



Renewed Evangelizers for New Evangelization in Asia

Message of X FABC Plenary Assembly

“We declare to you what we have seen and heard” (1 John 1:3).

We, the Bishops representing member-Episcopal Conferences and Associate Members of the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences gathered in Xuan Loc and Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam, from 10 to 16 December 2012, for the Tenth Plenary Assembly of the Federation of the Asian Bishops' Conferences. With us were: the Holy Father's Special Envoy, Gaudencio Cardinal Rosales; the Secretary of the Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples, Archbishop Savio Hon Tai-Fai SDB; the non-resident Pontifical representative to Vietnam, Archbishop Leopoldo Girelli; fraternal delegates of the continental Federations of Episcopal Conferences of Oceania, Latin America and Europe; representatives of a few funding and donor partners; the Bishops and Secretaries of the FABC Offices; and invited guests. There were a total of 111 participants (7 Cardinals, 69 Bishops, 35 priests, religious and laity).

We thank the Lord for the historic approval of the *Statutes* of the FABC 40 years ago. What extraordinary blessing it is for us that four important events converge with the FABC ruby anniversary: the Year of Faith, the 50th anniversary of the opening of the Second Vatican Council, the 20th anniversary of the publication of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, and the just concluded XIII Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops on the New Evangelization for the Transmission of the Christian Faith.

All these events awaken us to our deepest identity – we are a community of faith called by the Lord to a mission of evangelization in the world. We thank the Lord for blessing the FABC in its ongoing work of renewing the mission of love and service in Asia.

We are deeply grateful for the exceedingly warm welcome and hospitality extended to us by the Church in Vietnam, particularly in Xuan Loc and Ho Chi Minh City. We thank the Government of Vietnam for its openness to, and support for, our gathering in this country blessed with rich cultures and traditions. We wish God's special blessings upon the Church in Vietnam and all the people of Vietnam.

We also express our communion and solidarity with, and encouragement for, the Catholic Church in China. We missed the presence of its representatives in our Assembly and we dearly hope that one day we would have a wider fellowship with their active participation in the FABC. We are united with them in prayer that the peace, joy and hope that Christ came to bring may reach all in that great country.

We convey our deep gratitude to all the Laity, men and women in Consecrated Life, Priests and Bishops who carry out the mission of evangelization in the most difficult situations even at the risk of their lives. Their courage for the Lord's Gospel and their dedication greatly edify and inspire us.

This has been truly a Week of Faith. Our faith in the Lord has been stirred into flame by the deep and lively faith of the people in the Church in Vietnam and by the story of their martyrs. Through the supreme witnessing of martyrs, the power of faith and hope shines forth.

In the light of the Word, our Plenary Assembly discerned the paths of mission to which the Spirit of God is beckoning us. Guided by the Spirit we read the signs of the times, the social mega-trends in Asia and our own ecclesial realities, and analyzed the unfolding challenges and opportunities so that we might respond to them from the depths of our faith. We have the daunting mission of proclaiming Jesus as the Lord and Savior amid rapid changes in Asia. For this reason we are ever more aware that we need to be a more Christ-experiencing and Christ-witnessing community. At the core of the New Evangelization initiated by Blessed Pope John Paul II and reiterated by Pope Benedict XVI is the clarion call to be authentic and credible witnesses of Jesus the Lord and Savior.

The same Spirit who animated Vatican II now summons us to become **renewed evangelizers for a New Evangelization**. It is the Spirit who can fashion this newness in our Church and in each one of us. It is the Spirit who enables us to respond credibly and effectively to the social mega-trends and ecclesial realities that our Assembly has discerned.

To be renewed as evangelizers we have to respond to the Spirit active in the world, in the depths of our being, in the signs of the times and in all that is authentically human. ***We need to live a spirituality of New Evangelization.***

For such spirituality, we offer you some fundamental dimensions:

1. Personal encounter with Jesus Christ. New evangelizers need first and foremost a living faith that is grounded in a deep, personal, and transforming encounter with the living person of Jesus Christ, an encounter resulting in personal conversion and discipleship of Jesus in word and deed. In the final analysis, we proclaim the one whom we have seen, whom we have heard and touched (see *1 John* 1:1-3). This personal encounter and discipleship is indispensable. Without it none will be able to touch the soul of Asia.

2. Passion for mission. If we exist for mission, we need to have a passion for mission. The story of the Church in Asia is intertwined with the story of missionaries and martyrs – laymen and women, consecrated persons and clergy – who dared to risk their lives for the sake of Christ. Their story inspires and emboldens us. They epitomize the passion for mission in a manner that is impossible for human beings, but possible for God (cf. *Luke* 18:27). Blessed Pope John Paul II affirmed, “A fire can only be lit by something that is itself on fire... (we) have to be on fire with the love of Christ and burning with zeal to make him known more widely, loved more deeply, and followed more closely” (*Ecclesia in Asia*, 23). The words of St. Paul move our hearts: “the charity of Christ urges us” (*2 Corinthians* 5:14) to share the unique love of Jesus with the whole world. For we firmly believe that the aspirations of Asian peoples find their ultimate fulfillment in Jesus, who is Life.

3. Focus on the Kingdom of God. The proclamation of Jesus affects every aspect of life and stratum of society – the whole of human life. Hence the spirituality of the new evangelizer does not separate our world from God’s Reign. It does not separate the material from the religious, nor does it divorce faith-life from the task of transforming the socioeconomic and political life. Above all, the spirituality of the new evangelizer does not separate Jesus Christ from the Kingdom, nor detach the values of the Kingdom from the Person of Jesus. To focus on the Kingdom of God is to commit oneself to Jesus and His vision of a new humanity patterned after Him.

4. Commitment to communion. Jesus prayed for us that we might be in communion with the Father, with him and with one another (cf. *John* 17:20-22). Through his Passion, Death,

and Resurrection, he restored all things to himself and brought humanity and all creation to communion with the Father and the Spirit. Like Jesus, new evangelizers should be men and women who live and promote communion. ***The spirituality of communion is, in truth, the spirituality of the New Evangelization.*** Blessed Pope John Paul II reminds us that “communion and mission are inseparably connected.” Communion with the Triune God is “both the source and fruit of mission: communion gives rise to mission and mission is accomplished in communion” (*Ecclesia in Asia*, 24, citing *Christifideles laici*, 32). This then should be our motto: “communion for mission” and the “mission of communion” (*Ecclesia in Asia*, 25). Evangelizers will be effective to the extent that they live a deep contemplative communion with Jesus and commit themselves generously to being witnesses and promoters of communion with God, with one another, and with creation.

In the Asian quest for harmony amid increasing tensions and conflicts, all members of the Church – clergy and laity, men and women, youth and children – are called to be evangelizers, heralds of the Word, peacemakers, and builders of communion. Such a communion expresses itself in a vibrant communion of communities in our parishes and dioceses.

5. Dialogue, a mode of life and mission. The New Evangelization calls for a spirit of dialogue that animates daily living and opts for a unifying, rather than adversarial, relationship. Dialogue has to be a hallmark of all forms of ministry and service in Asia. It is characterized by humble sensitivity to the hidden presence of God in the struggles of the poor, in the riches of people’s cultures, in the varieties of religious traditions, and in the depths of every human heart. Such dialogue is our mode of life and our mode of mission. It is fundamental to a spirituality of communion for the renewed evangelizer.

6. Humble presence. We believe that everyone in Asia is a partner and co-pilgrim in the journey to God’s Reign, that the fields of mission are grounds of the mysterious presence and action of God’s Spirit. In the vast mission in Asia the silent but eloquent witness of an authentic Christian life requires a humble presence, a mode of dialogical living that includes a prayerful and “contemplative” way of life. This is imperative for renewed evangelizers amid cultures that value self-effacement and prayer. Humble presence must be matched by simplicity of life and communion with the poor.

7. Prophetic evangelizer. To be prophetic is to be aware in the light of the Holy Spirit of the contradictions of our Asian world and to denounce whatever diminishes, degrades and divests God’s children of their dignity. The renewed evangelizer has to protect the human dignity of all, especially of women and children and of those reduced to the condition of living almost as non-persons in our Asian society. By so denouncing injustice, the renewed evangelizer announces the love of God, “the weightier matters of the law” which are justice, mercy and faith (*Matthew 23:23*), and Jesus’ preferential love of the poor.

8. Solidarity with victims. We have noted in our Assembly that the number of victims of globalization, injustice, natural and nuclear disasters, and of attacks by fundamentalists and terrorists, is growing by the day. Jesus took the side of victims of disasters and injustices. He was in solidarity with those cast out of the social mainstream. Solidarity with and compassion for victims and the marginalized has to be an essential dimension of the spirituality for renewed evangelizers.

9. Care of creation. Our Assembly has likewise noted the unabated abuse of creation due to selfish and shortsighted economic gains. Human causes contribute significantly to global

warming and climate change, the impact of which affects the poor and the deprived more disastrously. The ecological concern, the care for the integrity of creation, including inter-generational justice and compassion, is fundamental to a spirituality of communion.

10. Boldness of faith and martyrdom. From the beginning of Christianity until now Asia's soil is marked by the blood of martyrs. If today we are called to give witness to our faith by supreme sacrifice, we are not to recoil. Jesus has forewarned us that such a sacrifice is the ultimate sign of total fidelity to him and his mission. Let the martyrs of our lands, many of whom are celebrated at our altars, inspire us by their example and empower us with their intercession. We are grateful to Blessed Pope John Paul II and Pope Benedict XVI for proclaiming many Asian witnesses to Christ as martyrs of the Church. Indeed, "*the blood of martyrs is the seed of Christianity.*"

Conclusion

In this Year of Faith, in the second decade of the new millennium, and on the occasion of the 40th anniversary of the FABC, we appeal to all in the Church in Asia to nurture a special passion for New Evangelization.

We should not be led into lethargy or pessimism by Asian social mega-trends which threaten the fabric of our society, the stability of the family and the faith-vision of the Christian community itself. Hidden in them might be the inner resources of the Spirit veiled within Asian values, the seeds of a new humanity hungering for fullness of life in Jesus.

The mission of new evangelization, new in its ardor, its methods and its expressions, is urgent. It calls for renewed evangelizers with a renewed spirituality, the spirituality of communion, of mission, of new evangelization. Every parish, every community, every family should be a school of this spirituality. It requires the new evangelizer to experience deep conversion, a change of vision as well as conformity with the attitude and the mind of Christ, and communion with God. It requires a living faith in the Lord, the entrustment of oneself to God, a following of Jesus in mind, heart, and deed.

The "small flock" of Jesus should not be timid or fearful among Asia's billions, more than 60% of the world's population. For we have the singular resource of our faith, Jesus Christ himself, the unique gift of God to humanity. He journeys with us just as he did with his disciples on the way to Emmaus (*Luke 24:13-32*). At every Eucharistic celebration, he keeps opening our eyes and warming our hearts with the fire of love for a New Evangelization in Asia.

May Mary, the Mother of Jesus and our Mother, accompany us as we walk the roads of Asia, to "tell the story of Jesus." We are not to fear. We have the Lord's assurance, "Take heart, it is I; do not be afraid" (*Matthew 14: 27*). And we have his guarantee, "remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age" (*Matthew 28:20*).

Xuan Loc and Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam

16 December 2012