

THE CHURCH — A COMMUNITY OF FAITH IN ASIA

THE THIRD PLENARY ASSEMBLY OF THE FEDERATION OF ASIAN BISHOPS' CONFERENCES, SAMPRAN, THAILAND, OCTOBER 20-27, 1982

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I. LETTER TO THE BISHOPS AND FAITHFUL OF ASIA
by Pope John Paul II

“To you, brothers, and to all God’s beloved in Asia, ‘who are called to be saints’: Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ” (Rom 1:7). In greeting you who are pastors of local churches in Asia, I greet also all the faithful spread throughout your vast continent, for whom you represent the Good Shepherd, Jesus Christ.

It gives me immense joy to note that you have chosen for your pastoral reflections a subject of great importance and far-reaching consequences: “the Church as a community of faith in the context of Asia.”

This Paper presents the official Statement and Recommendations of the Third Plenary Assembly of the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences (FABC), held at Lux Mundi Seminary in Sampran, Thailand, near Bangkok, October 20-27, 1982. The theme of the Plenary Assembly was: “The Church — A Community of Faith in Asia.”

This theme is an appropriate complement to your discussions in 1978 on Christian prayer as it constitutes an essential dimension of ecclesial life in Asia, and which you so aptly described as "our conscious personal communion with God our Father in Christ Jesus" (Final Statement, 14). This personal communion with God is indeed possible, precisely because of our faith, our free acceptance of Christ and his saving word.

In endeavoring to emphasize the Church as a community of faith, you are underlining a fundamental aspect of her life and activity, one which the whole tradition of the Church has considered the beginning of salvation and the foundation and root of all justification (cf. DS 1532). Dear brothers, faith is not only the basis of our Christian life and thus the basis of every community of Christ's followers, but it is also, in the powerful expression of Saint John, "the victory that overcomes the world" (1 Jn 5:4). Paschal faith is the fulfillment of God's will for us as taught by the same Apostle: "And this is his commandment, that we should believe in the name of his Son Jesus Christ . . ." (1 Jn 3:23). This Jesus Christ whom we accept and proclaim is the one who "was crucified in weakness, but lives by the power of God" (2 Cor 13:4).

Jesus Christ is truly alive in Asia: he lives by the power of God in your people who accept him in faith and who are called to live and to give witness to that faith, both as individuals and as communities. As shepherds of the flock, you are endowed with a pastoral charism that enables you, in union with the universal Church, to help your people express the one Catholic faith in the rich context of their Asian cultures. In the members of his one Body, the single Church—vitaly present throughout your continent in numerous communities of faith — the undivided Christ himself wills to be and to become, even more, Asian. But this can only be effected through the faith of the community, which in turn depends on the faithful proclamation of the Gospel and on its being authentically lived.

In speaking about the revealed mystery of the Church as a local community of faith, we realize the challenge that we have as pastors to live "by faith in the Son of God" (Gal 2; 20). It is only through faith that we can know the Jesus whom we proclaim: only through faith are we equipped to respond to that deep yearning of people, recorded in the Gospel and repeated in every generation of human history: "we wish to see Jesus" (Jn 12:21). Sharing by faith in the secrets of his divine person and knowing the mystery of his identity as Son of God and Savior of the world, we can proceed confidently to communicate Christ and his word.

Every dimension of the ecclesial communities is influenced by the faith of their pastors. For this reason Christ's appeal to us to evangelize is an appeal to us to believe more firmly in him and in his word. The Church is built on the faith of the Apostles and their personal acceptance of Christ. The well-being of communities of faith in Asia depends on the faith of the bishops of Asia and on their personal communion with the Lord.

It is only in the light of faith that the great issues of ecclesial life can be faced. It is faith that directs us in all aspects of our pastoral activity: in divine worship and sacramental life, in preaching and in catechesis, in our relationship with the priests and religious, in our ministry to the family and to all other groups, in treating the moral problems and challenges that affect our people in their daily lives. It is faith that enlightens and inspires us in our own involvement in promoting integral human development and in helping to foster the well-being of Asian society, where millions and millions of men, women and children are asking to have their human dignity reaffirmed and their hope in humanity reinforced.

For us bishops, faith in Jesus Christ and in his word must become the driving force of our lives. That it should also become the driving force in the lives of our people is what we desire to foster as we strive to build up the Church as a community of faith in the context of Asia.

Beloved brothers, I am one with you in this apostolic task to which you have been called and for the accomplishment of which we have received strength from God. We shall work together in the unity of the universal Church, being assisted by the Holy Spirit. We shall work for the glory of the Most Holy Trinity and for the good of all Asia. And in so doing, we shall know that Jesus Christ is with us, that he is in our midst.

Let us, therefore, in the words of the Letter to the Hebrews, "persevere in running the race which lies ahead: let us keep our eyes fixed on Jesus, who inspires and perfects our faith" (Hb 12:2). Yes, we shall run together with our eyes fixed on Jesus. And in his name — in the holy name of Jesus — I bless you all.

II. WORDS OF WELCOME

by Bishop Joseph Banchong Aribarg

In the name of the Bishops' Conference of Thailand we wholeheartedly and fraternally welcome you. We feel highly honored that you

have chosen our country for this Plenary Assembly and we feel happy and delighted, because in the events of these days I am sure we will sense our solidarity, our unity in love and faith. We will live together the community of Faith. We will experience together our one Lord, one Faith, one Baptism.

I hear that some have questioned the existence of FABC. Is this Federation useful? Is it worth spending so much money for seminars, meetings, or plenary assemblies, such as this one? We are of many countries, of different languages, of different mentalities; because of these things some doubt about the outcome or result of the seminars or meetings. In our meetings some talk too much, some talk too little, and some others don't talk at all.

But I think we don't waste our money, even if we do spend so much money for a meeting like this one. For coming out of ourselves, out of our place, out of our parish, out of our community, out of our diocese or country, we meet people, we meet our brother-priests, our brothers or sisters — the Religious. We meet our brother-bishops, other brothers. We live together, we talk to each other, we even have fun or recreation together. All these things give us strength and courage in faith and love. Don't we think this is worth more than even millions and millions of dollars?

We hope you will enjoy coming and living here. If there is anything you need, any service we can render you, please don't hesitate to let us know. We shall be very happy to serve you. You are welcome!

III. INTRODUCTION TO THE PLENARY ASSEMBLY by the Most Rev. Mariano G. Gaviola

“*Sawasdee*.” This is the Thai greeting for all occasions. To express how welcome you are we should join our hands together and raise them before our eyes, in the truly gentle Thai greeting, to all who have come from many countries to Lux Mundi Seminary for our Third Plenary Assembly of the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences.

The theme of the Plenary Assembly is “The Church—a Community of Faith in Asia.” One of our speakers has seen our theme in an original way. He has noted that when the bishops met in Manila in 1970 and in Taipei in 1974 their concern was the Church's task in the world: the “societal” dimension. In Calcutta in 1978 they focused on prayer and interiority: the intrapersonal dimension. And now the participants will deal principally with the communitarian, the Church as Church: the “interpersonal” dimension.

In twelve years the problems facing the Church have in some ways been magnified, and in other ways have changed. In many countries poverty and destitution have intensified, our youth are more in number and decent jobs for them are hard to come by and the strife continues to spread. As our countries take on their identities in political maturity, the Church is also asked to explain itself as Church, even as it reaches out to other communities and individuals.

The lines of our Plenary Assembly are simple. First: What does our Christian vision say about the Church as community of faith? And then: How do the Great Religions of Asia understand and live as communities of faith, and what can these religious traditions say to the Church in Asia?

For the first time in our Plenary Assembly two additional days will be given over to the discussion of topics of interest and concern for the Church in Asia — a kind of “open forum.”

We extend a cordial welcome to all our guests. We thank all who have given of their prayers, talent and time to make this Assembly a work in the service of God.

On November 16th, 1982, we shall celebrate the tenth anniversary of the approval by Pope Paul VI of the statutes of FABC — a birthday celebration indeed. Thailand is also celebrating; it is the bicentennial of their Royal Dynasty and the establishment of Bangkok as the capital of Thailand. We join with the people of Thailand and send them our own best wishes and prayers for peace and prosperity for all.

IV. OPENING REMARKS

by the Most Rev. Michael Rozario

We have gathered here for the Third Plenary Assembly of the FABC in a spirit of love and devotion for the Church and for the many millions of peoples who are God's children in these areas that FABC represents. We are present here today from 16 countries of East Asia, from 12 of our 14 Conferences and from Hong Kong and Macau. This Plenary Assembly happily includes for the first time the Conference of Burma. Two of our member Conferences are not represented; we join with them in our prayers. In fact, in a spirit of faith we offer these few days together as a prayer to the merciful Father in heaven, as we contemplate the mystery of his love and care, for all his children in our lands of the FABC. And we thank him for the grace he bestows on us to be ministers

of his mystery of his love, individually in our diocese, collectively and collegially in our Conferences, and in the FABC itself, which is the special instrument we have created ourselves for consultation and collaboration.

The theme for the Third Plenary Assembly of the FABC indicates some very important points of its life and ministry. The First Assembly in Taipei dealt with evangelization, i.e., with the proclamation and manifestation of the Good News of God's mercy and love for his children in Asia; the Second Assembly in Calcutta dealt with prayer, i.e., the contemplation about and thanksgiving for the divine love and mercy in Asia. The Third Plenary Assembly wishes to deal with the theme of community of the faithful, i.e., the communion and community that are the fruit of the proclamation of the Good News and the life of prayer.

The theme of communion and community is very crucial to the human race today. The wonderful advances in the secular order of science, technology, economics, etc., also result in widespread fear and curse upon humanity rather than only in simple true bliss and happiness. The cause of this, among others, is the marked individualism and selfishness of an increasing number of individuals and groups who are agents of that progress. That is to say, the lack of communion and community and brotherhood of man lie at the root. The process of increasing disparity among men can be healed, therefore, only through a true sense of communion and community among men. Through our discussions here at this Plenary Assembly we hopefully shall be initiating a process in the life of the Church in Asia for building this kind of brotherhood of communion and community among our peoples. This process needs to be continued; for many years ahead this theme has to remain a priority of our ministry of the Good News.

We are at the service of the universal Church, especially in the Asian context. We recognize ourselves to be a small visible community of Christians in the midst of vast and diverse religions and cultures. The need for creating communion and community with people of these religions and cultures through dialogue is also a priority for us in Asia, so that all together, as the community of children of God, we can bring about his Kingdom and its blessings for all humankind in Asia.

This communion and community have first to be experienced and lived in our own community of the faithful. One of our immediate tasks is to build this kind of community in our Asian churches.

In the FABC itself we try to witness to this sense of communion and community among ourselves, entrusted as we are with the common apostolic task of proclaiming the Good News to peoples of many religions and cultures and to a multitude of God's children living in poverty and oppression. Our united thinking and united prayer are required for a more sure and global understanding of the ministry at hand today, and our united action is required for a more sure pastoral action. We have already achieved in great deal this sense of community among ourselves in the FABC. This particular gathering at hand, centered on the theme of community, will strengthen this sense of communion among ourselves as servants of the Church. Then we shall go out as a community of servants to build a community of the faithful and of God's children in Asia.

Building a community among men in Asia is no easy task. We are to build and sustain the gift of faith that God gives to his many children, and we are to guide them in the very complex social, moral and religious issues of life. We are together faced with very fundamental moral issues that affect the family and human life, with issues of social justice, human rights and the defence of religious liberty, of the fight against consumerism and materialistic goals of life, of the total development of man, of the defence of spiritual values, and the like. In all this the hands of the individual and local churches are strengthened by the support of the regional and universal Church. The FABC can provide us this opportunity in the Asian context.

Thus we believe that the local churches can learn from each other, and each has the responsibility and privilege to help the other. Some of our churches are large and highly developed, others of us are so small as to seem to be always on the edge of survival. The earliest evidence of the New Testament speaks to us of the mutual sharing of the churches, and often the newest and weakest came to the aid of the oldest and strongest. When we are united in community we receive the gift of each one of us confirming the other in his faith.

Our participation here expresses also the de facto universality of each local church. For us the FABC is our very small means for each local Church to reach out and exercise its pastoral care throughout this Asian world, and through it to the universal Church. The FABC for us, therefore, is a forum in which collegially we wish to help our brothers in faith to be authentic local churches, and wherein each local church can manifest its responsibility and mission to the universal Church.

I think it is such a faith which has brought a new respect in the Church for associations such as the FABC. Our Holy Father refers often now to the national Conference, and to the regional associations, which, each in its own way, is an instrument of realizing the collegiate thrust of the bishops.

We as participants of this assembly are especially called to give witness to what *Lumen Gentium* calls "collegial goodwill." We must wish this Plenary Assembly, and the FABC which it expresses, to succeed. The Church in Asia, as elsewhere, is being challenged by the many marvelous happenings that began in the Second Vatican Council and are becoming more and more our way of life.

Being here in Bangkok is a renewal of the collegial goodwill which brought us to our first meeting with Pope Paul VI in Manila and later to our Plenary Assemblies in Taipei and Calcutta. Our purpose is also strengthened by each other's presence and sharing. The FABC is not something of a "super-Conference," as if something between our own Conference and the universal Church; rather it is our own small instrument of coming together, of becoming a community of brother bishops, which stands over on the side ready to help, when such help is desired by us. And in this coming together as one expression of community of faith we confirm each other in faith to go forward in our mission.

I welcome each of you to this beautiful seminary. I welcome our fellow bishops who are here as "fraternal delegates" from other Conferences. I welcome our special participating guests and those who have volunteered to help us in what I feel will be a significant event for the Church in Asia.

It is with deep sense of happiness that I come to our Third Plenary Assembly and, as convenor of the Standing Committee of the FABC, open the discussions that will occupy us and delight us, I trust, these next seven days.

V. INAUGURAL ADDRESS

by the Most Rev. D. Simon Lourdasamy

The Church, as we know, is a community of *faith*, a community of *worship*, and a community of *service*. You have chosen the first of these three aspects as the theme for the present plenary assembly; the other two aspects may well be a matter, if you like, for future plenary assemblies.

Introduction: From Ecclesial Communion to Community

There is a variety of definitions for explaining the intimate reality of the Church. None of them, however, is capable of explaining the depths of the mystery which is the Church. It is for this reason that divine pedagogy in the Holy Scriptures and in Tradition uses a wealth of metaphor and allegory in explaining what the Church really is. Let us recall here a text from *Lumen Gentium* which examines some of these images: the Church is a *sheepfold*, she is the farm or *field* of God, she is the *family* or dwelling of God; more often still the Church is called the *building* of God and is referred to as the *temple* of the Spirit; she is at one and same time *spouse* and *mother* (LG, 6).

Notwithstanding these beautiful images the Council prefers to present the Church as a communion and community of faith. The ecclesiology of communion is certainly prevalent in the Council with the result that it has become the synthetic vision of the Council itself. Let us take two definitions which it gives us of the Church. In the fulness of time the messianic people have been "constituted by Christ through a communion of life, charity and truth and assumed by him in order to be made an instrument of redemption" (LG, 9c). Christ himself "has constituted on earth and maintained his Church, a *community of faith*, of hope and charity, as a visible organism . . ." (LG, 8a). These definitions bring us closer to the deeper mystery of the Church. In fact it was the New Testament which introduced the Greek term *koinonia*, the Church in her most intimate mystery (Acts 2,42; 1 Cor 1,9; 1 Jn 1,3-6; 1 Cor 10,16, etc.)

Wherever there is "communion," there is also the formation of "community." The community is that coming together of the faithful where the mystery of communion is lived, celebrated and translated into a vital, organic and missionary reality. In the community the faithful receive, live and hand on the divine gift of communion. Communion and community encourage a renewed reflection on the reality and the work of the Church in Asia because the ecclesial communion as a universal reality tends to become incarnated and concrete in a community. The extent and depth of the ecclesial community cannot be fully realized in our communities which, though imperfect, are nevertheless a true expression of that communion. Communion is a gift from God. The community originates from it but it is greater than the community. The latter realizes it in time but does not exhaust its riches. The community is called upon constantly to measure up to the communion which it tends to incarnate but which constantly transcends it. We must avoid putting the emphasis on "communion" by distancing ourselves from the concrete community.

We must underline the truly spiritual meaning of communion and in the institutional community or Church we must disclaim and be critical of the human limitations and shortcomings which are historically present. Another phenomenon to be avoided is the consideration of the concrete communities present among our Asian peoples in a way which is disproportionate to the reality, forgetting that their source and origin is the ecclesial communion or, in other words, the communion of God with the universal Church.

1. The Church, A Community Which Can Only "Be Explained From Faith"

The first chapter of the conciliar Constitution on the Church has as its title: "*The Mystery of the Church*," and every Christian mystery is an object of faith. The earliest declarations of faith from the time of the Apostles repeatedly declare: "*I believe in the Church, one, holy, catholic and apostolic*" (Denzinger, nos. 2,3,4, . . .). The Church is a mystery of communion which can only be accepted and, to a certain degree, understood in the light of faith. The "ecclesial communion" is a theological reality before being an historical reality.

We cannot approach the Church from a point of view which is merely sociological, historical or juridical. It is only from faith that we can penetrate the depths of the Church's mystery.

In order to explain the meaning of the Church-community we cannot reduce her to the level of the institutions of civil society, even though there are some external similarities. The ecclesial community is not an ideological group, nor simply a religious phenomenon, nor a sort of state with its bureaucratic mechanism within the modern state. The ecclesial community has something of all these but it is not any of them. We shall never be able to explain the ecclesial community in socio-political categories.

This last-mentioned reflection presents us with a problem: Are there two images of the "Church-community" which are opposed to one another? The answer is clear: there is only one Church, which is the object of our faith, and no human science, nor any response to public opinion, can give a correct idea of the Church and of her communion. Apart from faith, all other means of knowledge, however precious or exact, can do no more than help us to discover some of the external effects and consequences of the mystery of communion. The Church is not like other societies. She has a human element but she is adorned with the gifts of heaven. She is at one and the same time (meaning inseparably) visible and spiritual, but the visible element is subordinate

to the spiritual: "as the assumed nature, inseparably united to him, serves the divine Word as a living organ of salvation, so, in a somewhat similar manner, does the social structure of the Church serve the Spirit of Christ who vivifies it in the building up of the body (LG, 8a). It is only by starting from faith that we can explain in some way the nature of our "ecclesial community." If we wish to appreciate and describe the theological and existential content of the Church as a community of faith, we must begin on a different level from that of the structures, of the practical initiatives and the achievements characteristic of the Church's visible, external aspect. Communion as such has a *hidden* dimension, which can only be reached by faith. It will be fully revealed only in the Parousia. It also has a *visible dimension*, which is that expressed by the Church engaged in her office of being the communion of all men and of being open in charity to every man.

The communion which forms the ecclesial community is a gift of the Holy Spirit, and it is only in the light of that same Spirit that it is possible to gain a deeper knowledge of and to speak about this mystery of the Church.

It is not possible either to measure in simple statistical categories the work of the Church as a community of faith and the fruits which she bears. These too must be measured in the light of faith, and this is a very important factor in speaking of the work of the Church in many Asian countries. We know that nothing which goes to make up the ecclesial community is without salvific fruit, but we do not know exactly where and when this fruit is to be borne. Once again the value of our work must be measured from the criteria of faith. This viewpoint gives our missionary work an intense optimism and great courage. As *Evangelii Nuntiandi* reminds us: "Evangelization is not an individual, isolated act for anybody, but an act which is deeply ecclesial. When, even in the most remote of places, the most unknown preacher, catechist or pastor preaches the Gospel, assembles his little community or administers a sacrament, even if he be alone, he is accomplishing an act of the Church. His action is most certainly connected by means of institutional relationships, but is also invisibly linked to the evangelizing activity of the whole Church in which it is deeply rooted. This presupposes that he does not act from any mission which he has arrogated to himself nor from any personal inspiration but in union with the mission of the Church and in her name" (EN, 60). This fact, which is so consoling for every pastor and missionary, is the fruit of "communion" and is explained through those "invisible links and deep roots" which belong to the order of faith. We must, therefore, become accustomed to speaking of our ecclesial community in the light of faith.

2. The Church Is A Community Which Is "Constituted In Faith"

All the constitutive elements of the ecclesial communion and of each community belong to the order of faith. The Church is a community assembled in the name of the Father, of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. "The supreme model and principle of this mystery (of the Church) is the unity in the Trinity of Persons of one only God the Father and Son in the Holy Spirit" (*UR*, 2, last sentence). Therefore, from whatever angle we may view the ecclesial communion, it is rooted essentially in the very communion which exists within the life of the Trinity. The Most Holy Trinity is the principle and *raison d'être* of the Church which is therefore in its deepest and most specific reality "a people assembled in the unity of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit" (*LG*, 4).

Our ecclesial community's mission has its origin in that fountain of love which comes from the Father: "This plan flows from 'fountain-like' love, the love of God the Father" (*LG*, 2b). The mission of the Son is the first new and definitive realization of the Father's salvific plan (*AG*, 3), and the Church is born from the mission of the Son incarnate and is a prolongation of this very mission. This is not however a merely juridical succession. Christ constitutes the Church as his Body and makes himself present in her. All the faithful, as members of the same Body, form one Church, although not all have the same function. The Holy Spirit is the one who sustains the Church's faith, because it is through his influence that "Christ's whole flock is maintained in unity of faith and makes progress in it" (*LG*, 25c). He becomes the "principle of communion" in the Church (*UR*, 2b,d).

Like all the gifts of the Spirit, communion generates duties and commitments in the Church and thus becomes a program of Christian life. Through the gift of communion we must live in charity, and we must build among ourselves that unity which Jesus pointed out as the condition by which the world — in our case, the Asian world — will believe in his message. God's gift is one thing, whereas our commitment is another, and it is only the gift which makes the commitment possible. Communion, which is bestowed upon us as members of the community, is greater than we because it comes from the Spirit who is present and at work in many different ways outside the visible frontiers of the Church (*Redemptor Hominis*, 12). This very working of the Spirit outside the visible frontiers of the Church is ordered towards ecclesial communion: the Spirit is at work in non-Christians arousing all that is good and holy in their culture and in their religion so that all may be brought to the feet of Christ. In this way all men and all things will be brought to Christ who is the heart and center of the ecclesial communion. In the mystery of

communion, therefore, the mission of the Holy Spirit reaches its final aim. In this context of the universality of the Spirit's presence and the communion which that presence brings about, the Church evidently holds a central and privileged place. She is the sign and the historical instrument through which it is God's wish to bring about universal communion of all men and of the whole of creation.

The constitutive elements of our ecclesial communities are: *the Gospel, the sacraments — concretely, the Eucharist — and the pastor.* The Council gives us a definition of the particular communities "where the Church of Christ is truly present and active" as a portion of the people of God, which "adhering to its pastor and by him united in the Holy Spirit through the Gospel and the Eucharist *constitutes* a particular church" (CD, 11a).

When *the Gospel* has been proclaimed and accepted, it generates faith (Rom 10, 15-17). The word of the Gospel, being the word of God, does not remain merely on the level of teaching, but, when it has been accepted with faith, it changes the hearts of men and constitutes a community. Thus through faith the Church becomes a community, called together by God and essentially constituted by this divine call. It is not merely a community which simply meets together, but a community which is brought together by God through the word and through our reply of faith. Each day the ecclesial community lives through its faith-filled listening to the word of God, to his Gospel, and this is the source of its life. Our ecclesial communities scattered throughout Asia are made up of those who once welcomed the word of God, confess it in their everyday lives and proclaim it with confidence. As can be seen, in this first constitutive element of our communities the function of faith is essential. Thanks to the Gospel we are a community and a community of faith.

The sacramental structure is proper to the ecclesial community. This is true not merely because the Church is the universal sacrament of salvation but because this salvation which has its source in Christ the Redeemer is communicated to all through the sacraments. These means are called and are in reality "sacraments of faith" (PO, 4b). The sacramental structure of the ecclesial community is, therefore, a faith structure. The sacraments, at one and the same time, create and perfect that unity which was begun by the word in the calling of the faithful (UR, 2d). They are called "sacraments of faith" because the faith aroused by the word of God must be manifested in these external signs which are the sacraments. Adherence to the Gospel cannot remain abstract and

disincarnate but must be revealed by sacramental gestures, as is recalled in the words of *Evangelii Nuntiandi* (EN, 23). One of the duties of evangelization is to “precisely educate in the faith in such a way that it leads each Christian to live the sacraments as true sacraments of faith and not receive them passively or merely to undergo them” (EN, 47).

Among the sacraments we cannot forget Baptism, which has an important function in our churches as the goal towards which the whole process of the catechumenate is directed. Baptism is the first and most radical turning point which the neophyte makes in the process of his faith which, although at its starting point, is nevertheless true and real. According to the mandate of Christ, Baptism is conferred in the name of the three divine Persons. Baptism is, in fact, a true and real immersion in the mystery of God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit and it is a new participation in the very “nature” of God (2 Peter 1, 4). Through Baptism the faithful are in communion with the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. This communion is a mysterious but wonderful gift which the Trinity makes of itself through the first sacrament of Christian initiation. At the same time Baptism introduces the newly-baptized into the ecclesial community. The *koinonia* does not derive simply from the will to unite or to come together; it is above all a supernatural reality which sinks its roots into the Trinitarian communion itself and we are introduced into that communion through the sacrament of Baptism. The sacraments are the foundation of ecclesial communion. There is, therefore, no ecclesial communion which is not rooted, either explicitly or implicitly, in the life of grace communicated to us through the sacraments. Even in their specific effects they insert us into the mystery of Christ’s priesthood and they cause us to share in the perennial liturgy which he, in communion with his Church, offers to the Father in the Spirit.

The sacramental life of the ecclesial communities reaches its highest point in the *Eucharist* (EN, 28). “All the sacraments, and indeed all the ministries, and all the works of the apostolate are closely united to the Eucharist and ordained to it. In fact, in the Eucharist is enclosed all the spiritual good of the Church . . . It is for this reason that the Eucharist is seen as the source and culminating point of all evangelization” (PO, 5b). The Eucharist, which is at the center of the whole sacramentary structure, is the great “mystery of faith” as the Church proclaims in the words uttered by the celebrant after the consecration: *Mysterium Fidei!* At the same time the Eucharist is the sacrament of communion, because it represents and brings about our ecclesial communion (SC, 47; UR, 2a). The epiclesis after the consecration in the new eucharistic prayers asks that “by your Holy Spirit all who share this one bread and one cup may be gathered into the one body of Christ” (Eucharistic Prayer IV); “grant

that we who are nourished by his body and blood may be filled with his Holy Spirit and become one body, one spirit in Christ" (Eucharistic Prayer III). The Eucharist is the high point of our faith and it is the moment in which the communion of divine life and the unity of God's people are manifested and made real through the gift of the Spirit. The person who shares in the mystery of the Eucharist is personally committed to build that universal communion of which this sacrament is the sign and the anticipation and he is also committed to a deeper life of faith. Our churches of Asia who gather around the Eucharist must never forget that the communion in which they rejoice is destined for all men in the whole world not only through the mysterious action of God, but also through the communication of the word and the witness of the disciples.

We have already pointed out that another constitutive element of the ecclesial community is *its hierarchical nature*. Our churches have a unity which is assured by one Gospel, by a community of cult centered on the Eucharist, and by a common destiny because all are on the way to the same fatherland under the guidance of their pastors. The origin of this hierarchical structure is to be found in the will of Christ who chose the Apostles and their successors, the bishops, as pastors and foundations of the Church of which Christ is the cornerstone (LG, 18ff.). We find another motive for the hierarchical nature of the Church in the gifts of the Holy Spirit who "provides (the Church) with hierarchical and charismatic gifts" (LG, 4); within our communities the ministry of the bishops is decisive, placed as they are by the Holy Spirit to shepherd the Church of God, as is noted by St. Paul (Acts 20, 28). The bishop is the visible principle of unity in the particular church, just as the Roman Pontiff, as successor of Peter, is the perpetual and visible principle and foundation both of the bishops and of the multitude of the faithful. The bishop constitutes the link of hierarchical communion between the universal Church and the particular church entrusted to his care. It is only in this context that the particular church is a genuine ecclesial community and a portion of the people of God. All these theological arguments and principles show us how the bishop, an essential element in the particular church, belongs to the structure of faith. In other words, the structure is the wish of Christ and is brought about by the Holy Spirit and is accepted by us in an act of supernatural perception. The ministry of the bishops is not confined to a simply bureaucratic dimension, nor is it limited to the juridical plane. Its deepest roots are to be found in faith.

The mission of the bishop in the Church is that of a teacher in a community of faith (LG, 25), a high priest in a community of worship (LG, 26), a shepherd and father in a community of love (LG, 27). If we

wish to give a correct interpretation of the bishop's ministry at all these levels, we must do so in the light of faith. It is important to emphasize the first aspect since it is probably the most important of the pastor's functions. In Christ's missionary mandate we read "make disciples of all peoples" (Mt 28, 19). The mandate is to make them "disciples" of Christ, not one's own disciples. Following is an essential element of being a disciple and thus forming a community. Christ is followed by accepting him in faith. Therefore one of the principal duties of the bishops in the local community is the preaching of the Gospel. Like the Apostles to whom he is successor, the bishop has been chosen for the Gospel of God; to announce it (Rom 1, 1), to defend it (Phil 1, 16), to give fearless witness to it. Since he knows that his preaching must be nourished by the Sacred Scriptures, he must listen humbly to the word of God in order to assimilate it in meditation and to proclaim it with confidence. In this way he will be an "authentic teacher" of the faith; he will explain it in the light of the Holy Spirit, he will make it fruitful by leading men to obedience in faith (Rom 16, 26), he will defend it against false teachers.

The service required of the bishop is most excellent and most difficult: it is that of communion which is presupposed by every renewal and which is the premise of the present situation of the Church in Asia. It is also presupposed by every mission and by every effective evangelization. From the bishop is also required the service of unity within his own community which he presides, while respecting the diversity of gifts and ministries; it is also his duty to promote collaboration with the other pastors of the Asian churches in keeping with the spirit of coresponsibility in one and the same mission. We cannot forget that one of the principal functions of the FABC must be "to promote intercommunion and cooperation among local churches and bishops of Asia" (*Statutes*, art. 2, D).

Not only must the bishops of our local communities in Asia feel themselves at one with their fellow bishops, but they must in a special way feel this unity with the Pope so that they may communicate to their own churches an awareness of belonging to the whole people of God and maintain them within the life circle and activity of the universal Church. Let us not forget the words of Vatican II: "In order that the episcopate itself might be one and undivided, he (Jesus Christ) put Peter at the head of the other Apostles and in him he set up a lasting and visible source of the unity both of faith and communion" (*LG*, 18b).

3. The Church Is "A Community Which Works In Faith And For The Faith"

The "communion" which is characteristic of our "communities" would not be true and would not be an authentic expression of continuity with the work of the Word incarnate if it were not open to all peoples, beginning with those who are nearest to us, so that all may benefit from the Paschal Mystery and be introduced to the very mystery of communion. From this point of view communion and mission are reminders one of the other. The two are very closely related because they are essential, constitutive dimensions of the one mystery of the Church which continues in history the presence of Christ, the incarnate Word who is sent into the world to re-establish communion with the Father. By gathering the Church into the divine community, the incarnate Word makes her a sharer in the salvific mission received from the Father. Once again it is only faith which can enlighten us to understand why it is that God, who could have saved all in what we may call a secret manner, chose to use the Church-community for the salvation of all men. This design of salvation enters into the plan of God which must be seen through the eyes of faith.

At the same time, the Son who was sent entered into communion with all without distinction. He thus overcame the rigid class distinctions of his time, both religious and social, and he entered into a dialogue of salvation with those who were held to be beyond saving. He welcomed those who were far away and emarginated. Following in the footsteps of the Lord, the Church cannot but desire to be in communion with all in order to lead all into communion with the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit.

This same theme of "work in faith," which is proper to our communities, may be studied under another aspect. That "communion" which is realized in our communities is a gift of the Holy Spirit, and like all gifts, it has its requirements of service, work and mission.

We do not form a community in order to live in greater security as though we were in a Noah's ark of salvation, but we are rather like fishermen who travel in the same boat with Jesus so that we may cast our nets in his name. Communion grows with the mystical exchange of all that each one is and accomplishes in the Church. In fact, each believer has his own gifts; and communion in the Church is an ensemble of different experiences which bring to mind the different members of one body. This variety is united in communion and mission which is the putting at the service of the world the gifts received. You must be careful

to ensure that the building up of the communion *ad intra* in your communities is orientated towards the building up of the communion *ad extra*, to mission and evangelization. The term "to build up" in St. Paul has the meaning of ecclesial and missionary communion and almost always refers to the work of the Holy Spirit (Eph 2, 19-22; 1 Cor 3, 9-16; Rom 15, 18-20).

There can be no mission and evangelization without communion or, in other words, within the framework of an ecclesiology of communion. Our community will not fulfill its mission if it is not "one" in Christ and in the Holy Spirit, as they are "one" in the Trinity and are sent. In the local community the action of the Spirit and the response of man link up together and make the local church an epiphany, however imperfect, of the Trinitarian communion.

The fulness and depth of our ecclesial communion are not exhausted in the exact realization and perfecting of our local communities. They have needs *ad extra*, and these needs are manifested, as we shall point out, in pastoral experience. The pastoral work of communion does not remain enclosed within the local church as though folded in upon itself; indeed it is open to men, to all men, to the signs of the times, and implies that deep sense of solidarity which is born of an awareness that ecclesial communion goes forward in step with the whole of humanity. It experiences together with the world the same fate here on earth and is like the soul of human society which is destined to be renewed in Christ and transformed into the family of God. In this field of universal communion, of openness, of communion with the problems of our time, our Asian communities have a great horizon opening up before them. One of the aims of the FABC is "to help in the study of problems of common interest to the Church in Asia and to investigate possibilities of solutions and coordinated action" (*Statutes*, I, art. 2, C). All the bishops should work together to read the signs of our times, especially in Asia.

According to Vatican II this reading can only be done in the light of faith; again we find the basis on which our communities should be "communities of faith." When the Council speaks of "the signs of the times," it does not say that they must be received blindly but read and interpreted in the light of faith, and it is only after this reading in faith that they may be accepted with all their consequences. For example, "it is the permanent duty of the Church to examine the signs of the times and to interpret them in the light of the Gospel" (*GS*, 4a). "The people of God believes that it is led by the Spirit of the Lord who fills the whole world. Moved by that faith it tries to discern in the events, the needs and the longings which it shares with other men of our time, what may be

genuine signs of the presence or of the purpose of God. For faith throws a new light on all things ...” (GS, 11a). It is the task “particularly of pastors and theologians to listen to and distinguish the many voices of our times and with the help of the Holy Spirit to interpret them in the light of the divine Word” (GS, 44b). It is only this light of faith and of the Spirit which will provide us with a constant discernment, that is a continuous attention, a concrete capacity “to investigate possibilities of solutions and coordinated action” for our problems in the Asian region. Discernment is, therefore, the basis for the renewal of persons and ecclesial communities. It is the path which leads to that continual conversion which must be characteristic of a Christian existence and which is an essential premise of communion. Discernment is the basis for that critical and promotional function which corresponds to an intelligent, active and responsible presence of the Church in the Asia of our time.

Seen in this perspective, the local church does not accentuate the jurisdictional aspect or its own problems. It is a “community brought together” by the word and by the Spirit and an active participant in evangelization and promotion. To speak of communion is to speak of participation by all the churches in the common mission. It is only in this way that communion avoids remaining an abstract premise and gives life to a community which endeavors to live that communion to the full. If communion is to develop within the community, it requires that within that community there be a deep sense of coresponsibility in all its members. This is required by the very nature of our communion, which is a sharing by each and every believer in the life of the Trinity.

Communion becomes mission, and one of the consequences of mission is intercommunication. Each church must give and communicate even of its own poverty, because it is destined to bring communion to all and must also receive. These are the ideas which Pope John Paul II used to launch a new approach to mission (Cf. address to the National Directors of the PMAS in the *Osservatore Romano*, 9th May, 1981). With the theology of the Church as the community of faith, the spirit of dialogue, openness and generosity is strengthened. We acknowledge dialogue as one way for understanding communion and mission, the disposition to give and to receive, the continuous need of two-way conversation with man in his world, in his culture, because with man Christ is, as faith tells us, in some way united, even when man is not aware of this unity (*Redemptor Hominis*, 13).

An integral element of our mission, as fruit of communion, is the human promotion of our people. This is also one of the aims of the

FABC: "to work for and to intensify the dynamic presence of the Church in the total development of the peoples of Asia" (*Statutes*, I, Art. 2,B). This total development includes the human promotion of our peoples. Our churches must dwell upon the problems and aspirations, on the mentality of men, women and families in our countries and they must do so with reference to the present condition of society in our countries. "There are deeply-rooted connections between evangelization and human promotion, development and liberation," we are reminded by *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, and these connections are not merely anthropological, but mainly "of a theological nature." It is not possible to disassociate the plan of redemption from the plan of creation. Both are "of the evangelical order" and the fruit of charity (*EN*, 31). In other words, the connections belong to the order of faith.

We have referred, especially in this latter part, to our local churches in Asia. Now I would like to reflect with you on a problem which is very topical and the object of debate even in Asia. It is a problem which can only be solved in the light of faith and of communion.

Certainly there is no such thing as an abstract "ecclesial communion." As we have pointed out, the "ecclesial communion" is realized in a concrete community with its own physiognomy and culture. Pope Paul VI has already devoted several numbers of his apostolic exhortation *Evangelii Nuntiandi* to this theme (see Nos. 62-64). Our present Holy Father, Pope John Paul II, often returns to this theme in his missionary addresses. To take one of his most recent pronouncements, we shall quote from his words to the bishops of Zimbabwe during their *ad limina* visit: "Finally, my dear brothers, you have expressed the wish that the Church in Zimbabwe be truly Catholic and truly African. I repeat here what I said during my pastoral visit to Nigeria: 'The Church truly respects the culture of each people.' In offering the Gospel message, the Church does not intend to destroy or abolish what is good and beautiful . . . Evangelization aims at penetrating and elevating culture by the power of the Gospel. I encourage you to make the divine message of the Gospel incarnate in the customs and culture of your people. At times this will require great powers of discernment, prudence and patience on your part" (*L'Osservatore Romano*, 19th June, 1982).

From the need to implant the mystery of the Church in the conditions proper to each region, arises the problem of reciprocal influence between universal values and particular values. Vatican Council II dealt not only with the universal Church, but also with the local or particular churches, and it presented them as one of the renewing aspects in the life of the Church (*LG* 13, 23, 26; *CD*, 3, 11, 15;

AG, 22). Each particular church is enriched with valuable human elements which are proper to the genius and nature of each nation. These elements, however, are not considered as signs of division, of particularism or of nationalism, but as the expression of variety within the same unity and a fullness of the incarnation which enriches the whole body of Christ. This unity imposes a number of concrete demands on bishops and missionaries in the fulfillment of their duties. The bishops and their collaborators are the first to have to answer for the correct discernment of cultural values in the life of their churches and the clear perspective of universality which derives from their missionary role as successors to the Apostles who have been sent into the whole world. (This vocabulary and the criteria which we will here propose are taken from the document *Mutuae Relationes*, i.e., Guidelines on the relationship between Bishops and Religious in the Church, which was issued by the Sacred Congregation for Bishops and the Sacred Congregation for Religious on the 23rd April, 1978, Nos. 18 and 23). What has been said above concerning the mission of the Church suggests the following guidelines: the reciprocal influence between the two poles, that is, the living participation of a particular culture and the horizon of universality, should have its foundation in an unwavering esteem and persevering protection for those values of unity which can never be denied. Such are the values of unity in the Catholic Church, and especially the values of faith and communion. The community which would break away from this unity would leave itself open to a double danger in the words of Pope Paul VI: "on the one hand, the danger of segregation which causes hardening . . . ; and on the other hand, the danger of losing its own liberty when separated from the head . . . , and becoming subject in many ways to those who try to enslave it and exploit it" (*EN*, 64).

At the same time it is important that bishops see the need for apostolic solicitude in the thinking out of new, ingenious and courageous ecclesial experiments in inculturation under the influence of the Holy Spirit, who is by his nature creative. In this introductory talk we have spoken frequently of this Spirit who is the principle of communion and the source of the gift of faith. If in all these experiments we are under his renewing guidance, we can live to the full the ecclesial, universal communion and keep intact the deposit of faith, which is the same for all Christians.

At the practical level, the "communion—mission" of our communities should be shown first of all at the pastoral level. Our pastoral approach should be renewed in the light of communion and the life of faith. This is not simply a question of updating, but of a new approach and mentality which must transform from within our way of thinking

about and doing pastoral work. This type of pastoral approach, based on communion—mission, should pervade the field of catechesis and teaching, of liturgy and renewal. It will immediately make our Asian churches into living and working communities, filled with creativity and open to the whole world and committed to live in communion with the Pope and with his magisterium. This is one of the characteristics of our Asian churches, as a sign of a genuine communion and an authentic life of faith.

VI. STATEMENT OF THE THIRD PLENARY ASSEMBLY OF THE FEDERATION OF ASIAN BISHOPS' CONFERENCES

Prenote

Towards the end of the visit of the Holy Father, Pope Paul VI, to South and East Asia in 1970, at Manila, in late November, the first definite steps for the organization of the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences (FABC) were taken. These were to be completed at Hong Kong on August 24-25, 1972, when the Statutes of the FABC were accepted, confirmed and submitted to the Holy See for approval *ad experimentum*. This approval, granted on November 16 of the same year, may be said to mark the official establishment of the FABC. With the Third Plenary Assembly at Bangkok, October 20-27, 1982, the Federation completes its tenth year of existence. This meeting has thus provided the participants the opportunity for looking back on ten years of blessing and grace, and thanking the Lord for them. The message which follows, fruit of the reflection and discussion of the plenary and workshop sessions, is addressed by the bishops present at the conference to their brother-bishops and their collaborators in the member churches of the Federation. Through them it is spoken also to all the communities of faith scattered throughout Asia, in the hope that it may be of service to them in their search for ecclesial communion and community.

Part One: The FABC: 1972-1982

1. We, the participants of the Third Plenary Assembly of the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences, gathered together at Lux Mundi Seminary, Sampran, Thailand, and joined in communion with Pope John Paul II, whose representatives we have welcomed in our midst, send our greeting to all our brother-bishops and their collaborators in

ministry in the local churches of Asia, as well as to all our beloved brothers and sisters in Jesus Christ in their communities. *Pax et bonum.*

2. We begin by thanking God and never ceasing to thank him for all the blessings we have received in these last years, through Jesus Christ our Lord (1 Cor 1:4). For this first decade of our Federation has truly been a decade of his gifts. In the face of serious and significant, sometimes deeply tragic, changes all over the Asian continent, in the political, social and economic spheres, the FABC has yet grown in so many ways, building bridges of communication, facilitating mutual support and collaboration among the churches in our part of the world.

3. We try to enumerate here, briefly and inadequately, what FABC has done for us:

3.1 The Asian bishops have come to know and understand one another better, and bonds of friendship and solidarity have grown among them. Surely, for shaping a community among the churches in Asia, this is a wonderful beginning, full of promise for the future, for unity is first of all a oneness of minds and hearts in friendship. The Asian bishops have come to appreciate better what the episcopal conferences and local churches in each country are doing, what the situations and problems they face are like, so that in a significant way, their joys have become the joys of all, and their setbacks and sorrows, griefs which touch the lives of all.

3.2 We in our local churches have been taught to pray with and for each other; to learn from each other's programs and projects, progress and failure; to share common pastoral and theological concerns; to be similarly reached by great ecclesial initiatives and movements; to work together at common tasks; to lend or give of our material and personnel resources — in brief, increasingly to become truly sister-churches in the one family of communities of the Gospel which is the Church of Jesus Christ.

3.3 The Federation's several offices, with their institutes (Bishops' Institute on the Missionary Apostolate, Bishops' Institute on Social Action, Bishops' Institute on Interreligious Affairs, et al.), seminars and formation courses, have taught us to reflect together on the situations which exist in our countries, on the needs of our peoples, and how we might more effectively respond to them. Theologians and other *periti* in the member churches, whose knowledge and skills have been made available to us, have helped us move forward in our understanding, discernment and action as pastors in our communities. They have helped too towards creating a

greater community of vision, values and priorities among ourselves.

3.4 We have also been enabled by our joint reflection and discernment, by pastoral options and policies we have together taken, to contribute to the ongoing reflection and discernment of churches in other continents and to the thinking and policies of the central administrative offices of the Church.

3.5 As our mutual knowledge, affection and esteem have grown for each other, so has our gratitude for the unity that is the Lord's gift to us. We have also learned to understand better the role of the See of Peter and of him who from it "presides over the Church in love" (LG, 18b), in the visible unity of Christ's Body on earth. And within our growing oneness we have felt all the more keenly in our meetings the absence of our brother bishops from the churches in those countries which have not permitted their participation.

3.6 The message of the historic 1970 meeting of Asian Bishops spoke of

helping to 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 love (ABM 1970, 26).

That the Church in Asia may in some small way be a sacrament — sign and instrument (LG, 1; GS, 40) — of this unity of our peoples is surely one of the hopes of FABC, and we believe that, in the Lord's designs, the last ten years have not been without significance for the realization of this hope.

For all these, and countless other gifts, we give our thanks.

4. Looking over previous statements of our plenary meetings and other major assemblies, we see that the concerns of the Asian bishops gathered together in the last decade have regarded:

— our churches' mission and service (*diakonia*) to our Asian peoples, especially in the tasks and dialogues of contemporary evangelization (ABM 1970, FABC I 1974);

— their life of prayer, in the interiority of persons and in the inner life of our communities, and in the bonds which link our Christian prayer with the prayer and spirituality of other religious traditions in Asia (FABC II 1978);

— the ministries exercised in our local churches and by them, as collocated within the most varied Asian contexts (ACMC 1977).

5. Our present Plenary Assembly has, in a way, now completed the circle of our reflection with its theme, "The Church — a Community of Faith in Asia." It has led us to consider the Church as community realizing its communion and mission in its own being and life, and in relation to other communities in whose midst we live in the Asian continent.

Part Two: The Church — A Community of Faith in Asia

6. Under the guidance of the Spirit of the Lord, we have tried to deepen our understanding of and love for the Church as a community of faith. We have tried to "search the Scriptures" and to meditate on the teaching of the Second Vatican Council, so that we might with a renewed vision of faith realize a little better the mystery of the Church, "a people made one with the unity of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit" (St. Cyprian, cf. LG, 4, in *Patre et Filio et Spiritu Sancto plebs adunata*), and what this mystery must mean for us in our own communities and local churches.

7. We have recalled these constants in the being and life of the Church, in its concrete realizations, ecclesial communities implanted in particular times and places:

7.1 that the Church is at its deepest level a *communion* (*koinonia*) rooted in the life of the Trinity, and thus in its essential reality a sacrament (*mysterium et sacramentum*) of the loving self-communication of God and the graced response of redeemed mankind in faith, hope and love;

7.2 that it is assembled by the summons of the Gospel and the Spirit of Jesus into one Body;

7.3 whose all-encompassing purpose is *discipleship in the Gospel*, ever proclaimed in its midst, whose imperatives are daily studied in mind and heart, and in whose light the realities of life and history which surround it are constantly discerned;

7.4 whose life and activity are meant to be led by the *guidance of the Spirit*, earnestly and unceasingly sought in contemplation and prayerful discernment;

7.5 that it is a community whose common life is nourished by *the sacraments of faith*, a life begun in the rebirth of Baptism and constantly built up by the Eucharist, whose faithful celebration is "its basis and center" (PO, 6), "the very heartbeat of the community of the faithful" (PO, 5);

7.6 that it is a community of authentic *participation and coresponsibility*, where genuine sharing of gifts and responsibilities obtains, where the talents and charisms 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;

7.7 that it is a community in true *oneness with its pastors*, the bishops and their collaborators in the ordained ministry, whom the Spirit has chosen to govern the Church (Acts 20, 28), and who stand in the midst of the faithful as those who serve;

7.8 that it is a community not closed in on itself and its particular concerns, but *linked* with many bonds to *other communities of faith* (concretely, the parishes and dioceses around them) and to the one and universal communion, *catholica unitas*, of the holy Church of the Lord;

7.9 that, finally, the issue of its discipleship shall not only be *reconciliation* constantly renewed in the midst of the brethren, as sign and promise of reconciliation within human community, but that vis-à-vis the world it shall fulfill the Gospel mandate of *mission*: proclaiming the Word through word and witness, reaching out to others through ways of *dialogue*, and acting in evangelical *service*, so that the Word and the Spirit may be shared in fidelity and joyfulness with our brothers and sisters in the other human communities which surround it.

8. We have recalled too, what previous gatherings of Asian bishops have repeatedly pointed out:

8.1 that our local churches are to realize their lives and destinies as Church in the midst of the harsh realities of the contemporary histories of our peoples, marked by turbulent political events and traversed by sweeping social transformations and movements, as, e.g., the resurgence of fundamentalist religious forces and of militant political ideologies, and the mechanisms and attitudes which create increasing poverty and injustice. Confronted with these, our communities must make their Christian discipleship significantly present and operative, in tasks of human development and the building up of fraternal community, in the promotion and defense of those rights which issue from the fundamental dignity of human persons as sons and daughters of God, and in other societal and political areas as well.

8.2 Further, that our Christian communities in Asia must listen to the Spirit at work in the many communities of believers who live and experience their own faith, who share and celebrate it in their own social, cultural and religious history, and that they (as communities of the Gospel) must accompany these others "in a common pilgrimage toward the ultimate goal, in relentless quest for the Absolute," and that thus they are to be sensitively attuned to the work "of the Spirit in the resounding symphony of Asian communion."

Part Three: In Our Communities: Some Inadequacies and Failures

9. In the hours we have worked together we asked ourselves where we have fallen short (and we readily admit that we have so often fallen short) in corresponding with the Lord's grace to become the kind of communities the faith calls us to be. We indicate only some of these inadequacies and failures:

9.1 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.

9.2 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 Christlike servanthood; even in the presbyteral communities and religious houses often enough true coresponsibility 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.

9.3 The structures of our ecclesial organization (sometimes so large, amorphous and impersonal) often image-forth "institution" in its less attractive aspects, and not "community"; church groups not infrequently remain individualist in ethos and practice. Sometimes organs of lay participation and coresponsibility have not been established, or are left inactive and impeded, existing only in name. Often enough the gifts and charisms of the laity, both men and women, are not duly recognized, welcomed or activated in significant functions and tasks of ministry and apostolate.

9.4. In many cases adequate formation—personal, theological, pastoral — in the authentic ecclesiology of Vatican II has not yet been provided, — a mutual catechesis which is of the greatest importance and even urgency for bishops, priests, religious and laity.

9.5 Although in recent years much progress has been made in formation to, and exercise of, prayer, still much remains to be done toward fostering it in our communities. Sometimes there is little or no prayer even in religious houses. Bishops, priests and religious do not do enough to help their fellow Christians in the practice of prayer. Our ecclesial communities often are lacking that esteem for spiritual values which are so highly regarded in Asia, especially by many Asian religions and their adherents.

9.6 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 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, carried forward in our response to the challenging Spirit, is an indispensable element for the building up of our own Christian communities on all levels.

9.7 How often too, our communities, especially among those more favored in life, have failed to grow in awareness of situations of social injustice, of the violation of human dignity and human rights massively present around them. How inadequate has been our proclamation of the Church’s social teaching, and the formation and transformation of our social attitudes as Catholics in line with that doctrine. How indifferent and hesitant, only too often, has been our involvement in the concerns of human development and liberation: in issues where the rights of women, the poor and powerless are crushed; where the relationships and structures which perpetuate injustice and exploitation in society are extended and reinforced; and where the proliferation of arms (including nuclear arms), oppressive militarization and established patterns of violence grow and spread.

9.8 How little, in Asia, have we spoken or taken action against the oppression and degradation of women, especially among the poor and less educated, for the purposes and profit of various exploitative industries, tourism, the sex-trades, and the like.

9.9 Finally, how insufficient for the most part has been our missionary consciousness and responsibility. We have so frequently forgotten that the summons and challenge to make known the person and message of Jesus Christ to those who do not know him is a mandate addressed to even the youngest Christian community.

Part Four: The Presence of the Spirit and Signs of Hope in Our Communities in Asia

10. The consideration of these failures and deficiencies does not dishearten us, for we are only too conscious of, and grateful for, the presence and the action of the Holy Spirit in our midst, during this first decade of the FABC's life, and in the twenty years which have followed the Second Vatican Council in the life of the Church.

11. We make ours the words spoken of our Asian churches by the First International Mission Congress, held in Asia, in Manila, in December of 1979:

11.1 There is today an undeniable thirst and hunger for prayer and contemplation. We see this all around us, but especially among the laity, especially among the young. Surely this is a sign of the presence and action of the Spirit.

11.2 There is the longing to hear and reflect on the word of God, especially with others in a community of prayer.

11.3 There is the eucharistic assembly increasingly celebrated and experienced as truly the heart of the Christians' pilgrimage through life.

11.4 There is the desire in many also for greater simplicity of life and even the experience of poverty as a following of Jesus, and as solidarity with the suffering and powerless poor.

11.5 There is the increased commitment to tasks of human development and struggles for justice and human rights.

11.6 There is, in some countries, the rapid multiplication of "grass-roots ecclesial communities," so often alive with the freshness and enthusiasm of early Christian times. In these communities an experience of genuine Christian fellowship and love is often found, as well as the emergence of diverse charisms and ministries.

11.7 There are new missionary initiatives among the former "mission churches," among priests and religious and — most encouraging of all — among the laity.

12. We can give witness, with joy and gratitude, to the reality of these phenomena in our Asian churches, to the living currents of renewal by the Spirit which traverse most of them. And we may add that in a number of countries and regions the Church grows in remarkable numbers, as do religious and priestly vocations. Religious houses and seminaries in this part of the Church, by God's favor and not our merits, are — more often than not — filled with the harvest sown in labor and tears by those men and women of heroic dedication, missionaries who in times past planted the seeds of Gospel and Church in the soil of our Asian lands.

13. We can speak too, even if poorly, of the life, labor and struggles of our brothers and sisters in Asian countries where they are either relatively isolated, or (in some cases) persecuted and reduced to suffering and silence. In them we believe the Spirit too is powerfully at work, sustaining them in their admirable fidelity and perseverance, planting in their lives and hardship future harvest for the Kingdom of the Father, and fruitfulness for the future of the Church as sacrament of the oneness of all mankind. As our minds, and our hearts, reach out to them, we embrace them in prayer, in solidarity and in love, humble in the presence of brothers and sisters who inspire and strengthen us by their courage and their unshakable faith and hope.

Part Five: Toward a Renewed Community of Faith

14. Our reflection at this point leads us to the options we must take, and the ways we must enter upon in the decade before us, if we are to make our local communities more and more authentic communities of faith.

15. We have seen (in Part Two) how the local church must be a community of graced communion rooted in the life of the Trinity, a community of prayer and contemplation, and of sacramental celebration and life centered around the Eucharist. It must be defined by its life of faithful discipleship in the Gospel, patterned on the paschal mystery of Jesus, "a community for others." It must strive to live and act under the constant guidance and by the power of his Spirit. We have realized that genuine participation and coresponsibility must be essential elements of its existence, and theological reflection and discernment integral components of its life. It is a community which strives to remain in unfeigned unity with its pastors, within the bonds of local and universal communion in the one Church. It is called to give witness to the meanings and values it professes, incarnating these in the ways of life of its own people, expressing them in its presence, dialogue and praxis in all

the spheres of its activity as Church in history, within its own real world. Finally, it constantly moves forward in mission, as it accompanies all humankind in its pilgrimage to the Kingdom of the Father.

16. The awareness of our shortcomings in becoming such communities and our acknowledgement of the many ways wherein we have failed point out to us already many avenues for future efforts, and reveal to us how much we need the help and guidance of the Lord. Recent FABC meetings on mission, social action, interreligious dialogue, social communication and the education apostolate have traced major orientations which are to be taken in the years to come.

16.1 Our theological vision must be turned ever more resolutely to the Church's responsibility in the world, in the public spheres, in the construction of a more fully human future for Asian peoples. We must be beyond merely seconding Pope John Paul's words, that "the preference for the poor is a Christian preference," and that "it expresses the concern of Christ who came to proclaim a message of salvation to the poor . . . the poor who are indeed loved by (the) God . . . who guarantees their rights"; we must now make them the real pattern of our daily praxis.

16.2 Increasingly our pastoral concerns must involve Christian lay people as members of the Church and involved in society, and attend to the life and role of women and the future of the family in Asian nations.

16.3 We must effectively translate the primacy of evangelization into deeds, in a continent where two billion men and women have not yet consciously come to know Christ and his Gospel in significant ways; our word and witness, with the progressively better use of the mass media, must be placed generously at the service of this endeavor.

16.4 Inculturation, carried out with creativity and discernment, and interreligious dialogue (especially through "the dialogue of life") continue to challenge us, as areas for ministry so necessary and urgent in Asia; our response to these challenges must likewise be more and more that of actualization of action.

17. Our workshop reports have also enumerated particular convictions and resolutions which we believe are of special relevance and urgency at the present time. So that they may be more attentively considered by ourselves and our communities and by others in days to come, we have drawn up a "list of concerns" which itself is meant to form an integral part of this statement.

Conclusion

As we complete this journey which FABC III has taken we offer again our prayer of thanksgiving to our Lord, *lux mundi*. He is the light of the world, and we have turned to him during these days of our being together, for knowledge and understanding, for foresight and wisdom, and for "every good gift which comes down from above." How graciously he has listened to our prayer!

We thank him for the ten years of the life of this Federation, which he has blessed even beyond our hopes.

We thank him for bringing us and our churches together, in a community of friendship and brotherhood which is in its way sign and sacrament, promise and beginning of the oneness to which he calls our peoples.

We beg him to accompany us, as bishops and brothers, as friends, in the years that are ahead of us: whether they be years of the brightness of dawn and morning, or of the heat and labor of the noontime, the gathering shadows of the evening, or the dreaded darkness of night.

We ask him to bless our communities, our beloved priests, our religious brothers and sisters, the growing ranks of lay ministers — catechists, and other associates, the sick and aged among us, the myriads of young people, children in our Christian families, their fathers and mothers.

We ask him to increase the numbers of our missionaries, who must carry his word to the millions who, in Asia, have not yet heard his name.

We see before us all the faithful people in our local churches, "the saints" whom he has called into his holy Church, and together with them we raise our hearts and hands in praise of his goodness and worship of his glory.

And we pray: Lord, be light of the world to your faithful, and be light of the world to those who await the shining forth of your compassion and loving kindness upon mankind. Be lamp for our paths, lighting up the way which leads to your Father, and to the city where he dwells in light.

Send us your Spirit, that from him we may learn your wisdom, your patience, and the ways of your mind and your heart.

Mary, Morning Star, dawn to your Son's perfect day, lead us and our peoples at last to the blessed Kingdom of your Son. Amen.

VII. THE REPORTS AND THE "SYLLABUS OF CONCERNS" OF THE PLENARY ASSEMBLY

Workshop: Forms of Christian Community-Living in Asia

There is a strong urge in Asian countries to develop basic Christian communities as a vibrant witness to Gospel values. This urge stems from a certain dissatisfaction with the impersonal character of our present Christian life and the rather individualistic approach to spirituality (God and I) which has held the field until now. The success of such small Christian communities and the obvious sense of joy they exude have also helped foster this desire for true Christian community.

Our group feels that the communitarian aspect of Christian spirituality and life (God, people and I) needs to be emphasized to balance the strong individualistic approach which has characterized our spirituality so far. Appropriate catechesis and education stress this community dimension and, comprising the essential elements of faith, charity and justice, must help promote true Christian community. Being Gospel-based and deriving their vitality from the word of God, these communities should be always open to the action of the Holy Spirit. Drawing their nourishment and inspiration from the Eucharist they should feel impelled to share the Good News with their neighbors and engage in apostolic activities. In close union with their bishop they should endeavor to build up the Church, looking upon this task as their personal responsibility.

In a true Christian community the horizontal and vertical dimensions should be simultaneously present at all levels, and communion must be readily apparent in all sectors of Church life.

No ideal model of Christian community can be appropriate for or fit every situation. Consequently, while safeguarding the essential elements noted above, the Christian community will acquire a different and distinctive character in each changing context as it strives to respond meaningfully to the needs of people in a particular situation.

The holistic view should remain always the ideal. Christians will enter into different dimensions of community, e.g., liturgy, evangelization, service, as personal and communal needs demand, but through a constant process of Christ-centered transformation they should acquire the holistic dimension which should be other-directed.

All movements within church life, e.g., the Charismatic movement, should be other-oriented and geared to fostering genuine community.

Rural people have a natural sense of community which we can build on to form a Christian community. In the urban setting, however, society is atomized and the sense of community destroyed. This makes the task of forming a Christian community all the harder, but it is in cities that the need for such communities is all the more necessary and urgent.

Stress on reading of the Bible and valuable Gospel-sharing can be a very useful way of building community. While Scripture scholars will have to play their proper part, one should never underestimate the power of the word of God itself, and therefore we should promote prayerful reading of the Scriptures by the faithful in an effort to form leaders and build a living Christian community.

The communitarian aspects of the sacraments is to be appreciated and exploited in so far as is possible, for the building of community. The social celebration of Baptism can be a step in this direction. No effort is to be spared to make the celebration of the Eucharist as diffuse as possible, as this is central and fundamental to the building of Christian community. Lack of priestly personnel unfortunately prevents this diffusion considered so essential to the survival and progress of the Christian community. The same problem is experienced when the communitarian aspect of the sacrament of Penance is emphasized.

If one is to revitalize the present amorphous, impersonal parish structure, it is imperative that this be broken down into manageable proportions where people can interact meaningfully with each other. Existing organizations, such as the St. Vincent de Paul Society, Legion of Mary, etc., are to be infused with the principles of Christian community and accorded a proper place in the new scheme of things.

Such basic Christian communities, if they are to be true to their Christ-centered inspiration and momentum, must engage in social service, maintaining always the Christian motivation. The testimony and witness of their personal lives will be the indispensable and convincing way to fulfil their essential obligation of being missionary. Working alongside of other Christians and non-Christians will foster the ecumenical, bridge-building dimension.

The priest is at the cutting edge of this thrust towards community building but it is necessary that he help train a corps of lay leaders who will be the leaven in the dough, helping foster such communities where

Christians who have seen a vision will have the courage to make the Gospel come alive. He can do this with credibility only if he and the presbyterate are themselves a vibrant Christian community.

Workshop: Diocese and Parish as Communities of Faith

We were unsure of how to proceed. One suggested that since the position papers emphasized the role of the laity, we should begin with that emphasis.

It was remarked that the two position papers seemed to indicate an opposition between *organization* and *spirituality*. The former in Europe and USA and the latter in the East. However, another bishop said that there was no such opposition. It was rather a question of emphasis and balance between the two poles, as both are necessary for the Church as a community of faith.

After some further discussion, it was agreed that we divide our workshop sessions into three areas, according to the paper of Bishop Claver — *outlooks, structures and leadership*. However, after an initial attempt at this, our discussion took the shape of a valuable exchange of experience in different situations.

The question was posed: If we want our local churches to be communities of faith, are the present structures helpful towards that goal or are they not?

To what extent do lay people participate in church life and how to help them? Various experiences were given:

— The third world is more passive and people leave things to the priest.

— In Asian cultures there is respect for the elders and hence, the opinion of priests and bishops counts.

— Parish councils have not been entirely successful. They are made to depend too much on the parish priests for their success.

— Sometimes there are “two” churches in a diocese — the Western and the Eastern and it is difficult at times to find the balance.

— Some had the experience of good lay participation through parish committees, parish councils. Lay people seem to be most willing to want to participate in having a say in the finances of the parish, and the parish priest least willing to accept participation in this regard. Both people and priests are to be prepared.

— One bishop said that his church was a “lay” church, and because of few priests some parishes were managed by people who do all (except

celebrate Mass) that is needed for the running of the parish. They have the responsibility for the church and their Christian presence is seen and felt by society at large.

One obstacle to forming communities of faith seems to be that among our presbyteries and religious houses there is not too much evidence of communities of faith.

Another answer was that there are no communities of faith because there is no genuine faith in us. We seem to give importance to observances of regulation (going to church on Sunday, etc.) but our daily life is lived as if we have no faith. We live on two levels. Faith does not touch the core of daily life. We are not truly men of God, having a personal relationship with God, who is our loving Father rather than a merciless judge. In the large non-Christian milieux in which most of us live more than ordinary faith is required.

In one area (USA), the catechumenate now being given to people on the occasion of the Rite of Initiation has been a great experience, developing a personal relationship with our Lord.

We are neglecting preaching the word of God in season and out of season. We have to do this because faith is a response to God's revelation.

What are the emphases we would like to see in the final document?

1. Besides structures such as dioceses, parishes, parish councils, etc., which are useful, if we take the Asian context into account, we should emphasize also the spiritual characteristic of interiority and appreciation for spiritual values which mark all the great religions found in Asia.

2. The Church (diocese, parish) could be presented more as a family than a community. The expression "community of faith" is too vague and abstract, a cliché. Our people would understand better if we spoke of the parish as a "family" or "the family that is the parish (diocese, church)."

3. It is true that in large groups (large parishes) where hundreds of people come to church on Sundays, it is difficult to form "communities of faith." However, this coming together to worship the Lord on Sunday is also important and necessary to sustain the sense of community of faith, which has to be developed and deepened in other ways, e.g., area masses, prayer groups, masses in homes on special occasions, Bible courses, faith formation courses, etc.

Also in similar concentrations of our people it must be remembered that the family, the clan, the tribe, the village have much influence and, in the Asian context, can be used to form communities of faith.

4. It was stressed more than once that if we are to form communities of faith among the faithful, they must see such communities in our presbyteries and religious houses. An appeal should be made to our priests and religious to be not just "communities," but communities of faith (loving, sharing, caring, being concerned, etc.)

Workshop: Integral Human Development and the Church as a Community of Faith in Asia

The vast number of people in Asia and the dehumanizing conditions in which many of them are forced to live pose a great challenge to the Church. This reality, varying in degrees from place to place, obliges us to continue to look for the root causes of problems and tackle them. We renew the response of our faith to these conditions and stress the struggle for justice, founded on truth and animated by love, as an integral part of evangelization. We wish to reaffirm our statements on justice and human development, made particularly at our FABC Plenary Assemblies and at the BISAs. We wish to rededicate ourselves to the task of opting like Christ for the poor (Lk 4:18) so that the endeavor of the Church in Asia to "bring about total human development and authentic liberation of people in justice and love" (FABC II, 1978, 3) may be pursued with greater intensity and fervor. We also wish to make our own the call of Pope John Paul II, during his journey in February, 1981, to Pakistan, Philippines and Japan, especially for justice, freedom and peace. To quote his speech to the people of Bacolod, Philippines:

The Church will not hesitate to take up the cause of the poor and to become the voice of those who are not listened to when they speak up, not to demand charity, but to ask for justice. Yes, the preference for the poor is a Christian preference! It is a preference that expresses the concern of Christ who came to proclaim a message of salvation to the poor, for the poor are indeed loved by God, and God it is who guarantees their rights.

We shared our experiences of how we struggle to build communities of faith where there would be joy and hope for all. We look forward to the day when people in every country of Asia would have at least the basic needs of life. We regret the fact that present unjust structures, attitudes and policies in many parts of Asia do actually deprive many of our people not only of material goods but also of human dignity and rights,

including participation in decisions affecting their lives. What is worse is that people who are victims of this situation consciously or unconsciously imbibe values contrary to Kingdom-values, which are detrimental to their integral human development and community building.

We realize that we in the Church are in continual need of evangelizing and of being evangelized. We stress the great importance of Gospel-values in our own lives and in those of others, values like concern for justice and human dignity, brotherhood of all people, concern for the common good, moral and social responsibility, love for the poor, human rights, willingness to share wealth, dignity of work and ability to see all as brothers and sisters.

We feel the necessity of education to further these values by making sure that the social teachings of the Church are included in all formation programs in seminaries, religious houses, catechetical institutes, etc. We also emphasize training of the laity—not merely to manage socio-economic projects but also to prepare them to be lay ministers, good Christian witnesses who can play their role in all fields, even politics. We appreciate the use of prayer groups and the liturgy to promote values to create awareness about social justice, for example, Human Rights Sunday or Social Justice Sunday, or a special mass to promote human rights. We recommend live-in programs and other means used to spread the growth of education for justice and action at the diocesan level. The growth of social action offices at the diocesan level was a help to promote this thrust. In quite a few cases socioeconomic projects have been used as starting points to build communities of faith. Others have engaged in organizing the poor to secure their just rights. We wish to support these groups, provided they are not manipulated by a few and do not resort to violence. We do not support any one particular ideology but judge whether we can co-operate with an ideology with our own criteria of Kingdom-values—values of freedom, equality, human dignity, justice, participation in decision making, non-violence. We hope that the efforts of dialogue among people, groups and institutions, adhering to different understandings of society, will continue and there will be an endeavor for consensus at all stages.

It is of the very essence of Christianity to be outgoing and co-operating with all people. Human development and human rights are areas of possible interreligious co-operation. Building communities stressing Kingdom-values hopefully will grow in Asia, a land of many faiths and ideologies.

Human development has played a big role in building communities of faith in the Church. However, there can be no true communities where some are rich and others very poor, where some have all the power and others none. Social action has helped to narrow the gap and change attitudes and values. It has helped people to function as brothers and sisters. It has highlighted the truth that Christianity is not just a concern for individual salvation but for all people and all dimensions of people's lives. In short, social action helps build up communities of faith in action. These Christian communities led by the Spirit are not closed groups of Christians but are open to all.

Workshop: The Dialogue of Communities of Faith in Asia

Our discussions have helped us to become more aware that one of the most important and challenging tasks of the Church — a Community of Faith in Asia is to promote a relevant “dialogue” among all communities of faith in this continent. We understand that dialogue as the “dialogue of life” in the recent statements of the First and Second Bishops' Institutes on Interreligious Affairs. Our discussions surfaced the following insights:

1. Recognize that from time immemorial God has been revealing himself to our peoples, who have responded in various ways to the workings of the Spirit among them, and have then emerged as communities of faith, living, experiencing, sharing and celebrating this faith in their social, cultural and religious history.

2. Acknowledge that our first experienced belonging is our human and religious belonging to these communities. Hence, move in from our isolation and join these communities so as to enrich ourselves with the heritage of our peoples. Understand them by being open to them, listening to them, receiving from them, in empathy, trust, respect, humility and in shedding our self-sufficiency and superiority complex.

3. Join these communities in our common pilgrimage towards the ultimate goal, in mutual listening and sharing, in relentless quest for the Absolute, the Truth:

— in encouraging one another with our vision of ultimate reality and final goal

— in living and promoting common values

— in upholding and living moral religious values

— in collaborating in common projects (social, economic, political, cultural, religious)

— in interacting with one another and responding to the Spirit challenging us in our mutual sharing, in undergoing conversion and transformation

- mutually enlightened and encouraged, mutually carried forward
- emotionally and practically convinced that such a “dialogue” is the form of Christian presence to people and other religions.

4. Finally, our two belongings—namely, to our culture and to our Christian faith—are not juxtaposed but intertwined in the depth of our being as a living synthesis in our spirituality, theology, worship and life-style. Thus work for and contribute to the building of the Kingdom of God.

It is only in this way, ultimately, that a community of faith in Asia can be built up. Therefore, this dialogue approach is an indispensable element for the building up of our Christian communities, on all levels.

Workshop: The Laity in the Church—a Community of Faith in Asia

Church as Community

The relationship of the clergy and the laity in the Church is fundamentally that of community and not of institution. The role of the laity and the clergy in the Church must flow from and be visualized within this relationship of community. This relationship is based on common dignity and specific functions (*LG*, 32). We want to take all possible measures to build this kind of community among the clergy and the laity in our churches in Asia. This community building requires mutual understanding, sharing and fraternal collaboration.

The dominant phenomena in the Church have been marked clergy-orientated structures in decision-making, administration and apostolate, without an active and responsible participation of the laity. We also note that while we possess a very developed theology and spirituality of the priesthood and religious life, we still need to develop a deeper theology and spirituality of the sacrament of Matrimony and of lay spirituality and family life.

While we realize that the laity should be drawn to participate more actively in the activities of the Church, mentioned above, we acknowledge and encourage first and foremost their specific contribution to the life and holiness of the Church and society through their specific state of life.

Functional Level

We need new functional set-ups so that the laity can take active and responsible participation in the life of the Church. We already note some new achievements in this line by way of parish councils and lay

organizations. The norms and patterns for parish councils and similar organizations of lay participation need not be uniform; they can be diverse in accordance with cultural background and actual needs and situation of places. And we also have to create new models of lay leadership.

Formation Level

We require adequate and planned programs of formation for both the laity and the clergy, so that we can form genuine community among them. This formation program should contain topics of ecclesiology, spirituality (both of the priesthood and religious life and more especially of the laity), theology of the laity, leadership and service in the Church.

The programs for new functional set-ups and of formation should not be haphazard, but must be issues of national and diocesan planning.

There is a felt need for both clergy (bishops, priests and religious) and laity to have a better and clearer knowledge and understanding of the pertinent documents of Vatican II (especially *Lumen Gentium* and *Apostolicam Actuositatem*).

Laity Office within FABC

We recommend the setting-up of an Office within FABC for the laity. This would be our instrument to continue our discussions so far.

Workshop: The Role of Women in the Church as a Community of Faith in Asia

I. First a general review of the situation of women in society and in the Church was attempted. Evidently, its value is limited by the knowledge and experience of the participants. The topics selected were: educational and vocational training, employment and other economic roles, marriage and the family, power and political participation, health and nutrition.

Education of women, at all levels, was reported to be progressively improving though not at the same rate everywhere. The figures from UNICEF for 1977 give qualitatively a correct picture. But much more requires to be done. Rural areas need greater attention than the urban. Though seldom is there any discrimination theoretically, in effect the rich and those in urban areas have easier access to all forms and to all institutions of education, while others, specifically the rural section and the poor, are in varying degrees deprived of them.

In the employment of women, too, the urban and rural distinction was found valid. Those in rural areas generally involved themselves in agriculture, mostly on their farms. Equal pay for equal work is the commonly accepted principle, though there are regions which do not observe the law, especially in non-unionized and unskilled labor groups.

Women employees from rural areas find suitable housing a serious problem when they migrate to towns. A recent phenomenon in practically all countries is the emigration of girls, for skilled as well as unskilled work, to the Gulf countries. The problems they face are many: loneliness, difficulties in the practice of faith and in safeguarding their human dignity.

II. Some time was spent on what the Church should do to see that the woman comes into her own right. As regards education, it was acknowledged that the Church had done much, even very much, for the education of women. This must continue, both for formal and non-formal education. Non-formal education is discussed much these days. This serves a double purpose: to educate those who did not have its benefit in youth, and to update the education of all. Given the urgency of educating all to improve the quality of their life, non-formal education is important, but formal education, especially in rural areas, continues to be important, as it is the best form of liberation of women. In the reality of developing countries, a government-recognized diploma is essential for most jobs.

Religious Sisters have done much for women's education. They must be encouraged to intensify their ministry, and also to diversify it by entering into the field of non-formal education, especially in rural areas. Efforts must be increased to make technical education, whether for industrial or agricultural purposes, available to women.

III. In all this, we must keep in mind some important facts.

1. The first concern of the Church is the mission of the Lord, i.e., the redemption and liberation of all, men and women. Other aspects, however important, are secondary to this mission. Our Blessed Mother is the model of all women redeemed by our Lord. It is this, more than anything else, that the Church must inculcate in the ministry of women's uplift.

So we have the tasks of a woman. As a child of God, she fulfills God's divine plan by the development of her personality at the service of all, especially through her responsibility in the family. The fulfillment of

this task is her greatest contribution to the building up of the community of love which is the Church. To this specific task we must recall all Christian women.

2. The Church forms a tiny minority in Asia, and in the overwhelming numbers of our countries. It would be presumptuous on the part of the Church to plan the solution of all problems of women's uplift. Hers is to have and uphold correct concepts of the liberated man and woman. Her role can be only catalytic; her role can be only one of giving hope to all women, to open doors for a more creative role of women in society and the Church.

3. While attending to all that the uplift of woman demands, one must not lose other values, e.g., the spirit of detachment and poverty, the communal sharing of responsibilities both in the family and in the diocese, values which we have from the Gospels and our cultural heritage.

IV. This leads us to the role women have in the Church and in society. It consists in the exercise of her charism according to Gospel teaching and our cultural background. The workshop discussion guide, in four inspiring pages, describes the attitude of Jesus towards women: his acceptance, respect and compassion for *persons*, setting aside all ethnic and sexual prejudices (Samaritan woman, widow of Naim, the sick woman, etc.). He overcame all these barriers, because he valued *persons*. We see also his appreciation of the faith of women, which moved him to heal them physically and spiritually (the Syro-Phoenician woman, the woman with haemorrhage, the woman who washed his feet with tears, the sisters of Lazarus, the women at Calvary and at the tomb). It is interesting to note that Jesus is never put to test by women. The encounter with the woman taken in adultery illustrates the egalitarian stance of Jesus — what is wrong for a woman is wrong also for a man. In Jn 11,27 and 12,8 we see women involved in the ministry of the word and the ministry of unction. Only angels and women minister to the person of Jesus. The workshop guide give many more illustrations.

Basing ourselves on the Gospel teaching and understanding it in the light of today's needs, we can stress the fundamental equality of woman as a person and God's child, her centrality in the life of the family "the domestic Church," her duty to carry faith from one generation to another. In her self-giving as mother and wife, she exercises in a specific way her role as prophet, priest and king.

V. One can specify now various functions of the woman who aspires to be a daughter of God. Filled with the spirit of faith, like Mary, she carries the faith to others, to those in her family and to those outside. Safeguarding and transmitting the faith at home is her special task. This becomes more necessary in the case of mixed marriages. At present, women form the greatest number of catechists. They must continue faithful to this duty, carrying the Good News to Catholics, lapsed Catholics, non-Catholics, visiting the sick and lonely. More than anything else, they will build the Church of Jesus ("Go and tell my brothers . . .") by preserving the life and sharing the values which he came to share with us in his Church. They should continue to minister to his Church, which is his Body, with the same concern as the Gospel women did to the person of the Lord. Thus will come about a true expression of their role in building up the community of love.

Religious women have another specific task. Their life of dedication is to give hope and courage to the entire Church. Their community life of love, in spite of differences of age, temperament, etc., will be a model of the community of love which is the Church.

VI. To fulfill her role, every woman has a right to various forms of education. She has right not to be obliged to stay at home, excluded from ministries and responsibilities which bring her personal fulfillment and do good to society. Suitable laws are required to protect their rights. Church structures, not in consonance with the above, should be changed, so that woman be fully herself.

In this way, every woman, as a daughter of God, will be enabled to fulfill God's plan for herself, in society and the Church. Only in this is her happiness and the good of society.

VII. In many of our countries, the reality is quite different. Few women have the opportunity to shoulder the responsibility of the evangelizing ministry at their level, which is the fulfillment of Christian discipleship. Hence, according to the situation of each country, member Conferences must plan and change situations until the Gospel image of the woman becomes a reality.

VIII. We regret and deplore, with all good men, the sexual exploitation of women in many direct and indirect ways. In our countries too many advertisements offend all norms of decorum, when sex is presented as the only appeal. We condemn with shame and sorrow the exploitation of our Asian women, often the poor and defenseless, for the purpose of commerce and tourism, that is, for the purpose of money. Sexual

oppression of women, leading to degradation of Asian women, not rarely at a tender age, has now taken an international dimension. We appeal to all civil authorities concerned to frame and implement suitable legislation so that especially the poor and the young are not forced into a life of unhappiness and dishonor not only in their own country but also abroad. Nothing can justify such an inhuman, degrading situation.

It would be as important to remove the causes of this immoral exploitation of women. A more just economic system and better opportunities for education and employment are some evident causes.

Workshop: Consecrated Religious Life in Asia as Witness of the Church as a Community of Faith

I. This group felt that when speaking of community we must always remember that community of faith can only be found through communion with God. Therefore consecrated religious life as a sign and means to community of faith for all people *must be centered on a life of prayer, especially the contemplative dimension of prayer*. In Asian customs and religions contemplation always forms a central part of the lives of monks and people. The bishops should call on all religious societies to return to a life of contemplative prayer and where there is already community prayer, to encourage and foster an even deeper dedication to union with God and their fellow men and women through prayer.

The group thought that an integration of Gospel values should be an essential part of prayer. Religious will be more considerate, more patient, more loving in dealing with people, and thus be better witnesses in leading people to God and community.

The bishops of Asia should encourage and actively seek contemplative orders of men not so much by importing monasticism from outside but promoting monasticism of a distinctive Asian style. Religious societies in general should be encouraged to set up houses of prayer to teach people to pray and contemplate and thus build up community of faith for all peoples.

II. The group considered a proposal made about temporary monkhood/sisterhood (becoming a monk or nun for a short period as in the Buddhist tradition). It was felt by some that the introduction of such a way of life would help the people of Asia to understand God and his Church and community living by having a short-time religious experience. The group considered the advantages and disadvantages of

this proposal but no conclusions were arrived at. In particular it was noted that sisters in some Buddhist countries are sometimes equated with Buddhist nuns whose vocation in general is considered to be due to rejection, difficulties or sorrow. It was debated as to whether temporary sisterhood would harm or help true religious life.

It was recalled that Vatican II emphasized the universal call to perfection. Religious life is a sign (especially through the practice of the vows) of this universal call to perfection.

III. Religious poverty as a witness and help to community of faith. It was felt that in general in Asia religious do not give the witness of poverty that is called for. They have too much, when compared to the many poor of Asia. Despite this fact, religious must be imbued with a spirit of detachment. *Religious should examine their lifestyle. They should examine their treatment of the poor.* Discussion brought up two alternative solutions to the present situation: 1) a radical change in the way of life which would involve giving up all big institutions and living like the poor; 2) or retaining institutions, which though large and costly, have a great value for the life of the Church and society at large. *At the same time it was felt that much more could be done by religious to identify themselves with the poor, so that by their lifestyle, their detachment, or working directly with and for the poor, it will be evident to all that they do not have a double standard — one for the rich, the other for the poor.* The group preferred the second alternative but it did not rule out the first if an extreme situation so demanded it. The group considered examples of how religious could build up community through a witness to poverty: using the goods they have to help the poor, receiving more poor into schools and hospitals, thus raising them up, positively helping the poor in development, avoiding giving the impression of avarice by asking for money or help in return for special favors.

IV. Official statements on justice and moral matters are the duty of the bishops. Religious should help and encourage them in these matters. Religious should assist the people to lead lives of community of faith and fight against injustice by positive means. The bishops should encourage religious actively and positively to promote justice. By justice we mean that all men and women have sufficient means to lead truly decent lives.

V. Religious life leads to a community of faith by the witness of celibate love and religious obedience. God must be the center of the community of faith for religious and all people. This will lead to loving as God wills us to love and to doing God's will. Religious by their vow of

chastity are a sign of loving as God wills, and by the vow of obedience (doing God's will as manifested by their rule and superiors) a sign for all to follow God's will. Difficulties to loving as God wills comes from a world permeated with pleasure seeking and messages of sexual permissiveness and even free love. Lack of faith is also shown in society through a materialistic view of self-fulfillment, permissiveness, and freedom from laws. In such a society, and especially taking into consideration the appeal of the Asian mentality for penance and mortification, *it was felt that religious should give a better witness in their lives of self-denial and mortification.*

Workshop: Social Communications in Asia

The Church in Asia has shown considerable progress in the field of social communications during the past several years, subsequent to the Second Vatican Council and the documents that followed. Radio Veritas has gradually developed as a credible source of news and information and significant agent of the development of the peoples of Asia. It has also spurred various local churches in the establishment and the development of their centers of communication. The various associations responsible for Catholic media, namely, UNDA, OCIC and UCIP, have been gathering momentum and have contributed to establishing a Catholic presence among the Asian media.

The FABC recognizes the need to support fully and to facilitate wherever necessary the various media efforts which evolve from and are supportive of the local communities, without neglecting the universal dimension of the Church.

While recognizing the welcome contribution made by the Catholic news agencies in Asia, we would recommend that all media work harmoniously to project a more realistic view of the Church, i.e., as a community of faith deeply rooted in Asia and appreciating all that is good in the life and the cultures of the peoples.

In order that the media should fulfil the task of projecting the correct and acceptable image of the Church, and at the same time support the formation of the faith-community, the media themselves have to deepen their credibility.

For this purpose the Church as a whole should place a greater trust in the media and help the media to live up to this trust by urging them towards greater professionalism.

This attitude towards professionalism should be made to radiate farther by encouraging Christian media professionals to work within the secular media and to become effective in the formation of public opinion.

In order to make the media more effective, it is strongly recommended that the resources available be pooled together at the national, or at least at the regional, levels.

The media for social communications should be in the vanguard and act as effective educators in creating public opinion. They should take the lead particularly in explaining the true meaning and significance of the changes being effected in the Church, such as in her discipline and her liturgy.

Thus the media of social communications could not only project the Church as a community of faith, but also be able to contribute significantly to her own edification.

THE "SYLLABUS OF CONCERNS" OF THE PLENARY ASSEMBLY

(The list or "syllabus" represents those points which the respective workshops wished to propose for more immediate pastoral attention, without, of course, ignoring the conclusions of the longer workshop reports. It is an integral part of the Statement of the Plenary Assembly.)

Workshop: Forms of Christian Community-Living in Asia

— That the communitarian aspects of Christian spirituality, catechesis and sacramental ministry be given greater emphasis to counterbalance the strong individualistic stress of our present approach to evangelization and Church life;

— That small ecclesial communities at all levels of Church life be more widely and intensely fostered, characterized by their openness and outreach to society through evangelization, social service, dialogue, ecumenical and interreligious cooperation with peoples of all faiths and by their close union with their priests and bishops.

Workshop: The Diocese and Parish as Communities of Faith

— That communities in our presbyteries and religious houses be genuine communities of faith (loving, sharing, caring, being concerned, etc.), so that they provide a pattern for a community of faith among the faithful.

Workshop: Total Human Development and the Church as a Community of Faith

— That education for justice and action at the diocesan level, based on the Gospel, the social teachings of the Church and proper analysis of society, be promoted, so that social change can be brought about on different levels — personal, attitudinal and structural;

— That a Sunday, preferably in Lent, be dedicated to social justice in all the dioceses, so that the proper teachings of the Church regarding justice, human rights and freedom can be emphasized.

— That the poor be organized for non-violent action for justice, freedom and their own welfare in solidarity with other groups, including collaboration with groups outside the Church; that all polarization of ideas in the field of development and actions for justice be discouraged and a dialogue among various groups adhering to different understandings of society be continued to bring about consensus and collaboration.

Workshop: The Dialogue of Communities of Faith in Asia

We recommend that Christian communities be conscious of communities of other faith, be educated to recognize their belonging to the social and cultural communities of their neighborhoods, be initiated into a true and real “dialogue of life” with one another, so that they, mutually enlightened and carried forward, may respond effectively through humble service, done with dedication and love, to the needs and aspiration of one and all.

Workshop: The Laity in the Church of Asia

— That a catechesis on the renewed ecclesiology of Vatican II regarding the role of the laity in the community of faith in the Church in Asia be undertaken by every diocese and episcopal conference within the FABC;

— That this catechesis be made available to both clergy and laity for better and deeper mutual understanding and formation;

— That priests participate in meetings of lay apostolate organizations for the formation of lay personnel;

— That formation for fostering the lay apostolate be included in the programs of major seminaries of the diocesan clergy and of the formation houses of religious;

— That suitable structures be provided so that the laity can be helped to play their proper role in the Church at the diocesan and parish levels (e.g., diocesan and parish councils);

— That the establishment of lay organizations be encouraged, particularly those of international scope;

— That efforts be made to hand over to the laity the responsibility in areas of apostolate which are proper to them, such as, social work, education, Caritas, etc.

— That FABC support the plan of the Pontifical Council for the Laity to hold a regional meeting in Asia in 1983.

Workshop: The Role of Women in the Church

— That suitable measures be devised, including arousing public opinion, to improve the plight of millions of working women employed in factories, farms and export-processing zones, who labor and live under poor conditions with low pay;

— That we encourage all civil authorities to frame and implement suitable legislation so that the sexual exploitation of women, especially the young and the poor, for the purpose of commerce and tourism may be stopped;

— That while stressing the fundamental equality of woman, her distinctive role to carry faith from one generation to another and her centrality in the life of the family, "the domestic Church," be affirmed and supported;

— That our Christian women be able to shoulder the responsibility of the evangelizing ministry, their right to various forms of education be recognized and fostered;

— That religious women be encouraged to intensify their ministry in the field of catechesis and other forms of pastoral work, and also to diversify the same by entering into the field of non-formal education, especially in rural areas.

Workshop: Consecrated Religious Life in Asia as Witness of Church as Community of Faith

— That the establishment of communities of contemplative orders of men be encouraged, not so much by “importing monasticism from outside” but by promoting monasticism of a distinctive Asian style;

— That religious examine their lifestyle and their dealings with the poor, to find ways whereby religious can better identify themselves with the poor.

Workshop: Social Communications in Asia

— That the FABC support fully and facilitate, where necessary, the various media efforts which evolve from and are supportive of the local communities;

— That all media work harmoniously to project a more realistic view of the Church as a community of faith deeply rooted in Asia and appreciating all that is good in the life and cultures of the peoples;

— That Catholic mass media, by becoming progressively professional, increase their credibility, so that they can the better project the true image of the Christian community, thus becoming an efficient instrument in dialogue as well as in the building up of the same Christian community.

VIII. GROWING IN COMMUNITY: SHARING IN PRAYER, CONCERN AND SUPPORT

The theme of the Plenary Assembly was “community” and the discussions took a practical direction with different ways of “sharing.”

Several hours of each day were dedicated to community prayer, beginning very early in the morning with shared prayer in small groups on the day's theme. For many this kind of praying together — with the New Testament in hand — was a new experience, and the beginnings were often difficult. Each plenary session began with one of the hours of the Divine Office. At the center of the day was the Eucharist, with each Conference taking its turn in preparing the Liturgy and leading the celebration.

The Sunday Eucharist at the Bangkok Cathedral was one evidence of the world-wide community of the Church. More than seventy bishops

were among the concelebrants. This witness to the community of faith was televised throughout Thailand. In midweek the participants in the Assembly took part in the annual mass and procession in honor of the Blessed Sacrament, and the bishops joined in administering the sacrament of Confirmation to eight hundred faithful.

All the participants learned more about the Assembly's theme when they tried "to form community." They discovered community does not happen but must be worked for. Again in small groups, the participants were led through the dynamics of community building by dedicated volunteers from several Catholic movements: Basic Christian Communities, the Folocare, the Better World Movement and the Charismatic Movement. Nor could full community happen in only eight days—and so the experience of building community could be bitter-sweet for the participants—a deepening sense of joy of belonging to each other, mixed also with some pains of traveling a new path, not always well marked out for all to see or go along smoothly.

This Third Plenary Assembly also witnessed a growth in the exchange of pastoral experiences among the Conferences. Every evening was given over to a presentation by some of the delegates of the particular problems facing the apostolate in their country, with all the local churches making their reports in turn. This often very personal sharing of brother-bishops turned out to be perhaps the highlight, almost unexpectedly, of the whole Assembly. If anything, it was these moments of knowing they were standing together before problems which were very much alike, although their cultures and languages were different, that brought the very deep sense of fraternity in faith and ministry. Many bishops remarked how much moved they were on hearing what were the joys and crosses of their fellow bishops.

Also for the first time the bishops had a "floor" to discuss specific topics of interest and concern for the Church in Asia. The Central Committee had decided to add two working days to the customary five in order to provide for a kind of "open forum."

To prepare for the open forum each Conference, and then every bishop in Asia, was invited to submit beforehand, individually or in groups, topics they would wish to see placed on the agenda. In the Assembly itself each delegate could make additional proposals. The Steering Committee made the final decisions on what proposals time allowed for discussion. In this short report only the resolutions can be given.

(a) Some of the points of the forum pertained to the inner workings of the FABC:

1. FABC itself is to undertake a self-evaluation in view of improving its present effectiveness. The manner of this evaluation will be determined by the Standing Committee.

2. The terms of office be extended by one year. Therefore, the two-year office will be three years; the three-year office will be four years (this latter then would pertain only to the two members-at-large of the Standing Committee).

3. The present ad hoc Committee for the Laity is established as a working committee of FABC *ad experimentum* for four years until the next Plenary Assembly. It would focus specifically on the laity as such, and particularly in the area of their pastoral and missionary formation.

4. An advisory commission of the theologians is to be formed, to hold occasional meetings, e.g., at least prior to plenary assemblies or more important consultations of the FABC. Without prejudice to other similar bodies which may exist at present, this commission would be explicitly linked with the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences and would exist as an auxiliary arm of the FABC, organized with the explicit purpose of helping the theological reflection of the assemblies and various projects of FABC.

(b) Other resolutions concerned themselves with several social problems, world-wide in themselves, but also particularly relevant to Asia. The points were discussed—and debated—at length. Because many of the words themselves were weighed for their possible implications or misunderstanding, the complete resolutions are given.

5. The Dignity of Human Life

This Plenary Assembly of FABC views with concern the concerted efforts being made in certain parts of Asia against the dignity of human life:

- through programs of abortion,
sterilization,
artificial contraception,
and the manipulation of the very sources
of life;
- through the physical and mental torture of prisoners;
- through the exploitation and ill-treatment of the weaker sections of society, especially women and children;

— through the promotion of materialistic values seen in a growing “consumerism mentality” among our peoples.

We earnestly request member Conferences to take up this question for study and appropriate action at the level of their own National Episcopal Conferences, and at the same time urge the FABC’s Office of Human Development to join hands with other men and women of goodwill in Asia to play a prophetic role in protecting the dignity and improving the quality of human life of all levels, in keeping with the finest traditions of our peoples.

6. Refugees in Thailand

We the participants of the Third Plenary Assembly of FABC, gathered together at Sampran, Bangkok, Thailand, are deeply concerned about the refugee problem of South East Asia.

Thailand and some of the neighboring countries are burdened with the overflow of refugees since 1975, from Laos, Kampuchea and Vietnam. Despite the fact that third countries have helped generously and taken a large number of refugees, there still are in Thailand 21 camps with almost 300,000 refugees.

Although we feel that the root causes of this refugee problem are difficult to tackle, we believe the real solution lies in the countries of their origin and needs to be found there. Failing to find remedies for the problem there, we look towards third countries to continue to help the refugees.

Gathered together at Thailand, we as Christians cannot but feel for these people in dire need. We pray for them. Christ showed his love for all, even the least of his brethren. We ask ourselves, our brother bishops and people what else we can do to overcome this refugee problem. We appeal to all to try and work towards a solution.

7. The Arms Race

This Body expresses its condemnation of the arms race among the nations, and the proliferation of nuclear experimentations, and deposits of nuclear waste in creating the dangers of ecological imbalance in our Asian countries;

and an appeal to these nations to come together to a sincere dialogue to eliminate or control these situations.

8. Armed Conflict and Violence

With deep sorrow our thoughts go out to the thousands who have lost their lives in armed conflict in various parts of the world, and particularly in areas close to our own region; and, while condemning the attempt to solve conflicts through violence, we urge all those concerned to seek solutions to these conflicts through openness, dialogue and deep understanding.

(c) Finally, other issues of ecclesiastical concern were proposed for discussion. In most cases the items were postponed for discussion until a later time, or were withdrawn by their proposers, again to allow for a wider examination. The items are simply listed.

9. Vernacular Translations of Liturgical Texts.

10. A Center in Asia for Liturgical Studies.

11. An All-Asia Dialogue Commission.

12. Pastoral care and concern of the Church for socioethnic minority groups.

13. Representation of Catholic Oriental Rite Churches at the Plenary Assembly.

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X. DAILY PRAYER FOR ASIA

Jesus,

My Lord and dearly beloved brother,

Teach me to adore God my Father

to acknowledge my sinfulness before him

to offer him the sincere desire of my heart

to belong to him,

to serve him fully in his Church.

In a special way today

make me faithful to your teaching:

just, truthful, honest, hardworking;

one who serves all his brothers and sisters kindly for your sake.

Today,

as everyday of this year,

I come before you

in the name of all my brethren of Asia

those who know you,

and those who do not.

May they all today
rejoice in your love.
Give peace to every home.
Let no one remain hungry today;
may no sick person lack necessary medicine;
may no one's heart be closed by pride, hatred or jealousy,
to the needs of his brethren.

Lord Jesus,
You were born in Asia.
Grant that all peoples of Asia
come to know you and to love you.

So that
one day
all of us
may praise the Father in your Church
in the sacrifice of Mass
which you have given us
as a memorial of your love.
Mother of Jesus
You who love us, the people of Asia,
protect us,
lead us,
till you gather us all
into the everlasting kingdom of your Son.
Amen.

FABC PAPERS is a project of the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences (FABC), designed to bring the thinking of Asian experts to a wider audience and to develop critical analysis of the problems facing the Church in Asia from people on the scene. The opinions expressed are those of the author alone and do not necessarily represent the official policies of the FABC or its member Episcopal Conferences. Manuscripts are always welcome and may be sent to: FABC, G.P.O. Box 2984, Hong Kong.

FABC Papers:

- No. 20. *Consecrated Religious Life in the Church of Contemporary Asia*, by Yves E. Raguin and Sister Vandana, 1980
21. *Interiority: The Foundation of Spiritual Authority in Asian Religious Traditions*, by Francis Acharya and Yves Raguin, 1980
22. *Church, Mission and the Kingdom of God*, by Bishop Patrick D'Souza, with the Message of the Delegates of the International Mission Congress at Manila, 1980
23. *Questions Muslims Ask Catholics*, by a Tunis Study Group, 1980
24. *The Collegiality of the Bishops for Human Development. The Fourth and Fifth Bishops' Institutes for Social Action*, 1981
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