

Laity Today

A series of studies

edited by the Pontifical Council for the Laity

PONTIFICIUM CONSILIUM PRO LAICIS

PROCLAIMING JESUS CHRIST IN ASIA TODAY

Congress of Asian Catholic Laity

August 31-September 5, 2010
Seoul, Korea



LIBRERIA EDITRICE VATICANA
2011

© Copyright 2011 - Libreria Editrice Vaticana
00120 CITTÀ DEL VATICANO
Tel. 06.698.81032 - Fax 06.698.84716

ISBN 978-88-209-8589-9

www.vatican.va
www.libreriaeditricevaticana.com

VATICAN PRESS

CONTENTS

Preface, <i>Cardinal Stanisław Rylko</i>	9
Letter of His Holiness Benedict XVI	19

CONFERENCES

Two thousand years of the Church's mission in Asia: waves of evangelization, holiness and martyrdom, <i>Rev. Felipe Gomez, S.I.</i>	25
Jesus Christ, a gift for Asia: demands, tasks and challenges of evangelizing today, <i>Cardinal Telesphore Placidus Toppo</i>	41
The vocation and mission of the lay faithful in the light of <i>Christifideles Laici</i> , <i>Bishop Josef Clemens</i>	51
The Christian formation of the laity and lay missionary efforts in Asia, <i>Msgr. Joseph Đình Duc Dao</i>	85
Courageous witnesses of faith, <i>Rev. Bernardo Cervellera, P.I.M.E.</i>	111
A new era of group endeavours, <i>Guzmán Carriquiry</i>	125
Catholic laity, witnesses of hope for the good of the peoples of Asia, <i>Cardinal Stanisław Rylko</i>	135

PANEL DISCUSSION I

The Gospel to the world, <i>Archbishop Thomas Menamparampil, S.D.B.</i>	151
The lay faithful as witnesses of Christ in the civil, business and political community, <i>Jesus P. Estanislao</i>	167

Contents

Testimonies of Christian charity and the service of the poor,
Bishop Martinus D. Situmorang, O.F.M. Cap. 177

PANEL DISCUSSION II

The experience of the laity in the work of ecumenism,
Azeem Sheraz Bhatti 185

From Matteo Ricci to inter-religious dialogue, *Rev. Savio Hon
Tai-Fai, S.D.B.* 193

The Gospel amidst cultures: reflections on inculturation in
Asia, *Archbishop Thomas Menampampil, S.D.B.* 203

PANEL DISCUSSION III

Some areas and priorities regarding the evangelization of Asia

The renewal of the parish, *Rev. Damasus Uichul Jeong* 219

Mission and pastoral care of the family, *Bishop Rolando Joven
Tria Tirona, O.C.D.* 223

The identity and mission of Catholic schools in the evange-
lization of Asia, *Guilherme Vaz* 229

Youth pastoral ministry and youth evangelization, *Manoj Sunny* . . . 239

The role of women in the Church and in society, *Zenaida V.
Rotea* 269

The participation of Catholic laity in politics and in the work-
place, *Rev. Jack Trisolini, S.D.B.* 273

HOMILIES

The lay faithful share in Christ's profetic mission,
Cardinal Stanisław Rylko 283

Contents

“Go into the deep”, *Bishop Rolando Joven Tria Tirona, O.C.D.* . . . 287

Let us preach the Gospel in Asia with the spirit of the Martyrs,
Bishop Andrew Yeom Soo-jung 291

Proclaiming Jesus Christ in Asia today, *Cardinal Nicholas Cheong
Jinsuk* 295

Prayer for the Congress 297

FINAL MESSAGES OF THE CONGRESS

Letter addressed to His Holiness, Pope Benedict XVI, on behalf
of the participants of the Congress of Asian Catholic Laity . . . 301

Message to the Catholic Laity of Asia 305

PREFACE

The presence of the Church in Asia traces its roots back to the Apostles and boasts of throngs of saints, martyrs and confessors, a great number of whom were lay people. While Asia makes up two thirds of the world's population (almost four billion people) the Catholic Church in Asia comprises a "small flock" of around 120 million faithful. Nonetheless, it is a Church characterized by missionary zeal, dynamism and growth.

The vast continent of Asia, which for centuries has been the home of age-old cultures and great religions, is today undergoing a profound and bewildering transformation. Due to its technological and economic progress, Asia now stands front and center on the global stage. But it is also experiencing the powerful influence of post modernity with its secularised mentality and Godless lifestyles. At the same time, it faces many serious social problems: unjust inequalities, extreme poverty, human rights abuses, etc.

Nor are the Christians who live on this continent exempt from these same challenges. During recent decades the number of Catholics in Asia has grown at an average rate of four to five percent (4-5%) per year. In spite of this growth, the Church faces many serious and threatening challenges.

Among the most painful trials that the Church confronts in the East is the increase in fundamentalism which imposes drastic limitations on religious freedom. *Ecclesia in Asia* notes that: "in many places in Asia where explicit proclamation is forbidden and religious freedom is denied or systematically restricted, silent witness of life still remains the only way of proclaiming God's Kingdom".¹ Indeed there are many sad

¹ JOHN PAUL II, Post-synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Ecclesia in Asia*, no. 23.

cases of discrimination and of outright persecution. Another age of martyrdom... This is a general outline of the context in which the Church in Asia fulfils its mission. Yes, Christians on this continent are a tiny minority, but they are certainly not a timid minority closed in on themselves. On the contrary, they are full of vitality and stimulated by the hope that comes from faith. To use a phrase dear to Pope Benedict XVI, we could say that Christians in Asia are a “creative minority”. They are fully aware that they have a decisive role to play in the future of the entire continent. As a “good Samaritan for humanity” (John Paul II), the Church in Asia places itself humbly at the service of each human being and lovingly reaches out to tend to the wounds of those who suffer so much. Conscious of being the repository of a message of salvation for all of humanity – salvation brought by Jesus Christ, the only Redeemer of humankind –, the Church knows that faith in Jesus Christ is the most precious gift that can be given to the people who live on this continent.²

This awareness and this conviction that Jesus Christ is the most precious gift for Asia was both the motive and the center of the Congress of Asian Catholic Laity, held in Seoul Korea from August 31st to September 5th, 2010. This is implicit in the theme of the Congress: “Proclaiming Jesus Christ in Asia today”, the proceedings of which are contained in this volume.

The main guidelines for our reflection were the key texts of the Magisterium regarding the vocation and mission of the laity, and regarding the evangelization of Asia, namely, the documents of the Second Vatican Council: the Dogmatic Constitution *Lumen Gentium*, the Decree *Apostolicam Actuositatem*, the Pastoral Constitution *Gaudium et Spes*; and the Apostolic Exhortation *Christifideles Laici* – the *magna charta* of the Catholic laity –; the Apostolic Exhortation *Ecclesia in Asia*; the Encyclical *Redemptoris Missio*; and several important documents from the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, including the dec-

² Cf. *Ibid.*, no. 10.

Preface

laration *Dominus Iesus* and the *Doctrinal Note on some Aspects of Evangelization*, and the *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*.

The Congress was an initiative of the Pontifical Council for the Laity that sought to give new impulse to the lay faithful in Asia in their own unique mission of proclaiming the Gospel of Jesus Christ. A gathering of this nature is not new to this Pontifical Council, as the organisation of continental or regional congresses of the Catholic laity has been part of our activities for many years. The first meeting of the Asian Catholic Laity took place in Korea in 1994 in collaboration with the Lay Apostolate Council of Korea and with the help of the Office of Laity and Family of the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences (FABC).³ We returned to Asia after sixteen years, due also to the generous commitment and dedication of Professor Thomas Hong Soon Han, a member of the Pontifical Council for the Laity and until recently president of the Lay Apostolate Council of Korea. In this way, such a significant ecclesial gathering in the Asian continent was organized in collaboration with the Lay Commission of the Korean Catholic Bishops' Conference and national councils for the laity. Participants at this event included official delegations, mostly headed by a bishop, from twenty of the Asian countries that form part of the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences (FABC), together with official representation from the FABC. There were also thirty-five delegations from lay associations, ecclesial movements and new communities that are recognized at the international level by the Holy See and have a significant presence in Asia. All together, Congress participants totaled some four hundred people.

The mosaic composed of the various faces and personal stories of the participants – laity, bishops, priests and religious all studying together – reflected an image of the Church as a mystery of missionary communion and as a rich and variegated reality in this vast continent.

³ Cf. *The First Asian Laity Meeting. 4-9 September 1994, Korea*, The Word of Today Publishing Company 1995.

Although it was predominantly a regional ecclesial gathering, the Congress was also followed with much interest in Rome and elsewhere. The Holy Father himself wanted to be present among us with a written message, which is an eloquent sign of his personal interest in this Congress. His Holiness expressed his hope that this Congress would “highlight the indispensable role of the lay faithful in the Church’s mission and develop specific programs and initiatives to assist them in their task of proclaiming Jesus Christ in Asia today”.⁴ These words of Benedict XVI, which are contained in the following chapter of this publication, offered us a guiding light for our reflections – and great encouragement for our mission.

Government authorities also expressed their interest in this event. The President of Korea, Lee Myung Bak, in his message to the participants of the Congress, noted how the Korean Catholic Church was formed at its base by the volunteer effort of the laity and he highlighted their great contribution to the spiritual maturity and the reconciliation of the Korean people.

Although the Church in Korea has a particularly unique history of lay evangelization, the dynamic mission force of the laity is not limited to Korea alone. In fact, as the Venerable Servant of God John Paul II pointed out, one of the great reasons for hope in the Church in Asia is “the increasing number of better trained, enthusiastic and Spirit-filled lay people, who are more and more aware of their specific vocation within the ecclesial community”.⁵ Encouraging the preparation and training of the laity that instills in them a firm Christian identity and a keen awareness of their mission in the Church and in the world was one of the principal objectives of the Congress. *Redemptoris Missio* teaches us that the growth of a mature and responsible laity is “an essential and undeniable element in the *plantatio Ecclesiae*”.⁶ Training and develop-

⁴ BENEDICT XVI, Letter of His Holiness Benedict XVI to Card. Stanisław Rylko on the occasion of the Congress of Asian Catholic Laity, 10 August 2010.

⁵ JOHN PAUL II, Post-synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Ecclesia in Asia*, no. 9.

⁶ IDEM, Encyclical Letter *Redemptoris Missio*, no. 72.

Preface

ment means, first of all, a renewed Christian initiation that helps baptised people to rediscover the greatness of the gift of Baptism through which God makes us new men and women, as Saint Paul tells us: “For all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ” (*Gal* 3: 27). Now, the situation of dispersion and distance in which the Christians of Asia live out their faith, and the cultural and religious pluralism that typifies their society, certainly does not make it easy for them to strengthen their baptismal identity. On the contrary, they are exposed to the real risk of being infected by syncretism and relativism. However, as Saint Ignatius of Antioch warned, “It is fitting, then, not only to be called Christians, but to be so in reality”.⁷ Saint Peter too also reminds us: “Therefore, brothers and sisters, be all the more eager to confirm your call and election, for if you do this, you will never stumble” (*2 Pet* 1: 10); and Saint Paul: “I [...] beg you to lead a life worthy of the calling to which you have been called, with all humility and gentleness, with patience” (*Eph* 4: 1-2).

Someone rightly said that the main problem for Christians is not so much the fact of being in the minority, but the fact of being irrelevant, of not being what we should be, true disciples of Christ. The amount of salt in food is minimal (we could say “a minority”), but it gives taste to the food. The amount of leavening in the dough is minimal (“a minority”), but it makes the dough rise. The Lord tells us: “You are the salt of the earth ... You are the light of the world” (*Mt* 5: 13, 16). Christians who lose their own identity and forget their vocation are like salt that is tasteless, a lamp that is switched off. This Congress provided us with an opportunity to rediscover the beauty of being Christians. Asian Catholics should be proud to be Christians. They need not have an inferiority complex in the non-Christian world. Benedict XVI reminded us in his homily at the start of his pontificate: “There is nothing more beautiful than to be surprised by the Gospel, by the encounter with

⁷ SAINT IGNATIUS OF ANTIOCH, *Epistle to the Magnesians*, chap. 3.

Christ. There is nothing more beautiful than to know Him and to speak to others of our friendship with Him. [...] If we let Christ into our lives, we lose nothing, nothing, absolutely nothing of what makes life free, beautiful and great. No! Only in this friendship are the doors of life opened wide. Only in this friendship is the great potential of human existence truly revealed”.⁸ While the Congress offered us many reasons for taking pride in our Christian identity, we were also able to rediscover the Church as an organic communion in which all baptised people have their place and their duty to fulfil. The laity’s involvement in the parish and Christian community, their sense of co-responsibility for their mission within their local Church, all of this is essential if the Church in Asia is to really become a “participatory Church”, that is, a Church in which all live according to their vocation and carry out a specific role.⁹

We Christians are men and women of hope. Our hope is a Person – Jesus Christ – of whom each of us can say: “I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me” (*Gal 2: 20*). Pope Benedict XVI, a great teacher of hope, says in *Spe Salvi*: “It is not science that redeems man: man is redeemed by love. [...] The human being needs unconditional love. He needs the certainty which makes him say: ‘neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord’ (*Rom 8: 38-39*). If this absolute love exists, with its absolute certainty, then – only then – is man ‘redeemed’, whatever should happen to him in his particular circumstances”.¹⁰ Inspired by this hope, the Venerable Servant of God John Paul II wrote in *Redemptoris Missio*: “God is preparing a great springtime for Chris-

⁸ BENEDICT XVI, Homily from the Mass for the Inauguration of the Pontificate, 24 April 2005.

⁹ Cf. JOHN PAUL II, Post-synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Ecclesia in Asia*, no. 25.

¹⁰ BENEDICT XVI, Encyclical Letter *Spe salvi*, no. 26.

Preface

tianity, and we can already see its first signs. [...] I see the dawning of a new missionary age, which will become a radiant day bearing an abundant harvest, if all Christians, and missionaries and young churches in particular, respond with generosity and holiness to the calls and challenges of our time”.¹¹

The Congress of Asian Catholic Laity is now over. But certain events really only begin after the concluding ceremony. Thus, the first stage now begins – that of nurturing the seeds that were planted during the Congress in Seoul. We also want to share the findings of the Congress with pastors and laity throughout the great continent of Asia. In order to do this, we have gathered together in this publication the lectures, the panel discussions and the homilies that together constitute the *corpus* of this Congress. The proceedings begin with the Holy Father’s message, and this is followed by the conferences. In addressing our theme of proclaiming Jesus Christ today, it was necessary to first recall Asia’s two thousand years of missionary activity. Then the Congress proceeded to address current themes regarding the prerequisites, tasks and challenges of evangelizing today, the identity and mission of the lay faithful and some specific needs regarding lay formation. The speakers also pointed out many current signs of hope found in Asia such as the growing presence of the new ecclesial movements and communities and the courageous testimonies being offered by the laity throughout Asia today. The panel discussions offered practical insights on the Christian witness of the laity in different sectors of society through various means as well as the more delicate themes of ecumenism and inter-religious dialogue. We are also pleased to include homilies given during the Eucharistic celebrations, the true “source and summit” which united us around the Lord’s table and offered us daily nourishment.

¹¹ JOHN PAUL II, Encyclical Letter *Redemptoris Missio*, nos. 86 & 92.

Card. Stanisław Rylko

I wish to conclude by giving thanks to God for this Congress of Asian Catholic Laity: what a gift it has been for us personally and for the Church on this continent. We all feel a deep desire to echo the words of the Virgin Mary: “My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Saviour [...] he has done great things for me, and holy is his name” (*Lk* 1.46-47.49). Yes, truly the Lord is doing “great things” even today, especially within the Church in Asia! Again, then, our thoughts go to all the bishops, priests, religious and lay people who labour with zeal in the “vineyard of the Lord” in Asia – the dioceses and parishes scattered throughout this boundless continent. We remember especially the Christian communities who are suffering because of extreme poverty or because they are deprived of religious freedom. Today we want to express all our love and solidarity for these our brothers and sisters. We want to assure them that they are not alone or abandoned. Their suffering is not in vain, but rather places them in a privileged position in the Church, the Mystical Body of Christ!

We ask the Lord to nurture the seeds of the Word of God which have been sown over these past few days, and we invoke the special intercession of Our Lady, Mother of the Church and Star of Evangelization, and the many martyrs and confessors of the faith born on Asian soil!

Cardinal STANISŁAW RYŁKO
President
Pontifical Council for the Laity

**LETTER OF HIS HOLINESS
BENEDICT XVI**

Letter of His Holiness Benedict XVI
to Card. Stanisław Ryłko
on the occasion of the Congress of Asian Catholic Laity

To my Venerable Brother Cardinal Stanisław Ryłko
President of the Pontifical Council for the Laity

I was pleased to learn that the Congress of Asian Catholic Laity will be held in Seoul from 31 August to 5 September 2010. I ask you kindly to convey my cordial greetings and prayerful good wishes to the Bishops, priests, religious and lay faithful from Asia assembled for this significant pastoral initiative promoted by the Pontifical Council for the Laity. The theme chosen for the Congress – Proclaiming Jesus Christ in Asia Today – is most timely, and I am confident that it will encourage and guide the lay faithful of the continent in bearing joyful witness to the Risen Lord and to the life-giving truth of his holy word.

Asia, home to two-thirds of the world's people, the cradle of great religions and spiritual traditions, and the birthplace of diverse cultures, is currently undergoing unprecedented processes of economic growth and social transformation. Asia's Catholics are called to be a sign and promise of that unity and communion – communion with God and among men – which the whole human family is meant to enjoy and which Christ alone makes possible. As part of the mosaic of the continent's different peoples, cultures and religions, they have been entrusted with a great mission: that of bearing witness to Jesus Christ, the universal Savior of mankind. This is the supreme service and the greatest gift that the Church can offer to the people of Asia, and it is my hope that the present Conference will provide renewed encouragement and direction in taking up this sacred mandate.

“The peoples of Asia need Jesus Christ and his Gospel. Asia is

thirsting for the living water that Jesus alone can give” (*Ecclesia in Asia*, 50). These prophetic words of the Servant of God John Paul II still resound as a summons addressed to each member of the Church in Asia. If the lay faithful are to take up this mission, they need to become ever more conscious of the grace of their Baptism and the dignity which is theirs as sons and daughters of God the Father, sharers in the death and resurrection of Jesus his Son, and anointed by the Holy Spirit as members of Christ’s mystical Body which is the Church. In union of mind and heart with their Pastors, and accompanied at every step of their journey of faith by a sound spiritual and catechetical formation, they need to be encouraged to cooperate actively not only in building up their local Christian communities but also in making new pathways for the Gospel in every sector of society. Vast horizons of mission are now opening up before the lay men and women of Asia in their efforts to bear witness to the truth of the Gospel; I think especially of the opportunities offered by their example of Christian married love and family life, their defense of God’s gift of life from conception to natural death, their loving concern for the poor and the oppressed, their willingness to forgive their enemies and persecutors, their example of justice, truthfulness and solidarity in the workplace, and their presence in public life.

The increasing numbers of committed, trained and enthusiastic lay persons is thus a sign of immense hope for the future of the Church in Asia. Here I wish to single out with gratitude the outstanding work of the many catechists who bring the riches of the Catholic faith to young and old alike, drawing individuals, families and parish communities to an ever deeper encounter with the Risen Lord. The apostolic and charismatic movements are also a special gift of the Spirit, since they bring new life and vigor to the formation of the laity, particularly families and young people. The associations and ecclesial movements devoted to the promotion of human dignity and justice concretely demonstrate the universality of the Gospel message of our adoption as children of God. Along with the many individuals and groups commit-

ted to prayer and works of charity, as well as the contribution made by pastoral and parish councils, these groups play an important role in helping the particular Churches of Asia to be built up in faith and love, strengthened in communion with the universal Church and renewed in zeal for the spread of the Gospel.

For this reason, I pray that the present Congress will highlight the indispensable role of the lay faithful in the Church's mission and develop specific programs and initiatives to assist them in their task of proclaiming Jesus Christ in Asia today. I am confident that the deliberations of the Congress will stress that the Christian life and calling must be seen first and foremost as a source of sublime happiness and a gift to be shared with others. Every Catholic should be able to say, with the Apostle Paul, "For me, to live is Christ" (*Phil* 1:21). Those who have found in Jesus the truth, joy and beauty which give meaning and direction to their lives will naturally desire to bring this grace to others. Undaunted by the presence of difficulties, or the enormity of the task at hand, they will trust in the mysterious presence of the Holy Spirit who is always at work in the hearts of individuals, in their traditions and cultures, mysteriously opening doors to Christ as "the way, and the truth and the life" (*Jn* 14:6), and the fulfilment of every human aspiration.

With these sentiments, I invoke upon all taking part in the Congress a fresh outpouring of the Holy Spirit and I willingly join in the prayer which will accompany these days of study and discernment. May the Church in Asia bear ever more fervent witness to the incomparable beauty of being a Christian, and proclaim Jesus Christ as the one Savior of the world. Commending those present to the loving intercession of Mary, Mother of the Church, I cordially impart my Apostolic Blessing as a pledge of joy and peace in the Lord.

From the Vatican, 10 August 2010

Benedictus PP. XVI

CONFERENCES

Two thousand years of the Church's mission in Asia: waves of evangelization, holiness and martyrdom

Rev. FELIPE GOMEZ, S.I.*

INTRODUCTION

Standing at the threshold of the third millennium, we are invited to look back to the two thousand years behind us, not only to “remember” – which is so Christian – but also to draw lessons for a future open to the hope we have to share. And we do this in a Church which enters a new and amazing human era, and that, therefore, is expected to exhibit characteristics different from those of the first and second millennium, always, of course, within the continuity which the identity demands: the same Church, same mission, but in a new Asia, with a new way of being Church.

We shall focus on the “waves of evangelization,” with special attention to martyrdom and holiness. The analogy of “waves” makes sense, since we detect in the events themselves the phenomenon of high and low levels of missionizing and Christian life, observing periods of high tide of Christian presence in vast territories, followed by a low tide of Christian recess, leaving barren ground to begin all over again. This phenomenon has no equal in other continents. History is not an “exact science”; therefore the division into periods is a question of convenience which does not exclude other choices. We have divided this whole history into five segments, which we call: foundational wave; the first millennium; the so called “*Pax Mongolica*”; the age of discoveries and, finally, our own time.

* East Asian Pastoral Institute, Manila, Philippines.

FOUNDATIONAL WAVE: THE APOSTLES AND POST-APOSTOLIC EVANGELIZERS

We call “foundational” the age of the Apostles until the establishment of local Churches, with an identity of doctrine, governance and cult still discernible today. All started in Asia: Jesus is the absolute source of all missions, although he was not a missionary; mission, as we understand it here, was only possible after the coming of the Holy Spirit. From Jerusalem, the Apostles fanned out to neighboring countries and to far away lands. The great patriarchal Churches, Antioch, Alexandria and Rome, were founded by unknown evangelizers; the see of Edessa – outside the Roman boundaries – claims to have been founded by Addai, one of the seventy-two disciples of the Lord. History does not know the regions where most of the Twelve preached; only traditions seem to remember: that Matthew evangelized the Persians and Parthians (though another tradition has him martyred in Ethiopia); that Thomas worked also in those regions and is buried in Edessa, while another tradition brings him to India and puts his tomb in Chennai; that Jude taught in Armenia and was martyred in Persia; one tradition links Bartholomew with Armenia and India; Simon the Zealot is also believed to have died in Persia. Whatever the historicity of those traditions – and the evidence for Saint Thomas in India is very strong¹ – we want to emphasize one point: that the Gospel moved towards the east with as much energy as towards the west: most of the Apostles died in Asia. In fact, by the third century, there were more Christians in Asia (in what today we call the Middle East) than in Europe.

While the Romans were still persecuting Christianity, Osrhoene, in territory of today’s Syria and Iraq, became the first Christian country, with the conversion of King Abgar IX, in 206; its capital, Edessa,

¹ Cf. C.V. CHERIYAN, *A History of Christianity in Kerala*, Kottayam: Kerala Historical Society C. M. S. Press 1973; L.W. BROWN, *The Indian Christians of St. Thomas*, Cambridge University Press, New York 1982.

became an important center of Christian intellectual life and the most powerful missionary hub until the age of European expansion. Gregory the Illuminator evangelized his home country, Armenia, and in 295 baptized King Tiridates II and became the first *Catholicos* of that Church. During the time of Constantine, ca. 330, Georgia became Christian, through the agency of the legendary woman Saint Nino.

It was Edessa that launched the mission to Asia. Missionaries reached Arbela in Adiabene, which became also a center of missionary expansion. Syrian culture promoted commerce, rather than agriculture; in that mindset the monks were also wandering evangelizers. At the end of the 2nd century there are mentions of Christians in Bactria, which is now Afghanistan. The *Chronicle of Arbela* (written in the 6th c.) recounts that by the year 225, when the Parthian dynasty fell to the Sassanids of Persia, there were Christian communities all over the Middle East, from the Euphrates to the Hindu Kush. In 325, in the Council of Nicaea, there was a bishop of Persia, “John the Persian”, who claimed contacts with India. In the mid fourth century a string of monasteries extended along the Persian shores from Basra to India, uniting the Thomas Christians with Edessa.² There were Christians among the Arab tribes, mainly in Tylos (today’s Bahrain). Then, as the Roman persecutions stopped in the west, the Persian persecutions began, especially under Shapur II (340-401).

These Christians were the so-called Nestorians and Jacobites, considered heretics by the Chalcedonian churches. The Persian authorities made sure that no Christian in their empire would pay allegiance to the Roman (Byzantine) enemy. This Church of the East was Aramaic speaking, with patriarchal structure and a liturgy of Syrian origin, plus a theology more and more based upon Theodore of Mopsuestia.

For us here, it is enough to consider the fact that, by the 5th century,

² Cf. S.H. MOFFETT, *A History of Christianity in Asia*, Maryknoll, Orbis Books, New York 1998, 94.

Churches were well established all over the Middle East, Persia, India and possibly Sri Lanka. The roots were well planted, only that they would grow separated from the rest of Christianity.

FIRST MILLENNIUM

The East Syrian Church fared reasonably well under the Sassanid and Muslim domination in Persia, despite sporadic persecutions and status of tolerated minority (*dhimmis*). “The missionary spirit of the East Syrian community in the third and fourth centuries, with its center at Edessa, was remarkable”,³ spreading the Gospel to the north (Armenia), and east (Arabia and India).⁴ In 410, the Patriarch had under him five metropolitans and thirty-eight bishops; by 650 (Islamic conquest) he had nine metropolitans and one hundred six bishops. In 497 the Sha Kavad was overthrown and fled to the Huns; with him were Nestorian Christians, lay and clergy. The clergy stayed for seven years and the two laymen for thirty, as missionaries with great fruit.⁵ Christian communities were established along the “Silk Road” among Turks, Tartars and Mongols; they preached in Tibet and, probably, all the way to Indonesia.⁶ Under Patriarch Timothy (780–823) – roughly contemporary with Charlemagne – the East Syrian Church was the most extended and numerous in Christendom. By the year 800, Nisibis and Gundeshapur⁷

³ JOHN PAUL II, Post-synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Ecclesia in Asia*, no. 9.

⁴ Cf. IDEM, Apostolic Letter for the 1700th anniversary of the Baptism of Armenian People.

⁵ Cf. S.H. MOFFETT, *A History*, cit., 208.

⁶ Cf. J. STEWART, *Nestorian Missionary Enterprise. The Story of a Church on Fire*, Gorgias Press, Piscataway, New Jersey 2006 (from the 1928 edition); A.S. ATIYA, *A History of Eastern Christianity*, University of Notre Dame Press, Indiana 1968.

⁷ Gundeshapur is variously transcribed as Gund-i Shâh Pür, Gondeshapur', Jondishapur, Jondishapur, and Jondishapour, Gundishapur, Gondêšâpur, Jund-e Shapur, Jundê-Shâpûr, etc., in Syriac: Beth Lapat and in Greek Bendosabora.

were brilliant centers of learning to a level Europe would not reach until the 13th century.⁸ But the most remarkable missionary feat of this period is the evangelization of China. The famous “Nestorian Stele”,⁹ of 781, records the arrival to the Tang capital of the monk Alopen in 635 (when Rome was evangelizing central and northern Europe). They thrived for a while: in the 8th century there were Nestorian churches nearly in all provinces; but soon they suffered persecutions from the Buddhists; in 845 the emperor Wu-tsung outlawed Christianity, making it an “un-Chinese” religion. By the fall of the Tang dynasty (907) Christians had vanished; the causes nobody knows.¹⁰

It is interesting that Buddhism was then missionizing China, and was also considered as “non-Chinese” religion. In fact, Bishop Adam, who probably composed the Xi’an Tablet, helped a Buddhist monk to translate Sanskrit sutras into Chinese. After a time, Buddhism became “Chinese” while Christianity remained “Syrian” or “Persian”.

THE “PAX MONGOLICA”

The second missionary wave took place during the so called *pax Mongolica*, an expression which reads like an oxymoron, for few times in history have seen such displays of barbarism, violence and wars. When in 1219 Genghis Khan launched his conquest of Muslim west, taking Samarkand and slaughtering Merv (1221), Christian lands, such as Armenia and Georgia were also devastated (1236). His grandson,

⁸ Cf. J.P. JENKINS, *The Lost History of Christianity: the thousand-year golden age of the church in the Middle East, Africa, and Asia – and how it died*, HarperCollins e-books, New York 2008, 7.

⁹ This monument contains 1,756 Chinese characters and 70 Syriac words on the stele, telling of the warm reception of the “Religion of Light” by the T’ang Emperor. Cf P. PELLIOTT, *L’inscription nestorienne de Si-ngan-fou*, ed. avec suppléments, Antonino Forte, Kyoto et Paris 1996; J.P. JENKINS, *The Lost History*, cit., 64-68.

¹⁰ Cf. R. MALEK and P. HOFRICHTER (eds.), *Jingjiao: the Church of the East in China and Central Asia*, Sankt Augustin. Steyler Verlag, Germany 2006.

Hulegu, perpetrated a historic massacre in Baghdad (1258) and Mongol terror extended to the heart of Europe. But they were religiously tolerant so that, paradoxically, in their immense empire a fresh wave of missionary activity flourished. Many of their leaders and officials were Christians, especially of Kerait, Onggud¹¹ and Uygur origin, and many of the wives in their courts were Christians.

The Nestorians revived their communities in central Asia and created many more; they followed the Mongol invaders into China and multiplied the churches, monasteries and bishoprics under the Yuan or Mongol dynasty (1271-1368). When in 1281 the monk Marcos, probably a Uygur, was elected Patriarch, under the name Yaballaha III, he ruled over thirty provinces and two hundred fifty dioceses.

What is new in this second wave is the Catholic presence. Dominicans and Franciscans had started missions in Asia. Although the Mongols ravaged the Dominican mission among the Cumans, killing about ninety friars (1241), papal diplomacy played perhaps the first active role in the missions, when ambassadors were sent to the khans.¹² Kublai Khan (1214-1294) asked the Pope for missionaries. In 1286 there was hope that the empress Yailak might become Catholic; in fact, the Khan Toqtaï and his family were baptized in 1290. In 1291 John of Montecorvino¹³ left Tabriz as a legate of Pope Nicholas IV to the court of Kublai Khan. An Italian merchant, a Dominican, Nicholas of Pistoia, and John traveled to India where the Dominican died. When John and the merchant arrived in Khambaliq (Beijing) in 1294, Kublai Khan had recently died. Montecorvino tasted instant success. He even brought to

¹¹ These names are variously written: Kerait, Kereit, Kereyid; Onggud, Ongud, Öngüd, Öngüt.

¹² Cf. I. DE RACHEWILTZ, *Papal Envoys to the Great Khan*, Stanford University Press, Stanford, Calif. 1971.

¹³ Cf. *I francescani e la Cina. 800 anni di storia*, Edizioni Porziuncola, Assisi 2001; L. ARNOLD, *Princely Gifts and Papal Treasures: the Franciscan Mission to China and its Influence on the Art of the West 1250-1350*, Desiderata Press, San Francisco 1999.

Catholic union the Onggud Nestorian Prince George (Korgiz). He translated the New Testament and the Psalter and trained boys for the liturgical services. After eleven years, the German Franciscan Arnold of Cologne was sent to him (1303 or 1304). In 1307 Pope Clement V, sent seven Franciscan bishops to consecrate John of Montecorvino archbishop of Beijing, but only three arrived (1308). Several bishops were ordained and Franciscan monasteries were founded in various provinces. In 1336, Toghun Temür, the last Mongol emperor, asked for missionaries and Benedict XII sent fifty (1338). The hopes were so high. But then the Chinese overthrew the Mongols, establishing the Ming Dynasty (1368), and the next year all Christians were expelled from China.

Interestingly, the Chinese did not distinguish the two versions of Christianity (Catholic and Nestorian). They were both foreign and allies of the Mongols. Neither Church survived the fall of the Yuan dynasty.

In other lands, the Dominicans were active in the Middle East, especially in Armenia, where they enjoyed some success in bringing several monasteries to Catholic union. Farther east, the Dominican Jordan Cathala de Severac worked in Quilon, India, and John XXII made him bishop in 1329, but his work did not survive.

Ecclesia in Asia sadly concludes: “Christianity almost vanished in these regions for a number of reasons, among them the rise of Islam, geographical isolation, the absence of an appropriate adaptation to local cultures, and perhaps above all a lack of preparedness to encounter the great religions of Asia”.¹⁴ Well, perhaps! Only God knows for sure. The history of the 14th and 15th centuries in Asia was tragic for Christianity. The radicalization of Islam – think of the bloody campaigns of Tamerlane (1336-1405) – dealt a deadly blow to Christianity. There was also the Black Death (mid fourteenth century), which almost annihilated the missionaries. And, again, the sins of a divided and un-evangelized

¹⁴ JOHN PAUL II, Post-synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Ecclesia in Asia*, no. 9.

cal Church.¹⁵ The fact is that, according to one estimate, between 1200 and 1500, the number of Asian Christians fell from 21 million to 3.4 million.¹⁶

THE AGE OF DISCOVERIES

We call “Age of Discoveries” the era opened by the Portuguese ventures to the East and the Spanish expansion to the West, speaking from a euro-centric point of view. The arrival of Vasco da Gama in India (1498) paved the way for what *Ecclesia in Asia* calls “a new era of missionary endeavor”.¹⁷ In fact, the Portuguese settlements of Goa (India) and Macao (China) became the main centers of missionary activity in the 16th and 17th centuries. The greatest missionaries of Asia, viz. Saint Francis Xavier, Matteo Ricci, Roberto de Nobili, Alessandro Valignano, Alexandre de Rhodes... all came under the umbrella of the Portuguese *Padroado*. The system, for sure, had flaws and generated conflicts.¹⁸

We should not forget that, from the beginning of the Church, traders – lay people! – have often been the first missionaries. Then the

¹⁵ Some testimonies: When the Turks sacked Edessa in the 1140s, Michael the Syrian described how the city of Abgar, the friend of Christ, “was trampled underfoot because of our iniquity”. Bishop John of Córdoba (10th c.) described the compromises that Spanish Christians had to make under Muslim rule, which he delicately terms as “the great calamity that we suffered for our sins”. Solomon of Basra in the 1220s traced the history of Muslim victories in the form of a retroactive prophecy: “It is not because God loves them that He has allowed them to enter into the kingdoms of the Christians, but by reason of the iniquity and sin which is wrought by the Christians”; Cf. L.E. BROWNE, *The Eclipse of Christianity in Asia from the Time of Mohammed till the Fourteenth Century*, Howard Fertig, New York 1967.

¹⁶ Cf. J.P. JENKINS, *The Lost History*, cit., 24.

¹⁷ JOHN PAUL II, Post-synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Ecclesia in Asia*, no. 9.

¹⁸ Cf. A.S. HERNÁNDEZ, S.I., *Las misiones bajo el patronato portugués*, Madrid 1977. C.J. COSTA, *A Missiological Conflict Between Padroado and Propaganda in the East*, Pilar Publ., Goa 1997.

professional missionaries – clergy and religious – followed them, because they knew the way to reach places and offered protection to stay there.

The first period of this era was reasonably successful. Francis Xavier¹⁹ came to India in 1542, worked in Indonesia (1546-47), and reached Japan in 1549. His method was to open doors that others might enter. And so, thirty years after him, there were in Japan two hundred thousand Christians and two hundred fifty churches. Other missionaries worked in the Japanese field, like Franciscans and Dominicans; by the time of the persecution (beginning in 1597), the Japanese Catholics were perhaps over five hundred thousand.²⁰

I will not linger exposing the missionary vision of A. Valignano and the work of Matteo Ricci in China (the 400th anniversary of whose death we celebrate this year), nor the similar mission method of Robert de Nobili in India, and the flexible approach of Alexander de Rhodes in Vietnam,²¹ because we have to mention in this period the foundation and role of the Congregation *De Propaganda Fide* (now For the Evangelization of Peoples), of momentous importance, which was prompted precisely by the missionary needs of this part of the world. New elements entered missionary undertaking: the direct involvement of the Holy See, the creation of Apostolic Vicars, the insistence on the native clergy, etc. It was at this time that the incredible saga of the Korean Church started, the only Church planted by natives, when in 1784 Yi Sung-hun was baptized in Beijing, with the name of Peter, and then, in Korea, he baptized his friends and many neophytes; the Church lived without priests practically until 1836. During this period, the apostolic

¹⁹ On Saint F. Xavier biography, cf. *Monumenta Historica Societatis Iesu*: biographies by G. SCHURHAMMER (1955), and J. BRODERICK (1952).

²⁰ Cf. C.R. BOXER, *The Christian Century in Japan, 1549-1650*, Carcanet Press Ltd, Manchester, United Kingdom 1993.

²¹ Cf. A.C. ROSS, *A Vision Betrayed: The Jesuits in Japan and China, 1542-1742*, Maryknoll, Orbis, New York 1994.

enthusiasm was somehow marred by what Pius XI called “ the accursed question of Chinese Rites ”, whose scars still hurt.²² History might be tempted to conclude that this “ wave ”, once more, was finally a failure, given the calamitous situation at the end of the 18th century.²³

NINETEENTH CENTURY MISSIONARY AWAKENING

After the Napoleonic wars (1814), Europe experienced a remarkable ecclesial renewal, especially with an impressive explosion of missionary zeal. On the one hand, the whole People of God became involved, thanks to institutions like the Children’s Mission, the Society of St. Peter Apostle, and others. On the other hand, never in history had there appeared so many religious congregations dedicated to mission. Two traits are noteworthy: the massive participation of women²⁴ and the élan of Protestant missions.²⁵ Most of the local Churches we have today were “ planted ” during this period (apart from the Philippines).

This missionary thrust came allied to the European colonial expansion, which caused many observers to see in both the same enterprise.²⁶ This mission was systematic, cloning the European Churches with their faith, institutions and culture.

During this time, Missiology was born, opening the door to new

²² Cf. G. MINAMIKI, *The Chinese Rites Controversy from the Beginnings to Modern Times*, Loyola University Press, Chicago 1985.

²³ Cf. J. COMBY, *Deux mille ans d’évangélisation*, Desclé, Paris 1992, 191-193.

²⁴ Just consult the Mission Weeks of Louvain: *Le rôle de la femme dans les missions*, (1950) and *Visage nouveau de la femme missionnaire* (1973).

²⁵ Cf. E.G. LÉONARD, *Histoire Générale du Protestantisme*, PUF, Paris 1964, vol. 3, 460-559.

²⁶ Cf. for India the bitter critique of M.K. PANIKKAR, *Asia and Western Dominance*, G. Allen & Unwin, London 1965; on China: P. HARRINGTON, *Peking 1900: The Boxer Rebellion*, Osprey, Oxford 2001.

ideas.²⁷ The Magisterium was more active, especially Pius XI with *Maximum illud* (1919), followed by these deeds: in 1925, the Pope put an end to the question of the Rites; in 1926, he ordained the first Chinese bishops,²⁸ followed by the first Japanese (1927) and Vietnamese (1933) bishops.

The results of this period have been very positive in Africa and Oceania; not so much in Asia. However, the roots of what we are now were planted then and it is up to us to make them bear more fruits.

POST-COLONIAL MISSION AND PRESENT SITUATION

The second half of the 20th century has brought a dramatic change to the Church and to the world. Vatican II (1962-1965) opened vast horizons, especially for missionary activity. Sure, a serious crisis followed the council, which twenty years later was still struggling to overcome.²⁹ As for the world, decolonization has given Africa, Asia and the Pacific their dignity as nations. This coming of age was sometimes peaceful, sometimes painful. The missions were deeply affected. Some countries expelled the foreign missionaries and many more closed their doors to new ones. Besides, the secularization of the West has dried up the flow of European personnel to the “missions” which now have become “churches”. For the first time in history, the Asian Churches are on their own, so to say, fully responsible for their sustenance and growth. United in the Federation of Asian Bishops’ Conferences (FABC), they strive to create a new way of being Church and, therefore, a new way of missioning.³⁰

²⁷ Cf. J.A.B. JONGENEEL, *Philosophy, Science and Theology of Mission in the 19th and 20th Centuries. A Missiological Encyclopedia*, Part 2, Peter Lang, Frankfurt 1997.

²⁸ There had been the case of Gregorio Lo(pez), O.P., ordained in Canton in 1685.

²⁹ Cf. F. GÓMEZ, *The Missionary Activity Twenty Years After Vatican II*, “East Asian Pastoral Review” 23 (1986), 26-57.

³⁰ See FABC Special Report, *A New Way of Being Church-in-Mission in Asia*, http://www.sedos.org/english/FABC_Special_Report.htm, accessed on July 3, 2010.

Now the missionary endeavor is Asian, in Asian ways.³¹ For the first time in history, an Asian Mission Congress has taken place (2006), explaining this Asian way as “an evocative way through stories, parables and symbols”.³² Taking dialogue as a method, the whole Church is missionary: “The whole community, every group, every person, with whom we relate in service, is an agent of evangelization”.³³ I dare say that hope in the future is today more justified than ever. Caution, though, is also needed here: the statistics reckon the Catholics in Asia to be 1.8% of the population (*Agenzia Fides* 22/10/2005).³⁴ Only Korea has had real growth: Since 1999 there has been an annual increase of 2-3%. Japan has decreased; Vietnam in 1956 had 7.5% of Catholics, while in 2008, the proportion had decreased to 7.18%.³⁵ India is 1.55% Catholic (2005), practically the same proportion as in 1965; and so on.

I would not close this brief survey without a note on the new wave we are now surfing... the “cyber-mission”. In less than one generation Internet has become a “New World”. It is also Asia that populates most of this “digital continent”. The possibilities for mission are mind-boggling: only now it becomes possible to reach the majority of the billions waiting for Christ in this vast region. Missionary training ought to

³¹ Cf. J. YUN-KA TAN, *Missio Inter Gentes: Towards a New Paradigm in the Mission Theology of the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences*, “FABC Paper” 109 (2004).

³² *Message of the First Asian Mission Congress of FABC*, Chiang Mai, Thailand, October 18-22, 2006; cf. more in M. SATURNINO DIAS (ed.), *Telling the Story of Jesus in Asia: A Celebration of Faith and Life*. Asian Trading Corporation, Bangalore 2007.

³³ *A Renewed Church In Asia: A Mission of Love and Service*, The Final Statement of the Seventh Plenary Assembly of the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences Samphran, Thailand, January 3-12, 2000.

³⁴ In 1900, the Catholics were 1.3% (including the Philippines), according to *The Catholic Encyclopedia* (Cf. *Catholic Encyclopedia*, Robert Appleton Company, New York 1907).

³⁵ Cf. MGR. S. DELACROIX (ed.), *Histoire Universelle des Missions Catholiques*, Vol.3, Grund, Paris 1957, 239; for the situation in our days, cf. <http://www.dunglac.org/index.php?m=module2&v=detailarticle&id=45&ia=7469>, accessed July 3, 2010.

prepare “i-evangelizers” lest we miss the opportunity.³⁶ As the Holy Father has said: “can we not see the web as also offering a space – like the ‘Court of the Gentiles’ of the Temple of Jerusalem – for those who have not yet come to know God?”³⁷ Besides, we emphasize inculturation in mission; the Pope calls this cyber-apostolate “diaconia of culture”, which should make us think.³⁸

My final point in this story is a brief mention of the role of the laity. We should not forget that “because the lay faithful belong to Christ, Lord and King of the Universe, they share in his kingly mission and are called by him to spread that Kingdom in history”.³⁹ And so it has been: Christian traders have opened the doors to the Gospel, both in Nestorian and Catholic missions. The women, wives of Mongol rulers, were greatly influential, especially Princess Sorghaghtani Beki, wife of a son of Genghis Khan and mother of Kublai Khan and Mongke Khan. Now the role of the laity is still more decisive, as we are here to show. Only when the whole laity become a massive missionary body, will the Church experience a real springtime in Asia.

HOLINESS AND MARTYRDOM

Speaking of “holiness” places the history of missions in a very different horizon. To begin, let me quote Cardinal Dias: “The theme of evangelization must be considered in the wider context of the spiritual combat which began in the Garden of Eden with the fall of our first parents, in the wake of fierce hostilities between God and the rebel

³⁶ Cf. PONTIFICAL COUNCIL FOR SOCIAL COMMUNICATIONS, *The Church and Internet*, February 22, 2002.

³⁷ BENEDICT XVI, Message for the 44th World Communications Day, *The Priest and Pastoral Ministry in a Digital World: New Media at the Service of the Word*, Sunday, 16 May 2010.

³⁸ Cf. *Ibid.*

³⁹ JOHN PAUL II, Post-synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Christifideles Laici*, no. 14.

angels. If this context is ignored in favour of a myopic world-vision, Christ's salvation will be conveniently dismissed as irrelevant".⁴⁰

If we consider history in the light of this principle, we realize that, perhaps, where we record "failure" God might have smiled with victory. The model is Calvary: was it a defeat or a triumph? When we revisit the waves of missionaries, marching out to unknown lands –like Abraham – we discover there an apostolic faith and obedience to Jesus' command which is, precisely, the glory of God, that is, the final goal of any Christian activity. This apostolic zeal reached often the level of heroism which is the definition of holiness.⁴¹

Francis X. Clark wrote of the four hundred and eighty-six Catholic canonized Asian Saints and Blessed.⁴² But we think first of the thousands of monks, mainly of the East Syrian and Jacobite churches, who peopled the monasteries from Mesopotamia to China and India, covering the huge span of Central Asia: Arabs, Persians, Turks, Uygurs, Tartars, Indians, Chinese... of all races, abandoning the world to serve only God: this is a triumph of light over darkness and, therefore, a success of the mission itself. Limiting ourselves to Catholics: the Asian Religious, from the medieval Franciscan and Dominican convents to the contemporary Congregations, are outstanding witnesses to the sanctity of the Gospel; an accomplishment of the mission.⁴³

Martyrdom is the summit of holiness, and Asia is the continent with the biggest number of martyrs: what an achievement for Mission! When the Roman Empire stopped persecuting Christians, the Persian Sassanids started; from 339, under Shapur II (309-379), until 401, "One estimate is that as many as 190,000 Persian Christians died in the

⁴⁰ CARD. IVAN DIAS, Prefect of the Congregation for Evangelization, to the Anglican Conference of Lambeth, 22 July 2008.

⁴¹ Cf. J.D. RYAN, "Missionary Saints of the High Middle Ages: Martyrdom, Popular Veneration, and Canonization" in: *The Catholic Historical Review*, 90 (1: 2004), 1-28.

⁴² Cf. F.X. CLARK, S.I., *Asian Saints*, Claretian Publications, Quezon City 2000; see also V.J. O'MALLEY, C.M., *Saints of Asia: 1500 to the Present*, Our Sunday Visitor 2007.

⁴³ Just think that India with 82,348 Sisters is second only to Italy (102,089) in number of women religious in the world: data of *Agenzia Fides* 22/10/2005.

terror...” – more than in the Roman persecutions.⁴⁴ In the modern ages, we can briefly remember that, in India, Gonsalo Garcia and John de Brito were canonized in 1629 and 1947 respectively. Japan had the most systematic – and effective – persecution, with perhaps more than two hundred thousand martyrs, such as Paul Miki and companions.⁴⁵ Korea honors more than ten thousand martyrs and John Paul II canonized one hundred and three in Seoul in 1984, lead by Andrew Kim Taegon, with Chung Hasang and Kim Hyoim who were lay leaders. Vietnam has more than two hundred thousand martyrs including those one hundred and seventeen canonized in 1988: Andrew Dung Lac and companions. China has one hundred and twenty martyrs canonized by John Paul II in 2000: thirty-three were missionaries and eight-seven native Chinese; there had been sporadic persecutions during the 17th, 18th and 19th centuries, but the so called Boxer rebellions, in 1900, produced the greatest numbers. About thirty-two thousand Christians were butchered, of whom two hundred and twenty-two were Orthodox.⁴⁶

The Philippines has no martyrs; Lorenzo Ruiz and companions and Catholic Pedro Calungsod who was beatified in 2000 were “made in Japan”.

The 20th c. is deemed as the bloodiest in human history, also for Christian martyrs.⁴⁷ In Asia, we must mention the genocide of Armenians, perpetrated by the Ottoman Turks in 1915, resulting in 2.1 million victims.⁴⁸ Persecutions have flared here or there, like in Thailand the so-

⁴⁴ Cf. S.H. MOFFETT, *A History*, cit., 139-145.

⁴⁵ Cf. *Catholic Encyclopedia*, Robert Appleton Company, New York 1907, entry on “Japanese Martyrs”.

⁴⁶ Cf. P. HARRINGTON, *Peking 1900*, cit.; see also J.W. ESHERICK, *The Origins of the Boxer Uprising*, University of California Press, Berkeley 1987; D. PRESTON, *The Boxer Rebellion*, Berkley Publishing, Berkeley 2001.

⁴⁷ Cf. R. ROYAL, *The Catholic Martyrs of the Twentieth Century: A Comprehensive World History*, The Crossroad Publishing Company, New York 2006.

⁴⁸ Divided roughly: 1.2 Million Armenian Christians, 0.6 million Syriac/Assyrian Christians and 0.3 million Greek Orthodox Christians, a number of Georgians were also killed. Cf. M.A. AHNERT, *The Knock at the Door: A Journey Through the Darkness of Armenian Genocide*. Beaufort Books, New York 2007.

called Seven Blessed Martyrs of Songkhon, in 1940, who were beatified by Pope John Paul II in 1989. Even today, in Muslim societies, martyrdom is often a likelihood, and in India, Hindu fanatics are a threat to Christians in many regions. Everywhere, workers for justice are always in danger.

CONCLUSION

Let us conclude with a historian: “Christians believe that God speaks through history; and only by knowing that history can we hope to interpret momentous events like the Japanese persecutions and the fall of the Asian Churches. Yet Christians have systematically forgotten or ignored so very much of their history that it is scarcely surprising that they encounter only a deafening silence. Losing the ancient Churches is one thing, but losing their memory and experience so utterly is a disaster scarcely less damaging”.⁴⁹ History is a teacher, but its lessons are never evident. The waxing-waning saga of Christian missions in Asia has been appraised only variously; today the emphasis is on “incarnation” and as one theologian puts it: “Only when the Gospel passes through the prism of Asian World-view, will it reveal its splendor, colours and beauty to the Asian peoples”.⁵⁰ Perhaps God’s clock for Asia ticks with a different rhythm and we must revere the mystery.

⁴⁹ Cf. J.P. JENKINS, *The Lost History*, cit., 262.

⁵⁰ F. WILFRED, *Sunset in the East?*, University of Madras 1991, 167.

Jesus Christ, a gift for Asia: demands, tasks and challenges of evangelizing today

Cardinal TELESPHORE PLACIDUS TOPPO*

It is a joy for me to participate in this great Congress of Asian Catholic Laity, whose sole interest in coming together is evidently to PROCLAIM JESUS CHRIST IN ASIA TODAY! I thank very warmly, and congratulate heartily, His Eminence Stanislaw Card. Rylko, and all the members of the Organizing Committee, and the Cardinal Archbishop of Seoul, for this splendid initiative!

I begin with a true story. A Hindu grocery store-owner in my archdiocese, many years ago, asked the missionary who used to come to his shop for any book to read. The priest only had with him the New Testament in Hindi, and he gave it to him. Some days later, the Hindu excitedly asked the priest, “Is this true, Father? It says Jesus rose from the dead. Did he really rise from the dead?” The priest said, “Yes, it is true! And he is alive today and active in my life! That is why I left my country and came here to India”. The man replied, “But Father, why didn’t you tell us before now? This is wonderful news that Jesus Christ died and rose again and is alive even today!” This must be proclaimed.

Yes, my dear friends, this is the Good News that the great peoples of Asia are still waiting to hear! Jesus Christ is truly a gift for Asia, and you and I are called to proclaim it both by word and by deed, by sharing about and by witnessing to our faith in the Resurrection and Lordship of Jesus Christ, the Saviour of all humanity! The call to evangelize is a privilege and a gift of every Christian, while at the same time it

* Archbishop of Ranchi, India.

places demands on the way we live, and confronts us with various challenges which we must overcome, in the power of the Spirit of God.

To illustrate some of these demands, tasks and challenges of evangelization, let me first share about our own large Tribal Church of Chotanagpur, India. The servant of God, Fr. Constant Lievens, S.I. is known as the Apostle of Tribal Chotanagpur. He was the son of a poor peasant in Belgium, and was called by God, through Mary's intervention, to come and evangelize the poor, oppressed and exploited tribals in the central tribal belt of India. Moved with compassion, he came to India one hundred and twenty-five years ago, to help, love and serve us. He learnt our language, entered into dialogue with our people, and worked with us for our liberation, transformation, and empowering in Christ.

Our tribals, Mundas, Hos, Oraons, Kharias etc., all belonged to the poor agricultural class. They had little hope of survival. To escape starvation they were forced to migrate from our State to the Assam tea gardens, the Andaman forests, to the brick kilns along the Ganges, to Kolkata as coolies, etc.; their future was extremely bleak; they were of course totally illiterate; they were subjugated, dispossessed and reduced to slavery by the landlords (*zamindars*); they were in the clutches of the moneylenders; they had mostly lost faith in God; they were dead-scared of evil spirits who left them no peace.

It was into such a world that Fr. Lievens arrived in 1885. There were then just fifty-six Catholics in the area entrusted to him for evangelization. But just over seven years later, and him already a broken man due to exhaustion and tuberculosis, there were more than eighty thousand baptized Catholics!

What made this possible? How did he find a way to these poor people's hearts? A wise Officer-in-charge of the local police station, whom he had befriended, explained to Fr. Lievens the root of these people's real condition and how he could help them. Lievens thereafter made himself available to the people who came in groups from far away villages, and readily listened to their tales of misery. He conversed with

them in their own tongue and daily spent hours and hours with them, taking down notes and advising them. Occasionally, on invitation, he would go on horseback to evaluate things on the spot. He studied the existing law of the land and soon realized how the people were being deprived of their rights deceitfully in the courts of law because the judges, who did not know the language of the people, were being misled by the landlords (*zamindar*).

Because the people lost their cases one after another, a mood of despair had set in among them. Finding no way out, many lost the will to live. People also came to believe that their “good spirits” were far inferior to the “spirits of the *dikus*” (foreigners). They felt abandoned by God. But Lievens taught the people to present their cases truthfully and honestly, took down the facts and proofs, put them in contact with trustworthy pleaders, and convinced them that justice could be obtained. Following his guidance and encouragement, they began to win their cases. They regained confidence in themselves, in their rights, in God. They discovered by their own experience that Lievens and people like him were very different from other outsiders. These men were not “*dikus*”. They were men of God. And so, the people eagerly listened to Lievens as gradually he also began to share the Gospel of Jesus Christ, the unique and universal Saviour, who could liberate, transform and empower them through Baptism in water and the Holy Spirit. Thus began the “miracle of Chotanagpur”, the one I personally know so well.

Here were people that were “no people”. They were mercilessly trampled underfoot. Their will to live was crushed to powder and dust. But once they accepted Jesus, they rose again with him in Baptism. Now they are God’s people, a people with a voice, with self-respect and confidence, able to stand up for their rights. As a Catholic community they have increased and multiplied. They have secured for themselves a place under the sun, as “children of the light”. Again and again I have heard Catholic aboriginal/indigenous children proclaim: “*ham krusvir kissi se kam nahin* – We are Eucharistic People and not inferior to any-

one!" These people now serve their country and earn a name for themselves in war and peace. Besides, the people are serving their society and their country by becoming heads of their own communities. Others do so by becoming teachers and catechists, and move out to different parts of the country. Looking at their service also through their associations we can say that the Church of Chotanagpur is in great part the church of the laity.

The missionaries were inspired then to promote priestly vocations among the Tribal boys. In 1903 an Apostolic School was opened. Then the Jesuit Archbishop of Kolkata approached the Holy See, and thus St. Albert's Seminary, Ranchi was opened in 1914. It is this seminary, of which I am a product, and this tribal church, that has produced in less than one hundred years thousands of priests, even more thousands of religious sisters, and innumerable religious brothers and seminarians scattered in many parts of the world. Within a period of fifty-four years (1873-1927), the number of Catholics rose from zero to 2,690,724. That was their number in 1927 when Ranchi was made a diocese. Now eighty-three years later, we can no longer count them, because they have become twelve dioceses with their own indigenous Bishops, and are also to be found in large numbers in another dozen dioceses, several of which too have Ranchi-linked adivasi or tribal Bishops in five neighbouring States of India.

With such a beautiful case study, who will ever again be able to question the wisdom of serving the poor as part of the effective evangelization of Asia? *Ecclesia in Asia* is very emphatic that "human beings, not wealth or technology, are the prime agents and destination of development. Therefore, the kind of development that the Church promotes... begins and ends with the integrity of the human person, created in the image of God and endowed with a God-given dignity and inalienable human rights".¹

¹ JOHN PAUL II, Post-synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Ecclesia in Asia*, no. 33.

I believe that our story, and other similar historic experiences in Asia, like here in South Korea itself, where in a short time, ten percent of the population is already Catholic, form part of the background for what *Ecclesia in Asia* declares about evangelization as service of the poor today. Behind this “today” there are two thousand years of history, ever since Jesus founded the Church, in Asia itself. It is certainly very sad that even after such a long period of time the overall percentage in Asia remains so meager. Yet *Ecclesia in Asia* opens in a spirit of exultation, praise and thanksgiving. In its very first paragraph, Venerable Pope John Paul II re-affirms his anticipation that the third millennium will see a great harvest of faith in Asia.

One of the reasons for thinking so is no doubt the fact that Asia is the continent of the poor. God cannot but feel compassion for us, and will intervene to come to our help. As *Ecclesia in Asia* notes: “the majority of Asian peoples are subjected to suffering, violence, discrimination and poverty”.² This realization calls all of us to “a new commitment to mission”.³ Therefore the Pope expressed his prophetic conviction that the Church’s “character, spiritual fire and zeal will assuredly make Asia the land of a bountiful harvest in the coming Millennium”.⁴

The Church offers her service to all people, but does so especially to the poor, and preferentially so. To this, Blessed Mother Teresa of Kolkata bore particular witness, one that focused the attention of India, Asia, and the world, on Jesus. He is present among us, and him personally we can serve, in the disguise of the poor. That also had been the very spirit of the Servant of God, Fr. Constant Lievens, the Apostle of Chotanagpur, who has remained an icon of the service of the Church to indigenous/tribal populations. These people have been found especially responsive to the Gospel, more than any other group. *Ecclesia in Asia* recalls that the poor “often feel drawn to the person of Jesus Christ and to the Church as a

² *Ibid.*, no. 4.

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ *Ibid.*

community of love and service... Herein lies an immense field of action in education and healthcare, as well as in promoting social participation. The Catholic community needs to intensify pastoral work among these people, attending to their concerns and to the questions of justice, which affect their lives. This implies an attitude of deep respect for their traditional religion and its values; it implies as well the need to help them to help themselves, so that they can work to improve their situation and become the evangelizers of their own culture and society”.⁵

These thoughts do not refer to a mere futuristic utopia. They actually find their verification in what has happened in several countries of Asia (the list of these countries being too long for me to mention each one here). However, since this is a Laity Congress, let us not forget that the back-up to the first evangelizers in many countries were and are all laity! When the Jesuit Fr. Lievens started his missionary service to the tribals of Chotanagpur, there were a mere three-four priests and not a single nun available to work together with him. But the Holy Spirit brought him wonderful partners, laymen and women, who became catechists and helpers in a number of ways. The success-story of our now vast Tribal Church is due not only to Lievens’ pioneering work but, in large part, also to the devoted and committed tribal laity! A similar assertion can be made also of the Church in the seven States of North East India (especially Arunachal Pradesh), where Jesus Christ has become a gift to the people in that part of India mainly because of the heroic and admirable work of the laity! May this Congress be a catalyst for more and more such laity in every Asian country, for *Ecclesia in Asia* correctly states: “To bear witness to Jesus Christ is the supreme service which the Church can offer to the peoples of Asia, for it responds to their profound longing for the Absolute, and it unveils the truths and values which will ensure their integral human development”.⁶

⁵ *Ibid.*, no. 38.

⁶ *Ibid.*, no. 20.

I now summarize what we must keep in mind in the following days: evangelization is two-dimensional; one dimension is “going out” as a missionary (a “Go and tell” dimension); the other is the dimension of a “life-witness” to the Good News (the “Come and see” dimension), “Come and see that the Good News is not empty theory, it really works, it is working in our own lives, it has transformed us”.

As *Redemptoris Missio* reminds us, “The witness of a Christian life is the first and irreplaceable form of mission. Christ, whose mission we continue, is the witness par excellence, and the model of all Christian witness. The first form of witness is the very life of the missionary, of the family, of the parish community, which reveal a new way of living. Everyone in the Church can and must bear this kind of witness. In many cases it is the only possible way of being a missionary”.⁷

Not every Christian in Asia can be a missionary in the sense of going out to tell the Good News, but every Christian in Asia can be a missionary by witnessing to a change in lifestyle, values and behaviour. This is true for bishops and priests as much as for the religious and laity! For all of us, the following three areas of witnessing are especially important.

First, “The evangelical witness which the world finds most appealing is that of concern for people, and of charity towards the poor, the weak, and those who suffer”.⁸ The first area is that of charity: to take initiatives of love. Mother Teresa received a State Funeral in non-Christian India because she was revered as “an angel of mercy and of love” by all.

Secondly, “The Church is called to bear witness to Christ by taking courageous and prophetic stands in the face of the corruption of political or economic power”.⁹ This stresses that Christians are not only called to religious activity but also to be “salt,” “light,” and “leaven” for the world. Saint Paul therefore exhorts us all: “Do not be con-

⁷ IDEM, Encyclical Letter *Redemptoris Missio*, no. 42.

⁸ *Ibid.*

⁹ *Ibid.*, no. 43.

formed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect” (*Rom 12: 2*).

Related to this is the third area which touches each Christian deeply: that of “imitating Christ’s own simplicity of life”.¹⁰ This is a very vast area wherein the first Beatitude must become the Christian’s motto: “Blessed are the poor” (*Lk 6: 20*) or “Blessed are the poor in spirit” (*Mt 5: 3*). It calls for a radically new attitude (among all Christians) towards money and other worldly goods. Among the early Christians, the Spirit achieved something mind-boggling: “there was not a needy person among them”, because those with more gave generously and gladly to their new family members, to their fellow Christians in need (Cf. *Acts 2: 44ff; 4: 32ff*). In this context, I am reminded of a document of the Congregation for the Clergy in Rome which pointed out a few areas of witnessing for the clergy, such as: “stop wearing expensive gold watches; don’t drive the latest flashy cars”, etc.! Bishops, priests, religious, laity and youth must all take heed!

The power of the Spirit for direct evangelization and indirect witnessing go together. Matthew (28: 19-20) records Christ’s mandate in these words: “Go make disciples of all nations... and I am with you always”. Mark (15: 20) has similar words: “Go, preach the good news to the whole creation ...and the Lord worked with them and confirmed their message with the signs that followed”. Two elements are common to these texts: the universality of the task, and the assurance that the Lord is with us. The task of spreading the Good News is not ours alone, but the Lord is with us in the task. Let us go ahead confidently, in the power of the Holy Spirit!

I end with the stirring words of The Second Vatican Council about the uniqueness and centrality of Jesus Christ for the world, and for Asia: “The Church believes that Christ, who died and was raised up for

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

all, can through his Spirit offer man the light and the strength to measure up to his supreme destiny. Nor has any other name under heaven been given to man by which he is saved. She likewise holds that in her most benign Lord and Master can be found the key, the focal point, and the goal of all human history. The Church also maintains that beneath all changes there are so many realities which do not change and which have their ultimate foundation in Christ, who is the same, yesterday, today, and forever. Hence, in the light of Christ, the image of the unseen God, the Council wishes to speak to all men and women, in order to illuminate the mystery of man, and to cooperate in finding the solution to the outstanding problems of our time”.¹¹

We too must continue to speak to all men and women of Asia about the gift that Jesus Christ is to humanity. To quote Pope Paul VI, “Let us preserve the delightful and comforting joy of evangelizing, even when it is in tears that we must sow. May it mean for us an interior enthusiasm that nobody and nothing can quench. And may the world of our time, which is searching, sometimes with anguish, sometimes with hope, be enabled to receive the Good News not from evangelizers who are dejected, discouraged, impatient or anxious, but from ministers of the Gospel whose lives glow with fervor, who have first received the joy of Christ, and who are willing to risk their lives so that the kingdom may be proclaimed and the Church established in the midst of the world”.¹²

I pray that as Asian Christians, through the special intercession of Mary, Queen of so many of our countries, we all will have the joy of seeing the world become the Kingdom of our God, a Kingdom of justice and peace, of truth and love, of beauty and happiness, through, with and in Jesus Christ the Lord, Amen.

¹¹ SECOND VATICAN ECUMENICAL COUNCIL, Pastoral Constitution *Gaudium et Spes*, no. 10.

¹² PAUL VI, Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, no. 80.

The vocation and mission of the lay faithful in the light of the *Christifideles Laici*

Bishop JOSEF CLEMENS*

INTRODUCTION

As we know, the former professor of theology, later Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger, and now Pope Benedict XVI, has a special ability to grasp the problems that “remain up in the air”: issues that are really pressing and important for theology and pastoral care, yet require further investigation and an in-depth reply.¹ I think that it is enough to compare a few titles of his theological, philosophical and socio-political works in the last forty years and the specific time of those publications to show his acute sensitivity for such issues.²

So, as a young professor in Freising, Bavaria, Joseph Ratzinger touched upon our present topic for the first time – according to my knowledge – with his review³ of Yves Congar’s work, “Lay People in the Church”.⁴ Already in 1958 he foresaw the focal points that needed reform in both “theory and practice” of the Catholic laity of that period. Among the topics covered are the altered status of the Catholic

* Secretary of the Pontifical Council for the Laity.

¹ Cf. T. WEILER, *Volk Gottes - Leib Christi. Die Ekklesiologie Joseph Ratzingers und ihr Einfluß auf das Zweite Vatikanische Konzil*, Matthias-Grünewald, Mainz 1997, 121.

² Cf. J. RATZINGER/PAPST BENEDIKT XVI, *Das Werk. Bibliographisches Hilfsmittel zur Erschließung des literarisch-theologischen Werkes von Joseph Ratzinger bis zur Papstwahl*, hrsg. vom Schülerkreis, bearbeitet von V. Pfnür, Verlag Sankt Ulrich, Augsburg 2009.

³ Cf. J. RATZINGER, “Der theologische Ort des Laien, a review of Y. Congar’s book, *Der Laie, Entwurf einer Theologie des Lientums*“, Schwabenverlag, Stuttgart 1957, *Wort und Wahrheit* 13 (1958), 718 (= J. RATZINGER, *Gesammelte Schriften. Kirche - Zeichen unter den Völkern*, Bd. 8/2, Verlag Herder, Freiburg im Breisgau 2010, 1273-1276).

⁴ Cf. Y. CONGAR, *Lay People in the Church*, Newman Press, 1965.

layperson (his/her “maturity”); the lack of a corresponding development in theology (regarding the laity’s theological and ecclesial placement); the need for clarity in distinguishing between the common and the ministerial priesthood; the secular character of the laity; and the need for a specific lay spirituality.

Three years later, while professor at the University of Bonn, he made a very original contribution with an article on ecclesiology for a prestigious German theological dictionary “*Lexikon für Theologie und Kirche*”. Regarding the ecclesial placement of the lay person, he affirmed: “The position of the lay person is not defined by some type of service of secondary importance, but by the fact that he or she bears the mystery of Christ, the salvific sign of the Church in the world, and makes it present in ever new situations, in obedience to the call of God”.⁵

We can find further enlightenment for our present theme in the addresses made by Cardinal Ratzinger, twenty-six years later, as the then-president of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith during the Seventh General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops. This 1987 Synod addressed the vocation and mission of the lay faithful⁶ and provided the basic working points for the Post-synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Christifidelis Laici* of the Servant of God, Pope John Paul II.⁷

⁵ Lexical entry for “Kirche”, in: *Lexikon für Theologie und Kirche*, Verlag Herder, Freiburg im Breisgau 1961 (II ed.), vol. 6, 172-183, 177.

⁶ Cf. G. CAPRILE, *Il Sinodo dei Vescovi 1987, Settima Assemblea Generale Ordinaria (1-30 ott.1987)*, Edizioni La Civiltà Cattolica, Roma 1989; see also: M. TOSO (a cura di) *Laici per una nuova evangelizzazione. Studi sull'esortazione «Christifideles Laici» di Giovanni Paolo II*, Editrice Elle Di Ci, Leumann, Torino 1990; E. GLAUBITZ, “Der christliche Laie. Vergleichende Untersuchung vom Zweiten Vatikanischen Konzil zur Bischofssynode 1987”, in *Reihe: Forschungen zur Kirchenrechtswissenschaft*, vol. 20, Verlag Echter, Würzburg 1995.

⁷ Cf. JOHN PAUL II, Post-synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Christifideles Laici* on the vocation and mission of the lay faithful in the Church and in the world; see also: P. NEUNER, *Der Laie und das Gottesvolk*, Verlag Knecht, Frankfurt am Main 1988; W. KASPER, “Berufung und Sendung der Laien in Kirche und Welt. Geschichtliche und

His first address took place during the first general congregation of the Synodal Assembly (October 1, 1987). He spoke about the work of the Commission, which he headed, that was preparing the Catechism of the Universal Church.⁸ In the widespread awareness for the need of a “valid” and “current” point of reference in catechetical work, we understand the vital necessity of educating the Catholic laity. Thus the catechism is a privileged instrument for faith education.⁹

The Cardinal theologian’s second address to the Synod took place at the end of its first week (October 6, 1987). In dealing with the meaning of the term “laity” he directs our attention to the fundamental question of the identity and dignity of the lay faithful.¹⁰ [I omit his third address (October 29, 1987), in which the Cardinal, as chairman of the committee mentioned above, informed the Synod Assembly of the latest developments in the case of Archbishop Marcel Lefebvre].¹¹

Due to his particular sensitivity as theologian, cardinal and pope, I would like his thoughts to accompany us at some crucial points of our journey through the Apostolic Exhortation *Christifideles Laici*. We can ask ourselves: as theologian and pastor, what theological developments

systematische Perspektiven”, in: *StdZ* 205 (1987), 579-593; J. FARNLEITNER, “Developments in the Lay Apostolate during the last 20 years and Challenges arising for the Laity”, in: *Christifideles Laici: comments and reflections*, The Laity Today, vol. 32-33, Vatican City 1989-90, 9-20; L. KARRER, *Die Stunde der Laien. Von der Würde eines namenlosen Standes*, Verlag Herder, Freiburg im Breisgau 1999.

⁸ Cf. G. CAPRILE, *Il Sinodo*, cit., 80-82; see also: JOHN PAUL II, Post-synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Christifideles Laici*, no. 34: “In the case of coming generations, the lay faithful must offer the very valuable contribution, more necessary than ever, of a systematic work in catechesis”.

⁹ Cf. JOHN PAUL II, Apostolic Constitution *Fidei Depositum* on the publication of the Catechism of the Catholic Church prepared following the Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, 11 October, 1992, no. 2.

¹⁰ Cf. G. CAPRILE, *Il Sinodo*, cit., 180: Card. Ratzinger presents four aspects to take into consideration: (a) the theological point of view, (b) the sociological and functional aspects, (c) the way of living the Gospel in the world and (d) the notion of laity from a historical perspective.

¹¹ Cf. *Ibid.*, 528-531.

did Joseph Ratzinger anticipate, and what advances did he seek from the Magisterium of the Church in this area?¹²

Here we have a sort of “trialogue” regarding some key issues:

1. the mystery of the Church as Communion
2. the vocation and mission of the laity
3. the two most pressing challenges of the lay faithful in Asia.

Before addressing these three issues, I should say that *Christifideles Laici* represents for our dicastery a kind of “*magna charta*” or “handbook” for the lay apostolate.¹³ Its enduring value can be summarized as follows: “In the first place, it provides an organic summary of the teachings of the Second Vatican Council on the laity, in the light of the subsequent Magisterium and practice of the Church. In the second place, in its approach to new movements and questions arising after and as a result of the Council, it proceeds to a delicate and necessary discernment as regards experiences, trends and forms of lay participation that characterized the first post-conciliar period. Thirdly, it gives new indications intended ‘to stir and promote a deeper awareness among all the faithful of the gift and responsibility they share ... in the communion and mission of the Church’ (JOHN PAUL II, Post-synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Christifideles Laici*, no. 2)”.¹⁴

¹² Cf. J. RATZINGER, *Der theologische Ort*, cit., 718: “Denn die wirkliche theologische Aufarbeitung der Probleme des Laientums war trotz einiger guter Ansätze bislang noch immer eine offene Aufgabe”.

¹³ Cf. E. PIRONIO, “Presentazione della ChL”, in: *L'Osservatore Romano*, 30-31 gen. 1989, tabloid insert, 3: “ChL ... (constitutes) for the lay faithful a rich and complete summary (a miniature *somma*) of the conciliar teachings on their identity, vocation and mission, within an ecclesiology of communion. It is a compendium of doctrine that merits greater reflection in order to relaunch the active participation of the lay faithful in the life and mission of the Church”.

¹⁴ PONTIFICIUM CONSILIUM PRO LAICIS, *The Pontifical Council for the Laity*, Vatican City 1997, 17; see also: E. GLAUBITZ, *Der christliche Laie.*, cit., 255 (no. 122).

We should underline the fact that the continual references in *Christifideles Laici* to the allegory of the vine, the vineyard and its workers (cf. *Mt* 20: 1-2, *Jn* 15: 1-11) is a particularly useful image in presenting the identity and dignity of the vocation and mission of the laity. The image of the vineyard – with its positive aspects of vitality, wholeness and fecundity – conveys the beauty, depth, attractiveness and persuasiveness of what it means to be a Christian.¹⁵

Without a doubt, the Second Vatican Council was the most important event for recent theology and the subsequent practice of the laity,¹⁶ so much so that some authors call it “the Council of the laity”.¹⁷ Let us not forget that at this Council, for the first time in the history of the Church, laypersons participated as observers and, also for the first time, the laity were made the “object” of reflection and the specific topic of a conciliar document.

This is why it is useful to bear in mind the conciliar texts which have guided theological developments, and which continue to be the reference point for theology and its practical applications in the life of the Catholic laity today.¹⁸ After the great leap forward of the Second

¹⁵ Cf. R. SCHNACKENBURG, “Das Johannesevangelium”, Bd. III, cap.13-21, in: *HTbKNT*, 108-123.

¹⁶ Cf. H. FILSER, “Das Dekret über das Laienapostolat *Apostolicam actuositatem*”, in: F.X. BISCHOF / ST. LEIMGRUBER (Hrsg.), *Vierzig Jahre II. Vatikanum. Zur Wirkungsgeschichte der Konzilstexte*, Verlag Echter, Würzburg 2005², 253-279; see also: G. BAUSENHART, “Theologischer Kommentar zum Dekret über das Apostolat der Laien *Apostolicam actuositatem*”, in: P. HÜNERMANN / B.J. HILBERATH, (ed.), *Herders Theologischer Kommentar zum Zweiten Vatikanischen Konzil*, Verlag Herder, Freiburg im Breisgau, 2005, vol. 4, 1-123; E. KLINGER/R. ZERFASS, *Die Kirche der Laien. Eine Weichenstellung des Konzils*, Verlag Echter, Würzburg 1987; C. BENDER/M. THULL, (Hrsg.), *Berufung und Sendung der Laien in Kirche und Welt*, Bernward Verlag, Hildesheim 1987.

¹⁷ Cf. E. GLAUBITZ, *Der christliche Laie*, cit., 60.

¹⁸ Cf. F. HENGSBACH, “Über das Apostolat der Laien, Lateinischer und deutscher Text mit Kommentar”, in *Konfessionskundliche und kontroverstheologische Studien*, Bd. XXIII, hrsg. vom Johann-Adam-Möhler-Institut, Paderborn 1967; see also: A. SCHROTT, E. TRUMMER, M. LIEBMANN, E. HOFER, *Das Laiendekret im Lichte des Konzils*, Wien 1966; R. PELLITERO (ed.), *Los laicos en la eclesiología del Concilio Vaticano II. Santificar el mundo*

Vatican Council, the Synod of Bishops of 1987 took another important step by evaluating the personal and communal experience of the whole Church in the twenty-two years gone by, so as to promote and consolidate the corresponding Church practice.¹⁹ This is the ultimate goal of *Christifideles Laici*: to encourage all of the lay faithful to take up anew the missionary endeavor to obey the command of Christ, “Go into all the world and preach the Gospel to the whole creation” (Mk 16: 15).²⁰

THE ECCLESIOLOGY OF COMMUNION

Number 8 of *Christifideles Laici* reveals the “common thread” for our reflections. “Only from inside the Church’s mystery of communion is the ‘identity’ of the lay faithful made known, and their fundamental dignity revealed. Only within the context of this dignity can their vocation and mission in the Church and in the world be defined”.²¹

At the press conference presenting *Christifideles Laici*, the then-president of the Council for the Laity, Cardinal Eduardo Pironio, concluded his speech by pointing out the “novelty” of the Post-synodal Exhortation: “Those who look for new things in the document or concrete solutions will perhaps come away disappointed... But the real and

desde dentro, Madrid 2006; H. SCHAMBECK (ed.), *Apostolat und Familie, Festschrift für Opilio Kardinal Rossi zum 70 Geburtstag*, Berlin 1980.

¹⁹ Cf. JOHN PAUL II, Post-synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Christifideles Laici*, no. 2: “In reality, the challenge embraced by the Synod Fathers has been that of indicating the concrete ways through which this rich ‘theory’ on the lay state expressed by the Council can be translated into authentic Church ‘practice’”.

²⁰ Cf. *Ibid.*, no. 64.

²¹ *Ibid.*, no. 8; cf. J. RATZINGER, *Weggemeinschaft des Glaubens. Kirche als Communio*, Sankt Ulrich Verlag, Augsburg 2002, 62-67; see also D. TETTAMANZI, “The Church: Mystery, Communion, Mission. The structure of *Christifideles Laici*”, in: *Christifideles Laici: Comments and Reflections*, The Laity Today, vol. 32-33, Vatican City 1989-90, 21-36; A. SCOLA, “La teologia del laicato alla luce dell’ecclesiologia di comunione: l’identità del fedele laico”, in: Pontificium Consilium pro Laicis (ed.), *Christifideles laici. Bilancio e prospettive*, Laici oggi n. 16, Libreria Editrice Vaticana, Città del Vaticano 2010, 23-46.

deeper novelty is this: the document frames the issue of the laity within an authentic ecclesiology of communion. The faithful are not considered ‘on their own’, as isolated or separate, but in the overall context of a Church which is essentially ‘communion in Christ’ (LG 1) and at the same time ‘universal sacrament of salvation’ (LG 48).²² The Exhortation *Christifideles Laici* makes its own the words of the final report of the Extraordinary Synod of Bishops in 1985, stating that the Second Vatican Council’s ecclesiology of communion is the central and fundamental idea of all the conciliar documents.²³

Christifideles Laici describes the communion of the faithful with Christ by means of the image of the vine: “I am the true vine and my Father is the vinedresser... Abide in me and I in you’ (*Jn* 15: 1, 4). These simple words reveal the mystery of communion that serves as the unifying bond between the Lord and his disciples, between Christ and the baptized: a living and life-giving communion ... From the communion that Christians experience in Christ there immediately flows the communion which they experience with one another”.²⁴ This “*koinonia-communion*” is the “union with God brought about by Jesus Christ, in the Holy Spirit. The opportunity for such communion is made present in the Word of God and in the Sacraments. Baptism is the door and the foundation of communion in the Church. The Eucharist is the source and summit of the whole Christian life (cf. *Lumen Gentium*, no. 11)”.²⁵

Following the teaching of the first number of the Dogmatic Constitution *Lumen Gentium*, the Exhortation *Christifideles Laici* states: “The

²² E. PIRONIO, *Presentazione*, cit., 3; see also: E. GLAUBITZ, *Der christliche Laie*, cit, 256 (no. 124).

²³ Cf. JOHN PAUL II, Post-synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Christifideles Laici*, no. 19; see also: S. MATUSIAK, *Kirche und Politik, Die politische Dimension des Laienapostolats im Licht der Ekklesiologie des Zweiten Vatikanischen Konzils*, Reihe: Ethik in Forschung und Praxis, Bd. 3, Hamburg 2005, 51-54.

²⁴ JOHN PAUL II, Post-synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Christifideles Laici*, no. 18.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, no. 19.

reality of the Church as Communion is, then, the integrating aspect, indeed the central content of the ‘mystery’, or rather, the divine plan for the salvation of humanity”.²⁶ Quoting the words of Pope Paul VI, *Christifideles Laici* develops the concept of Church-Communion especially as a communion of saints: “The meaning of the Church is a communion of saints. ‘Communion’ speaks of a double, life-giving participation: the incorporation of Christians into the life of Christ, and the communication of that life of charity to the entire body of the Faithful, in this world and in the next, union with Christ and in Christ, and union among Christians, in the Church”.²⁷

Church-Communion is an “organic” communion, characterized by a diversity and a complementarity of vocations and states in life, of ministries, of charisms and responsibilities.²⁸ “Because of this diversity and complementarity every member of the lay faithful is seen in relation to the whole body and offers a totally unique contribution on behalf of the whole body”.²⁹ *Christifideles Laici* points out that the Holy Spirit is always the dynamic force of unity in the Church.³⁰

Immediately after the Council, in a reflection on the structure of Vatican II, the theologian Ratzinger places the point of departure for a renewed theology of the laity within the broader context of a renewal of theology and the reality of the liturgy. “There will continue to remain

²⁶ *Ibid.*

²⁷ Cf. JOHN PAUL II, Post-synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Christifideles Laici*, no. 19 where it quotes the speech given by Paul VI at the Wednesday General Audience of June 8, 1966.

²⁸ Cf. JOHN PAUL II, Post-synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Christifideles Laici*, no. 20 & 21.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, no. 20.

³⁰ Cf. *Ibid.*: “One and the same Spirit is always the dynamic principle of diversity and unity in the Church. ... Thus, Church communion is a gift, a great gift of the Holy Spirit, to be gratefully accepted by the lay faithful, and at the same time to be lived with a deep sense of responsibility. This is concretely realized through their participation in the life and mission of the Church, to whose service the lay faithful put their varied and complementary ministries and charisms”.

even afterwards distinctions between a lay person and a priest, between a religious and a non religious: there exist different functions and different paths within the Church, and one thing is not the other. To place everything on the same level would not only be false, but also foolish. Nevertheless, the Council has brought about an opening in this sector, that represents a part of a new opening of the Church herself, as willed by her... The Christian liturgy signifies ... the communal adoration of God on behalf of all the baptized as they sit at table with the Risen Lord... It has, in this case, the characteristic of embracing all: everyone, even if they have different functions, are all subjects, because all form part of the body of the Lord... I think that the renewal of theology of the laity must start here, from the renewal of theology itself and of the reality of the liturgy, which is not a privilege of only the clergy; nor something to be enclosed within a glass case of its valuable past, but it is by its essence a liturgy, a universal worship".³¹

The Apostolic Exhortation answers one of Cardinal Ratzinger's greatest concerns: that of reducing the laity's activity to only fulfilling tasks within the Church's structure. While quoting from the Code of Canon Law, it observes: "However, the exercise of such tasks does not make pastors of the lay faithful: in fact, a person is not a minister simply in performing a task, but through sacramental ordination. [...] The task exercised in virtue of supply takes its legitimacy formally and immediately from the official deputation given by the pastors, as well as from its concrete exercise under the guidance of ecclesiastical authority (cf. Decree on the Apostolate of the Laity *Apostolicam Actuositatem*, no. 24)".³² The indications of the post-synodal document are very clear: "The various ministries, offices and roles that the lay faithful can legiti-

³¹ J. RATZINGER, *Kirchliche Zusendung zur Welt auf dem Zweiten Vatikanischen Konzils*, in: IDEM, *Das neue Volk Gottes, Entwürfe zur Ekklesiologie*, Patmos-Verlag, Düsseldorf 1969, 287-301, 290 ff.

³² JOHN PAUL II, Post-synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Christifideles Laici*, no. 23.

mately fulfill in the liturgy, in the transmission of the faith, and in the pastoral structure of the Church, ought to be exercised in conformity to their specific lay vocation, which is different from that of the sacred ministry”.³³

Christifideles Laici expresses at the same time a deep appreciation for the contribution of the lay faithful, both women and men, in the work of the apostolate, in evangelization, sanctification and the Christian animation of temporal affairs, as well as their generous willingness to supply in situations of emergency as was the case, and continues to be, in some parts of Asia. Here, we can also note by way of example, the efforts of numerous lay catechists.³⁴

After the experience of the second conciliar period, the theologian Ratzinger advised the Synod to guide the Church more in line with the twelfth chapter of the First Epistle of Paul to the Corinthians, and this desire is fulfilled admirably in number 20 of *Christifideles Laici*.³⁵ Furthermore, the theological clarifications and explanations of terminology in number 23 regarding the danger of a “clericalization” of the laity surely gained his full consent.³⁶

THE VOCATION OF THE LAY FAITHFUL

1. *The identity and dignity of the laity*

Cardinal Ratzinger gave a fundamental premise in his second address at the 1987 Synod: “In order for this discussion to be fruitful,

³³ *Ibid.*

³⁴ Cf. *Ibid.*

³⁵ Cf. J. RATZINGER, *Das Konzil auf dem Weg, Rückblick auf die zweite Sitzungsperiode*, Verlag J.P. Bachem, Köln 1964, 40-43.

³⁶ Cf. J. RATZINGER, “Ohne ein Amt frei für die Welt”, an interview with M. Lohmann, in: *Rheinischer Merkur/Christ und Welt*, 46 (13). November 1987, 24 = J. RATZINGER, “Balance del Sínodo sobre los laicos”, in: IDEM, *Ser cristiano en la era neopagana*. Edición e Introducciones de J.L. Restán, Ediciones Encuentro, Madrid 1995, 163-170.

we need to clearly define the full weight of the concept ‘laity’”.³⁷ Already as a young theologian he had delved into the matter of a more precise terminology, and hoped to find a rich and positive description of being “lay faithful” that surpassed the negative description of a lay person as merely someone who is not a priest or not a religious.³⁸

So who are the lay faithful, what is their identity and dignity, their vocation and mission, according to the Post-synodal Exhortation?³⁹ *Christifideles Laici* (no. 9) responds to this question by citing no. 31 of *Lumen Gentium*: “The term ‘lay faithful’ is here understood to mean all the faithful except those in Holy Orders and those who belong to a religious state sanctioned by the Church. Through Baptism the lay faithful are made one body with Christ and are established among the People of God. They are in their own way made sharers in the priestly, prophetic and kingly office of Christ. They carry out their own part in the mission of the whole Christian people with respect to the Church and the world”.

This is a typological description that contains several elements.⁴⁰ The lay Christian is distinguished – in a positive way – as (1) an active member of the People of God, (2) participating in the mission of the whole Church and as (3) jointly responsible for the Church. The lay Christian – in a negative sense – is (4) not ordained and a non-religious. Because of their specific nature, lay people are (5) engaged in world affairs, a trait that defines their particular vocation in the Church and the world. Their main task is – through the testimony of their life – (6) to make Christ visible in the world, (7) to permeate the world with his Spirit and to order it according to his will.

³⁷ This is immediately followed by four aspects to be taken into consideration: (a) the theological point of view, (b) the sociological and functional aspects, (c) the way of living the Gospel in the world and (d) the notion of laity from a historical perspective.

³⁸ Cf. J. RATZINGER, *Das Konzil auf dem Weg*, cit., 40.

³⁹ Cf. M. VERGOTTINI, art. “Laico”, in: *Teologia*, Collana: I Dizionari San Paolo, Edizioni San Paolo, Cinisello Balsamo 2002, 776-787.

⁴⁰ Cf. S. MATUSIAK, *Kirche und Politik*, cit., 57-61.

For this reason the first step to a better understanding of the identity and dignity of the lay faithful is that of properly valuing the sacraments of Christian initiation, especially Baptism⁴¹ which describes the “figure” of the layperson by virtue of these three fundamental aspects: “Baptism regenerates us to life as children of God; unites us to Christ and to his Body, the Church; and anoints us in the Holy Spirit, making us spiritual temples”.⁴²

Christifideles Laici speaks in clear terms about the meaning and purpose of the lay Christian’s existence: “It is no exaggeration to say that the entire existence of the lay faithful has as its purpose to lead a person to a knowledge of the radical newness of the Christian life that comes from Baptism, the sacrament of faith, so that this knowledge can help that person live the responsibilities which arise from that vocation received from God”.⁴³

Through their Baptism, the lay faithful participate in the threefold mission of Christ as Priest, Prophet and King.⁴⁴ They, together with ordained ministers and religious, and in light of their common dignity conferred by Baptism, are jointly responsible for the mission of the Church. The laity have a particular and distinguishing mark in their secular character,⁴⁵ a feature that the Second Vatican Council indicated as being proper to the lay person: “What specifically characterizes the laity is their secular nature”.⁴⁶

⁴¹ Cf. JOHN PAUL II, Post-synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Christifideles Laici*, no. 9, no. 17, no. 58; see also: G. CAMPANINI, *Il laico nella Chiesa e nel mondo*, Edizioni Dehoniane, Bologna 2004; E. MASSERONI, *Laici cristiani. Tra identità e nuove sfide*, Collana: Saggistica Paoline, Edizioni Figlie di San Paolo, Milano 2004; E. MALNATI, *Teologia del laicato*, Edizioni Piemme, Casale Monferrato 2000.

⁴² JOHN PAUL II, Post-synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Christifideles Laici*, no. 10.

⁴³ *Ibid.*

⁴⁴ Cf. *Ibid.*, no. 14.

⁴⁵ Cf. *Ibid.*, no. 15.

⁴⁶ Cf. SECOND VATICAN ECUMENICAL COUNCIL, Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, *Lumen Gentium*, no. 31: “What specifically characterizes the laity is their secular nature...by reason of their particular vocation especially and professedly ordained to the sacred ministry.

We should not consider the identity and action of the lay faithful merely from an anthropological or sociological point of view, but also in the light of theology and ecclesiology.

The world is the particular environment and means for the fulfillment of the lay vocation. The Synod Fathers stated that this “secular” aspect is to be understood in light of God’s creative and redemptive act, for God entrusted the world to men and women so that they might cooperate with his creative command.⁴⁷ Number 15 of *Christifideles Laici* sums it up in this way: “The lay faithful’s position in the Church,

Similarly, by their state in life, religious give splendid and striking testimony that the world cannot be transformed and offered to God without the spirit of the beatitudes. But the laity, by their very vocation, seek the kingdom of God by engaging in temporal affairs and by ordering them according to the plan of God. They live in the world, that is, in each and in all of the secular professions and occupations. They live in the ordinary circumstances of family and social life, from which the very web of their existence is woven. They are called there by God that by exercising their proper function and led by the spirit of the Gospel they may work for the sanctification of the world from within as a leaven. In this way they may make Christ known to others, especially by the testimony of a life resplendent in faith, hope and charity. Therefore, since they are tightly bound up in all types of temporal affairs it is their special task to order and to throw light upon these affairs in such a way that they may come into being and then continually increase according to Christ to the praise of the Creator and the Redeemer”; see also: SECOND VATICAN ECUMENICAL COUNCIL, Decree on the Apostolate of the Laity *Apostolicam Actuositatem*, no. 7: “The laity must take up the renewal of the temporal order as their own special obligation. Led by the light of the Gospel and the mind of the Church and motivated by Christian charity, they must act directly and in a definite way in the temporal sphere. As citizens they must cooperate with other citizens with their own particular skill and on their own responsibility. Everywhere and in all things they must seek the justice of God’s kingdom. The temporal order must be renewed in such a way that, without detriment to its own proper laws, it may be brought into conformity with the higher principles of the Christian life and adapted to the shifting circumstances of time, place, and peoples. Preeminent among the works of this type of apostolate is that of Christian social action which the sacred synod desires to see extended to the whole temporal sphere, including culture”; JOHN PAUL II, Post-synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Christifideles Laici*, no. 15; E. BRAUNBECK, *Der Weltcharakter des Laien. Eine theologisch-rechtliche Untersuchung im Licht des II. Vatikanischen Konzils*, Eichstätter Studien, Neue Folge XXXIV, Verlag Friedrich Pustet, Regensburg 1993.

⁴⁷ Cf. JOHN PAUL II, Post-synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Christifideles Laici*, no. 15 (Proposal 4).

then, comes to be fundamentally defined by their newness in Christian life and distinguished by their secular character”.

Therefore, any renewal of the lay faithful’s self-awareness and commitment must start from the source of Christian existence. Many of the baptized have forgotten or never realized this fundamental “newness” and this “specific difference” in their lives. We call to mind the admonition of Pope Leo the Great, also mentioned in *Christifideles Laici*: “Acknowledge, O Christian, your dignity!”⁴⁸

To understand well what it means to be a Christian, we must grasp more and more that to be baptized is not the same as joining a “club” or an international organization, nor is it comparable to “membership” in other religions. We know that these forms of membership are based on “some common interest” or on the fact of being born in a given territory or to parents who belong to a given religion. The teaching or rediscovery of the sacraments of Christian initiation is then a most pressing need, for both the “old” and the “new” particular Churches.⁴⁹ I firmly believe that *Christifideles Laici*, with its rich and profound description of lay identity and dignity, has fully satisfied the expectations of the theologian and Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger.

2. *The call to holiness*

The first and most fundamental aspect of the lay faithful’s call to holiness is the vocation to “the perfection of charity”. And this divine

⁴⁸ Cf. *Ibid.*, no. 17.

⁴⁹ Cf. *Ibid.*, no. 64: “It is of particular importance that all Christians be aware that through Baptism they have received an extraordinary dignity: through grace we are called to be children loved by the Father, members incorporated in Christ and his Church, living and holy temples of the Spirit... While this ‘Christian newness of life’ given to the members of the Church, constitutes for all the basis of their participation in the priestly, prophetic and kingly mission of Christ and of their vocation to holiness in love, it receives expression and is fulfilled in the lay faithful through the ‘secular character’ which is ‘uniquely and properly’ theirs”.

call, “made by the Father in Christ through the Holy Spirit” reveals their true dignity.⁵⁰ All the members of the Church receive from God and share the same vocation to holiness, inseparable from their dignity as baptized: namely, the call to fullness in Christian life and to perfection of charity in their particular state of life.⁵¹

Christifideles Laici points out the “concrete” consequences of this call, by referring to the letter to the Colossians (cf. *Col* 3: 17) as presented in number 4 of the Vatican II Decree on the Apostolate of Lay People, *Apostolicam Actuositatem*: “Neither family concerns nor other secular affairs should be excluded from their religious programme of life”. The Synod Fathers add: “The unity of life of the lay faithful is of the greatest importance: indeed they must be sanctified in everyday professional and social life. Therefore, to respond to their vocation, the lay faithful must see their daily activities as an occasion to join themselves to God, fulfill his will, serve other people and lead them to communion with God in Christ”.⁵²

The Exhortation *Christifideles Laici* sees the laity’s duty to witness as ultimately linked to the prophetic office of Christ: “Their responsibility, in particular, is to testify how the Christian faith constitutes the only fully valid response – consciously perceived and stated by all in varying degrees – to the problems and hopes that life poses to every person and society”.⁵³ Again and again the Magisterium of the Church urges the

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, no. 16; cf. *ibid.*, no. 17: “Such a vocation, then, ought to be called an essential and inseparable element of the new life of Baptism, and therefore an element which determines their dignity. At the same time the vocation to holiness is intimately connected to mission and to the responsibility entrusted to the lay faithful in the Church and in the world”.

⁵¹ Cf. *Ibid.*: “The vocation of the lay faithful to holiness implies that life according to the Spirit expresses itself in a particular way in their involvement in temporal affairs and in their participation in earthly activities”.

⁵² *Ibid.* (proposition 5).

⁵³ *Ibid.*, no. 34; cf. SECOND VATICAN ECUMENICAL COUNCIL, Decree on the Apostolate of the Laity *Apostolicam Actuositatem*, no. 13: “The laity fulfill this mission of the Church in the world especially by conforming their lives to their faith so that they become the light

faithful to make a vital synthesis between faith and life's daily duties, and feel the pressing need to give coherent testimony with their lives.⁵⁴

This is an appropriate moment to recall the "definition" of the lay faithful that Cardinal Ratzinger gave shortly after the end of the 1987 Synod: "A lay person is a baptized Christian who actively takes to heart his/her being a Christian, effectively living and achieving his/her specific profession in the world where he/she is placed as a Christian".⁵⁵

Christifideles Laici sees this living holiness of the laity, which emanates from their participation in the Church's holiness, as their primary and fundamental contribution to the building up of the Church, the "*communio sanctorum*". Holiness is the fundamental and indispensable condition for carrying out the Church's mission of salvation.⁵⁶

We can all attest that in our societies immersed in consumerism and dominated by mass media – whether in the East or the West – with an over-saturation of words and images, personal integrity has become decisive in transmitting the faith. The need for coherence of life could lead, in extreme cases, to the greatest and supreme witness of martyrdom, as the martyrs of nineteenth-century Korea show us.⁵⁷

of the world as well as by practicing honesty in all their dealings so that they attract all to the love of the true and the good and finally to the Church and to Christ. They fulfill their mission also by fraternal charity which presses them to share in the living conditions, labors, sorrows, and aspirations of their brethren with the result that the hearts of all about them are quietly prepared for the workings of saving grace".

⁵⁴ Cf. SECOND VATICAN ECUMENICAL COUNCIL, Pastoral Constitution *Gaudium et Spes*, no. 43; see also: JOHN PAUL II, Post-synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Christifideles Laici*, no. 17, no. 34, no. 35, no. 59; IDEM, Post-synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Ecclesia in Asia*, no. 23 and no. 42.

⁵⁵ J. RATZINGER, *Ohne ein Amt*, cit., 24: "Ein Laie ist ein getaufter Christenmensch, der aktiv sein Christentum in die Hand nimmt, es lebt und in seinem spezifischen Beruf in der Welt, in der er steht als Christ, wirksam vollzieht".

⁵⁶ Cf. JOHN PAUL II, Post-synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Christifideles Laici*, no. 17.

⁵⁷ Cf. *Ibid.*, no. 34: "The lay faithful have their part to fulfill in the formation of these ecclesial communities, not only through an active and responsible participation in the life of the community, in other words, through a testimony that only they can give, but also through a missionary zeal and activity towards the many people who still do not believe

THE MISSION OF THE LAY FAITHFUL

1. *Proclaiming and living the Gospel*

Taking up again the image of the vine and the branches, the Exhortation highlights the need for Christians to bear fruit⁵⁸ and considers communion with Jesus, which generates communion with others, as the essential prerequisite.⁵⁹

The Church as communion is by its very nature a missionary community, led by the Holy Spirit: “At this point *communion begets communion*: essentially it is likened to a *mission on behalf of communion*. [...] Communion and mission are profoundly connected with each other, they interpenetrate and mutually require each other to the point that *communion represents both the source and the fruit of mission: communion gives rise to mission and mission is accomplished in communion*”.⁶⁰

The Holy Spirit sends Christ’s disciples to evangelize to the ends of the earth (cf. *Acts* 1: 8). The Church is aware that “the communion received by her as a gift is destined for all people. Thus the Church feels she owes to each individual and to humanity as a whole the gift received from the Holy Spirit that pours the charity of Jesus Christ into the hearts of believers, as a mystical force for internal cohesion and external growth”.⁶¹

and who no longer live the faith received at Baptism”; and no. 39: “The proclamation of the Gospel and the Christian testimony given in a life of suffering and martyrdom make up the summit of the apostolic life among Christ’s disciples, just as the love for the Lord Jesus even to the giving of one’s life constitutes a source of extraordinary fruitfulness for the building up of the Church”.

⁵⁸ Cf. *Ibid.*, no. 32: “Bearing fruit is an essential demand of life in Christ and life in the Church”.

⁵⁹ Cf. *Ibid.*: “And communion with others is the most magnificent fruit that the branches can give: in fact, it is the gift of Christ and His Spirit”.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, no. 32 and no. 35.

The character of the Church as mission means that the primary and fundamental task of the lay faithful is to proclaim the Gospel. In his commentary back in 1967 on the famous quote from the conciliar Decree *Apostolicam Actuositatem* number 2 (“The Christian vocation ... is by its very nature a vocation to the apostolate”), the theologian Ratzinger said with great insight: “[This vocation] thus involves the basic understanding of Christian existence as dynamism. The mission can no longer be seen as external activity, superficially imposed on a static Christianity; being a Christian means in and of itself to go beyond oneself. Being a Christian is therefore characterized by a missionary imprint and as a result must express itself – in every time and in every true believer – as an external activity, put into motion so as to fulfill his/her deepest nature”.⁶²

Quoting from number 10 of *Apostolicam Actuositatem*, the Exhortation *Christifideles Laici* entrusts to the laity in a special way those who are “far” from the faith and the Church,⁶³ and indicates a systematic catechesis as the way to achieve this goal.⁶⁴ By announcing the Gospel, the lay faithful participate in the primary task of the Church, and thus they come to build and shape the community of faith “that confesses the faith in full adherence to the Word of God which is celebrated in the Sacraments, and lived in charity, the principle of Christian moral existence”.⁶⁵

Along the same lines Cardinal Ratzinger said, with his characteristic insightfulness, in the interview cited above: “This is precisely the spe-

⁶² J. RATZINGER, *Konzilsaussagen über die Mission außerhalb des Missionsdekrets*, in: IDEM, *Das neue Volk Gottes*, cit., 376-403, 388 ff.

⁶³ Cf. JOHN PAUL II, Post-synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Christifideles Laici*, no. 27; see also: IDEM, Post-synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Ecclesia in Asia*, no. 45.

⁶⁴ Cf. IDEM, Post-synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Christifideles Laici*, no. 33: “The lay faithful, precisely because they are members of the Church, have the vocation and mission of proclaiming the Gospel: they are prepared for this work by the sacraments of Christian initiation and by the gifts of the Holy Spirit”.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, no. 33.

cific task of the laity in the professional circles of a society: to act as Christians by developing in those circles an ethos inspired by faith”.⁶⁶ The Christian bears a message in the world, and a way of life that the world on its own cannot grasp. Both aspects have the potential and strength to transform the principles and standards of a life that is entirely “this-worldly”.

Christifideles Laici emphasizes that this Christian message awakens humanity to the true nature and meaning of its existence. Because of their “secular nature” the lay faithful play an irreplaceable role in this service to the human family. An authentically Christian life constitutes a service to all humanity and all aspects of society.⁶⁷

Christifideles Laici lists the following as fields of action: promoting the dignity of the person; protecting the inviolable right to life; acknowledging religious freedom and the family as the basic environment for social engagement; charity as inspiration and support for solidarity; the duty of all to engage in politics; the human person’s centrality in social and economic spheres; and evangelizing culture on both the general level as well as every individual culture.⁶⁸

In this sense, Professor Ratzinger – as early as 1970 – saw in the foundation of an association for young girls (“Union for the Protection of Young Women”) a model for lay responsibility and freedom.⁶⁹ He said that this lay initiative “...recognizes a need that is intrinsic to faith and fulfills it dutifully in freedom ... The layperson shows his/her own

⁶⁶ Cf. J. RATZINGER, *Obne ein Amt*, cit., 24.

⁶⁷ Cf. JOHN PAUL II, Post-synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Christifideles Laici*, no. 36: “In both accepting and proclaiming the Gospel in the power of the Spirit the Church becomes at one and the same time an “evangelizing and evangelized” community, and for this very reason she is made the servant of all. In her the lay faithful participate in the mission of service to the person and society”.

⁶⁸ Cf. *Ibid.*, no. 37- 44.

⁶⁹ Cf. J. RATZINGER, *Gesammelte Schriften* 8/1, Verlag Herder, Freiburg im Breisgau 2010, 105-118.

freedom and faith's requirements by doing that which the Church *should* do, that which is in fact necessary, but which can only happen if it is done freely, by free initiative".⁷⁰

In his 1987 interview the Cardinal highlights the motivations that lay people should take from the Synod: "...simply new encouragement to live as Christians in today's world. Also a call to rejoice in their faith. These synods are not about impressing the world with long documents; they are about forming Christian awareness, first through the exchange among bishops, which then should continue dynamically in dioceses. Every Christian is a living and active subject of the faith, and bears witness to this faith in the world. We have to comprehend both the unifying nature of the faith that binds us together into one large family, as well as the personal and individual task that every Christian has. This task cannot be imposed on the individual by any synod; the synod simply encourages him/her to recognize it".⁷¹

2. *A mission in the world*

The Exhortation *Christifideles Laici* focuses on a misunderstanding that arose in the post-conciliar period, and which the theologian Cardinal Ratzinger went to great means to rectify.⁷² This misunderstanding is the trend towards the "clericalization" of the laity, understood as a "preoccupation" with the functions and tasks internal to the Church, to the detriment of their "secular" commitment.⁷³

⁷⁰ IDEM, *Die anthropologischen Grundlagen der Bruderliebe*, in: IDEM, *Dogma und Verkündigung*, Wewel Verlag, München 1973, 239-253, 247.

⁷¹ IDEM, *Ohne ein Amt*, cit., 24.

⁷² Cf. IDEM, *Die anthropologischen Grundlagen*, cit., 247; see also: IDEM, *Ohne ein Amt*, cit., 24.

⁷³ Cf. JOHN PAUL II, Post-synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Christifideles Laici*, no. 2: "...the temptation of being so strongly interested in Church services and tasks that some fail to become actively engaged in their responsibilities in the professional, social, cultural

Taking the German-speaking Church as an example, the theological discussion and resulting practices manifest a tendency to frequently succumb to this temptation. A look at the numerous publications of the period is enough to show how this participation in the life and mission of the Church is most often understood as participation in the “internal” services, such as parish councils and commissions, the right to partake in hierarchical decisions, and administering the Church’s goods. The repeated requests for a share in decision-making and the claim to authorize the decisions of Church authority show this mentality clearly.⁷⁴

The theologian Ratzinger already stated back in 1970: “To speak of a [certain type of] theology of the laity is an utter contradiction in terms. The layperson is either a layperson or not. A theology of the layperson – understood as a campaign to have a part in the Church’s government – is a farce and remains so even if this misunderstanding is cloaked with the idea of running the Church in a conciliar way”.⁷⁵

The Exhortation *Christifideles Laici* insists on distinguishing, within the one mission of the Church, the ministry of pastors from the “lay nature” of the different ecclesiastical offices and functions entrusted to the laity, keeping in mind Baptism as the root of these duties.⁷⁶ Even a full-time job at the service of the Church does not change the lay per-

and political world; and the temptation of legitimizing the unwarranted separation of faith from life, that is, a separation of the Gospel’s acceptance from the actual living of the Gospel in various situations in the world”; see also: CONGREGATION FOR BISHOPS, Directory for the Pastoral Ministry of Bishops *Apostolorum Successores*, Libreria Editrice Vaticana, Vatican City 2004, no. 120.

⁷⁴ Cf. S. DEMEL, “Zur Verantwortung berufen, Nagelproben des Laienapostolats”, in: *Quaestiones disputatae* no. 230, Herder, Freiburg im Breisgau 2009; see also: the lexical entry for “Laie”, in: *Lexikon für Theologie und Kirche*, Verlag Herder, Freiburg im Breisgau 1997 (III), Bd. 6, 592-594; “Arbeiten in der Kirche. Ämter und Dienste in der Diskussion”, in: *Herder-Korrespondenz Spezial*, 1 (2009).

⁷⁵ J. RATZINGER, *Die anthropologischen Grundlagen*, cit., 246.

⁷⁶ Cf. JOHN PAUL II, Post-synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Christifideles Laici*, no. 23.

son's state of life, and this should remain clear in the terminology used.⁷⁷

Cardinal Ratzinger directs the discussion in another direction. "We must continue to clarify this concept and help Christians to see clearly that the value of a Christian is not measured by the number of jobs he/she holds in the Church. What the Church most needs are Christians who live in the world, not as Church employees, but as free individuals. It is a matter of each one perceiving his/her responsibility as a Christian, not according to regulations, but according to the way they live their Christianity. Christians should not use as a measuring stick their degree of involvement in the institutional set-up; the real measure should be the very strength of faith they hold within themselves".⁷⁸

3. *Forms of lay commitment*

These reflections lead us to the question of the ways that laity participate in Church life. It is important to note that all Christians have the freedom to choose their way of personal involvement in the Church. However, their first and indispensable duty consists in giving witness in their family, social and professional life.⁷⁹

⁷⁷ Cf. CONGREGATION FOR THE CLERGY, PONTIFICAL COUNCIL FOR THE LAITY, CONGREGATION FOR THE DOCTRINE OF THE FAITH, CONGREGATION FOR DIVINE WORSHIP AND THE DISCIPLINE OF THE SACRAMENTS, CONGREGATION FOR BISHOPS, CONGREGATION FOR THE EVANGELIZATION OF PEOPLES, CONGREGATION FOR THE INSTITUTES OF CONSECRATED LIFE AND SOCIETIES OF APOSTOLIC LIFE, PONTIFICAL COUNCIL FOR THE INTERPRETATION OF LEGISLATIVE TEXTS, *Instruction on Certain Questions Regarding the Collaboration of the Non-Ordained Faithful in the Sacred Ministry of Priest*, Libreria Editrice Vaticana, Vatican City 1997, 17-18; see also JOHN PAUL II, Post-synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Christifideles laici*, no. 23; the first article (on the "Need for an Appropriate Terminology") of the *Instruction on Certain Questions*, cit.; cf. also CONGREGATION FOR BISHOPS, Directory for the Pastoral Ministry of Bishops *Apostolorum Successores*, Libreria Editrice Vaticana, Vatican City 2004, no. 112.

⁷⁸ J. RATZINGER, *Ohne ein Amt*, cit., 24.

⁷⁹ Cf. SECOND VATICAN ECUMENICAL COUNCIL, Decree on the Apostolate of the Laity *Apostolicam Actuositatem*, no. 16: "The individual apostolate, flowing generously from its source in a truly Christian life (Cf. John 4:14), is the origin and condition of the whole lay apostolate, even of the organized type, and it admits of no substitute".

Among the possible areas of participation the first place goes to the parish, since it is the most immediately visible expression of ecclesial communion in a given place. The parish is not principally a structure, a territory, or a building, but rather, the “family of God”, a “fellowship afire with a unifying spirit”, a “familial and welcoming home”, the “community of the faithful”.⁸⁰ Plainly and simply put, “the parish is founded on a theological reality, because it is a Eucharistic community”.⁸¹ For this reason, the first and fundamental commitment for the laity is to participate actively in the Eucharistic community!⁸²

Christifideles Laici strongly recommends personal participation in parish life, for example in the liturgical services, in catechism, or in social works of charity.⁸³ It should be hoped that the lay faithful also help in the representative structures, such as the councils and pastoral synods of the diocese or the individual parishes.⁸⁴ *Christifideles Laici* reminds us that the vocation of every individual is “unique and irrepeatable”, for the good of all, that is, of the entire ecclesial community. In the apostolate exercised by the individual, the spreading of the Gospel takes on the characteristic of being personal, continual, and incisive.⁸⁵

Let us now look at the associative forms of lay participation, which are in a certain way a “qualified” type of collaboration.⁸⁶ Due to the growth and development of the movements and new ecclesial communities (“the new season of associations”), the Council’s teaching on the

⁸⁰ Cf. JOHN PAUL II, Post-synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Christifideles Laici*, no. 26.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*

⁸² Cf. J. RATZINGER, *Eucharistie und Mission*, in: IDEM, *Weggemeinschaft*, cit., 79-106, 105 ff.

⁸³ Cf. JOHN PAUL II, Post-synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Christifideles Laici*, no. 27.

⁸⁴ Cf. *Ibid.*, no. 25 ff.

⁸⁵ Cf. *Ibid.*, no. 28.

⁸⁶ Cf. J. RATZINGER, *Die kirchlichen Bewegungen und ihr theologischer Ort*, in: IDEM, *Gesammelte Schriften 8/1*, cit., 363-390; see also: J. RATZINGER, *Die Bewegungen, die Kirche, die Welt*, in: IDEM, *Gesammelte Schriften 8/1*, cit., 391-422.

associative form of lay involvement merits special attention. Number 18 of *Apostolicam Actuositatem* runs thus: “The faithful are called to engage in the apostolate as individuals in the varying circumstances of their life. They should remember, nevertheless, that man is naturally social and that it has pleased God to unite those who believe in Christ into the people of God ...and into one body The *group apostolate* of Christian believers then happily corresponds to a human and Christian need and at the same time signifies the communion and unity of the Church in Christ, who said, ‘Where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them’ (Matt. 18:20) ”.

Number 19 of *Apostolicam Actuositatem* denotes the Council’s turning point when it declares the right of the lay faithful to found and direct lay associations.⁸⁷ *Christifideles Laici* notes that this spring-time of new ecclesial groups brings about many different forms, both in methods of education, fields of action and outward configuration, but at the same time the document sees how “they all come together in an all-inclusive and profound convergence when viewed from the perspective of their common purpose, that is, the responsible participation of all of them in the Church’s mission of carrying forth the Gospel of Christ, the source of hope for humanity and the renewal of society”.⁸⁸

The Apostolic Exhortation also shows how these associations correspond to the social nature of human beings, and so Christian commit-

⁸⁷ Cf. *Codex Iuris Canonici* can. 215; see also: JOHN PAUL II, Post-synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Christifideles Laici*, no. 29; P. BOEKHOLT, *Der Laie in der Kirche. Seine Rechte und Pflichten im Neuen Kirchenrecht*, Verlag Butzon & Bercker, Kevelaer 1984; L. MARTINEZ SISTACH, *Las asociaciones de fieles*, Col. Llectània Sant Pacià 37, Barcelona 2004; C. HEGGE, *Rezeption und Charisma: der theologische und rechtliche Beitrag kirchlicher Bewegungen zur Rezeption des Zweiten Vatikanischen Konzils*, Würzburg 1999; IDEM (ed.), *Kirche bricht auf. Die Dynamik der Neuen Geistlichen Gemeinschaften*, Aschendorff Verlag, Münster 2005.

⁸⁸ JOHN PAUL II, Post-synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Christifideles Laici*, no. 29.

ment acquires a “social entity” that allows for a more extensive and effective impact on culture. In addition, faced with an ever more secularized society, a community is thus better able to provide support for a truly Christian life and missionary commitment.

This becomes all the more true in situations of Christian minority, where international groupings manifest the universality of the Catholic faith and provide a link with the See of Peter.⁸⁹ But prior to these considerations there is a fundamental ecclesiological reason that justifies lay associations. As number 18 of *Apostolicam Actuositatem* states, group apostolate “signifies the communion and unity of the Church in Christ”. It is important for new foundations to heed the fundamental criteria of ecclesiality, as formulated in number 30 of *Christifideles Laici*.

TWO URGENT TASKS FOR THE LAY FAITHFUL IN ASIA

Twelve years after the Synod on the laity, the Apostolic Exhortation *Ecclesia in Asia* specified some of the principles of *Christifideles Laici* with regard to the pastoral situation of the Asian continent.⁹⁰ In particular it highlights two points, namely the need for education in the faith and the re-awakening of the laity’s missionary commitment.⁹¹

1. *The need for adequate faith education*

In order to really live up to their Christian identity, the lay faithful must know their faith well. This principle applies twice as much where the Church is a minority!⁹² Our living of the faith cannot be limited to attending Mass and receiving the sacraments. *Christifideles Laici* has an

⁸⁹ Cf. IDEM, Post-synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Ecclesia in Asia*, no. 9.

⁹⁰ Cf. *Ibid.*, no. 24 (note 120).

⁹¹ Cf. *Ibid.*, no. 45.

⁹² Cf. *Ibid.*, no. 9.

entire chapter dedicated to the Christian instruction of the laity, referring again to the image of the vine and the branches: “the call to growth and a continual process of maturation, of always bearing much fruit”.⁹³

The basic objective of education in the faith is to help people to understand their vocation ever more clearly and to be more willing to live according to it.⁹⁴ The principle means listed by *Christifideles Laici* are listening to the word of God and of the Church, prayer, spiritual guidance, the recognition of personal gifts and the signs of the times. It is important not to stay at the level of mere theoretical knowledge, but go beyond this and to take concrete action: “to grow always in the knowledge of the richness of Baptism and faith as well as to live it more fully”.⁹⁵ The Apostolic Exhortation once again points to conciliar teaching.⁹⁶ It reiterates the bishops’ duties in this area⁹⁷ and highlights the many aspects of integral education and development.⁹⁸

Christifideles Laici insists on integral education because it alone can

⁹³ Cf. JOHN PAUL II, Post-synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Christifideles Laici*, no. 57-63, 57: “People are approached in liberty by God who calls everyone to grow, develop and bear fruit. A person cannot put off a response nor cast off personal responsibility in the matter ... In this dialogue between God who offers his gifts, and the person who is called to exercise responsibility, there comes the possibility, indeed the necessity, of a total and ongoing formation of the lay faithful ...”.

⁹⁴ Cf. *Ibid.*, no. 58: “God calls me and sends me forth as a labourer in his vineyard. He calls me and sends me forth to work for the coming of his Kingdom in history. This personal vocation and mission defines the dignity and the responsibility of each member of the lay faithful and makes up the focal point of the whole work of formation, whose purpose is the joyous and grateful recognition of this dignity and the faithful and generous living-out of this responsibility”.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*

⁹⁶ Cf. *Ibid.*, no. 57.

⁹⁷ Cf. *Ibid.*, no. 61.

⁹⁸ Cf. *Ibid.*, no. 60: “Above all, it is indispensable that they have a more exact knowledge – and this demands a more widespread and precise presentation – of the Church’s social doctrine ...”; see also: PONTIFICAL COUNCIL FOR JUSTICE AND PEACE (ed.), *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*, Libreria Editrice Vaticana, Vatican City 2004.

lead to unity of life, coherence between faith and life, and between life as a believer and citizen. Among the areas of integral, unified faith education we should emphasize spiritual, doctrinal and social education.⁹⁹ As regards places and resources, people and groups for this instruction in the faith, the synodal document emphasizes that God is the first educator, whose educational work is revealed and fulfilled in the person of Jesus and comes to people through the Holy Spirit, made real in the Church and through and in view of the Church.¹⁰⁰

Furthermore, the universal Church and the Pope have an irreplaceable role in the education of the laity. But particular Churches with their bishops and parishes with their priests must all play their part. *Christifideles Laici* speaks of the important role of small communities, groups, associations and movements in the process of preparing the lay faithful. Finally, families have a very special role in the task of education, and Catholic schools and universities also have an important function in this educational process.

There is one aspect of the reflections contained in *Christifideles Laici* that has particular relevance to the Asian continent, namely the attention paid to local culture, as the Synod Fathers wanted: “The formation of Christians will take the greatest account of local human culture, which contributes to formation itself, and will help to discern the value, whether implanted in tradition or proposed in modern affairs”.¹⁰¹

Therefore, *Ecclesia in Asia* (no. 22) gives the laity a decisive role in the process of inculturation: “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. A wider inculturation of the Gospel at every level of society in Asia will depend greatly

⁹⁹ Cf. JOHN PAUL II, Post-synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Christifideles Laici*, no. 60.

¹⁰⁰ Cf. *Ibid.*, no. 61.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, no. 63.

on the appropriate formation which the local Churches succeed in giving to the laity”.

Finally, let me mention three key tools for the faith education of the laity: the “Catechism of the Catholic Church”,¹⁰² the “Compendium of the Catechism of the Catholic Church”¹⁰³ and the “Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church”.¹⁰⁴ These resources are of great help in addressing urgent problems that require joint reflection and action.

2. *The urgent need for a missionary re-awakening*

In addition to the need for education in the faith, I can refer only briefly, for lack of time, to the need for a missionary revival of the lay faithful in Asia.¹⁰⁵

The Post-synodal Exhortation *Ecclesia in Asia* takes up the words spoken by Pope John Paul II at World Youth Day in Manila 1995: “If the Church in Asia is to fulfil its providential destiny, evangelization as the joyful, patient and progressive preaching of the saving Death and Resurrection of Jesus Christ must be your absolute priority”.¹⁰⁶

Let us not forget that among the effects of the globalization process an overall levelling of religious and ethical convictions is taking place. It seems that all religions and all kinds of proposals for ethics have the same value and the same degree of truth. The only real differences are emphases or preferences for this or that aspect. If as Christians we are to combat this “general relativism”, we must first of all become aware of our own identity and dignity as lay faithful.

¹⁰² *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, Libreria Editrice Vaticana, Vatican City 1993.

¹⁰³ *Compendium of the Catechism of the Catholic Church*, Libreria Editrice Vaticana, Vatican City 2005.

¹⁰⁴ PONTIFICAL COUNCIL FOR JUSTICE AND PEACE (ed.), *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*, Libreria Editrice Vaticana, Vatican City 2004.

¹⁰⁵ Cf. JOHN PAUL II, Post-synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Ecclesia in Asia*, no. 19.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, no. 2 = IDEM, *Speech to the 6th General Assembly of the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences* (FABC) Manila, 15 January 1995, no. 11; see also: *Ibid.*, no. 4.

We should remember that on the part of Christians there is no reason for any sense of inferiority, not even when they lack a long Christian tradition or when they live as minorities, a common situation in most Asian countries. In the end, the richness of the Christian message and the unity of life of those who live it out in the midst of all “outward” circumstances, lead to great “interior” joy and deep gratitude for the great gift of faith in God.

Cardinal Ratzinger affirmed as much when he said after the '87 Synod: “The Church lives above all by the fact that Christians feel the joy of being Christians and know that this is precisely why the Church needs them”.¹⁰⁷

Unity of life, when lived in a minority situation, creates yet another effect. The personal integrity of Christians who contribute to the building of bridges and relationships with the world around them, improves mutual relations and contributes to peaceful coexistence.¹⁰⁸ We remain firm in our certainty that “The believer is never alone!”¹⁰⁹ The believer

¹⁰⁷ J. RATZINGER, *Obne ein Amt*, cit., 24: “Aber vor allen Dingen lebt die Kirche davon, dass Christen Freude daran haben, Christen zu sein, und wissen, dass gerade so die Kirche sie braucht”.

¹⁰⁸ Cf. JOHN PAUL II, Post-synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Christifideles Laici*, no. 35: “The lay faithful can favour the relations which ought to be established with followers of various religions through their example in the situations in which they live and in their activities ... Throughout the world today the Church lives among people of various religions... All the Faithful, especially the lay faithful who live among the people of other religions...ought to be for all a sign of the Lord and his Church ...What is first needed for the evangelization of the world are those who will evangelize”; see also: IDEM, Post-synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Ecclesia in Asia*, no. 23: “This proclamation is a mission needing holy men and women who will make the Saviour known and loved through their lives ... Christians who speak of Christ must embody in their lives the message that they proclaim”.

¹⁰⁹ Cf. BENEDICT XVI, *Homily at the Islinger Feld in Regensburg, 12 September 2006*: “The Creed is not a collection of propositions; it is not a theory. It is anchored in the event of Baptism - a genuine encounter between God and man. In the mystery of Baptism, God stoops to meet us; he comes close to us and in turn brings us closer to one another. Baptism means that Jesus Christ adopts us as his brothers and sisters, welcoming us as sons and daughters into God’s family. He thus makes us one great family in the universal com-

always lives in a community of believers, both near and far. *Christifideles Laici* speaks of a “real, essential and constant bond” that joins the particular Churches with the universal Church.¹¹⁰ It often simply means being aware of breathing a more “Catholic” breath!¹¹¹

Another opportunity to capitalize upon, especially where the Church is a minority, are the various forms of lay association.¹¹² Besides the ecclesial and other reasons for their existence – such as the social dimension of the person – these forms of association provide an efficacious means of action. This is especially valid in a pluralistic and fragmented society where the faithful are few in number. These associations assist in offering the laity an integral and ongoing education in the faith.

It seems that the open acceptance of the forms of lay association on the part of this theologian, Cardinal and Pope, can be explained not only by their positive valorization as the fruit of Vatican II, but also by a hope that stems from the new forms of Christian fellowship.¹¹³ In a short book published in 1958, the young professor of dogmatic and fundamental theology in Freising presented Christian fellowship as a principle within the ecclesial community that is life giving and correcting, and which has decisive consequences for parish life, as well as for all ecclesial groups.¹¹⁴ To

munion of the Church. Truly, those who believe are never alone. God comes to meet us. Let us go out to meet God and thus meet one another! To the extent we can, let us make sure that none of God’s children ever feels alone!”

¹¹⁰ Cf. JOHN PAUL II, Post-synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Christifideles Laici*, no. 25.

¹¹¹ Cf. *Ibid.*, no. 26.

¹¹² Cf. IDEM, Post-synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Ecclesia in Asia*, no. 9: “The apostolic and charismatic movements too are a gift of the Spirit, bringing new life and vigour to the formation of lay men and women, families and the young. Associations and ecclesial movements devoted to the promotion of human dignity and justice make accessible and tangible the universality of the evangelical message of our adoption as children of God (Cf. *Rom* 8:15-16)”.

¹¹³ Cf. J. RATZINGER, *Gesammelte Schriften* 8/2, cit., 37-104.

¹¹⁴ Cf. IDEM, *Die christliche Brüderlichkeit*, in: *Gesammelte Schriften* 8/1, cit., 37-101, 83 ff. The author quotes from the book of German exegete HEINZ SCHÜRMANN, *Gemeinde*

encourage and to support these new movements as building blocks of Christian fellowship and as leaven within as they direct their energies towards the work of evangelization, is one of the “great projects” of Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger and Pope Benedict XVI!

I wish to end our long analysis with one last look at the Christians of the first centuries. Professor Christoph Marksches, a Protestant, professor of Ancient Church History at Humboldt University in Berlin, wrote a book a few years ago entitled: *How Did Christianity Ever Survive Antiquity?*. The author responds to the question with seven historical reasons, leaving out of the picture, however, any “divine” action or assistance.¹¹⁵

I think the first reason that he gives is directly connected with our theme. Marksches’ point of departure is the great “impression” that the first Christians made on the non-Christians as this reveals the fact of the exceptional personal credibility of each single Christian in a non-Christian world.¹¹⁶ The author specifically points out the “immediate personal effect” that the martyrs and missionaries provoked, as well as the monks and bishops.¹¹⁷ According to his thesis, the con-

als Bruderschaft im Lichte des Neuen Testaments, in: GENERALVORSTAND DES BONIFATIUSVEREINS (ed.) *Diaspora, Gabe und Aufgabe*, Paderborn 1955, 21-31, 24 ss. When referring to parish renewal through complementary initiatives, he agrees with an observation by Schürmann that “being a permanent entity, there remains the need today to continue to develop contemporary means of extra-ecclesial community life that complement worship observances and allow people to meet each other in fellowship ... If fellowship in parishes is, so to speak, subdivided according to associations and organisations, it will be necessary to continually organise activities at a general level that will effectively show that they are intended to foster greater unity in the parish. Each organisation has the right to exist only to the extent to which it is intended to be an initial instrument at the service of the fellowship of the whole community”.

¹¹⁵ Cf. C. MARKSCHIES, *Warum hat das Christentum in der Antike überlebt? Ein Beitrag zum Gespräch zwischen Kirchengeschichte und Systematischer Theologie*, Reihe: Forum. Theologische Literaturzeitung 13 (2004), Leipzig 2004.

¹¹⁶ Cf. J. RATZINGER, *Auf Christus schauen*. Einübung in Glaube, Hoffnung und Liebe, Herder Verlag, Freiburg 1989, 38.

¹¹⁷ Cf. C. MARKSCHIES, *Warum hat das Christentum*, cit., 44.

vincing force of the Christian faith consisted in a unique and common dynamic, expressed and recognized in the shared witness of each individual Christian, whether pastor or lay person, a faith that was lived out in its complete fullness without any if's, and's or but's. Regarding this point, Cardinal Ratzinger said: "The community of the living Church invited others to participate in this life. That was where the truth was revealed and it was from there that this life came forth".¹¹⁸

In 2005, shortly before being elected pope, Cardinal Ratzinger ended a conference in Subiaco with a clear invitation to be witnesses and to form this creative minority: "What we need most of all at this point in history are people whose enlightened and vibrant faith makes God credible to others. The negative testimony given by Christians who speak about God yet go against God's ways, has darkened God's image and opened the door to disbelief. It is people who have their gaze directed towards God that help us to understand true humanity. The world needs people whose minds are enlightened by the light of God, and whose hearts have been opened by God, so that their minds can speak to the minds of others, and so that their hearts can open up to the hearts of others".¹¹⁹

The twenty-second birthday of the Apostolic Exhortation *Christifideles Laici* will be celebrated at the end of this year: so we are dealing with a document that is still very "young", well theologically grounded, and full of enthusiasm and rich points for the vocation and mission of the laity in the Church and in the world. I am sure that the expectations and hopes nurtured in the heart of the theologian Joseph Ratzinger and those of the Church's Magisterium are expressed in the pronouncements made in the post conciliar teachings and in this Post-synodal

¹¹⁸ J. RATZINGER, *Auf Christus schauen*, cit., 38.

¹¹⁹ J. RATZINGER, *L'Europa di Benedetto nella Crisi delle Culture*, Edizioni Cantagalli, Siena 2005, 63-64.

The vocation and mission of the lay faithful in the light of Christifideles Laici

Apostolic Exhortation *Christifideles Laici*. Now it is up to us to keep these points present in our common reflections and to implement them in the life of our local Churches, in our families, in our work place, in our leisure, in our parish, and in our ecclesial movements and new communities.

The Christian formation of the laity and lay missionary efforts in Asia

Msgr. JOSEPH ĐÌNH DUC DAO *

INTRODUCTION

The title of the reflection seems to suggest two different questions, but they are rather two correlative aspects of the same reality. According to the decree *Ad Gentes*, “the Pilgrim Church is missionary by her very nature”;¹ thus, “as members of the living Christ, incorporated into Him and made like unto Him through Baptism and through Confirmation and the Eucharist, all the faithful are duty-bound to cooperate in the expansion and spreading out of His Body, to bring it to fullness as soon as may be (*Eph.* 4: 13). Therefore, all sons of the Church should have a lively awareness of their responsibility to the world... they should spend their forces in the work of evangelization”.² In this sense, a good Christian formation should open the mind and the heart of the lay faithful to the mission, and the missionary commitment is, in fact, the culmination of the long process of Christian formation.

For the sake of clarity, the reflection will be divided into two parts. The first part tries to offer an overview of the formation of the laity in Asia. Keeping in mind the intimate connection of the formation and the mission, as we have said, this part is not simply a description of the formation of the laity and of the mission of the laity in Asia, but it rather tries to see if the formation of the laity in Asia is open to the missionary perspective.

* Professor of Missionary Studies at the Pontifical Urban University, Rome, Vice Director of the International Center of Missionary Animation, Rome.

¹ SECOND VATICAN ECUMENICAL COUNCIL, Decree *Ad Gentes*, no. 2.

² *Ibid.*, no. 36.

The second part offers a reflection on what should be done so that a formation program may contribute to the missionary efforts of the lay faithful.

THE CHRISTIAN FORMATION AND THE MISSIONARY EFFORTS OF THE LAITY IN ASIA

1. *An overview of the formation of the laity*

The formation of the laity, object of our reflection, is not the basic Christian formation of preparation for the initiation sacraments and preparation for marriage, but the advanced Christian formation of the laity.

In Asia, the question of the role of the laity in the Church and their formation has been raised in different local Churches and it became particularly clear in 1982 when the FABC decided to establish the Office of Laity (OL), and in 2004, following the 8th FABC General Assembly on Family, the Office of Laity was entrusted with the question of Family and became the Office of Laity and Family (OLF). But it was the Synod of Bishops on Laity in 1987 which gave an impetus to the reflection on laity. In Asia, the Synod of Bishops was prepared with the 4th FABC Plenary Assembly in 1986 on the theme: “The Vocation and Mission of the Laity in the Church and in the World of Asia”.

Since then, we can find from the declarations of Bishops, both as individual bishops and as Bishops’ Conferences, and even as Federation of Bishops’ Conferences (FABC), uncountable affirmations on the importance of the laity and of their formation.

Declarations are followed then by facts and at present, the Churches in Asia are very active and animated with numerous initiatives for the formation of the laity which is conducted according to different levels and dynamics: dioceses, bishops’ conferences or bishops’ confer-

ence commissions, lay associations or movements, religious congregations or institutes.

The initiatives of formation for laity in different countries of Asia, particularly in India and Korea and the Philippines where the ecclesial forces are greater and where the Church can enjoy more political freedom, are so wide and numerous that it makes it impossible to give a comprehensive description, or simply to mention the presence of all the initiatives of formation for the laity. For this reason, I shall speak about some programs which can be considered representative of the initiatives at different levels of the Churches: the Office of Laity and Family (OLF) of the FABC (Continental level), Lay Formation Center (LFC) of the Archdiocese of Lingayen-Dagupan, Philippines, Institute of Formation – Fondacio Asia (IFF Asia); Formation course for lay leaders of Suwon (Korea); Courses of Biblical Apostolate.

a) *Office of Laity and Family (OLF) of FABC*³

Since 1982, when it came to life, the Office of Laity and Family has organized many Meetings and workshops on laity and on their formation. We can recall here the meetings at regional and continental level.

Regional laity meetings

From 1986, the National Laity Commissions held, in cooperation with the FABC Office of Laity, regular regional meetings for mutual support, sharing of experiences and to build awareness of the important role of lay people in the life of the Church.

- EARLM (East Asian Regional Laity Meetings for Japan, Korea, Hong Kong, Macao and Taiwan):

³ <http://www.fabc.org/offices/olaity/olaity.html>

- EARLM 1 (1986, Taiwan): “The Role of the Laity in the Growth of the Local Churches in East Asia”;
- EARLM 2 (1989, Japan): “Spiritual Crisis amidst Material Affluence and the Role of the Laity”;
- EARLM 3 (1992, Korea): “The Participation of the Laity in the Life of the Church”;
- EARLM 4 (1996, Macao): “The Role of the Laity in Human Development”;
- EARLM 5 (1999, Hong Kong): “Formation of Laity towards a Renewed Church”;
- EARLM 6 (2002, Taipei, Taiwan): “The Family in East Asia: Pastoral Challenges for the 3rd Millennium”.
- SEARLM (Southeast Asian Regional Laity Meetings for Brunei, Indonesia, Malaysia, Myanmar, Philippines, Singapore, Thailand and Vietnam):
 - SEARLM 1 (1996, Thailand): “The Role of the Laity in Church Mission in South East Asia, with Special Emphasis on Implementing the Church Social Teachings”;
 - SEARLM 2 (1999, Philippines): “Authentic Human Development and the Social Teachings of the Church”;
- SARLM (South Asian Regional Laity Meetings for Bangladesh, India, Nepal and Sri Lanka):
 - SARLM 1 (1995, India): “Towards a Participatory Church”;
 - SARLM 2 (1998, Nepal): “The Role and Mission of the Laity in the multi-religious contexts of South Asia at the threshold of the third millennium”.

Continental Laity Meetings

- ALM I (First Asian Laity Meeting) was held in 1994 in Suwon Diocese, Korea: “The Commitment of the Laity in the Church’s Mission with special reference to implementing the Church’s Social Teachings”;
- ALM II (Second Asian Laity Meeting) 2001 in Thailand: “Laity as a moving force of love and service in a renewed Church”.

b) *Lay Formation Center (LFC)*⁴

The Lay Formation Center (LFC) was established by Archbishop Oscar V. Cruz and the clergy of the Archdiocese of Lingayen-Dagupan, Philippines, for the formation “especially of the Laity”. It opened on the feast of San Lorenzo Ruiz de Manila, the first Filipino Saint (a lay person), on September 28, 2005. Since then, LFC has housed more than five-hundred groups from the entire country for retreats, recollections, conferences and seminars.

Following the directives of the Apostolic Exhortation *Christifideles Laici* of Pope John Paul II, the Center offers programs on different levels of formation:

- The spiritual formation of the laity – their continual growth in communion with Christ is nourished by the help to holiness offered by the Church.
- Doctrinal formation – which will enable them to explain to the world the reason for their hope. Systematic catechesis is also necessary.
- Proper formation of a social conscience, especially in the Church’s social teaching.
- An integrated program of formation that cultivates the human values and skills necessary for the apostolic activities of the lay faithful.

⁴ <http://laydagupan.blogspot.com/>

c) *Institute of Formation – Fondacio Asia (IFF Asia)*⁵

Fondacio - Christians for the world is an international association of the Laity at the service of the world. It has pontifical recognition and is present in more than twenty countries. Fondacio is Catholic and ecumenical and works with youth, professionals, couples and families, the elderly and marginalized to bring hope and renewal. In Asia, Fondacio is located in Quezon City in the Philippines.

IFF Asia proposes an integral and holistic approach to formation which includes various currents of formation in the Church and society. Our focus is discipleship-mission.

<i>Human Formation</i>	<i>Spiritual Formation</i>	<i>Social Development</i>	<i>Pastoral Formation</i>
Taking the existential path of self-discovery, growth, healing and transformation in the context of a living Community.	Understanding and growing in Christian faith, scripture, traditions and respect for other faiths and cultures.	Experience and understand the challenges of the times through exposure/immersion, critical analysis and integration of faith & life.	Equipping people with the necessary tools and skills to be effective workers and leaders.

d) *Lay Leaders Formation Course in Suwon*⁶

An advanced lay leaders' formation course has been organized by the Suwon Diocese in Korea. It is a ten-week course specifically for lay

⁵ http://www.fondacio-asia.org/?Institute_of_Formation

⁶ www.ucanews.com/.../korean-lay-formation-course-proving-a-bit/

leaders, including parish council members, coordinators of Small Christian Communities, and heads of devotional groups.

The course aims to provide lay leaders with good quality education based on the spirit of the Second Vatican Council. The diocese started the course in 2008 and three-hundred people on average participate each year.

Subjects on the course include “Church and Laity”, “Christian art and spirituality”, “Youth ministry”, “Catholic ethics on life”, “Church architecture and faith”, “Korean history and the Church”, “Shamanism and Christianity”.

e) *Biblical Apostolate*

Through the Biblical Apostolate, the formation of the laity is particularly dynamic, because in all countries there is some initiative or some form of instruction offered to the laity. Here I want to mention only one initiative from India, in Tamilnadu: St. Paul’s Bible Institute (Chennai, Tamilnadu, India).⁷

St. Paul’s Bible Institute was started in 1982 by the TamilNadu Catholic Bishop’s Council as a wing of Tamilnadu Biblical Catechetical Liturgical Centre (TNBCLC) and collocated directly under the Tamilnadu Bible Commission. This Institute aims at giving intensive training mainly to lay people and sometimes to religious sisters and brothers through the following programmes:

– One Year Residential Bible Course: Every year the Residential Bible Course is conducted in Tamil, starting from July to March and is offered to laymen, laywomen and religious sisters alternatively.

– Bible Correspondence Course: The Bible Correspondence Course for adults has been conducted by the Bible Institute since 1993. It is a two-year course. In every cycle more than four thousand candi-

⁷ <http://www.spbibleinstitute.org>.

dates follow this course, and even people from outside the state of Tamilnadu are also taking part in this programme.

– Bible Exhibition / Museum: From 1989, a Bible Exhibition has been conducted every academic year in many parishes of the Archdiocese of Madras – Mylapore and some parishes in the other dioceses of the region.

– Vivilia Virunthu – a Tamil Bible Monthly: The Bible Institute is publishing a Bible Monthly in Tamil called: *Vivilia Virunthu*. It has become very popular within a short span of time, and as many as seven thousand subscribers are receiving the copies every month. Among the subscribers there are about five hundred from Sri Lanka and five hundred from Tamil-speaking Catholics of Malaysia.

– Vacation Bible School: The Vacation Bible School (VBS) is conducted in the month of May at the parish level for ten days covering a specific theme of the Bible. This programme is very popular among the children, both school-going and the drop-outs. For the last ten years this VBS is conducted in all the sixteen Catholic dioceses of Tamilnadu and there is an increase in the number of participants year after year. In summer 2002 (April – May) the VBS was conducted in which more than sixty thousand children participated and benefited.

– Basic Bible Seminars: The Bible Commission regularly organizes basic Bible seminars every year in dioceses and some centers. It is a ten months programme in which the whole Bible is covered in ten full-day seminars. The lay people, both men and women, coming from various nearby parishes, would participate in this. Through this programme, a lot of biblical awareness is created among the simple people.

– On-going Biblical Formation: From 1996 onwards the Bible Commission has been organizing, at the regional level, on-going biblical formation for the lay people and religious sisters. The system of the formation: lay leaders and biblical animators who are actively involved in biblical apostolate are to be selected by every Diocesan Bible Commis-

sion. The Commission also takes up other Bible classes and seminars for various other people, thus covering more than three thousand five hundred people in a year.

– Summer Bible Diploma Seminar: The Bible Commission has been conducting the Summer Bible Diploma Seminar since 1976 at TNBCLC, Tindivanam. More than two hundred participants have taken part every year. It is a three-year cycle course in which we cover the whole Bible.

– Bible Sunday/Bible Week: Since 1974 Bible Sunday is celebrated all over Tamilnadu by the initiative taken by the Tamilnadu Bible Commission. As years went on, along with Bible Sunday, Bible week is also celebrated in most of the parishes in the state in the month of September every year.

– Audio/Video Cassettes on the Bible: The Commission is cooperating with the Santhome Communication Center run by the Catholic Bishops Council. The Center is producing many audio and video cassettes in Tamil on Biblical themes. Also it is dubbing in Tamil the video cassettes on Bible produced by Lux International (Italy). This is an effective effort to disseminate knowledge of the Bible among the illiterate.

– Bible Conventions: The Commission organizes, from time to time, Bible Conventions in which more than one thousand five hundred people attend every time. Through this type of convention one can motivate the people to have much interest for the Word of God, and also we are able to distribute Bible materials to a large number of people of the state.

2. Missionary efforts of the laity

As for missionary efforts, the lay faithful in Asia are also very active. Perhaps the most well-known case is the Church in Korea where the laity have been present and active from the very origin of the Church in the country.

In many local Churches, particularly in the countries with difficulties of a religious or political kind, missionary activities are undertaken by the laity individually or in small groups. In other local Churches, the missionary activities of the laity are well organized by the pastors.

There are then missionary efforts accomplished by various ecclesial associations or movements. Particularly numerous are the lay missionary groups in connection with a religious or missionary congregation from whom they are inspired or founded, sustained and guided. They may remain always auxiliary missionary groups of the religious congregation from whom they are originated, but sometimes, a group develops to become an independent lay missionary group. Among many, we may mention three lay missionary groups of this kind: “Philippine Catholic Lay Mission” (PCLM), “Japan Lay Missionary Movement” (PLMM) and “Hong Kong Catholic Lay Missionary Association” (HKCLMA).

a) *Philippine Catholic Lay Mission* (PCLM)⁸

PCLM traces its beginnings to the Maryknoll’s missionary charism and the growth of Small Christian Communities (SCCs) in the then-Prelature of Tagum in Davao in the 1960s. The Maryknoll evolved a program for SCCs in the Tagum prelateure, and as the communities matured, it became a natural consequence for them to become missionary by helping neighboring villages, parishes and dioceses to form SCCs.

In response to the growing missionary spirit and upon seeing the talents, acquired skills and willingness of many lay people to preach God’s Kingdom, the Maryknoll developed the concept of Filipino lay missionaries. After years of discussion and two experimental mission teams (in Hawaii and in Agusan del Sur), the Philippine Regional Meeting of Maryknoll formally established on March 1, 1977 the then called “Philippine Lay Mission Program”. The Philippine bishops have rec-

⁸ http://www.philcatholiclaymission.com/about_us.php

ognized it (along with the Mission Society of the Philippines) in the documents of the 1991 Second Plenary Council of the Philippines.

Starting in 1994, the PCLM prepared for turnover to fully Filipino and lay administration, and the dream of Maryknoll for PCLM to stand on its own feet was finally fulfilled in January 1999 when a lay missionary became the first Filipino and first lay director.

Since its foundation, it has sent one hundred eighty five lay missionaries to one hundred thirty two mission areas within and outside the Philippines including Hawaii in the USA, Venezuela, Tanzania, Kenya and Japan.

b) *Japan Lay Missionary Movement (JLMM)*⁹

JLMM was founded in 1981 by Fr. Michael Siegel and immediately in the following year (1982) it started sending missionaries. In 1983, it was registered with the Catholic Bishops' Conference of Japan. In 1987, it was named "Lay Missionary Movement". In 2002, it changed status from an organization of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of Japan to an authorized organization of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of Japan and was renamed "Japan Lay Missionary Movement".

Members of JLMM are volunteers sent to Asia and the Pacific-region. They live together with the local people sharing joys and sorrows through various activities in medical care, environment and agriculture, through their support of women and children together with the local people, and through their support of social welfare and development organized by local Catholic Churches. In 2007, at the celebration of the 25th anniversary of the foundation, it was decided to form the JLMM Gospel Choir, thus starting a new missionary activity through singing.

Since the first missionary was sent in 1982, until now, seventy-six missionaries of JLMM have been sent to sixteen countries.

⁹ <http://www.jlmm.net/english/>

c) *Hong Kong Catholic Lay Missionary Association*¹⁰

The Hong Kong Catholic Lay Missionary Association originated in 1983 when the Hong Kong Catholic Church sent two lay missionaries, Miss Jessica Ho and Miss Elizabeth Woo, to Tanzania, Africa through the Maryknoll Lay Missionary Program. But its definitive foundation was dated in 1987 when Msgr. John B. Wu, Bishop of Hong Kong, approved it as a Lay Missionary Association in Hong Kong. At present it is the only Catholic Lay Missionary Association in Hong Kong and from 1990, it has sent ten lay missionaries to Africa and Asia.

The Hong Kong Catholic Lay Missionary Association strives to respond to the call for full and active involvement in the Church's life and mission, as lay people serving in other local Churches; to respond to the needs of the poor and the marginalized, collaborating with them and helping them to recognize their own worth and God-given potential; to help the people to whom they are sent to become self-reliant and missionary themselves.

3. *Some remarks*

At this point, we need to reflect on the formation programs of the laity and their missionary efforts.

What has been said is indeed very short in comparison with the reality. Yet, it is sufficient to show the richness and the vitality of the formation programs and of the missionary efforts of the laity in Asia. However, in relation to the perspective indicated by the title, as we pointed out at the beginning of the reflection, one question should be raised and it is on the missionary perspective of the formation programs and even of the missionary efforts of the laity.

Although the formation programs of the various institutions are dif-

¹⁰ <http://bkclma.org.hk>

ferent in dynamics and methodology, they all have a certain common trend which may be summarized in the information offered by the FABC Office of Laity¹¹ which states that the formation programs for the laity are focused on four topics:

a) Social Teaching of the Church: implementation of the Social Teachings of the Church in the specific areas of the life and work of the laity and in their networking with people of other faiths.

b) Participatory Church: training of trainers in order to promote a participatory Church, that is a Church “Communion of Communities” through the application of the Asian Integral Pastoral Approach (ASIPA).

c) Youth: to carry out the recommendations given in FABC Plenary Assemblies with regards to youth, allowing the voice of the young to be heard and creating more channels for their participation.

d) Women: focusing on issues and concern that affect women and in a particular way, to encourage and offer ways for greater recognition and channels of partnership of women and men in carrying out the Church’s mission.

The four topics indicated, in fact, can be summarized in two principal realms of action, that is, deepening and implementing the Social Teachings of the Church and getting the laity, particularly the youth and women, to be more active in the life of the Church according to the vision of the Church as a “Communion of Communities”, promoting the Basic Ecclesial Communities (BEC) and applying particularly the methodology of “Asian Integral Pastoral Approach” (ASIPA).

In this vision, the formation programs are not clearly open to the missionary perspective, in the sense of “mission *ad gentes*” intended by the Decree *Ad Gentes* of Vatican II and of the Encyclical *Redemptoris*

¹¹ www.fabc.org/offices/olaity/asipa.html

Missio.¹² This is the apostolic action of the Church towards and in the midst of all those who do not know Christ as the Saviour and in places not enlightened and transformed by the Gospel so that Christ may be known, loved and accepted. Thus, the missionary perspective or “mission *ad gentes*” is an action “*ad extra*”, tending towards the world outside the Church, while the formation programs deal with the needs in the Church. In this sense, even some missionary activities may lack the missionary dimension.

This does not mean that the missionary spirit in Asia is not alive. We can recall here the example of the Church in Korea where, according to Cardinal Nicholas Cheong Jin-suk, Archbishop of Seoul: “over the past ten years (1996-2006) the Catholic Church in Korea has gone from less than three million faithful to over five million... In Seoul, we make up fourteen percent of the population, and we have launched an initiative called the ‘Evangelization Twenty Twenty Movement’, with the aim of reaching twenty percent by 2020” (Interview published in the Italian Catholic newspaper *Avvenire* on November 22, 2006).

In the context of all Asia, we certainly can recall the First Asian Mission Congress celebrated at Chiangmai, Thailand, from 18-22 October 2006, on the theme “Telling the story of Jesus in Asia”¹³ where the missionary spirit was particularly vivid and we may say, burning the heart.

The formation programs had priorities that may have been required by the needs and the realities of the Church at the time. But now the moment has come for the formation programs to be decisively open to the missionary dimension so that every Christian may “tell the story of Jesus”, sharing with everybody the joy of knowing Him and being with

¹² Cf. SECOND VATICAN ECUMENICAL COUNCIL, Decree *Ad Gentes*, no. 6; see also: JOHN PAUL II, Encyclical Letter *Redemptoris Missio*, no. 33 & 34.

¹³ Cf. M. SATURNINO DIAS (Ed.). *Telling the Story of Jesus in Asia: A Celebration of Faith and Life*. Asian Trading Corporation, Bangalore 2007.

Him. This missionary vision is particularly necessary in Asia, where Christ, the Saviour of the world is still unknown or, at most, insignificant to most of the Asians.

In this case, what are the most important aspects which should be integrated in a formation program for the laity? This question will be examined in the next section.

MISSIONARY ASPECTS IN THE FORMATION PROGRAM FOR THE LAITY

In the context of the multiple reality of cultures, religions, political regimes, social systems, living standards, history, races, languages, and particularly the rhythm of changes and transformations of mindset and of societies in Asia, the missionary action of the Church is not easy and not simple. Dealing with all these questions goes beyond the limit of this reflection. Taking inspiration from the Encyclical *Redemptoris Missio*, the Apostolic Exhortation *Christifideles Laici*, the Apostolic Exhortation *Ecclesia in Asia* and the message of the “First Asian Mission Congress” in Chiangmai (Thailand), I would single out three aspects at the root level which should be present in every formation program of the laity and they are: personal and intimate friendship with Christ; being leaven in the secular reality and docile to the Holy Spirit.

1. *Personal and intimate friendship with Christ*

The First Asian Mission Congress starts its message with vivid words as follows: “Jesus lives! Christ is Risen! Our Savior is with us; his life is our life... we express the same joyful faith as Christ’s first disciples, who proclaimed: ‘I have seen the Lord’ (*Jn* 20: 18); ‘It is the Lord’ (*Jn* 21: 7); ‘It is true: The Lord has risen’ (*Lk* 24: 34)... Jesus comes personally to his followers. He calls them by name: Mary of Magdala, Thomas, Peter, James, John. They recognize him”.

This message is not simply a new missionary methodology; it is an expression of a heart which has been touched by Christ and, in fact, it brings us to the root and the essence of Mission. It is so important to come to the essence, particularly in the context of today's culture, when ramification and the fragmentary is a reality of life.¹⁴ This happens also in Christian life and in the apostolate. There are so many new ideas and theories; so many pastoral initiatives, but one is unable to connect them together and harmonize them. One of the serious problems today is not the absence of ideas and activities, but the lack of the sense of equilibrium, of proportion and particularly the lack or the confusion of the motivation which gives sense to the ideas and activities. Thus, it is important to call to mind the ultimate reason and origin of the activity.

For a missionary, the essence of his/her life and mission is the personal encounter and intimate friendship with Christ the Saviour, promised by the Father from the very beginning of history. The missionary, by definition, is a person who has been touched and conquered by Christ; a person who has discovered that he/she is loved by Christ without condition, without measure and who has experienced that life with Christ is different from life without Christ. This is the meaning of the affirmation of the Encyclical *Redemptoris Missio*: "Mission is an issue of faith, an accurate indicator of our faith in Christ and his love for us".¹⁵

Talking of mission, one thinks spontaneously of terms such as, "going", "serving", "helping and defending the poor", "preaching", "dialogue with cultures and with religions", and that means that one thinks of people to be served, things to be done and problems to be resolved. No doubt, these are important and necessary issues to be dealt with in mission, but the fundamental question is the reason and the foundation which gives the "missionary" qualification to all those activities.

¹⁴ Cf. A. TOFFLER, *The Third Wave*, Bantam Books, New York 1981, 303.

¹⁵ JOHN PAUL II, Encyclical Letter *Redemptoris Missio*, no. 11.

The most profound reason for mission is not the problems of the world, but it is the desire of God “ who loves the world so much that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life ” (Jn 3: 16). The ultimate newness which Christians are sent to announce, to transmit and to give witness to in the world is that, in order to save the world, God did not simply send a messenger, but he came personally. He did not come simply in the form of a man, but he became a man and shared the human condition of every person in order to invite everyone to enter into his communion, so that “ they may have life and have it to the full ” (Jn 10: 10). All this manifests his tremendous love for humankind, and it is this unconditional love of God which has transformed the hearts of so many men and women, and therefore has renewed the face of the world and changed the course of history.

In the light of this vision, a formation program for the laity cannot be confined simply to theological instruction or to learning pastoral skills. It is essential to introduce the lay faithful to a personal and intimate relationship with Christ. Although one often claims that the faithful in Asia are all practising Catholics,¹⁶ a life with a personal and intimate relationship with Christ cannot be taken for granted. One may lead a sacramental and devotional life, but the heart, the spirit and life itself are far away from Christ; one may know by heart the psalm of the Shepherd, but one does not know the Shepherd; one may talk of God, but one does not talk with him or even encounter him.

This is the reason why in the world today, according to *Redemptoris Missio*, there is a temptation “ to reduce Christianity to merely human wisdom, a pseudo-science of well-being ”.¹⁷ In Asia, there is still another temptation. Because of the many difficulties and hostilities the Church

¹⁶ Cf. “ L'Osservatore Romano ”, Weekly Edition in English, 25 February 2000, Special Insert.

¹⁷ JOHN PAUL II, Encyclical Letter *Redemptoris Missio*, no. 11.

has to face, there is a temptation to confine the mission simply to the promotion of the values of the Kingdom, such as, peace, justice, dialogue, freedom, human dignity, etc. and hiding the person of Christ. No doubt, these values are necessary and they invite action on the part of the lay faithful, but the question is the perspective and the source of all these values. How can one understand the true meaning of the values of the Kingdom without Christ? Moreover, as we have said, the absolute newness which the Church is sent to proclaim to the world is not a system of values or a philosophy, but a person, who is Christ, God made man because of love for humankind. This is clearly affirmed also by the Apostolic Exhortation *Ecclesia in Asia*: “It is obvious to all that the Church’s unique contribution to the peoples of the continent is the proclamation of Jesus Christ, true God and true man, the one and only Saviour for all peoples. What distinguishes the Church from other religious communities is her faith in Jesus Christ; and she cannot keep this precious light of faith under a bushel (cf. *Mt* 5: 15)...The Church wants to offer the new life she has found in Jesus Christ to all the peoples of Asia as they search for the fullness of life, so that they can have the same fellowship with the Father and his Son Jesus Christ in the power of the Spirit. This faith in Jesus Christ is what inspires the Church’s evangelizing work in Asia, often carried out in difficult and even dangerous circumstances”.¹⁸

Therefore, a formation program for the laity should aim at leading the lay faithful to a personal and intimate friendship with Christ so that they can say “I know him”; “I have met him”, or in the words of the Apostle of Gentiles: “I know in whom I have put my trust” (2 *Tim* 1: 12). This is a loving knowledge which enables the lay faithful to accept being a minority because of Christ and to make use of everything to serve God. Then, they will really go out, telling the story of Christ just as the faithful in the Acts of the Apostles, when “a bitter persecution

¹⁸ JOHN PAUL II, Post-synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Ecclesia in Asia*, no. 10.

started against the Church in Jerusalem, and everyone except the apostles scattered to the country districts of Judaea and Samaria... Once they had scattered, they went from place to place preaching the Good News” (*Acts* 8: 1.4).

2. *Being leaven in secular reality*

The question examined here is the specific field where the lay faithful exercise their mission. In this regard, the Apostolic Exhortation *Christifideles Laici*, recalling the teaching of *Evangelii Nuntiandi* affirms that the field of evangelizing activity of the laity is the vast and complicated world of politics, society, economics, culture, sciences, arts, international structures and mass media. It also includes the realities of human love, family, education of children and adolescents, and professional work.¹⁹ The evangelizing action of the lay faithful is so needed today in this field of secular realities, when so many changes are taking place and creating so much confusion.²⁰

However, many lay men and women are keeping themselves aloof from this society because of difficulties and dangers; others are getting lost because of the temptations. According to the Apostolic Exhortation *Christifideles Laici*, there are two temptations, that is “the temptation of being so strongly interested in Church services and tasks that some fail to become actively engaged in their responsibilities in the professional, social, cultural and political world; and the temptation of legitimizing the unwarranted separation of faith from life, that is, a separation of the Gospel’s acceptance from the actual living of the Gospel in various situations in the world”.²¹

¹⁹ Cf JOHN PAUL II, Post-synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Christifideles Laici*, no. 23; see also: PAUL VI, Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, no. 70.

²⁰ Cf. A. TOFFLER, *The Third Wave*, cit., 289.

²¹ JOHN PAUL II, Post-synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Christifideles Laici*, no. 2.

The temptations indicated by *Christifideles Laici* in the context of the Universal Church are very real in Asia. The first temptation prevents the lay faithful from being active in society. The church communities certainly need the service not only of the clergy and the religious, but also of many lay faithful. But a problem arises when all or the majority of the lay faithful think of service only in the context of the church community, without being able to understand their Christian responsibility beyond the boundary of the church community. Then the vast field of society is left open to all forces, except to the Gospel, because of the absence of the lay faithful.

The second temptation makes the lay faithful become a meaningless, insignificant presence in society. They are present in secular realities, but they hide their Christian identity and conviction. Instead of bringing the light of the Gospel to enlighten the world, they rush to follow the trends of their environment in their behaviour, choices and life style; hence their presence as Christians is meaningless.

Therefore, it is urgent that the formation programs contribute to making the lay faithful aware of their responsibility to bring the Gospel into their specific field of secular realities and to encourage them to take bold initiatives personally to transform society from within.

The lay faithful, in their missionary commitment in secular realities, do not engage only with the impersonal aspects of life, but also with people who are dealing with and even giving command in those secular realities, often with a secular heart and mind. This fact requires from the lay faithful an open mind and a loving heart which are transformed by the saving love of Christ in order to enlighten the realities and to transform the hearts of people. In doing so, the lay faithful will be like salt, light and leaven in society.²² Their presence and their actions, penetrated by the perfume of the Gospel will edify the environment,

²² Cf. *Ibid.*, no. 15.

enlighten the mind and raise up the heart. At this point, I need to say something which is not common, that is, that one should not only help and serve the poor, but one should serve the rich and the powerful with the saving love of Christ. They are the people who decide the fate of the poor and of the nations, and they are also loved by Christ. He became man, suffered, died and rose again also for them. The rich and the powerful also need to hear the Good News that they are loved by God. Someone must whisper in their ears and their hearts this great message. Therefore, one needs a formation program which knows how to involve the intellectuals, the professionals and the rich, such as, students, university professors, lawyers, politicians... so that they may be leaven and messengers to their peers.

However, in the religious and political context of many countries of Asia, taking direct action in secular realities in the name of the Gospel, and even planning a formation program in the perspective of training people to be active in secular realities, may be risky and dangerous. To persevere in responsibility and to be faithful to the Gospel, one needs to have courage, a sense of prudence and particularly the strength and the wisdom of the Holy Spirit.

3. *Docile to the Holy Spirit*

All the Church documents of reference in this reflection, *Christifideles Laici*, *Redemptoris Missio* and *Ecclesia in Asia*, insist on the presence and the action of the Holy Spirit. To simplify the question, I shall just recall a short text from *Ecclesia in Asia*:: “The Church is convinced that deep within the people, cultures and religions of Asia there is a thirst for ‘living water’ (cf. *Jn* 4: 10-15), a thirst which the Spirit himself has created and which Jesus the Saviour alone can fully satisfy. The Church looks to the Holy Spirit to continue to prepare the peoples of Asia for the saving dialogue with the Saviour of all. The Church well

knows that she can accomplish her mission only in obedience to the promptings of the Holy Spirit ”.²³

It is often said that the Church in Asia must respond to three challenges, that is the challenge of cultures, the challenge of religions and the challenge of the poor and therefore, the Church must learn to dialogue with them: cultures, religions and the poor. Without minimizing the importance of the above mentioned challenges, I see the utmost challenge which the Church must respond to in Asia is the challenge of the Holy Spirit. He is present visibly and forcefully in Asia today as he was in the primitive Church narrated in the Acts of the Apostles. According to the Apostolic Exhortation *Ecclesia in Asia*, “ the Spirit who moved upon Asia in the time of the patriarchs and prophets, and still more powerfully in the time of Jesus Christ and the early Church, moves now among Asian Christians, strengthening the witness of their faith among the peoples, cultures and religions of the continent. Just as the great dialogue of love between God and man was prepared for by the Spirit and accomplished on Asian soil in the mystery of Christ, so the dialogue between the Saviour and the peoples of the continent continues today by the power of the same Holy Spirit at work in the Church ”.²⁴

The teaching of the Apostolic Exhortation *Ecclesia in Asia* can be confirmed by the life and the mission of the Church in Asia. Two facts would be sufficient and for one of these two facts, I am a witness.

Many years ago, I visited the Archdiocese of Ranchi in India whose Archbishop is Card. Telesphore Toppo. During my stay, two priests and one seminarian of the same parish were murdered. The church was all crowded at the funeral Mass and together with the parishioners, all the Hindu population of the village of origin of the seminarian, including his relatives were present. It so happened that the seminarian was a

²³ IDEM, Post-synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Ecclesia in Asia*, no. 18.

²⁴ *Ibid.*

convert from Hinduism and he was the only son and the only convert in his family. For solidarity, all the Hindu village came and at the funeral Mass, the Cardinal explained the example of the Crucified Christ who offered himself for all humanity and a whole Hindu village was there to listen to him. In a normal situation, no one in India, not even an archbishop can gather a Hindu village to talk about Christ. Moreover, the Catholics of the parish, instead of being frightened and discouraged, became even more courageous and more steady in the Faith, contrary to the calculations of the fanatic Hindu murderers. “How rich and deep are the wisdom and the knowledge of God” (*Rom* 11: 33). This is the real strength and the hope for the Church.

The second fact comes from Viet Nam and narrated by a Vietnamese bishop: “A sign worthy of being mentioned to show that the Word of God continues to support the Church in Vietnam. This would be the mass conversion of the thousands of persons of the ethnic minorities shortly after the canonization of the 117 Martyrs of Vietnam in 1988. What is curious about this is that many admitted to listening to the Protestant Radio in Manila, in the Philippines, but converted to Catholicism in Vietnam. Thus, the Protestants sow the seed and the Catholics harvest. The Word of God echoing from afar, reaching their ears, has become the source of hope for these persons lost in the mountains, deprived of all and without a future”.²⁵

It is the Holy Spirit who leads the Church in the mission, or in the words of *Redemptoris Missio*, “the Holy Spirit is indeed the principal agent of the whole of the Church’s mission”;²⁶ “The Spirit gives them the ability to bear witness to Jesus with ‘boldness’. When the first evangelizers go down from Jerusalem, the Spirit becomes even more of a ‘guide’, helping them to choose both those to whom they are to go and

²⁵ BISHOP JOSEPH NGUYEN CHI LINH, Bishop of Thanh Hóa (Viet Nam), *Bulletin of the Synod of Bishops*, 14.10.2008.

²⁶ JOHN PAUL II, Encyclical Letter *Redemptoris Missio*, no. 23.

the places to which their missionary journey is to take them. The working of the Spirit is manifested particularly in the impetus given to the mission which, in accordance with Christ's words, spreads out from Jerusalem to all of Judea and Samaria, and to the farthest ends of the earth".²⁷ In the context of the threefold challenges, we may say analogically that it is the Holy Spirit who helps the Church in Asia to perceive the threefold challenges and all other challenges in the right way, and to respond to them in an appropriate way.

This affirmation has a direct and concrete consequence for the formation programs of the laity. It should be a program which helps the lay faithful to be attentive to the whisperings and docile to the actions of the Holy Spirit; a formation which enables them to discern the inspirations and the actions of the Holy Spirit. The capacity of discernment of the Spirit is particularly necessary to the lay faithful who must operate in the ambiguity of secular realities.

CONCLUSION

Much has been said and still much more remains to be said, but we must go to the conclusion. I shall just reecho a few sentences of the message of the First Asian Mission Congress: "Jesus comes personally to his followers. He calls them by name: Mary of Magdala, Thomas, Peter, James, John. They recognize him. He speaks words of peace and reconciliation. The disbelieving disciples are transformed. Yet, Jesus, the Crucified-Risen One, expands the dimensions of their faith. He challenges them further. He sends them on mission: 'Go forth to every part of the world, and proclaim the Good News to the whole of creation' (*Mk* 16: 15); 'Go forth and make all nations my disciples' (*Mt* 28: 19); 'You are witnesses to all this' (*Lk* 24: 48); 'As the Father sent me, so

²⁷ *Ibid.*, no. 24.

The Christian formation of the laity and lay missionary efforts in Asia

I send you' (Jn 20: 21). And so the disciples set out to tell the Jesus story. They go to places, near and far: James to Jerusalem, Peter and Paul to Rome, Thomas to India. Indeed, to encounter the Risen Lord is to be sent on mission ”.

May all the lay faithful of Asia today be able to hear the mysterious call of Jesus and answer him. Then I would like to end this reflection with an invitation to all lay brothers and sisters; an invitation which consists in two “ up ” and one “ out ”:

Dear Brothers and Sisters:

Wake up

Get up

Set out

to tell all people: Christ is alive; he is our life and our Saviour.

Courageous witnesses of faith

Rev. BERNARDO CERVELLERA, P.I.M.E.*

I would like to express my gratitude for having been invited to take part in this Congress. My thanks to the Pontifical Council for the Laity, the Korean Bishops' Conference, to all of you lay representatives of the Asian Churches, Churches that are among the most heroic and vibrant in the universal Church.

Allow me to also express my gratitude to those who are the fathers of the faith here in Korea and who, thanks to the universality of the Church, I can also define as “my” fathers in faith.

We have just celebrated the 400th anniversary of the death of an Italian missionary Matteo Ricci, who brought the Gospel to China, creating a strong cultural and religious bridge between East and West. Unfortunately, during the celebrations for Matteo Ricci, it was not sufficiently emphasized that the Gospel spread to Korea through laity who had read a text written by him in Chinese, and hence the evangelization of Korea. Very soon, persecution arose and the first Korean baptized, Peter Yi Sung-hun, the son of a dignitary, was killed for the faith in 1801, along with many of his companions.

Our faith today, this very conference, owes its existence to the testimony of these our fathers in faith.

Peter Yi Sung-hun was baptized in 1784. During those same years, in Austria the composer Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart, composed the *Solemn Vespers of the Confessor*, one of the high points in sacred music by Mozart and perhaps in history.

This work encompasses the entire spectrum of expressions of the confession of faith: the dramatic promise of the Messiah's victory over

* Director of *AsiaNews* press agency, missionary with the Pontifical Institute for Foreign Missions (PIME).

his enemies (*Dixit Dominus* – Ps 108); the resolve of the man who fears God whose mercy, compassion and justice is spread among the poor and society (*Beatus Vir*, Ps 111), to the airy sweetness of the *Laudate Dominum* (Ps 116), which embraces all peoples of the earth in the victory of Peace and Truth.

Then comes the robust *Magnificat*, which thrusts the humble servant Mary and all humble into the light with triumphant sounds that are a contrast between loud and soft, a harmony of bass and treble that unites heaven and earth.

It is curious that still today no one knows to which confessor these Solemn Vespers are dedicated. I think they can be rightly applied primarily to Peter Yi Sung-hun, a contemporary of Mozart – although unknown – and then to all the martyrs, the renowned and the unheard of, whom John Paul II defined as “unknown soldiers of the great cause of God”.

In the Apostolic Letter he wrote in preparation for the Jubilee of 2000, *Tertio Millennio Adveniente*, he says: “At the end of the second millennium, *the Church has once again become a Church of martyrs*. The persecutions of believers – priests, religious and laity – has caused a great sowing of martyrdom in different parts of the world. The witness to Christ borne even to the shedding of blood has become a common inheritance of Catholics, Orthodox, Anglicans and Protestants... *In our own century the martyrs have returned*, many of them nameless, “*unknown soldiers*” as it were of *God’s great cause*. As far as possible, their witness should not be lost to the Church”.¹

MARTYRDOM AND BLESSING

Martyrdom is a blessing for Churches. “The blood of martyrs”, says Tertullian, “is the seed of new Christians”. In our communities we never really fully appreciate how much we are in debt to the martyrs, even for the conversions that their death inspires. In China, due to the

¹ JOHN PAUL II, Apostolic Letter *Tertio Millennio Adveniente*, no. 37.

persecution and martyrdom of many Christians, university students and intellectuals wonder if Christianity is not exactly what China needs to establish a society based on respect for the inalienable human rights of the individual. And in the new China of savage capitalism, many professionals are wondering what is so important in Christianity that it defeats love of money, well-being and tranquillity, and pushes ordinary people to give their lives for Christ.

It is worth mentioning that, “thanks” to the communist persecution, Catholics have more than quadrupled in the last sixty years. In 1949 there were only three million. Today, official and underground Catholics are more than twelve million and there are tens of thousands of newly baptized (adults) each year.

Martyrdom is also a blessing for society: the fact that in the many hells of the world there are people who give their lives for the love of Christ and humanity, reconciling and forgiving, gives us a chance to see the earth not as an apocalyptic place, doomed to destruction and violence, but a place predisposed to hope.

With great pastoral sensitivity on November 24, 2008 the bishops of Japan beatified the one hundred and eighty-eight martyrs of Nagasaki. One of my PIME confreres, a missionary in Japan, said at the time: “People in Japan are searching for strong values. They are faced every day with painful problems such as suicide, juvenile delinquency, the disintegration of families, the economic crisis ... All these things are destroying their old securities and this leads them to search for values that are more durable and demanding. People are really looking for God. The beatification of the martyrs may suggest an answer to this desire for truth for life”.

TWO TYPES OF MARTYRDOM

Not all Christians are called to martyrdom. The theologian Hans Urs von Balthasar said there are two types of martyrs: there are those

who give blood once and for all, and those who give their blood drop by drop, by the daily witness of their faith and the transformation of their lives. This second type of martyrdom is also a blessing for the Church and society.

In the reflection at the General Audience on Wednesday, 11 August 2010, Pope Benedict XVI explained that martyrdom is based on the invitation of Jesus to his disciples to “take up their cross daily and follow the path of total love for God and humanity”.² The martyrs therefore express a total love of God, which “enriches” and “enhances” their freedom: “The martyr – he said – is a supremely free person, free from the power of the world”.³

Of course, Benedict XVI stated, not all are called to martyrdom, “but none of us are excluded from the divine call to holiness, to live our Christian life to high standards and that means taking the cross upon ourselves every day”.⁴

He concluded: “Everyone, especially in our time when individualism and selfishness seem to prevail, must make our first and fundamental commitment that of growing every day in a greater love for God and for mankind, to transform our lives and in doing so transform our world”.⁵

RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

To enable the faith and Christians to transform the world there is, however, one condition: religious freedom is necessary, a human right that is still struggling to establish itself in Asia.

² BENEDICT XVI, General Audience, Papal Summer Residence, Castel Gandolfo, Wednesday, 11 August 2010.

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵ *Ibid.*; see also “*AsiaNews.it*”, *In Japan 188 martyrs to quench the thirst for God*, 24/11/2008.

Religious freedom – and this is true also for the UN – implies the freedom to practice or not practice a faith, freedom to associate with people of the same faith, to travel, to be led by teachers of one’s chosen faith, to change religion according to one’s own personal search for truth.

Freedom of religion is not only one right among others. It is a kind of synthesis of all human rights. As John Paul II and Benedict XVI have always stated, religious freedom is the foundation of all rights,⁶ the *litmus test*⁷ that checks whether there is real freedom in a society.

Suffocating religious freedom also means suffocating civil liberties groups. Religious freedom actually entails the freedom to publicly profess and express the reasons for one’s belief (freedom of conscience); freedom to spread one’s faith by voice, writing, film and other media (freedom of speech and press); freedom to meet members of one’s community at home and abroad (freedom of association). Limitations on religious freedom in fact limit the civil liberties of speech, press, publication and dissemination, of association and of movement.

ASIA, THE CONTINENT OF VIOLATIONS OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

Asia, this continent which is by now a protagonist in the global economy and international politics, still presents far too many imbalances and violations of religious freedom.

In 2008, Aid to the Church in Need published the “2008 Report on

⁶ Cf. BENEDICT XVI, address to the Diplomatic Corps accredited to the Holy See, Monday, 7 January 2008: “Even religious freedom, ‘an essential requirement of the dignity of every person [and] a cornerstone of the structure of human rights’ (*Message for the 1988 World Day of Peace*, Preamble) is often undermined. There are many places where this right cannot be fully exercised. The Holy See defends it, demands that it be universally respected, and views with concern discrimination against Christians and against the followers of other religions”.

⁷ Cf. JOHN PAUL II, Address to the participants in the Parliamentary Assembly of the OSCE, Friday, 10 October 2003, no. 1.

Religious Freedom in the World”. *AsiaNews* has for some time now collaborated in drafting the Asian section of this report. From this, one can clearly see that violations of religious freedom largely take place on the continent of Asia. In a list of thirteen countries where there are “serious limitations to religious freedom”, ten are Asian: Saudi Arabia, Yemen, Iran, Turkmenistan, Pakistan, China, Bhutan, Myanmar, Laos and North Korea. African nations such as Nigeria and Sudan keep them company, along with Cuba.

That is not all: fifteen other Asian countries are among those where there are “restrictions on religious freedom”. Again, all over the rest of the world there are only nine.

These violations come in a variety of forms: ranging from Saudi Arabia which, in declaring itself “entirely” Islamic, continues to prohibit any public expression of faith that is not Islamic (carrying a Bible, wearing a crucifix, a rosary, a pendant of Buddha, praying in public, having a meeting place) to Bhutan, where non-Buddhist missionaries are prevented from entering, where the building of non-Buddhist places of worship is restricted or not permitted, where all citizens must wear clothes of the Ngalop ethnicity, which is mostly Buddhist, in public offices, monasteries, schools and during official ceremonies.

From Myanmar, and the bloody suppression of Buddhist monks, to North Korea, where the practise of any faith is forbidden and there is no trace of a single priest or monk, in all likelihood killed in the past decades. According to testimonies collected by the few Christians who practice their faith in secret, after the division of the Korean peninsula, three hundred thousand Christians were massacred in the North.

And then there is India, infamous for the anti-Christian pogroms in Orissa, and China, with the systematic oppression of Churches, Tibetan Buddhists and Muslim Uyghurs, with priests and pastors in prison; and even the tourist paradise of the Maldives where the Constitution reserves all political judicial and administrative offices to Muslims, where the government applies Sharia, and prohibits any public display of other religions.

Currently, out of more than fifty-two Asian countries, at least thirty-two in some way limit the mission of religions: Islamic countries (from the Middle East to Pakistan, Indonesia, Malaysia) make it difficult for those who want to convert to a religion other than Islam but also create problems and violence for Muslim minority groups. We only have to look at Pakistan, home to sporadic violence by Sunnis against Shiites and against the Ahmadi minority.

Even in India and Sri Lanka there is an increasingly insistent lobby for anti-conversion laws. In India, indeed, there are five states that include it in their legislative body.

Central Asian countries limit religious freedom: just look at how they treat groups linked to the Jehovah's Witnesses, Protestants and even some Islamic groups that are not guaranteed by these States.

The communist countries (China, Laos, Vietnam, North Korea) suffocate or even persecute the Catholic Church, Protestant domestic churches, Buddhism and all religions.

VIOLENCE AGAINST SCHOOLS AND DEVELOPMENT

Violence against religious freedom is first and foremost an attack on people. But it is also an attack against society and the social and economic progress of a country. Whoever oppresses or stifles religious freedom in fact chooses to keep his or her people in a state of underdevelopment.

The pogrom against Christians in Orissa in 2008-2009 had as its slogan: " Kill the Christians, destroy their institutions ". In eliminating religious freedom it is not enough to suppress people. You must also seek to destroy the institutions: hospitals, community centers and schools in particular.

The destruction of schools (or gagging them) is an element of persecution that is almost a trend: in China, Hong Kong, Indonesia (even universities – in the Moluccas), Nepal, India and Pakistan. In this case

not only do they want to stifle the faith of a community (which perhaps through education would communicate their faith to the younger generation), they also want to destroy the possible social influence of the religion, particularly Christianity.

School means the end of illiteracy, it means learning a trade, obtaining a degree, education, career and social transformation. Therefore schools are destroyed not only to kill a faith, but also to impoverish, to frustrate the people and to smother social perspectives.

Hindus who fight against the Protestant and Catholic schools want to keep the outcastes in a slave-like status under their dominion, Muslims (in cahoots with the army) that burned the University of Ambon do not want Christians to find work or the Moluccas to fall prey to external influences.

In China, the government said “ok” to private schools. But then imposed a veto: no religiously motivated schools. Other schools teach techniques, careers and productions, but no freedom. The regimes are increasingly seeking slaves, not interlocutors.

Hong Kong Catholic schools are recognized by all as having the best quality, modern and far-reaching education. Yet Beijing is doing everything it can to close them down or gain control of them.

A few months ago a news report spoke of a bus of fifty young Christians targeted in an attack in northern Iraq.⁸ The students “were traveling by bus from the University of Mosul, despite the constant threats under which they live”, said Nissan Karoumi, Mayor of Hamdaniya. The university has been in the crosshairs of Islamic extremist groups fighting for the conversion of young students for over five years. Often leaflets circulate in the universities that promise to “kill every Iraqi girl who does not wear a veil” and threatening to kill anyone wearing “Western” clothes.

⁸ Cf. “AsiaNews.it”, *Car bomb targets Christian student's bus near Mosul*, 03/05/2010.

In Iraq, the persecution of Christians goes hand in hand with eliminating Iraqi intelligentsia. Sunni and Shia violence is in fact targeting the intellectuals and university professors, physicists, engineers, journalists and so-called moderate Muslims who are opening dialogue with other cultures, and are likely to “pollute” the purity of Islamic fundamentalism. From this point of view, the killing and kidnapping of intellectuals and scientists in Iraq is impoverishing the nation and condemning its people to underdevelopment more than the war and insecurity.

In Islamic countries, government support of fundamentalist Islamic schools is laying the foundations for the Islamic terrorists of tomorrow (Malaysia, Indonesia, Pakistan), instead of supporting the freedom of education and giving space to different religions.

Our conclusion is that the power that stifles religious freedom, lays the foundations for the destruction of society. In Muslim countries, it is because there will be a growth of fundamentalism. In atheist countries, it is because the lack of religious freedom creates an increasingly intense social conflict. Without human dignity guaranteed by the religious dimension and without social solidarity, technical progress creates injustice, division and conflict. Think about what happens in China. According to figures from the Ministry of Security of China, last year there were over one hundred thousand “mass incidents”, in other words, clashes between police, army and population, with deaths on both sides.

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT AND RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

It could be argued that China, India, Maldives and Vietnam, although they stifle religious freedom, they are now highly developing countries. In reality, violence against religions is a sign of a profound imbalance present in their society, which undermines the “human quality” of this development.

Let us analyze for example the price paid by China for this development: death in its mines; unemployment, pensioners without help, fami-

lies without health care and schools, migrants who work like slaves, desperate and suicidal young people, capital punishment and corruption.

Added to this there are enormous ecological and agricultural problems created by this savage and “not religious” development, disrespectful of God, nature and man. According to official figures, 90% of rivers and lakes are polluted in China. Over three hundred and twenty million peasants have no sources of drinking water and one hundred and ninety million drink contaminated water, which is also used to irrigate the fields. Among them there are high rates of cancer patients. According to government experts pollution problems cost the country between 8 and 13% of Gross Domestic Product.⁹ Even literacy, a cause of pride for Mao, has become a luxury item because at least 80% of the children of peasants leave school to go to work in cities as desperate migrants. As you know the fast and chaotic economic development is creating a storm of protest that is sweeping through Hunan, Guangdong, Henan, Hebei, Zhejiang, Shaanxi with dozens of deaths and arrests. According to the Communist Party itself, social injustice – the result of unbalanced development – is now the greatest danger to the stability of China.

The case of Vietnam is also significant: here religious persecution is linked to an attempt to eliminate or at least marginalize minority groups of the so-called Montagnards, the mountain tribes, who are denied not only the expression of their faith, but also the minimum services to aid their development: schools, healthcare, roads, land and homes. The faster the pace of industrial and economic development in Vietnam, the faster it expropriates houses, churches and land in the name of the party, only to be pocketed by some local leader as private property to be resold on the housing market. This is also happening with the probable complicity of those Western companies that are investing in Viet-

⁹ Cf “*AsiaNews.it*”, In *Yixing 80,000 people are without water for a month*, 14/03/2007.

nam, transferring their production chains to this wonderful country famed for its natural beauty and capacity for production.

These imbalances and inequities are created by the lack of religious freedom, the marginalization of the religious dimension in society.

It is worth mentioning here, as Benedict XVI said in his latest encyclical, *Caritas in Veritate*: “God is the guarantor of the true development of man”, because, “the deliberate promotion of religious indifference or practical atheism on the part of many countries obstructs the requirements for the genuine development of peoples, depriving them of spiritual and human resources”.¹⁰

And again: “When the State promotes, teaches, or actually imposes forms of practical atheism, it deprives its citizens of the moral and spiritual strength that is indispensable for attaining integral human development and it impedes them from moving forward with renewed dynamism as they strive to offer a more generous human response to divine love”.¹¹ Without religious freedom, the “super growth” of many Asian countries, remains plagued by “underdevelopment” which damages “authentic development”.

CONCLUSIONS

I think I can say that violations of religious freedom are increasingly motivated by power and contempt for the human and social development of mankind. In the past it was much more common to find motives of fanatic fundamentalism that wanted to annihilate other confessional communities; the rejection of religions (like Christianity) connected to a colonial past, and the Marxist ideological motivations which wanted to destroy religion as the “opiate of the people”. Now it is clear that even in communist countries the struggle against religions is a

¹⁰ BENEDICT XVI, Encyclical Letter *Caritas in Veritate*, no. 29.

¹¹ *Ibid.*

struggle against freedom, to save the power and business affairs of the party oligarchy.

Even the persecution in India, although with a strong dose of Hindu religious fundamentalism, is motivated by interests of political parties and land-owners to keep the enslavement of tribals and Dalits who convert to Christianity and are open to a new social and economic emancipation of their lives.

From this point of view, muzzling religion means muzzling the voices that speak of freedom of expression, justice against corruption, development and dignity. The forces of power which struggle against religious freedom want to keep their countries closed, locked, without economic development, to preserve their monopolies and interests.

It must also be said that there is less and less interest on the part of world governments in the issue of religious freedom. Globalization has made worldwide civil society more cohesive, but it has also made governments subservient to the economy. And I fear that with the global recession we are seeing, this neglect will become increasingly abysmal.

It is true that in the world there are parts of civil society who take to heart this or that situation, and that inform, demonstrate, support and sympathize. These links and these relationships that are created against the prevailing trend – against indifference and blind mercantilism – are also seeds of hope for the world.

Christians must contribute to this by offering the testimony of a commitment to the dignity of human beings, made in the image of God and loved by Jesus Christ. All this is a duty that comes from our mission.

I end with the words of Benedict XVI, from his Encyclical Letter *Deus Caritas Est*, quoted in abundance in his *Letter to Chinese Catholics*. What our Holy Father says can be applied to all of us, Asians and Europeans, East and West: “The Church cannot and must not take upon herself the political battle to bring about the most just society possible. She cannot and must not replace the State. Yet at the same time

Courageous witnesses of faith

she cannot and must not remain on the sidelines in the fight for justice. She has to play her part through rational argument and she has to reawaken the spiritual energy without which justice, which always demands sacrifice, cannot prevail and prosper. A just society must be the achievement of politics, not of the Church. Yet the promotion of justice through efforts to bring about openness of mind and will to the demands of the common good is something which concerns the Church deeply”.¹²

¹² IDEM, Encyclical Letter *Deus Caritas Est*, no. 28.

A new era of group endeavours

GUZMÁN CARRIQUIRY*

About twenty years ago, in the Post-synodal Exhortation *Christifideles Laici*, His Holiness John Paul II pointed to the emergence of a “new era of group endeavours” in the universal Church, where “alongside the traditional forming of associations, and at times coming from their very roots, movements and new sodalities have sprouted”,¹ as a sign of the “richness and the versatility of resources that the Holy Spirit nourishes in the ecclesial community”² and the laity’s capacity for generosity and initiative. In fact, Divine Providence enriched the life of the Church with the blossoming of many charisms, which were the source of these new movements and ecclesial communities, according to their diverse educational methods, forms of community and missionary momentum.

His Holiness John Paul II regarded them as “one of the most significant fruits of that springtime in the Church which was foretold by the Second Vatican Council, but unfortunately has often been hampered by the spread of secularization”,³ a cause for hope for the Church and humankind. In fact, both His Holiness John Paul II and His Holiness Benedict XVI consider these new ecclesial groups to be “providential”, that is, signs of the fruits of God’s designs for this historic time. Therefore, both Popes welcomed, praised, recognised and encouraged these new movements and communities, convinced that

* Undersecretary of the Pontifical Council for the Laity.

¹ JOHN PAUL II, Post-synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Christifideles Laici*, no. 29.

² *Ibid.*

³ IDEM, Message for the World Congress of Ecclesial Movements and New Communities, 27 May 1998.

they – and both Popes have reiterated this – “represent a secure newness, which is still waiting to be properly understood in light of its positive efficacy for the Kingdom of God at work in the present moment of history”.⁴

The bishops of the great continent of Asia have known how to gather and welcome this newness, in communion with the teaching of the recent Popes. In fact, on the recommendations of the Special Assembly of the Synod of Bishops for Asia, which took place in the Vatican from April 18th to May 14th 1988, Pope John Paul II stated the following in his Post-synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Ecclesia in Asia*: “One solid cause of hope is the increasing number of better trained, enthusiastic and Spirit-filled lay people, who are more and more aware of their specific vocation within the ecclesial community”,⁵ with “special recognition and praise” for lay catechists. He went on to add: “The apostolic and charismatic movements too are a gift of the Spirit, bringing new life and vigour to the formation of lay men and women, families and the youth. Associations and ecclesial movements devoted to the promotion of human dignity and justice make accessible and tangible the universality of the evangelical message of our adoption as children of God”.⁶ The seminar organised by the Federation of Asian Catholic Bishops (FABC) that was held from January 24th to 26th 2010 in Pattaya, Thailand, on the “Role of Ecclesial Movements” and their “Mission in Asia”, is a sign of the Asian bishops growing awareness of this. In fact, in the Seminar’s final statement, participants quote the message of Pope Benedict XVI and declare the movements to be an “inrush of the Holy Spirit in the Church and in contemporary society”, in such a way that “it is no longer possible to think of the life of the Church without including

⁴ IDEM, Speech to Communion and Liberation Movement on the 30th anniversary of its foundation, September 29, 1984.

⁵ IDEM, Post-synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Ecclesia in Asia*, no. 9.

⁶ *Ibid.*

these gifts of God within it”. The final statement affirms: “ We acknowledge the many blessings they have brought in the lives of individuals and communities through a revitalising of Christian life, renewed experience of Church, discovery of one’s vocation and awakening to mission ”.

We know that the associating of faithful among themselves has always been present, in various forms, throughout the history of the Church.⁷ Should we not remember the still vibrant “ secular third orders ” and the many confraternities? We cannot forget that for more than six decades, your Churches have been the recipients of the good works of the Legion of Mary, the St. Vincent de Paul Society and also those of the movements of Catholic Action. The Second Vatican Council decree on the *Apostolate of the Laity* highlighted “ the importance of the organisational forms of the lay apostolate ” as an effective response “ to human and Christian need and at the same time signifies the communion and unity of the Church in Christ ”, recommending the development of associations at an international level.⁸ The “ new era in group associations ” has witnessed the development of many ecclesial movements and new communities within the universal Church, for example, the Cursillos de Cristiandad, the Work of Mary (Focolare Movement), the Catholic Charismatic Renewal (with its diverse communities, services and prayer groups), Communion and Liberation, the St. Egidio Community, the Emmanuel Community, ecclesial realities such as the Neocatechumenal Way, different associations of lay faithful in communion and collaboration with Religious Congregations and Missionary Institutes, and many more present here today. Many of these groups were born in European nations, others in the United States, more recently others have been born in Latin American and Asian nations,

⁷ Cf. IDEM, Post-synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Christifideles Laici*, no. 29.

⁸ SECOND VATICAN ECUMENICAL COUNCIL, Decree on the Apostolate of the Laity *Apostolicam Actuositatem*, no. 18 & 19.

such as the “Couples for Christ” and “Jesus Youth Movement”. All of them, however, are Catholic, universal and missionary in nature and in goal, and precisely for this reason they are increasingly present in various forms within the Church on every continent and in so many cultures and circumstances. The charisms that gave birth to the ecclesial movements and new communities do not remain defined by the local Church nor circumscribed by the surrounding culture. The Christian experiences they generate expand to include various territorial, social and cultural areas, taking root in many particular churches. Their authenticity and fruitfulness are verified by their capacity to help people of very diverse backgrounds, ages, temperaments, social and cultural contexts, ethnicities and nationalities, to encounter Christ and live the Christian experience. Their original thrust towards universality and totality manifests itself in this way. This is also why Cardinal Ratzinger, on various occasions, explained that they are always a new gift for the task of the universal apostolic mission and, in a particular way, for the Petrine ministry in its apostolic duty to propagate the Gospel and baptise all nations until the ends of the earth (cf *Mt* 28: 18). This leads to a better understanding of Pope Benedict XVI’s exhortation to the ecclesial movements and new communities at the world meeting of June 3rd 2006, when he stated: “I ask you to collaborate even more, very much more, in the Pope’s universal apostolic ministry, opening doors to Christ”.⁹

What were the reasons that led the Popes to recognise the “providential” nature of the new era of group endeavours of the lay faithful? His Holiness John Paul II expressed them in a synthetic and very descriptive way when he said: “There is so much need today for mature Christian personalities, conscious of their baptismal identity, of their vocation and mission in the Church and in the world! There is great

⁹ BENEDICT XVI, Homily at the prayer vigil and meeting (solemnity of Pentecost), St. Peter’s Square, Saturday, 3 June 2006.

need for living Christian communities! And here are the movements and the new ecclesial communities [...] You are this providential response".¹⁰ They are the womb that nurtures new generations of men and women who discover, thanks to their charisms and educational methods, the gratitude, the joy, the truth and the beauty of being Christian.

For this very reason, Divine Providence has blessed the Church in our time with an outpouring of charisms. What is a charism? In synthesis, it is a gift (*gratia gratis data*) of the Holy Spirit (cf. *1 Cor* 12: 14-11), given to certain people at a specific time in order to start a unique experience of faith that will be useful for the building of the Church. This is what the Apostle Paul referred to when he pointed out that charisms come from the one Spirit if they proclaim Jesus as Lord (cf. *1 Cor* 12: 3), if they contribute to the growth of the Body of Christ (cf. *1 Cor* 12: 7, 12, 22-27) and if they hold above all else the gift of charity (cf. *1 Cor* 13: 12; *Cor* 6: 6; *Gal* 5: 22). Charisms open minds and move wills towards a new path of encounter and discipleship with the Lord. Through charisms, through a human encounter, the presence of Christ reaches people, it touches people's eyes, ears, mouths, hearts, intelligence, freedom, and for this reason, is proof of a very real presence, capable of affection and persuasion, just as Christ did with the apostles and first disciples two thousand years ago. In this sense, movements are means through which the event of Christ and his mystery in history, the Church, encounters people in a moving, educating and convincing way. Thus within the movements we witness a serene confession, full of joy and hope, without hesitation or problematic inhibition, that Jesus is Lord. Here we find the essence, simplicity, and freshness of what Christianity offers. It is thanks to the charisms in associations and movements that conform to ecclesial communion that the Gospel takes root, and

¹⁰ JOHN PAUL II, Address on the occasion of the Meeting with the Ecclesial Movements and the New Communities, Rome, 30 May 1998.

the content of faith and the living stream of tradition are persuasively communicated through personal experience of adhesion of one's freedom to Christ.

This is "providential" because everything in Christian life always starts out from a surprising, renewed and fascinating encounter with Jesus Christ. His Holiness Benedict XVI writes in the Encyclical *Deus Caritas Est*: "being Christian is not the result of an ethical choice or a lofty idea, but the encounter with an event, a person, which gives life a new horizon and a decisive direction".¹¹ Today more than ever, we must allow ourselves to be captivated by Christ in the midst of the tribulations in a world that does not know the real face of God or that rejects him and holds Christian witness hostage.

The movements and new communities are also providential because they educate people in a sense of belonging to the Church understood and lived out as a mystery of communion. Benedict XVI defined them as "schools of communion, groups journeying on in which one learns to live in the truth and love that Christ revealed and communicated to us through the witness of the Apostles, in the heart of the great family of his disciples".¹² Or, as Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger wrote in the book-interview "Salt of the earth", they are "vital cells" of support on the common journey, schools of real life, that "within a smaller reality, allow the great vital reality of the Church to be concretely experienced and practised".¹³ This tells us that these new movements and communities have helped increase recognition of the fact that the Church was founded on and is always renewed by the hierarchical, sacramental, and charismatic gifts that are equally essential.

Moreover, the ecclesial movements and new communities are

¹¹ BENEDICT XVI, Encyclical Letter *Deus Caritas Est*, no. 1.

¹² IDEM, Message to the participants of the Second World Congress on Ecclesial Movements and New Communities, 22 May 2006.

¹³ JOSEPH CARDINAL RATZINGER, *Salt of the Earth: the Church at the end of the Millennium: an interview with Peter Seewald*, Ignatius Press, San Francisco 1997.

“providential” because they are motivated by an *ad gentes* missionary responsibility and impetus. Mission is certainly not an extra to Christian life, a marketing strategy or fanatical proselytism. It is communication to others of the gift of the encounter with the Lord, who has given meaning, direction, flavour and the promise of fulfilment of our existence. It is so true, so beautiful, so good in all that it expresses that we feel compelled to share it with everyone, to be freely accepted, but offered in love for the sake of their life and their destiny. Therefore we can state with certainty that the implantation of the Catholic Christian identity does not take place by closing in on oneself and by protectionism. It is, rather, a desire and urge to be explicitly present and visible, without fear or calculation, in all areas and situations of life as communicators of the extraordinary gift of an encounter with Christ. For this very reason, a positive charge multiplies and deepens all encounters. Thus the movements are subjects of evangelization. They are promoters of ecumenism through their wide experience of friendship, prayer and collaboration with Christians of other confessions and communities. They can appreciate the religious sense present in encounters with believers of the great monotheistic traditions or other religious traditions. They are also capable of rejecting all idolatry or fundamentalist degeneration, while remaining committed to dialogue open to all cultures. A Christian way of thinking appreciates every trace of good and truth. It appreciates every sense of the Mystery, nostalgia and desire for God within the Divine plan that takes place in Jesus Christ, the fullness of God’s Revelation, the true face of the only God, the only Mediator, our only Lord, our only Savior. The most important question, the measure of the truly Christian quality of each individual, community or Church institution, is their *ad gentes* impetus, to “open the doors of Asia to Christ”, which is the greatest gift and supreme service that one could give the Asian peoples.

Moreover, the missionary momentum of the movements and new communities encourages parishes to become missionary, not only with

occasional and episodic activities but with a permanent attitude of “ordinary pastoral activity”. This should not be subdued by the rhythm of routine, but should be continually reawakened by the presence of Christ and his passion for life and the destiny of mankind. It is a call to come out from the comfortable shadows of the bell tower and to become a public, visible and active sign of mission in the midst of that portion of territory and people entrusted to you. It is to be present on the streets of the neighbourhood among the people, to answer to their needs, to welcome the poor and those who suffer with preferential love, and to take on the pastoral care of schools, hospitals and places of work and entertainment. “The parish must search for itself, outside of itself” John Paul II would say. Benedict XVI speaks of “auto-transcendence” of parishes as an antidote to closure within the walls of the temples and sacristies. Missionary zeal widens our gaze beyond the circle of the practising Catholics to promote new forms of presence in favour of those who are far, of those who are still missing, of those who do not believe, of those who are seeking...an authentic *ad gentes* mission! It is precisely in this area that we can find opportunities for excellent collaboration between parishes, small communities, movements and new communities.

In the Encyclical *Redemptoris Missio*, John Paul II referred to this new era of group endeavour – in which all of your associations, movements and communities recognize themselves – and he asked for a two-fold attitude: humility in presence, cordiality in welcome.¹⁴ This humility is demanded of every association, every movement and every new community as they are present in the local Churches of Asia. First of all, this implies knowledge of the vastly different social, cultural, and political situations of the places where they are present. It also means that they must know how to respond to God’s call that is manifest in these very ancient religious and cultural traditions in anticipation of an encounter with the real face of God in Jesus Christ. Furthermore, it

¹⁴ Cf. JOHN PAUL II, Encyclical Letter *Redemptoris Missio*, no. 71.

requires appreciation of the mission and tradition of these Churches and the holiness they have sown, cultivated and reaped, built on their witness, at times even heroic. It implies, *in primis*, an attitude of communion with their bishops and to be attentive to their indications; openness to sharing your charismatic, educational and missionary wealth with the local Church; the will for active vibrant collaboration; presence in the parish which is a community of communities.

At the same time, pastors are asked to be cordial in their welcome. This implies respect for their freedom of association and their charisms recognised by the Holy See as the Spirit's gift for the universal Church. Cordiality is the mark of a good shepherd who gets to know the different members of his flock well, welcomes them with magnanimity and cares for their well-being with paternal love. "I therefore ask you to approach movements with a great deal of love",¹⁵ Benedict XVI asked of the German bishops. Movements and new communities are bearers of the gift of the Spirit and of educational and missionary methods, and therefore there should be a sense of gratitude and joy for the precious contribution that they bring to the local Churches, enriched by the Christian experiences circulating in the living blood of Catholicity.

In any case, we must be careful to avoid any counterposition between the local Church and the universal Church, or between parishes, small communities and movements. John Paul II stated: "Moreover, if we are to build the common house together, then any spirit of antagonism and strife must be put aside, and people instead must come to love one another with mutual affection (cf. *Rm* 12: 10), anticipate one another in showing respect and the will to collaborate, with patience and foresight, willing to make those sacrifices that are

¹⁵ BENEDICT XVI, Address to the bishops of the German Bishops' Conference on their *ad limina* visit in the Consistory Hall, 18 November 2006; see also: IDEM, Address to the bishops of the German Bishops' Conference, 21 August 2005.

¹⁶ JOHN PAUL II, Address to participants in the Convention of the Italian Catholic Church in Loreto, April 11, 1985.

sometimes required”,¹⁶ always allowing that which is asked for in the hymn of love to prevail (*1 Cor 13: 1-13*). Parishes, movements and new communities, but also other groups of faithful, religious communities, shrines, rectories, chaplaincies, centers for apostolate... express the freedom of forms in which the one Church is realised. In this way, the mystery of communion unfolds as a living synthesis of unity and pluriformity. Pluriformity is born of unity and finds its roots, its expressive space and its goal in unity. This is why John Paul II wrote in the Apostolic letter *Novo Millennio Ineunte* that “ Before making practical plans, we need to promote a spirituality of communion, making it the guiding principle of education wherever individuals and Christians are formed, wherever ministers of the altar, consecrated persons, and pastoral workers are trained, wherever families and communities are being built up ”.¹⁷ On June 3rd 2006, Benedict XVI explained to the movements and new communities that the Holy Spirit “ wants your diversity and he wants you for the one body, in union with the permanent orders – the joints – of the Church, with the successors of the Apostles and with the Successor of Saint Peter. He does not lessen our efforts to learn the way of relating to one another; but he also shows us that he works with a view to the one body and in the unity of the one body. It is precisely in this way that unity obtains its strength and beauty ”.¹⁸ And he went on to make this exhortation: “ take part in the edification of the one body! Pastors must be careful not to extinguish the Spirit (cf. *1 Thes 5: 19*) and you will not cease to bring your gifts to the entire community. Once again, the Spirit blows where he wills. But his will is unity. He leads us towards Christ through his Body ”.¹⁹

¹⁷ IDEM, Apostolic Letter *Novo Millennio Ineunte*, no. 43.

¹⁸ BENEDICT XVI, Homily in the prayer vigil and meeting (solemnity of Pentecost), St. Peter’s Square, Saturday, 3 June 2006.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

Catholic laity, witnesses of hope for the good of the peoples of Asia

Cardinal STANISŁAW RYŁKO*

As the Congress of Catholic Laity in Asia draws to a close, our hearts are filled with joyful gratitude for the gift that it has been for each one of us and for the Church on this continent. The days we spent together have been truly blessed by the Lord. They have been a time of profound and unforgettable experience of ecclesial communion: bishops, priests, religious and laity gathered together – all listening attentively to what the Spirit has to say to the Church in Asia at this particular moment in history. There was an almost tangible atmosphere of Pentecost that confirmed the words of Christ: “You will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you, and you will be my witnesses [...] to the ends of the earth” (*Acts* 1: 8). Moreover, during these days of intense work, we have felt spiritually accompanied by the legions of Asian saints, martyrs and confessors who have been raised to the honours of the high altar, as well as all those “unknown soldiers of the great cause of God” (John Paul II) in Asia, whose names are known to the Eternal Father alone. And we have also been encouraged by the shining example of the great missionaries who brought the message of Jesus Christ to this boundless land: Saint Francis Xavier and the Servant of God Father Matteo Ricci.

Today, images come to mind of the moving liturgical celebrations that marked the rhythm of our reflections. The testimonies, the many personal interventions, conferences and panel discussions that we

* President of the Pontifical Council for the Laity.

heard, all echo within us. This Congress has helped us to discover unsuspected aspects of the life and mission of the Church in Asia. It has revealed a variety and richness of content which begs the question: what is the common denominator underlying the experiences that have emerged? What was the leitmotif? Well, I think the answer is contained in one word: “hope”. I think that for everyone – pastors, religious and lay faithful – this Congress has been above all else a school of hope, that hope of which Pope Benedict XVI masterfully speaks in his Encyclical *Spe Salvi*. We live in a world which, despite its outstanding and celebrated scientific and technological progress, is permeated by a painful inability to hope. Postmodern humanity has forgotten God and, disillusioned by the failure of false paradises that were promised by the ideology of a not-too-distant past, it shows the signs of a profound loss of direction. All too often, it falls victim to a practical nihilism that renders its very existence meaningless. Human beings cannot live without hope! The Pope writes: “anyone who does not know God, even though he may entertain all kinds of hopes, is ultimately without hope, without the great hope that sustains the whole of life (cf. *Eph* 2: 12). Man’s great, true hope which holds firm in spite of all disappointments can only be God – God who has loved us and who continues to love us ‘to the end’, until all ‘is accomplished’ (cf. *Jn* 13: 1-19,30)”.¹ The Holy Father tells us that this hope that comes from Christ is not only a hope for me, the individual, but for the entire community, because it is “linked to a lived union with a ‘people’, and for each individual it can only be attained within this ‘we’”.² This is the hope that the Church and every Christian is called to witness to the world, making it an important service to humanity in our time. This is how Saint Peter encourages the recipients of his first letter, and indeed all of us: “But even if you should suffer because of righteousness, blessed are you! Do not be afraid or terrified

¹ BENEDICT XVI, Encyclical Letter *Spe Salvi*, no. 27.

² *Ibid.*, no. 14.

with fear of them, but sanctify Christ as Lord in your hearts. Always be ready to give an explanation to anyone who asks you for a reason for your hope” (1 Pt 3: 13-15). This is the great mission that beckons the Christians in Asia: they must account for the hope that is in them... This is the mandate that Christ gives us at the end of our Congress: proclaim hope to this continent. “Each Christian’s words and life must make this proclamation resound: God loves you, Christ came for you, Christ is for you ‘the Way, the Truth and the Life!’ (Jn 14:6)”³ wrote the Servant of God John Paul II in *Christifideles Laici*. And this is always possible, even when we are denied religious freedom. But, let us consider together – and precisely in light of the word “hope” – some of the key issues discussed during the Congress.

“The Church today ought to take a giant step forward in her evangelization effort, and enter into a new stage of history in her missionary dynamism”.⁴ This statement contained in *Christifideles Laici* is still very relevant today, and the role of lay Catholics in this process remains irreplaceable. For this reason, during the Congress, Christ’s invitation: “You too go into my vineyard” (Mt 20: 3-4) resounded as a leitmotif, so that lay faithful – men and women – may come to understand in increasing numbers that this is a clear call to them to take on their part of responsibility in the life and mission of the Church, namely in the life and mission of all Christian communities (dioceses and parishes) scattered throughout this vast continent and of which they are part. The commitment of the laity to the work of evangelization is in reality changing ecclesial life,⁵ and this is a great sign of hope for the Church in Asia.

The scale of the evangelical harvest on this continent gives great urgency to the missionary mandate of the Divine Master: “Go into the

³ JOHN PAUL II, Apostolic Exhortation *Christifideles Laici*, no. 34.

⁴ *Ibid.*, no. 35.

⁵ Cf. JOHN PAUL II, Encyclical Letter *Redemptoris Missio*, no. 2.

whole world and proclaim the Gospel to every creature” (*Mk* 16: 15). But today, unfortunately, even among Christians a relativistic mind-set that creates no small amount of confusion about mission has taken root and is spreading. Some examples: the propensity to replace mission with a dialogue in which all positions are equal, the tendency to reduce evangelization to the simple task of human development, believing that it is enough to help people to become more human or more faithful to their own religion, a false concept of respecting the freedom of others, which leads to a relinquishing of the call to conversion. The responses to these and other doctrinal errors are contained firstly in the Encyclical *Redemptoris Missio* and then the declaration *Dominus Iesus*, as well as the *Doctrinal Note on Some Aspects of Evangelization* of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith – all documents that deserve to be thoroughly studied. Evangelization is an explicit mandate of Our Lord. Therefore, evangelization is not an ancillary activity of the Church, but rather the very reason for being of the Church, the Sacrament of salvation. Evangelization, *Redemptoris Missio* states, is an issue of faith, “an accurate indicator of our faith in Christ and his love for us”.⁶ As Paul says, “love of Christ impels us” (*2 Cor* 5: 14). Therefore it is not inappropriate to say that “There can be no true evangelization without the explicit proclamation of Jesus as Lord”⁷ by word and witness of life, since “people today put more trust in witnesses than in teachers, in experience than in teaching, and in life and action than in theories”.⁸ In addition – and again I quote *Redemptoris Missio* – “the Church sees no conflict between proclaiming Christ and engaging in interreligious dialogue. Instead, she feels the need to link the two in the context of her mission *ad gentes*. These two elements must maintain both their intimate connection and their distinctiveness; therefore they should not be

⁶ *Ibid.*, no. 11.

⁷ IDEM, Apostolic Exhortation *Ecclesia in Asia*, no. 19.

⁸ IDEM, Encyclical Letter *Redemptoris Missio*, no. 42.

confused, manipulated or regarded as identical, as though they were interchangeable”.⁹

The three fundamental *laws of evangelization* as set out by the future Benedict XVI in a lecture in 2000 are a helpful guide to our missionary commitment and worth remembering here. The first is what the then Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger called the *law of expropriation*. We Christians are not masters, but humble servants of the great cause of God in the world. Saint Paul writes: “For we do not preach ourselves but Jesus Christ as Lord, and ourselves as your slaves for the sake of Jesus” (2 Cor 4: 5). Thus Cardinal Ratzinger pointed out forcefully that “evangelizing is not merely a way of speaking, but a way of living: living by listening to the Father and being his voice. ‘He will not speak on his own authority, but whatever he hears he will speak’, says the Lord about the Holy Spirit (Jn 16: 13). Our Lord and the Holy Spirit build the Church, and they communicate through the Church. Christ’s proclamation, the proclamation of the Kingdom of God, counts on his voice being heard in the voice of the Church. ‘He will not speak in his own name’ means: to speak through the mission of the Church”.¹⁰ Thus evangelization is never a private matter, because God is always behind it, and there is the Church. Joseph Ratzinger said: “We ourselves cannot win people over. They come to us from God and for God. All methods are useless if they are not founded on prayer. Words of proclamation must always be immersed in an intense life of prayer”.¹¹ This certainty is a great support for us and gives us the strength and courage needed to meet the challenges that the world places in the path of the mission of the Church.

The second law of evangelization is the one that emerges from the

⁹ *Ibid.*, no. 55.

¹⁰ J. RATZINGER, “La nuova evangelizzazione” in: *L’Osservatore Romano*, 11-12 dicembre 2000, 11 [Our translation].

¹¹ *Ibid.*

parable of the mustard seed: “when it is sown in the ground, [it] is the smallest of all the seeds on the earth. But once it is sown, it springs up and becomes the largest of plants” (*Mk* 4: 31-32). “Great realities often have humble beginnings”,¹² stressed the then Cardinal Ratzinger. Indeed, God has a particular predilection for the small, “the small remnant of Israel”, bearer of hope for all the chosen people, the “little flock” of disciples that the Lord urges not be afraid, because it is to them that the Father gifts his Kingdom (cf. *Lk* 12: 32). The parable of the mustard seed says that those who proclaim the Gospel must be humble; they should not expect immediate results – either qualitative or quantitative. The law of large numbers is not the law of the Church, and the Lord of the harvest is God and he alone decides the pace, timing and mode of growth of the seed. Therefore, this law protects us from discouragement in our missionary commitment, without lessening our desire to give our all, because as Saint Paul reminds us, “whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows bountifully will also reap bountifully” (*2 Cor* 9: 6).

The third law of evangelization is, finally, the *law of the grain of wheat that dies in order to bear fruit* (cf. *Jn* 12: 24). Evangelization is always the logic of the Cross. Cardinal Ratzinger said: “Jesus did not redeem the world with beautiful words but with his suffering and his death. His Passion is a never-ending source of life for the world; his Passion gives power to his words”.¹³ Hence the weight of the martyrs’ witness to faith in the work of evangelization. The very reason for which Tertullian writes: “The more numerous we become, whenever we are cast down [...] the blood of Christians is seed”,¹⁴ a sentence more familiarly known in the version: “The blood of martyrs is seed of confessors”. The testimony of faith sealed with the blood of many martyrs

¹² *Ibid.*

¹³ *Ibid.*

¹⁴ TERTULLIAN, *Liber apologeticus* 50, 13.

is the great spiritual patrimony of the Church in Asia and a bright sign of hope for its future. Together with the Apostle Paul, Christians in Asia may say, “We are afflicted in every way, but not constrained; perplexed, but not driven to despair; persecuted, but not abandoned; struck down, but not destroyed” (2 *Cor* 4: 8-10).

The correct approach to the relationship between faith and culture is of capital importance for the Church’s evangelizing mission. And this is especially true for Asia, the cradle of ancient cultures and religions. Great missionary figures understood this very well, such as Matteo Ricci, whose work Pope Benedict XVI has called “a unique case of a happy synthesis between the proclamation of the Gospel and dialogue with the culture of the people to whom he brought it; he is an example of balance between doctrinal clarity and prudent pastoral action”.¹⁵ This presents a vast and delicate field of mission for the laity and one that requires a sound and thorough theological training. The inculturation of the Christian proclamation is a very complex question, of strong doctrinal value, and not the result of mere logic of efficiency. It has been dealt with in the utmost clarity by the recent Popes. “What matters is to evangelize man’s culture and cultures (not in a purely decorative way, as it were, by applying a thin veneer, but in a vital way, in depth and right to their very roots)”,¹⁶ Paul VI wrote in the historic Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Nuntiandi*. Because, he added, “the split between the Gospel and culture is without a doubt the drama of our time, just as it was of other times”.¹⁷ Again the Venerable Servant of God John Paul II devoted great attention to the issue, about which he stated, among other things, that “If it is true that faith is not identified with any one culture and is independent of all cultures, then it is no

¹⁵ BENEDICT XVI, Address to participants in a pilgrimage promoted by the Italian dioceses of the Marche region on the occasion of the 400th anniversary of the death of Fr. Matteo Ricci, Paul VI Audience Hall, Saturday, 29 May 2010.

¹⁶ PAUL VI, Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, no. 20.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

less true that, for this very reason, faith is called upon to inspire and to impregnate every culture. The whole person in the reality of his/her daily existence is saved by Christ, and therefore it is the whole person who must be fulfilled in Christ. A faith that does not become culture is a faith that is not fully accepted, nor entirely thought out, nor faithfully lived out”.¹⁸ In *Redemptoris Missio*, a fundamental text for this issue, following on from *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, he defined inculturation as “the intimate transformation of authentic cultural values through their integration in Christianity and the insertion of Christianity in the various human cultures”.¹⁹ Therefore, he added, “the process is thus a profound and all-embracing one, which involves the Christian message and also the Church’s reflection and practice. But at the same time it is a difficult process, for it must in no way compromise the distinctiveness and integrity of the Christian faith”.²⁰ In fact the risk of a lurking syncretism and of a dangerous irenicism is ever present, as the International Theological Commission observes in the document *Faith and Inculturation*, where it states: “However great the respect should be for what is true and holy in the cultural heritage of a people, this attitude does not demand that one should lend an absolute character to this cultural heritage. No one can forget that from the beginning, the Gospel was a ‘scandal for the Jews and foolishness for the pagans’”.²¹ Even Joseph Ratzinger, as Prefect of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, devoted memorable pages to the issue of inculturation. At a conference held in Hong Kong, addressing bishops of the Federation of Asian Bishops’ Conferences (FABC), he stated that “we should no longer speak of inculturation but of the meeting of cultures or [...] ‘inter-culturality’.

¹⁸ JOHN PAUL II, Address to participants in the National Congress of the Ecclesial Movement for Cultural Commitment, 16 January 1982 [Our translation].

¹⁹ IDEM, Encyclical Letter *Redemptoris Missio*, no. 52.

²⁰ *Ibid.*

²¹ INTERNATIONAL THEOLOGICAL COMMISSION, *Vol 1 Texts and Documents 1969-1985*, Ignatius Press, San Francisco 2009, 17.

For ‘inculturation’ presupposes that, as it were, a culturally naked faith is transferred into a culture that is indifferent [...] But this description is first of all artificial and unreal, because there is no such thing as a culture-free faith and – outside modern technical civilisation – there is no such thing as religion-free culture”.²² He then went on to explain that “the first thing we must say [is] that faith itself is culture. It does not exist in a naked state, as sheer religion. Simply by telling man who he is and how he should go about being human, faith is creating culture, it is culture [...] It would accordingly be nonsense to offer a Christianity that was, so to speak, precultural or deculturalized, as such a Christianity would be deprived of its own historical power and reduced to an empty collection of ideas”.²³ He then drew the important conclusion that “anyone entering the Church has to be aware that he is entering a separate, active cultural entity with her own many-layered intercultural character that has grown up in the course of history. Without a certain exodus, a breaking off with one’s life in all its aspects, one cannot become a Christian”.²⁴ This statement is important and reminds us that our “being Christian” is born from our personal encounter with Christ and that it must always be accompanied by profound wonder at the incredible newness of life the Master bestows on his disciples in Baptism. In the Christian’s life of faith – as in the life of Abraham, our “father in faith” – everything starts from an exodus: “Go forth from the land of your kinsfolk...”. So when we speak of inculturation of the Gospel, we must never forget that faith is not identified with any one culture, but is capable of permeating all cultures.

The question of the faith education of a mature laity, conscious of their vocation and mission in the Church and the world was a central

²² J. RATZINGER, *Truth and Tolerant. Christian Belief and World Religions*, Ignatius Press, San Francisco 2004, 66.

²³ *Ibid.*, 70 and 72.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 73.

part of our discussions during the Congress. The Fathers of the Synod on the laity have recommended that “the formation of the lay faithful must be placed among the priorities of a diocese. It ought to be so placed within the plan of pastoral action that the efforts of the whole community (clergy, lay faithful and religious) converge on this goal”.²⁵ Faith education is in fact a *duty*, and at the same time a *right* of the laity,²⁶ and has as its aim to lead them to a constant review of their Christian commitment, active participation in the life of the Church and constant deepening of their shared responsibility for the Church’s mission in the world. Therefore, pastors must promote this process within the parish, entrusting to the laity those tasks, services and offices to which they are called in virtue of their Baptism. They must also aim to exploit the growing presence and contribution of women, as stated in *Christifideles Laici*, where we can read: “The acknowledgment in theory of the active and responsible presence of woman in the Church must be realized in practice”.²⁷ In this collaboration of the laity we should nevertheless bear in mind the inter-dicasterial *Instruction* which refers to the need for “particular care to safeguard the nature and mission of sacred ministry and the vocation and secular character of the lay faithful. [Because] ‘collaboration with’ does not [...] mean ‘substitution for’”.²⁸ It is also true that we must remove the “clerical mentality” that at times renders priests unable to really collaborate with the laity. Nor is it less important to avoid a withdrawal of the Catholic laity within the Christian community. According to the opportunities guaranteed by the civil laws of respective countries, the lay faithful – because of their secular state – are in fact called upon to contribute to society, guided by the principles of the Church’s social doctrine, conveniently summarized in

²⁵ JOHN PAUL II, Apostolic Exhortation *Christifideles Laici*, no. 57.

²⁶ Cf. *Ibid.*, no. 63.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, no. 51.

²⁸ *Instruction on Certain Questions regarding the Collaboration of Non-Ordained Faithful in the Sacred Ministry of Priest*, Libreria Editrice Vaticana, Vatican City 1997, 7.

the renowned *Compendium*,²⁹ and which are part of the process of evangelization.³⁰ Faith education concerns everyone: lay people and clergy. Therefore it is advisable that every new generation of priests and lay faithful take in hand the council documents that concern them and the lay faithful, in particular, the Apostolic Exhortation *Christifideles Laici*, which is their real *Magna charta*.

Parishes are the primary venue for education in the faith of the laity. Parishes are the true schools of Christian life, major points of reference, of communion and witness of faith. In them the Church is embodied as a significant social fact. Faced with the challenges that the world launches at the Church today, in Asia too the parish must be supported and assisted in its mission to educate in the faith in small communities, such as the greatly appreciated “base ecclesial communities”. But not only. Here I would like to mention the new and flourishing era of group endeavours of the lay faithful, which are cause for great hopes for the Church.³¹ John Paul II wrote in *Redemptoris Missio*: “I call to mind, as a new development occurring in many churches in recent times, the rapid growth of ‘ecclesial movements’ filled with missionary dynamism. When these movements humbly seek to become part of the life of local churches and are welcomed by bishops and priests within diocesan and parish structures, they represent a true gift of God both for new evangelization and for missionary activity properly so-called. I therefore recommend – added the Venerable Servant of God – that they be spread, and that they be used to give fresh energy, especially among young people, to the Christian life and to evangelization, within a pluralistic view of the ways in which Christians can associate and express themselves”.³² How many people, adults and young people with these new

²⁹ PONTIFICAL COUNCIL FOR JUSTICE AND PEACE, *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*, Libreria Editrice Vaticana, Vatican City 2004.

³⁰ Cf. JOHN PAUL II, Encyclical Letter *Centesimus Annus*, no. 5.

³¹ Cf. IDEM, Apostolic Exhortation *Christifideles Laici*, no. 29.

³² IDEM, Encyclical Letter *Redemptoris Missio*, no. 72.

gifts bestowed generously by the Holy Spirit upon the Church, have discovered the beauty of being Christians! How many baptized have found renewed missionary zeal and courage! Pope Benedict XVI sees in these new associations and communities, the renewing flame of the Holy Spirit in the life of the Church and encourages pastors to be ever more open to this great gift: “After the Council – he said – the Holy Spirit has given us the ‘movements’ [...] places of faith where young people and adults try out a model of life in faith as an opportunity for life today. I therefore ask you to approach movements very lovingly. Here and there, they must be corrected or integrated into the overall context of the parish or Diocese. Yet, we must respect the specific character of their charism and rejoice in the birth of communitarian forms of faith in which the Word of God becomes life”.³³ Therefore, my heartfelt thanks go to the representatives of ecclesial movements and new communities working on this continent. Thank you for the priceless testimony that you brought to our Congress and thank you for everything that you do to serve the Church in Asia, which can only benefit from these new charisms, from an ever greater openness, in pastoral charity, to this gift of the Holy Spirit that is a precious sign of the hope which does not deceive.

The end goal of every itinerary of authentically Christian education is holiness. It is important to speak about this at the end of this Congress which saw the participation of a significant representation of the Catholic laity of Asia. As I said at the beginning, throughout these days we have felt supported by the saints, martyrs and confessors of the faith in Asia. And we felt their strong spiritual closeness, especially during the celebration in memory of the Korean Martyrs in the beautiful sanctuary dedicated to them. The saints are the great masters of Christian life. They speak of the centrality of God – the God who revealed him-

³³ BENEDICT XVI, Address to the second group of German bishops on their *ad limina* visit, Consistory Hall, Saturday, 18 November 2006.

self in the face of Jesus Christ – in human life. They instil in us the courage to wager our entire existence on God and, by their example, confirm that it's worth it, that it gives happiness. And in this way they challenge us to leave the prison of our human certainties, from a mediocrity that sees us adapt ourselves to the spirit of this world, willing to compromise with the secular culture that now dominates the scene here in Asia too – a mediocrity which sees us become insignificant and invisible. The saints remind us that salt should give flavour and the lantern spread light. That following the Master involves radical choices, it means going against the trend, being a “sign of contradiction” there, where the Lord calls us to be. Not least, the saints – especially the martyrs – are extraordinary builders of unity. John Paul II spoke of the “ecumenism of the martyrs”: Catholics, Protestants, Orthodox, united beyond their confessions by the same love for Christ: “*Amor Dei usque ad contemptum sui*” (love of God even to contempt of self), as Saint Augustine wrote in the *City of God*. Let us listen to the voices of saints, allow them to convince us that holiness is not a utopia, but the fascinating goal which Christ promises to all the baptized. This is one more reason for hope that comes from this Congress.

The scope of the tasks facing the Church in Asia at the dawn of the third millennium of the Christian era leaves us feeling inadequate and powerless. The great cause of God and the Gospel in the world is constantly hampered and opposed by hostile forces of various natures. But the words of hope of Benedict XVI help us to take heart. He said in a homily on the “failures of God” during Mass with the Swiss bishops on their *ad Limina* visit: “Initially God always fails, he lets human freedom exist and this freedom constantly says ‘no’; but God’s imagination, the creative power of his love, is greater than the human ‘no’ [...] What does all of this mean for us? First of all it means one certainty: God does not fail. He ‘fails’ continuously, but for this very reason he does not fail, because through this he finds new opportunities for far greater mercy and his imagination is inexhaustible. He does not fail because he

finds ever new ways to reach people and to open wider his great house so that it is completely filled”.³⁴ This is why we should never be without hope. The Successor of Peter assures us that God “today too, [...] will find new ways to call human beings, and he wants to have us with him as his messengers and servants”.³⁵

Dear brothers and sisters, I conclude by making my own the exhortation of the Apostle to the Gentiles: “So, as you received Christ Jesus the Lord, walk in him, rooted in him and built upon him and established in the faith as you were taught” (*Col 2: 6*).

³⁴ BENEDICT XVI, Homily in the Holy Mass with the members of Bishops’ Conference of Switzerland, Redemptoris Mater Chapel, Tuesday, 7 November 2006.

³⁵ *Ibid.*

PANEL DISCUSSION I

The Gospel to the world

Archbishop THOMAS MENAMPARAMPIL, S.D.B.*

You will probably excuse me if I present you a paper pronouncedly life-and-context-related. Jesus looked at the fields, the flowers, the dust of the earth, and the distant skies; he looked at the sick, the toiling masses, the hungry, and the disoriented crowds. That was the starting point for his reflections, and for his sermons. I would invite the evangelizers, especially in this context among the lay people of Asia, to look at the realities of this continent: painful, even alarming with violence and corruption, etc... and at the same time encouraging, re-assuring, and hope-filled with many positive movements.

Many of the saints we admire lived in troubled times, but they knew how to look at the brighter side of things and build on limited possibilities even in extremely bad situations. Some had to face opposition that came from enemies of the Church or totalitarian governments. They were harassed and even put to death. However, many of them knew how to befriend opponents and elicit help from them. Not rarely, they were creative and drew strength from the very difficulties they confronted. For them, problems were possibilities, and crises were God-given opportunities; trying to go even beyond possibilities was sheer ecstasy. Maybe we can attempt something similar.

If we were to wait passively for better times, better facilities, better equipment, better personnel, better atmosphere to take up our work seriously, we would merely be deceiving ourselves. All we can do is to begin from just where we are, use the means we have, be happy with our present co-workers, and take the work at least one step forward. But in doing

* Archbishop of Guwahati, India; Chairman of the FABC Office for Evangelization.

so, we may need to innovate, think afresh, look at things from a new angle, break new ground, win new collaborators, build up resources, adopt new directions and lead things to a new level of existence.

SECULARISATION VS. FUNDAMENTALISM

There are many things that cause us worry in our times. In the field of Christian faith, we can see the great Sahara of the secularized world expanding in every direction. It may be less in Asia than other places, but even here intellectuals are seriously affected. God and the values of his Kingdom are ignored or marginalized in the media, politics, economy, entertainment, university, development works, and human promotion. The people whom we serve are continuously exposed to perspectives that ignore the transcendent. Our public debates, studies in natural and human sciences, programmes for the development of the human person at various levels, research objectives, intellectual efforts, goals that social movements set for themselves... everything evades the question of whether there is anything beyond the visible and the tangible.

Coming closer to home, in many of our own Catholic institutions, hospitals, schools, universities and training centers it is possible that a faith-vision is becoming blurred and faith formation is growing weak. Shall I make bold to say that our seminaries and houses of formation are under heavy pressure to look at things merely from a secular point of view...guided solely by highly secularized social and psychological theories?

There is the other trend too of growing fundamentalism in Asia in reaction to secularization. In sharp response to the powerful secularization trend in the West and its impact on the rest of the world, there is a strong reassertion of indigenous religious traditions. This tendency at times develops extreme forms, emphasizing unfortunately only certain external aspects of religion: superficial details, empty traditions, lifeless

laws, fanatical self-expressions, and even militancy. Would I be wrong to say certain Catholic charismatic groups manifest a streak of this trend when they condemn other religions and take aggressive postures?

Such a trend is often linked with local politics and exaggerated forms of re-assertion of cultural and ethnic groups even going to the point of violence. Myths and legends are interpreted as history. Prejudices are strengthened. It expresses itself in closing the doors to missionaries, or restricting their area of activities (blasphemy laws like in Pakistan, “Freedom of religion” bill like in India), organizing mob resistance to evangelical activities, culminating in the burning of churches, humiliation and even elimination of Church personnel.

People are pulled in the direction of secularization on the one hand, especially our young people studying in universities or employed by big companies, and Pentecostal sects on the other. My question is, is there a moderate option, a middle position in between: just being earnest and sincere believers? Can we be carriers of the message of that “middle path” avoiding fanaticisms? Can we be real evangelizers?

GLOBALIZATION VS. ASSERTION OF LOCAL, REGIONAL AND ETHNIC IDENTITIES

The globalization of economy is a topic so widely discussed, I need not spend much time on it. We are fully aware of the impact that the prevalent global system has on the media, worldviews, outlooks, cultures, and attitudes. To the extent that globalization may bring into existence an intelligible and practical system that can make international collaboration easier, it can be helpful:

I. to the extent that it offers job opportunities to people in the Third World;

II. to the extent that it encourages work culture and guarantees adequate remuneration;

III. to the extent that it stimulates economy;

IV. to the extent that universal norms for ensuring transparency, accountability, mutual responsibility, fairness to the weak and protection of the environment may be developed... to that extent, globalization seems to be a welcome development.

On the other hand:

I. to the extent that the global system threatens the people in the developed world with unemployment;

II. to the extent that it exploits the people in the Third World who are treated as an anonymous mass of “cheap labour”;

III. to the extent that the anonymity of the unregulated global market leaves room for the manipulation of people and diversion of resources into illegitimate hands on a massive scale, throwing out of gear the economy of nations, hurting the weakest groups and interests;

IV. to the extent that it ruins the environment and damages nature;

V. and finally, to the extent that the system seeks to impose a monolithic culture on the whole of humanity, with the greatest danger to the world's feebler cultures and ethnic groups, it stands in need of serious correction.

There is another side to the picture: resistance to globalization is evident:

I. those who look at the economic dimension, point out how local industries and indigenous economic skills are dying out;

II. those whose interest is in the political field mourn the fact that the autonomy of their region or the sovereignty of their nation is being reduced;

III. those who are proud of their cultural and ethnic identities are inconsolable seeing the daily erosion of their culture and the blurring of their ethnic boundaries to the point of disappearance of identities;

IV. but others go further. They launch “culture wars” in stiff opposition. The moderates set up groups, launch programmes, and support movements that seek to revive cultural traditions, assert civilizational heritage, affirm ethnic identities, zealously promote dying languages, and politicize religiosity;

V. there are also fierce clashes between different ethnic and cultural groups, exploitation of minorities and resistance in response, genocide and ethnic cleansing.

Pope Benedict XVI says that religious leaders should play a significant role in creating peace in society: “Peace, so longed for, will only be born from the joint action of the individual, who discovers his true nature in God, and of the leaders of civil and religious societies who – with respect to the dignity and faith of everyone – will be able to recognize and give to religion its noble and authentic role of fulfilling and perfecting the human person”.¹

THE BOREDOM OF AFFLUENCE COMBINED WITH UNFAIRNESS TO OTHERS
VS. VIOLENT STRUGGLE FOR JUSTICE, EQUALITY

Under the present competitive global system, the lucky ones make great fortunes. Those that have had the advantage of belonging to a developed nation, or a leading segment of society; or those who had a good start due to education or for some other reason, move to better positions, as long as they are willing to exert themselves. While upwardly mobile groups are usually highly motivated and are hard-working, those who have already succeeded to make a fortune begin to get tired and bored after a while.

¹ BENEDICT XVI, Address to the new ambassadors at the presentation of the letters accrediting them to the Holy See. Clementine Hall, Thursday, 17 December 2009.

Boredom is often visible among the children and grandchildren of fortune-makers. They gradually grow weary, aimless, directionless, purposeless, and float through life. They begin to squander wealth, seek escape from boredom in a hedonistic lifestyle, take to addictions, drinks, drugs, sex; they find an ultimate solution to their weariness with life in suicide. Affluent nations like Japan and Korea report an increasing number of suicides.

An abundance of wealth or even relative equalization of incomes does not necessarily bring into existence a happy society. An accumulation of “things” in one’s hands does not fill one’s heart. It does not make one contented. It is only people who can make people happy.

There are unlucky ones too. People fall behind in the rat-race for success. It may happen through their own fault or others’ fault, or due to unfair structures in society. When inequalities begin to increase and take rigid forms, troubles arise. Right down the centuries, there have been struggles by the less fortunate demanding justice for themselves. They continue to our own days taking different forms:

I. some justice-fighters are genuine heroes, constantly appealing to the sense of fairness that is planted into human hearts. They seek to be fair to all parties concerned as they struggle for justice. This is the Gandhi-model;

II. others adopt violent methods and win acceptability for violence by projecting an image of zeal for social equality, fairness, justice. Meanwhile they camouflage their own selfish interests in order to retain the leadership of their community and exploit its members;

III. others may be merely outsmarting people in similar deprived conditions, who are equally in need of assistance, through their skill in the manipulation of the masses. Thus, even justice-fight itself becomes unjust when the smarter among the poor take advantage of others in similar or worse situations;

IV. the true justice-fighters ensure fairness in all directions: to oneself, one's party or community, to the other party, to all people around. They makes sure not to damage the economy, in which all have a legitimate stake.

Is it possible to be industrious, intelligent and creative in one's work in such a way as to be a perfect success on the one hand, and preserve a sense of responsibility for the common good on the other? Can we bring the Gospel into actual situations of affluence (evoking responsibility for others) and into situations of poverty and injustice (inspiring an intelligent, effective and fair manner of claiming justice)?

EXAGGERATIONS OF DIFFERENT KINDS

We have seen above one kind of exaggeration or the other. We see similar cases continuously in our daily life. Our personal exaggerations invite a personal resistance. Social exaggerations invite social resistance. We have already seen how rigid forms of inequality lead to violent struggle for justice. In all such cases, if we swing fanatically in one direction in one generation, the pendulum swings in the opposite direction in the next. As in civil life, so in Church life. Perceptive persons stand for the middle path. They adopt a moderate approach to things. Just for example,

I. they try to be with the changing times and accept all good ideas, but hold on to what is central to the Christian heritage;

II. they insert themselves into the secular realities of their day, but their life is characterized by religious earnestness;

III. they love their nation, but have a universal (Catholic) outlook;

We have lived through a few decades of tension arising from various ways of looking at things:

- I. with regard to our Christian faith;
- II. with regard to norms guiding Christian living, worship and organization;
- III. with regard to the nature of our mission in the world: our services both in the secular and religious spheres.

We have experienced pulls in different directions. We have seen good and creative ideas stretched too far till they become counter-productive. Is there the possibility of taking an intelligent, balanced and committed position in our choices amidst diverse opinions? With regard, for example, to:

- I. freedom of the individual-and responsibility to the family and the community;
- II. autonomy of the secular-and a vision of faith that qualifies even the secular;
- III. assertion of one's culture-and a sense of belonging to the wider human family;
- IV. concern for the environment and for ecological balance-concern also for the economy and economic development;
- V. inculturation of liturgy-and the sense of the sacred and respect for liturgical norms;
- VI. innovation in Christian life and ministry-and continuity of traditions and pride in the Church's history and heritage.

The list is endless. There is a way of harmonizing things that look like opposites. Asians believe that when we bring things into harmony, we lay the foundation for a sure future and give shape to our destiny. Buddha is said to have chosen the middle path between extreme austerity and a life of luxury.

May our good sense and sincere faith (reason and religion) keep us

perceptive, alert and balanced. That is the way of equipping our “minds with those things that are good and that deserve praise: things that are true, noble, right, pure, lovely, and honourable” (*Phil* 4:8).

RESPONDING TO GOD’S INSPIRATION IN CONTEXT

We have looked at the situation. Understanding the situation is already half the solution. It is in responding to God’s voice in context that we become innovative. He raised great saints to respond to a particular need in their society, as he did with Mother Teresa in Calcutta (Kolkata) or Father Damien of Molokai. Today God places us in these fast changing situations in Asia and entrusts us with great responsibility for the society of our times. Jesus must be announced in every context. This is the challenge before our Christian laity today.

One of the reasons why we fail may be that we are offering to the society in which we live answers to questions that they are not asking, holding out assistance that they are not searching for. We have made the Church irrelevant in our context. We can avoid making this mistake if we are close enough to people. How can we be present to people?

Pope Benedict XVI said to a group of bishops recently, “It is our task not to let it [faith] remain merely a tradition but to recognize it as a response to our questions”.²

a) *The art of presence-being present to people*

Herein lies the secret of the success of most achieving evangelizers: being close to the people whom they wanted to help, the faithful, ordinary people, peasants, workers, migrants, refugees, slum children, peo-

² IDEM, Homily in the Holy Mass for the imposition of the sacred pallium on Metropolitan Archbishops. Vatican Basilica, Monday, 29 June 2009.

ple uprooted from their communities, people who are helpless, the young at risk, everyone.

We complain of violence and corruption. People get radicalized and take extreme positions, go beyond boundaries, adopt aggressive postures or develop deceptive ways, when they have no sense of belonging (to a family, a community, a brotherhood, a solidarity group, a network of friends). Young people rushing to the cities to pursue their studies or in search of jobs can reach a position when they do not belong to anyone. Can the Church provide them with a sense of belonging and the motivation to live a purposeful life? Can the Gospel be brought to their contexts?

Radicalization itself is an expression of a hunger for solidarity and mutual belonging. People readily gather round an idea, a new ideology, an issue, a cause, a grievance, a programme of action, a campaign against perceived injustice.

However, you will be surprised to find that even radical groups grow attentive to a balanced point of view, they respect genuine wisdom even when they seem to ignore it.

“With your closeness [to people] and your words, with material aid and prayer, with the appeal for dialogue and in the spirit of understanding that always seeks the common good of the people...you want to bear a positive and visible witness to Christ’s love”.³

Presence stands for availability: availability when people seek us, availability when we go out with determination to meet people in their own life-situations. That is a method of evangelization that cannot fail. We find Jesus going out continuously; so does Paul; so did the missionaries. Presence stands for encounter, interactions, helpfulness, human nearness, not mere geographical nearness.

³ IDEM, Address to the bishops of Argentina on their *ad limina* visit, Consistory Hall, Thursday, 30 April 2009.

b) *The art of understanding (persons and cultures)*

We spoke of human nearness, which implies communication, and which in turn presupposes understanding. There can be no communication, no genuine encounter without mutual understanding. It is a great compliment for an evangelizer to be described as an “understanding person”. Our reaching out to others cannot become effective until we understand people in their own contexts and situations.

A missionary understands very well the need for recognizing diversity of character in different people in order to be of assistance to them. Norms of psychology can help if we are not blindly trapped by them. An evangelizer understands also the need for recognizing diversity of culture in order to assist people of different cultural and civilizational backgrounds. Anthropology and other social sciences can help.

Let me add one more word on culture. We must go beyond admiring the artistic dimension of a culture to the understanding of diverse worldviews, mental attitudes, inherited prejudices; inner priorities, compulsions and inhibitions that spontaneously arise in people of a culture, when entering into dialogue with them. The first thing to do is to recognize there is such a thing as a meaning-system by which people live. You have to identify the configurations of your own culture through self-awareness, translate your dialogue-partner’s meanings into your own meaning-system and help them to understand your meaning through intelligible explanations.

Great missionaries who worked among the indigenous communities of Asia (tribal people) adapting themselves to their cultures, have been eminently successful in passing on the message of the Gospel. This fertile soil is still a promising field for active lay evangelizers.

“...every people must integrate the message revealed into its own culture and express its saving truth in its own language”.⁴

⁴ IDEM, General Audience, Saint Peter’s Square, Wednesday, 17 June 2009.

Inter-cultural and inter-religious dialogue in recent years have sought to widen the common ground between communities and to serve humanity in a purposeful manner.

In today's globalized world, one cannot be blind to the forces of economy if one is serious about helping people and communities in their efforts to solve their problems. Our struggle for justice and rights will have a future only if it does not ignore the way that economy works. Everyone has a vested interest in it. On the other hand, the economy that ignores the rights of people who have a stake in it or ignores the spiritual dimension of the human person, is bound to fail in the long term. Thus, our dialogue can make meaning only if we take into consideration also economic and other social realities.

Likewise, at no stage can ethical principles be ignored.

“We all know that a fundamental element of the crisis [economic crisis] is the ethical deficit in economic structures. It has been understood that ethics is not something ‘outside’ the economy, but ‘inside’ and that economy does not function if it does not include the ethical element”.⁵

c) The art of responding-to contexts, obstacles

An evangelizer must remain creative and alert, responding to the needs and possibilities of the situations of our times. The possibility for sharing the Gospel in the different countries of Asia would be different: democratic or non-democratic, majoritarian or those that respect minorities, countries where religious sharing is allowed and those that do not allow any propagation of the faith. However, even in the midst of difficulties, there is a manner of responding to every situation, and answering to the need of every person. Even stiff opposition, as it happened in Orissa (India), has something to teach us. We learn, we respond, we change strategies, and make a breakthrough.

⁵ IDEM, Interview during the flight to Africa, Apostolic Journey to Cameroon and Angola, Tuesday, 17 March 2009.

We also need to translate the message to the needs of people of various categories: of children at their games, intellectuals in the university, politicians canvassing for the next elections, young people searching for jobs, a person injured in an accident, and a dying destitute in a house of Mother Teresa. When we fail to adapt, we fail to win a hearing. We remain irrelevant.

Some have developed the art of “pointing beyond” visible realities. Addressing the Pontifical Lateran University on the occasion of the 400th anniversary of the use of the telescope, Pope Benedict XVI said “Those who look at the cosmos, following Galileo’s lesson, will not be able to stop at merely what is observed with the telescope; they will be impelled to go beyond it and wonder about the meaning and end to which all creation is ordered”.⁶

Even in the midst of the hustle and bustle of life, even amidst contradictions, a meaningful word, a kind deed, a helpful suggestion can capture attention, touch hearts, change lives. A message can transform entire communities, if it is relevant:

- I. in contexts of conflict, a message of peace;
- II. in situations of division, one of unity;
- III. where nature is ravaged, respect for the environment;
- IV. when the family is threatened, emphasis on family values;
- V. where the unborn child is in peril, concern for life;
- VI. in the context of genetic manipulation or euthanasia, an awareness of the dignity of the human person and a deep sense of responsibility;
- VII. where business ethics are forgotten, a reminder to give attention to the unchangeable principles of integrity;
- VIII. where there is an opportunity for ecumenical collaboration for the common good, an invitation to join hands together;

⁶ IDEM, Message to Archbishop Rino Fisichella, Rector Magnificent of the Pontifical Lateran University, on the occasion of the International Congress *From Galileo’s telescope to evolutionary cosmology. Science, philosophy and theology in dialogue*, 26 November 2009.

IX. when questionable theological ideas crop up, responsible evaluation of the theories in true wisdom and faith.

We are not alone in this mission. There are many voluntary agencies and ecclesial movements today with which we can join hands, and thus our persuasive power increases.

Peers can evangelize peers.

d) *The art of persuasion*

Some think that we do not succeed in evangelizing the world because there are not enough people to proclaim the truth loud and clear. I would add something more: there are not enough people who have developed the skill of persuasion. We manage to persuade:

a) when truth is combined with love;

b) expressed in concern, commitment and in warm relationships;

c) combined also with respect for people's individuality and their culture;

d) combined again with contextual wisdom that is relevant, reshaped to suit the need;

e) combined further with beauty. For, as Dostoevsky says, "Man can live without science, he can live without bread, but without beauty he could no longer live..."

Persuasion is all about love. When we are close enough and intimate to someone, even a whisper communicates. I once wrote an article "Whispering the Gospel to the Soul of Asia". Many found in it a powerful idea. I was not rejecting the concept of "proclaiming from the house-tops" where it was possible and useful. But if we get across the barrier of cultures and of national and ethnic identities and are close to someone or some community, even a whisper can mean a lot.

We know that it is not logic alone that communicates or convinces. Life in its fullness offers something more:

- I. there is the natural eloquence of dedicated, self-forgetting service;
- II. there is the power of example;
- III. there is the power of religious symbolism;
- IV. there is the gentle persuasion of religious art. Hermann Hesse said, “ Art means revealing God in everything that exists ”;
- V. there is the attractiveness of religious practices;
- VI. there is the pull of devotional chants;
- VII. in many places in Asia, shrines and pilgrim places have the power of attraction;
- VIII. Many are impressed by the favours they receive in answer to prayers;
- IX. Many are touched by the depth they see in a religious believer.

e) *The art of leading people to conviction and commitment*

One step further is the art of convincing. A person who is deeply convinced has definitely an advantage, but that is not everything when it comes to the sharing of the Gospel. People are not always religiously bent. Most are busy with their own day-to-day affairs, complacent in their secular convictions or happy with their own religious traditions. How do we draw them from where they are to a deeper level of religious conviction and commitment, and to Christ? We will always have to begin with the problem they (or their community) is facing, the doubts they have, the emotions they are trying to handle, the despair they would like to emerge from.

“...the possibility of conversion demands that we learn to read the events of life in the perspective of faith, animated, that is, by holy fear of God. In the presence of suffering and bereavement, the true wisdom

is to let ourselves be called into question by the precarious state of existence and to see human history with the eyes of God...”⁷

There are serious moments even in the life of the most superficial persons. They question themselves in moments of crisis, anxiety, tension; a tsunami, cyclone, earthquake.

Cardinal Tarcisio Bertone had these moving words at L’Aquila after the earthquake, “Death makes tangible the fact that everything can cease in an instant – things and projects. Everything ends; only love endures...and triumphs over everything. Only God who is love endures”.⁸

There are young people who never put any serious questions to themselves until they are caught in an accident, or their best friends betray them, or there is a family crisis, or they are in trouble in some other manner. They look for a person who understands. At times silence can communicate more than words, sympathy more than flattery, sharing in anxiety more than wise suggestions for solution. Even a poor man is desirous of something deeper than quick-fix solutions; there is within him a hunger for God.

That was what Pope Benedict XVI was referring to when he said, “In this desert without God, the new generation feels a deep thirst for transcendence”.⁹ Every human person longs for a brief moment of prayer, of encounter with God. They draw nourishment from the authenticity, religious seriousness and profound convictions of the evangelizer who points to Jesus.

May millions more of people in Asia come close to him through the creative effort of our laity, and say with the centurion, “Truly this man was the Son of God” (*Mk* 15: 39).

⁷ IDEM, Angelus, St. Peter’s Square, Third Sunday of Lent, 7 March 2010.

⁸ CARD. TARCISIO BERTONE, S.D.B., Secretary of State, Homily at the funeral Mass for the earthquake victims in Abruzzo, L’Aquila, Good Friday, 10 April 2009.

⁹ BENEDICT XVI, Address to Bishops of the Episcopal Conference of Brazil (West 1 and West 2 Regions) on their *ad limina* visit, Papal Summer Residence, Castel Gandolfo, Monday, 7 September 2009.

The lay faithful as witnesses of Christ in the civil, business and political community

JESUS P. ESTANISLAO*

INTRODUCTION

Lay persons are the ordinary people in the Church. We are not the “exceptional” faithful, unlike the priests and the religious. We share in the common priesthood of the “people of God”, and we are called to perfection as well. Indeed, the universal call to perfection is addressed to all the faithful: lay persons, priests and religious.

Lay persons answer the call to perfection within the ordinary circumstances of life. These circumstances refer to our family life, professional or work situations, and social relations. It is mainly here, in these “temporal realities”, where laypeople are expected to give witness of our life in Christ. It is within these secular fields, where we are expected to “perfect” ourselves.

In addition to being closely related with Christ through the word and the bread, we lay persons aim to perfect ourselves mainly by attending to our ordinary duties at home, at work, and in relationship with friends and other people whom we serve. The extraordinary care and heroic virtue with which we carry out our ordinary duties mark out our pathway to fuller identification with Christ.

Lay persons, therefore, have our proper and distinctive approach to Christian perfection. We do not have to go beyond the ordinary circumstances of life: it is mainly in our respective homes, in our respec-

* Chairman, Institute for Solidarity in Asia, Manila (Philippines).

tive places of work, and in our respective positions in society where we find Christ and give witness to Christ. Moreover, the excellence with which we try to go about our daily tasks and duties is a characteristic demand, which we try to meet as we “offer” to God each day our home life, our occupation and economic engagements, and our friendly relations with people belonging to our social, civic and political networks: such offering to God in order to be acceptable and pleasing should be at least as good as Abel’s.

DEMANDS UPON LAY PERSONS AS WE GIVE WITNESS

Virtue is a primary demand upon lay persons as we offer our daily duties at home, at work, and with friends and colleagues. We bring to our duties all the virtues we can practice and observe; and these virtues start with human virtues. We find, in actual practice, that human virtues trace their roots back to four, namely: integrity, fairness, courage and orderliness. These do not much differ from, in fact they are identified with, the classical cardinal virtues of prudence, justice, fortitude and temperance. Our answer, as laypeople, to the call to perfection is to struggle each day to live these human virtues as well as possible within the circumstances where we live, work, and carry out our social relations.

In the circumstances of work, professional excellence is a specific demand upon lay persons. Trying to meet this demand with sustained, assiduous effort over a lifetime of professional work would earn for us professional prestige, which is the “hook” by which we can get others to come closer to Christ. Such prestige gives us some “moral authority” to attract other men and women, who may be in earnest search of an authentic (although admittedly imperfect) witness to a life of integrity and balance, where the moral, spiritual dimension is given its due importance, arising from its being centered in Christ. For lay persons, fulfilment of all ordinary duties is the “stuff” by which we try to build

our Christian life; the excellence (with increasing professional competence as well as an ever-higher spirit of service) with which we carry out our professional work is a principal feature of our struggle to become saintly.

It is easy to be immersed in our professional work and in temporal realities and to be fully absorbed by them or to drown in them. Lay persons, therefore, have to take good care of their piety and of those acts that secure our connection with Jesus Christ. We cannot give witness to what we do not live. We cannot share with others what we do not experience. The witness we are called upon to give is of Christ who is with us, as we go about our ordinary duties of daily life; and the experience we share is the one of ever-deeper and more intimate personal friendship with Christ. Thus, lay persons need to be closely connected with Christ through the sacraments, through prayer, and through a life of sacrifice. Without a life of piety, we can easily be “secularized”, with little or no trace of God in the life we live in the world.

We can foster a life of piety only if we partake of the different means of “formation” available to all ordinary men and women in the Church. We can seek spiritual direction. We should be regular in going to the sacraments, particularly the Eucharist and the sacrament of reconciliation. We should fill our mind and heart regularly with the word, by reading the Bible and other works that lead us to God. Moreover, we should spend the time necessary to know Catholic doctrine, including the social doctrine of the Church. In other words, our piety also has to be “doctrinal”, properly guided by the teaching authority of the Church’s pastors.

Indeed, lay persons have to be fully conscious of our role within the Church. We form the bulk of the Church’s faithful. What we do – how we live out our family life, how we carry out our work and engage in our respective occupations, and how we discharge our social obligations – would determine the Christian influence in the world. We enjoy great leeway, and therefore considerable freedom in bringing that influ-

ence to bear in the “secular” world. Within the broad parameters of Church doctrine and the social doctrine of the Church, we should feel free to choose options according to our best lights and personal preferences. We stand on our own. We act out of a sense of personal responsibility. The decisions and actions we take are to our account. We respect the decisions and actions that others may decide to take on their own account. Thus, in civic, social, economic, and political matters, for the most part we defend pluralism; and we understand that others may take a position different from the one we have chosen to take.

It is necessary for laypeople, however, to know the limits of social, economic, and political pluralism. We also need to take into serious account the legitimate exercise of the Church’s teaching authority: given the doctrinal and moral dimensions that touch upon social, economic and political issues, we need to listen to our pastors. We need to weave the pastoral guidance we receive from them into the personal stand we take on these issues. Knowing that we have primary responsibility for putting order into “temporal realities”, as lay persons we also know that we have to push the cart of our secular world in the same direction as that pointed out by our pastors in the proper exercise of their teaching function. Indeed, with lay persons, priests and religious staying within their respective spheres, there is an absolute need for unity: priests and religious serving the Christian community, made up mainly of lay persons, who are called upon to give witness to Christ in the world.

KEY SECTORS IN WHICH TO GIVE WITNESS

In giving witness to Christ in the world, we start with individuals. We deal with persons one by one. Within the family, a husband starts with an affectionate, caring relationship with the wife; a father reserves “quality time” for the children, each of whom needs individualized attention and care. Within our sphere of work, we deal mainly,

although not exclusively, with those immediately around us: the example of hard, serious, honest work speaks volumes about our Christian life; spice that example with friendship and human warmth, and we can bring them closer to the source of our Christian life, Christ himself. Within our circle of friends and our wider social circle, we share ideas and ideals as well as personal points of view into which are infused a Christian and supernatural perspective: it is mainly here where we can carry out our “personal apostolate” of friendship and confidence. It is possible for one lay person to have under his or her potential Christian influence, dozens and possibly a hundred other individuals.

Then through the networks into which we are plugged, we can contribute towards the strengthening of basic institutions in society. The family is the most basic of these. Schools, too, are important. Then, there are manifold socio-economic enterprises. On such a platform, civil society can flourish and be made to develop. Finally, there is the world of corporations, the key institutions within the business sector. All these institutions in both civil society and business sectors need proper governance, which nurtures such institutional values as commitment, competence, professionalism, and patriotism (i.e. social responsibility towards the entire political community). Promoting and deepening loyalty to basic social and economic institutions is a major concern of laypeople: this forms part of the broader duty we have towards putting order in “temporal realities”. Our secular world is strengthened and made sustainable the more the basic social and economic institutions nurture and observe the institutional values indicated above.

In addition to civil society and business sectors, we also have a duty and responsibility for the government sector. Duty for this sector is not for the governors alone; it is also for the governed. It is not for public officials alone, but also for ordinary citizens. It is not only for those elected and appointed to public office, but also for the general public as well. Thus, every lay person is called upon to exercise civic duties with social responsibility: the governance of public affairs has to be a shared

responsibility on the part of all citizens. That responsibility calls for these social values to be at the front and center of all political decisions and actions: respect for the dignity of each person; a commitment to the common good; subsidiarity; and solidarity. Lay persons are called upon to help ensure that these social values take on concrete form and specific substance in the political community we are helping to develop and strengthen.

SHARING EXPERIENCE IN GIVING WITNESS

At a personal, individual level, we are presented with many opportunities for sharing our respective experiences in trying to live “unity of life”. How do we combine our many duties related to the physical (fitness), educational, cultural, professional, social, economic and financial aspects of life, and ensuring that the spiritual and moral dimension is infused into them? It is possible to share with our friends and colleagues our personal experience in drawing up a personal road map and in using performance scorecards, which enable us to track progress in the different dimensions of our life over time. It is also possible to invite a couple dozen of our close friends and colleagues to join us in a spiritual retreat, which is an occasion for a deep examination of conscience and for extended periods of prayer and contemplation away from the hustle and bustle of the secular world.

We find small groups promoting the strength and unity of families; ensuring that the Christian perspective is present in the upbringing of children and in the formation of young people; promoting schools and colleges with high technical standards and underscoring moral values; and strengthening as well as increasing the number of socio-economic enterprises that combine social responsibility with profit discipline. These are groups we can help promote. We give them support. We open doors for them so they flourish and increase their reach and effectiveness.

Within the business sector, we can engage in advocacy aimed at raising the standards of corporate governance practice. Through such advocacy, not only technical best practices are promoted; also the principles of fairness, transparency, accountability, and social responsibility are underscored. Beyond underscoring these principles, we seek to bring them down to every level and every facet of corporate operations.

Within the government sector, starting with local government units and ending up with national government agencies, the advocacy for higher standards of public governance practice needs to be undertaken systematically and in a sustainable manner. Into this sector, lay persons should not fear to tread. We should bring into public service vivid examples of professional competence, great sacrifice for the common good, and personal selflessness: add to this good humor, smartness in using open networks, including having to work with bishops in defending common causes as suggested by the social doctrine of the Church, and the flexibility of knowing when to strike at the most opportune time. Above all, we should always be striving to lay the foundation of hope, which we need to help substantiate and “sell” through the political process.

Precisely because of the almost infinite variety of circumstances in which lay persons operate, we can only share experiences and inspire each other. Ordinary people cannot and should not be straight-jacketed. We cannot and should not be fitted into a single mould. Within the parameters of Church doctrine and the moral law, we should be fully responsible for the legitimate choices we make freely. In a preponderant majority of cases, lay people should stay where they are, in the heart of the world, i.e. in their respective homes, offices, and social circles. For as long as we keep Christ at the core of our life, then we can give due witness to him and to his presence even in the most ordinary circumstances of ordinary life.

CONCLUDING COMMENTS

Lay persons, living and working in the world, take the lead in putting order in the temporal realities of our respective communities at the local, national, and global levels. We have a specific role to play in giving witness to Christ in our secular world. Since we have to give such witness, we should not take Christ out of the decisions and actions we take and help shape in that world. Indeed, into those decisions and actions we bring the light and the savour of Christ. Thus, we cannot put secularist walls between the faith we profess in Christ and the reason as well as rationale for the resolution of issues in our personal life as well as in the different sectors of the community: civil society, business, and government.

Precisely because of the specific role we play in the world as ordinary faithful, we avoid two extremes. The first is to equate our giving witness with having to carry out duties connected with the role of priests and the religious. We must be clear about our need to cooperate with them and give them some assistance for as long as this does not take us away from taking on our secular duties within the home, in the exercise of our profession, and in reaching out to our friends and fellow citizens. The second extreme is to count upon priests and religious to take the lead in resolving major, critical issues arising in civil society, in business and government. While priests and religious have their principal role of ministering to the ordinary faithful and giving them moral orientation and guidance, still it is we, lay persons, who need to step up to the plate and take the lead in confronting major critical issues in our secular world.

The common priesthood that lay persons share is essentially different from the ministerial priesthood of priests. We have our sphere within which we work, and it is there that we share in the kingly, priestly, and prophetic mission of Christ in the world. Our sharing in such a mission is properly and distinctively secular, with peculiar char-

acteristics framed by our having to perfect ourselves at home, at work, and with friends and fellow citizens. Such a secular character does not reduce us to being mere extensions of priests and religious, who have their own distinctive and particular way of giving witness and of serving the people of God.

Testimonies of Christian charity and the service of the poor

Bishop MARTINUS D. SITUMORANG, O.F.M. CAP.*

INTRODUCTION

I take the liberty to interpret the topic given to me and go with my own thoughts under the umbrella around our general theme “Proclaiming Jesus Christ in Asia Today”. In a sense the topic is almost self-speaking and self-explaining: Christian charity must be service to the poor, and genuine service to the poor is the normal and pervading testimony of a Christian that clearly says: the Spirit of the Lord is upon me to do good works, to console, to free, to proclaim hope and peace.

The ancient Christian Communities were praised and respected by people around them because they were caring and loving towards each other, and no one claimed anything as their own and for their personal benefit. Deacons were installed to take care of the widows and the poor. When all is taken into account, the only criteria and guarantee we have that we could participate in eternal life and the fullness of God’s promise is that we do good deeds for our neighbors, near and far. Whatever we do for the least of the Lord’s brethren we do it for Christ himself. Jesus Christ identified with human beings, and particularly with the poor. So? In brief, charity is the supreme command and the only evident sign and criterion of value and authenticity of Christian life. Charity is testimony of Christian life, especially service to the poor.

* Bishop of Padang, Indonesia.

CHARITY IS THE WAY OF LIFE OF CHRISTIANS

Charity is Christian life *par excellence* and *par tout*. Charity should pervade and imbue all aspects of life and dispel the dichotomy between our spiritual faith life and daily activities. Charity must give impetus, motivation and spirit to the whole of life and all activities of Christians. Charity is the theological foundation and motivation which pushes us to the limit and to a sublimation and “beatification” of ordinary human goodwill and good deeds towards our neighbor. It is good to remember that our Church at all levels seems to be best in concepts and ideas as well as in planning, in programs and policy. Surely it is well proven that we are often best at discussing, deliberating, thinking, formulating and proposing, as I am doing (and probably all of us are doing now here) but have less impact with facts. We have the Scriptures, we have Jesus, we have many beautiful documents which we fluently and eloquently quote. However, works of charity and service to the poor must be seen and felt more deeply and radically.

WHO ARE THE POOR THAT CHRISTIAN CHARITY SHOULD SERVE?

The question has also much to do with our *modus operandi*, ways of doing, ways of serving the poor. Those who are evidently in need of immediate help are the hungry, the sick, the victims of natural and man-made disasters, the aged, and victims of war and conflict at all levels. Their number is increasing and the hardship they endure is much worse than in the past. Individualistic and insensitive societies make poverty much more acute and distressing.

There is a new class of poor: those who are excluded from a just economic system, those discriminated for any reason, children in general, those oppressed and deprived by corrupt systems and authorities, those who are isolated by nature and left out in remote areas.

Some facts and circumstances are locally made and preserved and

others are transnational and multinational in nature. Very often the most horrible reality is not the apparent and palpable poverty that we can see and touch, but the radix, roots, the deepest cause and reasons for that condition. Therefore Christian charity should not be limited to caring, curing and feeding, but should address the root causes which are the lack of justice, the violation of human rights and dignity, and the annihilation of basic liberty and freedom. The prophecy of Isaiah says that the Spirit of the Lord is poured upon all of us to serve the poor, to care for the abandoned and cure the sick as well as to let people free and to announce the coming of the year of grace (Cf. *Is* 61). Jesus himself quoted that passage and said that it is fulfilled in him, and should be in us Christians.

I am proud of our lay Catholics who take the initiative to provide for the education of poor children in remote areas, to enhance the income of the workers and heighten the spirit of entrepreneurship. Those initiatives are to be given room, recognized and encouraged.

WHERE ARE THE LAITY IN CHARITABLE WORKS?

We praise the heroic witnesses of selfless charity on our continent. The most recent and famous one is Mother Theresa. We can be proud, but more humbly carry out the traditional and classic forms and centers of works of charity to give service to the poor: orphanages, hospitals, soup kitchens, schools, etc. We have to admit honestly that not too rarely our centers for works of charity are invaded by other so-called “values” such as quality, excellence, creating cadres, etc. to the detriment of service to the poor.

We should all make sure that in “doing and extending charity” to people, both in the Church and beyond, our institutes and communities do not forget justice towards the employees and personnel at home.

We cannot deny the fact that Catholics can be very generous and charitable to many people and to the Church while neglecting basic

obligations to their employees in the factory and to their domestic helpers.

It is worth noting that actions that are done wholeheartedly and that take time and personal input, are always the most convincing testimonies of charity in the service of the poor.

WHO ARE THE ACTORS, SUBJECTS OR AGENTS OF CHRISTIAN CHARITY

Is it the hierarchy, the religious, the lay people or, even better, is it everyone, through institutions, foundations or individual initiatives? Is it true or could it be true that works of charity are a sort of monopoly of the non-laity? Institutional or organized works of charity are mostly connected with the hierarchy and religious communities. Very few are run by lay people. They are mostly like pious supporters, contributors or co-workers. Why? Is there no room or opportunity to take the initiative, or is it too Church-centered? Is there a lack of Christian commitment and awareness? Is this not a clear sign of paternalism, maternalism and clericalism on the part of the hierarchy? Is it pacifism or opportunism? If it is paternalism, then whose fault is it? Everybody's. In many ways we have to learn to appreciate our respective charisms and talents and use them. In many ways we have to learn and to understand more fully and experientially our own respective call. Without wanting to make clear-cut separations, let it be that the diocese, the parish and individuals do the works of charity to serve those in dire and immediate need; let the laity work to contribute to eradicating the root cause of poverty in social life; let the Church as a body do both and all. How? Yes, how. I do not have the answer.

[I witness the many ways our Muslim brothers pay much attention to the poor in forms of orphanages, *zakat* and *saddaqoh*, and they help those who are collecting alms, the poor at the traffic lights, in restaurants, malls and on the streets. They have many foundations and many groups, which also tend to be a means of proselytizing (they have a

boarding house for Mentawaiian children, who are generally Christians)].

The dioceses, parishes, ecclesial organizations and foundations are possible and real active agents of charity. Let us take note of two subtle and delicate things: firstly, international foundations must be careful and sensitive in avoiding the rigid and impersonal approach, the impression of doing things as projects, in coming to certain places and just using local partners as entry points. Secondly, the most common and simplest and cheapest way of witnessing to charity is in and through the faithful: it is always effective and efficient, not terrifying and not suspected of being means of proselytizing. The practice of doing charity in many parts of the world is not a simple matter anymore, but has to take into account the ethnic, cultural, religious and political settings and sensibilities.

Our Catholics seem to be charitable to the poor, compassionate and in solidarity. It is plausible that each one individually, silently and simply serves the poor in whatever way and form it might be. Charity is there only in the heart of each individual person based on awareness of God's love, our own honor and call to love, and the acknowledgement of our neighbors' dignity as brothers and sisters. That is the normal basis, spirit and motivation of Christian living and doing.

(It is to be courageously questioned and to be honestly answered how much and how efficient are the testimonies of Christian charity given by the hierarchy as such, dioceses and parishes, religious congregations and Church NGOs. Are they truly and clearly Catholic?).

We should look at and understand better and more comprehensively the new poor and the new forms of charitable works – both directly to quench hunger as well as to avoid the root cause of hunger – carried out by clergy and religious as well as by the lay faithful in society. The lay faithful should not simply be contributors, supporters and co-workers, but also initiators in answer to the overall and pervading call to justice and charity towards all in daily life.

To close, there absolutely cannot be any authentic charity and witness of service to the poor if we and our brothers and sisters in the Church do not comply with the basic demands of justice. It is counter-testimony if employers do not pay just salaries to their employees, if house masters do not treat their maids with justice and kindness, and if people think too materially as if paying or donating is enough. It is not testimony of charity if the money and logistics come from unclear or doubtful sources.

Charity will be just secular and possibly self-serving and self-adoring if there is no spirituality and asceticism. Charity cannot give testimony if it is not selfless and centered on human dignity. Works of charity will be vague and risk disappearing if there is no transparency, accountability and also sacrifice. Charity must be personal and individual in motivation and action, but it is more effective and more guaranteed to endure if there is community endeavour and community spirit.

PANEL DISCUSSION II

The experience of the laity in the work of ecumenism

AZEEM SHERAZ BHATTI*

In his Exhortation *Ecclesia in Asia* John Paul II firmly stressed how ecumenical commitment is an important aspect of our witnessing as Christians in Asia. He said: “the division among Christians is seen as a counter-witness to Jesus Christ by many in Asia who are searching for harmony and unity through their own religions and cultures. Therefore the Catholic Church in Asia feels especially impelled to work for unity with other Christians, realizing that the search for full communion demands from everyone charity, discernment, courage and hope”.¹

Christian presence on our continent today, despite being a minority, is characterized by great variety. Aside from the Catholic Church there are many evangelical Churches. Moreover, we must also mention the presence of ancient oriental Churches, mainly in India and in Central Asia. More recently, new assemblies inspired by Pentecostal movements are spreading at an impressive speed. This multiplicity, however, as John Paul II remarked, is not harmonized, and it shows a dramatic fragmentation that is rather, as the pope said, a counter-witness. It is a fact that the division of Christians has been sanctioned into the legislation of many Asian Countries – among which there are India, Indonesia, China, Japan, and others. In these places, Catholicism and Protestantism are considered to be two different religions!

Ethnic or territorial distribution of different confessions, a conse-

* Member of the Community of Sant'Egidio, Pakistan.

¹ JOHN PAUL II, Apostolic Exhortation *Ecclesia in Asia*, no. 30.

quence of the missionaries' work, has reinforced fragmentation, and they tend to live separated from the others, often ignoring each other.

Yet today in Asia, as we face the enormous challenges of this continent, a frontier for the communication of the Gospel in the new millennium, the prayer of Jesus is still echoing: "May they all be one" (*Jn 17: 21*). This prayer urges us to commit ourselves to the cause of unity. It is a matter of faith, but also a question that comes down to us from history.

In fact, where the followers of the Gospel are still a minority, facing difficulties and even open persecution, it is more evident how division is a fruit of evil. Division weakens our communities, and division makes the witnessing of our faith inefficient.

Recently a great step forward has indeed been made in order to get different Christian confessions and traditions to come closer. I am referring to the intense work of the Commissions of our Episcopal Conferences. I would especially like to mention the commission set up by the Episcopal Conference of Pakistan, which has also worked a lot for inter-religious dialogue.

Many opportunities to meet and to exchange our experiences took place in the past few years. We have to recognize, at this level, the efforts of some evangelical organizations, such as the Christian Conference of Asia, based in Hong Kong, and other agencies. Moreover, some congresses and ecumenical gatherings have taken place, forging a new concept of fellowship among Christians. Let me just quote from the recent meeting in Dhaka (Bangladesh), which had the inspiring title: "To revitalize the ecumenical movement in Asia".² The participants tried to detect the "new paradigms of ecumenical commitment". I

² The CCA General Committee, the members of the WCC Central Committee from Asia, the NCC General Secretaries and the Asia Regional Group met at a Joint Consultation in the Hope Centre, Dhaka, Bangladesh, from the 31st of August to the 3rd of September 2008.

would like to focus our attention on that issue because I am convinced that we, as Catholic lay-people, joined in movements and new communities, may be a major support for the action of the Church in our countries, especially at this level. The charisms that gave birth to many of the movements of the Catholic Church in the 20th century, have focused on unity, like the Focolare movement of Chiara Lubich, the Catholic Charismatic Renewal, and the Community of Sant'Egidio, which has ecumenism and dialogue among its spiritual roots. The impressive diffusion of the Taizé prayer groups in Asian countries is also a sign of the need for ecumenical exchange among the laity, especially the youth.

That is why, despite the “crisis of ecumenism” which is usually claimed to be taking place, we can affirm that the lay movements, because of their specific character, can play – and are playing – a role of support to local Churches in order to promote mutual understanding, cooperation and even spiritual unity with our brothers of other Christian confessions, inspired by the words of Pope John XXIII, who used to state: “Let us look for what unites us and put aside what divides us”.

Two main fields are the basis of this ecumenical encounter: the Word of God and Charity.

WORD OF GOD AND SPIRITUAL ECUMENISM

The teachings of the Second Vatican Council have given new strength to the centrality of the Word of God in the life of Catholic movements and new communities. Actually knowing more, prioritizing, focusing on the Word of God in personal prayer as well as in the prayer of the community is an essential basis of the “spiritual ecumenism” already invoked by the Second Vatican Council.

In this regard, many initiatives have been introduced in recent years. Improving knowledge of the Holy Scriptures and promoting occasions for study and discussion, may help towards ecumenical understanding. The Hong Kong Bible Society, for instance, promotes

ecumenical cooperation in order to spread knowledge of Holy Scripture. The Community of Sant'Egidio also promotes a "Bible Day" once a year in every diocese where it is present, to celebrate the centrality of Holy Scripture,³ encouraging people to have their own personal copy of the Holy Bible, and to discover that really the Word of God is "a lamp to our feet and a light on our path" (*Ps* 119: 105).

CHARITY AND ECUMENISM IN PRACTICE

The second common ground of unity is charity. Love freely given for the poor, the marginalized, the needy, and also for brothers and sisters in faith who face difficulties, obstacles, even persecution, enables Christians to communicate the Gospel even in environments where explicit evangelical proclamation is not tolerated, like in the great countries where the majority is Muslim, or where political situations create obstacles. This can be identified as "ecumenism of practice".

Today's Asia is not just the cradle of the great religions. It is also the privileged place of the new religion of materialism, with its own temples – the shopping malls, which are like huge modern cathedrals in which to perform the rite of buying. The new religion of materialism already has its own victims: a huge crowd of poor people. Let me just recall the slave children forced to labor. There are 155 million slave children in Asia, according to the International Labor Organization; a large number of them are in India and Pakistan.⁴

The increasing number of poor people is a side effect of the globalization of economy. As lay people who establish their spiritual life on

³ Cf. SECOND VATICAN ECUMENICAL COUNCIL, Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation *Dei Verbum*, no. 8.

⁴ Cf. ILO, *Accelerating Action Against Child Labour*. Report of the Director-General, International Labour Conference, 99th session, 2010.

the Word of God, we are urged to face these challenges. We shall answer with a new globalization of the Holy Spirit, that is love and compassion.

Charity unites us. We are living at a time when we often hear about the difficulties of ecumenical dialogue. But we can give our contribution to the unity of Christians by promoting unity through charity. As a matter of fact, we Christians of different confessions are already united in exercising charity. The experience of the Community of Sant'Egidio confirms so in Asia as well as in the rest of the world. Christians who belong to different confessions join together in taking care of the poor and neglected.

On the other hand, we cannot deny the great difficulties that Asian Catholics and Christians as a whole face today in many Asian countries, due to religious or political reasons. Some sad episodes happened in recent years, such as the aggression towards Christians in Gojra, Pakistan, about one year ago, or what has been going on for several months in Bekasi, Indonesia, where an evangelical community is banned from using its place of worship by a fundamentalist Muslim group. These all show the need to develop deep ties of fellowship and cooperation, to support our brothers and sisters in distress. Even if we are minorities, we should not fear. We are called to be a “creative minority”, as Pope Benedict XVI said, adding that creative minorities are those who can change history. Minorities who find the way of ecumenical relationships, in prayer, in common actions of charity, can change the history of our continent and can make us better witnesses of Christ. That is why ecumenical dialogue and cooperation, in praying together as well as acting jointly, is so crucial. On the contrary, division makes us weaker in the face of evil, and leads to our defeat.

Let me tell you about a personal experience that makes my faith in these words of the Pope stronger and stronger.

Since some years ago the Community of Sant'Egidio in Pakistan regularly visits the inmates on death row. Sometimes they are Christians

who are in jail because of the Blasphemy Law or because they are victims of abuses and false allegations.

Among those Christians there was a young Protestant who had been unjustly accused of murder by a landlord who had tried to abuse his mother. As the boy had tried to defend his own mother from the harassment, the landlord had taken revenge by accusing him of a murder that had happened in the region and asked for capital punishment for him. We, Catholics and Protestants together, prayed for him and we decided to act. We tried to convince several witnesses to be heard by the court and to state the truth. It was not an easy path. At the beginning we were insulted, verbally abused and sometimes even menaced. That action required time, patience and a capacity of persuasion. But we did not lose hope and did not complain. We just kept this on for some years. The situation was desperate. But finally a Muslim lawyer, impressed by our perseverance, decided to join our cause. We managed to convince fifty witnesses, Catholics and Protestants, to go in front of the judge and declare the truth. When the judge read the cancellation of the death penalty, all of us, including the witnesses, began to sing a Psalm in the hall. It was extremely unusual: Christians singing a prayer in a court of an Islamic Country!

You see, my dear brothers and sisters, we, disciples of Christ in Pakistan, are really a weak minority, but praying and cooperating, in unity, we found the strength to defeat a great evil, to save the life of a Christian accused by a Muslim landlord.

That is why, at the end of my contribution, I would like to tell you that we should dare and dream more. A very famous Protestant missionary and theologian, Albert Schweitzer, who spent his life working for the poorest people in Africa, suggested that every Christian should experience a “heroic note”⁵ in his life.

⁵ Cf. A. SCHWEITZER, *The Quest of the Historical Jesus*, Adam and Charles Black, London 1910.

We cannot afford to be weak and conformist Christians, bound to division and irrelevance. We have to find a “heroic note” in our witness to Christ. The martyrs show us the way, not just the early ones, but the many witnesses of faith who belong to any Christian confession and lived during the 20th and 21st century. In the Jubilee year 2000, Pope John Paul II organized a special ecumenical vigil of prayer in their honor.

Recently, a few weeks ago, the whole world was struck by the murder of ten Christians, medical doctors, volunteers of the “International Assistance Mission”, a Christian NGO dedicated to the people of Afghanistan. They were killed for their faith, and their evangelical dedication to the poor, the sick and the needy. “We are here to help people”. This was their answer to those who had warned them. They witness that there are still people who feel that life is a mission, as Andrea Riccardi said in a public commemoration. They are our brothers and sisters, they are an example. This is the ecumenism of martyrdom. This is the way for us to walk.

In 2008, Pope Benedict, when visiting the memorial of the witnesses of faith in the Basilica of the Apostle Bartholomew in Rome, where the Community of Sant’Egidio have collected relics of Christians of different confessions who gave their life for the Gospel, said: “May the example of the martyrs whom we have recalled guide your footsteps so that you may be true friends of God and authentic friends of humanity. And do not fear the difficulties and suffering that this missionary action entails: they are included in the ‘logic’ of the courageous witness of Christian love”.⁶ I wanted to share these words of the Pope with you all, because I am convinced that, while they properly describe our experience as lay people engaged in the service of ecumenism, they also show us the path, to be true friends of God and authentic friends of humanity.

⁶ BENEDICT XVI, Address at the conclusion of the Liturgy of the Word, memory of the witnesses to the Faith who died during the 20th Century, Basilica of St. Bartholomew on Tiber Island, Rome, Monday, 7 April 2008.

From Matteo Ricci to inter-religious dialogue

Rev. SAVIO HON TAI-FAI, S.D.B.*

The purpose of making friends with someone
is to exchange goodness with him.

If his goodness exceeds mine, I learn from him.

If my goodness exceeds his, I teach him.

(Ricci's *Dell'amicizia*, 69)

This year happens to be the 4th centenary of the death of Matteo Ricci (1552-1610) a great missionary figure in East Asia. I would like to start with an episodic dialogue between Matteo Ricci and a Buddhist Monk called Sanhuai. Then I will focus on his three principles, namely, Truth enlightens Reason; Reason empowers Dialogue; Dialogue enhances Proclamation. At the end I shall try to highlight some aspects from the recent Magisterium on inter-religious dialogue containing these principles.

AN EPISODIC DIALOGUE

The dialogue took place at Nanjing in 1599. Ricci moved to Zhaoqing in 1583 a year after he had arrived in Macau. Then, he was forced to move to Shaoguan in 1589 where he made the first attempt to go to Beijing in 1595 but without success. Then he travelled to Nanjing and Nanchang. In 1598 he went together with Wang Zhongming to Beijing

* Member of the International Theological Commission and Theology Professor at the Holy Spirit Seminary College, Hong Kong.

but then was obliged to return. Life was difficult for Ricci most of the time. In one letter he wrote that the missionaries were treated as the “trash of the world (*spazzatura del mondo*)”. In 1594, the Jesuit decided to change from dressing as a Buddhist monk and started dressing as a Confucian scholar (*literato*). In this way he was able to move up to the upper class of society. However, the missionaries were still under the constant threat of being sent away from China for good. The long-term solution was to be sought at the imperial court in Beijing. He needed the support of the *literati*.

By 1599 Ricci was known for his *mappamondo*, astrolabes, clock, and other Western artifacts. However, some *literati* wanted to see if Ricci really deserved to dress as a Confucian scholar, namely, having valid teaching on life. An opportunity came.

A Buddhist believer Li Runzhen invited Ricci to meet Sanhuai. Ricci did not want it, but he had little choice. His interlocutor, Sanhuai, was a renowned Master, very knowledgeable in Chinese culture and philosophy, and had a lot of followers. He heard of this foreigner Ricci who was trying to spread a new religion and thus Sanhuai intended to shut him up for good. Thus, the dialogue was not a casual talk. First of all, the talk can be likened to a fight between the gigantic Goliath and the little David. In front of this gigantic figure Ricci had a slim chance. Secondly, Ricci was in a sort of dilemma. If he won, he could offend an influential monk and get into trouble. If he lost, he would lose some support from the *literati* for his going to Beijing.

On that fixed day, Ricci came together with Qu Taisu his disciple. There were also about thirty guests. Sanhuai was sitting in the place of principal guest and looked eager to defeat this man from the West. Ricci humbly bowed to him but Sanhuai remained seated.

“Before our dispute”, said Ricci, “I would like to know what you think about the first principle, Creator and Lord of heaven and earth and of everything whom we call the Lord of Heaven”.

Sanhuai admitted that there was this lord and creator of heaven and earth, but asserted also that this lord was by no means very extraordinary because every human being could be equal to him. Sanhuai claimed himself to be able to create heaven and earth.

“ I would not bother you to make another heaven and another earth ”, said Ricci, “ but I simply ask you to create a brazier just equal to the one we had here ”.

Sanhuai at this point raised his voice saying that he should not be requested to do that. Ricci replied that Sanhuai should not boast about anything that he was not able to achieve.

Their heated dispute captivated the attention of all the guests. Sanhuai said,

“ I heard that you possess good knowledge in astronomy. Is it true? ”

“ I only know a little ”.

“ You talk about the Sun and Moon. Perhaps you also went up to the heaven to see the Sun and Moon? Or the Sun and Moon went down in front of you? ”

“ No, I never went up to the heaven, nor did the Sun and Moon come down on earth. But when we see something, at once we have an image of it in our mind ”.

“ If this is the case ”, to his delight Sanhuai advanced in his argument, “ then you are capable of creating the Sun and Moon in your mind. Why can people not create also heaven and earth? ”

“ By no means! ” Ricci answered, “ The Sun and Moon exist and I see them, so I did not create them but have the image of them. Take the example of a mirror being hung in the sky in such a way that the mirror may reflect everything, even the Heaven and Earth, including the Sun and Moon. Thus, they (The Sun and Moon) do exist first, so that by reflection the mirror can have an image of them. If they do not exist, then there will be no image in the mirror ”.

The guests applauded.

Then they switched to another subject on the question of whether man by nature is good or bad. Everybody spoke up, but no unanimity was reached. Ricci kept silent all the while. At a certain stage, they started to doubt if Ricci was able to follow the discussion. To their surprise, Ricci repeated their opinions one by one in summary and came to the heart of the argument, “If human nature is given by the Lord of the supreme good, how can human nature be not good?”

To Ricci, Sanhuai responded by appealing to the authority of the Buddhist teaching that God is neither good nor evil. Ricci said that he could have used the authority of his own doctrine, but maintained that on that day the dispute should be based on reason and not on authority. At the end, Ricci used the example of the Sun. As the Sun by nature is light and contains no darkness, so God by nature is goodness and contains no evil.

In the same meeting, Ricci refuted also the theory (sustained by some Taoists, Buddhists, and neo-Confucianists) that regards all things as one substance. Everybody was amazed and applauded him for his excellent exposition.¹

Ricci's arguments and refutations were gathered in his book: *The True Meaning of the Lord of Heaven*² printed in 1603.

At this point, I would like to focus on the three principles he used.

¹ Cf. P.P.M. D'ELIA, S.I., *Fonti Ricciane*, II, Libreria dello Stato, Roma 1942-1949, 73-80; cf. G. CRIVELLER, *La Vita di Matteo Ricci scritta da Giuglio Aleni (1630)* Fondazione Internazionale P. Matteo Ricci-Fondazione Civiltà bresciana, Macerata – Brescia 2010, nn. 50-53.

² Cf. M. RICCI, *The True Meaning of the Lord of Heaven* (TMLH). A Chinese and English Edition translated with Introduction and Notes by D. Lancashire – P. Hu and edited by E. Malatesta, *Variété Sinologiques – New Series 72* (Taipei-Paris-Hong Kong: Ricci Institute 1985). In this essay, whenever I quote TMLH, I will use this edition and the number given to the text paragraph by paragraph.

1. *Truth enlightens reason*

Ricci's starting point is the universality of human reason. Reason is trustworthy and can attain truth. When something is true, it is true for everybody. The Chinese are eager not only to learn the truth, but also to love it and to practice it with great veneration. For Ricci Christ is the Truth, *par excellence*, because Christ offers us divine love.

It is the Truth that goes back to the start when there was no time but only divine love overflowing from the Father to the Son in the Holy Spirit. It is due to this Truth of divine love that the world has been created. It is the same Truth that resounds in the Upper Room while addressing the question of Saint Thomas, the apostle, "I am the truth" (Jn 14: 6). As Saint Thomas brought this Truth to India, Ricci did the same to China.

Christianity is a synthesis between faith and reason. Reason can be a valid springboard for people to jump into faith. Before making Christ known, Ricci had to make people understand who the missionaries were and where they came from. He had to make the map and to show the people the astronomical instrument with which he observed the sky and determined the course of navigation, and then also the clock to measure time. Such scientific knowledge immediately caught the attention of the *literati* who at that time were in favor of the so-called concrete studies (*shixue*).

Ricci was gaining acceptance. In China acceptance means to cultivate *guanxi*. More than simple relationship, *guanxi* means also being shaped interactively by one another. Through *guanxi* people did not only appreciate Ricci's science but also his morality, and not only his morality but also his philosophy, not only his philosophy but also his teaching on *The True Meaning of the Lord of Heaven*.

To proclaim Christ is to make the Truth more readily acceptable. Truth, in turn, enlightens reason, because ultimately the Truth is in the hearts of human beings. Ricci wrote: "For more than twenty years, every morning and evening, looking up to Heaven, I have prayed with tears, lift-

ing my earnest hope to the Lord of Heaven, merciful and lenient to all the living spirits, so that He may assure the day in which they can be enlightened and corrected (TMLH, no. 8)...The Truth of the Lord of Heaven is already in the hearts of men. But human beings do not immediately understand it and are not inclined to reflect on such a matter (TMLH, no. 9) ”.

2. Reason empowers dialogue

Ricci had to make a great effort to level himself up so as to dialogue with his interlocutor on the same and equal footing. To achieve this, Ricci had to cultivate a bi-lingual mentality. To dialogue with the Chinese was a must in his daily life. More than a simple ability of speaking two languages, he cultivated a mental disposition to switch at ease from one linguistic world to another. Ricci, for example, translated the *Four Books* into Latin. A linguistic world is not only determined by distinct verbal languages, but also by discernible cultural traditions, world views, sensibilities, life-styles, perspectives and so on. Being bi-lingual touches one of the fundamental modes of human existence, namely, “questioning” or “being questioned”. A question entails a dialogue between two persons. One raises a question; another tries to understand it and seeks to make the answer readily acceptable. In fact, Ricci’s TMLH was written in a form of dialogue. A bilingual ability is a skill to communicate, but a bilingual mentality is a disposition that intends to communicate what is true with sincerity and humility. Such a disposition involves a spirituality to unlearn in order to learn, namely to put aside one’s own mind-set and sensibility in order to pick up the mind-set and sensibility of the others. To pick up does not necessarily mean to agree on. To pick up is to understand, to reason, to trust, and to draw wisdom, whenever possible, from the other.³

³ Cf. T.F. HON, “Towards the Wisdom of a Bilingual Mentality. A Model of Intercultural Exchange from Matteo Ricci’s The True Meaning of the Lord of Heaven”, in *Lantayan – a Pastoral Theological Journal* 8 (2009-10), 102-126.

3. *Dialogue enhances proclamation*

Dialogue is not meant to defeat someone but to win over the hearts of the interlocutors. Otherwise one would win the battle but lose the war. For Ricci, Christ is the Truth to all the question(s) about life posed by the Chinese. The proclamation becomes a matter of making the Truth more readily acceptable according to the thinking mode of the questioners. This is the so-called Thomistic principle of *ad modum recipientis*. However, with great creativity Ricci also enlarged the possibility of this principle with what can be called the way of friendship (*per viam amicitiae*).⁴ Ricci did not only learn Chinese but also made friends with the Chinese. From them he learnt also to put aside his own ideas so as to move into the heart of Chinese culture and allow himself to be shaped by the same culture. It was because of this “accommodative” attitude that the Jesuit missionaries became a bridge between the two cultures.⁵

⁴ Cf. MATTEO RICCI, *De Amicitia*, Beijing 1601.

⁵ Among the important figures of Chinese History (5000 years) in the Millennium Museum (for the celebration of jubilee year 2000), Beijing, only two foreigners are placed: Marco Polo and Matteo Ricci. As for Accommodation, cf. D.E. MUNGELLO, *Curious Land. Jesuit Accommodation and the Origins of Sinology*, Hawaii University Press 1985, 15: (“The term ‘accommodation’ applies to the setting in China where Jesuit missionaries accommodated Western learning to the Chinese cultural scene and attempted to achieve the acceptance of Chinese literati through the Confucian-Christian synthesis”). Cf. also J.S. SEBES, S.I., “Matteo Ricci, Chinois avec les Chinois”, in *Etudes* 357 (1982), 361–374. There are four aspects of accommodation:

I. Life-style, including language, dress, food, eating style, etiquette, traveling (with the characteristic Literati’s sedan-chair) etc.

II. Translation of ideas, the use of the Confucian classics and other Chinese cultural features such as popular idioms, or popular stories, examples from literature in order to express some aspects of Christian doctrine.

III. Ethics: the use of Western moral elements that are familiar to the Chinese, such as the value of friendship etc. Ricci believed in the possibility of communication based on a common ethical ground: natural morality. The personal integrity of the messengers was considered consistent with the credibility of the message. (...)

IV. Rites: the permission to participate in the Confucian rites to a certain extent.

In order to make Christ known, Ricci took the initiative to study the great religions of his time: Buddhism, Taoism and Confucianism. He was in dialogue with their believers. Later, in his proclamation of Christ, he had to take up a position which Paul Xu Guangqi called *buru yifo*, namely, “to integrate Confucianism and turn away from Buddhism [including Taoism]”. Upholding firmly the supreme Truth of Christ, he naturally developed this position. He turned away from Buddhism, because he did not see how Buddhism can be geared coherently to the understanding and acceptance of the Gospel. He sought to integrate Confucianism, because he saw it as a form of *preparatio evangelica*, namely, a culture, not self-enclosed, but having an intrinsic capacity to receive Divine Revelation. It is a culture in which the search for God brings about self-criticism or self-purification through moral cultivation.

SOME RECOMMENDATIONS FROM THE RECENT MAGISTERIUM

Admiration for Ricci must not lead us to forget our commitment in the inter-religious dialogue. Ricci used these principles: Truth enlightens reason; reason empowers dialogue; dialogue enhances proclamation. They are contained in the recent Magisterium on inter-religious dialogue. At the close of this short intervention, allow me to mention some:

1. Inter-religious dialogue is a part of the Church’s evangelizing mission. There is no conflict between dialogue and proclamation.⁶
2. Dialogue is possible because of the universality of the human spirit, the validity of the language and thought that the Church has gained to express her doctrine ever since her inculturation in the world of Greco-Latin culture,⁷ and the mutual purification of faith and reason.⁸

⁶ Cf. JOHN PAUL II, Encyclical Letter *Redemptoris Missio*, no. 55; cf. JOHN PAUL II, Post-synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Ecclesia in Asia*, no. 59.

⁷ Cf. IDEM, Encyclical Letter *Fides et Ratio*, no. 72.

⁸ Cf. *Ibid.*, no. 100.

3. Through dialogue, the Church seeks to uncover the “seeds of the Word”, a “ray of that Truth which enlightens all men”; these are found in individuals and in the religious traditions of mankind.⁹

4. Those who are engaged in this dialogue must be consistent with their own religious traditions and convictions, and be open to understanding those of the other party without pretense or close-mindedness, but with truth, humility and frankness, knowing that dialogue can enrich each side.¹⁰

5. Equality, which is a presupposition of interreligious dialogue, refers to the equal personal dignity of the parties in dialogue, not to doctrinal content, nor even less to the position of Jesus Christ.¹¹

6. The wisdom of the Cross, therefore, breaks free of all cultural limitations which seek to contain it and insists upon an openness to the universality of the truth which it bears.¹²

7. The Church guided by charity and respect for freedom must be primarily committed to proclaiming to all people the truth taught definitively by the Lord, and to announcing the necessity of conversion to Jesus Christ and of adherence to the Church through Baptism and the other sacraments.¹³

Ricci's dialogue did not convert Sanhuai. He only spread the seed of faith. It was through his great love for the Chinese and personal witness to life that made people change. Saint Thomas at first could not believe the resurrection of the Lord, notwithstanding the report of his fellow

⁹ Cf. IDEM, Encyclical Letter *Redemptoris Missio*, no. 56.

¹⁰ Cf. *Ibid.*

¹¹ Cf. CONGREGATION FOR THE DOCTRINE OF THE FAITH, Declaration *Dominus Iesus* on the unicity and salvific universality of Jesus Christ and the Church, no. 22.

¹² Cf. JOHN PAUL II, Encyclical Letter *Fides et Ratio*, no. 23.

¹³ Cf. CONGREGATION FOR THE DOCTRINE OF THE FAITH, Declaration *Dominus Iesus* on the unicity and salvific universality of Jesus Christ and the Church, no. 22.

Rev. Savio Hon Tai-Fai, S.D.B.

apostles, but later his faith was revived and strengthened by the Risen Lord himself. Saint Thomas came to the East with this faith. In Saint Thomas and in Ricci, we can see that faith, hope, and charity can never be left aside in our missionary work.

I am not like Thomas, wounds I cannot see,
But can plainly call thee Lord and God as he;
Let me to a deeper faith daily nearer move,
Daily make me harder hope and dearer love.

Plagas, sicut Thomas, non intueor:
Deum tamen meum te confiteor.
Fac me tibi semper magis credere,
In te spem habere, te diligere.

(Adoro te devote)

The Gospel amidst cultures: reflections on inculturation in Asia

Archbishop THOMAS MENAMPARAMPIL, S.D.B.*

INCULTURATION'S CHIEF CONCERN IS ABOUT TOUCHING THE INNER GENIUS OF A COMMUNITY

“It is the Church’s task to bring the Good News of salvation to all cultures and present it in a way that corresponds to the genius of each people”.¹

Asia is known for its multiplicity of cultures in every country, even under the shadow of its great civilizations. Therefore, our inculturation efforts will need to pay attention to the cultural assets of even smaller ethnic groups just as they take into account the great civilizational heritage of larger societies. Inculturation in this context would have reference to offering the Gospel according to the native genius of a community so that people receive and express their faith in a manner fully in keeping with their cultural identity. When the process takes place successfully, the original genius of the community is awakened to new possibilities, culture is further enriched, and faith finds expression in amazingly new and beautiful ways. In this process the faithful play a key role.

* Archbishop of Guwahati, India; Chairman of the FABC Office for Evangelization.

¹ JOHN PAUL II, Address on the occasion of the meeting with the Bishops in the Cathedral of the Sacred Heart, Delhi (India), Saturday, 1st February 1986.

MAKING THE MESSAGE INTELLIGIBLE AND ACCEPTABLE

“The Church respects the religions and cultures of peoples, and, in its encounter with them, wishes to preserve everything that is noble, true and good in their religions and cultures”.²

During the first stages of evangelization, inculturation would emphasize the need for making the Christian message intelligible and acceptable to the community to which the Gospel is being addressed. Evangelizers acquire competence not only in the local language but also in the use of images and symbols that make meaning to the local community. They immerse themselves in the inner world of the community (worldviews, mindsets, collective psyche, depth perceptions) and learn to look at the world from a new perspective. They begin to think in indigenous categories and seek to present the message using concepts and symbols that the local community can identify with. They take the task of communicating the message forward relating it to current realities: to current events, prevalent social processes, prevailing customs, beliefs, local ethos, traditions; statements and activities of national and regional leaders. They adopt local ways of interacting with people.

Evangelizers do not ignore even the prejudices and social weaknesses prevalent in that community, seeking to evoke thought and self-criticism in the community, thus assisting them to move to self-correction. “When that power [of the Gospel] enters into a culture, it is no surprise that it rectifies many of its elements”.³

The illustrations and examples they use are drawn from local cultures. They recognize subtle differences in the meaning of words in different cultural contexts, and are aware that idioms and images can be loaded with meanings that they are not familiar with. They study, consult the community, seek the opinion of the leading members of the

² PONTIFICAL COUNCIL FOR INTER-RELIGIOUS DIALOGUE, *Pastoral Attention to Traditional Religions*, 21 November 1993.

³ JOHN PAUL II, Apostolic Exhortation *Catechesi Tradendae*, no. 53.

faithful, and remain ever self-critical. They choose words, phrases, images, figures with the skill of an artist in such a way as to evoke the desired emotional response from their audience.

DRAWING FROM THE CULTURAL AND HISTORICAL HERITAGE, AND FROM THE ETHICAL AND SPIRITUAL TRADITIONS OF A PEOPLE

“[Catechesis] will learn their [cultures’] most significant expressions; it will respect their particular values and riches. In this manner it will be able to offer these cultures the knowledge of the hidden mystery and help them to bring forth from their own living tradition original expressions of Christian life, celebration and thought”.⁴

Evangelizers hold high the values specially cherished in the community (e.g. religiosity, love for the family, loyalty to the community, detachment, esteem for renunciation). The best interpreters in these matters are the lay faithful themselves. The core values prevalent in the community open the doors wider for the Gospel. Evangelizers call upon the memories of historic events that are always alive in the hearts and minds of the local community: their social and cultural achievements, national or cultural heroes or poets. They search for symbolisms that have a special association in the community’s subconscious. They prize the art and literature that form part of the historical heritage of the people.

They encourage the development of local art, architecture, music and modes of communication. They draw images from the community’s (civilization’s) oral or written classics: song, story, poem, epic, legend, parable, simile, fable, novel, drama, myth. They use local proverbs and sayings, and quotes from the authors who are popular in the society for which they work. They interact with and learn from prominent cultural leaders in the society like poets, artists, and other intellectuals.

⁴ *Ibid.*

They help the community in its struggle against social evils making full use of the cultural resources and spiritual traditions available within the community. They take to the native ways of expressing religious sentiments and accept all elements of value into Christian living and the prayer-traditions of the Christian community.

As the believing community moves ahead, the lay people play an even greater role and seek to express the more profound religious truths they have been accepting and personalizing in concepts derived from their own cultural heritage. People will be inclined spontaneously to express their faith and worship in symbols that appeal to their collective psyche. This would open out doors for new persons who are beginning to show interest in the faith too.

INCULTURATION IS NOT MERE “ ARCHAISM”; REVOLUTIONARY CHANGES THAT DAMAGE HISTORIC CONTINUITY ARE NOT HELPFUL

“ The process of inculturation should maintain the substantial unity of the Roman rite ”.⁵

Even in the older Christian communities in Asia, inculturation did not always keep pace with cultural changes. It is not for us to sit in judgement on the past and say what should have been done. That would be anachronistic. Some would like to take back the little Christian community in Asia to pre-Christian days and re-negotiate its way back into faith by directly using concepts and symbols that were used in the earlier non-Christian religion. It would be archaistic. Such an endeavour will not be found to be a useful exercise. It is bound to fail. There is no way of living history backwards.

In the same way, historical continuity of Church traditions and liturgical practices cannot be abruptly broken without damaging a society

⁵ CONGREGATION FOR DIVINE WORSHIP AND THE DISCIPLINE OF THE SACRAMENTS, Instruction: *Inculturation and the Roman Liturgy*, March 29, 1994, no. 36.

itself. Graduality helps. So, new styles of doing things, developed through mature reflection and discussion, including a well-thought-out revival of earlier traditions, can be beneficial. So, in an effort to build a Church that is authentically Asian in thought and life, it will not be purposeful to sift out from our theology all that is of Hellenic origin (as some would suggest), from law all that is Roman, from popular religiosity all that is German, from spiritual traditions all that is Celtic, from our monastic tradition all that is Egyptian, from religious practices all that is Syrian. On the contrary, we are proud of our common heritage which has developed over the centuries in an organic manner with contributions from many cultures. We are equally proud to contribute to this common heritage and develop distinct features that are more meaningful to Asian society, and in each cultural group what most appeals to its members. Initiators of such ventures will look for both affirmation and correctives from sister Churches and from the Universal Church. For, we belong to each other.

CULTIVATING SENSITIVITY TO THE BELIEVING COMMUNITY

Inculturation “must involve the whole people of God, and not a few experts, since the people reflect the authentic *sensus fidei*”.⁶ And I may add that it is precisely in the community that culture is most vibrant.

But most of all, such inculturation efforts ought to be launched by a believing community, for it is precisely in the community that culture is alive. No matter how competent groups of experts and theological teams are, they will need to attend to the sensitivity of the believing community too and interpret its response in a respectful and faith-filled atmosphere, not through pressure groups, canvassing, vote-seeking or opinion-bending.

⁶ JOHN PAUL II, Encyclical Letter *Redemptoris Missio*, no. 54.

It is in this context that all persons concerned ought to cultivate a sense of responsibility 1) to the believing community, 2) to the larger cultural world to which it belongs, 3) to the Universal Church and 4) to Christian truth. They will recognize the fact that both cultures and the living traditions of the Church are organic in nature. Therefore, they will have to handle the sharing of cultural elements either way in a manner that respects their organic identity.

Hasty, unreflected borrowing will not help healthy integration of cultural elements as living realities into Christian thought and worship. Even more, hurried insertion of alien religious elements from a living religion into the central areas of liturgy or into the core concepts of the Christian faith is sure to rouse opposition. No religious tradition in Asia allows thoughtless tampering with the most sacred areas of their thought or worship. The “sense of the sacred” is strong in them all. Any inculturation that threatens a central Asian value like the “sense of the sacred” is bound to fail. The adherents of other religions also may protest when they feel their religious symbolisms (I am not referring here to cultural symbolisms) are being “pilfered” by inculturators in haste.

INCULTURATION TOUCHES ART, MUSIC, SYMBOLISMS, THOUGHT PATTERNS

“...through inculturation, the Church makes the Gospel incarnate in different cultures, and at the same time introduces peoples, together with their cultures into her own community”.⁷

“...if the local Church has sunk deep roots into the indigenous culture in most areas of life, if it has made good progress in the use of local art, music, symbolisms, thought patterns, ways of expression and communication, both in the private sphere and social life, the indigenous culture flows spontaneously into prayer-life as well. It is here that the lay faithful contribute most of all.

⁷ *Ibid.*, no. 52.

Native Madonnas begin to appear. So do the figures of other saints. Biblical scenes are captured in indigenous imagery. Local art comes into the service of Christian themes. Locally meaningful devotions pick up. Various types of prayer forms with a local touch, spiritualities, retreats, silences, processions, religious symbolisms become popular. Hymns begin to be composed, unique prayers written, local dances placed at the service of piety. Pilgrimages take on a local colour. Shrines come up. Offerings made show an indigenous quality, and they are of infinite variety. So are decorations. Wood, stone, mud, metals that are most typical of a place provide material for sacred images, vessels, and utensils. Prayer-services create an atmosphere typical of local praying communities, religious events have a local touch, organizations derive from local traditions, and charitable works adopt a local style of functioning.

Religious gatherings seem to be the re-living of the community's ancient traditions. Greetings are done in the traditional fashion of the community. Celebrations have a local glow, decorations a local colour. Local musical instruments come to glorify the Lord. Dances, puppet shows, story-telling and other folk art recount the biblical stories and lives of saints. Even non-Christian neighbours begin to represent Gospel stories in local communication forms. Catechism is taught to children using indigenous teaching methods. Relationships within the family (husband and wife, parents and children, elders and younger persons, men and women) adhere to the community's inherited and wise traditions. So too relationships among neighbours. Contribution to the Church and to charity is done following local ways of showing generosity. Forms of penance that Christians spontaneously adopt remind one of religious renunciations and austerities traditional in native cultures. Family devotions show a continuity with inherited forms of religiosity. There is also continuity between worship and life".⁸

⁸ T. MENAMPARAMPIL, *Inculturation of Sacred Liturgy in Asia, Possibilities and Problems*, Colombo Conference, September 16-21, 2008, organized by the Congregation for Divine Worship.

Popular religiosity often serves as a starting point: e.g. visits to pilgrim centers, special devotions, fasts, forms of sacrifice like long bare-foot walking, ways of showing respect, words and gestures expressing gratitude, manner of expressing joy or sorrow, and spontaneous ways in which people try to reach out to the Ultimate.

DIFFICULTIES MAY BE MANY, YET CONSENSUS IS POSSIBLE

We need not deny the difficulties that lie ahead. Persons who are specially endowed with creativity in thought may not be equally gifted when dealing with a sensitive issue like culture. Social activists and justice-fighters (feminists, environmentalists, Marxists) not rarely develop a blind eye to the niceties of cultural differences. They find it difficult to enter into the emotional world of culture and listen to the language of the heart. Charismatic preachers at times take their message to extremes and hurt quite unconsciously the cultural sensitivities of different communities.

In a multicultural society one needs to be particularly careful. “There are situations too where many ethnic groups live side by side in a given area of a parish; where one cultural group is in a dominant position in reference to another; where one is oppressive of another; where two are in tense relationships. While, theoretically, borrowing elements from a local culture is a welcome idea, in a situation of complex relationships, one needs to proceed with care. An effort towards *mutual concessions* and ultimate *consensus* will be found most useful”.⁹

In this context, it may be good to point out also how some persons, by their sheer genius, transcend cultures. Mother Teresa was one such. She belonged to all persons of all cultures. Her sisters come close to people faster than any other international agency (say, Red Cross, Boy scouts, UNESCO, Peace corps, World Vision). But when the work begins

⁹ *Ibid.*

to organize itself, they too need to accommodate to different cultures to be acceptable and effective.

MANY PEOPLE ARE CULTURALLY UPROOTED IN THIS GLOBALIZED WORLD

In this globalized world, in fact, you will find too many uprooted people: for example, many Asians who have generally had a western education; those whose reading, training, updating, association (through travels, contacts, discussions, domicile) have been from the same source; those driven excessively by alien philosophies and ideologies or programmes of action; those of the clergy and religious who have studied or worked a long time abroad; those whose congregations are labouring in other countries in a big way.

Such persons may discover that they are partially or wholly uprooted people as far their relationship with their own cultures are concerned. While they too can make a very effective contribution to the cause of inculturation, they will need to make sure that they are culturally reinserted into their society and share emotional resonance with the masses, and more specifically with the believing community at whose service they are.

INCULTURATION EXPERTS: THOSE WHO STIR THE COLLECTIVE UNCONSCIOUS OF COMMUNITIES

This is another area where the lay people excel, for much assistance comes from a community's artists, poets, composers, other culturally sensitive persons, and especially those who can stir the collective unconscious of their communities. For, they have developed their imaginative faculties and keep them in tune with the cultural waves that are going through their society and constantly cultivate their intuitive skills. They can open new doors for people searching for the faith, because they inculturate the faith first of all in their own hearts and minds.

From them, initiatives for inculturation flow spontaneously. Even when they break from tradition and move in new directions, they retain their roots in the deeper cultural identity of their society, and consequently win its wholehearted support. They are able to dialogue with the subconscious of their society and whisper the Gospel to its soul. In this way, inculturation turns out to be a stimulus to evangelization, not an obstacle. It does not become a contentious issue, placing religious beliefs in question and leading communities on the way to uncertainties, but an experience of communicating joy in the faith and confidence in the message. Serenity qualifies the entire endeavour.

An entire universe is open e.g. in the area of church architecture, design and layout, façade, decoration, paintings, sculpture, engravings, furniture, chairs, pews, vessels, utensils.

IN THE CONTEXT OF HARASSMENT OF CHRISTIAN MISSIONARIES: THEY MUST BE BETTER INSERTED INTO LOCAL CULTURE

In the context of the recent harassment of Christians in certain Asian countries, I would like to make a brief reflection, not merely on the immediate issues connected with the happenings, but on the long term strategies for the Church in Asia in the fulfilment of her great mission on this vast continent.

First of all, many more Asians are coming out as missionaries to work in other continents and in other countries of Asia itself. They will need to give greater attention to the culture of the community that they serve and cultivate relationships with local cultural leaders, if they wish to be effective in their work. For, as we have said earlier, culture is linked with people's deeper level identities, their historic memories, ethnic pride; their collective psyche, community ambitions, motivations, shared fears and prejudices.

Cultural insertion into the larger society is important for missionaries and for the local Christian community for the effectiveness of their

services (health, education, social development, evangelization). Individuals and communities who have not developed the skill for speedy cultural and social insertion into the local society, will find themselves not making progress in their work: they will not start belonging to a place and to a local community, and much less win a response; they will cause annoyance to the society which they intend to serve, aggravate tensions, and become helpless in times of crisis. This insertion that I speak of should have deep roots, and have wide reference not only to the immediate neighbourhood, but also to society as a whole.

THE PRESENT “ANTI-CHRISTIAN FORCE” IS NOT MERELY A “POLITICAL FORCE” TO BE RESISTED, BUT A “CULTURAL FORCE” TO BE HANDLED WITH CARE

I would like to go further. The so-called “anti-Christian force” that is emerging strong in some of our countries is not merely a political force to be resisted, but a “cultural force” to be handled with care. While it seems to have developed basically in opposition to conversions and to the Christian work for the uplifting of the poor, it may also be considered a cultural self-affirmation of a society “taken to fanatical extremes”.

This form of cultural self-affirmation is a conservative reaction of a civilization (society) to things that seem to threaten its central identity by appealing to its own original sources of inspiration and motivating traditions. Unfortunately, as it is, the movement has been captured by politically motivated people, who in turn have handed it over to musclemen who are being trained systematically to harass and oppose their imaginary “enemies”, the Christians. Even if we win many legal battles in the court or in the international fora through publicity, these may bring some immediate relief but will not offer a lasting solution. The force will remain on, and if humiliated, it will grow in strength and aggressiveness.

What I am going to suggest may sound impossible even undesir-

able. All I urge is that it remains our ultimate goal. We will one day find a way towards it. So my suggestion is that, 1) Our political opponents will have to be tackled politically; 2) those who physically harm us or socially harass us will have to be confronted with the arm of the law; 3) but those who provide the philosophy for the movement and those who oppose us precisely because they feel we are religious and cultural aliens as they describe us, will need to be tackled differently. Our efforts for dialogue and inculturation will touch a peak point when we know how to address these persons.

“Never threaten the selfhood of communities. Selfhood is the most precious treasure they have.... Their individuality; their self pride, their unique heritage. It is important to show absolute respect to this selfhood. If anything we do appears like a threat to the selfhood of a community, resistance is inevitable. However, what stands at the heart of this selfhood is not easy to define. Is it ethnicity, culture, language, lifestyle, cuisine, philosophy, or religious system?”¹⁰ Threat (real or perceived) to the selfhood of a community can lead to tensions, conflict, even war. In the religious context, it has led to heresies and schisms. Inculturation is about constant attention to this selfhood and contributing to its promotion.

What lies at the heart of evangelization in addressing the Gospel is precisely this: taking it not only to individuals but to the Soul of a community (Self), society, culture, civilization. When we learn to evangelize India (Asia) in a way that does not seem to threaten its inner identity (its Self), we shall be at a turning point in our history. Inculturation has something to do with working towards that goal.

¹⁰ IDEM, “Conversion: The Cultural Dimension”, *Mission Today* 10 (1) 2008, 4-35.

A SECOND PENTECOST: HEARING GOD'S MESSAGE IN ONE'S OWN LANGUAGE AND EXPERIENCING IT IN ONE'S OWN CULTURE

“[Inculturation] means the penetration of the deepest strata of persons and peoples by the Gospel which touches them deeply, going to “the very centre and root” of their cultures”.¹¹

Maybe inculturation will have to begin at the deepest level of values that constitute the heart of Asia's identity. Changing perceptions and moods are of temporary importance, values are of abiding worth. Our inculturation efforts should begin with values. The rest will come spontaneously when we are constantly in dialogue with cultures and our life itself is inculturated.

A day will dawn when we shall communicate across cultures with ease, and surprise the world with our message, because we have learned to dialogue with cultures. Maybe then people will ask themselves, “How does each of us hear them in his own native language? We are Parthians, Medes, and Elamites, inhabitants of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the districts of Libya near Cyrene, as well as travelers from Rome, both Jews and converts to Judaism, Cretans and Arabs, [Koreans, Chinese, Kazaks, Thais, Filipinos, Malaysians, Indonesians, Indians, Sri Lankans, Pakistanis, Japanese] yet we hear them speaking in our tongues of the mighty acts of God” (*Acts* 2: 8-11).

¹¹ CONGREGATION FOR THE CLERGY, *General Directory for Catechesis*, 11 August 1997, no. 109.

PANEL DISCUSSION III

**Some areas and priorities regarding
the evangelization of Asia**

The renewal of the parish

Rev. DAMASUS UICHUL JEONG*

When the Pontifical Council for the Laity asked me to take part in a panel discussion during the Congress of Asian Catholic Laity and to speak about parish renewal, I was perplexed because I do not have much experience and expertise working in a parish. Actually, I have just started it recently. After my priestly ordination I studied in Rome and taught in a seminary for twenty years.

Even though my experience is relatively short, I would like to share my thoughts and opinions about parish renewal with you today.

Recently, I read an article “I am afraid of attending Mass” written by lay believers in the Peace Newspaper. It was not a complaint about their own passive attitude during the Mass and problems in parish liturgy.

It insisted that all members of the holy Catholic Church, priests, monks, nuns, and the faithful together should renew our faith and parish liturgy through reflection and joint efforts. I believe it has a significant meaning because it was not priests or monks and nuns but lay believers who raised their voices about the issue.

The article stated that priests and the faithful all together are losing momentum in belief and everything is becoming dull routine. What the Church has suffered in the West over the last 2000 years is also going on in Korea even more rapidly throughout the past two centuries.

If we consider that Mass is the lifeline of faith, then the current situation we are facing is horrifying, just like the title of the article. Mass is the root of our faith and liturgical life. The writers said that their eternal life depends on Mass and on whether Mass can give them strength and move their hearts. It reflects their thirst for renewal.

* Parish priest, Parish of Cheongdam (St. Peter Yu Tae-ch'ol), Seoul, Korea.

The article was not a recommendation of a prelate or a church scholar. It was a sincere voice from the faithful. It gave me an opportunity to think about it myself. I truly welcome their opinion.

“The liturgy is the summit toward which the activity of the Church is directed; at the same time it is the font from which all her power flows”. In this regard, I believe renewal of liturgical spirit leads to renewal of parish.

The article urged priests who are celebrating Mass to contemplate the words of the Lord profoundly, and to provide the fruits of their reflection in the guidance of the holy Church to the faithful. In fact, I saw the hope of the Korean Catholic Church in the article. It was evidence that our passion for God is still alive, that passion which laid the foundation for the establishment and development of the Korean Catholic Church in the past. I think the article lit the fire of renewal once again.

Then how can we bring about parish renewal? The renewal can be achieved by human efforts for reflection with God’s help. We should do our best while sincerely asking for mercy from the Lord.

Jesus said “Put out into deep water and lower your nets for a catch”. I strongly believe that by celebrating the liturgy, priests can fulfill their pastorship and their devotion will bear fruit through well prepared homilies.

As once Saint John Mary Vianney, patron of parish priests said “without priests there is no Mass and without Mass we cannot exist”. Priests must prioritize the liturgy, the most important pastoral duty.

In addition, priests should also distinguish what is good for evangelization among modern cultures utilizing the guidance of the Holy Spirit and Church teachings.

As the world is changing and rapidly becoming more globalized, there are more misunderstandings about Church values and life itself. Growing numbers of people cannot even realize the dignity and importance of human life. Therefore, it is no exaggeration that the role of the homily at Mass is ever more significant.

The renewal of the parish

Last year we celebrated the year for priests. To honour Saint John Mary Vianney, patron of parish priests, we gave special attention to confession. Priests should, however, make more efforts to encourage the faithful to attend confession regularly and change the negative perception about the sacrament from fear to hope in order that people may realize that confession is a sacrament of faith and comfort. I believe parish renewal is a goal and duty for salvation not only for the members of a church but also for the holy Catholic Church as a whole.

In this regard, parish renewal should be based on cooperation, one of the most important attitudes of The Second Vatican Council. Every diocese in Korea, including the Archdiocese of Seoul, has consistently followed up the small Christian communities movement. In today's fierce competition-driven society many people experience isolation, and in this multi-cultural society our sense of unity is disappearing. To this end, gathering together can be regarded as a restriction or as the opposite idea or concept to freedom. So, being together in one place is very difficult these days. Yet, the congregation is crucial. It is the momentum and energy of the Church. Renewal of the parish is about inviting the faithful to praise God together.

To achieve this, to spread the news of the salvation that comes from our Lord Jesus Christ, we should carry out the word of the Lord, "Put out into deep water and lower your nets for a catch".

I believe that preparation for parish renewal is very important as well. Like the wise virgins who brought flasks of oil with their lamps to go out to meet the bridegroom, we should be prepared and stay awake.

In my opinion, we should be Mary the sister of Martha in our efforts for parish renewal. Like her we should sit beside the Lord at his feet listening to him speak in serenity to find out the identity of the Church and the essence of our faith.

The Korean Catholic Church has been Martha who is burdened with much serving. Now it is time for us to prepare ourselves to sit next to Jesus through the liturgy.

Preparation of priests and the faithful for sacraments, apostolic activities, devotional activities, volunteer work, education, and the whole of church life should all work together to achieve parish renewal.

The Second Vatican Council recommended a proactive life motto “active participation”. To this end, the Council reinvented itself.

Today, mass culture and media as well as a barrage of information undermine Gospel values. They integrate and separate people at the same time.

Considering the ongoing ageing and shrinking number of male believers, the current situation is fearful, just like the title of the article I mentioned before. We should boost our efforts to bring more young people and men to the Church. We should prepare for this mission. I believe it is the vision we need in parish renewal.

There is a Korean saying that we should review the old and learn the new. It warns those who are obsessed with constantly shifting trends and cannot look back to the past.

It is easy to think that we should start something new in order to renew something. But, it is not true. For parish renewal we should prepare ourselves to restore the core values of the holy Catholic Church. They are our love and passion for Jesus Christ our Savior. Preparation is the first step of the journey.

I believe Liturgy is our expression of love to Jesus.

Prayer is our dialog of love with Jesus.

Volunteer activity is our practice of love for Jesus.

I wholeheartedly believe our preparation to meet him and welcome him, our Lord Jesus Christ, true love and humility, is renewal for our parish.

I hope I will have an article entitled “I love to attend mass” for the next time. Let us pray for ourselves so that we can renew ourselves to be Mary who chose the better part near the Lord instead of remaining as Martha burdened with much serving.

Mission and pastoral care of the family

Bishop ROLANDO JOVEN TRIA TIRONA, O.C.D. *

First of all I would like to thank His Eminence Cardinal Rylko and the Pontifical Council for the Laity for inviting me to this very special Congress of Asian Laity. I am also honored to be part of this panel.

The mission and pastoral care of the family has always been in the forefront of the Church's ministry. One reason is because the Church considers every family to be a "domestic church".

The more compelling reason is that Jesus, the Son of God, was born within a family, with the Blessed Mary as Mother and Saint Joseph, the holy guardian. Jesus "took flesh as an Asian".¹

Many pastoral teachings of our Popes have expressed the importance of ministering to the family. The servant of God Pope John Paul II left us the beautiful Apostolic Exhortation *Familiaris Consortio* which highlighted the dignity and mission of every member of the Christian family within the Church and in the world today.

The 1980 Synod of Bishops on the Family stated that the Christian family is the first agent of evangelization,² and underscored four major tasks of every family, namely: forming a community of persons; service of life; participating in the development of society; and sharing in the life and mission of the Church.³

The Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences (FABC) 8th Plenary Assembly in Daejun, Korea last August 23, 2004 reflected on the theme:

* Prelate of Infanta, Philippines.

¹ JOHN PAUL II, Post-synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Ecclesia in Asia*, no. 1.

² Cf. IDEM, Apostolic Exhortation *Familiaris Consortio*, no. 2.

³ Cf. *Ibid.*, no. 17.

“The Asian family Toward a Culture of Integral Life”. In that Plenary Assembly the disturbing issues that weighed heavily on the majority of Asian families today were enumerated. These are: the ill effects of globalization, migration, poverty, unemployment, violence against women and children, racial discrimination, problems in inter-faith marriages, armed conflicts, to mention a few.

On the other hand, the Assembly recognized the praiseworthy positive values that Asian families still consider important and hold dear, like: faith, religiosity, hospitality, close family ties, extended family relations, love for children, care for the elders, mutual support, sacrifice, etc.

Given the cultural and religious diversities of the Asian family, the Assembly recognized that there are cultural ambivalences within the Asian family that need purification. Therefore, the Assembly underscored the need for a systematic and inculturated family formation in the light of the Good News of Jesus.

Allow me now to share three expressions of the mission and pastoral care of the family. I hope this will animate or serve as springboard for our panel sharing and discussion.

In a way, the theme for our discussion also attempts to touch on the question of how the Church in Asia shares with our Asian brothers and sisters the gifts of the Good News.⁴

LOVING PRESENCE

Though Asian families are still kept united by loving family relationships, the Asian families today are beginning to show cracks in this family relationship. Violence towards wives and children are frequent occurrences. Migration for work often comes with a heavy price: the breakdown of families. Exposed to modern and Western media, Asian

⁴ Cf. IDEM, Post-synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Ecclesia in Asia*, no. 19-23.

families unconsciously absorb the culture of violence and culture of hedonism. The warmth of the human heart which is the core of every Asian family is being displaced by apathy and selfishness. The Asian family is in transition due to globalization and modernization exposing the family to the danger of becoming valueless, and worse, loveless.

The mission and pastoral care of the family consists of a loving presence in the midst of families. The reason for this is the loving presence of the most Holy Trinity, the Divine Family, expressed through the Incarnation of Jesus, in the family of mankind. In the old tradition, the scriptures narrate how the Lord God accompanied the Israelites on their journey through the desert with his majesty, power and above all, with his love (cf. *Deuteronomy*).

In the New Testament, Jesus' ministry as Savior was evident through his loving presence among the people "lost in darkness". He was the Good Shepherd leading the lost sheep into green pastures. He offered them a new way of life founded on love. "Love one another. As I have loved you, so you also should love one another" (*Jn 13: 34*). "This is how all will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another" (*Jn 13: 35*). Undoubtedly, his presence and mission was journeying with his disciples and people with love.

The Christian family is founded on the love of Jesus. The Christian family as a "domestic church" must experience the evangelical love that vivifies the Church. It must exude this life of love to every other family. How is this possible? Primarily, by being a loving presence to one's family (*ad intra*) and to the other families (*ad extra*). By being "just there, wasting time" so to say, especially to families devoid of love. Saint John of the Cross says: "Where there is no love put love and you will draw out love".

A concrete pastoral care of the family is seen in the Basic Ecclesial Communities (BECs), where the family comes to know and experience the loving presence of God through the Holy Scriptures, and where love is deeply encouraged following the mandate of the Lord Jesus.

The exercise of the “dialogue of life” that cares in the midst of our non-Christian Asian families is another effective way to bring about this loving presence. This dialogue of life-love can be an occasion for the explicit proclamation of the Good News.

With the grace of the Holy Spirit, the Christian family is empowered to be an evangelizer to other families. The evangelizing family becomes a loving presence of God to these families.

PROPHETIC MISSION AND CARE

In the vast continent of Asia, many people go through two major painful experiences: first, massive poverty, and secondly, oppression due to unjust structures. In most Asian countries there exists a wide gap in opportunities and resources between the rich and the poor resulting in the rich becoming richer and the poor becoming poorer. This appalling situation victimizes foremost the families. Evidently, this is not acceptable to God. This should not be acceptable to the Church of Jesus which is called to be the Church of the poor.

The prophetic mission and care of the family consist primarily in proclaiming the truths and values of the Gospels through evangelization, catechesis and especially through witness of life. It also involves courageous engagement for the cause of justice, peace, sustainable development and the total well-being of the family.

The Christian family must stand up and be heard in protest against any attempt of laws or practices to deny or diminish the natural vocation of every family to grow and develop (Ex. Filipinos against RH Bill, or D.E.A.T.H. Bills in the Philippines). The 1980 Synod of Bishops emphasized the rights of the family⁵ and how the Church and every Christian family must be ready to defend itself vigorously against the pressures of the state.

⁵ Cf. IDEM, Apostolic Exhortation *Familiaris Consortio*, no. 46.

Prophetic consciousness must be instilled in the family through formation on justice and through awareness of the social teachings, considered the hidden treasures of the Church.

The Asian youth must be formed in prophetic consciousness since they are the common target of distorted values peddled by consumerism and cheap sensationalism in the media.

THE PROMOTION OF FAMILY WELFARE

Reflections on the Asian family in society and in the Church inevitably reveal the stark reality of poverty among many Asian families which is aggravated by natural disasters so common to the region. Unfortunately, the ineffective intervention of the state and corrupt practices add to the misery of the victimized families. With these terrible situations the poor families could not immediately get back to their normal lives.

In *Ecclesia in Asia* we read: “The Church in Asia then, with its multitude of poor and oppressed people, is called to live a communion of life which shows itself particularly in the loving service of the poor and the defenseless”.⁶

The Christian family must be a community of service with compassion, empathy and generosity willing to share its time, talents and treasures with those in dire need. Its charity goes beyond the borders of one’s family, society and country.

Promotion of family welfare starts in the education of the children and the youth to face the challenges of life. Education is the best way to fight and eventually to get rid of poverty. Christian families must demand more schools and better quality of education for their children.

Poor families are made poorer due to lack of capital or resources to help them start to make a decent living. A concrete expression of the

⁶ IDEM, Post-synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Ecclesia in Asia*, no. 32.

promotion of family welfare is by providing them with capital or tools to help them make a living. They can be trained in management, entrepreneurship, and accounting as well.

Another concrete expression of mission and pastoral care of the family is providing basic medical services to the poor. In the Asian context where malnutrition of children is prevalent and inadequate access to medical facilities very common, the Christian families must lobby to obtain assistance to help malnourished children, and poor families. Parish or church groups can periodically facilitate medical missions for the poor.

These are just some examples of intervention for the welfare of poor families. I am sure many of these and even better ones are already being promoted by your particular Churches.

In conclusion, loving presence to the family, prophetic action and promotion of family welfare are some areas where the mission and pastoral care of the family are concretized.

At the end of any discussion on the mission and pastoral care of the family, love remains the bulwark, or foundation of every family. When evangelical love reigns in the family, the family becomes what it is meant to be: an “intimate community of life and love”.⁷

Let God’s love reign in this Congress on the laity and the family.

⁷ IDEM, Apostolic Exhortation *Familiaris Consortio*, no. 50.

The identity and mission of Catholic schools in the evangelization of Asia

GUILHERME VAZ*

I focus on the identity and mission of Catholic schools in the context, areas and priorities of evangelization of Asia. Asia is a challenging continent for evangelization. To highlight the challenges posed by the religious, economic, political, social, and cultural situation within Asian societies, we will try to discern the “signs of the times and to interpret them in the light of the Gospel”.

Birthplace of diverse religious traditions, embodying deep-rooted religious values, Asia presents a specific challenge for the Catholic Church, faced with the urgency of inculturating the Gospel and evangelizing its cultures, as it seeks with deep respect for these traditions and religions, to engage in sincere dialogue with their followers. Catholic schools too have to deal with the challenge to determine how to deal with religious pluralism and maintain dialogue without relativizing the uniqueness and universality of God’s self-revelation in Jesus Christ.

Consequently, our Catholic schools have to deal with the challenge of proclaiming, with a desire to lead others to faith in Christ, without imposing our faith in Christ; balancing respect for other religions, yet reaffirming what we believe about the truth that “Jesus is the only Savior of the world”.

Asia, home to sixty percent of the world’s population, is marked by wide disparities and stark contrasts.

* Member of the Pontifical Council for the Laity.

While millions have been lifted out of poverty, millions of others struggle to survive. Corruption is both a cause and a result of poverty, affecting the poorest and the most vulnerable, promoting extreme social inequality, eroding opportunities, increasing marginalization of the disadvantaged and perpetuating injustice. This situation provides a compelling thrust for Catholic schools to focus its priorities on working towards a just society in Asia – social justice dimensions of teaching being integral to Catholic education and an essential part of Catholic identity and formation.

On the other hand, globalization and the media has resulted in Asian societies being confronted with widespread materialism, consumerism and the idolatry of mammon presenting yet another challenge for Catholic schools who are guided in this by the social teaching of the Church which is also integral to Catholic faith.

Then we have the challenge of living and witnessing to the Gospel in times of persecution and in the face of restrictions of religious freedom, one of the essential human rights, which is threatened in some countries in Asia. To live and witness to the Gospel in times of persecution has been, and still is, one of the great challenges for many Asian Churches. In a world that is not always friendly to the truth, and in a continent where we are a tiny minority, we must be prepared and expect to be persecuted for our faith as we pursue the missionary mandate we have received from our Lord Jesus Christ to “Go into all the world and preach the Gospel to the whole creation” (*Mk* 16: 15). We must therefore face the challenges to proclamation knowing that it is our opportunity to bear witness with courage, while keeping in mind the words of Jesus: “Do not worry in advance about what to answer, for I will give you words and wisdom that none of your opponents will be able to withstand or contradict” (*Mk* 13:11).

In many parts in Asia, the Catholic Church also finds itself in the midst of struggles caused by communalist and fundamentalist ideologies. We might seem to be too small to be effective agents of peace and

understanding, but as leaven in the dough, in responding to the Gospel message of reconciliation, Catholic schools have a special role, as effective agents, in fostering peace and understanding in their societies.

In some countries in Asia, Catholic schools face restrictions, impositions and controls that encroach on the human right of minorities to establish and administer schools of their choice.

When restrictions, impositions and controls are unreasonable, arbitrary and prejudicial, this can challenge the very core of Catholic schools and threaten their mission and identity.

Catholic schools in some parts of Asia also have to face the image of being wrongly perceived as being part of a “foreign church”. Divisions within Christianity, often viewed as a scandal, are obstacles to giving a credible witness to the Gospel and the negative consequences of some Christian sects and cults with fundamentalist ideas, severely obscures the work and witness of the Catholic Church and its schools in the eyes of the general public.

Then we have more than half of the world’s youth living in Asia and the Pacific, and this offers an unparalleled opportunity for Catholic educators, to form, with a group representing half of humanity’s future, fully human and fully alive individuals with a Christian conscience.

Asian Catholics are barely three percent of the Asian population (one percent if one does not consider Philippines & East Timor) but account for more than ten percent of the world’s Catholics and this Asian Catholic population is growing. The role of Catholic schools is therefore crucial in ensuring that Catholics, despite being tiny minorities, continue to be: “Light to the nation, salt of the earth, leaven in the dough and glory of God’s Holy People”. With an ageing population of priests and religious along with declining vocations in more developed parts of the world, an extraordinary opportunity presents itself, as Asian priests and seminarians account for twenty five percent of all new priests and seminarians in the world. This trend requires a focused thrust to ensure that, in promoting vocations, Catholics students while

still in school, are formed with uncompromising fidelity to the Church and its teachings, guarding against highly personalized or optionally selective doctrinal teachings – a real risk sometimes posed by over-enthused and misguided inculturation.

The necessary emphasis on social welfare activities in Asian Churches, also pose questions as to whether ours is really a religion or rather a social movement. In this regard, if Christ is not at the heart of a Catholic school, we have nothing to offer that is different from any other school and our efforts would indeed be reduced to social service.

In a pluralistic and globalized society, it is not uncommon to find some Catholic schools tending towards secularization, to the point where their Catholic identity is compromised. The highest priority therefore, is a regular review, renewal and revitalization of the Catholic Identity of schools to ensure that the priority of mission is always the central focus of every Catholic school, reflected in its Catholic identity and ethos, reinforced by mutual collaboration between parish and school, with opportunities for prayer, evangelization, and catechesis as a regular part of school life.

It must be clearly understood that being Catholic is more than a descriptive label that expresses characteristics with minimal or no effect on external behaviour. Being Catholic is also more than a social declaration that expresses an external behaviour that we want others to see. As Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger mentioned in his book “Called to communion”: “There can be people who are engaged uninterruptedly in the activities of Church associations and yet are not Christians”. Being Catholic, therefore, involves a distinctive affirmation that expresses self-definition and which has a strong effect on external behaviour and is simultaneously a definitive statement that expresses what permeates inner life and which has a significant effect on attitudes and external behaviour. Applied to education, while the entire *Catechism of the Catholic Church* is relevant to the Magisterial teaching on Catholic education, from the several Vatican documents and pronouncements, we

can identify over a hundred distinct attributes of Catholic education, which indicate the consistency of the rich heritage, treasure and wisdom of the Catholic Church, that has never failed to underscore the importance, mission and identity of Catholic educational institutions. Clustered within seven defining and inter-related dimensions, these can guide and enable us to find new vigour and energy in our educational apostolate. To use a metaphor, just as white light is dispersed by a prism into the beautiful, seven visible colours of the optical spectrum, so also the light of Christ is dispersed through Catholic education into seven dimensions that highlight the Catholic identity and mission of Catholic schools, projecting the splendour of Jesus who alone is the Way, the Truth and the Life. It would be appropriate to highlight these seven dimensions of Catholic education as they also determine the Catholicity of our institutions.

First and foremost, Catholic education, which is appreciated by persons of all faiths, is Catholic faith inspired, enabling Catholics to grow in knowledge, understanding and appreciation of their faith, traditions and Church history; fostering participation in Church life, especially through the sacraments, liturgy and the Eucharist and preparing them for active, loyal and collaborative participation and leadership in the Church through active service and personal witness. As Catholic schools are always open to persons of all faiths, this same Catholic faith inspired education exposes all its students to the inspiration of Jesus Christ, helps them to see him present and working in all creation; encourages them to entrust themselves to Divine Providence and provides an appreciation of different religions through inter-religious interactions and dialogue which would facilitate, as stated in the Congregation for Catholic Education's document, "The Catholic School": "discovery and awareness of truth" which "leads one to the discovery of Truth itself".

Second, recognizing the uniqueness of each individual made in his image, Catholic education is personalist; adapting to the level, capabilities and challenges of each student who is taught how to learn with

enthusiasm by teachers who are active learners themselves and who offer personal guidance and counselling to ensure that the best is brought out of each student. While Catholic schools are inclusive, focused attention through special schools address the particular needs of differently-abled and specially-challenged students reaffirming the centrality of the human person in the Catholic educational process and also ensuring that such otherwise marginalized children are given extraordinary consideration.

Third, in providing an integral education, Catholic schools prepare students academically and to excel in all respects; to pay attention to their physical development and also to develop critical thinking; they encourage creativity, form emotionally mature persons, impart the skills of effective expression, inspire love and respect for people and the environment, and promote an appreciation and love of one's country as well as sane internationalism.

This integral formation of the human person cannot occur in a valueless vacuum. In a Catholic school, there is a clear sense of the type of character, compassion and values that they want to impart based on the character, compassion and values of Jesus Christ – the perfect person, in whom all human values find their fulfilment and unity. This Catholic Value Based Education helps students model their lives on the teaching of Jesus through prayer, respect for life, practice of self-discipline, sharpening of value judgment and fostering of responsible decision-making.

Fifth, Catholic schools are also distinguished by their collaboration with all stakeholders: parents who are the primary educators of their children; teachers and staff who share a common vision for the school and display mutual support and cooperation; management that is supportive and accountable for its Catholic identity; students who are marked by solidarity that transcends differences; alumni for life-long reinforcement of the ideals and values they were exposed to in school. As Catholic schools operate within both ecclesiastical and civil structures, this collaboration extends to those regulatory authorities as well.

Sixth, Catholic schools are innovative, engage in on-going self-evaluation, promote professional and spiritual growth of teachers and encourage use of new techniques and technologies to ensure effective outcomes and to sustain lasting relationships with students. Finally, Catholic schools are marked by an education towards a just society by forming Christian consciences; by fostering critical reflection of the unjust situations and structures in which they live; by becoming a voice for the voiceless; by providing opportunities for helping deprived sections of society; by stressing cooperation rather than competition; and by reaching the unreached through a preferential option for the poor and the marginalized.

Such authenticity of a Catholic school, is given life and expression through the vision, faith, enthusiasm, skills and leadership which a Catholic head and Catholic lay teachers bring to the educational apostolate of the Church. Given the crucial role they have, selection and ongoing formation of Catholic heads and teachers must be given high priority to enable them, through their vocation as Catholic educators, to unequivocally support the whole of the Church's teaching and to bear witness to it in their daily lives. Pope John Paul II emphasized this when he spoke to Catholic teachers in Melbourne in 1986 saying: "Your professionalism as teachers involves tasks that are linked to your Baptism and to your own commitment in faith... No matter what subject you teach, it is part of your responsibilities to lead your pupils more fully into the mystery of Christ and the living tradition of the Church".¹

From all that has been highlighted, if there is one learning that I have to share from over thirty-five years of assisting several dioceses and religious congregations in the review, renewal and revitalizing the Catholic identity of their educational institutions, it is that the early warning signs of the mission of a local church being at risk, is when the

¹ JOHN PAUL II, Address to the council, staff and students of the Institute of Catholic Education, Melbourne (Australia), 28 November 1986.

authenticity of its Catholic schools is compromised. In this regard, Bishops have a special role and responsibility to ensure and defend the Catholic identity and mission of their schools. Pope Benedict XVI in his address to Catholic educators in the US in 2008 stressed the identity of Catholic institutions as: “A university or school’s Catholic identity is not simply a question of the number of Catholic students. It is a question of conviction – do we really believe that only in the mystery of the Word made flesh does the mystery of man truly become clear (cf. *Gaudium et Spes*, 22)? Are we ready to commit our entire self – intellect and will, mind and heart – to God? Do we accept the truth Christ reveals? Is the faith tangible in our universities and schools? Is it given fervent expression liturgically, sacramentally, through prayer, acts of charity, a concern for justice, and respect for God’s creation? Only in this way do we really bear witness to the meaning of who we are and what we uphold”.² A Catholic school therefore does not exist for itself. It owes its existence to the mission of the Church and has an integral role to play and a precious service to render to the Church in its mission of evangelization. The Holy Father in the same address affirmed that: “The Church’s primary mission of evangelization, in which educational institutions play a crucial role, is consonant with a nation’s fundamental aspiration to develop a society truly worthy of the human person’s dignity”.³

To return to my metaphor of the prism, just as the optical spectrum does not contain all the colours that the human eyes and brain can distinguish, so also there is the invisible spectrum of the distinctive character of Catholic education, having its origin in the person of Christ and its roots in the teachings of the Gospel. True Catholic education is therefore fundamentally underscored by the many opportunities pre-

² BENEDICT XVI, Address to the Meeting with Catholic Educators, Conference Hall of the Catholic University of America in Washington, D.C., Thursday, 17 April 2008.

³ *Ibid.*

sented to all persons to encounter Jesus. Pope Benedict XVI accentuated this in his address to Catholic educators: “First and foremost every Catholic educational institution is a place to encounter the living God who in Jesus Christ reveals his transforming love and truth (cf. *Spe Salvi*, 4)”.⁴ This is only possible when Jesus Christ is the reason for our schools and when there is no doubt to all who enter a Catholic school that Jesus is the reason for its existence. Jesus Christ, unseen but ever present; the model of teachers; the inspiration of students; the core of relationships and the foundation of good governance. All these encounters are rooted in the Word of God, leading one to the God of the Word – Jesus our Saviour.

It is this very special and distinct environment and ethos which flows out of authentic Catholic identity and mission, that makes a Catholic school a place of Good News and enables that personal encounter with Jesus Christ, who alone has the power to transform and motivate one to exclaim, like the Apostles: “We are unable to hide what we have seen and heard” (*Acts* 4: 20). Consequently, in his time, it can also lead a person, to decide in conscience, through the power of the Holy Spirit, to a deeper conversion to Christ. This is the challenge, the priority and the hope of Catholic schools for evangelization in Asia as indeed it is all over the world.

⁴ *Ibid.*

Youth pastoral ministry and youth evangelization

MANOJ SUNNY*

I am truly delighted to reflect on the theme “Youth Pastoral Ministry and Youth Evangelisation” in the context of Asia. This reflection becomes especially relevant this year as the Church celebrates the Silver Jubilee of the First World Youth Day. This year, the UN also celebrates the 25th Anniversary of the Youth Year. Moreover, the UN has declared the period between 2010 Aug 12th and 2011 Aug 11th as the International Year of Youth with the theme “Dialogue and Mutual Understanding”.

WHO ARE YOUTH?

- The United Nations, for statistical purposes, defines youth as those persons between the ages of fifteen and twenty-four years, without prejudice to other definitions by Member States.
- The United Nations General Assembly defines youth as persons between the ages of fifteen and twenty-four years.
- The World Bank uses this term with reference to people between fifteen and twenty-five.
- The Commonwealth Youth Programme refers to young people as youngsters aged between fifteen and twenty-nine.
- Most of the bishops’ conferences refer to youth as youngsters starting from eighteen to the age of thirty/thirty-five.

Beyond all these definitions, youth are the most dynamic section of any society and the most fascinating stage of life. When we think of

* Executive Director of Jesus Youth International.

youth, we think of all that is beautiful in life such as fashion, sports, arts, media, new technologies, fun, adventure, relationships, idealism, creativity and great dreams. It is thus imperative that youth be seen not just as an age, but a state of mind and an attitude.

WHY FOCUS ON YOUTH?

- There are three billion people aged under twenty-five on this planet. Sixty one percent of them live in Asia. That is, fifty-seven percent of the world's population live in Asia and forty-seven percent of Asia's population are under twenty-five years of age. In other words, 1/4th of the world's population is under twenty-five and live in Asia (Source: US Census Bureau).

- Youth is the most generous time and so targeted by all.
- If approached well, this is the best time in a person's life to be moulded – for good or for bad.
- Youth are the best agents of change. They hold the key to the lifestyle of the world.
- It is a time of never-ending newness and learning, about themselves and the world around.
- They possess a spontaneous zeal for values like love, unity, peace and justice.
- They are the real “today” and “tomorrow”. Our future leaders – political and religious, priests and laity, are all there among them.
- Young people in Asia have long been overlooked, very misunderstood and literally a world away from the supposed hot beds of youth culture in the United States and Europe. In reality, young people in Asia are a leading light for understanding youth across the world.

THE WORLD OF YOUTH TODAY

“Multi-tasking”; “thirty-six hour day”; “five-minute attention span”... there are so many such expressions that describe the youth of today.

In diverse avenues the contemporary world attributes great significance to youth, their life and their contributions to society. In our technology-driven world, children or youth mostly have the final say where problem solving, gadget buying and decision-making are concerned. Youth and their trends are of great significance to society, to the business sector, to religion and politics. Major industries observe youth trends to decide on what to manufacture, while marketing organizations constantly evolve new styles in youth marketing. Consequently, research on youth trends and perspectives has assumed great significance today.

TODAY’S YOUTH – A CLOSER LOOK

- Youth are immersed in TODAY: they live in a practical world of life and its problems, work and difficulties.
- Intense experience: whether it is sadness or joy, love or hatred, they are deeply affected by it, very often vacillating from one to the other.
- The world of friendship is everything to them.
- One of the key words in the youth world is “Networking” – they cannot survive without being connected to one another – they want to be equipped to reach others 24/7 – and they need to be reached too.
- Many of them are in the grip of the mesmerising world of the media and technologies.
- A culture of death is increasing among the youth today.
- A spiritual search is also on the rise.
- Another interesting development is the growth of localisation in the youth culture, especially in Asia. There is a growing trend against Westernisation / Globalisation. It is an established fact that premium

music channels like MTV Asia feature eighty percent local music and only twenty percent imported music.

- Youth are still trying to make sense of a complex, multi-level world and are often very confused.

The whole of society is in a cauldron of rapid change. And the group that is melted and moulded the most in this transforming pressure is the young generation. In former times there were better props in the family, society and the Church to assist the youth to find their bearings and get a foothold in this most confusing stage of life. But today, more than ever, society is at a loss to provide relevant support and guidance to the growing generation of the day.

At this critical juncture, the Church is called to draw close to this complex reality and share Jesus with them.

KEY YOUTH INFLUENCES

“Love what the young love and they will love what you love” – Don Bosco.

Youth do not want change, they are the change. If you want to see youth, go to the cinemas, a music show, a cricket match or a political meeting. In a rapidly changing world they ride the wave; they enjoy its goods and are most deeply affected by it. They want to be talked with, not talked to. Today's youth are interested in fame, entrepreneurship; they want to become rich, be independent and be someone who can make a difference. Here are a few things around them that modern youth are interested in:

a) *Friendship*

Ask any young person. You will find that what he or she wants most is love and friendship. And they will do anything, not only to spend time with friends but if possible, to do whatever friends do; be it in the

way of dressing, ragging, joining a gang, helping the poor or getting together and praying. For good or for bad they want to enjoy and “experience every moment”.

Young men and women significantly differ in their attitude to having buddies and how they have fun. “Boys’ relationships tend to be more diffused. They hang out as a group, and the relationships are much more fluid... Girls spend a lot of time on their phones, in close, tight-knit social relationships”.¹ Girls easily get involved in very intimate conversations and exchange secrets that boys would never reveal. Studies reveal that girls are twice as likely as boys to attempt suicide if they have few friends and are isolated from their peers.

When young men and young women get together they easily get into deeper relationships. Asian statistics are not easy to come by, but that of the developed world, though much higher in degree, is often an indication of what is in store. In the US, one-quarter of fifteen-year-old females and less than thirty percent of fifteen-year-old males have had sex, compared with sixty-six percent of eighteen-year-old females and sixty-eight percent of eighteen-year-old males. Nearly one million young women under twenty years become pregnant each year. That means that close to two thousand and eight hundred teens get pregnant each day.² One indication of sexual practices in India could be the estimate of people living with HIV – between 2.4 to 3.2 million in 2007.³

b) *Youth and the Media*

Youth is all about wanting to explore, dream and discover. More than a thousand films were produced last year in India alone, more than

¹ Cf. the study “Friendship more Vital to Teen Girls”, <<http://68.71.208.15/Technology/story?id=99590&page=2>>

² Cf. Statistics on Teens, <<http://www.soundvision.com/Info/teens/stat.asp>>

³ Cf. UNICEF – India statistics, <http://www.unicef.org/infobycountry/india_statistics.html>

twenty hours of videos are uploaded to YouTube every minute and hundreds of thousands of video clips daily, millions are spent on cricket matches, new jobs are coming to the country and all these are transforming the lives of our youth.

I. Music

Music is something that an average young person is crazy about. Most of them, that is, ninety-three percent of Asian youth⁴ are passionate about music; eighty-five percent of the Asian youth like music; fifty-four percent of Asian youth “love” music; one percent hate music. Twenty-eight percent of Asian youth “would listen to music every minute of the day if [they] could”.

How they listen: sixty-six percent are listening to more music now that it is digital. In India fifty-two percent bought CDs from a store; Twenty-two percent paid to download music; twenty-three percent did not pay to download.

Music Videos (Asia): eighty-six percent watch on tv; sixty-seven percent on computer; thirty-eight percent on mobile. In India forty-two percent downloaded music to the phone “last month”. For seventeen percent, the phone is “my main music player” in Asia.

II. Internet

There are 1.8 billion net users⁵ in the world (twenty-five point six percent of the total population); forty-three percent of these net users are in Asia. In India there are 81 million Internet users and the number is fast increasing. Two thirds of them are youth.

A growing number of youth and children are on the Internet and they

⁴ Cf. Third Annual Music Matters Survey, source: MTV Music Matters Research 2008 (TNS).

⁵ Cf. Internet Usage in Asia. Internet World Stats, <http://www.internetworldstats.com/stats.htm>, 2 Jan 2010.

are crazy about it. But why do they want to be there? “There are three aspects of what the youth like to do (on the Internet). Voyeurism – they like to know what is happening, especially in other people’s lives. They want fame – the desire to be famous. Be God-like – they want to be in control”.⁶

Social Network Sites: today two thirds of those on the Internet are now on social networking sites (Facebook, Twitter, Orkut, etc.) If you ask teenagers about the number of friends they have, most of them will mention the number in hundreds and they surely mean their friends on Facebook or Orkut. Social networking will play the most important role in the online habits of young people in the coming years.

III. *Mobile phones*

India is currently the second largest mobile market in the world after China. In November 2009 there were 543 million⁷ telephone subscribers (506 wireless and 37 wireline) and according to the latest statistics, more than fifty percent of the population use a mobile phone.⁸ 10 – 12 million mobile subscribers are added monthly and its major user base clearly consists of youth.

With new, mind boggling features appearing in each new generation of handsets and with the increase in the number of service providers, mobile phones have become the greatest friend of any youth. Other than the facility for phone calls, text messaging, browsing, music player, scheduler, alarm, torch, calculator, camera and stopwatch are just some of the numerous facilities available on a regular mobile handset. As of now, mobile phones are perhaps an indication of the conven-

⁶ Cf. Prakash Bagri, Director – Marketing, Intel, www.exchange4media.com/e4m/news/printpage.asp?section_id=3&news_id=338727&tag=28844

⁷ Cf. Telecom Regulatory Authority of India. Dec 2009 <<http://www.trai.gov.in/WriteReadData/trai/upload/PressReleases/712/pr23dec09no79.pdf>>

⁸ Cf. the list of Countries by number of mobile phones in use. Wikipedia. <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_countries_by_number_of_mobile_phones_in_use>

iences and lifestyle of the generations to come, when futuristic facilities will be provided at zero cost to everyone.

c) *Youth and politics*

There have been complaints that the modern youth are not interested in politics and that in India, politics is full of “oldies”. But in Asia where the majority of the population is young and has a decisive vote to cast, the political parties are eager to relate to youth and also give some space for youth to contest. A World Bank survey says that the percentage of youth (the eighteen/twenty-four age group) “very” or “rather” interested in politics in India rose from around thirty-five per cent in 1990 to around fifty per cent in 2000.⁹ The study also indicates that the youth in poorer nations are more interested in politics compared to youth in richer nations.

f) *Youth and violent extremism*

Is violent extremism a threat to this continent? And what could be the role of the youth in violence and extremism?

Violent extremism or terrorism is the systematic use of terror especially as a means of coercion. Terrorism has been described variously as both a tactic and strategy; a crime and a holy duty; a justified reaction to oppression and an inexcusable abomination. But one thing is clear. It is often young people and not rarely, well educated youth who take leadership to mastermind and also carry out these heinous acts of technical prowess.

It is good to ask why well-educated engineers, doctors and computer specialists are drawn to these deviant groups.¹⁰ It is often pointed

⁹ Cf. “More Indian Youth Interested in Politics” <http://www.dnaindia.com/india/report_more-indian-youth-interested-in-politics_1053438>

¹⁰ Cf. Engineer, Asghar Ali, “Terrorism and Educated Youth”. <http://www.indian-muslims.info/articles/asghar_ali_engineer/terrorism_and_educated_youth.html>

out that modern education, more so technical education, is devoid of humanitarian values. Add to this the ruthless competition in education coupled with a mad consumerist rush for profit and it becomes the perfect recipe to lead young minds into radical responses.

A serious dearth of education in right attitudes and values at all levels has amply contributed to the development of these radical attitudes. Youth emerging from an authoritarian culture and those who feel exploited and persecuted are easily swayed by these campaigns of hatred and readily enrol for “acts of bravery”.

g) *Youth and sports*

“To succeed...You need to find something to hold on to, something to motivate you, something to inspire you” – Tony Dorsett (American footballer)

Young women like social networks, while young men like sports, and research says this is true of websites as well as magazines.¹¹ Parents and teachers drive them away, but youth are crazy about sports. Whether it be cricket, soccer, adventure sports or field games, most of the youth have their minds out there in the playground.

Unfortunately the sports field is set apart for professionals and others are discouraged from wasting time on it. One of the greatest frustrations that youth, especially young men, suffer is their inability to be involved in physical exercise of any kind, especially on the game field. This could also be a reason for the dangerously growing trend of general lethargy, a variety of deviant habits and internet or other addictions among a large number of young males in our country.

In recent times there has been a growing awareness of the benefits, not only of physical exercise, but also of all kinds of sports, especially

¹¹ Cf. “Youth Study: Women Like Social Networks, Men Like Sports Sites”, <http://www.marketingvox.com/youth_study_women_like_social_networks_men_like_sports_sites-022170/>

for youth.¹² It is well accepted that recreational sports and exercise can have a positive benefit psychologically. Brisk walking, biking or swimming can result in changes in the chemical balance of our mind, which induce positive emotions and have proven to be an effective therapy for mild to moderate depression, as or more effective than medication. Additionally, team sports can help one not to feel isolated, which can be one factor in many mental health difficulties and disorders. In terms of Positive Psychology, recreational sports can be a healthy part of life and contribute to a positive viewpoint, as well as be a preventive measure in terms of psychological fortitude.

THE CHURCH IN DIALOGUE WITH “TODAY”

Young people exert a very important influence in modern society. The circumstances of their life, their habits of thought, their relations with their families, have been completely transformed ... The growth of their social importance demands from them a corresponding apostolic activity; and indeed their natural character inclines them in this direction.¹³

Concerning our approach to youth there are a couple of fallacies or at least half-truths quite prevalent among the Church leadership.

- Youth are unspiritual: they like only games and fun. They are driven by media, entertainment and the search for pleasure. The only way to get them and keep them with us is to have competitions and fun sessions.

- Youth can never be disciplined, steady and dependable. They are out to disrupt any system that is out there.

¹² Cf. “Sport Psychology”, <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sport_psychology>

¹³ Cf. SECOND VATICAN ECUMENICAL COUNCIL, Decree on the Apostolate of the Laity *Apostolicam Actuositatem*, no. 12.

The saddest thing is that these statements are partly true for youth in general, but at the same time unbelievably false when we get close to them. Youth is a complex reality, not only for the elders but even for youth themselves. From a distance they might seem like troublemakers, but when one draws near to them and shares Christ with them they become the most lovable and noble friends.

Today the Church needs to search for and rediscover the world of young people, afresh. It is indeed a fast changing world and hence continuous effort for greater understanding will keep the Church young and relevant. They form a complex reality, ranging from highly urbanised and westernised to the most backward and rural, with a diverse spectrum of economic and social conditions in between. Being young is a great joy and a burden. There is a common world that they share. Understanding and drawing near to them is the first step in the Church's mission concerning youth.

WHERE ARE THESE YOUNG PEOPLE?

Meeting young men and women, individually and in groups and being present to them marks the beginning of an urgent mission of the Church today. But where can we find them, so that we can talk to them about Jesus and they in turn can talk to their friends?

– In our villages and cities – perhaps a parish setting is an easier way to reach them.

– Education – school and campus ministries are very effective tools here.

– Professionals/workers – peer group evangelism is the need of the hour.

– Leadership circles (political, social) – relating to them at this level is highly fruitful.

- Migrants/in hostels – their need to belong is best met by friends in Christ.
- The under privileged/tribals – they are waiting for the caring touch of Jesus.

Ecclesia in Asia puts it this way:

“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 evangelisation”.¹⁴

Meeting youth where they are, using their “language” and responding to their aspirations will help them come to Jesus and begin a new life with him.

“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”.¹⁵

GUIDING THE YOUTH

Helping youth to wade through the mixed fare of modern attractions, affiliations and pitfalls is a herculean task for the country, community and the Church. It throws up innumerable questions on how to ensure the safe enjoyment that they ask for while escorting them on avenues of development and at the same time, imparting formation for leadership.

¹⁴ JOHN PAUL II, Post-synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Ecclesia in Asia*, no. 5.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, no. 6.

The contemporary youth world and related issues do not just challenge the socially conscious, but disturb the sleep of most of the teachers, parents, caring elders, community leaders and socio-economic planners. Different communities, schools and service groups are brainstorming for and trying their hands at ways to tackle the most urgent need of every society, called youth care. A number of approaches, both old and new, have been tried out. Here is a sampling of the work of a secular agency in youth care:¹⁶

1) Befriending – Just being a friend to troubled youths, 2) Counselling – Developing self-awareness, providing support, 3) Life Skills Group Work – Imparting life skills such as effective communication, conflict resolution and decision making, 4) Service Learning – Learn as one serves the community, 5) Project Serve – Short attachment with YGOS, 6) Mentoring – Coaching, “walking” with a youth over an extended period of time, 7) Family Mediation – Playing peacemaker, 8) Parenting Talks – Sharing understanding of youths with parents of teenagers, 9) Volunteer Training – Equipping volunteers with necessary knowledge and skills in helping youths-at-risk and their families, 10) Outdoor Adventure – Such as kayaking, rock climbing, mountain biking, hiking etc., 11) Sports/Recreational Activities – Such as soccer, basketball, floor ball, BBQS, fishing etc., 12) Camps – Local and Overseas, 13) Overseas Community Service – Seeking to understand foreign cultures and serving underprivileged communities, etc.

But for us in the Church the issue of mentoring youth is much more pressing as it is integral to the Church’s mission and its very existence. The words of the venerable youth pastor of happy memory, Pope John Paul II crystallises the sentiments of the Mother Church:

“In our pastoral care we ask ourselves: How are we to reveal Jesus Christ, God made man, to this multitude of children and young people, reveal him not just in the fascination of a first fleeting encounter but

¹⁶ Cf. “Our Mission. Youth Guidance”, <<http://youthguidance.org.sg/front.htm>>

through an acquaintance, growing deeper and clearer daily, with him, his message, the plan of God that he has revealed, the call he addresses to each person, and the Kingdom that he wishes to establish in this world with the ‘little flock’ of those who believe in him, a Kingdom that will be complete only in eternity? How are we to enable them to know the meaning, the import, the fundamental requirements, the law of love, the promises and the hopes of this Kingdom? ”¹⁷

YOUTH AND THE CHURCH

The Church of all generations has had a special appreciation and preference for youth, after the life example and mind of its youthful Master. As Pope John Paul II wrote in the International Youth Year, “The Church looks to the young; or rather, the Church in a special way sees herself in the young – in you as a group and in each of you as individuals ”.¹⁸

The Church has much to give and receive from youth. A conscious effort to walk with youth and dialogue with this difficult reality will surely transform the heart and face of the Church. Making the Church and its institutions more youth-friendly will definitely put them more in touch with the “signs of the times ” and hence ready for dialogue with the diverse cultures and pressing issues around.

“The Church has so much to talk about with youth, and youth have so much to share with the Church. This mutual dialogue, by taking place with great cordiality, clarity and courage, will provide a favourable setting for the meeting and exchange between generations, and will be a source of richness and youthfulness for the Church and civil society ”.¹⁹

¹⁷ JOHN PAUL II, Apostolic Exhortation *Catechesi Tradendae*, no. 35.

¹⁸ IDEM, Apostolic Letter *Dilecti Amici*, no. 15.

¹⁹ IDEM, Post-synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Christifideles Laici*, no. 46.

Furthermore, if there is a clear focus and preparedness at different levels of the Church for imparting missionary formation to youth, the Church as a whole will come alive with greater fervour and spontaneity. A youth-friendly bishop or priest will be extremely successful as a pastor and a youth-friendly parish or religious congregation will be quite alive and contemporary.

CATHOLIC YOUTH MINISTRY

In the wider society youth guidance has always been the special prerogative of the Church and she has been doing this very effectively over the years. With this mission in mind the Church over the centuries developed a comprehensive formation system called education. In recent times when the wider society has taken over the system of education, the Church has developed other specialised tools and approaches to youth care with a wider name, youth ministry.

How can we define youth ministry? “Youth ministry is the response of the Christian community to the needs of young people and the sharing of the unique gifts of youth with the larger community”.²⁰ Then again, youth ministry, to address the complex reality of youth issues, has to be comprehensive and it involves different dimensions. “Youth Ministry is TO youth when the Christian community exercises its pastoral role in meeting young people’s needs. [...] Youth ministry is WITH youth because young people share with adults a common responsibility to carry out the Church’s mission. [...] Youth ministry is BY youth when young people exercise their own ministry to others, particularly to their peers. [...] Youth ministry is FOR youth in that adult youth ministers attempt to interpret the needs of youth and act as advocates in articulating youth’s legitimate concerns to the wider community”.²¹

²⁰ UNITED STATES CATHOLIC CONFERENCE, *Renewing the Vision: A Framework for Catholic Youth Ministry*, 1997, p1.

²¹ IDEM, *A Vision of Youth Ministry*, Hunter Publishing, New Jersey 1986, 6-7.

The challenge of youth ministry is this: How can we create a safe place where young people can hear others tell their (life) stories, until they find the courage to tell their own story and, in this context, discover God's salvation story? In reality most of the youth movements work with two different types of people: the first category is that of youth who are baptised, but not evangelized or re-evangelized; the second category has those who are neither baptised nor evangelized. We need to help them to have a personal encounter with the Living Christ and they need to be sustained, deepened, and put into mission. In other words, the four dimensions of youth ministry are, to help a person to have a personal God-experience, to undergo formation to become a disciple and an apostle, to grow as a part of a community, and to be sent on mission to produce fruits.

An earlier document by the US Bishops enlists eight components of comprehensive youth ministry. They are: I) Catechesis, II) Prayer & Worship, III) Community Life, IV) Pastoral Care, V) Justice & Service, VI) Leadership development, VII) Advocacy, and VIII) Evangelization.

I) Catechesis: deepening the faith of young people through teaching and reflection. Faith formation for youth has to be much more than Sunday classes. Peer group, life examples and media are perhaps the best vehicles of catechesis for youth.

II) Prayer and Worship: helping youth to develop an individual prayer life, experience a variety of communal prayers, and involving youth in the sacramental life of the Church are integral to youth ministry. Giving youth a taste of the beauty of communication with the Divine is the best equipping we can give to help them live through the challenges of the contemporary world.

III) Community Life: friendship is the best thing that youth like and they need a fellowship of peers who live their faith. Building community is not just between young people, but with their families and also engaging youth in the broader community.

IV) Pastoral Care: providing prevention programmes for youth and families, caring for those in crisis, and providing guidance during times of decisions and moral choices are the core of youth ministry. We are in need of trained elders as well as peer ministers to effectively carry on youth pastoral care at different levels.

V) Justice and Service: youth are eager to stand for values and justice and a very important aspect of youth ministry is engaging young people in helping and serving other people, and understanding the Gospel call to justice through education and reflection.

VI) Leadership Development: inviting, training, and supporting young people into leadership for youth ministry and for the broader community. Youth should not only be challenged to be the “light of the world” but should be equipped for it. This formation to take up the responsibility to be leaders and decision makers in the neighbourhood, places of study and work and in the wider society should begin at the level of the parish.

VII) Evangelization: proclaiming the Good News and inviting youth to a relationship with Jesus Christ through ongoing witness. Mission, especially to bring Christ and his values and the Gospel to the modern world, should challenge and motivate youth. This should be the right goal of youth ministry.

VIII) Advocacy: interpreting the needs of young people, standing up for young people, both as individuals and as a youth community. At all levels we need elders who truly understand youth, study their needs and speak up for them. Adults should be anxious to enter into friendly dialogue with the young, where, despite the difference in age, they could get to know one another and share with one another their own personal riches. It is by example first of all and, on occasion, by sound advice and practical help that adults should persuade the young to undertake the apostolate. The young, for their part, will treat their elders with respect and confidence; and though by nature inclined to

favour what is new, they will have due esteem for praiseworthy tradition.

CHALLENGES OF CONTEMPORARY YOUTH MINISTRY IN ASIA

“Listen to the words of youth, to some of the youth responses”.²²

“The Mass is monotonous. There is no life, no brightness or a sense of meaning and hope”, the young man says. “The clergy speak of life and take extracts from the Gospel text, but they don’t make an effort to explain its significance, nor get to know how we feel”.

UCA News spoke recently with about fifty... roughly eight in ten said the Church does not show enough interest in youth. They grumbled that despite their requests for youth Masses and seminars, youth camps at which they can share their experiences and engage in outdoor activities, Bible study and counselling, they are not being heard.

Speaking on behalf of the youth group... one of the main problems is that young people do not understand much of what is being said from the pulpit... the Church needs to provide “a lot of space for youth”, recognising that they represent the future of the Church.

“Unfortunately, the parish priests here have a tendency to encourage the passive and mediocre youth who fall in line with their way of thinking”, ... “This is wrong, as it is the strong-spirited and pushy youth who should be given a chance to learn new activities and bring new vision”.

“The Catholic Church has to stop making excuses and find a lot more time to keep youth in the Church family”.

(Another girl)... pointed out that fundamentalist churches seem to take time to understand and help youth. “Why can’t the Catholic Church do the same?” she asked.

A parish priest described the situation of youths being lured to fun-

²² Cf. *ucanews.com*, 20/4/2006.

damentalist churches as “sad but true”, adding that he cannot blame them for seeking help and solace there. “This is where we have to put words into action and implement a new vision for the youth”, he said. The Church has organised various training programs for priests to emphasise that youth are the future of the Church, he pointed out. But it is up to the priests, he maintained, “to allocate a lot of time towards the youth, otherwise they will continue to search for what they are missing in the Catholic Church”.

It is often pointed out that in an average parish about ten percent of youth participate actively in parish organisations or its pastoral life. Most of the Catholic higher educational institutions are headed by priests or sisters, but the number of staff or students who approach them for pastoral care is almost zero. These youth care institutions should have been forums of Christian formation and youth leadership equipping. There is an urgent need in the parish, in the school and at all levels of the Church to take youth seriously and to meet their needs and aspirations.

STRIKING THE RIGHT CHORD

The Master looked at the people of his times and found them, “harassed and helpless” and like “sheep without a shepherd”. But surprisingly he saw them as “harvest” that is plentiful (Cf. *Mt 9: 36*). The abundance and significance of youth in our region were very much in the mind of bishops during their discussions in the Asian Synod. “The Synod singled out young people in particular as those for whom [the Church] should provide greater opportunity for fellowship and communion... by means of organised youth apostolates and youth clubs”.²³ The need of the hour is a fresh outlook and some new strategies that flow out of it.

²³ JOHN PAUL II, Post-synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Ecclesia in Asia*, no. 25.

1. Contemporary youth ministry focus: in our country there is all round change and the youth reality is also changing. Hence the priorities of youth ministry also have to change accordingly. Some of the urgent issues are:

I. Migration and movement – youth are travelling for education and jobs, they need attention.

II. Growing media culture – that is their language, and we have to use it to be heard.

III. Professions and careers – careers have a culture, and faith has to be born there.

IV. Social concern and reach out – it is the need of the day and the best avenue for formation.

V. Preparing for public presence/secular leadership – in education, politics, management, technology, research, healthcare and in most of the ground-breaking fields our youth are there, but they need a Christian equipping.

2. Youth ministry is a process: Youth ministry is of supreme importance in the Church and hence the clergy, the institutions in the Church and the lay leaders should take this task seriously. This work is not for occasional visitors or arm-chair commentators. Youth ministry has to grow over long periods of time and proceed step by step:

I. Invitation: use their language, meet where they are, catch their heroes and thus you begin to help them go through a process of conversion experience in their life.

II. Community: growing as a part of a community – a place to belong and work together.

III. Formation: meeting them where they are is the start; taking them where they should be is the challenge. We are very much in need

of wholesome, ongoing formation style. Psychology, group dynamics, Word of God, teachings of the Church, etc. should be some of the significant elements of this formation.

IV. Commissioning / sending on mission: launching them in life and sending them as “fishers of youth” that they may learn through doing.

3. Integrated approach: a matter of confusion in youth ministry is that there is often a youth policy document, but it is often narrowly translated into a project, an organisation or a programme. Youth ministry has to be much broader. An integrated approach also means active and sensitive approach to gender, culture, interest, education, etc. For instance, most of our youth programmes are not boy friendly. Often they are too “Churchy”, while boys want outdoor activity. On the other hand girls come in big numbers for Church programmes but then again, their identity, needs and styles are also not taken into consideration.

4. Co-ordinated effort: there is an urgent need for co-ordination and a facilitation mechanism among youth related realities in the diocese as well as in the country. There is a lot of duplication as well as conflict in the area. Dialogue and collaboration are needed among the various youth specific ministries in the Church such as education, fine art centers, catechetical work, social service, vocation promotion and religious formation, social concern, and youth organisations. As of now youth ministry is limited to an appointed post with a very narrow gamut of focus and activities. On the contrary youth ministry has to have better advocacy, dialogue and co-ordination.

5. Watching youth culture: it has assumed great interest in all levels of society and it should evoke immense interest and concern in all levels of the Church as well. Youth trends are the most authentic pulse of today and it is fast changing. The Church at all levels should have a plan of interaction on this “reading the signs of the times” (*Lk* 16: 1) and looking at the crowds (cf. *Mt* 9: 37).

6. Train animators: youth is very much “today”, the here and now and they are very much caught up with “tomorrow”, the hopes, dreams and possibilities. But they also need the “yesterday” and an organic vision of yesterday-today-tomorrow or continuity. With the massive presence of youth in society and the Church, training animators should assume greater focus in the Church. This should be reflected in the diocesan and parish planning as well as fund allocation. Seminary/religious formation and the ongoing formation should be viewed also as this training for contemporary times.

7. Secular youth approach: the Church’s youth ministry is mostly with those who come to us. But the best of the lot and the influential ones are out there in the wider world: the professionals, the artists, the talented ones and those in focused leadership. The youth ministry in the Church has to be a) forming youth animators, b) forming the leaven of youth, c) caring for the wider Catholic youth, and finally d) the Church’s presence to the youth in the wider society. The Church needs a vision of youth work in the wider society. Much in the Church’s work such as media, education, social work, etc., address this dimension, but there is great room for progress. Wherever youth gather, like sports, media, politics or enjoyment, the Church has to have a special interest. Youth clubs, art groups, social concern groups and other initiatives of youth themselves should be seen as the true promptings of the Holy Spirit and should be supported by the official as well as the unofficial Church, of course, without any takeover threat.

SEVEN STEPS IN YOUTH GUIDANCE

We have to have a plan of leading youth out there from being ordinary troubled youth to missionaries leading others to Christ in their life situations. How do we go about it?

1. LOVE YOUTH: know them, pray for them; attract and challenge.

2. WALK WITH THEM: be positive, help them to have a fresh outlook, use their language and relevant dynamics.

3. INTRODUCE JESUS: be their models to walk with Jesus; bring them to an experiential knowledge of Jesus.

4. HELP THEM IN SELF-DISCOVERY: they are individuals in need of growth, unique persons. Give confidence; encourage initiative.

5. HELP THEM TO BE PART OF A NEW MOVE: give them new friends, a new culture, a movement to which they belong. Introduce them to cells and networking.

6. GIVE THEM A MISSION: motivate them to reach out, evangelize, and build a new culture and world order.

7. SUPPORT THEIR QUEST FOR A NEW SPIRITUALITY: help them discover relevant expressions of their faith drawing from the riches of the Church.

YOUTH-MISSION TECHNOLOGY: FORMING YOUTH AS MISSIONARIES

A young person charged with zeal for sharing Christ is the most potent reality for the Kingdom of God. Jesus and some of the great saints like Don Bosco had this special know-how of forming such youth full of the Holy Spirit. Church leaders of the youthful continent of Asia, more than ever, are in need of acquiring this special skill. Forming youth with evangelistic zeal and having Catholic groups that provide suitable ambience for nurturing missionary zeal is the need of the hour for the Church in Asia. “The Christian formation of young people in Asia should recognize that they are not only the object of the Church’s pastoral care but also agents and co-workers in the Church’s mission in her various apostolic works of love and service”.²⁴

²⁴ *Ibid.*, no. 47.

Youth are the best people to win over other youth for Jesus. Youth, perhaps, enjoy certain advantages when they go out to share Jesus:

- They are practical, not flooded by theory, easily motivated and effective.
- Jesus, for them, is often a personal hero and it makes all the difference.
- Relationships are at the center of their lives. It is the same with evangelization. They spontaneously build communities.
- “Their freshness and enthusiasm, their spirit of solidarity and hope”²⁵ transforms all that they do, even the everyday Church life.
- A young missionary shows creativity at its height and restlessness about what is dry and boring. This can be powerful in the hands of the Holy Spirit.
- They are an integral part of the multiethnic background of Asia and as such the best ones to be in dialogue with cultures in day-to-day life.

NEED FOR EFFECTIVE MISSION FORMATION

“If young people are to be effective agents of mission, the Church needs to offer them suitable pastoral care”.²⁶ “It is the task of the Pastors to ensure that the laity are formed as evangelisers able to face the challenges of the contemporary world, not just with worldly wisdom and efficiency, but with hearts renewed and strengthened by the truth of Christ”.²⁷ What the Holy Father speaks of as the ingredients of mission formation for lay people in general is relevant for the youth as well:

²⁵ *Ibid.*

²⁶ *Ibid.*

²⁷ *Ibid.*, no. 45.

1. Clarity of vision: once they meet Christ in their lives, youth are filled with an eagerness to share this reality of great joy with their friends, celebrate it in a group setting, and share it with others. But they should be helped by mature Christians to have a conviction of their vocation to share Christ. This vocation “sets them firmly in the world to perform the most varied tasks, and it is here that they are called to spread the Gospel of Jesus”.

2. Encouragement and support: “In many Asian countries, lay people are already serving as true missionaries”.²⁸ The Church in general can draw much inspiration from this silent work of the Spirit. The best encouragement for those who are already involved in missionary work is to extend the Church’s affirmation; especially by bringing them together to listen to their missionary efforts and wherever needed to offer guidance.

3. Evolving formation strategies, dynamics and materials: In order to ensure effective mission formation for youth, the Asian Church needs to develop more formation materials. We need more books and training modules. Using the Internet and TV is also important. Training of priests and religious to be effective evangelizers and motivators is significant. This is the age of models and networking. The best formation we can offer our youth is by showing them other youth who do effective evangelization and helping them to learn from them.

4. Establishment of centers of formation: the Pope also speaks of diocesan and national centers of missionary formation for lay people. More than just building centers of formation, there has to be a coming together of people of evangelistic fervour searching for ways to multiply effective evangelizers.

5. Collaborated effort of the youth movements and official Church organisations: after Vatican II, there are many ecclesial movements

²⁸ *Ibid.*

actively involved in the pastoral ministry of the Church serving its needs through their charisms. A consolidated effort to reach out and support difficult countries/areas in Asia can bear fruit in the evangelization dreams of Asia.

All these efforts of youth missionary formation should never lose sight of the real life needs of youth. These training steps should “help young people to cope better with social pressure by offering them not only a more mature growth in the Christian life but also by help in the form of career guidance, vocation training and youth counselling”.²⁹

THE DOORS ARE OPENING

Today, across Asia, young people are gradually opening up to the presence of Christ in the Church like never before. Their numbers in the World Youth Day celebrations have been growing considerably. Besides, through their participation in the growing number of contemporary Catholic movements, teenagers and youth are choosing to set aside time to pray, develop deep meaningful, spiritually enriching friendships and to reach out to other youth. The changing face of Catholic media and technology is also playing a crucial role in this opening up. Today young people can choose from a host of Catholic bands, singers, performers and worship leaders who play and compose music that are in tune with the tastes of young people – ranging from pop to hip hop. Many of them are also beginning to check out Catholic websites, download applications and choosing to be members of Catholic youth networks and forums. Thus Christ-centered spirituality is slowly beginning to become a part of several youth.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, no. 47.

CONCLUSION

Youth is the greatest challenge today and the Church, as in all generations, is eager to face this task. But a multi-pronged, integrated approach is the holistic path for contemporary youth guidance: not just inside the Church, but also in the living room, in school, on the road, in the field, at the market, in the theatre, at the club and the like. Here the priests, the religious and the elders are only “animators”, for the real youth ministers are youth themselves.

What the Church in Asia will become in the years to come will solely depend on the way in which it faces the greatest challenge of today, that is, the fast growing and fast changing reality of youth and children. The transforming presence of the mobile phone, the internet and other emerging realities of the media along with the volatile, yet intensely goading dynamics of globalisation and commercialisation are deepening the dimensions of this challenge. It is up to the Church not to smother the missionary urge under the security of institutions, but to listen to the promptings of God’s Spirit and face the challenges of this mighty Goliath to win over the contemporary generation for Christ and his love.

In John Paul II we had a Pope who had learnt the secret of filling youth with missionary zeal. May his words and actions find an echo in us: “The many complex problems which young people now face in the changing world of Asia impel the Church to remind the young of their responsibility for the future of society and the Church, and to encourage and support them at every step... To them the Church offers the truth of the Gospel as a joyful and liberating mystery to be known, lived and shared, with conviction and courage”.³⁰

This millennium dawned with the prophecy of our late Holy Father about reaping a harvest of faith in the soil of Asia. How many of us

³⁰ *Ibid.*

understand the urgency, the need of telling the story of Jesus in this vast continent “through our deeds and words”? How many of us realize the grace we have received from the Spirit to accomplish his mission according to the will of the Father?

We have a Holy Father now who knows the challenges and the heart of the youth world. He said to them, during the 2005 WYD in Cologne, “Dear young people, the happiness you are seeking, the happiness you have a right to enjoy has a name and a face: it is Jesus of Nazareth, hidden in the Eucharist. Only he gives the fullness of life to humanity! With Mary, say your own ‘yes’ to God, for He wishes to give himself to you. I repeat today what I said at the beginning of my Pontificate: ‘If we let Christ into our lives, we lose nothing, nothing, absolutely nothing of what makes life free, beautiful and great’”.³¹

The orientation for the Asian Mission Congress of 2006 gave this reminder: “Let every baptized person – the Pope, bishops, priests, religious and laity become more aware that he or she is called because of Baptism, to announce the message of Jesus Christ, Saviour and Redeemer, every day of our life, in every circumstance to which our personal history leads us, and to those we come in contact with. Let this Mission Congress be an opportunity to realise that the whole people of God is ‘on mission’”.³²

In *Ecclesia in Asia* the Holy Father Pope John Paul II says: “The Church is convinced that deep within the people, cultures and religions of Asia there is a thirst for ‘living water’ (cf. *Jn* 4: 10-15), a thirst which the Spirit himself has created and which Jesus the Saviour alone can fully satisfy”.³³ And he continues, “The words of the Apostle Paul become still more pointed, given the many people on that continent

³¹ BENEDICT XVI, Celebration welcoming the young people on the occasion of the 20th World Youth Day, Cologne - Poller Wiesen, Thursday, 18 August 2005.

³² M. SATURNINO DIAS (Ed.). *Telling the Story of Jesus in Asia: A Celebration of Faith and Life*. Asian Trading Corporation, Bangalore 2007, 125.

³³ JOHN PAUL II, Post-synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Ecclesia in Asia*, no. 18.

who have never encountered the person of Jesus in any clear and conscious way: ‘Everyone who calls upon the name of the Lord will be saved. But how are they to call upon him in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in him of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without a preacher?’ (*Rom* 10: 13-14)”.³⁴ So then, let us ask ourselves, “If I don’t do this mission, who else will do it? If I don’t do this, what else can I do better than this in my life? And if I don’t do it now, when am I going to do it?”

As one who has been actively involved in youth ministry for the last twenty-two years, and has travelled to more than forty countries and conducted more than eight hundred training programmes for youth leaders, I find immense joy in working with the youth which, for me, is the greatest privilege I enjoy in my life as a Catholic missionary. Let me close with a prayer for the rise of many more young missionaries who will dare to take up their crosses and follow the one who loved us beyond all borders.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, no. 19.

The role of women in the Church and in society

ZENAIDA V. ROTEA*

“**Y**ou go into the vineyard too” (*Mt 20: 3-4*).

This was the call of our Lord Jesus to those “standing in the market place”, a call addressed to every person in this world and a call that prays and hopes for a response.

This Congress of Asian Catholic Laity now gives the Asian lay faithful the golden opportunity to respond and share the fruits of their various apostolates in the field of evangelization (evangelizing the unreached and re-evangelizing those in need of renewing their faith), proclaiming and witnessing to the Word of God, addressing women’s issues and problems, the protection of life, care of God’s creation, and active participation in renewing politics in accordance with the values of the Good News.

ROLE OF WOMEN IN THE CHURCH

- To play a consultative role in preparing and implementing pastoral programs for women, e.g. the proposed integration of women’s perspectives in seminary formation (approved and currently implemented in the seminaries in Philippines).

- To assist in the formative clarification and dissemination of some Church documents, e.g. clarification of the message “The Letter to the Bishops of the Catholic Church on the Collaboration of Men and Women in the Church and in the World”. Such information was disseminated to the feminist groups and to all concerned.

* Executive Secretary of the Catholic Bishops’ Conference of the Philippines (CBCP), Board Member of WUCWO.

- To participate in liturgical services, provide the needs of the Church for liturgical celebrations and assist in organizing major events of the church.
- To participate in the decision-making process of the Church at some levels.

THE ROLE OF WOMEN IN SOCIETY

God's gift of compassion, sensitivity, femininity, and the "feminine genius" enables women to participate fully in the life of the Church and society thereby becoming the source of hope in renewing and humanizing society.

In several meetings organized by the Women's Desk of the Federation of Asian Bishops Conferences (FABC), Office of the Laity and Family, participants from Asian countries (Thailand, Philippines, Malaysia, India, Mongolia and Indonesia) have identified the common problems affecting women – poverty, violence of all forms, trafficking, prostitution, the social impact of migration on the family, exploitation in the media, lack of education, discrimination, dysfunctional families, and women in areas of armed conflict. These are the "shadows in the lives of suffering women, but then, what gives us comfort is the cliché "there is always light (hope) at the end of the tunnel". The following pastoral programs in place are the light and hopes that brighten the horizon of women for a better future.

- Anti-poverty programs including education to increase women's capabilities and creativity, micro-financing, organizing cooperatives and building small scale industries.
- Women's desks that give counselling to women in crisis and provide shelter to the abandoned.
- Work for the enactment of laws friendly to women such as: the protection of life, the promotion of their dignity, laws on violence

against women, against trafficking and prostitution, discrimination, exploitation in the media and laws for the protection of the environment.

- Migration services – orientation seminars for families of departing workers.

Much has been accomplished but more needs to be done to lighten the burden that women in Asia carry. Ours is a long journey of prayers, commitment, and meeting challenges that we have to overcome, but given this inspirational message of His Holiness Pope John Paul II, “Without the contribution of women, society is less alive, culture impoverished, and peace less sustainable”,¹ we will continue to respond to the call of Our Lord Jesus.

Invoking the blessings of God the Father, the guidance of the Holy Spirit and the love and the intercession of our blessed Mother we will continue to journey to the vineyard of the Lord.

¹ JOHN PAUL II, Angelus, Papal Summer Residence, Castel Gandolfo, 23 July 1995.

The participation of Catholic laity in politics and in the workplace

Rev. JACK TRISOLINI, S.D.B.*

INTRODUCTION

First of all, I thank Professor Han Hong-soon for requesting my presence on this discussion panel. Cardinal Rylko's official invitation came via the Nunciature a few weeks later in mid-July. I met Cardinal Rylko in Rome when he presided at the concelebrated opening mass for the 2004 International Council of the International Coordination of the Young Christian Workers.

The Cardinal's invitation gave me a lot of homework: to read *Ecclesia in Asia*, *Christifideles Laici*, the Encyclical Letter *Redemptoris Missio* and the recommendations of the 2006 Bangkok Asian Mission Congress and then make a statement based on all that and the title of my contribution in only ten minutes!

As soon as I heard the title of my contribution, an outline of what I wanted to say came into my mind. Having worked with the YCW for over forty-five years, I felt the importance of underlining the Young Christian Worker founder, Cardinal Cardijn's contribution to the universal Church and Vatican II in what I call the forgotten decree – "The Decree on the Apostolate of the Laity" (*Apostolicam Actuositatem*). Sadly, few priests, religious or lay people have really understood and, worse yet, even pondered over it! (Cardijn also contributed substantially to the Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, *Lumen Gentium*).

* Ministry to Migrant Workers in Seoul Archdiocese.

The Decree on the Apostolate of the Laity and numerous points in the just mentioned documents in many ways go back to Cardinal Cardijn's basic intuition and his life's work as laid out in his book "*Laics en Premiere Ligne*" or "Laypeople in Action".

Cardijn insisted on the daily life experience of each person as the basis to begin all Christian apostolate. (*Gaudium et Spes* tells us that Jesus "...revealed the love of the Father and the sublime vocation of man in terms of the most common of social realities and by making use of the speech and the imagery of plain everyday life").¹ Pope John Paul II in *Redemptoris Missio* expressed this same intuition as follows: "People today put more trust in witnesses than in teachers...The witness of a Christian life is the first and irreplaceable form of mission...";² and further on, "The first form of witness is the very life of the missionary, of the Christian family and of the ecclesial community, [and we might add of each person] which reveal a new way of living".³ In brief, the world is longing for the experience that comes from people made aware of their role as true Christian witnesses, but this experience has to be expressed, reflected on and processed!

Cardijn steadfastly supported the mission "*ad intra*",⁴ and pushed incessantly to strengthen the apostolate of the laity. He realized almost one hundred years ago that Christian Europe was in the first throes of de-christianizing. He spent his life and mission, as *Redemptoris Missio* teaches, in forming missionary vocations "*ad intra* and *ad gentes*" in ordinary lay people. He expressed this as forming foreign missionaries and missionaries to the interior! He felt that this should be done in each and every particular sector of human life and activity.⁵

¹ SECOND VATICAN ECUMENICAL COUNCIL, Pastoral Constitution *Gaudium et Spes*, no. 32.

² JOHN PAUL II, Encyclical Letter *Redemptoris Missio*, no. 42.

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ Cf. *Ibid.*, no. 33 & 34.

⁵ PAUL VI, Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, no. 18 & 19.

BRIGHT POINTS FROM THE PAST

Right from the beginning the Korean Church has had a magnificent experience of lay apostolate. Unselfish, inquisitive and generous lay people like Lee Seung-hoon were the first to bring the faith to Korea; lay people like Saint Paul Chung Ha-sang gathered the faithful together to solidify their faith. As a parish priest I knew that the eyes, ears, mouth, hands and feet knitting the parish together were lay Christian apostles active in each neighborhood and in the local factories and workshops.

In the often murky world of politics, former Prime Minister, Doctor John Chang Myun was an able politician and ardent evangelizer. He taught the fundamentals of Christian faith and Christian life to younger politicians like Kim Dae-joong, who went on to become Korea's first Catholic President. Defense Minister in Dr. Chang Myun's cabinet, Hyun Seok-ho, who, after the 1961 military coup overthrew Dr. Chang's democratically elected government, spent his life as a layman evangelizing innumerable people in the world of politics and business who then went on to become makers and shakers of government policy and the national economy. Among those instructed by Hyun Seok-ho, I particularly remember working together with Mr. Ignatius Kim Mal-yeong, a former leader of the Federation of Korean Trade Unions also ousted by the 1961 military coup. Ignatius Kim founded the Archdiocese of Seoul's Labor Counseling Office and used every legal means possible under dictatorial rule to obtain worker rights. At the end of his life, he became a member of the National Assembly but died suddenly before his term of office expired.

Together with Fr. Basil Price, Professor Park Yeong-ki of Sogang University founded the Labor Management Institute that trained a multitude of labor union leaders. Our deceased and dearly beloved Cardinal Kim Sou-hwan often consulted these people for legal and technical advice in guiding the Church's response to official policy. They and others like them contributed mightily to radically revising Korean society

and promoting a democratic society that recognizes human rights and freedom of religion – unfortunately freedoms denied or seriously curtailed in some countries of Asia.

As the Korean Church grew from the 1960s onward, thousands of young people in the world of work, agriculture and the student world received their religious and social action training from groups of the lay apostolate of the social milieu.⁶ As adults they continue to bear Christian witness and produce the fruits of a Christian life-style. Although Fr. Park Seong-jong as national chaplain formed the YCW as a church organization, an alert layman, Professor Lee Hae-nam was the first to introduce the YCW to Korea and a lay woman, Ms. Maria Park Myong-ja attracted and formed its first members. The YCW gave birth to student cell movements, the Catholic Farmers' Association and other apostolates of the social milieu.

In 1967, a group of YCW young working girls in an obscure factory on Kang-hwa Island were fired when they formed a labor union. The stand-up courage of these young women introduced Korean society to the Catholic Social Doctrine of the papal encyclicals. The Kang-hwa incident was followed by many others from the 1970s till the late 1990s that put ordinary lay people in the front line as Cardinal Cardijn insisted.

“The apostolate of the social milieu, that is, the effort to infuse a Christian spirit into the mentality, customs, laws and structures of the community in which a person lives, is so much the duty and responsibility of the laity that it can never be properly performed by others”.⁷

In Korea and in Asia in general, people revere and tend to look to priests and religious for leadership in social affairs. The ongoing danger is that priests and religious try to replace the laity. When the Priests for

⁶ Cf. SECOND VATICAN ECUMENICAL COUNCIL, Decree on the Apostolate of the Laity *Apostolicam Actuositatem*, no. 13.

⁷ *Ibid.*

Justice began forming their organization many years ago, I visited Cardinal Kim together with the famous spiritual writer Fr. Michel Quoist. Cardinal Kim requested that Fr. Quoist, who had accompanied the French YCW and served as a *Fidei Donum* priest in Brazil, speak to the group. Fr. Quoist listened to the priests attentively. His advice was quite succinct. “In my experience there are three kinds of priests”, he said. “Some priests live within the church and rectory like sacristy worms, interested in fine celebrations and show little interest in affairs beyond the parish confines. Other priests, always on the front line, lead demonstrations and rallies with dedication and fervor. Some priests take on a more daunting and effacing role: they form lay people to assume their rightful place as apostles in the world”. He then added, “You have to choose the way you want to do your priestly ministry”. Vatican II calls us to recognize “the rightful independence of earthly affairs”.⁸ In that sense lay people are duty bound to become the architects and builders of God’s Kingdom in the world.

Earlier this year the Bishop of Battambang in Cambodia visited Korea with a group of extraordinary children, many of whom had lost limbs due to land mines. The children played traditional Cambodian instruments and danced. The bishop pointed out two or three children and told me that their grandmother, a very ordinary lady, kept the faith alive in her family and village during the era of the Khmer Rouge atrocities.

THE PRESENT SITUATION AND PERSPECTIVES ON THE FUTURE

This overview of the past, brief and limited as it was, shows that the Korean Church prepared Catholic lay people to animate both the workplace and the political world. (Much of my contribution relies on per-

⁸ SECOND VATICAN ECUMENICAL COUNCIL, Pastoral Constitution *Gaudium et Spes*, no. 36.

sonal experience. Undoubtedly, all of you have had similar experiences in your own countries!). Anyway, that was then but what about the present?

The contemporary world is a hyper-opinionated, multi-choice, complex place. Technological innovation makes for a rapid-paced social setting in all but the remotest places. Cell phones have even made remote places close! Digital devices and electronically computerized technology have spawned an internet culture that facilitates easy and quick communication. This culture so overwhelms us with information that we find ourselves adrift in a sea of facts, distractions and temptations and become disconnected and isolated. (Here I'm merely describing contemporary trends!).

Are people so concerned about the newest technology trends that they overlook the present and neglect to reflect on their lived experiences? We seem to be constantly in future shock! Our contemporary environment makes gathering people, especially young people, in groups to dialog according to the three-step "SEE-JUDGE-ACT" method that connects life with action and creates non-abstract and action-based knowledge as John XXIII urged,⁹ cumbersome and harder to do. The internet and digital culture prevalent all over but especially in industrialized societies allows people, young and old alike, to amuse themselves with hardly any human contact and to be incessantly entertained. In such a world people tend to live one thing after another unconnectedly whereas the Jesus of the Gospels was always a Master of human encounter. Encountering people directly and creating small communities of people from similar areas of social life, endeavoring to dialog and interact and then infusing a Christian spirit in their everyday surroundings and society is still possible but far more demanding than in years past.

⁹ Cf. PAUL VI, Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, no. 3 & 4; see also: JOHN XXIII, Encyclical Letter *Mater et Magistra*, no. 236-238.

In today's confused and polarized world, how will we help and animate Catholic politicians? In an environment in which everyone wants their opinions heard and respected, how can Catholic politicians stand up for Gospel values, and when necessary be countercultural and promote life and still get elected? Korean National Assembly Catholic politicians have organized a "David Club". Whether or not this is merely a friendship group or one that gives formation in faith life, I don't know. But, Korean society is sorely challenged by bio-ethic and social justice issues and needs well prepared Catholic politicians.

At times newly founded movements and initiatives in the Church give the impression that they simply observe situations without making a human and faith-based judgment, but just try to instruct and jump into action without reflecting. Pope Benedict XVI keeps reminding us of the importance of natural law based on reason. In *Caritas in Veritate* he insists on "...charity, illumined by the light of reason and faith".¹⁰ Just doing things might be praise-worthy but they can also become unsustainable initiatives with no follow-up. No amount of events, declarations or devotional practices can substitute for the kind of Gospel reflection Jesus demanded when he spoke in parables. This happens mostly when Christians gather in small groups for reflection and dialog in view of action.¹¹

Much good is being done in the Church today but it often seems disparate, spur of the moment, without reflection and uncoordinated. So bogged up with events and issues are we, that like Martha (Cf. *Lk* 10: 41) we become busy and anxious about many affairs and perhaps neglect to take time to instruct others and ourselves as lay apostles, especially in the various social milieux, among politicians, professionals and the young.

¹⁰ BENEDICT XVI, Encyclical Letter *Caritas in Veritate*, no. 9.

¹¹ Cf. PAUL VI, Encyclical Letter *Ecclesiam Suam*, no. 81, where the Pope gives us the four qualities of dialog: clarity, meekness, trust and pedagogical prudence!

Rev. Jack Trisolini, S.D.B.

The Decree on the Apostolate of the Laity challenges every Catholic man, woman, young person and child to rise up to very high standards. “Christ’s redemptive work, while of itself directed toward the salvation of men, involves also the renewal of the whole temporal order. Hence the mission of the Church is not only to bring to men the message and grace of Christ, but also to penetrate and perfect the temporal sphere with the spirit of the Gospel. In fulfilling this mission of the Church, the laity, therefore, exercise their apostolate both in the Church and in the world, in both the spiritual and the temporal orders”.¹² And, we must help them to do this and never try to substitute them.

¹² Cf. SECOND VATICAN ECUMENICAL COUNCIL, Decree on the Apostolate of the Laity *Apostolicam Actuositatem*, no. 5.

HOMILIES

The lay faithful share in Christ's profetic mission

Cardinal STANISŁAW RYŁKO*

The liturgy of the word in this holy Mass takes us into the very heart of the mystery of the Church, as missionary communion. The Church is in a permanent state of mission, and has been so right from the beginning. Evangelization is indeed the very reason for the Church's existence. The Gospel reading we have just heard shows us how the Master was moved by zeal and concern to proclaim the Kingdom of God. "All those who had any who were sick with various kinds of diseases brought them to him", Saint Luke tells us, "and he laid his hands on each of them and cured them [...] the crowds were looking for him; and when they reached him, they wanted to prevent him from leaving them. But he said to them, 'I must proclaim the good news of the Kingdom of God to the other cities also; for I was sent for this purpose.' So he continued proclaiming the message in the synagogues of Judea" (*Lk* 4: 40-44). This is why the Church down through the ages feels the call to follow the example of Jesus Christ and is spurred on by his explicit command: "Go into all the world and proclaim the good news to the whole creation" (*Mk* 16: 15).

Christ proclaimed that God's Kingdom has come and is here among us. What does that mean? We have an explanation given by Pope Benedict XVI. In his beautiful book "Jesus of Nazareth", the Pope writes that when Jesus speaks of the Kingdom of God, he is simply proclaiming God and his dominion. His message is completely theocentric: "He is telling us: 'God exists' and 'God is really God', which means that he holds in his hands the threads of the world" (p. 55). Jesus is telling us

* President of the Pontifical Council for the Laity.

that God is once again coming close to humankind, and this new proximity is Jesus himself. “Through Jesus’ presence and action, God has here and now entered actively into history in a wholly new way. The reason why *now* is the fullness of time (cf *Mk* 1: 15), why *now* is in a unique sense the time of conversion and penance, as well as the time of joy, is that in Jesus it is God who draws near to us. In Jesus, God is now the one who acts and who rules as Lord – rules in a divine way, without worldly power, rules through the love that reaches ‘to the end’ (*Jn* 13: 1), to the Cross” (p. 60-61). So, to the great question that resounds throughout the book: “What has Jesus really brought?”, the Pope replies with surprising simplicity: “He has brought God, and now we know his face, now we can call upon him. Now we know the path that we human beings have to take in this world. Jesus has brought God and with God the truth about our origin and destiny: faith, hope, and love” (p. 44). In Christ, God is fully and definitively revealed to humankind. The origin of Christianity is not therefore a doctrine or an ethic. It is an event. The starting point of being a Christian is an encounter with a Person, Jesus Christ, and this “gives life a new horizon and a decisive direction”.¹ Jesus Christ is the focal point of our faith, the most precious treasure for which we Christians are depositories, together with the mission to proclaim him to men and women of all time.

During this Congress, we shall address the situation of Christianity in Asia, which continues to be mission territory. How is it that, two thousand years after the Son of God became a human being in the Holy Land, a tiny region of this vast continent, Jesus Christ is still largely unknown by the people of Asia? The harvest of the Gospel is enormous. The people of Asia have every right to hear from Christians a direct and explicit proclamation of Jesus Christ, the only Redeemer of humankind. They should hear a proclamation that is given without any ambiguity or sense of inferiority when compared to the millenniums-old

¹ BENEDICT XVI, Encyclical Letter *Deus Caritas Est*, no. 1.

cultural and religious traditions of this continent. Evangelization that respects the freedom and dignity of human beings is never proselytism. It responds to an entitlement – a right. It is the specific duty of Christians to proclaim the Good News of the Gospel to the world, as Saint Paul said: “If I proclaim the Gospel, this gives me no ground for boasting, for an obligation is laid on me, and woe to me if I do not proclaim the Gospel!” (1 Cor 9: 16). Unfortunately, in quite a number of Asian countries this right and this duty are severely limited, if not drastically repressed. There are numerous sad cases of discrimination and also of outright religious persecution.

In the first reading we have just heard, Saint Paul reminds us of the basic law of evangelization. It is twofold: “I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the growth” (1 Cor 3: 6). In the first place, the Church does not belong to either Paul or Apollos. The Church belongs to Christ. Secondly, evangelization is not the automatic result of our programming, our skills or our intelligence. The principle agent of evangelization is the Holy Spirit who works in the evangelizer and in the evangelized. Being aware of our fragility and human weakness, this fact gives us great consolation and hope. Nonetheless, it should not allow us to take lightly the Lord’s command to proclaim the Gospel to all humanity, nor to underestimate the part that we can undertake.

In the important mission of the evangelization of the world, the Catholic laity have a unique role, and this fact is also true in Asia. They must always re-examine their vocation and co-responsibility in the mission of the Church. They live in the midst of the world, immersed in the ordinary conditions of family, work and social life, and so, in a certain sense, they are in the front line of evangelization. They are together with the pastors of the Church in close communion, and they should feel that all are working together for the great cause of God in the world. We read in *Christifideles Laici*: “A new state of affairs today both in the Church and in social, economic, political and cultural life, calls with a particular urgency for the action of the lay faithful. If lack of commit-

ment is always unacceptable, the present time renders it even more so. It is not permissible for anyone to remain idle”.² These words were written over twenty years ago, but they are still relevant today. The Church has great hopes for the lay faithful in Asia, and counts on their active participation in the work of evangelization. The Church has great hopes for Christian communities: parishes, Church groups, ecclesial movements and new communities that are becoming genuine schools for a mature laity, and are very aware of their vocation and mission. In Asia, more than ever, the lay faithful should rediscover today the beauty of the prophetic dimension of the Christian vocation that makes us credible and courageous messengers of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Let us therefore pray that this Congress may make a valid and significant contribution in this direction. We are all convinced, as the venerable Servant of God John Paul II said, that: “To bear witness to Jesus Christ is the supreme service which the Church can offer to the peoples of Asia, for it responds to their profound longing for the Absolute, and it unveils the truths and values which will ensure their integral human development”.³

² JOHN PAUL II, Post-synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Christifideles laici*, no. 3.

³ IDEM, Post-synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Ecclesia in Asia*, no. 20.

“Go into the deep”

Bishop ROLANDO JOVEN TRIA TIRONA, O.C.D.*

Last May, together with a group of Filipinos from Sydney, Australia, I went on a pilgrimage to the Holy Land. The pilgrimage was both an emotional and a spiritual experience for me. Emotional and spiritual, not because that was the first time I went to the Holy Land. Rather, it was because, after forty-one years, I had come back again to this Holy place.

My first visit to the Holy land was when my Superiors sent me to Mt. Carmel Monastery in Haifa, in 1969. I was a very young Carmelite student then. A handsome teen-ager, to be exact. Together with nine other Carmelite confreres from Europe and Asia, we were blessed with the opportunity to study the Scriptures in the Holy Land. Going back after forty one years the pilgrimage proved to be an experience of deep renewal for me. You see, when I was a young student then, my concern was more for academic achievement. But with the pilgrimage, my visit was for spiritual renewal. As a young student, I was very eager to get something out of my stay in the Holy Land. During my pilgrimage, I realized that the Holy Land is a place, not so much to get, but so much to give. I realized too that the historical monuments, like the Wailing Wall, or the ruins of the towns of Capernaum, or Nazareth, important as they are, are not the main attractions of this Holy place. Rather, the main attractions of this Holy place are the people who lived then, and the people who live now. The main attraction of the place is Jesus Christ, known as a carpenter, who launched a New Way of Life.

Galilee was the stage where Jesus often revealed himself through his

* Prelate of Infanta, Philippines.

awesome words and mighty deeds. The Lake of Gennesaret or Sea of Galilee, was a place where dramatic events transpired. In the Gospels of Matthew and Mark, it was in Galilee where the first disciples were called by Jesus. It was the Sea of Galilee where Jesus walked on the water, before he proceeded to Capernaum where Jesus gave the beautiful discourse on the Bread of life (cf. *John* 6). It would also be in Galilee where Jesus would renew the call to discipleship and leadership of Peter even after Peter turned his back on him.

Galilee is where the fishermen were called to be disciples (cf. *Mt* 4: 18-22), and where they were to be sent forth as apostles (cf. *Mt* 28: 16).

One writer said that incident in today's Gospel in the Lake of Gennesaret was not about fish, but about people. How well said. Indeed, today's Gospel was not a lesson on fishing. Jesus was a carpenter and not a fisherman. Rather, today's Gospel was a lesson on humble obedience: "...but at your command I will lower the nets" (*Lk* 5: 5).

It was a lesson on worship: "Simon Peter fell at the knees of Jesus" (*Lk* 5: 8). It was a lesson on self-knowledge: "Depart from me, Lord, I am a sinful man" (*Lk* 5: 8). Above all, it was a lesson on trust and confidence on the part of God towards feeble men: "Do not be afraid; from now on you will be catching men" (*Lk* 5: 10). The Gospel today is a lifetime lesson on discipleship: "When they brought their boats to the shore, they left everything and followed him" (*Lk* 5: 9).

Today's Gospel came from the beginning of the Gospel of Mark 1: 16-20 who was Saint Luke's source. In the Gospel of Mark, this incident forms part of the beginning of the Galilean ministry of Jesus. This was how Mark narrated the call of the first disciples. However, in the 3rd chapter, verse thirteen of Mark, we read a more complete calling to discipleship and apostleship or mission sending: "He went up the mountain and summoned those whom he wanted and they came to him. He appointed twelve (whom he also named apostles) that they might be with him and he might send them forth to preach, and to have authority to drive out demons" (*Mk* 3: 13).

“Go into the deep”

My dear friends, to proclaim Jesus Christ in Asia today is to live out that call to discipleship and apostleship that Jesus so trustingly gave to his first disciples and apostles, as he trustingly gives this very same vocation to us in our times.

My dear brothers and sisters, let us not forget that true discipleship involves our personal response to Jesus' call: “COME” and we humbly respond to him in faith: “HERE I AM LORD”. Discipleship is all about keeping silent and still, as Jesus tells us: “LISTEN”.

Coming and listening – these constitute the core of discipleship. We come and listen to Jesus as he opens our ears and expands our hearts. Our listening to Jesus becomes our loving Jesus. Listening leads to intimacy. Intimacy to indwelling into the heart of the Father and Jesus: “And whoever loves me will keep my word, and my Father will love him and we will come to him and make our dwelling with him”. (*Jn 16: 23*).

This same Father who dwells in us in Jesus will send us forth, by the power of the Holy Spirit, to dwell in the hearts of many who have not known his Son. And this is the call to Apostleship. Like the early disciples and apostles, we too received this gift, this mission, this challenge. We are the “*new shaliach*”, the new envoy of God. By proclaiming and sharing Jesus' great love, and by serving as he served, we become true disciples and apostles of the Lord. The Lord hungers for witnesses and not reporters. Jesus did not say: “Be my reporters,” but “be my witnesses”. A reporter lives by what he passively narrates; a witness lives by his active experience. A reporter lives by words. A witness lives by his actions. A witness is caught up, transformed and made new by the Jesus event. In fact, he lives by the Jesus event.

“*Duc in altum...*”, “put out into the deep”... “go into the deep”. Asia, deep in poverty, in bad governance, in abused women and children, in religious strife, in lost youth, in illiteracy, in medical neglect. Asia, deep in religiosity, in family care, in respect for the elders, in hospitality, in mutual service, in natural resources, in cultures.

We are called by the Lord to go into the deep of Asia. Whether the deep is the lights or the shadows of Asia is less important. What is important is that we go, as disciples and apostles, we go, for that is the Lord's command: "*Duc in altum*"... "Go into the deep".

Confronted by today's Gospel, more than ever, we, especially you my dear lay faithful, are reminded of this tremendous calling to discipleship/apostleship, and to witness Jesus: "But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, throughout Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth" (*Acts 1: 8*).

Jesus has once again spoken to us. Let us be still and listen and proclaim. Amen.

Let us preach the Gospel in Asia with the spirit of the Martyrs

Bishop ANDREW YEOM SOO-JUNG*

“If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross daily and follow me”. (*Lk* 9: 23)

My dear brothers and sisters!

May the blessings and peace of Jesus be with you all.

On behalf of all Korean Catholics, it is my pleasure to welcome the President of the Pontifical Council for the Laity, His Eminence Stanisław Cardinal Ryłko, and His Eminence Telesphore P. Cardinal Toppo from India, as well as all the other visiting dignitaries.

I especially welcome all the lay delegates.

Welcome one and all!

I give thanks to God that we are able to gather here at Jeoldusan Martyrs' Shrine. This shrine is a place of deep meaning for Koreans.

It is wonderful that we can celebrate this Eucharist here, in this place, in this month of September – the month when we especially remember our named and unnamed martyrs.

As we know, Asia is home to about two thirds of the world's population and many diverse and ancient cultures. Indeed religious and cultural diversity is one of Asia's distinguishing characteristics. Unfortunately, oppressive governments and massive poverty are also distinguishing features.

When we reflect on our Church and its mission here in Asia, we are also only too aware that we are a “minority flock”. However, despite this, I find great hope in the words of the late Pope John Paul II who

* Auxiliary Bishop of Seoul, Korea.

affirmed that the third Christian Millennium belongs to the Church in Asia, and that “ a great harvest will be reaped in this vast and vital continent ”.¹

This Congress is being hosted with precisely that hope and confidence!

The theme of this Congress is: “ Proclaiming Jesus Christ in Asia Today ”.

This theme is challenging us to think about what it means to be a Christian living in Asia today. As well, this theme gives us an opportunity to prayerfully discern what, needs to be our priorities as we move forward.

In the end, I believe our discernment will become concrete expressions of, and ways to achieve dialogue, inculturation, witness, communion and integral human development etc.

Our continent faces huge problems.

- Many people are the victims of war and on-going violence, which we do not seem/to be able to solve. Is not dialogue our only true path forward?

- Asia is facing an ecological disaster. This disaster does not respect national boundaries. Is this not a challenge to discover the meaning of communion; not just with human beings but with the whole of God’s creation?

- Asia is dependent on the work of its farmers, especially small scale farmers. Is not protecting these small farmers an important key not only to conserving our environment but also integral human development?

- I also wish to point to the issue of women’s rights in Asia. The Church should be in the forefront of this issue because protecting and promoting women’s rights is a fundamental part of preaching the Gospel.

¹ JOHN PAUL II, Post-synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Ecclesia in Asia*, no. 1.

- Workers too, especially migrant workers, are facing increasing difficulties in our region. Is not our solidarity with them part of our witness?
- In the face of globalisation, does not inculturation challenge us to think more deeply about the meaning, significance and value of the diversity of cultures that is our reality?

There are so many issues I could raise. But that is not my point here.

My point is to invite you to think creatively and theologically about your reality, to discover hope through a careful reading of the “signs of the times”. In such a way, our faith communities will be a great witness of hope amongst the teeming populations of Asia.

Jesus, in today’s Gospel, puts two big challenges before us.

The first is the challenge to “deny ourselves”.

The second is “to take up our crosses and follow him”.

As we pray here today we remember that there are those, who have gone before us, who have lived and died by Jesus’ words in today’s Gospel.

I am talking about the martyrs. Not just the martyrs who have died here in this place, but martyrs across our continent who have died for their faith.

These martyrs endured violence and refused to compromise themselves in the face of injustice. They picked up their crosses and followed Jesus.

Do not we also have to live like them today? Should not our goal be the martyrs’ final victory?

If so, we will be able to overcome every difficulty and hardship.

Saint Paul says it so much better. The Apostle asks us today:

“If God is for us, who is against us?” (*Rom 8: 31*).

And his confident answer is: “For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to

come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord". (*Rom 8: 38-39*).

What a statement of hope!

Thus we find that the answer to the problem of preaching Jesus Christ in Asia today has been around for a long time and can be found in the hearts of the martyrs.

Martyrdom is, in the end, the ultimate witness to Our Saviour, Jesus Christ.

It is the courage of the martyrs that is the beginnings of genuine dialogue with those of other faiths, or no faith at all.

The Martyrs' courage is our courage as well.

As we try to live and practise our humble faith we are blessed with the graces of the Lord.

Through our feet, hands and lips we bear witness to Jesus Christ to our brothers and sisters in Asia.

And we draw strength from the fact that God is working strongly amongst us.

In the midst of the beauty, that is the true face of Asia, how can our witness and preaching of the Gospel not help but bear much fruit!

Proclaiming Jesus Christ in Asia today

Cardinal NICHOLAS CHEONG JINSUK*

Your Eminences,
Your Excellencies,
Dear Brothers in the Priesthood,
Dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ,
Laudetur Jesus Christus! Praised be Jesus Christ!

I would like to extend my cordial greetings to all of you participating in this Holy Eucharist, especially to those of you who have taken part in the Congress of Asian Catholic Laity which has been held for the past four days under the auspices of the Pontifical Council for the Laity.

I feel very privileged to preside at this Eucharistic celebration in this Cathedral with the representatives of almost all the Churches, movements and associations in Asia as well as the Pontifical Council for the Laity. It can be safely said that the entire Church in Asia is gathered here today in effective and affective communion with Our Holy Father through the Pontifical Council for the Laity. Let us offer thanks to God and Pope Benedict XVI!

“Whoever does not carry his own cross and come after me cannot be my disciple”. (*Lk* 14: 27) Today’s Gospel is very appropriate for the conclusion of the Congress of Asian Catholic Laity, for it indicates the most effective way of “Proclaiming Jesus Christ in Asia Today”. In fact, the most effective way of proclaiming Jesus Christ is to bear witness to him and the most effective way of bearing witness to him is to carry one’s own cross and come after him in one’s own daily life. “There can

* Archbishop of Seoul, Korea.

be no true proclamation of the Gospel unless Christians also offer the witness of lives in harmony with the message they preach”.¹ It is clear that there can be no effective witness of lives unless Christians carry their own cross in their own lives.

We need to develop a spirituality of a minority Church which, albeit small in number, must all the same be strong and dynamic like the Church of the early Christians. To be a minority is characteristic of the prophets. There is urgent need for Catholics of Asia today to “be not afraid” (Jn 6: 20), like so many martyrs of this continent, always keeping an unshakable faith and hope in Jesus Christ, the only savior.

“The difficulties seem insurmountable and could easily lead to discouragement, if it were a question of a merely human enterprise”.² However, they must not make us pessimistic or inactive. The evangelization of Asia is not a “mission impossible” but we can do it and do so successfully. Such difficulties only reaffirm the need for us to render our proclamation credible by means of the holiness of our lives.

Dear brothers and sisters, this mission stimulates us to believe in Christ with renewed faith, with such faith of the Asian martyrs, our early Korean Christians who persevered in their faith during centuries of trial and persecution. With renewed faith, let us start afresh from Christ.

The time for harvest will come also for Asia. We do not know when it will be. But it will surely come, because no one sows in vain. We should only have faith and hope. The Church in Asia badly needs new apostles, well trained in the Church’s social doctrine, capable of carrying out their mission of dialogue for a new evangelization. A great springtime for evangelization has dawned in Asia. It is time for the new apostles to act as witnesses of Christ without being afraid, and to consecrate Asia as a continent of hope for humanity.

¹ JOHN PAUL II, Post-synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Ecclesia in Asia*, no. 42.

² IDEM, Encyclical Letter *Redemptoris Missio*, no. 35.

Prayer for the Congress

Blessed are you merciful Father,
Creator and Lord of the universe;
in order to redeem us,
your Son Jesus Christ became man,
lived, died and rose from the dead in the Holy Land,
that small portion of the Asian continent.
Bless this Congress of Asian Catholic Laity;
lavish on us the gifts of your Holy Spirit,
and renew in us the wonders of Pentecost
so that we may bear witness to the people of today
of the incomparable beauty of being a Christian,
and that we may proclaim Jesus Christ,
the only savior of the world.
Sustain those who are persecuted
for the cause of the Gospel;
comfort those who are afflicted by poverty;
allow your Face to shine on our people.
We ask this through the intercession of Mary,
Queen of Martyrs and Confessors,
and the bright star of Evangelization.
Amen.

PONTIFICAL COUNCIL FOR THE LAITY

FINAL MESSAGES OF THE CONGRESS

**Letter addressed to His Holiness, Pope Benedict XVI,
on behalf of the participants
of the Congress of Asian Catholic Laity**

Seoul (Korea) September 4, 2010

Your Holiness,

The Congress of Asian Catholic Laity, organized by the Pontifical Council of the Laity, now draws to a close. From August 30 to September 5 we have been guests here in Seoul of the Catholic Church in Korea and they have made us feel quite at home. Tomorrow, as we celebrate the Holy Eucharist, presided over by His Eminence, Cardinal Nicholas Cheong Jinsuk, in the Archbishop of Seoul's Cathedral, we give thanks to God for the many blessings and the renewed apostolic zeal that he has lavished upon us by means of the Congress. This ecclesial event has instilled in all of us – bishops, priests, religious, and lay faithful from nearly every country of Asia, together with the representatives from the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences and representatives of associations, ecclesial movement and new communities – that particular grace of strengthening and deepening our awareness of being sons and daughters, disciples, witnesses and missionaries of the Lord in this immense and challenging continent.

We have certainly felt accompanied and sustained by the Universal Church, and above all, by Your Holiness. We have been touched by your paternal affection and closeness, expressed in the words of encouragement and guidance that you addressed to us in your letter to Cardinal Stanisław Ryłko in occasion of the opening of this Congress. We thank you for this initiative of your Pontifical Council for the Laity,

which we consider a tangible sign of the universal ministry and untiring missionary care of the Successor of Peter.

During these days of reflection, a recurring theme has been that of the need for the lay faithful in Asia to become “ more conscious of their Baptism and the dignity which is theirs as sons and daughters of God the Father ” and “ to cooperate actively not only in building up their local Christian communities but also in making new pathways for the Gospel in every sector of society ” (*taken from the Holy Father’s message to Card. Rylko*). The testimony of many Congress participants has shown how this awareness of the mission of the laity has matured in recent years and makes us more determined in helping all of the baptized to grow in their vocation as disciples of Christ and in their sense of belonging to the Universal Church. We are quite mindful of our unique contribution in building up the Christian community, of our vocation to charity for the good of all of our brothers and sisters throughout Asia. While immersed in a society that is undergoing deep-seated transformation, we want to collaborate all the more in establishing conditions of life that are much more dignified for all aspects of the person and for every person. All of us as baptized Christians are called to a renewed encounter with Jesus Christ the Lord that converts our life towards the path to holiness.

Dear Holy Father,

We are your “ little flock ”, a flock that can at times appear so small and inadequate before this vast continent with its billions of inhabitants and its ancient cultural and religious traditions, which stand in contrast to its new chaotic economic growth and rapid social changes that places Asia ever more on the forefront with a greater role to play on the global stage. Although we might be a little flock, we are able to affirm each day and firsthand that “ the peoples of Asia need Jesus Christ and his Gospel ” and that this continent “ thirsts for the living water that only He can give ” (*Ecclesia in Asia*, 50). Because of this, we are well aware of the need for each and everyone of us, as Catholic Laity, and as Your

Holiness has pointed out in your message for this Congress, to “bear ever more fervent witness to the incomparable beauty of being a Christian, and proclaim Jesus Christ as the one Savior of the world”.

Holy Father, we live in difficult times and it seems that almost everywhere the Church faces strong headwinds and waves that prevail against her. At times, we even fear being shipwrecked. But, in these moments we hear again those reassuring words of the Lord: “Take courage, it is I; do not be afraid” (*Mt 14: 27*).

By clinging securely to Christ, we can weather every storm. Together with him, and with your gaze fixed intently on him, Your Holiness is there steadfast at the helm, guiding this ship on course to its final destination, “towards the place of life, towards friendship with the Son of God, towards the One who gives us life, and life in abundance” (Benedict XVI, *Homily from Inaugural mass of his Pontificate*, 24 April 2005).

Because of this, all of us, while in affective and effective communion with the Successor of Peter, the Universal Shepherd, and while confirming our faith in the admirable teaching of Your Holiness, and while surprised and edified by the serenity and gentleness with which you guide us while sustaining the weight of the cross, and while supported by the Catholicity of the Church and the communion of saints, want to proclaim always and everywhere that the Risen Christ has won for us the definitive victory and is our ultimate and lasting peace.

Throughout this Congress we have been praying for you and for your ministry, and for your intentions. Our prayers are always with you so that the grace of Our Lord enables you to be ever more strong and courageous. May our Blessed Mother, the Holy Virgin Mary, be for you a tender refuge and source of consolation and renewed strength in difficult moments. But, it is above all, each and every one of us who entrust ourselves to your prayers. Holy Father, we ask that you remember us before the Lord. Remember those who bear witness to our Lord Jesus Christ, at times in a heroic degree, in many difficult places in our conti-

Letter addressed to His Holiness, Pope Benedict XVI

ment. Remember us as you invoke the intercession of great saints, martyrs and missionaries who have gone before us, proclaiming the faith in our lands. Remember especially, the lay faithful of Asia, their families, their communities, their associations and movements, so that in the practice of their faith, hope and love there will shine the glory of Christ.

Message to the Catholic Laity of Asia

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Jesus Christ,

To all those who confess their faith in Jesus Christ Our Lord, Son of the Living God, and bear witness to him in all of the different countries through this vast continent of Asia!

To you especially, our Catholic brothers and sisters, *Christifideles*, baptized in the Lord, sons and daughters of God the Father, anointed in the Holy Spirit, who are aware of the dignity and responsibility of our vocation as disciples, witnesses and missionaries.

To all of you we wish to express our profound sentiments of gratitude, joy and hope, which stem from our participation in this Congress of Asian Catholic Laity, held in Seoul, Korea from August 31 to September 5, 2010 under the auspices of the Pontifical Council for the Laity and in collaboration with different sectors of the Catholic Church in Korea.

Among the four hundred people who participated in this significant event, were those who formed the delegations from the bishops' conferences of various Asian countries that were headed up by their respective bishops and priests, representatives from the Federation of Asia Bishops' Conferences, representatives from associations, ecclesial movements and new communities in Asia and numerous lay Catholics from Korea.

While enjoying an atmosphere of prayer, ecclesial communion and friendship, and guided by the theme of the Congress: "Proclaiming Jesus Christ in Asia Today", we were able to reflect on the present reality of our beloved continent in the light of the faith.

We have certainly felt accompanied by the Holy Father, Pope Benedict XVI who has shown his paternal affection and closeness by his words of encouragement and guidance that he addressed to all of us in

his letter to Cardinal Stanisław Rylko in occasion of this Congress. In it, he expresses his hope that this Congress may provide renewed encouragement in taking up this sacred mandate “of bearing witness to Jesus Christ, the universal Savior”. Indeed, the Holy Father also notes that we have been entrusted with a “great mission” which is the “supreme service and greatest gift that the Church can offer to the people of Asia”.

During these days, we have gained a renewed understanding of greatness and timeliness of this mission that stems from the grace of our Baptism and the personal and transforming encounter with Christ which, as in the case of Saint Paul, becomes a “source of sublime happiness and a gift to share with others” (cf. *Letter of Pope Benedict XVI to Card. Rylko*). We know that we must allow ourselves to be captivated by Christ, through the personal and communitarian encounters with him; through listening to his word, through the frequent reception of the sacraments, through frequent moments of prayer with him in which we allow his grace to transform our hearts and touch all dimensions of our lives, making us holy in his sight. In this way, each one of us can respond to our divine vocation and become indispensable coworkers in the life of the Church and in making “new pathways for the Gospel in society” (*ibid*).

We continue to be impressed by the witness given by so many lay Catholics, who, although being such a small minority in this continent, are actively engaged in the work of evangelization, sustained by their belonging to the communion of the Catholic Church, and encouraged by their conviction of being brothers and sisters with those who, while spread throughout the world, make up those billion baptized Catholics, as well as the heroic testimonies of faith that have been bequeathed to us by brothers and sisters from our own continent who have gone before us and now form part of the communion of the saints.

We have been particularly edified by those who bear courageous witness to their faith in civil societies where the religious freedom of the

individual is either denied or restricted, or those who suffer hostility from religious fundamentalists, or those who because of their faith are threatened and persecuted by government authorities. How true, also for our times and continent, is the maxim of Tertullian: “The blood of martyrs is the seed of the Church”!

We have reflected on numerous ideas and exchanged many experiences during this Congress. Above all, we have focused on the Christian identity of the lay faithful, on the importance of Christian initiation and ongoing formation, on our belonging to the Church as a mystery of communion, of our co-responsibility in building up the local Church and parish community, of the experience of small faith communities, ecclesial movements and new communities as a precious gift for the life of the Church. We want to be active, and not passive nor discouraged lay Catholics; we want to be protagonists in the life of our local Churches in affective and effective communion with our bishops and clergy.

John Paul II had once referred to those who believe in Christ in this continent as a “small flock” entrusted with a great mission: that of bearing witness to Jesus Christ, that is the supreme service and the greatest gift that the Church can offer the people of Asia (cf. Post-synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Ecclesia in Asia*, 10, 20). We are a small flock then, that does not suffer a complex or fear from being a minority, nor wants to be contained within the walls of the Church; rather, we feel the call to be “leaven that causes the dough to rise”, salt that seasons and light that shines for this entire continent. In these days, many have shared with us their encouraging experiences of fraternal ecumenism with Christians of other confessions as well as others who live in harmony and in dialogue with those who are adherents to other religions. Also moving have been those who live Christian charity to a heroic degree in their service to the poorest of the poor, not to mention the eloquent examples of the “domestic Church” given by so many families. We have also considered the dedicated work of many who are engaged in the work of Christian

formation and general service to the common good through the apostolate of Catholic institutions of education, or by means of the many and various forms of Christian presence through the means of social communication, or through business or in politics or in other cultural spheres. We are few, but we are at once present everywhere, moved by love for all of our brothers and sisters in Asia, without any exceptions or discrimination. We are proud of the richness of our ancient cultural traditions, and, at the same time, motivated to share our faith in Jesus Christ, the fulfillment of every human aspiration.

Dear brothers and sisters. Asia is currently undergoing unprecedented processes of growth and social transformation. Its immense population and rapid economic growth make it a significant epicenter at the international level. Nevertheless, it faces serious problems regarding the promotion of freedom, justice, solidarity and the development of more humane living conditions. In light of this, we are convinced that the unique Christian contribution could be essential towards the resolution of these problems for the good of our people. So, before this enormous task, we are sustained by the certainty that, just as the Synod for Asia pointed out and as the Holy Father repeated in his message, “the peoples of Asia need Jesus Christ and his Gospel because this continent is thirsting for the water that Jesus alone can give” (cf. *Letter of Pope Benedict XVI to Card. Rylko*).

Thus, by the grace of God, and while thankful and joyful for having encountered him, the true face of God, the fullness of revelation, the one Savior, the fulfillment of every human aspiration, we renew our efforts to share our Christian experience with all of our “neighbors”, in our neighborhoods, in our schools and universities, at the workplace, in our dealings with others. This is not a marketing strategic or fanatic proselytizing, but rather, simply the fruit of an Encounter, for as Pope Benedict XVI explained in his message: “Those who have found in Jesus the truth, joy and beauty which give meaning and direction to their lives will naturally desire to bring this grace to others” (*ibid*).

Message to the Catholic Laity of Asia

Take courage friends! The Risen Christ has won for us the final victory! Evil no longer has the final word. Love has proved itself stronger than death, hatred, indifference! The power of God's grace strengthens our weakness. We are invited to generously share with others this fullness that we have received, this great treasure, this pearl of great price, which is Jesus Christ, even if we carry this treasure in earthen vessels. We bear witness to a miraculous source of unity, to a mystery of communion, to which every human person is called, and for which every human heart desires in its depths. We are the bearers of the most supreme good for the Asian people of today and tomorrow. May God assist us all in this task and may the Blessed Mother accompany us, console us, and intercede for us before her Son, enlightening our way and preceding us as the "Bright star of the New Evangelization".

“LAITY TODAY” COLLECTION

Publications by the Pontifical Council for the Laity emerge from events held by the dicastery (conferences, seminars, plenary assemblies...). English, French, Spanish and Italian editions of these publications are available.

1. *Rediscovering Baptism*, 17th Plenary Assembly, 27-31 October 1997 (€ 6).
2. *Movements in the Church*, world congress of ecclesial movements, 27-29 May 1998 (€ 10). Available in English and Italian only.
3. *Rediscovering Confirmation*, 18th Plenary Assembly, 27 February - 2 March 1999 (€ 10).
4. *The Ecclesial Movements in the Pastoral Concern of the Bishops*, Seminar, 16-18 June 1999 (€ 10).
5. *The Congress of Catholic Laity - Rome 2000*, International Congress, 25-30 November 2000 (€ 15).
6. *Ecumenismo e dialogo interreligioso: il contributo dei fedeli laici* Seminar, 22-23 June 2001 (€ 10). Available in Italian only.
7. *Rediscovering the Eucharist*, 20th Plenary Assembly, 21-23 November 2002 (€ 6).
8. *Men and Women: Diversity and Mutual Complementarity*, Seminar, 30-31 January 2004 (€ 10). Available in English and Italian only.
9. *Riscoprire il vero volto della parrocchia*, 21st Plenary Assembly, 24-28 November 2004 (€ 10). Available in Italian only.
10. *The World of Sport Today: a Field of Christian Mission*, Seminar, 11-12 November 2005 (€ 10). Available in English and Italian only.

11. *The Beauty of Being a Christian. Movements in the Church*, Proceedings of the 2nd World Congress of the Ecclesial Movements and New Communities (Rocca di Papa, 31 May – 2 June 2006) and texts of the Meeting with the Holy Father Benedict XVI on the Vigil of Pentecost (St. Peter's Square, 3 June 2006) (€ 15).
12. *La parrocchia ritrovata. Percorsi di rinnovamento*, Proceedings of the 22nd Plenary Assembly, 21-24 September 2006 (€ 15). Available in Italian only.
13. *Sport: an Educational and Pastoral Challenge*, Seminar, 7-8 September 2007 (€ 15). Available in Italian and English.
14. *Pastors and the Ecclesial Movements. A Seminar for Bishops*. Rocca di Papa (Rome), 15-17 May 2008 (€ 15).
15. *Woman and man: the humanum in its entirety*. On the 20th Anniversary of John Paul II's Apostolic Letter *Mulieris Dignitatem* (1988-2008). International Congress, Rome, 7-9 February 2008 (€ 15).
16. *Christifideles Laici. Bilancio e prospettive*, Proceedings of the 23rd Plenary Assembly of the Pontifical Council for the Laity, 13-15 November 2008 (€ 15). Available in Italian only.
17. *Sport, Education, Faith: towards a new season for Catholic sports associations*, International Seminar, 6-7 November 2009 (€ 15). Available in Italian and English only.

Orders can be made through our office:

Postal address: Pontifical Council for the Laity
Palazzo San Calisto
00120 VATICAN CITY

Offices: Piazza San Calisto, 16 (Trastevere)
00153 ROMA

Tel.: 06 69869300
Fax: 06 69887214
E-mail: pcpl@laity.va