

BOLETIN ECLESIASTICO de FILIPINAS

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Special Issue (Part 1)

MEDITATION FOR "HORA TERTIA"
Bishop George Phimpisan, CSsR

SOLEMN INAUGURATION OF THE
SPECIAL ASSEMBLY OF THE SYNOD
OF BISHOPS FOR ASIA
John Paul II

RELATIO ANTE DISCEPTATIONEM
Card. Paul Shan Kuo-hsi, SJ

MESSAGE OF THE SYNOD OF BISHOPS'
SPECIAL ASSEMBLY FOR ASIA
Synodal Delegates

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The Official Interdiocesan Bulletin

EDITOR	FR. VICENTE CAJILIG, O.P.
ASSOCIATE EDITOR	FR. HONORATO CASTIGADOR, O.P.
EDITORIAL CONSULTANTS	FR. FAUSTO GOMEZ, O.P. FR. JOSE MA. TINOKO, O.P.
BUSINESS MANAGER	FR. ROBERTO PINTO, O.P.
PUBLICATION ASSISTANTS	ANGELITA R. GUINTO ARNOLD S. MANALASTAS
COVER DESIGN	RODOLFO ATIENZA, O.P.

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BOLETIN ECLESIASTICO DE FILIPINAS
University of Santo Tomas
España, Manila, Philippines
Tel. No. 731-31-01 local 251 J 740-97-10
E-mail: boletin@ustcc.ust.edu.ph

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Synod of Bishops: Reflection in the Assembly Hall

VICENTE CAJILIG, OP

This Special Issue (Part I) starts with a reflection made by an Archbishop of Thailand at the time when the Synod was ending: May 13, 1998. The next issue will include the interventions delivered in the Assembly Hall.

Meditation for "Hora Tertia"

(May 13, 1998)

by: Bishop George Phimpisan, CSsR

In the 4th Chapter of the Letter to the Romans, St. Paul wrote that Abraham "drew strength from *faith* and gave glory to God, fully convinced that whatever God promised, He has the power to perform." We then applied this to our *believe* in God Who raised Jesus. Our Lord from the dead and raised him up for our justification.

We have traveled together with firm *FAITH* in the Lord Jesus during this Special Synod of Bishops for Asia. As we come towards the end, we are convinced more than ever of the uniqueness of Jesus Christ, the Saviour and of His mission of Love and Service

in the vast continent of Asia. It is now our task to carry out His great wish "— *That they may have life and have it abundantly*" (Jn 10:10).

We have listened to one another. We have discussed ways and means of proclaiming Jesus Christ. We can come up with all kinds of methods. But in the final analysis, we have to look at ourselves — to see if our own lives reflect our own convictions and of our deep *FAITH* in Christ.

To the Old Testament, God chose the Israelites that they may be a "*blessing*" to all nations. God called us. We are grateful for our *Faith*. But we must realize that being part of the family of God's chosen people brings with it the mission of "*being a blessing to all nations.*"

How can we be a blessing to others, unless we ourselves are blessed or holy? How can we be holy, unless we are close to God through our daily prayers and meditation. Our prayer life, is the only way to help us remain close to Christ. If we know Christ through our prayer life, our proclamation of Him will then be a genuine one, because it comes from our own deep and personal experience of Christ. This would carry more weight and conviction.

Very often we put so much emphasis on our own activities. We cut short our time with the Lord in prayer and "act like busy bodies" as St. Paul puts it. We act as if everything depends on our works. Let us not forget this axiom "*Work as if everything depends on you. Pray and trust as if everything depends on God.*"

Lord Jesus, make us realize that without you, we can do nothing. As a matter of fact without you *we are nothing!* But with you Lord we can do all things.

May your Holy Spirit make each and everyone of us instruments of your Mission of Love and Service in our beloved continent of Asia. Amen.

Solemn Inauguration of the Special Assembly of the Synod of Bishops for Asia*

JOHN PAUL II

"Write down in a book all that you see, and send it to the seven churches" (Rev 1:11). The words of the Book of Revelation are so current today. In fact, the Churches to which they referred were all located in Asia. And we are gathered here, this morning, to open by a solemn Eucharistic Liturgy the Special Assembly of the Synod of Bishops for Asia.

Bishops from the Asian continent have been convened to Rome for this important event, together with representatives of other ecclesial Communities. The fruit of the Synodal work will then be compiled in a book, which will be the post-Synodal document for all the Churches in Asia. In it will be *"written"* what the Spirit suggests, similarly to what John did, at the end of the first century after Christ, when addressing the Revelation to the Christian Communities then present in Asia.

Enraptured in ecstasy, whilst he was on the island of Patmos, he heard a loud voice (err. Rev 1:10) enjoining him to write down the things he had seen and send them to the Churches of Asia. John related that this was the voice of the Son of Man, who appeared to him in glory. He saw him and fell at his feet as though dead. Christ laid his hand on him and said: *"Do not be afraid; It is I, the First and the Last; I am the Living One, I was dead and look - I am alive for ever and ever, and I hold the keys of death and of Hades. Now write down all that you see of present happenings and what is still to come"* (Rev 1:17-19).

These same words, Venerable Brothers of the Churches of Asia, are, in a certain sense, also addressed to us. During the work of the Synod, we shall have to write about what we witness. As successors of the Apostles, we are called upon to proclaim Christ crucified and risen. In fact, this is the truth by which we advance towards the Third Millennium: *"Jesus Christ is the same today as he was yesterday and as he will be for ever!"* (Heb 13:8).

We are opening this Synodal Assembly on the second Sunday of Easter. The liturgy recalls today what happened at the Cenacle of Jerusalem, on the Sunday after the Resurrection, when Christ appeared again to the Apostles, this time in the presence of Thomas. In fact, an apparition had already taken place eight days before, but Thomas was not there and, when the others told him: *"We have seen the Lord!"*, he refused to believe and said: *"Unless I can see the holes that the nails made in his hands and can put my finger into the holes they made, and unless I can put my hand into his side, I refuse to believe!"* (Jn 20:25).

Thomas the unbeliever! It was because of him that Christ appeared in the Cenacle eight days later, entering although the doors were closed. He said to those who were there: *"Peace be with you!"*, and then he said to Thomas: *"Put your finger here; look, here are my hands. Give me your hand; put it into my side. Do not be unbelieving any more but believe!"* (Jn 20:27).

Thomas then said the words expressing all the faith of the apostolic Church: *"My Lord and my God!"* (Jn 20:28). And Christ said: *"You believe because you can see me. Blessed are those who have not seen and yet believe"* (Jn 20:29).

"Blessed are those who have not seen and yet believe". The Apostles were eyewitnesses of the life, passion, death and resurrection of Christ. After them, others, who were unable to see all of that with their own eyes, have had to accept the truth as handed down by the first witnesses in order to become witnesses themselves. The faith of the Church is handed down and lives thanks to this chain of witnesses which extends from generation to generation. And so, from the Cenacle of Jerusalem, the Church has spread across all the countries and all the continents.

According to a very old tradition, the Gospel was taken to India by St. Thomas, the Apostle to whom the Lord said: *"You believe because you can see me"*. Thomas, who was no longer unbelieving but by now convinced of the resurrection of his Lord, hands down to many other people the certainty expressed in his confession of faith: *"My Lord and my God!"*. His faith is still alive in India and Asia.

Dear Brothers in the Episcopate who have come here, the Church which you represent, built on the foundations of the Apostles, assembled in Rome today, at the threshold of the Third Millennium, for the Synodal work, in view of handing down to future generations the witness which the Apostles bore to Christ, the witness which Thomas bore almost twenty centuries ago.

"Jesus Christ the Saviour and his Mission of Love and Service in Asia: "... that they may have life, and have it abundantly" (Jn 10:10)". This is the theme of the Special Assembly of the Synod of Bishops which we are beginning today with this solemn liturgical celebration. The theme invites us to direct our gaze to Christ, from

whose pierced Heart flows the inexhaustible source of eternal life which vivifies our human existence.

This Synodal Assembly is a providential time of grace for the whole Christian people, and especially for the faithful in Asia, who are called to a fresh missionary outreach. In order that this favourable "*time*" may be truly fruitful, the figure of Jesus and his saving mission need to be presented once more in their full light. On everyone's lips there must resound with renewed awareness the profession of faith of the Apostle Thomas: "My Lord and my God!"

In effect, it is only by keeping her gaze fixed on Christ that the Church can adequately respond to the hopes and challenges of the Asian Continent, as to those of the rest of the world. The launch of the new evangelization for the Third Millennium demands an ever deeper knowledge of Jesus and unfailing fidelity to his Gospel.

At the same time, the new evangelization calls for respectful attention to "*Asian realities*" and healthy discernment in their regard. This vast continent, rich in history and age-old wisdom, is coming to the dawn of the Year 2000 with all the variety of its peoples, its cultures, its traditions and its religions.

Alongside the heritage of ancient civilizations, we see the signs of truly advanced technological and economic progress. There exists a notable difference between peoples, cultures and ways of living. And yet, there has been a long tradition of peaceful co-existence and mutual tolerance. Almost everywhere there are signs of the struggle for human advancement, and while difficulties and causes for concern are not lacking, notable signs of hope can also be seen. The ancient cultures of the continent, with their acknowledged wisdom, offer solid grounds for building the Asia of the future.

How can we ignore the fact that more than ***three** fifths of the world's inhabitants are Asian and that an important **part of them** are young people? To this vast portion of the humanity of **our** time, dwelling on the continent of Asia, we must bring **with** enthusiasm and vigour the Easter proclamation echoed in today's Liturgy: *"We have contemplated, O God, the wonders of your love"* (Responsorial Psalm); *"We have seen the Lord"* (Gospel).

Dear Brothers and Sisters, the first Reading, taken from **the** Acts of the Apostles, speaks of the fervour uniting the early community and of its missionary activity, to the amazement of the people (cf. Acts 5:12-13). May all this be a model for us, who have been called together by the Spirit of the Lord for this special Synodal Assembly.

We ask ourselves: what must we do to proclaim and bear witness to Christ before the men and women living in Asia? At the threshold of the Year 2000, what must be the Church's commitment in this vast continent, ancient and yet abounding in new developments? Essentially, we find the answer in today's Liturgy: we must bear witness to Christ Crucified and Risen, Redeemer of the world. At the same time we must carry on, for our part, the history initiated by the Apostles: ours is the task of writing new chapters of Christian witness in every part of the world, and in Asia: from India to Indonesia, from Japan to Lebanon, from Korea to Kazakhstan, from Vietnam to the Philippines, from Siberia to China. And it is precisely to the Catholics of Mainland China and to their Pastors that the thoughts of all of us go at this moment. In order that also the Episcopate there might be represented in this Synodal Assembly, in addition to the Bishops who work in the Diocese of Hong Kong I have invited to take part two other Bishops, namely Bishop Matthias Duan Yinming, Bishop of Wanhsien, and his Coadjutor, Bishop Joseph Xu Zhixuan. I hope that they will soon be able to take their places among us and bear witness to the vitality of those communities.

At this time all the Churches must feel mobilized, since they all take their origin from that dynamic Jerusalem community which had such a lively sense of its duty to proclaim the Gospel. All originate from the same Apostles, witnesses of Christ's Cross and Resurrection — the same Apostles who, on the day of Pentecost, by the power of the Holy Spirit, received the light and power needed to set out on the paths of the world and to raise up everywhere new communities of believers. We are the successors of these Apostles, and we must be ready to take up missionary heritage.

"Write down in a book all that you see, and send it to the seven churches." We feel these words are addressed to us in a special way. During the Synod we wish to bear witness to what the Spirit of Christ says to the Churches of the great Continent of Asia. We shall ask ourselves how they listen to his voice, how they live in a communion of the word of God and the Eucharist; how they can encourage evangelization among the peoples of Asia.

We want to listen to what the Spirit says to the Churches, so that they may proclaim Christ in the context of Hinduism, Buddhism, Shintoism and all those currents of thought and life which were already rooted in Asia before the preaching of the Gospel arrived. And, we want to reflect together on how the message of Christ has been accepted by people today and how today the history of salvation continues among them and how the words of the Good News re-echo into their souls. We shall ask in prayer and in mutual listening how Christ, *"The stone which the builders rejected"* (Ps 117 [118]: 22), can still be the cornerstone for building the Church in Asia.

All this is in the light of Easter, which floods our heart with the joy and the peace of the risen Lord.

'Haec est dies quam fecit Dominus. Exultemus et laetemur in ea<" (Ps 117 [118]:24).

Amen!

Relatio Secretarii Generalis

CARD. JAN SCHOTTE, CICM

Most Holy Father,
Venerable Brothers in the Episcopate,
Esteemed Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

As General Secretary of the Synod of Bishops, I am pleased to make this report to all present on the preparation of this Special Assembly of the Synod of Bishops for Asia.

Before directly treating the subject of the preparatory process, I would like to recall that this synodal assembly finds its origin in the series of continental and regional synods proposed by the Holy Father in his Apostolic Letter *Tertio millennio adveniente*. In this document, His Holiness, focusing on the global preparation for the Great Jubilee of the Year 2000, explicitly declared his intention to convoke a Special Assembly for the entire Asian continent and set forth the various aims of this synodal assembly.

He wrote: "Another plan for a continent-wide Synod will concern Asia, where the issue of the encounter of Christianity with ancient local cultures and religions is a pressing one. This is a great challenge for evangelization, since religious systems such as Buddhism or Hinduism which present themselves as having a

clearly soteriological character. There is also an urgent need for a synod on the occasion of the Great Jubilee in order to illustrate and explain more fully the truth that Christ is the one Mediator between God and man and the sole Redeemer of the world, to be clearly distinguished from the founders of other great religions. With sincere esteem, the Church regards the elements of truth found in those religions as a reflection of the Truth which enlightens all men and women. "*Ecce natus est nobis Salvator mundi*": in the Year 2000 the proclamation of this truth should resound with renewed power."¹

On 15 January 1995, in his address during the Sixth Plenary Session of the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences (F.A.B.C.) held in Manila on the occasion of the 25th Anniversary of its foundation, the Holy Father made reference to the Special Assembly for Asia as he recounted the past work of evangelization on the Asian continent and offered encouraging words in the important tasks facing the Church in continuing to proclaim Jesus Christ, as Saviour and Mediator between God and man (cf. *1 Tim* 2:5). In his extemporaneous remarks after his address, the Holy Father treated the subject of the Special Assembly in more detail, giving a brief reflection on the theology and benefits of synodal meetings in the first 1000 years of the Church's history and the "great synodal epoch"² inspired by the Second Vatican Council. The Holy Father is so convinced of the advantages for the Church resulting from the "synodal spirit" and "synodal experience" where bishops interact in various ways within and outside the synod hall, that he concluded that it would be a good thing if he was known as "the Synodal Pope"³

¹ John Paul II, Apostolic Letter *Tertio millennio adveniente* (10 November 1994), 38: AAS 87 (1995) 30.

² John Paul II, *Extemporaneous remarks to The Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences - F.A.B.C.* (15 January 1995), Manila, Philippines; *L'Osservatore Romano: Weekly Edition in English*, 25 January 1995, p. 4.

³ *Ibid.*

Following this brief introduction, I intend, for clarity's sake, to develop the process of preparation for the synodal assembly in the following order:

- I - The Background to the Announcement of the Synod**
- II - The Pre-Synodal Council of the General Secretariat**
- III - The Convocation of the Synod**
- IV - The Members of the Synod**
- V - The Synod Process and the Particular Churches**
- VI - Acknowledgments**

I - THE BACKGROUND TO THE ANNOUNCEMENT OF THE SYNOD

In a certain way, it can be said that the idea of a meeting of the bishops of all Asia to consider commonly shared pastoral problems was the fruit of a slow maturation process which began in the Second Vatican Council where collegiality was seen as not only an effective expression of the communion of the entire episcopate with the Successor of St. Peter but also a valuable tool in evangelization. This Ecumenical Council encouraged the bishops of the entire world to establish national and international bodies to consider the pastoral situation resulting from the new challenges posed at that time in contemporary civilization. In this post-conciliar spirit, fifteen (15) episcopal conferences were established, gathering bishops from the various regions and nations of the Asian continent. In some cases episcopal structures were formed to allow a greater cooperation between the Latin and Oriental Churches, for example, those in Lebanon, India and Iran, just to mention a few. The Federation of Asian Bishop's Conferences (F.A.B.C), whose

statutes were approved 6 December 1972, also came into being during this period as a regional tool of collegiality for South and South East Asia.

These beneficial experiences of ecclesial communion inspired the Holy Father to convoke this present meeting of the bishops of all Asia which takes the form of a Special Assembly of the Synod of Bishops. Holy Father, all of us are deeply grateful for this opportunity to meet in communion and pastoral fellowship; at this time, we desire to renew once again our devotion to the Vicar of Christ and the Successor of St. Peter.

H - PRE-SYNODAL COUNCIL OF THE GENERAL SECRETARIAT OF THE SYNOD OF BISHOPS

According to accepted procedure in the preparation of a synodal assembly, the Holy Father appointed the Pre-Synodal Council of the General Secretariat, whose membership was made public on 10 September 1995. At that time, the members of this Council were: His Eminent Beatitude, Cardinal Nasrallah Pierre SFEIR, Patriarch of Antioch of the Maronites, President of the Assembly of Patriarchs and Catholic Bishops of Lebanon (A.P.E.C.L.); His Eminence, Cardinal Michael Michai KTTBUNCHU, Archbishop of Bangkok (Thailand), President of the Bishops' Conference of Thailand; His eminence, Cardinal Julius Riyadi DARMAATMADJA, S.J., Archbishop of Jakarta (Indonesia) and President of the Episcopal Conference of Indonesia; His Eminence, Card. Jozef TOMKO, Prefect of the Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples; His Beatitude, Most Rev. Michel S ABB AH, Patriarch of Jerusalem of the Latins, President of the Assembly of Catholic Ordinaries of the Holy Land; His Excellency, Most Rev. Oscar V. CRUZ, Archbishop of Lingayen-Dagupan (Philippines), Secretary General of the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences (F.A.B.C.), *durante munere*; His Excellency, Most Rev. Peter

CHUNG HOAN TING, Archbishop of Kuching, Sarawak (Malaysia); His Excellency, Most Rev. Joseph POWATHIL, Archbishop of Changanacherry of the Syro-Malabars (India), President of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of India (C.B.C.I.); His Excellency, Most Rev. Francis Xavier Kaname SHIMAMOTO, Archbishop of Nagasaki (Japan); His Excellency, Most Rev. Carmelo F. MORELOS, Archbishop of Zamboanga (Philippines), President of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of the Philippines (C.B.C.P.), *durante munere*; His Excellency, Most Rev. Thomas MENAMPARAMPIL, S.D.B., Archbishop of Guwahati (India); His Excellency, Most Rev. Paul NGUYEN VAN HOA, Bishop of Nha Trang, (Vietnam); His Excellency, Most Rev. Paul SHAN KUO-HSI, S.J., Bishop of Kaohsiung (Taiwan), President of the Chinese Regional Bishops' Conference; His Excellency, Most Rev. Anthony Theodore LOBO, Bishop of Islamabad-Rawalpindi (Pakistan); His Excellency, Most Rev. Joseph Vianney FERNANDO, Bishop of Kandy (Sri Lanka), President of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of Sri Lanka, *durante munere*; His Excellency, Most Rev. John CHANG-YIK, Bishop of Chun Cheon (Korea).

Some members were appointed in their capacity as presidents of episcopal conferences, that is to say, *durante munere*. Therefore, such bishops exercised membership on the Council for the duration of their term of office and were later replaced by their elected successors.

The original Pre-Synodal Council held its First Meeting, 24-26 October 1995, during which the Council formulated a topic-later submitted to the Holy Father's approval-and provided observations in the preparation of the outline and text of the *Lineamenta*.

The Second Meeting of the Pre-Synodal Council, 27-29 February 1996, studied and examined the draft text of the *Lineamenta*, which incorporated the diverse proposals and suggestions set forth in the preceding meeting. At this meeting one less member resulted

because of the election of a new President of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of the Philippines. His Excellency, Most Rev. Oscar V. CRUZ, Archbishop of Lingayen-Dagupan, the newly elected President, took the place of His Excellency, Most Rev. Carmelo F. MORELOS, Archbishop of Zamboanga, thus being a member of the Council under two titles *ex officio*, i.e., President of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of the Philippines and Secretary General of the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conference - F.A.B.C.

The *Lineamenta*, appearing in the two official languages of this Special Assembly (English and French), were made public in the Holy See Press Office, 3 September 1996. Subsequently, various episcopal conferences and other ecclesial bodies promoted a widespread distribution of the document in their respective areas through re-publishing the text as well as through utilizing the electronic media (*Internet*). The *Lineamenta* was a result of the collaborative efforts of the members of the Pre-Synodal Council, experts from various parts of the Asian continent and the staff of the General Secretariat of the Synod of Bishops.

The document itself, after a brief introduction, is divided into six chapters corresponding to the various aspects of the general synod topic: Asian Realities, the context of evangelization (first chapter); Evangelization in Asia: a brief history (second chapter); God's Salvific Design in history, the work of the Holy Spirit (third chapter); Jesus Christ, God's Good News of Salvation to All (fourth chapter); the Church as Communion, continuing the mission of Christ (fifth chapter); the Church's mission of love and service in Asia (sixth chapter).

The Third Meeting of the Pre-Synodal Council, 25-27 February 1997 had a dual purpose: to examine initial reactions to the *Lineamenta* and to draft the criteria for participation for the synodal assembly.

In the course of the meeting, the Council members shared the positive reactions to the *Lineamenta* which took place in the various Church circles at both the local and international levels, and devoted themselves to drafting a series of suggestions for submission to the Holy Father on the criteria for participation for the Special Assembly. In this regard, the request was made to grant *ex officio* status to the following: 1) the active Asian Cardinals, 2) the Patriarchs of the Oriental Churches and Archbishops of the Syro-Malabar and Syro-Malankar Churches 3) the Presidents of the Episcopal Conferences, 4) the Secretary General of F.A.B.C. and the President of Catholic Bishops' Conference of India - Inter-ritual, 5) the Heads of the Departments of the Roman Curia; and 6) Heads of ecclesiastical territories with no episcopal conference.

Furthermore, a plan was devised for the election of members, determined by a ratio to the total number of members of each episcopal conference. These elections were then to receive the necessary ratification by the Holy Father. The Council Members attentively studied the proportionate formula with two aims in mind: on the one hand, to ensure that a substantial number of bishops from all Asia would participate at the synodal assembly and, on the other, to guarantee that all episcopal conferences, especially those having a very small membership, would have a suitable number of synodal members. At the same time, to ensure the presence of a representative number of members from the various Oriental Churches in Asia, elections were also to be held using the same ratio as for Episcopal Conferences, limiting eligibility, however, to those who actually work within the continent of Asia.

At the Fourth Meeting, 30 September - 2 October 1997, the membership of the Council received a new member as a result of elections by the Bishops' Conference of Thailand. His Excellency, George Yod PHIMPHISAN, C.Ss.R., Bishop of Udon Thani, the new President, replaced His Eminence, Michael Michai KTTBUNCHU, Archbishop of Bangkok.

The principal goal of this meeting was to examine the responses to the questions in the *Liieamenta* with the intention of drafting the *Instrumentum laboris*. The Council's work was done in collaboration with experts who came from various parts of the Asian continent.

The Fifth and Final Meeting of the Pre-Synodal Council, 7-9 February 1998, focused attention on immediate preparations for the Special Assembly by studying the *Vademecum* and suggesting certain points for consideration in the formulation of the *Relatio ante disceptationem*, the presentation on the synodal topic made during the synodal assembly. The work of the meeting was facilitated by the fact that a majority of those who were to be appointed by the Holy Father to exercise special roles during the synodal assembly were also Council members. Shortly after the meeting the following appointments were officially made on 26 February 1998:

Presidents-Delegate

His Eminence, Cardinal Stephen KIM SOU-HWAN, Archbishop of Seoul (Korea)

His Eminence, Cardinal Jozef TOMKO, Prefect of the Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples

His Eminence, Cardinal Julius Riyadi DARMAATMADJA, S.J., Archbishop of Jakarta (Indonesia)

General Rapporteur

His Eminence, Cardinal Paul SHAN KUO-HSI, S.J., Bishop of Kaohsiung (Taiwan, R.O.C.)

Special Secretary

His Excellency, Most Rev. Thomas MENAMPARAMPIL, S.D.B., Archbishop of Guwahati (India)

Commission for the Message

President: His Excellency, Most Rev. Oscar V. CRUZ, Archbishop of Lingayen-Dagupan (Philippines) and Secretary General of the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences - F.A.B.C.

Vice-President: His Excellency, Most Rev. Anthony Theodore LOBO, Bishop of Islamabad-Rawalpindi (Pakistan)

Commission for Information

President: His Excellency, Most Rev. Joseph Vianney FERNANDO Bishop of Kandy (Sri Lanka)

Vice-President: His Excellency, Most Rev. Cyrille Salim BUSTROS, M.S.S.P., Archbishop of Baalbek of the Greek Melkites (Lebanon)

HI – THE CONVOCATION OF THE SYNOD

After the Holy Father announced his intention to convoke the Special Assembly of the Synod of Bishops for Asia, various stages of preparation followed, principally resulting in the two previously mentioned documents, i.e., the *Lineamenta* and the *Instrumentum laboris*.

The next stage was the establishment of the actual dates for the assembly through the Holy Father's official act of convoking the Special Assembly, so that the synod of bishops could effectively take place.⁴ In a private audience on 25 October 1997, granted to the General Secretary, the Holy Father approved the actual dates of the Assembly: 19 April - 14 May. On 24 January 1998 the

* Cf. The Code of Canon Law (C.I.C.), can. 344, § 1; *Ordo Synodi Episcoporum Celebrandae recognitus et auctus*, art. 17, § 1.

dates were communicated by fax to the Presidents of the Episcopal Conferences and various Episcopal Bodies in Asia. Subsequently, these same dates were published in *L'Osservatore Romano*, 26 February 1998 with the names of those appointed by the Holy Father to exercise major roles at the synod.

IV - MEMBERS OF THE SPECIAL ASSEMBLY

At the end of April, 1997, the Holy Father approved the criteria for participation for the Special Assembly, which were immediately sent by the General Secretariat to those concerned on 15 May. These norms included the following categories of participants:

Members *ex officio*:

- active Asian cardinals;
- heads of the Oriental Churches in Asia: 5 patriarchs, the Apostolic Administrator of the Syro-Malabar Church and the Archbishop of the Syro-Malankar Church;
- Patriarch of Jerusalem of the Latins
- presidents of the national episcopal conferences;
- Secretary General of F.A.B.C. and the President of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of India - interritual
- heads of Ecclesiastical Territories without an Episcopal Conference
- General Secretary of the Synod of Bishops;
- heads of the departments of the Roman Curia.

In this category particular attention was given to ensure the participation of those exercising jurisdiction in ecclesiastical ter-

ritories which do not as yet have the benefit of the fraternal communion of an episcopal conference. These are: Diocese of Macao, Diocese of Dili (East Timor), Diocese of Baucau (East Timor), Apostolic Administration of Kazakhstan, Apostolic Administration of Siberia (Russia), Mission *sui iuris* of Nepal, Mission *sui iuris* of Urga (Mongolia), Mission *sui iuris* of Kyrgyzstan, Mission *sui iuris* of Tadjikistan, Mission *sui iuris* of Turkmenistan and Mission *sui iuris* of Uzbekistan.

Members *ex electione*:

- episcopal conferences:

- for episcopal conferences having less than 50 members, one for every 5 members or fraction thereof,
- for episcopal conferences having more than 50 members, one for every 7 members or fraction thereof,
- for episcopal conferences having more than 100 members, one for every 10 members or fraction thereof,

The afore-mentioned formula was also to be applied to the election of synod members from the Oriental Churches in Asia.

- Union of Superiors General:

- ten members, all to be priests belonging to clerical congregations of pontifical right.

Furthermore, since *Ordo Synodi* (art. 5,§4) establishes that up to 15% of the total number of Synod Fathers can be members *ex nominatione pontificia*, the Holy Father appointed for this Special Assembly 23 members.

Also figured in the count of participants are 40 auditors (*auditores*) appointed by the Holy Father, who come from all areas of Church life and share with the bishops their concern for the

good of the New People of God in Asia. They bring to the discussion in the small groups their experiences of Church life, as well as the graces received from the Lord for the upbuilding of the Church. Participants in this category include: five (5) diocesan priests, five (5) priest religious, two (2) brothers, eight (8) sisters, twelve (12) laymen, eight (8) lay women.

At the same time, the Holy Father appointed eighteen (18) experts to assist the Rapporteur and Special Secretary in their responsibilities.

"Fraternal Delegates" were also invited to represent the following Churches and ecclesial communities: 1) the Armenian Orthodox Church - Catholicosate of Antelias 2) the Malankar Orthodox Syrian Church in India 3) Anglican Church of Sri Lanka 4) Christian Conference of Asia 5) Central Sulawesi Christian Church in Indonesia and 6) Middle East Council of Churches.

The categories mentioned above can be numerically broken down in the following manner:

1 - Members *ex officio*⁵

1. Active Asian Cardinals	11
2. Patriarchs (Oriental Churches 5, Latin Church 1) . . .	6
3. Oriental Archbishops <i>sui iuris</i>	2
4. Presidents of Episcopal Conferences.	15
5. Heads of Cooperative Episcopal Bodies in Asia	2

⁵ The sums include members who participate under two titles, i.e., the number of cardinals includes, 1 Patriarch and 2 Presidents of Episcopal Conferences; the number of Patriarchs includes one President of an Episcopal Conference, etc.

6. Heads of Ecclesiastical Territories with no Episcopal Conference.	11
7. General Secretary of the Synod of Bishops	1
8. Heads of the Departments of the Roman Curia	25
II - Members <i>ex electione</i>	
1. Episcopal Conferences.	65
2. Oriental Churches.	23
3. Union of Superiors General.	10
III -Members <i>ex nominatione pontificia</i>	
1. Archbishops and Bishops.	18
2. Diocesan Priests.	1
3. Priests - Religious.	4
IV -Experts	18
V - Auditores	40
VI -Fraternal Delegates	6

Elected Members

Members of the episcopal **conferences and the Oriental Churches**, listed alphabetically, **are numerically distributed** as follows:

Episcopal Conferences

1. Arab Regional (C.E.L.R.A.).	2
2. Bangladesh.	2
3. Chinese Regional.	1
4. India - Latin Rite.	12
5. Indonesia	7
6. Japan.	4
7. Korea	4
8. Laos and Cambodia	2
9. Malaysia-Singapore-Brunei.	3
10. Myanmar.	3
11. Pakistan.	1
12. Philippines.	13
13. Sri Lanka	2
14. Thailand.	2
15. Vietnam.	7

Oriental Churches

1. Antioch of the Syrians.	2
2. Antioch of the Greek-Melkites.	4
3. Antioch of the Maronites.	4
4. Babylon of the Chaldeans.	4

5. Cilicia of the Armenians.	3
6. Ernakulam-Amgamaly of the Syro-Malabars.	5
7. Trivandrum of the Syro-Malankars.	1

According to the above-mentioned numbers, the total number of participants in the Special Assembly for Asia is 252, which can be numerically broken down in still another manner:

Members

Members <i>ex officio</i>	67
Members <i>ex electione</i>	98
Members <i>ex nominatione pontificia</i>	23
Sub-total.	188

Auditores and Experts

<i>Auditores</i>	40
Experts.	18
Sub-total.	58

Fraternal Delegates6
TOTAL	 252

V – THE SYNOD PROCESS AND THE PARTICULAR CHURCHES

According to synodal methodology, the good outcome of a synodal assembly depends in a great part on the active participation of the entire Church community at its various levels. It is for this reason that the General Secretariat, following the desire of the Holy Father, has continuously updated information on the progress of preparation for the synod, publishing Press Releases after each meeting of the Pre-Synodal Council as well as making public the *Lineamenta* (3 September 1997) and the *Instrumentwn laboris* (13 February 1998) through the Holy See Press Office. Subsequently, the English text appeared in *L'Osservatore Romano: Weekly Edition in English*, 25 February 1998 and *L'Osservatore Romano: Weekly Edition in French*, 24 February 1998.

So as to ensure maximum diffusion of information, the synod documents have been made available at the Vatican web site on the *Internet*, and permission has been given to episcopal conferences to authorize the republishing of these documents with the one condition that two copies of the new edition be sent to the General Secretariat. As a result, various conferences have published the above-mentioned documents and also circulated them through various web sites on the *Internet*.

In various episcopal conferences and especially in dioceses, special activities have been organized (study seminars, conferences, workshops, etc.), with an aim of generating responses to the questions of the *Lineamenta*, so that the drafting of the *Instrumentum laboris* might faithfully reflect local ecclesial experiences. Where the participation of persons and groups varied in episcopal conferences and other episcopal structures in the preparation of responses, it is possible to say with certainty that the entire Church in Asia has been "in synod", i.e., praying in communion, reflecting and meditating in light of the Word of God on the priorities of

the new evangelization at the approach of the Third Millennium. From the point of view of content, the responses indicate that they were carefully drafted, and, therefore, served as a rich contribution in the process of understanding the real situation of the Church in the Asian continent.

At the same time, bearing in mind that a special assembly-although primarily pertaining to Church concerns in a determined region-is an event with implications for the whole Church, the General Secretariat sent both the *Lineamenta* and *Instrumentum laboris* to all Episcopal Conferences outside of the Asian continent. In this way, the entire Church is adequately informed in the matter and able to unite herself in prayer for the successful outcome of the Special Assembly of the Synod of Bishops for Asia.

One of the most interesting aspects in this preparation process which concludes today to give way to the effective realization of the Special Assembly, is manifested in the *Instrumentum laboris*, that is, this document represents a truly realistic summary of the situation on the Asian continent. Emerging from the general treatment offered in this working document is a series of elements which confirm the providential intuition of the Holy Father in convoking this synod.

VI - ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I wish to express my special gratitude to all the bishops who as members of the Pre-Synodal Council have collaborated with the General Secretariat in the various phases of preparation for this Special Assembly and who have generously offered their time, working with great competence in their service to the Church. I pray that the Lord might accept their efforts as an agreeable sacrifice for the successful outcome of this assembly.

I also extend my special thanks to the staff members of the General Secretariat, the assistants (priests, deacon and seminarians), those cooperating in the dissemination of information, the simultaneous translators, and all service personnel whose work ensures the needed technical support for this Special Assembly. I thank everyone for the generosity and willingness with which they perform the work entrusted to them.

CONCLUSION

To conclude this presentation, I wish to highlight once again the topic of the Synod: **Jesus Christ the Saviour and His Mission of Love and Service in Asia: "...that they may have life and have it abundantly" (Jn 10:10).** Many men and women in this continent are yearning for peace and harmony within themselves, among their relationships with others and with the world of creation. Our faith tells us that the elements which underlie a basic human search for meaning are only to be found in personally experiencing the risen Jesus Christ through the Church and her members. Our task as Synod Fathers is to do all in our power to lead others to the fulfillment of this longing which is in the depths of the human heart, so that walking together in this synod the Church might announce with increasing conviction her Lord as the One and Only Saviour through concrete acts of Love and Service in Asia so that each person and whole groups of people "might have life and have it abundantly" {Jn 10:10).

In his address to the members of the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences, 15 January 1995, in Manila, the Holy Father used the following words to describe the challenge which awaits us in this synodal assembly. He said: "In these years of preparation for the Great Jubilee of the Year 2000, your particular Churches are fully committed to giving *fresh impulse to the evangelization of Asia*. Just as in the first millennium the Cross was planted on

the soil of Europe, and in the second on that of the Americas and Africa, we can pray that in the third Christian millennium *a great harvest of faith* will be reaped in this vast and vital continent. If the Church in Asia is to fulfill its providential destiny, evangelization as the joyful, patient and progressive preaching of the saving Death and Resurrection of Jesus Christ must be your absolute priority."⁶ Therefore, with the spiritual enthusiasm generated by the celebration of the Lord's Paschal Mystery still ours and with the Easter hymn of "Alleluia" still echoing in our midst during this joyful season, we consider this great challenge for the Third Millennium set before us by the Holy Father.

Following the spiritual journey marked by the Vicars of Christ in this century, we invoke in this task the maternal protection of the Holy Virgin Mary, placing at her feet the work of the synod which, with God's help, will bear abundant fruit for Asia and the whole Church. Trusting in her efficacious intercession, we are now ready to commence this Special Assembly in the hope of being able to open new paths in the evangelizing mission of the Church in Asia.

In conclusion, we extend our gratitude to Your Holiness for convoking us here and on this occasion, as members of the episcopal college, we acknowledge the great affection we bear you as Peter in our midst.

* John Paul II, *Address to the Members of the Federation of Asian Episcopal Conferences* (15 January 1995), Manila, Philippines, 11: *L'Osservatore Romano: Weekly Edition in English*, 25 January 1995, pp. 5-6.

Relatio Ante Disceptionem

CARD. PAUL SHAN KUO-HSI, SJ

INTRODUCTION

With hearts filled with joy we are gathered together by the Holy Spirit in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ to thank God our Father for the gift of faith in His Son, our Saviour, the Giver of Life in all its fullness and the Way, the Truth and the Life (cf. *Jn* 14:16).

We are gathered together as the Second Millennium is setting on the horizon and the Third is dawning upon us. This is a great moment of grace for the particular Churches in Asia, some of which were founded by the Apostles themselves like those in Western Asia and others in South India whose traditions date back to the Apostle Thomas. Others particular Churches are the result of the heroic sacrifices of thousands of missionaries, men and women across Asia in the First Millennium, some to the point of giving their lives. Still other particular Churches came about through the efforts of later missionaries from the 13th-20th centuries.

The Church is always gathered together in the name of the Lord Jesus through the power of the Holy Spirit. In this synodal gathering we as Christians keep our eyes fixed on Jesus Christ

whose image and likeness we want to assimilate, whose mission of love and service we want to carry on with renewed enthusiasm and total self-dedication. We ardently desire to listen, reflect upon and carry out what the Spirit is saying to the particular Churches in Asia (cf. *Rev* 2:29) and to each of their members.

At this moment in time our eyes are turned to the future with hope and confidence in the Lord who has entrusted his mission to us, despite our weak and fragile nature. We also look backward to the two millennia of evangelization in Asia, grateful for what has been accomplished and penitent for the human failures and weaknesses in that period as we take up the theological, spiritual and missionary tools to embark upon a new evangelization in the Third Millennium so as to build up the Church of Christ in Asia.

Our eyes are also turned to the universal Church and its Tradition, especially to the successor of Peter, the centre of unity within the Church, who gave the initial inspiration to convoke this Synod for Asia.¹ He further elaborated on the subject in his address to the Bishops of Asia.² Our attention is equally drawn to the world, the world of Asia, its peoples and their ancient religions, cultures and heritage. We are comforted and encouraged by the fact that the eyes of the Church are turned towards Asia at this Synod.³ We are convinced that the Risen Lord Jesus Christ is also looking upon the people of Asia as his very own brothers and sisters with love and compassion and with an offer of salvation and liberation from sin and all other oppressive factors arising from the sinful condition of humanity.

¹ Cf. John Paul II, Apostolic Letter *Tertio millennio adveniente* (10 November 1994), 38: AAS 87 (1995) 30.

² Cf. John Paul II, *Address to the Plenary Assembly of the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences*, 15 January 1995, Manila, Philippines: *L'Osservatore Romano: Weekly Edition in English*, 25 January 1995, p. 5.

³ Cf. John Paul II, Apostolic Letter *Tertio millennio adveniente* (10 November 1994), 38: AAS 87 (1995) 30.

This is indeed a moment of singular grace for the Church to act upon the Second Vatican Council's ecclesiology of communion, first in the particular Churches of Asia by the bishops, clergy, consecrated persons and laity; secondly in her relations with various Christian Churches and Church communities; and thirdly with all people of good will in Asia among whom the Church is called to be a sign and instrument of unity.⁴

By its very nature, the synod of bishops is a particularly full expression and powerful tool of communion of the college of bishops of the universal Church. This is its primary purpose. But in an extended sense, this gathering in the Spirit can lead to greater communion in other areas. In the first place the Synod can strengthen the ecclesial communion among the bishops of Asia, its various regional Episcopal Conferences (Synods of the Oriental Churches and the Federation of the Asian Bishops' Conferences) which bring together the bishops of West, Central, South, South East and East Asia. Secondly, this ecclesial communion of the Church's bishops can highlight for the other members of the Church that each has a role in the missionary and pastoral task of the Church in Asia. A renewed and strengthened ecclesial communion will enable the Church in Asia to work together in a single missionary and pastoral effort to show the Lord's love through service to all peoples of Asia.

We also consider the occasion of this Synod a special moment of grace for the peoples of Asia, since the Church, despite the inevitable shortcomings of her members, seeks to continue, out of love for her Saviour, her apostolate of service to all the people of Asia, especially at this time when the continent is undergoing rapid changes in the wake of the last hundred years of its history of independence movements and its attempts to garner its vast

* Cf. Second Vatican Ecumenical Council Dogmatic Constitution on the Church *Lumen gentium* 1.

cultural and religious values so as to build a better future for its peoples.⁵

THE THEME OF THE SYNOD

The topic of the Synod is **Jesus Christ the Saviour and His Mission of Love and Service in Asia: "... that they may have life, and have it abundantly" (Jn 10:10)**. This topic, selected by the Holy Father Pope John Paul II, obviously focuses on Jesus Christ as the core of the Church's life in Asia, her missionary and pastoral concerns and her service to Asia's peoples so as to offer them the fullness of life promised to all who follow Christ as Lord and Saviour.

The Church owes her existence to the passion, saving death and resurrection of Jesus Christ and the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. For this reason Jesus Christ, the Saviour of the world, determines our mission in the world of bringing his salvific gift of eternal life to all peoples, including those of Asia.⁶

In Jesus Christ-the Church firmly believes-all peoples of Asia can live as brothers and sisters. In him all can find an answer to every human predicament, especially of evil, sin, injustice, oppression, suffering, death and the fear of total desolation.⁷

The mission of Jesus Christ is to give the fullness of life to all peoples. Wherever life is diminished, threatened or destroyed in whatever form, Jesus comes with his message of pardon, which brings the hope of fullness of life. This is particularly true of the

³ Cf. Special Assembly of the Synod of Bishops for Asia, *Instrumentum laboris*, n. 2.

⁶ Cf. *Ibid.*, n. 3.

⁷ Cf. Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Pastoral Constitution on the Church the Modern World *Gaudium et spes*, 18.

Asian situation where there has always been a hunger for God, a hunger for the fullness of life, a hunger for communion with the Absolute, a hunger for the divine, a hunger for freedom from the transient, the impermanent or the merely apparent. The prayer rising from the depths of the heart of Asia has always been: Lead me Lord, from darkness to Light, from the unreal to the Real, from falsehood to Truth, from death to Immortality.

Such a yearning is in perfect consonance with the Church's faith in Jesus Christ as the giver of fullness of life: "For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life" (*Jn* 3:16).

The mission of Jesus is one of love and service to life in all its fullness. He accomplishes it with his own self-giving for the life of the world (cf. *Jn* 10:14-17). Likewise the mission of the Church is to be at the service of life in the way Jesus understood it and carried it out.

The Church's mission of love and service to life will take varied forms. They imply a genuine regard and respect for all the peoples of Asia, their religions and cultures. This love is put into action in concrete forms of service in alleviating suffering and inhuman poverty, and in removing illiteracy and many other social evils which keep the poor in Asia in continued slavery.

THE SYNOD A PILGRIMAGE FOR THE CHURCH

As the Church in Asia approaches the Third Millennium, the Synod must serve as a fresh start in a journey leading to internal renewal through an ever greater emphasis on self-evangelization and a renewed commitment to proclaim the saving message of Jesus

Christ in word and deed to all the peoples of Asia through a programme of a new evangelization.⁸

According to the etymological basis of the word "synod", the Church in Asia desires to use the occasion of the synod of bishops to "walk together" towards the Third Millennium with her faith firmly rooted in Jesus Christ, in communion with all the particular and local Churches of Asia and with the universal Church, in solidarity with other Christian Churches and ecclesial communities of Asia and finally in harmony with the followers of the great religions and cultural traditions of Asia.

In such a synodal pilgrimage, the Church is convinced that it is not traversing a totally unknown territory, since the Spirit of the Lord has left the rays of saving truth and grace among the peoples of Asia.⁹ Along the synodal way, the Church wants to recognise the presence of the Spirit who reveals Jesus Christ in Asian realities.¹⁰ She wants to recognise the presence of the Spirit through humbly sharing in the life-experiences of the Asian peoples and through acts of service to all. The Church in Asia seeks to do this, not as a stranger in a foreign cultural, organisational and liturgical garb but by means of Asian cultures, making her own "the joys and hopes, the griefs and anxieties of the people"¹¹ of Asia.

⁸ Cf. Special Assembly of the Synod of Bishops for Asia, *Instrumentum laboris*, n. 5.

⁹ Cf. Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Decree on the Church's Missionary Activity *Ad gentes*, 3, 11, 15.

¹⁰ Cf. John Paul II, *Address to Representatives of Non-Christian Religions*, 5 February 1986, Madras, India: AAS 78 (1986) 767; *Address to Representatives of Other Religions*, 24 February 1981, Tokyo, Japan, 3-4: *Insegnamenti* IV/1 (1981), 507f.

¹¹ Second Vatican Ecumenical Council Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World *Gaudium et spes*, n. 1.

I. THE CHURCH'S MISSION IN THE CONTEXT OF ASIAN REALITIES

The vast continent of Asia stretches from West Asia and the Gulf countries through South Asia, Central and Southeast Asia, to the North and Northeast parts made up Siberia, Mongolia, Korea and Japan. The Asian continent is home for many races and populations which form nearly two-thirds of the world population.

The geographic, ethnic and demographic diversities are indeed very striking. Similarly, the social organisations, political systems, economic patterns and standards of life vary in Asia from country to country and, at times, within the same country.

What is most distinctive in the Asian context is the fact that Asia is home to nearly all the great religions of the world such as Hinduism, Buddhism, Judaism, Christianity and Islam. It is also the birthplace of other social and religious traditions such as Taoism, Confucianism, Zoroastrian, Jainism, Sikhism, Shamanism, etc. They present themselves as soteriological in character¹², offering interpretations of the Absolute, the universe, the human person and his existential situation, evil, sin, impermanence and the means of liberation and salvation.

Therefore, it is very important for the Church in Asia to be aware of this socio-religious context in which she has to carry out her mission. The Asian cultural and religious context presents the Church in Asia with a unique challenge, task and opportunity unlike those she has encountered in the past. Without historical precedents to guide her, she has to enter into a profound dialogue with Asian cultures and other religions, becoming truly inculturated in theology, liturgy and spirituality in order to live and announce the message of Jesus Christ in Asia. Such dialogue and inculturation call for

¹² Cf. John Paul II, Apostolic Letter *Tertio millennio adveniente* (10 November 1994) 38: AAS 87 (1995) 30.

faithfulness to our own Christian faith, respect for the religious beliefs of others, sincerity, discernment, courage, prudence and patience on the part of all concerned.¹³

SOCIO-ECONOMIC CONTEXT

The future mission of the Church in Asia must be shaped also by its socio-economic context. While some countries have made rapid economic progress in the last fifty years or so, degrading poverty, inequality and social injustice are glaring and saddening phenomena in many other countries of Asia. Such a situation is the result of centuries-old social evils such as the caste and feudal systems, internal and external colonisation, vested national and international interests which resist social change, land ownership systems, state socialism, concentration of wealth and means of production in the hands of a few, corruption, political instability, etc.¹⁴

Rapid changes are taking place within Asian societies and countries due to several causes such as the phenomenon of urbanisation, the emergence of several "megapoloi" with all their social and moral problems, internal and external migration, construction of mega-industries, nuclear plants, globalisation of the economy without sufficient regard for global ethics and global solidarity, the heavy burden of foreign debt which recently caused the great economic crisis in South Asia, the rights of the evicted, displaced persons, expansion of slum areas, leading to organised crime, terrorism, prostitution, child abuse, pedophilia, exploitation of weaker sections of society, etc.

Asia has to deal with the problems of economic migrants, political refugees, asylum seekers, forced demographic changes,

¹³ Cf. Special Assembly of the Synod of Bishops for Asia, *Instrumentum laboris*, n. 6-7.

¹⁴ Cf. *ibid.*, n. 8-9.

religious fundamentalism, child-labour, bonded-labour, oppression of ethnic and cultural minorities, indigenous or tribal peoples all across Asia, sometimes by governments, at other times by dominant cultural, religious or ideological majorities. Within such socio-economic context the Church has to manifest her preferential love for the poor, the marginalised, the oppressed. Furthermore, she has to become not only a Church for the poor, but also a Church with the poor.

ASIA: AN EMERGING CONTINENT

The rapidly changing social, political and demographic landscape of Asian societies implies also an unprecedented cultural upheaval and mutation. With the growth and expansion of mass media, means of instant communication and informatics, cultural changes are also accelerated. Though these have a positive value in serving Asian peoples, they also tend to undermine religious, moral and cultural values. The unbridled spread of pornography, an exploitative, amoral, and even anti-moral, entertainment industry which tend towards the exaltation of violence, free sex, hedonism in every form, individualism, materialism and an exclusively secularist outlook upon life strike at the roots of Asian religious and cultural values in family and society.

There are other evils which threaten life in Asia; the unscrupulous destruction of natural resources and the sources of life in land, ocean and atmosphere lead to the destruction of eco-systems. There are growing threats to life in Asia through drug trafficking, drug addiction, the spread of AIDS, the neglect of basic health-care systems, etc. All these situations call for a renewed awareness in the Church. They also need to be considered in new missionary and pastoral plans as well as in the formation of new "apostles" capable of meeting these new situations in a new evangelization.

Despite the many negative factors at work in Asia, there are also many positive signs of hope in Asian society. There is

everywhere a great hunger for spiritual and religious values, freedom, human dignity and advancement. Levels of literacy, education and research as well as an appreciation for democratic values are increasing. Various continental institutions (Association of South Easter Asian Nations [A.S.E.A.N.], South Asia Association for Regional Cooperation [S.A.A.R.C.]) indicate a growing regional co-operation in trade and development.¹⁵

ECCLESIAL SITUATION AND CONTEXT

Many of the Churches of West Asia are Apostolic in origin. Today, however, the Churches of Oriental and Latin Traditions of West Asia live in the midst of predominantly Islamic or Jewish populations. Opportunities to evangelise are limited to works of charity and Christian witness. They are also affected by the West Asian conflicts and threatened by religious fundamentalism.¹⁶

Churches of Apostolic origin are found also in India, i.e., the Syro-Malabar and Syro-Malankar Churches dating back to the Apostle Thomas which are well rooted in the Indian culture and have large numbers of vocations. However, matters related to liturgy, synodal forms of government and jurisdiction have not been resolved, thus causing difficulties in areas of pastoral care and evangelisation work.

Most of the particular Churches in Asia are the result of the heroic efforts of many missionaries, both foreign and Asian, men and women, during the last 500 years. New missionary efforts are now being made in the central Asian Republics, Siberia and Mongolia where there is already a small Christian presence.

The local Churches of Asia, with the well-known exception of the Philippines, live among large Hindu, Buddhist or Muslim

¹⁵ Cf. *ibid.*, no. 10.

¹⁶ Cf. *ibid.*, no. 11.

populations. They live under a great variety of political systems, e.g., monarchy, democracy, communism or socialism. In some countries, freedom of religion is severely restricted, while in others Christians are persecuted outrightly. In some countries religious fundamentalism poses many problems for Christians; in others new religious movements tend to mislead Christian youth.¹⁷

Even though the Church in Asia is generally a minority community, the Christian faith is deeply felt and practised. Participation in the life of the Sacraments is particularly fervent and cherished. There are a number of Christian movements, such as the Basic Christian Communities, charismatic groups, lay missionary groups, etc. In many Churches, the laity are playing an important role in the life of the Church. The number of vocations to various forms of Consecrated Life is proportionately high. In recent years, several missionary institutes have sprung up in Asia.

The testimony of charity given by persons like Mother Teresa and many others is of great value for evangelization in Asia. Religious orders, congregations, religious brothers, contemplative communities and missionary institutes of diocesan clergy continue to make a great contribution to the Church's mission to the peoples of Asia. Christian ashrams, prayer and dialogue centres, liberation movements, and human rights movements are new forms of evangelization which are undergoing experimentation in Asia. Various efforts by theologians and pastors are also being made in theological and liturgical inculturation. Asian Christian art, Asian forms of consecrated life, Asian ways of formation to priesthood and religious life are increasingly assuming a part in the mission of the Church.¹⁸

¹⁷ Cf. *ibid.*, n. 12.

¹⁸ Cf. *ibid.*, n. 13-17.

THE CHURCH IN ASIA: TOWARDS THE THIRD MILLENNIUM

As the Church in Asia approaches the Third Millennium, she looks back with gratitude at the faith brought to the people of Asia, first by Asians themselves in Apostolic times and later through historical circumstances by western missionaries. The term "missionary" should not be taken in a restrictive geographic or clerical sense. Missionaries include innumerable men and women, religious priests, brothers, sisters, catechists, and ordinary lay people who through their witness of the Christian life, through martyrdom, through contemplation, through their preaching of the Gospel and human promotion, and through prayer and sacrifice have contributed to the growth of the Church. As a result, the Church has been of service to the peoples of Asia in the field of literacy, education, healthcare, pastoral works, catechesis, human rights and human promotion.

It is true that during the last two millennia the Christian mission in Asia was conditioned by the theology of mission and the theology of religions prevalent at any given time. On occasion, compromises were made with the world; not all attempts at inculturation were always encouraged. Christian mission in Asia has been not only a divine mission, but also a human mission and hence also subject to human weaknesses, mistaken priorities, incomplete theological and methodological assumptions.¹⁹

On the other hand, thanks to the work of all the "missionaries" of the past, there is a Christian presence in most Asian countries, and in some countries a very significant presence. They act as leaven in Asian Society, challenging social systems, practices and policies which do not respect the dignity of man and endanger the fullness of life. They have contributed-and continue to contribute-

" Cf. *ibid.*, n. 19-23.

to the growth of literacy, culture, art, education, healthcare, human development and rights far beyond what could be imagined from their numbers. As the Church enters into the Third Millennium, the Church in Asia is called upon to carry out her mission of love and service to life in Asia by keeping in mind the social, religious and economic context of its peoples.

H. JESUS CHRIST: THE GOOD NEWS OF SALVATION

GOD'S PLAN OF SALVATION

Preaching the message of salvation in Jesus Christ in an Asian context, as elsewhere, must be situated in God's plan of creation and redemption. Our understanding of God's plan of salvation is based upon the Christian revelation of the Trinitarian God communicated in Jesus Christ through the Holy Spirit. The Christian understanding of the universe, man, sin, redemption, salvation and life after death is based upon this revelation and a faith which flows from it.

THE SPIRIT OF GOD IN CREATION AND HISTORY

According to Christian faith, all creation and redemption have a Trinitarian origin, pattern and goal. Hence the Spirit of God was and is present in all creation, especially in human history, to lead all things to their end according to God's plan of sharing his divine life with mankind.²⁰ Despite the presence of the Spirit in the world, human history has been affected by the presence of evil and sin from its very beginning.²¹ Sin, however, did not entirely thwart God's plan of sharing his divine life with humanity. He continued to reveal himself in manifold ways (cf. *Heb* 1:1-3), and

²⁰ Cf. Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, *Dogmatic Constitution on the Church Lumen gentium*, 2.

²¹

give his saving light and grace to all through the work of the Spirit in the hearts of all peoples.²² The Spirit is at work in the hearts of individuals and societies as well as in their cultures and religions. The Spirit of God touches, purifies and saves not only individuals, but through them, also cultures and religions.²³ Hence they have a salvific role to play as Pope John Paul II states: "The Spirit's presence and activity affect not only individuals but also society and history, peoples, cultures and religions. Indeed, the Spirit is at the origin of the noble ideals and undertakings which benefit humanity on its journey through history: The Spirit of God with marvellous foresight directs the course of the ages and renews the face of the earth."²⁴

Nevertheless, the salvific activity of the Spirit is not an isolated activity. It is the activity of the Trinitarian God within his historical plan of salvation. That plan is initiated by the Spirit at the very beginning of creation, is further revealed in the history of salvation which culminates in Jesus Christ through the same Spirit and is carried on by the same Spirit until the Lord comes again in glory at the end of time. The salvific revelation in Jesus Christ is not, therefore, a parallel or superfluous one, but its historical fulfillment. The Spirit is not a substitute for Jesus Christ.²⁵

THE SPIRIT OF GOD AT WORK IN ASIA

What is said in general about the presence and salvific work of the Spirit of God among all peoples is particularly true in Asia. It is here that all the great religions were born and have developed their God-experiences. In Asia these religions have set forth their

²² Cf. Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation *Dei Verbum*, 3.

²³ Cf. John Paul II, Encyclical Letter *Dominum et Vivificantem* (18 May 1986), 53: AAS 78 (1986) 74.

²⁴ John Paul II, Encyclical Letter *Redemptoris missio*, (7 December 1990), 28: AAS 83 (1991) 274.

²⁵ Cf. *ibid.*, 29: AAS 83 (1991) 275.

religious interpretations in sacred books, developed appropriate forms of cult, formulated codes of human conduct, traced out specific spiritual and ascetic ways to liberation from evil and fullness of life. All of these, in their own way, are a preparation for receiving the Good News revealed in Jesus Christ.

All this constitutes a positive challenge to the Church in Asia,²⁶ first, to recognise the profound rays of truth and grace in them and joyfully to acknowledge them; and secondly, to bear witness in word and deed to the fullness of revelation in Jesus Christ.

Such an attitude calls for humble dialogue at all levels of the Church and in all dimensions of life and activity, e.g., a dialogue of life, a dialogue of the heart, a dialogue of religious experience, theology, spirituality, etc. Dialogue means sincere listening, learning, receiving, giving and sharing. Happily such dialogue is already taking place in many parts of the Church in Asia through the study of other religions, their philosophies, cultures, their sacred texts and prayer experiences.

True dialogue will lead the Church in Asia to discover several common religious values shared with the followers of other religious and philosophical traditions, e.g., the centrality of the will of God with Islam; with Hindus, the practise of meditation, contemplation, renunciation of one's will and the spirit of non-violence; with Buddhists, detachment and compassion; with Confucianism, filial piety and humanitarianism; with Taoists, simplicity and humility; and with Traditional Religion, reverence and respect for nature.²⁷

On the other hand the Church in Asia has much to offer to the followers of other religious traditions: the revelation of the Triune God, his salvific will in Jesus Christ, the salvific meaning

²⁶ Cf. *ibid.*, 56: AAS 83 (1991) 304.

²⁷ Cf. Special Assembly of the Synod of Bishops for Asia, *Instrumentwn laboris*, n. 32.

and value of his passion, death and resurrection, the values of reconciliation and peace, obedience to God's will, the sacredness and dignity of each person, love and service of neighbour, the Church's social doctrine, integral human promotion in its many forms, the value of suffering and service, which are central to the mystery of Jesus Christ,²⁸ and above all the person of Jesus Christ.

The Church's mission is not exhausted with dialogue alone even though it is one of its important elements. The presence of sin deep in the hearts of peoples and cultures calls for redemption, liberation and salvation. The Church believes that such inner conversion from sin, salvation and eschatological fullness of life is offered to all by God in Jesus Christ his Son, through the working of the Holy Spirit. He leads all peoples, in his own mysterious way to the new creation in Jesus Christ, who is "the firstborn and the first fruits of those who have died" (/ *Cor* 15:20). "The universal plan of God for the salvation of mankind is not carried out solely in a secret manner, as it were, in the minds of men, nor by the efforts, even religious, through which they in many ways seek God in an attempt to touch him and find him ... their efforts need to be enlightened, enriched and purified... God decided to enter into the history of mankind in a new and definitive manner, by sending his own Son in human flesh..."²⁹

JESUS CHRIST, THE SOURCE OF THE CHURCH'S FAITH

The Church, born in mystery of the Lord's death on the cross, looks to him in every age for her self-understanding and mission: "The Church's fundamental function in every age and particularly in our own is to direct man's gaze, to point the awareness and experience of the whole of humanity towards the mystery of God, to help all men to be familiar with the profundity of the Redemption

²⁸ Cf. *ibid.*.

²⁹ Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Decree on the Church's Missionary Activity *Ad gentes*, 3.

taking place in Christ Jesus."³⁰ It is with this same faith that the Church in Asia looks to Jesus Christ for understanding herself and how she is to carry out her mission in Asia.

The Apostles and disciples of Jesus experienced Jesus in his life on earth and in his passion, death and resurrection as truly human, and also divine.³¹ They saw in him the fulfillment of life and salvation, with its beginnings on earth and its end in the life of resurrection. In Jesus all people and all of creation are reconciled to God and brought into true harmony (cf. *Eph* 2:11-18). He made atonement for the sins of all (cf. *Heb* 1:2-3). He is the "Word" made flesh come to dwell among us as the source of all saving truth and grace (cf. *Jn* 1:16-17).

This is the faith of the Apostles which has been handed down by the Church no matter what cultural expression, doctrinal formulation and interpretation it has undergone nor what emphasis it has received in different periods of history. The source of the Church's faith and mission remains the same: "Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever." (*Heb* 13:8). It is because of the same experience of the Risen Lord Jesus Christ, prompted by the Holy Spirit, that the Church in Asia goes forth to bear witness to him. She wants to offer the new life she has found in Jesus Christ to all peoples of Asia as they search for the fullness of life, so that they can have the same fellowship with the Father and his Son Jesus Christ in the power of the Spirit. This is what the first disciples of Jesus did and said: "The life appeared; we have seen it and testify to it, and we proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and has appeared to us. We proclaim to you what we have seen and heard, so that you also may have fellowship with us" (7 *Jn* 1:2-3).

³⁰ John Paul II, Encyclical Letter *Redemptor hominis* (4'March 1979), 10: AAS 71 (1979) 275.

³¹ Cf. Second Vatican Ecumenical Council Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation *Dei Verbum*, 4.

The experience of-and the participation in-the mystery of the One God as a community or Trinity of Persons in and through Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit is the beginning, sustaining force and goal of the Church's mission at all times.³² Christian message and mission are not about an abstract faith or doctrine but a dynamic experience of the Risen Lord Jesus Christ. This is particularly to be stressed in the Asian context where religious experience is a far more compelling force for acceptance of a message than doctrinal formulations, valuable as they are.

The future of the Church's mission in Asia will depend much on how deep an experience Christians have of God in Jesus Christ and on how they can communicate their God-experience in Jesus Christ to the people of Asia in a manner which is truly inculturated and thus intelligible to them. Secondly, any one-sided presentation of Jesus Christ as divine or human will not do justice to the apostolic experience of Jesus Christ and faith in him.³³ It is the task of continued catechesis to present the Christ of the Gospels and the Christ of the Church's Tradition over the centuries, in both his human and divine dimensions.³⁴

The catechumenate and the catechesis at various levels of those already baptised must strive to communicate the experience of God as revealed in Jesus Christ. In this way, each one will have a truly personal experience of him. This takes place especially in the liturgy of the Church, particularly Eucharistic celebrations. The Liturgy ought to be an experience of the living Christ. A Christian experience of Jesus Christ also comes from knowing the Scriptures, especially the Gospels. For this reason, the biblical apostolate both

³² Cf. Second Vatican Ecumenical Council Dogmatic Constitution on the Church *Lumen gentium*, 4.

³³ Cf. Second Vatican Ecumenical Council Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation *Dei Verbum*, 7.

³⁴ Cf. John Paul II, Encyclical Letter *Redemptor hominis* (4 March 1979), 10: AAS 71 (1979) 274.

in evangelization work and in the catechesis of Christian communities through homilies, instructions and conferences assumes a very special importance.

Only an experience of Jesus Christ will bring about a true conversion of heart and a transformation of one's life. Without the conversion of heart in the sacrament of Baptism and its ongoing pursuit through the Church, conversion will have little meaning. Hence the experience of God in Jesus Christ through the Liturgy and Sacred Scripture is very important in the context of the Asian religions and cultures.

JESUS CHRIST THE SAVIOUR

The very name Jesus means salvation (cf. *Mt* 1:21; *Lk* 2:30). God sent his Son into the world because he loved the world and wanted to share his life with all humanity. He presented himself as the Way, the Truth and the Life in the most profound sense of these words (cf. *Jn* 14:6). As a condition for accepting such life, Jesus preached repentance and conversion of heart (cf. *Mk* 1:15).

Jesus accomplishes the work of salvation through his passion, death and resurrection and the gift of the Spirit. We call this the Paschal Mystery. The Risen Lord Jesus sent his disciples to proclaim repentance and forgiveness of sins in His name to all peoples (cf. *Lk* 24:46-47), so that all may believe in him and by believing they may have life (cf. *Jn* 20:31).

The Church is the community of Jesus' disciples born of repentance and forgiveness of sin and sent on a mission to proclaim the way of salvation in Jesus Christ and to invite people everywhere to become his disciples through an experience of repentance and forgiveness of sin. The experience of Jesus Christ in the sacraments of Baptism, Reconciliation and the Eucharist must lead Christians to a genuine experience of the Saviour which is capable of transforming their lives and the society in which they live.

The Church believes that Jesus Christ is not one of the many saviour figures of the world but the unique Saviour of all.³⁵ On the other hand, the presentation of Jesus Christ as the only saviour must be situated in the context of God's universal plan of salvation and with deep respect towards other religions.

The story of Jesus is a unique story. Jesus identified himself with God as his Father. He also identified himself equally with his brethren. The early Christians testify to this fact: "For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathise with our weakness, but we have one who in every respect has been tested as we are, yet without sin" (*Heb* 4:15). Indeed, through his Incarnation, life on earth and Resurrection, Jesus identified himself with every human person.³⁶

Jesus wanted his community of disciples to be characterised by mercy, forgiveness, brotherly love, mutual service, justice and authenticity of life. The mission of Jesus was that of priest, prophet and shepherd in a very special sense. He came to cleanse the hearts of people from sin and selfishness and offer genuine worship of the heart, in spirit and in truth. His sacrificial death was an act of worship in spirit and in truth. Jesus also made himself the voice of the poor, the sinner, the outcast, denouncing injustice, hypocrisy and selfishness in religion and society. Furthermore, Jesus presented himself as a spiritual leader, a shepherd leading people to God. At the same time, Jesus is the greatest contemplative and teacher of prayer and self-denial.

Jesus not only preached the above human and spiritual values, he lived and he bore witness to them through his passion, death and resurrection. They are the supreme proof of his authenticity

³⁵ Cf. *ibid.*, 14: AAS 71 (1979) 285.

³⁶ Cf. Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World *Gaudium et spes*, 22.

and the proof of God's love for humanity. In Jesus Christ the mystery of God and the meaning of man are finally and definitively revealed.³⁷

The Christian community in Asia must experience this Jesus of the Gospels in its Liturgy, Scriptures, Sacraments and fellowship and be transformed through that experience. In this way, the Christian community will then be credible in its proclamation of the Jesus of the Gospels. Such a Jesus will be also appealing to the peoples of Asia as the *Instrumentum laboris* says, "many argue that the action of service by the Church, after the example of her Master who became poor for the sake of all so as to bring people to God, is the most compelling and credible form of witness that the Church can render in the continent of Asia."³⁸

THE PROCLAMATION OF JESUS CHRIST IN ASIA

The presentation of Jesus Christ as the Saviour of all meets today with many practical, sociological, philosophical and theological difficulties in the context of other Asian religions, especially Hinduism and Buddhism. Most feel that Jesus must be presented with an "Asian countenance", using Asian philosophical concepts that are available in Asian cultures. This is particularly urgent in proclaiming Jesus Christ to Hindus and Buddhists. But the problem remains of believing in and explaining Jesus Christ as the one and only Saviour and unique Mediator of salvation to all peoples.³⁹

Some of the followers of the great religions of Asia have no problem in accepting Jesus as a manifestation of the Divine or the Absolute, or as an "enlightened one". But it is difficult for them

³⁷ Cf. John Paul II, Encyclical Letter *Redemptor hominis* (4 March 1979), 22: AAS 71 (1979) 320-324.

³⁸ Special Assembly of the Synod of Bishops for Asia, *Instrumentum laboris*, n. 29.

³⁹ Cf. *ibid.*, n. 30.

to see Him as the only manifestation of the Divine. Hence while they do not have any difficulty in believing in Jesus Christ and his teaching, they see no urgency in accepting the Christian faith or entering the Church community through conversion and baptism.⁴⁰

According to the classical, traditional and cosmic religions of Asia, the Asian people seek to live in harmony between heaven and earth, between the divine and the human, between transcendence and immanence. Both in philosophical reflection and in worship forms they seek to bridge the apparent contradiction between the two. This could be a point of departure in presenting Jesus Christ to Asian people, since the gap between the divine and the human has been bridged through the Incarnation, death and glorification of Jesus. In Jesus Christ the infinite and the finite are reconciled and the transcendent has become immanent. In the mystery of Jesus Christ the transcendent, invisible God becomes visible and concretely manifested.⁴¹

It is within this Asian context that Christians feel the need to present Jesus Christ in a way that is intelligible to the Asian mind. In Jesus Christ harmony between the apparent paradoxes which confront human existence has been established. It is a harmony "between transcendence and immanence, emptiness and fullness, death and life, suffering and joy, the finite and the infinite, poverty and riches, weakness and power, the temporal and the eternal, the historical and the cosmic. In Jesus Christ, the incarnate and in the Word of God, crucified and risen, the above paradoxes find a point of convergence."⁴²

⁴⁰ Cf. *ibid.*

⁴¹ Cf. John Paul II, Encyclical Letter *Dives in Misericordia* (30 November 1980), 7: AAS 72 (1980) 1199-1203

⁴² Special Assembly of the Synod of Bishops for Asia, *Instrumentum laboris*, n. 30.

In presenting Jesus Christ there is a need to develop a Christology centred on the theme of "kenosis" and "pleroma", namely, a Christology based on the "self-emptying" of Jesus in the mystery of his Incarnation, passion and death and his being "filled up" in the mystery of the resurrection. It is a Christology based on the Paschal Mystery. This is important in the socio-cultural context of Asia. Jesus came to give his life as a ransom for all so that all may have life in its fullness. He emptied himself so that all may be filled with the fullness of life.

A "suffering servant" of the Lord, who shares the pain, poverty, rejection and exploitation of the Asian peoples and who is able to give them a sense of human dignity will be appealing to the heart of Asia. In his self-emptying Jesus became the source of life for all. Though he was the eternal Word, Jesus did not cling to his divinity but emptied himself and became like all men in order to give all people his saving grace and a sense of human dignity as children of God. He presented himself as the "Good Samaritan" who cares for the weak, the wounded and the rejected. He showed himself to be the "Good Shepherd" who lays down his life so that others may live.

THE PERCEPTION OF JESUS CHRIST IN THE MISSIONARY CONTEXT OF ASIA

In the missionary context, the Church in Asia has different perceptions of Jesus Christ which place an emphasis on one or another aspect of the Person of Jesus Christ and his relation to salvation. During the past decades, theologians and missionaries have been engaged in expressing the Church's understanding of the person of Jesus Christ and the salvific value of his passion, death and resurrection. Such theological and missionary dialogue with the followers of other religions and cultures demands keeping in mind the philosophical and cultural context and religious language of Asia. At the same time, these presentations of Jesus Christ must

be in keeping with the faith-tradition of the Church going back to the Apostles.

Such a task is not an easy one. It requires of everyone time and patience. The inculturation of Christology in Asia is an urgent need, but it cannot be done at the expense of the integrity of Christian faith.⁴³ Integrity of faith, however, does not mean that we cannot present Jesus Christ by initially emphasising those aspects which are more appealing to Asians and then complementing them with further doctrinal points.

The Church in Asia needs to keep in mind that ultimately it is not doctrinal arguments which will make the Person of Jesus Christ appealing and acceptable to Asian peoples; the witness given by Christians to Jesus Christ will be convincing.⁴⁴ Asian Christians must incarnate in themselves the Gospel values which Jesus proclaimed and put on his love and compassion for the poor, the sick and the lowly. Asian peoples can come to know, love and accept Jesus Christ as their Lord and Saviour only when they recognise Him in his disciples in Asia.

Hence the Church in Asia has to put on Jesus Christ and have the same mind and heart which were in Jesus Christ. Having the mind of Jesus Christ, Christians in Asia will seek to understand and respect Asian cultures and religions and recognise the saving presence of the Spirit in their midst and his working among them. Having the heart of Jesus Christ, they will love all peoples, become instruments of reconciliation and channels of love, service, compassion and goodness.

⁴³ Cf. John Paul II, Apostolic Letter *Tertio millennio adveniente* (10 November 1994), 38, "There is an urgent need for a Synod on the occasion of the Great Jubilee in order to illustrate and explain more fully the truth that Jesus Christ is the only Mediator between God and man and the sole Redeemer of the world, to be clearly distinguished from the founders of other great religions.": AAS 87 (1995) 30-31.

⁴⁴ Cf. John Paul II, Encyclical Letter *Redemptoris missio* (7 December 1990), 91: AAS 83 (1991) 338.

IU. THE CHURCH AND HER MISSION

THE CHURCH: A THREE-FOLD COMMUNION

The Church in the Salvific Design of God

Vatican II states that God in his infinite goodness and wisdom created human beings in order to give them to participate in his own divine life.⁴⁵ Even when human beings had sinned through disobedience, God, like a loving Father, did not abandon them to their fate, but continued to offer them the means of liberation and salvation in anticipation of Jesus Christ, the Redeemer, "who is the image of invisible God, the firstborn of all creation" (*Col* 1:1s).⁴⁶ The Spirit of God silently worked in the hearts of all peoples, preparing them for the coming of God's only Son Jesus Christ. In Jesus Christ God revealed the hidden plan of his saving will so that all can have access as a community of disciples to the Father in his Son through the Holy Spirit.

The Church, the worshiping community of disciples called together by Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit, is the result of the one saving will and design of the Father accomplished in Jesus Christ through the power of the Holy Spirit. "The Mission of the Christ and the Holy Spirit is brought to completion in the Church, which is the body of Christ and the Temple of the Holy Spirit."⁴⁷

The Church and her mission are not, therefore, an addition to the mission of Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit. She came into existence as a result of their work to be a credible sacrament of the same mission to make the Kingdom of God visible on earth,

⁴⁵ Cf. Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Dogmatic Constitution on the Church *Lumen gentium*, 2.

⁴⁶ Cf. *ibid.*

⁴⁷ The Catechism of the Catholic Church, 737.

to be its witness and servant in all her activities. She is, therefore, sent to announce, bear witness to, make present and spread the mystery of the communion of the Holy Trinity.⁴⁸

The presence and activity of the Spirit in the world is meant to lead all peoples to the mystery of Trinitarian communion. The Church strives then to grow in her communion with the Father, the Son and the Spirit and lead all peoples to the same communion, which is the meaning of salvation. Wherever the communion with the Trinitarian God is not realised within the visible Church, she believes that the Spirit gives all a participation in the saving work of Jesus Christ, the Paschal mystery in his own secret way.⁴⁹ Her proclamation of Jesus Christ is intended to lead all peoples to the communion with the Holy Trinity which will find fulfillment in the eschatological Kingdom.

The Church: A Communion of Particular Churches

The Church is a community of persons in communion with the Holy Trinity and in a communion among themselves. This implies that every local Church and every particular Church has an *ad intra* and an *ad extra* dimension. At the level of the diocese, region, country and continent the particular Churches participate in a communion with each other. Such communion is expressed first of all among the hierarchy and in mutual collaboration in the missionary and pastoral works of the Church. Communion *ad intra* implies unity and complementarity within the Churches, among the bishop, priests, religious, consecrated persons and the laity so that every Church becomes a "participatory Church," namely, a Church in which everyone assumes their proper vocation and role.

⁴⁸ Cf. *ibid.*

⁴⁹ Cf. Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World *Gaudium et spes*, 22.

Communion *ad intra* leads to solidarity among the Churches. The Church in Asia needs to present herself as a servant Church. Such an image of the Church would better express to the people of Asia her internal communion.

Using the image of communion is to be preferred in presenting the Church in Asia because communion points to our experience of God through Jesus Christ and his Spirit. Such communion with the Trinity leads Christians to communion at various other levels: ecclesial communion, communion among all the believers in Jesus Christ, etc. First, a true communion of Catholics exists throughout the world. Secondly, communion exists among the various local and particular Churches in a specific area, no matter where they find themselves or what be their liturgical and spiritual traditions. Thirdly, a communion exists within the local and particular Churches where persons participate in a communion among themselves, each according to his vocation. Finally, every parish and other community participates in the communion of life, pastoral activities and goals of mission of the Universal Church.

Communion *ad extra* is the communion of the Church and the world of Asia. In varying degrees, the Church is the sign and instrument of communion with all peoples of other religions and cultures, as Vatican II has said.⁵⁰

Communion with the Universal Church

Universal communion implies that the Church in Asia, as all other local Churches, is in communion with all other local Churches and together with the centre of unity, namely, the successor of Peter and the universal magisterium of the Church in all essential matters which concern faith and morals.

⁵⁰ Cf. Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Dogmatic Constitution on the Church *Lumen gentium*, 15-16.

The communion of the local Church with the universal Church and her visible head, the Pope, the successor of Peter, is an essential part of the Catholic Faith. Therefore we humbly request the People's Republic of China to kindly allow our Catholic brethren to practise their Catholic Faith freely according to their conscience, as Pope John Paul II said in his message to the Church in China recently: "Let the Government of the Peoples Republic of China be assured of one thing. A disciple of Christ can live one's faith in any political system, provided one's right to live according to the dictates of one's conscience and faith is respected. For this I repeat to its rulers, as I have done many times to others, not to have fear of God or of his Church. Rather I ask them, with sentiments of deference, that in respecting true liberty which is the right of every man and woman, also the believers in Christ can give a contribution of their energies and talents for the development of the country... The Catholics can give an important contribution to this and they will do it with enthusiasm and dedication."⁵¹

The relationship between the universal Church and the local Churches is to be governed by the principle of the unity of faith and morals, Petrine primacy, episcopal collegiality and hierarchy. It calls for legitimate initiatives especially in areas of dialogue, inculturation and pastoral priorities, while, at the same time, maintaining communion and dialogue among the Churches themselves and all with the Universal Church.⁵²

Inter-ecclesial Communion

Inter-ecclesial communion calls for mutual understanding and a common pastoral and missionary approach to the Church's mission and to guaranteeing the autonomy and rights of each Church

⁵¹ John Paul II, *Message to the Church in China* (3 December 1996), 7: *U Osservatore Romano: Weekly Edition in English*, 11 December 1996, p. 8.

⁵² Cf. Special Assembly of the Synod of Bishops for Asia, *Instrumentum laboris*, n. 38.

according to the theological, liturgical and spiritual traditions of each Church. It means also legitimate initiatives in the exercise of pastoral care, missionary undertakings, etc... Charity and unity are to be the characteristics of their relationship. Regional, continental and other associations of Churches, such as the Council of Oriental Catholic Patriarchs (C.P.C.O.) and the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences (F.A.B.C.) are useful means of mutual understanding and collaboration, and serve as an assistance in resolving problems which may arise. Similarly, centres of theology, spirituality and pastoral activity across Asia offer an opportunity to foster communion of life, prayer and apostolic collaboration.⁵³

The Mission of Communion

The Church in Asia, being primarily a communion, has a mission of bringing about ever greater levels of communion among the peoples of Asia, both within the Churches and within Asian society at large. There are many tensions, conflicts and divisions in Asian society due to ethnic, social, cultural, linguistic, economic and religious differences. Others stem from exploitation of persons in one form or another, especially women, children, migrants, tribals, indigenous peoples, etc. Within and among the Churches there are also divisions due to ritual, linguistic, ethnic, caste and ideological differences. It is in this context that the local Churches in Asia should seek to bring about greater communion of minds and hearts through collaboration among the Catholic Churches of Asia, with other Christian Churches and followers of other religions and ideologies. This too is a part of the evangelising mission of the Church in Asia.

The vision of the Church as an agent of communion has been expressed by the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences (F.A.B.C.) in the following words: "With our Asian sisters and brothers, we

⁵³ Cf. *ibid.*, 37.

will strive to foster communion among Asian peoples who are threatened by glaring economic, social and political imbalances. With them we will explore ways of utilising the gifts of our diverse religions, cultures and languages to achieve a richer and deeper Asian unity."⁵⁴ The Church in Asia wants to work towards a global solidarity in communion with others.

THE CHURCH'S MISSION OF LOVE AND SERVICE IN ASIA

Missionary Proclamation

The Church is the community of those called into communion with the Trinitarian God in and through Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit.⁵⁵ Hence among all the activities of the Church, missionary proclamation takes priority since through it she calls others into that same communion. Thus, the proclamation of Jesus Christ is the highest service that the Church can give to the people of Asia. It is the centre and unifying element of the evangelising mission of the Church⁵⁶ in Asia. Evangelization has acquired a broader meaning in the recent magisterium of the Vatican II, *Evangelii nuntiandi*, *Redemptoris missio* as well as in the theological reflection and the missionary praxis of the Church. It includes dialogue, inculturation, human promotion, the promotion of the values of the Kingdom of God and collaboration in the creation of a just society. As *Evangelii nuntiandi*, *Redemptoris missio* and the documents of the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences (F.A.B.C.) have constantly re-stated, missionary proclamation holds primacy among

⁵⁴ Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences - F.A.B.C. VI, *Final Statement, Christian Discipleship in Asia today: Service to Life*, Manila, Philippines, 1995, n. 14, in F.A.B.C. Papers, 74.

⁵⁵ Cf. Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Dogmatic Constitution on the Church *Lumen gentium*, 4.

⁵⁶ Cf. Paul VI, Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii nuntiandi* (8 December 1975), 27: AAS 68 (1976) 23-24.

all these essential dimensions of mission. Without it there is no true evangelization.

While missionary proclamation is the duty and obligation of all the local Churches of Asia, some Churches like those of the Philippines, India, South Korea and others have a special role to play because of their ecclesial situation, abundance of missionary vocations, affinity of cultures, etc. Furthermore, in the work of evangelization our attention on major cultural groups should not make us overlook other groups and peoples all across Asia who are responsive to the Gospel proclamation.

Missionary Proclamation and Liturgy

Liturgy is the exercise of the work of redemption in which the mystery of Christ and the nature of the Church are manifested and the source and summit of the mission of the Church.⁵⁷ Hence the Liturgy is the source of all evangelising work of the Church. The mission of Jesus Christ sprang from his liturgy of life, namely, his prayer to and contemplation of the Father. It was totally manifested in his sacrificial death and brought to fulfillment in his resurrection. Mission springs from the experience of the mystery of God in Jesus Christ in the liturgy of the Church. For this reason, liturgical renewal and inculturation are of primary importance for the Church in Asia in order to carry out her mission.

The Word of God

Christian mission is intimately related to the Word of God, the Sacred Scriptures. Familiarity with the scriptures is essential for all, especially priests, religious and lay persons engaged in mission. In this context the biblical apostolate and the use of the Bible for evangelization assume great significance. Asian peoples

⁵⁷ Cf. Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, 2.

have great veneration for the sacred word and the sacred word has a special role in the transmission of their religious traditions. Their religious leaders are deeply transformed and shaped by their sacred texts. The venerated texts are widely used in their own missionary methods, spirituality and catechesis. Asian peoples have also a great love and veneration for the Christian Sacred Scripture.⁵⁸

In the above context, a renewed interest in the Bible and the Biblical apostolate⁵⁹ becomes an urgent need for all concerned with the mission of the Church in Asia, especially bishops, priests, consecrated persons and lay leaders. All missionary proclamation, catechesis, preaching and methods of spirituality must be Bible-inspired and Bible-oriented so that all may be sustained and heartened by the word of God through which he speaks to all peoples.⁶⁰

Missionary Spirituality

Christian mission depends very much on sound missionary spirituality and asceticism. At the basis of missionary spirituality is docility to the Holy Spirit. The Apostles' experience at Pentecost was essentially missionary through which they became hearers and servants of the Word and its herald to all the world. Hence formation to missionary spirituality should receive urgent attention in all formation centres.

Missionary spirituality renders the missionary a servant of the Word of God, a servant of the people whom he serves, and a universal brother/sister to all.⁶¹ The paths of mission are poverty,

⁵⁸ Cf. Special Assembly of the Synod of Bishops for Asia, *Instrumentum Laboris*, n. 42.

⁵⁹ Cf. John Paul II, Apostolic Letter *Tertio millennio adveniente* (10 November 1994), 40: AAS 87 (1995) 31.

⁶⁰ Cf. Second Vatican Ecumenical Council Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation *Dei Verbum*, 21, 25.

⁶¹ Cf. John Paul II, Encyclical Letter *Redemptoris missio* (7 December 1990), 89: AAS 83 (1991), 335-336.

meekness, acceptance of suffering and persecution, desire for justice and peace, charity and joy. The missionary reveals the Kingdom in oneself⁶² and therefore becomes a living proclamation in action even before orally proclaiming the message in words.

The Family and Youth

Family is at the heart of all Asian cultures. In the family religious and human values are transmitted. Today, however, due to various factors such as abortion, permissive morals, the negative aspects of urbanisation and migration, the invasion of certain negative values from western cultures, the exploitation of women and children, etc., the Asian family is in crisis. Such a crisis is also affecting Christian families.⁶³ Hence the family must be the object of very special pastoral care. The apostolate of the family in the context assumes great importance. Furthermore, the Christian family is also the object of the evangelising mission of the Church and the cradle of vocations to the priestly and consecrated life.

Secondly, youth, as is well known, forms a large section of the Asian population. Today the Asian youth is also exposed to many problems due to cultural transition, lack of opportunities for education, unemployment, exposure to the negative values of modern culture without due preparation, etc... The Church's pastoral presence among Asian youth is an urgent need. Youth has played an important role in the evangelization of people in many parts of Asia. Our Christian schools and educational institutions, therefore, must be centres of evangelization of our youth so that they in turn can also be evangelisers of their peers and families.

⁶² Cf. *ibid.*, 91: MS 83 (1991) 337-338.

⁶³ Cf. Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences - FABC IV, *Final Statement, The Vocation and Mission of the Laity in the Church and the World of Asia*, Tokyo, Japan, 1986, n. 3.

Christian mission is the work of the whole Christian community, especially of the laity who are called upon to bear witness to Jesus Christ in the world. But they cannot fulfill their mission in the world, unless they have adequate formation and catechesis. This applies especially to families and youth. The very large network of schools and other educational centres should also become centres of formation for young persons. Formation centres for seminarians and religious should not only be places of intellectual training but also centres for formation to mission in both theory and practice.

The Service of Dialogue and Inculturation

Today the Church is aware that her evangelising mission has many dimensions including dialogue, inculturation and human promotion. The importance of these elements of evangelization is reflected in all the major documents of the Magisterium in recent years.

In the Asian context of a multi-ethnic, multi-religious and multi-cultural situation, dialogue assumes a most important role. In addition, for the first time the Church is encountering millennia-old religions in a serious manner. Inter-religious dialogue is a respectful and sincere encounter in which the encountering parties want to know each other, to learn from one another, and to enrich each another. For the Christian believer this will also include the desire to communicate the saving message of Jesus Christ.

The Church in Asia is called upon to enter into a triple dialogue: a dialogue with the cultures of Asia, a dialogue with the religions of Asia and a dialogue with the peoples of Asia, especially the poor as was stated by the First Plenary Assembly of the

Federation of Asian Episcopal Conferences - (F.A.B.C.) at Taipei.⁶⁴ To carry on the dialogue with Asia, formation to dialogue is all-important, especially in formation centres.

Inculturation

Inculturation is another very urgent need in the particular Churches in Asia. While the Oriental Churches are for the most part well inculturated in the local cultures of West Asia and South India, the more recently established Churches have a serious need for inculturating the faith in the cultures of Asia and for shedding an appearance of being carbon copies of Churches in Western societies. In this way, the local Churches in Asia will be able to be better integrated into the cultures of Asia and shed the mistaken impression of some people that the Church is culturally foreign to Asia.

Inculturation is the process by which the Christian faith becomes incarnate in local cultures by assuming, purifying and ennobling elements of the philosophy, art and spirituality of peoples in so far as they are compatible with the values of the Gospel.⁶⁵ Inculturation applies to theology, liturgy, sacred art, spirituality and social organisation. In order to carry on the process of inculturation, the Church in Asia needs to study and come to know Asian cultures and to proceed with prudence and due freedom under the guidance of the magisterium. In this way, inculturation becomes a means of evangelization, growth and mutual enrichment of the Churches in Asia and the universal Church.

⁶⁴ Cf. Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences - FABC I, *Final Statement, Evangelization in Modern Day Asia*, Taipei, Taiwan, R.O.C., 1974, n. II-V.

⁶⁵ Cf. John Paul II, Encyclical Letter *Redemptoris missio* (7 December 1990), 52: AAS 83 (1991) 299-300.

Human Promotion

Christian mission has always been concerned with human promotion from its very beginning. But the context of inhuman poverty in many parts of Asia calls for a special involvement of the Church in human promotion, in promoting the values of the Kingdom of God in the creation of a just society.

In the first place, the Church must be a prophetic voice for the poor, the oppressed and the exploited. While the Church in Asia will carry on its vast network of traditional involvement in human promotion through education, healthcare and works of mercy, new areas are presenting themselves for evangelization, e.g., the promotion of human and legal rights, the struggle against the exploitation of women, children and minorities, migrants, AIDS, organised prostitution, child abuse, pedophilia, political corruption and the wanton destruction of natural resources. In her work of evangelization, the Church is also able to enter into collaboration with other groups engaged in human promotion, in attempts towards alleviating or even canceling the international debt or in compensating for collective exploitation, etc.

Means of Social Communication

In the emerging world of Asia, all the means of social communication play a most important role. The Church in Asia needs to be aware of the power and role of the mass media and the various means of social communication so as to utilise them as tools for spreading the message of the Gospel in Asia.

Secondly, in addition to using the modern means of social communication, the Church must also be prepared to enter into new areas of evangelization in this matter, oftentimes called new *Areopagi*. The world of social communications urgently needs to be evangelised so that it may serve the good of the people of Asia. This involves a knowledge and understanding of this new world and a formation for Church personnel and those engaged in the mission of the Church to use the communications media well.

CONCLUSION

Drawn together by the love of God the Father in his Son, Jesus Christ the Saviour and through the power of the Holy Spirit, we want to spend the coming days praying and reflecting upon the mission of the Church in Asia and the new evangelization which is before us. We feel like the Apostles in an "Asian Cenacle". We are gathered together around Mary the Mother of the Church and with the successor of Peter, we pray and await a new pentecost. We invoke the light and strength of the Holy Spirit to come down upon us and upon every member of the Church in Asia. We want to be docile and follow the inspiration and guidance which the Holy Spirit will give us through this Synod.

We want to rededicate ourselves to the renewal of the whole Church in Asia according to the teaching of Vatican II and the subsequent magisterium of the Church. We want to rededicate ourselves to the mission of the new evangelization in Asia, new in its energy and new in its methods. Our faith in Jesus Christ impels us to go forth and proclaim him to all the peoples of Asia. We repeat today the words of the Asian bishops a quarter of a century ago: "It is because of this faith, that the preaching of the Jesus Christ and his Gospel to our people in Asia becomes a task which today assumes an urgency, a necessity and magnitude unmatched in the history of our faith in this part of the world. It is because of this, that we can repeat the Apostle's word, and repeat it joyfully, 'woe to me if I do not preach the Gospel' (1 Cor 9:16) for it is 'the love of Christ which presses us' (2 Cor 5:14) to share with our peoples what is most precious in our hearts and in our lives, Jesus Christ and His Gospel, the unsurpassable riches of Christ (cf. Eph 3:8)."** May this "Asian Cenacle" look to Mary for continued guidance and assistance in its efforts towards renewal and a re-invigorated mission in Asia.

⁴⁶ Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences - FABC I, *Final Statement, Evangelization in Modern Day Asia*, Taipei, Taiwan, R.O.C., 1974, n. 8.

Message of the Synod of Bishops' Special Assembly for Asia

SYNODAL DELEGATES

Dearly beloved Sisters and Brothers in Christ:

Called by the Holy Father Pope John Paul II, on the eve of the Third Millennium, we the Fathers of the Special Assembly for Asia of the Synod of Bishops, together with the Fraternal Delegates and other Invitees, met in Rome from 19th April to 14th May, 1998. United with you all, **our hearts are filled with profound gratitude** to God the Father. He loved me so much that he sent his only Son Jesus our Saviour, so that all may have life and have it abundantly (cf. *Jn* 10:10).

A TIME OF GRACE

Our coming together, for the first time, from all parts of Asia, made this Synod a unique experience and **a foundational event** upon which our particular Churches could build. From the very start, we gathered round the Holy Father to offer the Eucharistic Sacrifice near the tomb of St. Peter. We prayed and sang in the different languages of Asia. We invoked the martyrs and saints of our people and we worshipped the Lord with gestures taken from our own cultures. We listened to the Apostle John sharing with us the revelation he received: "Listen to what the Spirit says to

the churches... (*Rev* 3:6) of Asia. "Write what you see in a book and send it to the seven Churches..." (*Rev* 1:11).

This Synod brought together participants from all over Asia as well as representatives from other continents. We thank God for the **profound sense of communion** we have felt in Christ, for the sincere sharing of pastoral concerns and for the deep solidarity we have experienced. The presence of delegates from countries such as Myanmar, Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia as well as from Central Asia, Mongolia and Siberia was a special reason for us to thank God. Previously, persons from these places had difficulties participating in such assemblies. We were sad that the two Bishops, who were expected to bring us the voice of the Church in Mainland China, could not be with us, but we prayed for them and benefited by their prayers.

All the testimonies of the great **work done by the thousands of missionaries** in Asia from the time of the Apostles down to our own times, evoked in us a deep sense of gratitude. We are thankful for all the help received from the various mission agencies, especially the Pontifical Mission Societies and other Church organisations, which generously assist the Church in Asia.

We are grateful to God for the inspiration and heroic example we have of many missionaries and **Asian martyrs**. We also thank the Lord for our sisters and brothers who today carry on the Church's mission in challenging circumstances in different countries. Their trials were recalled on various occasions during the Synod.

GREETING THE PEOPLES OF ASIA

We respectfully greet all our sisters and brothers in Asia who have put their confidence in other religious traditions. We gladly acknowledge the spiritual values of the great religions of Asia such as Hinduism, Buddhism, Judaism, Islam... We esteem the ethical

values in the customs and practices found in the teachings of the great philosophers of Asia, which promote natural virtues and pious devotion to ancestors. We also respect the beliefs and religious practices of indigenous/tribal people, whose reverence for all creation manifests their closeness to the Creator.

Together with all Asian peoples, we wish to grow in sharing our richness and in having mutual respect for our differences. We **resolve to work together** to improve the quality of life of our people. We consider our faith as our greatest treasure and would like to share it with all, fully respecting their religious beliefs and their freedom.

LISTENING TO THE SPIRIT

We prayed together and listened every day to the one among us who had been chosen to comment on the Word of God for us. The interventions in the plenary assembly, the group discussions, and the peaceful and orderly dynamics of the entire Synod, made us experience day after day that the Spirit of the Lord was by our side. He made us aware of our shortcomings and failings because of which we may be poor witnesses of Christ's saving love. We **ourselves need to be evangelised** while we strive to evangelise others. We wish to so live, that by seeing us, others may catch a glimpse of the marvellous riches that God has bestowed on us in his Son Jesus.

It is the Holy Spirit who helps us to understand what vision of the Church in Asia we should have as we stand the threshold of the Third Millennium. The presence among us of representatives of particular Churches who were persecuted in the past and of those now facing increasing intolerance, has added to our understanding of the situation of Christians living in difficult circumstances.

The Fraternal Delegates from other Christian Churches re-kindled in us the longing for unity of all Christians which Our Lord

desired and prayed for. This reminded us of the urgent need to foster **ecumenism**. The contributions of special guests and representatives from the laity, religious and apostolic associations have sharpened in us our awareness of our pastoral ministry beyond our traditional and institutional concerns.

MISSION OF THE CHURCH

The **Church** was entrusted by the Risen Lord with the task of proclaiming the Good News of God's Kingdom in the power of the Holy Spirit. It takes as its model the early Christians who «devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread, and the prayers» (*Acts* 2:42).

Our understanding of **mission** is that all may have life and have it abundantly (cf. *Jn* 10:10). Having its source in the Blessed Trinity, this life is communicated to us by Jesus, the Son of God, sent to save all humankind from sin, evil and death, and bring us to the dignity and unity to which we are called by God.

The Word of God should have a central place in our lives and should nourish us spiritually. The Bible is not an ordinary book, but rather the living voice of the living God who calls us every day to carry out His plan for our lives and our world. We are happy to note that thanks to good Bible translations available in local languages, people have access to «the Words of Eternal Life» (*Jn* 6:68).

All Christians have the duty to **proclaim Christ**. The urge to do this springs from the joy of having found a treasure and the desire of sharing it. In Jesus Christ, the unknown and inaccessible God fully reveals and communicates Himself. The living Father sent Jesus, who draws his life from Him (cf. *Jn* 6:57). This is the life Jesus has come to share with us. It is the source of all life and lasts forever.

Many creative ways, in consonance with Asian cultures, were suggested to present Jesus to our sisters and brothers. We acknowledge the wonderful service being rendered by those who bring the Good News to Asians who have not heard about Jesus Christ. We believe that the presentation of Jesus as the personification of God's love and forgiveness has great relevance for Asia.

We are all aware that the **liturgy** has a key role in evangelisation. It is an event where people may touch God and experience him as the One who takes the initiative to meet them. This evokes our response in adoration, contemplation and silence. For this, however, the liturgy must be participatory. The gestures should convey that something solemn and holy is happening. Even though we felt the urgent need to take more and more into account the local cultures in our liturgical celebrations, we note with joy that practically everywhere in Asia the liturgy is held in the language of the people.

Above all, it calls for a deep **missionary spirituality**, rooted in Christ, with special emphasis on compassion and harmony, detachment and self-emptying, solidarity with the poor and the suffering, and respect for the integrity of creation. The witness of **monastic and contemplative communities** is particularly called for to reveal the authentic countenance of Jesus; likewise, the life and work of consecrated men and women.

For this purpose, we need **formation programmes** to train priests and religious who are men and women of God devoted to prayer and living deep spiritual lives and who are able to guide and accompany others on their road to God. Christians in Asia need to have zealous pastors and spiritual guides, and not simply efficient administrators. The personal example of formators has a crucial role to play in the formation process.

We highlighted the importance of **inculturation** so that «the Church become a more intelligible sign of what she is and a more effective instrument of mission» (*Redemptoris missio* 52).

In the Asian context of a multi-ethnic, multi-religious and multi-cultural situation, **inter-religious dialogue** has clearly become a necessity. In our times, the Church is making major efforts to encounter the millennia-old religions in a serious manner. Inter-religious dialogue is a respectful and sincere meeting in which the encountering parties want to know each other, to learn from one another, to enrich each other and to love one another, as Christians and Muslims are trying to do in Lebanon, where their mutual relationship augurs well for the future. For the Christian believer, this will include the desire of sharing the saving message of Christ. The Church in Asia is called upon to enter a triple dialogue: a dialogue with the cultures of Asia, a dialogue with the religions of Asia and a dialogue with the peoples of Asia, especially the poor. To carry on such a dialogue, formation for dialogue is all-important, especially in our formation centres.

We acknowledge the wonderful service in the field of **education** rendered by priests, brothers, sisters and the lay people in Asia. We commit ourselves to promote Gospel values and foster Asian cultures and traditions, such as hospitality, simplicity, respect for sacred persons, places and things. The curriculum must foster critical thinking, equipping our students with the skill of analysing the various forces at work in society and to discern situations when people are exploited. We must pay greater attention to non-formal education. From time to time, we must evaluate our education system, its contents, its methodology, the benefit to its recipients, the relationships engendered, the values inculcated and the impact on society.

A pastoral plan for **social communications** should be made in all dioceses so as to include a public relations office. Due

attention should be paid to media education, the constructive use of the media, such as press and publications, television, radio and the *Internet*. The media is rightly called the modern Areopagus, and it is here, as in other fields, that the Church can play a prophetic role and, wherever necessary, become the voice of the voiceless.

Entrusted by God the Creator to be stewards of his creation, we must have a respect for mother earth and the life systems which nourish us. We should do all in our power to prevent the degradation of **the environment**, which is the consequence of unbridled greed among other causes. If not, the result will be the pollution of land, rivers and air and the cutting down of forests. We must work for ecologically sustainable development, particularly in the agricultural sector.

The **laity** has an important role to play in the mission of the Church. Many signs indicate that the Spirit is empowering them for an even greater role in the coming millennium which could be called the Age of the Laity. Some signs are: their commitment to evangelisation, their involvement in ecclesial life, and their active and enthusiastic participation in small Christian communities. Renewal programmes, catechesis and Catholic educational institutions have a decisive role to play in forming our laity to be missionaries. To equip them for the transformation of the socio-cultural and politico-economic structures of society, we must impart to them a thorough knowledge of the social and ethical teachings of the Church.

The **family** is the most endangered institution in Asia. Population control tends to discriminate against the girl child in some countries and targets the poor of the Third World. Traditional family values are being overturned and replaced by egotism, hedonism, materialism, and greed. Direct assaults on life are made by contraception, sterilisation and abortion. We must save the family which, because it welcomes and protects human beings, is

the basic cell of society and the Church. If the family is destroyed, society is destroyed. The family is the domestic Church located at the core of the Christian community. The home is the first school. Parents are the first teachers. The first text book for the child is the relationships within the family, between parents themselves and with their children and with other families.

One of the significant signs of the times is the awakening of **women's consciousness of their dignity** and equality with men. The Church in Asia, to be credible sign of the respect and freedom of women, must give witness to Christ as the promoter of the true dignity of women. This can be done by encouraging active participation of women as equally responsible for Christ's mission of love and service.

Youth are the hope of Asia and of the Church. The need of the hour is that the Church gives youth the formation they need to face the challenges of our fast changing society and our quite uncertain future. By taking proper care of the millions of young people in Asia, we fill their hearts with hope and enable them to be evangelisers. We recognise with gratitude and wish to harness the evangelising power of youth already at work in the shaping of a better future for the Church and society.

Special attention must be paid to **migrant workers**. Millions of them leave their families to earn their livelihood in other countries. Pastoral care for them in their own ecclesial tradition is most necessary. If they are Christians, a proper formation will enable them to be evangelisers in their host countries.

Another group of people that should cause us concern are the **refugees**. There are millions of them in Asia who have left their countries and are in great need of all kinds of assistance.

APPEALS FOR JUSTICE AND PEACE

We could not help but feel deeply concerned when hearing of the hardships people have to undergo in several countries of Asia on account of recurring **violence, internal strife, tensions and wars** between countries.

There is also the problem of **Jerusalem**, the heart of Christendom, a holy city for the three monotheistic religions: Judaism, Christianity and Islam. We appeal to all concerned to do everything within their power to preserve the unique and sacred character of this Holy City.

When considering the suffering of the people of **Iraq**, especially women and children, we strongly urge that steps be taken to lift the embargo against that country.

Elsewhere in Asia, people are suffering under political regimes that pay no heed to their legitimate claims for more **freedom and greater respect for their basic rights**. Others are struggling to regain sovereignty or greater autonomy.

We need to create a greater awareness of the dangers of the development and expansion of the **armaments industry**. These trends serve to suppress the people's demand for justice and democracy.

While there are beneficial effects of **globalisation**, we are concerned about its harmful effects. We call on the particular Churches of the First World to be in solidarity with the poor in Asia and to be their advocates with their own governments and with world economic institutions such as the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund and the World Trade Organisation so as to bring about what Pope John Paul II called in this year's World Day of Peace Message: "Globalisation without marginalisation. Globalisation in solidarity."

We strongly recommend that during the Jubilee Year 2000, the **Third World debt** be re-negotiated and its crushing burden alleviated.

REASONS FOR HOPE

Our greatest reason for hope is Jesus Christ who said: «Take heart, it is I; have no fear» (*Mt* 14:27) and « I have overcome the world» (*Jn* 16:33).

Another reason for hope is the **religiosity of our people** who have great resilience even in the most difficult situations.

In the midst of these peoples — who are obviously called to play a more and more important role in the evolution of humankind — the Church is already present. Barring the special case of the Philippines, Christians are everywhere a minority and in some cases, a tiny minority. Nevertheless, **particular Churches in Asia are very much alive** and some of them manifest an extraordinary dynamism.

Practically everywhere, we see a high number of **vocations** to the priesthood and religious life, but we are equally happy to see that in many countries of Asia a high number of lay people are fully conscious of their Christian responsibilities. They take part in the activity of the Church in many ways. Moreover, among them, some are very much conscious of their obligation to be authentic witnesses of Christ and to contribute to the progress of God's kingdom.

Wherever the Church has taken root, she renders highly appreciated services to the people. Though it may happen that some institutions are not truly at the service of the poorest, we are happy to note that more and more efforts are being made to ensure that the Church's **institutions are truly helping the most needy**. At the same time, we are happy to see that some do not hesitate to

get out of institutions to share the life of the most oppressed and to struggle with them to defend their rights.

So let us be confident. The Spirit of the Lord is obviously at work in Asia and the Church is quite active in this continent. With Christ, we have already defeated death; with him, we have already risen.

Without being self-complacent about our past achievement we should preserve our fervour of spirit as Pope Paul VI said, "Let us preserve the **delightful and comforting joy of evangelising** even when it is in tears that we must sow. May it mean for us ... an interior enthusiasm that nobody and nothing can quench ... and may the world of our time which is searching sometimes with anguish, sometimes with hope, be enabled to receive the Good News, not from evangelisers who are dejected, discouraged, impatient or anxious, but from ministers of the Gospel whose lives glow with fervour, who first received the joy of Christ, and who are willing to risk their lives so that the kingdom maybe proclaimed and the Church established in the midst of the world." (*Evangelii nuntiandi* 80)

In this message, we refer only to a few issues raised during the Synod. Many other matters were discussed which will be taken up in the various propositions to be presented to the Holy Father and eventually to be incorporated in the Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation which we await.

CONCLUDING PRAYER

As we began the Synod so we conclude it with the same Eucharistic Sacrifice, wherein through the words of consecration the bread and wine become the Body and Blood of Christ, and where the assembly is transformed into "one Body and one Spirit" in Christ. This encounter with Jesus must now continue in a greater measure all over Asia. This is the work of the Holy Spirit who

is always the One at our side to help us. We turn to Mary in whose body Christ was formed by the Holy Spirit. We pray that she may intercede for us so that, like Jesus, her divine son, the Church may become ever more a **Servant Church** to continue its mission of love and service to the people of Asia, so that "they may have life and have it abundantly" (*Jn* 10:10).

Solemn Closing of the Special Assembly of the Synod of Bishops for Asia*

JOHN PAUL II

"Tubilate Deo, Omnis terra, psalmum dicite gloriae nominis eius" (Ps 65[66]:1-2).

The Synodal Assembly which is about to conclude, like the others which I have already convoked in preparation for the Great Jubilee of the Year Two Thousand, intends to respond to the exhortation addressed to us in today's Liturgy: *"Acclaim God, all the earth, sing psalms to the glory of his name"*. The psalmist invites the earth to praise God; and we, in the epochal period which we are living, feel in a particular way the need to give glory to Him. This is the primary reason why the Bishops of the Church meet in regional and continental synodal assemblies.

After the Synod for Africa, which took place four years ago, the Special Assembly for Lebanon took place in 1995. In the

* At 10:30 a.m. today, 14 May 1998, the feast day of St. Matthew the Apostle, in St. Peter's Basilica, the Holy Father, Pope John Paul II, presided over a concelebrated Holy Mass with the Synod Fathers and collaborators to solemnly conclude the Special Assembly of the Synod of Bishops for Asia held in the Synod Hall in the Vatican from 19 April to 14 May. The Holy Father gave the following Homily.

autumn of last year the Assembly for America was held, with representatives from the Episcopacies of the North, Central and South America and the Caribbean reflecting and discussing among themselves about the situation of the Church in their countries.

Today, however, we are concluding the synodal encounter of the Pastors of the Ecclesial Communities of the Asian continent. This Synod has been in itself a canticle of praise to God. In fact, was this not the primary purpose of our works? We wanted to express, with all of our depth, the glory which the Churches of the vast continent give to God, the Creator and Father. In every corner of the world, in fact, the service of the Church is turned toward the living man, who is the authentic glory of God.

God is praised by the lands of Asia and the oceans surrounding them, the Himalayas with the highest peak in the world, and the immense rivers. God is praised by cities rich in millennial traditions, the centuries-old cultures of the continent with civilization much more ancient than those of Europe.

This multiform and silent homage to the Creator finds its definitive achievement in man, who gives glory to God in a way proper to Him, exclusive and unrepeatable. The synodal experience brings forth clearly that those living in each and every corner of Asia — from India to China, from Japan to Indochina, from Indonesia to all the other Nations, from the heights of Tibet to the deserts of Central Asia — when they interpret the ineffable mystery of the pluri-millennial and varied Asian religious traditions, try to express it in prayer and contemplation.

"I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit, and that your fruit should last" (*Jn* 15:16). At the Cenacle, on the eve of His Passion, Jesus entrusted the task of continuing His mission among men to the Apostles. Thanks to the faithful participation of numerous witnesses to the Gospel, His Word of salvation has spread almost everywhere in the world, during the

last two millennia. In the text which we have just heard, the Lord emphasizes that He Himself chose and appointed His disciples, so that they may go out into the whole world and bring lasting fruits of salvation.

One of these was Saint Matthew, whose feast day we celebrate today. After Judas' betrayal, he joined the eleven Apostles, to become a "witness to the Resurrection" of Christ. We have received little information about him; we only know that he proclaimed the Gospel with courage and that he died the death of a martyr.

According to tradition, the Apostle Thomas was the one to bring the Gospel to India and to the heart of Asia. Since then, many missionaries have traveled through the immense Asian continent and have undertaken evangelization there, proclaiming Christ Jesus, the Word made flesh, who died on the Cross and rose again on the third day to save the world.

Witnesses of the Lord's Resurrection, they showed new ways to peoples who, by reason of their philosophical and religious traditions, were used to seeking the Absolute in the depths of their being. The evangelizers followed the Apostle Paul's example, echoing his exhortation: "Since you have been raised up to be with Christ, you must look for the things that are above" (*Col 3:1*).

If it is true that God is in the world and that He has a certain degree of immanence, it is above all true that He is Transcendent, "above" the world, and that He cannot be identified in the world alone. One must not only look for Him in the world as if He were just the most profound mystery of all visible things. On the contrary, one must first of all look for Him "on high": He is the Lord of heaven and earth. In virtue of this absolute transcendence, the Son of God descended to the earth; He was made man by being born of a Virgin; He lived and He suffered death for the Truth that He announced. Moreover, in truth, he did not suffer death, but He confronted it. He did not want it to overcome Him, but

He broke its chains; He returned to His Father whence He came. This way, Christ showed men living on earth that their destiny is union with God: created in the image and likeness of God, the human being can only be fulfilled in union with Him, the Redeemer and Saviour.

Yes, in Jesus Christ, the Father created the world; in Him, He redeemed it. By His death and Resurrection, Christ proclaimed and achieved the truth about creation and redemption, truth which is the content of the permanent mission entrusted to the Church.

This is the saving truth which Jesus passed on to the disciples together with "his" commandment: "that you love one another as I have loved you" (*Jn 15:12*).

Dear Brothers and Sisters, you who have formed the Special Assembly for Asia of the Synod of Bishops! Today the Crucified and Risen Lord again repeats these same words to you, summoning you once more to evangelize your continent. To you in a special way, my Venerable Brothers in the Episcopate, he says: "I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit, and that your fruit should last" (*Jn 15:16*). And to everyone he says: "This is my commandment, that you love one another " (*Jn 15:17*).

As the Successor of the Apostle Peter, I have the honour and joy to echo these words, having shared with you in these past days the extraordinary experience of the Synod. Together we have experienced anew the love of Christ, and together we have seen the fruits of the Holy Spirit's power at work in Asia. The Church's mission of evangelization is a service of love to the Asian continent. And although the Christian community is but "a little flock" in the total population, it is the means through which God pursues his saving plan, which he will bring to completion if he finds that everyone is ready to work with him with generous heart.

Dear friends, this is precisely why I wish to say to you once more: remain in the Lord's love, like branches of the vine (cf. *Jn* 15:5), and then among the peoples of Asia you will bear the abundant fruit of new life.

Among the peoples of that Continent I cannot fail to mention, in particular, the Chinese nation, which is the most numerous. To you, Brothers and Sisters of the Catholic Church that is on Mainland China, I wish to express, once more, my affection and tell you how sorry I am that the Bishop of Wanxian and his Coadjutor could not come to Rome to take part personally in the Synod. Bishop Matthew Duan Yinming's words expressing his loyalty to the Successor of Peter and his communion with the universal Church have touched our hearts. The Synod Fathers, from every country in Asia, always considered their Chinese brothers as being here in spirit, and they hope that present difficulties may soon be overcome and that on some occasion in the near future these Bishops may be able to meet the other Pastors of the Church.

We all hope that, as the People's Republic of China gradually opens to the rest of the world, the Church in China will also be permitted to have more contact with the universal Church. We implore the Holy Spirit to pour out his gifts on the Chinese faithful and to lead them to the whole truth (cf. *Jn* 16:13), so that the proclamation of the Gospel in China, even in the midst of much suffering, will bring forth abundant fruit.

In the Liturgy of the Easter season, we read the Acts of the Apostles, which help us to understand how in our time too the Church does not cease to add new chapters to the history of salvation. Just as Saint Luke composed the "Acts" so that future generations of Christians would not forget their apostolic origins, so too have we, with this Synod Assembly, written a fresh page of ecclesial life on the Asian continent in this century. This page is an addition, in a sense, to the story of the Acts of the Apostles.

In surveying the whole of Asia, the work of the Synod has enabled us to see how the Gospel has taken root in that great continent in the course of the last two thousand years. In that continent, Christians remain a numerical minority, it is true; and such a situation stands as a sort of constant challenge to them. It stimulates the Church to offer her witness with special courage. How could we forget that Jesus was born at the unique crossroads of the world where Asia meets both Africa and Europe? He came into the world for all the continents, but for Asia in a special way; and Asia could therefore claim a certain right to pride of place. It was in a part of Asia that Christ lived; there he accomplished the work of the world's redemption; there he instituted the Eucharist and the other sacraments; there he rose again from the dead.

"Out of the men who have been with us the whole time that the Lord Jesus was living with us, from the time when John was baptising until the day when he was taken up from us" (Ac 1:21-22), Jesus, born in Asia, sowed the seed of salvation for all peoples in that continent.

At the end of the second millennium, the path of the successors of the Apostles continues in every corner of the Asian continent, where they proclaim the same truth and do so with the same unchanged apostolic and missionary zeal, repeating and bearing witness: *"Jesus Christ is the Saviour"*.

Dear Brothers and Sisters, continue this mission of love and service in Asia. May the maternal protection of Mary, Mother of the Church and of the Asian people, sustain you; may the martyrs, the saints and the beatified of Asia intercede for you. Remain faithful to the love of Christ, who called and appointed you as His disciples *"that you should go and bear fruit, and that your fruit should last" (Jn 15:16).*

Amen!

Cases & Inquiries

EXCELSO GARCIA, OP

INCARDINATION AND EXCARDINATION

Simplicio, a young Filipino priest of a diocese from Visayas, went with the permission of his Bishop to U.S.A. to visit his relatives. He was instructed by his Bishop to avail of this occasion to exercise his priestly ministry while he would stay in U.S.A., if any opportunity to do so would be offered to him. Thus, when he was there, he helped in a parish where most of the parishioners were from Cuba and Mexico. Due to his diligent performance, he was very well accepted by the parishioners as well as by the parish priest and by the Bishop himself. Before a year had elapsed from his arrival, the parish priest met an accident and died.

The Bishop, not having another priest to entrust the parish, advised by other parish priests he had consulted, requested Simplicio to take care of the parish, until he could find another priest to be appointed as parish priest. Simplicio accepted willingly the petition.

Encouraged by his success, Simplicio wrote his own Bishop insinuating his willingness to stay in the States indefinitely. The Bishop's answer was that he should come back to his diocese as soon as possible, where he could exercise his priestly ministry, as

he was badly needed. The Filipino Bishop sent also a letter to the American Bishop telling him that Simplicio was badly needed in the diocese, where he was incardinated. He also requested him to convince Simplicio to come back to his own diocese as soon as possible.

My question is: did not Simplicio's having been entrusted the care of the American parish incardinate him to that diocese?

A Priest

Our answer is NO. There is no Church's law that can be invoked to sustain Simplicio's incardination to the American diocese with the consequent excardination from his own diocese in Visayas.

The 1917 Code of Canon Law stated this norm in canon 114: "Habetur excardinatio, si clericus beneficium residentiale (*like a parish*) obtinuerit cum consensu sui Ordinarii in scripto dato, vel cum licentia ab eodem in scriptis concessa, e dioecesi discedendi in perpetuum". This norm cannot be interpreted to favor Simplicio's *wishes to stay in America indefinitely. As can easily be seen, the permission given to him by his Bishop was "to visit some members of his family".* Moreover, "he was even instructed by his Bishop to avail of this occasion to exercise his priestly ministry during his stay in U.S.A., if any opportunity to do so would be offered to him". This indicates clearly the nature of Simplicio's going to America and the desire of the Bishop for a profitable temporary staying in America exercising his priestly ministry. Moreover, there was no indication whatsoever at that time that Simplicio had any plan to change his incardination, nor that his Bishop would give him permission to stay in U.S.A. indefinitely.

The 1983 Code of Canon Law is more clear on the matter, since it states in canon 267: "To be validly incardinated in another particular Church, a cleric who is already incardinated must obtain a letter of excardination signed by the diocesan Bishop, and in the

same way a letter of incardination by the diocesan Bishop of the particular Church in which he wishes to be incardinated. Excardination granted in this way does not take effect until incardination is obtained in the other particular Church".

Simplicio was never appointed by the American Bishop as parish priest of the parish where he was staying, but "he requested Simplicio to take care of the parish, until he could find another priest to be appointed as parish priest". There was no indication *whatsoever of any plan to appoint Simplicio as parish priest.*

On the other hand, Simphcio's Bishop in the Philippines never signed any letter of excardination of Simplicio from his *diocese*. *All he* did was to "instruct him to exercise his priestly ministry during his visit to his relatives", and to "avail of any opportunity to do so that might be offered to him", which Simplicio did by "helping in the parish where most of the parishioners were from Cuba and Mexico". Nor the American Bishop signed any letter of incardination of Simplicio to his diocese.

The Bishop from Visayas, Philippines, therefore, did well when, upon receiving news from Simplicio that he planned to stay in U.S.A. indefinitely, recalled him to serve his own diocese in the Philippines and requested the American Bishop to convince Simplicio to return to the Philippines and serve the diocese to which he still legally belonged.

DISMISSAL OF A RELIGIOUS

Following the norms of the new Code of Canon Law, one of our members has recently been dismissed from the religious institute. Our Supreme Moderator with the consent of his council issued the decree of dismissal, summarizing the reasons motivating the same. I received a copy of the decree, which I notified to the

member concerned, as directed. Moreover, I told him that he had the right to have a recourse to the proper authority. It might prevent the Holy See's confirmation of the decree for his dismissal. However, somebody has told me that the Supreme Moderator should have waited until his decree for dismissal be confirmed by the Holy See, otherwise it has no effect whatsoever.

My question is: Is not the dismissed member entitled to have a recourse to the Holy See and thus prevent the decrees confirmation? If he has to wait until the decree be confirmed by the Holy See, it seems that his chance to reverse the decision of the Supreme Moderator is already lost.

A Major Superior

I will try to make the answer as clear as possible. Once a member is guilty of any fault enumerated in canon 696 and the process having been followed which is described in canons 697-699, the Supreme Moderator may issue the decree for dismissal, summarizing the motives of the same and indicating the right, which the dismissed member enjoys, of having recourse to the competent authority within ten days of receiving notice. It seems that those norms have been followed in the present case.

The decree of dismissal has no effect unless it has been confirmed by the Holy See, if the case concerns a religious institute of Pontifical right, as the present case seems to be. For the decree's confirmation it is necessary to send all the acts and the decree to the Sacred Congregation for Religious and Secular Institutes.

Two things, therefore, should be carefully distinguished:

1. the *validity* of the Supreme Moderator's decree and
2. its *effectivity*.

It seems that the decree is valid. Concerning its effectivity canon 700 states clearly: "the decree of dismissal has no effect unless it is confirmed by the Holy See." These means that the Supreme Moderator should not notify his decree of dismissal to the religious concerned nor should the latter make the recourse to the Holy See before the decree was confirmed.

To the question of the consultant, whether the religious dismissed is entitled or not to have a *recourse* to the Holy See, the answer is YES, but after the decree has been confirmed by the Holy See, because only then does the decree take effectivity. Before being confirmed it is not effective. It cannot be carried out. The consultant's reason that it would be better to make the *recourse* before the confirmation of the decree has been given in order to prevent its confirmation, such right is enjoyed by the religious concerned even before the issuance of the decree by the Supreme Moderator. But this is not the recourse we are talking about. Since there is no effective decree to be carried out, there is no proper recourse to be made. If the religious concerned writes to the Holy See about the case, the Holy See could not answer him until the acts and decree of the Supreme Moderator be sent to it in order to pronounce a proper judgment.

It can be presumed that the reason why the Supreme Moderator's decree is to be confirmed before being notified to the religious concerned, is to guarantee the absence of any prejudice or manipulation against the member to be dismissed, which might take place within the institute. On the other hand, this procedure protects the right of the member concerned and at the same time prevents the possibility of the prestige and good name of the Supreme Moderator being harmed and diminished if the confirmation of the Holy See is denied due to the recourse made by the religious to be dismissed.

It is in this context that the Pontifical Commission for the Interpretation of the Code of Canon Law gave a definite answer

to a question sent to her on this matter. The Commission was asked on March 21, 1986:

"Should the dismissal decree, issued by the Supreme Moderator in accordance to canon 700, to be notified to the religious dismissed, before it is confirmed by the Holy See or after its confirmation?"

"Negative to the first

Affirmative to the second."

The foregoing being considered, we have to say that the Supreme Moderator should not have sent the dismissal decree to the Provincial Superior, nor should the latter have notified the religious concerned about the same, before the said decree be confirmed by the Holy See. The decree, we presume, was validly issued, but it was ineffective before its confirmation. Likewise the Major Superior should not have advised the religious concerned to have a recourse to the Holy See against the said decree, since this was still ineffective.

Homiletic and Bibliarasal Pointers **September-October 1998**

EFREN RIVERA, OP

SEPTEMBER 6, 1998

**TWENTY THIRD SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIMES,
YEAR C**

**LUKE 14:25-33: RENOUNCING ALL
THAT ONE HOLDS DEAR**

The Holy Spirit — Advocate of Change

A. STUDY OF THE TEXT / BIBLIARASAL STEP 3

Jesus chose his Twelve Apostles after seeking the help of the Holy Spirit in prayer, but he left it to the decision of the other people following him whether they wanted to be his disciples or not. He challenged them, and secretly the Holy Spirit moved some of them, including women, to accept the challenge. According to Acts 1:15, there were, all in all, about 120 disciples who took part in choosing a substitute for Judas after the Ascension of Christ. This means that for every one Apostles chosen by Jesus, the Holy Spirit moved about nine persons to step up and be counted.

Focus Points. (1) V. 26 If anyone comes to me without turning his back on his father and mother, his wife and his children, his brothers and sisters, indeed his very self, he cannot be my follower. What Jesus requires here is a change in orientation. Those who want to be his disciples have to turn their backs to their closest relatives and turn their faces to Jesus. Today we say that they have to be Christ centered.

(2) V. 27 Anyone who does not take up his cross and follow me cannot be my disciple. At the time this was written, between AD 70 and AD 90, crucifixion was still being practised. It was a great shame and a horrible death to die by crucifixion. On top of that, the text says that one has to carry one's cross like Jesus did. This, indeed, is a tremendous challenge. No one less than the Holy Spirit could move a person to accept this challenge.

(3) V. 30 'That man began to build what he could not finish.' Discipleship is a process. It is not achieved with just one act. **V. 32-33. If he cannot, he will send a delegation while the enemy is still at a distance, asking for terms of peace. In the same way, none of you can be my disciple if he does not renounce all his possessions.** Christian discipleship is a paradox. Disciples must renounce their possessions to be more powerful in fighting the enemy. One does something apparently negative in order to achieve something positive. We should observe, however, that the early Christians did not understand "renouncing possessions" as going to the desert to live alone or to go around the city as a beggar. They understood this to mean becoming a member of a community to which one donates one's possessions. Since everyone is supposed to do this, the community ends up being quite prosperous. At least, there will be enough for everyone's real needs. If community members continue to hold their temporal goods, they do so as STEWARDS and not as owners. "Possessions" are an extension of "self." One cannot be centered on Christ if one continues to be centered on self or on one's possessions.

B. REFLECTION POINTS
BIBLIARASAL STEPS 4 & 5: GOD SPEAKS,
WE LISTEN AND SHARE

1. Christian discipleship starts with conversion or changing one's orientation. First, one has to turn away from self and one's sinful ways. Then one has to turn away from one's closest relatives. This does not mean losing one's affection and even one's caring for one's closest kinsfolk, but not giving them the same value one gives to Christ. Our Advocate for this kind of change in our hierarchy of values in the Holy Spirit.

1.1 Pointer for sharing: Do you have a hierarchy of values? Is Jesus number one in this hierarchy? Share your answers with your small group.

2. When there is something really important that we have to do or decide on, we must not forget that we have an Advocate to help us, namely, the Holy Spirit. We cannot really rise up to the great challenges that face us unless the Holy Spirit helps us. We have to turn to him in prayer.

2.1 Pointer for sharing: Maybe we are not, right now, carrying a heavy cross. But we have to keep training ourselves to do so, because it will come one day. How do you train yourself to carry your cross? Share your answer with your small group.
o If you are in fact carrying a heavy cross now, how do you manage? Share your answer with your small group.

3. We should observe, that the early Christians did not understand "renouncing possessions" as going to the desert to live alone or to go around the city as a beggar. They understood this to mean becoming a member of a community to which one donates one's possessions. Since everyone is supposed to do this, the community ends up being quite prosperous. At least, there will

be enough for everyone's real needs. If community members continue to hold their temporal goods, they do so as STEWARDS and not as owners. "Possessions" are an extension of "self." One cannot be centered on Christ if one continues to be centered on self or on one's possessions.

3.1 Pointer for Sharing. Would it not be good for you to join a "Covenant Community" where one of the covenants is to get transformed from being a possessor of your goods to being a STEWARD of them? Share with your small group on the "pro" and "con" of such a move.

Scandalous Renuntiation

Mother Teresa of Calcutta once told the following story.

A few weeks ago two young people came to our house and gave me quite a sum of money to feed the poor. In Calcutta we cook for 9,000 people every day. The two of them wished their money to be used to feed these hungry people. I then asked them, "Where did you get that much money?"

And they answered, "Two days ago we were married. Before our wedding we decided that we would not spend any money on special wedding clothes, nor would we have a wedding banquet. We wanted the money we would spend on these things to go to the poor."

For high caste Hindus to act like this was a scandal. Their friends and relatives found it unthinkable that a couple from such outstanding families should get married without bridal gowns and a proper wedding feast.

So Mother Teresa asked them, "Why did you give me all this money?"

And they gave her this surprising answer, "We love one another so much that we wanted to make a special sacrifice for each other at the very start of our married life."

That comes very close to what Jesus said his disciples should do: renounce self and possessions for love of him.

SEPTEMBER 13, 1998

**TWENTY FOURTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME,
YEAR C**

**LUKE 15:1-32 —• (LONG FORM:INCLUDES THE PARABLE
OF THE PRODIGAL SON)**

(See Lent IV, Year C, March 22, 1998)

OR LUKE 15:1-10: LOST SHEEP, LOST COIN

The Holy Spirit — Advocate of Joy

A. STUDY OF THE TEXT / BIBLIARASAL STEP 3

The beginning, the middle and the end of Luke's Gospel tells us about the joy brought to people by Jesus Christ. When he was born, an angel said to the shepherds: "You have nothing to fear! I come to proclaim good news to you — tidings of great joy to be shared by the whole people. This day in David's city a savior has been born to you, the Messiah and Lord." (Lk 2:10-11). At his Ascension, Luke observes that "As he blessed them, he left them, and was taken up to heaven. They fell down to do him reverence, then returned to Jerusalem filled with joy." Today's Gospel reading is in the middle part of the book, and it describes Jesus' mission as the finding of a lost sheep or a lost coin (or a lost son) — happenings that people mark with rejoicing.

Focus Points. (1) V. 7 I tell you, there will likewise be more joy in heaven over one repentant sinner than over ninety-

nine righteous people who have no need to repent." Heaven seems to have a bias for repentant sinners, and discriminates against "righteous people." However, we should remember that the "righteous people" meant by Jesus, namely, the Pharisees, Scribes and the elders of Israel during his time, were far from being truly "righteous." Besides, in reality, the number of common people who repented from their sins and turned to Jesus was greater than the number of Pharisees and Scribes who did so.

(2) V. 8 What woman, if she has ten silver pieces and loses one... The inclusion of a story taken from a life situation familiar to women shows Luke's desire to show that the Good News is for men and women alike.

B. REFLECTION POINTS

BIBLIARASAL STEPS 4 & 5: GOD SPEAKS, WE LISTEN AND SHARE

1. The rejoicing over repentant sinners is actually done by the Church, that is, by us when we get to know about their repentance. However, the repentance and the rejoicing are made possible by the Holy Spirit. In this sense it is he — represented in the text by the term "heaven" — who rejoices.

1.1 Pointer for sharing: Has the Holy Spirit ever moved you to rejoice over a repentant sinner? Share your experience with your small group.

2. Women, more often and more fully rejoice when sinners repent. In general, more women than men involve themselves in the life of the Church.

2.1 Pointer for sharing: Would you say that women are more sensitive to the stirrings of the Holy Spirit than men? Share your answer with your small group.

UAAP Champions

The University Athletic Association of the Philippines (UAAP) encourages its member universities to engage in a variety of sports and awards a General Championship trophy to the university that garnered championships in more sports than the others.

Nevertheless, universities are more interested in the basketball championship than in the General Championship trophy. To paraphrase the biblical saying, there is more rejoicing over one basketball championship than over ninety-nine championships in other sports.

SEPTEMBER 20, 1998

**TWENTY-FIFTH SUNDAY SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME,
YEAR C**

Sept 20 -27: National Catechetical Week

**LUKE 16:1-13 (v.1-9: THE CRAFTY STEWARD)
OR LUKE 16:10-13: CHRIST'S TEACHING ON WEALTH**

The Holy Spirit—Source of Lasting Wealth

A. STUDY OF THE TEXT / BIBLIARASAL STEP 3

Luke, in ch. 16, has a whole chapter (with the exception of vv. 16-18) on the use and abuse of money.

Focus Points. (1) V. 8 "The owner then gave his devious employee credit for being enterprising!" This is not an approval of cheating. It is being led to an exclamation about the astuteness of someone: how could he get away with that? The Skills used by sinners for sinning could be "converted" into good use by the

children of the Reign of God for living and spreading the Good News.

(2) V. 9 "What I say to you is this: Make friends for yourselves through your use of this world's goods, so that when they fail you, a lasting reception will be yours. The contrast here is between that is temporary or fleeting, and what is permanent or eternal. For the disciples of Christ, the "real thing" is what can last for all eternity. There is wealth of this kind, and that is what the disciples are to strive for.

(3) V. 13 "No servant can serve two masters..." For this observation to be true, both masters must claim a person's total time and total effort, in the same field. There is no contraction when a husband loves both God and his wife, because that is not in the same field.

B. REFLECTION POINTS

BIBLIARASAL STEPS 4 & 5: GOD SPEAKS, WE LISTEN AND SHARE

1. In recognition of the fact that managerial skills can be used for living and spreading the Good News, it is now customary for new bishops in Asia to undergo a seminar in management organized by the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences. It is one of the projects of FABC that always gets high marks during evaluation.

1.1 Pointer for sharing: Are you aware of skills used by sinners that can be "converted" and put at the service of the Good News? Share your answer with your small group.

2. The Holy Spirit is our Advocate for things that last for many generations, like culture, and our participation in the divine life that lasts forever.

2.1 Pointer for sharing: Fleeting achievements can be attributed to merely human skill — like a country's achievement under martial law — but lasting achievements are accomplished with the help of the Holy Spirit. Do you have experiences that can illustrate this insight? Share them with your small group.

Good News For Businessmen

One's astuteness in business or one's excellent entrepreneurship can be helpful in one's spiritual life after conversion to Christ. One good example of this is "Bro. Mike," founder of a big Catholic Charismatic community that counts millions of adherents.

Bro. Mike used to be like any other businessman dealing in real estate. Because he did not follow the way of the Lord, he lost all his money. In that situation, he turned to the Lord, and a miracle happened. He regained his wealth, and more.

Now he uses his expertise in business to gain people for the Catholic Charismatic movement. Among the things he does is to avail himself of mass media, in particular, radio and television. Another thing he does is use simple language. He never discusses any complicated theological topic. His exhortations are always down-to-earth.

Some people express apprehension at his methods, like his showmanship and his promise of wealth after conversion to the Lord. But, as Jesus said, "The wind/Spirit blows where it wills" (Jn 3:8).

SEPTEMBER 27, 1998
TWENTY SIXTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME,
YEAR C

**LUKE 16:19-31: PARABLE OF THE RICH MAN
AND LAZARUS**

The Holy Spirit Spoke Through the Prophets

A. STUDY OF THE TEXT / BIBLIARAS4L STEP 3

The main point of today's parable, the reversal of earthly roles or positions when one gets to the next life, is put at the service of St. Luke's teaching about use or abuse of wealth. Since this is already treated elsewhere, we could, perhaps give more attention to some "sidelights" in the story.

Focus Points. (1) V. 23 From the abode of the dead where he was in torment... The rich man was not in what we call "Hell" today, but in what the Jews called "Sheol," that is, where all the dead people go. However, it is also said that "he was in torment." For Catholics, this does not necessarily mean "Hell," because there is also torment or purification in Purgatory. This seems to be a better explanation, because nowhere in the story is the man accused of rebelling against God by setting aside his Ten Commandments. For those who want to see the rich man in Hell, the implication will be that his disregard of the poor man Lazarus was something so serious that he has to be punished with eternal damnation.

(2) V. 29 & 31 They have Moses and the prophets. Let them hear them... If they do not listen to Moses and the prophets, they will not be convinced even if one should rise from the dead. To do God's will we have to be empowered by the

Holy Spirit, the same Holy Spirit who spoke through Moses and the prophets. It is also the same Holy Spirit who moves people to believe in the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

B. REFLECTION POINTS
BIBLIARASAL STEPS 4 & 5: GOD SPEAKS,
WE LISTEN AND SHARE

1. People do not go to Hell just because they are rich nor do they go to Heaven just because they are poor. It is when one does such serious injustice amounting to "mortal sin" that one goes to Hell. And it is when one is "just" because of the merits of Jesus Christ and one's cooperation with the Holy Spirit that one goes to Heaven.

1.1 Pointer for sharing: Poor people, more than rich people, are in a situation where they can more readily respond to the call of Jesus Christ and the stirrings of the Holy Spirit. Share your insights on this truth with your small group.

2. Non-Christians who respond to the stirrings of the Holy Spirit even before they hear the proclamation of the Good News, become disposed to obey the impulse coming from him and pushing people to become members of the Church through faith in Jesus Christ and Baptism. This is the normal situation. In modern times, however, there seems to be more and more cases when people are led by the Spirit to Christian FAITH even when their life situation prohibits them from embracing the Christian RELIGION. Faith and religion, though closely related, are not one and the same thing. What about those who are insensitive to the Holy Spirit, even if they read the Old Testament Scriptures? Based on today's Gospel Reading the answer is: they neither arrive at Christian faith and morals nor do they embrace the Christian religion.

2.1 Pointer for sharing: Have you felt the presence of the Holy Spirit when you read Scriptures? Share your answer with your small group.

Hidden Feature

The king of France so enjoyed Italian composer Rossini's music that he gave him an especially beautiful watch. Rossini was very proud of the royal gift.

Some years later, he showed it to a friend who had heard a story about that watch. This friend told Rossini that it seemed that he was not at all aware of the real value of that watch he carried. Rossini was offended to hear that. So the friend told him, "Lend it to me for a moment."

Taking the watch, he touched a secret spring and the back of the watch flew open and revealed an artistic miniature painting of Rossini himself.

That was the first time that Rossini had any idea that it was hidden there all the while.

Similarly, most people think that we find the Holy Spirit in Scriptures only when he is expressly mentioned. Few realize that the Holy Spirit is in every text of Scripture in a hidden manner.

Adapted from M. Nassan and Frank Mihalic

OCTOBER 4, 1998

**TWENTY SEVENTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME,
YEAR C**

**LUKE 17:5-10 THE POWER OF FAITH.
HUMBLE SERVICE**

The Holy Spirit—Source of Faith and Humility

A. STUDY OF THE TEXT / BIBLIARASAL STEP 3

When people become disciples of Christ, they seldom become perfect disciples. Their lives need more and more purification. This should be done, as much as possible, in the present life. Otherwise it has to be done in Purgatory. Today's Gospel Reading points out two particular areas where we have to make progress. First, we must assure that our faith is "the real thing." Secondly, we must learn to be humble. For both of these, we need the help of the Holy Spirit.

Focus Points. (1) V. 6 If you had faith the size of a mustard seed, you could say to this sycamore, "Be uprooted and transplanted into the sea," and it will obey you. In Matthew and Mark reference is to the removal of "this mountain." Luke tells the same thing to his Greek readers, but he uses an expression that is more suitable to Greeks. They know that it is against the nature of a tree to grow in the sea. But something "unnatural" can be made possible by faith. The message, therefore is, that faith, as long as its authentic, can accomplish what nature can not. Nothing is impossible to a person who has faith — it does not matter how small it is. What matters is that it is real faith, that is, perfect confidence in God.

(2) V. 10 When you have done all you have been commanded to do, say, "We are useless servants. We have done

no more than our duty. The word translated as "useless" is *achreios* in Greek and is more accurately translated as "Poor," "humble," or "unworthy." The point being made is not that human works are useless, but that the reward God gives is a FREE GIFT — people have no "right" to demand it; it is not commensurate with their works. We must remember that whatever we do (or suffer) is temporary in character, and yet the reward given to us is eternal. We must humbly receive our reward as a free gift of God.

B. REFLECTION POINTS

BIBLIARASAL STEPS 4 & 5: GOD SPEAKS, WE LISTEN AND SHARE

1. Sometimes people claim they have "faith" when in fact, all they have is "popular religiosity." In a serious time of crisis, they find out that it does not work, and they blame God, or the Blessed Virgin Mary, or the saint to whom they have shown devotion and offered novenas and sacrifices. It is time for people who have mistaken "devotion" for "faith" to ask the Holy Spirit to give them even just a little of true faith. Without the Holy Spirit working in people, they cannot have faith.

2.7 Pointer for sharing: What do you have: is it faith in your heart (your innermost being)? Or is it "popular religiosity," that is, the practices of Catholic devotions? Share your answer with your small group.

2. Some people think that they do God a favor when they obey the Ten Commandments. Actually, God does not benefit from our obedience. He is not any happier if we obey and he is not less happier when we do not obey. It is we who have a happier life on earth when we obey the Ten Commandments. So, why should God still reward us? He is really not bound to do so, but in his goodness he gives us eternal life. We must always humbly

acknowledge that we are unworthy of this gift. Humility is a sign of the Holy Spirit's indwelling in us.

2.1 Pointer for sharing: Even on earth we followers of Christ already enjoy something we do not deserve, that is, to live as children of God. We must always show our gratitude with humility. What has been your experience with humility? Is it something easy or something difficult? Share your answer with your small group.

False Humility

One night, when the door of the parish church was already closed, three people remained inside to prepare for the big feast that will take place the next day. The preacher was preparing his sermon, and at a certain point, he beat his breast and said, "I am nothing, I am nothing."

The Cantor was practising his song, which also had to do with being humble. Last of all, the janitor was doing his little bit sweeping the floor. At a certain point, just to break the boredom, the janitor started imitating the preacher beating his breast. Unfortunately, the preacher saw him and scolded him. He found insult in the janitor's effort to imitate him.

After a while, the janitor, so as not to fall asleep, started imitating the Cantor's song about humility. The Cantor noticed, and also scolded the janitor.

If the Preacher and the Cantor were really humble, would they have scolded the janitor? The trouble is that sometimes, we say (or sing) what we don't really mean.

OCTOBER 11, 1998
TWENTY EIGHTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME,
YEAR C

**LUKE 17:11-19: THE TEN VICTIMS
OF SKIN DISEASE**
The Holy Spirit—Source of Gratitude

A. STUDY OF THE TEXT / BIBLIARASAL STEP 3

At the beginning of today's Gospel Reading we are reminded that Jesus was journeying to Jerusalem. At the end of this journey, Luke will say that "the entire crowd of disciples began to rejoice and praise God for the display of power they had seen" (Lk 19:37). The miracle of cleansing the ten victims of skin disease (lepers?) was among the events through which Christ's power was displayed. If we read between the lines, we will realize that Jesus performed his miracles by the power of the Holy Spirit that was activated in him from the day he was baptized by John in the Jordan River. The story has a bonus. It also teaches us the value of gratitude.

Focus Points. (1) **V. 14** When Jesus saw (the ten petitioners), he responded, "Go and show yourselves to the priests." On their way there they were cured. Jesus spoke. The ten people obeyed. This effected their cure. The story emphasizes the power of Jesus' word when people (moved by the Holy Spirit) respond to it by faith.

(2) **V. 18** Was there no one to return and give thanks to God except this foreigner? The Jews as a people failed to show the gratitude that is acceptable to God because they disregarded Jesus. True gratitude is offered to God through Jesus Christ.

B. REFLECTION POINTS

BIBLIARASAL STEPS 4 & 5: GOD SPEAKS, WE LISTEN AND SHARE

1. To have faith is something great, but faith is just a beginning of an interpersonal relationship with Jesus. The Jews in the story who had skin disease had faith but they stopped there. Sometimes, even people who start responding to the urgings of the Holy Spirit, fail to follow through. It is the community of faith, the Church, that helps people to continue having faith in Jesus.

1.1 Pointer for sharing: Has the Holy Spirit, through the Church, helped you continue having faith in Jesus Christ? Share your answer with your small group.

2. Christian life is a life of thanksgiving. It is centered on the Eucharist, a sacrament-sacrifice that derives its name from a Greek word, *eucharistein*, which means *to give thanks*. Through the Eucharist we give thanks to God through Jesus Christ, and our gratitude is accepted.

2.1 Pointer for sharing: Do you participate in the Eucharist with a true sense of gratitude offered to God through Jesus Christ? Share your answer with your small group.

He Got Sick Again

A certain lady repeatedly asked a priest, who was reputed to have the gift of healing, to come to place in the province where her brother stayed, because this man badly needed to be healed. Since the lady was the priest's generous benefactor, the priest obliged to do her bidding.

The priest prayed over the man and said that next day, he will be well enough to get out of his bed. And indeed this happened.

A week later, the man's sister was back to ask the priest to heal him again because he relapsed. Once more, the priest obliged. But he wanted to know why the man had a relapse. Upon arriving at the provincial town, he made inquiries. He learned that the man was keeping a mistress, and as soon as he got cured, the first thing he did was to go and visit his mistress — certainly not a way of showing gratitude to God.

This time, before laying hands on the sick man, the priest warned him that if he did not show gratitude to God by changing his sinful ways, he will not get cured and something worse may even happen to him.

OCTOBER 18, 1998

TWENTY NINTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

**LUKE 18:1-8 UNSCRUPULOUS JUDGE,
IMPORTUNATE WIDOW**

The Holy Spirit—Advocate of Justice For the Poor

A. STUDY OF THE TEXT / BIBLIARASAL STEP 3

Luke himself tells us how he understands the parable of the unjust judge and the importunate widow. He says it teaches Christian disciples "the necessity of praying always and not losing heart" (v. 1). However, he preserves an indication of the original main purpose of the parable in v. 7, "Will not God then do justice to his chosen ones who call out to him day and night?" The message is eschatological: the Reign of God is about to come, and then God will give justice to his oppressed people. This is actually what we pray for when we say, in the Our Father, "your kingdom come."

Focus Points. (1) V. 3 Give me my rights against my opponent. In the parable, the widow has right on her side, but the judge is not interested in the rights of a penniless plaintiff. This was the situation of many among the early Christians. They were law-abiding citizens, but since they were poor, the rich could oppress them. It is still the situation of many Christians today.

(2) V. 7 Will not God then do justice to his chosen ones who call out to him day and night? Will he delay long over them, do you suppose? I tell you, he will give them swift justice. Jesus promises "swift justice" to his chosen ones, but at the right time. It is the Holy Spirit whose help has to be invoked in prayer, perseveringly, until the right time comes.

B. REFLECTION POINTS

BIBLIARASAL STEPS 4 & 5: GOD SPEAKS, WE LISTEN AND SHARE

1. Knowingly or unknowingly, the rich people who have not surrendered their possessions to Christ and adopted the principle of stewardship over created goods, oppress the poor, from whose ranks most of the original followers of Christ were drawn. A Church is untrue to its origins when more and more of its members get rich and they do not share their wealth with the community made up mostly of poor people. It is a sad day and a sign of decadence when the majority in a local church are the rich who do not help their poor sisters and brothers escape from poverty.

1.1 Pointer for sharing: Has the Holy Spirit stirred you up to help your poor sisters and brothers in your community?

2. It took some time before persecutions against the early Christians stopped, that is, around the year 312, at the time of the Roman Emperor Constantine. Why the Church had to wait so long for peace to come, we really do not know. What we believe,

however, is that the Holy Spirit helped Christians remain loyal to their faith in Christ throughout all those years. And in our time, he will help us through all our trials until it is time for God's justice — if we pray perseveringly.

2.1 *Pointer for snaring:* Do you know of Christian people who have escaped from poverty and are now helping their sisters and brothers in their community also escape from poverty? Share on this with your small group.

Irony

I asked for health that I might achieve,
God made me weak that I might obey.
I asked for riches that I might be happy;
God gave me poverty that I might be wise.
I asked for strength to do greater things;
God gave me infirmity that I might do better things.
I asked for power that I might have the praise of men;
God sent me weakness that I might feel the need of God.
I asked for all things that I might enjoy life,
God gave me life that I might enjoy all things.
I received nothing that I asked for,
Yet much more than I hoped for.
My prayers were answered,
I am the most blessed of all men.

OCTOBER 25, 1998

THIRTIETH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME, YEAR C

**LUKE 18:9-14 THE PHARISEE
AND THE TAX COLLECTOR**

The Holy Spirit—Advocate of Humble Prayer

A. STUDY OF THE TEXT / BIBLIARASAL STEP 3

Today's parable is also about prayer, but, whereas the previous parable was about perseverance in prayer, this one is about humility in prayer. It is therefore also a lesson for Christians today to develop a humble lifestyle, and not one that is reminiscent of the Pharisees in Jesus' time.

Focus Points. (1) Y. 11 The Pharisee with head unbowed prayed in this fashion: 'I give you thanks, O God, that I am not like the rest of men — grasping, crooked, adulterous — or even like this tax collector. I fast twice a week. I pay tithes on all I possess/ Jewish prayer begin by giving praise and glory to God, but this man thanks God for what he himself is. Then he proceeds to mention good works that are not his obligations to do, since fasting is required by Mosaic Law only on the Day of Atonement, and tithes were to be paid according to Leviticus 27:30-33 "on the produce of the earth or the fruits of trees..." and on flocks or herds of animals. He is not conscious of any sin he has committed and he feels no need to ask for forgiveness

(2) Y. 13b All he did was beat his breast and say, 'O God, be merciful to me, a sinner.' Believe me, this man went home from the temple justified but the other did not The prayer of the tax collector, like the prayer of every Christian, is a cry from the heart; it is a plea for the forgiveness of sin. Because to this, he went home "justified," that is, acquitted, pardoned. The

Pharisee remained unpardoned, because he did not even recognize that he had sins and had not asked for forgiveness. His error was that he did not see himself for what he was.

B. REFLECTION POINTS

BIBLIARASAL STEPS 4 & 5: GOD SPEAKS, WE LISTEN AND SHARE

1. Catholic Church Liturgy, at the beginning of the Mass, requires everyone to acknowledge sins of commission and omission, and ask for forgiveness. However, it seems that many of us do not take this seriously. We still have many people who believe they have no sins and have no obligation to ask for forgiveness. They are insensitive to the Holy Spirit urging them to give up being like the Pharisee in today's parable.

1.1 Pointer for sharing: Do you seriously ask for the forgiveness of your sins at the beginning of Holy Mass? Share your answer with your small group.

2. The poet, Longfellow, speaks of the "power to quiet this restless pulse of care" and the "benediction that follows after prayer." This poetic expressions are reminiscent to the "justification" the tax collector obtained after humble prayer.

2.1 Pointer for sharing: When your prayer is humble and it comes from your heart, do you feel blest? Share your answer with your small group.

Sequel

It is said that after the Pharisee and the Publican prayed in the temple, they met a little girl. The Pharisee was very gruff to her, while the Publican was pleasant. She thought about this all day long, because she had been told that Pharisees are good

people while Publicans were bad people that one must avoid as much as possible.

That night, for evening prayer, the girl prayed: "Lord, make all people good; and make all good people nice." Amen.