

Inculturation in Asia – *Quo Vadis?*

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Twenty-five years have passed; yet, the urgency remains. Indeed, a quarter-century has elapsed since the ground-breaking *International Colloquium on Contextual Theology* was held in Manila, at the University of Santo Tomas, on June 20-23, 1978. The colloquium focused on the Church's task of contextualizing or inculturating the Gospel message, a task which remains a permanent imperative.

The 1978 colloquium played a pivotal role in a renewed promotion of the "rooting" of the Good News in the Asian context. The conference papers and conclusions, published in a special issue of *Philippiniana Sacra* [Vol. 40 (1979)], were widely disseminated and digested. Young religious and priests, this author included, became enthusiastic to do their part in fostering the inculturation of Asia's local Churches. Many committed Church workers saw this task as a specifically missionary commitment to be undertaken.

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This awakening to the pivotal challenge and obligation of inculturating the faith appeared in other contexts. One year earlier the *Asian Colloquium on Ministries in the Church* (ACMC) held in Hong Kong (February 27 – March 5, 1977) explored the new ministries needed in Asia's Christian communities; the final document asserted: "the decisive new phenomenon for Christianity in Asia will be the emergence of genuine Christian communities in Asia – Asian in their way of thinking, praying, living, communicating their own Christ-experience to others.... If the Asian Churches do not discover their own identity, they will have no future" (ACMC 14). This statement succinctly captures the urgent imperative of both building and strengthening each local Church to be, in the words of the First FABC Plenary Assembly in 1974, "a church incarnate in a people, a church indigenous and inculturated" (FABC I 12).

The two major colloquia, held only a year apart, proposed a new way of being the Church in Asia: the pathway of contextualization and inculturation. The original papers can still be profitably consulted. However, times and contexts have evolved. What is the meaning of the task of rooting the Gospel in Asia, as the pilgrim Church traverses the early years of a new millennium? In brief, Where are we now? What does the future hold? What concrete options for continued growth are open to Asia's inculturating local Churches?

This modest presentation does not emerge from an organized, international, theological colloquium. Rather, it arises inductively from extensive concrete experience of committed action in diverse Asian contexts. Seventeen short reflections, coming from the experience of long-term evangelizers (both Asian nationals and expatriate missionaries) explore a variety of specific areas in the life of the Christian community that are appropriate – even urgent – for continued inculturation efforts. The following is a panoramic overview, showing the various areas and naming the authors of each focused reflection:

I. COMMUNITY LIFE:

- 1) Human Promotion and Justice [A. Rogers];
- 2) Human Development [D. de Souza];
- 3) Ecology [M. Ramirez];
- 4) Public Health [A. Murniati];
- 5) Cultural Crisis [L. Kleden];

II. CHRISTIAN FAITH AND LIFE:

- 6) Scripture [M. Ko];
- 7) Theological Reflection [C. Arevalo];
- 8) Spirituality [S. Anand];

III. FORMATION, EDUCATION, MINISTRIES:

- 9) Formation of Clergy and Laity [C. Mateo];
- 10) Social Communication [F. Eilers];
- 11) Consecrated Life [S. Canilang];
- 12) Methods of Evangelization [J. Kroeger];
- 13) Church Leadership and Governance [O. Quevedo];

IV. CELEBRATION OF LIFE:

- 14) Life-style [S. Painadath];
- 15) Liturgy and Sacraments [P. Puthanangady];
- 16) Feasts and Festivals [A. Tirkey];
- 17) Art and Architecture [J. Sahi]

Readers will note the wide variety of authors listed; they are drawn from various countries in Asia. These women and men are all deeply passionate about the urgency of linking the Gospel into Asia's rich cultures and the building up of truly local Churches.

Each author approached the specific subject with three distinct questions in mind:

- a) Presently, where is the Church in Asia with regard to this area of inculturation?
- b) What are some positive orientations (e.g. Church statements, writings, documents) that would encourage Asian Christians to make further inculturation efforts?
- c) What are some concrete and practical initiatives whereby Asia's local Churches could advance the inculturation process?

These three guide-questions set the parameters for the short reflection pieces. Readers will obviously detect this pattern, but they will also recognize the initiative and creativity of each writer. In addition, the experience of the individual local Churches emerges (e.g. Indonesia, China, India, Philippines, Malaysia, etc.). It is logical to assume that when one writes on a specific area of inculturation, the person's life experience and community context will enter into the contribution.

Finally, readers are encouraged to capture the spirit inherent in each of these essays. The authors are to be thanked for their efforts to express how inculturation is progressing and what creative options are open for future action. Truly, the action of the “befriending Spirit” is at work fostering “the emergence of genuine Christian communities in Asia – Asian in their way of thinking, praying, living, communicating their own Christ-experience to others”! This writer asserts that because the inculturating Asian Churches are discovering their own identity, they have a bright and hopeful future!

I. HUMAN PROMOTION AND JUSTICE (Anthony Rogers²)

The Asian Context

The relationship between Inculturation and human promotion – which incorporates the three aspects of Christian charity, namely welfare and compassion, development, and advocacy for social transformation – is best seen in the context of integral evangelization.

Inculturation is the process of becoming a People of God in Asia; it means we learn to reflect the face of Jesus in an Asian way. Our way of life as individuals and as Church is influenced by the thoughts that go on in our minds, the reflections that flow from our hearts, and the actions that allow others to experience the compassionate love of God our Father.

Inculturation is the process of communicating the Jesus Experience as Church in Asia; it necessarily includes integral human promotion which has two key dimensions: (1) reading the signs of the times, and (2) responding to the cries of our age. To read the signs demands listening to and understanding the complex and diverse realities of the world of Asia, especially the causes of people’s sorrows and fears; one must penetrate the core of Asians’ religio-cultural heritage that is the source of their joys and hopes.

² Antony Rogers, a Malaysian De La Salle Brother (FSC), is Executive Secretary of the FABC Office of Human Development.

Responding to the cries of our age moves us to compassion; our faith urges us to discover new and creative compassionate ways to reach out to meet the cries and pains of the people of Asia and to be in solidarity with them. We reach out in compassion and justice.

Obstacles. It seems obvious that the vast majority in the Church in Asia are still not fully aware and do not fully understand the two key documents of the Council, namely *Lumen Gentium* and *Gaudium et Spes*. There is therefore an artificial dichotomy between faith and life, between Church and world. There is also the tendency to look for the face of Jesus in the sacramental life of the Church rather than seeing Jesus present as a “sacrament in the world.”

Since we already have Jesus and his Gospel in the Church, we feel little need to reach out to the World, where the Gospel has to be translated into living for the Kingdom. Thus, evangelization is seen more as conversion to the Church and subsequent membership in the Church, rather than growth in faith and making the Gospel present in the world. Few in the Church are convinced that integral evangelization is about being transformed by the Gospel of Jesus and thus being able to be transformative agents in the world, in order to promote the reign of God. There is often the tendency for the Church to be more “intra-ecclesial” and on a “maintenance mode” rather than to be reaching out to all peoples. There is a lack of awareness and commitment to the “missionary mandate” of the Church.

With the expansion of globalizing forces there is a tendency of both Church leaders and members to look upon the world with suspicion and fear. The lack of a genuine reflective and critical attitude towards the world creates confusion and uncertainty in the Church. The confines of the Church are more comfortable, especially for the laity; thus, the Church moves away from the social, and especially the political, arena.

Due to the fact that only a very small minority of Church members is involved in the mission of evangelization in the world, there is also the lack of a proper understanding of human promotion. Catholics do not see charity, coupled with integral

human development and social advocacy, as our response to the sorrows and pains of the human family as we journey with all in their joys and hopes.

While there is a growing awareness and committed action on behalf of justice in society as a whole, there seems to be, on the other hand, a growing indifference to suffering and injustice on the part of many Catholics. This includes the plight of refugees and migrants, drug users and persons with HIV-AIDS, victims of terrorism and unjust wars, and the sufferings of the elderly and marginalized.

Achievements. There is growing awareness that faith has to be lived in union with God and realized in the love for the self and neighbor with our whole hearts, minds, strength and will. Human promotion is our active involvement in the world in order to link our faith and life. We thank God that the vision of the Church in Asia as “A New Way of Being Church” is making sense to a generation of young people in the Church.

Human promotion involves “new ways” of showing love, compassion, and mercy through welfare works and charity; it includes the building of sustainable communities through integral human development and ensuring the coming of a just world through advocacy for social transformation. This integral approach incorporates the three-fold dimensions (gender, multi-faith, and ecological) as effective means of human promotion in the context of Asia.

Over the past decades there have been some significant advances among the laity and religious in the areas of option for the poor and for justice, in the development of new social ministries in the life of the Church, in their involvement with the working world and a commitment to more direct participation in politics.

Pastoral-Theological Orientations

Asian Christians have several sources of inspiration upon which they can draw as they engage in the mission of human promotion within the Asian context. Some pivotal areas are addressed in the following paragraphs.

The Church needs constant renewal and an ongoing examination of conscience to be aware of responsibilities she has for the state of the world, especially in Asia (cf. TMA 36). This is true because, as the Asian Synod noted, the Church “lives and fulfils her mission in the actual circumstances of time and place. A critical awareness of the diverse and complex realities of Asia is essential if the People of God on the continent are to respond to God’s will for them in the new evangelization. The Synod Fathers insisted that the Church’s mission of love and service in Asia is conditioned by two factors: on the one hand, her self-understanding as a community of disciples of Jesus Christ gathered around her Pastors, and on the other hand, the social, political, religious, cultural and economic realities of Asia” (EA 5b).

The Church, although a tiny minority in the vast Asian continent, will draw upon an “innate spiritual insight and moral wisdom in the Asian soul, and it is the core around which a growing sense of ‘being Asian’ is built. This ‘being Asian’ is best discovered and affirmed, not in confrontation and opposition, but in the spirit of complementarity and harmony. In this framework of complementarity and harmony, the Church can communicate the Gospel in a way which is faithful both to her own Tradition and to the Asian Soul” (EA 6d).

The Asian bishops in their Seventh FABC Plenary Assembly in Bangkok in 2000 stated: “Renewal for a mission of love and service requires fresh understanding and emphases. As we have been listening to each other we have realized that something new is happening. For thirty years, as we have tried to reformulate our Christian identity in Asia, we have addressed different issues, one after another: evangelization, inculturation, dialogue, the Asian-ness of the Church, justice, the option for the poor, etc. Today, after three decades, we no longer speak of such distinct issues. We are addressing present needs that are massive and increasingly complex. These issues are not separate topics to be discussed, but aspects of an integrated approach to our Mission of Love and Service. We need to feel and act ‘integrally.’ As we face the needs of the 21st century we do so with Asian hearts, in solidarity with the poor and the marginalized, in union with all our Christian brothers and sisters, and by joining hands with all men and women of Asia of many different faiths. Inculturation,

dialogue, justice and the option for the poor are aspects of whatever we do" (FABC VII, Part III).

The Asian bishops in the same assembly noted the importance of involvement in the wide range of human promotion activities. More specifically, they noted: "Advocacy has emerged as a powerful method and means to respond to the issues and challenges that have surfaced at this Seventh Plenary Assembly. Civil society in Asia is already doing it. Bishops have an important role in advocacy and should take it up as a pastoral priority. Based on the ethical and moral imperatives that are found in the social teachings of the Church, the process of advocacy should be articulated effectively. Particularly, the emphasis on the common good could form the basis for advocacy as we join hands with men and women of other faiths. The bishops' conferences that constitute the FABC should take up advocacy for the common good, depending upon the prevailing circumstances" (FABC VII, Part III.C.5).

The Church's commitment to human promotion must issue in specific involvements, because John Paul II has noted that authentic solidarity "is not a feeling of vague compassion or shallow distress at the misfortunes of so many people, both near and far. On the contrary, it is *a firm and persevering determination* to commit oneself to the *common good*; that is to say to the good of all and of each individual, because we are *all* really responsible for *all*" (SRS 38).

Concrete and Practical Initiatives

Any attempt to link inculturation and human promotion has to be in the context of integral evangelization. One of the concrete ways in which the Church in Asia has attempted to link inculturation and human promotion was at the Seventh FABC Plenary Assembly, when it linked our faith with life under the theme chosen for the assembly: "A Renewed Church: A Mission of Love and Service." This can serve as the basis for both a critical review of our lives and as a preparation for comprehensive pastoral plans within Asia's local Churches. Some specific areas of renewal can be mentioned.

Change in Attitude towards an Openness to the World. Our understanding of inculturation today, as the process of being

evangelized and becoming evangelizers as local Church, will require a radical change in attitude. The Church is not yet fully open to the life and problems of the people in the world, because most Catholics do not see this as an integral dimension of their faith. Human promotion is seen as an appendage for the Church, not as the heart of the Gospel of Jesus. A genuine theological shift has yet to take place in the hearts and minds of the majority of the People of God in Asia, to realize that the FABC “triple dialogue” with the poor, cultures and faiths has to necessarily be our prophetic position in Asia.

Renewed Formative Process that Includes Commitment to our Missionary Vocation of Solidarity. The option for the poor and social advocacy for justice have to be accepted as integral dimensions of the prophetic mission of Christ, who was “sent to preach good news to the poor.” All formation must incorporate such a growth in solidarity that fosters the evangelizing mission of the Church in the context of Asia.

Emergence of Witnessing Communities within the Church. The Gospel lived and experienced in the three essential and constitutive communities within the People of God (laity, hierarchy, religious) has to become the leaven for the building of the Kingdom of God. The witness of Church, walking compassionately and courageously with the lowly and in defense of human rights then becomes an effective echo of the Gospel and of the voice of the Church. Each group has to reflect the compassionate and courageous face of Jesus in the context of their specific vocation within Asia.

Holistic Faith Formation for Personal and Communitarian Transformation. This will be the basis for all in the Church to serve the Gospel and work for integral human promotion so as to be able to journey with those persecuted sectors, the “voiceless” and the “victims of injustices.” It is inevitable that this calls for a constant review of our life-options, the use of goods and the manner in which we conduct our structures and institutions. Those who dare to speak to others about justice must, above all, be just in the eyes of others.

Compassion Flowing from Contemplation of the Face of Jesus. The contemplative dimension in all aspects of life in the Church

and in our works allows us to be present to brothers and sisters in a deeper way in the charity of Christ. The various activities, works, and diversity of approaches are the most important means by which the Church carries out her mission of evangelization and human promotion in the world.

New Ministries for Caring and Social Advocacy. Present economic, cultural, social and political conditions, especially in the context of globalization, require new forms of solidarity and involvement. The Church is challenged to discover new ways of active participation involving the Christian community, and to encourage religious congregations to develop charisms that are more relevant in the context of Asia, particularly in the area of human development and social advocacy.

Role of the Laity in the Church and in the World. It is imperative that the participation of the laity, especially the women, be given importance in all aspects of Church life. In and through these diverse activities and works, the Asian local Churches will assume a new sense of identity and promote a renewed, co-responsible commitment to our common mission of integral evangelization. The FABC vision of "A New Way of Being Church" will take root and bear much fruit!

II. HUMAN DEVELOPMENT (Desmond de Sousa³)

The Asian Context

Inculturation, in simple terms, is the process by which a particular Church expresses its faith and life in and through the local culture. This results in a mutual enrichment: on the one hand, the local culture receives a new dynamism; on the other hand, fresh new ways of understanding and living the Christian faith are opened up.

Asia's uniqueness consists in its rich cultural diversity and deep religiosity as the cradle of the great world religions. These twin realities coalesce with its widespread poverty and injustice. Asia comprises some of the richest and poorest nations of the

³ Desmond de Sousa, Desmond de Sousa, an Indian Redemptorist (CSsR), is Executive Secretary of the Ecumenical Coalition on Third World Tourism.

world. The unique combination of these realities challenges Christian faith in Asia, “to bring the power of the Gospel into the very heart of [local] culture and [Asian] cultures” (CT 53). In a word, this is the meaning of inculturation of the Church in Asia.

Inculturation encompasses both personal change and social change. In human development terms, it means, to cite the vision of Paul VI, that on a personal level “being more” human, and on the social level, contributing towards transforming society “from less human conditions to more human conditions” (PP 6, 20).

The Church in Asia, because of its colonial past and rather strict control by Rome at present, can be considered a “young” Church of the sixteenth century, with the mentality and machinery of an “old” Church that has already grown through centuries of Christianity in Europe. By and large, the Church in Asia is a clone of the Church in Europe from where it came. She is well organized, full of pastoral activity, piety and discipline of which she can be justly proud. However, in many ways, this is a burden rather than a help, because it does not correspond to the needs of the present national or local situations in Asia. The local Churches need more flexibility, more mobility, more of everything that one associates with youth, to get involved in the struggle for a new society in Asia that symbolizes Asia’s cultural uniqueness.

For over fifty years now, as the colonized nations of Asia won their political independence often through liberation struggles, there has been a widespread cultural awakening. Culture is often called a “silent language” because a large part of culture is made up of unconscious and unspoken elements; traditions, attitudes, values, and prejudices are silent. But this great “cultural unconsciousness” in Asia was transformed and galvanized, after political struggles for independence, by certain cultural “irruptions.” Some of these were the Afro-Asian Conference (Bandung, Indonesia, 1955) that later became the Non-Aligned Movement. One can also mention the heroic struggle of the Vietnamese people against French colonization and American hegemony, and the “cultural revolution” in China from the mid-1950s to the 1970s.

Christians in Asia became much more aware of the “inculturation” of other religions like Buddhism. Soon “Independent,” “Indigenous,” “Pentecostal,” “Nationalist” Christian churches

began to flourish. These “churches” were often revolts against the rigidity of foreign domination of local Christian churches, especially through foreign funds and missionary personnel. But, the question must be posed: how can these churches that have been, as it were, “inculturated from below” through ordinary people’s protest, be assessed in terms of their Christian religious identity?

Pastoral-Theological Orientations

The challenge of inculturation of the Church in Asia, from the human development perspective, is personal change i.e. becoming better persons, through participation in social change towards a more humane society. While human nature realizes its potentialities by acquiring knowledge, grasping facts, mastering skills, the human person is enriched by self-sacrifice and self-giving. The ideal of life is the liberation of one’s transcendent self or “transcendent dimension of the human person” or “spark of God,” from the empirical self or the limitations imposed by one’s nature. This is personal change according to all the major religions in Asia.

This capacity for transcendence, however, is limited and even perverted by the structures and institutions of society like governments, laws, and media. The role of the Church in social change is to be “the sign and safeguard of the transcendent dimension of the human person” (GS 76). Inculturation therefore, cannot be reduced to “a simple external adaptation” to the local culture(s), but “the intimate transformation of authentic cultural values through their integration in Christianity in the various human cultures” (1985 Synod of Bishops II.D.4).

Moreover, all around the world there is a belated acknowledgement that justice can only flourish from within the transformation of culture. The roots of injustice are embedded not only in the economic-political structures but also in cultural values and attitudes.

Inculturation of the Gospel and the evangelization of culture are two complementary aspects of the Church’s one mission. Evangelization of culture aims both at personal change of mentalities, collective attitudes, and ways of life as well as at social change. Inculturation challenges the Church towards “affecting and as

it were upsetting, through the power of the Gospel, humankind's criteria of judgment, determining values, points of interest, lines of thought, sources of inspiration and models of life, which are in contrast with the Word of God and the plan of salvation" (EN 19).

Concrete and Practical Initiatives

There is a sense in which all inculturation is "inculturation from below." Inculturation is essentially a community process. It is not the task of a few experts "selling" it to the people. However, it should not take place in opposition to experts and official representatives of the Church, but rather in collaboration with them. The experts are needed to give the community encouragement and help to make the necessary discernment and the necessary critique of its own culture and promote the discovery of the "seeds of the Word." Experts are also needed to ensure the truly Christian identity of the new creation that inculturation brings into existence.

The steps to be followed in this process are three. First, identify the aspects of the culture that are in conformity with Gospel values and those aspects not in conformity. Second, choose the method of purifying and elevating a culture according to Gospel values by effecting a change in the world-view and value system that underlie it. This demands an appeal to the opinion leaders of the community, who may not be the official leaders. Third, begin the actual implementation of the plan of action chosen.

Inculturation is a slow process, requiring patient listening to, explaining and challenging of a culture. The basic community structure, especially where there is widespread participation of the community, can provide a convenient mode for the inculturation process.

Paul VI has stated: "It is up to the Christian communities to analyze with objectivity the situation which is proper to their own country, to shed on it the light of the Gospel's unalterable words and to draw principles of reflection, norms of judgment and directives of action from the social teachings of the Church.... It is up to these communities with the help of the Holy Spirit, in communion with the bishops who hold responsibility and in dialogue with other Christian brethren and all people of good will,

to discern the options and commitments which are called for in order to bring about the social, political and economic changes seen in many cases to be urgently needed" (OA 4).

The inculturation process will advance through actual involvement in the people's daily struggles of castes, classes and genders, of religions and cultures, of ideologies and spiritualities in the process of creating a new society.

III. ECOLOGY (Mina M. Ramirez⁴)

The Asian Context

This presentation begins with six short accounts of Church involvement in efforts to link evangelization and ecological concerns; the narratives emerge from Philippine experience, but most probably they are characteristic of similar efforts throughout the local Churches of Asia.

Marimil S. Lobregat, FMM, a Filipina religious, under the auspices of the Religious of the Good Shepherd in Manila, teaches socially involved religious and laity a bio-spiritual exercise, known as *Shibashi*. The goal of this activity is to assist socio-pastoral workers to sustain and generate even more energy for their mission.

Asia is home to many ashrams and Zen meditation centers. In the Philippines, for example, there are eco-sites that become retreat or learning centers for developing a sacred relationship with the environment. One's ecological consciousness may be awakened in the Cosmic Garden of the Maryknoll Sisters in Baguio, in the Ecozolic Center of the Columban Fathers in Silang, Cavite, in the Ecological Garden of the Benedictine Sisters in Tagaytay City, or in the eco-life-style site of the Sisters of the Immaculate Heart of Mary, an indigenous group of religious sisters in the Cordilleras region.

⁴ Mina M. Ramirez, a Filipina laywoman, is Dean of the Graduate School of the Asian Social Institute in Manila.

Gatherings of inter-university and inter-sectoral youth such as the *Kilusan para sa Kinabukasan ng Kabataan* have an ecological focus. The youth gather to plant trees and to celebrate through rituals their connectedness with all elements of life – earth, fire, water, and air. After such encounters, young people become highly creative.

The Sisters of the Immaculate Heart of Mary have established a bio-gas system. This effort heals the earth and causes organic herbal plants, flowers and vegetables to grow. They also produce honey. As one lives with them, one gets a sense of the natural flow of the cycle of life. As an expression of ecological and cosmic consciousness, their novitiate gives evidence of nature's abundance, of creativity, and of communion. Their liturgies are replete with their own arts and crafts, their chants and dances, their own unique expressions of God's presence among His people. Their ecological life-style is healing the consumeristic and materialistic attitude of today's world of economic globalization.

A young Redemptorist priest inspired people in a remote village of Surigao del Norte, Mindanao, Philippines to organize themselves to protect, conserve, manage and develop their environment. They have planted the sturdiest trees of the Philippines, and these have become magnificent forests, where springs provide cool, clear and refreshing waters whose sounds create a symphony with the songs of birds, insects and the rustling of leaves. Sustained by an eco-spirituality, the people have been able to apprehend powerful illegal loggers who are a threat to their forests and their lives. Fortunately, they have been able to secure the support of their town mayor and an ecumenical group.

On the level of graduate education, the Asian Social Institute in Manila offers a doctoral program in Applied Cosmic Anthropology; its curriculum employs elements from the physical, human, and social sciences as well as from creation spirituality. It aims to foster a holistic approach to social transformation. It considers both the intangible and tangible elements for a life geared to transformative approaches. Courses such as "Introduction to Creation Spirituality," "Asian Values and Creation Spirituality," "Harmonizing Ecology and Technology" and "Spiritual Expressions of Cosmic Consciousness" all make up the subject cluster for this Creation Spirituality Course.

Pastoral-Theological Orientations

For guidance in the area of theological reflection on ecological questions, one can turn to a variety of Church documents. Pope Paul VI wrote in *Evangelii Nuntiandi* that it is essential "to evangelize man's culture and cultures ...always taking the person as one's starting point and always coming back to the relationships of people among themselves and with God.... Therefore, every effort must be made to ensure a full evangelization of culture, or more correctly of cultures. They have to be regenerated by an encounter with the Gospel" (EN 20). It is such a transformative vision that undergirds Church involvement in the field of ecology.

In his 1987 encyclical letter on social concerns, *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis*, Pope John Paul II wrote: "Today perhaps more than in the past, people are realizing that they are linked together by a *common destiny*, which is to be constructed together, if catastrophe for all is to be avoided." The pope continued, "the idea is slowly emerging that the good to which we all are called and the happiness to which we aspire cannot be obtained without an *effort and commitment on the part of all*, nobody excluded, and the consequent renouncing of personal selfishness." Then he noted: "Among today's *positive signs* we must also mention is a greater realization of the limits of available resources, and of the need to respect the integrity and the cycles of nature and to take them into account when planning for development, rather than sacrificing them to certain demagogic ideas about the latter. Today this is called *ecological concern*" (SRS 26).

One of the most enlightened documents on ecology came from the Catholic Bishops' Conference of the Philippines in 1988; entitled "What Is Happening to Our Beautiful Land?" This pastoral letter addresses ecological concerns. The bishops began: "The Philippines is now at a critical point in its history.... One does not need to be an expert to see what is happening and to be profoundly troubled by it.... At this point in the history of our country, it is crucial that people motivated by religious faith develop a deep appreciation for the fragility of our islands' life-systems and take steps to defend the Earth. It is a matter of life and death."

The Second Plenary Council of the Philippines (PCP II) in 1991 contained some very positive orientations on the environment and ecological issues. The Council Acts noted that every Christian is called by faith to practice “stewardship of God’s creation” (PCP-II 79). The Council also added that “moral issues are involved” when fishing, mining and logging are done with “inadequate safeguards for ecological integrity” (PCP-II 321). Furthermore, the Council provided a moral principle: “The sovereignty granted to us by the Creator is not a license to misuse God’s creation. We are but stewards of creation, not its absolute mater. And stewards are accountable to the Creator and giver of all good things” (PCP-II 324).

Concrete and Practical Initiatives

Turning our thoughts to some concrete actions and practical options, I begin by noting that we Asians need to touch base with our Oriental philosophies and our indigenous religious traditions that speak of harmony with creation. If there is something common in the whole of Asia, it is the recognition that life in all its diverse forms needs balance and harmony, so that every life-force will bring well-being to all. This basic character of Oriental socio-religious culture addresses a concern for ecology. One discovers deep Oriental wisdom embedded in the bio-spiritual exercises of Aikido from Japan, Tai-Chi from China, and Yoga from India. Their world-view holds that the way one breathes and lives contains a path to health, life and holistic being. They promote a consciousness of the interconnectedness of the wholeness of all life forms. Christians can recall the Genesis story of how God breathed life into all of creation. The psalmist says: “Let everything that has breath praise the Lord” (Ps. 150:6).

The Philippine bishops’ pastoral letter on ecology quoted above contains some very concrete and apropos advice about putting an ecological vision into practice. The bishops stated: “In light of this vision we recommend action in the following areas: (a) Be aware of what is happening in your area.... Use your influence within your family and community to develop this awareness.... (b) Like every other group, the Church as a community is called to conversion around this, the ultimate pro-life issue.... There is

a great need for a Filipino theology of creation which will be sensitive to our unique living world, our diverse cultures, and our religious heritage.... (c) We ask the government not to pursue short-term economic gains at the expense of long-term ecological damage.... (d) Non-governmental organizations have a very important role to play in developing a widespread ecological awareness among people."

Finally, I see some additional concrete responses that Christians can make. I would recommend the following: (1) Children and youth activities in schools, in movements and organizations should include excursions to nature areas and sponsor activities wherein the young will experience God in nature. (2) Reflection on the Gospel should teach us how to appreciate Jesus' sensitivity to nature in our own particular culture. (3) Church agents should promote a heightened ecological consciousness and eco-spirituality in seminaries, schools, Church organizations and especially in Basic Christian Communities. (4) Oriental wisdom, particularly "the way of the breath as a path to life, health, and being," can be integrated in our prayer rituals and liturgies. (5) Seminars may be designed and given to motivate NGOs, Church groups, students, and people in media to be committed to total human development, linking ecological concerns with issues of justice and peace.

IV. PUBLIC HEALTH (Agustina Nunuk Murniati⁵)

The Asian Context

This reflection is written from the perspective of an Indonesian woman; it begins by narrating three experiences in various localities in Indonesia that are related to questions of public health and the responses given by Church workers.

When the SARS virus (Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome) was rampant here in Asia, I was invited to give a talk in Batam, a small island of Indonesia. I was replacing one of resource persons who did not arrive; she informed the body that she did not want

⁵ Agustina Nunuk Murniati, an Indonesian laywoman, is a member of the National Commission on Anti-Violence against Women.

to get SARS, because Batam Island is near Singapore, one of the countries hit by SARS. On my way to Batam, I met many people using facial masks to cover their nose and mouth. Many Indonesians were in a panic faced with this reality. The World Health Organization (WHO) cautioned governments about the epidemic. However, in fact, SARS is not the main public health problem in Indonesia; the real difficulties are disease and the lack of nutritious food, especially for women and children.

Novi is a ten-year old girl child. One day, she came home early from school. When her mother asked her why she came home, she only cried. The same pattern repeated itself daily for about two weeks. Tina, Novi's mother, came to my Women's Crisis Center and told of her experience. Our official counselor, a midwife, talked to Tina and arranged to visit Novi's school. She learned that Novi was reprimanded daily by her teacher. When our counselor asked why, she was told that Novi is lagging very far behind her friends and that she always sleeps in the classroom. Novi had grown and developed, but consistently lacked nutritious food. Now Novi can no longer go to the common school; she needs help in a special school. Novi is one of thousands of Indonesian children who lack nutritious food during their early growth period (under five years old).

This next experience took place in the 1970s, when my pastoral work team visited a village called Turi to do training for family income generation. Suti, one of our trainees told me that she could not continue her participation in this seminar because she felt unhealthy. Valentine, a member of our team who is a midwife, immediately examined her. She found out that Suti had been bleeding for a week. When Valentine investigated further, she discovered that Suti was one of hundreds of victims of contraceptive user failure. Suti was forced by a government official from the family planning center to use contraception, even though she is a widow and has entered menopause. She was forced to be one of the "hundred target group" of contraception users. Suti was not given the opportunity to explain her situation to the government official; she was forced to have an IUD inserted in her vagina. First she suffered with the IUD and then it was changed with an implant. Her body rejected it; she experienced continuous bleeding. Valentine took Suti immediately to the

hospital in the city; Suti needed emergency help for her serious situation.

The three experiences narrated above are illustrations of our basic health pastoral work in Indonesia. As in other Asian countries, Catholic schools, hospitals and clinics are very prevalent in the society. Ordinary people trust and like to be cared for in the Catholic schools and hospitals. In addition to hospital institutions, the Indonesian Catholic Church provides many local health clinics in grass-roots areas for supporting public health. PERDHAKI is the name of the Indonesian Catholic Church's institution for the Pastoral Health Care Apostolate.

Faith Reflection on Experience

Before proceeding further, I want to clarify how I understand "inculturation." I see inculturation linked with the emergence of the "local Church." The Second Vatican Council was an historical milestone, providing guidelines for social change. The Church has a universal mission, but it also recognizes that all people have their own culture. During the period of colonialism many peoples were controlled and never allowed to fully appreciate their own cultural richness. The independence movement liberated many countries from colonial control. This "foreign" control had spilled over into religion; "pagan" was the term used for many things that were rooted in the local culture. The growth of the local Church has resulted in songs and dances based on culture; these were developed for the liturgy. However, greater depth has to be achieved. Inculturation based on Christian faith must also relate the Church's mission with local culture. This means that faith is to reach all levels of society; it means including community health programs within the Church's mission of integral evangelization.

Inculturation in the area of health also means we must talk about human life and death. Human health cannot be separated from food, nutrition, medicine, and the natural environment. There is a rhythm of life in human experience; thus, health, human realities, and all human problems are interrelated. In addition, they cannot be separated from culture and its social-cultural-political construction.

Women are closely integrated into this reality; they have a pivotal role in supporting public health challenges; women are the “back-bone” of any public health initiative. Women bear a huge responsibility for family and public health matters. Since ancient times, the Indonesian people have entrusted to women the care of family health. When the mother of a family is healthy, this means she has the energy to take care of her family and to influence public health matters. It is a reality that in an agricultural society like Indonesia, women have a pivotal role in community health regulation. Their authority to manage the family’s health is closely related with the management of food, nutrition and medicines.

In Indonesia today women and men do not get the same treatment. Women’s subordinate position often pushes them into poverty; they often lack nutritious food, equal education, and their reproductive rights are abused. The mother of a family has to take care of her family’s health, but she gets the last food; she is expected to be responsible for limiting the birth of children. In some cases it can be said that the state controls the body of Indonesian women.

A Truly Human Life

The stories about SARS, Novi and Suti mentioned above represent many common human life problems in Indonesia. Where can one look for guidance and direction? What action can be taken? Will it truly be effective? I will cite one example. In October 1990 Father Gregorius Utomo and I (both alumni of the Maryknoll School of Theology) organized a farmer’s meeting at the national level; this gathering was held in Ganjuran, Jogjakarta. Based on the participants’ reflections, we all agreed to develop small communities all over Indonesia that would respond to human health issues. It was a type of peoples’ movement. The motivation was based on culture; the desired outcome was socio-cultural change for a more healthy, more human, life.

The Ganjuran meeting in October 1990 was the beginning of an awareness movement for the people in the grass-roots. This movement raised people’s consciousness that human life is threatened by ecological destruction of the soil, forest, seeds, food,

and herbs. Our rivers, seas and sources of water are becoming polluted. All these situations are closely related with people's health (as illustrated by my opening stories). People are becoming aware that they have to organize themselves to solve these problems. The existence of women's groups in the grass-roots becomes an opportunity to support the women's movement engaged in ecological healing and the issue of human health. The campaign envisions and supports the growth of small communities on the grass-roots level.

Some of the movement's activities are the following:

1) *Formation of a Community of Organic Farming.* These groups seek to provide secure food materials. They plant local seeds of rice, vegetables, and fruits. They use natural fertilizers and natural pesticides. Small market centers for their products are growing all over Indonesia. This is one effort to protect human health.

2) *Establishment of Community Health Centers.* In these centers people can get natural medicine made from local herbs. Several hundreds of such centers provide natural medicine for preventing and curing people's illnesses. In addition, these centers provide traditional medicinal treatments. In this area Indonesia is very rich with traditional healers. Recently, people have returned to the use of traditional medicine as preventive methods for family health.

3) *Information Campaign to Assist Women.* Regarding health questions and women's concerns in particular, small groups have been organized to disseminate information about reproductive rights, health care, and birth regulation decisions. The objective of the movement is to open women's hearts and minds so they can have control over what happens to their own bodies. Woman empowerment in health issues is a very important aspect of life.

4) *An Interfaith Approach to Community Issues.* Finally I want to note that our grass-roots approaches to inculturated health care seek to honor pluralistic values. Everyone must bear mutual respect for others, respect in all aspects of human life. Faith is a transcendent personal relationship; it is a universal

experience. How every person implements one's faith will differ, depending on one's locality. Every one lives in a community with specific life regulations, including ways to maintain life. No body and no one country has right to control another. We Christians have to reflect deeply on both the local and global role of the Catholic Church in the vast arena of human health and authentic development.

V. CULTURAL CRISIS (Leo Kleden⁶)

The Asian Context

In many countries in Asia local cultures are undergoing rapid changes because of modern transportation and telecommunication. For example, small villages on the islands of Flores, Timor, Sumba, Kalimantan and on other islands in Indonesia, as well as rural communities in India and China can no longer isolate themselves from global modern influences which invade everyone's consciousness everyday through radio and television. New ideas and values challenge the traditional worldviews and value systems; this bombardment can result in a kind of cultural crisis.

It is helpful to understand culture in the widest sense as the total complex of socially transmitted beliefs and values, behavior patterns and institutions, and all other products of human creativity. This definition actually describes culture on three levels. On the first level, culture is regarded as a collection of physical things produced by people who live together in a certain society: houses, clothes, temples, sculptures, paintings, books, rice fields, cars, factories, and so on. On a deeper level one finds symbols, systems of knowledge, patterns of behavior, traditions, and social institutions, which govern the life of people in a society. Finally, on the deepest level, however, every culture has what Paul Ricoeur calls an "ethico-mythical nucleus," which is a complex of the most fundamental beliefs and values that functions as a central point of reference and a source of inspiration for people in a particular society. It is called "ethico-mythical"

⁶ Leo Kleden, a Divine Word Missionary (SVD) from Indonesia, serves on the SVD General Council in Rome.

because very often this nucleus is not formulated in a systematic doctrine, but rather told in myths and stories which contain basic models for human life. No culture can survive and flourish without an ethico-mythical nucleus. To use a metaphor from physics, it is the atomic nucleus of culture which governs all cultural activities and movements.

In the course of history, however, this ethico-mythical nucleus can be destroyed by war, by the moral and spiritual decline of the leaders who do not live according to the inspiration of these fundamental values, or because of the clash with foreign dominant values which cannot be integrated. This is probably the secret behind the fall of the great ancient cultures of Egypt, Babylonia, the Incas, and so on. A successful encounter between different cultures, on the contrary, would result in a creative transformation.

What actually happens when local and traditional cultures in Asia are confronted with modern influences in the global world today? To answer this question, one must elucidate some characteristics of pre-modern and modern cultural paradigms in order to see better the possible encounter and even clash between them. [This presentation will skip the post-modern paradigm in order to avoid an overly complicated discussion.]

According to the pre-modern worldview, the universe is a cosmos, in which everything has its meaning and role within the harmony with the whole. This cosmos is sacred; people live in the awareness of their close proximity to the Holy. Community is conceived as a living organism with its own unity and order. A person realizes himself or herself by participating in the community in harmony with nature. Individuality, in the modern sense of the word, has not yet emerged. A human being is a micro-cosmos within a macro-cosmos. Religiosity is based on human awareness of the union with the sacred cosmos and the Holy.

The modern paradigm, on the contrary, is commenced by the birth of a rational and autonomous subject. In front of this subject, the universe becomes an object, a disenchanted universe, which can be exploited and dominated. The most spectacular manifestation of this domination is science and technology. Society is no longer an organism, but an organization based on a Social Contract (Hobbes, Locke, Rousseau). The ideal self-realization is

the promotion of the individual as a unique and autonomous ego. Religiosity is based on a personal relationship with God.

In these two great paradigms one observes different views concerning the world, the human person, community or society, and religiosity. They are intricately related to one another in such a way that change in one aspect will certainly have its repercussions in others. For example, one cannot change the vision of the world from a sacred cosmos to a disenchanted universe without the transformation of the human person into an autonomous subject, the transformation of society from organism to organization, and the transformation of the cosmic religiosity to personal belief.

In the encounter and confrontation between these two paradigms, the identity of local or traditional cultures is challenged; this results in a certain crisis. Several consequences may follow. First, modern influence prevails and the local culture is suppressed. Secondly, people within that particular culture may close themselves off in a kind of ghetto in order to preserve their culture and to avoid foreign influence. Thirdly, people may also live in a kind of cultural schizophrenia because they cannot integrate various cultural influences in their lives. Finally, there may be a creative cultural transformation, which might be the best outcome.

Historical Context

Faith is never lived in a cultural vacuum. So, when the Christian missionaries came in large numbers from Europe to Asia in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, they came with modern presuppositions. However, when people in India, Indonesia, the Philippines and elsewhere received the Gospel, they received it with their worldview and cultural heritage. Consciously or unconsciously, the missionaries from Europe had come to mission countries from a position of superiority. First, there was political superiority; they came from the colonizing to the colonized countries. Secondly, there was cultural superiority; they came from the developed to the so-called under-developed countries [though they met some very developed cultures and civilizations, e.g. Japan, China, India]; they arrived with the presuppositions that the modern worldview was the best viable paradigm for the future of humankind. Thirdly one notes economic superiority; they

came from rich to poorer countries. Finally, the missionaries held to religious superiority; they came with a strong conviction about *extra ecclesia nulla salus* (outside the Church there is no salvation).

Within this presupposition of superiority, the missionaries proclaimed the Gospel and baptized people, but they also promoted education, social and economic welfare. The prime aim of mission was *plantatio ecclesiae* (planting the Church). Since the model of the Church was the one they knew in Europe at that time, *plantatio ecclesiae* was actually *transplantatio ecclesiae* (transplantation of the Church). Of course, one must add that a number of missionaries paid much attention to language and cultural studies; the experiment of inculturation goes back to Matteo Ricci in the sixteenth century in China. What has been described here was the *general tendency*.

In the process of *transplantatio ecclesiae* the missionaries taught Christian doctrines formulated in a Western philosophical framework; they built churches according to European architecture. They introduced Gregorian chant, German and Spanish songs; they celebrated liturgy in the Latin Rite. In addition, they promoted education according to European systems. The Church was thus planted, but in many cases it remained a foreign entity.

Only after the Second Vatican Council did the idea of adaptation and later inculturation come to the fore. The Asian Bishops' Meeting used the word "inculturation" for the first time in their final statement in Manila in 1970; since then it has been used more and more in the later FABC documents. In the Asian Colloquium on Ministries in the Church (1977) one reads: "the decisive new phenomenon for Christianity in Asia will be the emergence of genuine Christian communities in Asia – Asian in their way of thinking, praying, living, communicating their own Christ-experience to others" (ACMC 14).

Pastoral-Theological Orientations

Inculturation has its theological foundation in the mystery of the Incarnation. The living Word of God with its redeeming power has to be incarnated again in local cultures; the Church has to grow and to have its roots in the local soil. According to

the Asian bishops, the way of inculturation is dialogue, a dialogue between Gospel and the Asian reality. In their analysis of Asian reality, the bishops describe this continent as the cradle of great religions; they indicate the plurality of cultures and mention the reality of the poor and marginalized who form the bulk of Asian peoples. As a consequence, the bishops propose a threefold dialogue, namely, dialogue with people of other religions, with cultures, and with the poor and marginalized.

Religions. Interreligious dialogue can take various forms which together may constitute a “virtual circle.” The first form is dialogue of life where people of various religions live together in the same society with tolerance and respect for each other. Secondly, through a dialogue of action they collaborate on some concrete projects such as helping the victims of a natural disaster, promoting human rights, improving education for poor children and so on. Thirdly, people of different religions can also pray together and share their faith; for example, after the big riot in Jakarta on May 13-15, 1998, where 1,190 people were killed, women activists of different religions (Islam, Christianity, Hinduism, Buddhism) organized several prayer meetings where they openly denounced the acts of violence and prayed together for justice, reconciliation and peace in a wounded nation. Finally, there can be dialogue on the theological or doctrinal level. Here one very often finds institutional obstacles. For this reason a group of Islamic, Christian, Hindu and Buddhist theologians in some countries could form a forum of interfaith dialogue, where each participant is supposed to speak from his or her own personal reflection without officially representing any institution. In brief, dialogue of life and action paves the way for theological dialogue. In its turn, theological dialogue should enlighten and promote dialogue of life and action.

Cultures. It has been noted earlier that only after Vatican II has there been a great movement of inculturation in order to incarnate the Gospel message into different languages and cultures. People now hear the Gospel in their own language, they sing their songs, they dance and celebrate their life of faith according to their own culture. In this way Christian faith slowly gets rooted in the culture and a genuine local church is formed.

The inculturation of theology, however, is more difficult. It is a long-term project. Only from the authentic *praxis* of faith can there follow an indigenous and original theological reflection, because theology is nothing else but a critical reflection on the life of faith. *Orthopraxis* comes first; then authentic theology follows! In other words, the main agent of the development of the local Church is not the theologian, but the local Christian community that celebrates the joys and sorrows of its life according to the inspiration of the Gospel.

How can one envision the relation between the particularity of the local Church and the catholicity of the universal Church? First of all, what Catholics call "universal Church" is the *ecclesia ecclesiarum* (Church of Churches), the communion of Christian communities in the Lord. One can use the paradigm of art in order to better understand the relation between particularity and universality. If someone simply copies the work of another artist, he or she is not a real artist but an imitator. It is a paradoxical truth of art that the more unique and original a work of art is, the more universal value it has. The same thing can be said about the particularity and universality of the Church. The more authentic and original the life of faith is in the local Churches, the more universal (catholic) value does it contribute to the communion of the Church. If, however, the local Church simply imitates what is done in Rome, then it is an imitation Church, not yet an authentic Church rooted in the local soil.

On the other hand, every culture contains elements of alienation, the elements which enslave people and which do not promote the well-being of humanity. The message of the Gospel is, therefore, a prophetic criticism and spiritual contribution to the life of a particular culture so that culture may become the celebration of human life before God.

The Poor and Marginalized. In many parts of Asia Christians live among the great mass of very poor people. Mission among the poor means being in solidarity with them, participating in their life and their struggle for a just and humane society. From their part the poor offer an opportunity to undergo a radical conversion. Aloysius Pieris asserts that the poor (the destitute, dispossessed, displaced and discriminated) who form the bulk of

Asian peoples, plus their specific brand of cosmic religiosity constitute a school where many Christian activists re-educate themselves in the art of speaking the language of God's reign, which is the language of liberation which God speaks through Jesus. Often, neither the academic nor the pastoral magisterium is conversant with this evangelical idiom.

Inculturation denotes a cultural transformation of faith, which is at the same time a redemptive innovation of culture. It is through inculturation that faith and culture collaborate to overcome cultural crisis. Then and only then, the local Church discovers its own identity as fully indigenous and authentically Christian.

It is important to note that human identity and social identity are always a narrative identity. People understand themselves in the framework of a story. In the process of inculturation, people begin to tell their own stories and weave them together with the story of Jesus as their model. In this way the Christian communities in Asia will be able to change the "Asian Drama of Suffering" into the "Asian Good News of Salvation."

VI. SCRIPTURE (Maria Ko⁷)

The Asian Context

"Your words were found, and I ate them, and your words became to me a joy and the delight of my heart" (Jer. 15:16).

One evident characteristic of the Catholic Church in the last few decades is the Biblical renewal movement. With Vatican II the Word of God returns gradually to its central place in the life of the Church after centuries of exile. This is especially true for the Church in the West. In the younger Churches in Asia, one would rather speak of a new epiphany of the Word, a discovery of the Bible; this is because in the history of evangelization in Asia, Scripture never played a prominent role.

The great epoch of evangelization in Asia, between the 1600s and 1800s, coincided with the rigid period of the Counter-

⁷ Maria Ko, an FMA Sister from Hong Kong, teaches Sacred Scripture at the Auxilium in Rome.

reformation. The most important book of faith was not the Bible, but the Catechism. Most missionaries shared the then common mentality that the Bible must be read with special care by only a few. Access to the Bible by the faithful was indirect and mediated by the clergy in pastoral ministry and in the liturgy. Therefore, from its very beginning in Asia, the Catholic Church was known more for its magnificent organizational structures and efficiency, works of charity, splendid churches, great missionary figures, European style of religious practices, and less for its spirituality and sacred books.

For Asian peoples, however, religious literature is much more important than any Westerner could imagine. All great Asian religions can boast of sacred books with elevated teaching and refined philosophy. The spread of a religion depends very much on the diffusion of its Scriptures. The spread of Buddhism in China is a witness to this. Even within the Catholic Church there is a significant example: the foundation of Christianity in Korea was not laid by foreign missionaries, but by the study of Christian books brought into the country from China by Korean converts.

Vatican II was a turning point. The Bible was handed over to Asians in a new way. The encounter with the sacred texts has become more immediate and intense, more frequent and vital. In this new encounter, Christians in Asia discover the marvels of the Bible. They realize with surprise that it is very near to their own mentality, their way of thinking and of expressing themselves. They feel at home with its narrative style, parables and metaphors, concise oracles of the prophets, poetic prayers, and especially its wisdom reflections. These are the same means used in the ancient writings to communicate experience and wisdom of life.

The Bible opens up a great display of symbols and images before the Asian reader, a lively intertwining of words and silence, of time and space. One hears the voice of God, of humans, of nature, of the whole cosmos; one feels drawn into the mysterious harmony, while the heart longs for the infinite, for fullness. This is exactly what Asians expect from divine revelation.

No one is surprised that in the few decades since Vatican II, all Churches in Asia have witnessed an increase of initiatives

around the Word of God. Where the Bible has the central place one observes a real vitality and a growth in quality in all aspects of the ecclesial community.

Pastoral-Theological Orientations

“He is ... like the master of a household who brings out of his treasure what is new and what is old” (Mt. 13:52).

The concept of inculturation supposes a mutual interaction of the Gospel and culture which brings out from the treasures of both “what is new and what is old” under the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

Every culture in its own way, is a bearer of the universal values established by God and is open to His Word. In effect, the Word of God is a seed which extracts from the earth where it is planted the elements useful for its growth and fruitfulness (cf. *Ad Gentes* 22). Consequently, inculturation of the Bible should not be considered a one-way process. It involves “mutual enrichment.” On one hand, the Word of God, which transcends all cultures, must take root in a variety of terrains and transform them. On the other hand, the treasures contained in diverse cultures allow the Word of God to produce new fruits. Thus, cultures can become hermeneutical criteria in understanding the biblical message.

The foundation is solid; the aim is clear, but the realization is difficult and the process complex. Speaking specifically of countries of recent evangelization such as many of those in Asia, a document of the Pontifical Biblical Commission entitled *The Interpretation of the Bible in the Church* (1993) states: “Missionaries cannot help bring the Word of God in the form in which it has been inculturated in their own country of origin. New local churches have to make every effort to convert this foreign form of biblical inculturation into another form more closely corresponding to the culture of their own land” (Section IV.B on “Inculturation”).

Facing the paradox that the Word of God has aroused the least response in Asia, the most religious continent of the world, another recent Vatican document *Towards a Pastoral Approach*

to *Culture*, issued by the Pontifical Council for Cultures (1999) asks: "Is that not chiefly because Christianity is still perceived there as a foreign religion introduced by Westerners, which has not been sufficiently adapted, thought through and lived in the cultures of Asia?" (TPAC 20).

Various Assemblies of the FABC from 1974 onwards and particularly the Synod of Asian Bishops (1998) launched the challenge of a change of vision: Jesus is not foreign to Asia. The post-synodal document *Ecclesia in Asia* states firmly that the Church in Asia has to rediscover, with greater awareness, "the Asian roots of Christianity" (EA 4a). "It was in fact in Asia that God revealed and fulfilled his saving purpose from the beginning" (EA 1a). "Jesus Christ the Savior ... took flesh as an Asian!" (EA 1a). Therefore, inculturation of the Gospel in Asia "involves rediscovering the Asian countenance of Jesus" (EA 20h).

In the search for the Asian countenance of Jesus, inculturation of the Bible is essential. Acknowledging that "the Word of God has an inherent power to touch the hearts of people" (EA 22d), the Synod Fathers stressed particularly 'the importance of the biblical word in passing on the message of salvation to the peoples of Asia, where the transmitted word is so important in preserving and communicating religious experience' (EA 22d). Moreover, almost all biblical texts are formed and written in Asia, and "the narrative style found in many books of the Bible has an affinity with the religious texts typical of Asia" (EA 22d). There is no doubt Asia can become "the land of a bountiful harvest" (EA 4d) for the Word of God.

Concrete and Practical Suggestions

"Your word is a lamp for my feet" (Ps. 119:105).

The renewed awareness of the closeness of the biblical text to the Asian mentality should stimulate all to make a paradigm shift and implement initiatives of inculturation of the Bible so that the Word of God may truly touch the hearts of Asians. How can this be promoted? Here are some suggestions.

1) Translation and diffusion of the Scriptures is the basic step for facilitating an effective encounter with the sacred text.

Today the Bible is translated in many Asian languages, but there is still much room for developing the dynamics of inculturation in this field.

2) Actualization of the Word of God consists in applying the texts to life-situations of Asians so that they can be experienced as life-giving Good News. The Word of God, set in a more explicit relationship with the ways of feeling, thinking and self-expression of Asian cultures, can shed light on many current issues in this continent; some examples are the youth, women, family, the poor, migrants, Christians as a minority, and the area of interreligious dialogue. This actualization is best achieved within the Basic Ecclesial communities. Since BECs “grappled with life-issues in the light of the Word of God, they are able to appropriate personally for themselves the meaning of the Word of God and recognize its concrete challenges and demands” (*FABC Theses on the Local Church* 9.1).

3) The Church can promote an Asian approach to the Bible; listening to the Word of God should go beyond academic analysis and exegesis of the scriptural texts. Asian biblical scholars have to localize hermeneutical sensitivities, based on the “innate spiritual insight and moral wisdom of the Asian soul” (EA 6d), and elaborate adequate methods and models of reading the Bible. For example, in many of the Asian religious traditions, scripture is not so much read but chanted. This is a unique mechanism for “tasting the word” and letting it echo internally as well as externally.

4) Asian readers tend to learn their sacred text by heart, repeating it, meditating on it, until it reveals its profound meaning, producing the effect of “enlightenment” and “awakening” in them. They are more open to intuit the infinite. From the material aspect of the written word, they desire to go to what is unwritten and unexpressed, from what is audible to silence.

5) Moreover, Asians have a great capacity for association. Reading the Bible, they can easily recall thoughts and traditions of their culture, thus witnessing the harmony and communicability between various experiences of truth and wisdom.

6) In the area of Biblical formation, one notes: “In the past, formation often followed the style, methods and programs

imported from the West" (EA 22e). Hopefully, the Church in Asia will develop a biblical formation program more intensive and more adequate to its social-cultural context. Though cultivating the scientific quality of biblical studies, Asian Christians should not ignore the formation for the biblical apostolate and biblical spirituality.

VII. THEOLOGICAL REFLECTION (Catalino G. Arévalo⁸)

The Asian Context

There is an enormous cultural diversity among Asia's four billion people; therefore, it is impossible to briefly describe where the Church in Asia is with regard to the task of inculturation of theology. Concomitantly, it becomes necessary to ask each major cultural area to describe its interests, concerns, projects, and experiences.

There is a marked diversity between "South Asia" and "East Asia." This fact has been recognized in various international bodies (e.g. FABC, International Theological Commission, etc.). Thus, efforts to understand Church realities must incorporate views and experiences from "joss stick" areas (e.g. India, Sri Lanka, etc.) as well as the "chopstick" cultural regions (e.g. Korea, Japan, etc.). And yet, since there is so large a diversity, no one can speak with any "authority" except for one's own immediate circle of labor and of contacts.

One can validly assert that there has been much greater and explicit inculturation work in theology from the "joss stick culture" area. Some of the work is quite wide and deep in character (e.g. S. Amalorpavadass, F. Wilfred, M. Amaladoss, S. Rayan, A. Pieris). Other names need to be added to the list (e.g. Protestant theologians and other "South Asian" theologians writing from the European academe).

The South Asian theologians write from their different context, with its own particular concerns (e.g. Indian situations of poverty and injustice), interreligious dialogue (based on concrete

⁸ Catalino G. Arévalo, a Filipino Jesuit (SJ), is professor emeritus at Loyola School of Theology in Manila.

experience), and culture change as it is taking place in various sectors in South Asia (considerably different in character and concrete consequences from the cultural shifts in East and South-east Asia).

In East and Southeast Asia, the “Christian areas” are mostly in the Philippines and South Korea. Places that are in “contact with Western theology but Chinese-speaking” are areas like Hong Kong, Taiwan, Singapore, Indonesia, and Malaysia. Simply to name the places is already to name the considerable cultural differences. There have been significant beginnings in inculturated theological reflection in each of these areas, for sure. Personally, I know much only on the Roman Catholic side and this from the Philippines and, to a lesser extent, Indonesia. As examples, one could cite two recent contributions: “The Craft of Contextual Theology” by D. Pilario [*Chakana* 1:1 (2003)]; *The Rise of Filipino Theology* by D. Tesoro and J. Jose [Paulines, 2004]. Finally, I note that in the Protestant churches and communities much has also been done, but unfortunately I myself do not know the details of this work.

In the Philippines, and this may be true in many Asian local Churches, inculturation concerns have centered mainly on social issues: development and liberation themes (including a “theology of struggle,” political ideologies, and societal change), BECs, popular religion and devotional life, the Church and the culture of the poor, feminism, youth, and the like. Considerable effort has been made to link biblical study and reflection with social issues. Some Christological studies have been done, many of them linked once again with theologies of social renewal and liberation of the poor. Yet, I do not know personally of any major Christological or Trinitarian work of “envergure.” In brief, most work focuses on the discernment of “the concrete mission of the Church” (as is done in other Asian countries *mutatis mutandis*).

Pastoral-Theological Orientations

The theological work fostered by the FABC through its assemblies, workshops, and pastoral meetings is now of considerable volume and “weight.” This whole backlog of reflection needs perhaps more formal study and more careful theological evaluation. The FABC in some ways has been “a major theological locus” of

Asian theological work in the last thirty years. Its over-arching “inculturation concern” has been, to my understanding, the more down-to-earth specification of the concrete mission of the Church, here and now in Asia. Yet, as situations “mutate” (even as viruses do), the inculturation process has to be modified.

The great variety of workshops sponsored by the seven (now nine) “offices” of the FABC (e.g. concerning social justice and its issues, integrity of creation, education, evangelization-in-the-concrete) always results in a concrete effort at theological reflection. Look at every “final statement” of these workshops and judge whether this is not true (see *FABC Papers 100* by J. Kroeger which is a *Comprehensive Index* of FABC reflection extending from 1976-2001). One will quickly see that the overall concern has been “specifying the mission of our local Asian Churches” in each one of these areas of evangelization.

There have been pivotal persons working within the FABC to promote the emergence of the “Asian face” of the Church. I would single out the behind-the-scenes labors of Maryknoll Father Edward Malone, the FABC “OIC” (officer-in-charge) of activities and projects under the FABC Secretary-General. He has done massive work, which, now that he has served over thirty years, deserves explicit recognition. One could also mention the wide variety of doctoral dissertations on FABC subjects (some authors: C. Putranta, P. Handoko, L. Nemet, L. Thuma, M. Quatra, H. Punda Panda, J. Yun-ka Tan, and E. Chia).

Some things I have indicated earlier already elucidate these FABC “pastoral-theological orientations.” I ask if it is possible, following on the steps of these theologians and the FABC activities to draw a “master chart” of important concerns of the FABC assemblies and workshops. Can we all look at the *FABC Papers* in a more systematic way to see what future theological reflection (as inculturation work) is waiting to be done? What are the truly “burning issues” as experienced at present in the various Asian areas?

Then, in a longer view, what themes have the FABC and *Ecclesia in Asia* indicated as areas for deeper, wider, more long-range study and reflection? I believe “the Asian understanding of the nature of God” is such a theme, as would be an effort to further “truly Asian Christological reflection.”

“Being Church in Asia” has been a very explicit FABC concern from the beginning. This interest and concern is ongoing. We can encourage further study on this. Much field work, leading to experience and reflection on what is actually taking place is needed in much more differentiated areas (e.g. urban populations as displaced from rural traditional sub-cultures; women in the present period of rapid change; the indigenous communities; the “post modern” young people, etc.). Sociological and anthropological studies must first provide factual material from which to work. Once more, we are in the area of the mission of the Church, as concretely understood as possible. “Being Church in Asia” has been FABC’s great focus from the beginning. In this focus a perseverance of labor is both mandatory and – has been and will be – fruitful.

Concrete and Pastoral Initiatives

Adding to some ideas already outlined in the previous section, I suggest that in each country or major cultural area, a meeting of deans and professors of theological institutions, with a good number of bishops who are really interested, and lay people from the academe, from government and NGO sectors, from parishes, from professional sectors – but people with some knowledge of theological work and concerns – could meet and brainstorm on the matter of “ongoing theological reflection” and “being Church in Asia.”

These not too large (personnel-wise) brainstorming sessions or “*Ecclesia in Asia* workshops,” if well handled, could be very fruitful. Maybe the FABC Office of Theological Concerns can do some thinking and planning for some “brainstorming” sessions on a wider scale. *Theology in our countries has to do some “breaking away” from European-academe accepted ways of doing things.*

The process may be somewhat chaotic at the beginning, but we have to be willing to take risks. Some good, strong, creative minds have to be at the “thinking and growing edge” of this contextual theological reflection in Asia. *Much work has to be done!*

Permit a final word. It seems to me that “contextualization” is the most operative meaning of “inculturation” at the present

time. This demands first of all much more immediate contact with the cultural developments transpiring in each country, its culture and subcultures. The importance of "language" (anthropological, cultural, etc.) so as to have access to "what is really going on" in the context must more and more occupy our attention. The changing perceptions of reality, especially among our young people, very often best indicate where the people are going. What "language" must the Church increasingly use to reach the young? How do we best communicate the message of hope which Christianity carries? What forms does the struggle to "be and become human" presently take? Theology in a given local Church must be in touch with what Lonergan spoke of as, "what is going forward" in a people, in a culture.

Theologians must decide "where they will live" and do their work: in the Academe, around Church leadership, or in "wider society" and in which sectors of society. The theological effort today needs to be present in many diverse areas of Church and society. Ours is not the age of *summas*, so we have to choose the smaller area where we will work, the particular currents in which we will involve ourselves, and there in that *locus* ask the questions of faith, and ask the faith's questions. Piece-meal work is what will have to come first. Let the "grand visions" (at present strongly frowned on by the post-modern ethos) come later. The immediate work is partial, by necessity, I believe. We will not, of course, cease to strive for the larger picture. In fact, it has always to be kept in the back of our heads. However, for the authentic inculturation of theology, more immediate needs have to be faced at the present time.

VIII. SPIRITUALITY (Subhash Anand⁹)

The Asian Context

I begin by confessing that I do not have adequate knowledge of the pan-Asian situation, but I presume that what transpires in India is, in some way, true of other Asian countries.

⁹ Subhash Anand, an Indian national, is professor of Hindu Philosophy and Religion at Jnanadeep Vidyapeeth in Pune, India.

The three ecclesial traditions in India entered this country only after they had acquired a definite shape in their native land. For many centuries these Churches had bishops of foreign origin. This not only perpetuated the culturally alien image of these Churches but also made them colonies of foreign powers.

Signs of inculturation are present in the Indian Church and elsewhere. These, however, are mostly restricted to liturgy and para-liturgical celebrations. This is understandable: replacing one set of vestments, sacred vessels, gestures, etc. with another does not call for much personal change. It is only when spirituality, liturgy and theology are intimately related, not merely on the conceptual/ritual level, but also in and through life, that real inculturation becomes possible. This approach will not only provide an inculturated *darsana* (vision), but also lead to and be nurtured by an inculturated *sadhana* (praxis).

In recent years some, in fact very few, have learned and practice *yoga*, together with exercises that help in being more recollected, more aware of their own self. They take texts of other faith traditions for their personal and communitarian prayer. One also finds the practice of the prayer of the divine name (*nama-japa*). Some squat on the floor for their personal prayer. The Buddhist retreat (*vipassana*) is slowly becoming popular among Christians. These attempts at inculturation of spirituality are found largely among religious. Very few if any diocesan priests think along these lines. This has a far-reaching consequence: the inculturation of spirituality has not yet become a real pastoral concern. Even when in some places the liturgy is celebrated in an “inculturated” manner (notice the quotes), it is only a matter of some rituals. This inculturated liturgy is not shaped by an inculturated vision, and hence does not lead to an inculturated praxis. Inculturation becomes a matter of some “local” gestures, and “local” elements: genuflection replaced by a bow, wax candles replaced by joss sticks. This sort of inculturation becomes counter-productive. It makes us feel comfortable: “Who says we are not inculturated?” Even when we try to absorb an inculturated spiritual method, we do so by uprooting the technique from its milieu. Thus, one aspect of *yoga* is *asana*, which does not simply mean a body-posture, but also a rejection of the “fast life” which is one of the dehumanizing aspects of contemporary culture.

One finds another disturbing phenomenon: fundamentalist attitudes of some preachers. The tradition of this land is presented in very poor light. What is more distressing is that these persons have not taken the trouble needed to understand another tradition. They are still guided by an outdated theology which asserts that Jesus Christ alone brings us all the truth we need to be saved.

Pastoral-Theological Orientations

Inculturation is not something new, a "new-fashioned" concern. From the start the Church has accepted inculturation as an essential dimension of her mission: bringing all nations together with their cultural patrimony to Jesus. The New Testament is written not in Hebrew but in Greek, as this was the language that was used by a greater number of peoples at that time. It is this principle of inculturation that explains the formation of different local Churches, what today we speak of as different rites. In these Churches the riches of the nations are part of Christian self-expression. The sad part of history is that when these Churches moved outside the territory of their origin, they became fossilized: outside cultural forms were imposed on the locals. Even today these outside cultural forms are not easily abandoned, because some leaders think that were their Churches to do so, they would lose their peculiar identity.

History also tells us how the Spirit guiding the Church can prompt her to move beyond the colonial mentality shaping the political realm. In 1668 the first two natives of Indochina were appointed bishops. This is part of the instruction they received from the Sacred Congregation for the Propagation of Faith: "Do not in any way attempt, and do not on any pretext persuade these people to change their rites, habits and customs, unless they are openly opposed to religion and good morals. For what could be more absurd than to bring France, Spain, Italy or any other European country over to China?"

The concern for inculturation becomes one of the central aspects of the ecclesiology of Vatican II. This is one of the theological consequences of seeing the Church more as the People of God and less as an institution. The latter approach tends to emphasize uniformity, while the former promotes pluralism as an

expression of the creative Spirit guiding the pilgrim people of God. It is this guidance of the Spirit that explains the emergence of the different local Churches, Churches that have brought the patrimony of their nation to the Church.

In his post-synodal apostolic exhortation *Evangelii Nuntiandi* (1975), Pope Paul VI has this to say: “The Church respects and esteems the non-Christian religions because they are the living expression of the soul of vast groups of people. They carry within them the echo of thousands of years of searching for God, a quest which is incomplete but often made with great sincerity and righteousness of heart. They possess an impressive patrimony of deeply religious texts. They have taught generations of people how to pray” (EN 53).

Twenty-five years after the publication of the conciliar Decree on Missionary Activity (*Ad Gentes*), Pope John Paul II, in his *Redemptoris Missio* (1990), invites all to renew their missionary commitment, particularly its contemplative dimension: “The missionary must be a ‘contemplative in action’.... My contact with representatives of the non-Christian spiritual traditions, particularly those of Asia, has confirmed me in the view that the future of the mission depends to a great extent on contemplation. Unless the missionary becomes a contemplative he cannot proclaim Christ in a credible way” (RM 91).

In *Ecclesia in Asia* (1999), the document presenting the fruit of the Asian Synod of Bishops (1998), the Pope repeats what he said in *Redemptoris Missio*: “Mission is contemplative action and active contemplation” (EA 23a). This is more urgent in Asia: “In Asia, home to great religions where individuals and entire peoples are thirsting for the divine, the Church is called to be a praying Church, deeply spiritual even as she engages in immediate human and social concerns. All Christians need a true missionary spirituality of prayer and contemplation” (Ib.)

Concrete and Practical Initiatives

In the same document, John Paul II draws attention to this fact: “The people of Asia take pride in their religious and cultural

values, such as love of silence and contemplation, simplicity, harmony, detachment, non-violence, the spirit of hard work, discipline, frugal living, the thirst for learning and philosophical enquiry" (EA 6c). Hence, inculturation demands that these values become one's way of looking at life (*darsana*). We, especially in India, need to realize that being (*satya*) is of more importance than having and doing. Our doing will be authentic if it flows from and deepens our being.

As noted earlier, liturgy, theology and spirituality are inter-related. In our contextualized reflection we cannot ignore the massive poverty we find in India and in other Asian countries. This calls for a deep conversion: "Solidarity with the poor becomes more credible if Christians themselves [and therefore all the more those who profess evangelical poverty] live simply, following the example of Jesus" (EA 34b). Any inculturation, be it of liturgy or theology or spirituality, that does not lead us to be with the poor not merely through inner detachment but also by experiencing in our life some of their struggles, will be merely a cosmetic facade. This call to a life of simplicity and frugality becomes all the more imperative in India which has traditionally seen simplicity of life as a necessary condition and visible evidence for deep interiority.

From what I have observed, very few diocesan priests and religious men and woman feel the call to a life of simplicity. There are different factors that explain this disturbing phenomenon. Ours is a society where job opportunities are day by day decreasing and where even professionally trained people have to face stiff competition. On the other hand, due to powerful mass media the glamour of affluent countries is casting a powerful spell on Asians. Such a society tends to foster "vocations." I am inclined to believe that even though most priests and religious are good people, they tend to see their life as one more career, easily available and fairly comfortable. Hence, if Asian Christians want to thirst for an inculturated spirituality, they need to have some effective "models." This is what they expect from those who have opted for the Kingdom through lifelong celibacy. This will partly be taken care of if we are more selective when accepting candidates for the priesthood and religious life.

IX. FORMATION OF CLERGY AND LAITY (Cora Mateo¹⁰)

The Asian Context

To assess the progress of inculturation in the formation of clergy and laity, I will be concrete and focus on the way homilies are given during the Sunday liturgy. For the great majority of Catholics, listening to the homily is the only time that they are able to receive some instruction about their faith. The homily can be an explanation of the text, an application of how to live it in daily life, or both. Many priests prepare their homilies very well; there are those who are not so prepared. The people can easily tell the difference.

Those who are prepared do not necessarily contribute to the inculturation process. Many homilies are very philosophical, over the heads of the people; these do not communicate any message, except perhaps through the tone of delivery or the stories or jokes that amuse some. Then, after mass, the laity go home either having received a simple message from the readings (and maybe from the homily) or they really have no new insight at all on how to live their faith better. Sometimes, the laity return home rather disappointed and sometimes (hopefully this is rare) rather confused or annoyed about what was heard during the homily.

The kind of homily that priests give is a clear indicator of how inculturated are the formation and outlook of the priest. The homily reflects if he is addressing the people as if they belong to a culture of a past time or as if they belong to a place different from where they actually are. Does he speak to the people who are living in the present with the many concrete challenges life poses to their Christian faith? One could also ask: How much does the homily on the Christian faith lived in a particular time and place in the past (like that of the first Christians) contribute so that faith takes root in the present culture of the people who are searching for a source of light and inspiration in their struggles to do what they see as right and just?

¹⁰ Cora Mateo, a Filipina laywoman, is Associate Secretary of the FABC Office on Laity, AsIPA Desk.

There are fine homilies that do touch the lives of people and challenge them to live a life that resembles the life of Jesus and make it alive in their present realities. They will remember some words from the homily that help them reflect on certain ways of doing things, ways of living life, ways they create culture. Such homilies inspire them to change, to be better, to transform the culture in the light of the Gospel. This kind of homily becomes a venue for the inculturation of the faith. People who are touched by the homily will go back to their families and share the light and the challenge. They will go back to their communities, enthusiastic to make an effort to live the Gospel message. Yet, as one observes the practice in many parishes, one naturally asks how many homilies are contributing to the process of making the faith alive in the very context of the people? How many priests are usually aware of the life struggles faced by people of their parish and thus are able to speak to them, give them new hope and new challenges to be better Christians?

In the parish where I heard a very down-to-earth homily, so relevant to life, giving new insights and at the same time making a strong call to conversion in a very concrete way, I was informed that a community helps the parish priest prepare his homily. It is an example of clergy and laity partnership for more inculturated preaching. A good homily will be a source of formation for the people; the people who share their life experience with the priest are also contributing to the formation of the priest. In this process, inculturated formation takes place for both clergy and laity.

Pastoral-Theological Orientation

The mystery of the Incarnation, God taking human form and becoming like us, except in sin, if taken seriously and coherently, is an event that challenges us to continue our efforts so that faith in God and following Jesus can take root in Asian cultures. Through this process Christian faith acquires an Asian face. The daily events of life and the development of culture shape the world where lay people are immersed. This is not the reality lived daily by priests who are fully dedicated in the ministry; they have given up daily concerns about life (e.g. providing for the family, caring for children) as their main task. Inculturation of the faith takes

place in the struggles of the people, in the blend of life's joys and pains, in the midst of family, profession and other concerns. Lay people are called to express faith and to allow faith to take root in these situations, in their milieu, in societal structures.

Ecclesia in Asia expresses it very clearly: "Moreover, since the inculturation of the Gospel involves the entire People of God, the role of the laity is of paramount importance. It is they above all who are called to transform society, in collaboration with the Bishops, clergy and religious, by infusing the 'mind of Christ' into the mentality, customs, laws and structures of the secular world in which they live" (EA 22e). Since the experiences of lay people are the concrete space and time where the Gospel is lived, these persons can best communicate them to the priests who, in turn, are called to give instruction on the faith to vast numbers of lay people who attend mass on Sunday and most likely will not have another opportunity during the week.

The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* speaks of the priesthood of the laity: "The whole community of believers is, as such, priestly. The faithful exercise their baptismal priesthood through their participation, each according to his own vocation, in Christ's mission as priest, prophet and king" (CCC 1546). It continues: "the ministerial priesthood is at the service of the common priesthood" (CCC 1547). The common priesthood of laity lived within worldly structures reveals many Christian responses to the demands of life; the ordained ministers at the service of this common priesthood have to receive inspiration from the people, if they want their message to be relevant to their aspirations and needs.

The final statement of the First Plenary Assembly of the Asian Bishops (FABC) in 1974 declared: "The local church is a church incarnate in a people, a church indigenous and inculturated, ... a church in continuous, humble and loving dialogue with the living traditions, the cultures, the religions – in brief, with all the life-realities of the people in whose midst it has sunk its roots deeply.... It seeks to share in whatever truly belongs to that people: its meanings and its values, its aspirations, its thoughts and its language, its songs and its artistry. Even its frailties and failings it assumes, so that they too may be healed" (FABC I 12). Certainly, for this process to take place, lay people have to have an active and systematic role in the formation of the clergy.

Concrete and Practical Initiatives

For the clergy to benefit from the faith experience of people and for the people to know how to look with eyes of faith at daily realities, training for Gospel sharing with a community should be given. Priests are to be encouraged to join a regular community and share their experience of living the Gospel. At the same time, their parishes should be organized into basic Christian communities (BECs) that pray together with the Gospel text to prepare for the Sunday liturgy. Parish priests usually go to visit other communities, and they have the chance to listen how the Word of God is touching the lives of people and how people respond by living the Word in their families, communities, workplaces, and within the wider society. This effort in the broader society, is oftentimes done (in most Asian countries) by the Christian communities with people of other faiths; it becomes an interreligious effort to come together as basic *human* communities. Listening to how the Word of God is actually lived, is listening to the inculturation process in the concrete situation.

To engage in this process one can follow a helpful basic method used in Asia; it is the "Seven Steps Gospel Sharing" and unfolds in the follow way:

- 1) Inviting the Lord to be present in the assembled community, done with spontaneous prayer, usually citing a Gospel passage.
- 2) Reading the Gospel text two or three times, if possible in different translations or in different languages if there are members present who use another language; this helps all to "feel at home" with the Word.
- 3) Repeating a word or some short phrases prayerfully three times in order to create an atmosphere of contemplation of the Word.
- 4) Remaining in silence for a few minutes to listen to what God is saying to each person.
- 5) Sharing the inspiration each has received from the Gospel text; "The word or phrase that touched me..." is the usual introductory sentence for the sharing.

- 6) Planning together how to live the Word of God, which has become an inspiration for action (which could be done separately) or planning a concrete action the community will do together.
- 7) Praying for the particular needs of each participant or sharing prayers of thanksgiving for graces received; there is a brief conclusion with a common prayer or hymn.

This method of praying with the Gospel text is done regularly by a community; together, they allow the Word of God to touch them and to move them into action. This activity is the very process of inculturating faith within life's realities, weaving the Gospel into daily life and into particular situations. Gospel sharing becomes the venue to allow faith to take root in culture.

Steps five and six show more concretely how inculturation takes place. "The word or phrase that touched me..." of step five means the Word of God that one sees as a challenge to conversion and to transformation of one's reality; this leads to transforming culture. The community in step six can choose a "Word of God" that will remind everyone to live it; it gradually creates an atmosphere, a way of relating and doing that expresses Christian faith. With this practice, the group gradually acquires a praxis, and the praxis repeated becomes a tradition, a culture. The same thing happens when the community decides to do an action together as a response to the challenge of the Word. They reflect on their realities that need to change and need to be permeated by the Gospel spirit. This is another way of gradually creating a Gospel-inspired culture of life and action, of living and caring for others.

A parish priest who takes part in Gospel sharing is receiving his "continuing formation" and will be able to prepare better his homily, because he has heard the realities the people experience and the faith response they desire to give. The homily he delivers becomes the faith formation of the lay people, most of whom will have no other chance to hear the Word of God during the week or month.

Other concrete methods of Gospel sharing can be employed. In Asia, the AsIPA (Asian Integral Pastoral Approach) Desk of the

FABC Office of Laity has effectively been promoting the renewal of local churches by fostering parish-based Small Christian Communities (SCCs or BECs) who come together by engaging in Gospel sharing, using the "Seven Steps" approach as well as other methods (e.g. the Bible Mirror Method, or the Look-Listen-Love Method). The inculturated formation process of both clergy and laity has begun.

X. SOCIAL COMMUNICATION (Franz-Josef Eilers¹¹)

The Asian Context

The inculturation of Christian faith and values needs communication. Since the "Church is Communication" (Avery Dulles) she cannot exist in any culture, society or person without being communicated. The whole book of the Acts of the Apostles documents this for the early Church. The arrival of new technical means and possibilities in the mass media (the press since around 1450; film, radio, TV and Internet from the beginning of the twentieth century) has brought new and additional possibilities to reach and influence a greater number of people in more places all over the world.

The relation between inculturation and social communication can be considered under two dimensions. The first considers the use of different communication means in transmitting Christian faith to the center of culture. The second dimension is to inculturate Christianity into these existing means of communication themselves.

After some over-fascination with modern technology and mass media, there is now a growing awareness that inculturating Christian faith means using and developing already existing ways and means of communicating in Asian cultures. Storytelling, drama, dance, song, Indonesian shadow plays are all ways of communication already embedded in a given culture. If their content reflects Christian values and beliefs, they become instruments of inculturation. Since they are rooted deeply in local

¹¹ Franz-Josef Eilers, a Divine Word Missionary (SVD) in Asia, is Executive Secretary of the FABC Office of Social Communication.

cultures, this communication does not stay on a superficial level, but goes deep into the hearts of people and their traditions. There are, for example in India, a growing number of dancers and dance groups for classical dance using Christian themes and approaches. *Kalai Kaviri*, the College for Indian Dance and Culture in Tiruchirapally is an example of such an approach for learning and teaching local communication arts. There was a successful initiative by *Amruthavani* in Hyderabad some years ago to produce a film on the life of Christ in an Indian setting.

Some approaches to communicating more locally in liturgy have now been discovered and developed in different countries, always keeping in mind that *social* communication as proposed by Vatican II refers to *all* ways and means of communicating used in human societies. This also includes the public image of the Church and her members in general society. Here the “witness of life” is essential. A person deeply rooted in one’s own culture, but also at the same time grounded in the faith, is the best communicator and example of inculturation. In addition, the general image that the mass media project of the Church and her members will either promote or hinder inculturation.

Through new technical developments there is now a rapidly growing tendency for mass media not to be any more “mass” but rather individualized and specialized “media.” Digitalization multiplies radio and TV channels in such a way that they do not cater any more to the masses, but rather to special interest groups like those with channels on sports, news, lifestyle, nature, or religion. From an original eight or ten channels for the general public, there are now scores of channels offering specialized programs. The development of the Internet also points in the same direction; it is primarily the individual person who accesses and interacts in the Net, not any more a whole “mass” of people. This has important consequences and possibilities for communication in inculturation. Usually the inculturation process starts with individuals or small groups before reaching bigger groups and even the masses.

A further consideration is the application of the insights and rules of *Intercultural Communication*. In relating Christianity to culture, the inculturation process has all the basic ingredients

of intercultural communication. Inculturation as a theological happening is not only an encounter of a culture with the “pure” gospel, but rather it is the meeting of the gospel that is already embodied in one culture with another culture. This means that inculturation, in reality, is part of a process of intercultural communication; it is like the study of communication and interaction between members of different cultures.

Pastoral-Theological Orientations

Inculturation and communication must be seen in a double perspective: (a) the use of communication means for inculturation, and (b) the inculturation of communication means into a given culture.

In the use of communication means for inculturation *Ecclesia in Asia* gives some important directions, recommending that “narrative methods akin to Asian cultural forms are to be preferred” and “the proclamation of Jesus Christ can most effectively be made by narrating his story, as the Gospels do.” Further, the Church “must be open to new and surprising ways in which the face of Jesus might be presented in Asia” (EA 20f).

Ecclesia in Asia further proposes “an evocative pedagogy, using stories, parables and symbols so characteristic of Asian methodology in teaching.” Here the persons involved have “to take the situation of the listener to heart,” because any inculturated communication must be adapted to “the listener’s level of maturity, and in appropriate form and language. In this perspective, the Synod Fathers stressed many times the need to evangelize in a way that appeals to the sensibilities of Asian peoples, and they suggested images of Jesus which would be intelligible to Asian minds and cultures” (EA 20g). All this is to be applied to traditional means of communication as well as to the modern means if they are to contribute to the inculturation of Christian faith.

On the other hand, the various means of communication and their use have to be inculturated themselves. This refers not only to the content but also to the use and selection of means, which might be directed by ways already determined by incul-

turated faith. Here the development of modern communication methods implies the possibility of creating “a new culture.” As Pope John Paul II said in *Redemptoris Missio* (37c):

... since the very evangelization of modern culture depends to a great extent on the influence of the media, it is not enough to use the media simply to spread the Christian message and the Church’s authentic teaching. It is also necessary to integrate that message into the “new culture” created by modern communications. This is a complex issue, since the “new culture” originates not just from whatever content is eventually expressed, but from the very fact that there exist new ways of communicating, with new languages, new techniques and a new psychology.

Concrete and Practical Initiatives

The Church in Asia can explore many options to foster genuine inculturation in the field of social communication; some possibilities are:

1) To look more deeply into the potentialities of communication ways and means already embedded in a given culture and examine how these could be related to Christian content and approach.

2) To study if and how Christian values are already reflected, and to what extent, in the way of communicating between people and within cultures. The Church would question: How far did or do modern media influence them? Are they creating a positive “atmosphere” for Christianity for initial evangelization and thus preparing for inculturation?

3) To emphasize the “witness of life” as a means of communication and inculturation. Christian witness should always be in the mind of those who have a public responsibility and thus reflect the image of a Christian community to the wider world.

4) To explore all possibilities for media productions with Christian values and content on special occasions of the community.

5) To develop friendly relationships with communications specialists and media practitioners who are open to Christianity

and are willing to inculturate Christian values into their work. This also holds true for relations with artists, anthropologists and other persons specialized in communicating culture.

6) To promote mature inculturated and professionally trained Christians who can work in the media as performing artists, managers or also in the academe for research and teaching, especially in the field of religion and social communication.

The Church should explore other potential areas within the diverse Asia local contexts, with their myriad languages and cultures. In the third millennium an immense challenge awaits the Church in Asia in the field of social communication!

XI. CONSECRATED LIFE (Samuel H. Canilang¹²)

The call to inculturation is addressed to the whole Church. For religious who have realized the necessity and urgency of this task, there is a growing awareness that the future of consecrated life and its evangelizing mission depends on an authentic expression within different cultures and contexts.

According to the 1994 Synod on religious life, it is necessary to inculturate consecrated life itself, be it for its extension into all parts of the world as well as for the quality of the evangelical witness that it must offer to all peoples. Exhorting the religious to seriously commit themselves to this task, the Holy Father says in *Vita Consecrata*: "The challenge of inculturation ought to be taken up by consecrated persons as a call to fruitful cooperation with grace in facing cultural diversity" (VC 79).

Five years later, another helpful document appeared: *Starting Afresh from Christ: A Renewed Commitment to Consecrated Life in the Third Millennium* (SAC), here one finds the call for inculturation of consecrated life expressed anew with evident insistence:

The appeals expressed by the Pope regarding the whole Church are also applicable to consecrated life. "In the third

¹² Samuel H. Canilang, a Filipino Claretian (CMF), is professor at the Institute for Consecrated Life in Asia (ICLA) in Manila.

millennium, Christianity will have to respond ever more effectively to this *need for inculturation*. Christianity, while remaining completely true to itself, with unswerving faith to the proclamation of the Gospel and the tradition of the Church, will also reflect the different faces of the cultures and peoples in which it is received and takes root." A true inculturation in consecrated life and in the whole Church will result in a notable enrichment and a new season of spiritual and apostolic growth (SAC 19).

In his intervention at the 1998 Asian Synod, Bishop Osta of Patna, India, stressing the need for inculturation, said: "Only when the Church dialogues with the cultures of Asia, giving birth to Asian forms of Christian spirituality, prayer and worship, theology and life-style, will we grow as fully Asian and authentically Christian Churches" (OR-EE May 6, 1988, 6). This expresses the mind of many religious in Asia who believe that the Gospel, and likewise consecrated life which is a bearer of Gospel values, must be expressed not only in the external forms but in the structures of thought of non-western cultures.

For consecrated life in Asia, the task of inculturation has much to do with developing a spiritual life that speaks to the Asian "thirst for the divine." It must be capable of responding to the Asian people's need for spiritual guidance and also be creative of a lifestyle that expresses the Asian values of prayerfulness, simplicity, openness, plurality, and harmony.

Asian Experiences

In Asia, the Church's task of inculturation has not yet made significant inroads. This is implied by Cardinal Peter Shirayanagi of Tokyo, Japan in his intervention at the Asian Synod:

"Foreignness is one thing which characterizes all the local Churches in Asia. The main reason why Christianity has been viewed as alien is because the local Churches in the countries of Asia have, by and large, kept themselves aloof from the mainstream of the life of the people, their history, struggles and dreams. They have failed to identify themselves with the people" (OR-EE April 29, 1988, 13).

That consecrated life remains foreign to most Asians has been expressed by religious men and women from various parts of Asia such as Vietnam, Myanmar, Thailand, Indonesia, and China. The general impression is that consecrated life has not been deeply rooted yet in the Asian soil. The Church still cannot speak of an Indonesian religious life, Filipino religious life, or Indian religious life. Nevertheless, it must be acknowledged that religious all around Asia have taken certain concrete inculturation initiatives. A few examples reveal such endeavors.

In *Myanmar* the sisters normally use the yogi dress, which is identified with Buddhist women pilgrims. This makes them constantly aware that they are women of Myanmar leading a religious life. At the same time, this makes people easily recognize them as such. The religious of *Thailand* have taken initiatives to study Thai culture, with a view to integrating its values into their life. They have already adopted certain Buddhist practices such as contemplation, silence, and repetitive prayer. With a strong desire to contextualize their charism and life, religious congregations in *Vietnam* have revised their Constitutions; this step has brought about changes in their basic orientation and in their daily life. In Vietnam many sisters dress like the average Vietnamese women.

Sisters from Hebei Province in *China* said: "We cannot speak of a Chinese religious life as of the moment." They have seen the need for inculturation. Given the restrictions on the practice of religion in the country, the Chinese religious do not wear any distinctive clothing. They have to be as discreet as possible; they have to be "externally" Chinese. In *Indonesia* there are initiatives on the part of the religious to reach out to the different Indonesian tribes, entering into a dialogue of life and culture with them. They learn from one another, making their interculturality a source of personal and communitarian enrichment. As a concrete initiative of inculturation every community speaks the dialect of the village. In *India* earlier efforts were primarily directed to the external: religious habit, way of praying, liturgical celebration, house arrangement and decoration, and so on. The challenge now is to go deeper and focus on the integration of Indian human and spiritual values: simplicity, hospitality, harmony, silence, contemplation, mysticism, and the ashram way of life.

In the *Philippines* there have been initiatives in doing a theology of consecrated life that is culturally intelligible, situationally relevant and pastorally meaningful. This involves a re-articulation of the fundamental aspects of consecrated life – consecration, the evangelical vows, communion, charism, mission – using a language that is clear, meaningful, relevant, and experientially recognizable to the Filipino people. Using the Filipino concept of *loob* (person's innermost being), consecrated life as following of Christ is re-expressed as *pagsasaloob ng kalooban ni Hesus Kristo* (making part of one's innermost or most authentic being the gracious, fullness-of-life-oriented will of Jesus Christ). Chastity is understood in terms of the Filipino value of hospitality, the rich meaning of which is conveyed through the expression *tuloy po sa loob* (please, come in, please enter). Poverty is viewed in the perspective of the Filipino value of stewardship, the rich meaning of which is conveyed through the expressions *pangangalaga* (taking care), *pangangasiwa* (managing something, assuring that everything is in order), *pagkakatiwala* (entrusting), *pamahalaan* (managing something with authority). Obedience is interpreted in terms of *pag-usapan natin* (let's talk about it) and *pagkakasundo* (coming to agreement).

Pastoral-Theological Orientations

Inculturation as applied to consecrated life consists in a dialogue between consecrated life, as bearer of evangelical values, and the different cultures of the world. It is a profound form of dialogue, involving a process of incarnation that leads to transformation and renewal. It requires an in-depth study and discernment. According to *Starting Afresh from Christ*, inculturation includes “adaptation of forms of spirituality and apostolate, ways of governing, formation, use of resources, and material goods and the carrying out of mission” (SAC 19).

The following principles may guide the task of inculturation of consecrated life:

- 1) Inculturation requires that consecrated life be lived according to the socio-cultural context of the place so that it may be recognized by the people as a sign of God's loving presence in their midst.

2) Consecrated life must, first of all, acknowledge the presence of God in the people's consciousness, history and life-project.

3) Cultural values are to be carefully studied with the aim of discerning that which is good and true in them, and of giving them new motive and meaning through their integration in consecrated life.

4) It has to be taken into account that a culture, like the human person, needs to undergo conversion in spirit and truth (cf. Jn. 4:24). The integration of consecrated life with any culture always demands a qualitative transformation and transcendence of the cultural values assumed.

5) It must not be forgotten that consecrated life is based, above all, on universal Gospel values; it has essential elements such as consecration through the evangelical counsels, community life, and charism-mission.

6) The work of inculturation demands deep and broad theological knowledge, spiritual discernment, pastoral wisdom and prudence which are gifts of the Holy Spirit.

7) Since the local Church is the natural space of inculturation, consecrated life must enter into the dynamics of its spiritual, community and pastoral life.

8) Fidelity to humanity and to our times, fidelity to Christ and to the Gospel, fidelity to the Church and to its mission in the world, and fidelity to consecrated life and to the charism of one's Institute are all fundamental criteria for inculturation of religious life.

Concrete and Practical Initiatives

Based on the above-mentioned experiences, realities and orientations, inculturation of consecrated life involves mainly the aspects of spirituality, charism-mission, lifestyle, and formation.

Christian Spirituality. Inculturation must result in a "new" Christian spirituality. An important example, in this regard, is the Catholic ashram movement in India. The objective is to develop a Christian ashram way of life. Many ashrams conduct

courses on Indian spirituality, inculturation, yoga and related topics and give retreats. Many religious have been staying in these ashrams for a few days, weeks, or even months or years to make retreats or to participate in various courses or just to have an ashram-experience. Such exposure to ashram life has positively influenced many religious to think in terms of integrating various elements from ashram life into their communities.

The Institute's Charism. Inculturation of consecrated life will give birth to “new” charismatic embodiments: Indonesian Franciscan charism, Vietnamese Salesian charism, Indian Carmelite charism, Thai Redemptorist charism, and so forth. For example, the Claretians in Asia describe their project of charismatic inculturation in this way: “As Servants of the Word we commit ourselves to live a spirituality that integrates the spiritual traditions of the religions of this continent that stress a deeper awareness of God and the whole self in recollection, silence and prayer, flowering in openness to others, in compassion, non-violence and generosity. This would enable us to be not only authentic messengers but the message itself.”

Lifestyle and Practices. Inculturation in consecrated life means integration into one's charism and life the dialogue partner's cultural and spiritual values. This means having concrete, meaningful manifestations in the day-to-day life of the religious communities such as lifestyle, organization of community life, work, diet, clothing, and celebrations.

Formation. This area is very important so that the young religious are helped to acquire a clear and profound understanding of one's own culture, leading to a sound and balanced appreciation of the cultural values, customs and traditions of one's people. The formator must accompany the young religious in such a way so that in the process of identity development the cultural values and the charismatic values are dynamically and creatively integrated and interiorized.

Likewise, the young religious must be accompanied to develop an open, respectful, learning-and-dialogue-disposed attitude towards other cultures. This should be accompanied by developing skills in intercultural and interreligious dialogue.

Multi-cultural formation communities are definitely conducive milieus for formation in this way of life. Moreover, the inter-cultural setting best prepares the formands for actual religious community living, considering the fact that religious communities are becoming more and more multi-cultural.

XII. METHODS OF EVANGELIZATION (James H. Kroeger¹³)

Current Asian Reality

Concrete facts and statistics are most helpful in grasping the enormous challenges facing the Church in Asia. Current Asian statistics may surprise and startle us; they should shake our complacency. In a word, they concretize the task at hand: *mission and evangelization in modern day Asia*.

Asia, the world's largest and most populated continent, constitutes one third of the land area of the whole world (17,124,000 square miles) and is home to almost 60% of humanity. It is a continent of the young (about 40% are below 15 years of age); there are more than 30 mega-cities in Asia with populations ranging from 5 to 20 million. The nine most populous nations (in descending order) are: China, India, Indonesia, Japan, Bangladesh, Pakistan, Vietnam, Philippines, and Thailand. China's population exceeds one billion; India's populace crossed the one billion mark in the year 2000. With this massive bulk goes a wide variety of diversity and contrasts – physical, ethnic, social, economic, political, and religious.

Asia is a continent rich in non-Christian cultures. It is the homeland of three eminent world religions: Hinduism, Buddhism, and Islam; 85% of all the world's non-Christians are in Asia and they adhere to several of the great religions. Hinduism, born about 5,000 years ago, has about 650 million followers, most of them in India and neighboring countries. Buddhism is a religion and philosophy developed from Hinduism by Siddhartha Gautama, (the "Enlightened One"); it has 300 million followers, mostly in Asia.

¹³ James H. Kroeger, a Maryknoll Missionary (MM) in Asia, is President of the Philippine Association of Catholic Missiologists (PACM).

Islam, established by Muhammad in the seventh century, is a monotheistic religion; it incorporates elements of Judaic and Christian belief. Islam numbers some 700 million followers in Asia alone; the Catholics of Asia are slightly over 100 million. The two largest Islamic nations in the world are found in Asia: Indonesia and Bangladesh – each have well over 100 million Muslims. Other significant religious and philosophical-ethical systems in Asia are Confucianism, Taoism, Shintoism, as well as many indigenous, traditional belief systems.

The Catholic Church in Asia

Catholics worldwide constitute 17.2% of all people; all Christians are 33.1% of humanity. In Asia, Catholics (approximately 110+ million) represent only 2.9% of the nearly 3.5 billion Asians. Significantly, well over 50% of all Asian Catholics are found in one country alone – the Philippines. Thus, if one excludes the Philippines, Asia is only about one percent Catholic; this leaves very small minorities of Catholics in most Asian nations – a pivotal fact for the Church as she chooses her methods of evangelization.

The Church in Asia continues to grow. In 1988 there were 84.3 million Catholics; now they have reached 110+ million (an increase of about 25%). The number of priests rose from 27,700 to 32,291 during the same period. Asian countries with the most seminarians (given in descending order) are: India, Philippines, South Korea, and Vietnam. The vast majority (86%) of religious sisters is also Asian; countries with the largest number of indigenous sisters (in descending rank) are: India, Philippines, South Korea, Japan, Indonesia, and Vietnam. The Church in Asia is known for its commitment to education, health care, and social services.

Individual Country Statistics

Regarding the individual Asian nations in the FABC Region of Asia, abundant statistics are available; only two items are presented here. For each FABC country the *estimated population* in millions for the year 2000 is listed; this is followed by the *percentage of Catholics* in that nation: Bangladesh (145.8m/0.27%); Bhutan (1.8m/0.02%); Burma/Myanmar (48.8m/1.3%); Cambodia

(10.3m/0.02%); China (1,239.5m/0.5%); Hong Kong (6.9m/4.7%); India (1,000m/1.72%); Indonesia (202m/2.58%); Japan (127.7m/0.36%); Korea-North (22.6m / ?); Korea-South (47.2m/6.7%); Laos (6.2m/0.9%); Macau (0.5m 5%); Malaysia (22m/3%); Mongolia (2.5m/ ?); Nepal (23m/0.05%); Pakistan (142.6m/0.6%); Philippines (76.2m/81%); Singapore (3.1m/6.5%); Sri Lanka (20.8m/8%); Taiwan (22.1m/1.4%); Thailand (61.6m/0.4%); Vietnam (78.2m/6.1%).

These few secular and religious statistics already indicate that "being a missionary Church in Asia" demands creative, innovative, dialogical and *inculturated* approaches to Gospel proclamation. Local Churches must consider diverse cultural, political, social and economic realities as they envision a pastoral program of integral evangelization. The task before the local Churches is great; they must respond with enthusiasm and insight!

Pastoral-Theological Orientations

In this area I will draw attention to only *three* major factors that can effectively guide the methods of evangelization chosen by Asia's diverse local Churches. First, Churches must operate with a holistic and integral vision of their task. Secondly, much inspiration can be drawn from Asian pastoral sources, in particular, *Ecclesia in Asia* and the corpus of FABC reflection.

Evangelization, though for many Catholics a generally unfamiliar term, is to be (according to the Second Vatican Council as well as recent popes) at the center of the Church's identity and mission. Today the Church sees that the "principal elements" of mission and evangelization are: (1) presence and witness; (2) commitment to social development and human liberation; (3) liturgical life, prayer and contemplation; (4) interreligious dialogue; and, (5) proclamation and catechesis. In a word, the one evangelizing mission of the Church is comprised of several essential component elements; this is a Catholic vision of evangelization.

For Paul VI, who sees that "evangelizing means bringing the Good News into all strata of humanity" (EN 18), *Christian presence and witness of life* form the "initial act of evangelization" (EN 21). Community living as good neighbors based on faith convictions should naturally issue in a *commitment to social develop-*

ment and human liberation or genuine service of all humanity; this dimension of evangelization includes the whole area of social concerns, ranging from peace-building, education and health services, to promoting family life and good government. In Asia, Mother Teresa of Calcutta (beatified on October 19, 2003), known for her loving and selfless care of the poorest of the poor, is an “icon” of Christian presence, life, and service (EA 7d).

Integral evangelization will necessarily include *liturgical life, prayer and contemplation*. No one can effectively be engaged in the Church’s mission without a strong faith and prayer-life; inculturated evangelization needs holy men and women who themselves are rooted in their specific context and are on fire with the love of Christ. The Church in Asia accomplishes her mission in pluralistic and diverse cultures; she enters into *interreligious dialogue*, cooperating with the followers of the great religious traditions. Finally, in evangelization today there is the role of *explicit Gospel proclamation and catechesis*. This dimension of evangelization includes preaching, catechesis on Christian life, teaching the content of the faith; in a word, this means “telling the Jesus story.” When the Holy Spirit opens the door and when the time is opportune, Christians do tell the Jesus story, giving explicit witness and testimony to the faith.

Obviously, these five dimensions of an integral understanding of inculturated evangelization complement and reinforce each other. Note also that an older concept of evangelization has been set aside. No longer are the elements of social justice, interfaith dialogue, peace-building, education and health care, life-witness, simply “preparatory” to evangelization [*praeparatio evangelica*]; all five “principal elements” are constitutive of a holistic and integral understanding. Concomitant with this vision of evangelization, one finds a renewed emphasis on the missionary nature of the *entire* Church (cf. AG 2). Every baptized member of the Church is an evangelizer, whether layperson, ordained, or religious; all contribute to the inculturation of the Gospel. For each and every Christian, to live is to evangelize!

Ecclesia in Asia, the papal exhortation that emerged from the 1998 “Asian Synod,” contains many insights that can guide inculturated evangelization. “The great question now facing the

Church in Asia is *how* to share with our Asian brothers and sisters what we treasure as the gift containing all gifts, namely, the Good News of Jesus Christ" (EA 19c). The Church is deeply "aware of the complexity of so many different situations in Asia" (EA 20b). Evangelization "needs to follow a *pedagogy* which will introduce people step-by-step" or gradually to the Gospel and Jesus (EA 20f). It will employ "narrative methods akin to Asian cultural forms" (EA 20f), that appeal to "the sensibilities of Asian peoples" (EA 20g). Images of Jesus that are "intelligible to Asian minds and cultures" (EA 20g) are needed; Jesus as "the Healer, the Liberator, the Spiritual Guide, the Enlightened One, the Compassionate Friend of the Poor" (EA 20g) will resonate with Asian "cultural patterns and ways of thinking" (EA 20h). *Ecclesia in Asia* mentions other examples that present the challenge of inculturation (EA 21a-d) and some key areas of inculturation (EA 22a-e).

The FABC corpus of theological reflection is also a rich source for inculturated Gospel proclamation. This writer finds that the document which emerged from the First FABC Plenary Assembly (Taiwan: 1974) still retains a valid, fundamental – even programmatic – vision of inculturated evangelization. The final statements of FABC V (Bandung: 1990) and FABC VII (Bangkok: 2000) are also particularly enlightening. Readers could profitably peruse the *FABC Papers Comprehensive Index (1976-2001)* which is published as *FABC Papers 100* for additional insights, many of which are country-specific and practical. Likewise, the development of FABC thought on "local Church" is an enlightening journey (cf. *FABC Papers 107*, 3-22).

Concrete and Pastoral Initiatives

An observant reader will notice that this book contains many contributions addressing the theme: "Continuing Inculturation Today." If one is searching for concrete, inculturated methods of evangelization, they can be found in *all* the contributions by the various authors. In short, within an integral approach to evangelization, one can identify *inculturated methods of evangelization* in all the different thematic contributions. This writer will now briefly make some few suggestions that fall under the category of *explicit Gospel proclamation and catechesis*.

To bring the Gospel into all strata of Asian society of the third millennium, the local Churches will need to employ skillfully the means of social communication. Media is a powerful tool to transmit the message and values of the Gospel; hopefully, media concomitantly fosters authentic cultural values in the process. There is a *caveat* here, because media can promote “de-culturation” by heavy reliance on already existing western programming.

Evangelization programs of the Church can profitably employ the traditional folk arts inherent in the culture: song, dance, drama, narratives, and the like. In the local Church of the Philippines (this probably remains true in most Asia countries), song is an extraordinarily effective means of catechesis. Artists who produce good religious and liturgical songs do as much to transmit the faith as do priests and catechists!

Popular religiosity and devotions are effective in communicating Christian faith. In the post-Vatican II era there may have been a loss when popular devotions were minimized. Liturgical renewal, focus on Sacred Scripture, adult catechesis, and similar efforts to renew the Church have been much needed and appreciated. However, popular devotions, renewed with proper theological emphases coming from the Council, have an important role in keeping ordinary Catholics in the Church. One marvelous example from the Philippines is the novena to Our Lady of Perpetual Help; this novena has been reworked to reflect the Mariology of the Council and Paul VI's *Marialis Cultus*. Weekly it draws millions to the Church and the Eucharist. It stands as a prime example of an inculturated method of evangelization.

Finally, there is an urgent need for Theological-Pastoral Formation with an authentic Asian face. The heavy reliance on Western theological and spiritual materials in seminaries and houses of formation still continues in many places. Asian authors and theologians, as well as the materials emanating from the FABC, are still used only minimally in many places. The potential impact of the FABC has still to be realized in this area. The local Churches in Asia still have a long journey to make along the pathways of inculturation. Yet, let us not forget that the journey has begun and has made some very significant progress.

XIII. CHURCH LEADERSHIP AND GOVERNANCE

(Orlando B. Quevedo¹⁴)

The Asian Context

The areas of theology, scripture, liturgy and spirituality are the main trajectory of inculturation efforts in Asia and almost exclusively so. There does not seem to be any extensive work being done on how Church leadership and governance could be inculturated or whether in fact they should be.

It is perennial Catholic belief that authority in the Church is founded on the authority of Jesus himself. Before he ascended to heaven, he shared this authority with his eleven apostles: "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go, therefore, make disciples of all the nations; baptize them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teach them to observe all the commands that I gave you. And know that I am with you always; yes, to the end of time" (Mt. 28:18-19). The apostles were endowed with spiritual authority to evangelize and to require obedience to the commands of Jesus. In this Christian community their authority was unchallenged, and Peter held a pre-eminent position among them (Acts 1:15; 2:14ff; 2:42; 3:1ff; 4:33).

Authority was related to the various gifts that the Holy Spirit gave to the Church. A few were apostles, some were prophets, others were healers, teachers, etc. (cf. 1 Cor. 12:4-31; Eph. 4:11; Rom. 12:6-8). These gifts corresponded to various forms of service intended to build up the Christian community. Authority (*exousia*) as a ministry of service is based on the teaching and example of Christ himself, as when he washed the disciples' feet: "I have given you a model to follow, so that as I have done for you, you should also do" (Jn. 13:13-15; cf. Mk. 10:43-46).

While the Church is most surely spiritual and divine, as a human community it requires authority in order to preserve unity, discipline, and identity. Over the ages, the authority of the bishops as the successors of the apostles, took on an official, public and

¹⁴ Orlando B. Quevedo, a Filipino Oblate of Mary Immaculate (OMI), is Archbishop of the Archdiocese of Cotabato, Philippines.

in a certain sense a secular dimension as they shepherded the faithful, administered justice, and defended the poor and the needy. Secularity developed even more as bishops and popes exercised their rightful moral and religious authority in the secular sphere, even confronting princes and kings. Thus, spiritual and legal power began to reside in the same offices.

Vatican II changed the emphasis placed on hierarchical authority. It reiterated the biblical emphasis of authority as service. “That office, however, which the Lord committed to the pastors of his people, is, in the strict sense of the term, a service, which is called very expressively in sacred scripture a *diakonia* or ministry” (LG 24; cf. LG 27; Acts 1:8; 2:1ff; 9:15). The Council also emphasized the Church as people of God, the Church as communion, the notions of episcopal collegiality, co-responsibility and lay participation. The collegial responsibility of bishops is rooted in their episcopal consecration and in the hierarchical communion they have among themselves and with the head of the college, the pope. Collegiality is also “affective,” and refers to the attitude of mutual interaction and collaboration within the college of bishops, head and members, on the international, national, and regional levels. In a derived way, effective “collegiality” is also expected in the local Church through presbyteral and pastoral councils.

Vatican II renewal brought in a new organizational culture within the Church. As a result, two organizational cultures are in tension. The old emphasizes institution, hierarchy and the power of the ordained minister in the Church. The emergent organizational culture more insistently emphasizes the notions of people of God, communion, participation, and co-responsibility. The old organizational culture with its corresponding non-participatory style of leadership and governance still prevails in many dioceses and parishes in Asia. A participatory leadership paradigm is beginning to take hold in many places, but it largely depends on personal interests, inclinations and skills.

Pastoral-Theological Orientations

The description of the current reality in Asia and the assertions made above by no means indicates that no efforts are being

made to inculturate Church governance in Asia. The FABC vision of "a new way of being Church in Asia" includes a vision of becoming an inculturated Church, a servant-Church and a participatory Church.

In 1977 the Asian Colloquium on Ministries in the Church (ACMC) urged: "The local Christian community leaders have also to develop a style of leadership that fits the culture, attitudes and values of their local situation" (ACMC 46). The Fourth FABC Plenary Assembly in Tokyo in 1986 on the laity pleaded: "The principles of communion, collegiality, and co-responsibility stressed by Vatican II demand that we re-examine our ecclesial structures.... [The renewal of inner ecclesial structures] consists in creating the right atmosphere of communion, collegiality and co-responsibility for an active and fuller lay initiation, participation, and action" [FABC IV 4.5.2]. The reflections of the Second Bishops' Institute for the Lay Apostolate (BILA) in 1986 reinforced this appeal to "move towards becoming a Church that is essentially a communion of love and mutuality. Because the clergy who are called to a position of leadership could often tend to dominate, it is they who should initiate a change in traditional attitudes. They could be more creative and daring in entrusting more responsibility to the laity" (BILA II 4).

It is in Basic Ecclesial Communities and among indigenous peoples that the inculturation of pastoral leadership and governance is commonly found. For instance, in the Archdiocese of Cotabato, Southern Philippines, the following striking features of the leadership mindset of Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate in relation to the indigenous Dulangan Manobos are noteworthy; the missionaries seek to promote: A deep critical awareness of the general features of Dulangan Manobo culture; A recognition of the central leadership role that traditional tribal elders and religious leaders (shamans) play in the life of the community; An acknowledgement of the overarching influence of cultural beliefs, myths, and values on community, land, property, law, and hierarchy; A critical openness to adapt wherever appropriate the process of integral evangelization, including leadership, to the ways of the community.

From the stories that the missionaries tell about Jesus as Healer, Leader, and Teacher, the Dulangan Manobos remember:

the kindness and compassion of Jesus, his generosity, his being with people, his respect for human dignity especially of the poor, his ability to teach the poor beyond what they materially need. These qualities correspond to the cultural values that Dulangan Manobos prize most highly in leaders.

Another positive feature of inculturation in Asia is a conscious attempt to update Church leadership and governance styles. In the long running FABC series of Leadership Training for Bishops, one finds that discussions and workshops on pastoral planning, pastoral governance, and participatory leadership and their interaction with the prevailing organizational culture are regular features.

Concrete and Pastoral Initiatives

The locus of inculturation is the local community. Led by the Holy Spirit, the local community simply lets the gospel interact with the local culture, with its ethos, values, beliefs, customs, discipline, laws and norms, its social structures. The gospel will critique rather forthrightly anti-gospel values, such as caste-hierarchy and the inferior human dignity accorded to women in some Asian cultures.

The following suggestions on the process of inculturating Church leadership and governance will consider, as a type of “case-study,” the interaction between Filipino culture and the Church organizational culture in the area of leadership and governance rooted in Vatican II. This is an attempt to describe the process that is going on in Basic Ecclesial Communities where the most positive development of inculturation in Asia is taking place.

A *first pastoral level* in the process of inculturation is critical awareness of the main cultural values that are to be considered in Church governance. This level requires value identification and clarification. Such a cultural analysis was described by the Philippine Bishops in their Pastoral Exhortation on Philippine Culture (PEPC), issued on January 25, 1999.

Filipino culture regards attachment and loyalty to family, nuclear and extended, as “a central organizing principle of Philippine social structure and behavior” (PEPC 4). The power of

influence (*lakas*) depends on one's connection with the people on top and their families. A paternalistic patron-client relationship results, as is found in Philippine politics. Highly personalistic Filipino culture fosters "social ties, on a face-to-face interaction" (PEPC 19). Therefore, group solidarity depends very much on "interpersonal ties based on reciprocity and mutual trust.... (S)ocial behavior is very much oriented towards keeping interpersonal relations running smoothly" (PEPC 19). *Utang-na-loob* [debt of gratitude], *hiya* [shame] and *pakikisama* [fraternity, sociability] are operative social norms. These values are neither good nor bad in themselves, depending on the context in which they are operative.

Emerging from the 1986 People Power Revolution are values such as a growing attitude toward democratic "participation by the people and decentralization in the sense of bringing government closer to the people," insistence on "consultative processes and transparency" (PEPC 30), "pro-poor" attitudes of some leaders that indicate a "growing consciousness of social inequalities and the need to do something about them" (PEPC 33). One can see in this pro-poor attitude the influence of yet another cultural value, *awa*, or compassion, particularly for the poor, the powerless and helpless. As a value conjoined to *lakas*, *awa* is expected of those placed over the community.

A *second pastoral level* in inculturating Church leadership and governance is a deculturation process. This might seem a contradiction. But, given the prevalent organizational culture in the Church of high clericalism and low participation, inculturation denotes deculturation. It is a process of purifying the old prevailing paternalistic, authoritarian, family-oriented, personalistic, cultural values so as to make them open to new community-based participatory values. Attitudinal change is most strongly resisted. Patient and persevering value transformation is needed.

A *third pastoral level* in the process of inculturation is the dynamic interaction between, on the one hand, Gospel and Vatican II values of leadership and governance and, on the other hand, Filipino cultural values. The result should be a seamless and enriched unity of both Gospel and Vatican II cultural values and Filipino cultural values. Thus, for instance, the interaction between the cultural value of family-centeredness and *pakikisama* and

the Vatican II value of community. Or, the interaction between the value of *lakas-awa* and the Gospel value of servant-leadership and option for the poor. This third level in the inculturation process is one of intensive value formation in leadership and governance through the various approaches, formal and informal, of catechesis and education. It should follow a spiral process of praxis-reflection.

The inculturation process of pastoral leadership and governance is now taking place in Basic Ecclesial Communities in Asia, and in parishes and dioceses that are BEC-based (consult the reports of various FABC initiatives of the BILAs and AsIPA [Asian Integral Pastoral Approach] sessions through the years). In these BEC clusters of families, family orientation, face-to-face interaction, co-responsibility, participation, transparency and accountability are most palpably demonstrated. With pastors guiding the process, due respect is given to the fundamental authoritative, not authoritarian, role that bishops and priests have in the community by sacred ordination. The participatory ethos in a Church of Communion is systematically developed. Leadership and governance empower people for the common good. It is transformational in view of the Kingdom of justice, truth, peace and love.

XIV. LIFE-STYLE (Sebastian Painadath¹⁵)

The Asian Context

Christian presence in Asia has to resonate with the Asian religious psyche; otherwise it will continue to remain a remnant of the colonial past. Over the centuries the mode of Christian life and thought has been imported from the West or from the Christian Orient. Local Churches are today moved by the Spirit of Christ to strike deep roots in the local Asian culture, to become incarnated in the local socio-cultural matrix. This process of continued incarnation of the divine Logos has to take place primarily in people's way of life. Inculturation in the areas of liturgy, theology and pastoral care has to emerge from a genuine process of inculturation of life itself. It is from the experience of a lived praxis of faith

¹⁵ Sebastian Painadath, an Indian Jesuit (SJ), is founder of the Sameeksha ("to see together") Ashram in Kelady, Kerala, India.

that creative theological reflection and elevating liturgical rites evolve.

The search for an inculturated way of life brings one to the question of the primary values which should shape the mode of Christian life. These values have to be discovered in the correlation between Gospel and culture, between the Kingdom proclamation of Jesus and the sublime ethos of local Asian cultures.

Ecclesia in Asia notes: "The people of Asia take pride in their religious and cultural values such as love of silence and contemplation, simplicity, harmony, detachment, non-violence, the spirit of hard work, discipline, frugal living, the thirst for learning and philosophical enquiry. They hold dear the values of respect for life, compassion for all beings, closeness to nature, filial piety towards parents, elders and ancestors, and a highly developed sense of community. In particular, they hold the family to be a vital source of strength, a closely knit community with a powerful sense of solidarity. Asian peoples are known for their spirit of religious tolerance and peaceful co-existence.... Asia has often demonstrated a remarkable capacity for accommodation and a natural openness to the mutual enrichment of peoples in the midst of a plurality of religions and cultures (EA 6c).

Signposts of an Inculturated Life-Style

Considering the dynamics of Asian culture, five values are of great significance in shaping the Christian presence in the local Churches of Asia; these are contemplation, renunciation, compassion, ecological concern, and interreligious harmony.

Contemplation. The search for contemplation is a basic characteristic of the Asian religious heritage. The sages and seekers of Asia search the divine primarily within themselves: in the cave of the heart (Hindus), in the intuitive *buddhi* (Buddhists), in the garden of the soul (Islamic Sufis). The divine is experienced as the ultimate subject of consciousness, not merely as the object of veneration. As a result, a rich heritage of contemplative exercises evolved on the Asian soil.

Christian existence in Asia has to be enriched by this spiritual heritage. The methods of meditation, the exercises of contem-

plation, the symbols of interiorization, the mantras of concentration and mystical consciousness that developed over the centuries in Asia have to fertilize Christian spiritual life and life-style. Without genuine mystical experience Christians cannot with credibility share their God-experience in Asian countries.

Pope John Paul II has asserted that “the future of mission depends to a great extent on contemplation. In Asia, home to great religions where individuals and entire peoples are thirsting for the divine, the Church is called to be a praying Church, deeply spiritual even as she engages in immediate human and social concerns. All Christians need a true missionary spirituality of prayer and contemplation” (EA 23a).

The Asian bishops (FABC) have noted: “The prayer-life of our Churches should ‘take over the riches of our nations, which have been given to Christ as an inheritance,’ especially those ways of prayer which have been developed by the native genius of our people and have played an important and honored role in shaping the traditions of our lands” (FABC II: Briefer Statement 22).

Similarly, the FABC writes: “We live in Asia, the home of great contemplative traditions. The Catholic Church is often perceived as not sharing in these contemplative traditions, as being primarily concerned with the external, with rituals and festivals. Central, however, to the Catholic tradition is incarnation, sacramentality ... and finding the mystery of the Divine in everyday reality – a deeply contemplative task – and then celebrating that mystery (FABC V 2.3.4).

Renunciation. An authentic religious person in Asia is primarily a person of renunciation. The sages of Hinduism, the monks of Buddhism, the teachers of Taoism, the *sufis* of Islam, and the gurus of Sikhism have always been persons of radical renunciation. They lived an ascetical life with the minimum requirements avoiding all sorts of material comforts. This does not mean a negative attitude toward life. On the contrary, renunciation makes one interiorly free and mature, compassionate and concerned about others. Through renunciation one creates space for the divine Spirit to transform the life of persons and of society as well. “Renounce and enjoy life” – this is a basic teaching of our sages (*Isa Upanishad* 1).

Jesus lived a life of radical renunciation. He kept nothing in possession and hence he could move about with a tremendous inner freedom trusting fully in the love of the Father. "He who holds on to his life will lose it, he who loses it for the Gospel gains it" (Mk. 8:35). The first generation of the Church as the community of the disciples of Jesus emerged as a community of evangelical renunciation (Acts 2:44-45). Gradually the Church got settled in the securities of earthly goods and power. This is the image of the Church that is being projected on the Asian soil. With the values and structures inherited from the Greco-Roman traditions, the Church cannot with credibility share the liberative message of the Crucified Christ in Asia. The local Churches need to be baptized in the ascetical traditions of Asia. This would mean that Christians in Asia live out a counter-cultural life-style in opposition to the values of consumerism and hedonism.

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

Compassion. What is the hallmark of a God-realized person? The Asian sages will unanimously give the answer: compassion. *Daya* (Hinduism), *karuna* (Buddhism), mercy (Islam), and cosmic feeling (Taoism) are the values constantly upheld by our spiritual masters. The one who experiences the divine within oneself feels the divine presence vibrating in all beings. Such an expansion of consciousness makes one resonate compassionately with every being. "Compassion is the Buddha-nature inherent in every reality" (*Mahaparinirvanasutta* 259). The suffering of the other becomes suffering for oneself. A compassionate person is deeply engaged in the transformation of social structures. The great compassionate sages of Asia protested against dehumanising structures like caste based marginalization and the discrimination against women.

Jesus intends us Christians to be the compassionate face of God turned towards humanity. Through him the poor experience how compassionately God accepts human persons. This image of the compassionate God has to be presented in Asia. We need to share with our fellow seekers our encounter with the Jesus, who washes the feet of his disciples, the Christ of kenosis, the God of compassion.

An Asian view holds that “Jesus’ deep intimacy with the Father and the resultant commitment in compassion to the poor would readily evoke a positive response in the Asian sensitivity to the divine. Hence credible evangelization demands from us Christians in Asia a life of authentic contemplation and genuine compassion” (FABC: FEISA I, 7.4.1).

Ecological Concern. Ours is an age of acute eco-crisis. The exploitative attitudes dominating the industrial culture have led to the depletion of natural resources and pollution of the environment. The future of humanity itself is under threat; we need to return to an eco-sensitive way of life. The basic principles of the primal and scriptural religions of Asia can provide great inspiration for this manner of living: “The earth is Mother for we are being fed by the earth” (*Atharva Veda* 12.1.12).

The divine Logos became flesh; this is the foundation of Christian faith. Incarnation is not the descent of God from above, but the unfolding of the divine presence from within the womb of the earth, for the Logos has been immanent in this universe: everything has been created in and through the Logos; in him was life (Jn. 1:1-5). Incarnation is therefore the unfolding of the divine dimension of the earth. Faith in the incarnate God demands an attitude of “seeing God in all things and all things in God.”

John Paul II has written: “Blatant disrespect for the environment will continue as long as the earth and its potential are seen merely as objects of immediate use and consumption, to be manipulated with an unbridled desire for profit.... It is the Creator’s will that man should treat nature not as a ruthless exploiter but as an intelligent and responsible administrator.... All have a moral duty to care for the environment, not only for their own good but also for the good of future generations” (EA 41a).

A Culture of Interreligious Harmony. Asia is the cradle of the great religions of humanity. This continent has not only given birth to different religions, but preserved them throughout the centuries. The different stages of the spiritual evolution of humanity are still vibrant in the religious expressions of the Asian countries, from primal symbols to high mystical experience. In general, believers of diverse religions live peacefully together in Asian villages. The Asian religious psyche resonates with the perception of plurality and the consequent attitude of tolerance. "There is only one all-pervading and all-transcending divine reality, but the ways to experience it are rich and diverse"; this is the basic principle of Asian religions (cf. *Rig Veda* 1.164.46). An abiding sense of the incomprehensibility of the divine mystery and of the fragmentary character of human perception permeates the Asian way of thinking. Hence, the Asian religious psyche cannot imbibe dogmatic fixations and absolute claims of truth.

Taking inspiration from Jesus, we Christians in Asia have to promote a culture of genuine interreligious relationship, dialogue and collaboration in our localities. In Asia Christianity cannot just exist as a structured religion, but it should evolve as the effective symbol of the Kingdom of God proclaimed by Jesus. We need to respect believers of other religions as co-pilgrims and journey with them, sharing our Christ-experience and becoming enriched through their spiritual experiences. The formation of basic *human* communities at the grass-roots level could be an effective Asian form of religious coexistence.

The writings of John Paul II are very rich in providing vision and guidelines for building a culture of interreligious harmony. "Interreligious dialogue at its deepest level is always a *dialogue of salvation*, because it seeks to discover, clarify and understand better the signs of the age-long dialogue which God maintains with humanity" (Rome, November 13, 1992).

"By dialogue, we let God be present in our midst, for as we open ourselves in dialogue to one another, we also open ourselves to God" (Madras, February 5, 1986).

"Dialogue ... is demanded by deep respect for everything that has been brought about in human beings by the Spirit who blows where he wills" (RM 56).

“God would like the developing history of humanity to be a fraternal journey in which we accompany one another towards the transcendent goal which He sets for us” (Assisi, October 27, 1986).

A clear vision and commitment to interreligious dialogue was enunciated by the Asian bishops in their inaugural assembly with Paul VI in Manila in 1970: “We pledge ourselves to an open, sincere and continuing dialogue with our brothers of other great religions of Asia, that we may learn from one another how to enrich ourselves spiritually and how to work more effectively together on our common task of total human development” (ABM Resolution 12). This same commitment remains firm in the Asian local Churches until this present day.

XV. LITURGY AND SACRAMENTS (Paul Puthanangady¹⁶)

Inculturation is concerned with every aspect of the Church’s life. The richness of the Gospel must be expressed in all its variety in all areas of Christian life. Since liturgy is the supreme manifestation of the mystery of the Church and most efficacious means of fulfilling her mission, celebration of the liturgy in indigenous forms is of paramount importance. Through a process of dialogue and exchange between the Gospel and culture, local expressions of worship emerge. Thus, inculturation of liturgy and sacraments becomes an integral element in the whole process of the encounter between the Gospel and culture.

The Asian Context

Historically, Jesus did not bequeath to his disciples any particular ritual system. In fact, he abolished all the existing rituals and initiated a worship based on symbols. He communicated to his disciples the Mystery of His death and resurrection, which they were to proclaim in word and deed, making use of the languages and symbols of the peoples to whom they were sent. Our Catholic liturgical tradition is made up of the symbolic expressions of the Mystery of Christ by the different cultural groups that have come into contact with the Gospel in the first

¹⁶ Paul Puthanangady, an Indian Salesian (SDB), is professor at Kristu Jyoti College, Krishnarajapuram, Bangalore, India.

centuries. That is why we do not have one Christian liturgy, but many Christian liturgies, representing the various cultural areas of early Christendom (e.g. Antiochian Liturgy, Chaldean Liturgy, Alexandrian Liturgy, Roman Liturgy).

Unfortunately, this way of continuing the liturgical tradition was not followed at the time of the evangelization of the peoples of Asia, Africa, and America during the colonial period. During this time, liturgical forms which had their origin in a particular culture in the West (e.g. Rome) were transplanted into the new areas that were evangelized. This resulted in ritualizing rather than symbolizing the Mystery.

There is a difference between rituals and symbols. The former is fixed and conditioned by external prescriptions without taking into account the context of the persons who perform them in a uniform manner in all situations and circumstances. The latter, however, emerge from the culture and life-style of the persons who perform them, and they vary according to situations and circumstances.

As mentioned earlier, the methodology of evangelization during the colonial period was not so much through proclamation as through instruction. It was not so much the sharing of an experience of Jesus the risen Lord; its focus was information regarding Jesus and his teachings. It was not so much the communication of the Mystery of Christ; it centered more on the religion of Christ. As a result, worship and other religious practices were performed more as rituals than as symbols; consequently, inculturation of worship was not a felt need. In addition, there has been a certain resistance to liturgical and sacramental inculturation in many parts of Asia.

With Vatican II, there has been a change in the understanding of liturgy. The appreciation of symbols and rituals and the consequent need of liturgical inculturation, which have been enunciated above, have entered into the way of thinking of the Church, but it has remained mainly within the understanding of theologians and the elite Christians. The ordinary faithful were not sufficiently enlightened on the need of inculturation of Christian worship. At times, some imprudent pastors have introduced changes in this regard without instructing the people

about their significance. In other words, liturgical inculturation has been either not introduced in our communities or has been introduced without preparation and proper catechesis.

The negative approach to other religions and their practices, which was very much inculcated in the pre-Vatican II period, has made many Christians suspicious of certain forms of inculturation, especially when they were taken from the worship symbols of these religions. The teaching of Vatican II regarding other faiths and the changed attitude which the Church has assumed in her relationship with them, have not been sufficiently assimilated by many faithful.

Finally, it must be admitted that there have been experiments in the field of inculturation without sufficient expertise and knowledge on the part of some promoters of inculturation. They have not followed the genuine principles of inculturation found in the authentic tradition of the Church and formulated in the documents of the Church. As a result, they have lost credibility both before the Church authorities and before the people. This has affected the process of liturgical inculturation adversely.

Pastoral-Theological Orientations

In examining sources for inculturation this presentation limits itself to two types of documents: one from the universal Church (Roman documents), the other from the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences (FABC).

Although the documents of Vatican II promote and encourage inculturation in all areas of Church life, the Council has given precise directives for inculturation only in the field of liturgy. In fact, according to the Liturgical Constitution, *Sacrosanctum Concilium* (SC), one of the norms for liturgical renewal initiated by Vatican II is "adapting the liturgy to the temperament and traditions of peoples" (cf. SC 37-40). Examination of these articles can be of help in implementing them in our Asian Churches. In summary, one finds four guidelines: the Church accepts in principle the inculturation of liturgy (37); the substantial unity of the Roman Rite should be preserved (38); guidelines are given for simple inculturation of liturgy (39); and, additional guidelines are supplied for the more profound or radical inculturation of liturgy (40).

Conferences of Bishops are authorized to initiate the process according to the following guidelines: (1) A preliminary study of the elements, which can be admitted into divine worship from traditions and cultures of individual peoples is to be made. (2) A draft text of the inculturated liturgy is formulated. (3) This draft text is to be approved by the Conference of Bishops. (4) This draft text is to be approved by the Apostolic See for experimentation for a determined period. (5) Experimentation takes place in certain groups. (6) These experimentations are evaluated and a definite text is re-drafted. (7) The re-drafted text is approved by the Conference of Bishops. (8) The text is then sent for the approval of Apostolic See. (9) After the approval of the Apostolic See it is introduced as the official liturgical text in the local Church.

Turning to the FABC perspective, one admits that FABC documents generally do not contain any significant discussion on liturgical inculturation beyond some brief references and allusions. There is, however, one important reference on the need for liturgical inculturation in *Theses on the Local Church* (TLC) issued in 1990 by the FABC Office of Theological Concerns. This pivotal reference deserves lengthy quotation (TLC 8.3):

“A very important area of inculturation is the liturgy of the Christian community. Liturgy expresses the faith of the Church (*lex orandi lex credendi*). Liturgy must be the outcome of the faith-experience in a particular cultural environment. In turn, such liturgical experience should flower in a Christian life that is fully inculturated. Therefore, true liturgical inculturation of the Christian community cannot be done from without and introduced through an external and artificial process; it should spontaneously spring forth from the life of the faith lived fully in the context of the culture and the life-realities of the people. Nevertheless, given the long estrangement of the liturgical life of the Asian local Churches from their cultural traditions, at this stage of transition to fully inculturated ecclesial life, certain liturgical experiments and models are very legitimate and necessary in order to facilitate the process of inculturation by the whole community. These experiments, however, should not reflect only the concern of a few experts, but rather should be in dialogue with the whole Christian community.”

From this statement several conclusions can be drawn with regard to the position of FABC in the matter of liturgical inculturation:

1) Liturgical inculturation should be the expression of the faith experience of the Asian Christian communities in their particular cultural contexts. Consequently, it cannot be effected through the action of an authority from outside the community. In other words it is the responsibility of the Asian Churches.

2) The existing liturgies of the Christian communities have been imposed from outside; hence they do not have much connection with the cultures and the life-situations of the peoples of Asia. The Christian communities of Asia today are, to some extent, accustomed to liturgical celebrations that are unrelated to their culture and life situations. In other words, they have unconsciously accepted this estrangement of their liturgy from their culture. As a result, their faith experience is superficial and does not affect their life very deeply.

3) It is good to introduce some elements of inculturation in the liturgy from outside in order to evoke and provoke people's faith experience in their cultural context. In this way they can experience their faith in a more existential and profound manner, which in its turn will affect their lives more deeply. However, in doing this, care should be taken so that these experiments, introduced from outside, should reflect the faith of the community from within their cultural milieu; they should not be merely the creation of some experts without any reference to the community.

4) Finally, one notes that there are references to this subject of liturgical inculturation in various other FABC documents. However, none of them give concrete guidelines with regard to the procedure to be followed in this matter. This may be due to the fact that the Asian local Churches, despite many similarities, are not homogeneous, and therefore the FABC can speak only in general terms and cannot address itself specifically to concrete situations.

Concrete and Practical Guidelines

One of the first things to realize with regard to changes in liturgy and sacraments is that it is not a mere replacement of one

set of rituals with another set, nor is it a process by which certain theological or sociological concepts are translated into gestures and postures. Just as every religious ritual has a mythological background, every liturgical symbol has a Mystery that it is trying to express. The medium through which the mystery becomes symbol is experience. Hence the experience of the Mystery includes the experience of Christ, the risen Lord present in the midst of the people with their culture and life-realities. The liturgical symbol, therefore, has to emerge both from the experience of Christ (faith experience) and from the experience of the people (involvement in the milieu). This is a gradual process that emerges from within a believing human community living and struggling in a particular context.

One should take into account the natural expressions of religiosity of a people (i.e. popular religiosity). Liturgical symbols have had their origin in most cases from the symbols used in popular religiosity. Evidently, these could be at times mixed with superstition and error. Hence, these should be subjected to a delicate process of careful Gospel scrutiny before they are integrated into liturgy.

A proper understanding of the Christian Mystery is required. This should not consist in a mere intellectual explanation, but it should be the result of an experiential encounter with the content of the Mystery. This is what is known as an adequate catechesis before introducing inculturation.

It is necessary to take into account the liturgical traditions of the Church, because the liturgical celebration should have a certain continuity with that of the universal Church both in time and in space, because that which is celebrated is the same everywhere and at all times. But this continuity is maintained not by imitation of the past or by copying the liturgy of another Church, but by giving new expressions to the same Mystery. For this it may be necessary to borrow from other religious traditions as the early Church did.

In order to make liturgical inculturation effective, it is necessary to introduce changes in an atmosphere that is conducive to experience at all levels, physical, emotional and spiritual. No liturgical inculturation is born from the study desk of an

expert; it has its origin in the context of the celebration of a community. Care should be taken that the celebration of the liturgy and sacraments be related to the life situation of the people. All types of dichotomy between liturgy and life should be avoided.

It is necessary to be attentive to the sociological implications of certain symbols. Some of them may, at times, be intellectually adequate and harmless, but they can be socially discriminative. For example, in India the Dalits can object to certain symbols adopted from the tradition of classical Hinduism, because they express domination and oppression by the higher castes. Similarly the use of Sanskrit, which is considered as the language of the Brahmins, can be offensive to the Dalits.

There should be a common policy and a common approach in this matter throughout the country and in the dioceses. The priests, religious and lay leaders should be conscientized on the need of liturgical and sacramental inculturation in the implementation of the pastoral policy of the Church. There should be a time-to-time evaluation of the changes that are introduced. This will help to correct mistakes and help all to follow a proper pastoral pedagogy in the implementation of inculturation.

Conclusion. Liturgy and Sacraments are two areas in which the ordinary faithful experience their Christian religiosity in a personal manner. Inculturation of these two areas can help them deepen their faith experience and lead them to translate that experience into more committed Christian praxis. Hence, the pastors should consider this as a very important area of their pastoral concern and implement it with the zeal and prudence, which this delicate sector of Christian life requires.

XVI. FEASTS AND FESTIVALS (Agapit Tirkey¹⁷)

What is most distinctive in the Asian context is the fact that Asia is home to nearly all the great religions of the world. Therefore, it is important for the Church in Asia to be aware of this socio-religious context in which she is to carry out her mission.

¹⁷ Agapit Tirkey, an Indian Jesuit (SJ), serves with the All India Coordinating Forum of the Adivasi/Indigenous Peoples (AICFAIP).

She has to enter into a profound dialogue with Asian cultures and religions, becoming truly inculturated in theology, liturgy and spirituality in order to live and announce the message of Jesus Christ. Such dialogue and inculturation call for fidelity to the Christian faith, respect for the religious beliefs of others, as well as sincerity, discernment, courage, prudence and patience on the part of all concerned.

Throughout Asian countries one finds many peoples who are the first or original inhabitants of a particular locality or region. These "native," "tribal," "indigenous" peoples possess their own cultures, languages, worldviews, values, and arts. In India, for example, there are at least thirty-two dioceses where *Adivasis* (original inhabitants) constitute the major Christian population. These dioceses are mostly in the north-central, eastern and north-eastern parts of India; these tribals belong mainly to (i) the Austro-Asiatic (ii) the Dravidian, and (iii) the Monkhmer linguistic groups. They call themselves *Adivasis* or original inhabitants of the land, because their forefathers first pioneered and opened up the regions for agriculture. Many of the feasts and festivals of the major *Adivasi* or tribal groups can harmonize well with the Gospel message. This presentation introduces some festival traditions of Indian *Adivasi* groups, showing them as pathways for inculturation. It is hoped that these very specific examples will resonate with the experiences of other evangelizers in the vast Asian continent, and thus prove to be an impetus for inculturation.

Annual Feasts and Festivals

The *Adivasi* feasts and festivals are closely linked with agricultural life and activities throughout the year. The *Adivasi* Catholic communities of the dioceses mentioned celebrate some of the feasts in the same spirit as their traditional *Adivasi* neighbors – even from before the time of the Second Vatican Council. This form of *dialogue of cultures* has been taking place in the local Churches quite naturally and spontaneously. What follows is a brief discussion of some of the *Adivasi* feasts and festivals celebrated in their traditional spirit, with a well prepared liturgy; this has been practiced for the last thirty-five years – with some successes as well as with failures in the field.

Phagua is celebrated on the full moon day in the lunar month of *Phagun* (February-March). It is the *new year* day for the *Adivasis*. For the celebration, a branch of the *simbali* tree often together with a branch of the *erandi* tree is planted on the *phagua* field outside the village. Several bundles of thatching grass are made to lean around the branches. After the usual invocation over a chicken, it is let loose under the standing thatch which the village priest next sets on fire. While the fire is blazing, the assistant of the village priest cuts the top of the *simbali* branch with a single blow of a *balua* (battle axe) saying: "Let all the sickness and suffering of the past year pass away like this severed branch." Children then light up their small torches from the flame and pelt fruit trees saying: "Bear abundant fruit." This gesture reminds the fruit trees of the dire consequences if they were not to produce fruit. Children, fruitfulness, and prosperity are associated ideas of life, and they are highly prized by the *Adivasis*.

The myth behind this ceremony is that there was a *vulture* on a very tall *simbali* tree in ancient times. It was notorious for carrying away the ploughs and yokes of people for making its nest. It was also lifting away human beings, young and old, to its nest and was killing them to feed its young. Terrorized by this evil vulture, the people prayed to God to save them. He had pity on them and took the form of a *liti bir* (dwarf hero) and went down to kill the vulture. He shot it and chopped down the *simbali* tree, because it had given shelter to the evil vulture. Thus, the *simbali* branch in the *phagua* ceremony is the symbol of evil.

Beginning with this feast, the *Adivasis* fill their moments of joy with *phagua* songs and dances until their next seasonal feast arrives. This brings us very close to the celebration of Easter, enabling us to say, "Let us celebrate our Passover, then, not with bread having the old yeast of sin and wickedness, but with the bread that has no yeast, the bread of purity and truth" (1 Cor. 5:8). In the Christian liturgy, therefore, *Phagua* is the feast of liberation from every kind of evil. It leads us to proclaim the good news that the time has come when the Lord will save his people from every bondage in the new year (cf. Lk. 4:18-19).

Sarhul is celebrated on the full moon day in the lunar month of *Chait* (March-April) when the *sal* trees are in full bloom.

It is the biggest annual spring festival of the *Adivasis*. A solemn procession of men starts for the *sarna* (sacred grove) where the assistant of the village priest clears a strip of ground with a spade and smears it with cow dung. A handful of pearl rice is placed for each one of the spirits on the clearing. The village priest now sits cross-legged in front of the clearing. His assistant takes chickens of appropriate colors and hands them over to the village priest. The latter beheads them, drops some blood on the rice heaps and on the winnowing fan, and then tosses them on the ground in front. Their heads are eaten only by him, while their vital parts, like hearts and livers, are offered to the spirits. The rest of the meat is cooked with rice and distributed to all men present at the *sarna* as a communion meal.

The transcendence of God and His almighty power over the spirits is clearly maintained at the *sarna*. He is offered a white (pure) victim at a separate spot away from the place of the spirits. The village priest while praying to God faces the east, because the sun symbolizing Him rises there. He prays to him as follows: "Here below are the panthes, God is above. O Father, you are above, we are below. You have eyes, we do not see. You know all, we are totally ignorant. Whether knowingly or by mistake we have offended the spirits, restrain them. Overlook our mistakes."

The central point of the ceremony is the *sarna* deity. She is the guardian spirit of the village with all its inhabitants, children and cattle. She is responsible for good monsoons and bumper crops during the year. Her abode is the *sarna* near the village. In one of the *Adivasi* myths, she had given shelter to God when He came down to earth in the form of a young boy to destroy the arrogant, disobedient, and greedy *Asurs* (a community of iron smelters).

The prayer of the village priest to God brings us very close to our Lord's prayer: "Forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us. And do not bring us to the test, but deliver us from evil" (Mt. 6:12-13). In the Christian liturgy, traditional rituals to the spirits are left out and it centers round God the Father who takes care of all His creation.

Nawakhani is the feast of eating the first fruits of the new harvest. It is celebrated in the lunar month of *Kuwanr* (September-October). The head of each household sacrifices a chicken to the

ancestors in gratitude to them for giving the gift of life, land and livestock to their descendants. The choicest portion of the festal meal is first offered to the ancestor spirits, and invocations are made to ask for their blessing and protection. As far as possible, all the members of a household must be present for the feast. No head of a family would ever eat of the new harvest meal in anyone else's house until he had first eaten it at home with his family members after offering sacrifices to the ancestors. In this feast, the ancestor spirits are believed to ask for a new harvest meal. Young people of the village still sing the *karam* songs and enjoy the dances. God has given us land through ancestors for our livelihood. It is right and fitting, therefore, to offer Him and the ancestors the first part of the new harvest that He gives us (cf. Deut. 26:1-10). Jesus is our true bread of life (Jn. 6:47-51).

Maghe is celebrated on the fourth day in the lunar month of *Magh* (January-February). It brings the *Adivasi* feasts and festivals to the end of the agricultural cycle. It is kept in honor of the house servants. On the day of *Maghe*, the housewife washes the feet of the servant. She oils his hair and combs it. The myth behind this feast is that when God came down to the earth in human form to destroy the arrogant, disobedient and greedy community of *Asurs*, He took shelter in the house of a poor widow and served her just like a house servant. Jesus washed the feet of his disciples like a servant and set an example for us to do exactly the same for one another (cf. Jn. 13:1-15).

Conclusion. In the area of liturgy, the teaching of Vatican II encourages adaptation to the genius and traditions of peoples (SC 37). In keeping with the Church's teaching, the feasts and festivals, songs and dances, discussed above can find ample space in the liturgy of the local Churches. This adds newness and joy to the clergy and faithful in their liturgical life and worship. The FABC documents in these areas of *dialogue and inculturation* have also been quite encouraging in bringing about more and deeper renewal and adaptation in the liturgical life of the local Churches in Asia. However, it appears that the degree of awareness among many Church leaders with regard to the above teaching and guidance of the Church is quite low. It is expected that new and greater initiatives will be taken for more meaningful liturgical life in the local Churches of Asia.

XVII. ART AND ARCHITECTURE (Jyoti Sahi¹⁸)

The Asian Context

The Church in Asia claims to go back to Apostolic times. The Aramaic or Syrian Church which spread to the West coast of the Indian subcontinent, and further east as far as the great wall of China, became "inculturated" from its very inception. Certain basic symbols like the "Cross of Light" seem to draw from an oriental representation linking life to light. Such forms are found in Jaina, Buddhist, and later Hindu art. From very early times the Syrian icon adopted the use of the halo, which again probably derived from iconographic types developed in Buddhist art. In addition to these visual symbols, the main vehicle for an inculturated form of Christianity seems to have been the liturgy. It is asserted that when Vasco de Gama touched the shores of Kerala, he found it difficult to distinguish between Christian places of worship and Hindu ones. Then, subsequent to what may be called the colonial period, stretching from the fifteenth to the twentieth centuries, the dominant tendency of Christian art in Asia seemed to ape the styles in painting, sculpture, and architecture which prevailed in the West.

The inculturated representations of Mary, Jesus, and the saints which exist from this colonial time, occurred almost by default, as local craftsmen tried to interpret and imitate foreign models which were provided them by missionaries. This can be seen in the art forms of Goa or in the works produced in the court workshops of Mogul emperors. A key turning point came when the Bible was translated into local languages. This process only came about in earnest in the nineteenth century, leading to many translations in local tongues that were done in the twentieth century. It was when people of other faiths began to read the Bible in their own native tongue that the idea of representing Jesus and scenes from the Bible in a local idiom of narrative painting took shape. Perhaps the earliest representation of Jesus as an Indian Guru, was attempted in Bengal, after the great Hindu mystic Rama Krishna had a vision of Jesus (in the late nineteenth

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century), clothed in the saffron robes of a Hindu monk. Here one observes a conscious effort to depict an Asian Christ, who could be absorbed into the world of Asian religious experience.

After the movement to gain freedom from colonial domination, many Asian artists began depicting Jesus as a freedom fighter, one who stood against the narrow religiosity of the Jews, and also the colonial power of the Roman empire. It was only gradually that the Church after independence (1940s) accepted this image of Jesus. Christian artists like Alfred Thomas, Frank Wesley, and Angelo da Fonseca were only slowly given recognition. It was after the Vatican exhibition in 1950, celebrating the year of Jubilee, that “mission art,” as it was then called, received official recognition. Later, after the Second Vatican Council, efforts were made to adopt symbols of worship found in other Eastern faith systems; experiments were initiated to create an Indian Rite.

The idea of creating an Indian Rite influenced Church architecture; it was also felt that structures characteristic of the places of worship belonging to Hindus, Buddhists, or Muslims, could be adapted for a Christian purpose. However, this process met with many difficulties. First of all, Indian converts to Christianity objected to the religious forms which they identified with a dominant belief system which had in the past marginalized and alienated them. Frequently, efforts at inculturation took as normative what could be called the “dominant” culture, which has also been termed the “Great Tradition.” This culture, representative of a spiritual elite who were also linked to those in political and economic power, worked against the interests of those who were marginalized and ignored.

Furthermore, there was an increasing perception among the authorities, that such inculturated forms might lead to dogmatic errors. The effort to separate culture from religion did not in fact prove possible. A given culture has always developed out of certain belief systems, having a world view which is founded on the cosmology basic to an understanding of the relation between the human, the rest of creation, and the divine. To simply take over the external forms of a culture, and ignore the belief systems from which these forms derive, tends to destroy the creative life within these signs and symbols.

Finally, it became increasingly objectionable to people of other faiths, that Christians were taking over signs and symbols which were distinctive of Hindu, Buddhist or Muslim places of worship; it was felt that this was only being done in an effort to convert the unsuspecting, who would be led to believe that Christianity is no different from other Asian forms of religion. The Church appeared to claim the right to appropriate cultural forms which have arisen out of other faith systems. In this way an inculturated Christianity in the service of evangelization becomes increasingly seen as a threat to other faiths; in addition, it is an obstacle when it comes to an ecumenism which accepts Truth in difference.

Finally, the fact that Christianity has been in Asia from very early times, probably before it was well established in Europe, has led some Christians to argue that there are already in existence inculturated forms of Christian faith to be found in other oriental rites. This has meant that the effort to draw elements from Hindu or Buddhist practices seems uncalled for, especially as Buddhism is essentially not a theistic faith, and Hinduism in its present form has developed after the Christian traditions which established themselves in the Middle East, and later in the Far East. As a result, there is now an increasing debate within the Church as to what in fact we mean by culture, and how the Church should relate to existing cultures found in Asia.

Pastoral-Theological Orientations

Underlying the different forms of worship or styles of representation, there lies a way of seeing reality; one might broadly term this as an "Asian spirituality." This is what shines out from the lives of mystics and saints found among Asian peoples. Indian theologians and men of a contemplative way of life (e.g. Swami Abhishiktananda, Raimondo Panikkar, Amalorpavadas, Samuel Rayan, Sebastian Painadath) have tried to live the spirit which infuses all that is best in the different faiths found in Asia. This spirit could be characterized as one of deep interiority, non-violence, and a search for Truth, which is not only rational but embraces every aspect of being.

In this search for the spiritual experience which characterizes the Asian encounter with the Divine, it is the human and contextual that gives a local form to the Gospel message. One realizes that in this process the traditional cultures, like old wine skins, are not the most appropriate vessels for what is new. Recognizing the dynamics of cultural change, theologians like Michael Amaladoss and Sebastian Kappen, have spoken of the important role that counter-cultures play in renewing the life of a culture. It is essential to draw a distinction between a tradition which can often be limiting, and a creative art which is prophetic and challenges what is outmoded or what serves the selfish interests of a dominant group. Christianity has been characterized by a message directed primarily to those who are marginalized and oppressed, offering new signs of hope. Asian Christian art, as it has blossomed in recent times, has expressed both a longing for liberation, and a recognition of cultural and religious diversity which is very much a feature of Asian societies.

Concrete and Practical Initiatives

A local culture arises out of an experience of the “here and now.” The landscape and a sense of “sacred space” are fundamental to the way in which spiritual experience is expressed in the local context. Worshipers need to identify important times and seasons that have to be consecrated through rites of passage in the lives of individuals; local festivals become an expression of a community identity. Too often the manner in which Christian communities in Asia celebrate the Word of God incarnated in daily life, does not take sufficient note of features that characterize the local landscape, or the cycle of the seasons that determine patterns of life and growth in a particular geographic place. One frequently finds that important Christian feasts like Christmas or Easter are celebrated in a way that simply copies the symbols and metaphors that are appropriate only in the European environment where they emerged. For example, Christmas is celebrated as though it were a festival of the cold winter, when nothing is growing; the general reality in Asia is that this festival occurs at a time when the harvest is being gathered in the fields. Again, Easter is thought of in terms of the spring season as it is characterized in northern climes, whereas in much of Asia, at least in

sub-tropical zones, this liturgical season occurs at a time when summer is approaching, and there is nothing growing. Finally, whereas the monsoon rains are an important time of transformation of the landscape in most of Asia, giving rise to many festivals that celebrate the life and fecundity of the earth, there is little attempt to give this time of year a Christian meaning, in relation to the Christian liturgical calendar.

Climatic conditions and locally available materials are very important in determining what is called "vernacular architecture." The Church building should relate to the topography and seasonal changes of the local countryside. By building churches in a style which evolved in the environment of Europe, little cognizance is given to the different building techniques which have characterized Asian ways of constructing shelters and using space and light. A truly Asian style of Christian architecture need not be the result of imitating the sacred forms of places of worship in other religions. What is most important is to situate the Christian understanding of sacred time and space within the context of building techniques which have been evolved to suit local environmental conditions.

Visual or plastic forms have a "language" which is determined by a regional cultural syntax. Art is not something specialized, belonging to an educated and so-called "cultured elite." True art emerges from the creative spirit which lies inherent in every community. However, this creative impulse needs to be actively encouraged and local talent given freedom to find its own forms of expression.

Christian life, following a pattern which developed in Europe, especially in the context of the Roman empire, is often too "churchy," relying on such institutional structures as the parish, which is not necessarily the most appropriate form in Asian cultures. Pilgrimages, religious dramas, and festivals can be given a Christian orientation. Above all, the individual also has to be spiritually nurtured. Meditation, personal times of prayer and interiority, have been the sustaining power in many Asian religions. Christianity, in contrast, is often seen to be overly concerned with outward observances. Art, as a creative upsurge from the depths of a believer's heart, comes from an inner experience. Inculturation,

if it is to be really a vital force in creating a Christian culture in Asia, has to come from the spiritual and devotional life of worshippers. Inculturation cannot be reduced to a set of techniques or liturgical rubrics. It has to be the natural fruit of an encounter with the Divine as incarnated within a community whose cultural memories are rooted in the land.

CONCLUDING REFLECTION

In many significant ways, *Ecclesia in Asia* recognized the imperative of inculturation; the document noted: “Jesus is often perceived as foreign to Asia. It is paradoxical that most Asians tend to regard Jesus – born on Asian soil – as a Western rather than an Asian figure” (EA 20d).

Referring to the Church’s existence in Asia, one reads: “Despite her centuries-long presence and her many apostolic endeavors, the Church in many places was [is] still considered as foreign to Asia” (EA 9e). Inculturation “has a special urgency today in the multi-ethnic, multi-religious and multi-cultural situation of Asia, where Christianity is still too often seen as foreign” (EA 21b).

These brief citations from *Ecclesia in Asia*, issued after the 1998 Asian Synod, form an urgent invitation to all Asian Christians to embark with renewed vigor on the road of inculturation. This task of rooting faith within life’s realities is not an optional commitment; it is linked intimately with becoming an evangelizing presence among Asia’s burgeoning masses. As Pope John Paul II (1978-2005) noted in his mission encyclical, “Through inculturation the Church, for her part, becomes a more intelligent sign of what she is, and a more effective instrument of mission” (RM 52).

To reverse the perception that both Jesus Christ and his Church are “non-Asian,” renewed efforts in inculturation are imperative – not only for priests and religious; this process “*must involve the entire People of God*, since the life of the Church as a whole must show forth the faith which is being proclaimed and appropriated” (EA 21d). Hopefully, the seventeen diverse contributions found in this presentation provide some direction for the task at hand (cf. EA 22).

The haunting words of the 1977 *Asian Colloquium on Ministries in the Church* should disturb all Asians who love the Church: "If the Asian Churches do not discover their own identity, they will have no future" (ACMC 14) □

ABBREVIATIONS

ABM	Asian Bishops' Meeting (1970)
ACMC	<i>Asian Colloquium on Ministries in the Church</i> (1977)
AG	<i>Ad Gentes</i> (1965)
AsIPA	Asian Integral Pastoral Approach
BECs	Basic Ecclesial Communities
BILA	Bishops' Institute for the Lay Apostolate
CA	<i>Centesimus Annus</i> (1991)
CCC	<i>Catechism of the Catholic Church</i> (1994)
CT	<i>Catechesi Tradendae</i> (1979)
EA	<i>Ecclesia in Asia</i> (1999)
EN	<i>Evangelii Nuntiandi</i> (1975)
FABC	Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences
GS	<i>Gaudium et Spes</i> (1965)
LE	<i>Laborem Exercens</i> (1981)
LG	<i>Lumen Gentium</i> (1964)
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
OA	<i>Octogesima Adveniens</i> (1971)
OHD	Office for Human Development (FABC)
OR-EE	<i>L'Osservatore Romano</i> – English Edition
PCP-II	Second Plenary Council of the Philippines (1991)
PLPC	<i>Pastoral Letter on Philippine Culture</i> (1999)
PP	<i>Populorum Progressio</i> (1967)
RM	<i>Redemptoris Missio</i> (1990)
SAC	<i>Starting Afresh from Christ</i> (2002)
SARS	Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome
SC	<i>Sacrosanctum Concilium</i> (1963)
SCCs	Small Christian Communities
SRS	<i>Sollicitudo Rei Socialis</i> (1987)
TLC	<i>Theses on the Local Church</i> (FABC)
TMA	<i>Tertio Millennio Adveniente</i> (1994)
TPAC	<i>Towards a Pastoral Approach to Culture</i> (1999)
VC	<i>Vita Consecrata</i> (1996)
WHO	World Health Organization

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FABC: TAC (Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences: Theological Advisory Commission). "Theses on the Local Church" (see theses 5-12 on inculturation), in: Gnanapiragasam, J. & Wilfred, F. *Being Church in Asia*. Quezon City, Philippines: Claretian Publications, 1994, 33-89; available also as *FABC Papers* 60. Hong Kong: FABC Secretariat, 1991.

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