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THE CHURCH IN ASIA AND MISSION IN THE 1990s*

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Pre-note[1]

One of my earliest memories of Cardinal Jaime Sin was of his participation at the First Plenary Assembly of the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences (FABC) at Taipei. He had been installed as Archbishop of Manila on the feast of Saint Joseph

*The first part of this paper represents an article previously published in the *International Bulletin of Missionary Research*, edited by Dr. Gerald H. Anderson of the Overseas Ministries Study Center (New Haven, Connecticut 06511 U.S.A), and a position paper written for the Fifth Plenary Assembly of the FABC (Bandung, Indonesia, July 17–27, 1990). The second part, which for the most part summarizes Father Joseph A. Komonchak's "God's Gift and Our Task," has been revised considerably. This two-part paper was offered as a contribution to a *Festschrift* on the occasion of the silver jubilee, on March 19, 1999, of Jaime Cardinal Sin's episcopal consecration.

[1]I would like to acknowledge indebtedness to the following publications, where the material here reproduced (with considerable revision) was first published.

International Bulletin of Missionary Research 14 (40th Anniversary Issue, April 1990): 50–53, published by the Overseas Ministries Study Center (OMSC), 490 Prospect Street, New Haven, Connecticut 06511 (U. S. A.). Dr. Gerard H. Anderson, director of the OMSC, serves as editor. The papers on "Mission

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(March 19, 1974). I had been present at the ceremony of installation held in the Manila Cathedral; I remember what an "upbeat" moment it had been—one of great expectation, of much hope. As a person, he was so different from the late Cardinal Santos. There was his ready laughter, with his infectious optimism and joy. Something of the same impression was made on the Asian bishops gathered at the Yangminshan meeting in Taiwan (I suppose many of the bishops there wanted to know what sort of man the new archbishop of Manila was).

Cardinal Sin's ministry as head of the archdiocese has included a notable presence in the "FABC area": visits, talks, participation in innumerable meetings and conferences in every major city of the region. Tokyo, Taipei, Singapore, Bangkok, Hong Kong, Calcutta, New Delhi, Bombay, Kuala Lumpur, Kota Kinabalu, Seoul … Shanghai, Beijing, Xiamen … all these cities and many others have been visited by our Cardinal. It was my privilege to have been invited to accompany him on his first visit to China in 1984, and to the Soviet Union in 1987.

Not having been with him at all the FABC meetings he has participated in, I cannot evaluate the impact he has made at them all. But I believe his contribution to the *koinonia*, the fellowship among Asian bishops that the FABC has so greatly facilitated—that his contribution has been noteworthy. At the Third FABC Plenary Assembly in Bangkok in 1982, the bishops present put in first place

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in the 1990s" were later gathered by Gerard H. Anderson, J. M. Phillips and Robert T. Coote in *Mission in the Nineteen 90s* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Win. B. Eerdmans/New Haven, Connecticut: OMSC, 1991).

C. G. Arévalo, S.J., "The Church in Asia and Mission in the 1990s," Fifth Plenary Assembly Workshop Discussion Guide, *FABC Papers* No. 57b (1990), with an appendix by Carolus B. Putranta, S. J., "A Brief Survey of the FABC Documents, 1970–82." The FABC Papers are published by the Office of the Secretary-General, Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences (FABC), Caine Road, Hong Kong, GPO Box 2984, Hong Kong. Fr. Edward Malone, M. M., serves as editor.

Joseph A. Komonchak, "The Church: God's Gift and Our Task," Address to Church Planners and Council Members, *Origins* XVI (1987): 735–741.

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among "the gifts of the FABC" to them, the creation of greater mutual understanding and of "bonds of friendship and solidarity [which have] grown among them" (FABC III, Statement of the Assembly, #3.1).[2]

> Surely for shaping a community among the churches in Asia, this is a wonderful beginning, full of promise for the future, for unity is first of all a oneness of minds and hearts in friendship.

Once again: for the creation of these bonds of friendship and solidarity, I have no doubt Cardinal Sin's contribution has been very significant.

To mention only one personal recollection; it concerns the late (and much loved) Bishop Simon Fung of Kota Kinabalu. Whenever I would meet him, "somewhere else in the world," he would have a new joke or funny story he would want me to bring home to Cardinal Sin; a joyful friendship had developed between them. He was to invite the Cardinal to the solemn consecration of the newly completed cathedral at Kota Kinabalu. More than once he told me of his affection for the Archbishop of Manila. Bishop Simon died young, and his last months, his final illness and death moved all those who were witnesses deeply: his strong and inspiring faith, hope and love shone through so powerfully. I am glad I could have served two or three times as a vehicle of his friendship for Cardinal Sin.

The paper which I here offer as a contribution to this *Festschrift Sin* deals with "The Church in Asia and Mission in the 1990s." Cardinal Sin has several times been asked to speak about the mission of the Church in Asia, in the Philippines and abroad. It would be interesting to draw up a summary of his addresses on this theme. Father James Kroeger's dissertation, *The Philippine Church and Evangelization 1965–1984* (Rome: Gregorian University, 1985), has at least 30 references to Cardinal Sin's words and deeds, and over 180 entries in the bibliography, listing addresses and writings of the 1965–1984 period alone.

These pages present a revision of an article previously published in the *International Bulletin of Missionary Research* (edited by Dr. Gerald

[2] *For All the Peoples of Asia*, Asian Bishops' Statements on Mission, Community and Ministry, 1970–1983 (Manila: IMC Publications, 1984), FABC III, 83–108, at 90.

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H. Anderson of the Overseas Ministries Study Center, New Haven, Connecticut 06511 U.S.A) and of a position paper written for the Fifth Plenary Assembly of the FABC (Bandung, Indonesia, July 17–27, 1990). The second part, summarizing Father Joseph A. Komonchak's "God's Gift and Our Task," has been revised considerably. I thought this paper would be of greater relevance for this volume offered to our Cardinal Archbishop on the silver jubilee of his episcopal consecration. It is a humble piece of work, but its concerns are close to Cardinal Sin's heart, I know. It is a token (such a poor token!) of my gratitude and affection for a man of the Church whose place in the history of the Church in our country is large and secure. Our hope and our prayer is that the years to come may witness an even more outstanding and more enduring presence and action of our Cardinal Archbishop in our land, our Church and our world.

Part One[3]

I. Agenda for Mission

The last two decades have produced so many discussions on the theology of mission and of the Church's missionary activity, so much soul-searching and debate on the role of missionaries and on the tasks of Christian mission as we move toward the third Christian millennium, that we can only repeat, or pickup and choose from, the positions already taken and the agenda already drawn up by countless conferences, seminars and individual theologians. The essays already published in the *International Bulletin of Missionary Research* on "Mission in the 1990s" have done us the service of summing up much of the enormous contemporary literature on the subject of Christian

[3]Cf. n. 1 above. I have made some minor changes in the text, and have revised some of the notes. I might use this occasion to encourage the reader who is interested in these issues to read Anderson, et al., *Mission in the Nineteen 90s* (publication data indicated in n. 1 above).

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mission and the questions it raises today.[4] This contribution thus cannot be expected to say anything really new. It will try instead to present "Mission in the 1990s" from a rather specific Roman Catholic viewpoint and from a definite context: East and Southeast Asia.

For twenty years, Roman Catholic bishops and theologians have struggled with the subject of Christian mission—more precisely with the mission of the Church—in what might be called the "FABC region" (Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences), that part of Asia that Europeans call "the Far East" ("Far from whom?" the renowned Filipino historian, Horacio de la Costa, used to ask). The years following the Vatican Council II saw in Latin America the remarkable emergence of CELAM (Consejo Episcopal Latinoamericano) and the significant movements in theology and ecclesial life and praxis that the names of Medellin and Puebla evoke. In a lower-profile way, the FABC assemblies and workshops represent in East, Southeast, and South Asia what CELAM II and CELAM III have meant for the Churches in Latin America. It is appropriate, therefore, to give readers a summary of FABC thought and directions on the theme of Christian mission.[5] It is my conviction that mission in Asia, as far as

[4]"Mission in the 1990s": I. Arthur F. Glasser & II. Michael Amaladoss, *International Bulletin of Missionary Research* 13:1 (January 1989). The present contribution owes much to Fr. Amaladoss' more comprehensive treatment of the theme. Cf. also his book, *Mission Today* (Rome: Centrum Ignatianum Spiritualitatis, 1988).

[5]Cf. *For All the Peoples of Asia* I: *The Church in Asia*, Asian Bishops' Statements on Mission, Community and Ministry, 1970–1983 (Manila: International Mission Congress Office, 1984) and *For All the Peoples of Asia* II: *Further Texts*, 1974–1986 (Manila: 1987). These two volumes are being reprinted in one volume, with additional materials (Quezon City: Claretian Publications, and Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1992). Cf. also Gaudencio B. Rosales, et al., eds., *Toward a New Age in Mission*, International Mission Congress in Mission, December 2–7, 1979 (Manila: International Mission Congress Office, 1981), Books I–III, 2 vols. For a study of these and other texts, cf. Carolus Putranta, S. J., *The Idea of the Church in the Documents of the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences (FABC) 1970–1982*, unpublished S.T.D. dissertation (Rome: Pontifical Gregorian University, 1985), 2 vols., 585 pp.

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the Catholic Church is concerned, will be in continuity with these directions, that the 1990s will spell out these orientations in more concrete ways and deepen the theological understanding of these areas of ecclesial thought and practice.[6]

1. Always the point of departure in the thought and texts of the FABC conferences has been the vision of a "new world being born" in Asia since the end of the colonial period in our part of the earth. In "this vast and varied, restless and swiftly-changing world" of nearly three billion people (almost two-thirds of humanity), we see an ever-widening, ever-increasing search, "new today in its breadth, restlessness and urgency," for the reshaping of national societies and human communities "in the midst of so much social change, conflict and struggle, suffering and oppression, inhumanity and death." This search "defines the turbulent history of our time." FABC documents clearly and explicitly affirm that the Church's missionary proclamation and activity must be in close dialogue with the realities of this context and must seek to respond to the "signs of the times."[7]

This perspective, on the part of Roman Catholic Church leaders in Asia, is a relatively new one. Vatican II, especially its pastoral constitution *Gaudium et Spes*, provided the necessary intervening moment toward the acceptance of this perspective. If we may draw

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[6]For example, for India, Felix Wilfred, *The Emergent Church in a New India* (Tiruchirappalli: 1988), and, for the Philippines, Brendan Lovett, *On Earth as in Heaven: Corresponding to God in Philippine Context* (Quezon City, Philippines: Claretian, 1988). See also Lovett's *Life Before Death: Inculturating Hope* (Quezon City, Philippines: Claretian, 1986). Cf. also Bishop Francisco Claver's writings, e.g., *The Stones Will Cry Out: Grassroots Pastorals* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis, 1978); from them a rather explicit ecclesiology of mission may be discerned. Also, Bishop Teodoro C. Bacani, *Towards the Third Millennium—the PCP II Vision* (Manila: 1991), a presentation of the Second Plenary Council of the Philippines' vision of the Church's mission for the coming decades, by one of the main drafters of the final document.

[7]Words included within quotation marks are taken from FABC texts, but especially from the "Final Statement of the International Congress on Mission, Manila, 2–7 December 1979." Cf. n. 5 above.

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wisdom from a perceptive remark of Cardinal Newman, however, it will take another generation before this point of view becomes universally accepted by Church leadership. But the establishment of this new perspective is henceforth irreversible and decisive.

2. From 1971 onward it has been affirmed—most clearly by the FABC General Assembly of 1974 at Taipei—that the "basic mode of mission in Asia" must be dialogue, *missionary* dialogue, of course. We must explore the interface of the Gospel's meanings and values with the realities of Asia and its many peoples—its histories and cultures, religions and religious traditions, and especially its "poor masses" in every country. These realities—cultures, religions, life situations of poverty—make up the ambiance and context wherein the Gospel is to be proclaimed; these realities define the "place" for the localization of the Church and the inchoate "realization" of God's kingdom.

This overarching program of dialogue with the cultures (i.e., inculturation), with the religions and religious traditions (i.e., inter-religious dialogue) and with "our peoples, especially the poor multitudes in Asia" (i.e., development/liberation), has been the thematic background of both the pastoral and missionary activity of the local Churches of Asia in the past twenty years. In the 1979 International Mission Congress (Manila), it was used as the overall framework for reflection on mission and the tasks of mission in the 1980s. For the 1990s, these dialogues remain the headings under which the concerns and activities of Christian mission are collocated. It is in the endeavor to bring these dialogues into life and practice, and in the ongoing reflection on the processes they have initiated, that the way of theologizing on mission must surely be constructed in the decade to come.

3. The "acting subject" of this missionary work and dialogue must be, concretely and in the first instance, the "local Church." The local Churches and Christian communities constitute the responsible historical subject of mission today in Asia (again, in the first instance). It is they who can discern and work out the way the Gospel is best proclaimed, the Church set up, the values of God's kingdom realized in their own place and time. The local Christian community "becomes

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Church" largely through interrelationship with the milieu that is its place and context of mission.[8]

4. The local Church means the entire Christian community, the "entire people of God" in this given time and place. Here the participation of lay people in the Church's missionary activity is especially to be stressed. This total ecclesial community is, in the first instance, "the self-acting and self-realizing subject of the Church's mission"; the proclamation of the Gospel by word, witness and work within the concrete realities of people's life, is a common task shared by all Christians and involving the entire community of faith.

Once again, if the language is not new, the living out in practice of these principles is new and has hardly begun to get off the ground. Here is where one of the most important realities, perhaps the most important reality that has emerged in Christian churches in Asia in the past twenty years, must be made: the grassroots ecclesial communities, or Base Ecclesial Communities (BEC), involving Christians "where they are and where they are at." We may note that although the BEC notion has gained very wide attention and encouragement in official texts and documents, the concrete emergence of BEC in Asia is only at the beginnings, except perhaps in a few areas (e.g., on Mindanao island in the Philippines). Similarly, the wider, fuller participation of lay people in ministries, called for repeatedly in the past twenty years, is only in its early stages, even if these beginnings are significant enough to invite widespread attention and advocacy.[9]

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[8]Joseph A. Komonchak, *Towards a Theology of the Local Church, FABC Papers* No. 42 (Hong Kong: FABC Office of the Secretary-General in Hong Kong, 1986).

The FABC Theological Advisory Committee (TAC) has recently published its study-paper on the theology of the local church in the Asian context (*FABC Papers* No. 60 [Hong Kong: 1991]).

[9]Cf. Niall O'Brien, *Revolution from the Heart* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987), a remarkable account of base ecclesial communities (BECs) in the diocese of Bacolod, Negros Island, Philippines, which deserves an even wider audience than it has already reached.

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5. "[In] practice … mission is no longer, and can no longer be, a one-way movement from the 'older churches' to ' younger Churches.' … Every local Church is and cannot but be missionary. Every local Church is sent by Christ and the Father to bring the Gospel to its surrounding milieu and to bear it also to all the world. For every local Church, this is a primary task …. [Every] local Church is responsible for its mission, and co-responsible for the mission of its sister Churches. Every local Church, according to its possibilities, must share whatever its gifts are for the needs of other Churches, for mission throughout mankind, for the life of the world."[10]

These words, written in 1979, have already been remarkably verified. Exact figures still have to be gathered, but from general information we know that already "missionaries from the two-thirds world" have taken up the tasks of mission in all continents, and "the internationalization of the missionary movements is the great new fact of our time."[11]

6. "The proclamation of Jesus Christ is the center and primary element of evangelization, without which all other elements will lose their cohesion and validity. In the same way, evangelization will lead to gathering together a believing community, the Church."[12]

Bishops and pastoral leaders in the FABC region and the theologians who work most closely with them have never wavered in the primary role they give to the proclamation of the Gospel and of Christ. It is no secret that much theological writing in our area in the past few years has raised radical questions about the uniqueness

[10]Cf. "Final Statement of the International Congress on Mission, Manila, 2–7 December 1979." See n. 5 above.

[11]Cf. Arthur Glasser in *International Bulletin of Missionary Research* 13:1 (January 1989), cited above, n. 4.

[12]"Evangelization in Asia Today," Statement of the FABC All Asian Conference on Evangelization, Suwon, South Korea, August 24–31, 1988 (Shillong, India: FABC Office of Evangelization, 1988), No. 6, *FABC Papers* No. 50, *The Urgency of Christian Mission* (Hong Kong: FABC Secretariat, 1988), 74–78.

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of Christ in the history of salvation. A good deal of current thought on this matter focuses on the "myth of Christian uniqueness" thesis. If it is true that a few Asian theologians (in agreement with some of their Western counterparts) propose a full blown pluralistic theology of religions whose bottom line is finally a parity of religions, still the Asian Roman Catholic bishops in their statements on mission and inter-religious dialogue have been consistent in holding on to the "traditional" view on the uniqueness of Jesus Christ as the one mediator of God's salvation in history.

The agenda outlined above received remarkable confirmation in the SEDOS Seminar on the Future of Mission (Rome, March 8–19, 1981), which identified the directions foreseen for the coming decades as proclamation, dialogue, inculturation and liberation of the poor. The final conclusions insisted on "the central place of the local Church." Whether or not the FABC texts had a strong influence on the SEDOS seminar is not really important; what is significant is the near-total agreement regarding the directions for the future of mission.[13]

II. The Doing Remains

In the theology of mission, then, it is clearly on this same FABC itinerary that the interaction of praxis-reflection-policy-action must move. And "all the doing remains."[14]

Inculturation has been very much present in theological discussion since the 1960s, but its implementation has not really moved forward in a genuinely significant or decisive way. The liberation theology

[13]Cf. part 3: "Agenda for Future Planning, Study and Research in Mission," from the Research Seminar on the Future of Mission, March 8–19, 1981, Rome, Italy, in Mary Motte & Joseph Lang, eds., *Mission in Dialogue* (Maryknoll, N. Y.: Orbis, 1982), 633–649. Also James Scherer, "Roman Catholic Mission Theology: The Impact of Vatican II," in *Gospel, Church and Kingdom: Comparative Studies in World Mission Theology* (Minneapolis: Augsburg), esp. 196–232.

[14]John Winjngaards, "New Ways for Mission," *The Tablet* (London) (October 22, 1988): 1208–1209. Cf. the study by Father Putranta, referred to in n. 5, above, and the recent work of Father Amaladoss, n. 4, above.

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breakthrough and subsequent vigorous debate on it now have been at the forefront of attention for more than fifteen years. This movement without doubt has been a major dimension of the ecclesial/missionary life of our time; the contribution of the Latin American Churches has been invaluable for a rethinking of mission. Liberation theology's energies are not spent, and for the decade to come we await continuing development and greater participation by other sectors (Asia, Africa, etc.).[15]

Inter-religious dialogue has gradually but steadily been moving toward front-and-center in the past few years. It will surely assume larger proportions in the coming decade. The debate on "the myth of Christian uniqueness" is already productive—not only of unsettling questions—but of a deepening re-examination of the person and the message of Jesus and of the salvation found in him. In this discussion of the very meaning of Christianity, the caution must be repeated that constant contact needs to be maintained with those actually engaged in missionary life and action and with "practicing believers" in other religious traditions. A mere exchange of ideas largely elaborated in academic circles begs to become a game of chess instead of a genuine service to mission in our time.

The Asian Theological Advisory Commission (TAC) of the Asian Bishops' Conferences, constituted in 1985 to advise the FABC, after informally sounding out the Asian episcopal conferences to find out

[15]Cf. for instance, "Journeying Together toward the Third Millennium," Final Statement of the Fifth Plenary Assembly of the FABC, Bandung, Indonesia, July 27, 1990, in *Asia Focus* (August 24, 1990), UCAN, Hong Kong, section 60/D, where "companionship, servanthood, compassion" are words charged with liberation theology resonances, softened in a language the FABC documents have consistently used when dealing with liberation theology themes. Also, "Journeying Together toward the Third Millennium," 7.3.2.2. In the section on "A Spirituality for Our Times," the same transposition of language takes place. Cf. Cardinal Stephen Kim, 19–22 (well worth reflecting on), Aloysius Pieris, "Human Rights Language and Liberation Theology," 299–310 (as always, stimulating), and also Samuel Rayan's contribution, "Wrestling in the Night," 450–469 (with his accustomed eloquence), in March H. Ellis & Otto Maduro, *The Failure of Liberation Theology: Essays in Honor of Gustavo Gutierrez* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 1989).

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what the pastoral leaders in the region believed were the most crucial and most urgent theological concerns, placed two themes—the theology of inter-religious dialogue, and the theology of the local Church—as the top items on its agenda.

The concern for the local Church is an attempt to understand the situation of Church communities on various levels in the present period of the Church's history in Asia. In many ways it is an effort at coming to grips with what the mission and task of each local Christian community must be, in the most concrete manner possible, as it tries to live the imperatives of the Gospel and insert the Gospel's meanings and values in the human milieu whose common history it shares. This will obviously mean a deepening of understanding, not only of the milieu of proclamation, witness and service, but of the concretion (or incarnation) of the Gospel's meanings and values in a given time, history and culture. Hence the concern that inculturation and dialogue, as well as human and societal development and liberation, become concrete in "the living out of its own particular mission, by the local Church." The fulfillment of Christian mission is the way to self-realization of the Church as authentic bearer of the gospel in its being and life, in its own place and time.

Our planning for mission activity should start from below. What we should do in a particular situation cannot be determined *a priori* from above. It should be the fruit of an analysis of the situation, of the kind of people with whom we are working, of their real needs. It is by involving ourselves with them and experiencing life with them that we shall be able to discern the will of God in that situation. Mission is not bringing God to a place where he is not present, but helping people to discover and listen to God who is there, perhaps hidden or dimly perceived or seen differently, but who is calling them all that time towards a dialogue leading them to fuller life.

Such a mission can be best accomplished only by a local Church. … Each Church is on mission and is co-responsible for mission all over the world. So instead of the more familiar concept of "foreign mission" we will have to be accustomed to the concept of collaboration

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in mission. The vision of the Church Universal as a communion of local Churches will also be manifested as a communion in mission.[16]

III. Some Enduring "Musts" for Mission

At this point I would like to recall yet older, more traditional things. They center around the spirituality of mission.

1. The thrust of grassroots ecclesial communities is a return to the most fundamental of Christian basics: *koinonia*, the Trinitarian life experienced and shared with the community of faith, hope and love. Mission today must be about the creation of Christian community, about the building up of human solidarity, beginning on the grassroots level. Hence the continuing importance of "base communities" and what they concretely mean for communion and participation.[17]

The realization of community, sociologically speaking, will differ from place to place, from society to society, from culture to culture, from "level to level." Community is not a univocal term, and its

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[16]Joseph A. Komonchak's "field theory" on the self-realization of the local Church is surely a most important contribution to the discussion on the theology of the local church (*FABC Papers* No. 42 [Hong Kong: FABC Secretariat, 1986]). We will refer to Father Komonchak's work in the second part of our paper. Father Komonchak participated in the discussions preceding the final formulation and publication of the Theses on the local church issued by the Theological Advisory Commission (TAC) of the FABC. Some excellent material will also be found in the book of Severino Dianich, *Chiesa Estroversa. Una ricerca sulla svolta dell'ecclesiologia contemporanea* (Torino: Edizione Paoline, 1987), esp. 110–122, and in Amaladoss, *Mission Today*, 164–166 (cf. n. 3, above), from which the quotation is taken. Cf. the really excellent work of the Italian theologian Bruno Forte, *The Church: Icon of the Trinity*, An introduction to Ecclesiology, trans. E. P. Hontiveros, C. G. Arévalo & F. Gustilo (Makati, Metro Manila: St. Paul Publications, 1990), 84–104 (on the local church), and 149–164 (the appendix from J. A. Komonchak).

[17]Niall O'Brien's book, *Revolution from the Heart*, spells out the revolution of hope that these base ecclesial communities can awaken. Cf. also Marcello de C. Azevedo, *Basic Ecclesial Communities in Brazil: The Challenge of a New Way of Being Church*, trans. John Drury (Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 1987).

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realization will take on diverse concrete expressions. Perhaps the word *solidarity*, so frequently in the vocabulary of John Paul II, best translates what is meant here.[18]

2. In his mission letter issued in 1975, Pope Paul VI spoke of the need of radical Christian witness for our time: the witness of totally given, self-sacrificing love. In the surfeit of words in our age, he said, only those teachers who teach by deed will be heard, or who join the witness of their lives to their words.[19]

3. Lastly, and in the same vein, we must affirm what a work on the theology of mission published not too long ago calls "mission as mystic itinerary."[20] Today it is the sense of God as *mystery*, beyond human concepts and formulations, rooted in the personal experience of faith, that characterizes the search for God, for the hidden God of our age. Face-to-face with the radical challenges to Christian mission, the bearers of the Gospel in the midst of any society—of other faiths or of unbelief—must speak from an authentic experience of God, personal or within community, or it will fail to gain a hearing. This experience must arise today and in the decades to come, as it has always arisen, from a living out of the Paschal Mystery in one's own life—in prayer and contemplation, in the labors of witnessing to the Gospel, in discernment in the Spirit, in the fundamental dedication to and involvement with the poor, the suffering, the broken, and the powerless in this world—"to the uttermost limit of loving" (John 13: 1). This has always been the authentic way of Christian mission; in the end, there is no other way.

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[18]On diverse realizations of community, see *The Church as a Community of Faith, FABC Papers* No. 29 (1982): 15. On Pope John Paul II and "solidarity," cf. his encyclical, *Solicitudo Rei Socialis*, for the twentieth anniversary of *Populorum Progressio*, December 30, 1987 (Vatican City: 1987).

[19]Pope Paul VI, *Evangelii Nuntiandi* (on evangelization of the world in our time) (Washington, D.C.: United States Catholic Conference, 1975), no. 41. Pope John Paul II, *Redemptoris Missio* (Rome: 1990), nos. 42–43 (on witness).

[20]Pierre Schouver, *L'Eglise et la Mission, Croire et comprendre* (Paris: Centurion, 1977), 140–142. Cited in Rosales, et al., *Toward a New Age in Mission* I, Book II, 152–153.

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The work of mission is finally the work of the Spirit of God.[21] In the 1990s, as in the past, we will seek to discern both the signs of the times and the ways by which we must respond to them. But in all this we must seek to be obedient to the Spirit, for in that obedience alone can we second God's renewing of the face of the earth.

Part Two

From what has been said in the previous section, we may (I believe) legitimately conclude that there is really no need for a "new ecclesiological vision," in the sense of something hitherto not attended to, something hitherto not discovered. True, the study of the FABC documents undertaken by Carolus Putranta reveals (Putranta holds) several *lacunae* in their ecclesiological checklist, e.g., a stronger ecumenical dimension, a more organic synthesis, an explicitation of "a method for Asian theological reflection," some guidelines for action in conflict-situations, further spelling out of forms of community for the local church. We can accept Putranta's comments, noting however that they constitute a list of items for a future agenda.[22] But substantially the overall vision stands.

There exists a good number of books and articles which develop in some detail the responses called for by contemporary situations in the FABC region.[23]

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[21]See Leslie Newbigin, *Mission in Christ's Way,* Bible Studies (Geneva: World Council of Churches, 1988). John Paul II, *Redemptoris Missio*, III, 21–30. See also Krister Stendhal, *Energy for Life*, Risk Series (Geneva: World Council of Churches, 1990).

[22]Carolus Putranta, "A Brief Survey of the FABC Documents, 1970–1982," in *For All the Peoples of Asia* II (IFAPA III, Volume Two: *Further Texts*) (Manila: IMC Publications, 1987), 438–446, reprinted as an appendix in *FABC Papers* No. 57b for FABC V (Bandung, Indonesia: 1990).

[23]We may simply refer here to the Workshop Discussion Guides prepared by *FABC Papers* for FABC V, e.g., Robert Hardawirjana, *The Church before the Changing Asian Societies of the 1990s* (*FABC Papers* No. 57a), and Michael Amaladoss, *The Church and Pluralism in the Asia of the 1990s* (*FABC Papers* No. 57b).

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These responses are, *inter alia*, renewed and ongoing proclamation, participation in the tasks of human development and in the creation of new human community, the enactment of the solidarity which John Paul II's *Solicitudo rei socialis* calls for, and so forth. The "models" (so much used in North American ecclesiology) of Church as "companion-on-the-way," as servant, as prophet, as itself "dialogues," as community of disciples, etc., are recalled too, as diverse modes of response. These perspectives are surely not new.[24] These have been in our conceptuality and language for some years now, even if their more exact significance and relevance are sharpened for the present and its developing concerns.

Is there some way of thinking on the church-in-mission which might be especially useful for our reflection? Is there some way that might bring us "beyond" even the preferred models of the Church in the last two decades, and which might enable us to see ecclesial praxis as deriving from a unified conception?

I. Building up of the Local Church

We might go back to the first FABC plenary assembly in Taipei (1974) to find there our point of departure.

> To preach the Gospel in Asia today we must make the message and life of Christ truly incarnate in the minds and lives of our peoples. The primary focus of our task of evangelization, then, at this time in our history, is the building up of a truly local Church.
>
> *For the local Church is the realization and the enfleshment of the Body of Christ in a given people, a given place and time* (FABC I, FAPA I, 29).[25]

In a sense, our task, twenty years after FABC's first "conception," is to return to the prophetic insight of our first beginnings. A fuller,

[24]Cf. Edmund Hill, O.P., "Church," in J. A. Komonchak, M. Collins & D. Lane, eds., *New Dictionary of Theology* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press/Michael Glazier, 1987), 185–201, and Avery Dulles, *Models of the Church* (Garden City, New York: Doubleday, 1974).

[25]*For All the Peoples of Asia* I, First Plenary Assembly, FABC (Manila: IMC Publications, 1984), 29.

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richer grasp of what "local Church" means, what this calls for from us in our communities today, provides us with some sort of unitary vision, and (properly understood) even traces an itinerary for FABC in the future. From such an understanding, projected onto our context(s) and interfacing with them, we can re-imagine the kind of Church we want to build, by the power of the Spirit of Jesus, in the years ahead of us.

The Theological Advisory Commission (TAC) of the FABC has recently completed and published its theses on the local Church in the Asian context, the fruit of five years of study and discussion. This text introduces us to a more developed reflection on the local church and its theology—incorporating much of what contemporary theological study is saying on this theme, but saying it from the perspective of the local churches of our region.[26]

II. "Field Theory" of the Local Church (An Excursus)

At this point I believe it is not only useful but even necessary to present a sketch of a theology of the local church. I here summarize briefly an address given by Father Joseph A. Komonchak of the Catholic University of America to church planners and church council members some years ago (in 1987, later published in *Origins* April 2, 1987 [Washington, D.C.: NC Documentary Service]).[27]

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[26]"Theses on the Local Church," *FABC Papers* No. 60, issued by the Theological Advisory Commission (TAC) of the Federation, which has been meeting annually since 1986. Father J. A. Komonchak of the Catholic University of America, Washington, D.C., wrote the first study-paper on the theme, also published by *FABC Papers* No. 42 (Hong Kong: FABC, 1986).

[27]Komonchak, "The Church: God's Gift and Our Task," 735–741. Cf. Forte, *The Church: Icon of the Trinity*, 84–104, 138–140, 148–164. As noted above, Fr. Komonchak's work provided a basic reference for the FABC/TAC's "Theses on the Local Church" (cf. n. 26 above). It is difficult to improve on Fr. Komonchak's presentation, and it is very difficult to compress the address here summarized, without notably reducing its intelligibility. Fr. Komonchak's "popularization" is already a digest of his fuller, more leisurely exposition. I can thus only refer the reader to his other writings. Cf. Joseph A. Komonchak, "The Local Realization

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Here, then, is a brief presentation.

Komonchak begins with this as an initial question: Should we perceive the Church as "something we make," something that is ours, or rather "something we receive," something that comes from God, something that is Christ's? "Is the Church God's gift, or is it rather our task?" The Second Vatican Council, of course, does not accept such an "either-or." No Catholic view can.

The Council's own statement on the fundamental issue was far more balanced:

> The Society structured with hierarchical organs and the mystical body of Christ, the visible society and the spiritual community, the earthly Church and the Church endowed with heavenly riches, are not to be thought of as two realities, but as one complex reality which comes together from a human and a divine element. (*Lumen Gentium*, 8)

> [Komonchak continues] This text is the equivalent for the Church of the statement of the Council of Chalcedon about Christ. Two sets of statements must be made about the Church: It is clearly a human community, with structural and societal elements, subject to the conditions and laws of human life here on earth, like many other human communities in its features. But it is also the people of God, the body of Christ, the temple of the Spirit. And just as the two sets of statements about the humanity and the divinity of Christ must be—asserted of one and the same Jesus of Nazareth without confusion or division, so also it is of one and the same Church that the two sets of statements, without confusion or division, must be asserted which describe its human character and its unique transcendence. And the chief task of the ecclesiologist is to try to understand how both statements can be made intelligibly about the same reality, how it is, to return to my title, that the Church is both God's gift—the mystery of his life communicated to us in Word and grace—and our task—a human community constituted by the faith, hope and love of its members and by the social and interpersonal relationships those founding acts

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of the Church," in G. Alberigo, J. P. Jossua & J. A. Komonchak, *The Reception of Vatican II* (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America, 1987), 77–90, where many relevant bibliographical references (e.g., to H. Legrand, E. Lanne, H. de Lubac, J. Grootaers, et al.) are given.

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> presuppose and engender. Or, in still other terms, how is an integral ecclesiology both sociological and supernatural?
>
> Without becoming highly technical or explaining all the methodological options which lie behind it, let me at least attempt a way of thinking about the Church which I believe offers some hope for going beyond the facile dichotomies and also for intelligibly relating the two necessary elements in any solution whether theoretical or practical.

First of all, the Church is a creature. It is the People of God, the Body of Christ, the Temple of the Spirit. But it is not itself God, Christ, or Spirit.

The Church is God's gift. Its permanent origin is out of the word of God and the grace of God: in what God has done in Christ and continues to do in the Spirit. The coming-to-be of the Church anywhere, and its continuing to exist anywhere, depends initially and finally on what God does and gives.

The Church is the sacrament, i.e., sign and instrument, of God's continued presence and action in the world. As a social and historical instrument, it has as its irreplaceable and unchangeable elements, the apostolic creed, the ministry and liturgy; these we receive from those who made up the Church before us.

The Church is Christ's sign and instrument precisely as a human community of men and women. As a human community it is "all too like other human communities" among which it lives, just as Jesus was fully a human being, "like us in all things save only sin."

Hence we must consider what a human community is, and how it is constituted, how it realizes itself as a human community. Let me cite Komonchak directly.

> It is helpful here to turn to the heuristic description of community elaborated by Bernard Lonergan. For Lonergan, a community is an achievement of common meanings and values. A group of people has some common field of experience, which they talk about and reflect on together, which they come to understand in common or at least complementary ways, about which they make common judgments, so that out of their common experience, understanding and judgments, they can act in common pursuit of common goals. Without this

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> common experience, understanding, judgment and commitment, there is no community, but just an aggregate of men and women linked only spatially or temporally.

The historical origins of the Church provide a paradigm for understanding how the Church is constituted by the Word and the grace of God.

A group of Palestinian men and women came together only because of the preaching of one Jesus of Nazareth. They followed Him, listened to His message about the reign of God as coming near. They related what they heard from him to their own religious ideas, values and hopes. They became his disciples. They hoped he would deliver Israel as the one sent by God. But when he was arrested and condemned to death, their hopes were shattered; most abandoned him and his cause. But shortly afterwards they came to believe that God raised Jesus from the dead. Their belief in his resurrection brought them together again. They shared in the experience of a new and transformed existence in the Spirit. Their renewed encounter with Jesus, once crucified but risen, and recognized by them as Lord and Messiah, reconstituted them as a community which came to call itself the Church.

This community of men and women who experienced what they experienced, who came to understand what they understood or believed, who spoke of Jesus as they spoke of Him, thus became a new and distinct community in the ancient world. The faith of this community was utterly dependent on the word lived and spoken, and on the Spirit of love poured out in them. Yet they believed, they began to hope, they learned how to love as Jesus did. What God had created and given was the new fellowship (*koinonia*) in the Spirit *constituted* by their common faith, hope and love.

And what they had received they undertook to share with others (cf. 1 Jn. 1: 1–4). The Church created by the encounter with Christ became the instrument of a new encounter with Him for those who themselves cannot see and hear and touch what that first generation of Christians experienced. That first generation spoke so that the fellowship created out of its originating experience could continue to generate the same joyful fellowship with God and His Son.

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> Under God, as the Venerable Bede said, "Every day the Church gives birth to the Church." God gives birth to the Church, but God does not give it birth as Father except through the maternal acts of the Church's proclamation, worship, love and service. The Church does not exist unless we contribute what we can—our faith, our hope, our love, our service, by which the Church is built up. And a new generation of believers is not born as the fellowship unless our community and our actions within it provide a living and powerful matrix for the birth of their faith. We are the Church as the people gathered into the fellowship of the Spirit, the *ecclesia congregata*; and, children of the preceding generation, we are the Church which must gather a new generation into God's people, the *ecclesia congregans*.

From the foregoing it would then seem evident: always and anywhere, the Church is at once *God's gift*, and *our task* and *our achievement*. Without believers who hope in Christ and the Spirit and who love God and love their fellows because of God's love for us, there would be no Church. The Spirit incorporates us into Christ, but we ourselves build up the body of Christ. We are brought into the temple of the Spirit, but we ourselves are the living stones of which it is constructed.

A complementary way of considering the Church as God's gift and our task is had by reflecting on the "two moments" in the coming-to-be of the Church (*ecclesiogenesis*).

We posit two elements of this genesis: an objective one, and a subjective one.

> The objective element is constituted by the Gospel of Jesus Christ as mediated through the Scriptures and fellowship of the Church. It is objective in the sense that it stands over and against every new generation of men and women as the representation of God's self-gift to us in Christ and the Spirit, for us to receive or to reject. This is the dimension of the Church that is not ours to refashion, but which we can only receive. And this objective dimension is what constitutes the unity of the apostolic Church across the centuries of history and across the diverse cultures of our own day.
>
> But this objective element by itself does not constitute the Church. Of itself it is only the potential form of an actual community of believers. The actual Church comes to be only when it is received and appropriated by and in the faith, hope and love of a group of men and

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> women. This living faith, hope and love of the members thus enter in as constitutive dimensions of the Church's genesis. This word of God itself does not constitute the Church; the Church exists only where the word is believed. God's love for us does not itself constitute the Church; the Church exists only when that love creates the loving fellowship in the Spirit. God's gift does not constitute the Church without the individual and communal acts which that gift enables us to accomplish.

At this point we come then to *the local church*, to which we have been moving (emphasis ours).

> This is why the genesis of the Church always occurs locally. The Church is born out of the communication and appropriation of the word of Christ and the grace of the Spirit. But the word is always communicated and received in concrete situations in which it is presented and received as light for the questions of existence asked by specific communities of men and women. The grace of God is always offered to and received by individuals and communities of believers whose need for forgiveness and new life are displayed in quite specific threats of sin and death. The fellowship of love emerges in communities which specific kinds of alienation have divided. Because there is no word of faith in the abstract, no grace or forgiveness in the abstract, no reconciled fellowship in the abstract, there is no Church in the abstract; there are only local communities of believing men and women. And this explains the remarkable interest since the Council in the theology of the local Church.

The question of local church vis-à-vis the Catholic or Universal Church surfaces here.

> The Church is, of course, catholic or universal. But the Church Universal is not some other Church, existing somewhere over and above the local Churches. The Church is universal because everywhere the same Gospel and the same Spirit have created the same fellowship of faith, hope and love. The one and universal Church is precisely what is realized in the variety of the local churches. Its unity is assured by the common reference to the same founding Gospel and engendering Spirit, its catholicity by the reception and appropriation of Gospel and Spirit in the various communities of faith in all the many varied situations of the world. The Church Universal is constituted in and out of the local churches: it is the communion of the local churches.[28]

[28]Komonchak, "The Church: God's Gift and Our Task." On local church and universal Church, cf. J. A. Komonchak, "The Church Universal as the

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Komonchak can now bring his exposition to term. All this shows us that "the Church is generated every day in quite specific communities of men and women." Komonchak sums up what he has been saying, with this conclusion.

> The mystery of the Church does not occur in some ethereal place, halfway between us and God. It is realized here, among us, through us, in human history and as part of its dialectic. And it is not some purely transcendent achievement in which only God is at work and we are only passive recipients. The mystery, rather, is precisely in what God effects, in what his word and grace enable us to accomplish through our faith, hope, love and service. As grace does not destroy but creates genuine human freedom in the individual, so also the gift we receive as the Church is the Church we build by our common acts.

Certain corollaries are drawn from this "field theory" of the self-constitution of the Church regarding the tasks involved in serving this self-constitution, this genesis of the Church. First, since it takes place when the mystery of God transforms the mystery of man, we are merely servants of mystery. Second, everything—everything—in the Church is to be measured by its reference to the genesis of the Church out of the word and love of God. Third, because the genesis of the Church is the genesis of a human community, any serious study of the Church may not ignore the contribution of the human sciences of community. Finally, fourth, over the entire "process" stands the Cross of Jesus Christ and his Paschal Mystery.

Komonchak's fifth and sixth corollaries are particularly relevant to our reflection, and we may be allowed to conclude this lengthy excursus by citing two final paragraphs from Komonchak's study.

> Fifth, the Church always comes to be locally. It does not occur on some abstract universal level or in diocesan parochial planning offices. It occurs when, perhaps as a result of our efforts, the word of God is preached pertinently and effectively, when the liturgy is celebrated joyfully and attractively, when a genuine community of reconciliation appears in our

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Communion of Local Churches," *Concilium* (June 1981): 30–35. The valuable ecclesiological work of H. Legrand, "La réalisation de l'Eglise en un lieu," in B. Lauret & F. Refoul, eds., *Initiation a la pratique de la Theologie*, Tome III, Dogmatique 2 (Paris: Cerf, 1983), and J. M. Tillard, "La communion visible des Eglises," chap. IV, in *Eglise d'Eglises, l'ecclesiologie de communion* (Paris: Cerf, 1987), 324ff.

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> broken world. The real action takes place outside our offices, where the drama of sin and grace is played out in the lives of people.
>
> Sixth, what we are to think about and plan for in our work, therefore, is how to help the genesis of the Church to occur in the particular times and places over which we have some responsibility. That should be our focus. And the kinds of questions we need to ask are: what are the specific questions of meaning, individual and social, that a proclamation of the word of God needs to address? What light do they throw on the Gospel and the Gospel on them? What are the temptations to resignation or despair to which the Christian message of hope must be addressed? What personal and social addictions do people need to be freed from? What are recurrent sins that need forgiveness, the egoisms and group biases that love needs to overcome? What are the divisions among people that need to be healed? Who are the contemporary equivalents of the Jew and the Greek, the man and the woman, the freeman and the slave whom Paul said were all one in Christ? And these are just particular ways of expressing the one great and basic question: what must we do in order for the world to see in and through our communities what God has already done in Christ and promises us in the Spirit?[29]

III. Local Church and Inculturation, Communion, Participation, Mission

For many Asian theologians, building up the local Church, or the genesis of the local church, is seen as another way of describing the process of *inculturation*, seen in its wider meaning. For this "self-realization of the local Church" in each of our diverse "places" will mean the actualization of a Church not "for" all peoples and cultures only, but truly "of" all peoples and cultures: of each people, with its own history and tradition, with its own concerns and questions, its own project in history.[30]

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[29]Komonchak, "The Church: God's Gift and Our Task."

[30]Cf. n. 27, above. Also Karl Rahner, "Basic Theological Interpretation of the Second Vatican Council," in *Concern for the Church*, Theological Investigations XX (New York: Crossroad, 1981), 77–89. L. Richard, D. Harrington & J. O'Malley, eds., *Vatican II: The Unfinished Agenda. A Look to the Future* (New York/Mahwah:

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This means making "total ecclesiology" actual in each of our communities: i.e., that every one of the faithful, to the extent of each one's possibilities, participates in the life and activity of the community of faith. "Communion and participation," so often spoken of with regard to ecclesial communities, must move from word-and-concept merely, to real life, in interchange, in action, in mission. Only through the ever-fuller activation for communion and participation—especially with regard to lay people—does any community *become Church* (in the sense given above).

Another way of saying this might be taken from Jürgen Moltmann, writing on the "servant Church" in 1979:

> My thesis is a simple one: the local congregation is the future of the Church. The renewal of the Church, finally, depends on what happens at the grassroots level. And renewal at this level awaits, it seems to me, the conscious reclaiming of the gifts of the Spirit on the part of the laity. These gifts, which in the New Testament are always identified as signs of the coming Kingdom of God, are given to the whole people of God for ministry, for *diakonia*.[31]

This same demand for "communion and participation" was central in FABC II in Bangkok, in the plenary assembly of 1982 (here we see once again that the past assemblies have consistently sounded the right notes and formulated the right imperatives).[32]

> In our day-to-day living with each other we have inadequately manifested true communion and participation …. (9.2)
>
> Sometimes organs of lay participation and co-responsibility have not been established, or are left inactive and impeded, existing only in name. Often enough the gifts and charisms of the laity—both women and men—are not duly recognized, welcomed or activated in significant functions and tasks of ministry and apostolate. (9.5)

Paulist, 1987), esp. 3–8 (the essays by Leo J. Donovan), 9–21 (Karl Rahner himself), and 57–70 & 93–112 (the two contributions of L. Richard).

[31]Jürgen Moltmann, "The Diaconal Church in the Context of the Kingdom of God," in *Hope for the Church* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1979), 21–36, at 21.

[32]Cf. FAPA I (see n. 25, above), 89–102, Final Statement, nos. 9.2 and 9.3.

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> We have seen … how the local Church must be a community of graced communion rooted in the life of the Trinity; a community of prayer and contemplation, and of sacramental celebration and life centered around the Eucharist. It must be defined by its life of faithful discipleship in the Gospel, patterned on the Paschal Mystery of Jesus, "a community for others …." We have realized that genuine participation and co-responsibility must be the essential elements of its existence, and theological reflection and discernment, integral components of its life.[33]

We will note that FABC III stressed that what our treatises on the Church call "communion" must become each day a reality in its life. How? Through finding and activating all the charisms of the community, through creatively bringing these charisms into action, in mutual collaboration and coordination, in effective co-responsibility. The final responsibility for this rests with the ordained ministry, true, but even here there are ways of exercising this responsibility. We are to remember that the bishop and priest embody not "a synthesis of ministry" but a "ministry of synthesis" (Bruno Forte). In a way, the whole point here is "empowering the faithful"—making our lay people, above all, active subjects, acting subjects, in the full sense of that term in contemporary thought.

FABC III was clear-sighted and insistent too in saying that local communities cannot "become Church" except in and through mission. If, according to Pope Paul VI's *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, evangelization is the very definition of the Church's task, no Church can "come into being" without mission. As with human persons, so with the Church, "it is our *praxis* which makes us what we become."

IV. Return to Images/Models

Having tried to understand the dynamic of "building up the local church" or of "serving the genesis of the local church," we may be allowed at this point to return to models-and-images. Given our present day context(s) in our various regions, and the signs of the times we discern in them, what sort of image of the Church should we keep

[33]Final Statement, no. 15.

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before our eyes to "charge our imagination" in the years ahead of us (if we have not already kept our eyes on it in the years past)?[34]

A. The Church as "Fellow Wayfarer"— As Companion on the Journey

For our basic premise, I believe, we can take Pope John Paul II's master principle in ecclesiology, "man is the way that the Church must walk" (*Redemptor hominis*, 14).

> … Man is the primary route the Church must travel in fulfilling her mission; he is the primary and fundamental way of the Church, the way traced out by Christ Himself ….
>
> This man is the way for the Church—a way that, in a sense, is the basis of all the other ways the Church must walk, because with man—every man without exception whatever—Christ is in a way united, even when man is unaware of it.[35]

From that premise, to speak of "being with" as the basic stance of the Church, i.e., to be companion, *acompañar*, on the journey of history, is only to transpose the principle in terms of a cognate image.

Acompañar is thus "being with" on the journey, walking with, and—as in the Emmaus narrative—sharing the fellow-wayfarer's story or situation, his sorrow or joy, disappointment and disillusionment, expectation and hope. It means also speaking the word of meaning

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[34]Some remarks made by J. A. Komonchak in "The Church: God's Gift and Our Task" are worth noting here. "As commonly received both by theologians and lay people, however, I believe that the models approach has not proven adequate either for ecclesiology or for Church life." Komonchak points out that the danger of "theological reductionism" has not been absent in the use of these models. "… the rightful stress on these theological notions has sometimes not been accompanied by any serious effort to show they apply to the quite concrete groups of men and women which constitute the Church" ("The Church: God's Gift and Our Task," 737–738). He also notes that "Father Dulles appears to be convinced that it is neither possible nor desirable to transcend the plurality of models, *on which I would disagree with him*" (italics are mine).

[35]Pope John Paul II, *Redemptor hominis* (Rome: 1979), 14. Cited in "Journeying Together toward the Third Millennium," D, 64.

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which enkindles the heart ("Were not our hearts burning within us?"), and it leads, in the end, to community—in faith, hope and love.

During the last years of the Marcos regime in the Philippines, when an increasingly all-pervading sense of hopelessness became present, and more and more people began opting for violent solutions, priests and religious were urged simply to keep alive a sense of hope among people, the sense that—with God's help—with prayer and patience, with persevering effort to foster change, things could still be turned around: that it was still possible to raise up a future for our people. Perhaps only then did many of us understand what the duty and service hope itself could be, grounded on our Christian faith.

B. The Church of the Suffering Servant

There are not a few among us who believe that the Asian situation(s) of today—situations of great poverty and suffering, of the privation and oppression for so many multitudes—demand a "more dramatic" stance from the Christian community. This response, it would seem, is present already in many statements from Christian groups (e.g., religious men and women, episcopal conferences, etc.) in Asia, and even explicitly or implicitly present in some of the FABC texts. *Acompañar* (which can suggest even going along on a holiday excursion) seems to some not to summon that sense of urgency, of tragic circumstances present around us, pressing down on our poorer people. Thus some believe that we are compelled as Church to turn rather to the biblical image of the Suffering Servant in Second Isaiah for a model of the Church we must become.

The servant model is often merely that of *diaconal* Church, which is ordinarily taken to mean that all the faithful participate in the Church's ministry: a Church in its entirety a ministerial Church. But the "Church of the Servant" is the Church of the Suffering Servant, with all that the name implies.[36]

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[36]Brendan Lovett, "The Servant," in *On Earth as in Heaven: Corresponding to God in Philippine Context* (Quezon City, Philippines: Claretian, 1988), 13–15. Father Lovett's entire book (a slim one of only 79 pages) deserves careful study: it is difficult, but rewarding. For the theme of the Suffering Servant and its meaning

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1. The Suffering Servant is seen as "the figure of those who correspond to God in history, … i.e., those who refuse to meet evil with evil, … who participate rather in God's redemptive action for the healing of the world, overcoming evil with good." "The servant does the unthinkable thing. He shows that the way forward is for the people to take on their own shoulders the burden of historical evil and creatively turn it around."

2. The formula given us in the Scriptures of the Suffering Servant is God's own solution to the problem of evil; the Church is asked to identify with it. The operative image to nourish in our minds here is not that of divinely empowered Rambos, whose energies are fired by hatred, but rather that of the Servant who absorbs the evil in himself without a retaliation or violence. "The Songs of the Servant suggest that the people called by God should find their destiny in this role. The Church only exists in order to embody this divine solution to historical evil" (Brendan Lovett).

The Servant is to carry out his mission "not in a world where evil has been abolished; it is to be in a world of continuing evil. If the Servant is not prepared to carry out his mission under these circumstances, there will be no historical salvation." "In the living of the Servant, who stands only for life, never death, who does not condemn and refuses to retaliate with evil for the viciousness of the people, they saw how a space for life could be opened up for everybody, a space for peace."[37]

3. Jesus came to realize the servanthood of the Isaiahn Servant in Himself. He came to fulfill the Servant's task in His own life, and above all in His passion, death and resurrection.

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for the Church, *vid.* writings of Jon Sobrino and Ignacio Ellacuria for the Latin American context, e.g., Sobrino, *Jesus in Latin America* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis, 1987), for a briefer presentation of themes more fully developed in his longer works, and Ellacuria, one of the Jesuits killed in San Salvador, "El pueblo crucificado," in *Conversion de la Iglesia al Reino de Dios, Para anunciarlo y realizarlo en la historia* (Santander: Sal Terrae), 21–53.

[37]Lovett, *On Earth as in Heaven*, 13–15.

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The Church, in turn, is in history to follow the path of the Servant, of Jesus, for the life of the world. "The Church is the movement within history of those willing to suffer for the sake of life, confronting evil and injustice … until justice be established on earth."[38]

4. What does this mean for the Church in the concrete? In varying degrees of clarity this has been (as noted above) implicitly or explicitly articulated in statements and pronouncements by Christians and by the Churches in the last twenty years or so. It has been formulated by the Latin American Bishops (CELAM II and III) as "the preferential option" or the preferential love of the poor, a position substantially confirmed by the present Holy Father many times over. It has been called also "solidarity with the poor, with the outcast, the victims."[39]

5. Perhaps one way, more generally acceptable, of spelling out how the Church in Asia can become "the Church of the Servant" is by affirming that the most important imperative for us is to develop in our communities a living out of a Christology of compassion, *a discipleship of Jesus as the compassion of God*, an ecclesial spirituality of compassion.

C. The Community of "Jesus, the Compassion of God"— an Ecclesiology and Spirituality of Compassion

It will be worthwhile, it would seem, for us to end this reflection with some paragraphs on "Jesus, the Compassion of God." In this theme many will find a key which opens the door to a perspective we are seeking (This third image does not differ greatly from that of the Suffering Servant. If the theme of the Suffering Servant, especially in some strands of liberation theology, seems to carry a freight of struggle and even conflict, the image of the community which bears Jesus, the Compassion of God, into the world, could hold within it all

[38]Lovett, *On Earth as in Heaven*, 13–15.

[39]Donald Dorr, *Option for the Poor: A Hundred Years of Vatican Social Teaching* (Maryknoll: New York, 1983), and Matthew Lamb, *Solidarity with Victims: Toward a Theology of Social Transformation* (New York: Crossroad, 1982). See the two instructions from the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith: "Libertatis nuntius" (On Certain Aspects of the Theology of Liberation, 1984) and "Libertatis conscientia" (On Christian Freedom and Liberation, 1986).

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that has been said under the preceding model, adding to it a decisive note of nonviolence—as well as the mark of the mercy of the God and Father of Jesus).

We summarize here some pertinent passages from Monika Hellwig on this theme.[40]

- Compassion is pity, but it means more than that. It means a movement towards the other; to help, to be involved in the situation, to enter into the experience of the other—especially "the suffering other," to try to do something about his suffering and oppression.
- Jesus as the compassion of God: what this means for us:

We are everywhere confronted by human suffering on a massive scale: suffering often enough brought about by sinful structures built up by evil deeds. Before them we experience our powerlessness and insignificance.

Yet in the face of all this, we as Christians still experience a sense of hope and courage. In places of greatest oppression and deprivation we meet the transforming power of, e.g., Christian grassroots communities among the poor and powerless.

We realize that this transforming hope and power comes from the crucified and risen Christ who lives among His people and fills their hearts with His own presence, love and courage.

Thus do we encounter Jesus who is the Compassion of God.

- In contemporary Christian praxis there are those who see the redemption of Christ as moving within the struggle of "victims" for liberation in all its historical and social concreteness, and those who see the redemption not so much as conflictive struggle, but as primarily communion with and surrender to God in individual lives.

[40]Monika Hellwig, *Jesus the Compassion of God* (Wilmington, Delaware: Michael Glazier/Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1983), 121–123. The argument is more briefly summarized in our presentation.

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The representation of Jesus as God's Compassion seems to lay down a middle ground between these two perceptions, because compassion is both essentially non-violent (tending to communion and community) and essentially active (tending to redress injustice and injury).

- God's Compassion is God's distinctive "activity" toward humanity and toward creation.

> It identifies Jesus with that outreach into creation which makes God present in it, entering into the human experience in solidarity with human suffering, history and destiny. It is a way of saying that in the person of Jesus, God truly enters into creation, into the human dilemma in all its tragic dimensions.[41]

From Jesus, the Incarnate Compassion of the Father, we take the steps to his re-presentation in the Church—the Church as the community of "Jesus the Compassion of God." This Church, this community, calls us to faithful discipleship in all those places in our lands in Asia where we must fulfill our discipleship and live out the Lord's sovereign compassion in the reality of our lives.[42]

Conclusion: On the Way to the Third Millennium

Already the First Plenary Assembly of the FABC, held at Taipei, so prophetically foresaw the *local church* standing at "front-and-center" among our concerns in our time. For as the years since 1974 have moved on, it has become more and more truly the *acting subject* on the Asian

[41]Hellwig, *Jesus the Compassion of God*, 121–123.

[42]"Journeying Together toward the Third Millennium" adopts the theme of the Church as community of the Compassion of God, D. 6. 4. "It will be a compassion that makes the Church weak and powerless with those who are weak and powerless" (*Non-violence*). But "it will be a compassion that will denounce in deeds, if it is not possible to do so in words, the injustices, oppressions, exploitations and inequalities resulting in so much suffering that is evident in the Asian situations" (*Active struggle*).

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scene, through communion-and-participation ever more fully realized, as well as mission-and-service more authentically activated. The 1990s, as we journey to the third millennium, will more urgently call for the self-realization of these local churches, if the Church will become in our epoch, not only the Church "for" all peoples, but also the Church truly "of" all peoples. What this self-realization calls for, the themes of *acompañar*, of the *Church of the Servant*, and of the community of "*Jesus the Compassion of God*" invite us to consider in all conscience.[43]

The past twenty years of the common journey of the Asian Bishops in the FABC have been years of growth in our local churches in Asia, years of growth hopefully "in wisdom, age and grace." In the years ahead, so full of challenge and promise, the tasks discerned for mission remain in front of us as imperatives which we have only begun to understand and fulfill. *Ardua adhuc restat via*, but as we move forward, we move in hope, knowing we can do more than our weakness can even dare, in the Spirit of Him who lends as His empowerment, the selfsame Spirit who renews the face of the earth.[44]

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[43]"To Love Is To Work for Justice and Peace," Statement of the Catholic Sector Peace Conference (Tagaytay City, August 10–13, 1990), I. Vision: "A Church for the Making of Peace," calls for a church of *conversion*, *companionship* and *compassion*, reflecting FABC V's declaration. "For the Church is that community which fulfills Jesus' servanthood in the world, made up of his disciples who must live out in their lives in solidarity with the struggle of the poor for life, that gospel-struggle for justice rooted and grounded in love" (*National Peace Conference III: Sectoral Pre-Conference Consultations* [Pasig, Metro Manila: Assisi Foundation, 1991], 13). We might here note that this statement, along with the various texts and resolutions which have emerged from the *National Peace Conference 1991*, deserves wider dissemination and more careful study—plus, hopefully, serious attempts at effective implementation.

[44]Pope John Paul II's *Redemptoris Missio*, his encyclical letter on the Church and her mission today, has not been taken up in these pages, which were substantially complete by the time I studied the papal document more closely. My own reading of the Pontiff's work is that the mission agenda here indicated is fully coherent with Pope John Paul II's thought and teaching. We can only express our gratitude for this new charter for mission in our time (C. G. A.).

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Part II

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