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MISSION TODAY IN THE ASIAN CONTEXT*

Further Reflections

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In this paper, I intend merely to provide a "reading companion": an easy and quick *vade mecum* for a careful reading of some texts from statements made by the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences (FABC). What I hope to accomplish is indicate some "milestones" along the road, lest they be missed amidst the flurry of lectures, seminars, and conferences that have filled our days in these times of transition and change.

This is what I try to do in Part III, by drawing out and underscoring some of the more important declarations on mission issued by the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences (FABC) between 1970 and 1978, but not without first providing, in Part II, an appropriate context of relevant conciliar and papal statements, principally, *Ad Gentes* of Vatican II and *Evangelii Nuntiandi* of Pope Paul VI.

With Part IV I offer something of a summary within what, I hope, is a somewhat coherent framework. This summary, it is hoped again,

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can form *the basis for discussion toward some consensus paper* on the Theology of Mission in the Asian Context today.

In Part V, for lack of time unfortunately, I present in outline a few suggestions, by way of appendix, a few headings for some brief personal reflections toward properly theological reflection on mission in Asia today.

I. Pre-Notes

I here hope to accomplish two objectives: first, give a hasty overview of an at least inchoate theology of evangelization found in the Asian Bishops' texts listed below, and second, lay the groundwork for some consensus in the course of this Congress. Obviously, all we can do within the limits we have is to trace broad lines and to give clear indications of current and foreseeable orientations and directions which might be taken.

I should say at the outset that any discussion of the concerns of Christian Mission should be preceded by a careful description of the situation in which the Gospel must be proclaimed and the mission realized. There should be a serious attempt at analysis too of the situation(s) so described. Such an analysis should *not* merely be sociological (not even if it is constructed by good practitioners of the sociology of religion). It should *also be an analysis worked out within the perspective of faith.* Such an analysis would then serve as a point of departure for lining up the challenges which confront the evangelizing action of the Church and of Christians, as they respond in obedience to the leading of the Holy Spirit speaking in (to use an already much-abused phrase) "the signs of the times."

While acknowledging the validity and desirability of such a procedure, we must *beg not* to have to enter into this effort in any statement which we make—at least not in any great length. Previous statements of Asian Bishops in assembly have done this already, time and time and time again, in the last ten years. There may be need to review with care what has already been affirmed. There is no need,

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I believe, to repeat it, especially since these texts are readily at hand, and some of them speak with exemplary clarity and force.

Neither do we wish to enter into the theology of mission *ab ovo*, but should (more realistically) build on and expand on the statements and declarations already made.

In continuity with the Second Vatican Council's *Ad Gentes* (*AG*) and, even more closely, with the apostolic exhortation, *Evangelii Nuntiandi* (*EN*) of Pope Paul VI, we will try to bring our understanding of mission in line with what we have shared, discussed with each other, discerned and resolved to do in *this* meeting on Evangelization, the first of its kind in Asia, as far as the Roman Catholic communion is concerned.

With this paper I am attempting an essay in a genre not perhaps too highly favored today, that of "magisterium theology." This was what most of our seminary teachers used to do in our theology classrooms when we gave *glossae* on Denzinger. But I may be pardoned for returning to an older manner of discourse, because I believe we have perhaps not yet made our own—in some more synthetic way—the developing lines of a theology of mission which our own Asian bishops have drawn in the last fifteen years. There will be some interpretation of course; every attempt at understanding yields a given line of interpretation. Listeners and readers will have to judge for themselves if the interpreter is faithful, and if the understanding is a valid one.

Let me list now the pertinent texts, with the expectation that participants in this Congress know them well, and that we can try to trace interconnecting lines linking together "places" they have been in before, themes that by dint of familiarity with these texts they will have already reflected on and made their own.

1. ABM/1970. The Asian Bishops' meeting (Manila, 1970) on the occasion of the visit of Pope Paul VI. Complete official text in *His Gospel To Our Peoples* Vol. II: Taipei (Manila: Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences Secretariat, 1976), pp. 349–355.
2. FABC I/1974. *Evangelization in Modern Day Asia*, the First Plenary Assembly of the Federation of Asian Bishops'

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Conferences (Taipei, Taiwan, Republic of China, April 22–27, 1974). Statement and recommendations of the Assembly (Manila, Philippines: Office of the Secretary-General, FABC, 1974).

3. ACMC/1977. Pedro S. de Achutegui, S.J., ed., *Asian Colloquium on Ministries in the Church*, Hong Kong, February 27–March 5, 1977 (Manila, Philippines: Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences [FABC], 1977).
4. B1SA/1978. Bishop Julio X. Labayen, OCD, et al., *The Bishops' Institutes For Social Action*, FABC Papers, Hong Kong, 1978.
5. FABC II/1978. *Prayer—The Life of The Church of Asia*, the Second Plenary Assembly of the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences (Calcutta, India, November 19–25, 1978). Statement and recommendations of the Assembly (Manila, Philippines: Office of the Secretary-General, FABC, 1979).
6. BIMA I/1978. The First Bishops' Institute for Missionary Apostolate, The Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences, July 19–27, 1978. FABC Papers, Hong Kong, No. 19 (FABC General Secretariat, 1979). Published among the papers in the present work.

We will of course presuppose, as a "standing base" of reference, the decree *Ad Gentes* of the Second Vatican Council, and the Apostolic Exhortation of Pope Paul VI, *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, wherein, in a comprehensive way,—even if some elements seem to us insufficiently developed—the Holy Father attempted to construct a *summula* on evangelization for our time, a text of indubitable value both as a wide-ranging review of the Synod of 1974 and a look-forward into the challenges of the future.

My task has been made infinitely lighter because Bishop Patrick D'Souza's keynote address and position paper touched practically all the important bases of the theology of mission in Asia today. This reflection

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can consequently focus on the Asian Bishops' texts, and hopefully limn in bold strokes the directions which these texts point out to us.

II. Some Fundamental Points: *Ad Gentes* and *Evangelii Nuntiandi*

Commentators on *Ad Gentes* have told us that, among the several new themes this decree puts its attention to, one of the most important is its emphasis on "the local church," especially the young church as local church—an indication that there is a decisive historical dimension to the theology of mission. The period preceding that of Vatican II was, in the area of political history, a period of the emergence of the newly independent "young nations," and, within the young nations, the emergence of the "young churches" which up to that time were called the "foreign missions."

Perhaps the most salient phenomenon on the horizon of Christian mission in the mid-1960s was this emergence of the *novellae ecclesiae*. Their development was henceforth to be seen as holding the center of Christian mission today. The future of mission was more and more in the hands of these "younger" Christian communities. What this meant, and means, is roughly what Wahlbert Buhlmann has tried to spell out in his controversial and uneven (but, sales-wise, very successful) book, *The Coming of the Third Church* (St. Paul Publications, Makati, Metro Manila: 1977). Even a reviewer critical of many specific points in this study has pointed out that Buhlmann's core thesis can hardly be disputed by anyone cognizant of the realities of the situation of Christian mission today.

The second emphasis which derives from *Ad Gentes* and *Lumen Gentium*, and which is generally accepted as of major importance, is the theme that every (local) church is a missionary church, that, properly speaking, the Christian communities throughout the world are no longer to be divided into the mission-sending and mission-receiving churches. Both the vocabulary and the theology behind this vocabulary are increasingly out of date. That the whole Church is on

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mission means that every local church is on mission; henceforth there is no "one-way one-direction mission." Every local church has to be "sign and sacrament" of salvation for the surrounding milieu. For the young churches this, of course, poses a challenge they must meet as their very missionary vocation. They must awaken to a creativity in mission which, up to the immediate past, they did not even begin to understand. It is only now, in fact, nearly twenty years later, that the meaning of this is beginning to be grasped.

Two points need to be made. First, the "young church" (hitherto the "mission" or "missions") has emerged as the new growing point of mission-thinking and mission-activity. Second, the young church, as "local church," is missionary, must be—as sign and instrument of Christ's redemption—missionary to its surrounding milieu and, indeed, to the whole world (which explains the slogan, "mission on six continents!").

Evangelii Nuntiandi (*EN*) is the document issued by Pope Paul VI as a summary of, and reflection on, the 1974 Synod of Bishops on Evangelization. It really constitutes an apostolic exhortation that covers a vast area of both theology and missionary action. For our present purpose, however, I would single out one facet only. *Evangelii Nuntiandi* has made it mandatory (at least for Catholic mission thinking) that the Catholic/Christian understanding of evangelization be "holistic," i.e., integral. It must be truly comprehensive: to understand mission only partially is to distort its meaning, to mutilate its range of action and life. "Any partial and fragmentary definition which attempts to render the reality of evangelization in all its richness, complexity and dynamism does so only at the risk of impoverishing it and even of distorting it" (*EN* 17).

Pope Paul VI is explicit that a more comprehensive grasp of what evangelization involves was what precisely emerged from the sharing of experience and insight which the Synod of 1974 proved to be.

> We must see each component in the total context wherein all of them are inserted. This was the merit of the recent Synod of Bishops. It was so strongly urged there that all these elements were not to be opposed to each other, but rather made to mesh in with each other …. So that

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> there might emerge a full understanding of the work of proclaiming the Gospel which is the task of the Church (*EN* 24).

Transposing the terms somewhat: basically, this means that in evangelization word cannot but be joined to witness, and witness must be joined to word—at least if evangelization is to be complete (Proclamation of "linguistic meaning" completes proclamation in and through "incarnate meaning." The obverse is also true.). To explain a bit: by *word* we mean the explicit preaching of the Gospel: *kerygma*, catechesis, the gradual formation of the church community and its development as a community of explicit faith, hope and love, with its ministry, the sacramental life, pastoral activity, and explicitly ecclesial presence and action. By *witness*, i.e., the presence and action of the Gospel "incarnately," we mean the living out, in life and action, of what the Gospel teaches (meanings, values) and what it commands (imperatives, deeds) mainly through *diakonia*, service—*diakonia* in the world and to the world in the world's own structures and spheres of concern and activity.

EN (18–21) enumerates with care and in some detail the elements of evangelization. The Gospel must transform humanity from within, make new its values, its interests, its aspirations, its models of life. Evangelization reaches into all spheres of human life and culture. The Gospel is meant to permeate them all, even to their very roots. Evangelization is—amongst men and women in our time—sharing, witness, solidarity, service. It is good (and importantly) explicit preaching, formation of the Christian community, its structures and ministries, adherence to the life of the Church in its doctrinal and sacramental fullness, apostolic and missionary initiative and labor.

There is a second point from *Evangelii Nuntiandi* which we should deal with here. It was a central issue in the Synod of 1974, and in *Evangelii Nuntiandi* as well: the relationship between evangelization, salvation, and intra-historical liberation, especially in the socio-economic and political areas. No one needs to be told how much this problem concerns all of us in Asia today, how present it is whenever we reflect on the meaning of the Gospel in our lands, in our time, for our peoples.

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Pope John Paul II, in his well-known address inaugurating CELAM III (the Latin American Bishops' continent-wide pastoral council on evangelization) at Puebla in Mexico, summarized and reiterated *EN*'s teaching on the issue of human liberation. A few sentences, recalling his words there, will have to suffice here:

> If the Church makes herself present in the defense, or in the advancement, of man, she does so in line with her mission, which, although it is religious and not social or political, cannot fail to consider man in the entirety of his being. The Lord outlines in the parable of the Good Samaritan the model of attention to all human needs (cf. Lk. 10:29ff.), and he said that in the final analysis he will identify himself with the disinherited—the sick, the imprisoned, the hungry, the lonely—who have been given a helping hand (Mt. 25:31ff.). The Church has learned in these and other pages of the Gospel (cf. Mk. 6:35–44) that her evangelizing mission has, as an essential part, action for justice and the tasks of the advancement of man, and that between evangelization and human advancement there are very strong links of the orders of anthropology, theology and love (*EN* 31); so that "evangelization would not be complete if it did not take into account the unceasing interplay of the Gospel and man's concrete life, both personal and social."
>
> It is therefore not through opportunism or thirst for novelty that the Church, "the expert in humanity," defends human rights. It is through a true evangelical commitment, which, as happened with Christ, is a commitment to the most needy. In fidelity to this commitment, the Church wishes to stay free with regard to the competing ideological systems, in order to opt only for man. Whatever the miseries or sufferings that afflict man, it is not through violence, the interplay of power and political systems, but through the truth concerning man, that he journeys towards a better future.

In summary still, Pope Paul's teaching in *EN* goes on to spell out the "correct Christian idea of liberation." It is "liberation from everything which oppresses man, but, … above all, liberation from sin and the Evil One, in the joy of knowing God and being known by him." It includes reconciliation, forgiveness, the recognition that every human heart can be transformed by God's love. Liberation, which has definite economic, political, social and cultural dimensions, but is not reduced to them. Liberation, whose fuller Christian sense is "not sacrificed to the

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demands of any strategy, practice or short-term solution." The Christian understanding of liberation is integrally evangelical and evangelically integral. It derives from the Gospel; it is part of the proclamation and the realization of the message of the Gospel.

Hence if preaching the Gospel today must include liberation in both teaching and praxis, conversely the Christian's understanding and praxis of liberation cannot remain Christian if the Gospel is not an integral and intrinsic part of it.

From *EN*, then, we have placed two points in relief: the comprehensive understanding of evangelization which integrally includes both *Word* and *Witness*, and the equally integral Christian understanding of liberation as deriving from the Gospel and inseparable from it, evangelization realizing itself in human liberation, but human liberation with genuinely evangelical dimensions (liberating evangelization).

What else will be said in this paper necessarily presupposes our complete adherence to the understanding of evangelization given us in *Evangelii Nuntiandi*. It is our permanent and ongoing point of reference. Let this be clearly and unambiguously understood. All this forms the basis and prelude of any "theology and theological reflection on mission" which the International Congress on Mission undertakes.

III. Orientations from Asian Bishops' Texts (1970–1978)

Do the declarations of the Asian Bishops, which I have listed above, offer us any more specific Asian orientations for theological thinking on mission, at least since the Second Vatican Council? To simplify our work somewhat toward finding the answer to our question, I have limited this survey only to texts from the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences (FABC), first, because they have an across-Asia dimension, something which statements from national conferences of bishops do not always possess, and second, because we believe it is only right and reasonable that FABC assemblies and their conclusions should feed into our present deliberations. The texts represent serious

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discussion and some areas of consensus already achieved. In these assemblies there has always been a genuine effort to call on the Holy Spirit for guidance and light, just as we have done and continue to do, in this present meeting. To gather the harvest from the meetings which have preceded this one seems an appropriate act of gratitude to the Asian bishops who gave time and labor to their previous gatherings, and an act of gratitude too to the Holy Spirit for his guidance.

ABM/1970. The overall topic chosen for discussion in the first meeting of Asian Bishops was *Populorum Progressio* and its meaning for peoples and churches of Asia. Within this given framework, the final statement of this meeting focused on the poverty and suffering of the Asian masses, on the youthfulness (percentage-wise) of Asian peoples, on the diversity of Asian cultures, on the post-colonial re-awakening and the emergence of a new consciousness and a new self-understanding, of which an aspect is an assertive nationalism, on the Asian peoples' recognition and desire for a life more truly worthy of their humanity, on the refusal of the youth to accept the status quo, on their clamor for reform and "bold transformations" in the economic conditions and political structures in their countries, and on the "coming to birth" in Asia of a "true community of peoples."

The Asian Bishops consequently saw their first task as the "renewal of ourselves in the light of Christ," the deepening "in ourselves" of the spirit of servant-hood, a commitment "to whatever concerns the dignity of man." They recognized that "it is far from true" that our commitment to Christ diverts us from "the duties and tasks of this earth."

To be more truly "the Church of the poor" was the first of their resolves. They also expressed determination to "speak out for the rights of the disadvantaged and powerless against all forms of injustice, and committed themselves to a concern for the total development of the peoples of Asia." The Bishops resolved too to become the "Church of the young."

The Asian Bishops also reached out to other Christian churches and communities in Asia, to collaborate with them towards the development of their peoples, and seek the just ending of strife and

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warfare in Asia. Reaching out too to all men of good will and resolving to uphold and promote the realization of human rights, they expressed resolve to seek the equitable distribution, and socially responsible use, of land and other resources; to impress on all the duty of responsible parenthood. In the context of their recognition of international aid programmes for countries of Asia and the rest of the Third World, they urged structural and real aid in terms of more equitable trade relations, the greater openness of markets to fruits of Asian labor, for example, and justice in international commodity prices. The Asian Bishops voiced support in the struggle against atheistic communism and against imperialism of every kind; cooperation between government and religious and civic bodies in development work; the effective implementation of aid to developing countries, particularly the realization of the goal of providing aid in the amount of 1% of the affluent nations' GNP. Surely these are not "narrow ecclesiastical concerns" which the Bishops saw as part of the Church's authentic concern in Asia.

But there were also more specific "home tasks":

- the construction of a theology of development with reflection on the role of conflict, and the clarification of the roles of priest, religious and laity in the concerns of development;
- the resolve to enter more resolutely into inter-religious dialogue;
- the development of indigenous theology and the work of inculturation of Christian faith and life;
- greater attention to, and recognition of, the importance of students in the tasks of transforming and building up Asian societies;
- greater emphasis on education for total human development;
- more unified practical action in areas of media—radio, television, press and film, the establishment of an Asian news agency, etc.

Here again, the task of mission is seen in a broad view, from as broad a perspective as that which characterizes *Gaudium et Spes* and

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other relatively recent Vatican II documents. Reflection on the nearly ten years which have followed on these recommendations will reveal, I think, a certain prophetic discernment of where the roads to the future were leading. One is pleasantly surprised, reading them today, how much they speak to us of our current concerns and purposes.

FABC 1/1974. The FABC had its ground-lines laid down in Manila in 1970 and in Hong Kong in early 1971. With the First Plenary Assembly, held in Taipei in April 1974, it became "fully real." The assembly met to consider the task of evangelization, in preparation for the Bishops' Synod of 1974. It was a historic gathering, and its deliberations (we believe) were a notable *prise de conscience* for the local churches in Asia, which proved far more significant than its participants realized in the course of the meeting itself. Its final text, on *Evangelizaton in Modern Day Asia*, in its official FABC secretariat edition alone, has gone into about a dozen printings up to this time. Surely this testifies to wide distribution and use, especially in Asia.

I shall refrain from commenting on this text at length. First, because the document is in everyone's hands and because the FABC Secretary-General, Bishop Mariano Gaviola, presented the statement with a commentary clearly underlining its major thrusts and indicating its points of focus. And second, because it is a text which has already "had a history." Many local communities and groups of priests, religious and lay people have said that they have been "educated on the text" as part of a program of orientation and action. Together with the Synod of 1971's "Justice in the World" and more recently Pope Paul's *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, it has provided a framework for an expanded and renewed understanding of evangelization in the Asian context today, a broadening of perspectives which *EN* was, in its own measure, to make its own. One commentator has said that the impact it has had in many places is a proof of the deep and wide-reaching influence a programmatic episcopal statement can in fact have, when it articulates with clarity the felt needs and aspirations of their own local churches after these have passed through the process of the Bishops' own "prophetic discernment."

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As the first and second volumes of *His Gospel to Our Peoples* abundantly substantiate, the statement and resolutions of the First FABC Plenary derive from the Asian churches and their Bishops—from statements made by various episcopates, e.g., from India (the 1974 CBCI texts), from Vietnam (one might read the papers given in 1970 and 1974 by Bishop Nguyen van Thuan), from the Philippines and from other conferences and bishops, and as the Taipei proceedings show, from somewhat hurried, but fruitful, discussion in the assembly work groups.

FABC/1974 places the local churches in Asia at the center of focus. The primordial "mission-now" assignment for the Church in Asia is the building up of the local church. This can be seen as in basic continuity with *Ad Gentes* in Vatican II. But the accents here are more markedly placed on the tasks of the local church in order to become, one might say, *more authentically the local church.*

> The primary focus of our task of evangelization, then, at this time in our history is the building up of a truly local church. (9)
>
> For the local church is the realization and the enfleshment of the body of Christ in a given place and time. (10)
>
> [The local church] is not a community in isolation from other communities of the Church one and catholic. Rather it seeks communion with all of them. With them it professes the one faith, shares the one Spirit and the one sacramental life. In a special way it rejoices in its communion and filial oneness with the See of Peter, which presides over the universal Church in love. (11)
>
> The local church is a church incarnate in a people, a church indigenous and inculturated. And this means concretely a Church in continuous, humble and loving dialogue with the living traditions, the cultures, the religions—in brief, with all the life-realities of the people in whose midst it has sunk its roots deeply and whose history and life it gladly makes its own. It seeks to share in whatever truly belongs to that people: its meanings and its values, its aspirations, its thoughts and its language, its songs and its artistry. Even its frailties and failings it assumes, so that they too may be healed. For so did God's Son assume the totality of our fallen human condition (save only for sin) so that He might make it truly His own, and redeem it in His paschal mystery. (12)

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This paragraph from the final statement of the First Plenary Assembly of the Asian Bishops' Conferences has often been cited as much in Europe as in Asia as the "classic description" of what inculturation means.

Dialogue too is put forward as imperative: a "dialogue of life"—a life-sharing—*within* the experience of the great majorities of Asian peoples who, from their poverty, undernourishment and illnesses, their suffering and enduring, seek a fuller human life, an affirmation in life and praxis of the dignity and rights of every human person, a striving for the liberation of man toward a fuller humanity, the existence of children of the heavenly Father.

In July 1978 the first FABC Bishops' Institute for Missionary Apostolate (Baguio City) had this to say, at the end of the first day of brain-storming on the common concerns of evangelization in Asia:

> Synthesizing the results of the brainstorming sessions, the assembly came to the conclusion, surprising for some, that we had, without intending it, actually followed in the footsteps of the Taipei meeting of 1974. This meeting had clearly stated the building up of the local church as the goal of all missionary activity, a goal that can be reached only by a … genuine dialogue.

These few remarks will have to suffice. FABC 1/1974 does not pretend to give a complete theology of evangelization, but it does lay down "an agenda for churches in Asia"—an agenda which in fact implies a theology of mission sketched only by suggestion in the last paragraphs (par 43–49) of the text.

ACMC/1977. The Asian Colloquium on Ministries in the Church took up a vast range of themes and problems (one admires the hardihood of the participants). The six question-points the colloquium enumerated are often cited, as is the lineup of new (especially lay) ministries in the church. Bishop D'Souza has reproduced "the situational challenges to the Christian Church in Asia" in his keynote address.

1. *In religious matters* the question is: how to preach the good news of Jesus to our brethren so that the Church may be, and appear to be, the sacrament of salvation and a community of love.

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2. *In relation to the world religions:* how to enrich its own Christian identity and life by opening itself to the great religious traditions of Asia in inter-religious dialogue, and together with them, how to practice religion, and promote moral and religious values, in a way that will contribute to the total human development of our peoples.
3. *In economics:* how to contribute to the eradication of stark poverty, by an authentic dialogue of life with the poor of *Asia,* without fostering materialism.
4. *In social life*: how to preserve the authentic values of personalism and family life in the face of urbanization and technological progress.
5. *In political matters*: how to help our people find an Asian style of authentic participative leadership in government at all levels.
6. *In cultural matters:* how to find their own national and Asian identity, by blending ancient and modern values in face of the future ahead. (ACMC No. 12, p. 22)

One way perhaps of evaluating the basic thrust of ACMC is to say that the colloquium was a sustained effort to draw-up a preliminary set of rough sketches for adapting the structures, ministries, and methods of evangelization of the Asian churches to bring these into gear with the mission as truly meeting the "situational challenges" indicated. We might cite this sentence from BIMA I as reflecting the same realization:

> Deeply challenged by these fundamental issues, the participants felt how inadequate our present structures are to realize this our mission in Asia, starting from the central mission organization of the church right down to the local level. The discussion also revealed the inadequacy of many of our present day mission methods.

It is at this point, I believe, that the *theme of the Basic Christian Communities* (BCC) emerges, and with it the new understanding of ministries,—especially lay ministries—which derives from the "realization" (the coming-to-be) of the grass-roots level ecclesial units.

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Unless we are mistaken, from this point on the BCCs begin more and more to take up "front and center" on the Asian Church scene (Your own experience, in various countries, will be greatly helpful in evaluating developments in this area. One effect of Pope Paul's *EN* was the genuine, if guarded, welcome and "right to the city" it gave to BCCs.). To more and more—as in our recent Manila Archdiocesan Synod (October 1979)—the BCC structure and processes seem to provide a privileged (and providential) way of realizing, especially on the levels where it really counts, the purposes the Asian churches have, for some time now, been setting for themselves.

> We will refer the issues which surface here to the Workshop on this topic. Perhaps it is not an accident that when the first responses of participants-to-be for this conference began to come in, Workshop VI was by far the most "popular" of the discussion-and-study groups. The topic, it would seem, has come to its hour in the local communities of the Church in Asia.

FABC II/1978. FABC II took up the theme of "Prayer, the Life of the Church of Asia." Bishop Gaviola, in his presentation of the text, notes with some insistence that the reflection on prayer was in no way envisioned—by anyone who planned the assembly or participated in it—as a backward step from the commitments solemnly taken up by the Asian Bishops in 1970 and 1974. On the contrary, it was seen as a step forward, a step of more explicit integration of commitment/action with the "depth dimension" of Christian life and mission: the dialogue with the Lord in the depths of the heart, in the depths of many hearts. The deep levels of Christian and Asian spirituality were in intent and purpose being *explicitly linked up* with the efforts toward inculturation, inter-religious dialogue, and toward the true development and liberation of persons and societies in Asia. FABC II was thus an attempt to complete the circle: to link mission and dialogue with prayer and contemplation, to affirm that all Christian involvement needs prayer-roots if it is to remain Christian and if it is to grow as true commitment to human persons, to the totality of persons and societies.

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We do not need to point out that the FABC II/1978 was an exercise in inculturation and in dialogue with (some aspects at least of) the religious traditions and prayer-ways of other Asian religions. It was, in fact, programmed to be just as much "prayer exercise" (and in this sense a praxis, though not in the Marxist sense) as reflection and discussion. It was also an attempt in practice to link up the prayer dimension of the Christian life with the action/praxis pole.

Bishop Gaviola's comment on the text places some emphasis on this latter intent. He cites three significant paragraphs to illustrate his point (pp. 4–5). We may be allowed after him to reproduce the same paragraphs here.

> We renew our commitment … to the tasks which the gospel and the Spirit speaking in "the signs of the times" have given to us and our communities. These tasks call us to shared responsibility for justice and brotherhood among men and peoples, to the solidarity with the men and women of our time, especially when they are poor and voiceless, marginalized and oppressed, deprived of their rights and their human dignity. (42)
>
> It is thus our resolve to "allow Jesus to pray to the Father and live for the Father in our hearts and lives" ever more fully, and in freedom to receive and make ours the gifts of Faith, Hope and Love which the Lord gives to men for their liberation from sin and its consequences in society, for the fulfillment of their earthly tasks and their pilgrimage to the Kingdom of God. (43)
>
> Our faith teaches us that liberation from oppressions which weigh upon our peoples will not be wrought, nor the pain and injustice of the world removed from it except through our sharing, in prayer and self-gift, in the mystery of the Cross. (44)
>
> We believe that finally the power of God's love is the only force that can truly renew the world. This force is the power of the Spirit; it is given to us by the Lord through prayer. (45)

BIMA I/1978. Though BIMA I/1978 (Baguio City, July 1978) preceded Calcutta, for our purposes we have preferred to take it up in last place. In a sense the present meeting is an extension and widening of BIMA I, not least because BIMA I pursued a purpose practically identical with ours: it can be seen as a preliminary to this assembly.

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When its participants began by formulating their common concerns, "another vital need surfaced: the creation of an integral mission theology suited for Asian conditions." In large measure this objective is high on our agenda also. I can only urge—with insistence, if I may—that our participants read the few pages with which BIMA I speaks to us. Again, if I may, I would like to highlight a few themes:

> From our experience of dialogue (the whole spirit and method of that conference was a sharing of experience and insights, joined to reflection and prayer) emerged the conviction that dialogue was the key we sought,—not dialogue in the superficial sense in which it is often understood, but as a witnessing to Christ in word and deed, by reaching out to people in the concrete reality of their daily lives.
>
> We were happily surprised to see that our spontaneous sharing led to the same conclusions as those of the First Plenary Assembly of FABC, Taipei 1974, namely, that the areas to be explored were those of inculturation of the Christian faith, the encounter with Asian religions, and the challenge posed to the Church by the poverty of the vast majority of our people.
>
> In the context of dialogue we tried to penetrate the meaning of the uniqueness of Christ—in our own inner experience, in our contact with others, in the very plan of God to bring all things to fulfillment in Christ as head. We realized … that our actual presentation of Christ does not correspond to what we have learnt about the divine economy of salvation. There is also much in the Church that must change—in ways of thinking and in structures—to make room for Christ to expand to the full dimensions envisaged by St. Paul. We feel that the Christian experience in contact with the age-old religious experience of Asia has much to contribute to the growth and transformation in outlook and appearance of the Universal Church.

The centerpiece, when everything is said, is *dialogue*: dialogue in the inner heart with Christ to grasp a little of his meaning for us, dialogue with one another within the community of Christian faith, hope and love, dialogue in the three wide realms described by FABC I/1974 and confirmed by the spontaneous reflection and discussion of BIMA I itself, dialogue with our people in their own concrete historical and cultural situations (dialogue with cultures), dialogue with the religious

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experience of Asian spirituality and prayer, the dialogue which must create "the poor Church of the Servant" within our own lives.

Some *practical imperatives* flow from this cluster of interlocking perspectives:

- the increasing involvement of bishops and other leaders of our communities in this climate and movement of dialogue;
- the attentive listening to "the signs of the times" in the great variety of constantly changing situations that have to be taken account of, and boldly ventured into;
- the creation, activation, fostering of authentic Christian communities;
- the growing realization in ideal, life and lifestyle, of "the image of the poor Church conformed to the pattern of the Suffering Servant of Yahweh—for it is such a Church which can effectively bring Christ to Asia";
- the opening up and renewal, the intensification of the role of prayer and contemplation, so important in the religious quest of Asia, in our evangelizing effort;
- the attention which must be paid to adequate formation for mission.

IV. Summing Up: Towards a Consensus

The foregoing exercise has been a rather tedious and unfortunately repetitive attempt to do exegesis of texts, and we now need to draw the strings together into some sort of coherent pattern.

1. It would seem that there is no need of substantially new orientations. The overall vision and thrusts seen in these past Asian Bishops' assemblies and workshops seem to remain essentially valid for the '80s. The discerned "signs of the times" remain the same:

> Our people, in their hearts, are reaching out to God. They are searching for deep spiritual values, in a world dominated by commerce and

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> industry. They are not only hungry for food; they are hungry for freedom, for dignity, for a life that is human.

The "good news" of the Gospel must consequently be preached to the peoples of Asia. And to do this there is need for the building up of a local church.

2. A local church is, though one with the universal Church, with the See of Peter, incarnate in the people. It is a church that springs out of local culture, one that reverences traditions and customs, uses local languages, speaks of immortal truths in images easily understood and loved by the common folk.

3. In the Asian context, it remains an imperative for the local church to engage in dialogue with the religious traditions of the region, which have been the peoples' "doorway to God." There could be mutual grace in such a dialogue: as it can shed some light on the truths themselves of Christ's Gospel, it can also bring to these ancient traditions a new understanding of man, an eternal vision revealing to the peoples of Asia new dimensions of love, the family, and life itself.

4. The same need to identify with the poor remains too, which finds an element of holiness in the practice of justice. To dialogue with the poor is to experience poverty in its stark reality so that one ends up working not so much *for* them as *with* them.

Hence, the same need too for renewal, involving some genuine re-forming, re-sharing, re-structuring: renewal, through the discernment and recognition of new forms and shapes of ministry, especially of lay ministries in our local churches (*vid.* ACMC, Hong Kong, 1977).

5. Here we will bring up some points which call for discussion and reflection (*vid.* papers of Father Amaladoss, the Korean Bishops/ Bishop McNaughton, BIMA I).

The building up of the local church ("evangelization today")—is not the task only or even primarily of the (clerical) leadership, or of an elite or chosen few, but of *all the people of God*, hence the importance of the role of the faithful, the *laity in the Church*.

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5.A. Building up the local church means building up a truly human and truly Christian community. It is a community involved in the concrete ongoing life of its milieu, aware of its mission as church, faithful to authentic Christian identity (hence the role of the Tradition and the magisterium), open "prophetically" to the future, creatively expressing through its life and action the good news of the Reigning of God among men in freedom, fellowship, justice and love.

5.B. Building up the local church means evolving and developing structures of participation and co-responsibility at every level, in a spirit conducive to an atmosphere of authentic freedom, initiative, courage and creativity which fosters genuine involvement of the community and its members in the total (socio-political-cultural) life of the people of one's country and region.

5.C. Building up a local church means building up too of a "church of the people." This term is not to be taken in either a political/ideological sense, or in a populist/"anti-hierarchical" sense (*vide* Pope John Paul II, Opening Address at CELAM III, Puebla, Mexico), but in the sense of:

> church truly renewed in and through groups and communities of Christians, especially those formed with and among the poor, truly committed to conversion and commitment to the Gospel, truly given to the service and the true liberation in full evangelical sense (given in *EN*) of the poor and the powerless among our peoples, truly dedicated to a presence, witness and self-giving which proclaims in life the Gospel in the midst of the world.

6. Renewal and *re-evangelization*. Re-evangelization in the sense called for, once again, by Pope Paul VI in *Evangelii Nuntiandi*. A renewed immersion, in the power of the Holy Spirit, in the Gospel, its meanings, its values, its commitments, its imperatives, its "life within" our hearts and spirits. Renewal in the Gospel of individuals and communities of faith, hope and love, in authentic prayer and authentic spirituality first of all (FABC II/1978), in the experiential and "mystical dimension" of the Christian existence:

- very importantly, for Asia above all, of Christian family life;

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- in *catechesis*: a renewal of the "words and gestures" of Faith, so that these communicate the Gospel and its message anew, without "ideologization," in a way that makes it intelligible, meaningful, prophetic and operative in the concrete life-and-society situations of our times and our peoples;
- in theological reflection and teaching, so that it is much more in touch with the core of the Gospel message, and much more in touch with the situations, the suffering, the needs, aspirations and movements of the diverse milieux in which the Christian faith and life must be inserted and made "leaven and spirit";
- in the formation and life-styles of all "agents of evangelization," according to the options and desires repeatedly expressed in the statements given above (1, 6).

7. The overall "slogan" then, which sums up the orientations indicated here, would be: "*A Renewed Christian Community, For A Renewed Mission!*"

8. "*Renewed mission*": what does this involve?

Here we can do no better than draw from the reflections of the First Bishops' Institute for Missionary Activity (BIMA I) held by the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences in Baguio, 1978.

The Church's evangelizing effort, its mission, must respond to the challenges Asia places before the Christian faith and the Christian community, concretely, in our time:

- the challenge of poverty, of our suffering multitudes;
- the challenge of the great religious traditions and the "ways of faith" of our non-Christian peoples;
- the challenge of inculturation, of making the Asian peoples and cultures "truly at home" in the household of the Christian faith and in the Church of Jesus Christ: truly catholic, truly for all peoples.

9. Finally, all this: both the re-evangelization of our Christian communities and the working-out of the tasks of mission send us back to Christ. In inwardness, in prayer, in re-discovering the Crucified and

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Risen Christ in our own lives, in the midst of our communities, as well as in the midst of our brethren in poverty, suffering and need. But recognizing Christ means *re-cognizing* one we have known and loved in the depths of our inner experience, in silence and contemplation.

Here, rather than say more of my own words, I would like simply to refer our participants to the section "Who is Christ?" in the reflections of BIMA I.

> Especially over the last few decades, the missionary in Asia, foreign and native alike, has acquired a definite image. Whether he is rejected and hated, or welcomed and loved, his "missionary" zeal has become a byword all over the continent. He is seen as a pioneer in social action, in medicine, in education, even in such secular activities as building village roads and clearing slums. But he is hardly seen as the "man of God," as a man with a deep experience of God, a man of silence and prayer, as the *guru* capable of showing the other pilgrims the way to their final liberation from a world that is not their ultimate home. In short, few will recognize him as *the Christ* that is walking on Asia's byways and highways. A sample survey made in India showed that 75% of educated Hindus regarded mission work not as a religious activity but as a humanitarian affair, like that of the Peace Corps workers. What is wrong with this type of missionary that he is not recognized as a messenger of Christ, and that, therefore, his message is likely to be rejected as a political interference or cultural aggression?
>
> The participants, therefore, retired for a quiet day of reflection, prayer and shared experiences in small groups. The challenging question, consoling and disturbing at the same time, that was put to them was: "Who is Christ for you? How do you see Christ present and at work in other religions? How do you understand Christ as the sacrament, the Eschatological Christ—the Cosmic Christ? How do you share this vision with other missionaries in the field?" The ensuing sharing in small workshops was one of the most rewarding experiences many had in this seminar. It was almost tangible that it was the Spirit of Jesus present in our midst who *fortiter suaviterque* put the Risen Christ and His on-going mission back into the very center of our "mission work," which not rarely had been to a large extent externalized. While sharing insights and experiences with each other, many felt the urgent need of re-educating missionaries in the field, as well as educating those who are preparing for "the mission," by giving them an integrated formation

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> that unites organically a vision as large as St. Paul's with a theology that articulates that vision, and a spirituality that lives it.

In the end, any Theology of Mission must link up with Christ again, the Crucified and Risen Lord. Pope John Paul's encyclical *Redemptor Hominis* tells us that all the roads of the Church pass through man. But they are finally roads of encounter with Christ. The ways of the Church pass through the heart and the life of man. But the heart and the life of man are all "Christ-lands." In the end and in the depths they lead to Jesus Christ, *in quo est salus, spes et resurrectio nostra.*

V. Some Reflections

1. Most of what has preceded is simply an exercise in "textual analysis." I had hoped to complete this paper with a few personal reflections on "some perspectives on mission in Asia today … and tomorrow."

2. Some themes I would like to develop as especially relevant to mission in Asia would be:

2.A. *the primacy of dialogue*, of a "new style" of dialogue which mission in Asia has to develop more and more. We have to work out in practice the relationship between proclamation and dialogue which (we all agree, I believe) are not contraries, but complementary aspects of the announcing of God's Word among men. But we have to speak of dialogue from experience, not from concepts;

2.B. *the true understanding of the Catholicity of the Church*: much remains to be "re-understood" here, once again, not from concepts alone, but from the "searching" and dialogue which must be the inner spirit and method of the practice of inculturation;

2.C. "*missionary experience*" within involvement and engagement in the world, life and struggles of the poor and the powerless (of the "little ones") in our Asian societies (the themes of the theology of liberation enter here). Once again the understanding must derive, in large measure, from (to use that much-abused word) *praxis*, and *faith-rooted reflection* on praxis;

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2.D. the *experience of basic ecclesial communities*;

2.E. finally, what Pierre Schouver calls "*mission as a mystic itinerary*."

Unfortunately there is no time now to write these out, and I will have to content myself with a few headings. Perhaps I can refer our participants to Pierre Schouver's *L'Eglise et la Mission* (Coll. "Croire et comprendre," Paris: Le Centurion, 1977). His closing reflections in Chapter 7, "La mission aujourd 'hui'," I have found excellent, perhaps because in large measure I agree with them (Here I summarize his last section, begging your indulgence for not assimilating these thoughts first and re-expressing them in a way that shall have made them my own.).

Mission as a "mystic itinerary" [more or less from Pierre Schouver].

> Ultimately, mission is a "theological affair," i.e., its final purpose is not the survival, expansion or glorification of the Church, but rather the ever fuller revelation of God the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ in his design for the salvation of all men.
>
> We are not "possessors of God;" all our lives long we remain seekers of God. This does not contradict the certainty of faith (we know this!), but it does underline the fact that God's revelation remains ever his free gift. If it is given to us by his mercy, we are yet never allowed to set ourselves above others. The Christian relies only on God's grace, not on himself. That grace summons him to faith and hope, to prayer, to the service of his brothers.
>
> In a very broad sense, one can say that today the search of God is in the line of the "mystical tradition" rather than in that of the "theological tradition" (i.e., not the theological tradition precisely as divorced from the mystical). That is, today it is the sense of God as mystery, beyond our concepts and formulations, *rooted in the personal experience of faith*, which characterizes the quest for the divine. Not that one by-passes or belittles the traditional expressions of faith and theology as found in the Church, but there is a search for God which seeks him beyond these formulae and institutional expressions, as the hidden God.
>
> Face to face with the "other religions," their beliefs, their ways of contemplation and prayer, we are driven back to the personal and community experiences of faith, back to the Church's *experience* of God, our quest for God is renewed: the God whom we "seek anew," even if our search is truly guided by the Christian tradition.

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And yet this search for "the hidden God" is not for God in some platonic empyrean, a search undertaken by some spiritual elite which lives in privileged separation from the world. No, instead God is sought in his hiddenness in our day to day experience, in the contradictions and difficulties of our ordinary existence, in the common ways and prosaic lives of men and women today. The true mystical search today is not "outside all critical control." It still bears the mark of a certain "foolishness" vis-a-vis the values of he world. But it is the foolishness of charity, of the Cross, which has its own demands, and whose fruits one can discern.

When the Church on mission goes beyond her own frontiers, she gives witness of her faith in the Lord who is greater than she is. The Lord she seeks, she seeks *not* "outside the world," but within history. The mystery of the God who is Love is *there* revealed where Christians, under the leading of the Spirit, let themselves "lose their lives" in opening themselves to others, in giving themselves over to their service. For it is always in the pattern and logic of the Paschal Mystery that the fulfillment of the Promise of the Father is truly found.

The *hidden God is the God of the Cross of Jesus*. He reveals himself as our Liberator when we live out in our lives that dying through which others can find life. Missionary spirituality has always placed its accent on the spirit of sacrifice, of total self-gift. Today it is not so much the "secondary sacrifices" (connected with climate, distance from home, food, lodging. etc.) we speak of, but of that fundamental and daily self-gift which dedication to and involvement with the poor, the suffering, the broken and powerless in this world demand, which an unfailing respect, reverence and patience for "the other" (the stranger, above all) asks of us.

It is through this "daily dying" that the missionary shares in the dying of Christ (Col. 1:24; 2 Cor. 4, 10), "so that the more grace is multiplied among people, the more thanksgiving there will be, to the glory of God" (2 Cor. 4, 5).

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