

Seventh Plenary Assembly: Workshop Discussion Guide

**SPRINGTIME OF HOLINESS:
A CONTINUING CALL TO SPIRITUALITY IN ASIA**
by
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I. INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this short paper is to give a starting point for the theme of the Seventh FABC Plenary Assembly, "A Renewed Church in Asia: A Mission of Love and Service". As a discussion guide this paper has no pretension of being exhaustive and scholarly; it is a mere starting point for a hopefully lively and rich exchange of ideas by the participants regarding the very broad but essential topic of call to holiness, specifically in the context of Asia after the celebration of the Special Assembly of the Synod of Bishops for Asia (April-May 1998).

We Asians are blessed with the long-awaited Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation "*Ecclesia in Asia*", recently promulgated by Pope John Paul II on an Asian soil, at New Delhi, India, on the sixth of November, 1999. Chapter VII, the last chapter, entitled "Witnesses to the Gospel," repeats the doctrine of the Second Vatican Council that the entire church is missionary. However, there can be no proclamation of the gospel or missionary work unless Christians who preach the gospel are genuine "witnesses" by showing that their life is in harmony with their teaching. Because of the urgency of missionary work, especially in the vast continent of Asia where the great majority are non-Christians, there is a corresponding urgency of the individual Christian's response to the call of holiness. The Holy Father notes that "people today put more trust in witnesses than in teachers, in experience than in teaching, and in life and action than in theories". He adds that "this is certainly true in the Asian context, where people are more persuaded by holiness of life than by intellectual argument". In no. 23 of the same

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document, where he speaks of Christian Life as Proclamation, the Pope has an impassioned appeal to all Christians in Asia to be a "praying Church, deeply spiritual even as she engages in immediate human and social concerns. All Christians need a true missionary spirituality of prayer and contemplation".

Then the Holy Father, echoing the request of the Synod Fathers, offers some general guidelines for those who are engaged in the evangelization of Asia, namely: the pastors (bishops and priests), the religious (members of institutes of Consecrated Life and missionary societies), the laity, the family and the young people. For each group the Pope suggests seminal ways how they can become effective evangelizers by offering them a formation that is proper to their state of life in the Asian context.

Having in mind the concerns mentioned in "*Ecclesia in Asia*", especially in Chapter Seven of the Post-Synodal Exhortation, the main points of this discussion guide are the following:

1. The Church in Asia, as called to holiness, God-experience.
2. The Asian context of spiritual formation: of pastors (bishops and priests), religious, and laity.
3. The specific role of the religious congregations in formulating an Asian spirituality, and methodology of Asian spirituality at the service of the whole Church.
4. Some practical goals.

II. THE CHURCH IN ASIA, AS CALLED TO HOLINESS, GOD-EXPERIENCE

One of the key points of the Second Vatican Council's Dogmatic Constitution on the Church is that there is a universal call to holiness in the Church. "Be holy, for I the Lord your God am holy" (Lev 19:2). Conversion is only a prerequisite for holiness, a journey towards God who is holy. Holiness is simply to live like God. To be holy is nothing else but to be similar to God. However, the invisible God is very distant from us, even hidden from us. For us Christians the only model, guide and reference for imitating the holiness of God is Jesus Christ, the Son of God, the Word of God made flesh, who dwelt among us. Jesus Christ, who is "the Way, the Truth and the Life" is the one way to holiness.

It is the sacrifice of Christ on the Cross that effectively sanctifies the faithful "in truth", truly communicating holiness to them, in contrast to the non-effectivity of sacrifices of animals and other offerings of the Old Covenant. The Christians really participate in the life of the risen Christ by faith

and baptism, which give them the anointing which has come from the Holy One. In baptism Christians receive the Holy Spirit, the supreme gift of Christ as he died on the Cross. Through the presence of the Holy Spirit in them they are indeed "baptized in the Holy Spirit", as John the Baptist had announced. Hence, although we are redeemed by the saving work of Christ, the principal agent in the sanctification of the Christian is the Holy Spirit. The presence of the Spirit is permanent so that St. Paul can affirm that the redeemed are "temples of the Holy Spirit".

A person who wishes to be sanctified by the Spirit, must first of all purify him/herself, that is, wash from him/herself any defilement that is incompatible with God's sanctity. Conversion, *metanoia*, or a complete turning away from self to turning toward God, is a precondition for holiness. Responding by faith to God's offer of life in the Spirit, which is grace, a person attains "salvation", freedom from sin, from the imprisonment of self, ultimately participating in the holiness of God. Although it is the Holy Spirit who effects the sanctification or holiness of an individual Christian, a personal cooperation is demanded from every human being, which involves the practice of asceticism, self-denial, "mortification" in order to live no longer for self but for Christ, who lives in the innermost being of the Christian.

Thus in the universal call to holiness, the following elements have to be kept in mind:

- a) God's call to individual men and women, a free act of God's love, grace or favor, to be holy as He is holy.
- b) The human being's free response to this generous call of God.
- c) Jesus Christ, the Holy One of God, is the model and the point of reference to imitate the holiness of God.
- d) The Holy Spirit, whose coming is bound up with baptism and faith in the mystery of the dead and risen Christ, is the principal agent in the sanctification of the Christian.
- e) The holiness of the Christians, effected by the Spirit, demands that they cut themselves off from sin. A holy way of living is demanded from the Christians because they, "captivated by Christ", must share his sufferings and death in order to arrive at his resurrection. (Phil 3,10-14). This is the basis of the whole Christian ascetical tradition.

However, this universal call to holiness did not begin only in the New Testament. In fact, the biblical quotation most often cited as referring to this universal call is an Old Testament text (Lev. 19,2): "Be holy, for I the Lord your God am holy". Chosen and set apart from the other nations, Israel becomes the "holy people" of God, in whose midst God lives and walks. This active presence of God confers a holiness on the people of Israel, which

is not simply one of ritual, but a dignity demanding a holy life. It is in order to sanctify His people that Yahweh promulgates the Law. Israel must respond to the free choice of God who wishes her sanctification by sanctifying herself, purifying herself from any defilement that is incompatible with the holiness of God.

Neither is the Spirit of God active only in the new dispensation. In the Old Testament the Spirit was not yet revealed as a Person but as a divine force that transformed human beings to make them capable of exceptional deeds. These deeds were always intended to strengthen the people in their vocation, and to make them servants and cooperators of the Holy God. Having come from the God of Israel and consecrating Israel to the God of the covenant, the Spirit was already the sanctifying agent of the chosen people of God. As Spirit of salvation, the Spirit of God endowed judges with a new personality, which rendered them capable of fulfilling a specific mission of liberating the people. The rite of anointing for kings manifested the indelible imprint of the Spirit and invested them with a sacred majesty. To assure Israel of salvation, justice and peace, a more penetrating action of the Spirit was needed, the direct anointing by God, which would designate the promised Messiah. Upon him the Spirit would not only descend but would remain. It was the Spirit who empowered the prophets to proclaim the word of God and to let them understand its meaning. It was he who made witnesses of them. The Spirit was finally poured out to the whole people, like rain bringing life to a thirsting land (Is 32,15, Ez 36,25), or like the breath of life coming to animate dried bones (Ez 37). This pouring out of the Spirit was like a new creation. Regenerated by the Spirit, Israel would be able to recognize her God, and God would find again His people: "I will no longer hide my face from them because I shall have poured out my Spirit on the house of Israel" (Ez 39,29).

Nonetheless, this vision was still only a hope, because in the old dispensation the Spirit was not yet revealed as a Person and hence could not remain. At the time of the Old Covenant "He is not yet given" (John 7,39). It was the prayer of the devout people of Israel that God must give an unprecedented sign that He should intervene in PERSON, so that the gift of the Spirit might be made total and final. "AH! IF YOU WOULD ONLY REND THE HEAVENS AND DESCEND! (*UTINAM COELOS DIRUMPERES ET DESCENDERES!*)" (Is 63, 15-19).

Because God's call to holiness is universal, it cannot be limited only to the people of the New and the Old Testaments, or to the Church. This call is co-extensive with the universal mission of Holy Spirit, who in a hidden way develops the "seeds of the Word of God" among all peoples. The Second Vatican Council clearly teaches that "the Holy Spirit in a manner known only to God offers to everyone the possibility of being associated with the

Paschal Mystery" (GS 22). It is even the duty of the Church, especially in Asia, to recognize them, promote them and even receive them in dialogue. Since Asia is the cradle of the great religions of the world: Hinduism (in all its varied expressions), Buddhism, Zen, Confucianism, Shintoism, Sikhism, Jainism, Zoroastrianism, Islam, which have a large following, it is our task to discover in this religious phenomenon how God calls to holiness peoples belonging to different religious traditions as manifested in their own cultures.

Why is it that these cultures and religions continue to captivate and fascinate the majority of Asians, while the influence of Christianity in Asia (except the Philippines and some parts of India, Indonesia and Korea perhaps) has been minimal? What is the inherent goodness, beauty and truth in them? Do these religions answer the deepest desire of every human being for the contact with the Other One, the Holy One, and thereby experience salvation from their sinfulness and feeling of insufficiency? Perhaps one of the tasks of the workshop on holiness by this present assembly is to answer these questions. There have been only general observations regarding the beauty, truth, goodness and attractiveness of these great world religions born in Asia. There is need to give a more detailed information for us Christians regarding these general statements, so that we can understand more clearly why they remain so attractive and captivating to our fellow Asians.

Asians in general are very religious. Any human being for that matter, has a great hunger for God. The Jesuit Cardinal Henri de Lubac systematically wrote about this and called this craving "*desiderium naturale videndi Deum*". Another Jesuit philosopher, Fr. Marechal, taught that in every and the very act of judgement, every human being necessarily makes an implicit affirmation of the existence of God. There cannot be a religious vacuum in any human person. Hence it is philosophically and theologically impossible that the Asians' genuine religious feeling or tendency for God, an in-born craving of every human being, cannot find fulfillment in their own traditional religions. It is greatly helpful for us Christian evangelizers and pastors to know concretely and phenomenologically how this religious vacuum is being filled by the beauty, goodness of truth of the great Asian religious traditions so dearly treasured by billions of Asians through centuries and millennia. Nature abhors a vacuum, much more the vacuum felt for the need of God.

We have to note that many of these religions antedate the coming of Christianity to these Asian countries. Kenneth Cragg, an Anglican bishop, who was deeply influenced by the indigenous peoples of Africa, said: "When we approach another people, another culture, another religion, our first task is to take off our shoes; for the place we are approaching is holy. Else we may find ourselves trampling on peoples' dreams. More seriously still —

may forget that God was there before our arrival!"

The Second Vatican Council teaches that the Church rejects nothing of what is true and holy in these religions, and even encourages the preservation and promotion of the authentic values found in these cultures, approaching them in a spirit of loving dialogue. These authentic values "reflect a ray of that truth which enlightens all human beings". Nevertheless the Church must clearly proclaim the fullness of Truth, which is Christ himself. (NA 2) This was stressed again by all the Synod Fathers. Despite the fact that we discover in these religions great truths, beauty, and wisdom, we have to affirm that the fullness of beauty, wisdom and truth resides only in our Lord Jesus Christ. It is not our intention to water down the truth of Christ when we dialogue with the great religions. Our task is to put them in the proper perspective of the salvific plan of God, to respect them sincerely in the way that God would want us to respect them, since they are within the unspeakable plan of God to show His immeasurable love for all peoples.

It is clear then that God has called all Asians, whether before, during or after the time of Christ, to holiness in life by giving them peculiar methods of God-experience. For example a devout Buddhist strives hard to follow the Eight-Fold Path: right view (perspective), right thought, right speech, right action, right livelihood, right effort, right mindfulness, right concentration. In treading this path the devout Buddhist experiences that his craving or "desire" (the cause of suffering or unhappiness) is extinguished, and hence deliverance from suffering ensues. What ascetical practices the devout Buddhist has to undergo, sometimes even more than the asceticism of Christians in religious vows! Buddhist monks, besides taking the vow of celibacy, have to practice strict abstinence and other forms of penance and self-denial. During the Fifth Plenary Assembly of the Catholic Biblical Federation held in Hong Kong in July 1996, we participants in the assembly had the joy and privilege of witnessing Buddhist monks at prayer, chanting their sacred scriptures with great devotion, filling the Christian audience with the awesome and real presence of God. When I saw some of them at close range, I feel that these men could be much holier than many of us Catholic priests, religious and lay people. From that moment on, I personally believe that the God-experience of many of our non-Christian Asian brothers and sisters, who can be truly called "living saints" is an authentic inspiration of the Holy Spirit. A good introduction to the Holy Spirit's activity in Asia today is FABC PAPER No. 81, THE SPIRIT AT WORK IN ASIA TODAY.

Moreover, the Spirit is at work not only in the great world religions but also in "primal religions". Although these primal religions, found in many Asian indigenous peoples, do not have sacred scriptures or systematic doctrines about their beliefs, they are rich in their traditions and moral values.

Long ago the pioneer Catholic ethnologist and anthropologist, Fr. Wilhelm Schmidt, SVD, discovered that the more "primitive" the tribal peoples were, the purer is their idea of God. Their celebrations, myths and proverbs, conveyed through their sense of the sacred, reveal a high level of code of conduct that puts Christians to shame. For some indigenous peoples in the Philippines the term "Christian" is a pejorative word, for it is synonymous with being a thief!

The challenge of the Church's continual call to holiness in Asia, which is a *sine qua non* for the effectivity of our task of evangelizing the vast field of Asia, is to formulate concrete programs of formation, specifically in spirituality, for Christian evangelizers in the context of Asian realities and situation. There is need for us to take into serious consideration God's call to holiness of many Asians who belong to different religious traditions.

As mentioned in the introduction, the recent post-synodal exhortation *Ecclesia in Asia* offers general guidelines of formation for evangelizers in Asia: the bishops, the priests, the religious, the laity, including the family and the youth. However, the guidelines found in an official Papal Exhortation are necessarily very general, recalling the principles discussed in the Synod. Hence, another task of this present Plenary Assembly is to spell out concrete suggestions how to give a spiritual formation to evangelizers in Asia today after having heard the post-synodal exhortation of the Holy Father.

III. THE ASIAN CONTEXT OF SPIRITUAL FORMATION

Before we begin talking about the "Asian" context, I would like to make some remarks, which come from my observation during the Asian Synod. Asia is the biggest continent of the world, comprising all kinds of races and ethnic groups with so diverse cultures and with so different histories. Some countries in the Middle East belong to the nations which are the first to be mentioned in the history of the world, while others were recently born or reborn as independent nations, like those which were parts of the former Soviet Union. I personally wonder why territories so far away from each other, like Siberia in the North and Irian Jaya in the South, are lumped together with a single name of Asia. They have practically nothing in common with each other except that they are recognized as not belonging to Europe or America or Africa.

When we speak of the need for "Asian context", we usually refer to countries which were evangelized by the Latin or Western missionaries. Hence, we exclude the "Western" Asian countries, namely, the countries of the Middle East, Asia Minor, where we find the birth-place of our Lord Jesus and the first apostles. The churches here received the faith from the

Apostles themselves, and they retain their "Asian" identity, not made "foreign". Some local churches of India belong to this category.

Regarding the Asian countries evangelized by Europe, the South and Southeast Asian nations, I find two opposing attitudes toward their being Christianized by the West. Many of them, especially the ancient Asian nations such as India, Japan and China, with venerable traditions, customs and high culture, find the "foreignness" of the Church very onerous. But for Filipinos in general the fact that our country was evangelized by the Spaniards is not something which is burdensome, but even something to be proud of. Although we staged a revolution against Spain in 1898, the reason was not religious but political, caused by the repressive Spanish regime. It was not a problem for us to continue receiving the faith from foreigners, such as American and other European missionaries, who came after the Spaniards. Nevertheless, also we Filipinos today have gradually felt that there is a great need in rooting our Catholicism more profoundly in our Filipino values and cultures. There are now serious attempts to "inculturate", for instance, the liturgy, spirituality, and the formation of candidates for the religious life and the priesthood in order to make our Church more "Filipino".

It was the consensus of the Synod Fathers that spiritual formation for men and women evangelizers in Asia should be contextualized or inculturated in order for them to respond to the Church's pastoral mission in Asia. The context of spiritual formation is of course the realities of Asia today. Many recent pronouncements of the Church, including the Second Vatican Council, have encouraged, or even ordered, this way of forming priests, religious and lay evangelizers, not only in Asia but everywhere in all continents. However, indications are still strong that Asian realities have not yet been taken seriously enough in the present practice of the Church's pastoral mission in general and in the formation of evangelizers (bishops, priests, religious and the laity) in particular. There is a need to point out some areas where shifts or change of mental attitude, a sort of "cultural metanoia", have to take place. Unless this cultural metanoia happens, there is not much hope for the Asian Church to emerge, and for Christianity to be accepted by more Asians in this third millennium.

As a general principle there should be a shift from the perspective of a European-centered Church to an authentically Asian perspective. The Church's mission in Asia had been approached from the perspective of a European-centered Church which was deeply conditioned by the European colonialism of the times. For example, in the Philippines the Spanish authority for a long time did not consider "Indios" (native indigenous people) worthy of becoming priests and religious. When later on priests from the indigenous population were ordained, they were not fit to become pastors, only assistant parish priests. Christian faith and practice, including the for-

mation of the clergy and the religious men and women, were linked to the culture, language and symbols of the Western Church (European and American). This is evident from the architecture of churches, the symbols, rites and music of the liturgy, and especially the way of forming young candidates for the priesthood and the religious life. The colonizers did not and could not enter the lives of the people to discover their religion and culture, their own way of expressing God in their lives. It was a one-way traffic. Everything tipped to the side of a foreign church. Formation of priests and religious men and women was mono-cultural, "universal", which was really European or Western.

Unless a "cultural metanoia" is made in the way the Church looks at her pastoral mission in Asia today, the Church's mission approach and formation of evangelizers will stay colonial, alien and foreign to Asian peoples. This complaint was often aired in the Synod hall and is echoed by the Pope in his post-synodal exhortation (no. 22) when he speaks of some key areas of inculturation.

Although Christianity was born in Asia, many Synod Fathers made the observation that it has been alienated from Asia because of the perspective of the Euro-centered or a Western Church. Among many Asians there is great reluctance to become Christian because there is a perception that to become a Christian means to become a European. Hence, there should be some political will to "de-Westernize" the Church in Asia in order to free many of our people from this false identification. Because the influence of the West continues to be heavy on us in this age and era of "globalization", which is one of the subtle instruments of the West to impose a global culture, which is in fact another guise of a monoculture with strong Western impact, we need to undergo a "cultural metanoia" to go back to our Asian cultural roots. We know from history that perhaps the giant countries of China and India could have been Christian long ago, if the Church, so much dominated by the West, had been broad-minded enough at that time to be open to the authentically good elements of the culture of these great Asian nations.

But in this allegation of Western infiltration into Asian culture in spirituality, religion and theology, it would be well to do some rigorous "exegetical" of what is actually happening. For, as in the situation above regarding our relationship or assessment of the great world religions, much of what is being said still dwells in generalities, which need explicitation in order to clear our ground.

We should honestly examine in what way the culture of the West continues to exist in Asia. Questions like these should be asked and some attempts to answer them should be made. In what areas of Christian spiritual-

ity, theology and praxis the influence of the West is still being felt? In what parts of the Asian continent is that influence still very visible? What is the degree of such an influence being felt in different Asian countries? There could be various answers to the same question because of the immense diversity of the Asian continent.

If there is such a heavy influence, we should also distinguish between the beneficial and counter-productive forces of the West, to which we owe much historically. For I imagine that not everything would be "bad". As people on a journey, undergoing growth and development, we are equipped with the freedom of choice: to discard what is not helpful for our growth as a community and to keep what is beneficial for our people. We have to take account of the cross-cultural dynamics that must come into play during our common journey to the Kingdom.

There should also be a rigorous examination or discernment whether an element concerned is something that is only cultural, not essential to the faith, therefore something that is "negotiable". Or whether it is an element in the Gospel, which is part and parcel of being a Christian, something that is "non-negotiable". We have also to take into consideration that an ascetical practice or a doctrine or an attitude taught in the Gospel may be rejected not because it is alien to a people's culture, but because "it is a hard saying" of Christ, a reason why so many "Jews" rejected Christ, as shown dramatically in the Fourth Gospel. We are certainly touching the depth of each human being, when we come to the question of the individual's response to God's offer of grace. I mean here the mysterious personal act of faith, which is really the deciding point of a person's acceptance or rejection of Christ.

The results of this exercise, which is only the start of more rigorous efforts to be done by various scientific disciplines, could be the basis for the general approach how to contextualize or inculturate the formation of evangelizers in and for Asia: bishops, priests, religious and laity.

The following points may be suggested as the main elements or steps for the spiritual formation of evangelizers in Asia:

1. The evangelizers should be given a solid acquaintance of the basic teachings of the main religious traditions in Asia, especially those that relate to some experience of the divinity. The beauty, goodness and truth of these religious traditions should be pointed out as "seeds of the Word of God" sown by the Holy Spirit, that command our respect and appreciation. A manual or compendium regarding the main doctrines of the great world religions, especially their "spirituality", is needed as common and authoritative guide, both for the formators and the formandi.

2. The evangelizers should be equipped with a more intimate knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ, leading to a practical love for the Savior of the world. Jesus, "the Way, the Truth and the Life," should be presented as THE model for holiness. For this, a thorough knowledge of Our Lord based on Sacred Scriptures is required. Voices of complaints have been heard from many sectors that there is a dire lack of proper formation in a spirituality based on Sacred Scripture.
3. A practical training in the art of prayer should be handled by experienced spiritual directors. Some techniques of how to pray should be explicitly taught like the classic *Lectio Divina*, which uses the Bible as the fundamental prayer book. Here a good course in the "Oriental" methods of prayer, that are "Christianized", should be included. Even the techniques of meditation or contemplation made popular by Indian Catholic writers and spiritual directors should be learned. The practical learning of the art of prayer should not be taken for granted.
4. Some practical hints on how to integrate prayer life with the every-day situation should be a part of spiritual formation. The situation can be moments of "discernment", suffering, joy, sorrow, and especially the social, political and economic conditions in Asia where the evangelizer finds himself/herself. Spiritual formation should stress the most important point that prayer life cannot be divorced from actual daily life. However, a certain method or technique about how to integrate prayer with daily activity has to be taught, learned and practiced.
5. To make the evangelizers experience genuine Asian reality (to keep them from living in an ivory tower), a period of immersion in a typical locus of exposure should be required of them by the spiritual director.
6. If possible, this exposure should include experiencing an actual dialogue of life with Asians who belong to different religious traditions, so that the evangelizers can find out for themselves how these fellow Asians experience God in their own way. Likewise, it is hoped that through this dialogue of life Asians belonging to a different religious tradition will discover how a Christian experiences God by a living faith in Jesus Christ.
7. After this period of exposure the evangelizers should be required to reflect on their own experience of God, living in the midst of the Asian people, and to write down these personal reflections to be able to monitor the progress of their spiritual life or journey. This "looking back" on their experience will help them correct their faults and failures, find practical strategies for self-improvement with the help of their spiritual director. The aim of this seventh step or element is to deepen the

individual evangelizer's internalization of his/her personal response to the Lord's call to holiness.

These elements of a contextualized spiritual formation should be considered common to all Christian evangelizers: bishops, priests, religious and lay.

However there are other elements that are proper to each group of evangelizers because of their particular vocation in the Church. For instance, the spiritual formation of a religious has of course different aspects from that of a diocesan seminarian. The lay people should have their own spirituality, which is of course different from people in vows and in sacred orders. The Catholic Bishops' Conference of the Philippines has issued on July 1999 a pastoral letter on Filipino spirituality, addressed in a special way to the laity. Because it deals with FILIPINO spirituality, the letter is written in Filipino (Tagalog), the first pastoral letter of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of the Philippines ever written in a Filipino tongue. This is one of the examples of the current attempts of the Philippine Church to insert Christian spirituality into the cultural values of the people.

IV. THE SPECIFIC ROLE OF THE RELIGIOUS CONGREGATIONS IN FORMULATING AN ASIAN SPIRITUALITY AND METHODOLOGY OF ASIAN SPIRITUALITY AT THE SERVICE OF THE WHOLE CHURCH

Because of their vocation to the consecrated life, to a "transfigured existence" (*Vita Consecrata*, n. 59) the religious congregations in Asia should pull their efforts together in the formulation of an Asian spirituality. Imbued with the charism passed on by their founders/foundresses, religious congregations are structurally equipped to develop a spirituality suited to our times and especially to the context of Asia. Indeed, ever since the Second Vatican Council enjoined all religious institutes to review their constitutions or rule of life in the spirit of their founders/foundresses in order to conform to the conditions of the Church in the modern world, all religious congregations and societies of missionary or apostolic life, have celebrated chapters of renewal. One of the most important aspects of this renewal is the rearticulation of the institute's spirituality. But spirituality is a concrete way of life, which is existential, rooted in one's given self, lived in relationship to others, to concrete situations and, of course, to God. Hence, there cannot be a general spirituality for a whole institute valid for the whole world. This is particularly true for missionaries or religious working in Asia where we find diverse cultures, peoples, religions and all kinds of political, economic and social situations. The spirituality of the religious of Asia should be one where his/her two feet are on the ground, rooted in actual situations peculiar to Asia. Hence, there is a need for a methodology of Asian spirituality, that is culturally distinct from the one imported from the West.

The articulation of the methodology of an Asian spirituality will enrich the Universal Church. I am sure that many of our brothers and sisters of the Western hemisphere will be eager to learn from such a methodology. There is a strange phenomenon in Europe and America. Many young men and women, who feel thirsty for God, go to the East to consult Oriental gurus and spiritual masters, and even become their disciples after having tasted the sweetness of divine experience through these Oriental methodologies of spirituality. What is happening to the Christian spirituality in the West? Why is it that it has seemingly lost its attractiveness for some people who seek God? So the Church in Asia should produce a contemporary methodology of spirituality that should be shared with all the members of the Church, just as the classic methodology of Western or Latin spirituality became an effective means for inculcating spirituality in the Universal Church, including Asia.

The classic religious orders, such as the Franciscans, Dominicans, Carmelites and Augustinians, were very successful in promoting their peculiar spirituality among the diocesan clergy and the laity in the Philippines. For lack of other models, many lay men and women adopted the spirituality of these European religious orders in order to lead "devout lives". There are still a lot of women, inspired by the Franciscan spirituality of St. Anthony of Padua, who wear the Franciscan habit (brown dress and a cord), when they go to church. Till today, there are thousands of Filipinos who wear the brown scapular of the Carmelites in its very diminutive form because of the inspiration they get from the devotion to Our Lady of Mt. Carmel, promoted by the Carmelites. In order to become "holy" the simple lay folk thought they have to imitate a bit the religious even externally.

Another reason why institutes of consecrated life and missionary societies should take the lead in formulating concretely an Asian spirituality and its methodology is that, while Christians are a small minority in Asia, there is a remarkable flourishing of religious and priestly vocations in Asia. In Christian Europe and America there is a considerable decrease of vocations. Many European religious congregations have to do vocation campaigns in the Philippines, India, Indonesia and other parts of Asia in order to survive. Very soon the institute to which I belong (Society of the Divine Word) will have more Asians than Europeans and Americans. If the Africans and Oceanians are grouped with the Asians, the Europeans and the Americans are now the minority. And most of the SVD novices and young seminarians in the United States of America are ethnic Vietnamese. Perhaps what is happening in the SVD is also taking place in other religious congregations of Western origin. In the near future the major superiors of many religious institutes, based in Rome, will be men and women from Asia. In fact there are now many Asian men and women religious who are members of general councils residing in Rome. Thus, because of sheer num-

bers, several religious institutes will be Asianized. A big consequence to be expected is the "Asianization" of the religious congregation's spirituality.

The majority of religious congregations or missionary societies that work in Asia originated in Europe or North America. Hence, they necessarily bring with them until now the culture of Western religious life. When an Asian enters an international religious congregation, usually of a European origin, he/she will experience a cross-cultural dynamic brought about by the contact of two different cultures, that of his own country and that of the religious congregation. There should be a healthy interaction of these two cultures in order for the religious to live out properly his/her commitment of living out the vows of poverty, chastity and obedience in community and in the particular situation of Asia where the community is witnessing its faith in Christ. It is then imperative for the Asian religious to know first the cultural elements of his/her own country, because they impact his/her own understanding of the religious vows and community living.

For example, one of the characteristic cultural traits of Filipinos is their strong family orientation. The Filipino culture with its strong family orientation results in a sense of self which is personalistic and familial. This strong family orientation is expressed in close family ties and extended family system where everyone can somehow be related to everyone else. Tradition and hierarchy play an important part in the exercise of power and authority in the family. This is contrasted with the Western trait of a strong sense of individualism and strong spirit of competition. This particular cultural trait of a Filipino religious can affect his/her living concretely the three religious vows in a new community. To be able to live out the religious commitment and in order to avoid conflicting interaction of two cultures, some crosscultural adjustment has to take place, both from the side of the religious and the side of the congregation.

Religious institutes differ from each other mainly because of their proper charism, inherited from their founders or foundresses, their own history and traditions. But as consecrated persons all religious have the same three essential characteristics:

- a) Their call originates from the Triune God and is rooted in the mystery of Christ.
- b) Their lives, lived in a community, are intimately connected with the Church's mission.
- c) Professing the three evangelical counsels of chastity, poverty and obedience, they manifest the love of God in the world.

Pope John Paul II in his Apostolic Exhortation *Vita Consecrata* calls these three aspects of consecrated life: *confessio Trinitatis, signum*

fraternitatis, et servitium caritatis. These three aspects, common to all religious, make it possible to formulate a methodology of spirituality, which could become a model for all religious congregations missioned in Asia, although each religious congregation must make certain adaptations in view of its peculiar charism.

For starting the discussion about a possible methodology of Asian spirituality, this model could be proposed, keeping in mind the three aspects of religious life emphasized by the Holy Father:

1. Christian spirituality in Asia is essentially a missionary spirituality. It is a combination of contemplation and action. Without contemplation our action is pointless and aimless. Without action our contemplation is out of touch with reality.
2. This spirituality is rooted in history. For a religious missioned in Asia the privileged sphere of contemplation and action is history with the cultural, religious, social, political and economic situation of the people. Let the religious discover that history is dynamic and whole, not static, nor isolated from the rest. It demands a critical awareness of history: its social processes, systems and consequences.
3. Touching history is to encounter the living God revealing Himself. Through the Incarnation of Jesus and the outpouring of the Spirit to all creation, history with all its aspects becomes a place of God's epiphany. The religious must possess a contemplative heart. A contemplative heart helps to discover the active creative presence of God in the peoples of Asia, revealed in their culture, religion, and even in their creation/environment. The religious must strive to discover in the Asian people God's mysterious presence, that has nourished billions of Asians through the centuries. But as a Christian the religious must contemplate the life of the Trinity, the mutual love of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, flowing out into the world, manifested in the concrete situation he/she finds himself/herself, planting the Kingdom among the Asians.
4. The events in history are not themselves the Word of God. They have to be read and to be discerned in the light of the revealed Word of God, and only then one can discover the religious significance of the events and God's creative presence and liberating deeds. Deep in history are patterns and impulses which reveal the plan of God. Here a meditative and contemplative reading of Sacred Scriptures, called *Lectio Divina*, can aid the religious to discover the religious significance of the events happening in Asia here and now. Some referral to the scriptures of other great world religions is helpful in order to experience how our fellow Asians discover God's active creative presence in their midst.

5. When a religious discerns the events in history, he/she is led by the Holy Spirit. It is through the Spirit that one can discern the presence and action of God. Here the missionary must also be aware that the Spirit is actively sowing the seeds of God's word among the Asians even now.
6. Spirituality cannot be sustained without sharing one's faith, for the heart of mission is sharing of faith that gives life. "I have come into the world that all may have life and have it in abundance" (John 10,40). This is in fact the theme of the Special Synod for Asia. Sharing our life in God (faith) among the members of the religious community and with others brings the religious closer to one another as a community of faith, life and mission. An essential aspect of missionary spirituality is faith sharing. There are many methods of faith sharing practiced by different Christian groups. Again it is best to take the Word of God as basis for every faith sharing, just as it is best to take the Word of God as basis for a personal contemplation of the Trinitarian life, a personal experience of the Trinitarian God.
7. Spirituality starts with contemplation but it results in action. The action flowing from contemplation is the common mission of the Kingdom, the central message of Jesus in the Gospels. In our world, especially in Asia, the urgency of mission expresses itself in the task of transforming society which allows peoples of every race to live in peace, *shalom*, the wholeness of God's blessing for all human beings. The presence of God incarnated in history motivates us to a closer cooperation with all people of good will and with those of other faiths in Asia in creating a continent or a world of justice and peace. Missionary spirituality is a liberating spirituality.
8. Asian spirituality is also a frontier mission spirituality. God often reveals himself more profusely and acts more creatively in the frontiers and peripheries of society. Asian religious dwell in the "cutting edge" of the Church, to the limits where "the different", "the unknown", and "the unfamiliar" begin.
9. Here, the religious in Asia takes upon his/her person the mission of the Son, the Paschal Mystery of Christ. The core spirituality of many mission congregations today is described as "passing over", a participation in the mission of the Incarnate Word in the world. This is the concrete horizontal aspect of a missionary religious spirituality, the corresponding element to the vertical aspect which is the mystical contemplation of the life of love of the Triune God. The "passing over" is four-fold, very much in conformity with the realities of Asia:

- a) Passing over to the poor: The poor in Asia have concrete faces and names, living in situations of marginalization. Our encounter with the poor is seeing the face of God turned towards humanity in the crucified Christ today. It is to experience Jesus who gives preferential option for the poor. For to them the Kingdom is given in preference.
- b) Passing over to other religions, to people with different faiths: In Asia we encounter people with other faiths and beliefs, who are bearers of God's presence and revelation. It is a journey with brothers and sisters of other religions into the deeper levels of consciousness where we experience the presence of the Divine.
- c) Passing over to other cultures: The many Asian cultures and traditions are profound expressions of life, of humanness and identity of a particular race or people. A religious who passes over to other cultures will discover the diversity and pluralism of life — a profound experience of the diversity and unity in the Trinity.
- d) Passing over to creation: Asians are noted for their spirit of harmony not only with fellow human beings but with the whole creation. They have a feeling for the sacred. They respect nature as God's gift for all living beings. But there is now a wanton destruction of nature and environment all over Asia, which is mainly brought about by greed arising from economic globalization. Worse still, by-products of Western industrialization are dumped in many parts of Asia, causing pollution to seas, rivers, fields, and forests, killing millions of species of plants, animals, birds and fish, reducing to a virtual extinction the rich biodiversity of what was once a paradise in many parts of the continent. Religious should bear witness to the protection of life at all levels, calling in mind that their mission includes not only *AD GENTES* and *AD EXTEROS* but *AD VITAM*.

This suggested methodology of Asian spirituality is not exclusive for the religious. Although religious profession and the missionary vocation can dispose a Christian to live this Asian spirituality in a greater and more intensive degree, any Christian lay man or woman in Asia can take this approach in order to respond to God's call to holiness at this present age and time.

Because of the realization that the lay people are partners of their mission, many contemporary and classic religious institutes are sharing their spirituality to their "lay partners". The religious family to which I belong (the Arnold Janssen Family: Society of the Divine Word composed of brothers and clerics, the Holy Spirit Missionary Sisters, the Holy Spirit Adoration Sisters who are contemplatives) is actively promoting among our lay mission partners the "updated" mission spirituality inherited from our common founder, Blessed Arnold Janssen. The model described above is influ-

enced by what I learned and experienced as a member of this religious and missionary family, trying to bring the basic spirituality and charism of our founder in conformity with the present mission of the Church. A good spirituality, which is a concrete tool for a Christian's response to God's universal call to holiness, should be shared with all the members of the Church. If we Asians succeed in spelling out a methodology for spirituality, we are doing a good service for the whole Church.

V. SOME PRACTICAL GOALS

What is expected of this discussion are some practical goals to be achieved, with a time schedule.

There are two immediate concerns that have been raised in this discussion:

First, the formulation of contextualized spiritual formation for evangelizers missioned in Asia: the pastors (bishops and priests), the religious, and the laity. Two levels have to be considered: one which spells out the essential aspects of contextualized Asian spiritual formation, common or applicable to all three groups of evangelizers. The other stresses some elements proper to each group in view of the difference of their calling and ministry in the Church.

Second, the formulation of a methodology of Asian spirituality to be initiated by religious institutes or missionary societies working in Asia.

As to the first, this could be a common effort of several Offices of the Federation, such as the Office of Evangelization, the Office of Ecumenical and Interreligious Affairs, the Office of the Laity and the Office of Theological Concerns. Will it be possible for representatives of these Offices to work together in order to produce a tentative draft after five years, in time for the Eighth Plenary Assembly? A collaborative approach is needed because there are specific questions of contextualized spiritual formation that can be answered properly only by a specific office. A definite timetable for the meetings of this "ad hoc commission" should be set in order to produce concrete results. Otherwise the whole project would be relegated to a limbo of inaction and indifference.

The second concern can be very well addressed by the religious themselves. There should be a tie-up between the FABC and the existing "conferences" of religious congregations doing mission work in Asia. For instance the SOUTHEAST ASIAN MAJOR RELIGIOUS SUPERIORS (SEAMS) organize a periodic congress somewhat parallel to the FABC Plenary Assembly. As an SVD Provincial, I happened to attend the Ninth Congress of the SEAMS held on November 6 to 11, 1995 in the Philip-

pires. Can the FABC General Secretariat do the preliminary contact with the leaders of the SEAMS to sound out if this project can be handled by representatives of various religious institutes missioned in Asia? Religious have the resources, which bishops often lack. Again it is good to set a timetable for the project. The goal should be to produce at least a draft of a methodology of Asian spirituality in five years, to be followed up in the next FABC Plenary Assembly.

It might take many more years before a satisfactory formulation of Asian contextualized spiritual formation for evangelizers and a methodology of Asian spirituality is achieved. However, on account of a sense of urgency for the task, expressed by the Holy Father in his Post-Synodal Exhortation "*Ecclesia in Asia*", we cannot afford to delay helping our fellow Christians to be able to respond to the challenge brought about by Asia's springtime of holiness, the ever new and ancient challenge to sanctity.

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- No. 90. Emerging Demands of Mission of the Church at the Turn of the Century; the Church as a Servant of Hope for the Peoples of Asia, by Soosai Arokiasamy. A Position Paper for the Seventh Plenary Assembly of the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences, 2000.
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