

Seventh Plenary Assembly: Position Paper

**RENEWAL THAT AWAITS THE CHURCH IN ASIA  
A THEOLOGICAL AND ECCLESIOLOGICAL REFLECTION  
ON RENEWAL**

by  
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Yves Congar, the great Dominican theologian and cardinal, once said that there is a "geography of ideas" ("*une géographie des idées*").<sup>1</sup> Ideas do not arise from a vacuum but from a confluence of factors that shape a particular people, place and historical moment. Conversely, ideas help shape human, social and cultural geographies. Strictly speaking, there are no ideas per se but only ideas and their times and contexts.

For this Seventh Plenary Assembly of the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences, the question of *renewal* needs to be addressed from within the realities of the Church's concrete life at a concrete moment of history, in a concrete locality called Asia, which really is made up of various "worlds." Understanding renewal requires an appreciation of the rich heritage of the Christian Tradition, which is the very life of the Church anywhere and at any time. It must take into account the many FABC assemblies, workshops and meetings that have influenced the Church in Asia these past three decades. It must face the dawning of the new Christian millennium and the challenges of the Great Jubilee, as indicated by the Special Assembly of the Synod of Bishops for Asia and by its fruit, the post-Synodal apostolic exhortation of Pope John Paul II, *Ecclesia in Asia* (EA).<sup>2</sup> How can we best conceive of the renewal of the Church in a continent where Christianity actually began but where in most places the Church has barely begun? How do we renew what is not "old"? What does it mean to renew the Church in cultures shaped by other faiths and ancient civilizations and which are being radically changed by emerging global, materialistic and post-modern values? What does renewal of the Church entail in the midst of political

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and social upheavals where the Church's voice is almost unheeded? How does the Church pursue its renewal among an economically strangled people? In what sense is the Church to be renewed in Asia where people have deep yearnings for life itself?

The reflection that follows will offer one possible way of exploring the renewal of the Church in Asia. It does not pretend to be able to cover the whole "geography" within which true renewal is to be understood and pursued in Asia. It is meant to be a simple guide and tool for our reflection and discernment.

My presentation will dwell first of all on the New Testament basis for the understanding of renewal. It will be followed by a consideration of the concept of renewal in the Second Vatican Council. A third section will focus on the various theological and pastoral ways of approaching the renewal of the Church. A final section will be devoted to specific points about renewing the Church in Asia offered for our reflection and discussion.

## I. Renewal in the New Testament<sup>3</sup>

It will be profitable for us to begin our investigation of renewal by going to its biblical basis, especially to the New Testament.

### A. *Kainós*

Two Greek words denote "new things." *Neos* signifies what was not there before or what is new in time or origin. *Kainós* signifies what is new in nature, what is different from the usual or what is better than the old or superior in value. *Kainós* is qualitative, while *neos* is temporal.

Theologically, *kainós* depicts the wholly different and miraculous brought by the time of salvation in Jesus Christ. Images of the new reality inaugurated by salvation in Jesus Christ abound in the New Testament: "a new heaven and a new earth" (Rev 21:1), "the new Jerusalem" (Rev 3:12),

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<sup>1</sup> Yves Congar, O.P., "Situation ecclésiologique au moment de 'Ecclesiam Suam' au passage à une église dans l'itinéraire des hommes," *Ecclesiam Suam. Première lettre encyclique de Paul VI* (Brescia: Istituto Paolo VI, 1982), 79.

<sup>2</sup> John Paul II, Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Ecclesia in Asia* (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1999).

<sup>3</sup> This portion relies heavily on the entry *kainós* and its derivatives in Gerhard Kittel, ed. *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament, III* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. Eerdmans Publishing, 1965), 447-454.

"a new creation in Christ" (2 Cor 5:17). The one who sat on the throne said, "Behold, I make all things new" (Rev 21:5). St. Paul portrays Jesus Christ as the initiator of the new dispensation surpassing the regime of sin initiated by Adam (Rom 5:12-21). The reality of salvation given by Jesus to humanity, most especially to Christians, is far superior to the worthlessness of the former life of sin. "We were indeed buried with him through baptism into death, so that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might live in newness of life" (Rom 6:4). Paul also declares, "But now we are released from the law, dead to what held us captive, so that we may serve in the newness of the spirit and not under the obsolete letter" (Rom 7:6). The Church, the community of the baptized and believers in Christ, is the new humanity, bearing the new reality of salvation already present in Christ.

### B. *Anakainóou* (to renew) and *Anakainousis* (renewal)

In early Christian writings, making new is connected with regeneration in faith in Christ, formalized in the reception of baptism. St. Paul reminds Christians that the subject of the inner renewal of human beings is the Holy Spirit poured out by God. "Now the one who has prepared us for this very thing is God who has given us the Spirit as a first installment" (2 Cor 5:5). "If the Spirit of the one who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, the one who raised Christ from the dead will give life to your mortal bodies also, through his Spirit that dwells in you" (Rom 8:11). Christians, however, must strive to show in their conduct that they truly possess the Spirit of renewal, that they belong indeed to the new age and the new humanity. "Do not conform yourself to this age but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and pleasing and perfect" (Rom 12:2).

### C. Summary

Renewal in the New Testament is a multifaceted reality with the following dimensions:

1. *Trinitarian, Christological, Pneumatological and Soteriological*: Jesus Christ, in fulfillment of the Father's plan and in the power of the Holy Spirit, generates a new humanity, a new heaven and a new earth through the gift of salvation. This thrust of renewal in the New Testament blends well with the theme of the Special Assembly of the Synod of Bishops for Asia, *Jesus Christ the Savior and His Mission of Love and Service in Asia*: "That they may have life, and have it abundantly". The saving mission of Jesus is aimed at and is the beginning of the definitive renewal of all things.
2. *Eschatological*: the newness brought about by salvation in Christ is

already present and operative, yet humanity and the world still await its fullness in hope.

3. *Anthropological and Ethical*: those renewed in Christ need to strive daily to discard the old person, the old life. They are to live by the new life shared by Christ and to manifest the renewal of the inner person in a life of righteousness and holiness.
4. *Ecclesiological*: the Church is the new humanity, the presence or "sacrament" of salvation that renews the world.

In the New Testament, we learn that the renewal of the world and of humanity is a gift that has already been offered by the Triune God, thanks to the mission of the Son and the Holy Spirit. The renewal of the world and of humanity is the fruit of the *missio Dei*. Following Karl Rahner, we can say that the very offer of the gift already effects a new objective situation in the world and humanity, prior to the acceptance or rejection of the gift. Renewal is a gift, an irrevocable gift, waiting to be received, to be appropriated, to be made one's own by people, by the community and by humanity. If only they would dare to receive it.

## II. The Renewal of The Church in Vatican II

In the twentieth century, the great moment of renewal of and for the Catholic Church has been the Second Vatican Council (1962-65). Attempts of various local and regional Churches to renew themselves, including those of the FABC, have been inspired by the directions mapped out by the council. It might be profitable to note the ideas on the renewal of the Church of the two popes who guided the council, John XXIII and Paul VI, for they influenced the council's agenda.

### A. Pope John XXIII<sup>4</sup>

For John XXIII, the renewal of the Church that Vatican II aims to promote must have two trajectories. First is the inward movement (*ad intra*) or renewal as rediscovering the Church's true identity, inner vitality or interior life. Second is the outward movement (*ad extra*), where the Church

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<sup>4</sup> The main texts of John XXIII used in this section are the Apostolic Constitution *Humanae Salutis* of 25 December 1961, the Radiomessage of 11 September 1962, the speech at the solemn opening of the Council, *Gaudet Mater Ecclesia*, on 11 October 1962, and the speech at the closing of the first period of the Council on 8 December 1962. These texts are found in *Enchiridion Vaticanum II, Documenti del Concilio Vaticano II. Testo ufficiale e versione italiana* (Bologna: Edizioni Dehoniane, 1981), 2-19, 24-31, 32-53, 68-81 respectively.

is renewed in its mission in the modern world. While preserving the Christian doctrine and the patrimony of truth, the Church needs to bring the "energies" of the Gospel into contact with the modern world, so that it may respond to the needs of the times. In view of mission, the renewal of the Church's identity does not mean a mere repetition of what it believes in. Neither is interior renewal to be equated with immobility. Rather it urges the Church to offer the Gospel truth in a manner effective for the men and women of our times. Through the Church, Jesus continues renewing the world. Renewal, therefore, involves the Church's fidelity to itself and discernment of the signs of the times for its "prolongation" of Jesus' mission in the world.

### B. Pope Paul VI<sup>5</sup>

Paul VI follows the main lines set by his predecessor while putting his unique stamp on the understanding of renewal. First, ecclesial renewal has a christological motivation. The Church is renewed only by being more conformed to Christ and his intention for the Church. Secondly, ecclesial renewal is for mission. The inner vitality of the Church is reawakened to equip it better for its missionary vocation. Renewal, therefore, does not lead to a Church closed in upon itself but produces a Church more open to humanity, rendering Christ more present to all. Thirdly, renewal is a process of purification. Although the Church, due to the Holy Spirit's guidance, cannot be accused of substantial infidelity to the Tradition, it still must be cleansed of impurities that could impede it from fulfilling its mission more effectively. So a return to the mind of Christ is not "historicizing" the Church but purifying it to meet the new conditions of the world. Renewal involves purifying both hearts and structures of the Church, all for fidelity to Christ and the mission he entrusted to the Church.

### C. Vatican II

The Second Vatican Council treats explicitly the theme of Church renewal mainly in the Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, *Lumen gentium*,

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<sup>5</sup> The main texts of Paul VI used in this section are the speech at the opening of the second period of the Council on 29 September 1963, the speech at the opening of the third period on 14 September 1964, the speech at the opening of the fourth period on 14 September 1965, the homily at the Seventh Session of the Council on 28 October 1965, and the speech at the Eighth Session on 18 November 1965, *ibid.*, 80-119, 140-163, 192-215, 248-255, 256-271 respectively. See also Antonio Ugenti, *La Chiesa dei tempi nuovi. Il rinnovamento della Chiesa nel magistero di Paolo VI* (Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1983).

and the Decree on Ecumenism, *Unitatis redintegratio*. The terms used quite consistently are *renovatio* and *renovare*. Only in some isolated cases does the council utilize the term *reformatio*. There seems to have been a conscious decision to distinguish renewal from reform. At the risk of oversimplifying the teaching of the council, let us identify the major lines of Church renewal in the two documents mentioned.

First, the council identifies the agents of renewal of the Church. Jesus Christ, who makes all things new, renews the Church and calls it unceasingly to renewal. Christ renews the Church through the Holy Spirit that he has given to vivify, unite and move his Body. The Church community also acts to renew itself but always under the impulse of the same Holy Spirit.

Secondly, why is there a need to renew the Church? To be sure the Church is indefectibly holy.<sup>6</sup> But because it contains sinners in its own bosom, it is always in need of purification (*LG 8*). In its pilgrim state and as a human institution, the Church is in need of continued reform (*UR 6*). Although the Church is endowed with all divinely revealed truth and the means of grace, its members fail to live by them (*UR 4*). The council openly admits the sins and failures of the members of the holy Church. Thus the need for renewal and purification.

Thirdly, the goal of renewal is to increase the Church's fidelity to its own calling (*UR 6*), to Christ's will for it (*UR 4*). Through purification and renewal, separated Christians will grow in unity so that the Church as sign of Christ may shine forth more clearly in the earth (*LG 15*).

Fourthly, there are various forms of renewal and purification. These include penance (*LG 8*), the biblical and liturgical movements, the preaching of the Word and catechetics, the apostolate of the laity, new forms of religious life, the spirituality of married life, the Church's social teaching and activity (*UR 6*).

#### D. Summary

Vatican II and the popes that guided it depict renewal primarily as a rediscovery, a retrieval of a life, a goal, and a mission that are already the possession of the Church as a gift of the Triune God. But the members and children of the Church are not always up to that new life, mission and final-

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<sup>6</sup> The teaching of Vatican II on the indefectible holiness of the Church and its need for constant renewal is discussed in Francis A. Sullivan, S.J., *The Church We Believe In. One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic* (Mahwah, N.J.: Paulist Press, 1988), 66-83.

ity that are theirs. Hence the need to be purified. The Church is not renewed only for its own sake but for mission, for the changing world that needs to see Jesus. The Church also embarks on its renewal for Jesus who is its Lord. The modern world beckons the Church to speak the renewing word of Jesus. The Spirit of Christ, who is already present in the Church and who is also in the world, awaits the Church to be made ever new in Jesus.

In many ways, the plenary assemblies and other activities of the FABC these past thirty years have been attempts to "give flesh" to the framework of renewal provided by Vatican II. This observation can be verified by perusing the statements emanating from the FABC sessions and offices. At this point, it might be profitable to articulate the understanding of renewal found in the FABC documents. This task, however, is massive and cannot be done here with justice because it requires bringing to the explicit level what was is latent but powerfully present in the life and "rhythm" of the FABC. To my knowledge, this seventh plenary assembly is the first plenary assembly that will tackle renewal as a theme rather than a context. The FABC understanding of Church renewal deserves a fuller study than can be contained in these few points.<sup>7</sup>

### III. Strategies of Renewal (Ways of Looking at Renewal)

Wilbert Shenk<sup>8</sup> and Avery Dulles, S.J.,<sup>9</sup> in separate studies, were able to identify various ways of looking at renewal of the Church, especially in relation to modern culture. Their respective categorizations can be a useful tool for assessing the different approaches to renewal. Each strategy will be described briefly in terms of what it considers as the source, goal of renewal, and process of renewal. Some strengths and weaknesses of each will also be indicated.

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<sup>7</sup> Seminal studies on the ecclesiology of FABC include C.B. Putranta, *The Idea of the Church in the Documents of the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences (FABC), 1970-1982*, Dissertatio ad Doctoratum in Facultate Theologiae Pontificiae Universitatis Gregoriana, Romae, 1983 (Roma: Tipografia Poliglotta della Pontificia Universita Gregoriana, 1985), and Miguel Marcelo Quatra, O.M.I., *At the Side of the Multitudes. The Kingdom of God and Mission of the Church in the FABC Documents* (Quezon City: Claretian Publications, 2000).

<sup>8</sup> Wilbert R. Shenk, "Mission, Renewal, and the Future of the Church," *International Bulletin of Missionary Research* 21 (1997): 154-159.

<sup>9</sup> Avery Dulles, S.J., *The Resilient Church. The Necessity and Limits of Adaptation* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday and Company, 1977), 29-44.

#### A. Renewal as Reaffirmation of Tradition.

In this view, the source of renewal is ecclesiastical identity, while its goal is the self-preservation of the Church. Renewal is the recapturing of the genius and integrity of its tradition, appealing to the past for authority in the face of possible changes. Renewal for this option is primarily a matter of spirituality, quite inward and ecclesiocentric.

#### B. Renewal as Restructuring the Church.

For those who espouse this model, the source of renewal is efficient and effective ecclesiastical organization, while its goal is a "streamlined" and efficient church. The Church needs to update its structures if it wants to be a credible witness to contemporary society. Inefficiency discredits the Church. Restructuring by itself, however, does little to stimulate vision and commitment.

#### C. Renewal as "Mainstreaming" the Church.

This particular strategy looks to general cultures as the very source of renewal, while its goal is the active participation of the Church in cultures. In other words, a renewed Church finds its place in the culture in which it exists. So the Church must package and market itself in culturally acceptable forms. "Mainstreaming," however, may not provide the Church with enough motivation to be a distinctive presence in society, or even a counter-culture.

#### D. Renewal as Restoring the Primitive Church.

The source of renewal for this approach is the primitive apostolic Church, while the goal is the replication in our time of this original Church. Based on the assumption that the Church was perfect in its inception, renewal, therefore, means a repristination, eliminating accretions or corruption by returning to the beginnings. While providing motivation for correcting abuses, this theory is criticized for idealizing the period of Christian origins and ignoring its defects. It also tends to ignore the action of the Holy Spirit in the more recent past.

#### E. Renewal as Development.

The source of renewal is the vital principle that impels the Church to grow, while the goal is the actualization of the Church's potentialities. This developmental concept of reform rests upon an optimistic estimation of human powers to grow, to the neglect of the pervasiveness of sin. The discontinuous and irregular character of historical change is also ignored,



and is not integrated into the process of renewal.

#### F. Renewal as Missionary Engagement or Creative Interaction and Response.

The source of renewal is the *missio Dei*, while the goal is the intensified witness of the Church to the Reign of God. Renewal is concerned with recovering the Church's *raison d'être* which is mission on behalf of the world. Authentic renewal is manifested in intensified witness in the world to the Reign of God. This involves a dialogic and relational view of the Church as it responds to the shifting human environment in which it lives and carries out its mission.

#### Summary:

The final strategy, renewal as missionary engagement, seems to be the most appropriate umbrella within which the other strategies of renewal could be viewed and implemented. It is closer to the biblical data regarding renewal and corresponds to the thrust of Vatican II and the various assemblies of the FABC.

### **IV. Some Points for Reflection on Renewal as a Theological and Ecclesiological Question in Asia.**

The renewal of the Church is much more than just a pragmatic or practical question. At root it is a theological question that can be proficiently understood by no means other than that by cognition proceeding from what the faith says about the Church and its mission in the world. However, because the Church is also a social body, its renewal involves sociological and anthropological questions as well. The fundamental theological and ecclesiological questions of renewal are: Will the Church dare to receive anew the gift of salvation in Christ and make it its life source? Will it dare to be the sacrament of salvation to today's world? Will it dare to manifest to the world the power of Christ's salvation to form a new humanity, a new earth? Will the Church dare to do all these in Asia? We can only provide a few stimuli for reflection on aspects of Church renewal in Asia. The best way to give these points is through images.

#### A. The Renewed Church as Door or Window

One area of renewal concerns the tension between the pole of identity and the pole of going out to the world on mission.

On the one hand, a renewed Church must preserve its identity by rediscovering and reembracing it. In the process, the Church becomes clearer about who it is and what it is meant to be in God's mysterious purpose for

the world. After all, Christianity is fundamentally an "instituted" religion.<sup>10</sup> Its identity is a mystery that is given to it and to which it must be faithful. We want to see in Asia a Church that takes "holy pride" in its identity, a confidence or security in the gift entrusted to it.<sup>11</sup>

On the other hand, the Church cannot be an end in itself. Renewal cannot just be about diminishing membership and attendance or sagging monetary contributions, and in Asia, increasing the number of baptized Christians. True renewal in Church identity happens only when the Church engages the world and its cultures "missionally," so that its presence in society invites people to a reconciled relationship with God, neighbors and creation, to justice and peace.<sup>12</sup> A Church does not renew itself for its own sake, but so that it might follow its Lord more faithfully as it journeys in history.<sup>13</sup>

The church door can symbolize a renewed Church working itself out in the tension between identity and mission. The Christian community that comes in through the door and goes out again is a people seeking an identity and mission in Christ. Renewal means being able to locate the mystery of salvation on both sides of the door—in identity and in worldly life.<sup>14</sup> A mirror can also be an image for a renewed Church. "A mirror that reflects only itself is no longer a mirror. A window that no longer lets us see the wide open spaces outside, but gets in the way of the view, has lost its reason for being."<sup>15</sup> In other words, renewal happens anew when the Church in Asia becomes the *locus* of the holy covenant between the Word and the world, the *sacramentum Christi* and *sacramentum mundi*.

This involves engaging courageously and missionally the worlds and cultures of Asia. Not just the traditional cultures formed by ancient faiths and civilizations but also the emerging cultures shaped by global, consumerist, post-modern cultures which the bishops of Asia and John Paul II alert us to in *EA* 6, 22. The Church needs to read critically and in a discerning

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<sup>10</sup> Yves Congar, O.P., "Renewal of the Spirit and Reform of the Institution," Alois Muller and Norbert Greinacher, ed., *Ongoing Reform of the Church, Concilium 73* (New York: Herder and Herder, 1972), 48.

<sup>11</sup> John Paul II, *EA* 31.

<sup>12</sup> Shenk, "Mission, Renewal," 154.

<sup>13</sup> Robert Schreiter, CPPS, "Renewing the Church in China," *Origins* 22 (1993), 710.

<sup>14</sup> From a talk of Mary Collins at a Notre Dame Symposium on December 2, 1995, quoted by Nathan Mitchell, "The Amen Corner," *Worship* 70 (1996), 167.

<sup>15</sup> Joseph Ratzinger, *Called to Communion. Understanding the Church Today*, translated by Adrian Walker from the German original, *Zur Gemeinschaft gerufen: Kirche heute verstehen*, (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1996), 145.

way the post-modern culture emerging in Asia, with its denial of absolutes and metanarratives, pluralism, fragmentation, skepticism, decentered and multiple selves, individualism.<sup>16</sup> A renewed Church dares to tell the story of Jesus to this world that has no use for metanarratives. A renewed Church in Asia retells the story of Jesus from the perspective of the life realities of Asian peoples, and also looks at the situations of Asia from the mystery of the Jesus event. But the story must be told, retold, more and more beautifully, through words and living parables of life and witness. In hearing the story of salvation, the world might "look through" the window, or even "pass through" the door, and see not just the mystery that the Church possesses but understand its deep yearning, thirst and hunger. The renewed Church as door also allows the experiences of non-Christians to uncover for the Church itself the mystery of Christ it possesses, in the same way that it shares that mystery with peoples of other faiths.

## B. Renewal as Sitting at One Table

Another area of renewal is the question of who initiates renewal, who promotes it, and who benefits from it. This issue has a direct bearing on renewing the spirit of communion in the Church.

On the one hand, renewal initiated by those in authority enjoys "officiality," and can utilize the resources of ecclesiastical office. The Church can point to Vatican II as a renewal "from above," which was a fairly unusual phenomenon because it was not prepared from below.<sup>17</sup> One danger of a renewal exclusively handled by officials is bureaucratization in the Church. "Bureaucratization means the process by which the skills and knowledge necessary to the conducting of life at all levels become centralized in a professional 'knowledge class' operating through a businesslike administrative structure."<sup>18</sup> A highly bureaucratized Church is not our image of a renewed Church, for bureaucratization often results in fragmentation, breakdown of traditional institutions, politicization of ideas, ideological thinking.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> See the enlightening studies of Daniel Patrick Huang, S.J., "Emerging Global, Postmodern Culture in the Philippines," *Landas. Journal of Loyola School of Theology* 13 (1999): 48-58; Samuel H. Canilang, CMF, "Post-Modernity: An Emerging New Cultural Milieu and Consecrated Life," *Religious Life Asia* (1999): 71-83; Martin Henry, "God in Postmodernity," *The Irish Theological Quarterly* 63 (1998): 3-21; Julio César Barrera Velez, "Descripcion del fenomeno religioso en la postmodernidad," *Cristianismo y Sociedad* 36 (1998): 7-27.

<sup>17</sup> Congar, "Renewal of the Spirit," 45-46.

<sup>18</sup> M. Francis Mannion, "Cultural Fragmentation and Christian Worship," *Liturgy* 90 (1990): 5, quoted in Mitchell, "The Amen Corner," 163-64.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, 164.

Renewal must have room for initiatives "from below," or from the "periphery," or the "margins." "An 'official' reform can lead more speedily to clear and binding results, yet it is actively hindered by many ecclesio-sociological factors. A reform arising from the community has more prospects of being creative, but it does run the risk of remaining non-binding and diffuse."<sup>20</sup> Programs drawn up 'from above' need feedback from the base.<sup>21</sup> Renewal listens to the negative experiences as well, to "constructive disobedience."<sup>22</sup> Reception, not just submission, becomes the preferred process for renewal. The traditional concept of reception is based on a fabric of relationships, a mutual give and take between persons in the Church and the local Churches between themselves.<sup>23</sup>

The renewal of the Church in Asia is and must be the concern of all. The very process of renewal that allows participation and recognition produces a community of mutuality, communication, interdependence, and participation. Renewal enables the Church to celebrate diversity, firm in belief that that diversity is a gift of the Spirit that makes the body one. No one will, therefore, be alienated in a renewed Church. No poor person will be turned down because of poverty. No indigenous person will feel foreign in it. No woman will be looked down upon. No young will be reduced to a "problem." No non-Catholic will be treated as an enemy. No idea will be dismissed a priori because it does not come from those with authority or influence. Renewal involves receiving the gift of communion that is the identity and mission of the Church. Communion and mission are inseparably connected (EA 24). The image of table fellowship may be utilized here, an image close to the experience of Asian peoples. In a renewed Church all are children of God, all will have a place at table, all will have enough to eat, all can laugh and enjoy, all can talk and be listened to. In that communion which could only be the gift of the Spirit, the mystery of salvation and of the reign of God is experienced especially by the poor and needy. One blessing that God has given to the Church in Asia through the FABC is the "eruption" of the mystery of Church in the exchange of stories and personal interaction of participants in its assemblies.

Renewal of the Church in Asia also means that we take our rightful place in the Universal Church, fully participating in the mutual give and take among the local Churches and the Church Universal. In the history of the development of Tradition, the whole Church can be the receiver of a

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<sup>20</sup> Alois Muller, "Practical Theology of Church Reform," *Concilium* 73, 69.

<sup>21</sup> Adolf Exeler, "Change of Consciousness and Church Reform," *Ibid.*, 84.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, 82-83.

<sup>23</sup> Hermann Pottmeyer, "Reception and Submission," *The Jurist* 51 (1991): 269.

decision or initiative that comes from a local Church.<sup>24</sup> In many parts of *Ecclesia in Asia* the Holy Father celebrates, with the Synod Fathers and delegates, the Asian roots of Christ and of Christianity. Can the Churches in Asia bring their noodles, curry, adobo, papaya, guava, etc., to the grand table of Christian fellowship, and also enjoy the pasta, steak, sausages, croissants, nachos brought by our brothers and sisters from other lands? A renewed Church in Asia humbly shares what it possesses and gladly receives what others offer. In so doing, the Church also contributes to universal peace and communion at a time when many Asian countries are feeling the adverse effects of globalization (*EA* 39).

### C. Renewal as Letting Go for New Life.

Some writers have applied the idea of grieving as a model for understanding renewal in the Church. Let us explore it.

Because the Church is essentially Tradition or transmission of faith life, it cannot renew itself by discarding everything that has been handed down from the past just because it is past. One can recreate only the forms of what one has already received. That is why renewal involves knowledge of the content of the Christian realities that have been received and are to be handed on.<sup>25</sup> Renewal that seeks to break with the past, to ignore history and wants to make a totally fresh start without any regard for continuity could not be true renewal of the Church.<sup>26</sup> Renewal means being rooted again in "the faith of our ancestors."

It would be a mistake, however, to think of Tradition as merely past. Tradition is the very life of the Church, the past that is ever new as present and as future life of the community. Thus, fidelity to Tradition does not mean simply repeating or imitating what was done in the past, mulling over the idealized past with nostalgia and longing. True renewal acknowledges that some things will not be the same again. Fidelity to Tradition is never idolatry or a sterile imitation of the past but a courageous shaping of a future that grows out of the Tradition.<sup>27</sup> It, of course, demands real discernment to be able to separate the Church's true life from its passing sociological forms. The process of grieving as described by those who have studied it might be helpful at this point.

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<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, 289-290.

<sup>25</sup> Congar, "Renewal of the Spirit," 48.

<sup>26</sup> Karl-Heinz Ohlig, "The Theological Objectives of Church Reform," *Concilium* 73, 52.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, 53.

Restorationism, rather than renewal, results from "the refusal to grieve and to risk the new."<sup>28</sup> There are stages of societal and cultural grieving: a feeling of sadness together with symptoms of resistance; the tension between the attraction of the past and the call to face the future; and the stage of recovery of marked detachment at what has been lost. Life must go on now "with the best of the past being carried over into the future."<sup>29</sup> In a similar vein, John Paul II calls for a purification of memory, through an examination of conscience, asking forgiveness and offering forgiveness, so that the Church can let go of unacceptable and sinful ways of the past as it faces the future.<sup>30</sup> Without proper grieving, a Church engages in chronic denial. It would blame others for whatever is chaotic; it would pass on to outside agencies whatever is painful or dangerous; it would not tolerate people who see the truth. "Following Christ demands from the Church the constant readiness to give up everything that has become dear to it over the course of time — its traditions, all that it holds to be its life, and to walk in poverty beneath the cross towards the hope of new life."<sup>31</sup>

A renewed Church in Asia cannot be but deeply immersed in its Christian Tradition, drawing from its treasure what is old and what is ever new (see Mt 13:52). Cardinal Henri de Lubac, S.J., has earlier emphasized the need for commitment to the *living* Tradition if renewal is to be fruitful.<sup>32</sup> A renewed Church in Asia will also be reconciled with its past, will learn how to let go and to risk facing the future with hope. Blaming others for ills of the past will have to stop somewhere. The present and the future beckon. The mystery of the hope coming from the Christian heritage awaits the response of the Church in Asia as its future. Old forms of being Church which now shackle genuine Tradition need to be courageously abandoned, not for the sake of novelty but for the mission of the Church in Asia today.

#### D. Renewal as Conversion of Hearts and Structures

There is no doubt that renewal of the Church will happen only when there is moral renewal,<sup>33</sup> a transformation of the human and ecclesial spirit

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<sup>28</sup> Gerard Arbuckle, S.M., *Refounding the Church* (Quezon City: Claretian Publications, 1996), 180-181.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, 183.

<sup>30</sup> John Paul II, Apostolic Letter *Tertio Millennio Adveniente* (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1994), especially numbers 31-26.

<sup>31</sup> Ohlig, loc. cit., 54.

<sup>32</sup> See Christopher J. Walsh, "De Lubac's critique of the postconciliar Church," *Communio* 19 (1992): 404-432, and "Henri de Lubac in Connecticut: Unpublished conferences on renewal in the postconciliar period," *Communio* 23 (1996): 786-805.

<sup>33</sup> Ratzinger, *Called to Communion*, 150.

according to the standards of the Gospel, the following of Christ and the values of the Reign of God.<sup>34</sup> "At the heart of our commitments lie our attitudes. Our thoughts and feelings towards people and organizations determine our willingness to commit ourselves to them. Commitment means focus. Focus means concentration, intensity, direction and clarity, but it also means freely chosen limitations, defined contours and real surrender. Our question is not relevance but simply, 'Is it loving?' Success is not one of the names of God. To struggle is to love."<sup>35</sup> Renewal happens only when an appropriate consciousness has been formed among those involved in the process. When reforms are put into effect without the necessary change of consciousness, they may well produce the opposite effect to that intended.<sup>36</sup> Archbishop Rembert Weakland, O.S.B., recommends a revival of spiritual consciousness through the rediscovery of the mystical and contemplative traditions of the Church if it wants to bring to the world a sense of the sacred and the transcendent.<sup>37</sup> The memory of martyrs and saints serves the renewal of the Church since they manifest the power of Christ's redemption in their renewed persons (cf. TMA 37). As Ratzinger notes, we need people interiorly transformed by the faith, who live by it with joy and hope, becoming saints or persons who live in love.<sup>38</sup> Saints, in a real sense, are not only agents of renewal but also powerful signs of the renewal worked out by the Spirit in every age.

Renewal, however, includes renewing or rebirthing institutions as well. The function of an institution is to mediate the relations between the self and the world.<sup>39</sup> As far as the Church's mission is concerned, institutions, the right institutions, are necessary. Institutions are moral communities shaping character and vocation. They play a normative function because they are based on a vision of what is right and good.<sup>40</sup> However, as Ratzinger once pointed out, "ecclesiastical institutions and juridical organizations become obsolete. They risk setting themselves up as the essence of the Church, and thus prevent us from seeing through to what is truly essential. This is

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<sup>34</sup> Congar, "Renewal of the Spirit," 41.

<sup>35</sup> Erik Riechers, "The Elusive Reality of Church Renewal," *Review for Religious* 54 (1995): 197.

<sup>36</sup> Adolf Exeler, "Change of Consciousness and Church Reform," *Concilium* 73, 78.

<sup>37</sup> Rembert Weakland, O.S.B., "Church Reform: What Remains to be Done," *Doctrine and Life* 41 (1991): 175.

<sup>38</sup> Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger, *Il Sale della Terra. Cristianesimo e Chiesa cattolica nella svolta del millennio*, translated from the German original entitled *Salz der Erde. Christentum und katholische Kirche an der Jahrtausendwende* by Giuseppe Reguzzoni and Cinzia Patella (Milano: Edizioni San Paolo, 1997), 204.

<sup>39</sup> Robert N. Bellah, *The Good Society* (New York: Vintage Books, 1992), 10, 287, quoted by Shenk, "Mission, Renewal," 156.

<sup>40</sup> Shenk, *ibid.*, 158.

why they must always be dismantled again, like scaffolding that has outlived its necessity. Reform is ever renewed *ablatio*—removal, whose purpose is to allow the *nobilis forma*, the countenance of the bride, and with it the Bridegroom himself, the living Lord, to appear."<sup>41</sup>

Renewal happens when the mystery of salvation in Christ is lived in the hearts of persons and in the mediating structures of the community. It is never a choice of one over the other. "It is true that purely spiritual attitudes also have an impact on social structures. This shows that the spiritual element does take effect. It is necessary; yet it is not sufficient. There is in fact a density proper to impersonal and collective structures which has to be reached."<sup>42</sup>

A renewed Church in Asia must work hard to awaken the Spirit of Jesus and his values in hearts and lives of persons. It was observed during the Special Assembly of the Synod for Asia in 1998 that the Church in Asia is known and appreciated for providing quality education, quality health care, quality social and advocacy services. But when Asians want spiritual guidance, they prefer to go Buddhist, Zen and Hindu prayer masters. Why? This observation makes us pause. But a renewed Church must also see whether its structures mirror the values of the Reign of God. Access of the poor to the Church and its services, the lifestyles and options of the faithful and the leaders, the heroes and heroines of the Church—all these must be evaluated. The Second Plenary Council of the Philippines, for example, challenged the Church in the Philippines to be a Church of the Poor, one trait of which is "to orient and tilt the center of gravity of the entire community in favor of the needy."<sup>43</sup> Can the Church receive the mystery of a new heart, a new humanity offered to it, and translate it into liberating structures?

#### E. Renewal as Daring Waiting

Because of the human and sociological dimension of the Church, renewal involves planning, decision, and effective action. Answers must be sought for the pressing queries of our time. After all, Christians are sent to the world not just as innocent as doves but as wise as serpents! (Mt 10:16) The Church cannot and must not escape from the use of human tools for enhancing its life and mission.

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<sup>41</sup> Ratzinger, *Called to Communion*, 142.

<sup>42</sup> Congar, "Renewal of the Spirit," 43.

<sup>43</sup> Second Plenary Council of the Philippines, "Conciliar Document," paragraph number 134, *Acts and Decrees of the Second Plenary Council of the Philippines, 2 January-17 February 1991* (Manila: Catholic Bishops' Conference of the Philippines, 1992), 51.



Many people in the Church, however, have come to realize that while "reforms can be planned, predicted, promoted and evaluated, renewals cannot. Reform invites vigorous action; renewal invites self-surrender."<sup>44</sup> To renew is to welcome an arriving presence that, when it fully and finally appears, will wrap our hearts in wonder, shock and surprise. We can define and describe a reform; but we are defined by a renewal.<sup>45</sup>

Renewal is promoted by the wonderer and not only by the maker or doer. If the maker were to dominate renewal, the Church will become a self-made institution reduced to the merely empirical domain.<sup>46</sup> The maker values his own activity; the wonderer opens oneself to the horizon of the eternal and the infinite. Renewal is promoted also by poets and poetic images that create a disequilibrium, a thrilling sense of vertigo, a shuddering disturbance deep at the center of things that spreads outward to apprehend the whole range of reality and to alter our experience and perception of it. "Only poems can create a new being in our language by making us what they express."<sup>47</sup> The artist uncovers, releases rather than makes.<sup>48</sup> If the Church needs to be a wonderer, poet, artist, then it must be at home with surprises, with God's "anarchical plots and surprises".<sup>49</sup> In the theological scene of Asia, fruitful renewal has occurred when theologians like Catalino G. Arevalo, S.J. and Michael Amaladoss, S.J., to name a few, dared to be open to the mystery of the faith as it led them to unknown, surprising and disturbing lands to be explored.<sup>50</sup>

Let it not be said that the Church in Asia suffers from a collective crisis of imagination and will.<sup>51</sup> Christ has renewed all things. The Church has only to dream it again, to see it again, to sing it again, to celebrate it in ritual and dance, to hope in it again, to live it again against all the death dealing forces in Asia. "The renewal that awaits us cannot be engineered into existence. We can only dare and dream our way into it."<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> Mitchell, "The Amen Corner," 164.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid.

<sup>46</sup> Ratzinger, *Called to Communion*, 140.

<sup>47</sup> Mitchell, "The Amen Corner," 172.

<sup>48</sup> Ratzinger, *Called to Communion*, 141.

<sup>49</sup> Werner Jeanrod, "Some Criteria for Church Reform," *Doctrine and Life* 42 (1992): 361.

<sup>50</sup> See Catalino G. Arevalo, S.J., "A Life in the Service of the Church in the Philippines and of Asia," *Yearbook of Contextual Theologies* 95 (Aachen: Missionswissenschaftliches Institut Missio), and Michael Amaladoss, S.J., "Faith meets Faith. Living with Cross-cultural Experiences," *Yearbook of Contextual Theologies* 98.

<sup>51</sup> Sr. Doris Gottemoeller, R.S.M., "A Vision for the Church of 2010," *Origins* 25 (1995): 151.

<sup>52</sup> Mitchell, "The Amen Corner," 166.

## Conclusion

A renewed Church is a Church that dares and dreams its way into the Triune God's renewal of all things, a renewal that awaits it. The mystery of salvation that has renewed all things is awaiting the Church in Asia. Will the Church dream to enter it? Will the Church dare to live by it? Will the Church dare to discover that mystery in itself and in the thirst, yearning and hunger of Asian peoples?

We have reason to believe that the Church in Asia will not let renewal wait in vain. Already, we see manifestations of the courage and daring that mark a renewed Church. Pope John Paul II, echoing the sentiments of the Synod Fathers in the Special Assembly for Asia, said:

Those who believe in Christ are still a small minority in this vast and most populous continent. Yet far from being a timid minority, they are lively in faith, full of the hope and vitality which only love can bring. In their humble and courageous way, they have influenced the cultures and societies of Asia, especially the lives of the poor and the helpless, many of whom do not share the Catholic faith. They are an example to Christians everywhere to be eager to share the treasure of the Good News 'in season and out of season' (2 Tim 4:2). They find strength in the wondrous power of the Holy Spirit who, despite the generally small numbers of the Church in Asia, ensures that the Church's presence is like the yeast which mixes with the flour in a quiet and hidden way till it is all leavened (cf. Mt 13:33) " (EA 50).

For these intimations of a renewal already happening in the Church in Asia, we are grateful. For the fullness of renewal not yet with us but towards which the Church in Asia is journeying, we are hopeful!

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