

LOYOLA SCHOOL OF THEOLOGY PUBLICATIONS



LOYOLA Monographs

The Community Dimension of Grace
Perspectives from the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences

Arnel de Castro Aquino, SJ

Loyola School of Theology

THE COMMUNITY DIMENSION OF GRACE

Perspectives from the
Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences

Arnel de Castro Aquino, SJ

The Community Dimension of Grace: Perspectives from the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences by Arnel de Castro Aquino, SJ

Copyright © 2024 Loyola School of Theology

All rights reserved. This book or parts thereof may not be reproduced in any form, stored in any retrieval system, or transmitted in any form by any means—electronic, mechanical, photocopy, recording, or otherwise—without prior written permission of the publisher, except as provided by Philippine copyright law. For permission requests, contact the publisher at publications@lst.edu.

First edition May 2024.

Loyola School of Theology
Katipunan Avenue, Loyola Heights, Quezon City 1108 Philippines
https://lst.edu/; https://publications.lst.edu/

THE COMMUNITY DIMENSION OF GRACE

Perspectives from the
Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences

ARNEL DE CASTRO AQUINO, SJ

MONOGRAPHS

© 2024 LOYOLA SCHOOL OF THEOLOGY
QUEZON CITY, PHILIPPINES

Boston College
Graduate School of Arts and Sciences
School of Theology and Ministry

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctorate in Sacred Theology

by

Arnel de Castro Aquino, SJ
Society of Jesus

Read and approved by the Committee:

John R. Sachs, SJ
Chair

Margaret E. Guider, OSF
Member

Dominic F. Doyle, PhD
Member

28 October 2011

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS ix
ABSTRACT xi
INTRODUCTION 1
OBJECTIVE 5
METHOD 7
ORGANIZATION 9
KEY TERMS 13

CHAPTER ONE: GRACE AS GOD'S GRATUITOUS SELF-COMMUNICATION TO PERSONS 17
Rahner's Two Conceptual Models of God's Action in Grace 17
Grace and Nature 21
The Central Place of the Incarnation 25
Grace and Communion 27
Pentecost and Community 29
Conclusion 31

CHAPTER TWO: THE FEDERATION OF ASIAN BISHOPS' CONFERENCES 35
The Asian Bishops' Meeting: Precursor of the FABC 35
The Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences: Structure and Mission 43

The Structure of the Federation 44
Asia Through the FABC Eyes:
A "Composition of Place" 47
The Asia of Many Cultures 49
The Asia of Many Religions 53
The Asia of the Poor 57
Mission and Evangelization:
The Triple Dialogue with Religions,
Cultures, and the Poor 61
Key Foundations in the Theology and
Methodology of the FABC 70
God Draws All Creation Unto Godself 70
Asian Realities: A Vital Context in
Theological Reflection 74
Summary: "Communion of Communities" 77

CHAPTER THREE: THE COMMUNITARIAN
REALITY OF GRACE 83
The New Way of Being Church in Asia:
A Participatory, Dialogical, and
Prophetic Communion of Communities 83
The God of Grace is Participative,
Dialogical, and Prophetic 91
Introduction: The Community-Forming Spirit 91
The Church Images the God of Communion 93
Christ Reveals God as Communion 95
The God of Communion is Participative 98
The God of Communion is Dialogical 103
The God of Communion is Prophetic 108

Grace is Participative, Dialogical, and Prophetic 113
Grace as Participative 114
Grace as Dialogical 123
Grace as Prophetic 128
Conclusion: Grace as the Wideness of Divine Love 134

CHAPTER FOUR: THE DYNAMIC OF SELF-CONSCIOUSNESS AND SELF-FORGETFULNESS IN GRACE AS SHOWN IN ECCLESIAL HOSPITALITY 141
Self-Consciousness and Self-Forgetfulness in Grace 143
Shared Self-Consciousness 143
Shared Self-Forgetfulness 144
Hospitality and the Dynamic of Self-Consciousness and Self-Forgetfulness 146
Hospitality 146
Self-Consciousness/Forgetfulness in Hospitality . . . 148
Ecclesial Hospitality: Gracious Self-Consciousness and Self-Forgetfulness in Fostering the Communion of Communities 150
Ecclesial Hospitality through Participation in and Receptivity to the Lay Communities 150
Ecclesial Hospitality through Welcoming Cultural and Religious Pluralism 157
Ecclesial Hospitality through Working Towards Harmony and Dialogue 164
Ecclesial Hospitality through Welcome and Care for the Poor 182

CONCLUSION 193

BIBLIOGRAPHY 201
Books 201
Articles 207

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Thank you, Randy, Meg, and Dominic for your patience in reading my manuscript. Your confidence in me and your cheerful encouragement have made these years in the doctorate both highly educational and very inspiring. Thank you, Tito, for agreeing to be our fourth examiner. It must have been quite a challenge to sit in front of the computer for more than two hours of the defense. It is wonderful to have a fellow Filipino in the panel.

Thank you to my dearest friends, Joel and Mia Obillo, Rafa and Ene Carandang, to my brothers, Peter Pojol SJ and Francis Alvarez SJ—for your company, your love, your laughter, and your most precious prayers.

To Sr. Mary Mark Pizzotti DM, Sr. Lucille Banagh DM, Sr. Teresa Tiñana DM, and the residents and staff of Sancta Maria Nursing Facility who have welcomed me warmly into their fold, and through whose prayers and kind thoughts have brought God's consolation.

To Barry Langley OFM, Tom Donovan OFM, the Friars Community and the Friday mass-goers of Saint Anthony Shrine at Arch Street—I will miss hearing confessions and presiding over our Friday masses. Thank you for giving me the chance to share with you my prayers and reflections.

To Rochie Panganiban, Jean Livelo, Tita Gloria Platon, and the Mother of Perpetual Help Community, thank you for your trust, affection, and loving care every first Wednesday of each month.

To Brad Schaeffer SJ and Ken Hughes SJ of Faber Jesuit Community, thank you for your patience, encouragement, and

company. To the American Assistancy of the Society of Jesus under the leadership of Tom Smolich SJ, thank you for this opportunity to study in Boston College. My Province is deeply grateful and indebted to you.

To my best friends in Manila: Sr. Meny Vera-Cruz RC, Sr. Reylie de Guzman RC, Sr. Nerissa Bandojo RC, Veepee Pinpin, and James Gascon SJ, thank you for encouraging me to look forward to earning my degree and coming back to the Philippines.

Finally, to my best friend and prayer partner, coach and cheerleader, North End buddy and soul-mate, Bob Muti, thank you. My life in the US has been all the richer, meaningful, and truly unforgettable because of your friendship and deep love.

Ad majorem Dei gloriam!

ABSTRACT

This dissertation explains how divine grace, that is, God's self-communication to humanity, is a communitarian reality specifically in its participative, dialogical, and prophetic core as well as its manifestations, characteristics, and consequences. It draws from two main sources: Karl Rahner's understanding of grace and the pastoral statements and reflections of the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences (FABC) from 1974 to 2010.

Religious and cultural pluralism and the abiding poverty in Asian communities are the realities that frame the discussion both of the FABC documents and the main theme of this dissertation. The FABC believes that in order to respond to God's call for the Asian Church to be "a communion of communities", the Asian Church—hierarchy, religious, and laity—must reckon with these permanent realities through which God reveals divine self and will. They must therefore figure significantly upon the Church's ways of evangelizing, theologizing, and living in community. For this reason, the FABC understands being a communion of communities as God's call for the Church to be more participative, dialogical, and prophetic in evangelization and attitude with and towards other communities.

The life-giving relationship in the experience of grace does not remain restricted to God and individual persons. God gives Godself gratuitously not simply to individuals but to the whole human community. Divine self-giving creates loving, self-donating persons in communion with Godself and one another. The community is therefore a privileged place where one experiences grace especially in the shared effort to respond to God's unifying presence and call to greater participation, dialogue, and prophetic action with other

communities. As the ground of grace, God's presence and activity in the world is always participative in human realities, dialogical with persons, and prophetic in its thrust for the poor. The response to this grace also takes on communitarian characteristics, that is, participative, dialogical, and prophetic attributes.

Self-consciousness and self-forgetfulness form a significant dialectic that takes place in the experience of grace—both on the side of the Giver and of the recipients of the gift. A community that enjoys God's grace is constantly aware of the fact that the grace is due to God's gratuitous, selfless love for all. At the same time, grace empowers a community towards self-forgetfulness as God's self-communication always calls forth shared self-denial and servanthood as witnessed to by the total self-outpouring of Christ to the world.

The grace of God therefore becomes clearly manifest in a community whose members willingly participate in fostering well-being, when they strive for deeper harmony through constant and open dialogue, and most of all, when they take care of their poor sisters and brothers.

INTRODUCTION

In the twentieth century, the drive towards self-actualization comes with an increasingly individualistic valorization of human existence. This has often led to a growing individualistic understanding not only of social life but also of faith and morals in which the relationship with God and salvation are construed as a private matter between the self and God. Human persons, however, are created as essentially relational, as other-seeking. Self-actualization is the fruit not just of isolated, individualistic effort, but of a Spirit-grounded desire for life-giving relationships with fellow human beings. God's activity of self-giving to humanity is the ground of the essential relationality of persons. The same divine self-giving also calls for relational and communitarian consequences in persons' lives.

Christianity is essentially an ecclesial and communitarian faith. The Church, as Karl Rahner defines it, is the "historical continuation of Christ in and through the community of those who believe in him and who recognize him explicitly as the mediator of salvation in a profession of faith."[1] As Christ has shown through his life and teaching, there is mutual conditioning in the love between God and persons, and the love persons have with each other. The Holy Spirit who continues Christ's mission is a Church-forming presence in the world. The Spirit's activity is a saving dynamic within three interpenetrating relationships: between God and the individual, between the individual and one's community, and between a particular community and other communities. God's redemptive activity is personal. It is attuned to

[1] Karl Rahner, *Foundations of Christian Faith* (New York: Crossroad, 1976), 322.

an individual's uniqueness and particular situation in the world. At the same time, God's activity is also ecclesial and communitarian. The Holy Spirit inspires and draws individuals and communities towards being co-agents with God for each other's salvation within the three interpenetrating relationships.

Grace is the life-giving, saving presence and activity of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit in the individual and the community. Grace grounds all relationships a person has with God and with one's community. Grace not only enables individuals to perform salutary acts that each of them may be justified. More importantly, it impels the human spirit towards fostering closer, greater unity with the human community.

By dialoguing with the bishops of Asia as they reflect and theologize about the lights, shadows, and challenges in the Asian Church, and with Karl Rahner and his theology of grace, I hope to build on and develop the deeper appreciation for the radically ecclesial and communitarian nature of grace that has arisen in the Asian context. Such an appreciation has had important pastoral significance for the mission of the Church in Asia and for believers who often continue to have an individualistic understanding of grace that is often removed from everyday life.

Gaudium et Spes opens with a preface about the solidarity of the Church with humanity:

> The joys and hopes, the grief and anguish of the people of our time, especially of those who are poor or afflicted, are the joys and hopes, the grief and anguish of the followers of Christ as well. Nothing that is genuinely human fails to find an echo in their hearts. For theirs is a community of people united in Christ and guided by the holy Spirit in their pilgrimage towards the Father's kingdom, bearers of a message of salvation for all of humanity. That is why they cherish a feeling of deep solidarity with the human race and its history (GS 1).

As evidenced by the reflections, concerns, and problems identified both by Vatican II and the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences (FABC), an essential dimension of Christian living, theologizing, and doing ecclesiology and spirituality today especially in Asia is the dimension of community. Christians in Asia share the continent with over three billion people, two-thirds of the world's population. Only eleven percent of Asians are Roman Catholics, a minority among the faithful of other principal religions (five of which are more ancient than Christianity): Brahmanism, Buddhism, Confucianism, Taoism, Zoroastrianism, Islam, and Judaism. Across these religions, most people live in dire poverty as the result of varied, complicated local and global forces. Furthermore, close to 900 million people living below the poverty line (earning less than US$ 1 a day) are in Asia[2], especially in the southern regions. Poverty in Asia deprives millions of very basic nutrition, literacy, health services, access to clean water, and decent housing.

To be truly universal in its communion, the Church must continually and seriously reckon with Catholicism and Christianity in the Asian context where most Christians are poor, multi-cultural, and living and interacting with hundreds of non-Christians on a day-to-day basis. The basic social realities of religious/cultural pluralism and widespread poverty should bear upon the theology and spirituality which the Church undertakes in Asia, especially if it believes that God truly reveals Godself there, and if it continues to uphold that theology and faith should be agents of liberation for human communities rather than forms of cultural imperialism associated with the spread of Christianity through western European colonial powers. This serious consideration of Asian realities must also have relevance on the important subject of grace.

For many centuries, the Asian Church has learned and benefited much from the theologies that developed in the European and North

---

[2] Asian Development Bank, "Fighting Poverty in Asia and the Pacific: The Poverty Reduction Strategy" at http://www.adb.org/documents/policies/poverty_reduction/challenge.asp (accessed 16 May 2011).

American contexts. But today, as one learns to recognize the unique value of local, contextual theologies, one must seriously ask what the particularly Asian context has to contribute, not only to the local Church but to the universal Church, both in terms of its many ancient and contemporary cultural and religious traditions and, most of all, in terms of the reality of poverty. What can the highly communitarian culture of Asian Christians contribute to a renewed understanding of divine grace in the Church?

OBJECTIVE

Taking Karl Rahner's definition of grace as God's self-giving to persons and drawing from the writings of the bishops and theologians involved in the FABC, this dissertation aims to capture an ecclesial understanding of grace, highlighting its essentially communitarian dimension.

Out of the many Asian realities that the FABC has reflected upon, this project focuses on three major issues around which many programs in the FABC revolve: the Church's need for greater participation in the pluralistic dynamics (cultural, religious, social, political, economic, etc.) of the members of the community, the urgency of dialogue with non-Catholics, non-Christians, and the poor, and finally, the Christian imperative of a preferential option for the poor. From these realities arise the need to understand grace in a more communitarian way.

An ecclesial understanding of grace is a way of understanding the experience of grace as grounded in a God who communicates Godself to the human community, the Church in the widest sense of the word—not only to individual persons as isolated beings. While God relates in unique and personal ways to each person, grace ultimately enables the recipient to see oneself as a member of a community which is a reality larger than oneself or one's personal needs. An authentic sign of grace is therefore a person's fulfillment of one's capacity to give of oneself to the larger community, to share the effort with them towards everyone's well-being in this larger fellowship. In an ecclesial understanding of grace, the emphasis lies on the essentially social character of people who achieve self-actualization not by being disconnected, individualistic entities, but through life-giving

relationships that the Holy Spirit fosters in community. This innate relationality and natural desire to extending oneself towards other people with whom one may share beliefs, values, faiths, struggles, and the endeavor for wholeness and meaning all find their ground in God. God's first and final desire in communicating Godself is the universal loving unity of all people. Because grace is the ground of all human searching for meaning, love, and wholeness, and because it is ecclesial in character and effects—therefore, persons in whom God dwells in grace are community-seeking or Church-forming rather than self-isolating in essence. Their response to God's love reaches its deepest authenticity when they lay their lives down for the community.

I believe that the FABC thrust towards becoming a communion of communities specifically through participation, dialogue, and prophetic action is not only a fruit of communitarian grace but also descriptive of that grace—the Giver, the gift itself, and the effects of the gift. To be a communion of communities is the fruit of an ecclesial reflection. It is the Spirit-inspired outcome of shared discernment by both clerics and non-clerics, members of several religions, cultures, and social strata—and therefore, a fruit of communitarian grace.

METHOD

The FABC documents are a significant and trustworthy source for Catholic pastoral reflections on theology and ecclesiology in the postmodern Asian world. They yield much vital material for a contemporary, contextual understanding of the Spirit's gracious role in and call to the Asian Church. In view of this, Karl Rahner's theology of grace is a very significant and widely acknowledged interpretation of the tradition that corresponds well with the reflections of the Asian Church. By correlating Rahner's idea of grace as God's self-gift to persons on the one hand, and on the other, the three attitudes and means of the evangelization in Asia as mentioned above, this dissertation develops an ecclesiological understanding of grace particularly apt in the Asian context: grace as God's self-outpouring, always and everywhere, to a community of persons, grounding their desire for and their effort towards greater unity among Asian Churches through participation in a pluralistic community, life-giving dialogue with other communities, and prophetic action for the poor and suffering members of Asian societies. By correlating Rahner's understanding of grace with the concerns of the Asian Church, the dissertation aims to make the experience of grace more meaningful especially in the postmodern context where societies are "overtly secularized" and religion "seems reduced to the realm of the private and interior."[3]

The dynamic of self-consciousness and self-forgetfulness is very much part of the grace experience. In order to make the dialectic more accessible, I begin the last chapter with the experience of hospitality

---

[3] Roger Haight, S.J., *Dynamics of Theology* (New York: Orbis, 1990), 242.

within which the two dynamics play a key role. I then correlate self-consciousness/forgetfulness in hospitality with the self-consciousness/forgetfulness that grace involves especially with regard to the Church's response to God's call of communion with other communities. I spell out some of the significant implications that this dynamic holds for the community life of the Church. The dissertation aims to clarify the meaning of grace as both God's self-gift to the community as well as the community's shared responsibility and response to God.

ORGANIZATION

Chapter One presents Karl Rahner's theology of grace as primarily the divine self-gift to persons, a self-communication which forms the constitutive element of being human. It focuses on the understanding of grace as the Uncreated Gift who dwells as love in human persons.

Chapter Two presents the history of the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences and introduces the reader to its vision of engaging in a triple dialogue with cultures, religions, and the poor. The chapter provides the overall context out of which the mission of participation, dialogue, and prophecy (further discussed in Chapter Four) emerges as the primary task which the Church believes is its response to God's presence and call in Asia.

Chapter Three, the core of the dissertation, advances the position that grace is a communitarian reality in its participative, dialogical, and prophetic nature in addition to being commonly understood as an individual reality. The chapter begins with an exposition of the Spirit's call to the Asian Church as the FABC has discerned: to be a participative, dialogical, and prophetic presence in the continent, the "new way of being Church." Because God constitutes the Church as a sacrament of God's communion with humanity and salvation for the world, the Spirit's call for the Church to be participative, dialogical, and prophetic discloses not only God's mission for the community but more importantly what grace is: a participative, dialogical, and prophetic God who communicates Godself to humanity. Therefore, grace, considered ecclesially, that is, in its being God's outpouring and indwelling in the human community, should manifest these three characteristics and effects.

Chapter Four explains the dialectic of *self-consciousness* and *self-forgetfulness* as an important dynamic in the Church's response to God's grace. Self-consciousness refers to the shared understanding that God freely gives Godself to the community to be the source and ground of its life and unity—a gift that God does not owe the Church but is nevertheless given the community for its salvation. At the same time, a shared attitude of self-forgetfulness is important in the Church's response to God's participative, dialogical, and prophetic presence and call to the Church. The community can express this self-forgetfulness through shared self-denial, a more sincere effort at understanding others who live, think, and pray differently from the Church, working towards greater harmony with non-Christian and non-Catholic groups, and most importantly, more vigorous and wholehearted ministry to the poor. To provide a culturally contextualized experience that demonstrates this two-fold dynamic of self-consciousness and self-forgetfulness, Chapter Five uses the metaphor of hospitality, a major form of Asian graciousness that involves a dynamic tension between self-consciousness and self-forgetfulness when welcoming a guest into the household. The virtue of hospitality is important because the Asian Church's thrust of being a communion of communities is a form of hospitality and graciousness to other communities, a value that demands living within the tension of self-consciousness and self-forgetfulness.

Where Asian Christians live as a minority among non-Christian religions and cultures and as predominantly poor, grace cannot be authentically understood in an individualistic way. Because grace is God's self-communication in history to all persons, God is present and is speaking through communities other than Christian or Catholic. The very presence of the poor, in fact, regardless of religion or culture, must call forth common action for greater dignity, unity, and wholeness in the Asian community. While prizing their religious heritage, Catholics in Asia must nonetheless turn towards the "others", the poor and the members of other communities in whom the Spirit dwells no less than in Christian communities. Grace empowers believers to come to a new and deeper understanding and appreciation of their own Christian identity and heritage. At the same time, it

enables them to move outward in mission, to foster communion with other communities through the three FABC tasks: building more significant relationships with the larger community of faith through participation, responding to the Spirit of the self-revealing God in non-Catholics and non-Christians through dialogue, and most importantly, creating a more human world-society through a prophetic community life by uplifting the victims of poverty and oppression.

The dissertation concludes with a closing personal reflection on the ecclesial dimension of grace and its relevance to the Church's continuing mission of communion with God and with the whole world.

KEY TERMS

Grace

For Karl Rahner, grace is the self-gift by which God makes God's own divine reality the "innermost constitutive element" of human beings. For this reason, persons as finite embodied spirits are not only oriented to the infinite mystery of God the Creator, but are more radically, and by God's gracious self-gift, "the event of a free, unmerited…forgiving and absolute self-communication of God."[4] Ultimately, grace has everything to do with love. Because the self-giving God creates self-giving persons, this act of self-giving love for another sums up "the original unity of what is human and what is the totality of man's experience…collected together and achieved [so that] love for the other person is not just something which also exists in man among many other things but is man himself in his total achievement."[5] The dissertation employs synonymous terms for grace, e.g., God's "self-gift" or "self-giving", "divine self-donation", the "Spirit's self-outpouring", "self-revelation", "divine self-communication", "divine indwelling". The word "grace" is used in the singular to convey this sense, which in the tradition has been called "Uncreated grace".

On occasion, the dissertation uses the plural "graces" to pertain to the particular effects of the divine indwelling (e.g., individual or social peace, unity despite diversity, a sense of openness to dialogue, deep

---

[4] Rahner, *Foundations*, 116.

[5] Karl Rahner, "Reflections on the Unity of the Love of Neighbor and Love of God" in *Theological Investigations*, trans. Karl-H. Kruger and Boniface Kruger, vol. 6 (Baltimore: Helicon Press, 1969), 242. Hereon, referred to as *TI.*

sympathy for the poor, etc.). This usage corresponds to the traditional concept of "created grace".

Community

In the broadest sense, "community" refers to all people sharing a common reality, that is, as continuously created and sustained by God, loved by Christ, and indwelt by the Holy Spirit. In this wide sense, community ultimately points to God's ongoing activity of drawing together the whole of humanity—with all its diversity and uniqueness—in unity and love so that all may share abundantly in divine goodness.

In the plural form, "communities" refers to the various relationships which people foster in order to establish groups or associations characterized by a shared identity, a set of goals and norms, beliefs, and practices. In this sense, "communities" can refer to families, parish groups, civil organizations, ethnicities, etc. "Communities" may either be faith-based or not.

The dissertation uses the phrase "Church community" to refer primarily to the members of the Catholic Church but with particular stress on the fact that its members include the leaders of the community, that is, the hierarchy.

The crucial point in understanding the word "community" in this dissertation is the sense of dynamic interaction and responsiveness which a person or persons have as members of the wider network of relationships in the family, or the Church, or civil society.

Communitarian or Ecclesial Dimension

The dissertation uses the phrase "communitarian dimension" or "ecclesial dimension" in order to highlight the interpersonal dynamic of grace. While grace is deeply personal, it is not a private relationship with God. This dissertation devotes greater focus on the more communal aspect. It draws the reader's attention to the often overlooked fact that God communicates Godself to communities. God's self-gift therefore forms the constitutive element of the network

of human relationships and has implications in the community's shared response to God.

"Communitarian" or "ecclesial" is related to "social" in that all three terms signal the reality of other subjects whose presence significantly affects the personal, social, and spiritual aspects of an individual's life. Because this dissertation aims to focus on the ecclesial dimension of grace, "communitarian" or "ecclesial" is the preferred term on account mainly of the Church-forming activity of grace. In other words, the Pentecost experience which is the climax of the Paschal mystery is the horizon from which "communitarian" or "ecclesial" must be read, and from which either reality draws its meaning. At Pentecost, the apostles' community was filled with the Spirit who empowered them to continue Christ's mission of healing and unity within and beyond Jerusalem.[6]

Participation and Dialogue

The fourth chapter defines and explains the words "participation", "dialogue", and "prophecy" according to how the FABC understands them as embodying its mission to be a communion of communities in Asia. "Participation" and "dialogue" converge in meaning. To dialogue with other cultures, religions, or with the poor is a mode of participation. Similarly, to participate in the prayer and worship of another religion, or in the daily life of the poor, naturally necessitates dialogue, that is, an interaction with others that entails speaking with and receptivity to one another. There is an overlap in the meanings of both terms. However, there are concrete instances in which the two tasks may not necessarily be simultaneous. For instance, there are communities that participate in activities that help the poor (e.g., relief drives, free clinics, catechism, etc.) but whose members know fairly little beyond the common impression that the poor

---

[6] In this dissertation, any convergence with the ideas or concepts of Communitarianism (as formulated by Dorothy Day and the Catholic Worker Movement, or by the personalist philosophy of Emmanuel Mournier, or by the response to John Rawls' *Theory of Justice* by communitarian philosophers like Alasdair McIntyre, Michael Sandel, Charles Taylor, etc.) is purely coincidental.

need physical, material, or educational assistance. In the same way, regarding dialogue, it is one thing for the members of a community to engage in an exchange of concepts, to share about one's culture and religion, and to listen to others about theirs. But is quite another for both parties to actually participate and experience each other's culture, faith, or poverty in such a way as to learn more than the notional aspects of each other's realities.

Self-Consciousness and Self-Forgetfulness

In this dissertation, self-consciousness and its related terms (self-awareness, self-knowledge, self-understanding) have a particular reference. First of all, it pertains to a person's or community's experience, recognition, and affirmation that the indwelling God's self-offer is gratuitous. Persons enjoy the indwelling of the Spirit and the fruits of that grace not because God owes them this goodness but because God is love, God loves humanity. Humanity's being ordained to a communion with God is gift. Its capacity to receive God's love is itself a gift from God. It is God who initiates the relationship with persons and invites them to respond to divine goodness. The second meaning of self-consciousness pertains to a person's or community's recognition and affirmation that persons have (and use) the capacity to willfully reject God's self-donation. The most serious manifestation of this rejection is the refusal to love others.

Self-forgetfulness and its allied terms (self-denial, self-surrender, self-sacrifice, self-outpouring) pertain to the capacity to disregard, forgo, or suspend one's own interests, comfort, or well-being in order to devote greater concern for the welfare of other people. Like self-consciousness, it is the empowering effect of the Spirit so that as God gives Godself to persons, they acquire a similar capacity to give of themselves for each other's welfare.

CHAPTER ONE

GRACE AS GOD'S GRATUITOUS SELF-COMMUNICATION TO PERSONS

Written deeply in Rahner's theological imagination is his understanding of God who has drawn intimately close to humanity so that what is truly and deeply human cannot be entirely dissociated from the abiding presence of the divine. Rahner's understanding of the human person, salvation history, the Christian faith, and the Church is fundamentally built on his understanding of God as the self-communicating, self-giving life and goal of humanity, the condition of the possibility for the ever-deepening self-consciousness of persons, the reason behind their relentless pursuit of firmer knowledge of the world and persistent drive towards deeper, more enduring love. It is Rahner's understanding of grace—God's self-giving to humanity—that constitutes the unifying and distinctive thread running through his theology.

Rahner's Two Conceptual Models of God's Action in Grace

In the article "On the Theology of Worship", Rahner describes two conceptual models in the consciousness of believers as to how God's grace operates in the world. While one does not necessarily contradict the other, the difference between the two models arises from the way the Church understands God's fundamental relationship with the world.

The first conceptual model sees grace "as an intervention of God in the world at a definite point in space and time."[7] This model regards the world as a "secular" reality, "both because of what we call 'nature' and because of the inherited sinful state of this history of the world and humanity."[8] Divine grace therefore enters this world that is otherwise bereft of it. God freely intervenes in history, forgiving and deifying certain persons in specific instances, causing in them salutary effects which otherwise are unavailable to most people, and which remain beyond their own capacities. According to such an understanding, grace is totally exterior to the human world. That it is an unmerited gift is seen chiefly in the fact that it is denied to most. The sacraments are seen as "events at certain points in space and time where grace comes to be [and which] produce something not otherwise available."[9] The sacraments effect grace in an otherwise graceless world.

The first conceptual model of grace further reveals a fundamental understanding the Church has of the nature of the human being. Looking back at the relationship between grace and nature according to the scholastic and neo-scholastic notions—which have had far-reaching influence in the way the Church still understands grace today—Rahner states:

> The region where we know ourselves as spiritually and morally active is identified as the dimension of 'nature'. Indeed this state becomes the very definition of what we mean by nature: that which we know about ourselves without the word of revelation—for that is nature and *merely* nature.[10]

---

[7] Karl Rahner, "On the Theology of Worship" in *TI*, trans. Edward Quinn, vol. 19 (New York: Crossroad, 1983), 142.

[8] Ibid.

[9] Ibid.

[10] Karl Rahner, "Concerning the Relationship Between Nature and Grace" in *TI*, trans. Cornelius Ernst, vol. 1 (Baltimore: Helicon Press, 1966), 167. Italics in the original.

According to this understanding, God's grace is therefore beyond human nature. It is a reality supernatural that "enlightenment, moral 'impulse' and 'inspiration' to good acts, the 'light' of faith, the breath of the Spirit…are reduced either to this purely entitative elevation of our natural moral acts, or to some psychological influence."[11] In a manner of speaking, God's grace is a stratum to which human nature has very little access if at all. Nature and grace are regarded as two separate realities. Nature finds its perfection "as easily in its own proper realm, within a purely natural end, without any intuition of God in the beatific vision"[12] while grace exists as a superstructure past human consciousness.

> [A person's] experience of his spiritual and moral acts in their proper reality…remains exactly what it would and could be, if there were no such thing as a supernatural 'elevation' of these acts. Thus grace, of itself…is a superstructure beyond the realm of consciousness, with regard to the mental experience of the moral being, though it is of course a conscious object of faith and acknowledged to be the most sublime and divine element in man, his only salutary possession.[13]

According to the first conceptual model, grace "happens" when God makes spatio-temporal incursions into history. In this in-breaking of the divine into human experience and the world, God is understood to elevate human nature from a fundamental state devoid of divinity, and bestows on persons the capacity for salutary acts, increases their faith, pardons their sins, and sanctifies them. This event is entirely gratuitous. God freely deigns to enter humanity in order to raise it to be like God. God owes it to no one. Without this divinizing act, grace cannot otherwise be found where human beings are, even as spiritual creatures. In this respect, the sacraments, prayer, and membership in the Church are vital to the reception of grace.

---

[11] Ibid., 167.

[12] Ibid.

[13] Ibid., 166.

Through these religious settings and events, the Spirit arrives in order to bestow God's gifts for the salvation of their beneficiaries.

The second conceptual model of grace is what principally runs through Rahner's theology. Its starting point is the assumption that God's gracious self-communication constantly encompasses human reality.

> This grace is always and everywhere present in the world. It is, of course, present either in the form of a pure offer to freedom…or in the form of acceptance with the 'justified' person or of rejection with the sinner (a rejection which does not mean that it ceases to be the sinner's demanding and orienting existential); but it *is*, always and everywhere.[14]

Rather, grace is "God himself, the communication in which he gives himself to man as the divinizing favor which he is himself."[15] It is not simply the effects of God's intermittent interventions in the world but rather is itself "'life', 'unction', 'consolation', 'light', the inexpressible co-intercession of the Spirit—*pneuma* more than *nous*—an inward attraction, a testimony given by the Spirit, etc."[16] In this understanding of grace, the sacraments are privileged events in Christian life because through words and actions of the community, they symbolize or make present in sensible ways the constant sanctifying action of God in the world. For Rahner, ecclesial worship is important

> not because something happens in it that does not happen elsewhere, but because there is present and explicit in it that which makes the world important, since it is everywhere blessed by grace, by faith, hope, and love, and in it there occurred the cross of Christ, which is the culmination of

---

[14] Rahner, "Theology of Worship", 143.

[15] Rahner, "Nature and Grace", 177.

[16] Ibid., 179.

> its engraced history and the culmination of the historically explicitness of this history of grace.[17]

According to this second understanding of grace, the conceptual model that resonates mostly through Rahner's theology, God has communicated Godself from the very beginning "where he offers himself to man's freedom."[18] In what he calls the "mysticism of everyday life", Rahner believes that it must be constantly shown that "God is always present from the very outset and even already accepted, as infinite offer, as silent love, as absolute future, wherever a person is faithful to his conscience and breaks out of the prison walls of his selfishness."[19]

Grace and Nature

One cannot delineate a margin along which nature ends and the supernatural begins. For Rahner,

> no neat horizontal allows of being drawn between this nature and the supernatural (both existential and grace). We never have this postulated pure nature for itself alone, so as in all cases to be able to say *exactly* what in our existential experience is to be reckoned to its account, what to the account of the supernatural.[20]

Rahner affirms that grace as a supernatural reality is actually a "horizon"; God communicates Godself to persons always and everywhere. God's self-communication is the ground, the condition of the possibility in and by which all persons exist, know, and love. By "self-communication", Rahner means that "God in his own most proper reality makes himself the innermost constitutive element of man…what is communicated is really God in his own being and in

---

[17] Rahner, "Theology of Worship", 147.

[18] Ibid., 148.

[19] Ibid., 148-149.

[20] Rahner, "Nature and Grace", 314.

this way, it is a communication for the sake of knowing and possessing God in immediate vision and love."[21] Rahner also refers to grace as the "mystery" that has drawn close to persons. In this sense, mystery is not some puzzlement or a short-term, provisional inscrutability which, when finally fully known and understood, fades into the background with other objects likewise known. Mystery is that "which always and necessarily characterizes God—and through him, us—so much so, that the immediate vision of God which is promised to us as our fulfillment, is the immediacy of the incomprehensible."[22] This "mystery" is God about whom no person can ever sufficiently encompass with human knowledge or whom anyone can completely possess but at the same time who has drawn radically near to persons and to the world as their deepest constitution. Grace is therefore an "existential". In the innermost being of persons is God in self-donation. In God are they continually created, and because of whom their knowing and loving are ceaselessly drawn beyond themselves and towards the infinite. "God is the unexpressed but real 'whither' of the dynamism of all spiritual and moral life in the realm of spiritual existence which is in fact founded and supernaturally elevated by God."[23]

If nature were a closed, self-contained system of self-understanding prior to and devoid of any divine self-communication (as the first concept tends to regard it), how would one account at all for the person's capacity to receive God's grace which is otherwise supernatural? Yet, human experience attests that nature is not shut into itself, that persons are not a "finite system" incapable of seeing and confronting their own totality and that of the world. God's self-communication does not enter into human experience so sporadically that only within spatio-temporally circumscribed moments may one say that the supernatural finally arrives and privileges persons by changing

---

[21] Rahner, *Foundations*, 117.

[22] Karl Rahner, "On the Theology of the Incarnation" in *TI*, trans. Kevin Smyth, vol. 4 (Baltimore: Helicon Press, 1966), 108.

[23] Rahner, "Nature and Grace", 181.

them into something they are previously not. Were nature such a shut-in reality, persons would have been incapable of radically placing themselves or the world in question.[24] They would simply not have a horizon from which they could perceive beyond their personal, time-bound realities, or search for answers regarding existence, knowledge, and love further past their categorical situations.

Human experience, however, attests that persons do raise questions constantly about themselves and the world, and what still lies beyond them. Their inquiries open to newer discoveries and still more questions about whom persons are within as well as beyond the categorical exigencies. Rahner points out that whenever the person asks about oneself and one's world,

> he has already transcended himself and every conceivable element of such analysis or of an empirical reconstruction of himself…affirming himself as more than the sum of such analyzable components of his reality. Precisely this consciousness of himself, this confrontation with the totality of all his conditions, and this very being-conditioned show him to be more than the sum of his factors.[25]

Rahner affirms that "a finite system of distinguishable elements" does not have such a capacity for transcendence. Hence, the person is "transcendent being"[26] whose openness to the absolute or the infinite is always present in his daily living.

> Every answer is always the beginning of a new question. Man experiences himself as infinite possibility because in practice and in theory he necessarily places every sought-after result in question. He always situates it in a broader horizon which looms before him in its vastness. He is the spirit who experiences himself as spirit in that he does not experience himself as *pure* spirit. Man is not the

---

[24] Rahner, *Foundations*, 30.

[25] Ibid., 29.

[26] Ibid., 31.

> unquestioning and unquestioned infinity of reality. He is the question which rises up before him, empty, but really and inescapably, and which can never be settled and never adequately answered by him.[27]

This capacity for transcendence, for openness to the absolute, is, to use Rahner's distinctive phrase, the supernatural existential of persons. It is supernatural because it is really God's self-communication to persons. It is existential because being so graced is an intrinsic part of being human. God therefore constitutes persons to be *capax Dei*, capable of openness towards receiving God's gift of self. As a radical receptivity to God, the supernatural existential refers to God's self-giving as the ground, the condition of the possibility that persons exist at all, know, believe, hope, and love at all.

Grace, as Rahner understands it under the second conceptual model, is the "radical form to man's being. It is not a new, additional storey planted on top of what is really a self-contained sub-structure known as the nature of man."[28] Grace is Godself given to persons as "the divinizing favor which he is himself"[29] and which grounds human freedom. Rahner affirms, nevertheless, that this divine presence is not always consciously recognized or responded to by persons. While God is immediately and intimately present to persons as their ground of being and love, a "given" in the appearance of every human life, they can really and truly say "no" to God.[30] The human freedom that grace grounds includes the possibility of deciding against God. There is a real process of growing in grace, in the recognition and deeper acceptance of God's self-offering and loving presence. Rahner reflects:

---

[27] Ibid., 32.

[28] Karl Rahner, "The Theological Dimension of the Question about Man" in *TI*, trans. Margaret Kohl, vol. 17 (New York: Crossroad, 1981), 66.

[29] Rahner, "Nature and Grace", 177.

[30] Rahner, *Foundations*, 101.

> When we have let ourselves go and no longer belong to ourselves, when we have denied ourselves and no longer have the disposing of ourselves, when everything (including ourselves) has moved away from us as if into an infinite distance, then we begin to live in the world of God himself, the world of the God of grace and of eternal life. This may still appear strange to us at the beginning, and we will always be tempted again to take fright and flee back into what is familiar and near to us…. But we should gradually try to get ourselves used to the taste of the pure wine of the spirit, which is filled with the Holy Spirit…. This chalice is drunk only by those who have slowly learned in little ways to taste the fullness in emptiness, the ascent in the fall, life in death, the finding in renunciation. Anyone who learns this, experiences the spirit…and in this experience he is also given the experience of the Holy Spirit of grace.[31]

The Central Place of the Incarnation

With the eternal and timeless God drawing close to all that is human and historical, the Incarnation, the event in which God's Word becomes flesh, holds a paradigmatic significance in Rahner's theological anthropology and his theology of grace.

For Rahner, the goal of the world consists in God's communication of Self to it "that the whole dynamism which God has instituted in the very heart of the world's becoming by self-transcendence…is really always meant already as the beginning and first step towards this self-communication and its acceptance by the world."[32] God's self-communication turns towards the direction of history and affects persons, both as individuals and as a human community in space and time, and reaching an irrevocable point in the Incarnation of

---

[31] Karl Rahner, "Reflections on the Experience of Grace" in *TI*, trans. Karl-H. Kruger and B. Kruger, vol. 3 (New York: Crossroad, 1985), 89.

[32] Karl Rahner, "Christology Within an Evolutionary View of the World" in *TI*, trans. Karl-H. Kruger and Boniface Kruger, vol. 5 (Baltimore: Helicon Press, 1966), 172.

the Word. Jesus Christ, fully divine and fully human, is God's most visible, most personal embodiment of self-offer to humanity and humanity's acceptance of the offer.

> We give the title of Savior simply to that historical person who, coming in space and time, signifies that beginning of God's absolute communication of himself which inaugurates this self-communication for all men as something happening irrevocably and which shows this to be happening.[33]

This does not mean, Rahner cautions, that God's self-communication to the world begins only at the moment of the Incarnation for "it can easily be conceived as beginning before the actual coming of the Savior, indeed as co-existent with the whole spiritual history of humanity and of the world—as was actually the case according to Christian teaching."[34] Rather, with the Word becoming flesh, God's self-giving to humanity is shown as a permanent and irreversible reality, an event that really serves as the very goal of creation, nature, and the history of salvation. In the Word made flesh, the world "reaches its climax, in so far as this climax must be thought of as a moment in the total history of the human race and in so far as this climax is not simply identified with the totality of the spiritual world subject to God's communication of himself."[35] Reminiscent of the Scotian view that the Incarnation happens not so much in view of saving the world from sin but rather of privileging it as the recipient of divine love, Rahner holds that the Word becoming Flesh is God's highest purpose for creation. "The whole movement of history lives only for the moment of arrival at its goal and climax—it lives only for its entry into the event which makes it irreversible—in short, it lives for the one whom we call Savior."[36]

---

[33] Ibid., 174-175.

[34] Ibid., 175.

[35] Ibid., 175.

[36] Ibid., 175.

The Incarnation is the heart of God's drawing closely and permanently to humanity. In Jesus, the Word-made-Flesh, God validates the creation of humanity as ordained towards receiving the divine self-gift. At the same time, in Jesus, humanity accepts the gift.

> This Savior, who represents the climax of this self-communication, must therefore be at the same time God's absolute pledge by self-communication to the spiritual creature as a whole *and* the acceptance of this self-communication by this Savior; only then is there an utterly irrevocable self-communication on both sides, and only thus is it present in the world in a historically communicative manner. Jesus is the one who—by what we call his obedience, his prayer and the freely acted destiny of his death—has achieved also the acceptance of his divinely given grace and direct presence to God which he possesses as man…. Jesus is truly man. He has absolutely everything which belongs to the nature of man: he has (also) a finite subjective nature in which the world becomes present to itself and which has a radical directness to God which, like ours, rests on that self-communication by God in grace and glory which we too possess.[37]

Grace and Communion

The life, death and resurrection of the Savior revealed self-giving love as what unites God and humanity together—which is the divine purpose of creation. Jesus embodied this divine love and purpose through his healing and forgiving ministry, drawing towards the Father the people for whom God sent him. In Jesus Christ, "the unity of the love of God and the love of one's neighbor, the presence of God and his love within man and in the love towards men, is eternally secured."[38] Fully human and fully divine, the Incarnate Son personally revealed this communion of Divinity and humanity through three

---

[37] Ibid., 176.

[38] Karl Rahner, "Christian Humanism" in *TI*, trans. Graham Harrison, vol. 9 (New York: Herder and Herder, 1979), 189.

interpenetrating relationships: God loving persons, persons loving God, and persons loving one another.

Life-in-communion is a fundamental dimension of human existence constituted by God's self-gift to persons as witnessed by Christ. If the ground of all human life, knowledge, and love is "God's loving self-communication with the Thou in the world"[39]—that is, humanity—then the act of self-offering in love to a Thou is fundamental to being human and to loving God. For Rahner, a person's awareness of one's transcendental experience of God is possible only

> in and through man who has already (in logical priority) experienced the human Thou by his intramundane transcendental experience (of his *a priori* reference to the Thou) and by his categorized experience (of his concrete encounter with the concrete Thou) and who only *in this way* can exercise the (at least) transcendental experience of his reference to the absolute mystery (i.e. God).[40]

The capacity that persons have to form relationships is constituted by the original closeness of God to them. At the same time, this gracious closeness is mediated by the life-giving relationships that build human communion. Rahner states that the grace of salvation happens

> in *all* dimensions of human existence, i.e. even where man does not interpret his actions in a *consciously* religious way, but where he loves in an absolutely responsible manner, serves his fellow-man selflessly and willingly accepts the incomprehensible nature and the disappointments of his existence, hoping ultimately to embrace its as yet unrevealed meaningfulness.[41]

---

[39] Rahner, "Reflections on the Unity of the Love of Neighbor and Love of God", 245.

[40] Ibid.

[41] Rahner, "Christian Humanism", 189.

Jesus himself gathered a community of friends with whom he shared this ministry of love and service that united persons with God through forgiveness and mercy. In their presence, he restored sinners back to God and re-established their place in society. Furthermore, Jesus' person and presence fostered communion. Drawing them to a more personal relationship with God as Abba, and with one another in love as brothers and sisters, Jesus restored humanity to the original salvific plan of grace: loving union with God through loving union with others.

Persons in community cannot truly love God except in loving each other. For Rahner, love for another human being is not just one kind of love among many but rather

> the all-embracing basic act of man which gives meaning, direction and measure to everything else. If this is correct, then the essential *a priori* openness to the other human being which must be undertaken freely belongs as such to the *a priori* and most basic constitution of man and is an essential inner moment of his (knowing and willing) transcendentality…experienced in the concrete encounter with man in the concrete…. [T]his basic act is, according to what has been said, elevated supernaturally by a self-communication of God in uncreated grace and in the resulting basic triune faculty of the theological virtues of faith, hope and charity, whereby theological love necessarily and of its very nature integrates and saves faith and hope into itself. Hence the one basic human act, where it takes place positively, is the love of neighbor understood as *caritas*, i.e. as love of neighbor whose movement is directed towards the God of eternal life.[42]

Pentecost and Community

The outpouring of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost is of particular value in the consideration of grace as God's self-giving that draws

---

[42] Rahner, "Reflections on the Unity of the Love of Neighbor and Love of God", 241.

humanity towards unity with God and with one another. In self-communication to humanity, it is the Spirit of love that God shares to dwell within persons.

> That is why Pentecost is the fulfillment of Easter. The reason why the glowing Love of the Father and of the Son has brought our humanity back into the Father's light. The reason why man can live God's own life in the Holy Spirit is that the Son of Man died according to the flesh. The Holy Spirit of the eternal God has come. He is here: he lives in us, he sanctifies us, he strengthens us, he consoles us…. The center of all reality, the innermost heart of all infinity, the love of the all-holy God has become our center, our heart.[43]

The coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost is the visible witness to God giving the whole of humanity—gathered as one and represented by many nations—a gift, not "merely a gift…created and finite like ourselves, but the gift of God's whole being."[44] Furthermore, the event at Pentecost validates the community-forming mission of Christ in which the members live a new life in his Spirit. The Spirit through whom God binds persons to Godself draws them as well to one another as a community, as an *ekklesia* strengthened, enlightened, given a share in the new life of the Resurrection.

In this regard, relationality and interpersonal communication are not simply adjuncts in being human. They are *essentially* human. The Church that is "born" on Pentecost is not a religion meant to be appropriated privately and interiorly by individual persons who simply happen to believe in the mystery of Christ's life, death, and resurrection. The new life in the Spirit that Pentecost renders irrevocable is a life in community where as a Church, the members witness to the continuing presence of Christ by their love for one

---

[43] Karl Rahner, "Pentecost" in *The Eternal Year*, trans. J. Shea, S.S. (Baltimore: Helicon, 1964), 105.

[44] Ibid., 106.

another. For Rahner, to be followers of Christ means to be constituted as Church.

> When we say that Christianity must be constituted as church, we mean that this ecclesial community belongs to the religious existence of man as such…. It is part of man's question about salvation and it is fundamentally co-constitutive of his relationship to God. It is in this sense that we are maintaining that church has something to do with the essence of Christianity, and that it is not merely an organization for the practice of religion….[45]

To be in communion as a Church "springs from the very essence of Christianity as the supernatural self-communication of God to humanity which has become manifest in history and has found its final and definitive historical climax in Jesus Christ."[46] By the very nature of God and persons, and the nature of the relationship between them, the interpersonal and ecclesial dimension cannot be excluded in the reality of grace. The Spirit of grace is Church-gathering, and it is in the kind of communion among persons that the new life in Christ can be recognized, authenticated, and affirmed.

CONCLUSION

Karl Rahner's understanding of grace as God's self-communication to all persons is vital to this dissertation. In the documents of the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences arises a similar understanding of God, not as someone who makes sporadic interventions into humanity and only through Christ, the Church and its sacraments, but rather as someone who reveals and offers Godself to women and men of every particular time and place, drawing them into communion with Godself and with one another. The Asian Bishops

---

[45] Rahner, *Foundations*, 342.

[46] Ibid., 343.

have discerned that in their own time and place God's self-giving in grace invites and empowers the community to respond in three specific ways: participation in, dialogue with, and prophetic mission to the people who are immersed in a plurality of religions, cultures, and who are mostly poor. A more holistic way of understanding the experience of grace therefore includes its communitarian dimension. Grace, as God's communication of Spirit, is a community-gathering experience. God's self-gift constitutes community and grounds each person's community-oriented-ness.

The Holy Spirit's life-giving presence is fundamental to the authenticity and relevance of a Church constituted by Christ. If a Church is truly a place in which the Spirit dwells, then this divine presence must be validated by the community's response to the Spirit's call: to participate and dialogue with other communities, and diligently care for the poor. This is particularly important in Asia where, according to the FABC documents, the Church should be

> at its deepest level a *communion* (*koinonia*) rooted in the life of the Trinity, and thus in its essential reality, a sacrament of the loving self-communication of God and the graced response of redeemed mankind in faith, hope and love…a community of authentic *participation* and *co-responsibility*, where genuine sharing of gifts and responsibilities obtains, where the talents and charism of each one are accepted and exercised in diverse ministries, and where all are schooled to the attitudes and practice of mutual listening and dialogue, common discernment in the Spirit, common witness and collaborative action…not closed in on itself and its particular concerns but *linked* with many bonds *to other communities of faith* and to the one universal communion, *catholica unitas*, of the holy Church of the Lord.[47]

---

[47] Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences (from hereon, FABC), "The Church: A Community of Faith in Asia" in *For All the Peoples of Asia: Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences Documents from 1970-1991*, ed. G. Rosales, D.D. and C. G. Arevalo, S.J. (from hereon, *FAPA* 1) (Diliman: Claretian Publications, 1997), 56.

God's presence in all people draws them naturally together to form or be counted as part of communities. "Communitarianness" is not only an option of a graced humanity. To be drawn towards community is both the call and the fruit of God's having ordained persons to Godself. To be privileged subjects of God's self-communication is to therefore be *ekklesia*.

CHAPTER TWO

THE FEDERATION OF ASIAN BISHOPS' CONFERENCES

THE ASIAN BISHOPS' MEETING: PRECURSOR OF THE FABC

> With the era of colonialism now a moment of the past, we witness through Asia today the emergence within each of our nations…of a new consciousness…a new self-understanding (which) seeks to discover and affirm an identity in continuity with the heritage of its own past, but also resolutely turned toward the future…. We witness the awakening of the masses, and the ending of the long ages of resigned fatalism and passive acceptance of poverty, ignorance and sickness…injustice and exploitation…. We witness their expectations of a better and fuller life…for more rice on their tables, knowledge for their (children), their yearnings for greater freedom and dignity…for a life more truly worthy of (persons).[48]

The Asian Bishops' Meeting in Manila on 30 November 1970 marked the first-ever occasion for Asian bishops to come together and discuss common experiences, problems, questions and reflections about the overall pastoral life of Christian and non-Christian faithful in the world's largest continent. Up until then, the Asian episcopacy had always related directly with that of Europe, mainly Rome, and with North America, mainly the United

---

[48] "Message and Resolutions of the Asian Bishops' Meeting [from hereon, ABM]: 29 November 1970" in *FAPA* 1, 4.

States. It was from these two ecclesiastical regions that the leadership of the Asian Churches had drawn much of its support in terms of directives, personnel, advice, and funding. Before the Manila meeting that brought Asian bishops together, they knew and interacted mostly with western bishops more than with fellow Asian bishops.

Six years before the Asian Bishops' Meeting, the Second Vatican Council in 1962 had actually provided the Asian bishops an initial opportunity to finally meet their several counterparts from the different countries of the continent. Gathered together in an international setting for the first time, the bishops "became aware that they hardly knew each other" [49] and that they had never felt the need to communicate with each other until then. Furthermore, the majority of the episcopal contingent from Asia was still made up of foreign missionary societies rather than the indigenous clergy. The Asian minority in that contingent knew very little about each other, let alone about the situation of the Catholic Church in countries other than their own.

Though the Council was clearly no occasion for formal discussion of concerns local and germane only to the Asian Church, its formal and informal sessions became for many Asian bishops a chance to discover and to speak with one another about comparable, even parallel concerns regarding the Asian faithful. The fruit of these "Asian" exchanges were four contributions they made to the different documents of the Council which were mostly in the fields of liturgy (about which they enthusiastically opted for the use of the vernacular), ecumenism (in which they expressed a strong desire to be a more truly united Church), missiology (for which they insisted that missionary activity was an essential task of every local Church), and the theology of religions (about which they postulated that the Council consider the Church's attitude not only towards Judaism but also towards other religions—thus paving the way for *Nostra Aetate*, the declaration on

---

[49] Miguel Marcelo Quattra, O.M.I., *At the Side of the Multitudes: The Kingdom of God and the Mission of the Church in the FABC Documents* (Diliman: Claretian Publications, 2000), 7.

the relation of the Catholic Church with non-Christian religions).[50] Finally inspired by the Council's fresh spirit of collegiality, the Asian bishops left from the Council with greater common resolve for more solidarity among each other.[51]

Pope Paul VI revisited Asia in 1970, his seventh trip outside of Italy, primarily to inaugurate the Eucharistic Congress in Bombay. One of the most significant points of this journey was his three-day stopover in Manila where 180 bishops from fifteen countries convened for the first Asian Bishops' Meeting. Prompted by the papal visit, the Meeting steered Asia's bishops further towards a new direction in the spirit of collegiality and the sense of community among local Churches. It would also firm up the bishops' determination to begin formulating some process, some system of coordination by which they could relate with one another more closely and with more deliberate regularity than before. From 23 to 29 November 1970, one assembly of Asian bishops shared and gained a new and refreshing spirit of collegial awareness.

> The meeting marked the beginning of a new consciousness of the many traditional links that united the various peoples of this part of the globe. In spite of many differences, the peoples of this region of Asia have been bound together by a spiritual affinity and sharing of common moral and religious values…. In addition to the traditional links, the peoples of Asia experience today the same patterns of socio-political conditions, face common challenges and share similar concerns.[52]

---

[50] George Evers, "Challenges to the Churches in Asia Today", a talk given at the East Asia Pastoral Institute Alumni Homecoming, 4 October 2005, Manila, at http://eapi. admu.edu.ph/eapr006/georgevers.htm (accessed 9 March 2010).

[51] Thomas C. Fox, *Pentecost in Asia: A New Way of Being Church* (New York: Orbis, 2002), 16.

[52] Felix Wilfred, *The Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences: Orientations, Challenges, and Impact* in *FAPA* 1, xxiii-xxiv. (Felix Wilfred teaches systematic theology in the University of Madras, Chennai, India. He served as the

Sharing and reflecting about these Asian experiences, this time as one formal assembly convened for that precise reason, the bishops gained greater consciousness than ever before, that the problems, challenges, and situations one bishop encountered in his country were strikingly similar to those with which other bishops from another country were confronted. So too did the aspirations and hopes of one bishop for his community resonate with what his confreres aspired and hoped for in their local Churches across the continent. Despite the irrefutable range and variety of cultures, languages, and religions that flourished in the country that each Church leader represented, the bishops discovered that the communities they served shared kindred cultural, historical, and contemporary connections. Hence, in the Asian Bishops' Meeting, they set upon seeking to discover new ways of being more effectively concerted in the service not only of their Catholic communities back home, but also of all people in their home country. This they would do in the spirit of collegiality and dialogue that they believed was earnestly urged upon them by the Second Vatican Council.[53]

For many bishops, Vatican II marked a crucial turning to history, opening a new direction towards realizing an "Asian" Church which, as the reflections of the Asian Bishops' Meeting revealed, was increasingly emerging as "one" Church. This oneness was substantiated not solely by the strength of abstract or historical principles, but by the concrete cultural, social, and religious situations in which the Asian faithful found themselves. In a considerable way, the pope's 1967 encyclical, *Populorum Progressio*, also played a crucial part in helping reawaken the wider imagination of the Asian Church leaders. In his message, Paul VI enjoined the whole Church towards "progressive development of peoples" especially those who were struggling to be free from the ravages of "hunger, poverty, endemic disease and ignorance," as well as peoples who had longed for "a larger share in the benefits of

---

executive secretary of the Theological Advisory Commission of the FABC, and is a member of the Pontifical International Theological Commission.)

[53] ABM, 3.

civilization and a more active improvement of their human qualities… for fuller growth."[54]

In his Manila stopover, two days prior to the first session of the Asian Bishops' Meeting, Paul VI announced over national radio the same concern:

> The Church, conscious of human aspirations towards dignity and well-being, pained by the unjust inequalities which still exist and often become more acute between nations and within nations, while respecting the competence of States, must offer her assistance for promoting a fuller humanism, that is to say "the full development of the whole man and of every man" (*Populorum Progressio*, 42). It is a logical consequence of our Christian faith. The hierarchy of the Philippines recalled it quite recently: "Christianity and democracy have one basic principle in common: the respect for the dignity and value of the human person, the respect of those means which man requires to make himself fully human" (9th July 1970).[55] It is in the name of this principle that the Church must support as best she can the struggle against ignorance, hunger, disease and social insecurity. Taking her place in the vanguard of social action, she must bend all her efforts to support, encourage and push forward initiatives working for the full promotion of man. Since she is the witness of human conscience and

---

[54] Pope Paul VI, *Populorum Progressio* (from hereon, PP) (Encyclical of Pope Paul VI on the Development of Peoples, 26 March 1967) at http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/paul_vi/encyclicals/documents/hf_p-vi_enc_26031967_populorum_ en.html (accessed 8 March 2010).

[55] On 9 July 1970, 69 Filipino bishops openly denounced several counts of abuse of power by the government and militia of the dictator-president, Ferdinand E. Marcos, and urged the public unto greater vigilance in the hope of forestalling cheating during the elections and checking governmental responsibility (see *The New York Times*, 10 July 1970, page 10).

> of divine love for men, she must take up the defense of the poor and the weak against every form of social injustice.[56]

For their part, the Asian bishops chose as the theme for their gathering Paul VI's message in *Populorum Progressio* which he re-echoed in the Manila radio broadcast. Given an insistent papal call for a more holistic development of peoples, the bishops felt empowered to discuss the development of Asian peoples, and resolved to find concerted ways to help raise "the city (that is, Asia) of brothers (and sisters)—a city which shall mirror, in hope and promise, the kingdom whose foundations Christ laid, reconciling all in Himself…."[57]

In the same spirit, the bishops were determined above all to work towards the first concrete task: "to be more truly 'the Church of the poor.'" They committed themselves to share something of the poverty of Asia's poor faithful. They believed that to be such a Church was to unequivocally place themselves on the side of the multitudes in the continent. The Church, the bishops pointed out, "cannot set up islands of affluence in a sea of want and misery," but instead must herself witness to evangelical simplicity. Moreover, no person, however lowly or poor, should find difficulty gaining access to and the attention of his or her bishop who had, after all, committed himself to be on the side of the poor.[58]

Being a "church of the young"[59] was a second concrete task to which the bishops committed themselves in the Meeting. They recognized that on one hand, Asia lived and breathed in and through centuries-old cultures and traditions, but that on the other, that it is a

---

[56] Pope Paul VI, "Address to All the Bishops of Asia: Manila, Philippines; 28 November 1970" at http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/paul_vi/speeches/1970/documents/hf_p-vi_spe_19701129_popoli-asia_en.html (accessed 1 February 2010).

[57] ABM, 7.

[58] Ibid., 5.

[59] Ibid., 6.

continent of the young with sixty percent of its people younger than twenty-five years old at the time of the Meeting. In view of this reality, the bishops resolved to be a Church that will speak to the youth as "worthy of their devotion and hope: which seeks to understand and trust them…a Church which lives out in deeds…the convictions of her faith and the imperatives of her compassion."[60] In other words, these leaders of the Asian Church desired to be a credible witness to the faith for the youth that is the future of the community.

Enormous tasks awaited to be engaged in the continent for which the Asian bishops felt a forceful need to be themselves formed into a community of dialogue and action:

> It remains for us to gather the needed knowledge for the difficult planning in which we must henceforth participate, and to muster the effective will to eradicate entrenched injustice and replace oppressive structures, thus bringing to realization in each of our nations of that society which is the substance of the expectations of our peoples. It remains for us, with both patience and decision, to help bind together the new world of Asia, as a true family of nations in this part of the earth, linked not only by lines of geography, but by mutual understanding and respect, by the nobler bonds of brotherhood and of love.[61]

It was at the second plenary session of the Asian Bishops' Meeting that Cardinal Justinus Darmajuwono of Indonesia broached the idea of establishing a central secretariat that would see to the implementation of the proposals and resolutions of the Meeting. The proposition was received well by the body, but it needed further discussion and structuring in order to be truly compelling for the majority of the assembly. That same afternoon, Darmajuwono and four others (Cardinals Stephen Kim of Korea and Valerian Gracias of India, Bishops Francis Hsu of Hong Kong and Mariano Gaviola of the Philippines, and Fr. Horacio de la Costa SJ, the Philippine Provincial)

---

[60] Ibid.

[61] Ibid.

met to firm up the profile and rationale behind the proposed central secretariat. The small group formulated the basic idea and functions of such a secretariat. Upon presentation to the body on 26 November , it gained greater consensus and was tabled for fuller discussion by the assembly.

Darmajuwono made it clear to the assembly that this proposed committee was not to wield any authority above and beyond the national Episcopal Conferences to which the bishops already belonged. It would be a structure as modest and as flexible as possible, thereby dispelling any fear that the presidents of the Episcopal Conferences would have to cede their autonomy to the central secretariat. This proviso effectively addressed an apprehension verbalized by Thailand Bishop Robert Ratna Bamrungtrakul who feared the possibility that this overall episcopal structure might represent an even greater burden on an already small, overworked Thai Church community.[62]

On 28 November, in the presence of Paul VI, whose approval was necessary, the resolution to authorize and support a permanent structure for the effective implementation of the Asian Bishops' Meeting was passed. The assembly designated Bishop Hsu to organize the first meeting of the constituted Central Committee. The Asian bishops released a set of episcopal resolutions at the end of the Manila meeting. At the top of the list was a call for the establishment of a permanent structure for the effective implementation of the decisions of the gathering. The organization that would later be the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences was taking shape and coming to life.

By the end of August 1972, two years after the Manila meeting, the statutes that were being drafted by a committee of five (Cardinal Darmajuwono of Indonesia, Archbishop Teopisto Alberto of the Philippines, Bishops Hsu of Hong Kong and Patrick D'Souza of India) led by Cardinal Kim were submitted to the Asian bishops for review. After feedback from the body, it was amended to the satisfaction of the Asian ordinaries. Four Asian cardinals—Valerian

---

[62] Quattra, *At the Side of the Multitudes*, 9.

Gracias of Bombay, Thomas Cooray of Colombo, Darmojuwono, and Kim—would hand-carry the document of the constitutions to the Vatican for papal approval.

Not everyone in the Vatican was pleased by this turn of events, however. According to Kim, some officials in Rome "did not want another CELAM (the Latin American Episcopal Conference),"[63] referring most likely to the Vatican's displeasure over that conference being a strong advocate of liberation theology. Moreover, the Vatican was not keen on granting the proposed Asian episcopal organization any power to wield juridically binding authority in doctrinal and moral matters. The Asian cardinals headed by Kim assured the pope that the proposed federation would be an advisory body of a pastoral nature that would facilitate communication between the local Asian Churches, and would promote and work for social justice and human development—just as the statutes had stipulated. In other words, the proposed federation was a move towards the call and vision of Vatican II for collegiality in view of the total development of the Asian people.

In 1972, Paul VI finally approved the statutes for an experimental period of two years. On 13 February 1973, the presidents of ten Asian bishops' conferences met again in Hong Kong to formulate the federation's formal structures. There would be no president, it was decided, but an appointed secretary general who would coordinate with the conferences in view of convening plenary assemblies. Only a plenary assembly, the supreme governing body of the federation, could modify the statutes and structures.

The Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences: Structure and Mission

The first plenary assembly since the Asian Bishops' Meeting in 1970 met in Taiwan in April 1974, with Filipino bishop Mariano Gaviola elected as the first secretary general of the body. Later that year, a synod on evangelization was to be convened in Rome and so this first plenary was opportune in preparing the Asian representation

---

[63] Fox, *Pentecost in Asia*, 25.

to that gathering. It was obviously also the time to further refine the contours of the episcopal federation that the Asian bishops had been desirous of establishing formally for four years. All the input from the ordinaries still had to be laid out into a clearer, more synthetic framework, faithful to what had been said at the assemblies and to the spirit of the Meeting four years previous. Catalino Arévalo SJ recalled as the final document emerged to launch the Federation that it took several hours of "struggle" until the vision finally took its clearest shape: with "the local church at the center; dialogue as the way; three dialogues as the spelling out of the talks; the final theological synthesis presented within a prayer to the crucified and risen Christ, Lord of our Asian peoples, head of the Church, shaper of history."[64] It was read and discussed by the plenum and passed with very little changes.

The Structure of the Federation

As a voluntary association of the bishops' conferences in South, Southeast, East and Central Asia, the FABC is not a supra-episcopal conference to which individual conferences cede its autonomy as federation members. Federation decisions, resolutions, and recommendations do not enjoy juridical binding force, but the process by which these are discussed, reflected upon, and resolved as one body is truly an expression of collegial responsibility. In that spirit, the Federation seeks to foster solidarity and co-responsibility among its members, all for the welfare of the Church of Asia and the wider societies. It is also determined to defend and promote the greater good not only of Asian Catholics but of all people of the continent.[65]

The fifteen bishops' conferences of the following eighteen Asian nations are the members of the FABC: Bangladesh, India, Indonesia, Japan, Kazakhstan, Korea, Myanmar, Pakistan, Philippines, Sri Lanka, Taiwan, Thailand, Vietnam, Laos-Cambodia, and Malaysia-Singapore-Brunei. The ten associate members are: Hong Kong, Macau,

---

[64] Ibid., 33.

[65] See http://www.fabc.org/about.html (accessed 10 July 2010).

Mongolia, Nepal, Kyrgyzstan, Siberia, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, and East Timor.

The seven principal functions[66] of the FABC are: (1) to study ways and means of promoting the apostolate, especially in the light of the Second Vatican Council and post-conciliar official documents, and according to the needs of Asia; (2) to work for and to intensify the dynamic presence of the Church in the total development of the peoples of Asia; (3) to help in the study of problems of common interest to the Church in Asia, and to investigate possibilities of solutions and coordinated action; (4) to promote inter-communication and cooperation among the local Churches and bishops of Asia; (5) to render service to the episcopal conferences of Asia in order to help them to better meet the needs of the People of God; (6) to foster a more ordered development of organizations and movements in the Church at the international level; and finally, (7) to foster ecumenical and interreligious communication and dialogue.

The supreme body of the FABC is the Plenary Assembly composed of the following: all bishop-presidents of the member conferences (or whoever they designate officially to represent them), bishop-delegates elected by the member-conferences, associate members, and members of the Standing Committee. The Plenary Assembly is convened every four years. There have so far been nine such assemblies; the first was held in Taiwan, 1974, the most recent was held in Manila, August 2009.

The Central Committee, composed of the presidents of member-conferences (or their officially designated representatives) oversees the implementation of instructions and resolutions drawn up in the Plenary Assembly. In between plenary assemblies, the Central Committee directs the FABC. It is convened every two years. The Standing Committee, a group of five bishops from different parts of Asia, elected by the Plenary Assembly, is responsible for implementing instructions and resolutions of the Central Committee. It is assisted

---

[66] Ibid.

by the Central Secretariat which also provides support to the different organs of the FABC.

The Central Secretariat, based in Hong Kong, serves as the principal agency that coordinates with all the offices and agencies of the FABC in their day-to-day running. It facilitates exchange of information and of experiences among the member conferences, promotes research and study regarding problems common among members, especially as regards evangelization, cultural adaptation, and issues of justice and peace. It also acts as a liaison to other pontifical organizations as well as sponsors conferences, seminars, and dialogue forums with other Christians and non-Christians all over the continent.

To ascertain that specific and significant aspects of Asian Christian living have a voice in the FABC, specialized service agencies, or Offices as they are called, are set up (comparable, perhaps, to the different committees in a pastoral council of a contemporary parish community). The agencies function under the Central Secretariat. These are the Offices of: (1) Human Development (OHD), (2) Social Communication (OSC), (3) Laity and Family (OLF), (4) Theological Concerns (OTC), (5) Education and Faith Formation (OEFF), (6) Ecumenical and Interreligious Affairs (OEIA), (7) Evangelization (OE), (8) Clergy (OC), and (9) Consecrated Life (OCL).[67]

What may well be considered as the force that connects the FABC bishops to the ordinary run of Asian Christian living and its attendant concerns, problems, and challenges is the multi-sectoral work accomplished by the different "Bishops' Institutes" that fall under the Offices. To mention some of the major ones: the Bishops' Institute for the Missionary Apostolate (BIMA), for the Lay Apostolate (BILA), for Interreligious Affairs (BIRA), for Social Action (BISA), the Formation Institute for Interreligious Affairs (FIRA), for the Biblical Apostolate (BIBA), for Faith Encounters in Social Action (FEISA), and the Asian Movement for Christian Unity (AMCU). The

[67] The objectives of each Office are described in detail on the FABC website, specifically http://www.fabc.org/offices.

Institutes run programs organized by the various FABC Offices. They are primarily aimed at the formation and education of the bishops who, through time, have invited both lay and religious delegates from the local Church.

The resolutions and theological-pastoral reflections of the Bishops' Institutes are the fruit both of episcopal voices and of many contributing voices from the religious and the lay communities—the members of whom have been invited to discuss the pastoral needs of their domiciles. As suggested by their names, each Institute is convened to converse about specific themes and issues that affect particular sectors and situations of the Asian faithful. While the statements harvested from the Bishops' Institutes carry no juridical binding influence, they are nonetheless accepted and owned by the FABC.

Asia Through the FABC Eyes: A "Composition of Place"

In the statements written by the bishops' institutes as well as all nine plenary assemblies, the FABC customarily opens with, to use an Ignatian phrase, a "composition of place" by which it describes the situation in Asia at that particular point in the continent's history. The reflections, resolutions, and programs of action that follow the composition of place are precisely the FABC's multi-sectoral response to that contemporary context. The composition of place illustrates two evident realities that the FABC consistently sees in the Asian landscape: first, its lights and shadows as a multi-cultural, multi-religious, and predominantly poor community; and second, the undeniably and deeply communitarian character of Asian living. This composition of place is key to FABC reflections because it describes the Asia in which the Catholic Church must participate, dialogue with, and witness prophetically to the saving act of God through the mission of Christ and the Spirit.

The FABC has keen awareness of the marvelous gifts that Asia bears as a continent of colorful traditions, ethnicities, and faiths. At the same time, it does not gloss over the harsher truths that blight the Asian reality. The Bishops also affirm the deeply communitarian ethos that typifies the Asian way of life. There is in fact no major

portion in any of the FABC's multi-sectoral reflections and resolutions that concentrates singly on the Asian as an individual entity or as an isolated subject who is, in the jargon of philosophy, "an individual substance of a rational nature," "a being unto oneself," "a thinking subject," "a reflexive knower." Lights and shadows in the community of Asians, as accurately sensed by the FABC, are of a deeply communal character bearing very little signs of that "turn to the subject" typical of the European persuasion of socio-anthropology. Consequently, the resolutions made by the FABC are equally communal in tenor.

In the composition of place, the FABC often describes Asia as blessed in being a medley of cultures and religions, a treasury of diverse and centuries-old traditions, origins and history, and of wide ranging socio-political temperaments chiefly affected by the people's creeds. The introductions to the FABC statements are often variations on a celebratory theme about the "signs of vibrant life in the fecundity of creation, the wealth of cultures, the depth of religious and ethical traditions, the strength of new economies, the progress in technology, and the promotion of human dignity and peace."[68] Common to the vagaries of the Asian reality, the FABC points out, is "the Asian search for life, the Asian celebration of life, and the Asian struggle for true life."[69]

The Asia in which the FABC finds itself is that which, in this century, has "thrown off the yoke of colonialism and taken (her) place of dignity and freedom center stage in the human drama."[70] It is a continent that promises growing solidarity and progress, yet at the same time wrestles with dimmer realities that affect Asian

---

[68] Ibid.

[69] FABC, "Living the Eucharist in Asia: Final Document of the Ninth Plenary Assembly, Manila, 10-16 August 2009" (from hereon, PA 9), 4.

[70] FABC, "A Renewed Church in Asia: A Mission of Love and Service, Final Statement of the Seventh Plenary Assembly, Samphran, Thailand, 3-12 January 2000" (from hereon, PA 7) in *FAPA*, ed. F. J. Eilers, vol. 3 (from hereon *FAPA* 3), 2.

peoples—like ethno-religious wars resulting in violent blood-spills, the increase of numbers among the poor and disenfranchised, and the ambiguous realities of modernization with its secularizing and materialistic ramifications.

A systematic summary of how the FABC sees the Asian community can be made under three headings that describe the three most apparent characteristics of the Asian reality: the Asia of many cultures, the Asia of many religions, and the Asia of the poor. These characteristics of the Asian community are important for three reasons. First, the FABC sees them as the realities upon which the Asian Church's mission must subsequently be carried out by the Church's engagement in dialogue with cultures, with religions, and with the poor—collectively called the Triple Dialogue. Second, these three characteristics of the Asian community will eventually show that a Church fully engaged in God's mission must ultimately be a *participative*, *dialogical*, and *prophetic* Church. What follows is a synthesis of these features of the overall Asian community as seen by the FABC. Each characteristic reality, according to the FABC, exhibits lights as well as shadows.

The Asia of Many Cultures. "If…the Church in Southeast Asia is to be a Church of the people, it must be a Church that recognizes and appreciates in what our people are rich: our Asian traditions, cultures, values; in short, an Asian Church."[71] The FABC finds it a cause for joy that the marvelous blend of ancient cultures is still very visible in Asian societies even in the continent's modernizing atmosphere. An even deeper cause for celebration is the fact that although immensely diverse in race, customs, and creed, Asian communities nevertheless bear common values and aspirations, revealing a shared identity. Close family—and extended family—ties, filial respect and devotion not only to parents but also to other elders (demonstrated for instance by the variant, that is, of a more formal or respectful level of vocabulary, sentence construction, and honorifics employed in many

---

[71] FABC Bishops' Institute for Social Action (from hereon, BISA), "Final Reflections, Novaliches, Philippines, 15 March 1974" in *FAPA* 1, 199.

Asian languages, and which rules an Asian's intercourse with older persons), the importance of the sharing of a meal with family or with friends, smooth interpersonal relationships, hospitality to guests and visitors however simple or abstemious the host's accommodations, light-hearted, often self-deprecating humor even in the most trying episodes in life, the very polite shunning of praise and compliment, putting great significance to honor and to shame in moral living, the passing on to the young heroic tales of ancestors and family stories—all these are a few of the many values shared in common by Asian people across races, customs, and creeds.

> From the dynamic forces at work within Asian realities, a basic vision of life emerges. In the living heritage of cultures and religious traditions of Asia, we discern values and their expressions in symbols, stories and art forms that embody a vision of life; while we are critically aware of the distortions that have entered into these traditions. In these cultural and religious traditions, we also discover the responses to life given by past generations of Asian peoples, which in turn become resources for our contemporary response.[72]

At the very center of the cultural and social ferment in the Asian community is the family which, to the FABC, "is the cellular receptor of emerging cultures as well as initiator…of influential cultural forces…a point of reference for social, political, economic and religion-based ideal relationships."[73] While the family is shaped very much by the culture of a people, culture and its traditions are themselves

---

[72] FABC, "Christian Discipleship in Asia Today: Service to Life, Final Statement of the Sixth Plenary Assembly, Manila, Philippines, 10-19 January 1995" (from hereon, PA 6) in *FAPA: FABC Documents from 1992-1996*, ed. Franz-Josef Eilers, S.V.D., vol. 2 (from hereon, *FAPA* 2) (Diliman: Claretian Publications, 1997), 4.

[73] FABC, "The Asian Family Towards a Culture of Integral Life: Final Statement of the Eighth Plenary Assembly, Daejeon, South Korea, 17-23 August 2004" (from hereon, PA 8) in *FAPA: FABC Documents from 1992-1996*, ed. Franz-Josef Eilers, S.V.D., vol 4 (from hereon, *FAPA* 4) (Diliman: Claretian Publications, 1997), 2.

kept alive by the families that hand them over from one generation to the next. The FABC notes that while different types of cultural situations in Asia abound, there are major commonalities in today's family situation that were otherwise infrequent twenty years past. The first most common characteristic among today's Asian families is the reality of intercultural and inter-faith families resulting from mixed marriages where "couples might find adjustment to each other much more difficult than if they were of the same faith."[74] Secondly, Asian culture has seen single parenthood on the increase as some parents are permanently separated, while others are temporarily divided because one or both parents have to work abroad. Thus, many Asian children grow up with only one parent—or with their grandparents and relatives. There are also more families in which children do not have common fathers or mothers. In other words, while Asians still try to raise a family according to the cultural tradition of having a closely knit extended family, there is nevertheless an increase of "less traditional" families which the FABC attributes to "the advance of new liberation movements and growing neo-liberal and post-modern thinking"[75] as well as the massive poverty that continues to alter the family situation.

Alongside the common positive values in Asia's many cultures come, therefore, the shadows, the most serious of which is often mentioned in all Plenary Assembly statements and several institute statements: the problem of modernization and its attendant industrialization and secularization, "with its worship of technology, narrow materialism and secularism, its fever for consumerism, its ideological pluralism…."[76] While modernity and industrial progress have significantly facilitated vital operations in the practical run of day-to-day Asian living, their complementary secularization has spawned

---

[74] Ibid., 4.

[75] Ibid., 5.

[76] FABC, "Prayer: The Life of the Church of Asia: Statement and Recommendations of the Second Plenary Assembly, Calcutta, India, 25 November 1978" (from hereon, PA 2) in *FAPA* 1, 31.

a "troubled moment in the history of our people." The FABC observes that "(the) modern world, despite its undeniably great achievements, brings about the gradual disintegration of our traditional societies and the effects on people's lives which follow on it. The loss of a sense of belonging in community, depersonalized relationships, disorientation and loneliness—these have become part of the lives of so many of our people."[77] While modernization offers bright prospects for Asia's economic and technological future, the FABC remains understandably critical of modernization being equally laden with uncertainty. It has led to "social and cultural dislocation" in which "traditional values and attitudes are called into question." Many traditional symbols in family and societal life have begun to lose their cultural influence especially on many young people who comprise the target audience of secularizing lifestyles promoted by various modern communications media. Instead of valorizing the communal ways of proceeding typical in Asian cultures, many forces in modernization have endorsed individualism, self-centeredness, and the thickening of personal boundaries at the expense of communitarian values. In more and more countries in Asia, the FABC detects the rise of "a new middle class which is highly consumerist and competitive, and in general, insensitive and indifferent to the overwhelming majority of poor and marginalized people."[78] In other words, in spite of the centuries-old cherished Asian tradition that prizes shared values, communal vigilance and concern for the well-being of community members, and the unifying ramifications of filial respect of and devotion to elders, the modernization ushered by the unremittingly globalizing world society has thinned the robust threads that have shaped the many-colored fabric of Asian community life.

But there is hope, the FABC asserts. There is still an abiding "desire for community" among many sectors in Asian living, which,

---

[77] Ibid., 30.

[78] FABC, "Journeying Together Toward the Third Millennium: Statement of the Fifth Plenary Assembly, Bandung, Indonesia, 27 July 1990" (from hereon, PA 5) in *FAPA* 1, 276.

at the global level, is what the FABC sees as "a desire for solidarity".[79] In other words, notwithstanding the perceptible fissures in the traditional values that have held communities together, the drive towards solidarity is still clearly substantiated "in the growth of Basic Ecclesial Communities (among Catholics)," for instance, and "of neighborhood groups, of groups that come together to defend human rights, or…for prayer or bible sharing…motivated by a healthy reaction to the breakdown of traditional structures of community. And more positively, they stem from a concern with human persons rather than with impersonal structures…."[80]

The Asia of Many Religions. "The Asian soul is often characterized by its search for the Divine and for life. Such a search, present in the religious and philosophical traditions that originated in Asia, is at the root of humility, non-violence, non-aggression, patience and harmony (that typifies the inner landscape of Asians)."[81] The FABC recognizes that "Asia is a cradle of the world's great religions."[82] Confucianism, Shinto, and Taoism are the main religions founded in East Asia; Hinduism, Buddhism, Jainism, and Sikhism are the faiths of the Indian region. Founded in Iran, Zoroastrianism, once-upon-a-time the state religion of the Persian Empire, still thrives although it has become a minority religion in Iran and in India. Shamanism and Animism are still alive in particular sectors of Northern Asia, especially in Korea. Christianity, Islam, and Judaism—the three major Abrahamic religions (with Christianity and Islam having the most adherents)[83]—have their beginnings in Asia as well. These religions, says the FABC,

---

[79] Ibid., 278.

[80] Ibid.

[81] PA 9, 7.

[82] Asian Colloquium on Ministries in the Church (from hereon, ACMC), "Conclusions, Hong Kong, 5 March 1977" in *FAPA* 1, 68.

[83] World Religions Statistics at http://www.adherents.com/Religions_By_Adherents.html (accessed 3 January 2010).

> have been (and continue to be) the authentic expression of the noblest longings of [the Asian peoples'] hearts and the home of their contemplation and prayer. They have helped to give shape to the histories and cultures of our nations. How then can we not give them reverence and honor (and) acknowledge that God has drawn our peoples to Himself through them?"[84]

The bishops recall the words Paul VI delivered in Manila at the first Asian Bishops' Meeting: "Asia is a continent, the past history of whose people manifests the sense of spiritual values dominating the thoughts of their sages and the lives of their vast multitudes."[85] Manifest, too, the bishops add, "have been the discipline of ascetics, a deep and innate religious sense…primacy of things of the spirit, an unrelenting search for God and hunger for the supernatural."[86]

Asian Catholics and Christians bear wondrous ways of prayer and worship drawn from the treasury of Christian heritage—out of which they can contribute to the even larger treasury of world religions of the continent. In the same way, the FABC affirms, can Asian religions have much to contribute to Christians. In many non-Christian religions, for instance, one finds

> a richly developed prayer of the whole person in unity of body-psyche-spirit; contemplation of deep interiority and immanence; venerable sacred books and writings; traditions of asceticism and renunciation; techniques of contemplation found in the ancient eastern religions; simplified prayer-forms and other popular expressions of faith and piety….[87]

---

[84] PA 1, 14.

[85] PA 2, 30.

[86] Ibid.

[87] Ibid., 35.

In the past, the FABC notes, it was thought with apprehension that particular elements from non-Christian religions could actually find a comfortable place in the communal faith and practice of Christian religions, let alone in those of Roman Catholic communities. But the Asian bishops now believe that "with deeper study and understanding, with prudent discernment on our part and proper catechesis of our Christian people, these many indigenous riches will at last find a natural place in the prayer of our Churches in Asia and will greatly enrich the prayer life of the Church through the world."[88]

The desire for greater solidarity is noticeably present in Asian religions:

> Ecumenical and interreligious dialogue, for example, has come about because both Christians and [people] of other faiths desire to learn from one another, to search together for a better understanding of the meaning of life, to work together for a new world which is at once more human and more divine.[89]

With these lights come shadows as well. The FABC observes that believers of all religions, not excluding Christians, are vulnerable to the influences of secularization in a modernizing world. Both culture and religion are affected directly by these influences. Foremost among the worrisome realities is the effect of rapid globalization where a new economic structure breeds a false ideology among the poor, the youth, and the indigenous communities. This "present troubled moment of the history of our peoples," the FABC says, precisely referring to the secularization and materialism of a globalizing world culture, "threatens precisely the meanings and values which form our precious spiritual heritage."[90] More and more people of the present generation tend to lose their sense of the divine and its presence in the world. "The young and modernizing elite tend increasingly towards

---

[88] Ibid.

[89] PA 5, 278.

[90] PA 2, 30.

agnosticism, secularism and materialism," on the one hand; on the other, "the studentry and intellectuals tend to look to revolutionary ideologies for hope."[91] Furthermore, many precious values that typify Asian cultures are being supplanted by "counter-values" that work to the detriment of "family-centeredness, our deep respect for the sacred, our traditional worldview that is holistic and harmonious to nature."[92]

Another problem that has turned acute in Asia is religious fundamentalism which, according to the bishops, is perpetuated by either a majority group or a powerful minority which imposes its values on the rest of society.[93] Hence, in spite of the many ways by which religious pluralism has enriched the cultures of Asia, there is that "growing fundamentalist extremism and fanaticism discriminating and excluding people who belong to other religious traditions, thus destroying the harmony of peoples' lives and their solidarity…."[94] Religious fundamentalism has given rise to appalling lesions in the life of Asian communities: violence and loss of lives, atrocities to women, destruction of sacred temples, and summary executions, to mention a few. The flashpoints of religious strife are not the isolated incidents of only one or two nations but of several—Pakistan, Bangladesh, and India in south Asia, Myanmar and Indonesia in the southeast, to name a few—all for the vindication of religious affiliation and cultural patrimony. As an extreme reaction to the secularization of modern societies, fundamentalism has led to religious dogmatism and intolerance in precept and practice, perpetrated by the use of force, resulting in barefaced violations of human rights.[95] The FABC further observes that while devotees are drawn to fundamentalist religions

---

[91] ACMC, 68.

[92] PA 6, 28.

[93] PA 5, 276.

[94] PA 6, 4.

[95] FABC, "The Vocation and Mission of the Laity in the Church and in the World of Asia: Statement of the Fourth Plenary Assembly, Tokyo, Japan, 16-25 September 1986" (from hereon, PA 4), in *FAPA* 1, 181.

and movements primarily because of religious reasons, they are "too often exploited by persons and groups whose motive is political power and social control, or economic greed."[96]

This last observation leads right to the next Asian reality which has direct implications on the ways by which the Asian cultures and religions are lived out: the reality of poverty among multitudes, a reality that leaders in civil and religious governance have used to further their self-interests.

The Asia of the Poor. The members of the FABC are well aware that in spite of all the encouraging changes happening in Asia, especially after liberation from centuries of colonial regimentation which has suppressed many aspects of culture and religion, the reality of injustice in the Asian community remains to be confronted from all sides of the problem. Notwithstanding Asian economies opening up to the global fiscal systems that have truly promoted national growth and change, the Asian poor receive and suffer the worst effects nonetheless. Not only has the gap between them and the rich widened, but with globalization's appetite for good profit cozened from cheap labor, wealthy institutions (run either by transnational corporations investing cheap in Asian nations or local companies owned by families, clans, oligarchs, or individuals) contribute to human indignities. Unfortunately, the uplifting of the poor and destitute who thrive in festering slums and ghettoes figures the least in the overall economic package of globalization. Furthermore, the FABC knows that women are the least paid yet the worst treated, that children are hired as laborers, that systematic health care is almost absent from the labor package in spite of the high-risk job environments in which workers toil. The FABC states:

> The task of articulating an Asian paradigm of development (in the face of accelerating industrialization and advancement in business and modern technology) that is liberative, inclusive and holistic is still an unfinished agenda. To bring together experiences, insights, interpretations of

[96] PA 5, 276.

> people of justice[,] rights, peace and harmony in their relentless struggles for a fuller humanity into a paradigm appropriate for Asia…that is liberative, inclusive (gender-sensitive) and holistic, marked by preferential commitment to and solidarity with the powerless and marginalized, a paradigm that integrates social justice and human rights with peace and harmony with nature remains an ongoing challenge for advocacy.[97]

Meanwhile, unremitting poverty continues to fracture Asian human dignity. The FABC observes that for decades, hundreds of millions of Asians still have no decent access to even the most basic living conditions, or to just wages that can amply support the average family of five, or to proper education, and to affordable medical treatment. The reward of profit shored up through the hard work of the poor changes hands only among the wealthy. The FABC further reckons that the evils of globalization manifest especially through the emergence of various forms of neo-liberalism, and lies in their having "reduced the role of governments and State to serve people and the common good…making them servants and facilitators of the market and corporate sector."[98] The governance of Asian states has come under the spell of profit-making, diverting significant attention "from the basic responsibility of promoting the common good and protecting basic human rights of individuals" and of communities.[99] Science and technology, the pride of modernity, prioritize income enlargement rather than facilitate the poor's access to basic community needs—like proper nutrition, health education and services, sanitation and disease control.

---

[97] FABC Consultation on Advocacy for Justice and Peace in the 21st Century, "The Prophetic Path to the New Millennium Through Social Advocacy: Summary Report" in *FAPA* 3, 53.

[98] Ibid.

[99] FABC Joint Consultation on Social Advocacy, "Ecumenical Consultation on Social Advocacy Towards a Culture of Peace in the 21st Century" in *FAPA* 3, 58.

The many ills involved in globalization have also sprung leaks in the communitarian integrity of Asian living—from the level of families to that of larger societies. The Philippines alone fields over eleven million Filipino workers overseas. The number is steadily on the increase. Thousands among them have reluctantly left home in order to better provide for their families by working abroad. They leave their growing children behind, or put their young marriages "on hold", or entrust to a relative the care for a sick parent whose treatment is only possible if the son or daughter earns dollars, euros, or rials. Vietnamese, Sri Lankan, Bangladeshi, Pakistani, and Indian overseas workers face very similar problems. Their particular governments rightly hail them as the unsung heroes who remit millions of dollars to their countries and give their economies untold boost. But the detrimental effects that a dislocated family bears upon individuals and upon the community—these have yet to be thoroughly studied and more aggressively addressed. The FABC notes:

> Asia is the great exporter of cheap labor. It is true that salaries (overseas workers) earn abroad are significantly much more than they can earn in their home countries, but at the price of the stability of their families, the proper education and maturation of their children who are deprived of the presence, the guidance, and love of both parents at their most formative and impressionable age.[100]

For many years in the past, small businesses run by families thrived and kept members together. Now that Asian economies have welcomed the boom of trans-national corporations, not only is the livelihood of small farmers, traditional fishermen, and urban workers compromised, but also the family and neighborly dynamics that have for years bound communities together as a closely-knit fabric of relationships.[101] The erosion of the agricultural base of Asian economies has resulted in "the displacement of millions internally and externally,

---

[100] PA 8, 6.

[101] FABC Office of Theological Concerns (from hereon, OTC), "The Spirit at Work in Asia Today", in *FAPA* 3, 237.

[and given rise to] the situation of millions of migrant workers who have to leave their homes and families to work as contract labor with little security and under deplorable conditions."[102] All this has seriously disrupted the run of the once-upon-a-time more harmonious and closely bonded family and societal life.

> Accelerating consumerism, individualism and competition is promoting an ethos of having more than being more… weakening the communitarian and cooperative ethos of people…undermining people's initiatives for human rights, justice, peace and harmony and alternative means of development generated by people's struggles and structures of participation.[103]

Another reality that does not go past the FABC's awareness is the perpetration of violence by various forces in the Asian communities. The delegates constantly decry the systematic violence committed against various groups "as a method of control of minorities, *dalits*, tribals, *adivasis*, women, children, the unborn, bonded laborers, domestic workers, refugees and migrants, prisoners, and all those in unorganized labor and in low income groups."[104] The FABC recognizes that aside from the physical violence, "there are forms of moral and psychological violence which can be even more degrading than the purely physical. Violence is not only the desecration of individuals but also of whole groups in society."[105] In a final statement addressing violence in Asia, the FABC lists and defines thirteen types of violence: social, cultural, ecological, religious, economic, political, ethnic, gender, state; violence against children, against the unborn, against the homeland; and violence to one's self-image and

---

[102] Ibid., 59.

[103] Ibid.

[104] South Asian Bishops' Meeting, "Christian Response to the Phenomenon of Violence in South Asia, Kathmandu, Nepal, 22 September 1996" in *FAPA* 2, 15.

[105] Ibid., 13.

self-respect.[106] Common to most of the types is the atmosphere of ostracism, exclusion, expulsion, uprooting, or evicting of a subject, either individual or group, from the mainstream community because of the subject's religion, gender, political principles, or ethnic values and traditions—or on the pretext of "progress" or the "common good". Violence is also commonly perpetrated against the helpless: the unborn who are aborted, the children who are drafted into labor, or to nature and the environment exploited for personal profit—all three whose survival depends on the highest form of parental devotion, human responsibility, and stewardship.

Mission and Evangelization: The Triple Dialogue with Religions, Cultures, and the Poor

In the "composition of place" that introduces the statement of the latest Plenary Assembly held in Manila, the FABC descriptively summarizes the current realities of Asia as such that can be "interpreted as the Asian search for life, the Asian celebration of life, and the Asian struggle for life."[107] As the foregoing paragraphs show, the "search for life" is evident in the religiosity and spirituality running deep within the Asian heritage and in daily living. The Asian people's sense of the Absolute, their prayerful acknowledgment of the Source of life and the universe, their respectful regard for the Sacred—all characteristic of the Asian interiority—affirm the conviction that personal life and community survival are fashioned and sustained by hands not their own. Secondly, the "celebration of life", truly evident in the many Asian festivals that bring together faith communities, is also apparent in the growing consciousness of, and activism for, the dignity of all persons regardless of gender or age, social status or race, as well as in the movements that safeguard the integrity of creation. The FABC also believes that the technological and financial boom in the continent is a further sign of the "vibrant life [and] fecundity of creation"[108]

---

[106] Ibid., 14.

[107] PA 9, 1.

[108] Ibid.

although it is nonetheless aware of its deleterious effects on personal and community life. Thirdly, the "struggle for life" is no more clearly seen than in the many old and new forms of oppression and poverty that continue to cause the deterioration both of natural resources and of the integrity of human community, the most basic and hardest hit of which is the family. As mentioned in the preceding paragraphs, the participants of the latest Plenary continue to notice: "With the unrestrained flow of capital came the unabated entry of information, new mindsets and priorities that are altering the cultures of Asia…but not always for the good." But despite this ongoing "struggle for life", the FABC also notes: "In the midst of the ruins of life brought about by wars, violence, and displacement of peoples, we are amazed at the Asian capacity to celebrate life and to hope for a better life. The Church journeys with the peoples of Asia as they search for true life."[109]

How does the FABC "journey" with the peoples of Asia as they search for true life? As a Church, how must the Asian Catholic community live out its mission in a continent blessed with many life-giving cultures and religions while, at the same time, plagued by death-dealing poverty and oppression? To put the question in a more typically Asian manner, how can harmony—a value that Asians highly prize—between the Asian Church and the rest of Asia be achieved in the face of the plurality of cultures and religions, as well as the abiding poverty of its peoples?

From the first Plenary Assembly down through the different Institutes convened in the past thirty-six years, the FABC has placed great importance and hope upon dialogue as part of that journey towards harmony with the peoples of Asia. It is a conviction commonly held among the Asian bishops that the Church is "incarnate in a people…indigenous and inculturated," and that it therefore has to be "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 set its roots deeply and whose history

---

[109] Ibid., 2.

and life it gladly makes its own."[110] To be able to preach the Gospel in Asia, the bishops realize the importance of making the message and life of Jesus Christ incarnate not simply by preaching about him but by encountering him in the ways of thinking and living of the Asian peoples. In order for this mission to be carried out effectively, the Church, through her engagement in dialogue, must be willing

> to share in whatever truly belongs to the people: its meanings and its values, its aspirations, its thoughts and its language, its songs and its artistry. Even its frailties and failings (the church) 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.[111]

For the FABC, dialogue is a vital form both of evangelization in today's Asia and in achieving harmonious solidarity with the non-Christian and non-Catholic faithful of the continent. Dialogue comes down to an attitude, a community-mindedness born of a constant awareness of the context of the Church in Asia, a Church that thrives in a world of myriad ethnicities, undergirded by ancient philosophies and religious traditions, a continent faced by an ambiguous future ushered in by modernization and globalization. In this sense, therefore, dialogue refers not only to the interreligious kind. Rather, "dialogue must therefore take place in such fields of human encounter as the political, economic, cultural and religious. It ranges from a simple dialogue of life and heart in grassroots communities to dialogue for mutual collaboration in human development, to the delicate professional dialogue in matters of faith."[112] To both initiate and participate in dialogue with religions, cultures, and the Asian peoples especially the poor is seen as having its very origin and meaning in

---

[110] PA 1, 14.

[111] Ibid.

[112] FABC Office of Evangelization (from hereon, OE), "Symposium on 'Evangelization in the Light of Ecclesia in Asia': Statement and Recommendations, Pattaya, Thailand, 3-7 September 2002" in *FAPA* 4, 252.

God's "loving dialogue of salvation with humanity through the Son in the power of the Holy Spirit."[113]

To dialogue with the cultures and great religious traditions of Asia, first of all, means to engage in a process of "talking and listening, of giving and receiving, of searching and studying, for the deepening and enriching of one another's faith and understanding" and not to regard them as objects of Christian conversion.[114] Secondly, it means accepting non-Catholics' cultures and traditions as "significant and positive elements in the economy of God's design for salvation,"[115] recognizing and respecting them for the profound ethical and spiritual milieu and inspiration they have fostered among the faithful for hundreds of years. The FABC affirms that other cultures and religions are genuine expressions of the peoples' values, longings, and ideals. Like the Christian Catholic faith and culture, other faiths and cultures are a home in which the faithful community encounters the Sacred, the Source of life, and the well-being of all creatures as individuals and, more importantly, as faith communities. To engage in dialogue with them therefore opens the Christian consciousness to the richness of God's creation of humanity, and God's self-revelation to humanity—through many forms other than the familiarly Christian.

Reflexively, dialogue also develops in Christians a new appreciation of the depth and richness of their own faith. "This dialogue will allow us to touch the expression and the reality of our peoples' deepest selves, and enable us to find authentic ways of living and expressing our own Christian faith. It will reveal to us also many riches of our own faith which we perhaps would not have perceived. Thus it can become

---

[113] Pope John Paul II, *Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation Ecclesia in Asia* at http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/john_paul_ii/apost_exhortations/documents/hf_jp-ii_exh_06111999 _ecclesia-in-asia_en.html (accessed 20 December 2009).

[114] Bishops' Institute for Interreligious Affairs (from hereon, BIRA), "Statement and Recommendations of the First BIRA in Sampran, Thailand, 23-30 October 1984" in *FAPA* 1, 111.

[115] PA 1, 14.

a sharing in friendship of our quest for God and for brotherhood among His sons (and daughters)."[116] The FABC is convinced that entering into dialogue with the great faith traditions that underpin Asian religions and cultures can shed light on the truths of the Gospel and consequently help Christians better understand and appreciate their own faith.

In its turn, Christianity can also offer new and different ways of understanding human persons and the human community in the light of the message of Christ. To dialogue interreligiously and interculturally is an integral part of living out and preaching the Gospel. It is an attitude and a praxis that addresses not only creedal or doctrinal issues, but more importantly, an opportunity that can lead the dialogue partners to the promotion of human wholeness. "While the Church is the visible sign of the presence of Jesus Christ and his Spirit in the world, we believe that the same mystery is also present beyond the boundaries of the Church community and that our non-Christian brethren in ways unknown to us also relate to the mystery of the Church."[117]

The FABC also perceives that dialogue is "a necessary condition and instrument for inculturation."[118] In order to make the Gospel message relevant to Asian realities, careful and respectful study of other religious traditions—their forms of prayer and worship, for instance, how they perceive the relationship between persons and the environment, their theological anthropology, their sense of the Sacred—is imperative. Tribal peoples, the FABC exemplifies, have a special contribution to make in their keen awareness of the divine presence in creation for which, through millennia, they have lived in harmony with the earth and have preserved the spirit of

---

[116] Ibid., 15.

[117] FABC Bishops' Institute for the Missionary Apostolate (from hereon, BIMA), "Letter of Participants, Kerala, India, 30 November 1980" in *FAPA* 1, 101.

[118] BIRA, "Brief Report on the Assembly" in *FAPA* 1, 249.

community and hospitality.[119] The Asian sense of harmony, the FABC observes, "constitutes in a certain sense the intellectual and affective, religious and artistic, personal and societal soul of both persona and institutions in Asia." In this respect, the FABC believes that such a study of religious traditions includes the desire to know how other faith communities view the Church so that she may more clearly be evaluated as regards her effectiveness in bringing the saving message of Christ to the continent, whether it is being fulfilled or not. As harmony is a community value that ranks high in Asian cultural and spiritual life, the Church believes that inculturation through dialogue "is a journey of complementarity and harmony, where faith and its cultural expressions remain truly Christian while becoming truly Asian."[120]

Equally important is the Church's dialogue with the large community of the poor, which the FABC calls a "dialogue of life".[121] Such a dialogue is not confined to the usual statistical studies, seminars, or round-table exchanges with resource speakers—although these are substantial sources of information. More significantly, dialogue of life especially in view of the poor begins with a direct, realistic experience and understanding of poverty, deprivation, and oppression in which the majority of Asians have to live from day to day.

> It demands working, not for them merely in a paternalistic sense, but *with* them, to learn from them (for we have much to learn from them!) their real needs and aspirations, as they are enabled to identify and articulate these…and to strive for their fulfillment by transforming those structures and situations which keep them in that deprivation and powerlessness.[122]

---

[119] BIRA, "Final Statement on the Theology of Dialogue" in *FAPA* 1, 329.

[120] OE, 252.

[121] PA 1, 15.

[122] BIMA, 101.

The FABC envisions this dialogue of life to eventually lead the Church to a stronger commitment and a systematic effort to promote and work for social justice in Asian societies.

> This includes an operative and organized action and reflection in faith (sometimes called 'conscientization')…a process which seeks the change and transformation of unjust social structures. Through it, the deprived and oppressed acquire effective responsibility and participation in the decisions which determine their lives, and thus are enabled to free themselves.[123]

At the same time, the FABC hopes that those who consciously or unconsciously maintain structures that oppress the poor may be made aware of them—that is, be "conscientisized"[124] and converted to justice and the freedom of Christian love for the poor.

To dialogue with the poor, furthermore, involves the expansion of the Church's awareness and vigorous support for particular communities in Asian cultures that suffer through oppression locally and internationally, foremost of whom are the women, the migrant workers, and the children (especially the unborn, the laborers, and the orphans). The FABC maintains that the Church must always listen to what the marginalized say in the arduous predicament to which many of them have acquiesced as the normal, the usual way of living. The Asian Catholic Church—which means both hierarchy and the worshipping faithful—must go beyond consoling the poor through a listening ear or by administering the sacraments, or passing around a collection basket. More importantly, the whole Church, as a community, must actually "stand together with them by supporting their just causes" as this is the call from God for the Church to be in solidarity with the poor, to be an instrument of God's healing and love for them.

---

[123] PA 1, 15.

[124] Ibid.

For the FABC, the triple dialogue with religions, cultures, and peoples—especially the poor and marginalized—"is not primarily a matter of talking" but rather "an attitude, an openness to the neighbor, a sharing of spiritual and material resources as people stand before the great crises of life and death, as they struggle for justice and human dignity, as they yearn for peace."[125] Dialogue is not a tool or instrument for mission and evangelization, if by "mission" and "evangelization" is primarily and rigorously taken to mean the attempt to convert people of other faiths into Roman Catholicism, and little else. For the FABC, mission and evangelization are primarily the means by which the Church can actively participate in God's saving activity through the Holy Spirit—

> to mend a broken creation, to overcome the fragmentation of humanity, and to heal the rift between nature, humanity and God (for) God's recreating activity is prior to and more comprehensive than the Church's mission, and it directs our attention beyond the Church to the Kingdom.[126]

The FABC acknowledges the fact that the Catholic Church in Asia is only a part, even a minority, within a much larger community in which the majority are of different faiths and religions, but which is invariably beset by widespread poverty and political oppression. By such centuries-old faiths and religions are the many peoples held together, rich and poor alike. From them also have Asian peoples drawn strength, meaning, and harmony. The Catholic Church, planted in the East by foreign missionaries in the era of colonization, has for its part admittedly become rather an isolated, exclusive community for decades—"closed in on itself,"[127] as the FABC describes it—turned towards its own particular ecclesiastical and doctrinal concerns. With forthright self-evaluation during the first plenary assembly, the FABC admits:

---

[125] BIRA, "Final Statement", 303.

[126] Ibid., 304.

[127] PA 1, 15.

> In our inner convictions and personal and collective spirituality, there has often been insufficient interiorization of, and conversion to, the teaching of the Gospel and the Council on authentic Christian community: e.g., praying together as brothers and sisters one in mind and heart; openness to one another in sharing, mutual concern and self-giving; attitudes of 'being *with* others and *for* others,' making the joys and sorrows of the community truly our own. In our day-to-day living with each other, we have inadequately manifested true communion and participation: all too often perhaps in the exercise of authority, there still persists a spirit of domination, instead of the reality of Christ-like servanthood; even in the priests' communities and religious houses often enough true co-responsibility is not manifest; in our parish and diocesan communities—for various reasons, sometimes deriving from resistant structures—not rarely the evident realization of our Lord's own commandment of love is not to be found.[128]

The effects of this admitted predicament are consequently seen and felt in the fact that the larger community of Catholics in Asia has remained unaware, if not even resistant or fearful, of that greater sense of community with people of other faiths, despite actually sharing with them the same cultural and spiritual values. In this respect, the FABC acknowledges:

> How often, too, have our communities, in relation to the communities of other faiths which surround them, failed to be communities of dialogue. Lacking in 'ecumenical and dialogal' consciousness and orientation, they can be complacent in attitudes of superiority. They can be unconcerned in reaching out to their neighbors of other religions in their day-to-day relationships, seemingly unaware that the 'dialogue of life,' through which we interact with one another and become mutually enlightened, encouraged and carried forward in our response to the

[128] Ibid., 57.

> challenging Spirit, is an indispensable element for the building up of our own community life in all levels.[129]

In the face of these realities in the Asian Catholic community, the FABC is convinced that all Christians are called to be in solidarity with the rest of the Asian community. They affirm:

> Our very survival demands a transcending of social, ethnic and indeed religious boundaries. Those of different faiths are summoned to live and work together for a more human world. In other words, we are summoned to a dialogue of life, a dialogue in the context of ordinary life and which is in the fullest sense of life.[130]

Key Foundations in the Theology and Methodology of the FABC

God Draws All Creation Unto Godself

God's universal salvific will is the overarching theological conviction the FABC upholds in its statements and reflections. "We have firm faith that God in His mercy wills all…to be saved and to have full share in His own life. Since God's will unfailingly bears fruit, we also believe that God gives to (everyone) in history sufficient means to be saved and to partake of His divine life."[131] There is therefore no salvation except by the grace of God. The FABC holds that this salvific grace is freely given to all who respond to the call of love, justice, harmony, and goodness. Furthermore, redeeming grace, as Christians hold, is the fruit of the gift of Christ.

> This we believe to be particularly true of the Great Religions of Asia that [have] led countless people to God throughout the ages. Fully respectful of this mystery of mercy, we…the Church, are mindful of our election as the sacramental manifestation of this salvific will of God and

---

[129] Ibid., 58.

[130] BIRA, "Final Statement", 328.

[131] Ibid., 110.

> see our relationship to other religions and religionists in the light of this mystery.[132]

Here, the FABC does not in any way declare that the Catholic Church is "elected" by God—exclusive of other faiths—to be the sole sign or bearer of the divine call to salvation in the world. The FABC verbalizes the Christian confidence that God, first of all, speaks the divine message to humanity—a word that rules over human existence, individual and societal. Secondly, this saving word "became incarnate in Jesus who announced the Good News of God's reign in this world."[133] Because the divine word of God is incarnate in humanity, Christians believe that God's saving will is at work in and through many religions and in different ways of this humanity to which the Son has been sent with the mission to draw all creation unto God.

> God's saving grace is not limited to members of the (Christian/Catholic) Church but is offered to every person. His grace may lead some to accept baptism and enter the Church, but it cannot be presumed that this must always be the case. His ways are mysterious and unfathomable and no one can dictate the direction of His grace.[134]

In the mind of the FABC, the eternal will to draw all people and all creation unto Godself is manifested clearly in the very act of creation. In the beginning, "God created heaven and earth in full harmony through his word (Jn 1:3)." In this full harmony, there is "order, hierarchy of values," and among all creatures, the "mutual relationship of complementarity and service."[135] God's will to save all creatures is already revealed in the original harmony wrought in both

---

[132] Ibid.

[133] Ibid., 115.

[134] Ibid.

[135] FABC Theological Advisory Commission (from hereon, TAC), "Asian Perspectives on Harmony" in *FAPA* 2, 267.

the *act* of creation and in the *fruit* of that creative will, that is, the harmony of all creation.

Sin introduces disharmony into creation. From the first sins of selfishness and individualism that have driven rifts in human relationships (represented by the ambition of Adam and Eve, the jealousy of Cain, the pride of Babel's citizens) to the succeeding sins that Genesis collectively calls "the wickedness of humankind" (Gen 6:5), God's creative work remains relentless; God continues to constantly draw creation back unto Godself, "to restore the primeval harmony of his creation."[136]

The incarnation of the Son into the world, his preaching, and his embodying the reign of God—this is a salvific event that fulfills the divine will of drawing all humanity to Godself. "By being a person of harmony," the FABC declares, "Jesus fulfills the coming of the reign of God that saves the whole human race and the entire cosmos."[137]

> The Reign of God has come upon us through the Christ of harmony. Through his ministry of preaching the Good News, as well as by his calling for repentance, through his exorcisms of Satan and his healing of the sick and his pardoning of sins, through his parables that conveyed his wisdom to those whose hearts had already been touched by it, but took away understanding from those who had never learned to listen and obey (Mt 13:12-13; Mk 4:11; Lk 8:10), through his prophetic denunciations as well as his personal witness of compassion and love, he exemplified the harmony brought by the reign of God.[138]

The work of "the Christ of harmony" is in a very deep sense the work of reconciliation and unity in the human community. He restores the harmony that God has willed for all creation from the

---

[136] Ibid.

[137] Ibid., 269.

[138] Ibid.

beginning of time, a harmony constantly threatened by the sin of human selfishness and self-centeredness. In stark contrast to the disharmony that human selfishness perpetuates in the community of creatures, the person of the Son is a self-emptying, self-giving, self-sacrificing figure of harmony. "Jesus, whose birth ushers in peace to (all) of goodwill (Lk 2:24), is one destined to be a sign that is rejected (Lk 2:34), a sign of contradiction. Jesus was confronted by the evil power of disharmony and division in his very mission to bring about peace and harmony in the world."[139] Through a life of self-offering, suffering and death on the cross, and through the glorious resurrection, Christ has affirmed the divine will for the human race to become "a community of fellowship and love" so that human beings, in the state of broken relationship, are reconciled to God by being reconciled to one another by Christ's own self-giving.[140]

The FABC reflects that since Christ died for all people, and since the ultimate vocation of humanity is in fact one and divine, the Holy Spirit, "in a manner known only to God (*Gaudium et Spes* 22), offers to everyone the possibility of being associated with this Paschal mystery."[141] The work of the Spirit, therefore, continues what Christ has begun to bring to fulfillment in his earthly ministry: the harmony of all creation by drawing the community of humanity unto Godself. To live in this Spirit of communion and harmony means for Christians to, first of all, respectfully dialogue with the realities of Asia (meaning its plurality and abiding poverty). Secondly, it means that Christians continually discern the harmonizing movement of God's Spirit in the continent; and thirdly, that Christians translate into deeds what the Spirit bids them to accomplish in view of their faith in the Reign of God embodied in the Christ of harmony.[142]

---

[139] Ibid., 270.

[140] Ibid., 271.

[141] Ibid., 239.

[142] PA 5, 284.

Asian Realities: A Vital Context in Theological Reflection

In Asia, the FABC notes, the image of the Triune God who draws humanity back to Godself through the Son and the Spirit's work of reconciliation, peace, and love of the poor—this has significant implications for the manner and content of theologizing within the Asian Church, for the mission of the Asian Church, and for the goal towards which the Holy Spirit leads the community.

> As a Church community, we are called to be the sacrament, the sign and the instrument of the communion with God and with humanity that Jesus himself brings (cf. *Lumen Gentium* 1). Because our inner life as Church community is the Spirit of communion, we can ignore our mission of breaking down all barriers only to the negation of our identity.[143]

This Jesus whom God has sent to draw all people together is a man who

> challenges religious exclusivism that divides…and announces a radically new worshipping of God in Spirit and Truth. He dares to touch the untouchables, calls women to be his close disciples. His love touches the miserable lives of the outcast, unshackles their chains of non-dignity and insecurity, and leads them into the freedom and joy that he shares with his Father. He speaks to them of his father, 'our Father,' who cares not only for the birds of the air and the lilies of the field, but even more for persons (Mt 6:25-32; Lk 12:22-30). He forgives and reconciles. He is the person of harmony. He is peace (Jn 14:27; 20:21-23; Eph 2:14).[144]

Furthermore, the FABC's theological enterprise—remaining faithful to the God who draws all to Godself as expressed in Christ's mission as reconciler—allows for the Asian reality of poverty to figure in its theological reflection. The FABC gives both plurality and

---

[143] ATC, "Being Church in Asia: Journeying with the Spirit into Fuller Life" in *FAPA* 2, 225.

[144] Ibid., 222.

poverty due regard, not so much as merely pre-existent circumstances for which the Bishops simply translate core doctrines in Christian theology. Rather, they see Asian realities as significant resources that generate theological reflection and, more importantly, subsequent action on behalf of reconciliation and justice in the community. By no means does this kind of theological enterprise undervalue or supplant the traditional manner and resources by which theological reflection is ordinarily accomplished. "As Christians," the FABC states, "we rely first on the Sacred Tradition and Sacred Scripture…the one sacred deposit of the Word of God [and also on] the teaching office of the Church [in their] task of authentically interpreting the deposit of the Word of God in the Spirit…."[145] But in addition to these resources, the Asian cultures, religions, and the reality of abiding poverty—these are truths that bear signs of God's presence and self-communication. Having the Asian context as the background and source for theological reflection, "we use these resources *in correlation with* (emphasis added) the Bible and the Tradition of the Church."[146] The Asian bishops therefore see to it that their theology reflects systematically on themes that are critical to the communal journey that Asians make through life. This designates not just Christian and Catholic Asians, but also those who belong to other faiths and cultures. It refers not just to theologians, scholars, and leaders of Churches, but also to the poor and the oppressed in Asian societies. In order to do this,

> theology has to start from below, from the underside of history, from the perspective of those who struggle for life, love, justice, and freedom. The life-long experiences of living the Christian faith by the various churches in their Asian context are the starting points. Theologizing thus becomes more than faith seeking understanding, but faith fostering life and love, justice and freedom.[147]

---

[145] ATC, "Asian Christian Theology" in *FAPA* 3, 355.

[146] Ibid.

[147] ATC, "Being Church in Asia", 226.

The FABC believes that its theology must begin "from the dusty soils of our countries and thus be in dialogue with the peoples, their religions, their cultures, and especially their pain and sufferings." [148] Such a theological approach takes the experience and context of the peoples as its starting point. This then is brought into dialogue with the Christian tradition and its texts.

The method of correlation that the FABC employs is consistent with the contextual theology it develops. Through it, the FABC regards the Asian experiences of plurality and poverty as critical loci from which the divine message and will are and can be discerned. Plurality and poverty are closely reflected upon and subsequently correlated with the traditional sources and teachings of the Catholic faith, with special attention to the mission for which God has sent Christ and the Holy Spirit to the world—to reconcile the world to God by preaching the good news to the poor, binding up the brokenhearted, and proclaiming freedom to captives and release from darkness for the prisoners (Is 61:1).

In order to do systematic reflection on Asian realities and discern in them the divine message and will, the FABC makes use of critical social analysis, which is an important component in the documents. It identifies and explores the multi-layered causes of socio-political, religious, cultural, political, and economic "lights and shadows". The analysis is done with an eye towards how human life, dignity, and integrity of community life are either upheld or violated by these structures given the Asian realities of plurality, communal life, and abiding poverty. In this respect, the bishops directly seek the assistance, opinions, advice, research, and first-hand experiences of both lay and religious who are competent in reading the signs of the times, the socio-cultural and religious undercurrents of the Asian community life.

---

[148] Christian Conference of Asia and FABC, "Together in Cultivating a Culture of Peace: Joint Ecumenical Formation, Taipei, 2-13 September 2002" in *FAPA* 4, 195.

Upon every social analysis made, the FABC continually affirms that the local Churches in Asia are unmistakably and constantly being called by the Triune God to respond to the pastoral realities experienced by the Asian flock. The Spirit of God, a Spirit of harmony and communion, is always at work in the community. The Spirit reconciles the diverse religious-cultural traditions in Asia, as well as bringing the poor, the oppressed, and the marginalized the justice that they deserve.

> Through communion with and within the life of the Triune God, Christ's disciple-community can more credibly share the love and life of God with others, and more effectively bring the forces of God's Kingdom of Life to bear on the death-dealing realities of Asia, and thus become the sacrament of eschatological cosmic harmony of 'the new heavens and the new earth.'[149]

This is why the need for the triple dialogue (with cultures, religions, and the poor) outlined above cannot be overstated in the FABC documents. The Asian Church stands in the midst of many global and social currents, all of them affecting twenty-first century human living and believing, consequently affecting the Catholic Church. The Spirit urges the Church—leaders and members alike—to provide guidance and help for the care of the whole community especially through listening and dialogue with its members. Through this method of theology and praxis, it is hoped that the community will be able to discern the Spirit's saving message to the Asian community.

SUMMARY: "COMMUNION OF COMMUNITIES"

Just as the Asian ordinaries realized in 1970 that, belonging to the same Church, they could no longer possibly remain isolated from one another like they were for many years before Vatican II, so, too, did they realize that the Catholic Church could not stay disengaged

---

[149] TAC, "Asian Perspectives on Harmony", 281.

and isolated from the rest of the cultures and faiths in a continent in which all of these flourished. For the Catholic Church in Asia to be truly universal despite its being the minority religion, it must therefore work not only towards welcoming more adherents to the faith. It must also engage actively with the rest of the Asian community being what it is: a continent that is blessed with various cultures and faiths other than Christianity, and a continent where hundreds of thousands of poor people struggle constantly to make a living. The presence of God, as the FABC rightly notices, is not relatively stronger in the Christian communities than it is in other faiths and cultures. God's constant desire is to gather all of creation to Godself by loving all into excellence. This divine desire is part of God's constant creation of the world. Divine creativity certifies the presence of God in grace wherever there is that human response to God's goodness, Christ's call to reconciliation, sense for the sacred engendered by the Spirit, and most of all, love for the poor that is unmistakably the call of the Kingdom of God.

In order to thus engage with Asia's pluralist community, the FABC seeks deeper involvement with other cultures and religions, and stronger commitment to the poor. This is an engagement by which Catholics do not simply talk in conferences with people of other customs, faiths, or social status for the sole purpose of promoting Christianity to them. Through this engagement, the FABC desires that Roman Catholics forge greater solidarity with the Asian community by seeking common grounds of faith, nourishing mutual cultural and spiritual enrichment, and most of all, working together to uplift the poor—by caring for them and empowering them.

The triple dialogue is the chief way the FABC engages with the Asian realities in which the Catholic Church is an inextricable part. The bishops have not only promoted the triple dialogue but have also put it into practice. The FABC depends on other members of the community—religious and lay—for a more realistic view and deeper experience of realities in Asia that go beyond Christian and Catholic doctrine. They have welcomed these people into the FABC, and learned from their input. They have planned with them and have

been led and taught by them. The bishops have gone out of their way to experience with their lay partners the various cultural, spiritual, and social realities of everyday Asian life, realities that may ordinarily go past Church attention when its hierarchy becomes preoccupied with its own intra-faith concerns. The FABC accomplishes all this in order to bring the Catholic Church community in closer and stronger solidarity with as many of God's people as possible. In other words, the triple dialogue is communitarian in terms of vision, effort, execution, and goals.

"The Church [in Asia] will have to be a communion of communities where laity, religious, and clergy recognize and accept each other as sisters and brothers…called together by the word of God."[150] The value of community consciousness and action is what gives the convictions of the FABC their particular strength and character. From the initial desire among the Asian bishops to establish solidarity with one another in the seventies through today, community-mindfulness and communitarian action make up the moving force behind both the organization as well as theological enterprise of the FABC. Its social analyses, pastoral reflections and recommendations manifest the following convictions that highlight the communitarian essence of Asian ecclesial life.

First, the Creator, Redeemer, and Sustainer of the universe is a God of unity and harmony. At every moment, God creates and draws all to Godself in unity and harmony. God has desired this unity even before the foundation of the world, to the time the universe was created, through the birth of the many religions and cultures, through the history and development of the Christian Church, and up to this day when the fervor for solidarity in community is constantly beclouded by the forces of human sinfulness that seek to extinguish it. But all through this time, God continues to create and recreate humanity unto community.

---

[150] PA 5, 287.

Second, as God is Creator of all, everyone on earth in his or her given culture and creed is given a place in the divine salvific desire. The sense of the holy or sacred, the drive towards personal and social wholeness, the desire for self-actualization, the need to pray and to be faithful to One from whom all is owed, the willingness to die to oneself for the sake of one's loved ones, the struggle for justice and harmony, the faith in the fundamental goodness of the human community, the longing for nearness to the Transcendent (manifested especially in symbols and rituals), regret for personal and societal sinfulness…all these that dwell in the hearts of the faithful of many religions confirm God's gracious presence and creative desire to draw to Godself the whole human community. Asia is a community where God's creative presence is strong, a community that is made all the richer in its cultural and religious diversity.

Third, the Catholic Church in which the Spirit dwells must, by its very character and mission, be in constant engagement with communities of non-Christian religions for three reasons. First, Catholic Asians will surely find God's presence and message in the faith of their non-Christian fellows, and thereupon realize how one can see and appreciate new ways through which God communicates Godself through another religion. Second, they must themselves openly share the richness of their faith with the non-Christian brethren, while at the same time discovering in it even deeper value—the result of coming to closer contact with, and learning of, other faiths. Third, and most importantly, Catholics and non-Christians should eventually work together towards the more important kind of dialogue, the "dialogue of life"—a concerted interreligious, intercultural action towards liberation and upliftment of the poor and the marginalized in the human community.

According to the FABC, being a "communion of communities" created and drawn together by God is the "new way of being Church" in Asia.[151] The main themes of the theological and pastoral reflections as shown above reveal the FABC's vision of having the Asian Catholic

[151] PA 5, 287.

community engage more openly, actively, and deeply in two major areas: in the mission and decision-making of the Catholic Church, and more importantly, in the realities that face the whole Asian community. It is a "new way" in that for a long time before Vatican II and the birth of the FABC, Church leadership in Asia was less of a concerted effort between the bishops and the laity, and even less between the Catholic bishops and leaders of other faith communities. With the realization that the hierarchy can have a more realistic grasp of the situation of the Church only when the Catholic community finally engages the larger realities of Asian living, the FABC seeks greater openness and commitment to the larger community. In order to engage more fully with the Asian community, the Catholic Church must itself affirm the communitarian dynamic of the presence of God in grace. This is the new way of being Church in Asia—to be a communion of communities.

What emerges from the experiences and reflections of the FABC about the Church in Asia, though it may not have been explicitly stated or discussed as a specific theme, is the reality of God's grace as having an inevitably communitarian dimension. From the pastoral, missiological, and ecclesiological output of the FABC, the reality of God's presence in human persons as a "communitizing" presence is apparent. This is a theological outlook on grace that has not often been sufficiently reckoned with: that grace is the communitarian presence of God. Divine presence in persons involves not only a call for individuals to draw closer to God through a personal, one-on-one relationship. Grace also necessarily implies the call for each graced person towards a community consciousness and orientedness. This manifests in a desire, a conviction, an impulse or a drive towards engaging with the community which is obviously the much larger, much wider setting of God's saving will compared to one's personal, individual life.

The next chapter will discuss the communitarian dimension of God's grace more fully by bringing together in dialogue the theology of grace by Karl Rahner, the pastoral reflections of the FABC, and my own thoughts.

CHAPTER THREE

THE COMMUNITARIAN REALITY OF GRACE

THE NEW WAY OF BEING CHURCH IN ASIA: A PARTICIPATORY, DIALOGICAL, AND PROPHETIC COMMUNION OF COMMUNITIES

In a communal reflection made in July 2001 by the delegates of the FABC regarding being Church in Southeast Asia, they stated:

> Church as Communion has to be for us a Church that is witnessing, worshipping, serving Christ's disciples, struggling to become Church of the Poor, trusting in God, simple, open to all cultures. [The] Church should defend the victims of violence, serve the poor [and help them] move on against trauma, be witnessing together with other religious denominations, be credible as mediator of peace and dialogue, defend rights of the marginalized, defend gender dignity, and be open to dialogue. We need to find new ways as to how we can live together and resolve conflicts through mutual trust and by rebuilding civil society.[152]

The overall vision of the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences for the Asian Church is that the Church be a "communion of communities."[153] In the mind of the FABC, this is the descriptive

---

[152] FABC Faith Encounters in Social Action (from hereon, FEISA), "Understanding Christian-Muslim Dialogue in Southeast Asia" in *FAPA* 4, 84.

[153] FABC Office of Social Communications (from hereon, OSC), "A New Way of Being Church in Asia: Communication Consequences" in *FAPA* 3, 158.

phrase that captures what it means to be the "new way of being Church in Asia"[154] based on the experiences of all who are involved in the work of the FABC—which includes both religious and lay persons, Christians and non-Christians.

The new way of being Church refers to the need that the FABC senses for the Asian Church to engage more deeply with the surrounding cultures, to learn what human and spiritual values other religions witness to, and most importantly, to exert a concerted effort with these communities in order to help the poor everywhere. In this vision, the triple dialogue outlined in the previous chapter is the strategy and approach by which being a communion of communities may be achieved. Vital in the FABC's self-understanding is its vision of the Asian Church to be in communion not solely with other Church or faith communities but with other communities within the arena of civil society, cultures, political groups, socially oriented task forces, etc. The communion that the FABC desires for the Catholic Church to foster involves a reach that extends beyond faith and religion—although solidarity regardless of faith and religion is a chief concern in being a communion of communities.

What chief characteristics guide the Asian community towards the achievement of its vision and mission of being a communion of communities? In the reflections made by the Office of Social Communications in November of 1997 in preparation for the new millennium, the delegates described the Asian Church community as one that must continue striving towards being: a *participatory* Church, a *dialoging* Church, and a *prophetic* Church.[155]

---

[154] The phrase "new way of being Church in Asia" first appeared in the statement of the Fifth Plenary Assembly, 1990, in Bandung, Indonesia. The theme for the plenary was "The Emerging Challenges for the Church in Asia in the 1990's: A Call to Respond" (see *FAPA* 1, 287). A concise explanation of the phrase can also be found at http://www.catholicspi.org/images/FAQs%20on%20AsIPA%20for%20web.pdf.

[155] Ibid., 157.

From 1974 to the beginning of the eighties, the thrust of the FABC highlighted the triple dialogue with religions, cultures, and the poor. In the effort to more fully substantiate what it means to be "a new way of being Church" in the nineties, the FABC refined the triple dialogue thrust by describing the new way of being Church as participatory, dialogical, and prophetic. The essence of these three characteristics is still very much dialogical in the sense that they are ways by which the Asian Church desires to specifically engage the world to which God sends it. At the November 1997 Bandung meeting, as bishops and lay partners planned for the communications apostolate for the new millennium, the main question was: "Where are we going, and what are we doing in the spirit of a new way of being Church?" In other words, how could the Church more deeply engage with other cultures, religions, and the poor of the continent? Through the evaluative and planning process, the FABC articulated the three characteristics which recapitulated the vision and mission of the Catholic community. They would serve as the standard against which the ongoing mission of the Asian Church was to be evaluated in terms of its social communications apostolate and eventually of its *raison d'etre*.

"If we are a truly ***participatory Church*** where the gifts that the Spirit gives to all are recognized and activated, [we must] encourage co-responsibility at all levels both vertically and horizontally."[156] In the mind of the FABC, the word "participatory" refers to several related things. It refers for instance to the Church's involvement in the search for a more harmonious living by engaging with members of other cultural and religious communities. In this way, people of different communities may rediscover their common and rich cultural and spiritual heritage in view of working together for greater solidarity, mutual cultural and spiritual enrichment, and preservation of precious Asian values for the next generation.[157] Another vital interpretation

---

[156] Ibid., 158.

[157] FABC Office of Human Development (from hereon, OHD), "Towards a Communion Solidarity in the Context of Globalization" in *FAPA* 3, 44.

of "participatory" is the Church's involvement with other sectors of society in their work towards "the total liberation of our peoples from oppressive and exploitative tendencies of corrupt and powerful individuals, groups, organizations, and governments."[158]

In other words, a participatory Church is a community in which all members of the Christian community, religious and lay alike, must be well-represented and engaged actively in the mission of the entire Church. This implies that as much as possible, both the lay and the religious must take an active part in the reflection, planning, execution, and decision-making of the Church in its triple dialogue mission. In the first International Congress on Mission back in 1979, the bishops had already honestly affirmed:

> We have to confess that there is still hardly any lay participation in the decision-making of the Church. Such participation whereby the laity really become equal partners in the mission and life of the Church presupposes a certain maturity which it is the role of ordained ministers to stimulate and to unreservedly promote.[159]

This corporate participation was to be reaffirmed at each Plenary Assembly from there forward.

In other words, all members of the Christian community must be involved in the communal discernment, deliberation, decision-making and most importantly, action on matters affecting the life and mission of the Church in Asia where a considerable representation from both lay and religious plays a role in facilitating, organizing, and taking part in the several initiatives (either by the lay or the religious) for inter-faith solidarity, social action, promotion of social justice, and upliftment of the poor.

---

[158] BIRA, "Working Together for Harmony in God's World" in *FAPA* 2, 146.

[159] FABC International Congress on Mission (from hereon, ICM), "Message to Delegates" in *FAPA* 1, 151.

Secondly, the FABC affirmed in that meeting:

> If we are a…***dialoguing Church***, (we) must be concerned with the World, where people live in their joys and hopes, their fears and anxieties, (we must be) reaching out to people of other faiths and persuasions in a dialogue of life towards the integral liberation of all.[160]

As mentioned in the previous chapter, the FABC believes that dialogue is one of the distinctive modes of the Church's mission in Asia. To be "dialogical" denotes a humble receptivity to what another culture or religion can teach or share with the Catholic Church.[161] It also implies competent teaching and sharing of its own traditions and values with the other participants in the dialogue. As the previous chapter shows, being "dialogical" is, yet goes beyond, the discursive, didactic enterprise of intellectual, round-table discussions on the qualities and merits of faiths and cultural backgrounds other than the Christians' own. Dialogue, in fact, is not confined to the "interreligious" kind. In its widest sense, it is an attitude of openness and sincere interest in what can be imparted by people of other faiths, cultures, castes, or creeds.[162] This dialogue looks "beyond institutional boundaries [and involves the willingness for] moving into the unknown led by the Spirit within."[163] In its most Christian sense, it means reaching out "in love and trust of others," a dialogue not only of words but really of the "heart and soul", involving not only institutions within institutional Church settings, but also within families, grassroots communities, and youth social groups.[164] A dialogical Church places great worth on

---

[160] OSC, 158.

[161] Ibid.

[162] FABC Office of Education and Student Chaplaincy (from hereon, OESC), "Dialogue Between Faith and Cultures in Asia: Towards Integral Human and Social Development: A Message to our Fellow Christians" in *FAPA* 2, 24.

[163] OSC, 158.

[164] OESC, 25.

the concerted effort at a corporate receptivity to, learning from, and compassioning with people of other cultures and religions.

The dialogical characteristic of the new way of being Church in Asia has everything to do with listening and being attentive most especially to the poor and the disenfranchised: knowing their plight, commiserating with their helplessness by eventually defending them from the forces that perpetuate oppression, poverty, and misery. In other words, a dialogical Church must work towards the transformation of a society, with a particular option for the poor. This entails concerted and sustained action "to correct social evils… corruption in society, globalization which marginalizes the majority of the poor by enriching a tiny elite…apathy towards the poor and suffering…violence and terrorism" and other evils that directly affect whole communities.[165]

Peter Phan gives a good description of the dialogue in which the Asian Church must be involved:

> [It is] a dialogue of life, whereby communities of diverse faiths live harmoniously together; a dialogue of action, in which people of different faiths collaborate with one another on projects of human development; a dialogue of theological exchange, in which believers attempt to understand better one another's beliefs and practices; and a dialogue of religious sharing, which is the most difficult, in which believers, while remaining firmly rooted in their own traditions, share religious practices with followers of another religion in order to enrich them and to be enriched spiritually by them.[166]

Finally, the FABC reflected: "if we are a ***prophetic Church***, we should be a leaven of transformation in this world…. [We must] challenge, announce and denounce the forces in society

---

[165] Ibid.

[166] Peter Phan, *Being Religious Interreligiously: Asian Perspectives on Interfaith Dialogue* (New York: Orbis, 2004), 125-126. See also *FAPA* 2, 169-170.

that undermine the values which uphold human life, dignity, and community."[167] In the writings of the FABC, the term "prophetic" runs a gamut of meanings—proclaiming God's law, for instance, or encouraging faithfulness to the values of the Kingdom, or personally witnessing to Christ-centered values of love and compassion, or denouncing and protesting against sinful social structures by direct and active role with the victims in their fight against such structures. In the reflection questions that the FABC asks itself, one discerns how "prophetic" is to be understood: "In what way are we crying out like the prophets with conviction and in a convincing manner? Where is our witness of life? Are we seen as standing with people who are crying out for justice, harmony equality, ecology?"[168]

To be "prophetic" therefore involves the following aspects. First, it means having a preferential option for the poor, the marginalized, and the disenfranchised in Asian societies—by being their voice against oppressive structures and institutions, by actively

> assisting in the liberation of the materially poor, indigenous peoples, victims of misguided economic and political development, wars, sex tourism, and by assiduously working towards the liberation of oppressed women, children, [and] the youth who cry out for their rightful place in society and in the Church's mission to serve life.[169]

Secondly, it means witnessing to the Christ-centered values of respect for human life, promotion of peace and non-violence, and courage to break down barriers set up by the social sins of greed, discrimination, lopsided social norms and religious distortions.[170] To be a prophetic Church therefore means working towards a stronger

---

[167] OSC, 159.

[168] Ibid.

[169] PA 6, 8.

[170] Ibid., 6.

commitment and a systematic effort to promote and work for social justice and dignity of life in Asian societies.

In its Final Considerations in 1997, the FABC cautioned that "it is not enough that the Church be for the poor—she must in a true sense be a poor Church."[171] To be a poor Church must have direct impact on the very lifestyle of the members of the community, most especially its leaders. Reflecting on the lifestyle of the religious vis-à-vis the mission of the Church in Asia, the delegates of the International Congress on Mission of the FABC state:

> A formation for mission and ministry which overcomes those ecclesiocentric attitudes and lifestyles counter to evangelization should involve lived experience of genuine brotherhood and mutual concern. It is not through abstract concepts that the truth is learned and error overcome, but through the concrete living out of human values in the community [and instead] be ready to put [Church] resources and influence at the service of those who suffer from hunger, disease, homelessness, persecution, discrimination and oppression.[172]

For the FABC, one of the primary tasks of the Asian Church, especially its leadership, is to become a credible prophetic presence among the poor that predominate the number of the faithful—and of the overall Asian population. This compels the Church to do a critical examination of the "image" that Christians—both individually and corporately—project to the poor of Asia.

> Let each individual community and institution feel the urgency of the apostolic decision that has to be made in the matter of poverty and simplicity of life. For only the

---

[171] Bishops' Institute for the Missionary Apostolate (BIMA), "Letter of Participants" in *FAPA* 1, 94.

[172] ICM, 146.

> person who is in solidarity with the poor can identify with the poor, and love them in deed and in truth.[173]

This is the self-understanding of the Asian Church at this point in its history, as articulated by the FABC: to be a communion of both religious and non-religious communities by being a participative, dialogical, and prophetic Church. In the parts that follow, I will argue that the Asian Church's self-understanding reveals God as participative, dialogical, and prophetic. First, I will briefly revisit the idea that the Church reflects the communion of love in the Triune God. Secondly, I will describe specific ways in which the God of grace is indeed participative, dialogical, and prophetic. This will lead the way towards the discussion of grace as bearing the same characteristics.

The God of Grace is Participative, Dialogical, and Prophetic

Introduction: The Community-Forming Spirit

The history of the Asian Church has evolved such that the community understands itself and its mission to be more and more a communion of communities by being a participatory, dialogical, and prophetic Church. This self-understanding is the fruit of shared experiences and reflections of many delegates (not only of bishops, or a privileged team of priests and theologians, or only of Catholics) on how the different communities see, hear, and discern God's movement in a continent with an irrefutable plurality of religions, cultures, and poor people. To be such a communion is the fruit of the community-forming inspiration and action of the Holy Spirit whose presence in the world continues to concretize the unifying love of God revealed in Jesus Christ who welcomed all and drew all to God. It is reminiscent of Pentecost to which the FABC looks back and reflects:

> The purpose of the Spirit's onrush is to bestow upon [the apostles] the gifts most needed for the mission to the whole world, represented by the crowd drawn together in Jerusalem "from every nation under heaven" (Acts 2:2-5).

---

[173] Ibid.

> This fulfillment of the words of Joel has been made possible by the resurrection and glorification of Jesus; "Being therefore exalted at the right hand of God, and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, he has poured out this which you see and hear" (Acts 2:33).[174]

Filled and empowered by Christ's Spirit, the apostles continue the Lord's mission of drawing human communities towards God through a ministry of healing and love. According to Richard Lennan, this love, which is the fruit of the Resurrection,

> cannot be restricted to one place or one form which might make it unlikely that most people would have access to it. Only a love that is universally accessible could be the expression of the risen Christ who is not bound by the limits to which Jesus, as fully human, was subject during his life.[175]

The Holy Spirit therefore gathers, forms, and inspires communities in love. "Communities" refers not only to Church-based groups or religious communities, but also communities of social concern and action, of civil involvement for justice, of political uprightness, of moral wholeness. God dwells in what God forms, and the Spirit's community-forming presence is clearest in situations where people of good will come together to work towards shared objectives based on love and justice.[176] The Spirit who is the communion of love between the Father and the Son is the same Spirit that makes possible the communion of human communities with God as well as with one another.

God's self-donation to persons has a profoundly corporate quality. The ecclesial experiences of the Asian Church that have led to the critical understanding of itself as a communion of communities

---

[174] OTC, "The Spirit at Work in Asia Today" in *FAPA* 3, 289.

[175] Richard Lennan, *Risking the Church: The Challenges of Catholic Faith* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 93.

[176] BIRA, "Theology of Dialogue", 260.

reveal this. However, the community-forming power of the Spirit and the communitarian quality of divine self-donation often remain underemphasized in favor of the personal, individual encounter with God in grace. It therefore bears repetition and renewal that coextensive with the deeply personal dimension of that intimate saving relationship the Spirit has with an individual comes an essentially community dimension and implications. The Spirit of grace is a Church-forming Spirit. Community is therefore constitutive of the experience of grace. The Spirit reveals through the Church that the God of grace is a God of communion. The Church as a communion of communities is a privileged place of understanding the grace experience.

The Church Images the God of Communion

Communion ecclesiology provides a theological framework whose trajectory is steered mainly by the fundamental importance of relationality. This relationality has its provenance in the communion of the Persons of the Trinity. The Church as communion is founded on the principle that the Triune God is fundamentally a communion of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. It is a dynamic and spiritual reality of interwoven relationships precisely constituted by the God of communion. The Trinity grounds and sustains the very existence of the Church so that the Trinity forms the very source and goal of all other relationships shaping and sustaining ecclesial life. In this respect, the FABC has affirmed that the Church, understood as communion, "is the heart of the ecclesial reality [which] demands that we enter into relationships [with fellow Christians, other churches, cultures] in the spirit of the reconciling love of God in Jesus Christ and the Lord's passionate prayer that all his disciples may be united."[177]

The principle that the Church is reflective of Trinitarian communion is particularly resonant of John D. Zizioulas' affirmation in *Being and Communion* that ecclesial communion "is bound to the very being of God. From the fact that a human being is a member of the Church, he becomes an 'image of God,' he exists as God Himself

---

[177] FABC, "Final Statement of the Third Seminar on Asian Movement for Christian Unity" in *FAPA* 4, 152.

exists…takes on God's 'way of being.'"[178] What is this "way of being" according to Zizioulas? "The being of God is a relational being [such that] without the concept of communion, it would not be possible to speak of the being of God."[179] The Church community is primarily the fruit of the Spirit of love that unites the Persons of the Triune God. This divine love categorically reveals the innermost Spirit-driven dynamic of the Church: a spirit of loving communion between God and humanity in the person of Jesus who gathers all people to himself and leads them to God.

> [The] Spirit as life giver and communion brings the ultimate, the eschaton (Acts 2)—i.e., the eternal life of God—into history. The Church in this way becomes the communion of saints in which the past, the present, and the future are not causally related to each other but are the one body of Christ in the event of communion.[180]

Being Church, therefore, designates our being impelled towards living and relating as persons-in-community fashioned by God through the gathering action of Christ's Spirit. Thus constituted and drawn to God, the Church shares in the Personal communion that exists eternally in the Triune God. Being Church means for human relationships and communities to be the historical manifestation of the loving unity and relationality that constitute the God of eternity.

Each Person of the Trinity is always immediately relational, other-oriented, and mutually welcoming. Divine relationality, love, and communion form the source, essence, and meaning of human existence and community. In turn, persons and communities that God creates are profoundly and fundamentally other-seeking and relational if they are to enjoy the fullness of meaning and the reason for their existence.

---

[178] John D. Zizioulas, *Being as Communion* (New York: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1985), 15.

[179] Ibid., 17.

[180] John D. Zizioulas, "The Pneumatological Dimension of the Church" in *Communio: International Catholic Review* 1 (1974), 147.

Therefore, the loving communion of the Divine Persons furnishes the deepest dynamic of being Church—human communities vivified by the Spirit, reflective of divine communion, and called to further communion with other communities in the world.

Christ Reveals God as Communion. Karl Rahner states that Christianity is essentially ecclesial.[181] Religion like Christianity is not simply a projection made by human beings but is in fact God's manifestation in history of the transcendental presence in and relation with the human community. He argues that for religion to be what it truly is—the concretization of God's self-communication to humanity—it must essentially be social. It must rise above the private or exclusive relationship between one person and God.

> By the very nature of Christianity, church must be understood in such a way that it springs from the very essence of Christianity as the supernatural self-communication of God to humanity which has become manifest in history and has found its final and definitive historical climax in Jesus Christ…. We cannot exclude communal and social intercommunication from man's essence even when he is considered as the religious subject of a relationship to God. By the very nature of man and by the very nature of God, and by the very nature of the relationship between man and God when God is understood correctly, the social dimension cannot be excluded from the essence of religion. It belongs to it because man in all of his dimensions is related to the one God who saves the whole person. Otherwise religion would become merely a private affair of man and would cease to be religion.[182]

In Christ is made manifest the reality of God as relational, as a God of communion. Christ is the sacrament, the visible sign, the historical reality and concreteness of the eternal God's free self-giving

---

[181] Rahner, *Foundations*, 146.

[182] Ibid., 343.

to the human race, the symbolic[183] reality of the Father as a relational God. The Church, in turn, dwelt in by the Spirit, continues the work of Christ, the relationship between Christ and the Father, and the relationship between Christ and the world. "As Christ is the sacrament of the Father, so the Church was the sacrament of Christ himself."[184] The Church community is "the continuation, the perpetual presence of the task and function of Christ in the economy of redemption, his contemporaneous presence in history, his life, the Church in the full and proper sense."[185] Avery Dulles states:

> Christ, as the sacrament of God, contains the grace that he signifies. Conversely, he signifies and confers the grace he contains. In him the invisible grace of God takes on visible form. But the sacrament of redemption is not complete in Jesus as a single individual. In order to become the kind of sign he must be, he must appear as the sign of God's redemptive love extended toward all humanity, and of the response of all humanity to that redemptive love.[186]

In other words, the Son's incarnation into humanity and his saving relationship with persons reveals the Trinity's gracious desire to draw everyone into loving communion with one another in intimacy and unity with Godself. Consequently, the Church, which is Christ's

---

[183] By "symbol", Rahner means "real symbol", that which renders truly present what is revealed, by which something makes itself known and without which it cannot be known at all, and most importantly, one whose reality is not separate from that which it symbolizes but is in fact "the reality, constituted by the thing symbolized as the inner moment of the moment of itself, which reveals and proclaims the thing symbolized, and is itself full of the thing symbolized, being its concrete form of existence." See Karl Rahner, "Theology of Symbol" in *Theological Investigations*, trans. Kevin Smyth, vol. 4 (Baltimore: Helicon Press, 1966), 251.

[184] Richard Lennan, *The Ecclesiology of Karl Rahner* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 24.

[185] Karl Rahner, *The Church and the Sacraments* (London: Burns and Oates, 1974), 13.

[186] Avery Dulles, *Models of the Church* (New York: Image Books, 2002), 60.

mystical body and sacrament, makes constantly present, visible, and effective through the community's words and symbols humanity's saving communion with God, an intimacy and dependence that Christ lived out concretely. Furthermore, as Christ was the incarnate sign of humanity's response to God's self-offer to the world, the Church continues living out the Son's self-giving to God. Constituted and united in Christ, the Church is a privileged place in which persons as a community can respond to God in total self-surrender. Rahner affirms that the Church is the "extension" and continuation of God's redeeming love to all as revealed and embodied by the life, death, and resurrection of Christ.[187] It may also be the "extension" of humanity's self-giving to God as lived out by Christ who constituted the Church in the Spirit. The FABC affirms that the Spirit "calls the Asian Church to become the embodiment of His own self-emptying and self-giving, that from death new life may arise."[188]

The climax of Christ's self-giving paschal mystery is the Pentecost event which affirms that the constitution of the Church through the outpouring of the Spirit is the most visible and most authentic outcome of divine grace. In ways perceptible and historical, Pentecost reveals that the Church is a real symbol of the community-forming grace of Christ—in every era, age, race, and human condition. The Spirit of grace constitutes not only communion with the Triune God but also communion within the community at the same time. The Paschal mystery that climaxes at Pentecost has shown that the two "communions" are mutually constitutive rather than mutually exclusive. Catherine LaCugna echoes the same idea of the communion of the Triune God as engendering the saving communion of the Church with God and with one another:

> The communion of Father, Son, and Spirit among themselves (which) structures the divine substance…is the unifying force that holds together the three coequal persons who know and love each other as peers…. Jesus

---

[187] Rahner, *Foundations*, 344.

[188] FABC, "Asian Colloquium on Ministries in the Church" in *FAPA 2*, 71.

> Christ *is* the true union of divine and human and therefore the means of our own communion with God and with one another. The Holy Spirit is the power and presence who brings about through *theosis* the real union of the creature with God. The entire purpose of the economy in the Greek vision is the communion of all in all, all in God, God in all.[189]

The Asian Church has come to the self-understanding that it is and would like to continue to be, above all, a "communion of communities". The FABC discerns that the Spirit is moving the Asian Church to be such a communion through three very specific ways, that is, by being a participative, dialogical, and prophetic community vis-à-vis other communities in the world. Through its reflections, the FABC offers a theological understanding of each of these ways by associating them to the essential features of the Christ event. Because Christ reveals God and because the Church is an embodiment of Christ's presence in history, participation, dialogue, and prophetic presence are also essential, normative, and timely features of the experience of grace which is God's very self-communication to the world.

The God of Communion is Participative

From the earliest experiences of God by the Old Testament communities, to the personal encounter with Jesus by the believing community in the New Testament, and through the Spirit-led growth of Christian communities after the Resurrection until today, Christianity affirms that God is dynamically present and active in history. In the Christian faith, this reality is confirmed by the Incarnation of the Son into the world and whose mission was to preach the nearness of the Kingdom of God, and at the same time, to personally embody this nearness through his active presence with the people, and through sending the community-forming Spirit upon his return to the Father.

---

[189] Catherine M. LaCugna, *God For Us: The Trinity and Christian Life* (New York: Harper Collins, 1991), 249.

Calling this reality to mind, the FABC reaffirms God's communion with the community through God's participation in the world which is the locus of the Kingdom:

> This reign is not only God's rule as Creator…getting creatures to interact harmoniously even in a world spoiled by sin, and orchestrating the cultures and religions of the human race so that they would move towards harmony in spite of divisive and corruptive elements…. It is (also) the salvation that God brought to the whole human race and the cosmos by sending his Son into the world…through his ministry of preaching the Good News…his call for repentance through his exorcisms of Satan…healing the sick…pardoning of sins, through his parables that conveyed his wisdom to those whose hearts had already been touched by it…through his prophetic denunciations as well as his personal witness of compassion and love, he exemplified the harmony brought by the reign of God.[190]

God participates in history and this participation encompasses all time and every nation on earth "in order to strengthen us to make this mystery of God's reign a reality in human history."[191]

John Zizioulas affirms that the God of history is a dynamic and relational being.[192] As a relational being, God is intimately personal to both individuals and to the human community as a whole. God's very dynamism and essence consist in being connected with persons. Jesus most clearly testified to this reality of God. The history of salvation that reaches an eminent point in the incarnation of the Son reveals how God "reaches man and creation not from outside, as in the Old Testament, but as 'flesh'—from inside our own existence, as part of

---

[190] FABC Theological Advisory Commission (TAC), "Asian Christian Perspectives on Harmony" in *FAPA 2*, 269.

[191] Ibid., 270.

[192] Zizioulas, *Being and Communion*, 17.

creation."[193] Zizioulas argues that God's presence in persons is not so much as rational knowledge or even a mystical inner experience, "but as communion within a community."[194] For him, the fact that persons in the Church are, as mentioned above, the image or the sacrament of God is entirely on account of the activity of the Holy Trinity making its participative presence felt in the world. "The Church is built by the historical work of the divine economy that leads finally to the vision of God 'as He is', to the vision of the Triune God in his eternal existence."[195] The world never ceases to be "God's cosmos", according to Zizioulas' "liturgical" vision of the world—a vision in which God is understood no longer as "beyond" nature but is rather "with us" through the person of the Son and the presence of the Spirit.[196]

Karl Rahner finds positive assurance from Scripture, especially in the New Testament, that God's reality as a being personally involved in the world is a knowledge that is not so much the product of people's theoretical comprehension but rather of "their experience of God's living activity among them."[197] Both in the Old Testament as well as the New, God is "He who Acts", referring to a definite and distinct activity of God within the world,

> at work everywhere, in Nature too…how he makes the sun rise and the rain fall, clothes the lilies of the field and feeds the birds of heaven…at work too in the history of humanity as a whole, the spreading abroad of the races

---

[193] Ibid., 115.

[194] Ibid.

[195] Ibid., 19.

[196] Patricia Fox, *God as Communion: John Zizioulas, Elizabeth Johnson and the Retrieval of the Symbol of the Triune God* (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 2001), 55.

[197] Karl Rahner, "Theos in the New Testament" in *Theological Investigations*, trans. Cornelius Ernst, O.P., vol. 1 (Baltimore: Helicon Press, 1969), 104.

> of men as the historical epochs succeed each other, the coming and going of peoples (Acts 17:26).[198]

From the beginning of human awareness of God, God has been recognized as involved in the world, sovereign and free over human destiny.

> And in this sway over history, man has a deep impression of God's free and unconstrained sovereignty in action, his creativeness…which shows itself with power in the Resurrection, discloses to us in general to 'the incredible greatness of God's power' (Eph 1:19, 20), gives us the faith through the mighty power of God (Col 2:12), and so allows us to experience concretely and vividly the fact that God is one who works out everything according to the purpose of his will (Eph 1:11).[199]

This age-old affirmation of God's constant presence and activity in the world through the Spirit is re-echoed by Elizabeth Johnson as she reflects on how God's presence and action is mediated in world history. She affirms that the triune God's participation in human experience and history is the activity of one "who actually arrives and is effective wherever fragments of freedom and healing gain a foothold in the struggling world, [effecting within it] new life and energy, peace and justice, resistance and liberation, hope against hope, wisdom, courage, and all that goes with love."[200] Johnson believes that potentially all human experience mediates the presence of God in Spirit. Since God is the creator and life-giver,

> the historical world becomes a sacrament of divine presence and activity, even if only as a fragile possibility…. Wherever we encounter the world and ourselves as held by, open to, gifted by, mourning the absence of, or yearning

---

[198] Ibid., 105-106.

[199] Ibid., 107.

[200] Elizabeth Johnson, *She Who Is: The Mystery of God in Feminist Theological Discourse* (New York: Herder and Herder, 2007), 122.

> for something ineffably more than immediately appears… there the experience of the Spirit transpires. Within this wide horizon of historical experience, language about the Spirit of God finds its origin and home.[201]

The foregoing reflections acknowledge that the Triune God of communion constantly takes part in the workings of the human community—its history, its march towards self-fulfillment and wholeness. The life and person of Jesus, who lived in and for the community, embodies the high point of God's participation in human history. Through the abiding activity of the Spirit who continues the work of the Son today, God maintains involvement in the human community as divinity continues to unite humanity to Godself in the Spirit. It is an old story that carries on anew to the present:

> Assuming humanity, [the Son] incarnates Abba's life-giving actions of old: creation of all the living out of sheer love, liberation of the chosen people from the bondage of Egypt, mutual belonging within the covenant. Like Abba, Jesus brings life through a new creation, a radical liberation and a renewed communion. At his word, demons flee, sinners are liberated…the sick are healed. He frees the victims of society from the evil and sin that shackle them…restores them to communion…breaks down barriers set up by greed, pride, discrimination, lopsided social norms and even religious distortions. Outcasts become sisters and brothers. Sinners are worthy of compassion. The hungry, the thirsty, the prisoners, the naked bear the divine presence. In the freedom and communion that Jesus offers, a new creation dawns. The human community is reborn…. The Kingdom is here.[202]

The Triune God participates in the life of the human community by divine acts of love and salvation: creating and renewing the life of all creatures and all human relationships, uniting humanity by fostering

---

[201] Ibid., 124-125.

[202] FABC, "Christian Discipleship in Asia Today: Service to Life" in *FAPA* 2, 6.

community life in the Spirit, drawing Godself personally and closely to persons as embodied by the life and person of Christ, effecting new life and freedom, hope and healing, wisdom and love where there is death and sin, despair and anguish, senselessness and hatred—all that alienate the community from God and consequently fracture human solidarity. But at the same time, God remains transcendently beyond the circumscription of time and space. God's participation in the realities of human community of which God is the ground is pure gift.

The God of Communion is Dialogical

In one of the first theological and pastoral reflections made on the subject of interreligious dialogue occasioned by a meeting that sought to fortify stronger ties with the Buddhists, the FABC recognized that the Spirit of Christ was constantly moving the Asian Church to realize more clearly that "God in His mercy wills all to be saved and to have full share in His own life. Since God's will unfailingly bears fruit… God gives to everyone in history sufficient means to be saved and to partake of His divine life."[203] The way by which Christians were to gain deeper sensitivity to God's universal salvific will was through dialogue with Buddhists as well as with people of other faiths. The FABC was convinced that dialogue was in fact intrinsic to the very life of the Asian Church as well as the essential mode that evangelization must necessarily take.[204]

Upon generating reflections from contact and experiences with Buddhists, Muslims, Hindus, etc., the FABC has realized only more compellingly that real dialogue is a dynamic of listening as well as talking, of receiving what the other generously offers as well as sharing what one bears. It is a process of searching and trying to understand the multi-faceted reality of the other, in the hope of mutually deepening and enriching each other's faith, rather than to eventually find a definite strategy by which to convert the other into

---

[203] BIRA, "Statement and Recommendations" in *FAPA* 1, 110

[204] Ibid., 111.

the Catholic fold. To enter into dialogue is to place oneself within the frame of mind that all involved are equal partners "in a mutuality of sharing and enrichment contributing to mutual growth…kept alive and strengthened especially by means of collaboration in educational, social and moral fields."[205]

Upon what foundation is this particular charism of dialogue that the Asian Church feels itself called to nurture built?

> The basis for all our dialoguing is that God spoke and continues to speak to all peoples in a variety of ways. God manifests Godself in time and history, in our struggles and yearning, our pain and suffering, hopes and dreams, in the whole created world. Dialogue is God's way. God is, you could say, *a dialogical God* (emphasis provided).[206]

Here is where a dialogical disposition and mission finds its foundation according to the FABC: Divinity's drawing humanity together towards the fulfillment of history is accomplished by God speaking to the human community through the signs of the times, and listening to humanity's needs, prayers, the search for truth, the desire for unity, freedom, and peace. The FABC firmly believes that from eternity, God has been "in constant dialogue with humanity…a dialogue spanning eras, cultures, religions, and continents."[207] As humanity is created by this self-communicating God, God gives persons the capacity to discern this self-communication, and the access to God's presence in history. The Incarnation definitively confirms the entry of the Divine into the world, embodying the divine desire for mutual self-revelation and communication between Godself and humanity. In Christ, the full meaning of God's self-communication is constantly "incarnate" in human history "in this incessant, mutual encounter of the speaker

---

[205] Ibid.

[206] FABC Formation Institute for Interreligious Affairs (from hereon, FIRA), "Final Statement of the First Meeting" in *FAPA* 3, 120.

[207] FIRA, "Final Statement of the First Meeting", 143.

and the hearer…maturing into fullness till the end of time."[208] This mutual encounter that the FABC sees no less as a permanent enterprise in history reveals that the community's access to the Divine means that persons are able to both hear God's word addressed to them in love as well as sense that God listens to the words they address to God. It is through the Spirit in the whole of creation and in every person that God, who commands all to love others, that a person

> is impelled to enter into dialogue…[for] God is present and working through the Spirit in the whole of creation and the Christian, together with men of all faiths…. Through dialogue, the Christian grows in awareness of his partnership with God in the coming about of the Kingdom. The history of salvation tells us that God is continuously dialoguing with men. Christ is the center of this process. As disciples of Christ, within his community, the Church, we are called to imitate him.[209]

Jesus' life and mission bore witness to God's constant dialogue with humanity. In his earthly ministry, Jesus entered into relationships with people coming from a wide spectrum of people in society—in fact, a spectrum too wide for comfort as far as his adversaries were concerned. Upon the people he spoke with and listened to, Jesus brought to bear the consolation of the Kingdom of God—by healing them, granting them the forgiveness they sought, stirring them towards gentle righteousness and away from corrupted ways, bringing them back to the fold of society, taking up their plight, being their voice in order to deliver a counteractive message to the perpetrators of alienation and self-righteousness. From the well-placed religious authorities to the ordinary-folk, and even to the so-called public sinners with whom conversation was anathematized, Jesus was present. Hence, the dialogue that Jesus carried out with the community was not only a passing on of information about God's reign. He brought about that

---

[208] BIRA, "Statement and Recommendations", 111.

[209] ICM, 141.

reign through the saving deeds that confirmed his teachings. Jesus himself was the medium and the message of God's reign.

In a particularly noticeable way, especially to Jesus' opponents, the Lord did not confine his interaction to fellow Jews. He engaged the Roman centurion, the Samaritan woman, the Syrophoenician mother. In other words, he spoke, listened, commiserated with, and preached to the members of the Jewish community as well as those outside Judaism. No person remained unreachable to the Reign of God unless that person decided to have nothing to do with the kingdom. God's Word-made-flesh dedicated his life attending to people rather than living a remote, self-contained life privy only to God or to an inner coterie of friends. Through his self-communication, Jesus afforded people the opportunity to know him and to speak with him (Mt 21:15ff; 19:16ff; Mk 3:1ff; 10:13ff; Lk 7:36ff; etc.). He preached the Kingdom of God to the community and validated his message by seeking the sinners out, affirming the growth of God's reign in them, and offering them his friendship (Mt 9:20ff; Mk 12:28ff; Lk 18:35ff; 19:1ff; Jn 4:5ff; etc.). Jesus co-responded with the victims of alienation and marginalization as well as their perpetrators of injustice. To both groups of people did he draw near that he may restore to the victims their rightful place in society, and compel the perpetrators into an awareness of their alienating self-righteousness, and into conversion.

The FABC reflects that "as the Incarnate Word was spoken into human history, so also should the Church's witnessing word have a bearing on the hearer, and vice-versa. It is in this incessant, mutual encounter of the speaker and the hearer that the full meaning of the Divine Word becomes incarnate in history, maturing into fullness till the end of time."[210] The Church, being the sacrament of God's message in the world, continues Christ's work of dialogue. The Church's duty is to always proclaim and bring the reign of God into every aspect of human life in Asia. This means that the Church must constantly be involved in dialogue with people of other religions, cultures, and the poor—as well as with communities not necessarily

---

[210] Ibid.

ecclesial by nature but which nonetheless play significant roles in the promotion of communal wholeness and solidarity for the good. In this endeavor, "the Christian finds himself continually evangelizing and being evangelized by his partners in dialogue"[211] because the "dialogical God" speaks the Word to the human community and through it as well.

The FABC's outlook on the Divine as a dialogical God finds resonance in Rahner who writes about God's Person by engaging the human being in an exchange that enables God's creature to recognize and engage Divinity in return:

> God shows himself as Person in that he deals with man in an historical *dialogue*, that he allows man, his creature, really to be himself, too, a person…. The personal God so transcends the world that he can allow this world, which is totally dependent on him, a genuine activity, even with regard to himself; that what is totally dependent on him acquires through his own agency a genuine independence with regard to him; that God can set man free with regard to God himself.[212]

Rahner emphasizes that God's participation in the world is not a divine monologue but a "dramatic dialogue" between God and persons in whom the capacity to make a genuine response to divine self-communication is itself bestowed as God's gift. "God's free action never ceases to take new fire in the activity of man. History is not just a play in which God puts himself on the stage and creatures are merely what is performed; the creature is a real co-performer in this humano-divine drama of history."[213]

For Rahner, God *is* by self-disclosing, self-giving, self-expressing. Through God's personal Word, God calls as well as enables persons

---

[211] Ibid., 115.

[212] Rahner, "Theos", 110.

[213] Ibid., 111.

to do the divine will. Rahner is very much aware, nevertheless, that persons called by God can most certainly say no to the call and refuse the engagement offered by the Divine. "Man can harden his heart… resist the Spirit…contradict God…shut the doors of his heart to God when he knocks…."[214] But even though the dialogue between God and human persons does not guarantee God's being accordingly engaged with a human "yes", Rahner believes that Divinity still retains the last word

> not only in the sense that as the stronger physically, so to speak, he finally acts in such a way that no reaction of the creature can follow his action, having no further power to withstand it; but also in the sense that even the creature's sinful act, while it does indeed involve total disaster for the creature itself, is nevertheless incapable of leaving the field of God's ultimate will—the will by which God wills his glory.[215]

A person's refusal to dialogue with God does not in any way stifle the divine desire and gracious act of continually disclosing and offering Godself to persons. The latitude of divine attention, mercy, and love is far wider than can ever be humanly imagined. The ways by which God speaks to the community and listens to it are as constant as they are myriad. God's dialogue with humanity reveals both the divine desire to be intimately close to the community and, at the same time, God's transcendence beyond the circumscriptions and vagaries of time, space, and human experience.

The God of Communion is Prophetic

For the FABC, the image of the Christ who identified fully with humanity and loved the poor and suffering lot best captures the Asian imagination and understanding of the Kingdom of God the Lord preached and embodied—a community that does not and must not remain isolated from other communities especially that of the

---

[214] Ibid., 110.

[215] Ibid., 111.

poor who are loved by Christ whose grace, according to Paul, is "that though he was rich, yet for your sake, became poor so that through his poverty, all may become rich" (2 Cor 8:9).

> [As] we reflect on the harsh underside of suffering Asia, the image of Jesus that captures our imagination is his human portrait in the Scriptures. Born of woman (Gal 4:4), he is the God who pitches his tent among us (Jn 1:14). He empties himself to be in solidarity with the little ones, those treated as non-persons—the poor and deprived, the outcast and marginalized, the oppressed and downtrodden, the sick, those who do not count, children and women. He strikes at the natural upward mobility of humankind and goes down to the downtrodden, walks among them, lives with them, takes up their burdens, calls them his friends (Lk 4:18; 15:2).[216]

That the Kingdom of God is especially for the poor is therefore most clearly shown both in Christ's person and his prophetic ministry to the marginalized and the victims of injustice in society.

> Jesus speaks confidently and authoritatively about God and his reign. 'The Kingdom is here, in your midst' (Lk 17:21). He is most compassionate over the multitude. He weeps for an individual (Jn 11:35-36), he weeps for the whole city (Lk 19:41-44). He calls the poor blessed, the Kingdom of God is theirs (Lk 6:20). The homeless, the hungry, the naked, the little ones bear his face. Uncompromising in defending the little ones, his healing touch, forgiving words, signal the compassionate irruption of the Kingdom of God into our space and time…. Jesus boldly confronts the powers that be and denounces their greed, their hypocrisy (Mt 23:13-36; Lk 12:1), corruption and oppression, their leadership, their forgetting the weightier matters of the law, like justice, mercy and faith (Mt 23:23). Bold and daring[,] thirsting for justice, the prophet of the ages, his words and actions subvert the values of this world. He speaks of reconciling

---

[216] FABC International Theological Colloquium (ITC), "Being Church in Asia: Journeying with the Spirit into Fuller Life" in *FAPA* 2, 223.

> with one's enemies, praying for them, loving them, and forgiving them (Mt 5:43-48; Lk 6:27-36).[217]

As a prophetic counter-witness to the socio-religious structures to which people adhered at the expense of kindness and concern for the poor, Jesus associated freely, closely, and fearlessly with a "sub-community" that Jewish authorities found reprehensible. Healing the disabled and forgiving the public sinners even during much-respected Sabbath days, Jesus witnessed against self-righteous obedience to and an exclusivizing interpretation of the letter of the law at the expense of compassion, and instead witnessed for the original spirit of the law: God's kindness and fidelity that formed a community of faith. In so doing, "[Jesus] enters the realm of economics, relativizes wealth, places all material possession at the service of the Kingdom, condemns slavery to mammon."[218]

To the end of his earthly ministry, Jesus did not turn away the cross that embodied the hostile reactions of those against whom he prophesied. Enjoying the abundance of life in the Spirit, the Son did not hold back in emptying himself and daring to be the advocate and defender of the last, the least, and the lost in a community that professed fidelity to God. Instead, Jesus worked as a prophet of new life and died to usher in this new life especially for people who suffered many deaths dealt by an oppressive society. Being prophet of the poor meant being the poor's life-giver.

Karl Rahner states that Jesus Christ is the "eschatologically final" prophet who remains unsurpassable in the history of salvation, both in what has unfolded in the past and in what is still to come. In this way, Jesus is different from the prophets of the past (or from those who might be considered modern-day "prophets" today or in the future) in that the mission he has been sent to accomplish and the person that he is are identical. Through his message and person, the absolute immediacy and self-communication of God is made personally and

---

[217] Ibid.

[218] Ibid., 223.

intimately near to humanity. Unlike the prophets of old who are known to have spoken for Yahweh, Jesus does not simply proclaim a divine message or promise that descends upon him from without. Jesus' "function" reveals his "essence"[219]; in him, the closeness of the Kingdom of God becomes present in a way never before seen and will no longer be surpassed.

> We must bear in mind here that his word as God's final word can be understood to be definitive, not because God now ceases arbitrarily to say anything further although he could have said more, and not because he 'concludes' revelation although he could have continued it had he just wanted to. It is the final word of God that is present in Jesus because there is nothing to say beyond it, because God has really and in a strict sense offered *himself* in Jesus.[220]

Central to the prophetic words, deeds, and person of Jesus is the proclamation of the imminence of God's Kingdom of which he assures everyone from the sinners to the innocent children. In the response to John's messengers who asked if he was the one who was to come, Jesus responds in certain terms that God's reign has drawn near through his person: the blind receive their sight, and the lame walk, lepers are cleansed and the deaf hear, and the dead are raised up, and the poor have the good news preached to them (Mt 11:4ff; Lk 4:18ff), reminiscent of the prophet Isaiah's descriptions of the coming of the glory of the Lord, when Zion would be ransomed from its burdensome captivity and saved onto "gladness and joy" (cf. Is. 35:1ff). In other words, the nearness of God's kingdom proclaimed through the prophetic words and deeds of Jesus privileges all who are in need of salvation—from ignorance, oppression, sin, death, and the loss of human dignity.

This is the God that the Asian Church images: a God who, in and through Jesus' prophetic words, deeds, and personal life, always takes the side of the marginalized people regardless of their race, gender, or

---

[219] Rahner, *Foundations*, 251.

[220] Ibid., 280.

religious persuasion. The prophetic God revealed in Christ is the sure foundation upon which the Asian Church understands its identity and mission as a prophetic community, a Church for the poor, a "new Church in Asia."

A particular strength of the theological reflections made by the Asian Church lies in their having been harvested from three compelling realities of the continent: the pluralism of religions, the array of centuries-old cultures, and the dismal poverty afflicting millions. At this particular point in the salvation and human history of the Asian Church, the self-revelation of God as participative, dialogical, and prophetic as taught by Christian doctrine and Tradition is truly corroborated by this contemporary situation in which the Asian Church lives, moves, and has its being.

The Asian Church is far from being a perfect ecclesial community. The continent still suffers from social and sectarian strife. There is, for instance, the religious fundamentalism that abets violence and genocide. There is the deeply rooted and history-enabled male exclusivism and superiorism that still plague age-old faiths and societies. There is the abject poverty and out-and-out structural injustice which seriously injure human dignity and cripple authentic freedom.

The self-communicating God, however, does not cease revealing Godself through both the marvelous and dour realities in the Asian community. That God participates in the human enterprise for greater community solidarity, that God dialogues with the community through the fundamental circumstances that bless or hurt daily life, and that God communicates a compelling word of prophecy that marshals human action in favor of the helpless and the destitute—these are not "new" characteristics of the Divine. Christian tradition has long held them of God, the very reason why the FABC finds the ground of its self-understanding in God as participative, dialogical, and prophetic. This time, however, out of a communal reflection of Asian realities re-emerge God's participatory, dialogical, and prophetic character and action in the world. That God is participative, dialogical, and prophetic is manifested anew and more compellingly

today precisely in and through the Asian Church's realization that it cannot possibly remain a Church community detached from the ever-present plurality of religions, unreflective of the array of cultures, and aloof from the abiding misery of poverty. Church tradition itself is an ongoing process of re-interpretation so that the Christian community may be faithful to ever-changing historical contexts in which religious pluralism is significantly a part.

Moreover, the Asian Church cannot remain isolated from other communities which are not necessarily ecclesial, religious, or faith-based. The reality of Asia and the signs of the times call the Church to foster communion with as many communities as it can reach. Because, as Rahner says,

> insofar as the Church is the concreteness of Christ in relation to us, and insofar as Jesus Christ is really the absolute, irrevocable and victorious offer of God as the absolute mystery who gives himself to us in love, the Church is the tangible place where we have the assurance and the historical promise that God loves us.[221]

A wider communion of communities that grace urges the Asian Church to establish is a significant way towards common action to correct dehumanization—which, to all intents and purposes, is contrary to the divine life towards which the gracious God moves everyone from within.

Grace is Participative, Dialogical, and Prophetic

We now reach the main point of this dissertation: God's self-communication, though a truly personal experience of grace by an individual, is a profoundly communitarian reality. As a participative, dialogical, and prophetic presence in the world, God's self-communication bears vital implications in the way grace should be defined, understood, discerned, detected, and preached about today. The experience of grace is not a dynamic only between God and the individual person, or between God and one particular group of people

---

[221] Ibid., 398.

at a given time. Grace has everything to do with the relationship between God, the individual person or group of persons, *and* the community in which that person or group lives and prays. Another way of saying this is: the beneficiary of God's self-giving is not just the human individual isolated from others in the human community, or only one particular community that thinks of itself as set apart from other communities. Persons other than ourselves and communities other than our own are also very much the locus and beneficiary of God's self-offer to us all. While it is true that God's self-giving is deeply personal, it nevertheless constantly and simultaneously carries with it communitarian implications for any one person, or any one group, that responds with a "yes" to the divine offer. Grace is a shared reality: it is participative, dialogical and prophetic in implications and effects on one person's life and that of particular groups or communities including the Catholic Church, its hierarchy, and the Magisterium.

Grace as Participative

In his discussion on the experience of grace within the particular vision of liberation theology, Stephen Duffy states:

> For good or for ill, humans are locked together in a network of interdependence, cultural divergences notwithstanding. Solidarity and conflictivity coexist; ontologically one, the race as a race is *simul justus et peccator*. For too long theology has privatized Christianity and reduced faith to individual decision, private virtue, and ahistorical I-Thou encounters, thereby isolating it from social praxis. Ironically, such pious individualism, so characteristic of modernity, while fearful of any Constantinian symbiosis between religion and sociopolitical life, is itself highly political and in fact an endorsement of the status quo.[222]

He makes this critique in view of the position that far too frequently, Christians systematically dichotomize between nature and grace, creation and salvation, secular history and saving history. The

---

[222] Stephen J. Duffy, *Dynamics of Grace* (Eugene: Wipf and Stock, 1993), 347.

dichotomy is worsened by modernity's overemphasis on the division between what is secular from what is religious, the knowing subject and the object known. He compliments Karl Rahner for having taken the lead in reconnecting nature and grace. As the earlier chapter of this dissertation shows, Rahner has contoured his theological anthropology so that what is truly human is defined precisely as open to what is divine, what is created is understood as precisely the locus of salvation. Echoing Rahner, Duffy points out:

> Creation and history are *for* salvation; they are the hypothetical condition of its possibility. God creates only to graciously save by divine self-communication to all. Grace as the condition of the possibility of *all* action cannot be hermetically sealed off in an isolated compartment of life called 'religion'. Grace is woven into creation as its deepest dynamism, intentionality, and destiny.[223]

I believe that along the same lines runs the ordinary, almost knee-jerk understanding of grace, one that often fetches the more individualistic notions of a person's relationship with God, and only secondarily, notions that have to do with a person's relationship with others in the community, and with one community's relationship with other communities. In addition, grace has fittingly been identified with themes allied to prayer and the sacraments, like receiving spiritual consolation, feeling deep love and devotion to God, being infused and sealed with the Spirit onto greater Christian maturity, being restored one's unity with the divine in forgiveness, ruing one's deep sinfulness, gaining spiritual freedom, etc. All of these are justifiably the effects of God's grace, blessings that help persons live more fully in relation to the realities of the world. The Catechism of the Catholic Church affirms that Christian experience attests especially in prayer that "the more docile we are to the promptings of grace, the more we grow in freedom during trials, such as those we face in the pressures and constraints of the outer world" (CCC 1742).

---

[223] Ibid., 366.

However, the Catechism continues: "By the working of grace, the Holy Spirit educates us in spiritual freedom in order to make us free collaborators of the Church and in the world" (CCC 1742). By proceeding further into the relation between grace and its implications on a person's involvement and participation as a dynamic agent in the Church community—further outside and beyond prayer and sacramental life, and precisely *as* an authentication of one's spiritual life—the wider and more interpersonal aspects of grace can still be more amply supported and elucidated. Understood in a predominantly intra-personal or individualistic way, grace can appear as though God's self-giving affects mostly the individual and only his or her soul. But one's relationships with others and with the larger community are directly affected by one's "yes" to God's self-offer. This interpersonal, inter-community dimension can be accorded still greater emphasis in order to restore in human awareness the community aspect involved in grace. A person's active and meaningful association with the life of community is very much a significant effect and fruit of a person's "yes" to God's self-offer. Rahner says:

> If a person really grasps that this self-disclosure of the absolute and incomprehensible mystery which is not at our disposal and which we call God is the most wonderful and the most unexpected of all things, and is something without which ultimately we could not live, he most certainly will want to experience God's loving self-offer in the mystery of his own existence not only in what we call grace or the experience of grace in the ultimate depth of his conscience. Rather, as a historical, corporeal and concrete person, he hopes and expects that something of this will become manifest in his existence as a tangible pledge, as a sacrament in the deepest and broadest sense. And where Christ becomes manifest as this corporeal and incarnate offer, namely, in the church with all of its historical conditioning and its provisionality…there a Christian experiences that God loves him, provided that he understands this form of faith.[224]

---

[224] Rahner, *Foundations*, 399.

The locus of God's self-offer in grace is therefore twofold, a person's spiritual interiority and that person's externalization of this interiority towards the relationships fostered in and with the world outside of the self—which is very much the locus of divine activity in history.

In this respect, the theme of participation is important in the discussion on grace within Christian tradition:

> Grace is a *participation in the life of God*. It introduces us into the intimacy of Trinitarian life: by Baptism, the Christian participates in the grace of Christ, the Head of his Body. As an 'adopted son', he can henceforth call God, 'Father', in union with the only son. He receives the life of the Spirit who breathes charity into him and who forms the Church. (CCC 1997)

Peter Fransen echoes this traditional understanding in his summary of the classical theory of grace which he synthesizes from the theological thought of the Latin Church in the past three centuries:

> Essentially, grace consists in this: that God, the Blessed Trinity, loves us. The trinitarian love consists in the union of the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost with us; or better, Their drawing us into the intimacy of Their own Trinitarian life by uniting us with Themselves…. All these various conceptions—divine love, presence, indwelling, image and likeness, sanctification and justification—are simply different approaches through different symbolisms to one identical reality: that through grace we share in the divine life.[225]

This notion of participation in the divine life does not begin from abstract notions on divine essence and attributes but rather from a personal encounter with Christ and the healing grace of the Spirit. "Such is the image of God imprinted on us when through grace we

---

[225] Peter Fransen, *Divine Grace and Man*, trans. George Dupont, S.J. (New York: Mentor-Omega Book, 1965), 86.

are united with the Son, encounter Him in the Church and in the sacraments and thus share in His filial life."[226]

Our participation in the divine life of the Trinity is indeed a gratuitous invitation made by God to us. In God's self-communication to persons as addressees, God "really arrives at man, really enters into man's situation, really assumes it himself and *thus* is what he is."[227] Since grace bears a deeply communitarian dimension—precisely on account of the communion that exists among the persons of the Trinity creating us and inviting us to share in divine life—the idea of participation can still be amplified so that it may be understood as taking on the interpersonal, social dimensions and effects indispensable in human existence. Because persons are inherently relational beings, they are immediately and necessarily circumscribed within the dynamics of human relationships and community life. Persons flourish where there is significant human contact and meaningful association with other people. The beginning and the entire subsequent course of human life, growth and wholeness are a product of interpersonal dynamics not only with those close to us like the family but also with the other members of the community. In other words, more than being *naturae rationalis individua substantia* (Boethius), persons are both dynamic agents as well as fruits of participation in the relationships sustaining the human community. A person's development of identity and growth in subjectivity are very much the result of participating deliberately and actively in this relationality. John Macmurray puts it this way: "We can therefore formulate the inherent idea of the

---

[226] Ibid., 87. For additional discussions on the idea of grace as a participation in the divine life, see: Donald L. Gelpi, S.J., *The Gracing of Human Experience: Rethinking the Relationship Between Nature and Grace* (Eugene: Michael Glazier, 2007), 3-65; and also an old but very reliable source, Robert W. Gleason S.J., *Grace* (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1962), 57-74, 123-163. Sharing of the Divine nature is also discussed succinctly by John Hardon, S.J., *History and Theology of Grace: The Catholic Teaching on Divine Grace* (Ann Arbor: Ave Maria University, 2005), 163-204.

[227] Karl Rahner, *The Trinity*, trans. J. Donceel (New York: Crossroad and Herder, 1997), 89.

personal. It is a universal community of persons in which each cares for all the others and no one for himself."[228] The participation in the Trinity's divine life that God's grace makes possible boosts our significant participation in the human community at the same time. In grace, to be closely brought into the communion of the Trinity also means being empowered towards deeper desire for, and involvement in, the human community. Grace enhances the spirit of participation that is really already part of being created by the God of communion.

Since the nature of the Triune God is participative as earlier shown, and since human beings are already fundamentally relational and communitarian beings, then God's gracious self-gift is not just the ground of our participation in community life. God's self-gift also enhances, encourages, and empowers our capacity and drive to foster and strengthen fellowship in faith, hope, and love. Because God's grace is a dynamic presence of self-giving to and from within the human community—manifested by the person and ministry of Christ: grace therefore results in an increase—not only in spiritual consolation or personal enrichment,[229] but also in the zeal for social involvement towards a more humane and dignified community; not only in devotion to God in prayer life but also in the vigilance and care for the needs and the plight of other people especially those marginalized by warped societal associations; not only in the desire to be more closely in touch with God through personal spirituality but also in the productive interaction and widening of reach towards fellow human beings through shared dynamics in and outside one's family, and communal action for authentic Christian or human development. God's other-centered, self-giving presence felt as personal consolation, goodness, faith, hope, love, etc. is at the same time dynamically relational, communitarian, and participatory. Divine presence in each of us ordains us towards meaningful involvement with one another

---

[228] John Macmurray, *Persons in Relation* (Amherst: Humanity Books, 1999), 159.

[229] Cf. Ignatius of Loyola's *Spiritual Exercises*, especially on the Discernment of Spirits, numbers 313-336.

as members of the human community which God draws towards Godself for a share in the divine life.

These participatory implications of grace are very much in harmony with what we hold in our faith as the vital role of the Incarnation in God's self-revelation to humanity. Christ was born into to the world like the rest of humanity. He participated in all things human save sinning. He grew in age and in wisdom certainly within the dynamic of family, friends, religious and non-religious society. The unique fellowship he shared, he concretized primarily in healing and justifying friendship with persons within whom he awakened faith and hope, and whom he brought back into membership in the community which marginalized them.

Jesus drew and invited the human community to a filial relationship with Abba in order to eventually free them from whatever and whoever inhibited them from the fullness of life that this shared relationship precisely engendered. In his summary of the early fathers' explanation of universal grace regarding the Incarnation, Richard Cote says:

> The Savior was not merely to be a gift from on high, but he was, as the 'fruit of the earth' (Is 4:2), to bud forth from the earth…. Underlying this view of the Incarnation as a divine transfusion from within is a forceful affirmation of the unity of humankind…. The incarnation of God in the man Christ was therefore seen by them as a union of God with the whole body of humankind…. It was in the light of Christ's entry into this basic unity that the early fathers explained the radical solidarity between Christ and all people, a union they described as affording all a real and enduring measure of grace. In this view there is not a single person who could be isolated from the community of the human race…. They always envisaged a whole community of humankind—not just the Christian community—as

> caught up in the consequences of the Incarnation, involved in and affected by everything Christ did and experienced.[230]

Leonardo Boff offers another view of Incarnation in terms of God's self-giving participation to and in all things human save sin. In *Liberating Grace*, he speaks of the Incarnation as God giving Godself entirely to humanity in the person of Christ, thus bringing forth the community, a living companionship in love:

> God is the total openness that moves out of itself and its absolute mysteriousness (Father), communicates itself fully (Son) and manifests itself in what is different from itself (creation in, for, with, and by the Logos), and returns to itself reuniting all in its primeval unity (Holy Spirit). In this sense, then, God is a living transcendence…which realizes itself and generates itself eternally and ever outside itself. In short, God is the love that created companions in love and that realizes its being (divinity) by loving and communicating itself to all that it created so that they might in turn accept it. In Jesus Christ, God gave himself completely to the world, thus revealing himself as he truly is—i.e., as total self-giving.[231]

Through the mystery of the Incarnation, we realize that it is this gratuitous and divine *kenosis* that characterizes grace as granting everyone a share, a participation in the love of the Triune God. Hence, as a consequence, it is also *kenosis* that actualizes our innermost essence as human beings. Persons become Godly only by giving themselves away in association with others and service to others as Christ lived out.

> For human beings, participating in God means being able to possess what in God is being: that is to say, it means being able to love radically, to give oneself permanently, and to commune openly with all things…. Being a person

---

[230] Richard Cote, *Universal Grace: Myth or Reality?* (New York: Orbis, 1977), 32-33.

[231] Leonardo Boff, *Liberating Grace* (Eugene: Wipf and Stock, 1979), 182.

> means living in communion, opening up to others, being a living web of relationships. The more humans go out of themselves and commune with others, the more they enrich themselves and resemble the being of God himself.… In the course of life, human beings are led to open themselves, to give of themselves and transcend themselves. Insofar as they do, they participate more and more in the nature of God, who realizes this openness in absolute, infinite, eternal form.[232]

The participative dimension that is an attribute of grace may very well be said to have its antithesis in willfully chosen attitudes by which Christians alienate themselves from the genuine concerns involving the human community: self-absorption, dominance, and social apathy. These and similar attitudes which manifest one's "no" to fellow persons certainly reveal one's "no" not only to the God of communion, but also to being the graced creatures that we are, dwelt-in by the Spirit of communion.

> [Since] God loved us so much, we also ought to love one another. No one has ever seen God; if we love one another, God lives in us, and his love is perfected in us. By this we know that we abide in him and he in us, because he has given us of his Spirit.… Those who say, 'I love God,' and hate their brothers or sisters, are liars; for those who do not love a brother or sister whom they have seen, cannot love God whom they have not seen. (1 Jn 4:11-13, 19)

In a person's or community's disaffected refusal to cooperate with others in fostering love through human solidarity, a more humane society, and care for the common good, one compromises his or her participation in the divine life of grace. Macmurray is well aware of this refusal as he states:

> In any actual community of persons, then, there is not merely a common life, but also a consciousness of the common life, and it is this consciousness which constitutes…a personal association or community. But all personal

---

[232] Ibid., 182.

> consciousness is problematic; so that the consciousness of the common life is *ipso facto* a consciousness that it may or may not be realized in action. It is the consciousness that hostility may take the place of fellowship, and the unity be broken. This will happen if personal relations become negatively motived, if fear of the others replaces love for the others. Thus the problem of community is the problem of overcoming fear and subordinating the negative to the positive in the motivation of persons in relation.[233]

The participatory characteristic of the community dimension of grace reemphasizes that grace is not purely an individualistic experience. It has direct, immediate, and significant implications for our participation in fellowship with members of the community, consistent with the participative action of God through the person and activity of Christ and the Spirit within us; consistent also with the essence of persons as fundamentally relational. Furthermore, because God dwells not only in individual people but also in communities, grace engenders in a particular community a radical openness to other communities in which God dwells.

Grace as Dialogical

"In Jesus, God as the unutterable mystery has totally and irrevocably expressed himself as Word; in him the Word is present as spoken to all of us, as the God of nearness, inexpressible intimacy, and forgiveness."[234]

From the moment of creation up to now, God communicates Godself to persons as their deepest life and final goal. God's revealing Word became flesh in Jesus Christ through whom God "insinuated himself into the very heart of the world,"[235] whose life and Spirit became the world's unifying and healing core so that humanity

---

[233] Macmurray, *Persons in Relation*, 161.

[234] Karl Rahner, "Understanding Christmas" in *TI*, trans. J. Donceel and H. Riley, vol. 22 (New York: Crossroad, 1992), 144.

[235] Ibid., 143.

might no longer despair in God being largely unknowable, or God's will being completely past human understanding, or God's love being beyond human reach. Through the Word made flesh, God's forgiveness and intimate nearness, God's very love in other words, has become incarnate, irreversibly and enduringly born and offered to humanity. "For [God] sent His Son, the eternal Word, who enlightens all people, so that He might dwell among them and tell them of the innermost being of God" (DV 4). Love is the innermost being of God, now enfleshed in the person of the Son. Jesus' words and deeds reveal God's loving will and message to humanity. "As the Father's definitive Word, Jesus makes God and his saving will known in the fullest way possible" (EA 12). The Word made flesh heals the community and unites its members to God and to one another. Zizioulas affirms that

> the Word of God does not dwell in the human mind as rational knowledge, but as communion within a community. And it is most important to note that in this way of understanding Christ as truth, Christ Himself becomes revealed as truth not *in* a community, but *as* a community…the community itself becoming the truth.[236]

God's self-disclosure to humanity through the Word made flesh was first of all a healing presence in the world. Jesus personally fulfilled God's desire for persons to be made whole by forgiving them of their sins, freeing them from their socially stigmatizing infirmities, and restoring their dignity and rightful membership in a society which regarded them as outsiders (e.g., Mk 1:40-45; Lk 8:43-48; Jn 9:1-41, etc.). In making their bodies whole again, the Lord fulfilled the deepest yearning of the human spirit: the sense of completeness, the restoration of estranged relationships, and the sense of belonging to the community.

Secondly, God's self-revelation through the Word was a call to relationship. Jesus invited persons to follow him, to respond as his friends (e.g., Mt 4:18-22; Mk 1:16-20; Lk 5:1-11; 8:1-3) with whom he could teach about the Father and share his ministry. But he did

---

[236] Zizioulas, *Being and Communion*, 115.

not restrict his friendship only to those who passed standards of uprightness that religious society lay down. He actually breached legal and social prohibitions and spoke openly with whom the public called sinners, and associated himself with them by calling them or sharing a meal with them (e.g., Mt 9:11-13, 18-22). In reaching forth to the "community" of sinners, he led some of them to contrition and humility. Encouraging them to sin no more (e.g., Lk 7:36-50; 19:1-10; Jn 4:1-42), Jesus sent them on their way, showing the hope he still had in them. With authority and frankness, he taught people so that they might willfully choose and experience the interior freedom God desires for all (e.g., Mt 16:24-28; 19:16-30; Mk 13:41-44; Lk 10:38-42). In the heart of his preaching was the communication of God's reign, a reign of justice and peace, a divine presence within persons and in the community, a reign that was ever growing, widening, deepening (e.g., Mt 13:33; Mk 4:30-44; Mt 13:24-30). The reign of God was not simply a sovereignty of holiness within a person but a celebration of God's nearness (Mt 22:2-10; Lk 14:15-24). It is a gift from God which brought deep personal joy as well as celebration with others (e.g., Lk 15:1-7, 8-10, 11-30).

Thirdly, God's self-disclosure through the Word made flesh is a self-communication of new life. In healing the sick and forgiving the sinners, Jesus reopened in them the sense of hope and renewed well-being. Those who listened to Jesus experienced something fresh and revivifying because in revealing God to them, he also revealed to people their true selves in terms of the good that they still possess in them and the better persons they could still become. He instilled in them a desire to die to their old selves in order to live anew (e.g., Jn 4:4-26; Lk 19:1-10; 23:54-62; Jn 6:60-71; 13:1-20) and welcomed them as part of God's reign (e.g., Mk 7:25-30; Mt 8:5-13; 22:2-14). In a very literal way, Jesus raised the dead thereby giving new life not only to those he raised but also to the family and community that mourned the loss of their beloved (e.g., Mk 5:35-43; Lk 7:11-17; Jn 11:1-44).

The Word through whom God communicates Godself to the world presumes two salient realities: that being God's Word, God

addresses the human community. The Word is an invitation for all to know God, to experience God, and to enter into a saving relationship with God. Secondly, God's Word does not merely serve to inform the community about God. Rather, the Word made flesh is himself the very life, meaning, and goal of the community. Through Jesus, God gives us his Word of love and makes final and irrevocable that unconditional love. God's self-emptying love through Christ assures us of constant fidelity and presence through the Spirit who dwells in everyone at all times.

Because the Word given to the world by God is healing, relational, and renewing, the community's response to the Word must also be characterized by healing rather than damage, by building relationships rather than withdrawing into exclusivity or isolation, and by being open to new ways of discerning God's self-communication rather than adhering unreasonably to encrusted mindsets. In the dialogue with God, persons respond to God's Word by allowing themselves to be formed and led by the Spirit into the wideness of God's grace that encompasses individuals and communities, and affects not only spiritual life but life in all its physical, emotional, moral, and psychological aspects. True to Christ's mercy and welcome to all, the Spirit continually urges persons to forge new and life-giving relationships within and outside of their own communities. The Spirit is a community-forming presence in the world, as witnessed to by Christ who drew people together during his life on earth. The Spirit creates communities of faith, healing, and forgiveness, unifies persons despite their individual, cultural, and cultic differences. God issues one call: that all persons respond to divine love, that is, to be drawn as a community into the life of God. Striving towards the same wideness, openness, and newness that characterize the Lord's person and ministry, humanity responds to the call to be drawn into God's spacious life, a life whose innermost dynamism is love.

In his essay "Prayer as Dialogue", Karl Rahner proposes an interesting perspective about the relationship between God and persons. In this particular article, he discusses the subject of dialogue in the context of prayer. Rahner asks his readers to consider the

possibility that when God speaks in this mutual exchange between Godself and persons, it is "us" that God "speaks" so that we experience ourselves as "spoken by God to himself."[237] Persons, in a manner of speaking, are actually God's utterance in the dialogue with God.

> When a person, in the Spirit and by grace, experiences himself and understands himself as the one spoken by God to himself and understands this as his true essence to the concreteness of which the gratuitous grace of God's self-communication also belongs, and when he admits this existence and freely accepts it in prayer as the word of God in which God promises himself to man with his Word, his prayer is already dialogic, an exchange with God. The person then hears himself as God's address, heavy with God's self-promise, in the grace-filled self-communication of God by faith, hope and love. He does not hear "something" in addition to himself as one already presupposed in his dead facticity, but hears himself as the self-promised word in which God sets up a listener and to which he speaks himself as an answer.[238]

Perhaps one way of interpreting Rahner's reflection is this: the One Who speaks is God who is love. As God loves, God brings into being. In God's loving, God creates and sustains the world in which humanity is the highest creation for it is in persons that God's love finds a responsive addressee, a knowing receiver of the gift. As "spoken" by the self-disclosing God, persons therefore have God as their very meaning. Furthermore, because God communicates Godself which is love, persons discern that God delivers a message to them as well as through them. When they turn inwards, persons realize that they are dearly encompassed by a Reality greater than themselves. And they realize that it is only upon loving others that they feel their deepest fulfillment as persons.

---

[237] Karl Rahner, "Prayer as Dialogue" in *The Practice of Faith: A Handbook of Contemporary Spirituality*, ed. K. Lehman and A. Raffelt (New York: Crossroad, 1984), 95.

[238] Ibid.

Being God's "speech" or God's expression of Godself, persons are gifted with the deep, persistent, and often mysterious desire and drive for life, wholeness, meaning, newness, and a sense of belonging to something greater than themselves (a family, for instance, or a community, or a group of very close friends) to which they may give of themselves and by which they may be loved towards further growth in body and spirit. "Spoken" by the God who is and who expresses love is in all likelihood the reason why people experience the deepest joy only when they begin the journey of deliberately relating with others in a meaningful, life-giving way—through friendship, faith or religion, a charitable mission, a family, etc.—and in those relationships, discover that self-offering in love, like God's self-disclosure in love, is "creative" of oneself as well as of others. It promotes personal and communal growth, freshness in perspective, fullness of meaning, and lasting joy. Created in divine love, persons as God's "words" become what God wills only when they are precisely "addressed" to others, that is, when they move outwards from the self onto self-offer to others in love and communion.

The dialogical dimension of grace rests on the reality that God's Word made flesh is a Word of love, of new life, of forgiveness, and of unity—addressed to all persons. Through the inspiration of the Spirit, humanity makes a response to God's address in Christ by loving, fully living, forgiving, and opening itself up to greater solidarity with others in life-giving relationships and community-living—as the Word of God had done.

Grace as Prophetic

In the mind of the FABC, the prophetic nature and mission of the Church is founded in God's love for the poor.

> [A prophetic Church] is a Church that dares being incarnated in weak humanity…that will not turn away from the crosses of history…that does not hold back in emptying itself…that dares to be the Church of the Poor.

> Through this Church, the face of Jesus who loves the poor…will shine forth in Asia.[239]

The prophetic aspect of Jesus' life is pertinent to the reality and understanding of grace. The divine presence that abides in persons is Christ's Spirit who keeps alive God's love and care for the poor so that when persons experience the joy of personal giftedness which they owe to the interior enrichment of the Spirit, they also gain a grasp of the reality that personal and shared selfishness has caused the suffering and poverty of other people. The poor are not any less gifted by God, but the corporate selfishness in humanity has nevertheless inflicted suffering on many. Those who do experience deep grace are often made more sensitive to this negative reality alongside their interior knowledge of having been blessed by God with many gifts.

Interior knowledge of the poverty and suffering of others which follows from the grace-driven appreciation of giftedness is comparable to the grace of contrition which is very often concurrent with the deep sense of indebtedness to God's love. Very often, when we are granted the consoling grace to feel God's love for us, it is then that we are also shown how remiss we have been at reciprocating that love. Both are grace-driven and scripture attests the reality of this dynamic. The stories of Zaccheus (Lk 19:1-10), the woman caught in adultery (Jn 8:1-11), and the woman who washed Jesus' feet (Lk 7:36-50) are examples that demonstrate this dynamic. After being shown great love by the Lord, each of them was inspired towards deeper contrition, and in the case of Zaccheus, a renewed sense of generosity. In a similar way, the grace that instills in persons a deep appreciation of their giftedness is the same grace that widens their perception and sensitivity to a negative reality: that the lack of generosity has somehow formed part of the shared selfishness that causes poverty and suffering upon others. In other words, the sense of being loved and forgiven that grace engenders also increases one's personal sense of sin and selfishness.

---

[239] ITC, "Being Church in Asia: Journeying with the Spirit into Fuller Life", 224-225.

Grace brings both a sense of personal enrichment and the awareness of the impoverishing effects of sin.

The history of salvation has shown how God loves the poor. This love was made particularly distinct in the person and work of Jesus who brought the reign of God closely to the poor: the sick, the disabled, the marginalized, the mourning. Socio-religious boundaries and opposition notwithstanding, Jesus brought himself into close, personal, even physical contact with the poor. The words he spoke to them and about them were far kinder and more favorable than the words he had for those who already presumed themselves irreproachable in the eyes of the law and of God. Most of all, to the weak and the rejected, the humbled and contrite, Jesus gave renewed hope, strength, and the promise of a new life.

Jesus lived out the Father's self-giving to humanity not only through a healing ministry of love but also through a progressive ministry of prophetic words and deeds. He witnessed against ignorance about God's love and corrected the impression about God's remoteness by teaching with authority and personal example that God's reign is all about divine nearness and availability as Abba (e.g., Mt 5:3-12; Mk 1:15; Lk 7:20-23; Jn 5:24-30). He protested the discrimination and marginalization that Israel's theocracy perpetuated by widening his sphere of friendship to include precisely those whom religious society had rejected as reprehensible, unclean, or punished with afflictions by God (e.g., Lk 15:3-7, 8-10, 11-32; 13:10-17; Mk 2:13-15). He challenged people's constricted and self-serving representations of God's justice by rebuking the superiority and self-righteousness especially of the Pharisees, the Sadducees, and the Scribes (e.g., Mt 15:1-20; Mk 7:5-23; Lk 11:42-52). He gave new meaning to the seeming pointlessness and irrevocability of suffering and persecution in this life by freeing the anguished from their present burdens as well as assuring the people of the coming of the definitive and final sovereignty of divine justice and new life. Whatever persecutions people endured today for his sake would thereafter be reckoned as righteousness by God in the final and eternal reign (Mt 16:24-27; Mk 8:34-38; Jn 14:23-28; 15:18-57).

Jesus' example of and call to discipleship for the poor was transformative not only of individual lives but also of the religious outlook, principles, and the very faith of the community. Scandalous as it was to his detractors, Jesus struck prophetically at the heart of that against which people were often harshly judged: the law, which some authorities had encrusted in their own, years-long, narrow, prohibitive interpretation and application. By his liberation of the poor, he actually also "freed" the law by re-associating it with God and God's supreme commandment of love—especially for those that lived a diminished life. The Sabbath, otherwise a most holy day rendered inviolate by the law, was made for people and not the other way around, Jesus declared (Mk 2:27). By healing on many Sabbath days, he showed that compassion most needed by the suffering—and not so much the letter of the law itself—constituted the heart of God's law, and therefore formed the heart of God's will.

Jesus' respect for poor people over the strict observance of the letter of the law was well-known, his criticism of authorities strident, and his forgiveness of sinners mortifying to the theocracy. Jesus' opponents were apprehensive about the man's capacity to transform not only a few lives but the wider community. Putting Jesus to trial and executing him in full sight of everyone would be the solution to this affront to tradition. It would overturn everything he had said and done "against" God's holy law. His death as a common subversive could eventually expunge whatever trace of contentiousness might still be smoldering in his followers' collective imagination.

Freely accepting his fate when he was given up to death, Jesus confirmed only the more evidently his solidarity with the persecuted, the oppressed, and the poor—with all those whose lives suffered and were diminished by their many "deaths" within self-righteous society. Innocent and abandoned, Jesus died a poor man. But just as his earthly life revealed the beginning of God's reign of mercy in history, his Resurrection assured the eternity of that reign just as he promised.

> The Resurrection reveals also the meaning of God's Kingdom in the present: the life of God is shown to be present in powerlessness, wealth in poverty, love in

> desolation, abundance in emptiness, and life in death. In other words, if the life of Jesus showed that the love of God could reach sinners, the sick, and foreigners, those who, according to the prevailing socio-religious norms[,] had no place, the Resurrection shows that God's love, the source of the fullness of the Kingdom, could reach us even in the face of death, the obstacle inimical to every human endeavor.[240]

Jesus' resurrection was the clearest evidence that his ministry to bring new life to the poor, the oppressed, and the marginalized had crossed the boundary of time. Because God raised from death the innocent and abandoned Messiah, then the poor and the suffering with whom he identified himself would thereupon be understood as always in the heart of God. Jesus' intimacy with the poor would now perdure in the world through his Spirit who would continue taking the side of the poor and inspiring the rest to share in giving new life to them.

Death-dealing poverty in all its allied forms is barely justifiable in a world that God has created and to which God communicates relentlessly as its very life. Where there are sufficient resources and opportunities which God meant for all to enjoy, that there thrive incredibly wealthy and powerful communities while the rest remain hungry and totally under the often oppressive sway of the powerful—this man-made inequity must be counter to the fullness of life for which Christ prophetically lived. Judging from Jesus' love for the poor and his protest against forces that perpetuate oppression, the life-giving Spirit must be, to use Ignatius of Loyola's word in the Spiritual Exercises, "laboring" (no. 236) in order that God's gifts may benefit all. In view of this, the Spirit must be laboring to draw persons together in grace, to form communities in which the wealthy and powerful might share their graces with the impoverished and powerless. The way Ignatius of Loyola sees God moving creatures to sustain them, to give them life, make them temples of the Spirit, and create them in the divine image and likeness, so does the Spirit continue to move humanity towards the fullness of life that takes after

---

[240] Lennan, *Risking*, 80.

the image and likeness of the Creator. God continues creating and sustaining humanity not only as beings outside of God. All that God gives life to, God "retains in Himself by the unsurpassable mystery of His grace…."[241] The Spirit in the world continues the divine impulse of creation directed to all, so that everyone may share in the fullness that divine creativity brings, especially those precisely weakened and diminished by man-made, death-dealing forces. God's care for humanity through the Spirit is a self-communication of divine life. Christ came that persons might precisely live and have life to the full (Jn 10:10). The grace of indwelling is an empowerment not only to follow Christ as an exterior exemplar of love for the poor. The Spirit of grace is the Spirit of Christ himself active and "laboring" within persons and communities—bestowing an interior energy, a desire, even a compulsion for persons to move out of themselves and relate meaningfully with the poor. Grace is the Lover of the poor active within us and deepening our sense of the poor. At the same time, Christ within the poor is the Spirit that wills them to be uplifted and liberated, that reaches out to the community of the fortunate for assistance and sustenance.

In preparation for the sixth FABC plenary assembly, S. Arokiasamy SJ writes:

> The Asian peoples' struggles for fuller humanity derive from their yearning for liberation or wholeness as persons and peoples, and for a life of dignity, freedom and solidarity to empower them to become communities of compassion. The vocation and mission of the Church is a dynamic continuation of the mission of Christ, who came that "they may have life, and have it abundantly" (Jn 10:10).[242]

---

[241] Karl Rahner, *Spiritual Exercises*, trans. K. Baker (New York: Herder and Herder, 1966), 276.

[242] S. Aroksiamy, "Asia: The Struggle for Life in the Midst of Death and Destruction" in *FABC Papers* No. 70, at http://www.ucanews.com/html/fabc-papers/fabc-70.htm (accessed 7 January 2011), 3.

In what may be considered as its response to the prophetic spirit of grace, the FABC says at the end of the same assembly:

> In profound solidarity with suffering humanity and led by the Spirit of life, we need to immerse ourselves in Asia's cultures of poverty and deprivation, from whose depths the aspirations for love and life are most poignant and compelling. Serving life demands communion with every woman and man seeking and struggling for life, in the way of Jesus' solidarity with humanity.[243]

CONCLUSION: GRACE AS THE WIDENESS OF DIVINE LOVE

To conclude the major points in this section, I will use the opening of chapter three of St. Paul's letter to the Ephesians in which Paul addresses the non-Jews in order to impart a message to Jewish Christians about God's will to save all people, Jews and non-Jews alike. From this passage, one gathers that grace in its deepest sense is rooted and grounded in the "breadth, length, height and depth" of divine love. In a word, grace is the "wideness" of God's love, a wideness that grounds the participative, dialogical, and prophetic reality of God's self-communication to persons.

The quote of the passage in full:

> This is the reason that I Paul am a prisoner for Christ Jesus for the sake of you Gentiles—for surely you have already heard of the commission of God's grace that was given me for you, and how the mystery was made known to me by revelation, as I wrote above in a few words, a reading of which will enable you to perceive my understanding of the mystery of Christ. In former generations this mystery was not made known to humankind, as it has now been revealed to his holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit:

---

[243] PA 4, in *FAPA* 2, 8.

> that is, the Gentiles have become fellow heirs, members of the same body, and sharers in the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel. Of this gospel I have become a servant according to the gift of God's grace that was given me by the working of his power. Although I am the very least of all the saints, this grace was given to me to bring to the Gentiles the news of the boundless riches of Christ, and to make everyone see what is the plan of the mystery hidden for ages in God who created all things; so that through the church the wisdom of God in its rich variety might now be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places. This was in accordance with the eternal purpose that he has carried out in Christ Jesus our Lord, in whom we have access to God in boldness and confidence through faith in him. I pray therefore that you may not lose heart over my sufferings for you; they are your glory. For this reason I bow my knees before the Father, from whom every family in heaven and on earth takes its name. I pray that, according to the riches of his glory, he may grant that you may be strengthened in your inner being with power through his Spirit, and that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith, as you are being rooted and grounded in love. I pray that you may have the power to comprehend, with all the saints, what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, so that you may be filled with all the fullness of God. Now to him who by the power at work within us is able to accomplish abundantly far more than all we can ask or imagine, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations, forever and ever. Amen. (Eph 3:1-21)

The passage expresses important aspects of the communal dimension of God's action in grace through Christ's Spirit, first of which is gratuitousness. As the FABC has affirmed in its communal discernment, the Spirit has freely made Godself known to the human community.[244] Grace unites communities by bringing all

---

[244] OTC, "The Spirit at Work in Asia Today", 238.

persons into intimate knowledge of God as a person of deep love for everyone. Secondly, grace evokes in persons not only an appreciation of the divine presence; it also engenders in them love and obedience to Christ's call to share with the "Jews and non-Jews" the Spirit's presence. To participate in the divine life of God is at the same time to share that gift of life and love with others. The Spirit's dwelling within humanity and humanity's sharing in the divine life ground the participative dynamic of grace as well as the call to the Church for greater participation in fostering peace, unity, and human dignity with other communities.

Thirdly, the faith, appreciation, and welcome which Paul describes that non-Jews bear towards Christ re-emphasize that there is a breadth in God's self-giving. It is inclusive of all people. The Spirit, present in everyone, inspires members of the community to commit to an Absolute Reality greater than themselves. Furthermore, the faith that the Spirit awakens in the people of different cultures or religions, as the FABC has discerned, reaffirms the Spirit's community-forming action by which all who receive God's grace are drawn to communion with one another. This grounds the dialogical dynamic of grace as well as the call to the Asian Church to foster an attitude of dialogue with other communities.

A fourth aspect of God's grace, as Paul's letter shows, is the importance of the Church community through which God's revelation is made known to the world. The Spirit of Christ dwells in the heart of humanity. Grace constitutes the Church as a community that channels God's self-giving, self-revealing love to the world especially to the poor. For Paul, the constitution of the Church has been God's purpose for the world from eternity concretized in the gathering, empowering, and healing ministry of Jesus, and carried on by the community-forming Spirit. As God cares for humanity through Christ and the outpouring of the Spirit, persons must also take care of the underprivileged, the marginalized, the poor, and the suffering. Caring for the poor is constitutive of building the community, the *ekklesia* in which everyone belongs. This grounds the prophetic dynamic of grace as well as the call to the Asian Church to

live in prophetic witness especially to the upliftment of the poor in God's Kingdom.

The four words with which Paul describes divine love also describe divine grace, that is, as having breadth, length, height, and depth. Considering the Asian Church's thrust to be a communion of communities, breadth may be understood as the universality of God's salvation that is meant for all peoples of all cultures and religions. Height may be taken to mean the divinity from which God descends in self-outpouring to all the earth, especially through the Incarnation which bridges divinity and humanity in Jesus. Depth may be understood as the still-undiscovered mysteries of God's loving will that people have yet to reckon with and appreciate through the different faiths and cultures through which the Spirit manifests Godself. In a word, there is a wideness to God's grace. Grace is the ongoing and relentless forward movement of the Spirit in the world, onto the fulfillment of the unifying reign of God that is inclusive of all people.

Yves Congar in *I Believe in the Holy Spirit* writes:

> [The] Holy Spirit is, as his name indicates, a going out, an impulse, an 'ecstasy'. That is why, if the Spirit is, in God, the term of the substantial communication that goes out from the Father, it is suitable though not necessary, that this movement should continue, no longer by a mode of substantial transference, but by mode of free and creative will…. God, in other words, can exist, as it were, outside himself. God is Love and he is Grace. Love and Grace are hypostatized in the Spirit. Grace is a synthesis of generosity, freedom and power. For the most high God, it is also the possibility of being not only with the lowliest, but also with the most wretched of creatures. Grace even makes God prefer what is wretched to what is sublime.[245]

Because grace is the Spirit of the self-revealing God, it is, taking from Paul, a broadening, heightening, deepening, and widening

---

[245] Yves Congar, *I Believe in the Holy Spirit*, trans. D. Smith (New York: Herder and Herder, 1983), 149.

experience of love. Since this love is a reaching forth or a "going outside of Himself"[246] by God towards humanity as Congar says, then its attendant effect on the beneficiary must also be a comparable "going outside" of oneself and of one's community in order to be generous to others and freeing of others. The Spirit impels individuals and communities towards this going-out, self-giving to others, and welcoming of others.

This is why the call to participation, dialogue, and prophecy which the FABC discerns as its shared self-understanding and vocation is compatible with the broadening and deepening action of the Spirit in grace. Contrariwise, the FABC's observations on the socio-structural effects of a community's self-isolation and self-preoccupation bring into relief the ever-present tendency of communities to disregard the participative, dialogical, and prophetic dimensions of grace. The FABC poses critiques of and challenges to the hierarchy of the institutional Church, to the first world countries, to the Asian communities, and to themselves as a federation by citing the widespread consequences of a community's lack of mindfulness about the participatory, dialogical, and prophetic imperative of God's grace in the Church. Evidently, a community's inadequate understanding of the communal dimension of God's self-revelation eventually gives way to the perpetration of and complicity with societal and structural sin. Abject poverty, sectarian violence, oppression of women and children, religious and racial discrimination, disordered materialism and secularism, modern slavery, and exploitation of poor countries by the wealthy ones are the necessary consequences of the deliberate self-isolation and self-centeredness of societies and institutions, including the Church as a community in the world.[247]

---

[246] Ibid.

[247] See for instance the critiques and challenges cited by the OHD in "The Prophetic Path to the New Millennium through Social Advocacy" (*FAPA* 3, 52-54); by FIRA (in *FAPA* 3, especially pages 134-137); by BILA on "The Role of Women in Church in Society" (*FAPA* 2, 93-94) and by BISA I through V (*FAPA* 1, 199-227) on Social Action; by FEISA on the "Pastoral Care of Migrants and Refugees: A New Way of Being Church" (*FAPA* 4, 89-133),

Grace is the wideness of God's love. It is God's Spirit that impels that growth in an individual and a community that welcomes it. The Spirit always moves forward—towards the fulfillment of God's universal reign of love, never backwards. The Spirit always moves towards greater communion, never isolation or exclusivity. The Spirit always widens in order that the recipient of grace becomes more inclusive of others. The Spirit always deepens the sense of appreciation of giftedness and therefore also the desire to share the blessings. The Spirit always gives Godself "away" and therefore inspires self-forgetfulness and the laying down of one's life as one's greatest way of loving.

---

and the Plenary Council IV's final statement on the "Asian Family" (*FAPA* 1, 179-184)—to name a few. The FABC does not exempt itself from critique and challenge especially in the Third Plenary Assembly (*FAPA* 1, pages 57-58) where the FABC outlines substantial and honest self-critique in the face of its being remiss in being a participatory, dialogical, and prophetic presence in the community.

CHAPTER FOUR

THE DYNAMIC OF SELF-CONSCIOUSNESS AND SELF-FORGETFULNESS IN GRACE AS SHOWN IN ECCLESIAL HOSPITALITY

In his article "Forgotten Dogmatic Initiatives", Karl Rahner revisits Vatican II's teaching on the universality of salvation—a subject he believed was getting inadequate attention and theological elaboration:

> Another point that must be considered in connection with our theme…is the hope that clearly emerged in the Council of a really universal salvation of the whole world and our ensuing new relationship to the other churches and communities, as well as to the non-Christian world religions…. [The Council] professes that grace is offered to all human beings…. This universal hope is part of the folly of the cross that is expected from us, today's Christians…. In the long run, it is the hope of eternal life—but for all.[248]

In grace God offers Godself as gift not only to Christians but to the entire human community. Communitarian participation, dialogue, and prophecy make up the Church's cooperation with God in the call to welcome and be of service to all people in whom God dwells and for whom God pours out Godself. However, the grace of

---

[248] Karl Rahner, "Forgotten Dogmatic Initiatives" in *TI*, trans. J. Donceel, S.J., vol. 22 (New York: Crossroad, 1991), 103.

God does not automatically render communities spiritually mature and responsive all at once. Rahner states:

> [While] praising grace, we should not forget that it does not always rush over us in a wave of victory, sweeping aside all obstacles; nor is it a simple and unhindered growth…. Generally speaking, the spiritual life is grace precisely because it must be painstakingly cultivated day by day; it requires constant training and drilling. In short, the spiritual life is also (even though not exclusively or even predominantly) *work, planned exercise,* and *conscious development* of the believing, hoping, and loving life in us according to the laws of nature and grace, and according to the motives of a total dedication to God.[249]

In a community constituted by God's grace, this day by day cultivation, constant training and practicing may be concretely demonstrated in the Church's commitment to two important dynamics of grace: self-consciousness and self-forgetfulness.

To concretely demonstrate and explain the self-consciousness and self-forgetfulness dynamics that grace involves, I will frame the discussion within a cultural trait prized by Asians: hospitality. In hospitality, self-consciousness and self-forgetfulness play a central role. This chapter will show that the Church, in its response to God's gracious self-giving, must itself be hospitable and gracious to other communities. To be so involves a volitional sense of self-consciousness and self-forgetfulness especially in fostering communion with communities through participation, dialogue, and prophetic presence in the world.[250]

---

[249] Karl Rahner, *The Practice of Faith: A Handbook of Contemporary Spirituality*, ed. K. Lehmann and A. Raffelt (New York: Crossroad, 1984), 236.

[250] The words "self-awareness" and "self-knowledge" will be used alternately as synonymous to "self-consciousness"; the words "self-denial", "selflessness", "self-sacrifice", "self-giving", and "self-abnegation" will be used alternately as synonymous to "self-forgetfulness".

Self-Consciousness and Self-Forgetfulness in Grace

Shared Self-Consciousness

Communitarian self-consciousness refers to a reflexive, shared awareness and remembrance of the gratuity of God's love of and providence to all persons in all communities. The grace that the Church enjoys is a gift, not a right. The Church has come to realize more deeply that God has freely willed to share this grace with all men and women in some way. In absolute freedom, God participates in all people's lives, speaks through signs that reveal divine will, and offers to all the opportunity to love God by caring for others within and outside one's community. Shared self-consciousness also means recognizing one's unworthiness in the face of God's generosity—that one receives from God more than one has given to others, that one is given greater importance by God than how one has actually valued others.

Secondly, a graced community that welcomes other communities is constantly aware that the gift is also a responsibility that bears directly on all relationships. This call goes back to Christ's mission to his friends at the Last Supper: "If I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. For I have set you an example, that you also should do what I have done to you" (Jn 13:14-15). In such hospitality, the receivers of the divine self-gift humbly share their gift of self with those they welcome in graciousness.

Shared self-consciousness fixed upon God's gratuitous love finds support in both the Old and the New Testament faith communities. The People of God value the communal remembrance of Yahweh's liberating grace which the dramatic events of the Exodus manifested. The memory which Israel keeps alive and ritualizes at every Passover meal (cf. Deut 6:5) makes present the people's confidence in God's faithful, saving presence through history. From one generation to the next, the solemn repetition of the story of deliverance reemphasizes God's gratuitous trustworthiness and fidelity to the Covenant for Israel's well-being. At the same time, this self-understanding holds the community to its solemn commitment to Yahweh who has brought

freedom.[251] Likewise, in the New Testament, when Christ invites his friends to partake of his body and blood "in memory of me" (cf. Lk 22:19; 1 Cor 11:23-26), he urges them to remember how he has devoted his entire life for the salvation of all. To "do this in memory of me" missions the disciples to offer their lives in selfless service of others in the community.[252] From one generation to the next, these words of solemn consecration and mission make present to Christians their self-understanding: that they are the recipients of the total self-giving of Christ that impels them to give themselves to others. This forms the core-value of the community and ushers all people towards the salvation Christ wrought through his self-giving.

In this respect, both the Israelite community of the old covenant and the Lord's community of disciples in the new are to understand themselves as freed, forgiven, saved, and chosen as God's friends through the outpouring of divine love, unwarranted by the community but freely given to it. The community is to understand itself as constituted by God to be united and welcoming of each other in mutual self-giving. As Jon Sobrino notes, "God draws near because God is good; and God draws near as that which is good for human beings…. God has heard the cries of the people, God is mindful of the people…. God approaches *in order* to save…*as* savior. God draws near *for* love, and *as* love."[253]

Shared Self-Forgetfulness

Since the core of the grace experience is God's self-giving love of people, being a communion of communities calls for shared selflessness, for humility. To participate in the life of other communities, engage

---

[251] Paul D. Hanson, *The People Called: The Growth of Community in the Bible* (Louisville: John Knox Press, 2001), 88-89.

[252] Robert J. Karris, O.F.M., "The Gospel According to Luke" in *The New Jerome Biblical Commentary*, ed. R. E. Brown, J. A. Fitzmyer, S.J., and R. E. Murphy, OCarm. (Upper Saddle River: Prentice Hall, 1990), 716.

[253] Jon Sobrino, *The Principle of Mercy* (New York: Orbis, 1997), 113. Italicized in original text.

in open dialogue, and care for the poor entail a self-expropriation that is not always easy but is indicative of obedience to Christ's call to deny oneself, take up the cross, and follow him, "for whoever loses his life for my sake…will find it" (Mt 16:25; Mk 8:35). Self-forgetfulness in grace refers to that healthy, willful attitude of prizing the welfare of other people as well as—if not more than—one's own institution. It refers to a Christ-centered sense of shared self-denial, a corporate readiness to welcome others, to relieve them of the burden that institutional and societal sins have inflicted. It is a shared willingness to delay self-gratification, fostering instead what will benefit those who are at the wider reach of the community, who have the greater need for support and acceptance. Present-day examples of communities that "decrease" so that others may "increase" abound. These are groups whose members have been devoting themselves to welcoming and helping other people so that regardless of anyone's particular faith, culture, tribe, etc., all that come within their wide reach may live more fully dignified lives. Among them are communities of teachers from North America and Europe who serve in poor areas like Belize, East Africa, and El Salvador (the Mission Society, the Volunteer Missionary Movement, World Concern, etc.), volunteer nurses and doctors in disaster areas, war-torn communities, and poverty-stricken countries (Médecins Sans Frontières, Physicians for Peace, Project HOPE, etc.), and communities of mostly middle class members like Gawad Kalinga in the Philippines or Techo Por La Humanidad in Chile that build houses for the poor.

Self-forgetfulness is not self-abasement. As many of these communities show, shared self-forgetfulness is not a thoughtless disregard of one's own well-being such that one abandons all good sense in order to put oneself in harm's way, with very little level-headedness or discernment. Shared self-forgetfulness is an act of well-founded and sound faith in the fact that all people, especially those in dire need, deserve one's welcome and self-denial. For the Church, this shared self-denial is an act of deference to the Lord's call to sell everything one has in order to receive others, especially the poor, and thereby follow the Lord (Mk 10:21). Christ reveals the self-giving God by freely laying his life down for his community, he

"who, though he was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited, but emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, being born in human likeness. And being found in human form, he emptied himself and became obedient to the point of death—even death on a cross" (Phil 2:6-8).

The self-consciousness and self-forgetfulness dynamic in the experience of grace emerges clearly in the concrete experience of graciousness or hospitality. This will be the topic of the succeeding part.

Hospitality and the Dynamic of Self-Consciousness and Self-Forgetfulness

Hospitality

In his first letter, Peter writes:

> Offer hospitality to one another without grumbling. Each of you should use whatever gift you have received to serve others, as faithful stewards of God's grace in its various forms. If anyone speaks, they should do so as one who speaks the very words of God. If anyone serves, they should do so with the strength God provides, so that in all things God may be praised through Jesus Christ. To him be the glory and the power for ever and ever. Amen. (1 Pet. 4:10-11)

The Christian virtue of hospitality finds an important place in the Asian culture. Hospitality has a collective rather than an individualistic horizon of meaning. It is more often associated with shared effort rather than with one person's trait or social aptitude. To welcome guests with graciousness validates the goodness and decency of a family or community. The brief description that follows embodies some fundamental characteristics and dispositions in a Filipino family when receiving guests into the household.

In Filipino hospitality, for instance, it is important that the hosts have their guests feel physically at ease and emotionally connected to the welcoming family as far as this may be achieved. No matter how humble the home happens to be, the family prepares for the

welcome by tidying up the house—ridding it of the unsightly or out of place, making sure there is clean space within which the guests may move comfortably. The best room is given to the visitor even if it requires the occupants to vacate it for the time being. In the case of a one-room home where a poor family sleeps on the floor, the guest is often offered a bench for a "bed". It is not unusual for poor families with a large brood to send some of their children to the neighbors to spend the night in order to open up a space on the floor for the guests. Elders admonish the children to put on their best behavior when the guests arrive and through the remainder of their stay. This means, for instance, that they are not to make too much noise or interrupt conversations between the elders and the guests. The older children are required to stay around and help in the house while the younger ones are told to play outside. They are to use the honorific "*po*" or "*ho*" when addressing the visitor, and are not to speak out of turn, especially when they are not being spoken to by their elders.

Meals are a particularly important setting in which Filipino hospitality as table fellowship also comes into clear view. Even outside of the household, Filipinos almost never eat without motioning over a friend or an acquaintance within earshot to join them at table. One must always share the "*grasya ng Dios*" (the "grace of God", as food is respectfully called by Filipinos) even if only to bid someone share a meal, regardless of whether the invited person actually decides to eat or not. Filipinos rarely leave someone uninvited when they are at table. Even strangers who walk up to a group eating a meal will usually be invited to eat, however humble the spread. In the household setting, hospitality calls for fare that is more special than usual. Even a poor family that ordinarily eats fish (because it is cheaper than meat) will offer guests a meal with special, more expensive foods like pork, chicken, and canned products. At table, guests are served first. The hosts serve themselves modestly, so that the visitors can help themselves to a second serving. No matter how poor a family may be, the good dishes and silverware are brought out—or borrowed from neighbors—for guests.

All Filipinos, regardless of economic status, go to great lengths to make guests feel as comfortable, satisfied, worry-free, and part of the family as they can. They are quite willing to make financial sacrifices to do so. Families of slender means are as hospitable, and often more hospitable, than the well-to-do. Making the guests feel as though they were in their own home is key to hospitality, just as the hosts themselves would hope to be welcomed in someone else's household or community.

Self-Consciousness/Forgetfulness in Hospitality

The gracious welcome of a guest into one's own home entails intentional self-consciousness and self-forgetfulness for the host.

One of the first things that an ordinary Filipino family typically tells a guest is, "*Pasensiya na kayo sa bahay namin*," freely translated: "Please forgive the simplicity (or smallness) of our house." The same self-effacing statement introduces a table fellowship: "Please forgive the humble spread that we are able to afford." In Filipino hospitality, there is always a self-consciousness of how humble or small one's home is. But at the same time, the family is constantly mindful that this home is gift, a fruit of both grace and human effort made possible by God. Secondly, self-consciousness in hospitality includes the host's constant sense of gratitude towards the guest who accepts the invitation to be hosted. The guest's willingness to stay in a family's home provides the hosts all the more reason to treat the guest with utmost respect. Thirdly, self-consciousness in hospitality refers to the constant awareness of the attendant inadequacies of one's family. Very often, for instance, when a member of a family inadvertently exhibits a mild gaucheness or bad habit, the guest is gently told: "Please forgive my husband for his peculiarity…" or "I'm really sorry for my children's manners…" or "Pardon my mother-in-law, she's old and doesn't really mean to offend." This self-consciousness over one's foibles is meant to make the guest feel even more at ease knowing that the family has its own share of frailties around which one can freely be oneself. But as part of graciousness, the family sees beyond the guest's idiosyncrasies and tries its best to appropriate his or her peculiarities into the family's

matter of course. Lastly, a Filipino family is always aware of what is culturally called *gulong ng palad*, or the "circle of fate", or "the wheel of life" which ascribes persons to be hosts at one time and guests at another. Therefore, how one hosts a guest today may well have everything to do with how a person or loved ones might be treated as a guest tomorrow.

At the same time, graciousness also calls for a good measure of self-forgetfulness. It entails the shared effort to put on hold one's comfort and needs in order to devote greater attention to providing the guest the most welcome comfort, like expropriating a sleeping space or reserving the choicest part of the meal for the guest. Because it is not polite of the host that a guest come home to an empty dwelling in his or her comings and goings, at least one member of the family comes home early to welcome the guest's arrival even if this entails leaving work or school sooner than usual. There are times when the host takes time off from work to show the guest around or to simply accompany him or her even if this is tantamount to losing a few days' precious wages. As far as possible, the guest is not to pay for any meal out for as long as the host is with him or her, unless the guest insists on doing so.

Self-forgetfulness also includes suspending one's emotional or psychological needs in favor of the guest's. Before a guest arrives, for instance, family tensions are often suspended, discord is set aside or provisionally resolved, conflict gives way to temporary peace. Family members try their best to foster the needed harmony, however difficult it can sometimes be, for the sake of the visitor.

In order to be a hospitable community as a response to God's presence and call to be participative, dialogical, and prophetic, the Asian Church should practice an analogous kind of self-consciousness and self-forgetfulness which should give particular shape, direction, and disposition to its participative, dialogical, and prophetic missions. This will be the topic of the succeeding parts of this chapter.

Ecclesial Hospitality: Gracious Self-Consciousness and Self-Forgetfulness in Fostering the Communion of Communities

Just as Asians prize and practice hospitality to guests, the Asian Church can take on the same virtue and practice in its thrust towards being a communion of communities. Hospitality to other communities, specifically in participation with other cultures, dialogue with other faiths, and prophetic action for the poor, involves a substantial measure of self-consciousness and self-forgetfulness for the Church. As the succeeding section will show, ecclesial hospitality involves self-consciousness and self-forgetfulness in order to be receptive to non-religious, non-Christian communities, to work for harmony through openness to dialogue with other cultures and faiths, and to welcome and care for the poor of the community.

Ecclesial Hospitality through Participation in and Receptivity to the Lay Communities

According to Aloysius Pieris's theology of liberation set in the Asian context, for Christian theology to find a place in the spiritual and practical lives of Asians, the Church must reckon with two prevailing Asian conditions if it is to communicate God's reign to the community: poverty and religiousness.[254]

> There is in the Asian ethos, a yet-undiscovered point at which poverty and religiousness seem to coalesce in order to procreate the Asian character of this continent. In fact, history attests…that the *theological* attempts to encounter Asian religions with no radical concern for Asia's poor and the *ideological* programs that presume to eradicate Asia's poverty with naïve disregard for its religiousness…have both proved to be misdirected zeal.[255]

---

[254] Peter Phan, *Christianity with an Asian Face* (New York: Orbis, 2003), 82.

[255] Aloysius Pieris, *An Asian Theology of Liberation* (New York: Orbis, 1988), 69.

Pieris points out that Jesus' mission itself consisted in both prophetic asceticism and authentic spirituality.[256] The Lord primarily concerned himself with the marginalized and the sinners whom society rejected but who were more receptive to the Good News than was the aristocracy. The poor possessed a "spirituality of their own" that welcomed Jesus' news of imminent liberation.[257]

For a communion with the poverty-stricken communities to continue, the Church must constantly and directly participate in the life of the poor and diligently endeavor to understand how they live and believe, what they pray to God for, and the depth of their reliance on Providence. For instance, parish communities—especially the clergy that lead them—must spend significant time not just organizing fund raising projects for the poor, distributing goods to them, or getting to know their plight through resource persons who report about them. Bishops, priests, and seminarians can still spend more time being and living with the poor. Notional knowledge of poverty must give way to personal and sustained encounter with the victims of that poverty. Fortunately, faith communities in many Asian societies have a gift of credible advocacy for the poor.

Furthermore, the Church has the numbers and the human resources to actually influence civil sectors and national governments to dedicate to the poor the most urgent attention. Especially in countries where the Christian churches enjoy the grace of membership and positive influence on their faithful (in the Philippines, South Korea, and India, for instance), the community leaders can actually use that influence to petition and urge national governance towards advocating for the upliftment of the poor. Many Church leaders in parochial communities in the Philippines, for instance, have used this gift of advocacy to influence civil leaders into prioritizing programs benefitting the poor. Bishops have also endorsed and participated in civil initiatives that organize non-partisan voters' education sessions

---

[256] Ibid., 46.

[257] Ibid., 46.

to help the electorate, the majority of which come from the poor, discern which candidates to elect. When the survival and upliftment of the poor are at stake, the Church must be an active and visible participant in the affairs of the state. It must not only educate the poor in being better citizens of the nation, but also empower them to more actively and vigilantly participate in the decision-making processes in the civil arena.

Another concrete example where the Church can still be receptive to the needs of its members through more significant participation in their practical lives: the issue of over-population and poverty in the Philippines. In the government's effort to come up with solutions to this complex problem, the State will finally vote for or against in June 2011 on the Reproductive Health (RH) Bill, which seeks to legalize the promotion of all effective natural and modern methods of family planning that are medically safe and legal.[258] This includes making available and accessible "a full range of methods, techniques, supplies and services that contribute to reproductive and sexual health and well-being by preventing and solving reproductive health-related problems in order to achieve enhancement of life and personal relations" (Sect. 4g). Under "reproductive health care" fall various measures for maternal and infant nutrition, the promotion of breastfeeding, prevention of abortion and management of post-abortion complications, prevention and management of reproductive tract infections, HIV/AIDS and other sexually transmitted diseases, male involvement and participation in the achievement of reproductive health, and an integrated sexuality and family planning education in the fifth grade to senior-year curricula.

The Catholic Bishops' Conference of the Philippines (CBCP) maintains an unconditional insistence on natural contraception as the one and only alternative to total abstinence from sexual intercourse. The first of its major objections to the Bill:

---

[258] For the full text of the Bill, see http://jlp-law.com/blog/full-text-of-house-bill-no-5043-reproductive-health-and-population-development-act-of-2008/.

> [The RH Bill] does not protect the health of the sacred human life that is being formed or born. The very name "contraceptive" already reveals the anti-life nature of the means that the RH bill promotes. These artificial means are fatal to human life, either preventing it from fruition or actually destroying it. Moreover, scientists have known for a long time that contraceptives may cause cancer. Contraceptives are hazardous to a woman's health.[259]

The CBCP believes that the Bill gives no due consideration to the Filipino culture, the sacredness of human life, and the value of moral principles.

State and Church leaders are now locked in the horns of a dilemma; so, too, are the citizens and the faithful. Some critical and educated sectors in civil society notice that the Church seems to have narrowed the scope of political conscience to a single issue, that of contraception, at the expense of other urgent issues out of which over-population is a symptom of deeper societal problems like poverty of the people and corruption in the government. While the Bill is far from perfect (especially with words and phrases that need further definition or specification—like "contraception", that is, if it specifically refers to fertilization of the egg cell or to the implantation of an embryo in the womb), there are significant parts that are worth saving and promulgating. In a statement issued jointly by the Loyola School of Theology and the John Carroll Institute of Church and Social Issues, Fathers Eric Genilo, John Carroll, and Joaquin Bernas state:

> It is unfortunate that the debate has focused only on whether the Bill should be passed or rejected in its present form. Either option would not be good for Filipinos. The Church sees in the proposed Bill serious flaws that can lead to violations of human rights and freedom of conscience. It would not be acceptable to pass it in its present form. Total rejection of the Bill, however, will not

---

[259] Catholic Bishops Conference of the Philippines (CBCP), "Choosing Life, Rejecting the Bill: A Pastoral Letter of the CBCP" at http://cbcpnews.com/?q=node/14472.

> change the status quo of high rates of infant mortality, maternal deaths, and abortions. It is a moral imperative that such dehumanizing conditions should not be allowed to continue. What is needed is a third option: critical and constructive engagement. By working together to amend the objectionable provisions of the Bill and retain the provisions that actually improve the lives of Filipinos, both the proponents and opponents of the Bill can make a contribution to protection of the dignity of Filipinos and an improvement of their quality of life.[260]

If the Church is to continue fostering communion with non-ecclesial communities, its leaders must diligently study the necessary correlation between religious culture and civil culture, faithfulness to religion and upright citizenship, personal spirituality and civil responsibility, leadership of the Church and responsibility to civil development. There are more problems that surround the support of or the opposition to the Reproductive Health Bill, for instance, than simply the question of sexual morality. There is the problem of poverty, for instance, that is clearly fed by the lack of sexual responsibility in many poor families. There is also the question of whether or not there is sufficient education initiated and sustained by both the state and the Church to teach the citizenry regarding sexuality and civil responsibility, about religion and moral responsibility, about making the right choice according to conscience.

The fundamental correlation between ecclesial life and civil life cannot be denied. When it comes to the overall well-being (that is, not just moral or spiritual but also physical, economic, and civil well-being) especially of the poor and powerless in society, the Church must continue to initiate and engage in critical and constructive engagement with the State. Some questions, for instance, might help the Church begin this engagement: When does Church teaching contribute to moral and civil uprightness, and when might it be

---

[260] Eric Genilo, S.J., et al., "Talking Points for Dialogue on the RH Bill: Towards Critical and Constructive Engagement" at http://www.admu.edu.ph/index.php?p=120&type=2&aid=9056 (accessed 5 January 2011).

complicit in creating national problems like over-population, poverty, fatalism, over-spiritualization? Why do some Church teachings vis-à-vis civil concerns fall on deaf ears? Is it because its leaders need greater participation in the pressing dilemmas that ordinary people face every day? Does the Church leave sufficient room for being challenged or for dialogue? How much education does the Church do in forming not only religious conscience but also civil conscience? In the Philippines, Church authority can still much more assiduously investigate and humbly admit the reasons why natural family planning alone somehow fails in many sectors of the populace. Over-population is not only a civil problem that only the government must solve. It is also a socio-religious issue that has a stake in the national problem towards which the Church must contribute a practical solution.

Receptivity on the part of the Church is a kind of self-forgetfulness that is important to fostering a communion of communities. For the Church to be more hospitable and participative in the life of the people who are members of both Church and civil society, the faith community and its leaders must continually assume not only a pedagogical stance but also that of tutelage. Through greater civil participation and awareness—and the willingness for greater lay participation in its discernment and decision-making—the Church can still learn from the experience and practical expertise of non-clerical communities: the poor, the government, humanitarian groups, women's movements, university professors, etc. Non-ecclesial members come from different vantage points that look at the same reality. There will always be room for the Church to further broaden its vision of several aspects of reality that otherwise remain invisible from within Church walls. Religious authority must have faith in the fact that there are people who have the best intentions for the whole community, people who are much more deeply immersed in realities outside parochial life, many of whom are specialists in their fields of endeavor. This is where greater lay participation and know-how play an important part. It is a sign of self-denial when the Church gives lay representatives more opportunities to educate the Church about areas in which many bishops may not be proficient: psycho-emotional or psycho-sexual integration, economics and statistics,

medical physiology and cellular biology, business administration and management, to name a few.

Ecclesial receptivity which is a measure of self-forgetfulness entails a readiness to listen actively to non-clerical communities about the dilemmas, sufferings, and protests that mark civil and religious life in Asia. It means seeing life-in-the-raw especially that of the poor and the struggling middle class. As a kind of self-forgetfulness, receptivity requires an acknowledgment of the problematic areas of community life where religious authority seems unyielding in its pronouncements and lacking in sympathy with the ordinary folk—like the divorced or separated, the advocates of alternative contraceptive techniques, converts from the Catholic faith to the born-again Christian movement, Muslims, Protestants, etc. Receptivity calls for the consideration of the possibility that a lack of empathy will render the Church less and less relevant to its members' practical lives. In some cases, Church position can even be obstructive to the free exercise of the call of conscience.

Discussing the Philippine Constitution vis-à-vis the Church's wholesale stand against the Reproductive Health Bill, Joaquin Bernas, SJ concludes his editorial, saying:

> Another important element in the debate is the freedom of religious belief. The free exercise of religion guaranteed by the Constitution means more than just the freedom to believe. It also means the freedom to act or not to act according to what one believes. And this freedom is violated when one is compelled to act against one's belief or is prevented from acting according to one's belief. In our society, while people of good faith may find near unanimity on the matter of abortion, there clearly is a sharp division in the matter of contraception. The division is drawn along religious lines. The law as proposed will require people of good faith to act or not to act contrary to what they believe. Concessions must be made so that

> religious liberty will not be violated. The law must allow for the conscientious objector.[261]

The Church may try its best in forming the conscience of its members. But it will eventually have very little control over the many ways by which its well-intended members dutifully choose to use their freedom of conscience and maturely decide what is best for their families and communities.

What if even in its sincere participation in its members' lives and in its receptivity to non-clerical contributions, the Church is ultimately brought face-to-face with an issue that is, to all intents and purposes, un-Christian? In that case, however the Church eventually stands on a particular issue that affects the community, it will have gone through a process of painstaking discernment. Its decision, whether popular or not, will have been a fruit of as many voices as possible. Its final well-considered position will have been the consequence of a sincere and thorough effort at seeing the same reality from its many dimensions. It will have made this decision after discerning with the community, instead of making a choice for it or in its stead.

Ecclesial Hospitality through Welcoming Cultural and Religious Pluralism

After poverty, according to Aloysius Pieris, the second reality one needs to reckon with in view of relevant theologizing in Asia is the presence of many religions. In this respect, hospitality to other religions by the Christian community finds basis in salvation history itself. In his theology of religious diversity, Jacques Dupuis revisits the idea of the Word, the Wisdom, and the Spirit of God to account for the welcome that the Old Testament has towards all people, not just the chosen people. Dupuis tries to show that God was active and participative in communities of faith other than Israel. The Word

---

[261] Joaquin Bernas, S.J., "Church, Constitution, and the RH Bill" in *Philippine Daily Inquirer*, 13 Nov 2008. Fr. Bernas is the dean emeritus of the Ateneo de Manila School of Law. He played a major role in the amendment of the Philippine Constitution in 1986.

not only reveals the law. It also clarifies the presence of Yahweh in his interventions in history.[262] The Word, which is not separate from Yahweh, "is God turning to human beings to reveal himself, God calling human beings to a communion of life. This, as Genesis testifies, is the universal call of humankind."[263] In other words, the historical actions of Yahweh are meant to save not only Israel but all people.

The Spirit of grace is active in all of creation. Vatican II insists that other religions and cultures "have been by no means deprived of significance and importance in the mystery of salvation. For the Spirit of Christ has not refrained from using them as means of salvation which derive their efficacy from the very fullness of grace and truth entrusted to the Church" (UR 3). In the same spirit, Dupuis says: "The privileged action of the Spirit in Israel does not…prevent his universal influence. 'The Spirit of the Lord has filled the world' (Wis 1:7): God's omnipresence (see Jer 23:24) is understood in terms of his Spirit (Ps 139:7), and the Spirit's universal, life-giving activity."[264] Dupuis concludes by saying:

> Word-Wisdom-Spirit witness in the OT to God's dealings with humankind throughout salvation history. History is from beginning to end a history of salvation, that is, a dialogue initiated by God with humankind from the dawn of time which through distinct phases is leading humankind to God's appointed destiny. In the OT, Word-Wisdom-Spirit already testify to such commitment on the part of God, pending its realization in the Word-Wisdom made flesh and in the Spirit poured out.[265]

---

[262] Jacques Dupuis, *Toward a Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism* (New York: Orbis, 2001), 42.

[263] Ibid., 43.

[264] Ibid.

[265] Ibid., 45.

Likewise, in the New Testament, Dupuis points out that the Reign of God Jesus preached extended to nations other than Israel.

> Jesus came into contact with persons who did not belong to the chosen people. Once more he is astonished at the faith [of] these 'pagans,' and at their request he performs for them miracles of healing…. There should be no misunderstanding here: the miracles worked by Jesus on behalf of 'strangers' have the same meaning that Jesus gives to all his miracles. They signify that the Reign of God is already present and at work (see Mt 11:4-6; 12:25-28; Lk 4:16-22) [and that] for Jesus, saving faith is not only remotely accessible to pagans and foreigners, it is actually operative among them.[266]

Dupuis believes that the eschatological gathering of the nations in the Kingdom of God, symbolized by the banquet with the patriarchs (Mt 8:10-12; Lk 13:28-29), "is not to be understood as being delayed to the end of time."[267] It is a unity that Jesus announces as he begins his ministry (Mk 1:15) and finally "established by God on earth in Jesus' death and resurrection (see Lk 22:16) to be announced by the Church (see Mk 16:15; cf. Acts 28:30-31) until it grows unto its fullness (Mt 6:10; 25:31; Lk 11:2)." All of this the apostle Paul takes to heart and spreads the faith to the communities beyond Israel, to the non-Jews whose faith "in the unknown God" he looks at with an open attitude.[268]

In view, therefore, of the receptivity that the Asian Church community must assume as a fundamental attitude towards other faiths especially the Muslims, the FABC says:

> We are called to a fundamental change in our treatment of 'the other', resulting ultimately in our genuinely treating the Muslims as our brothers and sisters for the one Creator. We are called to a generosity of heart, not

---

[266] Ibid., 46-47.

[267] Ibid., 47.

[268] Ibid., 49; cf 50-52.

> just in sharing what we have, but also in approaching the Muslims with a positive attitude, giving credit where it is due, and refusing to be defeated by negative mindsets. We are called to a conversion that dispels prejudices, dissolves hatred and above all, inspires humility to acknowledge our own shortcomings and to apologize for the sins we have committed.[269]

This resonates well with an important statement in *Nostra Aetate* that has influenced the Church's relationship with non-Christian religions:

> The Catholic Church rejects nothing that is true and holy in these religions. She regards with sincere reverence those ways of conduct and of life, those precepts and teachings which, though differing in many aspects from the ones she holds and sets forth, nonetheless often reflect a ray of that Truth which enlightens all…. (NA 2)

Receptivity to God's self-communication through non-Christian cultures and religions can also mean for the Asian Church to be a more enthusiastic participant in the re-visitation of age-old Asian sources of spiritual and practical wisdom. Influenced by a centuries-old European Christian mindset, several Asian religious leaders tend to look upon local religious practices as syncretistic, superstitious, and at times, even idolatrous. Self-forgetfulness on the part of the Church can be practiced by being more appreciative of the ways non-western cultures have incorporated the Christian faith into their spirituality. Rather than hastily impose desperate measures to protect the faith from any admixture of non-traditional alterations, the Church can first consider how inculturation can be a sign of grace, a gift from the Spirit which can "give us the Divine face from the natural sense of the religiosity of the people."[270] Inculturation witnesses to the adaptability

---

[269] FEISA, "Understanding Christian-Muslim Dialogue in Southeast Asia" in *FAPA* 4, 85.

[270] OESC, "Catholicism Encountering Confucianism, Taoism, and Folk Religions: A Case of Interreligious Dialogue" in *FAPA* 4, 67.

and resilience of the Spirit-driven faith and the spiritual creativity of the faithful.

> Asia has its own experience of God, the world, and human beings which at times is not in relation to the West. Christian theological reflection…has to address the problem and the promise of the "many religions," the challenge and instrumentality of the "many poor," the systemic and indigenous forms of Asian structural marginalities (such as caste, patriarchy, and ethnicity), and the post-colonial resistance within the dynamics of globalization and from the memory of colonialism.[271]

Receptivity to another culture and religion entails a more trusting acknowledgment that adapting and contextualizing Christianity into the local expressions and forms need not be feared as incompatible to, or in competition with, traditional Christian doctrine and practice. Folk and cultural religiosity within Christian faith is not an affront to God. It is in fact a healthy sign of divine creativity. It is an opportunity for the Church to encounter God in new—or more precisely, in old but forgotten—ways. It gives the Church a real occasion for hospitality by welcoming Christ into a non-western home, re-envisioning his teachings from within the local horizon of reverencing the Absolute in meaning-laden ways, drawn from a deep and ancient well of heritage and wisdom. The FABC says:

> We need to go back to our Asian mythologies and stories. We need to 'sit at the feet' of our Asian spiritual masters and sages and allow ourselves to be nourished by their wisdom, their sacred texts, not only by our own. In connection to this, we need to refrain from judging our brothers and sisters of other faiths (Hindus and Buddhists in particular) as engaging in idolatry. This is not only judgmental but also prevents us from tapping into and being nourished

---

[271] Second Asia Conference of Theological Students (ACTS II), "Issues, Trends, and Challenges in Theology in Asia" in *FAPA* 4, 207.

> by a fecund and vital source for our own spiritual growth, identity, and maturity.[272]

The FABC affirms that all persons exist in an "openness to the Spirit," which they express as a community in various forms of worship and ways of life.[273] This resonates well with what *Nostra Aetate* says: "From ancient times down to the present, there is found among various peoples a certain perception of that hidden power which hovers over the course of things" (NA 2). In other words, the search for Divinity and the need to worship Divinity undergird the human spirit. At the same time, however, certain age-old folk beliefs and practices deriving from more primal forms of "faith" perdure in many Asian cultures. Some run completely counter to the message of Christ such that it will be difficult, if not altogether impossible, to incorporate them into the Christian faith and heritage without violating the truth, goodness, and supremacy of God as well as the God-given dignity of every person (e.g., necromancy, witchcraft, physical mutilation). In such cases, part of the Church's practice of receptivity is to diligently continue observing the possible reasons why such folk and cultic practices continue to exert particular influence among members of the communities. The Church can take care to withhold judging the people who practice them, and to remember that the Church itself is constantly called by Christ

> to continual reformation as she sojourns here on earth. Thus, if in various times and circumstances, there have been deficiencies in moral conduct or in church discipline, or even the way that church teaching has been formulated—to be carefully distinguished from the deposit of faith itself—these can and should be set right at the opportune moment. (LG 6)

---

[272] FIRA, "Final Statement", 121.

[273] OESC, "Dialogue Between Faith and Cultures in Asia: Towards Integral Human Development" in *FAPA* 2, 22.

For the Church to behave with receptivity, it must also pray with receptivity. With the re-visitation of ancient wisdom comes the need for the Church to continue adapting its faith into more contemplative forms of prayer—another opportunity for bringing Christianity to participate with the eastern forms of relating with God.

> We also realize that in order to go deeper into ourselves in this inward journey to the God of the ongoing dialogue [across cultures], we need to integrate Asian forms of prayer which have helped us to be in touch with the Spirit within. We acknowledge here the tremendous opportunities we have of learning from the other religious traditions of Asia, especially from the mystical traditions. Because of the meditative form of traditional Asian prayer which leads to the inner center, we may move more freely from a culture of words to a culture of silence, for God may be discerned too in silence. In saying this, we are also saying that we would like to attain a healthy balance between the prophetic [referring to the conceptual, discursive, activity-oriented] and mystical [referring to the intuitive, experiential, meditative] dimensions of spirituality.[274]

By incorporating more contemplation into prayer, Asian Catholics can rest assured that prayer need not always be vocal, formulary, petitionary, or led by clerics and religious. While contemplation and meditation have grown roots in many seminaries, novitiates, university prayer groups, and retreats for the lay, the Church can still bring contemplation further into the Catholic faith practice of the ordinary Church congregation. It can be an alternative way of praying as a Church. Furthermore, the more receptive way of prayer also builds Asian Catholics' confidence in their God-given ability to pray by themselves or among others, and to lead the community in prayer. It means setting Asian Catholics free from the common impression that divinity resides more in a priest or a nun and he or she therefore "knows better" the right words to say, or the "official" way to address God. Contemplative modes can usher praying communities towards

---

[274] Ibid., 122.

broader receptivity to the gracious Spirit who does not confine divine activity only to religious authorities or the spoken word, or traditional formula prayers. The Spirit is very much alive in and through the faithful themselves especially when they pray together—in silence, with nature, through gestures or postures of the human body, through the presence of fellow pray-ers in community, etc.

As a community experiences God's presence, so shall that community pray. As it prays, so shall it reflect and theologize. The more receptive modes of spirituality and prayer which characterize oriental spirituality, when discerningly welcomed and appropriated by the Christian community in Asia, can actually freshen Christian theology with new insights on how God manifests divinity in Asia, in a community where so many poor people long for very deep and lasting salvation, a community where God communicates Godself in many different, sometimes bewildering ways.

Ecclesial Hospitality through Working Towards Harmony and Dialogue

What is the Asian sense of harmony and how is it related to hospitality and dialogue?

In a survey that the Theological Advisory Commission made on the subject of harmony according to the major religions in Asia (Buddhism, Hinduism, Taoism, Islam, and Christianity), "harmony" in the Asian understanding implies three major features or characteristics.

First, harmony entails the constant recognition of, and respect for, the interrelatedness of four "orders" in human life: the cosmic or mystical, the ecological, the social, and the individual. The cosmic or mystical pertains to the Divine, the Absolute from whom all life comes as providence. The ecological refers to the order of nature which nourishes and supports human life. The social refers to the community, especially the family, in which each person belongs and by whom one is taught the virtues of faith, hope, and love. The individual pertains to each person whose life, dignity, and goodness are precious to God and

to the community. Akin to the Hindu idea of *dharma*, Asians hold that the constituent orders of reality are held together so that when people respect and uphold this interconnectedness, then the forces of reality will work towards their advantage. The opposite is true as well. When people disrespect, disrupt, or violate any of the orders, they will eventually reap the negative effects of their contravention.[275]

The presence of peace is the second characteristic of harmony. Peace is not so much an absence of war as it is the fruit of mutual sensitivity and respect for the uniqueness and diversity of individuals or cultures. Peace is also a consequence of mutual forgiveness of each other's failings springing from the desire to be reconciled as friends, to cease and desist from divisive hostility between families, cultures, or religions.[276]

Lastly, harmony refers to the valorization of smooth interpersonal relationships. Feelings are very important to the Asian sensibility. Persons gain trust and respect not so much when they can demonstrate and prove in discourse that they are "right", but rather when they are sensitive to and considerate of other people's feelings and sensibilities. This aspect of the Asian sensibility often finds criticism from Western observers who might value rectitude regardless of the manner by which they declare it or of how they affect other people's feelings. In the Asian sensibility, "truth" is very much interlaced with accord. Harmony

> has a strong experiential and affective component [and] requires that the whole person…heart, sentiment, and mind be involved…. Based on the concrete experience of Asian Churches…harmony embodies the realities of order, well-being, justice and love as seen in human interaction…rooted in the value systems developed in [peoples'] histories.[277]

---

[275] TAC, "Asian Perspectives on Harmony" in *FAPA* 2, 259.

[276] BIRA, "Final Statement" in *FAPA* 1, 318.

[277] TAC, "Asian Perspectives on Harmony", 278.

There is a fundamental connection between hospitality, dialogue, and harmony. In order to be a welcoming and gracious presence to other communities, the Church must constantly be a dialogical disposition towards other cultures, religions, and the poor. In the process, hospitable dialogue becomes a significant bearer of the harmony that Asians highly value across cultures and religions.

As hospitality shows, harmony in the home provides a welcoming atmosphere for the guest whom the hosts wish to feel as a true member of the family. Harmony is a shared effort towards the most important concern: the guest's well-being. In a similar way, hospitality and harmony require a dialogical disposition in the way members of the Church relate with each other and with members of other communities. A "dialogue of life", as the FABC describes it, primarily concerns the well-being of all.[278] "Being in dialogue is an essential part of the Church's mission because it has its origin in the Father's loving dialogue of salvation."[279] Harmony, an important aspect of Asian community life, "constitutes the intellectual and affective, religious and artistic, personal and societal soul of both persons and institutions in Asia."[280] To the Asian sensibility,

> the world, human society and nature are seen as interrelated, and they make up one single field of experiences. The meaningfulness of this relationship is expressed in the psychological state of tranquility, peacefulness, and interior equilibrium. Social interactions express attitudes towards nature, and the attitudes to nature are seen as socially relevant, too.[281]

---

[278] Cf. BIRA in *FAPA* 1, 120; OESC in *FAPA* 2, 25; FIRA I in *FAPA* 3, 121. See also EA 3, 18, 31.

[279] Sebastiano D'Ambra, "Interreligious Dialogue in *Ecclesia in Asia*" in *The Future of the Asian Churches: The Asian Synod and Ecclesia in Asia*, ed. J. H. Kroeger and Peter C. Phan (Quezon City: Claretian Publications, 2002), 113.

[280] TAC, "Asian Perspectives on Harmony", 232.

[281] Ibid., 245.

The dialogue of life geared towards harmony requires the Asian Church to seek to understand people of other faiths, cultures, Christian denominations, and non-ecclesial sectors—that is, not just to be understood by them. Dialogue for harmony is a two-fold dynamic: attentiveness to differing voices addressing the Church, and respectful proclamation of Christian principles with the desire to share, not impose the richness of its heritage. The Church must be conscious of itself as a community that must cooperate with the Spirit who leads it in grace towards fulfillment. Because the Church is in the world, harmony with other communities is a vital part of this fulfillment. The Spirit is not yet finished with the Church or the world. From the hierarchy to the laity, the Church is still evolving as a community within history. Both religious and non-religious forces influence its self-understanding, forces through which the Spirit moves everything forward to completion. Dialogue plays an important role in that harmony. For the Asian Church to be in communion with other communities, it must have sufficient self-denial to dialogue with various sectors of society. The following paragraphs exemplify three such sectors.

The Church, for instance, can still be of greater welcome to women by critically observing and sincerely listening to the signs and attitudes with which Asian societies and institutions regard and treat the women in the community. The role of women in the Asian family and society is key to the religious and civil rearing of future citizens of the country, future members of the faiths. This is a reality that Asians accept and value. The FABC likewise affirms that the social teachings of the Church uphold and emphasize the dignity of women who are "the expression of God's compassion and promoters of peace [who] highlight the maternal attributes of God."[282] But in spite of this, Asian communities including the Church continue to systematically inhibit women from playing decisive roles in the leadership and formation of these communities. This is to speak nothing of other sectors in society where structures run predominantly by males continue to maltreat,

---

[282] FABC Institute for Lay Apostolate (BILA) II, "On Women" in *FAPA* 3, 74.

abuse, and marginalize women through subtle and outright ways. It takes a self-denying Church to sincerely dialogue with women so that it may more vigorously evangelize to societies in favor of them, to reverse marginalization alongside of them, and to proclaim them as no less important, courageous, and effective as—if not more than—men. To institutionally witness to its commitment to the women's cause, the Asian Church can fearlessly allow more and more women more directly authoritative and formative roles in the community—the way they already naturally are in the Asian families. Moreover, through the schools and universities that religious orders run in many Asian countries (and where most teachers are, in fact, women),[283] the Church finds a partner in educating the community towards a mentality and attitude of gender equitability, respect, and dignity. The marginalization of women in Asia is abetted by centuries-old cultural as well as colonial mindsets. But through sustained education and formation in the schools and parishes, the rectification of this lopsided cultural outlook is not only possible, it is imperative.

In this respect, as Asians use and value symbols to express more abstract realities of faith and living, the symbol that models women need not be confined to the mother of the Lord. Many other biblical figures (e.g., Abigail from 1 Sam 25:32-33; 41-42; Deborah of Judges 4 and 5; Martha of Lk 10; etc.), saints (e.g., Edith Stein, Grand Duchess Elizabeth of Russia, Elizabeth Anne Seton, Katharine Drexel, Kateri Tekakwitha, etc.), and human rights and freedom fighters (Corazon Aquino of the Philippines; Aung San Suu Kyi of Myanmar; Meera and Sarla Ben of India, etc.) can serve as witnesses to the fact that God has called and will continue to call women to assume leading, decisive, even counter-cultural roles in Kingdom-building. Meekness and submission to male authority at the cost of dignity and self-respect are two of many hackneyed paradigms that have to be retired from the horizon of meaning of Asian womanhood. For the Church, this entails opening the faith up afresh to prayer-symbols that may not in themselves be typically religious or traditional. The FABC sees the

---

[283] See http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0012/001227/122720e.pdf (accessed 17 February 2011).

same need for which it declares: "Part of authentic dialogue demands that we continue the process of re-imagining our Christian faith in the light of Asian realities in order to birth new symbols, rituals, language and expressions that are truly Asian in flavor and character."[284] A significant part of the Asian reality is the irreplaceable role of women in the community with which the Church must seriously reckon if it is to be a more humane and wholehearted Church under the Spirit's non-gender-limited movement.

A second sector with whom the Church can build greater harmony through hospitality is the non-Christian and the non-Catholic community. In self-criticism regarding the shortfall of true dialogue with the Muslims, for instance, the FABC says:

> Any call for dialogue has also to be the result of both our understanding of the root causes of Muslim anger and the various forms of Islamic resurgence that are attempting to bring changes to their lives and people's. Years of oppression and aggression have been taken in silence but this will not be the position any longer. Much of the violence in the Region has been related to the sales of arms and armaments industry in the First World and use of religious and ethnic sentiments to stir such feelings among the people.[285]

In this regard, while many Asian parish communities have done well in initiating and participating in interfaith dialogue especially with Muslims, the Church can still plan and execute dialogues that, this time, really ask members of other faiths honest questions: "Who do you say that we are?" The Church needs to find out where other faiths believe Christians fall short of working together with the rest for greater harmony. A receptive, self-forgetful Church is a self-critical, self-evaluating Church. This kind of communal self-assessment includes the fortitude to ask non-Christians how Christians, especially Catholics, come across to them, how their socio-religious attitude affects them,

---

[284] FIRA, "Final Statement", 121.

[285] FEISA IV, "Understanding Christian-Muslim Dialogue in Southeast Asia", 87.

what they find inconsistent in Christian proclamation and practice, who they think impedes communion between communities, what they see are areas and issues affecting the human person to which the Church remains heedless, inflexible, heavy-handed, or inhuman. Whatever the Church gathers from this kind of a dialogue must form part of its self-understanding and must trickle down to the members of the community. This kind of humble, if not painful receptivity is necessary if the Asian Church is to continue maturing in faith, to be in communion with communities, to remain relevant in human affairs, and to be an agent of God's harmony in the world.

A third and very important sector with whom the Asian Church must dialogue is the poor. If the Church is to be truly hospitable to the poor, it needs to ask who or what the poor think the Church truly is. As it listens to the poor, Church authority might venture an honest answer to the following questions: How have we been a credible advocate of the poor as Christ was, or as the case may be, how have we lacked that credibility? What do the poor really feel about the comfortable and sometimes even lavish lifestyle that they see many of us enjoy? Is there anything else that we can promote that the community accomplish not only *for* the poor but also *with* them, aside from raising funds, filling up food pantries, distributing relief goods, doing a second collection at mass, teaching them catechism? If the poor were to really ask the Church, "What does our liberation and salvation really mean to you?", how would we actually *show* through our actions our response to their question? What often makes us stop short at using our civil influence to strongly urge government in taking the plight of the poor more seriously? Are we really still drawn to the poor as Jesus was? Do the poor still see hope in us as their upliftment? How sincerely are we allowing the Spirit to move our communities to really be a Church of the poor?

As regards all the foregoing examples of dialogue, self-consciousness means for the Church to consider itself as very much still a learning community as much as it is a teaching one. In the same vein, self-denial calls for the Church to listen and learn from the experience and wisdom of the community to which it ministers. For the Church not only witnesses Christ to the communities. Because the Spirit is in

the communities, they witness Christ to the authorities of the Church for greater credibility and goodness. While it is a holy community because the Spirit dwells in it, the Church is likewise given to sin because of vainglory, lack of generosity, and narrow-mindedness. While its leaders are called in grace to lead by example, they do not cease at being Jesus' disciples who must obey and be receptive to the Spirit that enlightens and teaches them through persons outside their ranks. In spite of centuries of tradition and wisdom, the Church does not have all the answers in and by its own doctrines alone. Asia is not a one-dimensional culture. Church doctrines and tradition are rich but they do not necessarily make a perfect fit, an all-time solution for the various problems in the world. On the contrary, Asia is a heterogeneous community of religions and cultures; all the more reason is there for the Church to acknowledge that God is not the enemy of diversity, adaptation, and change, but their Author and Goal. Through everything God creates, God reveals divinity. This includes diversity, adaptation, and change. Through the Spirit's work, God brings everything towards greater harmony through unity which does not necessarily mean uniformity.

In view of how the Church has at times fallen short of fostering a dialogical attitude in the name of harmony, the FABC says in self-critique:

> How often too our communities[,] in relation to the communities of other faiths which surround them, have failed to be communities of dialogue. Lacking in ecumenical and dialogical consciousness and orientation, they can be complacent in attitudes of superiority. They can be unconcerned in reaching out to their neighbors of other religions in their day-to-day relationships, seemingly unaware that the dialogue of life through which we interact with one another and become mutually enlightened, encouraged and carried forward in our response to the challenging Spirit is an indispensable element for the building up of our own community life on all levels.[286]

---

[286] FABC, Plenary Assembly III, "The Church: A Community of Faith in Asia" in *FAPA* 1, 58.

Self-denial or self-effacement plays a vital role in Asian harmony. A dialogical attitude in view of harmony therefore requires prudence especially when the Church proclaims itself as the one true Church, the sole mediator of salvation. Modesty is deeply cultivated in Asian families and respected in the larger society. Asians are taught at an early age to inhibit themselves from soliciting the adulation of others and from self-praise. It is uncouth to announce one's achievements or to categorically declare oneself as better than others. In the Asian sensibility, it is polite to even apologize for one's insufficiency—like the smallness of one's home or the simplicity of a gift, one's unworthiness at being cared for, helped, or welcomed. The western mind might find this apologetic trait difficult to understand, even absurd. But this brand of modesty is very much part of the characteristic hospitality by which Asians live: the other person, the guest—and not oneself—must be given the greater importance and attention in order to make that person feel welcome in one's company or home. To try and capture other people's attention and approval is often chastised as impertinence. It is tantamount to arrogance. It grates against interpersonal sensibilities and relations. It obviates significant channels of communication like empathy and sensitivity. One who praises oneself or declares oneself superior to the rest unwittingly achieves what he self-proclaims: to be separated from everyone, and by being so, will find no welcome from others. At its worst, the lack of self-effacement triggers resentment and anger.

The Catholic Church has often asserted that people of other faiths are in a deficient condition as compared to Catholics to whom the fullness of the way to salvation is available (see for example, *Dominus Iesus* [DI] 22). But considering the Asian predisposition to self-effacement, a proclamation of such tenor exemplifies what non-Christians can interpret as ecumenically insensitive, as one that puts on airs of religious superiority, and in need of consistency with God's universal salvific will. In a continent where Christians are a minority among non-Christian religions and in a culture where self-praise indicates superciliousness, proclamations such as this may actually hamper dialogue and harmony rather than promote them. The FABC states that for true dialogue to happen, leaders and members

of the community must "enter as equal partners into the dialogue [with people of other communities] in a mutuality of sharing and enrichment contributing to mutual growth…which excludes any sense of competition [but rather] centers on each other's values."[287]

If dialogue is to be oriented towards the communication of truth, especially truth that saves (*Dialogue and Proclamation* [DP] 2, 16, 18, 26, 37), then the Church must communicate in a way *meaningful* to the sensibilities of the Asian faithful. In his article entitled "The Quest for Truth in Asia", theologian and bishop José de Mesa explains:

> It is undeniable that theology does not only have to square with the demands of meaning, but also those of truth. Legitimate attention to meaningfulness and relevance, after all, does not dispense with fidelity to the Tradition. But however closely the question of meaning may be connected with that about truth, the two questions are different. More than that, the question of meaning always precedes that of truth, because only a meaningful and relevant statement can be true or false. The inevitable consequence of this is that, whenever this relationship with actual human experience is no longer felt, no attention is paid to Christians when they begin to speak even about the real significance of Gospel.[288]

De Mesa finds it vital that the truth the Church communicates to the community be meaningful to the people. He finds the question of truth and its relation to orthodoxy to be characteristic of western theology which presupposes that true knowledge fulfills mainly the *rational* essence of being human. So the question of absolute truth and orthodoxy "seems to be a question primarily drawn from both the [western] cultural presupposition about the human person and

---

[287] BIRA, "Statement and Recommendations", 111. See also EA 20, 31.

[288] José de Mesa, "The Quest for Truth in Asia" in *East Asian Pastoral Review* 1998, at http://eapi.admu.edu.ph/eapr98/joede.htm (accessed 10 February 2011).

the western theologies which start from, and build on this premise."[289] However, what may be rationally, doctrinally, or traditionally true may still be far from *meaningful* to whom this truth is preached.

In Asia, therefore, to proclaim the truth entails a committed exploration of ways by which Asian sensibility might find the proclamation not just orthodox but more importantly, meaningful. De Mesa then revisits particular characteristics of the truth which can render this truth meaningful to the Asian sensibility.

First, De Mesa re-emphasizes that truth is relational—in view of the Asian valuation of smooth interpersonal relationships. For Asians, it is important for any truth to have the capacity not just to make sense but more so to respect and uphold important relationships in the community. De Mesa cites Scripture to attest to the religious basis of the relationality of truth.

> God is true because God is faithful to us…. God's 'truthfulness' is manifested in hearing the cry of His/Her people. Hence, for Israel the manifestation par excellence of Yahweh's historical truth is its liberation from bondage in Egypt. There God's *emet* came to light decisively and with a strong hand. And for the Christian community, in Jesus God's 'truth', that is, God's Godness itself as the dependable God of compassion and salvation, became flesh. In Jesus God's truth was revealed decisively and definitively; He, as Emmanuel, is the truth of God's faithful solidarity with us (Jn. l4:6; Mt. l:23).[290]

To proclaim the truth meaningfully, that is, relationally, in the Asian Churches is to proclaim God's faithfulness and reliability in God's relationship with the people. Furthermore, God's goodness is reflected by the relational beings that persons are, such that "we are

---

[289] Ibid.

[290] Ibid.

'true' images of God and true disciples of Jesus when we are committed and faithful to each other's happiness and well-being."[291]

Secondly, De Mesa asserts that the Church, as the universal sacrament of salvation (GS 45), is a sharer in God's truth which, to all intents and purposes, is really God's love for humanity.

> Thus, the 'truth' of the church is revealed when the believing community faithfully and reliably manifests and exercises the mystery of God's love for people. The 'truth' of the church is to sacramentalize God's love for humankind. In Asia the church does this by responding to the urgent needs of the various peoples of the region, proclaiming salvation in a manner most suitable to the situation.[292]

De Mesa then points out that the "situation" within which the Church proclaims the truth of God is a situation of great poverty and of many religions—a similar assertion that Aloysius Pieris makes. Dialogue is not so much in the interest of orthodoxy but rather of common action for the poor, and of greater harmony with other religions. For the Asian Church, this dialogue begins with receptivity to God's relational truth which is already at work in the community.

> Because of this peculiar situation of Asia and the active presence of God in the world, there is an urgent need for the church of Asia to manifest God's truth not by way of claiming the monopoly to the truth, much less through triumphalistic imposition of what it thinks to be the truth, but rather through humble and respectful dialogue. Its first task is to listen to, to discern, and to discover God's truth already operative among the poor who inspire us with their trust in God's reliable promise of liberation, in the plurality of cultures which reveal the wonderful creativity of God,

---

[291] Ibid.

[292] Ibid.

> and in the faith though which the Spirit leads people to holiness in so many surprising ways.[293]

Many religious proclamations express apprehension of the religious indifferentism and relativism incipient in the outlook that "one religion is as good as another" (see RM 36; DP 74; DI 22). But this issue may not actually be as much of a threat to Asian religiosity and fidelity to the Church as it might be to the western sensibility. The Asian practice of faith is intuition-driven, as De Mesa notices. More often than not, faith and religion involve Asian affect more than desire for academic reasonability. For religious "truth" to be meaningful to the Asian sensibility, it must bear significantly on one's relationship with others and with the things of nature, rather than on the logic-driven, scholastic, western, "masculine" brand of philosophy and theology. Leo Ikenaga SJ, archbishop of Japan, also affirms that it is important to appreciate the way Asians view and experience divinity, as this will serve as a guidepost in the way the Church must continue to evangelize in the continent.

> The God of Christianity is limitless and possesses both fatherly and motherly elements. However, the Christianity that came from Europe tends to overstress the former. In the East, we need to give greater expression of the feminine aspects of God: the God who permeates the universe, lives in us through faith, receives all people in his embrace, the God of universal love and infinite tenderness, always ready to forgive, the Christ atoning for all the sins of humankind on the cross.[294]

De Mesa concedes that the ecclesiastical emphasis on orthodoxy and absolute truth springs from the cultural exigencies surrounding the western Church for which the more discursive rather than the affective and relational aspects of faith and evangelization take the

---

[293] Ibid.

[294] Leo Jun Ikenaga, S.J., "Evangelization and Culture" in *The Asian Synod: Texts and Commentaries*, comp. and ed. P. C. Phan (New York: Orbis, 2002), 103.

foreground. However, the exigencies in Asia are very different from those of western communities. To alleviate poverty and to dialogue with other religions are the more critical demands that ask for the Asian Church's response and action. De Mesa believes that there is a quest for truth in Asia but it is not so much in the interest of orthodoxy as it is of promoting dignity of life and fostering interreligious harmony. Asians approach the same truth about God from very different trajectories, that of relationality, poverty, and pluralism. Therefore, for Catholics to proclaim that their Church is the only mediator of salvation, and that other religions are deficient in grace, or that only an inchoate reality of the Kingdom is found in other religions—this can impede greater harmony among communities which the Spirit labors to foster in Asia. Not only does this mindset overlook the more critical realities of poverty and pluralism, it is largely un-Asian in its lack of self-effacement.

In an essay regarding his experience of pastoral leadership in Asia, Bishop Berard Oshikawa reiterates the question that Archbishop Leo Ikenaga of Japan asked as the first delegate to speak at the Asian Synod. Why has Christianity not grown in Japan? Ikenaga admits that the norms for Christian life, Church discipline, liturgical expression, and theological orthodoxy forwarded by the Western Church have been barely appropriated by the eastern sensibility. Like De Mesa, both Oshikawa and Ikenaga recognize that the norms of faith set by Western Christianity are the result of the intercultural conditions from which it has been formed: "these norms have been developed through long centuries of interaction between the faith of the Mediterranean and later, North-European and American Churches and their respective cultures."[295] But despite assiduous efforts, the predominantly western

---

[295] Berard T. Oshikawa, OFM Conv., "Pastoral Life in Asia and 'The Principle of Graduality'" in *The Asian Synod: Texts and Commentaries*, comp. and ed. P. C. Phan (New York: Orbis, 2002), 104. See also Edmund Chia, "The New Way of Being Church in Asia" (June 2002) at www.sedomission.org/old/eng/chia_4.htm (accessed 3 February 2011).

manner of Church-building seems to have "failed to touch the hearts of those who come searching."[296]

Oshikawa believes therefore that John Paul II's appropriation of the "Principle of Graduality" must be the guiding principle of evangelization in Asia. The principle of graduality calls for a good measure of self-forgetfulness on the part of a highly westernized Church if it sincerely seeks to be welcomed into the Asian fold. According to Oshikawa's pastoral experience, John Paul II's "principle of graduality" means for Asian Christians to grow in the faith "out of and through our own cultures in an ongoing rereading and contemplation of the Gospel in the midst of the pains, struggles, and hopes of our societies."[297] Christianity in Asia must therefore be a journey made by Asians from within their cultures and sensibilities rather than be "a mental 'Introduction to Christianity'"[298] that originates entirely from an exterior force, typical of the western way of evangelization (and, it can be added, of colonization).

Another Japanese Bishop, Agustinus Jun-Ichi, confirms these views and asserts that the way towards more effective evangelization in Japan and in the rest of Asia lies "in a better integration of faith and life so as to facilitate a more fruitful harmony of soul, heart, and body," because in Asia, the eyes have a more central role to play than the ears. Witnessing to the faith is more crucial than simply preaching its doctrines.[299]

The late Filipino bishop Francisco Claver SJ echoed a similar position:

> People are the bearers of a culture—culture being their distinctive way of being human. The Holy Spirit is the

---

[296] Ibid.

[297] Ibid.

[298] Ibid.

[299] Edmund Chia, "The New Way of Being Church in Asia".

> Giver and Source of Faith, and faith, we know, is a free gift. Hence, if the inculturation process is basically the putting together of faith and culture into an integrated whole, the prime acts in that putting together necessarily are the bearers of culture, that is, the people and the Giver of faith, that is, the Spirit. Not the missionary, not somebody from outside the culture, not primarily bishops, theologians, liturgists, and other experts. The task is the people's—the community's—and the Spirit's.[300]

Secondly, John Paul II's appropriation of the principle of graduality requires that Church leaders, specifically the bishops, respect and support these local ways by which Asian communities welcome and re-appropriate Christianity. In today's world where globalization and internationality affect nearly all levels of existence and relationships, Oshikawa agrees with Ikenaga that it is more urgent than ever that Church leaders nurture and support the natural diversity and richness of inter-culturality by being in constant dialogue with other cultures so that they can better discern the signs of the times.

> Now is the time to learn from our past mistakes and make sure that no imposition of any kind hinders the work of the Holy Spirit in the lives and minds of people who, in the wonderful variety of histories and cultures, look for God with a sincere heart.[301]

Finally, in Oshikawa's view, the principle of graduality calls for "prudence, flexibility, trust, and courage"[302] in the way the Holy See performs its leadership tasks.

> This will mean moving away from a single and uniform abstract norm that stifles genuine spirituality, Asian

---

[300] Francisco Claver, S.J., "Inculturation as Dialogue" in *The Asian Synod: Texts and Commentaries*, comp. and ed. P. Phan (New York: Orbis, 2002), 100-101.

[301] Oshikawa, "Pastoral Life in Asia and 'The Principle of Graduality'", 105.

[302] Ibid.

> liturgical expression, earnest Asian theological search, and real growth into maturity in issues involving life and society. It will mean moving to a more spiritual and creative position of working for a new harmony where the gifts of the Spirit to the Churches become the new treasure of the whole Church, into which all others, Christian and non-Christian alike, can be invited to share in the abundance of God's life.[303]

Shared self-forgetfulness means that the Church, fully conscious of its own spirituality, philosophy, theology, and local contexts, must gradually but sustainably extend itself towards communities of the poor and other religions. This, the FABC believes, must be in view of marshalling common action especially against evils that fracture humanity, powers that deal death instead of bring life.[304] "The forces of death isolate people, societies and religious communities from one another, and generate the suspicion and rivalry that lead to conflict. The Holy Spirit, by contrast, sustains people in their search for mutual understanding" (EA 15). The dialogue that seeks life-giving harmony entails the fundamental self-understanding that the same Spirit continually "sows the seeds of truth among all peoples, their religions, cultures and philosophies…capable of helping people, individually and collectively" (EA 15). Harmony that dialogue ushers in is "not an absence of strife but rather the result of acceptance of diversity and richness."[305] They are not simply a plan or stratagem for practical living in the midst of community differences but rather "an Asian approach to reality, an Asian understanding of reality that is profoundly organic, i.e., a world-view wherein the whole, the unity, is the sum-total of the web of relations and interaction of the various parts with each other…."[306]

---

[303] Ibid.

[304] OESC in *FAPA* 2, 25.

[305] Peter Phan, *Being Religious Interreligiously* (New York: Orbis, 2004), 123. See also *Dialogue and Proclamation* (DP) 9.

[306] TAC, "Asian Perspectives on Harmony", 232. See also DP 56.

God is "reconciler and restorer of universal and cosmic harmony… who includes all and embraces all."[307] Attentiveness and receptivity to the diversity of God's creation is the first disposition Christians must assume as a community that thrives in a pluralistic context.

> Indeed, the first act of our Christian God-talk in Asia, is paradoxically, not to talk but to be silent, not to preach but to listen, not to teach but to learn. This behavior is not merely a polite thing to do, part of the social etiquette that a guest must observe in the host's home. Rather it is steeped in the conviction that Asian cultures and religions, and the Asian peoples themselves…have doctrines and practices that in certain respects are no less true and noble than or are even superior to, those of Christianity.[308]

If dialogue is to be grounded on logic at all, it is grounded "in the logic of the Incarnation (EA 29) which is none else but divine grace, the mysterious self-emptying (*kenosis*) of God (Phil 2:5-11)."[309] It is the "greatest work accomplished by the Holy Spirit…the supreme grace, the grace of union and source of every other grace" (*Dominum et Vivificantem* 50). If the Church is to prolong Jesus Christ's mission of uniting all humanity to God in grace, then the spirit of dialogue "must inform every aspect or element of the evangelizing mission."[310] God has made a covenant with all humanity, a covenant which reaches particular eminence in Christ who entered into dialogue with all he saved—both the members of the Chosen People and those whom the Chosen People did not recognize as their own (*Dialogue and Proclamation* 21).

---

[307] Phan, *Being Religious*, 125.

[308] Ibid., 118.

[309] D'Ambra, "Interreligious Dialogue in *Ecclesia in Asia*", 113.

[310] Dupuis, *Toward a Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism*, 360.

Ecclesial Hospitality through Welcome and Care for the Poor

The 1986 People Power Revolution in the Philippines can serve as an example of a prophetic communion of communities in which the local Church was deeply involved. It was where the people's response to the Spirit of grace, in their self-consciousness and self-forgetfulness, played a vital role in the desire for peace and freedom.

On Saturday, 22 February 1986, two weeks after dictator Ferdinand Marcos engineered massive cheating in a national snap election, two of the dictator's most trusted men—Chief of Staff Lieutenant-General Fidel Ramos and Senator Juan Ponce Enrile—organized a military take-over. They plotted to take their loyal troops to the presidential palace, arrest Marcos, and set up a provisional government that would gradually restore to the country its democracy after twenty-three years of Marcos' martial rule.

The dictator learned of the plot. He ordered his most loyal general, Fabian Ver—the former family chauffeur who rose from the ranks to be Marcos's personal protector—to hunt for Ramos and Enrile and put an end to the sedition. On the evening of 22 February, Ramos, Enrile and their troops seized Camp Aguinaldo, a military installation along Epifanio De Los Santos Avenue (EDSA), and made it their headquarters. They were protected by trusted soldiers who themselves had defected from the Marcos regime in support of Ramos's and Enrile's vision of democracy.

The two leaders needed the support not just of the armed forces, but of the Filipinos. In that regard, Juan Ponce Enrile's first move was to make a phone call to the then archbishop of Manila, Cardinal Jaime Sin, to ask for the Church's support. At nine o'clock of the same evening, in a broadcast from Church-run Radio Veritas, Cardinal Sin exhorted Filipinos to come to EDSA if they were able to, and peacefully declare their support for Ramos and Enrile in the name of democracy:

> My dear people, I wish you to pray because it's only through prayer that we may solve this problem. This is Cardinal Sin speaking to the people especially in Metro-Manila. I

> am in deep concern about the situation of Mister Enrile and General Ramos. I am calling our people to support our two good friends at the camp. If any of you could be around at Camp Aguinaldo to show your solidarity and your support in this very crucial period when our two good friends have shown their idealism. I would be very happy if you could support them now. I would only wish that violence and bloodshed be avoided. Let us pray to our Blessed Lady to help us in order that we can solve this problem peacefully…. Mister Enrile and those with him have appealed for food and expression of support. Those of you who wish to help can do so.[311]

By Sunday midday, 23 February, the crowd of unarmed Filipinos, mostly middle class and poor families, swelled to nearly two-hundred thousand. The crowd kept growing. The rich walked side by side with the poor; the famous with the nameless; the able-bodied with the paraplegics; and the old with the young. The crowd that protected Camp Aguinaldo grew so massive that Marcos-deployed tanks and truckloads of armed troops failed at every attempt to gain access to the camp. The unarmed Filipinos who locked arms to forestall their charge were not only standing in harm's way, they were praying and singing religious songs as they formed a human wall. Emboldened by a communal vision of democracy, Filipinos on EDSA fended off war tanks by laying their hands on their steel armor while nuns, seminarians, or parish leaders led the rosary and the singing. Women and children took plastic bags of food and ran up to the pro-Marcos troops on army trucks to offer them nourishment. Teen-agers came up to soldiers face-to-face and inserted flowers into the muzzles of their machine guns. They also slung rosaries around their necks.

At some point that afternoon, General Ver radioed shoot-to-kill orders to his men. Drivers of tanks were to run over civilians who stood in their way. Soldiers were to open fire on whoever refused them access to Camp Aguinaldo. But the civilians continued singing and

---

[311] See http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=U__iN2kS600&feature=related (accessed 12 February 2011).

praying while in arm-lock. The men kept laying their hands on the tanks, the women kept giving food to Marcos's soldiers, and the rest kept chanting, "*Sumama na kayo, sumama na kayo*" ("Come, join us; come join us"). This went on for many hours.

By Monday morning, 24 February, the war tanks and trucks sat empty. Pro-Marcos soldiers had finally joined the people to protect them instead of Marcos. By nine-o'clock that night, the Marcos family, their whole retinue of servants, and close relatives had all fled the presidential palace. The dictatorship was over. With the later election of Corazon C. Aquino as president, a struggling age of democracy had begun.[312]

The 1986 "EDSA People Power Revolution" was an example of a communion of communities taking part in a nationwide protest in the face of political and economic power. Parish pastoral groups, basic ecclesial communities, Couples for Christ, charismatic movements, Caritas Philippines, religious orders, archdiocesan and diocesan associations, and families were involved. Instead of violent resistance against Marcos's forces, the communities fostered a spirit of welcome to the armed forces, the government, members of other faiths, the international media, and most of all, with people from all walks of life. The local Church shared in the prophetic spirit that intensified the whole community's non-violent desire for political and social freedom and reconciliation. Self-forgetful of differences in social status, political loyalties, gender, or religion, hundreds shared whatever little or great they had in order that fellow Filipinos might have sufficient physical and moral strength to see through the fulfillment of this freedom. Most of all, EDSA was an example of the grace of communal valor in the face of possible death. It was often preached after EDSA that the Catholic Church ignited People Power. Rather, the Catholic Church responded to the Spirit's call in the selfsame way that several other

---

[312] For a complete account of the history of the "People Power Revolution" on EDSA, see Monina A. Mercado, *People Power: An Eyewitness History: The Philippine Revolution of 1986* (Manila: Writers and Readers Publishing, Inc., 1986).

communities answered the same call to freedom. The Spirit of grace ignited the spirit of People Power. The non-violent communion of communities that swelled on EDSA had clearly proven this.

In different parts of Asia, local Churches continue to serve as prophetic examples of communion and hospitality towards other communities especially the poor and the disenfranchised. In Madhya Pradesh, a central Indian state ruled by the Bharatiya Janata Party, the Church has initiated a move towards bringing secular groups together to form The Harmony Foundation. It is a network of several ecclesial and secular communities that envision peace and work towards more interfaith tolerance in the central Indian state, especially in the spate of violent attacks which radical Hindu sects have recently made against Christian institutions. Hindu fundamentalists are aggressively acting on the suspicion that Christians are out to convert Hindus to Christianity. According to Fr. Anand Muttungal, the foundation's founder and director: "Whenever the Church is under attack from Hindu radical groups, it is often forced to suffer in isolation due to its own failure to promote understanding with other people."[313] The victims who suffer most from interreligious violence in Madhya Pradesh are the poor who, regardless of their religion, benefit the most from the humanitarian and peace-keeping assistance of ecclesial and secular institutions. Fr. Muttungal decries the fact that the state police have barely carried out their law-and-order responsibilities and failed to protect the minority community of Christians from the attacks. This has seriously set back the humanitarian projects of the interfaith foundation but has not kept it from continuing its ministry.

Archbishop Thomas Menamparampil of Guwahati, eastern India, has also initiated efforts to ease ethnic tensions in the border of two Indian states, Assam and Meghalaya. More than 1,500 houses in ninety villages of poor, innocent Christian tribes-people have been burned in the ethno-religious struggle. The local churches under Archbishop Menamparampil and Bishop Andrew Marak of the Tura diocese continue to bring leaders of the warring ethnic groups to

---

[313] See http://www.ucanews.com/category/news/ (accessed 23 February 2011).

the peace-keeping table. Menamparampil also continues urging the bishops, priests, and nuns from various Indian states to give priority and attention to learning about tribal groups. "We have to work toward understanding tribal people who are often misunderstood."[314] He has urged Church workers to treat tribal people with respect, whether they are Christian or not, especially as a way of witnessing to government workers who often undervalue tribal people as criminals.[315] It is important for the Church to find creative ways and to carefully map out strategies of support for and evangelization to tribal people while respecting their culture.

In Thailand, Catholic Church communities and schools in the province of Ubon Ratchathani are playing a leading role in providing short- and long-term assistance to hundreds of Cambodian and Thai civilians displaced by border clashes between the two nations. The parishes in Ubon have mobilized Christian women's organizations to help cook and distribute meals, take care of the children, and nurse the wounded—most of whom have had to live in tents that the volunteer group Catholic Commission for Emergency, Relief and Refugees (COERR) have set up. Until the situation at the borders improves, Bishop Banchong Chaiyara and COERR chaplain Anucha Chaopraekno will continue coordinating with Christian and Catholic groups to take care of the people caught in the cross-fire.

These and many other examples in Asia exemplify local Church efforts at prioritizing and responding to the more critical problems of violence and poverty. Notwithstanding differences in religion, culture, language, or moral or tribal practices, the common struggle among the greater majority of Asians is against violence and poverty. This is why Asian hospitality especially to the poor, regardless of their religion or culture, is a crucial way of prophetically witnessing to the

---

[314] See http://www.heraldmalaysia.com/news/Archbishop-stresses-culture-sensitive-evangelization-3374-1-1.html (accessed 25 February 2011).

[315] Ibid.

gracious Spirit's love for people in worsening poverty and on the run from war.

Often, however, the Church finds it much easier to fall back into issuing official statements regarding long-standing moral issues like artificial contraception, homosexuality, divorce, the role of women in liturgy and Church life, and folk religiosity than to be directly and deeply involved in the lives of the victims of poverty and violence.

In the Philippines, for instance, the Bishops' Conference has lately been in the media, delivering statements and rallying Church support against the civil government's "condom campaign".[316] More recently still, Bishop Paciano Aniceto, who heads the Episcopal Commission on Family Life, has been speaking to the nation, urging homosexuals to come out in order to "know themselves better and what they did wrong."[317] Granted that the importance of these moral issues cannot be entirely underestimated, the struggle against sectarian violence and economic poverty in the Philippines remains the more urgent issue for the Church to address. It is what requires sustained, vigorous, and concerted Church involvement towards solutions. If the Church in Asia is to be a self-denying and prophetic communion of communities, its leaders must always strive for greater relevance—in this case, relevance to and action for the poor. They must also be very discerning, prudent, and cautious in order to avoid further disenchantment and division in a community whose faithful members happen to come from many different backgrounds, have different sexual orientations, and experience various spiritual and emotional struggles. This requires prudence and wisdom in the Church's choice of issues to prioritize and address. In this respect, uniting the community against violence and poverty at this point in Philippine history gives clearer witness to Jesus, who loves the poor. It marks a greater obedience to the Spirit who leads the Church to be a Church of the poor. This prophetic

---

[316] See http://www.catholicnewsagency.com/news/philippines_bishops_warn_against_govt._condom_campaign/ (accessed 25 February 2011).

[317] See http://www.lifesitenews.com/news/philippine-bishops-encourage-homosexuals-to-come-out-for-support (accessed 25 February 2011).

witness will demand substantial self-forgetfulness which can mean, especially for authorities, to relinquish their pet moral protests against otherwise less pressing but potentially divisive issues, and instead refocus ecclesiastical strength and efforts on the ever-present struggle for basic human dignity and well-being among its people.

A significant part of the Church's capacity to be hospitable to the poor of the community requires a constant re-evaluation of ecclesiastical lifestyle. The tendency towards complacency and attachment to comfort can be mitigated if the Church, especially its leaders, devotes sustained energy in working towards eradicating poverty and equally execrable forms of subjugation of the weak by the powerful—both locally and globally. This constant re-evaluation can help shake off the self-satisfaction and isolation that material wealth and power often cause. One of the best ways to uplift the poor is to maintain close contact with them and a lifestyle that is in solidarity with them. A self-forgetful Church values its gifts not for their own sake but for their capacity to bring the community "to live a communion of life which shows itself particularly in loving service to the poor and defenseless…especially migrants…indigenous and tribal peoples…women and with children since they are often the victims of the worst forms of exploitation" (EA 32, 34). The wealth and authority the Church enjoys must significantly assist in putting an end to social evil, not to perpetuate it by being complicit with it.

Echoing Medellin 1968 and Puebla 1980, Aloysius Pieris insists that the community's fundamental mission is to the poor.[318] "He who entrusted this mission to us has so defined it. Because good news to the poor is always bad news to the rich, the liberation of the rich is mediated by the liberation of the poor, not vice versa."[319]

What Ishvani Kendra sees as the vision for the new millennium of the Asian Church deserves mention.

---

[318] Pieris, *An Asian Theology of Liberation*, 36.

[319] Ibid., 36.

> Reading the signs of the times enjoins on us the duty to reformulate the meaning of mission in response to the present day exigencies. What our milieu calls for is a clear departure from the preferred positions of the past resulting from blatant triumphalism, unqualified claims of absolutism, smothering hierarchism, unhealthy dualism, and debilitating male domination. For tomorrow's Christian mission, the methods we adopt will be the ultimate message. Accepting mission as the art of negotiating boundaries, evangelizers are called upon to ready themselves for the task of communing across the borders, recognized as essentially porous and fluid. Moving beyond the confines of mere inclusivism and pluralism, they embrace the concept of kenotic universality, as opposed to hegemonic universality, and thus turn themselves into harbingers of a culture of tolerance and peace and messengers of hope.[320]

When God reigns, the Spirit dwells as a presence of welcome and care for the poor and the oppressed. Whenever prophets experienced God's powerful presence, they zealously spoke and witnessed against power and authority complicit in the oppression of the poor—even to the extent of imperiling their own lives. It is clear how care for widows, orphans, aliens, and laborers occupied a special place in the prophetic witness to the community. "I will be quick to testify…against those who defraud laborers of their wages, who oppress the widows and the fatherless, and deprive aliens of justice" (Mal 3:5; also Zech 7:10; Jer 5:28; 22:3; Is 3:14-15; Ez 2:29). In the time of the Lord, there was praise and blessing for those who welcomed the lowliest in the community with whom Jesus identified himself: "For I was hungry, and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink…a stranger and you welcomed me" (Mt 25:35; cf. also Mt 5:42, 6:2-4, 19:20ff; Lk 14:12-14, 16:19-25). The presence of the Spirit often brings the poor significantly into the vision of salvation. In the experience of grace by the Lord's very own mother, as

---

[320] Ishvani Kendra, "A Vision for the Church for the New Millenium" in *EAPI Pastoral Review* 37, no. 2 (2000), at http://eapi.admu.edu.ph/eapr00/kendra.htm (accessed 5 January 2011).

the Holy Spirit overshadowed her and Divinity literally dwelled in her womb, Mary glorified the gracious God as someone who was mindful of a lowly servant and who brought down rulers from their thrones, exalted the lowly, filled the hungry with good things, and sent the rich away empty (Lk 1:46-55).

Grace instills selflessness in both individuals and communities. It endows them with many other-oriented capacities—like empathy, kindness, patience, friendship, etc. But because grace has a communitarian dimension, owing to the Spirit of Christ who identified himself mostly closely with the poor, grace is the specific drive and capacity to reach out and be of assistance to the community of the poor. Concern and action for the poor validate the authenticity of the response that a person or a community makes to God's grace. Contrariwise, doing very little or nothing at all towards caring for the poor in the community may very well signal a serious misunderstanding about grace, or a shortfall of faith, hope, and love. In his epistle, James asks: "What good is it…if someone claims to have faith but has no deeds? If one of you says, 'Go in peace; keep warm and well-fed,' but does nothing about their physical needs, what good is it? In the same way, faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead" (Jas 2:14-17). Grace, like faith, is a relationship with God that is most authentically manifested in love especially for the poor. Persons or communities may claim that God has blessed them with divine presence and its concomitant blessings. But if they are mostly turned into their internal affairs at the expense of sustained action for the least of the Lord's brothers and sisters, how will they stand at the judgment described in Matthew 25?

By being directly and intimately involved with those who suffer poverty and oppression, the Church not only contributes directly to humanity's search for wholeness and liberation; it can once again become a sign of hope to other communities in its being a servant of God through its ministry to the poor. Here is a notion worth more serious consideration—if Asian communities place empowerment of and assistance to the poor as the highest priority, the poor can actually draw cultures and religions together towards a common

and urgent humanitarian cause: the preservation and improvement of the life and dignity of persons who are in most need. Poverty is blind to religion or culture. Poor people are everywhere in Asia, across faith, heritage, geographical borders, or political persuasions. What Christ says about the poor is true; that they will always be around (Mt 26:11). That they are ever-present may have made them precisely "invisible" to many communities including the Church. Despite many good efforts among both religious, lay, civil or government groups, poverty continues to tether thousands of Asian families to hunger, sickness, and desperation. There is all the more reason that communities should come together and prioritize the poor, because in the face of advancing technology and human know-how, poverty and all the suffering it brings have yet to find a shared, sustainable effort at a solution.

Poverty "binds" many Asians together in the sense that beyond culture and religion, they will always have the poor among them. But this poverty can also "bind" communities more closely towards a common cause. In the face of poverty, communities must ever be self-conscious that the poor are always with them, that they will always be in need of uplifting and defense against the forces that perpetuate their plight. At the same time, communities must deny themselves by setting aside doctrinal differences, living more simply with and for the poor, and taking up the cross of the poor *together*. In that way, the poor can indeed be our "salvation".

CONCLUSION

In a homily about the unity of love for God and neighbor, Rahner says:

> To people in their nature as spiritual, personal subjects, the world is primarily a world with others. We do not live in an environment merely filled with all types of things. Rather, from the perspective of the subject and the reality that humans encounter, the world has an inner structure and is ultimately a communication of love with the other, the "you." The entire material world we deal with, even in economic and social matters, for example, is basically only the material, the prerequisite, the effect of a loving communication with the other "you." In the radical freedom that creates eternity, people may completely dispose of themselves, and this self-disposal is ultimately either a loving self-opening toward the human "you" or an ultimate self-refusal in egotism, which casts people into the condemning, deadly loneliness of being lost…. In the act of understanding and especially in the act of freedom, we are always and everywhere implicitly dealing with God. When people act in a loving way toward others as the basic act of their existence, then this basic act results from the general sanctifying and salvific will of God, which exists and works also outside the church, is carried out by God's Holy Spirit, by God's grace, and is at least implicitly, but truly, an act of charity, an act of the love of God.[321]

Deeply planted in being human is an ordination and a desire for the absolute, the whole, the unified, the "all together." The runaway

---

[321] Karl Rahner, "Love of God and Neighbor" in *The Mystical Way in Everyday Life*, trans. and ed. Annemarie S. Kidder (New York: Orbis, 2010), 81.

popularity of internet social networking and information-sharing in the global community is one of many popular manifestations of this inherent dynamism towards inter-connectedness to the larger network. In various areas of expertise like medicine, psychiatry, architecture, art, and entrepreneurship, there is increasing value placed on the role of the group, the family, and the community in the concern for healing, for instance, or in caring for the planet, or in succeeding in business, or in achieving societal integrity. In other words, whatever we personally or communally aspire for and do to attain it, it is essentially an endeavor as interdependent persons who desire unity and harmony. Self-actualization is a shared achievement. Well-being is not an individualistic pursuit. Both are significantly shaped by the community that nurtures, protects, and challenges us. Like human knowledge in which we behold what is other and make sense of it only by relating it to the network of things we already know—we appreciate each other's uniqueness and affirm our common aspirations only when we relate meaningfully with one another as community. Even our desire for individuality is underpinned by an even deeper desire to belong to the larger complex of relationships, a desire to be loved by those different from ourselves—the way God has drawn and loved us who are "other" to God. We are able to know who God is only by knowing one another. We are able to affirm that God is love only by experiencing that love in and through one another.

Grace, God's self-communication to persons, is the ground of this ordination and desire for the absolute, the whole, the unified—for community. God creates us so that God may continually and lovingly offer Godself to all of us. With God's self-communication reaching an irreversible point in the Incarnation, we know more assuredly that we relate most meaningfully with God only in knowing and relating with those whom God assumes as God's own reality—our fellow members of the community. Christ's presence of healing and reconciliation in the community has shown for all time that our mission and our goal as God's creatures are one and the same: to be ceaselessly drawn together and united with God always and everywhere, by being lovingly united with one another. This is the ecclesial dimension of grace. God's self-communication gives birth to relationships. It creates

the Church in whom God dwells in reconciling love. As God's offer and our response, grace is ecclesial.

The FABC communally discerns that the new way of being Church in Asia is to be a participatory, dialogical, and prophetic community. This self-understanding is both a fruit of grace and a description of grace as an ecclesial reality. It is a fruit of grace in that the Church-building Spirit has drawn together many representatives of the Asian community and inspired them to seriously reckon with the pluralism of cultures and religions, and with the abiding poverty in the Asian community. Moreover, the threefold self-understanding shows the specific ecclesiality of grace. God's participative, dialogical, and prophetic presence in the community empowers its members towards a similar disposition. The Spirit encourages the leaders of the community to give more members an active share in the pursuit of ecclesial and societal integrity. The Spirit urges the Christian community to assume an attitude and practice of sincere dialogue with other faith and cultural communities in order to foster mutual respect and unity. The Spirit advocates that communities harness the wisdom of cultures, the power of religions, and the social influence of the government leaders in order to alleviate the poverty of their very own brothers and sisters. Participation, dialogue, and prophetic action are not alien to us. They are a concretization of God's own participative, dialogical, and prophetic grace that grounds our humanity, our ordination towards being interrelated, and our mission as a Church.

Grace is the Spirit of the self-giving God indwelling in us. Through this indwelling, God participates in our human lot, speaks to us and empowers us to listen to the Spirit, and instills in us a hunger for justice which impels the struggle against poverty in its many forms. Grace empowers persons to indwell each other in community as well. We are able to participate in each other's realities, dialogue with other communities, and exert concerted effort to lift up the poor when we constantly affirm that the reality of the Church is far wider than how we often see and experience it.

We indwell one another when we, for instance, continue to strive towards deeper familiarity and empathy with the personal, marital, spiritual, or moral concerns that currently press upon the members of the community. This way, what we teach and practice as a Church issues from a meaningful, contemporaneous, and inculturated context. We indwell one another when we allow ourselves to be taught by the wisdom that has kept other cultures and religions as alive and vibrant as our own. This way, we see how God's saving will is truly manifested in all communities where love and justice prevail. When we indwell the poor—learn from their simplicity and survival, see how they depend on each other to rise above their circumstances, and understand how they keep the faith despite daily suffering—we realize as a Church that it is to their upliftment that we need to pour our greatest shared effort if we truly are God's people.

The Church grows and deepens in knowledge and love of God not by merely reading about other faiths, or passive attendance at Church service, or detached observation of the poor, but by our mutual indwelling in each other's realities, diversities, and plight for justice as the Spirit empowers us to do. A setback in some communities happens when some leaders knowingly or unwittingly try to make the community more of an extension of their personal selves, their own desires, fears, or compunctions. As a result, community spirit devolves towards self-protection, rigid uniformity, or exclusivism rather than graciousness, hospitality, and unity in diversity. In such a case, the leaders may become reactive instead of responsive to the Spirit's inspiration for renewal. The Spirit's gracious action throughout the history of the world reveals God's presence in new and shifting realities, fresh even if sometimes bewildering perspectives and narratives arising from ever evolving human relationships especially in the rapid advancement of communication technology. Hence, a shared sense of self-forgetfulness or self-denial plays an important role in cooperating with the Spirit dwelling in the Church. This is true especially on the part of the leaders for whom change sometimes poses a threat to their personal stability. Nevertheless, spiritual, pastoral, cultural, and moral renewal signals the presence and indwelling dynamism of the Spirit in the community, not its absence. Faithfulness to God calls

for shared and constant re-adaptation of the community to evolving relationships, even when it means self-forgetfulness—falling to the ground and dying to oneself in order to give way to new growth, new fellowship with other faiths, and a better life for the poor.

In his essay entitled "Mission: A Journey of Hope", Michael Amaladoss sees that a global community is the goal of both the reign of God in the Spirit and of the human search for wholeness and unity.

> We are living in a redeemed world and this is the source of our hope. We are now living in the era of the creative Spirit. Somehow our Christianity has taught us to look back at the past, to Christ on the cross. But Christ is risen and the Spirit has been given to us. This Spirit is in each one of us, freeing us and enabling us to call God our Abba, Father. The cosmos itself is groaning to join us in this movement of liberation. The Spirit helps us in our weakness, interceding for us with sighs too deep for words, working in everything for our good. "Neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Rom 8:38-39). This same Spirit links us together with his many gifts, given to us for our service to the community. The one Spirit unites us as the one body of Christ. This is more real for us than all that divides us. The fruits of the Spirit are "love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control." This is our hope. We should fix our eyes on the future that the Spirit will enable us to achieve, not in the past nor the present with all our shortcomings. The new Pentecostal communities have a lesson for us. They are alive with praise, thankfulness, joy, and hope in a way that our staid liturgical communities, oppressed by a sense of sin and suffering, are not.[322]

---

[322] Michael Amaladoss, "Mission: A Journey of Hope" in *East Asian Pastoral Review* 46, no. 1 (2009), at http://eapi.admu.edu.ph/content/ mission-journey-hope (accessed 17 July 2011).

The Asian Church can still grow in grace. There remains much room for greater participation, interfaith dialogue, and prophetic action for the poor. Nonetheless, the Spirit continues to lead and urge us to discover what unites our different cultures and faiths, given the many different gifts we are to share in serving the community. Just as the Asian Church has much to learn and celebrate regarding how God communicates Godself through the realities of diversity and of poverty, so, too, does the Asian Church have much to share with the Universal Church in this experience of ecclesial grace. The indwelling, self-giving God desires that all humanity be drawn towards Godself in unity and justice.

Greater attention to the ecclesial essence of grace can pose pertinent questions to the areas of spirituality, ecclesiology, and systematic theology that may lead to further directions in each field of study.

In spirituality, especially in the context of the Spiritual Exercises, where grace is a crucial element in prayer, how may one discern the spiritual progress of a retreatant or spiritual directee in and outside of the retreat context, considering that grace is essentially ecclesial? Over time, the spiritual director may look for signs towards such maturity particularly in his or her increasing sense of openness towards other people's particular dynamics, greater patience and willingness to listen to other people's perspectives, and feeling a growing passion to be of service to others especially the poor. How much a person is capable of denying oneself in order to be a positive, life-giving, and joyful presence in the community is a good measure of a person's self-mastery and interior freedom that are fruits of ecclesial grace.

In the area of ecclesiology, the ways by which the Asian Church continues to embrace, theologize about, and incorporate the reality of diversity and plurality into its self-understanding can provide theologians and Church leaders some criteria by which they may evaluate their response to God's grace: In the life of the Church, is there wider representation of members invited to participate in the analysis and decision-making regarding the life and worship of the

Church? Are the leaders closely in touch with the actual social and moral situations and experiences of the members? What does it mean to be laity if God's self-giving to lay people cannot be any less efficacious than God's self-giving to the religious or the ordained? Does the community welcome different world-views or new perspectives regarding the human person, relationships, or regarding God's salvific will vis-à-vis people of a different faith? Is the community attentive to new ways by which the people manifest and celebrate their faith, their humanity, their uniqueness, their unions? Do communities of the poor find powerful and sustained advocacy in the leaders and members of the Church outside of the parish setting or of the mass?

In systematic theology, discussions on grace might earn a much-needed revitalization if there is focus on grace as the supernatural existential that is fundamentally ecclesial, that is, always personal yet also communitarian, and grounds knowledge and love which are relational realities as well. A theologian's constant awareness of grace as an ecclesial reality can urge him to investigate further into the associative implications of grace in revelation, soteriology, tradition, the Magisterium, or theological anthropology. Moreover, to understand nature as already being graced by the Spirit who constitutes Church may also encourage the theologian to envision nature as a connective reality, as encompassing wider, newer, and more varied qualities than formerly appreciated.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Books

Amaladoss, Michael. *The Asian Jesus*. New York: Orbis, 2006.

Avineri, Shlomo and De-Shalit, Avner, eds. *Communitarianism and Individualism*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992.

Banks, Robert J. *Paul's Idea of a Community: The Early House Churches in Their Cultural Setting*. Peabody: Hendrickson Publishers, 1994.

Bevans, Stephen B. *An Introduction to Theology in Global Perspective*, ed. Peter Phan. New York: Orbis, 2009.

———. *Models of Contextual Theology: Revised and Expanded Edition*. New York: Orbis, 2004.

Boff, Leonardo. *Liberating Grace*. Eugene: Wipf and Stock, 1979.

Burrows, William R., ed. *Redemption and Dialogue: Reading Redemptoris Missio and Dialogue and Proclamation*. Eugene: Wipf and Stock, 1993.

Cassidy, Edward Idris Cardinal. *Rediscovering Vatican II: Ecumenism and Interreligious Dialogue—Unitatis Redintegratio, Nostra Aetate*. New York: Paulist Press, 2005.

Catechism of the Catholic Church, trans. United States Catholic Conference. New York: Doubleday, 1994.

Congar, Yves. *I Believe in the Holy Spirit*, trans. David Smith. New York: Herder and Herder, 1983.

———. *True and False Reform in the Church*, trans. Paul Philibert, O.P. Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 2011.

Cote, Richard. *Universal Grace: Myth or Reality?* New York: Orbis, 1977.

Crowley, Paul G., S.J., ed. *Rahner Beyond Rahner: A Great Theologian Encounters the Pacific Rim*. New York: Sheed and Ward, 2005.

Doyle, Dennis M. *Communion Ecclesiology: Vision and Versions*. New York: Orbis, 2000.

Duffy, Stephen J. *Dynamics of Grace.* Eugene: Wipf and Stock, 1993.

Dulles, Avery. *Models of the Church*. New York: Image Books, 2002.

Dupuis, Jacques. *Toward a Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism.* New York: Orbis, 2001.

Eilers, Franz J., S.V.D., ed. *For All the Peoples of Asia: Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences Documents from 1992-1996.* Diliman: Claretian Publications, 1997.

———. *For All the Peoples of Asia: Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences Documents from 1997-2001*. Diliman: Claretian Publications, 2002.

———. *For All the Peoples of Asia: Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences Documents from 2002-2006*. Diliman: Claretian Publications, 2007.

Fairweather, A. M., ed. and trans. *Aquinas on Nature and Grace: Selections from the Summa Theologica*. London: Westminster John Knox Press, 1954.

Fiorenza, Francis Schüssler and Galvin, John P., eds. *Systematic Theology: Roman Catholic Perspectives*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2011.

Fox, Patricia. *God as Communion: John Zizioulas, Elizabeth Johnson and the Retrieval of the Symbol of the Triune God*. Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 2001.

Fox, Thomas C. *Pentecost in Asia: A New Way of Being Church*. New York: Orbis, 2002.

Fransen, Peter. *Divine Grace and Man*, trans. George Dupont S.J. New York: Mentor-Omega Book, 1965.

Ganss, George E., S.J., trans., *The Spiritual Exercises of Saint Ignatius*. St. Louis: Institute of Jesuit Sources, 1992.

Gelpi, Donald L., S.J. *The Gracing of Human Experience: Rethinking the Relationship Between Nature and Grace*. Eugene: Michael Glazier, 2007.

Gleason, Robert W., S.J. *Grace*. New York: Sheed and Ward, 1962.

Haight, Roger, S.J. *Dynamics of Theology*. New York: Orbis, 1990.

Hanson, Paul D. *The People Called: The Growth of Community in the Bible*. Louisville: John Knox Press, 2001.

Hardon, John, S.J. *History and Theology of Grace: The Catholic Teaching on Divine Grace*. Ann Arbor: Ave Maria University, 2005.

Johnson, Elizabeth. *Quest for the Living God: Mapping Frontiers in the Theology of God*. New York: Continuum, 2007.

———. *She Who Is: The Mystery of God in Feminist Theological Discourse*. Tenth anniversary edition. New York: Herder and Herder, 2002.

LaCugna, Catherine M. *God For Us: The Trinity and Christian Life*. New York: Harper Collins, 1991.

Lennan, Richard. *Risking the Church: The Challenges of Catholic Faith*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004.

———. *The Ecclesiology of Karl Rahner*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997.

Livingston, James C. *Modern Christian Thought: The Enlightenment and the Nineteenth Century*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2006.

Macmurray, John. *Persons in Relation*. Amherst: Humanity Books, 1999.

Mercado, Monina A. *People Power: An Eyewitness History: The Philippine Revolution of 1986*. Manila: Writers and Readers Publishing, Inc., 1986.

Panikkar, Raimundo. *The Silence of God: The Answer of the Buddha*, trans. Robert R. Bar. New York: Orbis, 1989.

———. *The Unknown Christ of Hinduism*. Revised and enlarged edition. New York: Orbis, 1981.

Pekarske, Daniel T. *Abstracts of Karl Rahner's Theological Investigations 1 to 23*. Marquette: Marquette University Press, 2006.

Phan, Peter. *Being Religious Interreligiously: Asian Perspectives on Interfaith Dialogue*. New York: Orbis, 2004.

———. *Christianity with an Asian Face*. New York: Orbis, 2003.

Pieris, Aloysius. *An Asian Theology of Liberation*. New York: Orbis, 1988.

Pohl, Christine D. *Making Room: Recovering Hospitality as a Christian Tradition*. Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1999.

Quattra, Miguel Marcelo, O.M.I. *At the Side of the Multitudes: The Kingdom of God and the Mission of the Church in the FABC Documents*. Diliman: Claretian Publications, 2000.

Rahner, Karl, ed. *Encyclopedia of Theology: A Concise Sacramentum Mundi*. New York: Burns and Oats, 1975.

———. *Foundations of Christian Faith*. New York: Crossroad, 1976.

———. "Love of God and Neighbor" in *The Mystical Way in Everyday Life*, trans. and ed. Annemarie S. Kidder. New York: Orbis, 2010.

———. *The Church and the Sacraments*. London: Burns and Oates, 1974.

———. *The Eternal Year*, trans. J. Shea, S.S. Baltimore: Helicon, 1964.

———. *The Practice of Faith: A Handbook of Contemporary Spirituality*, ed. K. Lehman and A. Raffelt. New York: Crossroad, 1984.

———. *The Trinity*, trans. Joseph Donceel. New York: Crossroad and Herder, 1997.

———. *Theological Investigations*, trans. Cornelius Ernst, vol. 1. Baltimore: Helicon Press, 1966.

———. *Theological Investigations*, trans. Karl-H. Kruger and Boniface Kruger, vol. 3. New York: Crossroad, 1985.

———. *Theological Investigations*, trans. Kevin Smyth, vol. 4. Baltimore: Helicon Press, 1966.

———. *Theological Investigations*, trans. Karl-H. Kruger, vol. 5. Baltimore: Helicon Press, 1966.

———. *Theological Investigations*, trans. Karl-H. Kruger and Boniface Kruger, vol. 6. Baltimore: Helicon Press, 1969.

———. *Theological Investigations*, trans. Graham Harrison, vol. 9. New York: Herder and Herder, 1979.

———. *Theological Investigations*, trans. Margaret Kohl, vol. 17. New York: Crossroad, 1981.

———. *Theological Investigations*, trans. Edward Quinn, vol. 19. New York: Crossroad, 1983.

———. *Theological Investigations*, trans. Edward Quinn, vol. 20. New York: Crossroad, 1981.

———. *Theological Investigations*, trans. Joseph Donceel and H. Riley, vol. 22. New York: Crossroad, 1992.

Rosales, Gaudencio, D.D. and Arevalo, C. G., S.J., eds. *For All the Peoples of Asia: Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences Documents from 1970-1991*. Diliman: Claretian Publications, 1997.

Russell, Norman. *The Doctrine of Deification in the Greek Patristic Tradition*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004.

Schreiter, Robert. *Constructing Local Theologies*. New York: Orbis, 1999.

———. *The New Catholicity: Theology Between the Global and the Local*. New York: Orbis, 1999.

Segundo, Juan Luis, S.J. *Grace and the Human Condition*. New York: Orbis, 1973.

Shorter, Aylward. *Toward a Theology of Inculturation*. Eugene: Wipf and Stock, 1999.

Sobrino, Jon, S.J. *Hope and Solidarity: Jon Sobrino's Challenge to Christian Theology*, ed. Stephen Pope. New York: Orbis, 2008.

———. *Spirituality of Liberation: Toward Political Holiness*, trans. Robert R. Barr. New York: Orbis, 1988.

———. *The Principle of Mercy*. New York: Orbis, 1997.

Sobrino, Jon, S.J. and Ellacuría, Ignacio, S.J., eds. *Systematic Theology: Perspectives from Liberation Theology*. New York: Orbis, 1993.

Sugirtharajah, R. S., ed. *Asian Faces of Jesus*. New York: Orbis, 1993.

Tillard, J. M. R. *Church of Churches: The Ecclesiology of Communion*, trans. R. C. De Peaux, O. Praem. Collegeville: The Liturgical Press, 1992.

———. *Flesh of the Church, Flesh of Christ: At the Source of the Ecclesiology of Communion*. Collegeville: The Liturgical Press, 2001.

Torrance, Thomas. *The Doctrine of Grace in the Apostolic Fathers*. Eugene: Wipf and Stock, 1996.

Vatican Council II: Constitutions, Decrees, Declarations: A Completely Revised Translation in Inclusive Language, ed. Austin Flannery, O.P. Newport: Costello Publishing Company, 1995.

Zizioulas, John D. *Being as Communion*. New York: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1985.

———. *Communion and Otherness: Further Studies in Personhood and the Church*, ed. Paul McPartlan. London: T and T Clarke, 2006.

Articles

Amaladoss, Michael. "Mission: A Journey of Hope" in *East Asian Pastoral Review* 46, no. 1 (2009), at http://eapi.admu.edu.ph/content/mission-journey-hope (accessed 17 July 2011).

Arokasiamy, Soosai. "Asia: The Struggle for Life in the Midst of Death and Destruction" in *Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences Papers* (from hereon, *FABC Papers*), no. 70, at http://www.ucanews.com/ html/fabc-papers/fabc-70.htm (accessed 7 January 2011).

Asian Development Bank. "Fighting Poverty in Asia and the Pacific: The Poverty Reduction Strategy" at http://www.adb.org/documents/policies/poverty_reduction/challenge.asp (accessed 16 May 2011).

Bevans, Stephen, S.V.D. "Twenty-Five Years of Inculturation in Asia: The Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences, 1970-1995" in *FABC Papers*, no. 78 (1995), at http://www.ucanews.com/html/fabc-papers/fabc-78-bevans.htm (accessed 8 March 2010).

Catholic Bishops Conference of the Philippines. "Choosing Life, Rejecting the Bill: A Pastoral Letter of the CBCP" at http://cbcpnews.com/?q=node/14472 (accessed 4 April 2011).

Claver, Francisco, S.J. "Inculturation as Dialogue" in *The Asian Synod: Texts and Commentaries*, comp. and ed. Peter Phan, 100-101. New York: Orbis, 2002.

Clooney, Frank, S.J. "Rahner Beyond Rahner: A Comparative Theologian's Reflections on Theological Investigation 18" in *Rahner Beyond Rahner: A Great Theologian Encounters the Pacific Rim*, ed. Paul G. Crowley, S.J., 12. New York: Sheed and Ward, 2005.

D'Ambra, Sebastiano. "Interreligious Dialogue in *Ecclesia in Asia*" in *The Future of the Asian Churches: The Asian Synod and Ecclesia in Asia*, ed. James H. Kroeger, M.M. and Peter C. Phan. Quezon City: Claretian Publications, 2002.

De Mesa, José. "The Quest for Truth in Asia" in *East Asian Pastoral Review* 1998, at http://eapi.admu.edu.ph/eapr98/joede.htm (accessed 10 February 2011).

Evers, George. "Challenges to the Churches in Asia Today", a talk given at the East Asia Pastoral Institute Alumni Homecoming, 4 October 2005, Manila, at http://eapi. admu.edu.ph/eapr006/georgevers.htm (accessed 9 March 2010).

Genilo, Eric, S.J., et al. "Talking Points for Dialogue on the RH Bill: Towards Critical and Constructive Engagement" at http://www.admu.edu.ph/index.php?p=120&type=2&aid=9056 (accessed 5 January 2011).

Ikenaga, Leo Jun, S.J. "Evangelization and Culture" in *The Asian Synod: Texts and Commentaries*, comp. and ed. Peter C. Phan. New York: Orbis, 2002.

Karris, Robert J., O.F.M. "The Gospel According to Luke" in *The New Jerome Biblical Commentary*, ed. R. E. Brown, J. A. Fitzmyer,

S.J., and R. E. Murphy, O.Carm. Upper Saddle River: Prentice Hall, 1990.

Kendra, Ishvani. "A Vision for the Church for the New Millenium" in *EAPI Pastoral Review* 37, no. 2 (2000) at http://eapi.admu.edu.ph/eapr00/kendra.htm (accessed 5 Jan 2011).

Kroeger, James. "The Second Vatican Council and the Church in Asia: Readings and Reflections" in *FABC Papers*, no. 117 (2006), at http://www.ucanews.com/html/ fabc-papers/fabc-117.htm (accessed 6 August 2009).

Oshikawa, Berard T., OFM Conv. "Pastoral Life in Asia and 'The Principle of Graduality'" in *The Asian Synod: Texts and Commentaries*, comp. and ed. Peter C. Phan, 104. New York: Orbis, 2002.

Pope John Paul II. *Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation Ecclesia in Asia* at http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/john_paul_ii/apost_exhortations/ documents/hf_jp-ii_exh_06111999 _ecclesia-in-asia_en.html (accessed 20 December 2009).

Pope Paul VI. "Address to All the Bishops of Asia: Manila, Philippines; 28 November 1970" at http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/paul_vi/speeches/1970/documents/hf_p-vi_spe_19701129_popoli-asia_en.html (accessed 1 February 2010).

Pope Paul VI. *Populorum Progressio* (Encyclical of Pope Paul VI on the Development of Peoples, 26 March 1967) at http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/paul_vi/encyclicals/ documents/hf_p-vi_enc_26031967_populorum_ en.html (accessed 8 March 2010).

Tagle, Luis Antonio G. "Renewal That Awaits The Church In Asia: A Theological And Ecclesiological Reflection On Renewal" in *FABC Papers*, no. 91 (2000), at http://www.ucanews.com/html/fabc-papers/fabc-91.htm (accessed 17 August 2009).

Wilfred, Felix. "The Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences: Orientations, Challenges, and Impact" in *For All the Peoples of*

Asia: Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences Documents from 1970-1991, ed. Gaudencio Rosales, D.D. and C.G. Arevalo, S.J., vol. 1, xxiii-xxiv. Diliman: Claretian Publications, 1997.

World Religions Statistics at http://www.adherents.com/Religions_By_Adherents.html (accessed 3 January 2010).

Zizioulas, John D. "The Pneumatological Dimension of the Church" in *Communio: International Catholic Review* 1 (1974), 147.



Arnel de Castro Aquino, SJ holds degrees in Sacred Theology from Loyola School of Theology (STB and STL) and a Doctorate in Sacred Theology (STD) from the Weston Jesuit School of Theology and Boston College School of Theology and Ministry. He currently teaches Systematic Theology at Loyola School of Theology, focusing on Revelation/Faith, Creation/Eschatology, Sin/Grace, and the Sacraments. His published works include *Empty Boat … Full Nets* (which won the Cardinal Sin Award for Best Book in Homiletics in November 2020) and his most recent one, *But Only Say the Word.*