buddhists in Thailand, and in other countries, striving for integral development. An international network was established 1988 by Sulak Sivaraksa of the Theravada tradition and Maruyama Teruo who represents the Mahayana tradition. In India we find a growing awareness among Hindus to take seriously the challenges of poverty and social oppression. One example is the work of Swami Agnivesh and his followers. Similar developments can be observed in the Muslim world where, for example, Ali Asghar Engineer is a pioneer in developing something like a Muslim equivalent of liberation theology.

In Asia we find several inter-religious and international organisations which work for peace and understanding among the followers of different religions, like the World Conference on Religion and Peace (WCRP), founded in 1972 in Kyoto, or the World Fellowship of Inter-Religious Councils as a form of co-operation of religious leaders for world peace. In Malaysia there is the Malaysian Consultative Council of Buddhists, Christians, Hindus and Sikhs (MCCBCHS), an inter-religious working group.

### 2.3 Ideologies/Theologies

2.3.1 In recent times there is much talk about the Globalisation of Economy as the new economic order and new universal ideology. The



globalisation of economy and its market policy are presented as absolute goals, whereas they should be seen as means to human development and a well-being rooted in justice, freedom, dignity and the well-being of people. The consequences of globalisation of the economy and the accompanying liberalisation of the market include more foreign investment for the industrial sector, the introduction of high technology, deregulation, and emphasis on export-oriented cash crops, all of which result in a reduction of the necessary goods and products to satisfy the basic material and social needs of the people. The absolute priority of technology and market economy attains the quality of an ideology on a par with religion. There is an absolute need to sustain the spirit of safeguarding the dignity of the human person and to put humanisation above technologisation of society.

2.3.2 Several countries in Asia are dominated by regimes committed to atheistic Marxism and others are dominated by anti-theistic capitalism, whereas the masses believe in religions that are predominantly non-theistic or polytheistic. Only Islam as well as one or two brands of Hinduism, together with a small minority of Christians, profess faith in a personal, creator-redeemer God. But these masses, even while adhering to the aforementioned "(metacosmic) religions", are still profoundly rooted in a "cosmic religiosity" — a species of ecological and creation-conscious spirituality that would rather die than co-exist with "technocracy" which is part of the package of modern agro-industrial technology.

2.3.3 In many Asian countries there is a rise in Fundamentalism, Communalism and other forms of extremism which threaten the peaceful living together of people of different faiths, cultures and ethnic belonging. In India the events in Ayodhya in 1992 were a signal for a deteriorating situation of religious intolerance and attempts to destroy the other religions. A spirit of contention, of a sense of superiority, of exclusivism, of intolerance, of hate, and of destruction is at work. There is the dark scenario of an inevitable "clash of civilisations" (Samuel Huntington) on a global scale, which denies the feasibility of bringing about inter-religious and inter-cultural understanding.

2.3.4 The National Security State Ideology has been a strong force during the period of the Cold War in countries like South Korea, Taiwan, Singapore, Malaysia, Indonesia, and is still a factor to be reckoned with. It is still used when governments try to make excuses for the heavy spending of national resources for "militarisation". The obsession with national security leads to many violations of civil and human rights.

2.3.5 In the various forms of Asian spirituality many positive signs and movements can be detected which try to answer to the challenges of Asia today. Some elements of this spirituality are:

- The priority of needs in a humanised society of social justice and solidarity
- A call to compassion, understanding and hospitality for the homeless, the migrants and the refugees
- The quest for holistic health and preservation of the dignity of life and the human person
- The respect of the human rights of the people in developing forms of a non-violent society
- Forms of participatory democracy and humane governance
- Commitment to justice and ecology in the service of life
- The holistic world view of Asia, which sees the Spirit active in the world and, therefore, understands the world as the sacrament of the divine, not to be used simply as material for human exploitation.

2.3.6 Some religio-cultural roots of a spirituality of compassion in the various Asian religious traditions:

- the spirituality of the suffering servant (Christian)
- the sense of compassion for the suffering (*yu-huan yi-shih*) of the Chinese religio-cultural resources
- the spirituality of self-emptying in Buddhist, Confucian, Taoist tradition
- the spirituality of earthly blessing marked by detachment and distance from mammon

2.3.7 There is a growing awareness of the theological meaning of the Spirit's movements in the people's struggles in Asia by looking into the folk stories, narratives, songs, mask dance, theatre, and other artistic expressions.

2.3.8 There are many protest movements in Asia of groups of peoples who have been rendered powerless and who are waking up to their right to be human. There are tribal nationalist movements in India, Bangladesh and Burma, Dalit movements in India, minority movements in Indonesia and Thailand, the Moro movement for autonomy in the Philippines, the Tamil liberation struggle in Sri Lanka, the ethnic riots in Pakistan. The aims of the struggle are for cultural identity and for the fulfilment of national, economic, political, and religious demands.

2.3.9 During the last years many forms of Asian Liberation Theologies have been developed. There is the Minjung Theology in South Korea, the Theology of Struggle in the Philippines. Starting from a commitment with the people's struggle in the economic-political and socio-cultural field, it looks for the presence and action of the Spirit in the historical context, expressed in a new language, symbols, myths, images and new forms of liturgies relevant to the struggling people. The *Dalit* Liberation Movement in India, reaffirms the sacredness of cosmic resources and the commonly

shared stewardship over them as against the practice of segregation by some caste Hindus. For the Christian Dalits the Holy Spirit is the life-giver, the unifier and empowerer in their liberation struggle who makes the no-people into God's people. In Japan we find the Theology of the Crown of Thorns of the Burakumin who in the Suiheisha-Movement work for the equality of this discriminated minority. In Pakistan there is the *Maktaba-E-Anaweem* group which as a people's forum works for the development of contextual theologies.

The Mindanao Interfaith People's Conference (MIPC) in the Philippines is an inter-religious group of people from different professions, ethnic groups and religious adherence who work for social justice.

2.3.10 Everywhere in Asia we come across a movement for Basic Christian and Basic Human Communities, which look for new ways of living a life committed to a betterment of society and peaceful living together. Various social action groups and people's movements constitute a conscious effort to bring about changes in the existing order by means of people's participation in order to obtain a just, participatory and sustainable society which respects social justice, human rights and protects the environment. This awareness of the ecological crisis in many Asian countries is rooted in Asia's traditional sense of reverential obligation towards the common natural resources which are considered to be too sacred to be manipulated or appropriated by any single person or a privileged group of persons. Today, all over the Asia-Pacific region, people are engaged in various forms of struggle. Tribal people are fighting for land rights, in India, the Philippines and many other Asian countries. Ethnic minorities are struggling for their rights like the Burakumin in Japan, the indigenous people in Irian Jaya, the tribal groups in India, the Tibetan people and many similarly discriminated groups in other Asian countries.

## 2.4 Challenges Of The Young

2.4.1 The first Asian bishops meeting in Manila in 1970 made the statement: "Asia is young. And so the Church in Asia must be young". The Asia of Today is a continent where more than half of the world's population lives, and it is a continent of the young where more than half of the people are below twenty-one years of age. In Asia, which is one of the fastest growing regions demographically, the growth in numbers will outpace the employment and educational opportunities; this will be felt especially by youth and students.

2.4.2 There are, however, regional differences to be observed. In East Asia the level of industrialisation and economic growth is higher with the consequence of resulting social trends of high consumerism, individualism and weakening of family ties. Youth in such societies are often faced with

loneliness, lack of meaning in life, high competition in the educational field and in looking for job opportunities. The deeper aspirations for fulfilment of an interior emptiness and the desire for lasting relationships is often not met. In South East Asia there are strong efforts to catch up with the rest of the industrialised nations of Asia with similar effects on the traditional patterns of individual and family which are threatened by a value system which puts success, social advancement and performance first. The results of this rapid development and economic progress do not reach all sectors of youth equally. While young people in the cities advance, there is a majority of youth living in rural communities who face very limited opportunities of educational, economic and social advancement. In South Asia the discrepancies and contrasts are much more strongly marked. The vast majority of the people and the young are not profiting from the growth of the economy while a small minority of the rich is enjoying an extravagant lifestyle. Young people, of which 80% still live in the rural areas, are lured to the big cities to look for chances of social advancement which for many of them never comes true.

2.4.3 In several Asian countries the youth has become involved in the ideological and political struggles. There is the example of the struggle of the *Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE)* in Sri Lanka in the fight for more autonomy for the Tamils and the fate of the *Janata Vimukti Peramuna (JVP)*, the youth movement in the South of Sri Lanka which was smashed by the Black Cats in the years 1987-1990 when 60,000 children and youth died or disappeared. The danger of radicalisation of such liberation movements can be seen in the development of the LTTE which has resulted in its use of violence and intimidation without respecting the differing views of other groups also fighting for the cause of the Tamils. In China the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976) which mobilised millions of young people became the symbol of a lost generation of youth misguided and used for ideological purposes. In Korea there was the tragedy of the Kwangju demonstration in 1980 where thousands of young people were killed while expressing their rejection of military dictatorship and desire for democracy.

2.4.4 It is the young people who are the primary victims of many social ills and evils which accompany the development of Asian societies. The fast growing drug market in Asia mainly targets the youth, both rural and urban. In the widespread sex markets of Asia young people (boys, girls and children) play a very large role. The mass media present lifestyles and value systems which are undermining the traditional value system and tempting Asian youth to imitate ways and cultural patterns of the West.

2.4.5 Asia is a continent with many old cultures and religious traditions, diverse in race, colour and creed. Most Asian cultures are in the process of change from a traditional way of life to a modern one, a process which

poses many challenges especially for young people. Old values are questioned and appear in the eyes of the young as obsolete. The lure of the mass media, the glamour of modern life in the global village are often at odds with the traditional answers and world views which Asian societies, cultures and peoples have developed in the course of their history. The challenges to the age-old traditional Asian perceptions of society, values and mode of living have led many young people to question the religious traditions and world views and to turn away from them. There is a certain trend towards secularism and agnosticism in today's Asian youth in the big cities. Many young people are living under wretched conditions, unable, because of poverty, to liberate themselves from the bondage of ignorance and illiteracy.

2.4.6 At the same time, there are many positive aspects in the life of the young in Asia. Young people are in the forefront to search for alternative ways of shaping a new society by social transformation. They are ready to join groups and movements to work for more social justice, to take up responsibility for community services in the field of education, health and politics. Asian youth can go back to cultural values and traditions of filial piety, care and respect of the aged, closely knit family ties in order to face the challenges of a new age. Young people play a substantial role in the social transformations taking place in Asia today. For the Catholic youth, belonging to the Christian minority Churches, the efforts for a betterment of society and a just social order can only become effective when they join with other partners belonging to other religions or ideologies. This sometimes involves difficulties, because in the process of collaboration with members of other religions, there occur problems with Church authorities who are concerned about a distinct Christian identity. Young people often feel that programmes are planned for them by authorities in the Church or in society without giving them a share in the selection and decision making processes — with the consequence that these programmes appear irrelevant to them. Young people wish to decide their own course of action, in a collective and creative self-determination. They want to be free from control by hierarchical structures. As it was formulated in ecumenical meeting of Asian youth within the CCA in the eighties: “Youth is out of control, because the Spirit is always out of control!”

2.4.7 The contribution of trans-national bodies of young people like the Catholic Asian branch of the International Movement of Catholic Students (IMCS) or the Protestant World Student Christian Federation (WSCF-Asia) is significant. The Young Christian Workers (YCW) play an important role in the social apostolate — often attracting young people belonging to other religious faiths. In January 1995, the celebration of the World Youth Day was held in Manila, for the first time in history in an Asian country, and in the presence of the Holy Father.

## 2.5 The Presence Of The Spirit In Suffering

2.5.1 Suffering is experienced in all dimensions of human life and activity. Human suffering can take many forms from physical pain to hunger, sickness, terror, expulsion, discrimination, exploitation, lack of skills, illiteracy, bereavement, and other forms of physical and spiritual agony. There is a certain dialectic at work in suffering which becomes evident in the impulse to alleviate suffering and to fight the causes of suffering by righting injustices and working to change the conditions of social and political life.

In the Christian tradition suffering is traditionally seen as a result of sin. But suffering is also understood as trial and purification, as in the story of Job. More properly in the New Testament, suffering is considered as redemptive suffering for the sake of others, freely chosen and endured.

2.5.2 In Buddhism suffering is understood as the existential human condition of all beings clinging with greed and attachment to the goods of this earth, thus prolonging the craving and foregoing liberation in attaining *nirvana*. In the ideal of the *Bodhisattva*, a form of freely chosen remaining in the spinning of the wheel of *karma*, can be found a concept which is akin to the Christian concept of redemptive suffering.

2.5.3 In different forms of art, in theatre, in popular parables, stories and myths in Asian folklore human suffering is depicted as an essential part of human existence, rich in theological implications.

2.5.4 A privileged form of suffering is to suffer as a martyr for one's conviction and in the defence of the highest principles of justice. All religions in Asia have their martyrs and their number is steadily growing. There are shining examples of well-known personalities who died a martyr's death. To mention only a few, there is the fate of Fr. Michael Rodrigo, OMI in Sri Lanka, a pioneer in Christian-Buddhist dialogue, killed in 1987 while defending the interests of small farmers against mighty landlords. There is Fr. Salvatore Carzedda, PIME, engaged in Christian-Muslim dialogue of the Silsilah Movement, who was killed in Zamboanga in 1992. Far more numerous are the nameless, silent heroes whose life was taken without the public taking notice of it. There are, for example, the many church workers and social activists, the so-called "salvaged people" killed in the Philippines by the military or vigilantes in the years 1987-89, simply because they were active in Basic Christian Communities, co-operatives, unions or human rights groups. The many thousand former "comfort women" who were forced into prostitution by the Japanese military are another example of the nameless victims. Their endless fight for justice and recompense for their suffering and degradation at the hands of Japanese military is an expression of the many forms of suffering in Asia today.

During the last fifty years the church in mainland China has experienced many forms of persecution. There have been numerous examples of extraordinary witness by lay-people, religious, priests and bishops in standing up for their conviction and faith.

### 2.5.5 Conclusion

This overview of the socio-political realities in Asia abundantly demonstrates that Asia is facing a crucial time of extraordinary changes in all areas of human life. The spiritual forces at work in these upheavals and the new developments they bring forth are challenging all people in Asia, regardless of their ideological or religious adherence. The Asian churches find themselves in the midst of these often wild currents and are struggling to provide guidance and help for discernment for their believers. Asian theologians are, therefore, called to make use of the various resources of biblical and traditional teachings, combined with the Asian religio-cultural heritage, to grope for elements of an Asian pneumatology which might provide elements to discern the various spirits at work in Asia today.

## 3 THE SPIRIT AT WORK IN THE BIBLICAL TRADITION

### 3.1 The Spirit At Work In Creation / In The Cosmos

The Spirit of God is present and is at work everywhere bringing the whole of humankind into the fullness of life and glory of the children of God. Our Christian experience calls for acknowledging this redemptive work of the Spirit in the Cosmos, especially within humankind:

For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the children of God; for the creation was subjected to futility, not of its own will, but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to decay and will obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God. We know that the whole creation has been groaning in labour pain until now, and not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the first fruits of the Spirit groan inwardly while we wait for adoption, the redemption of our bodies. (Rom. 8:19-23)

The act of creation was the self-revelation and communication of God's life through his Spirit and his Word (Gen. 1:1-3). The Spirit and the Word were, so to say, the two hands of God effecting this self-revelation and communication. This work of the Spirit takes on the redemptive nature because of sin, which subjected creation to futility, bondage to decay, but in hope. Sin was a refusal on the part of man to be led by the Spirit discerning good and evil in accordance with the Word. Eating from the tree of knowledge of good and evil results in losing the tree of life (Gen. 3:1-7, 22-24). Lack of docility to the Spirit and obedience to the Word results in the loss of life and

communion with God. But God in his redemptive love continues to lead the whole of creation to the fullness of life through his Spirit and his Word.

### 3.2 The Spirit Of God And The Spirit Of Man

It is a combined action between the Spirit of God and the spirit of man that leads man to the life characteristic of the children of God. "When we cry 'Abba Father', it is the very Spirit of God (*pneuma*) bearing witness with our spirit (*pneuma*) that we are children of God." (Rom. 8:15-16) Every human person possesses the spirit, namely the potentiality to be activated by the Spirit of God. Hence no human person nor any human activity as such can be excluded from the realm of the action of the Spirit.

### 3.3 The Spirit At Work In The Struggle Between Good And Evil

The Priestly narrative about Creation, towards its end, observes that God "looked at everything he had made, and he found it very good" (Gen. 1:31a). How, then, did **evil** come to the world? The Yahwist theologian, who actually reflected on this at an earlier stage of revelation, answered that this was the work of the serpent (Gen. 3:1), which Rev 12:9 identifies as the Devil or Satan.

As a result of the Serpent's trickery to which human beings succumbed by disobeying God, human beings acquired the "knowledge of good and evil". Instead of becoming divine; they were expelled from the garden of Eden so that they could no longer have access to the "tree of life" that would have made them immortal (Gen. 3:22). Mortality, then, was the epitome of the evil that human beings brought upon themselves. (See also Gen. 3:19b). This evil will take other concrete forms for creatures, woman and man: Gen. 3:14b-19. There will be enmity between the serpent and the woman, his offspring and her offspring. Woman will have intense pangs at childbearing, in pain will she bring forth children and her urge will be for her husband, and he will dominate her. As for man, the ground was **curse**d because of his sin; in **toil** shall he eat its yield, thorns and thistles will it bring forth as he seeks food from the plants of the field; by the sweat of his face will he get bread to eat.

It would seem, at first, that the Holy Spirit did not have any role at the beginning of man's struggle against evil. Three things, however, must be observed in the Genesis story:

Firstly, the river in Eden can be understood as a prophetic symbol of the Holy Spirit, see Jn. 7:38-39; Rev 21:6.

Secondly, the "tree of life in the middle of the garden" (Gen. 2:9b) can also be understood as a prophetic symbol of the Holy Spirit; to eat of the



fruit of this tree is to have immortal life (Gen. 3:22) while being deprived of the fruit of this tree is to be a mortal being.

Thirdly, before mankind's fall, man and woman enjoyed intimacy with God. The biblical scene is that of God and the first human beings walking together in the garden "at the breezy time of the day" (Gen. 3:8). Three realities are mentioned that, for the Christian reader, would relate to the Trinity: God, his "sound" or "voice" evoking the Logos, and the evening breeze evoking the *Pneuma* or Spirit.

One clear thing is that man and woman lost their place in paradise because of Satan, and their struggle to regain paradise or to attain a new paradise is a struggle against Satan, an Evil Spiritual Power. The one who can best help in this struggle is the opposite Spiritual Power, the Holy Spirit. This, however, does not deny that in Gen. 3:15, the woman will have an offspring that will strike at the serpent's head.

In the scheme of Genesis, evil becomes worse and worse until "no desire that (the human) heart conceived was ever anything but evil" and God "regretted that he had made man on earth, and his heart was grieved. So the Lord said: 'I will wipe out from the earth the man whom I have created, and not only the men, but also the beasts and the creeping things and the birds of the air, for I am sorry that I made them.'"

At this point, Genesis says: "but Noah found favour with the Lord" (Gen. 6:8). This divine "favour" upon Noah can be understood as a foreshadowing of God's favour on Jesus Christ which is manifested by the descent of the Holy Spirit in the form of a dove (see Mt. 3:17, Mk. 1:11, Lk. 3:22). Noah was a "good man and blameless" (Gen. 6:8-9) whose family God will spare from the Flood while He destroys the rest of the human beings because of their wickedness (Gen. 6:5; 11-13). It is because of Noah that the earth is given a new beginning (Gen. 8:21-22; 9:1-17).

His descendant, Abraham appears in the biblical scene as the man blessed by God and through whom all the communities of the earth shall find blessing (Gen. 12:2-3). He foreshadows all who will be led by the Spirit. When he reaches Canaan, having left Haran in obedience to God's call, he builds an altar and invokes the name of the Lord, foreshadowing all those who will worship in spirit and truth (see Jn. 4:23-24).

"The path of the upright is like the light of dawn, its brightness growing to the fullness of day, the way of the wicked is as dark as night, they cannot tell the obstacles they stumble over"(Prov. 4:18-19). Insights such as this abound in the Book of Proverbs, which is not only a witness to the teachings of the wise in ancient Israel, at least from the time of king Solomon, but also reflects similar teachings in the surrounding countries of

Egypt and Syro-Mesopotamia. The Holy Spirit, who is behind the cultivation of Wisdom among ancient peoples maintained the struggle against evil in this manner.

Later, at the end of the Old Testament, the Book of Wisdom identifies *pneuma*, Spirit, with *sophia*, Wisdom. This does not come in the beginning of life; it is imparted in answer to prayer. It is the intellectual power which can see clearly and sharply and which, not limited in time and space, can, with universal efficacy, permeate objects in virtue of its fineness without being affected by them. As this intellectual power the Spirit is oriented to the good and is free from any stain. In and with this orientation to the good it addresses itself beneficently to men and women. In contra-distinction to the breath of life it is not in all things. It permeates thinking men and women who are morally pure and who open themselves to it in prayer. By reason of their suitability for the *pneuma* these people are called *pneumata*, Wis. 7:23. The capacity for thought and power of moral resolve present in the *pneumata* is already an outworking of the permeating *pneuma* which enables them to see the concrete will of God which is to be done, Wis. 9:17. In the fact that *pneuma* permeates the *pneumata*, its superiority to all things human is displayed: it is free from care and from all human uncertainty and failure. It is unlimited in its possibilities. It sees and hears all things, Wis. 1:7. This intellectually and ethically superhuman power stands in a unique relation to God to whom it properly belongs. As the spirit of discipline, the *pneuma* has no fellowship with evil.

As Salvation History moves to its last era with the coming of Jesus Christ, at least one of the evangelists, Mark, presents the messianic ministry as a continuous struggle between the Holy Spirit acting in Jesus, on one hand, and Satan on the other hand. It is the Holy Spirit who impels Jesus to the desert (Mk. 1:12) where he remains "for forty days, tempted by Satan" (Mk. 1:13). In the desert Jesus was "among wild beasts, and angels ministered to him," (Mk. 1:13) but that is all that made it special, because, in fact his, struggle with Satan and with the evil spirit lasted throughout his ministry. This ministry lasted from the time heaven was torn open by the Holy Spirit descending on Jesus (Mk. 1:10) until the curtain of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom at the time when Jesus, on the cross, gave a loud cry and breathed his last (Mk. 15:38).

There are several allusions to the exorcism of demons in the synoptic gospel and on one occasion Jesus implies that the casting out was "by the Spirit of God" (Mt. 12:28). The Holy Spirit is the power whereby evil spirits are overcome and cast out. As already noted, Jesus was plunged into a spiritual conflict by the Holy Spirit. Jesus' exorcisms were unique because they were regarded as messianic signs, and they were performed through the Holy Spirit (not by magic). If Jesus was to establish his own kingdom, he must first overthrow the kingdom of evil. The exorcisms were powerful

manifestations of the Spirit which demonstrated that a stronger person had come.

The ministry of exorcisms which Jesus himself practised was intended to be passed on as the seventy experienced on their mission. It was the subjection of the demons that most impressed them when they returned to report to Jesus (Lk. 10:17 ff.), but he tempered their enthusiasm, no doubt to ensure that they would not give prime importance to power over spirits. Yet at the same time he himself is said to have rejoiced in the Holy Spirit (Lk. 10:21) because of the discovery that his disciples had made.

All the Synoptics record the occasion when Jesus was accused of casting out demons by the prince of demons (Mk. 3:22-30; Mt. 12:22-32; Lk. 11:14-23). Jesus makes a distinction between general opposition to himself in his teaching ministry and a deliberate distortion of the Holy Spirit's ministry within him. The first is a sin but forgivable, while the second is an unforgivable sin, a turning away from the very source of forgiveness who is no other than God. Opposition to Jesus, like that coming from his relatives who thought he was mad, can be forgiven because the ignorance on which it is based can be cured. But opposition to the divine power working in Jesus (an opposition that goes to the extent of deceiving others and of identifying the Holy Spirit with the devil) can only be due to a malice that distorts the saving acts of God so as to save one's face and turns one away from the very source of forgiveness.

After the Resurrection and the coming of the Holy Spirit on Pentecost, the disciples of Christ were to give witness to his Good News in Jerusalem, throughout Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth" (Acts 1:8). They were to tell people: "Repent and be baptised, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; and you will receive the gift of the holy Spirit. Save yourselves from this corrupt generation" (Acts 2:38. 40b).

Even after being baptised, Christians are to engage in the struggle between the spirit of this world and the Spirit of God (1 Cor. 2:12 etc.), but they can have the confidence of ultimate victory (Rom. 8:37-39).

### **3.4 The Spirit At Work In History, Religions And Cultural Traditions Of Peoples**

For Israel, as for the individual, the Spirit is the medium by which God teaches man to do his will, and leads him onward in the right way of life (Ps 143:10). Its activity is associated especially with the establishment of God's covenant with Israel, and the deliverance of the Exodus. God "put in the midst of them his holy Spirit" and "caused his glorious arm to go at the right hand of Moses" (Is. 63:11-12). Here the Spirit is equated with the

“arm” of the Lord and represents the active presence of God among his people, saving them from their enemies and constituting them the people of the covenant.

Israel’s disloyalty to God is a rebellion against his Spirit (Is. 63:10) and the action of God leading Israel in the exodus wanderings is equated to the personal activity of God himself (Is. 63:14).

It is by the action of the Spirit that kings and rulers receive the gifts necessary for leadership. The judges, in particular, are represented as Spirit-possessed men, gifted with qualities that enable them to govern Israel and save her from her oppressors; thus it is said of Othniel that “the Spirit of the Lord came upon him, and he judged Israel,” and it was under the influence of the spirit of the Lord that Gideon roused the tribes to repel the hostile Midianites and Jephthah advanced against the Ammonite invaders (Judg. 3:10; 6:34; 11:29). Saul was similarly empowered to lead Israel to the relief of Jabesh-gilead (I Sam. 11:6).

Of more significance is the Spirit-possession of David after Samuel had anointed him (I Sam 16:13). As the divinely chosen king of Israel, David was a Spirit-filled ruler. Hence the expectations associated with the house of David point to the hope of a ruler pre-eminently endowed with the Spirit of God. The ideal figure of an inspired king, as it is portrayed by Isaiah (11:2), has the distinctive characteristic of Spirit-possession, through which he receives the sevenfold abundance of those gifts that are the special qualities of a wise and just ruler. This link between the ideas of anointing and of Spirit-possession reappears in connection with the Servant of the Lord (Is. 42:1) and the divinely sent prophet of Is. 61:1, and in this respect associates these figures with that of the Israelite monarch.

The primary manifestation of the activity of the Spirit in the Old Testament is prophecy. By his Spirit the Lord sent “the law and the words” through the prophets (Zech. 7:12), and it was by the Spirit that God sent his warnings to Israel through the prophets (Neh. 9:30).

As the personal power of God, effective in the moral and spiritual transformation of his people, the Spirit will be the inner principle of life of the restored community after the Babylonian exile. The bestowal by God of his Spirit will bring about a renewal of the covenant relationship between God and Israel, enabling the people to observe his laws and truly belong to him (Ezek. 11:19-20). To receive the Spirit will be the decisive turning point in Israel’s repentance (Ezek. 18:31), where the new human spirit of the restored community is the effect of the operation of the Spirit of God (Ezek. 36:26-27). Through the divine Spirit there will be a transformation of the human character, so that a “heart of flesh” replaces the “heart of stone” of the days of Israel’s transgression.

Works of divine power attributed to God's Spirit in the Jewish Bible are familiar in the religions around Israel. Ecstasy can hardly have had its root in Israel, nor in other Semitic religions. It points rather in the direction of the Indo-European religions. It is no accident that the same Hebrew word *ru'ah* is used for both "spirit" and "wind." The wind is powerful; it is indeed irresistible in its force. It is also mysterious. Mysterious and unfathomable forces are at one with the wind in that one cannot tell whence it comes and where it goes (Jn. 3:8). These divine forces are a breathing, a *ru'ah* of God. Hence in other religions, too, they are known as divine powers which bring either deliverance or destruction. In terms of its belief in *ru'ah* Israel is embedded in its environment.

The scattering of humankind over the face of the earth at Babel (Gen. 11:1-9) and the gathering of people from every nation under heaven on Pentecost (Acts 2:1-13) indicate that this redemptive activity of the Spirit is present among all the peoples. The calling of Abraham, which marks the concrete historical (beginning) of the redemptive activity of God in the history of salvation was in view of blessing all the families of the earth (Gen. 12:3). The Lord stirring up the spirit of Cyrus, the presence of the Spirit of God in the nostrils of Job (Tob. 27:3), the promise of God to pour out his Spirit on all flesh (Joel 2:28) all point to the working of the Spirit also outside Israel, the people of God. To the astonishment of Peter and others, the gift of the Holy Spirit was poured out on the Gentiles. (Acts 10:45) The interaction between the history of Israel and the history of the peoples around them which has contributed substantially to the formation of the biblical tradition, the Wisdom literature in the Old testament and the Hellenistic influence in the formation of the New Testament, are all clear evidence of the working of the Spirit in the religious and cultural traditions and the historical vicissitudes of the people at large and of the unity of the working of the Spirit within and outside the People of God.

### 3.5 Spirit And Word

The Spirit of God is intimately related to the Word of God. Already in creation we find the intimate relationship between the Spirit and the Word. If it was the Spirit who was at work in creation, it was through the Word that God called the universe into existence (Gen. 1:1-3). The mediation of the Word and the Spirit is not limited to creation, but it is extended to revelation, sanctification and salvation (Jn. 1:3-4). If the New Covenant is established by putting the Law (Word) of God within the people (Jer. 31:31-33), it is also by putting the Spirit of God within them (Ezek. 36:27). The Word became flesh through the work of the Holy Spirit (Jn. 1:14; Lk. 1:35). Jesus the Incarnated Word is presented as the one who permanently possesses the Spirit and dispenses the Spirit to believers (Jn. 1:32; 3:22-26). Jesus' words are Spirit and Life (Jn. 6:63). The Word of God is qualified as the Sword of the Spirit (Eph. 6:17). The new birth through the Spirit (Jn.

3:5) is a birth through the imperishable seed, the living and enduring Word of God (1 Pet 1:23).

“God spoke to our ancestors in many and various ways by the prophets, but in these last days he has spoken to us by a Son” (Heb. 1:1). God chose to speak or to reveal himself by establishing a relationship with mankind through creation and salvation. The Spirit of God was guiding the people of God through their history. It is this self-revelation or the Word of God which was experienced in the history of Israel through the mediation of the patriarchs, judges, kings and prophets that finally resulted in the codification of the written scriptures of the Old Testament. The New Testament is the written form of the Incarnated Word as experienced by the Apostolic witnesses and the first Christian communities. All throughout their process of codification, the Spirit of God was guiding all those who were involved in this process: All Scripture is inspired by God, and is useful for teaching. (2 Tim 3:16).

The same God entered the history of the various peoples through his Spirit and his Word in mysterious ways known only to Him, and therefore the Sacred Scriptures of the other religions are also reflections of the presence and activity of the Spirit in the non-Christian religious traditions.

### **3.6 The Spirit At Work In Christ**

The presence and activity of the Spirit in Jesus Christ can be found throughout his life and ministry, from Incarnation to Resurrection. Jesus is conceived and born of the Holy Spirit (Mt. 1:20; Lk. 1:35). Jesus starts his public ministry having been anointed by the Holy Spirit. He is led by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil (Mt. 4:1). The presence of the Spirit in Jesus was manifested in his preaching the Gospel (Lk. 4:18 ff.), in his teaching with authority (Mk. 1:22, 27), in his miracles (Mt. 12:28) in his power to forgive sins (Mk. 2:5-12), in his prophetic knowledge and utterances (Mt. 8:31-33), and finally in his death and resurrection (Acts 2:33; 1 Cor. 15:45).

#### **3.6.1 Jesus: the Source of the Spirit**

Jesus, through his glorification (death and resurrection), becomes the source of the Spirit. This was announced during his public ministry (Jn. 7:37-39) and was symbolically presented at the piercing of the side (Jn. 19:34-35) and the death of Jesus (Jn. 19:30). After his resurrection Jesus breathed on his disciples and communicated to them the Holy Spirit (Jn. 20:22).

#### **3.6.2 The Holy Spirit (Paraclete): the Spirit of Jesus**

The Holy Spirit is presented as the Spirit of Jesus Christ, especially in the gospel of John. The giving of the Spirit to the disciples through the

breathing of Jesus (Jn. 20:22) is an indication of it. The Spirit is given by the Father at the request of Jesus (Jn. 14:16) and in the name of Jesus (Jn. 14:26). It is Jesus who sends the Spirit from the Father (Jn. 15:26). Through the Spirit, Jesus and the Father will be present with the disciples (Jn. 14:18:23). The Holy Spirit is qualified as the "Spirit of Truth" (Jn. 14:26), while Jesus is the Truth (Jn. 14.6).

### 3.6.3 The Spirit as Paraclete: the Eschatological Continuum of Christ

The work of the Spirit is to make operative and to bring to fulfilment what Christ has effected. His activities such as teaching (Jn. 14:26), witnessing (Jn. 15:26), and convicting (Jn. 16:7-11) are all related to the work of Christ and dependent on it. The Spirit will guide us into all the "Truth".(Jn. 16:13) If "Truth" means the "Word" (Jn. 17:17), or God's self-revelation in Jesus Christ, the Spirit's work is at the service of the Truth, helping us to understand, appreciate and appropriate it in our life.

## 3.7 The Spirit At Work In The Church

The coming of the Spirit, as the result of the completion of the mission of Jesus, is the fulfilment of John's prophecy of a coming "baptism" with the Holy Spirit (Acts 1:5). That this is a participation in the same Spirit which operated in Jesus is emphasised in Luke's assertion that it was "through the Holy Spirit" that the risen Lord gave his final commandment to his apostles (Acts 1:2). This is the fulfilment of the promise of a general outpouring of the Spirit; the followers of Christ will participate in his own baptism with the Spirit.

The accompaniment of wind and fire at the outpouring of the Spirit on Pentecost represented the power of the Spirit, one unseen, the other seen. The Pentecostal wind is like the *ru'ah* of the Old Testament in its more concrete and physical manifestations, and its coming is symbolised in terms of tongues "as of fire," distributed and resting upon the apostles. The purpose of the Spirit's onrush is to bestow upon them the gifts most needed for the mission to the whole world, represented by the crowd drawn together in Jerusalem "from every nation under heaven" (Acts 2:2-5). This fulfilment of the words of Joel has been made possible by the resurrection and glorification of Jesus: "Being therefore exalted at the right hand of God, and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, he has poured out this which you see and hear" (Acts 2:33).

The gift is not something confined to the original witnesses who were empowered from on high on the day of Pentecost. "The promise," said Peter in his speech to the Pentecost crowd, "is to you and to your children and to all that are far off" (Acts 2:39). It is to be received by those who, like the followers of John, repent and are baptised for the forgiveness of sins (Acts

2:38). The vitally important difference between John's baptism and the Christian baptism, which is an effective sign of the bestowal of the Spirit, is that the latter is "in the name of Jesus the Messiah." It is as the people of Christ, the renewed Israel, that those who repent now receive the fulfilment of what in John's preaching could only be a promise for the future. The infilling of the Spirit is extended to all Christian believers, that is to say, that it was both corporate and individual. The expression, "filled with the Holy Spirit" in Acts 2:4 does not occur in any of the Old Testament references to the Spirit. There is one use of it in relation to Jesus at his baptism (Lk. 4:1). But it became the hallmark of Christians. The Spirit is no longer, as in the Old Testament, a phenomenon that comes and goes but is now, in the Church, a divine presence in the community of believers.

### 3.7.1 The Spirit At Work In The Proclamation Of The Word

Christ promised the coming of the Spirit to enable the apostles to receive power, and so become his witnesses to the end of the earth (Acts 1:8). When the apostles did in fact receive the Holy Spirit on Pentecost day, Luke describes the event as an experience of the Spirit of prophecy, which is now the power and motive principle of the church's missionary witness to Christ throughout the world. The Spirit is the guiding and controlling power of the world-wide mission.

In addition to the Apostles, certain outstanding leaders of the mission are described as being pre-eminently possessed by the Holy Spirit. This is true of the Seven (Acts 6:3, 5), of Barnabas (11:24), and of Paul after his conversion, when the touch of Ananias brings him healing for his blindness and participation in the Pentecostal gift which had been received by the earliest believers (Acts 9:17). There is no necessary contradiction between this special endowment and the general impression given by the early chapters of Acts that the whole church was the Spirit-possessed community of the new covenant. Luke's chief interest is in the work of the Spirit in the furtherance of the church's world-wide mission. He therefore concentrates his attention upon the specifically missionary gifts of the Spirit. There are some who are endowed with peculiar powers of eloquence of the doing of mighty works, and are leaders of the mission in a special sense; there are those who have special gifts of prophecy. In such cases the operation of the Spirit is manifested in "tongues", prophesying, and other unusual phenomena.

Stephen, in particular, fulfils the Lord's promise that the confessor of the faith under persecution would be directly inspired, and it is in his being put to death because of his witnessing that his inspiration through the Spirit reaches its highest point (Acts 7:55).



Through the inspiration of the Spirit, Philip is instructed to join the Ethiopian eunuch (Acts 8:29), and when his task is accomplished, Philip is removed to other spheres of activity by the agency of the Spirit (Acts 8:39). It is through the guidance of the Spirit that Peter is induced to meet the envoys of Cornelius and go with them to Caesarea (Acts 10:19; 11:12). The Spirit directs the church at Antioch to send out Barnabas and Saul as their missionaries to the Gentile countries of Asia Minor (Acts 13:2), and it is in the consciousness of the Spirit's guidance that they set out on their journey (Acts 13:4).

The Council of Jerusalem sends its instructions to the Gentile brethren in Antioch, Syria, and Cilicia in the confidence that its decision has been due to the direct guidance of the Spirit: "It has seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us" (Acts 15:28).

On the second missionary journey the Spirit dictates to Paul and Silas how the strategy of the mission is to be pursued. On this journey the province of Asia is not to be evangelised, nor are the apostle and his companion allowed to go into Bithynia; the Spirit's guidance brings them perforce to Troas, where the call will come to take the gospel overseas to Macedonia (Acts 16:6-7). Luke does not tell us how this guidance was mediated; but we should probably infer that it was received through prophetic insight, in the manner in which the Hebrew prophets had discerned the divine command to go to particular places and carry out particular tasks. It is in connection with this guidance of the missionary preachers that the Spirit is specifically described as the "Spirit of Jesus." Paul's decision on his third journey to leave Asia and revisit Greece is similarly made under the compulsion of the Spirit (Acts 19:21).

The work of the Spirit was indispensable in the preaching ministry of the apostle Paul, who said that his speech and message was "in demonstration of the Spirit and power" (1 Cor. 2:4). In this expression the Spirit is the source of power. Paul is concerned that faith should not rest on man's wisdom. Proclamation which is dependent on the Spirit is seen to be independent of human wisdom. This does not mean that Spirit-endowed preaching is opposed to human wisdom, but that human wisdom is not the source of the message. The fact that the Spirit plays so important a part at once places the proclamation of the gospel on a higher plane than man's reason.

A similar conviction about the Spirit's part in preaching is seen in 1Thess. 1:5, where "power", "the Holy Spirit" and "full conviction" are linked together. In Ephesians 3:5 the revelation which had been given to apostles and prophets is said to be by the Spirit. The particular subject of the revelation in this case is the inclusion of the Gentiles (see also Eph. 2:18).

### 3.7.2 The Spirit At Work In The Life Of The Christian Community

The quality of life evinced by the Church as a Spirit-filled community is summed up in Acts 2:42-47 and 4:32 ff. The Spirit is the life principle of the community as a whole. Its manifestations are to be seen in the common life marked by *didache*, *koinonia*, *klassis tou artou*, *proseuche* (Acts 2:42-47; 4:32-35; 5:12-16).

The *didache* is to be distinguished from the *kerygma*, which was the proclamation of the gospel to those being invited to conversion — samples of which can be found in Acts 2:14-39; 3:12-26; 4:8-12; 5:29-32; 10:34-43 and 13:17-41. It consisted of instructions for the newly converted in which the scriptures were explained in the light of the Incarnation and Ministry of Christ.

The *koinonia* denotes community of goods (Acts 3:44; 4:32-35), which expresses and strengthens community of Spirit (Acts 3:46; 4:32), as a result of sharing the gospel and all the benefits received in the apostolic community from God through Jesus Christ. While the practice of *koinonia* is not limited to help on the social level, nor to a common ideology or feeling of solidarity, it does include something of all these.

In itself *klassis tou artou* or the “breaking of the bread” suggests a Jewish meal where the one who presides pronounces a blessing before dividing the bread. For Christians, however, it implies the Eucharistic service, Lk. 22:19 and par.; 24:35; 1 Cor. 10:16; 11:24. Christians met in private houses for this celebration and an ordinary meal would accompany it, see 1 Cor. 11:20-34.

The *proseuche* consisted of prayers in common, presided over by an apostle or a designated leader, see 1:14, 24; 4:24-30; 6:4; 12:5.

When the church in a particular area is at peace and is being consolidated, its way of life can be described as “walking in the fear of the Lord and in the comfort of the Holy Spirit” (Acts 9:31). This life in the Spirit is especially characterised by joy (Acts 13:52).

### 3.7.3 The Spirit At Work In The Sacraments

According to Paul the Spirit’s task is not simply to draw attention to the glories of the risen Christ, but also to take an essential part in the process of regeneration. All believers are said to be baptised into one body “by one Spirit” (1 Cor. 12:13). The unity brought about by the same Spirit exists across such strongly marked groups as Jews and Gentiles, slaves and freemen, two of the most strongly marked divides in the ancient world. As if to reinforce his point Paul adds: “all were made to drink of one Spirit.” A

similar parallel is found in Eph. 4:4 where “one body”, “one Spirit” and “one baptism” are all linked.

The only passage in Paul where Spirit and baptism are definitely linked is 1 Cor. 12:13, which reads, “For by (*en*) one Spirit we were all baptised into (*eis*) one body . . . and all were made to drink of one Spirit.” Now, although the preposition (*en*) could here be instrumental, making the act of baptism to be the work of the Spirit, this would not agree with the other New Testament instances of the verb “baptise” used with *en*. In all these instances the preposition refers to the *sphere* in which the baptising takes place, i.e. either in water or in the Spirit. Moreover, baptism has as its aim the incorporation into the body, which implies that no one can be in the body without the operation of the Spirit. It is in the Spirit that all Christians enjoy solidarity.

### 3.8 Charisms, Services, Ministries

Paul has a great deal to say about spiritual gifts, especially when writing to the Corinthian church. It seems probable that an over-emphasis on the gifts had caused a situation in which it was necessary for Paul to give a more balanced view. He mentions a number of gifts which had been exercised among them, although he devotes more attention to the gifts of utterance (tongues, interpretation, prophecy) than to others, presumably again because these were being the most abused at Corinth. When he introduces the matter in 1 Cor. 12:4-11, his chief concern is to show that whatever the gifts, the giver is the same Spirit. Indeed he contrasts the variety of gifts with the word “same”, applied to God, to the Lord and to the Spirit (verses 4, 5, 6). His concern is clearly to combat the divisiveness which had occurred at Corinth. He is at pains to point out that when the Spirit gives gifts he gives them “for the common good” (v.7). The gifts are related to the community and must contribute to the welfare of the whole. This is borne out by the fact that in the context of his discussion on spiritual gifts, Paul points out the unity of the church under the metaphor of a body. The Spirit as giver of gifts will see to it that concord and not division results.

Moreover, the actual bestowing of the gifts is seen to be the sovereign decision of the Spirit. Paul puts the matter succinctly: “All these (i.e. gifts) are inspired by one and the same Spirit, who apportions to each one individually as he wills” (1 Cor. 12:11). This established the important principle that no one is expected to seek for any specific gift, since the Spirit of God exercises sovereign control. This means, moreover, that no one can claim superiority over another on the grounds of possessing particular gifts. In 1 Cor. 12:31 ff., he considers the best gifts to be love, hope and faith, of which the greatest is love. But this kind of gift is expected to manifest itself in all Christians.

The Spirit's main task is to guide and empower the people of God, and when he bestows gifts on people he does not abdicate his sovereign control. The gifts are still his, whoever happens to be the channel through whom they are exercised. Paul insists that the only valid outcome of the exercise of these gifts is the building up of the church. In a significant exhortation to the Corinthians he says, "since you are eager for manifestations of the Spirit, strive to excel in building up the church" (1 Cor 14:12). He is clearly implying that the Corinthians were not doing this, but were valuing gifts of the Spirit for their own sake.

Other gifts mentioned by Paul concentrate on *specific functions*, and these must never be separated from those gifts enumerated in 1 Cor. 12:8-10. The functional aspect appears in the list in 1 Cor. 12:28, where gifts which are not specifically called gifts of the Spirit are named as being appointed by God: "apostles, prophets, teachers, miracle-workers, healers, helpers, administrators, speakers in tongues".

The fact that some of these have already been included under the list of gifts in 1 Cor. 12:8-10, but are repeated in conjunction with **offices**, shows the close link between them. It is particularly significant that the most clearly ecstatic function in this list, speaking in tongues, is placed last. Another list occurs in Rom. 12:6-8, where again the Spirit is not mentioned, but where some of the gifts elsewhere attributed to the Spirit are included (prophecy, helps). Yet another occurs in Eph. 4:11 where the gifts are given by the ascended Christ and where the list wholly concentrates on **functions**: apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, teachers. In this case the purpose is again stated to be the building up of the body of Christ (Eph. 4:12).

It is clear that Paul never conceives of the Spirit as the giver of a certain number of circumscribed gifts. His manner of mentioning them, with variations of order and content, supports the view that he not only regarded the Spirit as sovereign, but as acting in a completely non-stereotyped way. Moreover, the mixing of gifts and functions shows that nothing designed for the building up of the church can take place apart from the operation of the Spirit. The fact that the spirit is not always mentioned as giver is immaterial, since in Paul's mind there does not appear to be any distinction between God, Christ and the Spirit as bestower of spiritual benefits.

### 3.9 Activities Of The Spirit

#### 3.9.1 The Spirit that Draws

The Spirit is at work drawing people to the Truth, which according to the Christian revelation is Christ himself. "No one can come to me unless drawn by the Father who sent me." (Jn. 6:66) This is also indicated in the

statement: “When I am lifted up from the earth, I will draw all men to myself” (Jn. 12:32). Jesus’ exaltation was the culmination of revelation. Hence one of the main activities of the Spirit is to bring people to the fullness of revelation, and knowledge of God. This takes place both within and outside the Church since the revelation in Christ or Truth is not limited to Christianity or the Church.

### 3.9.2 The Spirit that Begets

“Unless one is born of Water and the Spirit he cannot enter the Kingdom of God”(Jn. 3:5). Since the words “water and” in this text is a later addition of the ecclesial dimension, the original text refers to the new life of conversion that the Spirit effects in the human hearts in view of establishing the Kingdom of God. Though the “Kingdom of God” is intimately related to the person of Christ, it is broader than the Church. Hence the Spirit of God is at work, both within and outside the Church, effecting the new birth or conversion in human hearts.

However, within the members of the Church, the beginning of this work of regeneration is simultaneous with Baptism. All believers are baptized into one Body in one Spirit and all are made to drink of one Spirit (1Cor. 12:13). No one can respond to the claims of Christ without being activated and possessed by the Holy Spirit (1Cor. 12:3). The presence of the Spirit in the Christian is personal, permanent and indwelling (Jn. 14:15-17). The Activity of the Spirit within the believers takes on the character of a helper (Paraclete) who helps them to understand their faith (Jn. 2:11-13; Jn. 14:26), live their faith, especially in adverse circumstances (Jn. 15:26-27) and to defend their faith against the unbelieving world (Jn. 16:7-11).

### 3.9.3 The Spirit that Teaches

“But the Paraclete, the Holy Spirit whom the Father will send in my name will teach you everything, and remind you of all that I have said to you.” (Jn. 14:26) The Spirit is a teacher and his teaching is necessarily related to that of Christ. The Spirit will not bring a new revelation. He will help the believers to understand the meaning of the Revelation in Christ in our times and situations. If Jesus is the “Truth, “ the Spirit will guide the believers into all the Truth (Jn. 16:12-15).

### 3.9.4 The Spirit that Witnesses; Helps Martyrs

“When the Paraclete comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, the Spirit of Truth who comes from the Father, he will bear witness to me. You also are witnesses, because you have been with me from the beginning.” (Jn. 15:26-27) The Spirit helps the believers not only to understand the faith, but also to live the faith especially in adverse circumstances. It is

in the context of persecution by the world that the witnessing role of the Spirit is spoken of: "If the world hates you, be aware that it hated me before it hated you." (Jn. 15:18) The witnessing of the Spirit is in view of the witnessing of the believers. "You also are witnesses, because you have been with me from the beginning." (Jn. 15:27) The expression "from the beginning" refers to the beginning of the faith experience. Hence it is a question of bearing witness to one's faith even to the extent of martyrdom. The Spirit helps the believers to bear witness to their faith even at the cost of life.

### 3.9.5 The Spirit that Accuses

"And when he comes, he will accuse the world of sin, righteousness and judgement" (Jn. 8:16). The Spirit as Paraclete cannot be received by the world: "This is the Spirit of Truth whom the world cannot receive." (Jn. 16:17) The world here refers to the unbelieving world. The sin in St. John is precisely the sin of unbelief. The spirit, who is a helper in faith, will also arouse a sense of sin in the unbeliever and ultimately bring him to conversion and faith.

### 3.9.6 The Spirit that Liberates

The Spirit is the spirit of holiness (Rom. 1:4) and it liberates men from sin (Gal 3:2). It is the Spirit that breaks the shackles of the flesh (Rom. 6) and the Law (Rom. 7) and gives men the freedom of the children of God (Rom. 8:21). The Spirit brings deliverance from the slavery of sin as a continuous process and enhancement in the new-found freedom (2Cor. 3:17). The Spirit enables us to walk in the Spirit (Gal 5:16), in the newness of life (Rom. 6:4) in love (Rom. 14:15; Eph. 5:2) as children of light (Eph. 5:2) according to God's way (1Cor. 7:17; Eph. 2:10).

### 3.9.7 The Spirit that Effects Growth

The Spirit enables one to grow into a maturity of human life that is manifested in the fruits of the Spirit such as love, joy, peace, etc. (Gal 5:22-23). God's love is poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit (Rom. 5:5). The Spirit remains as the inner principle of life resulting in an organic growth in our human life with attitudes, dispositions and qualities proper to a full human development.

### 3.9.8 The Spirit that Prays

"Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we ought, but the Spirit intercedes with sighs too deep for words" (Rom. 8:26). "When we cry 'Abba, Father' it is the Spirit bearing witness with our own spirit, that we are children of God" (Rom. 8:15-16).

Prayer is the action of the Spirit in man. Prayer being a dialogue between God and man, it can be properly realised only through the mediation of the Spirit and Word through which God enters human life. The true worshippers whom God seeks are those who worship in Spirit and Truth (Word), Jn. 4:23. The spirit in man longs for God who is Spirit as a deer longs for flowing streams (Ps 42:1-2) and prayer-experience is the encounter between the Spirit of God and the spirit of man. Hence all genuine prayer experience is the work of the Spirit of God.

### 3.9.9 The Spirit that Leads

“All who are led by the Spirit of God are children of God” (Rom. 8:16). The Holy Spirit becomes a new principle of life and action in those who have been made children of God through their faith in the Son of God (Gal. 3:26). The “leading” of the Spirit is to be understood eschatologically, that is, the Spirit leads man by liberating him from the slavery of sin and death and guiding him throughout his life until he possesses his eschatological adoption at the resurrection. This eschatological sense is supported by the usage of the term “lead” (*agein*) in the OT, where it is used of God as subject almost exclusively in contexts speaking of the Exodus of Israel from Egypt and of the new Exodus from the exile, and that often in texts speaking of the father — son relationship between God and Israel (Dt. 8:2-5; 32:5-12; Is 43:5-6; 63:7-64:11; Jer. 31:8-9). As Israel was led by God through the desert towards their heritage of the promised land, so the children of God are led by the Spirit of God through the desert of this earthly life to their eschatological glory.

### 3.9.10 The Spirit that Renews

“And the one who was seated on the throne said, “See, I am making all things new.” (Rev 21:5) The ultimate goal towards which all the activities of the Spirit are directed is the renewal of all things: individual renewal, societal renewal and cosmic renewal. This is the eschatological condition towards which the whole Cosmos is moving as described in the presentation of the new heaven and the new earth. (Rev 21:1-4) Man, being the centre of the Cosmos, the renewing work of the Spirit takes place fundamentally in the heart of man: “A new heart I will give you, and a new spirit I will put into you . . . I will put my Spirit within you . . .” (Ezek. 36:26-27) The Spirit at work in the prophets of the Old Testament was ultimately in view of a permanent establishment of justice and righteousness in society. The Spirit transforms the world into a place of righteousness: “A Spirit from on high is poured out on us and the wilderness becomes a fruitful field . . . Then justice will dwell in the wilderness and righteousness abide in the fruitful field. The effect of righteousness will be peace.” (Is. 32:15-17). The Spirit renews the individual (Ps. 51:10-11) and the community (Is. 59:21). The Spirit effects a new creation, stripping off the old self and clothing oneself

with the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge according to the image of the Creator (Col. 3:9-11).

### **3.10 The Spirit And Discernment**

#### **3.10.1 The Need Of Discernment Of The Spirit**

The Spirit is entirely free in its operations and there is always a mysterious character which accompanies all the activities of the Spirit (Jn. 3:8). Man cannot by himself fathom the operation of the Spirit. In the same way the one who is begotten of the Spirit, having the quality of the Spirit, shares also the unfathomable character of the Spirit. The existence of the Spirit and those who are begotten of the Spirit is a reality, though mysterious. The nature itself of this activity of the Spirit cannot be perceived by human beings except in its effects: "You hear the sound of (the Spirit)" (Jn. 3:8). Hence it is possible to discern the working of the Spirit from the visible consequences.

The discernment of the Spirit at work is in fact necessary since there are also evil spirits at work, opposing the working of the Holy Spirit. In the life and ministry of Jesus we see the evil spirits resisting the Spirit at work in Jesus (Mk. 1:23-28; Mt. 4:1-11; Mk. 3:11-12; 5:1-13). Besides, the discernment of the Spirit is necessitated by the fact that there are people who falsely claim they have the Holy Spirit. Even in the time of the early Church there was such a situation. In the first epistle of John, the apostle says: "Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are of God. For many false prophets have gone out into the world" (1 Jn. 4:1).

#### **3.10.2 Criteria For Discernment**

Several criteria could be mentioned for the discernment of the Spirit. But the following may be mentioned in the light of the biblical tradition.

##### **3.10.2.1 Fruits of the Spirit**

The tree is known from its fruits: "Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly are ravenous wolves. You will know them by their fruits" (Mt. 7:15-16). St. Paul speaks of the "fruits of the Spirit": "The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control" (Gal 5:22-23). These fruits of the Spirit certainly constitute fundamental criteria for the discernment of the Holy Spirit.

##### **3.10.2.2 Values of the Kingdom**

When the exorcisms performed by Jesus were misinterpreted by the Pharisees, Jesus himself gave them instructions as to how to interpret his



miracles of exorcism. He told them that, “If it is by the Spirit of God that I cast out demons, then the Kingdom of God has come upon you” (Mt. 12:28). Jesus who came proclaiming the Good News of the Kingdom of God associates it with the work of the Spirit. Hence the working of the Spirit of God in the history of humankind is to be understood and interpreted in relation to the kingdom of God proclaimed by Christ. Therefore the values of the Kingdom constitute additional criteria for the discernment of the Spirit.

### 3.10.2.3 Sense of Faith of the Church

Speaking of the necessity of discerning the Spirit John says: “By this you know the Spirit of God: every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God, and every spirit that does not confess Jesus is not from God” (1 Jn. 4:2-3). The immediate context of this statement seems to be the docetic teaching denying the reality of the Incarnation of Christ. However, the reference to the ‘confession of faith’ is important. The Greek term ‘*homologeîn*’ (confess) refers to the public or ecclesial confession of faith. The Incarnated Word or the Truth present in the Church through its confession and proclamation is intimately related with the working of the Spirit. There is no Spirit without the Word; and there is no Word without the Spirit. As the Word of God is embodied in the faith of the Church it becomes one of the criteria to discern the working of the Spirit.

### 3.10.2.4 Listening Attitude

Again, in the same context John says: “Whoever knows God listens to us, and whoever is not from God does not listen to us. From this we know the spirit of truth and the spirit of error” (1 Jn. 4:6). Since the Spirit blows where it wills and since no one can predict precisely the “what” and the “how” of the Spirit’s work, one needs to have the basic attitude of listening and openness in order to be properly guided by the Spirit. John qualifies the Spirit here as the Spirit of Truth in contrast to the spirit of error. On the one hand because of the presence of the Truth and the Spirit in the Church, the Church needs to be listened to. On the other hand, since the presence of the Truth and the Spirit is not limited to the Church, the Church needs to be open to the presence of the Truth and the Spirit in all the human realities. Their attitude of listening and openness should characterise the life of all the members of the Church, both those teaching and those who are taught, so that the Church can really be a Community guided by the Spirit and fulfil her mission properly.

### 3.10.2.5 Love, Harmony and Unity

The Corinthian Church was a charismatic Church abundantly blessed with charisms of the Spirit (1 Cor. 12 - 14). St. Paul, however, wants them

to be properly informed about the gifts of the Spirit (1 Cor. 12:1). He stresses the importance of the “unity” that should exist along with the diversity of the gifts which are given precisely to build up the one Body of Christ. He then presents “love” as the greatest of the gifts of the Spirit (1 Cor. 13). Thus a harmonious use of the gifts of the Spirit resulting in unity and love could be taken as another of the criteria for discerning the Spirit at work in the Church.

#### **4 THE SPIRIT AT WORK IN THE CHURCH**

Obviously, it is difficult, not to say impossible, to give even just a bird’s eye view of what the Spirit has been doing in Asia in the span of more than nineteen centuries between the last written page of Sacred Scriptures and this document. However, if we really want to follow the Spirit as it moves on to the third Christian millennium, we must, for the sake of doing theology in the present Asian context, (1) review the experience of the Spirit in the history of the whole Church, (2) look at the Spirit at work with the perspectives of the second Vatican council and of the FABC documents, and (3) focus on some areas of contemporary Church life where the blowing of the Spirit is more strongly felt.

##### **4.1 The Experience Of The Spirit In The History Of The Church**

We cannot deal with the whole history of the theology of experience of the Spirit in a few pages; what we can do here is to pick out only some important themes, looking first at the Early Church and then at the later evolution in the following centuries up to the present.

###### **4.1.1 Experience of the Spirit in the Early Church**

###### **4.1.1.1 The Spirit as Imparter of Charisms**

In the beginning, the Church saw itself as subject to the activity of the Spirit and filled with its gifts. The authors of the New Testament proclaimed the primacy of the Spirit, and of experience of the Spirit, over everything else in life. The gifts of the Spirit, are not ends in themselves or the object of a quest for self-advantage, but are of service to the community. In the apostolic and sub-apostolic periods, prophecy is considered the highest gift, though it may produce insecurity in the communities, because disturbing personalities make their appearance in the name of the Spirit. The emphasis is no more on celebrating the charisms brought by the Spirit, but rather on disciplining them through discernment. The *Didache*, for example, gives an important place to the ministry of prophets and provides criteria that enable their authenticity to be determined (XI, 8-12; XIII).

During the second century there was no conflict between the experience of the Spirit and the institution of the episcopate, since many bishops

were also charismatics. Both Justin and Irenaeus claimed that prophecy and charismatic gifts still existed in the Church. Irenaeus adds: "We know that, in the Church, many brethren have prophetic charisms and, by the power of the Holy Spirit, speak all languages, and for the good of all, reveal the secrets of men and the mysteries of God. The Apostle calls these charisms spiritual; not because they are separated from and suppress the flesh, but because of the participation of the Spirit and only because of this." (Ad Haer. II, XXXII, 4).

Nevertheless, at the end of the century, a serious crisis arose. Montanus, claiming to be a sort of incarnation of the Spirit, announced that eschatological fulfilment and the descent of the heavenly Jerusalem were near at hand. The teachings and practices of the Montanists spread very rapidly, gathering a large movement of people who thirsted for social justice, and longed for the simple faith of old. This movement came to be seen as a mortal threat to the unity and order of the Church, because Montanus and his prophetesses claimed to be the authoritatively inspired leaders of the entire Church, the purveyors of prophecies designed to supplement the message handed over to the Church by the apostles. Montanism was the first movement to set the Spirit effectively over against the Church and its tradition. In the writings of its illustrious convert, Tertullian, the movement sowed the seeds of an idea that broke out again and again in the future, namely that the final age is an age of the Spirit **in contrast to** the previous ages of the Son and of the Father respectively.

As regards the Spirit's charisms, Montanism brought back into relief a dimension of Church life that seemed to be dying out. Opponents of Montanism such as Irenaeus took care to point out that the charisms of the Spirit did indeed flourish in the Church. References to the continued existence of the charisms can be found throughout the two succeeding centuries, but by the fourth century John Chrysostom could say that charisms were given to the early Church as something exceptional, because of the weakness of the Church then. From this time on, there would be no more charisms in the Church because the Church had no further need of them. In effect, since then, charisms and experience of the Spirit have not been held to be constituent of the Church. They are considered exceptional phenomena, though they did not disappear entirely. Two obvious cases of their continuance were miracles and prophecy.

#### 4.1.1.2 The Doctrine of the Spirit

The Cappadocian Fathers in the East and Augustine in the West gave the doctrine of the Spirit the shape it had ever afterwards in their respective Churches.

As a particular way of existing distinct from all others, each of the three Divine Persons must have identifiable characteristics. The

Cappadocians describe these “properties” as paternity or being ungenerated, sonship or being generated, and sanctifying power or procession. The Spirit’s distinctive property then is that “of proceeding” or “being sent” as sanctifier. This latter focuses on the Spirit’s distinctive character in terms of our salvation, while the former attempts to define what makes the Spirit unique within the Trinity itself. As later theology would put it, “what distinguishes the Divine Persons is the way in which each possesses one and the same divine nature”.

The Cappadocians had much to say on the workings of the Spirit: as sanctifier; as the one who illumines our minds; as the one who showers blessings on us; as the one who, living in the Church, fills and leads it into perfection; as the one who unfolds more and more of Christ’s truth to the Church as time goes on; as the one who provides the Church with apostles, prophets and teachers.

In searching for the Spirit’s distinguishing mark, Augustine takes up Hillary of Poitiers’ idea of “gift”. The Spirit is the gift of the Father and Son to us. It is their **common** gift to us. What marks the Spirit as one who can be given, is love. For Augustine, the Spirit is love in a special way, it is love binding Father and Son, that is to say their mutual love, and for that reason is gift. Father and Son bequeath to us that which unites them, so that we can be similarly united to them and each other. This communion is one of love, and is broken by lack of love. To break with the Church is to demonstrate a lack of love. This love is the special gift of the Church to its members.

The Spirit, then, creates the Church through creating love. So close is the bond between the Spirit and the Church that the Spirit can be called “soul” of the Church. “What the soul is to the members of our body, that the Spirit is to Christ’s members, the members of Christ’s body, the Church.” (“Sermon” 268, 2). The description of the Spirit as the soul of the Church was one that became widespread in later theology.

The unity in love forged by the Spirit is also a guarantee of the presence of the truth in the Church (“Letter” 105). Hence truth is linked to love because love is essential to knowing the truth in all its fullness.

For Augustine love stands as the sign of **the** Spirit’s presence. In his “Sixth Homily on the Epistle of John” [10, xii], he contrasts love with the older extraordinary signs of the Spirit; which were useful for the original spreading of the gospel and so have passed away for good. He then asks the question: If the Spirit’s presence is no longer manifested through such extraordinary phenomena, how is a person to know he or she has received the Spirit? Augustine’s answer is clear: Look into your heart and see whether you love your neighbour, whether you love the Church, whether you love the peace and unity binding the Church’s members to each

other. Augustine's theology of the Spirit is but the detailed and consistent application of the idea that love unites and, and by uniting, transforms all it unites.

Augustine's idea of the Spirit as love became common to all great Western thinkers of the Middle Ages and beyond. However, it was developed along two major lines: monastic theology analysed experiential realities, while scholastic theology analysed concepts. The contrast was not always as sharp as that. The great Scholastics were also mystics, and conceptual analysis was by no means foreign to some monastic theologians. But the two ways of theologising were of themselves very different. As it turned out, it was the academic, scholastic form of theology that became the norm. As a result, mystical experience ceased to be part of theology and mystics tended to retreat into a rather anti-theological attitude.

#### 4.1.2 Later Evolution of Experience of the Spirit

The general lines on which pneumatology developed in the West were mainly determined by three events: the progressive institutionalisation of the Spirit, the Reformation and the flowering of Spirit-orientated movements.

##### 4.1.2.1 Progressive Institutionalisation

From the third century onwards, the link between the Spirit and the Church became increasingly close. Irenaeus expressed this well when he wrote: "Where the Church is, there too is the Spirit of God; where the Spirit of God is, there too is the Church and all grace" (*Adv. Haer.* III, XXIV, 1).

While the Eastern tradition always kept to a very broad understanding of the Church as including everything within the confines of the empire, in the West the Church has been increasingly identified with the hierarchy, at least since the eleventh century. The mediaevals inherited a tradition that linked Spirit and Church to each other in an unbreakable bond. On the one hand, the Church was a Spirit-filled reality. It was this Spirit that filled the church's sacrament with divine life, and guided it into all truth, protecting it from mistaking error for God's truth. The Church was the **Spirit's** Church. On the other hand, the Spirit was the **Church's** Spirit. Individuals shared in the Spirit because they shared in the Church, not the reverse.

However, a subtle change occurred. It was a change in ecclesiology that resulted in a changed way of viewing the Spirit's activity. This was caused by basically two, connected, factors. The first was the battles that began to be fought between ecclesiastical and secular authorities over their respective powers. The second was the canonical studies that mushroomed as part of the systematised institutionalisation of Church structures and

defence of Church rights and powers. The result was an obscuring of the idea of the Church as a Spirit-filled *communio*, a community whose unity, sacraments and consensus in faith guaranteed primarily by the Spirit. Instead, it was now conceived of in the first instance as a legal body, a legal structure, a clearly defined society structured along legal lines.

Though the Spirit was not replaced by law and continued to be seen as functioning in the Church, sacraments and councils, the legal structures became the primary **guarantor** of the spiritual reality. The Spirit became almost a servant of the structures, being there to give them spiritual content. The general mentality gave the Church and its structures divine sanction, and ability to transmit divine life, and an ability to appeal to divine prevention from error despite the widespread corruption and political wheeling and dealing of the higher clergy. Where, so it seemed to many, was the Spirit of God in that? And so, counter-movements began, movements that played down the institutional and stressed the role of the Spirit within the individual.

The teaching of Joachim of Fiore (1130-1202) about the coming of a third age of salvation of the world, the age of the Holy Spirit who would renew society completely, touched the aspirations of many. The movement of the Franciscan "Spirituals" was based on Joachim's ideas and saw the Holy Spirit working through the poor.

Official theology poured scorn on Joachim's view. St. Thomas Aquinas stated that everything that could be expected of the Holy Spirit had already been given and was present in the Church. Thomist theology favoured the institutional Church, regarding it as definitive, as well as the established society. The Fourth Lateran Council condemned Joachim. But his age of the Spirit and all it represented for those disenchanting with the Church's excessive institutionalisation lived on in the dreams, hopes and ideals of countless generations.

#### 4.1.2.2 Reformation

Luther tried to break with the institutionalisation of the Spirit on the part of the mediaeval Church. He wished to eradicate any idea that the Spirit could be made present simply by the decision of a council or of a Pope, or by performing the correct sacramental ritual. He insisted on justification by faith alone and on the fact that good works were the **fruit**, and not the cause, of the Spirit's presence.

But hardly had he broken with this "institutionalisation of the Spirit" than he had to confront an outbreak of Spirit-orientated movements of the kind that had been surfacing here and there ever since the days of Joachim of Fiore. These "Enthusiasts" as they were called, thought Luther had not gone far enough in his reform, since he had retained certain institutional

structures such as the ordained ministry and the sacraments. The Enthusiasts felt that these institutional structures were not really necessary. The Spirit guided people directly. That and the Bible were sufficient. Luther's reaction was one of violent rejection of the Enthusiasts and their ideas.

For Calvin, the characteristic of the Spirit was energy and efficacy of action, and not simply love. The special role of the Spirit is not to do something independent, but to be the means whereby the work of the Father and the Son is achieved. Calvin saw the constant presence of the Spirit to the world as being absolutely necessary for its continued existence. Calvin, therefore, did not limit the Spirit's activity to Christians as Origen did. Rather he attributed to the Spirit a cosmic activity: the creation and preservation of the cosmos. It is the same Spirit that will lead the cosmos to its final fulfilment, the new creation.

Humanity is the special work of the Spirit. Despite its fall, we can see something of the gifts of the Spirit to it in its social, cultural and political achievements. Christ sends out the Spirit not simply as the world's conservator, but also as the one who brings salvation to people. This the Spirit does by uniting people to Christ in the closest imaginable way, so closely that we are slowly but surely transformed into images of Christ. This working of the Spirit within us, enlightening us as to the true message of the word of God, convincing us of its truth and of our sharing in salvation is what Calvin called "the inner testimony of the Holy Spirit".

#### 4.1.2.3 Spirit-orientated Movements, Pentecostalism and Modern Charismatic Movements

We have seen that the 12th century witnessed the emergence of movements expressing an eagerness for the renewal of Christian life and for emancipating it from what was seen by many as an excess of institutionalisation and formalism. Such movements blossomed in the 17th century. It was a century known for its interest in the "interior life", for its focus on the piety, the spiritual progress in the individual. Literature on how to pray, how to meditate, how to progress in one's Christian life abounded. Accompanying this interest in the individual's union with God was a widespread stress on feeling, experiencing the Spirit's presence.

Quakerism and Pietism were Protestant movements not only to reform the lives of the Christians but also to protest against an institutionalism and formalism that their own churches had sunk into despite the Reformation. As such, they were liberation movements. The freedom of the Spirit that they appealed to was also a cry for the freedom of individual Christian from excessive enslavement to externals. The Pietists argued that Luther's doctrine of the Priesthood of all the believers had not been taken seriously enough. The Quakers, too, rejected the distinction between clergy and laity.

They insisted on the dignity of all who possessed the Spirit. However, since they believed that even non-Christians could possess the Spirit, could possess the “inner light” brought by the Spirit, they stressed the dignity not simply of Christians but also of all human beings. The Quakers therefore became the earliest of Christian fighters for human rights.

The father of Methodism, John Wesley (1703-91), preached a doctrine that marks a high point in the search for spiritual renewal. He taught that perfect holiness was indeed possible and should be striven after. In his view there were ordinary Christians and Christians who have been “sanctified”. This “second blessing”, as it was called, could be achieved in a single experience, or be progressively realised, but was to be achieved by the power of the Holy Spirit.

Pentecostalism was born with the experience of baptism of the Spirit, verified by the gift of tongues. With Pentecostalism, the growth of Spirit-orientated movements found its climax. Entire Churches were organised with the Spirit as their focus. However, it was the Spirit’s activities rather than its nature that formed the centre of interest.

A significant development of Catholic theology was a debate about the possibility of experiencing the Spirit’s presence within oneself. Was an experiential knowledge of grace, of the Spirit’s presence possible? For centuries now, these supernatural realities had been viewed as being beyond the reach of experience. But a growing body of opinion began to hold, as the mediaevals had done, that if God’s Spirit was at work within us, then we must be able to experience that fact in some way or another. This particular development meant that within Catholicism the experiential side of the Spirit-orientated movements was beginning to be taken seriously.

Modern Catholic Charismatics have had to rethink the theology of Baptism in the Spirit and the role of *glossolalia* or gift of tongues in a way that would harmonise with and not obscure their other Catholic beliefs. As a result, the movement has enriched not only the lives of countless Catholics but also our common theological heritage.

#### **4.2 The Spirit At Work As Seen In Vatican II And FABC**

Since the present Document on highlights the action of the Spirit in the life of the Churches in Asia, it focuses on the Pneumatology of FABC Documents. Vatican II is referred to as a wider context and point of departure, to the extent that it is directly relevant in the Asian perspective.



## 4.2.1 The Spirit At Work According to Vatican II

### 4.2.1.1 The Spirit at Work within the Church

Vatican II is very rich in its doctrine on the Holy Spirit. Elaborating on the Church as Mystery, it starts with summarising the active presence of the Spirit in the Church, and stresses Christian faith communion as people gathered in the unity of Father, Son and Holy Spirit (cf. LG. 4). In the context of “Catholicity” Vatican II — before other more “institutional” indications — emphasises as primary condition for Church membership the presence of the Holy Spirit (cf. LG. 8).

Particularly relevant in the Asian context is the teaching that by the anointing of the Spirit the faithful are given the “sense of faith”. The Spirit is guiding them not only by the Hierarchy and the sacraments, but also directly, and making them participate fully in the life and mission of the Church by the many charisms bestowed upon them for the building up of the Body of Christ (cf. LG. 12).

### 4.2.1.2 The Spirit at Work in the World

The Spirit is at work not only within the Church. Vatican II highlights the Church as essentially being in mission by stressing the universal presence of the Spirit in the world (cf. GS. 11), “outside the visible body of the Church” (AG. 15). Accordingly the Church is to carefully scrutinise the “signs of the times” in the light of the Gospel (cf. GS 4).

Hence, the Council speaks very pointedly of “all people of good will in whose hearts grace works in an unseen way. For since Christ died for all, and since the ultimate vocation of humanity is in fact one and divine, we ought to believe that the Holy Spirit in a manner known only to God offers to everyone the possibility of being associated with this Paschal mystery” (GS. 22).

### 4.2.1.3 The Spirit at Work in the Asian Context

In Asia the Church is called to implement its evangelising mission in the midst of teeming millions adhering to numerous religious beliefs and traditions, in the overwhelming plurality of cultures and ideologies, in life situations marked with ever stronger trends of modernisation with its inherent secularisation. It is there that Christians are faced also with many socio-political and economic problems weighing heavily upon the impoverished masses, victims of injustice.

It is, therefore, from the viewpoint of the universal presence of the Holy Spirit clearly and repeatedly emphasised in FABC documents, that —

“precisely as the indispensable complement to the teaching of the Council” (Paul VI, General Audience, June 6, 1973) — in this document the study on the Spirit at work is pursued, in order that we may better understand our way of being Church in mission in Asia today.

#### 4.2.2 The Spirit at Work According to the FABC

##### 4.2.2.1 Developing an Asian Pneumatology from Below

Pneumatology “will be developed from below; that is, from prayerful and systematic reflection in the light of revelation on events, encounters and movements in Asia . . . these encounters are of many kinds and on different levels; and, therefore, a theology of the Spirit will grow slowly and will be woven from many strands . . . [It] will not be a separate, isolated area of theology, but a leaven which will permeate all of the presently emerging Asian theologies” (BIRA IV/3 1986).

##### 4.2.2.2 The Spirit at Work in Asian Popular Religiosity

In Asia not only the Great Religions are important. No less considerable are the numerous trends of religious beliefs and traditions among people, as many expressions of their popular religiosity, their enduring quest for the God of Life, pervading their adherence to Buddhism, Hinduism, Islam and other Religions.

Taking account of widespread popular religiosity down to the grass-roots of Asian society seems more important in view of discerning the Holy Spirit at work, not only because our faithful bring with them into the Church this religiosity (sentiments expressed in customs and behaviour), but also because among Christians, day to day life in faith, particularly at the level of “faith instinct” takes on the form of popular religiosity. There is here, however, an area of religious syncretism to be carefully assessed in the process of inculturation of Christian faith.

##### 4.2.2.3 The Spirit in Inter-religious Dialogue

FABC II 1978 insists that in the deeper meanings and intentions of people of other faiths, none the less when expressed in religious forms alien to our own, we are to recognise “the voice of the Spirit bearing witness to the marvellous variety of God’s Self-revelation to man, and able to influence the way we lift up our hearts to the Lord”.

Dialogue is the work of the Spirit; it leads to mutual understanding, respect and enrichment. It must be open to proclamation, though one does not enter into dialogue to prepare the way for proclamation. Christian participants in dialogue are to discern the movements of the Spirit and to

second His actions. It is the Spirit who leads them to discern the face of God and to contemplate His splendour in the other. To realise and humbly accept this, and accordingly to reinterpret their belief is often difficult and painful (BIRA IV/7).

Dialogue must be undertaken seriously, and accompanied constantly by discernment in the Spirit, fostered and safeguarded by attitudes leading to its deepening and its loving growth. It demands openness to the mystery of God's saving action in history, of respect for the others, of humility because of failures to respond adequately to the Spirit, and of fearlessness because of the guidance of the Spirit (FABC II 1978; BIRA III 1982).

#### 4.2.2.4 The Spirit in Social Transformation

Among the major signs of the times in most Asian countries undoubtedly are powerlessness, despair and apathy of the impoverished masses, often enhanced by religious resignation to the Will of God, and impelling people to flee from the hardships of daily struggle for survival. In an atmosphere of animosity brought about by injustice and violation of human rights dialogue means powerlessness and vulnerability. To dialogue means to open one's heart and to speak one's mind with courage and respect, realising that the Spirit often has used powerlessness and vulnerability to effect at least some social change (BIRA IV/7 1988 n.15).

Faithful to the Spirit who stirs people to proclaim the Good News to the poor (cf. Lk 4:18), Christians are to live in solidarity with the poor as their response to the Gospel. There the work of the Spirit appears in the struggle for a better world in all its forms (cf. BIRA IV/10 1988).

In increasing common awareness of human dignity and rights, in the growing quest for genuine human freedom, in people's movements for more justice and equality, in the hard struggle against death dealing forces towards ever fuller human life, surely is present the Holy Spirit sent "to renew the face of the earth", and to bring about social transformation.

Only by the outpouring of the Holy Spirit will come to realisation the quest to find new meanings in life, "to overcome destructive forces and to shape a new integration in our societies, to free themselves from structures which have created new forms of bondage, to foster human dignity and freedom and a more fully human life, to create a more genuine communion among men and nations" (FABC I 1974).

#### 4.2.2.5 Pneumatology for More Solidarity among Humanity

The Spirit poured into the hearts of the faithful so that all may call the Father of Jesus Christ our Lord their "Abba", exists only to build Christian

communities. In the value of sharing daily life in sincere brother- and sisterhood, highly cherished among Asian peoples (cf. FABC III 1982), in all kinds of co-operation in rural areas and other concerted efforts for common welfare, the Spirit is at work impelling Christians as well as people of other faiths to generously reach out in sincere love to one another, and to build up human communities among all of them, irrespective of religious following, racial and cultural belonging, social and economic conditions.

In this era of continuing globalisation, amid heightened social, religious and political tensions and conflicts, along the ongoing process of alienation, fragmentation and anonymity especially in urban and industrial areas, Christians are expected to commit themselves to serve the Spirit in creating solidarity among humanity, which is to reach its ultimate fulfilment in the anakephalaiosis at the end of time (cf. Eph. 1:10).

#### 4.2.2.6 Pneumatology in Asian Christian Spirituality

Christian spirituality is a journey of discipleship, love and service after the pattern of the dying and rising of Jesus Himself. It is “one of discerning the movement of the Spirit who re-enacts in us the mysteries of Jesus Christ in the contextual realities of daily life and struggling. Here is seen the value of the contemplative dimension of Asian peoples, who discern the movement of God in mundane events and activities”, a prayerful attitude immersed in life (FABC IV 1986).

As regards contextualised Christian Spirituality, for laity, religious and clergy alike: discernment in the Holy Spirit is to be pursued (cf. ICM 1979; BIRA IV/3 1986): — a) not only in terms of merely individual acts, but more in depth as a basic Christian spiritual attitude, an enduring charism of the Spirit; — b) not only as personal charism in view of individual spiritual growth, but as charism of the entire Christian community shared by each one of its members (cf. BISA I 1974; FABC III 1982); — c) not only in order to develop the community of faithful in itself, but also in view of its mission in society.

#### 4.2.2.7 Pneumatology: A New Orientation for Being Church in Asia

Christians are assembled into one Body by the Spirit of Jesus (FABC III 1982), “a communion in the Spirit, a community of sharing and fellowship, of witness and service” (ACMC 1977). Thus the local faith community must be defined “by its life of faithful discipleship in the Gospel, patterned on the Paschal mystery of Jesus, a community for others. It must strive to live and act under the constant guidance and by the power of the Spirit” (FABC III 1982).

The guidance of the Spirit is to be sought continually in scrutinising and assessing the signs of the times in Asia in the light of the Gospel. Thus

the Christian community, all and everyone of its members, will live entirely as enlightened and empowered by the Spirit, delicately attuned to the Spirit in discerning His movements in Church and society. In the Spirit Christians will learn appropriate ways of being Church in mission today, ever more profoundly incorporated in Jesus Christ, in common pilgrimage to God's eternal Reign.

### 4.3 The Spirit At Work In The Various Spheres Of The Contemporary Church

#### 4.3.1 Ministers And Ministries

##### 4.3.1.1 New Shifts

Current Ecclesiology stresses the Church as the Mystical Body of Christ, and its sacramentality has given impetus to the re-thinking of the ministries and consequently opens possibilities for new ones. (LG, FABC papers, on Ministries 1977 Hong Kong, Being Church in Asia).

Theological reflections on sacraments and charisms throw new lights upon the understanding of the minister that is conducive to the expansion of the ministries in our situation. The figure of the minister is to be the sign and instrument that makes sacramentally visible the hidden mystery of the Church, realises the fellowship and perpetuates the mission of Christ continually interpreted and rethought in regard to the contextual realities of our continent. The sacraments, in general, give the official character to the Church ministries, lay or clerical. Charisms concomitant to the sacramental effects are free gifts of the Holy Spirit so much so that they make ministries more flexible and creative.

The renewal of the consecrated life, whether it be in new form or not, gives rise to a better exercise of ministries for many people. They trace back their own original charism and become more committed to the Gospel. They endeavour to bear a prophetic witness to the kingdom of God by constantly praising the Holy Trinity, living in fraternal communion and serving in charity. New forms of living consecrated life, enriched by and inculturated in Asian ideals of renunciation, contemplation, monastic and *ashramic* life are emerging hope-filled signs of the Spirit in our Churches.

Indigenous ecclesial movements, practices, people's search for and expression of their piety, aspirations and hopes rooted in Asian religiosity and sentiments of devotion are no less under the guidance of the Spirit. Movements like *Barangay sang Birhen* (a Marian movement), Rural missionaries, *Bibliarasal* (a Bible study and sharing movement), ecological movements like *Taru Mitra* (a Catholic sponsored environmental movement involving students of all religious and socio-economic backgrounds in North India), Couples for Christ, family movements, the spontaneous

practices of pilgrimages to the shrines of Our Lady (e.g. shrine of Valanhanni in India), Christian action groups coming together in fora in search of social spirituality, plus spontaneous prayer groups among the ordinary faithful are signs of the Spirit active in believers. They need to be discerned, encouraged and supported. Together with these Asian religious movements, others like New Gen, Taize, Neo-catechumenate, Charismatic Renewal, prayer groups of different sorts contribute to a greater prayerful attentiveness to the guidance of the Holy Spirit. For example, in Metro Manila, the gathering of praying communities has overflowed to the offices, working place and even the marketplace.

A number of consultations at different levels have taken place in different countries on ministries, lay or clerical, which are to meet the new demands of the changing situations. (India, Philippines, FABC etc.) All this points to sensitivity to the stirrings of the Spirit and generous attempts to respond. Recent shifts in the exercise of the ministries have been noticed in many local churches of Asia in the wake of the renewal set in motion by Vat II.

The first is the expansion of ministry. It is multi-directional. It moves from liturgical orientation to that of the service of life, from the parochial area to trans-parochial sectors, from the ministries of the intra-ecclesial character to more extra-ecclesial domains like inter-religious dialogue, immigration, social concerns and the like. This challenge of ministry increases because of the globalisation of economy and the phenomena of urbanisation.

The second is the increase of lay participation. There is greater involvement of the laity at different levels of evangelisation. Many lay catechists are involved in faith formation. Lay participation in Pastoral Councils and on Administration boards, lay delegates for the bishops for certain sectors like education, social welfare and the like become more common.

The third is the significant presence of women in sharing ministerial responsibilities. In fact, their presence extends to all levels of Church life (except for the ordained ministries) and their contributions are substantial.

The fourth is the tendency to assume the local style in the exercise of the ministries. Due to the sensitivity of inculturation and indigenisation, the growing assimilation of values from the Asian religio-cultural legacies gives new expression to the service of the Church ministers.

#### 4.3.1.2 Experiences and Challenges

The life of Church consists chiefly in experiential animation by the Holy Spirit. Listening to the stirrings of the Holy Spirit, the Church learns

to read the signs of times. The following indicates both experiences and challenges that the Church has on the threshold of the third millennium.

#### Communion and Co-responsibility

The Church as communion means that all the members of the Church, anointed in the Spirit, are called to bear witness to the Church as mystery, to strengthen and promote communion of faith and commit themselves in co-responsibility to the one mission of the Church. It goes with development of communication channels, team-work spirit and flexible structures of responsible participation.

#### Authority for service

The understanding of authority (*exousia*) as "authority for service" is rooted in the event of Christ as servant-messiah. The Church derives her ministerial nature from Him. (Cf. Mk. 10:43-46; Jn. 13). Hence all ministries in the Church share in the servanthood of Christ. Church leadership means servant leadership which, in turn, calls for the servant spirituality. Primarily, this gives the ministers authority and competence. Asian people treasure very highly a spiritual authority which comes from the experience of the Divine, as seen in the *gurus* and the spiritual masters. It means that the Church ministers should be, above all, persons of the Spirit.

The people of God, being the mystical body of Christ gifted with charisms, freely offering themselves to the community through ministries, are like a variety of musical instruments. The multiplicity of ministries blended properly by the servant-leadership plays a symphonic masterpiece called "life in communion and mission".

#### Promotion of lay ministries

The emerging charisms of the laity in the socio-economic-political-cultural arena have been recognised. They need to be developed and promoted. Social issues, like street children, migrant workers, refugees, marginalised tribals and ethnic minorities call for creative ministries.

#### Initiatives for shared involvement

Some measures have already been taken to make room for the laity at the level of decision making. They need to be deepened and widened according to the new demands. Courage and caution must be taken for the creation of new structures and forms of collaboration between laity and clergy, between Catholics and others.

#### Formation

Adequate formation is needed for the emerging ministries and for new

way of being ministers. This always goes with the need for on-going formation. An Asian theology of the Spirit should constitute an important dimension of the formation programmes. This theology endeavours to discover the values from the Asian legacies, which for centuries bore so many good fruits in the history of humankind. Furthermore, new ministries for inter-religious dialogue, cultural-ethnic pluralism, ecumenism, promotion of human rights and so on are to be taken into account. Church ministry is chiefly concerned with the love of heart. It is the duty of the ministers to let the Holy Spirit be present and at work in their hearts. They should ever be open to the freedom of the Spirit which blows where it wills.

#### 4.3.2 Small Ecclesial Communities

The Mystery of the Church becomes actualised in diverse ways at various levels. This is the mystery of the “local church” in its many forms. Among these Vatican II has singled out the “Particular Church” or diocesan community as having special ecclesial significance. This special significance is due to the presence in its midst of the bishop, by whose ministry of unity and presidency the diocesan community is linked in space with all other churches and in time with the Church of the Apostles. (see LG. 23-29; CD 11) The Christian community experiencing the saving encounter with the Risen Lord opens itself to society by means of a powerful witness through humble service in love and to other churches by means of sharing.

Other modes of Christian assembly operating at different levels have their own significance in the Church’s life. The “traditional parish community” embodies the mystery of the Church in a genuine sense, inasmuch as it is endowed with the life organs, including the priestly ministry which the day-to-day life of the community requires.

In some areas a form of Christian community living has developed which is termed the “Basic (or Small) Ecclesial Community”. The small Christian communities are varied in several manifestations and are known by different names in different places. These communities operating at a still lower level than the parish are the most fundamental ecclesial realities, provided they too are equipped with proportionate services and ministries, including the priestly ministry. The Spirit seems to be moving the Church strongly in the direction of small Christian communities.

A group of people is described as a basic community when the number of members is such that they can really know one another, meet with one another, relate to one another. The members are not too far apart to come together fairly frequently. There is a certain degree of permanence among the members. There is also mutual caring, sharing and support. The community strives for common goals and concerns. There is unity and togetherness. A basic community becomes a Christian community when its inspira-



tion, model and centre is Jesus, the Risen Lord. There is openness to the charisma of the Holy Spirit, a praying and worshipping together. The members of the community share the word of God, integrate it into their daily lives and proclaim it to others. "No Christian community, however, can be built up unless it has its basis and centre in the celebration of the most Holy Eucharist." (PO4)

In our contemporary context of a multi-religious environment and of ideological struggles, the individual Christian can obviously best grow and develop as a Christian person in the midst of a self-nourishing, self-ministering and self-propagating Christian community. (See FABC HK Colloquium, 42,49)

#### 4.3.2.1 Visible Signs of the Presence of the Spirit

*Thirst for Prayer* In the small Christian communities one can generally notice in the members a kind of thirst for prayer, both personal and communitarian. They have a real experience of praying together as brothers and sisters, one in mind and heart. They seem to feel an intimacy with God as they pray together and that gives them a spiritual and emotional experience. As St. Paul says, "By the Spirit's power we cry out to God 'Father, my Father' and God's Spirit joins himself to our spirits to declare that we are God's children." (Rom 8:15-16) This contemplative dimension of their faith should lead them to concrete acts of service to humanity.

*Hunger for the Word of God* There is a real hunger for the word of God among the members. It is the Spirit that is moving them to read the word of God personally, hear it with real interest when read out in the assembly and reflect over it together as a community and apply it to their lives. Where the word of God is, there the Spirit is. They also pray with the words of the Scriptures. It is the bread broken and shared when the community gathers together. However, a deeper understanding of genuine interpretation of Holy Scripture of the teaching of the Church can improve the quality of Christian life.

*Celebration of the Eucharist* The Eucharist is celebrated meaningfully with real participation of the members. As the Eucharistic bread is shared they feel strengthened in their solidarity, mutual concern and care. Thus a life of Christian discipleship and brotherhood is fostered. This is further manifested in the simplicity of life and experience of poverty, sharing and solidarity with the suffering.

*Docility to Charisms* Charisms are enduring gifts of the Spirit given to Church members to be put to use in services and ministries, thereby contributing, each in his or her own manner, to the Christian mission. (see FABC V 1990, Statement #8:1:2) The Holy Spirit has endowed the Church

with a variety of Spiritual gifts. (1 Cor. 12:6-11) Each of these has a special function and contributes to the task of enabling the Church to grow into a mature community of faith, and they are interrelated.

The charism of healing is quite conspicuous in the charismatic groups. Such healings both external and internal reinforce the faith of the people. In any genuine healing the whole person experiences God's "Shalom". However, it should be noted that in the Catholic Church integral healing in the human relationship with God is manifested in the sacraments, chiefly the sacraments of reconciliation and anointing of the sick. The Holy Eucharist is the most important healing celebration. If lived in intense and sincere devotion, the Eucharistic celebration can bring forth the tranquillity of heart, spiritual healings and restoration of social relationships.

The fruits of the Spirit (Gal 5:22-23), love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control, should be our constant guides in discerning the presence of the Spirit. Any exercise of the gifts of the Spirit may be seen legitimate if it bears the fruits of the Spirit. Any effort towards an experience of immediate access to the Spirit has to be seen in relation to Jesus Christ to whom the Spirit bears witness. (See FABC, BIRA IV/3 1986, #9-11)

*Promotion of Peace and Justice* In small Christian communities we sometimes see the Spirit moving the members to bear witness to justice in our societies. They open their ears to the cry of the voiceless millions in our countries, who are denied life-conditions worthy of men and women created in God's image. They stand in protest where human rights are denied and denounce structures of society which perpetuate an unjust social order.

While these efforts coming from the inspiration of the Spirit are praiseworthy, we need to see more and more that these communities not only stand for the poor and the oppressed but that they become one with such unfortunate brethren. A preferential option in favour of the poor and the oppressed is called for. The Spirit of the Lord is calling our Churches to such an option.

### 4.3.3 Popular Religiosity and New Catholic Religious Movements

The growing strength of popular religiosity and new Catholic religious movements throughout Asia today is clearly one of its "signs of the times".

#### 4.3.3.1 Popular Christian Religiosity

Popular religiosity in Christianity is usually described as the religious expressions, practices, forms and attitudes belonging to vast sectors of Christians who (1) have minimal formal religious education; (2) have

achieved to deep symbiosis between their religious and cultural behaviours; (3) emphasise the role of religion with regard to their temporal, material needs. These factors are usually combined in different proportions and according to places, times, and social situations.

Most scholars agree on the special relevance of cultural factors. The fact that Christian forms and practices are assimilated and even reinterpreted in reference to indigenous cultural expression is paramount in the elaboration of divergent expressions of Christianity. This is particularly true with regard to the so-called popular cultures, or cultures of poor and simple peoples.

Traditional popular Christianity has been more apparent in Roman Catholicism and in the Christian Orthodox churches, because of their emphasis on sacramental symbols, than in Protestantism. However, this comparison is becoming more and more relative to the extent that Protestant denominations implant themselves in non-European cultures.

Asian people have almost all the characteristics of popular religiosity, especially in the sense that:

- for them the heart, sentiment, and poetical discourse are more important than the intellect, the reasoning, analytical language in the relationship with God; in this regard, we need a deep and systematic study of the epistemology which characterises the religious and philosophical traditions of Asia;
- they have a strong sense of God's presence in everyday life;
- likewise, they have a strong sense of God's presence in nature, in images, in places, and in material things related to religion; they love to make pilgrimages;
- they emphasise the religious meaning of life, marriage, death, etc;
- they uphold the religious value of the weak; the very poor, the sick, the elderly and the children are *locus* of God's presence.

Popular religion as the religion of the masses is important in Asia, because in this continent we have a large number of people who feel they do not belong to the sophisticated, discriminating and learned class in their society.

The crucified Christ (and in the Philippines, the Sto. Nino) is perceived to be close to the people, always ready to hear prayers and to be the source of love and favours. Marian devotion, especially in the forms of the Rosary, the scapular, novenas, the veneration of the images of Mary, and pilgrimages to her shrines is also very strong everywhere in Asia.

When we take into consideration the importance of "popular religiosity" we have to admit that a more systematic study than what has

been possible in this paper is needed. We have to do this work beginning with a survey of the actual situation in this regard in each region.

It might be helpful, however, to keep in mind that Jesus clearly condemned the formal, exterior, hypocritical religion of the classes and social categories that occupied the ruling position at that time. On the other hand, he had a language of admiration and sometimes of enthusiasm, before the faith of the humble, without distinction of their nationality or religious obedience. He accepted the exuberance of their gesture, the lyrical fantasy of their language, the ingenuity of their demands, their supplications to be liberated from illness and death, and especially the admirable interior availability toward God of the poor people, that which makes them the real *anawim*. Following the prophetic message of the Bible, Jesus emphasises by acts and words that the behaviour testifying to the true faith and piety can be found much easier among the humble and oppressed classes than among the ruling one; so much so that if it is found among the later, it is rather exceptional. (Mk. 10:23ff.)

#### 4.3.3.2 New Catholic Religious Movements

A number of new or renewed Catholic religious movements that cross the barriers between the masses and the elite have surfaced in the wake of the Second Vatican Council. These movements would never have been hatched had the Spirit not taken the Council under its wings. For example, the popular Bible Study and Sharing Movement that we find in almost all parishes in urban areas of Asia today owes its origin to chapter six of *Dei Verbum*. Many movements centred on marriage and the family stem from conciliar and post-conciliar documents on marriage and the family. The same can be said of movements promoting the apostolate of, for and by the youth, women, workers, peasants, and the oppressed poor. Whether these movements originated inside or outside Asia is of little importance since they respond to the needs of Asian people and Asia has put its cultural imprints on all of them.

The Catholic Charismatic Renewal movement deserves special mention because of the large number of Asian Catholics it counts among its ranks. In the Philippines alone, if all Catholic Charismatic groups, big and small, are to be considered, a conservative estimate would place the number of their followers at thirty per cent of the Catholic population of about fifty-one million Filipinos.

Catholics use the term “charismatic” to distinguish their spiritual “renewal” movement from Protestant Pentecostal “revival”. It is also customary to speak of a “born again” movement among Protestant fundamentalists. Both the Protestant and the Catholic modern Pentecostal/Charismatic movements began (in the late 19th century for Protestants and

in the mid-20th century for Catholics) when a group of people, dissatisfied with the prevalent formalistic forms of worship of church-going people they lived with, prayed for the coming of the Holy Spirit, and suddenly found themselves speaking in tongues and prophesying. Both among Protestants and Catholics, experiences of this kind first took place in Europe but it did not take long before the phenomenon was reported also in the United States of America. While spreading and developing there, it cropped up in other parts of the world including Asia.

The Catholic Charismatic movement attracts the interest of people through faith healing, rallies and prayer meetings where *glossolalia* and prophecy occur amid much singing, clapping, dancing and preaching or sharing of faith experiences. Ordinarily, however, one joins the movement by taking a seminar, the most widespread in Asia being known as the "Catholic Life in the Spirit Seminar".

A survey done in India revealed that there are four main reasons why people are attracted to the Pentecostal movement, namely, (1) they want to "experience God," (2) they want to be familiar with and be nourished by God's Word through direct contact with the Bible, (3) they want to be actively involved in a warm, fraternal fellowship, and (4) they want a sustained interpersonal pastoral care that will keep them growing in the spiritual life. The context of the survey was the fact that many Catholics had turned their backs on the Church to join the Protestant or "born-again" Pentecostals, but the reasons are also valid for the Catholic Charismatic movement in Asia.

Church leaders have noted a number of shortcomings in the Catholic Charismatic movement in Asia, but in general they are optimistic that through intensified pastoral care by bishops and priests, these shortcomings will be minimised. A "National Service Committee" for the Catholic Charismatic movement like the one organised in the Philippines, is certainly a big step in assuring that the Spirit will continue for a long time to enrich Asian spiritual life with gifts that build up the Church.

## 5 TOWARDS AN ASIAN THEOLOGY OF THE SPIRIT

The reflections we made on the working of the Spirit in the formation of the Biblical tradition has given us the foundations for pneumatology and particularly its relationship to Christology and the mystery of the Holy Trinity. They are presupposed and do not bear repetition here. In these concluding theological reflections we want to rather highlight those aspects and areas which appear to us to be of great significance, viewed against our contemporary experiences in the continent. Consistent with our Asian vision of reality, we try to view the mystery of the Holy Spirit in a holistic, inclusive and integral perspective.

## 5.1 Asia And The Pneumatic Vision Of Vatican II

In the first place we must acknowledge the remarkable openings made by Vatican II in the area of pneumatology which are of great help to discern and articulate our own Asian experiences of the Spirit. The very convocation of the Council and its programme of *aggiornamento* were due to the inspiration of the Spirit, as testified by its initiator Pope John XXIII. In the evaluation of the present Pope, "the Council is essentially 'pneumatological'; it is permeated by the truth about the Holy Spirit . . . the Council has made the Spirit newly present in our difficult age". (Encyclical on Holy Spirit no. 26).

In the task of deepening our experience of the Spirit leading to the formulation of an Asian perspective on pneumatology, we recognise as very important the Trinitarian vision of the Council and its teaching on the nature of the Church as a community of believers filled with the living Spirit. This Spirit "dwells" in the Church as in a temple, prays in the Church, "bears witness", "guides", "brings unity", "bestows gifts" and "leads" it to perfect union in the future Kingdom. (L.G. 4). Particularly of great significance for us Asians is the teaching of the Council regarding the presence and working of the Spirit outside the visible boundaries of the Church — in other religions, cultures, ideologies, etc. (L.G. 14,15; N.A. 1,2; G.S. ). This offers a broader theological framework in which we are able to relate the Spirit with the mystery of God's Reign, and consequently understand and interpret our Asian experiences in a pluri-cultural and multi-religious context. No wonder, then, that the Asian Bishops in their reflections time and again have focused their attention on the Spirit in relation to the Kingdom of God and its taking shape.

## 5.2 Asian Approach To The Divine Mystery Through The Spirit

"God is Spirit" as St. John laconically expressed (Jn 4: 24). To speak of the Spirit is to speak of the Divine mystery. Asia is a continent whose tradition has been particularly sensitive to the mystery nature of the Divine. Whatever has been manifest and expressed has been viewed as the mirror of the unmanifest, the unexpressed; the revealed as a fragment of the unrevealed; the *Isvara* with attributes as the epiphany of the Brahman beyond all qualities and attributes. The realisation that the Divine mystery can never be expressed fully and adequately gave rise to such classical adages as "*neti, neti*" (not this, not this), and "the reality is one, and the sages have called it many". In the Upanishads the Divine mystery is compared to the experience of lightning that powerfully storms into our horizon and before which we are dumbfounded and can at the most utter "Ah!". The Divine mystery is also the *ananda*, that wonderful bliss towards which all our deepest human yearnings and aspirations tend as their ultimate goal.

This Divine mystery which is inexhaustible and at the same time permits us to have a faint glimpse of its “unapproachable light” can be named — if we can name it at all — as the Spirit. It is intimately present in all that we are and tend to be, and yet it cannot be comprehended and its ways, cannot be circumscribed and delimited within our scheme of things. “It blows where it wills” (Jn. 3:8).

### 5.3 Binding Together The Universe — The Spirit As Freedom And Movement

Spirit can, certainly, be viewed from a personalistic perspective. But it is more than a person in the sense that it is that through which all life and the whole creation is bound and held together. Today, this way of viewing the Spirit has a lot of implications for our relationship with the nature and the whole universe. The realisation and experience of the Spirit which fills nature and the universe and lets life blossom in a thousand ways leads us to a sense of the sacred in our relationship to the environment. A one-sided anthropocentric vision of reality which tends to reduce the Spirit within the human sphere needs to be overcome today in Asia by bringing onto the centre-stage of our consciousness and practice our traditional Asian heritage of a cosmic vision and bio-centered thought. This will unfold ever new insights into the mystery of the Divine Spirit. In our cultures and religious traditions, a proper perception of the human person is gained by underlining what unites him or her with all sentient beings and the entire nature. Therefore, a true human being is one who participates in the movement of the Spirit whose nature it is to unite and integrate. Such an experience makes a human person truly free. For, freedom becomes real and authentic in our bondedness with the whole and the cords of relationships we forge with all of its parts.

The Spirit which is a movement of integration and wholeness, breaks down all kinds of divisions, barriers and compartmentalisation which we continue to create through our *avidya* (ignorance). To live and operate in this sense of the whole is an experience of true freedom.

In Asia we experience the Divine mystery also as one full of power and in continuous movement. As the Book of *Tao Te Ching* puts it, the Ultimate reality is “movement in stillness, and stillness in movement”. In the Indian tradition, the whole creation comes into being and is continuously sustained through the cosmic dance in which the power of the Divine is unfolded. This divine power which we experience as the Spirit of God continues to pulsate through the whole universe bringing into being life and sustaining it in its growth and full flowering — from the blade of grass to the most intricate human form of life. Wherever the endless forms of life surrounding us is nurtured, we experience the maternal hand of the Spirit accompanying us in our journey. The Spirit places us in refreshingly new

and unpredictably challenging situations, so that by responding to them our life is revitalised and strengthened.

We experience the same Spirit and its power of life manifested in the struggles that are being waged in Asia against increasing threats to life and forces that want to maim or corrode it. In this way, the experience of the Spirit becomes for us an experience of freedom in the midst of the ambiguities and contradictions of our present-day Asian history. It is the same Spirit who frees us from the deep-rooted *ahankara* (selfishness) and our attachments which prevent us from seeing and experiencing the truth. In our Asian cultures, this inner freedom from attachment and egotism is as important as the freedom from the threats to life which we experience in the outer world. Both these forms of freedom and liberation need to mutually interpenetrate and sustain us as expressions of the one and the same Spirit and its power. The Spirit frees us from within and transforms us into new creatures (see II Cor 5:17; Eph. 4:24), while it renovates the whole earth and the creation, as well as our inter-human relationships.

We realise that the Spirit of God manifests itself and embodies its life and power in innumerable ways — ways which cannot be compared with each other, since their inter-connections surpass our concepts and world of understanding. Within the New Testament itself we find different approaches to the mystery of Jesus Christ, and they have all been very much influenced by the context of particular Christian communities. One such approach which seems to be the earliest one, was to view the mystery of Jesus Christ — his life, preaching, death and resurrection — to have taken place under the sway of the Spirit of God. At this moment of our Asian history, we find this pneumatological approach to the mystery of Jesus Christ to be of great importance in understanding and interpreting our tradition, our contemporary experiences, and to integrate them harmoniously with our Christian faith. This approach has as its basic assumption our faith in the unity of the divine plan of salvation as well as the basic unity of the whole human family. As disciples of Jesus Christ, we contemplate the marvellous power of the Spirit that was at work in him. In Jesus, his person, life teaching, passion, death and resurrection we realise what it means to be led by the Spirit to the land of life, light and truth. It is in following the Spirit that we become the true disciples of Jesus Christ constantly on the journey into our deeper selves and in the quest for the Kingdom of God which he portrayed to us as the destination towards which we need to set our face.

In this journey, we cannot but be struck by the fact that the sacred writings of our neighbours of other faiths — *Bhagavadgita*, *Dhammapada*, *Tao Te Ching*, *Qu'ran*, etc.— have inspired generations of women and men to face the various situations in their lives; they have been a source of spiritual nourishment, constant strength, consolation and hope. Furthermore,



they have effected profound transformations in the life of countless women and men and have been a source of inspiration for social and political transformation as well as of harmonious relationship with nature and the entire creation. There are millions of Asian peoples — like the tribals, indigenous peoples and *dalits* — whose spiritual heritage is associated with the oral tradition which they have transmitted from generation to generation. Their stories, songs, proverbs, and other expressions of life help us to discern the way they have encountered the Spirit in their daily lives, in their mutual relationships and in their bondedness to nature. Openness to our neighbours of other faiths is, then, also openness to the treasures of their sacred texts as well as their sacred oral traditions which are transmitted in a living way.

#### 5.4 The Spirit Of Asian Pluralism

A multiplicity of ethnic groups, cultures, languages, ways of thought have characterised life in Asia throughout its long history. The experience of pluralism in our societies has given birth to an ethos that prizes what is different. Even if the different defies explanation, still one realises that what is different has a place and role in an order of things which transcends us and our imaging. In practice, this comes to expression in every-day life when in our parts of Asia people are able to enter into seemingly opposed kinds of experiences — religious, cultural, etc. — without any difficulty and without worrying themselves about reconciling them all in a logically coherent whole. Underlying this general Asian cultural matrix is the realisation of the inexhaustible character of reality or truth on the one hand, and the yawning gap lying between it and our human limitedness, on the other. A consciously accepted and nurtured pluralism has been the hinge on which our multi-ethnic, multi-cultural and pluri-religious societies have been moving. Understandably, then, more than anywhere else, the approach to the Spirit as the author of plurality strikes a highly responsive cord in the Asian hearts.

There is also another motive today to highlight the importance of pluralism as a gift of the Spirit in Asia. Many of our societies are being torn by communal conflicts. Sustaining our societies in pluralism and mutual acceptance has become an imperative necessity. We are also painfully aware that fascist trends and homogenising forces are today asserting themselves in Asia. We may mention here, by way of example, political trends which in the name of such ideologies as “national unity” disregard the legitimate self-affirmation of various peoples and groups and their rights, and the eco-fascism which homogenises the biological diversity through mono-culture and cash-crops. The experience of the Spirit as the author of diversity and plurality helps us to overcome the increasing temptations of steamrolling all differences and forcing them into pre-conceived moulds and standardised patterns. In the event of Pentecost in which peoples from various nations, races and languages gathered together (Acts

2:1-13), we see the ideal towards which our Asian societies should move for an authentic life of peace, harmony and joy.

We value pluralism as a great gift of the Spirit. There is also a situation of pluralism that results from the different ways people respond to the prompting of the Spirit, which the Asian Bishops have called “receptive pluralism”. Again, “. . . People encounter the Spirit within their context, which is pluralistic in terms of religions, cultures and world-views. In this light, we affirm a stance of *receptive pluralism*. That is, the many ways of responding to the prompting of the Holy Spirit must be continually in conversation with one another” (BIRA IV/3 1986, no. 16). This opens up a wide horizon to foster deeper relationships with our neighbours of other faiths, since we are led to see the presence of the Spirit not only in their religious expressions, but even more deeply see these as various responses to the working of the Spirit in a context which we share with them. Such a positive approach centred on the Spirit will go a long way to bind us Christians spiritually with peoples and communities in the midst of whom we live and who are inextricable parts of our lives and experiences.

### 5.5 Spirit — The Power Of The Powerless

An important activity of the Spirit is to give life by breathing into what appears as powerless and weak. In the vision of Ezekiel (Ez 37: 1ff), through the breath of the Spirit, the valley of dead-bones is turned into an oasis of living people. A clear test whether our Asian Churches are Spirit-filled will be seen in that we become truly Churches of the poor, breathing into the struggling masses hope for greater humanity and fuller forms of life. The preaching of the Good News to the poor in the life of Jesus was the result of his being filled with the Spirit. When we know that the greatest number of the **poor** and destitute in the world today are to be found in Asia, the imperative necessity of an unambiguous commitment of our Churches to the poor, the oppressed and the marginalised become very obvious.

Prophets both in the past and in contemporary times, the saints and seers, wise women and men, those heroically committed to the struggle to free their sisters and brothers, those whose life and service are filled with unbound love — these are concrete signs and symbols in our Asian histories wherein we are able to discern the Spirit of God and its power.

### 5.6 Primacy Of The Spirit And The Christian Communities Of Asia

One of the characteristics of the Asian way of life and thought is the primacy accorded to the realm of the spirit over the externals — whether they are structures or institutions, laws or systems of belief. But when the Church, in the concrete, appears as an institution attached to the externals, and gives the impression of not being attuned to the ways of the Spirit, it

looses its credibility in the eyes of our neighbours of other faiths. It projects its own image as that of a powerful organisation with a complex bureaucratic system. Such a Church may evoke admiration for its power and efficiency, but fails to impress as an instance of inspiration. For, it seems to lack precisely what is most important to Asians — the inner power of the Spirit. This is a challenge for the Asian local Churches.

For us Asian Christians to be Church should mean to be filled by the Spirit and to act with its power. The charisms and powers which we find in the early Church are not special gifts endowed only for that period. The coming into being of the Church in every historical period and among every people is always a new event of the Spirit which bestows new power and gifts appropriate to the context and situation. We believe that the Spirit showers very special gifts on us at this moment of our Asian history as our Churches are struggling to become true local Churches. But it is the duty of us, the Asian Churches, to discern the Spirit and its working in our midst.

This implies that we do not turn our Churches into mere institutions. Of course, institution and charisms are not to be opposed to each other. However, it is important that in our life and praxis we ensure that our institutions and ministries are truly vehicles of the Spirit, and that they do not extinguish it. The historical juncture in which our Asian Churches find themselves requires that new initiatives and probings be encouraged and supported in such fields as those relating to the socio-political world, religions, cultures, worship, ministries, theological thought, etc. We need to approach these with a freshness of mind, and should not, in any case, let what the Spirit has delicately planted and nurtured among our Asian peoples, be trampled upon by alien boots.

We want particularly to underscore the importance of viewing ministries in Asia from the pneumatic perspective. Whether the *gurus* of Indic tradition or the Masters of Chinese tradition, they are not seen primarily as representatives of an institution from which they derive their power and authority. The moral authority of being persons who were constantly drinking from the fountains of the Divine or drawing from the house of Wisdom was what gave them power and drew people to what they had to say. People of all walks of life went in search of them, as they continue to do even today. This indicates how important it is for our Churches to have ministers and leaders of the Church who will draw others because they are women and men of the Spirit.

Our reflections on the experience of the Spirit in Asia leads us to turn our minds also to the important question of discernment. The complex new socio-political and Religio-cultural situation in which our Churches find themselves make the practice of discernment a very challenging one, indeed. It is important to realise that the situation we live in is fraught with

many ambiguities and contradictions. The temptation is too strong to sit in judgement without understanding and to misinterpret the events and experiences around us.

To be able to discern the Spirit and its working, the Churches themselves need to be filled with the Spirit and to be attuned to its stirrings and interpellations. Part of this discernment process is also a self-critique of the arrogant ways which often give the impression that the Church, its leaders and ministers are the sole possessors of the Spirit and its exclusive channels. In fact, the life and praxis in our Churches unfortunately continue to manifest many obvious signs of wealth and power which often go along with disregard for others, their persons, their freedom and basic rights, their views and legitimate aspirations. Self-critique will make us more humble and attentive to others. We are happy that the Holy Father in his document *Tertio Millennio Adveniente* has indicated, reviewing the Christian history of the past, the many failings the Church needs to repent for. A similar review of the history of our Christian Churches in Asia at the threshold of the new millennium needs to be done with the Spirit whom we believe is also God's power of purification.

### 5.7 Spirit And The Participative Community Of Equals

We cannot sufficiently underline the importance of the Church as a Spirit-filled community of equals in Asia. For, in different parts of the continent, there exist strong social stratifications and caste-hierarchy. It will be an irony if the mode of exercise of authority were to reinforce the existing discriminations and inequalities in society-as not seldom is the case- rather than helping the community to grow as a communion among members who are endowed with the same basic dignity. In Asia's own history, the creation of *Sangha* by the Buddha was an attempt to create a community without caste or class, and it found great appeal among people who suffered the oppression of a casteist society.

The presence of the Spirit in the Church is borne witness to and perceived in that it becomes truly a participative Church in its life and operation. Moving towards a participative Church has been a very important concern in the ecclesiological efforts of FABC for the past many years. It is guided by the thought that the Spirit operates in and through the **community** whose members are active subjects. The structures and institutions are the means which it uses in its operation, and these need to be evaluated and judged against the measure of their attunement to the voice of the one Spirit speaking through the different voices of its many members. No institution or Church-leader or minister can discern the voice of the Spirit except by being in effective relationship with the community and attentively listening to it. All this has far-reaching implications for Asian local Churches, their life and involvement in society.

Within the Church itself, we need to create an environment in which the charisms of all are recognised and affirmed. The strong clericalism which the Asian Churches have inherited, and, through their own practice, have further strengthened should give way to a situation in which the laity can give expression to the multifarious gifts of the Spirit they have received. Today this is an absolute pre-condition for the creation of true and authentic Church-communities in Asia based on the basic equality of all Christian believers and the recognition of the plurality of charisms and functions.

## **5.8 With The Spirit Moving Towards The Future**

As we are stepping into a new millennium, our obligation also grows to hearken more intensely to “what the Spirit tells to the Churches” (Rev. 2:7). We are convinced that the future shape of our Churches of Asia will very much depend upon our readiness to listen to its voice and allow it to operate in our midst unhindered by forces which do not share our experiences and our Asian ways of thought and modes of acting. In the present times when the tendency to bypass the contextual and to undermine the local in the name of the global and universal is asserting itself in every sphere with serious consequences for the quality of life, our Churches should become, each one, truly centres of the refreshing and creative action of the Spirit which is deeply involved in our context and experiences and which (the Spirit), only in and through them, leads us to understand the global and the universal. In an Asia that is becoming ever more complex, it would be a tall claim for any one single individual or institution to claim to have understood, much less mastered the varieties of situations in which our Asian local Churches find themselves and the intricate problems with which we have to grapple. Nor can we content ourselves by importing solutions from without. It is this which forces us, the Christian communities of, Asia to be ourselves truly active subjects who, with the power of the Spirit and its guidance, will shape responsibly our future destinies. In this process of our continuous conversing and communication with the Spirit — which in no way can be substituted — we do not want to remain isolated, but want to stand in communion and dialogue with all other local Churches and their traditions.

## **6. PASTORAL RECOMMENDATIONS**

“Let anyone who can hear, listen to what the spirit is saying to the Churches” (Rev. 2:7). We recommend that all ministers of the Church be trained in the art of listening to others in order to hear the voice of the Spirit. We need to listen to the Spirit speaking in Asian traditions, cultures, religions, movements for justice and peace. More specifically, we recommend the following:

1. Leaders of the Asian Church should promote a genuine devotion to the Holy Spirit as experienced in Asian Spiritual heritages, Asian movements for liberation and struggles for human dignity. A practical suggestion to achieve this goal would be a catechetical preparation for the celebration of the feast of Pentecost, perhaps, even having a separate feast of the Holy Spirit, as we have with the feast of Corpus Christi, at a time of the year that is more appropriate in the local situation, perhaps, linking it to a national feast like Deevali.

2. The Church in Asia also needs to develop its faculty of discerning the Spirit at work in Asia today, within the church in the various charismatic and popular movements that have arisen, and in the Asian spiritualities, Asian aspirations for liberation and full human dignity. "Do not stifle the Spirit or despise the gift of prophecy with contempt; test everything and hold on to what is good." (1 Thess. 5:19 - 21 ). In order to achieve this sense of discernment, we suggest the following:

- a) Workshops on discernment, to sensitise Asian Christians to the work of the Spirit.
- b) Elaborate certain guidelines to help people to discern the Spirit at work in various groups and peoples.
- c) In attempting to understand the movements of the Spirit, we may need an inter-disciplinary approach, which make use of the insights of sociology, anthropology and psychology.

3. Charismatic movements are spreading everywhere in the Asian Church and producing great fruit. Questions are raised about these movements. Two important criteria to discern the authentic presence of the Spirit are:

- a) Have they taken root in Asian cultures and traditions?
- b) Do they lead people to concern for the poor and the marginalised and social transformation?

4. Christians in Asia have come to appreciate the work of the Spirit in their own lives and in the lives of their brothers and sisters of other religions. The life of Asian Christians is more and more nourished by Asian Spiritualities. In order to further promote and encourage a true Asian Christian Spirituality, we recommend the FABC to set up an institute for Asian Spiritualities, or to incorporate such a programme into an existing institute like the EAPI.

5. One of the signs of the Spirit at work in the Asian Church is the FABC itself, and its various activities. Much has been accomplished and many excellent documents have been produced by various offices of the FABC, but unfortunately, they are little known, even among Asians.

- a) We recommend that the FABC set up a publication office to function as an information pool, and to disseminate the fruits of so much labour. Among other things this office might do are the following:
- 1) Give notification of publications, results of seminars, etc. to news agencies.
  - 2) Distribute reviews or short notices of FABC publications among Theological and Religious journals.
  - 3) Arrange for popular presentations of the contents of the FABC documents in diocesan bulletins, weeklies, etc.
  - 4) Ensure that the FABC publications are made available to seminaries, Catholic Universities and Colleges.
  - 5) Publicise the existence of the FABC website: <http://www.fabc.com.ph>
- b) In view of the efforts in Asia to develop a contextualised theology and spirituality, we recommend that there be special courses and seminars on FABC documents in Asian seminaries and Theological Institutes, religious formation houses, and lay formation programmes. Night schools for lay people have been successful in this regard, in certain parts of Asia.

6. In order to appreciate and foster the values found in primal religions, such as, the spirit of community and communion in society and the sense of sacredness of nature and ecology, we need to recognise the work of the Spirit among those people who profess primal religions, and assist them to let these values grow and develop in Asian Christian life.

7. Asian women are making significant contributions to the building up of the Church in Asia. The Church must let their voice be heard and enable them to exercise their proper ministries according to their own charisms.

8. Popular religiosity is part of our rich Asian heritage, and as such, it should be encouraged and promoted with proper discernment.

9. One of the principal fruits of the Spirit is reconciliation and healing. Services which promote reconciliation and holistic healing should be encouraged in our parishes and shrines.

10. The work of the Spirit in dialogue will be fruitful only if there are personnel trained in inter-religious dialogue and ecumenism. Greater resources of personnel must be committed to this work of the Spirit.

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