

“Journeying Together Towards the Third Millennium”

The Final Statement of the Fifth Plenary Assembly of Federation of Asian Bishops' Conference

Bandung, Indonesia July 27, 1990

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Gathered together at Bandung, Indonesia, for the Fifth Plenary Assembly of the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences, from the 17th to 27th July 1990, we, the bishops, priests, Religious and laity, experienced a communion which resembled our Asian Church in miniature. We were united in prayer, asking for an outpouring of the Holy Spirit on all the Church, imploring his grace also for those who were not able to be present. In an atmosphere of mutual sharing and dialogue, we considered the theme: “The Emerging Challenges for the Church in Asia in the 1990s: A Call to Respond.” We reflected on the time in which we find ourselves in Asia, and tried to see the way on which we must walk as the Church in this vast continent. The time, the way and the place are deeply related to the mission of Christ which we as his Church must continue.

1.2 We sought to understand and appreciate the critical importance on the present time and to hear what God is calling us to do as we complete the last decade of the second millennium and came to the threshold of the third, remembering that all times are embraced in the hour of Jesus.

1.3 Being at Bandung, we remembered that it was here that the non-Aligned Movement was born 35 years ago, as a Third Force in between the first world of capitalism and the second world of communism. And today, with the collapse of the Berlin Wall, symbolizing the dawn of a new era, we see an opportunity opening up for the Church to present its social doctrine. We feel even more the challenge to work for a new and just international order, where even the small states can make a contribution and all nations can participate with dignity, and live in peace with one another. We discussed the theology and motivation which should inspire us at this critical time.

1.4 We searched together for a way along which the Asian Church must walk. A father of the Church has said: “Walk in man and you will arrive in God.” This is possible because the Word of God became flesh and called himself the Way (John 14.6). As Pope John Paul II says in the Redeemer of Humankind: “This man is the way for the Church—a way that, in a sense, is the basis of all the other ways the Church must walk, because with man—every man without exception whatever—Christ is in a way united, even when man is unaware of it.”

1.5 Finally, having regarded this huge land mass of Asia and our “teeming millions,” we tried to understand our Asian realities. This is the context of God’s creative, incarnational and redemptive action, the theatre in which the drama of Asia’s salvation is enacted.

1.6 We then tried to see the new way of being and becoming Church in Asia and also the spirituality which must inform it.

1.7 We regret that there are many situations and structures, groups and persons in Asia where justice and peace, love and compassion, equality and brotherhood, and religious freedom do not always find a sufficient place for existence. Our challenge is to proclaim the Good News of the Kingdom of God: to promote justice, peace, love, compassion, equality and brotherhood in these Asian realities. In short, it is to work to make the Kingdom of God a reality. We wish, then, to share with our Asian sisters and brothers and with all men and women of goodwill the journey in faith that we experienced in these days when we were together at Bandung. Our challenge is to cooperate with all people of goodwill in God’s action in the world in the service of justice and peace.

II. Challenges and hopes

A. The Challenge of Ferment and Change in Asia

2.1.1 The past year has been a time of extraordinary change and desire for change. The face of Eastern Europe appears transformed. There is new hopes for a just society in Southern Africa. Here in Asia popular movements for participation in society are emerging.

2.1.2 We are conscious that the Asian reality is increasingly part of the global reality. Our world is becoming progressively interdependent, with mutual interests and concerns. This situation holds our great opportunities. The old order dominated by the two power blocks has broken down. A new order is emerging, in which even the smallest nation can play its role; Asian countries influencing, as well as being influenced by, the rest of the world.

2.1.3 Change is the most constant factor in our societies. Some changes are clearly beneficial--we think, for instance, of the disappearance of many old animosities between nations. Other changes are full of promise but of uncertain outcome--we think of the growing desire for participation in society, dramatically apparent in the democracy movement which has made itself felt in a number of Asian countries. Other changes again are at best of ambiguous value. There is new economic prosperity in many of our societies, but typically it has benefited mainly a tiny elite--old power structures remain substantially unchanged.

2.1.4 A striking change in many of our societies in the breakdown of the nation-state. Typically the nation-state in Asia was usually the creation of the colonial powers; boundaries were set up with little regard for traditional, ethnic and cultural groupings. Hence, it is not surprising that we now witness a variety of “secessionist” movements, and, tragically, widespread ethnic and communal conflict and violence.

2.1.5 One reaction to this situation is the growth of “statism” --the imposition of artificial harmony through oppressive state power. Elsewhere, the struggle for power spawns militant fundamentalism, by which a majority group or a powerful minority imposes its values on the rest of society. Religious fundamentalism has its attraction to some believers for primarily religious reasons.

But such attractions is too often exploited by persons and groups whose motive is political power and social control, or economic greed. Here we see how valid Pope John Paul II's analysis of social problems is in his encyclical *On Social Concerns*. He points out that the desire for profit and the desire for power are the root causes of social problems all over the world.

2.1.6 Modernization offers bright promise for our future. Even so, the whole process of modernization is fraught with ambiguity. Modernization often leads to social and cultural dislocation. Traditional values and attitude are called into question. Traditional symbols lose their power. The beneficiaries of modernization are too often infected with secularism, materialism and consumerism. In some countries there has arisen a new middle class which is highly consumeristic and competitive, and in general insensitive and indifferent to the overwhelming majority of poor and marginalized people.

B. The Challenge of Continuing Injustice

2.2.1 We are deeply conscious, therefore, that within our context of change there is the unchanging reality of injustice. There remains in Asia massive poverty. Hundreds of millions of people are debarred from access to natural resources. Exploitation of the environment destroys precious resources and thus destroys the material and spiritual habit of many of our peoples. Militarization involves the wasting of scarce resources to meet genuine and pressing human needs. Traditional patterns of discrimination against women continue in force. In situations of poverty and injustice it is usually women who suffer most. We see in the flourishing of exploitative tourism, where women and children are driven into prostitution--this is both a matter of sexual morality and also a matter of structural injustice. Poverty likewise drives both men and women to become migrant workers, often destroying family life in the process. Political conflict and economic desperation have driven millions to become refugees, to living for years in camps that are sometimes in effect crowded prisons. Within many Asian societies, graft and corruption remain a source of serious injustice.

2.2.2 Asia is home to vast numbers of young people. But too many of them face a future of unemployment and consequent frustration. The most basic and fundamental human right to life is denied to the unborn child by the practice of abortion. Child labour (even bonded labour) is still prevalent. Our youth, who are 60% of the Asian population, tend to be influenced by an education, the media and social pressure which perpetuate this reality of injustice, and youth themselves are often victims.

2.2.3 Connected too with these injustices are other violations of human rights. We see forms of cultural imperialism, with the imposition of majority values of an assertive minority on the rest of society. Access to education and employment is denied or limited on the basis of religion, caste, political stance, economic status, or ethnic origin. Those in these societies and elsewhere who speak and act in the name of justice are subject to imprisonment and other forms of punishment. All of these injustice are interconnected. Taken together, they amount to a crisis of survival.

C. HOPE AT THE CROSSROADS

In the face of the massive problems engendered by social change and in the face of massive injustice, we can discern, however, many signs of hope.

2.3.1. There is a new consciousness on the part of the marginalized that the situation is not an inevitable fate but something to be struggled against. Coupled with this is a new consciousness of solidarity-people are not isolated in the struggle against injustice. The growing desire for and growing sense of solidarity cross national, ethnic and class boundaries, boundaries of religion and sex - indeed, the boundary between the human and the rest of creation.

2.3.2. We see, in other words, the promise of movements for democracy, participation and human rights, of ecumenical and interreligious dialogue, of the woman's movement, of ecological movements, of the search of spirituality and spiritual values. We see the vitality of our young people and the potential that they provide for positive change. These movements converge in a desire for community, which at its best is a desire for inclusive community, community which seeks to cross boundaries, to break down walls rather than artificially strengthening itself by building barriers.

2.3.3. The desire for solidarity is present on both side of the old boundaries. Ecumenical and interreligious dialogue, for example, has come about because both Christians and those 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. It is an enterprise full of hope and also of challenge. We are all being challenged to appreciate the other, to learn from the other, even to be corrected by the other--and at same time to remain faithful to what is best in our tradition. By doing this we run counter to all forms of fundamentalism.

2.3.4. Dialogue between religious traditions, the ecological movement, and aspects of the women's movement offer hope for a more holistic spirituality. This hope and desire is present within, and beyond, the Catholic community. We live in Asia, the home of great contemplative traditions. The Catholic Church is often perceived as not a sharing in these contemplative traditions, as being primarily concerned with the external, with ritual and festivals. Central, however, to the Catholic tradition is incarnation, sacramentality. And genuine sacramentality is the antithesis of empty ritualism. It is about finding the mystery of the Divine in everyday reality-a deeply contemplative task-and then celebrating that mystery. At the heart of the ecological movement, likewise, can be found a theology of creation, or better, a spirituality of creation-creation as the divine handwork and the place of divine presence. Desire for spirituality, for the contemplative, on the one hand, and the possibility of convergence of the sacramental tradition, of the contemplative tradition in other faiths, of concern for the environment, of respect for the feminine, on the other-these for us are great signs of hope.

2.3.5 They are instances where those who are blessed with power and wealth are animated by the spirit of the Gospel, work to promote the common good and are generous in sharing their gifts and talents.

2.3.6 A further sign of hope is the desire for community. We have spoken of this at the global level as the desire for solidarity. More locally, it is seen in the growth of Basic Ecclesial Communities, of neighbourhood groups, of groups that come together to defend human rights, or that come together for prayer or Bible sharing. Of course, these groups overlap and interlock. In part, they are motivated by a healthy reaction to the breakdown of traditional structures, a concern above all with those who are small, neglected or despised. In cities, the caste system is gradually weakening.

2.3.7 Desire for community goes together with desire for dialogue. It goes together too with desire for participation, the longing to share in shaping one's personal and communal destiny. We have noted this desire in society. It is felt passionately too in the Church, and is beginning to find its flowering in greater lay involvement in the Church's life and ministry.

2.3.8 We can, therefore, speak of a time of "crisis" in the Asian continent, a movement of history opening out to both danger and opportunity. The very same historical situation holds out possibilities of sin as well as grace. It is upto the local Churches in Asia to walk with their people, to accompany them in their journey toward a world that is more Spirit-filled. For in all this ferment we sense the stirrings of the creative Spirit, a Spirit sometimes disturbing, but ever surprising, challenging and hope-giving.

We began by looking at the changing face of Asian societies, change with much danger for dehumanization. The danger is all too often realized. But the signs of hope that we have discerned offer the potential for humanized and humanizing change. The truly human can, moreover, never be divorced from the rest of divine creation. And when the truly human is discovered and deeply contemplated, it reveals to us the mystery of the Divine, of that creative Being who loves all creation in ways beyond even our deepest hopes and imaginings. So, though there may be negative and dangerous things occurring, the movement in Asia toward modernity calls for a joyful response from the Church as it accompanies our Asian people, as partner with them in all positive moments of the human spirit. The challenge for the Church is to work for justice and peace along with the Christians of other Churches, together with our sisters and brothers of other faiths and with all people of goodwill, to make the Kingdom of God visibly present in Asia.

III. The Evangelizing Mission of the Church

in Contemporary Asia

The vastness of the Asian continent, the number, complexity and tenacity of its problem could cause in Christians a paralyzing discouragement. But seen with the eyes of faith, these difficulties, together with the signs of hope that accompany them, are as so many challenges to mission. God speaks to us from the travails and the progress of our countries, and bids us from the contemporary challenges to our world to renew our sense of mission.

A. A Renewal of the Sense of Mission

3.1.1. 1. A renewal of our sense of mission means, first of all renewal of our faith that God so loved the world that he sent his Son to be the saviour of all. This Son, through whom all things were made (Jn. 1:3, Heb 1:2), became like us in all things, sin alone excepted (cf. Heb 4:15). He went about doing good and healing all who were in the power of evil (cf. Acts 10:38). Filled with the Spirit, he preached the Good News of the Kingdom of God, and commanded his disciples to do the same. Lifted up from the earth, he draws all peoples to himself through his Church and through other ways unknown to us. He is the light that enlightens every human being (Jn. 1:9). He has imprinted traces of his revelation in the world which exists in him (Col 1:16), and in the "seeds of the Word" found in the cultures and in other religious traditions. The Spirit, sent by the Father and the Son, and ever-present and active in the Church, in the world and in the human heart, leads all to their unity and fulfillment.

3.1.2 From this perspective, mission, being a continuation in the Spirit of the mission of Christ, involves a being with the people, as was Jesus: “The word became flesh and dwelt among us” (Jn 1:14). Therefore, mission includes: being with the people, responding to their needs, with sensitiveness to the presence of God in cultures and other religious traditions, and witnessing to the values of God’s Kingdom through presence, solidarity, sharing the Word. Mission will mean a dialogue with Asia’s poor, with its local cultures, and with other religious traditions (FABC 1).

3.2.1. Renewal of a sense of mission will also require a renewal of our motivations for mission. There has been perceived in some a weakening of these motivations so necessary to preserve in this demanding task. Why indeed, should we evangelize?

3.2.1 a) We evangelize, first of all, from a deep sense of gratitude to God, the Father “who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing” (Eph 1:3), and sent the Spirit in to our hearts so that we may share in God’s own life. Mission is above all else an overflow of this life from grateful hearts transformed by the grace of God.

That is why it is so important for us Christians to have a deep faith experience of the love of God in Christ Jesus (Rom 8:39), that love which has been poured forth in our hearts by the Holy Spirit who has been given to us (Rom 5:5). Without a personal experience of this love received as gift and mercy, no sense of mission can flourish.

3.2.2 b) But mission is also a mandate. We evangelize because we are sent into the whole world to make disciples of all nations. The one who sends us is Jesus, who has been sent by the Father, and to whom has been given all authority in heaven and on earth (Mt 28:18). He sends us on a mission which is part of the epiphany of God’s plan to bring all things together under Christ as head (Eph 1:9-10). We cannot fulfill this mission apart from him (Jn 15:4-5). But he assures us that he will remain with us all days till the end of time (Mt 28:20), and he has send us his Spirit so that we may be his witness to the ends of the earth (Acts 1:8).

3.2.3. c) We evangelize also because we believe in the Lord Jesus. We have received the gift of faith. We have become Christians. “The Christian vocation is by its very nature a vocation to the apostolate (Vatican Council II, Decree on the Apostolate of the Laity. 2). That is why Pope Paul VI emphatically states: “It is unthinkable that a person should accept the Word and give himself to the Kingdom without becoming a person who bears witness to it and proclaims it in his turn” (Evangelization in the Modern World; 24).

Unfortunately for many Catholics, faith is only something to be received and celebrated. They do not feel it is something to be shared. The missionary nature of the gift of faith must be inculcated in all Christians. All must be helped to realize that God has called us to be Christians not only so that we may be saved but that we may collaborate in the work of the world’s salvation, and invite those whom God draws to the Church to share in our faith.

3.2.4 d) We evangelize also because we have been incorporated by baptism into the Church; which is missionary by its very nature because it is the result of the mission of the Son and of the Holy Spirit (Vatican Council II, Decree on the Church’s Missionary Activity, 2). The Church exists in order to evangelize (Evangelization in the Modern World, 14), and each member, by virtue of the

sacraments of baptism and confirmation has received the right and duty to the apostolate from the Lord Himself (Vatican Council II, Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, 33).

3.2.5 e) And finally, we evangelize because the Gospel is a leaven for liberation and for the transformation of society. Our Asian world needs the values of the Kingdom and of Christ in order to bring about the development, justice, peace and harmony with God, among peoples and with all creation that the peoples of Asia long for.

Yes, for Asia and its teeming millions also we must affirm: "The Lord is the goal of human history, the focal point of the desires of history and civilization, the centre of humankind, the joy of all hearts, and the fulfillment of all aspirations" (Vatican Council II, Constitution on the Church in the Modern World, 45).

We look forward to the day when daughters and sons of the Church, imbued with these motivations, will see in their evangelizing mission not only a duty that they must fulfil but a privilege they can be thankful for, and a right they will be joyful witnesses of the values of the Kingdom, and of Christ whose disciples they are.

3.3.1. The renewal of our sense of mission will mean thirdly, that the acting subject of mission is the local Church living and acting in communion with the universal Church. It is the local Churches and communities which can discern and work out (in dialogue with each other and with other persons of good will) the way the Gospel is best proclaimed, the Church set up, the values of God's Kingdom realized in their own place and time. In fact, it is by responding to and serving the needs of the peoples of Asia that the different Christian communities become truly local Churches.

3.3.2 This local Church, which is the acting subject of mission, is the people of God in a given milieu, the whole Christian community - laity, Religious and clergy. It is the whole diocese, the parish, the Basic Ecclesial Community and other groups. Their time has come for Asia.

3.3.3 Hence, we can see from the point of view of mission how vital is the formation of fully participatory Christian communities where people experience that they "belong" and that together they are the Church. On the other hand, such communities become fully Church only when they accept their share in the Church's mission.

B. The mode of Mission in Asia

4.1 Mission may find its greatest urgency in Asia; it also finds in our continent a distinctive mode. We affirm, together with others, that "the proclamation of Jesus Christ is the centre and primary element of evangelization" (Statement of the FABC All Asia Conference on Evangelization, Suwon, South Korea, August 24-31, 1988). But the proclamation of Jesus Christ in Asia means, first of all, the witness of Christians and of Christian communities to the values of the Kingdom of God, a proclamation through Christlike deeds. For Christians in Asia, to proclaim Christ means above all to live like him, in the midst of our neighbours of other faiths and persuasions, and to do his deeds by the power of his grace. Proclamation through dialogue and deeds-this is the first call to the Churches in Asia.

4.2 Mission in Asia will also seek through dialogue to serve the cause of unity of the peoples of Asia marked by such a diversity of beliefs, cultures and socio-political structures. In an Asia marked by diversity and torn by conflicts, the Church must in a special way be a sacrament- a visible sign and instrument of unity and harmony.

4.3 But we shall not be timid when God opens the door for us to proclaim explicitly the Lord Jesus Christ as the Saviour and the answer to the fundamental questions of human existence. We shall proclaim the Gospel in the manner of the Lord Jesus, who expressed his mission in these terms:

The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to captives and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed, to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord (Lk 4: 18-19).

4.4 Despite the goodwill and sometime heroic efforts of evangelizers, our deeds have often proven inadequate. What was lacking?

4.5 It seems to us now that in conformation with Asian realities we have preached about values which ought to be pursued, but have often failed to follow through with effective actions that would help dismantle structures of sin oppressive of our peoples. We now recognize the need to plan and do appropriate deeds consequent upon dialogue and prayerful discernment.

4.6 Our minority status should not deter us from patiently working out in collaboration with Christians of other Churches and peoples of other religious and persuasions the steps needed to liberate our people from the bondage of sin and its societal manifestations, and to inscribe the values of the Kingdom in Asian society. For the Lord assures us: "Fear not, little flock, for it has pleased the Father to give you the Kingdom" (Lk 12:32).

C. The Role of the Lay Faithful

5.1 The renewal of Asian society which the Lord bids us to accomplish in dialogue and collaboration with peoples of other religious traditions and persons of goodwill requires the effort of the whole Church. While bishops and priests should be active in the Christian formation of lay people (Pope John Paul II, Message to FABC V, Bandung) the lay faithful should take upon themselves as their specific responsibility the renewal of Asian society according to the values and of cultures, and of the whole fabric of life in society. Hence, there must not be in Catholics what Vatican II has describe as a "pernicious opposition between professional and social activity on one hand and religious life on the other" (Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World, 43).

5.2 This calls for a thorough education of Catholic in the social doctrine of the Church, as well as the formation of their hearts towards just and compassionate living in present-day Asian society. Christians formed in this manner will be evangelizers of their own-the young evangelizing the young, workers evangelizing workers, professionals evangelizing professionals, government officials evangelizing government officials, families evangelizing families and will be leaven for the transformation of Asian society.

D. The Face of the Church in Asia

6.1 We have up to now emphasized deeds. But mission is more than deeds. It involves the very being of the Church.

Therefore, we ask: "what should the Church be in and to this changing Asian world marked by so much diversity, poverty, suffering and injustice, and with so many movements for social transformation?"

6.2 The Christian community, it seems to us, must live in companionship, as true partners with all Asians as they search for the meaning of human life and progress. Because the human person created in Christ, redeemed by Christ and united by Christ to himself is the way for the Church, the Church must walk along with him/her in human solidarity.

6.3 But it is as servants of the Lord and of humanity that we Christians share the same journey with all the Asian peoples. The Church was not sent to observe but to serve-to serve the Asian peoples in their quest for God and for a better human life; to serve Asia under the leading of the Spirit of Christ and in the manner of Christ himself who did not come to be served but to serve and to lay down his life as a ransom for all (Mk 10:45)-and to discern, in dialogue with Asian peoples and Asian realities, what deeds the Lord wills to be done so that all humankind may be gathered together in harmony as his family. As servant of Yahweh and of humanity, the Church will seek above all faithfulness to God and to the Asian peoples, and will also invite to full participation in the Christian community those who are led to it by the Spirit of God.

6.4 This service will be done in compassion, the compassion of Jesus himself who, like the Good Samaritan, came to bind the wounds of humanity. It will be a compassion that makes the Church weak and powerless with those who are weak and powerless. But it will be a compassion that will denounce, in deeds, it is not possible to do so in words, the injustices, oppressions, exploitations and inequalities resulting in so much of the suffering that is evident in the Asian situation. Such compassion will see as fellow members of the one human family under the Fatherhood of God all exploited women and workers, unwelcome refugees, victims of violations of human rights, and in fact every needy human person. This compassion will see even deeper, and will welcome in each human being-but especially the poor, deprived and oppressed the very person of Christ who has united himself to every human being though he/she may be unaware of it (The Redeemer of Humankind, 14).

6.5 Such a Church will not boast of human power but will serve with the Power of the Lord Jesus who emptied himself and took the form of a servant (Phil 2:7), but is, for all who believe, the Wisdom and Power of God (1 Cor 1:23-24).

6.6 This Church, witnessing by its very being and deeds to the values of the Kingdom of God, will be credible when it proclaims with its lips that Jesus is the Saviour of the world and the answer to all its longings.

IV. Living in the Spirit:

Pastoral Responses our process

7.1 Our reflection on the Asian situation in the light of our mission of evangelization has led us to realize the enduring validity of a process of: (a) dialoguing with the realities of Asia from within; (b) discerning the movement of God's Spirit in Asia; and (c) translating in to deeds what the Spirit bids us to accomplish. This process has to be the general approach for our total response as Church in Asia.

A. Pervading Pastoral Imperatives

At the Level of Discernment

From our sharing of experiences and reflections, six pervading pastoral imperatives have constantly emerged:

1. The necessity for Christian mission to keep Christ at the centre of our proclamation, behaviour and relationships.

2. The imperative of considering with the utmost concern and sensitivity the relationship and between the mission and pastoral thrust of the Church and the pluralism of Asian societies.

3. The imperative of empowering people for mission, ministry and the task of integral liberation.

4. The need to encourage, initiate and facilitate micro-level initiatives with ripple effects especially at the grassroots level.

5. The indispensable necessity for the Church in Asia to be credible in its lifestyle and deeds in proclaiming its faith and in acting for justice and human rights.

6. The imperative of re-envisioning and re-planning formation process, with particular attention being given to cultural values and structural factors.

B. Specific Pastoral Directions At the Level of Doing

Having discerned the way the Holy Spirit is leading us to respond to the challenges emerging in Asia, for specific pastoral initiatives and processes we urge:

Proclaiming the Faith

1. That appropriate formation process for mission and proclamation be developed with emphasis on the laity's participation.

2. That integral catechesis and the promotion of Bible study and reflection toward the building of Word-centred communities be undertaken.

3. That serious concern and care, through intensive inculturation and catechesis, be given toward a meaningful and joyful celebration of the Sacraments and Liturgy, especially the Eucharist that would be creative of fellowship and community.

4. That effective measures be taken by episcopal conferences to develop and communicate a process of regular faith-discernment that everyone could easily use and share in.

5. That the content and programming of Catholic media implement a “ministry of compassion” for the sick and poor of Asia, thus making itself a more effective instrument of evangelization.

6. That a commission for the Biblical apostolate be set up in every episcopal conference to promote an understanding and a love of the Scriptures among our people.

Serving Asian Societies

Mediated by the Social Doctrine of the Church

1. That social analysis be integrated with cultural analysis, and both subjected to faith-discernment.

2. That the social doctrine of the Church be part of formation in faith for everyone, at all levels of laity, religious and clergy.

3. That the formation of a faith-inspired social conscience be a priority task in catechesis, media, schools and other apostolates of formation.

4. That the Church, consistent with its social doctrine, investigate and remove from within its own structures and practices whatever obstructs human rights and justice.

5. That, wherever possible, specialized institutions be set up to provide, from a faith-perspective, competence for lay persons in the socio-economic and political field, including the civil service.

In Quest of Justice, Peace and the Integrity of Creation

(“There is no peace without social justice, and little social justice without peace”)

1. That episcopal conferences effectively incorporate into their Justice and Peace Programs a vigorous defence and promotion of human rights, especially those of women and children, born and unborn.

2. That Catholic schools integrate into their curricula the formation of values necessary for peace and social transformation, and study how Gospel values can positively influence culture, science and technology.

3. That the justice and peace commissions of episcopal conferences develop and implement a program of forming men and women dedicated to the Gospel value of active non-violence, and facilitate the organization of peace groups (e.g., peace cells, zones of peace) at the grassroots level.

4. That FBAC set up contacts with other regional associations of episcopal conference in order to raise and discuss both the interlocking character and also the moral dimensions of issues of Justice, peace and the integrity of creation.

In a Situation of Pluralism Dialogue

1. That episcopal conferences develop a formation process for clergy, Religious and laity toward the formation of “persons of dialogue,” who would be sensitive to other faiths and persuasions, and to social and cultural diversity in the Church and in the world.

2. That the collaboration of the appropriate FBAC officers to facilitate at the grassroots level ecumenical and inter-religious dialogue for integral development be continued, and that such dialogue be further promoted by episcopal conferences in their own areas.

3. That the episcopal conferences identify cultural attitudes and grassroots structures, including inter-church and inter-faith groups, and set up leadership-training programs that would promote ecumenical and inter-religious dialogue.

4. That episcopal conferences explore closer relationships with international Catholic organisations and with government and non-government organisations to promote integral development.

5. That efforts to have a dialogue of life at the grassroots level be facilitated and promoted so that people of different Churches, religious traditions and persuasions, becoming aware of shared human and spiritual values, may act together for their common good.

6. That the church, as the sacrament of unity of all humankind promote communion with the church, and peace and harmony in the world, especially when pluralism becomes a cause for division.

Deepening the Faith

1. That episcopal conferences promote the development of centres of prayer; and the development of seminaries into centres of deep spirituality for priests and other ministers of the Church.

2. That episcopal conferences promote the development of the spiritual depth and possibilities of pilgrimages which could also serve as events of ecumenical and inter-religious encounter.

3. That episcopal conferences foster the inculturation of the sacraments and liturgy, especially the celebration of the Eucharist

4. That the ways of prayer be integrated into all catechetical programs, especially of Christian initiation.

5. That episcopal conferences explore approaches to spirituality that would be relevant to youth.

6. That religious orders and congregations in Asia exercise leadership in living the Gospel prophetically and radically, thus providing depth and spiritual inspiration for the upbuilding of the Body of Christ.

7. That events and experiences that would help bishops come into deeper contacts with the inner journey of the Spirit be planned and promoted.

C. A New Way of being Church in the 1990s

Response at the Level of Being

(For principal features of this “new” way of being Church, see FABC III, 1982, “The Church: A Community of Faith in Asia”; and the FABC Asian Colloquium on Ministries in the Church, 1977)

8.1 The above recommendations of the Fifth Plenary Assembly envision alternative ways of being Church in the Asia of the 1990s. But these alternatives ways share some major dimensions.

8.1.1. 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. They are called together by the Word of God which, regarded as a quasi-sacramental presence of the Risen Lord, leads them to form Small Christian Communities (e.g., neighbourhood groups, Basic Ecclesial Communities and “covenant” communities). There, they pray and share together the Gospel of Jesus, living it in their daily lives as they support one another and work together, united as they are “in one mind and heart”.

8.1.2. It is a participatory Church where the gifts that the Holy Spirit gives to all the faithful - lay, religious and cleric alike - are recognized and activated, so that the Church may be built up and its mission realized.

8.1.3. Built in the hearts of people, it is a Church that faithfully and lovingly witnesses to the Risen Lord Jesus and reaches out to people of other faiths and persuasions in a dialogue of life toward the integral liberation of all.

8.1.4. It is a leaven of transformation in this world and serves as a prophetic sign daring to point beyond this world to the ineffable Kingdom that is yet fully to come.

D. A Spirituality for our Times

Response At the Focal Point of the Spirit

(For major features of this spirituality, see FABC II, 1978, “Prayer- The Life of the Church of Asia”; and FABC IV, 1986. “The Vocation and Mission of the Laity in the Church and in the world of Asia.”)

9.1 At the centre of this new way of being Church is the action of the Spirit of Jesus, guiding and directing individual believers as well as the whole community to live a life that is Spirit-filled-that is, to live an authentic spirituality. It is nothing more and nothing less than a following of Jesus-in-mission, an authentic discipleship in the context of Asia.

9.2 If people are convinced more by witnessing than by teaching, this is most true of the peoples of Asia whose cultures hold the contemplative dimension, renunciation, detachment, humility, simplicity and silence in the highest regard. We would have a message for Asia only when our Asian sisters and brothers see in us the marks of God-realized persons. Credibility is the fruit of authenticity. The sharing of what are our lived spiritual experience is of incalculable necessities and importance in the tasks of evangelization and integral development.

9.3 Our spirituality has, therefore, to integrate every aspect of Christian life: liturgy, prayer, community living, solidarity with all and especially with the poor, evangelization, catechesis, dialogue, social commitment, etc. There has to be no dichotomy between faith and life, or between love and action, unless we wish simply to be like clanging cymbals, noisy and distracting, without depth and direction. In all things, we need to have a profound sense of the holy, a deep sense and awareness of God, his presence and mystery.

9.4 We require a return to the very source of Christian life, to the Scriptures, to the living traditions of our Church, to the spiritual wisdom of our ancestors. And this return would have to be in dynamic interaction with a pervasive sensitivity to the aspirations of all, and especially of the poor peoples of Asia.

9.5 For the spirituality of the new way of being Church is the spirituality of those who place their complete trust in the Lord, it is the spirituality of the powerless, of the anawim. Renunciation and simplicity, compassion for the solidarity with all, and especially with the poor, meekness and humanity-virtues promoted by active non-violence are some of the significant features of the spirituality we need, and these Gospel values resonate deeply with the cultures of Asia. It is a spirituality of harmony, it expresses our intimate communion with God, our docility to his Spirit our following of Jesus, as we challenge the disharmonies of our Asian world. It moves us away from images of exterior organisation, power or mere secular effectiveness to images of simplicity, humble presence and service.

9.6 Its depth prepares us for ecumenical and inter-religious dialogue. It stirs up in us a faith and hope in the Lord of history, a sense of wonder at his mighty work, a hunger for the saving message, and beckons all to share in the ultimate goal of all human striving, which is the inner life of God.

9.7 By itself then, such spirituality is already a living proclamation of Jesus, the Lord and Saviour, unequivocal in its meaning, powerful and far-reaching in its impact.

10. We began by emphasizing deeds as a response of the Church to the challenges of Asia and we have ended by pointing out that responding with the very being and heart of the Church has primacy over doing. This must be so, for effective doing can only result from the very depths of the Church's being and authentic living. The Church has to become what it really is for the doing to begin, for the Church in Asia "to act justly, love tenderly, and walk humbly with your God"(Micah 6:8).

With a prayer on our lips and a hope in our hearts, we entrust ourselves to Mary, the Mother of Jesus. She is our Guide for the Way. She will help the Church in Asia to keep on the right path even if this proves to be the Way of the Cross. She will assist us to be faithful to God's plan for

the Church in Asia till the time comes when her Son will return to take us to that place described by Isaiah:

“On this mountain, he has destroyed the veil which used to veil all the peoples, the pall enveloping all nations: he has destroyed death forever. Lord Yahweh was wiped away the tears from every cheek; he has taken away his people’s shame everywhere on earth, for Yahweh has spoken”(Isaiah 25:7-8).