

**A RENEWED CHURCH IN ASIA:
A MISSION OF LOVE AND SERVICE****The Final Statement of the Seventh Plenary Assembly
of the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences
Samphran, Thailand, January 3-12, 2000****INTRODUCTION**

I shall pour out my spirit on all humanity. Your sons and daughters shall prophesy, your old people shall dream dreams, and your young people shall see visions (Joel 3:1).

Prophesying, dreaming dreams, seeing visions — at this moment of the Great Jubilee, the words of the prophet Joel animate our hearts. We, the bishops of the FABC Plenary Assembly,* stand at the threshold of a new century and a new millennium, the third since the birth of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, born of Mary, an Asian woman. The marvels that we see impel us to give thanks to our loving God, Father, Son and Spirit.

We give thanks because God's own Son has realized for us the dream and vision of full life (Jn 10:10). We give thanks because "the love of God has been poured into our hearts by the Holy Spirit which has been given to us" (Rom 5:5) through the Special Assembly for Asia of the Synod of Bishops. We give thanks for that great pentecostal event of our century, the Second Vatican Council, and for the fellowship and pastoral creativity that the regular gathering of the Churches in Asia has engendered. At this moment we are filled with gratitude for the ecclesial event of the Special Assembly for Asia of the Synod of Bishops, and the Apostolic Exhortation "The Church in Asia," *Ecclesia in Asia* (EA).

We look back on a century that has seen the most phenomenal scientific and technological progress in the story of humankind. In this century Asian peoples have thrown off the yoke of colonialism and taken their place in dignity and freedom, center stage, in the human drama. We look back on

* The Plenary Assembly, with 193 participants, included five cardinals, 95 bishops (from 14 episcopal conferences and participants from associate memberships: two bishops, one apostolic prefect and one superior of a *mission sui juris*), clergy, Religious and laity.

a decade of development that promises a new and wonderful world of human solidarity and progress. Women are emerging from their traditional roles and now claim their rightful place in society and in the Church.

Yet, for the poor, and especially for women, freedom, progress, globalization, and other realities that now affect Asian peoples are not unmixed blessings. They are ambiguous. Furthermore, as we look back on the century that has passed, we remember it as one of the bloodiest in history with its two World Wars and countless lesser wars. Globalization, unregulated by juridical and ethical norms, increases the millions who live below the poverty line. It accelerates the process of secularization. It brings consumerism in its wake and threatens the deeper values of Asian cultures. Within Asian societies themselves one finds other oppressive structures, such as the caste system, dictatorships, exploitation of indigenous peoples and internal strife. Widespread corruption at various levels of both government and society are facts of daily life.

Thus we gather here in the Year of the Jubilee at Samphran in Thailand to pause and discern. Like Mary, we keep all these things in our hearts. Again, from the depths of Asia's hopes and anxieties, we hear the call of the Spirit to the local churches in Asia. It is a call to renewal, to a renewed mission of love and service. It is a call to the local churches to be faithful to Asian cultural, spiritual and social values and thus to be truly inculturated local churches. The call of the Spirit is daunting. But what better time to recall the sacrifices of our Asian martyrs who heeded Christ's mandate to his Apostles to go and not to be afraid, "I am with you always" (Mt 28:20)? What better time to recall his words, "Fear not, little flock, for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the Kingdom" (Lk 12:32)?

We heed the call of the Spirit coming to us through the Special Assembly for Asia of the Synod of Bishops in Rome in 1998 and the Apostolic Exhortation, "The Church in Asia." We dream of sharing our faith in Jesus. We dream of faith in Jesus through whom God saves. We dream of empowering our communities to be men and women who, indeed, give life by sharing with their sisters and brothers in Asia the abundant life given by Jesus, whom we believe is "the Life." We dream of reconciliation between Asian brothers and sisters divided by wars and ethnic conflicts. We express our solidarity with all our brothers and sisters in China and other countries where they do not experience the freedom necessary for living the faith and fulfilling their mission. With joy we welcome the representatives from the countries of Central Asia which have recently gained their independence.

PART I. RENEWAL OF THE CHURCH IN ASIA — VISION, MEANING

A. A Vision of Renewal

The dawn of the new millennium is a time of crisis. Yet a time of crisis, as Scripture and the whole history of the Church show us, is a time of new beginnings, of new movements. The thirty-year history of the FABC has been a concerted series of movements toward a renewed Church. We observe eight movements that as a whole constitute an Asian vision of a renewed Church:

1. A movement towards a Church of the Poor and a Church of the Young. "If we are to place ourselves at the side of the multitudes in our continent, we must in our way of life share something of their poverty," "speak out for the rights of the disadvantaged and powerless, against all forms of injustice." In this continent of the young, we must become "in them and for them, the Church of the young" (Meeting of Asian Bishops, Manila, Philippines, 1970).
2. A movement toward a "truly local Church," toward a Church "incarnate in a people, a Church indigenous and inculturated" (2 FABC Plenary Assembly, Calcutta, 1978).
3. A movement toward deep interiority so that the Church becomes a "deeply praying community whose contemplation is inserted in the context of our time and the cultures of our peoples today. Integrated into everyday life, "authentic prayer has to engender in Christians a clear witness of service and love" (2 FABC Plenary Assembly, Calcutta, India, 1978).
4. A movement toward an authentic community of faith. Fully rooted in the life of the Trinity, the Church in Asia has to be a communion of communities of authentic participation and co-responsibility, one with its pastors, and linked "to other communities of faith and to the one and universal communion" of the holy Church of the Lord. The movement in Asia toward Basic Ecclesial Communities expresses the deep desire to be such a community of faith, love and service and to be truly a "community of communities" and open to building up Basic Human Communities (3 FABC Plenary Assembly, Bangkok, 1982).
5. A movement toward active integral evangelization, toward a new sense of mission (5 FABC Plenary Assembly, Bandung, Indonesia, 1990). We evangelize because we believe that Jesus is the Lord and Savior, "the goal of human history, . . . the joy of all hearts, and the fulfillment of all aspirations" (GS, 45). In this mission, the Church has to be a

compassionate companion and partner of all Asians, a servant of the Lord and of all Asian peoples in the journey toward full life in God's Kingdom.

6. A movement toward empowerment of men and women. We must evolve participative church structures in order to use the personal talents and skills of lay women and men. Empowered by the Spirit and through the sacraments, lay men and women should be involved in the life and mission of the Church by bringing the Good News of Jesus to bear upon the fields of business and politics, of education and health, of mass media and the world of work. This requires a spirituality of discipleship enabling both the clergy and the laity to work together in their own specific roles in the common mission of the Church. (4 FABC Plenary Assembly, Tokyo, 1986). The Church cannot be a sign of the Kingdom and of the eschatological community if the fruits of the Spirit to women are not given due recognition, and if women do not share in the "freedom of the children of God" (4 FABC Plenary Assembly, Tokyo, 1986).
7. A movement toward active involvement in generating and serving life. The Church has to respond to the death-dealing forces in Asia. By authentic discipleship, it has to share its vision of full life as promised by Jesus. It is a vision of life with integrity and dignity, with compassion and sensitive care of the earth; a vision of participation and mutuality, with a reverential sense of the sacred, of peace, harmony, and solidarity (6 FABC Plenary Assembly, Manila, Philippines, 1995).
8. A movement toward the triple dialogue with other faiths, with the poor and with the cultures, a Church "in dialogue with the great religious traditions of our peoples," in fact, a dialogue with all people, especially the poor.

This is the vision of a renewed Church that FABC has developed over the past thirty years. It is still valid today. Yet we keep searching for the deeper challenges of renewal — its meaning and scope in our life and mission in Asia.

B. The Meaning of Renewal

"Behold I make all things new" (Rev 21:5). In Asia we discover again and again that renewal is the work of God's Spirit. It is the Spirit of the Lord "that has filled the world" (Wis 1:7) and "renews the face of the earth." We need to be attentive and open to the mysterious stirrings of the Spirit in the realities of Asia and of the Church. In the Scriptures, renewal is the shaping of what is qualitatively new, totally new. Renewal refers principally to the

salvation wrought through Jesus Christ in the Holy Spirit. It extends to everything and to all times — until the Spirit has refashioned a new heaven and a new earth (Rev 21:1; Is 65:17).

We are caught up in the dynamism and tension of what is already here and still awaits its full realization. Renewal is both God's gift as well as our own task. God has already accomplished it as the fruit of the mission of Jesus and the Spirit. It is now impacting on our world. Yet, renewal is a gift waiting to be made our own, to be incarnated in the life of the world, in the life of the men and women of Asia, in the life of the Church. The Church is always in need of an intense renewal of her life and mission. We are a holy Church in need of purification. We do acknowledge that we have, in many ways, fallen short of our vocation to the mission of love and service.

As Church in Asia we choose:

- A renewal of which the author is God, who recreates us anew in the Spirit of his Son. For God in Christ has made us a sacrament of a new humanity, a sign and servant of newness. Heeding the words of St. Paul, we embrace the ethical demand of renewal to discard the old self and move forward to witness to new life in Jesus by selfless love;
- A renewal then toward a profound and holistic spirituality and an interiority that mirrors our newness of life in the Spirit of Jesus, our new way of being Church;
- A renewal which is missionary engagement, taking up with renewed vigor and spirit the mission of the Church, in creative interaction with the realities of Asia;
- A renewal that respects tradition but is courageous enough to embrace a future that grows in creative fidelity to that tradition;
- A renewal that enables us to dare tell the story of Jesus and announce his gift of new life to our Asian world of lights and shadows;
- A renewal that must include, given our human condition, not only conversion of minds and hearts but also a conversion of structures in which those marginalized by society are given a wider participatory role;
- A renewal that is the project of two poles, of the clergy and lay men and lay women creatively working together — from above and from below — so that newness is a sign of authentic communion;
- A renewal that celebrates communion-in-diversity, giving witness to the wonder of the Church's catholicity;
- A renewal that does not count merely on numbers and crowded churches, nor on the numerous services we render. What counts inestimably more is our ecclesial identity and the quality of our witness as servants and disciples of Jesus and the Kingdom of God for the peoples of Asia.

For us in Asia, to renew the Church is to be open to the mystery of the Spirit, to welcome the arriving presence of the God of surprises who will capture our hearts in wonder. We need, therefore, to be more than mere workers of renewal. We need to have the creative imagination of poets and artists, of wonderers and dreamers as befit those who are gifted by the Spirit of God. It is in the doing of renewal that the Church experiences the surprises of God. Discerning and knowing God, communing with God through contemplative experience, the Church experiences the mandate of the Gospel as ongoing, as dynamically interacting with the complex realities of Asia.

PART II. ISSUES AND CHALLENGES IN THE MISSION OF LOVE AND SERVICE

A. Globalization

We view the Asian economic scenario with great pastoral concern. A critical awareness on our part of the diverse and complex socio-economic realities of Asia is essential (EA 5). While the process of economic globalization has brought certain positive effects, we are aware that it "has also worked to the detriment of the poor, tending to push poorer countries to the margin of economic and political relations. Many Asian nations are unable to hold their own in a global market economy" (EA 39). The phenomenon of marginalization and exclusion are its direct consequences. It has produced greater inequalities among people. It has enabled only a small portion of the population to improve their standards of living, leaving many to remain in poverty. Another consequence is excessive urbanization, causing the emergence of huge urban conglomerations and the resultant migration, crime and exploitation of the weaker sections.

We are aware that "cultural globalization" through the over-saturation of the mass media is "quickly drawing Asian societies into a global consumer culture that is both secularist and materialistic," undermining or causing the erosion of traditional social, cultural and religious values that have sustained Asia. Such a process is a great threat to Asia's cultures and religions, resulting in "incalculable damage" (EA 7).

Therefore, globalization is an ethical and moral issue which we, as Church, can ill afford to ignore.

B. Fundamentalism

We are painfully aware of the rise of religious fundamentalism, or better, extremism, which continues to bring division to Asian societies and suffering to our people. A renewed Church will encourage Christian men

and women to participate fully in social and cultural activities, at the local as well as the national level, to bridge the gaps between communities and build harmony. In Asia Christians live in multireligious societies; and in all countries of Asia, except the Philippines and East Timor, they are a small minority. The Church should share with other religious leaders the Vatican II vision of a return to roots, and help them to draw nourishment from their own roots in this time of globalization which is causing widespread chaos and confusion among people. We must endeavor to promote the human rights of all people, regardless of caste, color, creed or religion by raising our voices against all such violations.

C. Political Situation

Though Asia is free from external colonization, and most Asian countries have some sort of democratic government, they do not follow the same model of democracy. The results of elections are at times questionable. Frequently, after elections, the governed have very little say in governance. Some would even characterize the situation as a hijacking of democracy. A common feature is that those who are elected pursue their own interests. Most of the governments come to power through the alliance of various parties, often without a clear mandate from the people. Further, there is a tendency towards centralization of power and decision-making. Pervasive corruption is a reality at various levels of government. In certain countries, the whole of life is politicized, affecting every sector, making implementation impossible. Governments are forced to adopt policies and practices such as the Structural Adjustment Policies (SAP) dictated by the IMF, WB and the WTO. These policies are devoid of a human face and social concern. The model of economic development promoted by the transnational corporations in Asia is not acceptable.

D. Ecology

As we look at the development being promoted in Asia and its impact on our environment, we see a steady, ongoing deterioration of our environment as a result of uncontrolled pollution, degrading poverty, deforestation, etc. The effect worsens when some Asian countries become dumping grounds for toxic wastes, production platforms for hazardous industries, and industrialization proceeds without any environmental standards. Even if there are standards, government agencies of environmental control are often slack in enforcing accepted norms of the right to a clean environment.

E. Militarization

The increasing militarization of societies, fostered by governments and the "death merchants," is another challenge. Peace-building, including dis-

armament, becomes imperative, calling for urgent responses to such issues as the banning of land mines, trade in small arms and nuclear proliferation. Given the nature of armed conflicts in many Asian countries, conflict-prevention, as well as conflict resolution, constitute a critical challenge. Asian religions, including Christianity, are called to contribute to the building-up of peace. This is a central area for dialogue with religions and cultures leading to reconciliation.

PART III : THE CHALLENGE OF DISCERNING THE ASIAN WAY

Asia is a cultural mosaic shining with its rich diversity. This is also true of the Catholic Church. The local churches in Asia present a splendid variety in their origin, historical, social-political and cultural situations, ecclesial identity and growth. Obviously, the pastoral challenges facing the Church in Asia are equally diverse. Yet, one common mission unites all: to proclaim "the Good News of Jesus Christ through Christian witness, works of charity and human solidarity. . . The many positive elements found in the local churches. . .strengthen our expectation of a new springtime of Christian life" (EA 9).

In the face of such a challenge, we recognize with hope "a growing awareness throughout Asia of people's capacity to change unjust structures," with an ever-growing awareness and demand for social justice, for more political and economic participation, for equal opportunities, and the determination to safeguard human dignity and rights. Long-dormant minority groups are seeking ways to become agents of their own social advancement. In this we see the Spirit of God at work in people's struggles and efforts "to transform society so that the human yearning for a more abundant life may be satisfied as God wills" (EA 8).

Renewal for a mission of love and service requires fresh understanding and emphases. As we have been listening to each other we have realized that something new is happening. For thirty years, as we have tried to reformulate our Christian identity in Asia, we have addressed different issues, one after another: evangelization, inculturation, dialogue, the Asian-ness of the Church, justice, the option for the poor, etc. Today, after three decades, we no longer speak of such distinct issues. We are addressing present needs that are massive and increasingly complex. These issues are not separate topics to be discussed, but aspects of an integrated approach to our Mission of Love and Service. We need to feel and act "integrally." As we face the needs of the 21st century, we do so with Asian hearts, in solidarity with the poor and the marginalized, in union with all our Christian brothers and sisters and by joining hands with all men and women of Asia of many different faiths. Inculturation, dialogue, justice and the option for the poor are aspects of whatever we do

We are committed to the emergence of the Asianness of the Church in Asia. This means that the Church has to be an embodiment of the Asian vision and values of life, especially interiority, harmony, a holistic and inclusive approach to every area of life. We are also convinced that only by the "inner authority" of authentic lives founded on a deep spirituality will we become credible instruments of transformation. This is important, because our contacts with those of other religious traditions have to be at the level of depth, rather than just the level of ideas or action. We are aware that this Asianness, founded on solid values, is a special gift the world is awaiting. For the whole world is in need of a holistic paradigm for meeting the challenges of life. In this task, together with all Asians, the Church, a tiny minority in this vast continent, has a singular contribution to make, and this contribution is the task of the whole Church in Asia. We believe in:

the innate spiritual insight and moral wisdom in the Asian soul; and it is the core around which a growing sense of "being Asian" is built. This "being Asian" is best discovered and affirmed, not in confrontation and opposition, but in the spirit of complementarity and harmony. In this framework of complementarity and harmony, the Church can communicate the Gospel in a way which is faithful both to her own Tradition and to the Asian Soul (EA 6).

A. Pastoral Concerns

Since the contexts of people's life are so diverse in the Asian continent, it is each ecclesial community, under the leadership of its episcopal conference, which discerns the pastoral priorities for its area. However, in this Plenary Assembly, we identified certain sectors of people to whom we need especially to direct our mission of love and service; and who are, at the same time, equally partners in that mission. These are: the youth, women, the family, indigenous peoples, sea-based and land-based migrants, and refugees.

1. **The Youth.** Asia is generally described as the continent of the youth, since youth constitute the majority of Asia's population. The youth are the reality of today, not only the hope of tomorrow. They are a source of energy and vitality in society and in the Church. At the same time, they are the most vulnerable and are victimized by structures of exploitation in our world. The situation of the youth should be understood against the background of the complex realities in which they live. The swift and drastic changes taking place in our world — globalization, political changes and the media explosion — radically affect the lives of youth in every part of Asia. Youth of all backgrounds, urban and rural, poor and rich, educated and uneducated, employed and unemployed, the organized and unorganized are all being tossed about by the waves of contemporary culture. The problems

faced by youth need to be tackled collectively, along with the youth leaders.

The new millennium awaits us with hope, openness and optimism because of the very resources of our youth, which enable them to deal with the concerns of evangelization, leadership, unemployment, women's empowerment and communal harmony in order to establish the Reign of God based on justice and peace. If the Church journeys with youth, many new horizons of love and service will evolve and the objectives of the youth ministry itself (i.e., fellowship, formation and service) will be realized. The new way of journeying with the youth are to see the youth as resources and not as problems; to facilitate their learning from their experiences and not from ready-made answers; to involve the youth more in the decision-making process, and not only to ask them to implement the decisions taken by others. Only when the youth are recognized as agents and co-workers of the evangelizing mission of the Church will their full potential blossom forth

2. Women. We acknowledge that the cultures of Asia value the family and family relationships. Yet there is a widespread discrimination against the girl-child, destruction of the unborn girl-child, violence against and abuse of women and girls in the family, and a general lack of respect for life. Certain cultural prejudices and traditions have a strong influence on the way society and communities treat women. The Church can address herself to these issues by creating effective structures for awareness-building, advocacy, empowerment, and for dealing with issues of violence to women. We take Jesus to be our exemplar for a new way of mission for and with women. Against the prevailing culture of his times, Jesus courageously accepted and recognized women's equality, dignity and giftedness. His great sensitivity and respect for women are an invitation for a deep conversion for the Church and society.

3. The Family. The family embodies for its members the mystery of Trinitarian love in the heart of our world. It can be called a "sacrament" of God's love and is, in fact, the domestic church. It is the school and sanctuary of love where human beings first experience love and learn the art of loving and praying. Asia has a millennial tradition of great respect for the gift of the family. The family is the bearer of the heritage of humanity; and the future of humanity passes on by way of the family. It is also the cradle of faith-formation, and the school for imparting Gospel values, the first arena for socialization and development of the child. "The family is not simply the object of the Church's pastoral care; it is also one of the Church's most effective agents of evangelization" (EA 46). Renewal in the Church, therefore, should begin with the family.

At this juncture of history, we painfully witness the breakdown of the family in many places in our continent, especially in the urban centers. Many are the forces arrayed against the sanctity and the endurance of the values of family life. Individualism, hedonism, materialism, consumerism, interference from the state, a contraceptive mentality and a technological lifestyle, all adversely affect the stability of marriage and family life, and endanger the stability of our society and its values.

4. Indigenous People. Indigenous peoples form a significant section of Asian society and of the Church in Asia. These communities are ancient and well-knit communities, and have preserved many important human and social values. Today, in many countries of Asia, their right to land is threatened and their fields are laid bare; they themselves are subjected to economic exploitation, excluded from political participation and reduced to the status of second-class citizens. Detribalization, a process of imposed alienation from their social and cultural roots, is even a hidden policy in several places. Their cultures are under pressure by dominant cultures and "Great Traditions." Mighty projects for the exploitation of mineral, forest and water resources, often in areas which have been the home of the tribal population, have generally worked to the disadvantage of the tribals.

In our contemporary society, where there is a steady erosion of traditional Asian values, indigenous Asian communities can play an important role. Close to nature, they retain the values of a cosmic view of life, a casteless sharing, and a democratic society. They have preserved their simplicity and hospitality. Their values and cultures can offer a corrective to the culture of the dominant communities, to the emerging materialistic and consumeristic ethos of our modern societies.

5. Sea-based and Land-based Migrants and Refugees. Among the rapid changes that are taking place within Asian societies we view with great concern the phenomenon of unprecedented migration and refugee movements. It is "a major social phenomenon, exposing millions of people to situations which are difficult economically, culturally and morally. People migrate within Asia and from Asia to other continents for many reasons, among them poverty, war and ethnic conflicts, the denial of their human rights and fundamental freedoms" (EA 7). Other reasons are the establishment of giant industrial complexes with an eye to cost-efficiency and profit, solely for the economic interests of national and transnational corporations. Migrants experience the destructive effects of migration in their personal and family life, of social and cultural values.

The alarming number of migrants, refugees, returnees and internally displaced persons, and the emerging economic, cultural, religious and moral issues are certainly a pastoral challenge for the Church, demanding an ad-

equate and urgent pastoral response. In the light of the teaching of the Church, we affirm that migration and refugee movements, which result in depersonalization, loss of human dignity and the break up of families, are moral issues confronting the conscience of the Church and that of our Asian nations. As for the Church in Asia, these pose urgent pastoral challenges to evolve life-giving, service-oriented programs of action within the pastoral mission of the Church. The Church should join hands with all who are concerned with the rights of the migrants and their situation, keeping in mind that the migrants themselves are to be the primary agents of change.

B. The Thrust of Our Response

When we turn to a consideration of the response of the Church to these and other challenges, a credible and integrated approach emerges as imperative. If we would dare add anything to the words of Saint Paul about the beginnings of faith, we would add, from the perspective of Asia: "faith comes from the 'hearing' and the 'seeing'." We could easily trace the source of many conversions to the living witness of genuine Christians, be they clerical or lay. The Asian search for the Ultimate has been felt and voiced frequently in our meditations and discussions. We will be credible witnesses to our Asian sisters and brothers only if they sense that we have experienced the Ultimate.

Our approach must be integrated. Our Churches are coming to the renewed conviction that the agents of service and ministry cannot be isolated any more in specialized groups. The whole community, every group, every person, with whom we relate in service, is an agent of evangelization. We realize that, precisely because it is the Spirit who ultimately invites, directs and energizes each of us for mission, this mission cannot take place except in mutuality and exchange. Moreover, the issues and needs that we are facing have reached a volume and complexity that go well beyond the skills, capabilities and resources of individuals, communities and churches. Ecumenism and interreligious dialogue have become essential to any ministry we undertake. This shared understanding has equally underlined the participatory and mutual character of our ministry and service. No real service takes place that is not collaborative, that is not actively involving the other person or community, that does not become a real "exchange of gifts" — the true meaning of the charismatic theology of St. Paul. One of the best ways to help and to empower the "other," whoever he or she is, will always be our ability to recognize their gifts and wisdom and the deep and hidden capabilities of humanity they carry within themselves in the midst of their search, suffering, poverty or segregation.

Thus, we recognize with gratitude and admiration the ever-present and generous contribution of women, the young, and consecrated persons. Fur-

thermore, in this continent of Asia where we cherish and reverence elders, we also recognize the elderly as energetic, experienced and mature persons of faith and humanity. We invite them to put their capabilities at the service of the mission of Christ in Church and society

C. A Few Practical Directions

1. The most effective means of evangelization and service in the name of Christ has always been and continues to be the **witness of life**. The embodiment of our faith in sharing and compassion (sacrament) supports the credibility of our obedience to the Word (proclamation). This witnessing has to become the way of the Gospel for persons, institutions and the whole Church community. Asian people will recognize the Gospel that we announce, when they see in our life the transparency of the message of Jesus and the inspiring and healing figure of men and women immersed in God.

2. We consider the **formation** of all evangelizers — laity, priests and religious — as pivotal and crucial in the process of our becoming Asian and in fulfilling our mission in an Asian way. "In the past, formation often followed the style, methods and programs imported from the West ..." (EA 22). What is being done and still needs to be urgently pursued is "to adapt formation to the cultural contexts of Asia" and to the social, economic and religious milieu, where ministry has to be exercised. Formation that will facilitate the emergence of ministers and evangelizers capable of promoting a new way of being Church in Asia should take place in the local Church, contextually and within the wider community. It should be undertaken with active involvement and participation of the different sections of the Church. Worthy of special attention is the question of ongoing formation for all evangelizers: bishops, priests, religious and lay people. In formation programs for the laity there should be lay women and men, along with priests and religious.

Similarly, in the formation of future priests, and religious, and in their ongoing formation, the partnership of competent lay persons needs to be ensured in order that such formation is geared towards the realization of a participative Church. Unless the entire community is creatively involved in the formation process, we can not achieve the goal we have set for ourselves: an Asian image of the Church. (Such an Asian image of the evangelizer is spelt out by Pope John Paul II in *The Church in Asia*.)

Further, people in Asia want to see their pastors, not as administrators of institutions and providers of services "but as persons whose minds and hearts are set on deep things of the Spirit" (Rom 8:5). The Church must respond to the reverence which Asian people have for those in authority by a clear moral uprightness on the part of those with ministerial responsibili-

ties in the Church" (EA 43). The formators should promote "a profound understanding of the elements of spirituality and prayer akin to the Asian soul, and to involve themselves more deeply in the Asian people's search for fuller life."(EA 22). The primacy of the Spirit, which characterizes Asia, needs to find concrete expression in all formation programs. "In Asia, home to great religions, where individuals and entire peoples are thirsting for the divine, the Church is called 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" (EA 23).

3. The Church's evangelizing mission is deeply affected by the impact of the **mass media** and new information technologies. Nevertheless, the media can assist greatly in the proclamation of the Gospel to every corner of the continent, as it is done now by the FABC initiative, Radio Veritas Asia. However, it is not enough to use the media simply to spread the Christian message and the Church's authentic teaching. It is necessary to integrate that message into the "new culture" created by modern communications (EA 48).

4. Serious and faith-inspired involvement of **professionals** in public life is crucial for the building of society. Thus, the professionals become witnesses among their own ranks and counterparts, their clients, customers and beneficiaries. The Church's task of promoting justice, peace and human development, as well as safeguarding human rights, will be more effective when policy-makers, planners and executives are properly informed about the human and moral side of their professional career or service. It is here that Catholic professionals, politicians, business persons, technocrats, executives and others have their special mission. Let the Catholic professionals open the doors of their boardrooms or chambers of commerce to Christ to renew and sanctify the temporal order. The pastors must also allow them to enrich the Church by their expertise, guidance and experience.

On the other hand, specialization in various fields has left most of the Catholic professionals with a knowledge of the faith inadequate to their level of education—many are hardly aware of the social teaching of the Church. Therefore, there is a "need especially for lay men and women with responsibilities in public life, to be well informed in these teachings so that they can inspire and vivify civil life and its structures with the leaven of the Gospel" (EA 32).

5. **Advocacy** has emerged as a powerful method and means to respond to the issues and challenges that have surfaced at this 7th Plenary Assembly. Civil society in Asia is already doing it. Bishops have an important role in advocacy and should take it up as a pastoral priority. Based on the

ethical and moral imperatives that are found in the social teaching of the Church, the process of advocacy should be articulated effectively. Particularly, the emphasis on the common good could form the basis for advocacy as we join hands with men and women of other faiths. The bishops' conferences that constitute the FABC should take up advocacy for the common good, depending upon the prevailing circumstances.

6. **Education** in its different forms — formal, informal, parochial, public and private — has contributed much to human growth and personality formation. In every problem and challenge we face there are dimensions of Christian humanism, of mental and spiritual growth and liberation that a Christian perspective can help develop. Catholic educators, in professional and creative dialogue with members of other religions and other Christian communities, are called to be companions and guides in the ongoing process of becoming persons. This extends to every stage in human growth, and is also a dimension of the pastoral service of the Church, which should be articulated in relevant programs of ongoing formation for its own members and the public at large. Furthermore, educators must remember that an essential element of any holistic educational program is formation in values.

7. Other effective means for our mission of love and service will continue to be **the Basic Ecclesial Communities (BECs), Small Gospel-Based Communities, and Ecclesial Movements**. The vision of a "New Way of Being Church" (AsIPA), promoted by FABC, is proving to be a very good help to the growth and development of the BECs and deserves our attention and support. Ecclesial Movements, duly discerned by the local Church along with its hierarchy, can also offer specific and creative contributions to the being and ministry of the Church.

8. In this varied, demanding and global ministry of love and service the presence and promotion of specific groups who dedicate themselves to the service of God, his Kingdom and the Church, will continue to be an important task of the hierarchy. Here we mention the different groups of consecrated persons, the Asian-born missionary societies, and the many lay persons who offer important years of their life to missionary or other volunteer work.

9. Lastly, **exchange of personnel** and other resources in its different forms, such as *Fidei Donum* priests, "twinning" of dioceses, sponsoring formation-education opportunities, and the like, are forms of support for the overall mission of the Church.

CONCLUSION

As we celebrate the Great Jubilee of the birth of Jesus Christ our Savior, and the Holy Doors of churches are being opened, we look at the image of the door and are gladdened to rediscover our calling to enter into the community of Christ's disciples and to share in his life and mission. It is there beyond the doors that we hear his reassuring and empowering word. During these days of meeting together it was so for us: we have heard his whisper in all that we have shared. It is through the same doors that we now go out into the world of the peoples of Asia and into their struggles and joys, which are also ours.

Here in Samphan, we have shared our lives, hopes and difficulties, and have been strengthened by the Spirit, mutual love and friendship in our gathering. In the Scriptures and the Eucharist we put all our memories together as we open our hearts to Christ and to each other:

Trusting in the Lord who will not fail those whom he has called, the Church in Asia joyfully makes her pilgrim way into the Third Millennium. Her only joy is that which comes from sharing with the multitude of Asia's peoples the immense gift which she herself has received—the love of Jesus the Savior. Her one ambition is to continue his mission of service and love, so that all Asians may have life and have it more abundantly (EA 50).

In this mission, we draw inspiration and strength from Mary, the Mother of the Church, who with haste went to the house of Elizabeth to proclaim the Good News—Jesus Christ the Savior.

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FABC Papers:

- 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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