

Seventh Plenary Assembly: Workshop Discussion Guide

THE CHURCH IN ASIA IN MISSION *AD GENTES*

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**I. THE LOCAL CHURCHES IN ASIA
IN MISSION *AD GENTES*,**

BY
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INTRODUCTION

“Missionary activity specifically directed ‘to the nations’ (*ad gentes*) appears to be waning.” This was the assessment authoritatively made by the Supreme Pontiff, John Paul II, in the introduction to his missionary encyclical *Redemptoris Missio* (RM). In that same context, he also stated that “this tendency is certainly not in line with the directives of the Council and of subsequent statements of the Magisterium.” Expressing his concern, he stated further that “difficulties both internal and external have weakened the Church’s missionary thrust towards non-Christians, a fact which must arouse concern among all who believe in Christ. For in the Church’s history, missionary drive has always been a sign of vitality, just as its lessening is a sign of a crisis of faith” (RM 2). He concluded the introduction on a positive and appealing note that “God is opening before the Church the horizons of humanity more fully prepared for the sowing of the Gospel. I sense that the moment has come to commit all of the Church’s energies to a new evangelization and to the mission *ad gentes*. No believer in Christ, no institution of the Church can avoid this supreme duty: to proclaim Christ to all peoples” (RM 3).

As a timely response to the above concern and appeal, and in the wake of the recently concluded Special Assembly for Asia of the Synod of Bish-

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ops in Rome (April 19 — May 4, 1998), which discussed the theme: “*Jesus Christ the Savior and His Message of Love and Service in Asia: That They May Have Life and Have It Abundantly*” (Jn 10:10), the Seventh FABC Plenary Assembly has chosen the theme: “*A Renewed Church in Asia in a Mission of Love and Service.*” Our discussion calls special attention to the Synodal document, the Apostolic Exhortation *Ecclesia in Asia*, promulgated by the Holy Father on 6 November, 1999, in New Delhi. The Synodal document was not yet released at the time of this writing.

Within this framework, it would appear extremely appropriate, and indeed necessary, that the bishops of Asia take serious appropriate steps to “commit all of the Church’s energies to a new evangelization and to the mission *ad gentes* in Asia,” because Asia is the most densely populated continent, where all the major religions reside, and where Catholicism is just a minority religion with only 2.4% Catholics.

This Paper does not pretend to be a sort of treatise. It is presented as a help and guide to the discussion on this important issue, hoping that it will contribute to a deeper reflection and concrete action plan. It is divided into two parts.

We shall presume that the reader is well-versed in the main lines of Mission Theology in general, and with the special focus of mission *ad gentes*. We shall cite extensively the Vatican II Decree on the Church’s Missionary Activity, *Ad Gentes* (AG), the missionary encyclicals *Evangelii Nuntiandi* (EN) of Paul VI, and *Redemptoris Missio* (RM) of John Paul II, and the recent instruction, *Cooperatio Missionalis* (CM) of the Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples. We shall deal with the theme: The Local Churches in Asia in Mission *ad Gentes*. Here we shall use the FABC documents.

A. THE LOCAL CHURCHES IN ASIA IN MISSION *AD GENTES*

I. An Overview of the Asian Reality

Asia is an immense and extremely complex continent, holding nearly two-thirds of the world’s population. Today’s Asia is characterized by rapid social change, overwhelming poverty, cultural and religious pluralism. Thus, it is extremely difficult to make accurate observations which are applicable everywhere.

The Social — Political Situation

Asia is undergoing dynamic economic development. Japan, Taiwan, Korea, Thailand, Hong Kong, and Singapore represent new economic

centers. There is great technological change. Yet most people are still struggling for survival. There is no substantial improvement for the majority of them.

Local economies are caught up in a global economy, which exercises excessive and aggressive trade exchanges, sucking out much of Asia's assets. There is much dependence, exploitation of cheap labor, destruction of resources and environment, unfair prices in trade, also illiteracy, problems connected with migrant labor, exploitation of women, child labor, landlessness, problems of peasant farmers, poor working conditions, inadequate salaries, unemployment and underemployment. All these lead to mass poverty.

This situation is further aggravated by authoritarian and oppressive political regimes. Many Asian countries are governed by dictatorial, military or theocratic regimes, marked by a denial of human and civil rights, political murder, the curtailing of freedom of expression and of the press. There is an underground world of vice, drugs and arms trade. Democracy in many countries is only nominal. In this situation modernization is bringing about increasing socio-cultural dislocation.

Such a complex situation makes it very difficult to live the values of the Kingdom. However, there are signs of hope in a growing awareness about, and concern for, social questions. There is a commitment to remove illiteracy, improve health care, and prepare people for self-reliance. With the FABC's Fifth Plenary Assembly we acknowledge the "the number, complexity and tenacity of (Asia's) problems could cause a paralyzing discouragement. But seen with the eyes of faith, these difficulties ... are so many challenges to mission" (3.0).

The Cultural—Religious Situation

The religious situation in Asia largely reflects the social situation, as described above, because of a strong interrelation in Asia between religion and culture. Ethnic and communal conflicts are frequently mixed up with religious fanaticism. Asia tends to identify nationality, religion and culture. Hence, politicians easily manipulate religious, ethnic and regional differences.

Religion as faith experience belongs to the private or personal sphere, while religion as social institution belongs to the public or civic sphere. For that reason religion as a social institution also reflects the oppressive structures of socio-cultural life. However, religion as faith experience is often largely concerned with "asking for help," thus reflecting the position of the poor in society. Among mobile classes in society new religious movements

have arisen, as well as indifference to formal religious observance.

While there are some remarkable exceptions, on the whole in the public sphere world religions in Asia seem to be almost impenetrable to each other. The Christian Churches have met with some success among cosmic religions, tribal peoples, the socially marginalized and minority groups. Such Churches are often strongly influenced by cosmic religiosity and closed in upon them. This is a real challenge to the Christian mission.

In this situation we also recognize signs of hope. There is a greater openness to Asian philosophies, cultures and spirituality. Some are engaged in interfaith prayer and meditation, and are cooperative in the struggle for peace, justice and the integrity of creation.⁵

II. The “Regnocentric” Approach of FABC to Mission in Asia

As we said earlier, Jesus identified his mission as preaching the Good News about the Kingdom of God (cf. Lk 4:43). That was his main preoccupation, and he taught his disciples to be concerned above everything else with the Kingdom of God (Mt 6:33), and to pray for the coming of God’s Kingdom (Mt 6:10; LK 11:2).

The establishment of this Reign of God is the work of the Spirit. Jesus himself was anointed by the Spirit to bring the Good News to the poor (Lk 4:18). No doubt, the Spirit works in a very special manner in the Church. Yet, the work of the Spirit cannot be restricted to revelation in the Old and New Testaments, or confined to the Church. Beyond this, but not separated from it, is the universal mission of the Spirit, which consists in preparing for and developing the “seeds of the Word” among all peoples, guiding the Church to recognize them, promote and receive them in dialogue (cf. RM, 29). The presence and activity of the Spirit who guides with admirable providence the course of time and renews the face of the earth (cf. GS, 26) touch not only individuals but also peoples, cultures and their religions.

Therefore, it was but natural that, in the context of the rich plurireligious and pluricultural traditions of Asia, within FABC there should be developed a Kingdom-oriented theology of mission. For missionary activity is working with the Spirit to bring to maturation the “seeds of the Word,” mindful that the command the Church received from Christ is for the salvation of all peoples (cf. Acts 4:12)

Though, surprisingly absent in the first FABC Plenary Assembly held in Taipei in 1974, the “regnocentric” perspective entered into the thinking of subsequent documents of FABC, especially through the statements of the Bishops’ Institutes. These were organized over the years by the various

Offices of the FABC: the Bishops' Institutes for Missionary Animation (BIMA), for Interreligious Affairs (BIRA), and for Social Action (BISA).

In fact, the perspective of God's Kingdom first appears in the conclusions of BISA III (1975)⁶. It speaks of the involvement of the local Church in "building God's Kingdom on earth" by fostering Gospel values (n. 8), together with adherents of other religious faiths and people of good-will (n. 6). BISA VI⁷ in 1983 hoped that, by becoming "the Church of the poor," the Church in Asia may be "a sign and sacrament of the Kingdom of God" (n. 19).

The BIRA meetings⁸ provided an opportunity to develop further the theme of the Kingdom of God, present and at work among people of other faiths. Thus, BIRA III (1982) speaks of dialogue as a "crucial challenge to the Churches in Asia in their growing commitment to the building of the Kingdom" (conclusion). Of particular importance are the statements of the BIRA IV series. Thus, BIRA IV/1 (1984) remarks that "the relationship of the Church to the Kingdom" is in need of clarification (n. 9); and "the Spirit's action, his presence and ministry can — and must — be discerned both in other religions, and even in secular movements that may be shaped and leading to the Kingdom of God" (n. 10). The clarifications are provided in the final statement of BIRA IV/2 (1985):

The Reign of God is the very reason for the being of the Church. The Church exists in and for the Kingdom. The Kingdom, God's gift and initiative, is already begun and is continually being realized, and made present through the Spirit. Where God is accepted, when the Gospel values are lived, where man is respected, there is the Kingdom. It is far wider than the Church's boundaries. This already-present reality is oriented towards the final manifestation and full perfection of the Reign of God(n. 8. 1).

The Church is an instrument for the actualization of the Kingdom. In this process of continual renewal and actualization, she empties herself and dies like her Master (cf. Phil 2:7), through transforming and suffering, and even persecution, so that she may rise to a new life which approaches the reality of the Kingdom(n. 8.2).

The Spirit is active among the nations, religions and peoples of Asia today, as clear signs of his presence testify" (n. 6). "The fruits of the Spirit (cf. Gal 5:22-23) which 'embody the values of the Reign of God of which the Church is the visible sign' must serve as constant guide in discerning the presence of the Spirit in others" (n. 10). The statement ends up advocating "receptive plu-

ralism” by which “the many ways of responding to the prompting of the Holy Spirit (are) continually in conversation with one another” (n.16).

BIRA IV/10 (1988), too, has important statements about the Kingdom of God:

Through Christ and in Christ the Kingdom of God has come and is now progressing to its fulfillment. It is a force transforming the world. Necessarily, the Kingdom of God confronts the forces of injustice, violence and oppression ... Hence, solidarity with the poor is a response to the Good News of God’s Kingdom. Where this solidarity exists, there the power of Christ’s Spirit is working. The work of the Spirit appears in the struggle for a better world in all its forms. We see people of all faiths participating in that struggle (n. 7).

The coming of the Kingdom requires of us Christians a genuine conversion. We need to recognize first our failures; and we need to abandon our self-image as sole possessors of the Kingdom ... (n. 8).

The last of the series, BIRA IV/12 (1991), conceptualizes the Reign of God as “God’s dream for the world.” Jesus spoke of the dream through the image of God’s Reign. “We may describe the dream as one of people and communities fully alive. That fullness of life is ultimately communion of life among individuals, among communities and with God” (n. 2.1). The Church must “work with other believers and believing communities for a world where people and communities are fully alive, for a communion of all life, for the final coming of God’s dream” (n. 9.8). The document ends hoping that the Church may become “more effectively a sign of reconciliation, a sign of the Reign of God, a sign of the love of God in Asia” (n. 10.3).

The FABC Plenary Assemblies also reflected the same concern and probed further into the prompting of the Spirit. Thus, the Third FABC Plenary Assembly,⁹ held at Bangkok in 1982, noted that “our Christian communities in Asia must listen to the Spirit at work in the many communities of believers who live and experience their own faith ... and that they ... must accompany these others ‘in a common pilgrimage toward the ultimate goal, in relentless quest for the Absolute’” (n. 8.2). The Church, it is added, “constantly moves forward in mission as it accompanies all humankind in its pilgrimage to the Kingdom of the Father” (n. 15).

The Fourth FABC Plenary Assembly,¹⁰ 1986, held in Tokyo, sees the

“seeds of the Kingdom” present in the youth of Asia (n. 3.2.3), as well as in diverse cultures and religions (n. 3.6.5). Within this plurality of cultures the Church’s task consists, on the one hand, in infusing Gospel values, and, on the other, in “drawing out more explicitly” the “seeds of the Kingdom” already present (n. 3.6.5).

Seeking the Kingdom that Jesus proclaimed is really to build it in the concrete experiences of the social, political, economic, religious and cultural world of Asia. In Jesus the Reign of God began; he came that we might have life to the full. The struggle for fullness of life in Asia is a seeking of the Kingdom. Discipleship then is not at all a withdrawal from the world, but an immersion into the wellspring of Asian reality so that it might have life. Communion, solidarity, compassion, justice, love are keystones of a spirituality of discipleship” (n. 4.8.7). ... The spirituality of the People of God is a journey in the Spirit of Jesus into the Kingdom of the Father, it is a journey of discipleship, of love and service, after the pattern of the dying and rising of Jesus himself” (n. 4.8.8).

The FABC V,¹¹ (Bandung, 1990), explained that:

A renewal of our sense of mission means, first of all, renewal of our faith that ... Filled with the Spirit, he (Jesus) preached the Good News of the Kingdom of God, and commanded his disciples to do the same. Lifted up from the earth, he draws all peoples to himself through his Church, and through other ways unknown to us ... The Spirit, sent by the Father and the Son, and ever present and active in the Church, in the world and in the human heart, leads all to their unity and fulfillment (n. 3.1.1).

From this perspective, mission, being a continuation in the Spirit of the mission of Christ, involves a being with the people, as was Jesus: “The Word ... dwelt among us” (Jn 1:14). Therefore, mission includes: being with the people, responding to their needs, with sensitiveness to the presence of God in cultures and other religious traditions, and witnessing to the values of God’s Kingdom through presence, solidarity, sharing and word. Mission will mean a dialogue with Asia’s poor, with its local cultures, and with other religious traditions (FABC I) (n. 3.1.2).

Referring to the renewal of our motivation for mission it concludes: “And finally, we evangelize because the Gospel is leaven for liberation and for the transformation of society. Our Asian world needs the values of the Kingdom and of Christ in order to bring about the human development, justice, peace and harmony with God, among peoples and with all creation

that the peoples of Asia long for” (n. 3.2.5).

The Sixth FABC Plenary Assembly,¹² held in Manila in 1995, depicts the mission of Jesus as “the mission of announcing and inaugurating the Kingdom of God (Mk 1:15), the hope of subjugated Israel for the fullness of life in God. Jesus teaches what life in the Kingdom consists in, namely “communion with Abba ... Liberating and Recreating Communion among neighbors ...” (n. 13).

Therefore, the various BISA and BIRA meetings, as well as the FABC Plenaries, laid increasing emphasis over the years on the Kingdom of God theme as a focus for mission in the Asian context. They tried to seek and learn from the various movements of the Spirit in the history of our peoples. They experienced the Kingdom of God as a reality already present in history, and extending beyond the Church’s boundaries. They found it as being built by Christians and others together, especially through their common involvement for human liberation and the practice of interreligious dialogue. The BIMA statements are not quoted here for the sake of brevity. There is reference to them in the next two sections.

III. The Threefold Dialogue as Mode of Evangelization

As we have seen in our exposition of the “Mission in general,” the aim of Mission is Proclamation of the Word. And the Word that is sown results in the conversion of the cooperating hearer, as and when God wants it.

How do we proclaim Jesus in Asia? The “regnocentric” approach to mission has made clear two points:

- The Spirit has sown the “seeds of the Word” in the rich cultures and religious traditions of our people, as well as in the pluralistic socio-political situations which condition the struggles of the poor people of our countries.
- The thrust of the missionary activity is to discover these “seeds of the Word,” and to bring them to light trying to make them flower into maturity, using the same method of Jesus, so as to be able to explicitly proclaim the unknown and hidden Christ present in these seeds.

Jesus was a Jew, deeply inserted in the culture of his people. The message he preached and the way he preached are deeply rooted in the religious traditions and culture of Israel. Hence, the mystery of Incarnation and the Paschal mystery are the theological foundation and model for the missionary activity of the local Churches.

That is precisely the path chosen and developed by the FABC over the

past 25 years. It is the path of the threefold dialogue: dialogue with cultures, dialogue with religions, and dialogue with the poor. It is the path of:

A Church in continuous, humble and loving dialogue ... with all the life-realities of the people in whose midst it has sunk its roots deeply, and whose history and life it gladly makes its own. It seeks to share in whatever truly belongs to that people: its meanings and its values, its aspirations, its thoughts and its language, its songs and its artistry. — Even its frailties and failings it assumes, so that they too may be healed. For so did God's Son assume the totality of our fallen human condition (save only for sin) so that he might make it truly his own, and redeem it in his paschal mystery, as proposed already in the very first Plenary of FABC¹³ (n. 12).

Further, FABC I described the local Church as “native, springing out of the local culture, with a reverence for ancient customs and traditions, speaking the local language, dressed in local clothing, expressing immortal truth in images which the common people understand, and love” (n. 9). The same Assembly also indicated the elements of crucial importance in the task of preaching the Gospel in Asia:

- *Inculturation*, which renders the local Church truly present within the life of our people.
- *Dialogue* with the great Asian religions, which brings them into contact with the Gospel, so that the seed of the Word in them may come to full flower.
- *Service of the poor*, uniting with them in their struggle for a more human world (n. 20).

1. Dialogue with Cultures (Inculturation)

BIMA I¹⁴ recognized that :

True inculturation, far from being a tactic for the propagation of the faith, belongs to the very core of evangelization, for it is the continuation in time and space of the dialogue of salvation initiated by God and brought to a culmination when he uttered his Word in a very concrete historical situation.” It appreciated the efforts being made everywhere but felt the need “for further study and experiment” with involvement of all bishops and many leaders (nn. 9,13,14).

The Second Plenary Assembly¹⁵ (1978) expressed that the task of inculturation:

Must assume into the full Christian life of our peoples what is good, noble and living in our cultures and traditions — and thus in our hearts and minds. Thus, too, it will bring to fulfillment the future harvest of those seeds which God's own hand has planted in our ancient cultures before the Gospel was preached to our people (n. I. 11).

The participants of BIRA IV/7 in 1988 found that inculturation was:

Indispensable to prepare the Christian communities and their leaders for dialogue,²³ as often it is lack of understanding and attuning to culture, language and genius of the people, which is the cause of lack of interest and involvement in dialogue; and suggested that the process of inculturation in our Christian communities be deepened and that the formators ... be given specific training in inculturation and in the practice and deeper commitment to dialogue (n. 1).

Reflecting on inculturation, the International Congress on Mission, in its Consensus Paper of Workshop II: *Local Asia Churches and the Tasks of Mission: Inculturation*,¹⁶ argued that:

The Word of God which became flesh (cf Jn. 1:14) in Jesus Christ, continues to incarnate Itself in the cultures of the peoples it encounters, transforming them in the power of the Spirit and leading them to the universal fullness of the new creation (cf. Eph 1:10). In this process of inculturation a people receives the Word, makes it the principle of their life, values, attitudes and aspirations. In this way, they become the Body of Christ in this particular place and time — a local Church (NI, 1-2).

The same International Congress made some extensive important observations concerning the process of and attitudes in inculturation, as well as recommendations which seem to be valid even today, and will help to have a fresh look into the responsibility of today's leaders, concerning this important subject of inculturation. These observations are found in nn. 6-19.

2. Dialogue with Religions and Religious Traditions

Why should the local Church engage in dialogue with the great religious traditions of Asia? The FABC I answers:

... We must recognize their profound spiritual values — their power to shape minds and hearts and lives. Down through the

centuries the ancient religions of the Orient have given light and strength to our ancestors. They have expressed the noblest longings in the hearts of our people, our deepest joys and sorrows. Their temples have been the home of contemplation and prayer. They have shaped our history, and our way of thinking. They are part of our culture. For us in Asia, they have been the doorways to God. In dialogue with these religions, we will find ways of expressing our own Christian faith. This can become a common quest for God. It can be a sharing in friendship, a brotherhood. The great religious traditions can shed light on the truths of the Gospel. They can help us understand the riches of our own faith. Christianity, in turn, can offer a new understanding of man, and of human dignity. It offers an eternal vision which gives new meaning to love, to the family, and to life itself (nn. 11-15).

These religions have a value system that is closely related to that of Christianity, but with a philosophical orientation that is characterized by "relativism," which, contrary to the Western way of thinking, tends to accommodate all views and eliminates none, even the opposite. In fact, this is the major difficulty for Asians to accept Christianity that has come to them through Western culture. And the mother of all difficulties is the proclamation that "Jesus is the *only* Savior of mankind," while they have no difficulty to accept Jesus as *one of* the Saviors. Therefore, interreligious dialogue requires special sensibility to their beliefs and worldviews.

This is why the participants of BIMA I (1978) came to realize that: "*Religious dialogue* is not just a substitute for or a mere preliminary to the proclamation of Christ, but should be the ideal form of evangelization, where in humility and mutual support we seek together with our brothers and sisters that fullness of Christ which is God's plan for the whole of creation, in its entirety and its great and wonderful diversity" (n. 10).

Subsequently, BIRA I (1979) defined dialogue as:

A process of talking and listening, of giving and receiving, of searching and studying, for the deepening and enriching of one another's faith and understanding," and fixed its parameters. We enter as equal partners into the dialogue in a mutuality of sharing and enrichment contributing to mutual growth. It excludes any sense of competition. Rather, it centers on each other's values. Dialogue itself contributes to a deeper rooting of the Christian faith and to the unfolding of the local Church. Dialogue takes place in any kind of friendly contacts between people of different religions. It is kept alive and strengthened especially by means of collaboration in educational, social and moral fields (nn. 11-14).

Therefore, dialogue must go beyond being a conversation of experts to become an attitude and practice of every Christian.

The Theological Consultation of FABC-OE (CTC) clarified further the theological foundation of the dialogue and added:

... Only in the life of the Church is found the full visibility of the mystery of salvation. There, the seeds of the Word contained in the religious traditions of the world grow to maturity and come to fulfillment. In this manner the Church shares with others, "the fullness of the benefits and means of salvation" (RM, 18) which she has received from her Lord and Master ... The local Churches of Asia will proclaim Jesus Christ to their fellow humans in a dialogical manner (DP 70e; cf. 77). The proclaiming Church encounters people among whom the rays of that Truth, which enlighten everybody coming into the world, are already present. This hidden presence is the starting point for the Church's proclamation. Thus, in announcing the Good News, both the proclaimers and the hearers will grow into the fullness of the mystery of salvation in Jesus Christ (nn. 49-51).

Dialogue must be open to proclamation. It is the Spirit that decides when, where and how one must proclaim, as exemplified in the Acts of the Apostles. The task of the Christian engaged in dialogue is to discern the movements of the Spirit and to second his action.

3. Dialogue with the Poor

The people of Asia are rich in Spirit, but often poor in material things. Social, economic and political injustice is built into the structures under which they live. Therefore, FABC I argued that: "Dialogue with the poor means a real experience of poverty and the oppressive socioeconomic and political structures under which they live." Such a dialogue takes shape in a dialogue of life. "It demands working, not *for* them merely (in a paternalistic sense), but *with* them, to learn from them, their needs and aspirations, as they are able to identify and articulate these, and to strive for their fulfillment, by transforming those structures and situations which keep them in that deprivation and powerlessness." Such a dialogue leads to a genuine commitment and effort to bring about social justice in our societies, by an operative and organized "action and reflection in faith," sometimes known as "conscientization," which enables the poor to acquire effective responsibility and participation in the decisions which determine their lives, and thus to free themselves (cf. nn. 19-24).

In his inaugural speech on the coming of the Kingdom of God and its

realization in him, Jesus announced Good News to the poor (cf. Lk 4:18). Hence, BIMA III advocated that to be true to her Master, the Church must make every effort “to listen to the poor and marginalized, to discover their cultural values and expressions, and to stand together with them by supporting their just causes, in order to be truly a healing sign of God’s love for them.” It added that “in the light of the urbanization and industrialization which are sweeping East and Southeast Asia, the Church today must give special attention to the plight of the urban workers, who are often uprooted from their traditional cultures and involved in a difficult struggle for life” (n. 4).

FABC V (1990) brought the ecumenical and plurireligious dimension in the efforts to work together for the poor. It insisted that our minority status should not deter us from patiently working out in collaboration with Christians of other Churches and peoples of other religions and persuasions the steps needed to liberate our people from the bondage of sin and its societal manifestations, and to inscribe the values of the Kingdom in the Asian society (cf. nn. 4.1-4.6).

IV. Ambiguity in the Relationship between Dialogue and Proclamation in FABC Statements

The Church in Asia has accepted the triple dialogue with cultures, religions and the poor as the mode of evangelization in Asia. But there seems to be a need to clarify what exactly is meant by the “mode of evangelization,” and that the stress laid on the local Church’s threefold dialogue, as constituting the missionary thrust of the Church in Asia, in no way underestimates the importance of the proclamation.

The statements on the need of the threefold dialogue are found mainly in the BIRA and BIMA meeting is, besides the plenary assemblies. These statements have made efforts to show the vital importance of the threefold dialogue for evangelization, and their relationship with proclamation. However, it appears that some of the statements are rather confusing. They give the impression that interreligious dialogue is a substitute for proclamation, or another aspect of evangelizations. Thus:

a. BIRA III (1982) affirms that “dialogue and proclamation are complementary. Sincere and authentic dialogue does not have for its objective the conversion of the other,” but “promotes mutual understanding and enrichment” (nn 4-5). The meeting concludes that “dialogue is a crucial challenge to the Churches in Asia in their growing commitment to the building of the Kingdom” (Conclusion).

This statement raises three questions:

i. If sincere and authentic dialogue does not have for its objective “the conversion of the other,” then what is the dialogue for? Certainly, dialogue is expected to promote mutual understanding and enrichment in their search of truth. This understanding and enrichment itself should result in some kind of conversion (shedding of prejudices and misconceptions, leading to appreciation of the other) of both partners. Like St. Augustine, who dialogued with various philosophical and religious traditions of his time in his honest search for truth, and finally converted to Catholicism, the interreligious dialogue, if it is sincere and authentic, should have as its objective, conversion to the truth. This openness to the truth is essential to any honest and fruitful dialogue.

ii. Does honest dialogue, respect for others including their beliefs, and renouncing the position of superiority, take away the right to share one's belief in Jesus Christ as the only Savior of mankind, and the right of the partner in dialogue to hear the message of salvation? Aren't they coming together precisely to share and discuss their honest beliefs, their value systems, and worldviews based on these beliefs, which each considers to be true, and to hold on to them as each one's truth? It is well said in the statement: “conversion depends solely on God's internal call and the person's free decision.” Therefore, conversion should not be forced on any one. This does not mean, however, that the door to conversion should be closed.

iii. Is interreligious dialogue by definition expected to go on indefinitely? I submit that dialogue by its very nature is time-bound, though in this case, because of its complexity, it may take a long time. The purpose of a sincere and authentic dialogue is to clarify the issues at hand, and to reconcile divergent opinions based on misunderstandings, misconceptions, etc. Once these are clarified, reconciliation should take place, and that is conversion. What is most required is the openness from both sides, mindful that conversion is a gift of God.

b. The FABC — CCA Joint Consultation, which took the place of BIRA IV/6 (1987), stated that “dialogue and mission have their own integrity and freedom. They are distinct, but not unrelated. Dialogue is not a tool or instrument for mission and evangelization, but it does influence the way the Church perceives and practices mission in a pluralistic world” (n. 5).

True, dialogue and mission have their own integrity and freedom in so far as they are distinct, but not unrelated, that is to say, that in the context of finding of truth they are related. That precisely should be the meaning of what in FABC's parlance is being said to be a “mode” of proclamation — a way leading to proclamation, or a situation where the redemptive action of God and the way the redemption is made would become manifest. To that

extent, dialogue is a tool or instrument of mission and evangelization. This is probably the reason why BIRA IV/7 (1988) in the following year explained the autonomy of dialogue and its relation to proclamation, stating that “dialogue must be open to proclamation,” but added, “though one does not enter into interreligious dialogue to prepare the way for proclamation” (n. 13).

c. However, BIRA IV/11 (1988) that same year made another statement of dubious nature. It said: to be promoters of “harmony,” Christians and others must see the “complementarity which exists between peoples, cultures, faiths, ideologies, worldviews, etc.” and “cultivate an all-embracing and complementary way of thinking ...,” characteristic of Asian traditions which consider the various dimensions of reality not as contradictory, but as complementary (*yin-yang*)” (n. 20). This statement questions seriously the faith we profess. It would amount to denying that Jesus Christ is the only Savior of mankind, and to conclude that all religions, all faiths are equally good. Needless to say, there is some complementarity in the sense that there are the “seeds of the Word” in the various faiths, cultures, ideologies and worldviews; and they may help understand better the mystery of redemption, and even enrich, the Christian perception of the mystery, but they cannot be equally good, or equally imperfect, and placed on the same level.

d. BIRA IV/12 (1991), the last of the series, called Asian Churches to “a new way of being Church” — Churches of dialogue (n. 48). “In this model of Church, dialogue, liberation, inculturation and proclamation are but different aspects of the one reality” (n. 51). Note that proclamation is put together with dialogue, inculturation and liberation, which are said to be different aspects of the one reality! This too betrays a confused mind on the relationship of dialogue with proclamation.

However, the BIMA meetings, after some sort of hesitation in the first three meetings, reaffirmed in unequivocal terms the primacy of proclamation among the various aspects of the Church’s evangelizing mission in the last meeting of the series, which took the shape of an All-Asia Conference on Evangelization in 1998. The all-important text states:

The ultimate goal of all evangelization is the ushering in and establishment of God’s Kingdom, ... While we are aware of, and sensitive to, the fact that evangelization is a complex reality and has many essential aspects — such as witnessing to the Gospel, working for the values of the Kingdom, ... dialogue, sharing, inculturation, ... we affirm that there can never be true evangelization without the proclamation of Jesus Christ (n. 5).

The proclamation of Jesus Christ is the center and the primary element of evangelization, without which all other elements will lose their cohesion and validity ... (n. 6).

We also affirm that the primary task of the Church is the proclamation of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, calling to personal faith in him. ... Every other task of the Church flows from and is relocated to this proclamation and its acceptance in faith. The Gospel fulfills all hopes, a Gospel which Asia and the whole world direly need (n. 7).

The same may be said of the FABC Plenary Assemblies. In fact, the FABC V (1990) adopted as its own the statement of the All-Asia Conference on Evangelization, organized by the FABC Office of Evangelization in 1988, according to which "the proclamation of Jesus Christ is the center and primary element of evangelization" (n. 4.1). It advocated strongly the renewal of a sense of mission by a renewal of our motivations for mission, which it enumerated (nn. 3.2 to 3.2.5e). However, it betrayed some hesitation while explaining what a distinctive Asian mode of proclamation would consist of at the present time. It explained that proclamation of Jesus Christ in Asia means, first of all, the witness of Christians to the values of the Kingdom of God, a proclamation through *Christ like-deeds* ... (n. 4.1). It also means to seek through dialogue to serve the cause of unity of the people of Asia ... and thus to be a sacrament — a visible sign and instrument of unity and harmony (n. 4.2). Then the document adds: "we shall *not* be *timid* when God opens the door for us *to proclaim explicitly* the Lord Jesus Christ as the Savior and the answer to the fundamental questions of human existence" (n. 4.3).

Therefore, it would appear that explicit proclamation is kept under intended suspension, while witnessing and dialoguing go on. Yet, right in the beginning of this paragraph, n.4, it is said that mission "may find its greatest urgency in Asia" (n. 4.1). Therefore, one senses a kind of ambivalence still prevailing in the FABC documents.

However, the FABC VI (1995), is more categorical:

Whether in explicit proclamation of the Gospel or in the silence prayer, whether in the warmth of personal contact, or the burden of the liberative action, the Spirit of life guides, sanctifies and unifies the disciple-community for the world and humanity. The deepest communication of the Church in Asia is its Spirit-filled and multiform mission of sharing Christ as the Way, the Truth and the Life (n. 14.5). In the final analysis to the question that we have asked about our Christian contribution to the struggle of life

in Asia, our answer is brief, but profoundly committed. Our answer is Jesus and his Gospel of Life (n. 14.7).

Already in 1974 FABCI had affirmed that the “basis mode of mission in Asia” must be dialogue. Coming as it did in the wake of the 1974 Synod of Bishops on “Evangelization of the Modern World,” in its communication to the Synod, entitled “Evangelization in Modern Day Asia,” the Plenary Assembly stressed from the outset the abiding need and urgency of the proclamation of Jesus Christ and his Good News “so that our peoples will finally find the full meaning we all seek, the liberation we strive after, the brotherhood and peace, which is the desire of all our hearts” (nn. 7-8). The document then establishes that “the primary focus of our task of evangelization... is the building up of a truly local Church” (n. 10). In Asia, especially, the document insists, a local Church must be a Church in “dialogue with the great religious traditions of our peoples” (nn. 13-18) and “with the poor” (nn. 19-24).

As to the relationship of this threefold task to the Church’s mission, the document simply says that it is “through them (that) our local Churches can most effectively preach Christ to our peoples” (n. 25). Though, it does not explicitly say that proclamation of Jesus Christ is necessary while dialogue in different forms is on; or that (explicit) proclamation goes hand in hand with the threefold dialogue; certainly it does not exclude it either. Therefore, it would be incorrect to say that the Taipei statement reduces the Church’s evangelizing mission in Asia to inculturation, interreligious dialogue and involvement in human liberation. Also because of the strong profession of faith in Jesus, referred to above, and the statement that “only in and through Christ and his Gospel ... that these quests can come to realization. For Christ alone ... is for every man ‘the Way, the Truth and the Life,’ (Jn. 14:6) ...” (n. 7).

However, according to J. Dupuis,¹⁷ M. Amaladoss, in an article entitled “Evangelization in Asia: A New Focus,”¹⁸ commenting on the Taipei document, has interpreted that the activity of building up the local Church — in which evangelization consists — “finds expression in a threefold dialogue with the local cultures, with the religions and with the poor of Asia” (p. 7), and that the bishops have thus reduced the Church’s evangelizing mission to inculturation, dialogue and liberation, to the exclusion of proclamation. As I said, like J. Dupuis, I too disagree with this interpretation. However, the reference is made here because the fact that there has been a different interpretation of the bishops’ statement is significant, and it stresses the need of an unambiguous and clear statement on the matter.

From the exposed, it appears that groups of bishops of Asia have taken different stands in different contexts. Those participating in the BIMA

meetings naturally have asserted the primacy of proclamation among the various aspects of Church's evangelizing mission to the point of affirming that there can never be true evangelization without the proclamation of Jesus Christ (BIMA IV, n. 5). However, those participating in the BIRA meetings have tried to play down the role of proclamation, giving it a complementary role with interreligious dialogue (BIRA III, nn. 4-5, in 1982); or insisting on its autonomy (BIRA IV/6, n.5, in 1987 and BIRA IV/7, n. 13, in 1988). Or they made it all embracing and complementary (BIRA IV/11, n. 20, in 1988), or just one of the different aspects of the one reality (BIRA IV/12, n. 51, 1991). On the other hand, the statements made by the FABC plenaries also seem to be hesitating to assert clearly the need of explicit proclamation. On the whole, therefore, the stand of FABC seems ambiguous, especially because, after asserting the primacy of proclamation at the BIMA meeting in August 1988, the stand was somehow diluted at BIRA IV/7 in October the same year, and at BIRA IV/12 in February 1991. Interestingly also at the Plenary Assembly in July 1990.

V. Renewed Effort of Local Churches in Mission *ad Gentes* in Asia

The success of any enterprise depends on the manageability of the objectives we set for ourselves, and on the clarity of perception of these objectives in our minds. It also depends on the availability of adequate means, and on the confidence we have on our own ability to achieve the objectives through the means at hand. The success of the evangelizing mission, too, will depend very much on the nature of the stand taken by the leaders of the Church, both regarding proclamation and the triple dialogue. It will also depend on their understanding of the dynamics of this dialogue, and the interpretation of the movements of the Spirit, to be able to proclaim as and when the Spirit prompts us to do so. Therefore, it is imperative that the hierarchies in Asia take a clear and convincing stand in favor of the primacy of proclamation, and clarify the relationship of dialogue with it. By such a stand the Church will try to be in a continuous, humble and loving dialogue with the living traditions, the cultures, the religions and religious traditions, and with all the life-realities of the people, especially its "poor masses." The Church will try to make the message and life of Christ truly incarnate in the minds and lives of our peoples, and strive to build up a truly local Church in each place.¹⁹ Thus, to respond wholeheartedly to the appeal of the Holy Father "to commit all of the Church's energies to a new evangelization and to mission *ad gentes*" (RM, 3).

However, while in dialogue with the cultures, religions and the poor, we shall always be on the lookout for an opportunity to share our experience of Jesus Christ and his Good News. And to proclaim our belief that Jesus Christ is the only Savior of mankind, and the Church is the sacrament

of that salvation. All know that this is our position. The interlocutors may even eye the fact that we hesitate to express it with suspicion. And perhaps, on account of this, they do not take us seriously, much to the detriment of the dialogue and evangelization we wish to promote.

1. The Local Church and Mission *ad Gentes*

The local Church, living and acting in communion with the universal Church, is the acting subject of mission. That, I suppose, was the reason why FABC I had placed the primary focus of the task of evangelization in the building-up of a truly local Church (cf. n. 9). And FABC V insisted that “it is the local Churches and communities which can discern and work out ... the way the Gospel is best proclaimed, the Church set up, the values of God’s Kingdom realized in their own place and time. In fact, it is by responding to and serving the needs of the peoples of Asia that the different Christian communities become truly local churches” (n. 3.3.1).

a) The Whole Church Community

The local Church is the whole Christian community of a given socio-cultural milieu, the People of God — laity, Religious and clergy. Concretely, it is the particular Church (cf. AG n. 19), or the diocese with all its parishes, the Basic Christian Communities and other associations and groups. It is all of these that are the acting subject of mission. Hence, it is the entire Church community that, conscious of Christ’s mandate and grateful for the gift of faith and salvation received, must joyfully take every step to proclaim the Good News of salvation; convinced that Christ alone is for every man and woman “the Way, the Truth and the Life” (Jn 14:6); and that “it is in him and in his Good News that our peoples will finally find the full meaning we all seek, the liberation we strive after, the brotherhood and peace which is the desire of all our hearts.”²⁰

b) Must Become Communicators of the Good News

At this point I wish to resonate again the appeal of John Paul II: “God is opening before the Church the horizons of a humanity more fully prepared for the sowing of the Gospel. I sense that the moment has come to commit all of the Church’s energies to a new evangelization and to the mission *ad gentes*. No believer in Christ, no institution of the Church can avoid this supreme duty: to proclaim Christ to all peoples” (RM, 3).

In spite of all our efforts, at the end of the 2nd millenium, we are still in the beginning of our mission (cf. RM, 1). The local Churches, therefore, should embark on new and bold initiatives to make the proclamation of

Jesus and the Gospel more effective and extensive. The recently concluded consultation on “Evangelization and Social Communication” (July 1999), jointly sponsored by the FABC Offices of Evangelization and Social Communication, has made these recommendations in order to ensure effectiveness in evangelization in Asia. The Church *should make use of the secular media* by submitting articles for publication and providing programs for broadcast. *Be available for interviews and offer timely and accurate information* when required. *Actively oppose negative portrayal of and public attacks on Catholic and other religious groups.* *Have our “success stories” publicized* to inspire others to a life of faith. *Use movies, TV shows, songs and other media in religion courses, formation seminars and homilies.* *Ensure that Christian communities are mission-oriented* in using social communications, and avoid privatization of faith. *Provide a communication environment, which is attractive to young people,* such as media events, performances, special liturgies, pilgrimages, camps and others. *Join with other religious groups, NGOs and professionals in conducting media campaigns, which address national and social needs.* *Produce programs aimed at perceived needs of the audience, with a subtext of human values.* Church communication centers should network among themselves and other people and NGOs to inspire and assist each other. Make our facilities available to media people committed to human values; help bishops, priests, religious and seminarians to acquire a thorough understanding of the working of social communication on different levels, from homiletics to the use of modern technologies for evangelization. This requires *regular training courses in formation programs.*

Therefore, this is an opportunity to take a clear and convincing stand in favor of primacy of proclamation and to rediscover the true meaning of the FABC’s threefold dialogue. Also to reformulate the mission strategy, in tune with the prompting of the Spirit of Jesus who has promised his assistance to the end of the age (cf. Mt. 28:20).

2. Reevangelization and Holiness of Life Essential to Mission *ad Gentes*

It is said: “the witness of Christian life is the first and irreplaceable form of mission.” The first form of witness is “the very life of the missionary, of the Christian family, and of the ecclesial community, which reveal a new way of living” (cf. RM, 42).

a) Not Only the “Nominal” Catholics Must Be Reevangelized

We know that there are sometimes entire groups of the baptized that have lost a living sense of the faith. They consider themselves Christians, and others too know them to be Christians, but there is nothing or very little

of the Christian in their lives. There are also others who no longer consider themselves members of the Church, and live a life far removed from Christ and his Gospel. As long as they remain in this condition, they give active counter-witness to Christ and the Gospel, which affect the very credibility of the Church. In this sense, reevangelization is an integral part of the mission, and has to be pursued with equal vigor, especially in places where such groups are in the midst of non-Christians, as is the case in pockets of Asian countries, where Christians are a majority or a sizable minority.

The Final Statement of FABC V reflected on the theme: “Journeying Together toward the Third Millennium.” It has very important sections on the Evangelizing Mission, on the Mode of Mission, on the Role of the Lay Faithful, on the Face of the Church, on Living in the Spirit. Also, it has others on Pastoral Responses, on a New Way of Being Church in the 1990s, and on Spirituality for Our Times. It would be of great help to move forward, if we could gather some data on what has been done so far by way of implementation and actualization of what is contained in that statement.

Thus, the section on the “Face of the Church in Asia” rightly insists that, more than deeds, mission involves the very *being* of the Church. And asks: “What should the Church *be in* and to this changing Asian world, marked by so much diversity, poverty, suffering and injustice, and with so many movements for social transformation?” It responds by listing a number of traits of the new face of the Church. Its characteristics are: a *communion of communities*, a *participatory* Church that faithfully and lovingly *witnesses* to the Risen Lord Jesus, and *reaches out to people* of other faiths and persuasions in a dialogue of life towards the integral liberation of all. It acts as a *leaven* of transformation in this world, and as a *prophetic* sign daring to point beyond this world to the ineffable Kingdom that is yet fully to come (cf. nn, 3.1-8.1.4).

If people are convinced more by witnessing than by teaching, this is most true of the peoples of Asia whose cultures hold the contemplative dimension, renunciation, detachment, humility, simplicity and silence in the highest regard. We would have a message for Asia only when our Asian sisters and brothers *see in us the marks of God-realized persons*. Credibility is the fruit of authenticity. The sharing of what are our lived spiritual experiences is of incalculable necessity and importance in the tasks of evangelization and integral development (n. 9.2).

As John Paul II rightly reminds us “the universal call to holiness is closely linked to the universal call to mission... It is not enough to update pastoral techniques, organize and co-ordinate ecclesial resources, or, delve more deeply into the biblical and theological foundations of faith. What is

needed is the encouragement of a new ardor for holiness among missionaries and throughout the Christian community, especially among those who work most closely with missionaries" (RM, 90). Therefore, "holiness must be called a fundamental presupposition and an irreplaceable condition for everyone in fulfilling the mission of salvation in the Church" (RM, 90).

b) But also the Church as Institution and the Church's Institutions

We are inclined to identify easily the so-called "nominal" Catholics, individually or as a group, being counter-witnesses of Christ and of the Gospel. What is not easily recognized is that the entire local Church as a social institution, and the institutions of the Church, can also be a counter-witness.

In this context, the CTC (1991) has a strong message for reflection. It says:

In the public sphere the Church presents itself as a powerful social institution. The Church is an effective organization but is not often seen as a spiritual guide, especially in a continent where the religious and spiritual is so much a part of public life.

As a social institution the Church is perceived as a foreign body in its colonial origins, while other world religions are not. The lingering colonial image survives in its traditional ecclesiastical structures and economic dependence on the West. This gives ground for suspicion. The Church is even sometimes seen as an obstacle or threat to national integration and to religious and cultural identity. Alignments between the Church and the socio-political elite often legitimize and preserve the socio-political status quo and do not succeed in obviating this image. The Church remains foreign in its lifestyle, in its institutional structure, in its worship, in its western-trained leadership and in its theology... There is a gap between leaders and ordinary believers in the Church: a fortiori with members of other faiths. The Church has created a powerful priestly class with little lay participation...(nn. 12-13).

Hence, there is need for introspection and conversion at all levels in various degrees.

3. Dialogue and Mission *ad Gentes*

Much is said, and much seems to be taken for granted, in the name of the threefold dialogue with cultures, the religions and the poor. The time has come that the bishops should take a deep look into the concrete realiza-

tion of this dialogue in view of mission *ad gentes* over the past 25 years, ever since it became the thematic background of both the pastoral and missionary activity of the local Churches in Asia. The following statement from the OTC may be a prophetic call to take both proclamation as well as the threefold dialogue seriously, if we are to “commit all of the Church’s energies to ... mission *ad gentes*” in response to the appeal of the Holy Father:

Although there are many seeds of faith and hope, nevertheless it still holds true that the Church is often giving a counter-witness to its evangelizing mission. This is most notable in its lack of practical identification with the poor, its lack of concrete involvement in interfaith dialogue, and its lack of real interest in interculturalism. In many cases the Church fails to raise a prophetic voice in matters of injustice because of her minority situation as a community. The Church is also still divided, lacking a practical ecumenism. There is little real communion between Churches; let alone with other religions. Lack of conviction seems to make the Church fearful of interculturalism; proclamation still has little reference to local culture, history and philosophy... In short, there is a gap between the vision manifested in the statements of FABC on the triple dialogue with the poor, with cultures and with religions, and the everyday life of the Churches. The Church is an institution planted in Asia rather than an evangelizing community of Asia (n. 15).

What are then the ignored concerns that need to be taken into consideration to make the triple dialogue and proclamation work effectively for mission *ad gentes*?

a) Dialogue with Cultures

Dialogue with cultures concretely means inculturation. Given the fact that even within a country there are many cultures, a question rightfully being raised is: “dialogue in whose cultures”? John Paul II gave a good catechesis on inculturation in his homily during the Mass on February 4, 1986, at the Brigade Police Grounds, Calcutta:

In offering to others the Good News of the Redemption, the Church strives to *understand their culture*. She seeks to know the minds and hearts of her hearers, their values and customs, their problems and difficulties, their hopes and dreams. Once she knows and understands these various aspects of culture, then she can begin *the dialogue of salvation*; she can offer, respectfully but with clarity and conviction, the Good News of the Redemption to all

who freely wish to listen and to respond. This is the evangelical challenge of the Church in every age²¹.

The Pope has identified three critical moments or tasks in the process of evangelization of cultures:

- **Inculturation.** The Church simply has to penetrate the cultures of the people by identifying itself with them, understanding their values and beliefs, and responding to their struggles and aspirations. It has to incarnate the Gospel message of love into the thought patterns and affective climate of the communities. The Church must truly enter the minds and hearts of the communities, their worldviews and customs, their pains and hardships, their dreams and hopes.

- **The Proclamation of the Gospel Message.** The Gospel is proclaimed to “all who freely wish to listen and respond.” It is proclaimed, not imposed. The message of salvation is an invitation, not coercion. And those who freely wish to listen and to respond have a right to the Gospel. Hence, the explicit proclamation has to be made.

- **The “Dialogue of Salvation” proper.** This is where the interaction between the Gospel and culture, the Church and the communities, takes full effect. The Gospel is made flesh among the people, and the Church can be considered theirs, one with them. The laity’s role is most crucial in the dialogue of salvation. It is they who can en flesh the message of salvation in the context of family life and work situation, in the socio-economic and political fields of community life, in the challenges offered by modernization and technology.

BIRA IV/1, held in 1984, had made two important observations:

- a. Harmony constitutes in a certain sense “the intellectual and affective, religious and artistic, personal and societal soul of both persons and institutions in Asia. Hence, the imperative of a study in depth of the theology of harmony in the Asian context leading to interreligious dialogue”.

- b. The Church is a “sign” and sacrament (LG, 1). It is important “to have an objective view of how the Church is viewed by different groups both within and outside the Church in Asia, and to evaluate how effectively the Church fulfills, or does not fulfill, the aspirations and needs of the peoples of Asia, particularly the youth...” (nn. 12-14).

The CTC dreamt of “an Asian Church which feels at home in her own culture: well educated and ensouled in the cultural traditions of their country. By culture is meant the emergent cultures of Asia, a combination of many

diverse elements of modern civilization, yet still rooted in local traditions of their country..." (n. 20).

My own observation about one area of inculturation, which is of the liturgical life of the Church, is that we are yet to identify ourselves with our people in their customs and ways of living in the society. And perhaps we have invested most of our energies in this, without much concern for other areas for inculturation. Inculturation cannot be imposed, and especially cannot be forced, through liturgy, as it is done in some places. Liturgy must be celebration of life, giving spontaneous expression to joy and sorrow of the events of life, not the other way around.

This is the time for us to take stock of how much the Gospel has penetrated and is made flesh among the people of our respective countries and within the local Churches. Of how much the message of salvation is enfolded in the context of family life and work situation, in the socio-economic and political fields of our community life, and in the challenges offered by modernization and technology; and how much the message of salvation is actually proclaimed through inculturation. Then, we try to answer the question: Where do we go from here?

b) Dialogue with Religions and Religious Traditions

When we speak of interreligious dialogue, our mind goes to the prayer meetings organized to foster friendly relations and better understanding among the different religious communities. Such prayer meetings are held occasionally, and attended to by a relatively small number of people. BIRA I has classified in three categories the various kinds of dialogue: dialogue to promote mutual understanding and harmony; dialogue of life where people join together to promote whatever leads to unity, love, truth, justice and peace; and dialogue of prayer and religious experience sharing the riches of our spiritual heritages (cf. nn. 15-17).

i. Dialogue of Life

The above meetings do provide some opening for proclamation. However, there are countless encounters at the parish community level among friends, families or just neighbors or co-workers, professional groups, as also members of religious associations, especially those who visit the sick and the dying, and those struck by sudden calamities. These people very often share their religious experiences, invite each other to pray, or simply offer to pray the God they believe in, and also take part in each other's festivities. Catholics, in such circumstances have ample opportunities to proclaim their faith in Jesus Christ, and many do use these opportunities to do so in a non-threatening manner, and, in fact, in a welcomed

manner in cases of sickness, death and times of great anxieties. This is how Naaman was converted to the God of Israel through the instrumentality of the Israelite girl, a servant of Naaman's wife (2 Kgs. 5:3,15,17). As a parish priest in Goa (India), I have used on such occasions my pastoral visitation of parish families, even for explicit proclamation. So have done the parish associations, like the Legion of Mary and the Charismatic Prayer Groups. Dialogue in such cases, taking the form of sharing or spontaneous prayer appropriate for the occasion, at the end of the visit, is certainly a mode of proclamation, and very often makes way for explicit proclamation. Therefore, to shy away or to stop short of proclaiming (there is no question of imposing our view or faith at all) is indeed anti-evangelization, and such an attitude amounts to denying the right to hear the message of salvation to well-disposed persons.

As BIRA IV/12 has rightly pointed out, the prime agent of this new mission in dialogue is the local community. Within the Church this means especially the parish, the family, institutions like the schools and health care centers, and even commercial bodies, where people experience a strong sense of belonging. Basic Christian Communities, especially, have a vast apostolic potential. They can play a creative role in interreligious dialogue. They can enter into partnership with groups and organizations belonging to the people of other religions. Also, people are brought together in dramatic ways when calamities like flood and epidemic, and even fratricidal violence and war, afflict a society. This rushing together to heal wounds, to restore broken peace and concord, to repair violated justice and honor, can lead to the formation of voluntary groups that can serve as basic units for the monitoring of trends and events. The common celebration of the happy events of the locality, or of a particular group, or indeed of the nation, also can give new life to the multireligious community. Friendships are struck, and cordiality is established across the boundaries of race and religion. New strengths and new possibilities are discovered. As people share the treasures of faith traditions, and as they give scope to the hidden processes of interaction and assimilation proper to kinship, a fabric of affinity can be woven. Then a new mode of being human and of being a believer comes into being (cf. nn. 15-20).

The new task before the Church that can lead to proclamation is that of being a reconciling community in the midst of tension within different communities or ethnic groups that make up the Asian countries, as hoped for by BIRA IV/12 (n. 10.3).

ii. Formal Dialogue

In his address to the Catholic bishops of India at New Delhi during his pastoral visit in 1986, John Paul II reminded them of what we may call the

requirements for a formal dialogue:

As ministers of the Gospel here in India [applicable to Asia], you have the task of expressing the Church's respect and esteem for all your brethren and for the spiritual, moral and cultural values enshrined in their different religious traditions. In doing so, you have to bear witness to your own convictions of faith, and offer the Gospel of Christ's love and peace and its spirit of service to the consideration of all those who freely wish to reflect on it, just as you yourself freely reflect on the values of other religious traditions. In this interreligious dialogue, which of its nature involves collaboration, the supreme criterion is charity and truth. You yourself will always bear in mind the exhortation of St. Paul: 'Speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ' (Eph 4:15).²²

Together with the interreligious dialogue, Christians must work for unity among themselves through ecumenical and interritual dialogue. This call to unity becomes more pressing in situations where Christians are a seemingly insignificant minority. The challenge is further intensified by the prevalence of other religions that equally stress the primacy of the spiritual in man. Any sign of division hampers the mission of evangelization. Ecumenical efforts must be further cemented through the continuing process of genuine dialogue, including theological dialogue, substantiated through collaboration, common witness, prayer and change of heart.

iii. Overcoming the Shortcomings of Dialogue

In their evaluation of the BIRA V series, the participants of BIRA V/5 (1996) reported the recurrent criticism of dialogue efforts. Dialogue involves too small a number of participants to be able to bring about any serious change in society in terms of attitudes towards other religions. Adequate follow-up is often lacking, and dialogue efforts tend to be limited to scholars and religious leaders. Thus, the concerns of ordinary believers are often not expressed. They offered the following suggestions:

A better use of communication media, such as press releases and press conferences, and jointly produced interreligious radio and television programs and videos. A better follow-up through the establishment of interreligious committees, both Asia-wide and in each nation, through circular letters or a newsletter, and through the production of materials on interreligious dialogue for school children. Where effective local dialogue networks are not yet functioning, the establishment of such remains a priority. The grassroots can be reached through participation in feasts and religious celebrations, interreligious pilgrimage tours, exposure of students to places

of worship of others, and through non-formal means of education to foster esteem for other believers.

Involvement of underrepresented groups in dialogue requires bold initiatives: national and international youth seminars, interchanges among university students and among those in religious studies; support for women to meet and share concerns across religious boundaries; inclusion of indigenous peoples in interreligious encounters. For young people it is important to prepare action-oriented interreligious youth events and camps that bring youths together with companions of their own age (cf. nn. 13-15).

c) Dialogue with the Poor

Asia is the most populous continent in the world, the majority of whose population is both poor and young. Asia is also the continent which has made unique contributions to the philosophy of man by articulating his spiritual dimensions; man is not just gifted with intellect and will, but also a pilgrim of faith and the Absolute. What is more striking is that the Asian spiritual vision of man reflects the Gospel teaching on man. It reechoes the Christian view of man as created in the image of God, elevated through the mystery of Incarnation, brought into greater union with God, and destined for eternal life. Both the Asian and the Gospel visions of man regard as incomplete any philosophy that reduces human life to the physical and material; together they exult the transcendent value of his dignity, a dignity that is not imposed from outside but dwelling from within.

i. Spiritual Vision of Man: Criterion for Interreligious Dialogue in Favor of Man

Therefore, in the Asian context, man must be the criterion of all social activities. Thus, the basis for interreligious dialogue and ecumenical collaboration rests on the spiritual vision of man; science and technology must form an alliance with conscience to serve the cause of humanity; the violation of basic human rights and the escalation of the refugee problems must be checked, to defend and promote human dignity; and violence and struggles must not be used to promote the development of man. As John Paul II puts it: "Man is the Way of the Church."²³

This is why John Paul II, speaking to the representatives of religious, cultural, social, economic and political life of India, during his visit to India in 1986 said:

In the world today, there is a need for all religions to collaborate in the cause of humanity, and to do this from the viewpoint of the

spiritual nature of man... As we proclaim the truth about man, we insist that man's search for temporal and social well-being and full human dignity corresponds to the deep longings of his spiritual nature. To work for the attainment and preservation of all human rights, including the basic right to worship God according to the dictates of an upright conscience and to profess that faith externally, must become ever more a subject of interreligious collaboration at all levels. This interreligious collaboration must also be concerned with the struggle to eliminate hunger, poverty, ignorance, persecution, discrimination and every form of enslavement of the human spirit...²⁴

Therefore, especially in Asia there is the crying need for religions to join hands against the forces that infringe on the inherent dignity and rights of every person. Thus, there is the need of developmental projects, such as housing, food sufficiency programs, health care, nutrition and different type of cooperatives in view of the widespread poverty in many countries of Asia. The propagation of family rights and the education for the youth are also necessary for the future of the continent.

ii. Also Criterion for the Mission and Ministry of the Local Churches

Man is also the criterion for the mission and ministry of the local Churches. The local Churches must become deeply sensitive to anything that debases the person. It entails solidarity with the poor and the suffering, and with all victims of dehumanization. It calls for a stronger commitment to promote all activities that correspond to man's true dignity and destiny.

The local Church's involvement is directly in line with its mission of evangelization process, the full salvation of man, of the whole man on a pilgrim journey in this world. This mystery of Christ's redemptive presence has already been present and operative within the Asian experiences. The Spirit has been active in the people's history and struggles — the same Spirit that has made every individual and all people children of a common Father, through Christ's death and Resurrection.

iii. Which Demands Preferential Option for the Poor

As the International Congress on Mission,²⁵ (Manila 1979) rightly puts it, at this stage of Asian history:

... the way to give witness to our people of the Father's love for them, the way to lead them to follow Jesus in his suffering and glory and the way to awaken them to the presence of the Spirit in their hearts, is for the Church to show, not only in word but in

deed, that she is unreservedly committed to the poor man of Asia, that she is ready to suffer and to die like her Lord, if only the poor of Asia would live ... And we believe with all our hearts that the way given us by the Spirit to show this universal love for men is, strange as it may seem, to give witness through action of our preferential love for the Asian poor.

iv. And to Be the Sign and Sacrament of That Option also in Its Institutions

Again and again in the various documents we find that there is a realization that the Church must give up the colonial garb and return to the spirit of the primitive Church, which under the inspiration of the Pentecost, invented and reinvented her "way of being Church" in each of the new situations she encountered. The prophetic role of the local Churches in Asia urges them to act also as catalysts in facilitating dialogue between different socio-political forces, religions and cultures, so that they work together in building up a better society based on the values of the Kingdom. To respond to the socio-political situation prevailing in Asia, as described in the beginning of this Part, the Office of Theological Concerns proposed that the local Churches of Asia be more in line with the primitive Church and recreate themselves, growing anew from local turf. Make a living option for the poor, aligning themselves with the lower classes and the marginalized. Depend no longer upon their institutions, wherever they are hindering their prophetic role, but take a stand in defense of the poor, even at the risk of losing these institutions. Flexible service structures would free the Church from the chains of money and power, and give her the experience of evangelical freedom of a self-reliant Church with a simple lifestyle. Institutions, such as schools, hospitals, clinics, orphanages and old folk's homes, were established out of the spirit of charity. Now they often survive as competitive businesses. A decision needs to be made as to which institutions may be kept and which not. Those that are kept should be easily accessible to people in general. They should be open for the celebration of local festivals and public gatherings, and as centers of service to the communities.

The Church as a pilgrim in history, belongs to the order of signs, and, as such, needs to be conformed to Jesus and his Reign, lest the quality of her witness be impaired and her signifying power obscured. The preferential option for the poor, which the Asian context demands from all local Churches, is in deep harmony with the nature of the Church herself as the sacrament of Jesus Christ, who for us became poor and made himself a servant. In order to be an effective sign and bear a convincing witness, the pilgrim Church, not only in her members but, in so far as she is an institu-

tion of men on earth, is constantly in need of renewal and reform (cf. nn. 17-34).

Today, there is much talk about our schools. Many of them have become symbols of erudition, not rarely out of reach of the poor; and the value education (and Catholic education in places where Catholic presence is strong) is being more and more neglected. In many countries people holding public offices, especially in politics, are educated in our Catholic school. However, it is noticed that political corruption and exploitation of the poor and marginalized by them is on the increase. One wonders what kind of education they received; and what kind of witness they are giving. Today there are allegations that some of them have commercialized education. What a counter-witness!

4. Missionary Co-operation and Mission *ad Gentes*

John Paul II begins his missionary encyclical *Redemptoris Missio* by stating that the mission of Christ the Redeemer, entrusted to the Church, is still very far from completion, that an overall view of the human race shows that this mission is still only beginning, and that we must commit ourselves wholeheartedly to its service. The statistical data prove the Holy Father absolutely right. He wrote the encyclical, convinced of the urgency of missionary activity as a result of his direct contact with peoples from all over the world who do not know Christ (cf. RM, 1), and “to invite the Church to renew her missionary commitment” (cf. RM, 2).

In order to stimulate this commitment, the Pope takes us to the beginnings of the Church, reminding us that the local Church at Antioch, after being evangelized, became an evangelizing community, which sent missionaries to other (cf. Acts 13:2-3). The early Church experienced her mission to be a community task, while acknowledging in her midst certain special envoys or missionaries devoted to the Gentiles, such as Paul and Barnabas (cf. RM, 61).

Therefore, in tune with AG, 20, he feels that it is highly appropriate that young Churches should share in the universal missionary work of the Church, and themselves send missionaries to proclaim the Gospel all over the world, even though they are suffering from a shortage of clergy (cf. RM, 62). He, then, exhorts bishops and episcopal conferences to act generously in implementing the provisions of the *Norms* which the Congregation for the Clergy issued regarding cooperation between particular Churches, especially regarding the better distribution of clergy in the world. And he appeals to all the Churches, young and old alike, to share in this concern by seeking to overcome the various obstacles and increase missionary vocations (cf. RM, 64).

In its turn the Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples, after vast consultations, has published (October 1998) a new instruction, titled *Cooperatio Missionalis* (CM) to foster and coordinate the missionary cooperation, taking account of the new situation in the Church and the world.

a) Missionary Cooperation at the Level of the Church Universal

Missionary cooperation is the expression used to describe the sharing by communities and individual Christians in the responsibility for missionary activity. Missionary cooperation requires adequate coordination, so as to be carried out in a spirit of ecclesial communion and in an ordered manner, and thus effectively attain its goal (cf. CM, 2). Hence, the Supreme Authority of the Church has established that there should be only one central body to “direct and coordinate” initiatives and activities of missionary cooperation everywhere, namely, the Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples (cf. CM, 3).

Missionary cooperation involves all Christians, and can be carried out in different forms. Cooperation is the first fruit of missionary animation, which is understood as a spirit and vitality, which opens individual believers, institutions and communities to a universal responsibility, forming a missionary awareness and a mindset directed *ad gentes* (cf. CM, 2).

i. Coordination among the Protagonists of Missionary Work

To increase animation and cooperation, the Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples relies in a particular way on the four Pontifical Mission Societies (PMS). They are the Pontifical Mission Society for the Propagation of the Faith, which must foster interest in evangelization and promote aid in means and personnel for the missions; the Pontifical Mission Society of Saint Peter the Apostle to foster the formation of the clergy and the consecrated life; the Pontifical Mission Society of the Holy Childhood to encourage the missionary formation of children; and the Pontifical Missionary Union for the missionary animation of the clergy and of consecrated persons. They have a priority character in animation, and a special relationship with the Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples and with the respective episcopal conferences (cf. CM, 3-6).

ii. Forms of Missionary Cooperation

The Instruction recalls that cooperation “is carried out in different forms: prayer, witness, sacrifice, offering of one’s work and help... to foster numerous, genuine missionary vocations” (CM,2). The encyclical *Redemptoris Missio* has its entire Chapter VII on this cooperation (RM, 78-81). Both documents emphasize the importance of the “witness of life.”

Today, witness also passes through the mass media and increasingly frequent contacts, as well as through the action of grace. It is above all in this way that the Church becomes a sign and instrument of salvation.

iii. New Forms of Missionary Cooperation

Historically, the mission *ad gentes* has been carried out mostly by the special vocations “for life” of the missionary institutes. They are the backbone of the mission, and are “the model of the Church’s missionary commitment, which always stand in need of radical and total self-giving, of new and bold endeavors” (RM, 66). The Instruction also recognizes this, before it indicates the new forms of cooperation (cf. CM, 16).

The present scenario of the world presents new needs, and calls for new forms of cooperation. Some of the new forms mentioned in the Instruction are: the sending of the missionaries on a temporary basis (cf. CM, 16-17), “twinning” (cf. CM, 18), pastoral needs connected with human mobility (cf. CM, 19), and the presence of priests from mission territories in the West (cf. CM, 20).

b) Missionary Cooperation at All-Asia Level

i. Sharing of Personnel

Many dioceses in Asian countries have been blessed with an excess of vocations. Such dioceses could help the dioceses in need of personnel within their own episcopal conference, or also in other Asian episcopal conferences to begin with. In the same way there are pressing requests for personnel from the new associate members of FABC, especially from Central Asia. If the episcopal conferences can come to some kind of commitment of this nature, the Missions Desk of the FABC Office of Evangelization could help with some coordination. There are six Asian-born Missionary Societies of Apostolic Life. (For more information on them, see Section II below.)

The bishops, especially those with surplus vocations, could encourage the setting up of such missionary societies of the Apostolic Life in their own or countries.

They could encourage religious and laity to respond generously to the call to commit all of the Church’s energies to re-evangelization and to mission *ad gentes, ad exteros, and ad vitam*.

ii. Sharing of Other Resources

Though the majority of FABC member conferences belong to the group

of developing countries, and are financially dependent on the West, it is high time the Church in Asia thinks in terms of “Asianness,” also in economic matters. If the social, economic, political and cultural analyses made by John Naisbitt are to be accepted, the Church in Asia will be well advised to be ready to face the consequences of what he calls *Asianization* of Asia, where the Asian consciousness is rising, while Asia is modernizing, holding on to its family values and self-sufficiency. And the modernization of Asia, he considers, “the most momentous global development of the 1990s and the early part of the next century,” due to eight major shifts (megatrends) taking place in the region today, “which will forever reshape the world.” According to him, what the World Bank has described as the “economic miracle,” has not been purely one of economics. “The story of the new Asia is a story of the miracle of the human spirit, driven by an awakening to one’s own potential, and propelled by the power of determination, and of the progress achieved by toil and sacrifice.”²⁶ Therefore, inculturation of the Gospel is an urgent necessity.

The CTC concluded among other things: “As a social institution, the Church is perceived as a foreign body, colonial in origins, while other world religions are not. The lingering colonial image survives in its traditional ecclesiastical structures and economic dependence on the West. This gives ground for suspicion” (nn. 13).

Can the dioceses take a cue from the success of secular forces in Asia and do some serious thinking on the issue of self-support? They may find ways to be self-sufficient locally, and also to help other local Churches to be self-sufficient by financial help of one diocese to the other, and even from one episcopal conference to the other. Fortunately, even in the so-called poor countries of Asia there are some dioceses that are better off and are generous and are sharing. The same generosity could be extended also to sharing institutions and educational facilities by neighboring dioceses.

iii. Mission *ad Gentes* in One’s Own Diocese

Though Asia is considered a mission continent, with only about 2.4 percent of its population being Christian (an exception being made for the Philippines), there are some countries where some dioceses have twenty or more percent of its population Catholic. The tendency, especially in the old dioceses is to be content with providing pastoral care to the baptized. Vast areas without Christian presence are simply forgotten. Some bishops in their Synodal interventions characterized this as a “maintenance” mode; and stressed that the Church in Asia should pass from the static dimension of preserving a heritage of faith to the dynamic dimension of proclaiming the Word of God, or a “missionary” mode of re-evangelization and mission *ad gentes*.

There is need to rejuvenate the notion and the fact of mission *ad gentes* in these places, and also to launch a drive for re-evangelization.

c) Missionary Cooperation of the Church in Asia towards the Church Universal

i. Fulfilling the Directives of *Cooperatio Missionalis*

• At the Level of the Diocese:

— The instruction states that, given their nature and value, the Pontifical Mission Societies should be present and operative in every particular Church, whether of ancient or new foundation. In this way commitment to missionary cooperation will become the “conscience of the Church” (cf. CM, 5).

— In every country there should normally be only one national director for all four mission societies... In some cases one director may be responsible for several nations (cf. CM, 7).

— In each diocese the bishop normally entrusts to the one person the position of episcopal delegate for the missions and diocesan director of the PMS. This person should be a member of the Council of Priests or the Pastoral Council (cf. CM, 9).

— Therefore, each diocese of the member conferences of FABC is expected to

- establish all the four PMS.
- appoint one person as episcopal delegate for the missions and director of the PMS.

• At the Level of the Episcopal Conferences.

The bishops’ conferences also have the responsibility to support and coordinate missionary cooperation (cf. CM, 3, 10), especially through the episcopal commission for missions (cf. CM, 10-11), and the National Missionary Council (cf. CM, 12), and the actuality of local bishops in each diocese (cf. CM, 9). The instruction gives precise guidelines for the proper functioning and coordination of these bodies on a world wide level through the Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples (cf. CM, 13,15), and on a national level, through the episcopal commission for the missions (cf. CM, 14).

Therefore, to fulfil the responsibility of coordination of missionary cooperation, the Episcopal Conferences:

- are expected to appoint one national director for all the four PMSs; and have,
- an episcopal commission for missions and a National Missionary Council.

ii. The Sharing of Personnel

Concerning new forms of missionary cooperation, the Instruction reminds us that:

— Diocesan priests, called the *Fidei Donum* from the name of the encyclical of Pius XII (1957), which encouraged this practice, have also been engaged in missionary activity. Like *Redemptoris Missio*, the instruction too invites such exchanges and stresses, that they should be selected from among the most suitable candidates (cf. RM, 68; CM, 17).

— Religious (cf. RM, 69-70; CM, 17) and the laity (cf. RM, 71-73; CM, 17) are invited to give their service also on a temporary basis, and in conformity with their specific charism and state.

— “Twinning,” which is a form of direct cooperation between dioceses of the old and young Churches, has become frequent. They are also encouraged but with two recommendations: churches must not exclude or neglect other initiatives in favor of the universal mission; and they must take into account the ecclesial context in which they work, v.g., a mission sponsored by a rich diocese in the North must not become a sign of abundance in an ecclesial situation of poverty. It must adopt a similar style of life and work, and be in dialogue with the local authorities (cf. CM, 18).

— Human mobility is causing many new situations, which call for appropriate responses (cf. RM, 82). Concerning this, the instruction indicates four areas of missionary cooperation: international tourism which demands a witness to faith and evangelical charity, and respect for cultural inter-exchange; visits to missions territories, which can become a school of missionary outreach and globalization, and in some cases can help human promotion; temporary sojourns in other countries for reasons of study or work, that require appropriate pastoral care; and the immigration of non-Christian groups, who bring the mission *ad gentes* to one’s own country. In this last case, Christian communities are called not only to missionary cooperation, but to a real missionary commitment in order to bear witness to Good News in all its forms (cf. CM, 19).

— Exchange between Churches must be in every direction, and must foster inter-Church communion. However, care must be taken that the coming of priests from the young Churches to the old ones, even with the best of intentions, does not deprive the young Churches of sizable apostolic forces

that are indispensable for their Christian life, and for progress in evangelization among the population for the most part, not yet baptized. Hence, this way of acting must be limited and reordered. Note must be taken also that success always depends on the quality of personnel (cf. CM, 20).

Compliance with the appeal of the Holy Father to be generous may in fact be beneficial to the donor dioceses, for sometimes the “surplus” contributes to bringing in laziness, while a shortage of priests contributes to dynamism and creativity. In some cases, reorganization of the diocese, as well as an equitable distribution of priests and other personnel, could contribute to the sparing of some with other dioceses in need.

Therefore :

- Some dioceses at least can send missionaries on a temporary basis:
 - “Twinning” between dioceses of the old and young Churches is another possibility open to the dioceses not only with surplus priests, but also by sparing some from among those that are thought to be just enough for the needs of the diocese.
 - The local churches of Asia can also be of service to the demands of international tourism;
 - They can organize and promote visits to mission territories;
 - Provide appropriate pastoral care to those on temporary sojourns in other countries for reasons of study or work; and
 - Provide a welcome and social assistance; also become the first evangelization to non-Christian immigrants.

CONCLUSION

The mandate of Christ to proclaim the Good News is being fulfilled in and through the local Churches in communion with the universal Church. They are the living and active subject of mission *ad gentes*. The Local Church is the entire Christian Community of a given socio-cultural and religious milieu – priests, religious and laity. Concretely it is the diocese with each of its parishes, its associations and its institutions.

In Asia, because of its pluricultural, plurireligious traditions, and pluralistic socio-cultural situations of people living in overwhelming poverty, the best method of mission is the one used by Jesus himself through his Incarnation and Paschal Mystery. By becoming man, he inserted himself into the culture and religious traditions of his people, with whom he identified. His preaching of the Kingdom of God, the message, and the way he preached, were deeply rooted in that culture and religious tradition. He took part in the struggles of his people, especially of the poor. He raised his prophetic voice against the abuses of religious authorities, as well as against

those who exploited the poor. His preaching was based on the life situations of his people. He taught to obey the Law (Mt 5:17-20), but used every opportunity to perfect the Law by projecting the dimension of love and forgiveness (Mt 5:21-26), and to rectify the wrong interpretations of the Scriptures, whether with the "Woe to you... you hypocrites" (Mt 23:13-36); or "you have heard this ... I tell you" (Mt 5,43-44); or by exposing the doctrine about the Kingdom of God in parables. He preached with authority. He courageously suffered death to redeem, not only his people but the whole mankind, thus becoming a sign of the forgiving and reconciling love of God the Father.

Likewise, the local Churches in Asia are invited to follow the same path of Jesus. Convinced that "the Church is the ordinary means of salvation, and that she alone possesses the fullness of the means of salvation" (RM, 55), they too must be truly incarnated in the rich cultures and religious traditions of their respective people; and use every opportunity to proclaim that same love of God manifested in Jesus, the only Savior of mankind. This is best done in the mode of the triple dialogue with cultures, religions, and the poor through the regnocentric approach to mission. These are the dialogues that will help unearth the hidden or unknown "seeds of the Word," sown by the Spirit in these cultures, religious traditions and events of life. They are in an inchoate form of the Kingdom, waiting to be manifest, fully flowered, and matured in our journey together towards the fulfillment of the Kingdom of God. In the process they will help us to understand our own faith better and grow into the fullness of Christ.

There is an urgency of missionary activity since, at the end of the year 2000, only a small fraction of the humanity in Asia has known and accepted Jesus as the only Savior of mankind. This task involves all of us, individually and collectively, and, therefore, needs to be coordinated by the various coordinating bodies under the leadership of the Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples. The task ahead is a gigantic task. Left to ourselves it overwhelms us and exposes our weakness and smallness, but gives us courage in him, who promised us the assistance of his Spirit and his own presence to bring to completion his mission: "Go, then, to the peoples ... make them my disciples: baptize them ... And I will be with you always, to the end of the age" (Mt 28:19-20). Therefore, like the Apostles after Christ's Ascension, we gather in the Upper Room "together with Mary, the mother of Jesus" (Acts 1:14) and the mother and model of the Church, and pray for the Spirit "to gain strength and courage to carry out the missionary mandate" (RM, 92), as a "Renewed Church in Asia on a Mission of Love and Service."

II. ASIAN – BORN MISSION SOCIETIES

BY

JAMES H. KROEGER, M.M.

Pope Paul VI will be remembered as a great missionary pope. In addition to his missionary journeys to six continents, he wrote beautiful and inspiring words that describe the Church's evangelizing mission. He noted in *Evangelii Nuntiandi* (14): "We wish to confirm once more that the task of evangelizing all people constitutes the essential mission of the Church ... Evangelizing is in fact the grace and vocation proper to the Church, her deepest identity. She exists in order to evangelize."

In recent years Asia's local churches have made steady progress in their understanding of and commitment to this mission of evangelization. Although these churches are a minority (2-3% of Asia's burgeoning masses), and even if they face numerous and complex challenges in the vastness of the Asian continent, they make a significant contribution to realizing the Church in Asia as a church "missionary by her very nature" (*Ad Gentes* 2).

In the continent of Asia (home to 85% of all the world's non-Christians), the local churches always affirm: "Our challenge is to proclaim the Good News" (FABC V: 1,7). For these Asian faith-communities, evangelization concretely means becoming churches that are "in continuous, humble and loving dialogue with the living traditions, the cultures, the religions [of Asia]" (FABC I:12).

Among the many mission initiatives that have been launched in Asia in recent decades, the emergence of several **missionary societies of apostolic life** is particularly noteworthy. While most international societies of men and women have a home in Asia, the growth of Asian-born mission communities augurs well for the future of evangelization and the growth of the local churches of Asia. These societies concretize the words of John Paul II in *Redemptoris Missio* (66): "The special vocation of missionaries 'for life' retains all its validity: it is the model of the Church's missionary commitment, which always stands in need of radical and total self-giving, of new and bold endeavors."

Currently, there are six such societies existing in Asia; two are of Philippine origin; two emerged from Indian initiatives; Korea and Thailand each has one institute. Five are of diocesan right and belong to the Roman Church. One is of Major-Archiepiscopal Right of the Syro-Malabar Church. It is noteworthy that all these societies have been founded in the wake of Vatican II, that is, 1965 and following.

As Missionary Societies of Apostolic Life, they bring a particular iden-

tity and focus to mission (cf. *CIC* 731-746; *Vita Consecrata* 11). Their charism is unique: *ad gentes* (to those who have not yet heard the salvific and liberating Good News of Jesus Christ); *ad exteros* (to people outside their own cultural-language group and nation); and *ad vitam* (devoting themselves to a life-long commitment to this unique form of missionary witness). All are focused on "apostolic" life; they do not pronounce "religious" vows, though they bind themselves permanently (*ad vitam*) for specifically *ad gentes* and *ad exteros* mission.

This brief essay now turns to presenting a short synopsis of the history, charism, membership, works, statistics, and contact information for each society. As one reads, there emerges a clear appreciation of what the Holy Spirit, "the principal agent of mission" (RM 21, 30), is enabling and unfolding in the local churches of Asia.

THE MISSION SOCIETY OF THE PHILIPPINES. On the fourth centenary of the evangelization of the Philippine Islands (1565-1965) the Catholic Hierarchy declared that "to express in the concrete our gratitude to God for the gift of our Faith we will organize the Foreign Mission Society of the Philippines." The official or statutory name of the society is: Mission Society of the Philippines (MSP), often popularly referred to as "Fil-Mission." It is a diocesan Filipino clerical mission society of apostolic life.

The MSP defines its charism in these words: "In love and gratitude to the Father, ours is a joyful missionary spirit flowing from deep union with Christ through Mary and in the power of the Holy Spirit, willing to spend and be spent in sharing his Gospel to all." From its beginnings, the MSP desired pontifical status; Rome requested the MSP to begin on the local level. The Society has a juridical personality under the Archbishop of Manila (current statutes approved on January 29, 1989).

Membership in the MSP is open to natural-born Filipinos. The Society also welcomes Filipino diocesan priests as associate members to serve in foreign mission. The MSP considers its mission apostolate in *de jure* and *de facto* mission territories as its foremost duty and privilege. Asia has always been the highest priority in the choice of mission apostolates. Presently, MSP missionaries work in Hong Kong, Taiwan, Japan, Thailand, Korea, Papua New Guinea, New Zealand, and the Solomon Islands.

MSP statistics (1999) count 60 permanent members and five associate priests. Fr. Manuel C. Jdraque, MSP is the Father Moderator; he can be addressed at: MSP Central House; 9105 Banuyo Street; San Antonio Village; M.C.P.O. Box 1006; Makati City, Philippines.

MISSIONARY SOCIETY OF SAINT THOMAS THE APOSTLE.

The Missionary Society of St. Thomas the Apostle (MST) in India is an indigenous missionary institute of the Syro-Malabar Church. In 1960, Mar Sebastian Vayalil sought the permission of the Holy See to found a mission society. Rome asked Bishop Vayalil to submit a draft constitution of the proposed society in 1963; he accomplished this in 1964. The nascent society began as a Pious Union of Diocesan Clergy in 1965. Additional steps were taken, and the MST was founded at Deepti Nagar, Melampara, Bharananganam, on February 22, 1968. The founding members of MST were 18 diocesan priests who made their Promise of Incorporation to MST on July 16, 1968. On July 3, 1997 the MST was raised to a "Society of Apostolic Life of Major Archiepiscopal Right" (CCEO c. 572); equivalently, this corresponds to "Pontifical Right" in the Roman Church.

The scope of the Society is "mission *ad gentes*" in the less Christian regions of India and beyond, "remaining faithful to the heritage and identity of the Syro-Malabar Church." MST now serves three mission regions (Ujjain, Mandya, and Sangli). In 1995 the MST accepted to begin work in Leh-Ladakh. The Society sent three people to work in this area known as the "Roof of the World." Some MST members also render service in various Indian dioceses and in Tanzania, Germany, and America.

The growth of MST in its first 29 years of existence (1968-1997) has been phenomenal. Today (1997) there are 217 priest members, 35 theology students, 37 philosophy students, and a total of 106 students at other levels of formation. In 1993 when the MST celebrated its silver jubilee, the Syro-Malabar bishops through a joint pastoral letter again owned the Society, and exhorted the faithful to support its missionary activities. The current Director General is Father Thomas Parayady, MST. His address is: Missionary Society of St. Thomas; MST Deepti Bhavan; Melampara 686594; Kerala, India.

CATHOLIC FOREIGN MISSION SOCIETY OF KOREA.

In late 1974 a Korean preparation committee was established to explore the possible formation of a mission society. By a decision of the Korean Bishops' Conference, the Korean Foreign Mission Society was founded on February 26, 1975. A formation house was opened in 1976, and the first priest for the society was ordained in 1981. In the same year the first missionary was sent to Papua New Guinea.

The KMS (Korean Mission Society) seeks to proclaim the Gospel and imitate Jesus Christ, the model for all missionaries. "We also model ourselves on the evangelical spirit of the 103 Korean martyrs who witnessed to Jesus even unto their death." They also "make a preferential option for the poor and are in solidarity with their spiritual and material sufferings."

There are presently 72 members of the Society (1997); 17 are priests; 6 are deacons, there are 15 temporary oath seminarians, 20 major seminarians, and 14 in the spiritual formation year. Members work within Korea (Suwon and Seoul dioceses), and also in Hong Kong, Taiwan, Papua New Guinea, the Philippines, and Italy.

The vision of the KMS foresees new missions in China, Cambodia, Mongolia, as well as Central and South Asia. Additional plans envision cooperative endeavors with other mission societies; the KMS also hopes to establish an Asian Mission Research Institute. The current KMS superior is: Father Bonaventura Jung, KMS; Korean Foreign Mission Society; 1 Ga 120 Sung Buk Dong; Sung Buk Gu, Seoul, Korea 136-021.

MISSIONARY SOCIETY OF THE HERALDS OF GOOD NEWS.

In 1971 Father Jose Kaimlett, a priest of the Vijayawada diocese in Andhra Pradesh, India, thought of founding a missionary society to serve the universal Church. However, as Fr. Jose himself says: "In God's plan the time was not yet ripe."

In December, 1976, a new diocese of Eluru was created with territory taken from Vijayawada. Fr. Kaimlett temporarily managed the diocese until the appointment of Bishop John Mulagada. Fr. Kaimlett was sent to Rome for canon law studies and returned to serve the diocese of Eluru. His dreams for a male missionary institute continued. In 1984 with three priests and two brothers of the diocese, he founded the Society of the Heralds of Good News.

Episcopal approval of the foundation was formalized on October 14, 1984. In early 1985 the first members made their perpetual vows. On May 5, 1991, Bishop John Mulagada, with the *nihil obstat* from the Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples, instituted the Missionary Society of the Heralds of Good News of diocesan right.

The main focus of the Society is to form and send "zealous, hard-working and holy missionaries." Our Lady Queen of the Apostles and Saint Joseph are its patrons. Today (1999) the Society has 109 permanent members working in India, South Africa, Papua New Guinea, and the U.S.A. There are 495 scholastics at various levels of formation.

In its 13 years of existence, the Society has opened four minor and two major seminaries. Fr. Kaimlett has also founded a female branch: the Sisters of the Good News, with current membership standing at 66 sisters. Father Jose Kaimlett, present superior, can be contacted at: Heralds of Good News; Tallapalem Post Office: Machilipatanam 521 002, India.

MISSION SOCIETY OF THAILAND. In March 1987, the Superior of the Paris Foreign Mission Society in Thailand addressed a letter to the Bishops' Conference suggesting the formation of a missionary group of Thai priests. They were to work with the Hill Tribe peoples in northern Thailand. The idea was well received by the bishops; contacts were made with diocesan seminarians, religious congregations, and lay people. The responsibility for the project came to rest upon Bishop Banchong Aribang from Nakorn Sawan.

In 1989 four seminarians volunteered to become members of the Society. In June 1990, and in January 1991, the first two priests were ordained for the Missionary Society of Thailand (MST). This is considered the real beginning of MST. This society of secular priests (with religious and lay associates) aims to do "apostolic work among those who do not know Jesus Christ in Thailand and out of Thailand." Currently, they serve in Northern Thailand and in Cambodia.

As a Society of Apostolic Life, MST is responsible to the Bishops' Conference of Thailand. The bishops appoint the superior of the society. Full members are secular, diocesan priests who join the society with the approval of their bishop. They keep a special relationship with their home diocese, even though they are incardinated into the MST. Religious and lay people may be accepted as associates for a three-year period. At present, consideration is being given to setting up an autonomous branch for lay people.

Currently, MST counts three priests, six religious sisters, and four lay persons as their personnel. Bishop Banchong Aribang is responsible through the Bishops' Conference, who have approved a temporary MST constitution. Father Jean Dantonel, MEP, is the first superior of the MST (a Bishops' Conference appointee); a Thai priest acts as his assistant. They can be reached at: Mission Society of Thailand; Lux Mundi Seminary; 20 Petchkasem Road, Sampran, Nakorn Pathom 73110, Thailand.

LORENZO RUIZ MISSION SOCIETY. In 1949 during civil disturbances in China, the Saint Joseph Regional Seminary which was under Jesuit administration was transferred to Manila. In the ensuing years about 60 Chinese seminarians were ordained in the Philippines. They went on to found 14 Filipino-Chinese parishes and 18 Filipino-Chinese schools.

To facilitate the continuation of these apostolates and to recruit and train younger clergy, Jaime Cardinal Sin of Manila established the Lorenzo Mission Institute (a Filipino-Chinese seminary) in 1987. Pope John Paul II has also requested Cardinal Sin to help prepare missionaries for China. During the Pope's January 1995 sojourn in Manila, he visited this seminary,

instructing the Cardinal to “maintain and preserve the said seminary at all cost.”

In this context the Lorenzo Ruiz Mission Society (LRMS) has been formed; it received its decree of approval from Cardinal Sin on January 14, 1997. It is a Clerical Society of Apostolic Life of diocesan right with its ecclesiastical seat in the Archdiocese of Manila. The LRMS draws its inspiration from Saint Lorenzo, the first Filipino saint who was of mixed Filipino and Chinese descent. He was martyred in Japan where he went as a lay catechist with Spanish Dominican friars in the 1600s.

The LRMS is “intrinsicly and eminently missionary in spirit and finality.” The members are committed to the Church in China, the Filipino-Chinese Apostolate, and other overseas Chinese Communities. Currently (1999), there are 10 ordained priests, 3 deacons, and 31 seminarians. Some members have studied language and culture in northern China. The Archbishop of Manila governs the Society through his delegate. Correspondence may be address to: Msgr. Paul Lu, PME; Lorenzo Ruiz Mission Society; San Carlos – EDSA – Guadalupe; M.C.P.O. Box 144, 1254 Makati City, Philippines.

CONCLUSION. The story of evangelization in Asia is rich and has many facets. Without doubt, much more could be written about these Asian-born missionary societies. In this light, the reader’s attention is directed to a 1998 book entitled: *Heralds of the Gospel in Asia: a Study of the History and Contribution of Missionary Societies to the Local Churches of Asia* (contact: Sacred Heart Theological College; Shillong 793 008, India).

As the dawn of the third millennium approaches, it is appropriate to recall John Paul II’s persistent focus on the continent of “Asia, towards which the Church’s mission *ad gentes* ought to be chiefly directed” (RM 37; cf. RM, 55,91). The emergence, growth, and continued service of “Asia’s own” missionary societies of apostolic life is a special blessing for all God’s Asian peoples. Under the lead of the “befriending Spirit” (GS 3), may additional missionary societies of apostolic life spring from fertile Asian soil. Asia will continue to emerge as a continent of missionary hope in the third millennium.

SOME QUESTIONS FOR THE WORKSHOP

(The questionnaire that follows is meant to help to take stock of the present situation, to discern about it in the light of the Word of God, and to set up manageable goals, in a discernible sequence of steps, with flexible yet definite time targets, etc., so that the Church in Asia can promote a “new Spring-time of the Gospel,” as desired by Pope John Paul II).

1. The proclamation of Jesus as the one Savior of the world is central to mission *ad gentes*. However, like dialogue and inculturation, it has not a uniform pattern and may vary from country to country. In any case, the “initial proclamation” must be completed with a “fuller catechesis” of Jesus Christ as true God and true man.

a. Why is the proclamation of Jesus as the one Savior of the world central? What does the above statement mean concretely in the context of your country/episcopal conference, region, diocese?

b. How is it being fulfilled at present? Would you favor a clear and determined stand by FABC in favor of proclamation? How would you like it worded?

c. What concrete additional steps should be taken so that Jesus is not only witnessed to be or proclaimed to be the one Savior of the world, but a “fuller catechesis” is done of Jesus Christ as true God and true man? What steps will you take in your diocese? What is the link between dialogue and proclamation?

2. FABC has accepted as a mode of evangelization, the triple dialogue with the poor, with cultures and with peoples of other religions: human liberation, inculturation, and inter-religious dialogue.

a. Do the social works, health care services, education in your diocese/country convey the concern and love of Jesus for the poor and marginalized (including women, children, young people, bonded laborers, indigenous peoples, migrants and refugees)? If yes, try to evaluate the extent to which this is done. If not, what is lacking or what could help project Jesus’ concern and love through these works?

b. Do the people involved in social works/health care/education, from the bishop to the directors of these works and their co-workers, come across to the people as true witnesses of Christ, who come to them in genuine love of them and to serve them? What is the image they project, and how could this image be improved further?

c. What kind of attempts have been made in your country/region/diocese to foster ecumenical and inter-religious dialogue for its own sake as well as to jointly address the cause of the poor and marginalized? Is there true sharing of one’s faith experiences, which helps the Catholic partners to project Jesus as the one Savior of the world, as experienced by them as much as it helps them to listen to the faith experiences of others, whether they be Christians or non-Christians? What needs to be done so that the initial doubts and suspicions give way to genuine unguarded and defense-

less sharing and working together?

d. What are some of the burning issues affecting people which could bring people from the various religions in your country together to work for the good of the human family?

3. FABC has proposed the “new way of being Church” as a “communion of communities,” a “sign and servant of the Kingdom of God.” Specifically, the Basic Ecclesial Community is one “new way of being Church in Asia.”

a. As a communion of communities, a sign and servant of the Kingdom of God, what is the role of these communities in the evangelization *ad intra* and *ad exteros* (mission *ad gentes*)?

b. Evangelization *ad exteros* also requires that these communities express concern not only for the evangelization/growth of one’s own community, but also for the evangelization/growth of other needy communities, especially of Central Asia. Why should they be concerned for other communities? How can your diocese/episcopal conference help to materialize this concern?

c. More specifically, how can the Basic Ecclesial Communities work for *evangelization ad intra* and *ad exteros*? What concrete incentives, pastoral means will you, as pastor, place at their disposal?

d. What kinds of means does your local Church regularly and consciously use to foster missionary activity? What concrete steps could be taken at the diocesan/parish/institution levels to make missionary activity a daily concern of all Christians?

e. How many of the four PMS are present and active in your diocese/country? What would you do to have them all “present and operative”?

f. The Instruction has given various indications to the Episcopal Commissions for Missions in order to guarantee “good coordination between the activities of the Holy See and the bishops’ conferences in the area of missionary cooperation”. Are they being followed by your episcopal conference to your satisfaction? Is there anything else that you could suggest to ensure this “good coordination”?

g. Are there any Missionary Societies of Apostolic Life from your diocese? If not, would you like to encourage one such Society to be formed in your diocese? What concrete steps will you take for this purpose? What do you think of the new forms of missionary cooperation? Can you spare

some diocesan priests, as “Fidei Donum,” and also some men and women Religious, and lay people, to be sent to a missionary circumscription to collaborate in apostolic activity, even on a temporary basis? Or can you help another needy diocese by ‘twinning’ for missionary cooperation? Is your diocese/episcopal conference in a position to send personnel to mission territories? If yes, what concrete steps will you take to ensure that this is done in accordance with the criteria given in the same Instruction?

h. In the context of “Asianization” of Asia, why is it important that the Asian dioceses also help each other financially? Is your diocese in a position to offer such help? Or do you know of any diocese/s of your episcopal conference that could offer such help? How should this be regulated?

4. FABC has encouraged the work of inculturation, including explorations in inculturated theology, liturgy, formation of priests and religious, spirituality, popular religiosity, etc.

a. What do you understand by inculturation? Why is inculturation necessary? Do you see its urgency in view of Asianization of Asia? What is the ambit of inculturation?

b. What is the present status of inculturation in your country/region/diocese? Does the Church come across to people as “their own” or as a “foreign religion”? What changes need to be brought about in the life-style and social living of Christians – laity, priests, Religious and the Bishop – and in explorations in theology, liturgy, formation of priests and religious, spirituality, popular religiosity, etc?

c. What steps should be taken in your country/region/diocese to foster such inculturation? What steps do you intend to take in your diocese?

5. The missionary encyclicals, *Cooperatio Missionalis*, the FABC and the Synod have emphasized authentic witnessing, true God-experience nourished by prayer, as essential for the task of proclamation.

a. Why is authentic witnessing, true God-experience nourished by prayer, essential for proclamation? Explore some of the psycho-social and theological reasons for it.

b. In your understanding, what are the components of “authentic witnessing,” “true God-experience nourished by prayer”? Is this type of witnessing seen in the life of our bishops, priests, Religious and laity? What kind of changes should be made in the catechesis, and formation of priests and Religious?

c. Would you foster “Ashram” type of witnessing? Whether yes or no, why?

6. The Synod affirmed the integral role of formal education in evangelization in the Asian context, but urged a rethinking of the apostolate of education in relation to service of the poor.

a. Articulate the purpose of Catholic schools/colleges in your diocese/region/country.

b. Is this purpose being fulfilled at present to your satisfaction? If not, what is lacking especially in terms of service to the poor and marginalized, and proclamation of the Good News?

c. What kind of changes in the curriculum, life-style, and attitude of the management and teaching staff, should be made, so that they become effective instruments for the uplift of the poor, deepening of faith of the Catholics, and evangelization of the non-Christians?

7. FABC, as well as the Synod, urged that a solid, foundation in the social doctrine of the Church be given to all Catholics, and that the Church engage fully in the work of human rights, human promotion, justice and peace, never forgetting the evangelizing character of such work.

a. How does the work of human rights, human promotion, justice and peace contribute to evangelization? What are the theological reasons behind it?

b. To what extent are the Catholics in your diocese knowledgeable of the social doctrine of the Church, and ready to work for its implementation within the Catholic community as well as in the society at large?

c. What needs to be done in your diocese/region/country to give a solid foundation in the social doctrine of the Church to all Catholics, and to encourage their participation in the work of human rights, human promotion, justice and peace as part of the evangelizing mission of the Church?

8. Keeping all the above in mind, the Synod required a holistic contextualized formation of laity, of seminarians and Religious, a spiritual renewal of priests, a more authentic witnessing of persons in consecrated life.

a. Why is there the need of a holistic contextualized formation of laity, of seminarians and Religious, a spiritual renewal of priests, a more authentic witnessing of persons in consecrated life?

b. What kind of changes do you think should be made in the formation of laity, seminarians and Religious, so as to make it a holistic contextualized formation? Do you foresee any difficulties in this task? How would you overcome them?

c. What kind of concrete steps should be taken for a spiritual renewal of priests, and a more authentic witnessing of persons in consecrated life? How would you try to implement it in your diocese?

9. Keep in mind the exigencies of evangelization on the one hand, and the eight megatrends that are likely to revolutionize people's life in the next millennium on the other. And list in the order of precedence what you would consider as pastoral priorities for your diocese/country in the next four years.

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