

**FABC AT FORTY YEARS: RESPONDING TO THE  
CHALLENGES OF ASIA**

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# I. FINAL DOCUMENT: FABC AT FORTY YEARS - RESPONDING TO THE CHALLENGES OF ASIA - A NEW EVANGELIZATION

## INTRODUCTION

1. In mysterious and invisible ways from time immemorial to the present day the creative and renewing Spirit of God continues to stir among Asian peoples and cultures as it hovers over the Asian continent. Deep in the heart of Asia's teeming millions, expectancy, vibrancy and energy pulsate, as Asians struggle for self-identity and a free development space in the social, political, economic, cultural and religious fields. Asia is a continent experiencing the hopes and joys of constant rebirth in the Spirit.<sup>1</sup>

2. Led by the same Spirit we, Bishops from Asia, have gathered together in this beautiful country of Vietnam forty years after the official foundation of the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences (FABC) in 1972, the year in which the Holy See approved the Statutes of FABC. Our gathering this year is marked by great joy, celebration and thanksgiving, even more blessed as we celebrate the Year of Faith from 11 October 2012 to 24 November 2013, declared by our Holy Father Pope Benedict XVI<sup>2</sup> so as to deepen our faith in view of the New Evangelization. Moreover, the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the opening of the Second Vatican Council (1962-65) and the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* taking place this year are also providential events offering us a fresh clarion call to live, celebrate, proclaim and witness to our faith in the context of Asia.

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<sup>1</sup> See Pope John Paul II, *Ecclesia in Asia*, November 6, 1999, no. 15 for the work of the Holy Spirit in creation; no. 18 for his work in Asia. A very enlightening Asian elaboration of the work of the Holy Spirit is that of the FABC Office of Theological Concerns (OTC) in *Sprouts of Theology from the Asian Soil (STAS), Collection of TAC and OTC Documents, 1987-2007*, ed. Vimal Tirimanna, CSsR, 2007, chapter 5, "The Spirit at Work in Asia Today," pp. 167-98.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. *Porta fidei*, October 11, 2011.

3. We come together then to express our deep gratitude for God's blessings on the Church in Asia, to listen to the renewing Spirit and discern the pastoral situation that confronts us. We gather in dialogue among Local Churches and, with the grace of God, to respond with a deepened faith, with trust and daring to the emerging challenges of the Asian situation. With immense hope we place the future of the Church in Asia in the hands of God.

“... do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him” (Col 3: 17).

#### **A. REMEMBERING, WE GIVE THANKS TO GOD**

4. In remembering the past, we rejoice at accomplishments in deep gratitude to the Lord and his wonderful ways, for the extraordinary flame of renewal that the Holy Spirit enkindled at the Second Vatican Council. Through it the renewing Spirit revitalized and rejuvenated the whole Church so that it may face the world with wisdom, boldness and hope. The Spirit stirred up the Church in Asia with great energy. To this day the energizing vision of the Council – the people of God, the Kingdom of God, integral evangelization, communion, co-responsibility, collegiality, participation, dialogue, liturgical renewal, clergy and religious renewal, engagement with the modern world – continue to catalyze the renewal of the Church in Asia. It was, in fact, to prepare for the 1974 Synod on Evangelization that the FABC first gathered.

#### **FABC Plenary Assemblies**

5. We thank the Lord for the nine Plenary Assemblies of the FABC which provided the principal themes of renewal for the Local Churches in Asia. At their first FABC Plenary Assembly in Taiwan in 1974 the Asian Bishops sought to discover how the Church, only a little flock of less than 3% of the total Asian population, could more effectively and credibly announce the Good News of Jesus. With the guidance of God's Spirit the Bishops identified three significant and all-pervasive Asian social phenomena: the massive poverty of Asian peoples, their rich

mosaic of ancient cultures and religious and philosophical traditions. The Asian Bishops responded with a vision of evangelization by way of **living Triple Dialogue**: dialogue with the poor of Asia (integral liberation and option for the poor), dialogue with their cultures (inculturation) and dialogue with their religious and philosophical traditions (inter-religious dialogue). They affirmed that the acting subject of mission is **the local church**, incarnated and rooted firmly in the culture of its people, taking up their strength as well as their weaknesses in the light of the healing and redeeming grace of Christ.<sup>3</sup>

6. In the subsequent Plenary Assemblies, the Bishops examined the internal requirements of a Church for credible integral evangelization and probed into the nature of the Church as a **community of prayer and contemplation** which is its very life, animated in all its being by the Spirit of God.<sup>4</sup> They explored the Church as a **community of faith** in communion with the triune God, a **communion of communities**, fundamentally characterized by participation and co-responsibility.<sup>5</sup> They discerned the indispensable **evangelizing role of lay people** in the Church particularly in the vast field of secularity which is especially their own and they strongly urged and committed themselves to the activation of their baptismal gifts, in the building up of the Church and the transformation of Asian society.<sup>6</sup> Realizing the increasing demands of mission and the diminishing sense of mission, with the approach of the third millennium, they firmly reiterated **the centrality of Jesus in evangelization**. They provided a renewed justification for mission as an imperative from the Lord Jesus and as the

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<sup>3</sup> See *Final Statement* of FABC I, "Evangelization in Modern Day Asia," Taipei, 1974, in *For All the Peoples of Asia* (FAPA), vol. 1, FABC Documents, 1970-1991, eds. Gaudencio B. Rosales and C.G. Arevalo, 1992, pp.11-25.

<sup>4</sup> See *Final Statement* of FABC II, "Prayer - the Life of the Church in Asia," Calcutta, 1978, in FAPA vol. 1, pp. 27-48.

<sup>5</sup> See *Final Statement* of FABC III, "A Community of Faith in Asia," 1982, in FAPA, vol. 1, pp. 49-65.

<sup>6</sup> See *Final Statement* of FABC IV, "The Vocation and Mission of the Laity in the Church and in the World of Asia," Tokyo, 1986, in FAPA, vol. 1, pp. 177-98.

inevitable consequence of the gift of faith, thus providing a strong impulse to the missionary spirit while re-affirming **dialogue as the mode of mission in Asia**.<sup>7</sup> Nevertheless they maintained that the proclamation of Jesus as the Lord and Savior of the world remains as the very heart of evangelization – a faith conviction that the Church in Asia firmly holds as non-negotiable.

7. In announcing the Reign of God and the Good News of Jesus, the one Lord and Savior, the Church has to be a humble servant. She is a **community-in-mission, a disciple-community** in the footsteps of the Lord Jesus who came to serve and not to be served. Christian discipleship in Asia, the Asian Bishops affirm, has to be a **service to life**, the full life of unending communion with God promised by the Lord Jesus. Such communion is to be reflected on earth by the solidarity of peoples with one another and solidarity with all creation.<sup>8</sup> The Church-in-mission has always to be open to the renewing Spirit. All its members have to renew themselves continually in mind and heart towards a holistic spirituality and missionary engagement in a **mission of love and service**.<sup>9</sup>

8. Evangelization and renewal in Asia take the **family as the focal point**. The Asian family is the cellular receptor of everything that impinges Asian societies for good or evil. A renewed Asian family is a renewing family that strives **towards a culture of integral life** in the midst of death-dealing forces. For this purpose, a renewed holistic family ministry in the local church is required, a ministry that develops a family spirituality that is built on the **spirituality of communion**, the communion between husband and wife. Communion in the family is rooted in the communion of unending love between God the Father, Son

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<sup>7</sup> See *Final Statement* of FABC V, "Journeying towards the Third Millennium," Bandung, 1990, in FAPA, vol. 1, pp. 273-89.

<sup>8</sup> See *Final Statement* of FABC VI, "Christian Discipleship in Asia Today: Service to Life," Manila, 1995, in FAPA, vol. 2, FABC Documents from 1992 to 1996, ed. Franz-Josef Eilers, pp.1-12.

<sup>9</sup> See *Final Statement* of FABC VII, "Renewed Church in Asia: a Mission of Love and Service," Samphran, 2000, in FAPA, vol. 3, FABC Documents from 1997 to 2001, ed. Franz-Josef Eilers, SVD, 2002, pp. 1-16.



and Spirit, a communion that flows inexorably to the children born of the love between husband and wife, and reaches out in solidarity with others regardless of religion or culture.<sup>10</sup>

9. Nowhere is such communion of love most deeply and dramatically expressed than in the **Holy Eucharist**. Communion is at the very heart of the Eucharist, the communion of Jesus with the Father in the Spirit and our communion with Jesus who in sacrificial redeeming love gives his own Body and Blood to us. In the offering of Jesus' own Body and Blood in the form of bread and wine, communion radically flows towards all humanity and the whole of creation. At the Eucharist we recognize and confess our brokenness, plead for forgiveness and reconciliation. There we pray for a Culture of Life in Asia, remembering the life-giving memories with which God has blessed Asian societies in movements of peace and freedom, of truth and justice, of love and service. The full significance of the Eucharist as the love of Jesus poured out for integral salvation impels us to act **towards social transformation**.<sup>11</sup> There is no other way to be truly and profoundly thankful or Eucharistic but to **live the Eucharist in its personal, communitarian, and social dimensions**.

### **Radio Veritas Asia**

10. We thank the Lord for inspiring the Asian Bishops to set up Radio Veritas Asia even before the FABC was born. Through the years RVA has gained a well-earned reputation that Blessed Pope John Paul II called it "the voice of Asian Christianity." Its voice reaches remote areas of Asia that are not otherwise accessible to missionaries.

### **A Vision of Church in Asia**

11. We thank the Lord for a challenging **vision of Church in Asia**. This vision of Church has been the over-all objective of the

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<sup>10</sup> See *Final Statement* of FABC VIII, "The Asian Family towards a Culture of Integral Life," Daejeon, 2004, in FAPA, vol. 4, FABC Documents from 2002 to 2006, ed. Franz-Josef Eilers, SVD, 2007, pp. 1-51.

<sup>11</sup> See FABC VII *Final Statement*, "Living the Eucharist in Asia," Manila, 2008.

pastoral reflection, discernment, prayer, and pastoral action of the FABC through the years.<sup>12</sup> We envision a Church that is:

- *truly Asian, in triple dialogue with the religions, cultures and peoples of Asia, especially the poor;*<sup>13</sup>
- *a humble servant of the peoples of Asia, accompanying them to the Kingdom of God;*<sup>14</sup>
- *a credible herald of the Gospel, a disciple-community sent on mission of integral evangelization to tell the story of Jesus to Asians in season and out of season;*<sup>15</sup>
- *in herself the bearer of the Asian face of Jesus, the God who became Man, who was compassionate, loving, forgiving, self-sacrificing; a teacher, servant, healer, prophet, life-giver, ennobler of the poor;*<sup>16</sup>
- *a communion of communities, reflecting the Trinitarian communion;*
- *a participatory Church of renewed servant-leaders, of prophetic Religious and empowered laity;*

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<sup>12</sup> Useful for understanding this FABC vision as mirrored by the Local Church is the work of FABC TAC, now OTC, in STAS, chapter 2, "Theses on the Local Church: A Theological Reflection in the Asian Context," pp. 19-68.

<sup>13</sup> An enlightening Asian elaboration of inter-religious dialogue by the FABC Theological Advisory Commission, now known as the Office of Theological Concerns (OTC), is "Theses on Interreligious Dialogue: An Essay in Pastoral Theological Reflection," 1987, in STAS, chapter 1, pp. 1-18.

<sup>14</sup> See *Final Statement*, FABC V no. 6, Bandung, 1990 in FAPA, vol. 1, pp. 283-84; see also Statement of FABC International Theological Colloquium, Thailand, 1994, in FAPA, vol. 2, "The Face of the Church in Asia," pp. 224-226].

<sup>15</sup> Following up the Special Assembly for Asia of the Synod of Bishops, 18 April to 14 May 1998, the FABC Office of Evangelization organized the First Asian Mission Congress on the theme, "Telling the Story of Jesus in Asia: A Celebration of Faith and Life," Chiang Mai, Thailand, 8-27 October 2006. The proceedings have been published with the same title as the theme by Office of Evangelization, Goa, India, ed. Fr. Mario Saturnino Dias, undated, 504 pp.

<sup>16</sup> See *Final Statement* of the FABC International Theological Colloquium, Thailand, 1994, "Being Church in Asia: Journeying with the Spirit into Fuller Life," in FAPA, vol. 2, "The Face of Jesus in Asia," pp. 222-24. Cf. Pope John Paul II, *Ecclesia in Asia*, no. 20.

- a *Church of the Poor* where the sick and the needy are at home;
- a *Church of the Youth* where they find solidarity in their struggle for authentic life ;
- a *Church in solidarity with the whole of creation.*

### **Asian Methodologies: Pastoral Discernment, Building Basic Ecclesial/Human Communities, Theological Reflection**

12. We thank the Lord for the FABC **methodology of pastoral discernment (Pastoral Spiral / Cycle)**. The Pastoral Cycle begins with immersion-exposure in the life situation of a group of people, proceeds to situation analysis and reflection in faith on the situation, results in pastoral decisions and planning to implement the decisions and all this leading to effective implementation. An elaboration of the classic see-judge-act methodology, it is used by the FABC Offices in some of their Bishops' Institutes.<sup>17</sup> Without the component of immersion-exposure, this methodology has consistently been used by the FABC Plenary Assemblies as the Bishops analysed and reflected on contextual realities in order to arrive at pastoral decisions that would advance the mission of the Church.

We are likewise thankful to the Lord for the ever-growing **Basic Ecclesial Communities or Small Christian Communities** in Asia. They are biblically oriented, formative, participatory and designed to build Word-centered communities of faith. One of the approaches - the **Asian Integral Pastoral Approach**<sup>18</sup> - is used in Asia. Adapted to the Asian situation from the Lumko method of South Africa, it has also attracted interest of some churches outside Asia. A similar method, with adaptation, is

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<sup>17</sup> See "Final Reflections," 7<sup>th</sup> Bishops' Institute for Social Action, Hua Hin, Thailand, 1986, in FAPA vol. 1, pp. 231-32.

<sup>18</sup> See Report of the First AsiPA General Assembly, "Asian Integral Pastoral Approach, Message to the Churches of Asia," Thailand, 1996 in FAPA, vol. 2, pp. 137-39; see also Report on Consultation on Integral Formation, "Asian Integral Pastoral Approach towards a New Way of Being Church in Asia," Malaysia, 1993, in FAPA, vol. 2, pp.107-11.

used by local churches in building *basic human communities* where Christians and people of other religions live together.

We thank the Lord for an **experiential and contextualized method of theological reflection** that is at the service of mission and pastoral ministry. The method relies first on Sacred Tradition and Sacred Scripture which form the one sacred deposit of the Word of God<sup>19</sup> that is interpreted authentically by the Church's magisterium. But it takes in Asian realities as resources insofar as God's presence and action and the work of the Spirit are discerned therein.<sup>20</sup> It is a method of "liberative integration, interrelatedness and wholeness" and "emphasizes symbolic approaches and expressions, and is marked by a preference for those in the periphery and 'outside the Gate'."<sup>21</sup>

### **The Renewal Work of FABC Offices**

13. We thank the Lord for the **FABC Offices** that spearhead the implementation of FABC orientations for a renewed Church in Asia. Through Bishops' Institutes they assist Episcopal conferences, clergy, religious and laity to understand Asian pastoral issues *more deeply* and articulate pastoral approaches and directions. They help in pastoral envisioning and initial pastoral planning, in the areas of evangelization, social communications, integral human development, ministry to indigenous peoples and migrants, lay empowerment, inter-religious dialogue, priestly and religious renewal, seminary formation, education and faith-formation, formation of families, women and youth. Many of the results of such Institutes are incorporated in the theological reflections of the Office of Theological Concerns.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> *Dei Verbum*, no. 10.

<sup>20</sup> See STAS, chapter 6, "Methodology: Asian Christian Theology, Doing Theology in Asia Today," p. 280.

<sup>21</sup> *Heb. 13:3*; see STAS, p. 343.

<sup>22</sup> The FABC Offices are: Office of Evangelization, Office of Social Communications, Office of Human Development, Office of Education and Student Chaplaincy, Office of Laity and Family (Women's Desk, Youth Desk, AsIPA Desk), Office of Ecumenical and Inter-religious Affairs, Office of Consecrated Life, Office of Clergy and Office of Theological Concerns. For a detailed elaboration of the

## **The Contribution of Church Leaders, Clergy, Religious, Laity, Theologians**

14. We thank the Lord for the invaluable contribution of **many great leaders of the Church in Asia** who conceptualized, planned, and brought the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences into being.<sup>23</sup> They were joined by many others who nurtured the Federation to what it is today. Asian prelates, theologians, expert Clergy, Religious and Lay People have collaborated in this enormous pastoral undertaking. They have contributed their talents and time to build up communion within the Church for mission.

## **Dialogue between Episcopal Conferences and Local Churches**

15. Finally we thank the Lord for the **Episcopal Conferences and Local Churches** that constitute the FABC, their Bishops, Clergy, Religious and Laity - from Central Asia to Southeast Asia, from Kazakhstan to Timor Leste. Through the years, they have generously contributed to the growth of FABC from its humble beginnings in 1972. The FABC process has been truly a dialogue among local churches, where Bishops in communion, solidarity and affective collegiality collaborate to announce the Good News of Jesus and of God's Kingdom. The communion of local churches is marvelously enriched with the active presence of those that are *sui iuris* of the Eastern rite that trace their origins back to St. Thomas the Apostle. The Lord has, indeed, blessed

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contribution of FABC Offices to the over-all vision of the Church in Asia, see Report of Secretary General, FABC IX Plenary Assembly, Manila, 2008.

<sup>23</sup> After the historic meeting of Asian Bishops with Pope Paul VI in Manila in 1970, the idea of an Asian regional conference was conceived. At a meeting at the Jesuit Provincial House in Manila, participating were Cardinals Valerian Gracias (Bombay), Stephen Kim (Seoul), Justin Darmojuwono (Semarang), Bishops Stanislaus Loquang (Taipei), Francis Hsu (Hong Kong), Mariano Gaviola (Philippines), and Fr. Horacio de la Costa (Jesuit Provincial). The mind and pen of the eminent Asian theologian Fr. Catalino Arevalo SJ synthesized the Asian Bishops' reflections at the FABC Plenary Assembly, Taipei, 1974. We remember with deep gratitude Fr. Edward Malone, M.M., who with great competence and generosity served as Assistant Secretary General until 2005 and contributed significantly to the growth of the FABC.

FABC through and in each of its members for the mission of evangelization that he has entrusted to the Church in Asia.

### **Confession of Shortcomings**

16. Yet while thanking the Lord for countless blessings, we are sadly aware that our decisions and actions do not always match our words and intentions. Renewal of values and mindsets, of agents of evangelization and of church structures towards a “new way of being Church” has not been adequate and consistent. The FABC vision and its key ideas, its programs and projects have not yet impacted the grassroots to the extent that we had desired. The mega-trends themselves indicate the inadequacies of Church response that reflect in turn mega-trends *in* the Church. We have progressed but we still have a long journey towards the realization of the vision of a new way of being Church. For this we humbly say to the Lord, *mea culpa, mea maxima culpa*.

“The New Evangelization requires personal and communal conversion”<sup>24</sup> It calls us to holiness, to the “following of Christ expressed in a life of faith active in charity, which is a privileged proclamation of the Gospel.”<sup>25</sup> Holiness begets credibility. In this year of anniversaries for the Church, we recommit ourselves with greater resolve to the mission of New Evangelization.

## **B. DISCERNING THE SIGNS OF THE TIMES, WE PRAY FOR WISDOM**

17. As we thank the Lord, the Spirit calls us again to discern the signs of the times as did our brother Bishops in 1974.

### **Mega-trends in Asia and Ecclesial Realities**

Among the signs of the times are positive and negative mega-trends that will shape the evangelizing mission of the Church in

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<sup>24</sup> *Final List of Propositions*, Synod of Bishops on the New Evangelization for the Transmission of the Christian Faith, Rome, 2012, *Propositio 22*, “Conversion.”

<sup>25</sup> *Propositio 23*, “Holiness and the New Evangelizers.”

Asia. They are pastoral challenges with new faces, new forms, new facets and emphases. In responding to them we note ecclesial realities, both lights and shadows, which in themselves are mega-trends in the Church. We need to view them with the pastoral concern and compassion that Jesus had for the people of his day.

### **Globalization**

18. The overarching mega-trend that impacts all dimensions of Asian life is globalization.<sup>26</sup> It is an ongoing, inexorable, complex and ambivalent process that impacts as both bane and blessing the world of politics, economics, communications, education, environment, technology, religion, culture, family, and values. Driven as an **economic process** by neo-liberal capitalism it emphasizes free-markets and free trade in order to maximize economic growth. It has led to “free competition” which many critics deem to be detrimental to poor countries whose very poverty makes them unable to compete in the global market.<sup>27</sup> The result is an ever widening gap between the rich and the poor. As a **cultural phenomenon** using the means of social communication, globalization is quietly and relentlessly disseminating a relatively new culture that threatens cherished cultural values.

### **Culture**

19. The ancient cultures of Asia, once the dominant catalysts of civilizations, are facing the formidable challenge of a globalizing and homogenizing culture that is **secular, materialist, hedonist, consumerist, and relativist**. Driven by a **postmodern**

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<sup>26</sup> For a concise presentation of Church teachings on globalization, see *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church* (CSDC), Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2004, Chapter 5, esp. nos. 361-367, “Globalization: Opportunities and Risks.”

<sup>27</sup> Pope John Paul II, *Message for World Day of Peace*, 1 January 1998, cited in *Ecclesia in Asia*, no. 39. See also Pope John Paul’s *Homily* in Havana, Cuba, 1998 and his *Address* to the Pontifical Academy of Social Sciences, 2003; Pope Benedict XVI, e.g., *Sacramentum caritatis*, no. 90.

**spirit** originating from the West, it dismisses the sacred as hardly relevant to truth, claims to unravel the mysteries of the cosmos without any reference to the Divine Creator, ignores religious and ethical norms, and usurps God's authority over life in all its forms. Unfortunately many sectors of Asian societies have embraced various elements of this culture, most notably consumerism that is catered to by proliferating and sprawling giant shopping malls all over Asia. The post-modern spirit of the 20<sup>th</sup> century is transforming human values and relationships for better or for worse. It is subverting cherished family and Gospel values, such as the sacredness and dignity of human life from the moment of conception, marriage as a lifelong relationship only between man and woman, marriage as a sacrament, and the biblical vision of family. The postmodern spirit clashes with the pervasive Asian sense of the sacred and transcendent.

On the other hand the emerging global culture is admittedly replete with blessings. It has re-emphasized human freedom, human rights and equality. Scientific and technological knowledge is now shared more widely among the peoples of the world. The tools of social communication disseminate information more rapidly than ever imagined and provide new avenues of dialogue and human formation. A new hope for interdependence, interconnectedness and solidarity among the families of the world is rekindled in the midst of conflict, human greed and selfishness.

How the bane and blessings of economic and cultural globalization can be made opportunities of grace through New Evangelization is the over-riding challenge to the Church in Asia. The goal is "globalization without marginalization, globalization with solidarity"<sup>28</sup>

### **Poverty**

20. Regional economic disparities mark the economic landscape of Asia. We see high development levels in some of the countries of Asia such as South Korea, Japan, Hong Kong, and

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<sup>28</sup> See *Caritas in veritate*, no. 42, for some positive possibilities of globalization.



Taiwan, rising development in Thailand and Malaysia, and the countries of Central Asia, while most countries in South and Southeast Asia generally lag far behind, mired in wide-spread poverty. Exacerbated by globalization, poverty is heightened by corruption, economic and political imbalances and injustices. The underdevelopment of agriculture which makes up the main production and livelihood of Asian countries contributes to this economic malaise. A new form of poverty has also emerged in the wake of globalization, *the poverty of those who do not know* and are being left behind by the rapid advance of scientific and technological knowledge. In all these we see the need to promote a culture of evangelical poverty in the Church.

But we also perceive the creative work of God's Spirit in the solidarity of some of the more wealthy sectors of society in the struggle of the poor for a better future and in the increasing participation of the poor in the mission of evangelization and social transformation. All over Asia communities of poor people are becoming more aware of their God-given power to liberate themselves in solidarity with others. Their power to announce God's good news of blessedness for the poor is becoming more deeply embedded in the self-consciousness of a Church that strives to be a Church of the Poor. At the same time Asian economies are being transformed by the drive for sustainable development.

### **Migrants and Refugees**

21. The phenomenon of migrant workers and refugees in search of better work and security – a better future – has been a continuing concern of the FABC<sup>29</sup>. Many Asian migrant workers

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<sup>29</sup> Cf., e.g., "Pastoral Care of Migrants and Refugees: A New Way of Being Church," OHD Faith Encounters in Social Action V (FEISA), in FAPA, vol. 4, pp. 89-133. The Vatican document *Erga Migrantes Caritas Christi* (*The Love of Christ towards Migrants*), by the Pontifical Council for the Pastoral Care of Migrants and Itinerant People, 3 May 2004, provides doctrinal, juridical, and pastoral guidance for the ministry to migrants and deserves to be read and reflected on by a wider audience. It is providential that the document is signed by the Council President, the late Stephen

and refugees often work under most inhumane conditions. They are exploited and abused, their human rights violated. No wonder that the plight of many migrant workers is considered as the “new slavery.” In recent times a new facet has emerged. The concern for internal security, the war on terrorism, the ethnic, cultural, and demographic changes in Western societies due to migration have brought about restrictive measures of migration. The ongoing global economic crisis has sent home literally millions of Asian migrant workers with no assurance that they would be called back to work.

Yet we also discern the work of the Holy Spirit in the phenomenon of Asian migrants. In their places of work they are witnessing to the Asian sense of close family relationships. In the midst of developed secular societies Asian migrants demonstrate their deep spiritual sense. Catholic migrants witness to their faith in Christ and by example lead others not only to question their secular spirit but also, by the grace of God, to return to Christian prayer and devotion.

### **Indigenous Peoples**

22. In the past 15 years the FABC has urged local churches to focus on indigenous peoples as a major pastoral priority. As a social group indigenous peoples remain among the poorest of the poor in Asia. There are about 300 million indigenous peoples in the world and make up only 4.4% of the global population, but they account for about 10% of the poor. And nearly 80% of indigenous groups live in Asia. China and India account for two-thirds of the indigenous peoples of the world.<sup>30</sup> Generally indigenous groups face a triple challenge: economic survival, cultural survival, and threats to their land and environment. Impoverished and marginalized, indigenous peoples are nonetheless gifted by God with distinctively rich cultures, marked by communion with nature. Option for the poor and the

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Fumio Cardinal Hamao, who had been the distinguished Chairman of the FABC Office of Human Development.

<sup>30</sup> World Bank Study, *Indigenous Peoples, Poverty and Development*, 2010, presented by Harry R. Patrinos.

vision of becoming a Church of the Poor impel the Church towards a deep concern for indigenous peoples and their marginalization.

### **Population**

23. The global population in mid-2011 was estimated at seven billion people. Over 60% live in Asia. India and China account for 37% of the global population.<sup>31</sup> With respect to population growth, the policies of Asian governments tend to follow the position of international bodies and developed secularist countries that poverty and “overpopulation” are directly related. The neo-Malthusian theory that population growth is outracing food supply is the reason for controlling population through “reproductive health” concepts and measures that advocate means of birth control contrary to Catholic teaching. We shall continue to insist that population control by such means is not merely a demographic and economic issue but a moral issue.<sup>32</sup> How the Church in Asia will proclaim the Gospel of Life more persuasively in a world where secularist, materialist, and relativist thinking usurps authority over human life from conception to death is a perennial challenge.

### **Religious Freedom**

24. Already besieged by secularism, our faith and our Catholic identity face violent reaction from religious intolerance and extremism that reject religious freedom.<sup>33</sup> In several Asian countries the persecution of Christians is on the rise. Terrorist bombings, abuse and violence against Christians, burning of churches, discrimination, forced conversion of Christians into the dominant religion, anti-Christian laws, create terror and insecurity. Partly because of the inter-active relationships of

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<sup>31</sup> Data from *World Population Prospects, 2010 Revision*, UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs.

<sup>32</sup> See *Ecclesia in Asia*, no. 7.

<sup>33</sup> See *Caritas in veritate*, no. 29.

extremist religious groups, terrorism perpetrated in some parts of the world has repercussions in Asian countries. The rise of religious extremism and violence plays havoc on the Church's vision of inter-religious dialogue.<sup>34</sup>

On the other hand, we also perceive in Asia an increasing awareness of the need for inter-religious dialogue to understand and respect one another. We discern a positive inclination to go beyond dialogue of life in order to collaborate with one another in common social promotion. More and more people believe in dialogue as the principled option to resolve disputes, tensions and conflicts and promote peace and harmony. Surely the FABC experience of inter-religious dialogue for the past 40 years is one of our major contributions to the whole Church.

At the same time the **political ideological threat to religious freedom** is readily observable in some Asian countries that officially profess religious unbelief and want to impose political authority on religious groups. Christians do not have total religious freedom and suffer excessive constraints and sometimes violent repression. In some instances there is non-recognition of church leadership. The lack of religious freedom because of political ideology causes untold suffering among millions of believers, separated from their own believing communities. Its demise is sadly unforeseeable in the near future.

### **Threats to Life**

25. Increasing threats to life are most disturbing and frightening. Ethnic conflicts, violent repression of ethnic rights, the killing of those who struggle to protect the environment, killings in the name of national security, arms build-up and even nuclear threat, the lack of medical and social services due to endemic corruption – all these and other threats to life are taking place, sometimes with impunity. As today so in years to come, threats to life will come from continuous arms trade, arms

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<sup>34</sup> A very informative background to this megatrend of religious extremism and violence is the work of the FABC Office of Theological Concerns "Religious Freedom in the Context of Asia," 2004, in STAS, chapter 7, pp. 345-76.

production and build-up, territorial disputes and geopolitical tensions. In cooperation with governments, civil society, other religions and all peoples of good faith we need to search for creative ways towards peace.

Most tragic are the many threats to life against the helpless – the unborn, the hopelessly sick who are considered “burdens” of society. Pre-natal diagnosis is being used to determine gender and possible deformities. Millions of abortions or the destruction of unborn children take place every year, simply because they are female fetuses, or are possibly deformed or simply unwanted. The use of contraceptives, many of which are abortifacients, for reasons of “reproductive health” is becoming official government policy in many Asian countries. Genetic engineering threatens the life of human embryos and considers them as simple objects of experimentation rather than as divinely gifted with human life and dignity.<sup>35</sup> All the above are death-dealing forces that we, on the basis of our faith, strongly condemn. At the same time, the increasing incidence of suicide and euthanasia in some countries points to a perceived emptiness of life, to the loss of meaning and of any motivation for life. All these are abetted by secularism and utilitarianism that ignore moral norms.

### **Social Communications**

26. A mega-trend that is developing in quantum leaps with enormous potentialities is Social Communications.<sup>36</sup> The means of social communications now seem to be the primary formator of values especially among the young. Because social communications have a grip on eyes, ears, mind, memory and imagination, their power to form attitudes and values is immeasurable. We strongly inveigh against the secularist, materialist, consumerist, and relativist values that they often

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<sup>35</sup> See *Caritas in veritate*, no. 28; for a valuable pastoral theological reflection on “Respect for Life in the Context of Asia,” see STAS chapter 8, pp. 377-418.

<sup>36</sup> Noteworthy are the *Final Considerations* of the 1999 meeting of Bishops sponsored by the FABC Office of Social Communications that reflected on the implications of John Naisbitt’s *Megatrends Asia* (New York, Simon & Schuster, 1997), on the Church’s work in Social Communications, see FAPA, vol. 3, pp. 165-70.

impart. But looking beyond the negative is a tremendous opportunity for evangelization. Social communications is a bewildering and exciting new *areopagus* of proclaiming the Good News. Social networking facilitates and creates relationships. The e-generation has emerged, with a free spirit, new interests, new attitudes, and new values. The potentialities of this mega-trend for the mission of new evangelization are incalculable.<sup>37</sup>

## Ecology

27. Natural disasters in various parts of Asia and especially the monumental disaster in Japan brought about by a destructive earthquake, tsunami, and nuclear power breakdown on March 11, 2011 bring the ecological question unto the world stage. The old challenge to the integrity of creation had consisted of rapid, indiscriminate and irresponsible deforestation leading to floods, droughts, soil erosion, and loss of life-support systems. Today the ecological question has to do with a far more urgent and destructive issue - that of global warming and climate change. The whole world is experiencing the disastrous signs of climate change. Our world is warming up with the uncontrolled emission of carbon dioxide into the atmosphere particularly in the developed world through the use of fossil-fuel. This creates a greenhouse effect that raises sea temperatures and water levels, breaks up glaciers, melts polar ice, results in extraordinary rainfalls, floods, and extreme weather changes and even the loss of species of animals and plants.

Even now hundreds of thousands are ecological refugees as they search for safer places away from floods and rising sea levels. Climate change is wreaking havoc on agricultural production and on sources of livelihood.

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<sup>37</sup> A Church response to the challenge of Social Communications comes from the FABC-OSC Bishops' Meet 2000 and 2001. See FAPA, vol. 3, pp. 171-77, especially the Bishops' Institute for Social Communications (BISCOM II), "Modern Communication Technologies: Challenge for the Church in Asia?" Bangkok, 1999, see FAPA, vol. 3, pp. 193-96.

We in Asia are becoming increasingly aware and concerned regarding the ecological problem and its ethical implications.<sup>38</sup> Local churches are collaborating with civil society to care for the integrity of creation. The local concern against polluting the atmosphere, irresponsible mining and logging, destructive fishing, indiscriminate use of pesticides, dumping of e-waste, etc., now extends to the macro-issue of global warming and climate change as well as to the need for intergenerational justice. This awareness, concern and action on the ecological challenge are being brought down to the level of the grassroots.<sup>39</sup>

### Laity

28. Although we continue to be truly concerned about the lack of informed faith among the laity, the passivity and non-participation of many, we are encouraged by the movement of lay “empowerment,” or the activation of lay charisms that are gifts of the Spirit at Baptism and Confirmation. This empowerment is taking place in local churches all over Asia. The seminal ideas of Vatican II on communion, co-responsibility, and participation have been brought down in Asia to the level of Basic Ecclesial Communities, ecclesial movements, and other faith communities, enabling lay people to participate actively in the mission of the Church, in decision making, and in action for social transformation.<sup>40</sup> The BEC movement is strongly needed in Asia where members of parish communities live very far from parish centers. Most of all intensive faith formation of the laity is

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<sup>38</sup> See *Final Statement*, FABC-MISEREOR Symposium, “Church Response to the Challenge of Climate Change in Asia: Towards a New Creation,” Bangkok, 20 October 2011.

<sup>39</sup>For illustrative Church responses to climate change, see Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace – MISEREOR, Rome South – South Dialogue Declaration, “Climate Change: A Call to Justice,” 1-2 October 2010; Final Statement of FABC – MISEREOR Seminar, “Church Response to the Challenge of Climate Change in Asia: Towards a New Creation,” Bangkok, 19-20 October 2012.

<sup>40</sup>The Bishops’ Institute for Lay Apostolate (BILA), first organized by the FABC Office of the Laity in 1984, has been significant in promoting lay empowerment.

imperative and will require a renewed catechesis that the Year of Faith is urging us to do.

## **Women**

29. For more than a decade now the Church in Asia has considered women as a major pastoral priority. Of most serious concern are discrimination against women, abuses against women and girl-children as in domestic violence, sex tourism and human trafficking. Traditional and cultural practices that exploit and repress women's rights, sometimes considering women as second class citizens cause utmost distress. We strongly denounce the abuse of women, migrant workers and the abortion of millions of unborn human beings simply because they are female or unwanted. At the same time, we observe in Asia a rising consciousness regarding the mutuality and equality of dignity and rights of man and woman, of gender awareness and sensitivity and the "empowerment" of women. Young women are at the vanguard of movements of freedom and peace, of the care for the integrity of creation. They actively participate in the Church's ministry of catechesis, liturgy, family life and youth, health, and social action.

This mega-trend calls the Church in Asia to deeper discernment, compassion and wisdom towards women. Not only do we need to recognize the objective equality of men and women before God but we also have to implement *relational* equality in daily life for a more effective and credible mission of evangelization and integral social transformation.

## **Youth**

30. It is more than 40 years since Asian Bishops gathered in Manila and, inspired by the message of Pope Paul VI, called the Church to be a "Church of the Poor" and a "Church of the Young".<sup>41</sup> Granting regional differences Asia remains to this day a continent of poor people and of young people. On the one hand, we observe young Asians who are seemingly restless,

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<sup>41</sup> See *Final Statement of Asian Bishops' Meeting, Manila, 1970.*



without direction, drifting into a sub-culture of the easy life, chemical dependency, rebellion, and despondency over meaninglessness and busy-ness. Deeply influenced by secularism and its loss of a sense of transcendence they think of the future as without hope and many just want to give up.

On the other hand, young people are at the forefront of social change, active in movements of freedom, justice, peace, human rights, and the care of the earth. In the Church they are taking their role as subjects of evangelization most seriously. They serve as catechists, lectors, peer counselors, social action workers, promoters of pro-life, and health workers. In a continent of the young, the challenge of the youth is full of hope for the Church in Asia.<sup>42</sup>

### **Pentecostalism**

31. Recent statistics show a certain decline in Church membership and at the same time a significant increase of membership in so called “born-again, bible-believing” Christians. We tend to console ourselves and say that numbers do not matter as much as quality. Yet the loss of a good number of the faithful to sects and other religious groups is undoubtedly a matter of serious concern. The question often asked is why? Why do so many of the flock go over to different religious sects? Why do religious sects attract them? These questions should make us reflect on how we evangelize, how we form the faith of the faithful, and what quality of fellowship our churches have. Providentially the challenge of Pentecostalism is being met with the phenomenal rise and spread of **Catholic renewal communities** such as charismatics, covenant communities, ecclesial movements in Asia, and especially Basic Ecclesial Communities (BEC or Small Christian Communities), parish or diocesan wide. BECs and SCCs as well as many other renewal

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<sup>42</sup>The gatherings of Asian Youth at the regularly held Asian Youth Day are a source of joy to the Church in Asia. They are organized by the Youth Desk of the FABC Office of the Laity. See, for example, *Final Statement of 4<sup>th</sup> Asian Youth Day, “Youth, Hope of Asian Families,”* Hong Kong, 30 July – 5 August 2006, in FAPA, vol. 4, pp. 167-71.

communities are Asian-born. They witness to the hunger of people for the Word of God and the Eucharist. They provide faith formation, the experience of joyful worship, fellowship and belongingness. They demonstrate the zeal and dedication of lay people to celebrate and witness to their faith in the Lord.

### **Vocations**

32. Although there may be a certain decline of vocations in more affluent sectors the Church in Asia, as in Africa, is enjoying a springtime of **vocations** to the priestly and religious life. For many decades now, despite our “minority status” in the Asian continent we have become a “sending Church.” Dioceses and religious congregations, both indigenous and foreign-born, are now sending lay people, religious, and priests as missionaries from their centers to other Asian countries and to all the other continents of the world. The depth and richness of the Asian spiritual sense is a firm basis for a culture of vocation and is certainly a factor for the great number of young men and women who respond to God’s call to the priestly and religious life and to mission.

### **Sub-Conclusion**

33. These mega-trends are the lights and shadows of an Asian world stirred to profound renewal by the Spirit of God. They offer immense possibilities and hope. Indeed, the positive mega-trends are moments of grace while the negatives are opportunities of grace. They all remind us of our God-given task to mend our Asian world, its broken relationships, the lack of harmony and peace between men and women, between ethnic, cultural and religious groups, between Asian humanity, creation and God. The ever active sanctifying Spirit of God is calling us to cooperate in the task of renewing our Asian world towards justice, integrity, unity, reconciliation, peace and harmony, and love. The call of the Spirit is a call to New Evangelization. On these mega-trends in the social, political, cultural, economic, religious and ecological situation we Asian Bishops offer a guide reflection in the light of our faith. How does our faith generally

explain the root causes of mega-trends? What directions does our faith offer in order that the Church may address these mega-trends?

### C. REFLECTING IN FAITH ON THE PASTORAL SITUATION, WE PRAY FOR GUIDANCE

In the beginning God created the heavens and earth. Everything that came from God was good. There was love, goodness, harmony and peace, a divinely created order.<sup>43</sup>

#### The Story of Creation

##### *God's Word and Creative Spirit – Love, Goodness, Harmony*

34. The two wonderful narratives of creation and the tragic story of sin in chapters 1-3 of the Book of Genesis express God's absolutely gratuitous love. Here we discover profound fundamental truths:

- The heavens and the earth had their origin in and through the word of God. At the very beginning the creative Spirit of God was at work (*Gen* 1:1-3, "a wind from God swept over the face of the waters" ...and "God said...");<sup>44</sup>
- God's creative word brought forth into being everything in heaven and earth, light and darkness, the land, seas and skies, all vegetation, night and day, every living creature that moves in the water and on land and God declared everything as "good" (vv. 3-25);
- At the pinnacle of this ordered creation is the human person. God uttered his creative word to bring man and woman together into being – in God's image. Between man

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<sup>43</sup> Useful material for this entire faith reflection is the work of the FABC Theological Advisory Commission, now called the Office of Theological Concerns (OTC), "Asian Christian Perspectives on Harmony," in STAS, chapter 4, pp. 111-66, especially pp. 139-46.

<sup>44</sup> Like many biblical scholars Pope John Paul II perceives the Holy Spirit in the "mighty wind," see *Ecclesia in Asia*, no. 15.

and woman there was the joy of communion: “bone of my bones, flesh of my flesh,” man and wife “become one flesh” (vv. 26-27; *Gen* 2:21-25);

- God blessed man and woman to multiply and fill the earth, to care for it and to have everything on earth for their responsible use. To have dominion over creation is to be responsible stewards of creation. This is the first mandate of solidarity between humankind and the rest of creation. It is at the root of the social and moral principle of the universal destination of created goods (vv. 28-30; *Gen* 2:18-20);
- Having shared his goodness and love with creation and humanity God unconditionally declared all creation as “indeed very good” and affirmed the “integrity of creation” (v. 31).
- The story of creation is, indeed, the story of God’s purely gratuitous love.

### *Rupture by Sin*

35. This pristine goodness of creation and of relationships among all creatures, between humanity and God was radically ruptured by the sin of disobedience to God the Creator due to human pride and overweening self-interest.<sup>45</sup> Brokenness entered the relationship between the Creator and humanity. Members of humanity began to blame one another, and the harshness and pain of caring for one another and for the earth began (*Gen* 3).

Yet even after the Fall the magnificence, beauty, order and harmony of the heavens and of the earth and the power of natural forces continue to strike us with awe and move us to humility and reverence. “O Lord our Sovereign, how majestic is your name in all the earth!” (*P*s 8:1, 9). How truly marvelous God is! Even in the midst of sinfulness in *Genesis* 3 humanity receives a protoevangelium. To the serpent, the Lord said: “I will put

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<sup>45</sup> See CSDC, nos. 115-16.

enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; he will strike you and you will strike his heel" (Gen 3:15).

### *Fundamental Principles*

#### **Communion and Solidarity of All Creation**

36. Thus at the time of Creation God already established the fundamental relationship of communion and solidarity between humanity and divinity, between man and woman, within the family, between family and community, and between humanity and the rest of creation.<sup>46</sup>

#### **God, the Source and Sustainer of Communion**

37. At the center of these relationships and holding them together is God. These fundamental relationships are in truth overarching religious, moral, and social principles that address major dimensions of the pastoral situation in Asia. The deep Asian sense of the sacred and religious is a basic acknowledgement of the pervading sacred horizon of God as Creator, the source of everything that exists. This Asian religious sense certainly serves as a powerful buffer to the subtle but powerful onslaught of a materialist, secular and an a-religious culture.<sup>47</sup>

#### **Centrality of the Human Person and Universal Communion**

38. As the very image of God, *imago Dei*, the human person is central in creation and has inviolable dignity and worth.<sup>48</sup> The centrality of the human person and the original solidarity of the human family directly address situations where human freedom, human dignity and human rights are violated, abused or repressed. The same fundamental principles likewise address

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<sup>46</sup> See CCC, nos. 340-44, 360-61.

<sup>47</sup> See CCC, no. 301-02.

<sup>48</sup> See CCC, nos. 356-57; CSDC, nos. 111-14, 132-33.

such death-dealing forces as the caste system, the inhumane treatment of many migrants, minority-majority cultural, political, economic and religious conflicts, violent and terrorist extremism in the name of religion, and the repression of human freedom by totalitarian and dictatorial regimes.

39. The love, unity, complementarity, and solidarity of man and woman in the Garden of Eden, their divine gift of intimate communion,<sup>49</sup> challenge today's broken family relationships, the disregard of marital vows, the disrespect given to the God-willed marriage as between man and woman. These fundamental principles denounce gender discrimination, the various forms of abuse and exploitation of women, and the evils of social customs and practices that categorize women as subservient to men.

### **The Universal Destination of Created Goods**

40. The original communion and solidarity that existed at the beginning between humanity and the rest of creation – a situation declared by God as “good,” and implied as well in God's mandate to cultivate and care for the earth – are moral and social principles that are urgent in our day. “God destined the earth and all it contains for all men and all peoples so that all created things would be shared fairly by all mankind under the guidance of justice tempered by charity.”<sup>50</sup> These are the social and moral principles of the universal destination of created goods, based on the communion and solidarity of all creation. They strongly indict the power of the few to control the use of natural resources that at the time of creation God destined for the use of all humanity. These same principles denounce the continuous destruction of our natural resources, forests, seas, fauna and flora where the common good of the present and future generations is sacrificed for short-term economic gains. It is most tragic that in many cases such destruction is now irreparable and irreversible.

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<sup>49</sup> See CCC, nos. 369-72.

<sup>50</sup> *Gaudium et spes*, no. 583; see also CCC, nos. 299, 2402-03; CSDC, nos. 171-72.

## **Responsible Stewardship of the Integrity of Creation**

41. In the covenant of creation, God's mandate for humanity to subdue creation and have dominion over it is nothing more and nothing less than to cultivate the earth and care for it for the sake of all (*Gen 2:15*).<sup>51</sup> Humanity is the steward of God's creation responsibly making use of creation for the good of humanity. When the principles of stewardship and the "goodness" or integrity of creation, including its beauty and harmony of order, and the universal destination of created goods are wantonly violated we do grave injustice to creation and to generations yet to come. Such are the ethical implications of global warming and climate change. The words of King Solomon are most relevant. He rightly understood that to have dominion over the creatures God had made is to rule over it "in holiness and righteousness." And so he prayed to God for wisdom (see *Wisdom 9, 1-3*).

42. As a final note, since the time of Genesis the understanding of the origin and development of the universe has changed, for example, by "heavens" today we understand a vast universe of stars, planets and galaxies beyond our ken. Our faith in God as Creator would certainly include all these and all the worlds not yet discovered – the entire Cosmos as God's creative handiwork.

## **Telling the Story of Jesus – God's Gratuitous Love**

43. Our faith reflection goes further – into the heart of Sacred Scriptures. How does the pristine goodness of the created world and of humanity as well as its rupture by sin relate to the event of salvation wrought by the Lord Jesus? This question is best answered by telling the magnificent story of Jesus.

## **Proclaiming the Kingdom of God**

44. The gratuitous love of God manifested in Creation is never as dramatically demonstrated as in the Jesus-event. This is the story that we tell in Asia – Jesus the Compassion of God.

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<sup>51</sup> See CCC, no. 373; CSDC, nos. 460, 467, 470.

In the very first chapter of the Gospel of Mark, Jesus appears quite suddenly like a meteor flashing through the skies. He is in the prime of his life, energetic, peripatetic, and prophetic. A poor man from Galilee, he begins proclaiming what people had been dreaming of for ages: "The Kingdom of God is at hand. Repent and believe in the Gospel" (*Mk* 1:15). This is both promise and fulfillment. He promises God's justice and truth, God's peace and love - the restoration of universal harmony long craved for by a broken world. His message goes far beyond the understanding of his contemporaries. For them the coming of the Kingdom was simply the triumphant return of a Davidic kingdom. He begins to fulfill the promise of God's Reign through his own example, his parables and miraculous deeds.

### **Human Dignity, Solidarity and Communion, Preferential Love of the Poor**

45. Born of poor Asian parents from an obscure Asian village he takes the side of the poor. He is Spirit-filled, Spirit-driven (*Lk* 3:22; 4:1, 14, 18-21). He proclaims the poor blessed (*Lk* 6:20). He reverses the order of values of this world thereby restoring the human dignity of those considered by society as social outcasts and sinners. His extraordinary statement of Beatitudes (*Lk* 6: 22; *Mt* 5:3-12) for those in the underside of history and those who with their minds and hearts pursue righteousness and peace is a veritable charter of God's Kingdom. He forgives sinners (*Mk* 2:5; *Mt* 7:48, 50), heals the sick with his touch and words (*Mk* 1:40-41; 2:10-11; 3:1-5; 5:25-34), he raises the dead to life (*Mk* 5:35-42; 6:53-56; 7:22-26), he expels unclean spirits (*Mk* 1:21-27; 5:1-13; 9:14-28). The power of the Kingdom is irrupting into our space and time, forgiving, making whole, and restoring life.

Jesus calls the poor to fellowship with him, thus affirming their human dignity as well as God's preferential love of the poor. He raises his disciples to communion with God whom he calls endearingly in love, "Abba, Father." He extends this communion to all who believe in him, telling them to call upon God in prayer as "Abba" (*Lk* 11: 1-4). It is in faith and total trust in the Father that we are to pray. In his encounters with the needy, Jesus insists



on faith and rewards faith (*Mt* 8:13; 17:19). "If you have faith the size of a mustard seed, you will say to this mountain, 'Move from here to there,' and it will move; and nothing will be impossible for you" (*Mt* 17:20-21). "Your faith has saved you" (*Mt* 7:50). With his words and deeds, he leads men and women, the poor and the rich, the sick and the healthy, the outcast and the powerful to have faith and thus to love. And he weeps over the unbelief of Jerusalem (*Lk* 19:41).

### **God's Universal Love, the Harmony of Creation, the Centrality of the Human Person**

46. He teaches the most profound truths in simple stories and parables. His listeners are rapt in attention as he describes God's providence for the beautiful lilies of the field and the blithe birds in the skies. But he insists that God's benevolent care of the human person is central and transcendent (*Lk* 12:22-29; *Mt* 6:25-34). He tells of the seed sown on different kinds of soil (*Lk* 8:4-15; *Mk* 4:2-9; *Mt* 13:1-23), seeds quietly growing unnoticed (*Mk* 4:26-29), the smallest seed growing into the biggest of trees where the birds of the sky make their nest (*Lk* 13:18-19; *Mt* 13:31-32; *Mk* 4:30-32), the treasure found in a field (*Mt* 13:44), the pearl of great price (*Mt* 13:45). He tells them of cosmic order and of the portents of the skies, the signs of imminent good or bad weather (*Mt* 16:2-3) and of coming rain and heat (*Lk* 12:54), of sun rising and rain falling upon both the good and the bad (*Mt* 5:45). He demonstrates his mastery over creation, stilling the storm at sea (*Mt* 8:23-27; *Mk* 4:35-41; *Lk* 8:22-25) and walking on the water (*Mk* 6:47-52; *Mt* 14:22-33; *Jn* 6:16-21).

From these stories and events and from many others scattered in the four Gospels, the thousands who listened to Jesus learned of the nature of God's Reign and its growth from small beginnings, the universal loving providence of God, the beauty and harmony of creation, the centrality of the human person, love of one's enemies, God's special love of the poor and the needy.

The Kingdom is for Jesus of paramount and irreplaceable priority, "Seek first the Kingdom of God and everything else will be given to you" (*Lk* 12: 31). Finally Jesus speaks of communion

with him and with God his Father in the imagery of the Vine and its branches (*Jn* 15:1-6).

### **Justice, Integrity and Service Beyond Conventions**

47. Jesus' words and his actions bespeak of astonishing authority that amazes people (*Mt* 7:29). He scandalizes and infuriates the self-righteous when he heals a man on the Sabbath (*Lk* 6:6-11; *Mt* 12:9-14; *Mk* 3:1-6; see also *Jn* 5:16). Breaking the conventions of the times, he speaks freely with a Samaritan woman (*Jn* 4:7 ff, 27) and blesses those who do not seem to count in society, widows, orphans and strangers. He drives out merchants and moneychangers from the place of prayer (*Mk* 11:15-18; *Jn* 2:13-22; *Mt* 21:12-13; *Lk* 19:45-46). He teaches that one cannot serve both God and mammon (*Mt* 6:24; *Lk* 16:13). He approaches and touches lepers and heals them. He courageously denounces the attitudes of religious and political leaders as hypocritical (*Mt* 23). They have neglected, he says, "the weightier matters of the law," the sacred values of justice, mercy, and faith (*Mt* 23:23).

His teaching is neither mere words nor empty action. His very life is a witness to what he teaches. As a teacher of extraordinary personal integrity he is totally credible and effective. Yet while his disciples call him teacher and Lord he is the one who serves (*Jn* 13:3-16) and goes about doing good (*Acts* 10:38).

By his words and actions Jesus brings back his hearers to the fundamentals of faith – love, compassion, justice, integrity, the priority of the spirit over the body, the priority of people over rules, regulations and traditions, the priority of the interior heart over externals. His integrity, justice, and selfless service address the lack of a sense of the public good, the authoritarianism, and the endemic corruption in our Asian societies.

### **Paschal Mystery, Redemption, New Creation**

48. The totally gratuitous love of God at Creation reaches its climax in Jesus' Passion, Death and Resurrection. In the *kenosis* of his Passion and Death Jesus demonstrates the depth of his love for us, utterly emptying himself taking the form of a slave. Such

love the world has never seen! It is the infinite love of God. Jesus himself told Nicodemus of this indescribable love: "For God so loved the world 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 manner of Jesus' sacrificial love becomes more and more explicit in the Gospel according to John: "And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself. He said this to indicate the kind of death he was to die" (*Jn* 12: 32-33). As in the act of Creation, so in the mystery of Redemption, the initiative of the Father is the reason for humanity's bond with God: "No one can come to me unless drawn by the Father who sent me" (*Jn* 6:44).

But Redemption is not only about humanity restored to God. It is also about the whole of Creation. Creation is in travail as it waits to share in the "glorious freedom of the children of God" (see *Rom* 8:19-22). The Paschal Mystery of the Word made flesh heals all broken relationships including the disorder of Creation due to humanity's primordial sin. "For in him (Jesus Christ) all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell and through him God was pleased to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, by making peace through the blood of his cross" (*Col* 1: 19-20). Indeed, God's plan in "the fullness of time" is "to gather up all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth" (*Eph* 1:11; *Col* 1:20).

49. Paul speaks about those who believe in the Lord and are in him as a "new creation... everything has become new!" (*2 Cor* 5:17). The imagery looks back to the words of Isaiah the prophet: "I am about to do a new thing; ... I will make a way in the wilderness and rivers in the desert. The wild animals will honor me..." (*Is* 43:19-21). The imagery looks forward to the *eschaton*: "Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away... And the one who was seated on the throne said, 'See I am making all things new'" (*Rev* 21: 1-5).

Through the Paschal Mystery of Jesus, all broken relationships between individuals and people, between cultures, and ethnic groups, between humanity, Creation and God are restored in

him, transforming the entire world into a “new creation.” Cosmic harmony is established by the Cosmic Christ so that “God may be all in all” (1 Cor 15:28; see Eph 4:6).

50. But human freedom does not always conform to Christ’s redemptive grace. Pride, selfishness, and greed continue to destroy creation, disrespect the human person, violate or suppress human rights, discriminate against others, cause wars, perpetrate violence, break the harmony of human relationships, oppress the poor and the needy, etc. Still, in the midst of this chaos of sinfulness and standing over it, is the Risen Christ, our Life and Light, Lord of the Cosmos, who gives us hope of continuing Redemption.

This is the stupendous story of Jesus, the poor Asian, Healer, Teacher, the Suffering Servant, Redeemer, Restorer of Harmony, Solidarity, and Communion, our Peace and Reconciliation, Savior and Lord.

In this jubilee year the Spirit of the Lord bids the Church in Asia to recommit herself to the mission of the Lord, to tell his story, be a credible witness to the Risen Christ and be a sign and sacrament of His redeeming work.

#### **D. RESPONDING TO THE PASTORAL CHALLENGES, WE PRAY FOR GENEROSITY AND COURAGE**

51. For this perennial mission we reaffirm our conviction that the proclamation of Jesus as the Lord and Savior of the world is the very heart of evangelization. We reaffirm the enduring validity of the initial insight of FABC in 1974 that our mode of evangelizing is by way of dialogue, particularly the triple dialogue with the peoples of Asia, especially with the poor, with the rich and ancient cultures of Asian peoples, and with their many religious and philosophical traditions.<sup>52</sup> Our overarching pastoral priority remains that of building the Local Church as the subject of evangelization.

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<sup>52</sup> The Bishops of Myanmar have raised the idea of a “quadruple dialogue,” that would include a dialogue with atheism, the product of either radical secularism or of political ideology.

## **Basic Postulates of the Church's Response**

To respond credibly and effectively to the mega-trends in Asia and within the Church that affect our faith and its proclamation we return, in a spirit of renewal, to our basic identity as Church-in-mission and disciples of the Lord. This identity includes the following fundamental and inseparable dimensions:

### **The Prophetic Role of the Church**

52. The Risen Lord bequeathed to the Apostles and disciples a prophetic identity such as that of the prophets of old – to teach all nations what he has commanded. The prophetic identity requires a mind-set and a worldview. The mindset is to be totally conformed to the mind of Christ, as St. Paul reminds us: “Have among yourselves the same attitude that Christ Jesus had” (*Phil* 2:3). The worldview is to regard discipleship and apostolicity as being immersed in and engaged with the world while adhering to values that are not of this world but are of the Reign of God (*Jn* 17:11, 14, 16, 18). As Paul reminds us: “Do not conform yourselves to this age but be transformed by the renewal of your mind; that you may discern what is good and pleasing and perfect” (*Rom* 12:2).

The Church is a prophet who receives and proclaims the word of God and serves as a countersign to the prevailing values of today's secularist and materialist spirit.<sup>53</sup>

### **A New Evangelization**

53. In most of Asia, as in Mongolia where Catholic presence is only 20 years old, the paramount need is for “first proclamation”.<sup>54</sup> It is noteworthy that with only a few hundred Catholic families, the local church in Mongolia looks towards a catechumenate faith formation program and the building of Basic Ecclesial Communities as a pastoral vision. However, given the worldwide influence of the secularist and materialist spirit on the cultural, social, economic, social communications, scientific and

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<sup>53</sup> See *Propositio* 8, “Witnessing in a Secularized World.”

<sup>54</sup> Cf. *Propositio* 9, “New Evangelization and First Proclamation.”

technological, civic and political sectors of life,<sup>55</sup> a renewed faith is necessary. A New Evangelization is imperative. Recalling the axiom that no evangelization can be authentic without proclaiming Jesus, the New Evangelization requires a renewed proclamation of Jesus, “new in its ardor, methods and expression”,<sup>56</sup> We do recall that from its very beginning the FABC has been promoting a new evangelization by its vision of a Church in Asia becoming a “*new way of being Church.*” The New Evangelization has to take in the whole of creation, which the post-modern mind is emptying of its sacredness, its divine origin, its religious and moral dimension, and its divine destiny. The New Evangelization has to insist on the religious and moral character of God’s Creation where God dwells in many and various ways. Like Christ driving away the vendors and moneychangers from the Outer Court of the Temple, the Church in Asia has to have a restless zeal for the Father’s house (cf. *Jn* 2:17) where worship of the Creator, Redeemer, and Sanctifier is unending and where heartfelt gratitude for God’s handiwork is “right and just.”

### **The Word of God, the Mystical and Liturgical Dimension of Our Pastoral Response**

54. Our pastoral response must come from the heart, a heart that listens to the Word of God and proclaims the Word.<sup>57</sup> A deep personal encounter with Jesus, the Word of God, is basic to the New Evangelization. “This is the ‘contemplative dimension’ of the New Evangelization which is nourished continually through prayer, beginning with the liturgy, especially the Eucharist, source and summit of the life of the Church.”<sup>58</sup> Despite the inroads of the post-modern world the peoples of Asia still have a

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<sup>55</sup> See Synod of Bishops on the New Evangelization for the Transmission of the Christian Faith, *Instrumentum Laboris*, nos. 51-67.

<sup>56</sup> John Paul II, *Discourse* to the XIX Assembly of C.E.L.A.M, March 9, 1983.

<sup>57</sup> See *Propositio* 11, “New Evangelization and Prayerful Reading of Sacred Scriptures.”

<sup>58</sup> *Propositio* 36, “Spiritual Dimension of the New Evangelization.”

strong “mystical” dimension, a lively sense of God the Absolute One, a lived experience of transcendence, and consequently a constant recourse to prayer. How inspired we were, indeed, by a sharing in this Assembly that when there were no priests and no sacraments it was the prayer of the faithful, especially the Rosary, which kept their faith alive!

Just as Paul VI,<sup>59</sup> Benedict XVI emphasizes prayer:

Development needs Christians with their arms raised towards God in prayer, Christians moved by the knowledge that truth-filled love, *caritas in veritate*, from which authentic development proceeds, is not produced by us, but given to us. For this reason, even in the most difficult and complex times, besides recognizing what is happening, we must above all else turn to God’s love.<sup>60</sup>

Previous FABC Plenary Assemblies have pointed out the need for *holy evangelizers, men and women of deep God-experience*.<sup>61</sup> If, indeed, in many places in Asia the silent witness of one’s Christian life is the only way of proclaiming Jesus as the Lord and Savior,<sup>62</sup> one can see how such God-experience is necessary and crucial.

## **Spirituality of Communion**

55. A spirituality of communion is the spirituality for our times. It is a spirituality of discipleship, of following in the footsteps of Jesus, whose communion with *Abba* his Father meant a mission of love for humankind and the cosmos. It is rooted in the Trinitarian communion of love that flows into communion with one’s neighbor, with creation, communion in the family, and the Church as communion. It is a spirituality that responds from the depths of the spirit to the brokenness and disharmonies of our Asian world. With such spirituality we become persons of God-experience, credible and effective in telling the story of Jesus

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<sup>59</sup> Cf. *Populorum progressio*, nos. 20, 75.

<sup>60</sup> See *Caritas in veritate*, no. 79.

<sup>61</sup> E.g., FABC V, *Final Statement* in FAPA, vol. 1, pp. 288-89.

<sup>62</sup> See *Ecclesia in Asia*, no. 23.

to Asia.<sup>63</sup> A pastoral and practical demonstration of a spirituality of communion would be the solidarity and cooperation in the mission of evangelization at various levels of the Church, within the local church and among local churches.

### **The Holy Spirit and New Evangelization**

56. Just as Jesus was Spirit-filled and Spirit-driven as he journeyed through the length and breadth of Palestine preaching the coming of the Reign of God, so must his disciples be filled with the Spirit and led by the Spirit. Jesus promised them the Holy Spirit. "When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you to all the truth... he will take what is mine and declare it to you" (*Jn* 16: 12-14). "The Holy Spirit whom the Father will send in my name, he will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you" (*Jn* 14:26).

It was a promise fulfilled on Pentecost day. Gathered in prayer with Mary, the Mother of the Lord, the Holy Spirit descended upon them and transformed their fear and timidity into courage, daring, and zeal. Spirit-filled and Spirit-driven they went forth to evangelize the world, proclaiming the Risen Lord as the Savior of the world. The Holy Spirit is the Spirit of the New Evangelization. He awakens our faith and communicates to us the new life which is "to know the Father and the one whom he has sent, Jesus Christ". It is the Holy Spirit who makes a new evangelization credible and effective. Through him we pray, in him we are united with Christ, with him we evangelize with new fervor, creativity, and zeal.

Ultimately it is the Triune God, Father, Son and Spirit who builds his house – the Church and the Cosmos. With his grace we are co-builders in the religious, cultural, social, scientific and technological, civic and political, economic, social communications and ecological spheres of Asian life.

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<sup>63</sup> On spirituality of communion see FABC V, *Final Statement* in FAPA vol. 1, pp. 288-89; FABC VI, *Final Statement* in FAPA, vol.2, pp. 6-8; FABC VIII, *Final Document*, 2004, in FAPA, vol. 3, pp. 39-40; see also OTC paper "Asian Christian Perspectives on Harmony," 1996, in STAS, Chapter 4, pp. 151-64; Pope John Paul II, *Ecclesia in Asia*, no. 24.



## CONCLUSION: PRAYER TO OUR BLESSED MOTHER

57. Attaching the resolutions of this Assembly we close our reflections by invoking the assistance of our Blessed Mother:

O Mary, our Blessed Mother,  
You listened and said "Yes" to the word of God.  
And thus in Asia you brought forth Jesus, the only begotten Son of God.  
Help us, O Woman of the Word, to listen and say "Yes" to God's word  
that summons us to proclaim your Son as our Lord and Savior.

Overshadowed by the Holy Spirit, you reflected and pondered on God's word.  
Intercede for us that the Spirit may grant us a discerning heart  
so that we may discover His presence and activity  
amid the daunting challenges facing us in Asia.

You were the first of the Lord's disciples.  
O Mother of all Disciples, pray for us  
that we may follow Jesus more closely and be conformed  
to his mind and values rather than to those of our secularized world.

Your faith in God and in your Son brought you bravely to the Cross.  
Help us, O Woman of Faith, to know, deepen and live our faith  
that we too may bear our cross in the suffering and sorrows  
of Asian peoples and guide them to the light of the Resurrection.

At Pentecost you were in the midst of the Apostles in prayer.

Assist us that we may be filled with the Holy Spirit and be united with your Son in holiness through the Eucharist, prayer and “faith working through love,” (Gal. 5:6) ready and eager to tell the story of your Son with new fervor and zeal.

We entrust ourselves and our mission of New Evangelization to you, O Mother of Asia, our Star of Evangelization. Remember us before the Lord today and always. Amen.

## **PASTORAL RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE X FABC PLENARY ASSEMBLY**

Our Plenary Assembly has proposed a number of recommendations for New Evangelization, on knowing, living and sharing our faith in Asia. We have selected a few of them to address the megatrends and ecclesial realities in Asia and we recommend them to the entire Church in Asia:

### **ON THE GREAT PRIORITY**

1. That every local church at all its levels discern a concrete plan of action to develop and nurture a deeper sense of urgency for new evangelization. That practical steps are taken for such formation of all sections of the Church especially of the laity making use of the Small Christian Communities as the milieu for such an effort.

### **ON FAITH FORMATION**

2. That all our institutions from Diocesan to Parochial, particularly educational institutions make special effort for the faith formation and value education of all people especially the young so that they will be able to respond with Christian maturity to the process of secularization.

That the long cherished Asian values be fostered among the younger generation.

## ON MEGATRENDS AND ECCLESIAL REALITIES

### *Poverty*

3. That local churches, keeping in mind the Asian pastoral preference for living dialogue with the poor, promote a culture of evangelical poverty and foster among all pastoral agents, particularly among bishops, priests and religious, a deep concern for the poor so as to credibly witness to the Lord Jesus who himself had a preferential love for the poor.

### *Threats to Life*

4. That Episcopal Conferences and local churches promote a “culture of life” in response to the growing “culture of death”, to the issues of abortion and to all other unacceptable initiatives for reproductive health and inculcate responsible parenthood and natural family planning. Such concern needs to be expressed in supporting movements and organizations in Asia that engage in the defense of life. That we also need to keep in mind that the ‘culture of death’ extends to the lives of millions of Asians threatened by hunger, malnutrition, unemployment, criminal activities, environmental exploitation, violence, war, terrorism and other similar causes.

### *Dialogue and Peace*

5. That in view of the 50th Anniversary of *Pacem in Terris*, the Episcopal Conferences, local churches, and FABC offices intensify their efforts in building a culture of peace using distinctly Christian approaches such as dialogue, reconciliation and forgiveness, and especially by establishing better relations with other cultures, religions and also with secular movements in order to achieve their noble goals.

6. That in view of the positive experience of the X FABC Plenary Assembly in Vietnam, FABC encourage a continued dialogue between the Church in Vietnam and the government and indeed between all Churches in the FABC territory and their respective governments. A similar dialogue between the Holy See and China is also encouraged with a hope that a future FABC Plenary Assembly may soon take place in that great country.

### *Ecology*

7. That the entire Church in Asia inculcate a new sense of environmental responsibility among all its members making it part of spirituality, Christian practice and ministry. That the FABC Offices collaborate and network with one another and with other concerned groups on the burning issues related to ecology and climate change. The teaching of the recent popes and of FABC on this important and urgent issue should form part of the formation of Christians. Disseminating the FABC Climate Change Declaration may be one concrete step towards this goal.

That the Office of Theological Concerns develop a Theology of Creation taking into account the urgent concerns of contemporary Asian realities.

### *Migrants and Itinerant Peoples*

8. That a network of pastoral care for migrant workers and itinerant people and their families be established by the sending and receiving communities.
9. That a systematic faith-formation program for migrant workers be developed so that they could be effective witnesses to the Gospel and evangelizers themselves in their places of work.

### *Indigenous Peoples*

10. That the Episcopal Conferences and local churches provide effective spiritual and pastoral assistance for the integral

growth of indigenous peoples and the preservation of the values in their cultures. That since openness of indigenous peoples to the Gospel is one of the signs of the times it should be matched by a greater commitment to their evangelization.

#### **ON ENGAGEMENT WITH THE MODERN WORLD**

11. That we promote a prophetically critical and at the same time a discerning approach to the emerging trends of post-modernism and forces of secularization and globalization in Asia, avoiding any form of pessimistic, condemnatory or aggressive stance which might prevent the Christian community from entering into a constructive dialogue with them, upholding the centrality of God and religion in human life and preserving a sense of the sacred.

#### **GENERAL RECOMMENDATION**

12. That Episcopal Conferences, particular and local churches make available the FABC Plenary Assembly documents in local languages so that the thinking of Asian Bishops regarding the renewal of the Church in Asia may be accessible to our people. Furthermore, these documents should be resources for initial and on-going formation programs for pastoral agents.

#### **COMMITMENT**

In this Year of Faith and on the occasion of the 40th anniversary of the FABC we firmly commit ourselves and our resources to the Church's mission of New Evangelization – to proclaim Jesus as the Lord and Savior and to tell his story to the peoples of Asia with 'new ardor, new methods and new expressions' – in triple dialogue.

## II. FINAL MESSAGE - Renewed Evangelizers for New Evangelization in Asia

“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 (FABC) were gathered together in Xuan Loc and Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam, from 10 to 16 December 2012, for the X FABC Plenary Assembly. 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).

### Gratitude

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 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the opening of the Second Vatican Council, the 20<sup>th</sup> 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.

### **Week of Faith**

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.

## **Spirituality of New Evangelization**

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 40<sup>th</sup> 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 & Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam  
16 December 2012

### **III. APPENDIX**

#### **A. Homily at Solemn Opening Mass by Gaudencio B. Cardinal Rosales, Papal Envoy, Archbishop Emeritus of Manila**

Your Eminences, Your Excellences, Reverend Fathers, sisters, our brothers and sisters, the officials from the civil government, seminarians and all beloved ones.

If you will permit me, I will make this homily short, two to three minutes because I have a long message from the letter of Pope Benedict at the end of the Eucharist. The gospel tells about a shepherd who tends his flock, and one disappeared. The Lord Jesus, in the Gospel says, the good shepherd will leave the ninety nine and will go after the lost one. We know the context of the Lord’s saying. The shepherd does not really own all the sheep. In the Jewish context, there could be two, three, or even ten owners. The shepherd merely takes care of them, and they follow his voice. The task of the shepherd is to take care of each one. The shepherd tends them, and this is his task, his obligation and his responsibility to the owners, that is to protect the flock, and that is it. You can see why even one is important.

We must reflect on our task as shepherds, bishops, priests, and deacons. The flock is not ours, but it is our task, our obligation and our responsibility to care for it. We must remember that the Lord said it is the Father’s will that not one should be lost. What does that say about the many? When the owner is such that he loves, none should be lost.

In the context of Asia, I do not want to surprise you. It is my reflection, you can do your own reflection afterwards. We have only one, a small flock, and the many, the ninety nine are not with us, especially here in Asia, we are caring for one and the ninety nine are out there.

Within the context of today's Gospel, as we begin the FABC Plenary Assembly, the will of the Father remains the same. Brothers and sisters, we have to leave the one and go after the ninety nine.

+ Gaudencio B. Cardinal Rosales  
Archbishop – Emeritus of Manila  
Extraordinary Delegate of FABC

## **B. Letter of the Holy Father to the Papal Envoy**



*To Our Venerable Brother  
Gaudencio B. Rosales, Cardinal of the Holy Roman Church  
Former Metropolitan Archbishop of Manila*

The subject of the New Evangelization, which we propose to all the faithful, defines in a singular way an aspect of Our Pontificate and offers to the entire Church a special occasion to reflect on how to fulfill her mission with still greater attention. We note gladly all the initiatives being undertaken by the Bishops throughout the world in order to disseminate the Gospel: We accompany these initiatives with Our Prayers.

It was thus with joyful and grateful heart that we have learned that in the coming month of December, the 10<sup>th</sup> Plenary Congress of the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences will be held in Vietnam on the occasion of the Federation's establishment forty years ago. In that Congress, the Bishops will treat the subject of "Evangelization, Inculturation and Dialogue in Asia", while they examine the spiritual journey of the peoples of this continent under various aspects.

Given the importance of the event, Our Venerable Brothers John Baptist Cardinal Pham Minh Man, Archbishop of Ho Chi Minh, and Oswald Cardinal Gracias, Archbishop of

Bombay and the Federation's Secretary General, have graciously requested that We designate an illustrious Cardinal to participate in the Congress and deliver words of spiritual encouragement. Willingly assenting to this request We hasten to approach you, Our Venerable Brother, son of the Philippines, who live in and have known Asia.

Hence, with this letter we name you as OUR EXTRAORDINARY DELEGATE to the 10<sup>th</sup> Plenary Congress of the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences, which will be held from the 10<sup>th</sup> to the 16<sup>th</sup> of the month of December at the Xuan Loc Diocese Pastoral Centre, and will be concluded solemnly in the Cathedral of Ho Chi Minh.

In that Congress you will represent Us and openly express Our charity to the Bishops and through them to the beloved faithful of Asia, whom you will exhort to a more assiduous imitation of Christ. It is their duty to manifest by their renewed strength and zeal the love of Christ, the Church and the Gospel. Burning with the virtue of faith, they should foster human culture and diligently pursue dialogue among peoples. On Our part, We shall accompany you, Our Venerable Brother, in the fulfilment of your mission. Lastly, We gladly impart Our Apostolic Blessing upon you: it is a sign of Our Benevolence toward you and a pledge of heavenly gifts, which you will convey to all the participants of the Congress.

*From the Vatican City, on the 24th day of the month of October 2012, the eighth year of Our Pontificate.*

**BENEDICTUS PP XVI**

**C. "FABC at Forty" – Message after Solemn Opening Mass by Gaudencio B. Cardinal Rosales, Papal Envoy, Archbishop Emeritus of Manila**

At the occasion of the consecration of the Manila Cathedral, December 7, 1958, and at the invitation of Manila Archbishop Rufino J. Santos, the Arch/Bishops of Asia were invited. The Vatican sent Cardinal Agagianian, Prefect of

Propaganda Fide, as Papal Legate; and the desire for harmonious and collaborative work among Bishops including the needs of evangelization in continental Asia in the 50's were discussed. From that historic meeting of Asian Bishops in Manila Radio Veritas was born.

Pope Paul VI, in his pastoral visit to the Philippines in November 1970 said this: "You have before you an immense field for your apostolate. It is difficult to speak of Asia as a whole since more than half of mankind lives here. One can however point to a certain network of common interests, a certain identity in the way of looking at life and a certain harmony of aspirations. Young in its peoples but rich in civilizations often thousands of years old, Asia is impelled as by an irresistible desire to occupy her rightful place in the world, and her influence is effectively increasing" (Paul VI, *Address to all Bishops of Asia*, Manila, Nov. 28, 1970). Those words sounded like they were pronounced only yesterday.

The same Supreme Pontiff continued by encouraging the Asian Bishops to take the then recently concluded Ecumenical Council as guide in their Asian Pastoral Ministry. Noting that the "natural disposition of Asian people for religious mystery" could serve as a sign of their call to Christian revelation", he further added that the missionary vocations in this continent would be the sign of the maturity of Asia's local churches.

Not long after that first Papal visit to Asia, a select group of leading Asian Church men met at the Jesuit Francis Xavier Provincial House in Manila, with the Jesuit Provincial, then Father Horacio de la Costa, assisting them. They were Cardinals Valerian Gracias of Bombay, Stephen Kim of Seoul, Justin Darmojuwono of Semarang, Bishops Stanislaus Lokuang of Taipei, Francis Hsu of Hong Kong and Mariano Gaviola of the Philippines. Taking off from Vatican II's *Christus Dominus* on the need of regional conferences, this handful of Bishops, inspired by the Spirit prayed and later accepted that there was a great need for a regional conference of Bishops in Asia. Most insistent and taking the firmest initiative among these, rightly called, FABC Fathers, was Cardinal Stephen Kim of Korea who practically directed the group towards the establishment of the regional



conference which, in fact, would take place only at the Taipeh Conference.

As we recall the role of these leading Church men in Asia in the founding of FABC, we include, in grateful memory, the role of the Reverend Father Catalino Arevalo, S. J., Asia's eminent theologian, who, out of his love for the Church, has guided the development of Asian theology, refined the theological thought of many a theological-pastoral statement of Bishops for nearly forty (40) years.

Everything was preparatory, until 1974 when the Bishops of Asia finally met in the historic Taipeh Conference, where the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences (FABC) was formally established. It was in that Conference where Asia's Bishops, reflecting on the situation, history and needs of the Asian people decidedly assigned to themselves the challenges of Evangelization among their people: the triple dialogue (a) the Dialogue with the old Religions of Asia, (b) the dialogue with the rich cultures of Asia, and (c) dialogue with the poor. The Triple Dialogue accepted by Asia's Bishops in Taipeh truly was the response to the needs of the people in this oriental continent; but it was also their acceptance of the proposal of Pope Paul VI's Encyclical, *Ecclesiam Suam*, where dialogue was presented as an efficient means to Evangelization.

Significant themes have been discussed and reflected on by FABC the past 40 years: Evangelization in Modern Day Asia, in 1974; Prayer: the life of the Church in Asia, 1978; the Church, a Community of Faith in Asia, 1982; the Vocation and Mission of the laity in Asia, 1986; Journey Together to the Third Millennium, 1990; Christian Discipleship in Asia: Service to Life, 1995; a Renewed Church in Asia: Mission of Love and Service, 2000; the Asian Family: Towards a Culture of Integral Life, 2004; Living the Eucharist in Asia, 2009.

Worth mentioning too was the Asian Bishops' participation in the celebrated International Mission Congress in Manila (1979) the first ever in this part of the world whose final message became something like an "Asian Magna Charta" for local church mission and evangelization labours.

All these initiatives of the Asian Bishops towards an ever impassioned manner of reaching out to people with the message of Jesus, as also taking place in other parts of the world, but with greater challenges for the Pastors in Asia, are what the Holy Father Pope Benedict XVI said he appreciates and accompanies with his prayers.

We look back at those grace-filled years of evangelization in Asia; and we thank God for what have been accomplished, and how those experiences have challenged all to further reach out towards the “fullness of life” that the Lord promised to those who accept Him.

From this celebration of forty years we have the duty to “look ahead” to what the call of the grace of evangelization is drawing us. This year also two events have just been inaugurated in the Church, “The Year of Faith” and “the New Evangelization”.

In his homily at the closing of the recent Synod on the New Evangelization, His Holiness Pope Benedict XVI reminded Bishops, Priests and the Laity that the new evangelization applies to *all* in the Church.

First, it will concern the faithful in the Sacrament of Christian Initiation – Baptism, Confirmation and the Eucharist. And because these Sacraments lay the foundation of every Christian life, they will be treasured by everyone who has met Christ. In these Sacraments we encounter the Lord’s call to holiness, including also the celebration of God’s mercy in Confession. The Sacrament that we call penance, beyond the forgiveness of sins, is really the Sacrament that invites us to celebrate the greatness of God’s love and mercy, a need many have set aside these days on account of the present day delusion that peace is attained only when one is in comfort and satisfied. On the other hand the Lord Jesus showed that peace is attained through repentance and renewal, and when one is again embraced by God, who, as Father, loves His sons (Luke 15:11-31).

Second, the new evangelization is linked to *Missio ad Gentes*. Jesus and his message of the Father’s love in the Kingdom must reach peoples, especially in Asia. Those who never heard about Him and those who long ago had been evangelized, but

had forgotten Him or had placed Him as second or lower choice, needed to hear about Him (again).

Continental Asia is different from the rest of the world, because again and again it has been termed as the home of the world's great religions, and yet the first proclamation of Jesus is still awaited among its teeming billions. Have we not heard in the hall of the recent synod that for Asians Evangelization is just beginning?

In today's global phenomenon of migration hundreds of millions - including many Christians - are on the move to other countries and across continents for social, political, economic, ethnic and many other reasons. In the end it is not at all only a matter of earning a living, but moving out to another country commits the migrant to an inestimable way of life; for the Christian wherever s/he is, his or her "light" must shine in the sight of men, so that seeing their good works, other may give praise to the Father in Heaven" (Matt. 5:16). Evangelization is inevitably linked to witness. The way a person lives puts at stake what s/he believes.

Pope Paul VI thus expressed the truth of evangelization in *Evangelii Nuntiandi*: "The person who has been evangelized goes on to evangelize others. Here lies the test of truth, the touchstone of evangelization: it is unthinkable that a person should accept the Word and give himself to the kingdom without becoming a person who bears witness to it and proclaims it in his turn". (E. N., 24).

Thirty-nine years ago Pope Paul VI wrote to the Bishops stating that "Above all, the Gospel must be proclaimed by witness ... Through this wordless witness these Christians stir up irresistible questions in the hearts of those who see how they live: Why are they like this? Why do they live in this way? What or who is it that inspires them? Why are they in our midst? Such a witness is already a silent proclamation of the Good News and a very powerful and effective one. Here we have an initial act of evangelization" (E. N., 21). And when other questions are posed which presume presence, friendship, sharing and compassion, the soul-searching friend may finally admit that what s/he had sensed for so long and yet could not say or name can only be

Jesus that Christians love and follow. Such is the power of witness that when people ask questions like “where or why”, the answer will always be, “Come and see”. Just recently in his homily at the closing of the Synod, His Holiness Pope Benedict XVI said that “the real protagonists of the new evangelization are the saints – who speak a language intelligible to all through the example of their lives and the works of charity”.

Love speaks all languages so that even the blind is enabled to “see” the truth and attractiveness of what is good; in love the deaf can “hear” the call and the bidding of compassion. This too is the reason why His Holiness Pope Benedict XVI said that charity is the language that is intelligible to all. Evangelization that is coupled with charity makes Jesus and His message intelligible to and welcomed by all.

Again, the proclamation of Jesus will not only be directed “ad extra”, for the reason that even in the countries that were long ago called Christians, there is the great need for the Lord Jesus Christ to be received again, but this time in a profoundly new and lovingly welcoming way.

In the words of the Holy Father the Year of Faith that we celebrate the whole year round (2012-2013) is indeed “a summons to authentic and renewed conversion to the Lord, the one Saviour of the world”. And just as evangelization takes place only in Jesus, any renewal in the Church can only mean a “renewed conversion to Jesus” – through a renewal that is a turning away from evil by a heart that has been hardened by sin, but, through proclamation, can slowly learn the road back to God whose love one discovers in Jesus. We become reconciled to God in Jesus; we know the Father only in His Son Jesus. “No one can know the Father except through me. If you know me, you know the Father also”, the Lord said. (John 14:6, 7).

Pope Paul VI again underlined the centrality of Jesus in the Church’s evangelization when he said that evangelization can be “defined as the proclamation of Jesus to those who do not know Him” (E.N., 17). There is no evangelization that does not have Jesus as the centre of proclamation. In the New Evangelization we become inventive, in the sense of being spiritually creative, in making the Lord Jesus captivating again.

We awaken that hunger for the Lord in this new evangelization. We must say that we need Jesus again!

In the apostolic letter *Porta Fidei* Pope Benedict XVI puts it this way, "We must rediscover a taste for feeding ourselves on the word of God, faithfully handed down by the Church, and on the bread of life, offered as sustenance for his disciples".

The different themes discussed and reflected on by the Asian Bishops in past FABC assemblies – Prayer, the Triple Dialogue, Christian Discipleship, Renewed Church: Mission and Love – the thoughts and reflections gathered then could now be employed in the renewal that is called for by the new evangelization. We need not reinvent the attractiveness of Jesus; He already is "the desire of all nations". That longing for Christ needs to be fanned, awakened to the truth that the hunger for that unknown and unnamed tranquillity or peace, truly, is a yearning for a Saviour Jesus.

And **lastly**, Christians whose lives do not reflect the demands of Baptism must be helped to meet and encounter Jesus Christ again. They need to be approached using new language attuned to the cultures (age old or recent), always dialoguing within an attitude of friendship, but always animated by love that is rooted in God.

The Holy Father expressed in his letter to this legate his desire for the Brothers in the Episcopacy to generously continue in the commitment to "the Bishops' duty to manifest, by their renewed strength and zeal, the love of Christ, the Church and the Gospel. Burning with the virtue of faith, they should foster human culture and diligently pursue dialogue among the peoples".

On our part we will communicate to His Holiness what we see and hear of the dedicated efforts of the Asian Bishops, with the assistance of the FABC, in keeping ever alive the dialogues with peoples, religions and long subsisting cultures in the large Asian continent in relation to the evangelization in Jesus, initiated years ago.

We bring to you the Holy Father, Pope Benedict XVI's wish of expressing his charity to all the Bishops of Asia, and through you, beloved Bishops, the same love is extended to the

Priests and the beloved Faithful of Asia. Happy to be informed of your efforts and initiatives to disseminate the Gospel, he assures all that he accompanies you in spirit and encourages all with his prayers.

May the Blessed Virgin Mary, Mother of Jesus and Queen of Apostles, always protect and guide us, as we retell the story of Her Son with words and deeds.

God Bless!

#### **D. Message delivered at Opening Ceremony**

*- Bishop Dominic Nguyen Chu Trinh of Xuan Loc*

Your Eminence Cardinal Special Envoy of the Holy Father

Your Eminence Cardinal Secretary General of FABC

Eminences, Excellencies Archbishops and Bishops

Reverend Fathers Vicar General, Reverend Fathers

Dear Brothers and Sisters

Dear Distinguished Guests

On behalf of my Diocese Xuân Lộc, together with the Auxiliary Bishop Thomas, Monsignor Vincent Vicar General, Monsignor Joseph, Rector of the Major Seminary, 475 priests, 1963 religious, men and women and almost one million Catholics, I would like to welcome you all with a warm greeting. I want to greet, in a very special way:

- Your Eminence Cardinal Special Envoy of the Holy Father and I ask you, Eminence, to transmit to the Holy Father Benedict XVI the love and respect of all our Diocese.
- Your Eminence Cardinal Secretary General of the FABC, all the Cardinals, Archbishops, Bishops, and the Secretariat of the FABC

Accepting the task, entrusted by the Vietnamese Bishops' Conference, to organize the accommodations and services for the X Plenary Assembly of FABC, we feel honoured but also aware of the great responsibility before the Church and the People in Viet Nam. For this reason, on one hand, we have invited our faithful

to pray for the success of the Plenary Assembly, on the other hand, together with the Archdiocese of Ho Chi Minh City, we have made use of all the resources, human and material, in order to create all the facilities necessary for the Plenary Assembly of the FABC.

This is the first time we are called to offer services for such an international meeting, we cannot avoid all errors and deficiencies in the services. We humbly ask you to forgive us.

Finally I wish you all, Eminences, Excellencies and all the staff members of FABC good health, peace and all the graces of the Holy Spirit. May God grant many fruits for the hard works of the X Plenary Assembly of FABC. Thank you.

### **Message delivered at Opening Ceremony**

*- Archbishop Peter Nguyen Van Nhon, Catholic Bishops' Conference of Vietnam (CBCV) President*

Your Eminences, Your Excellencies and distinguished Guests

On behalf of my Vietnamese brother bishops, I would like to welcome you all, as delegates from the Asian Episcopal Conferences and distinguished guests to our country. I warmly welcome, especially Cardinal Gaudencio Rosales, the Papal Envoy who brings the fraternal care and affection of the Successor of Saint Peter to us in this Assembly. The Church in Vietnam is greatly honoured for on its fortieth anniversary, the Plenary Assembly of the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences is held in Vietnam.

The People of God in Vietnam are really glad and warmly welcome all of you to our country for the first time. It is grateful to mention that the seeds of the Gospel were sown in this land by the missionaries from some religious congregations, beginning in the 16<sup>th</sup> century. Despite many persecutions in history, the Church in Vietnam has grown strongly and has been confirmed by the blood of our Holy Martyrs. Today there are 7 million Catholics in Vietnam, as composed about 7 percent of the whole

population. And so, the evangelization of the rest 93 percent of our Vietnamese brothers and sisters who do not yet know Jesus Christ, is the most challenging and urgent mission of our local Church today.

Your presence as Bishops from different Asian countries is a concrete and living sign of communion between the Church in Vietnam and our sister Churches in Asia, and we hope that this Assembly will foster this communion more strongly and effectively. It is in Asia that Jesus Christ, the Savior of the world, was born. Indeed more so, in Asia, he preached the Good News and established his Church. Your presence, therefore, would also remind us of the great mission of the whole Church to evangelize the majority of peoples in this vast continent. Our faith, the free gift from the Lord, must be shared with others. May the fire of love that Our Lord cast on earth and longed for (Lk. 12:49), be enkindled in all Asian people's hearts, and burn throughout Asia.

Again, please accept our warm welcome to Vietnam. Through the maternal care Our Lady of La Vang, may our hearts be filled with the Holy Spirit and more committed to Christ's mission of love and service to our beloved peoples in Asia.

### **Message delivered at Opening Ceremony**

*- Archbishop Leopoldo Girelli, Holy See Representative*

Your Eminences, Excellencies, Reverend Fathers, Sisters and Guests.

First of all, I apologize for addressing you spontaneously without a formal speech. I hope this is the way to be shorter in my speech.

I respectfully greet Your Eminence Cardinal Gaudencio Rosales, as the special envoy of the Holy Father, Pope Benedict XVI. Your presence among us is the sign of the closeness of the Holy Father to the Catholic Church in Asia. We thank you very much for your presence; you are here, the eyes, the ears and the mouth of the Holy Father. So you can see the enthusiasm of the Vietnamese



Catholics in welcoming the Bishops of the FABC, you can hear also the commitments of the Bishops and then you can tell the Holy Father that we are united. I am glad also to greet in a special way all the Bishops, some of them I know personally, from Indonesia, East Timor, Singapore, Malaysia, Brunei and Vietnam of course. With you, I feel at home in these days. I would like also to express my gratitude to Bishop Dominic and the Episcopal Conference represented here by Archbishop Nhon for their splendid hospitality in this occasion.

And special greetings for the officials of the government, Mr. Pham Dung, Deputy Minister of Internal Affairs, Head of the Government, Committee for Religious Affairs, you are very much welcome and your presence here is very much appreciated. As well, I would like to greet all the members of the government delegation and religious representatives. Your presence here is very much appreciated because it is a sign of the good relationship existing between the Catholic Church in Vietnam and the Government, as well as with the other religious confessions here. The Catholic Church is always ready and committed to cooperate with the government and other religions for the good of the people.

Jesus in the Gospel invites us to read the signs of the times and I think this event in Xuan Loc is a very good sign of time for the Church in Vietnam and for the relationship with the Vietnam government.

Thank you, Your Eminence Cardinal Gracias and all FABC to decide to come to Vietnam and celebrate the 40<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of your Federation here. In this Year of Faith, also Asia needs New Evangelization. But Jesus Christ is always the same; yesterday, today and forever. So, new evangelization doesn't mean New Christ but New Way to proclaim the Gospel of Jesus Christ. In Asia we need a new evangelization *ad intra* and a new evangelization *ad extra*. Within the Church we need to go deeper in our faith, teaching to our people the doctrine of the Catholic Church in the way that their faith is stronger and deeper. And

outside the Church we need to reach the majority of the Non-Catholics and we can do that through our faithful, they are the best missionaries for today's continent of Asia.

I wish the FABC Plenary Assembly all the best and a fruitful meeting especially for the new evangelization and to all the Vietnamese here present I want to reiterate the Pope loves you!

### **Message delivered at Opening Ceremony**

*- Oswald Cardinal Gracias, FABC Secretary General*

Your Eminence, Cardinal Gaundecio Rosales, Special Envoy of the Holy Father

Mr. Pham Dung, Vice Minister for Internal Affairs, President of Government Committee for Religious Affairs, Government of Vietnam

My dear Cardinal Man

Archbishop Pierre, President of the Vietnam Bishops' Conference  
Bishop Dominic, our host bishop

My dear brother Archbishops, Bishops, staff of the FABC, distinguished guests and friends

It is with particularly great joy that we meet over here in Xuan Loc in December 2012 to celebrate the Fortieth Anniversary of the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences and to participate in the Tenth Plenary of FABC.

The Federation of the Asian Bishops' Conferences was formed as an Association of Bishops from Asia - a Federation of Conferences. We represent nineteen Conferences and nine Associate Members, which do not yet have a Conference, coming from a total of twenty-nine countries. The Federation of the Asian Bishops' Conferences is a direct fruit of the Second Vatican Council. During the Council, names became acquaintances, acquaintances became friends and friends desired to develop into a stable structure in order to share in the lights and shadows of

Asia, to collaborate for greater effectiveness and to coordinate our mission of service.

This dream became a reality when the Bishops met in Manila on the occasion of Pope Paul VI's visit to the Philippines in 1970. They got not only encouragement from the Holy Father but active support and direction for this Association.

Our minds and hearts go back to forty years ago when the idea germinated, was accepted, committees were formed, recognition was given and statutes approved by the Holy Father in 1972. It has been a long journey for the FABC. In Taipei in 1974 we held our very first meeting on "Evangelization in Modern Day Asia". Our perspective was to "proclaim by word and witness the good news from God". We resolved to take ahead our mission by a triple dialogue: with the cultures, with religions and with the poor.

In 1978 we met at Calcutta and our theme was "Prayer in the life of the Church of Asia". Traditional society was deeply affected by secularization and the worship of technology. Prayer was understood as a deep personal communion with God: this was essential for restoration of society, for it was to be rooted in the Eucharist, the source and summit of worship.

We met in Bangkok in 1982 and stressed the Community of faith. This was a distinguishing mark of the Church among the communities of Asia. We live in faith, strengthened by the Word of God with service to the poor.

Four years later we met in Tokyo in 1986: we focused on the vocation and mission of the laity. We needed competent and principled laity to enter into the field of public life, and help programmes and activities of all peoples. We were particularly struck that Asia is a young continent with 60 % of Asian population young and therefore the necessity of our work with the young and for the young.

In Bandung in 1990 Asia was journeying towards the Third Millennium and we sought a new way of being and becoming the Church in Asia and the spirituality that must inform it. The pastoral response, challenges of our times is dialogue with the realities of Asia, reflecting and discerning the movement of the spirit in Asia and responding by translating into action what the spirit bids us to accomplish.

In Manila in 1995 we reflected on “Christian Discipleship on Asia Today: A Service to Life”. “We identified five priorities for the Church in Asia: family; women and the girl child, youth, ecology, and displaced persons. Pope John Paul II was with us as we then celebrated the twenty-fifth anniversary of Radio Veritas Asia.

In Samphran, in Thailand in 2000, we discussed: “A Renewed Church in Asia: A Mission of Love and Service”. The most effective means of evangelization has always been and continues to be the witness of life. The world must see in us the transparency of the message of Jesus and the healing figure of an existence immersed in God.

In Daejeon, Korea in 2004, our focal point was the Asian family. The family was the point of reference for all relationships - social, economic, and hence the necessity of developing a family spirituality to help families.

At our last Plenary Assembly, the ninth at Manila in 2009, we studied “Living the Eucharist in Asia”. As we testified to God’s presence in the Eucharist, we continue to discover Him in the poor, in creation and in history.

And so we come to this Ruby Jubilee meeting in Xuan Loc this week. Any time is good enough to pause and reflect but a Jubilee is a specially appropriate occasion to do so. And so this week we pause and reflect. We look back at the past and look forward to the future. The FABC at Forty Years - Responding to the Challenges of Asia.

The Holy Father has called for a New Evangelization and we wish to examine what this call means to us, what implication of new evangelization is: What does it mean to be new in ardour, new in method, and new in expression.

Asia has its own social and political situation. We are to touch the soul of Asia and examine how we can serve Asia more. Jesus Christ came to serve all men and women even to the point of giving his life. The Church in Asia seeks to be more authentic: a body of disciples of Jesus Christ, and a continuation of Him: an organic body alive, serving all of society. It is this that we will reflect on these days.

And as we begin this Plenary Assembly with excitement and enthusiasm, we already at the very have so much to be thankful for. We are thankful to God, the giver of all good gifts, for this meeting and the opportunity we have of exchanging, reflecting and planning ahead.

A matter of special joy is the presence of the special Envoy of the Holy Father: Cardinal Gaudencio Rosales, for this Ruby Jubilee. We are aware that it is not the policy of the Vatican to send a Papal Legate for Fortieth Anniversaries. A special exception was made in this case, the special appreciation and affection for Asia from the Holy Father.

Your Eminence, please convey to His Holiness our deep gratitude fir his continuous support to us, for his care and special affection for Asia and do covey to him our feelings of affection, loyalty and obedience. The Church in Asia loves him!

It is a matter of deep joy that we have also the presence this morning of Mr. Pham Dung, Vice Minister of Internal Affairs. We also had a very fruitful meeting with him in Hanoi yesterday when we discussed the possibility of greater collaboration between the Church and the Government for the service of the people of Vietnam. From the moment we landed at the airport, we experienced the warmth, hospitality and kindness of the

Government and people of Vietnam. You have a very, very beautiful country. This is my second visit to Vietnam. My previous visit was to prepare the Plenary Assembly. One can sense that this is a truly an Asian country with all the qualities of the Asian spirit. Vietnam though is outstanding for kindness, politeness, charm, beauty and hospitality, where we saw and experienced from the moment of our entry into your country.

We are very grateful to the Episcopal Conference of Vietnam particularly its President, Archbishop Pierre, and the Office Bearers of the Conference and Bishop Dominic, our host Bishop in Xuan Loc. We have seen and felt your warm hospitality and also your excellent logistic arrangements. It is clear that we are going to have not only a very useful and a very fruitful but also a very comfortable stay. The welcome you have given us has been an exquisite exposition of beauty, colour and music. You have transformed the premises of this seminary into a fairyland.

And so to the Government and to the people of Vietnam I say that we have come and have been conquered. When the hundred or more bishops leave Vietnam next week we will leave behind a little bit of ourselves: our hearts. You, the Government and the Bishops have collaborated to enable us to have a successful International Conference. The Church is here, as indeed in all countries of the world, on a mission of service. This was the life and teaching of Jesus. We are here to serve all people and thus to see how we could strengthen our countries in Asia, how we could help each Society to build on its strengths so that the Church in Asia might give its rightful place, and the countries of Asia would continue to make its contribution to the world. Vietnam, we have come here to reflect how we could help the Churches in Asia and how we could help you.

Therefore! Thank you Bishops of Vietnam, thank you Government of Vietnam, thank you people of Vietnam. We are so happy to be here. I want to say that I wish we do come here again. God bless you.

## **Message delivered at Opening Ceremony**

*- Mr. Pham Dung, Deputy Minister for Internal Affairs, Head of the Government Committee for Religious Affairs Government Representative*

Your Eminence Cardinal Gaudencio Rosales, delegate of Pope Benedict XVI

Your Eminence Cardinal Oswald Gracias, Archbishop of Bombay, India, Secretary General of FABC

Your Grace Nguyen Van Nhon, Archbishop of Hanoi, President of the Catholic Bishops' Conferences of Vietnam

Your Eminences, Your Excellencies, distinguished Guests of FABC

Representatives of the Central Government and Dong Nai Province

Representatives of religions

It is with the atmosphere of joyful preparation for the coming Christmas 2012 and the New Year 2013, that today at the beautiful and vibrant Xuan Loc Bishop's house, the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences (FABC) solemnly celebrates the X Plenary Assembly, on the occasion of its 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary of establishment. On behalf of the representatives of the Central government and Dong Nai province, and on my own, we would like to send our warmest greetings and the wishes of peace and health to all the cardinals, archbishops, priests, religious and representatives. We wish for the great success of the Plenary Assembly.

The FABC Plenary Assembly plays an important role in the life of the Catholic Church in Asia. The fact that the Assembly is held in Vietnam is a great event for religious life in Vietnam, and a great honor for the Vietnamese Catholics, especially for the diocese of Xuan Loc.

Catholicism has been introduced and developed in Vietnam since nearly 500 years. Vietnamese Catholics have become an important part of our nation, and had many contributions in all areas of social life. With the tradition "*good society, good religion*", "*journeying together with the nation*",

Vietnamese Catholics have positively participated to the movements such as *“Loving God, loving the country”*, *“Living out the Gospel in the midst of the nation to be in service to the happiness of our people”*. The endeavour of Church leaders and Catholic faithful in this area has made an important contribution to the building of the peaceful and happy life of our people, as well as to the social stability and stable development of the Vietnamese nation.

For the last years, the reform policy of the Vietnamese government has acquired positive results in all areas, among which there is the reform in policy for religions. The Vietnamese government has consistently exercised the policy of respect for the freedom of beliefs and religions of the people. Vietnam also respect the good moral and spiritual values in all religions and Catholicism as well, which makes a good contribution to the social life and lead the people to the True, the Good, and the Beautiful, especially the values that are in accordance with the moral and cultural tradition, and the good-oriented way of life of the Vietnamese people.

Keeping with Christ’s mission of *“love and service”*, Vietnamese Catholics integrate more strongly in all areas of social life, and continue to implement the orientation of the Pastoral Letter in the year 1980 of the Catholic Bishops’ Conference of Vietnam; *“Living out the Gospel in the midst of the nation to be in service to the happiness of our people”*, also the will of Pope Benedict XVI: *“Good Catholics also are good citizens”*.

I hope that during the days of the Plenary Assembly, you will have a better understanding of the country, person, history, culture and tradition of Vietnam, also experience the sentiment of sincerity and hospitality of the Vietnamese people in general and Vietnamese Catholics in particular.

Finally, I wish you are healthy and happy under God’s grace to enjoy a Christmas filled with peace and a New Year filled with divine grace. May God bless us all.

Thank you.



## **Message delivered at Opening Ceremony**

*- Vote of Thanks: Jean-Baptiste Cardinal Pham Minh Mân*

### **1. Thanks to the X FABC Assembly**

Eminences, Excellences, Reverends, brothers and sisters in the X FABC Assembly,

In the name of the people of God in Viet Nam, I express to all of you my sincere thankfulness for your coming and holding the X FABC Assembly in Viet Nam. Your presence in our home country is opening a wide window for the fresh and sane air of the fraternal communion getting into the life of the people of God in Viet Nam. You are the most welcomed. And thank you very much.

### **2. Thanks to the Vietnamese Government**

In the name of the Catholic Church in Viet Nam, I would like to thank you for giving us the opportunity of collaborating to build up the Viet Nam home full with fraternity, where the cardinals, bishops, priests, and lay people in Asia, can hold their X FABC Assembly in peace. Hopefully, this fraternity and peace can prove that we are brothers and sisters in one family of God in Asia. Thank you very much.

### **3. Thanks to the Vietnamese people of God, especially the people in the diocese of Xuan Loc and in the archdiocese of Saigon - Ho Chi Minh City.**

I would like to thank you for your collaboration with the Catholic Church in Viet Nam to offer a warm welcome to the representatives of the Catholic Church in Vatican and in Asia. With your collaboration, you contribute to build up the Catholic Church in Viet Nam to become a Bethany Home, which gives a warm and fraternal hospitality to Christ and His disciples on the way to proclaim the Good News to the people in Asia and in today world. Thank you very much.

## **Message delivered at Opening Ceremony**

*- Gaudencio B. Cardinal Rosales, Papal Envoy, Archbishop Emeritus of Manila*

Your Eminences, Your Excellencies, Reverend Fathers, Sisters, Seminarians, the Minister for Religious Affairs, Honourable Pham Dung, your distinguished colleagues, our brothers and sisters from different faiths and from different Christian confessions, and all of you who are today gathered here in Christ.

At this point of the day when we have just opened the 10<sup>th</sup> Plenary Assembly of the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences on its 40<sup>th</sup> Anniversary, we now meet in this hall to exchange greetings of welcome and friendship.

In the name of the Holy Father, Pope Benedict XVI, who sent me as special legate for this FABC Jubilee celebration with full memories of friendship and collaborative evangelization work among Bishops in Asia, I extend his greetings and blessings for Asia's Bishops and for those who welcome them in this 10<sup>th</sup> FABC Plenary Assembly in Xuan Loc, Vietnam.

We thank God for the grace of the 40 years of the Asian Bishops' brotherly cooperation for the evangelization of Asia since the foundation of FABC forty years ago. There are many things to recall and many more things and events to bring to the Holy Father.

A Special Report covering the proceedings of and the addresses to the FABC Assembly is to be presented to the Holy Father Pope Benedict XVI.

The local people here are most welcoming. And the welcome you give to us is an indication that you, the People of Vietnam, hold fast to your priceless culture and your traditions, to what you believe of every human person, as friend and as member of the great family of humankind. This is a treasure that

belongs precisely to your people and which you offer to friends beyond your national boundaries.

All these are the concerns of our evangelization: to let people recognize the goodness in the human person --- as refined, developed, made mature by what one believes in Jesus --- and we call this faith. The readiness to welcome everyone and to help the poor is a treasure of the Christian Faith as we mentioned earlier this morning at the formal opening of the Plenary Assembly. Already rich in culture, but now believing that Christ comes from the Father to bring us the Good News of God's love, any person will be able to further refine and purify to perfection what goodness there already is in culture. This is what evangelization is about.

In the words of the Holy Father, Pope Benedict XVI, using new languages, applying new forms of listening and styles of sharing what we know of Jesus as the image of the God's goodness to all that will not injure or offend anyone, but instead will inspire and make Jesus attractive to them --- this, in effect, is what evangelization today means. There is no need to fear Jesus. There is no need to fear people who believe in Jesus. I am happy that the People's Republic of Vietnam welcomes dialogue with people of faith. Your Government's welcome of FABC Delegates from different Asian countries has allowed us to hold the 10<sup>th</sup> Plenary Assembly in Xuan Loc Diocese.

Our coming together as successors of the Apostles in Asia is very much appreciated by His Holiness, Pope Benedict XVI.

Our thanks go to all who have participated in the opening ceremonies; your presence offers encouragement to the Catholic Bishops in Asia.

I extend the Holy Father's thanks to Bishop Dominic Nguyen Vhu Trinh, his Auxiliary Bishop, Monsignor Thomas Vu Dinh Hieu, the Priests, Religious and the generous Laity of Xuan Loc Diocese. You can be assured of God's Blessing bestowed on you. Please extend the Holy Father's gratitude to those who are

not here and yet have helped in the welcome to FABC. We also appreciate the presence of our Brethren from other religions; thank you for being with us today. We are overwhelmed by your hospitality.

Be assured that the Holy Father has everyone of you in his Prayers, and to all he extends his Blessings.

God Bless!

### **E. Message**

*- Fernando Cardinal Filoni, Prefect of the Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples.*

*You yourselves give them something to eat (Lk 19:13)*

Your Eminence Cardinal Oswald Gracias  
Archbishop of Bombay and Secretary General of FABC and  
My dear brother Bishops!

I am very honoured to have been invited to participate in the 10<sup>th</sup> General Assembly of the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences, which this year celebrates its 40th anniversary. Although I am unable to respond positively to your most kind invitation, allow me to send you this Message as a sign of our fraternal communion and joyous participation in the work that you will engage in during these days. I gladly unite with His Eminence Cardinal Gaudencio B. Rosales, Archbishop Emeritus of Manila and Special Envoy to this Assembly of the Holy Father, Pope Benedict XVI, in order to express the propinquity of heart and spirit of the Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples to all of the Pastors of the local Churches in Asia, and to reaffirm its interest in and solicitude for the Church of God that is present in this vast continent. Your joys, hopes and concerns are also mine and those of this Missionary Dicastery.

I cordially greet each and every one of you in the joy and peace of Our Lord. My greetings extend equally to all of my brother

bishops of the Episcopal Conference of Vietnam and in particular to the Ordinary of the Diocese of Xuan Loc, which for the first time is hosting and organizing with great care this important meeting of bishops on the continental level. Your assembly is a very heartening sign that collaboration between the Churches of God in Asia is possible today, thanks also to a new political openness on the part of the nations concerned. This fact encourages us even more to search for suitable means of concrete collaboration between National Episcopal Conferences, and between local Churches in the same region, for the benefit of the Church and society for a *new evangelization* capable of responding to the religious and social exigencies, as well as the aspirations of the peoples in Asia. This *new evangelization* is at the heart of Blessed John Paul II and of our beloved Holy Father, Benedict XVI, who has just recently convoked and presided over the 13<sup>th</sup> General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops on the theme of "*The New Evangelization For The Transmission of the Christian Faith*", whose opening coincided with that of the inauguration of the Year of Faith and the commemoration of the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the opening of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Vatican Council, as well as the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the publication of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*. The constant solicitude for Peter's Successor invites us to reflect, rediscover and deepen our Christian faith for an ever more effective evangelization that is both the very nature and mission of the Church in the world.

The commemoration of 40 years of the Conferences history evokes for us the happy period after the 2<sup>nd</sup> Vatican Council, where the Holy Spirit had forcefully breathed upon the whole Church in Asia – east and west, north and south – to manifest her living experience and ever renewing actions. It then sparked within the Church and within the hearts of her Pastors and faithful an enthusiasm and joy for the renewal and apostolic engagement. It was in this context that in 1970, from November 23<sup>rd</sup> to 29<sup>th</sup>, some 180 Bishops of South and East Asia gathered in Manila for an historic meeting attended by the Holy Father, Pope Paul VI. At the end of the meeting they issued a Message and a number of Resolutions. The first Resolution states that the

'Episcopal Conferences here represented are urged to authorize and support a permanent structure for effective implementation of the decisions of this meeting" (*Statutes, Chronicle of Events*).

Successively, in 1971 (March 18-21), a group of representatives of the Episcopal Conferences of the countries of Asia met in Hong Kong in order to establish "a permanent co-ordinating body for the Episcopal Conferences in Asia", thus giving birth to the FABC, whose "purpose is to foster among its members solidarity and co-responsibility of the welfare of Church and society in Asia" (*Statutes, 1*). This objective is the compass for the activities accomplished up to now and I trust and hope that it will become a force for renewal, attracting great cooperation for the good of the whole Church and society in Asia during this 3<sup>rd</sup> Millennium. Along with the wishes that Pope Blessed John Paul II had expressed in his discourse proclaimed at the 6<sup>th</sup> Plenary Assembly of FABC in Manila on January 15<sup>th</sup>, 1995, I pray to Our Lord that, "just as during the first Millennium the Cross was planted on European soil and during the second on American and African soil, so in the third Millennium it might bring forth a great harvest of faith on this vast and living continent" (*Ecclesia in Asia, 1*).

This year's theme, "*FABC at 40 years: Responding to the challenges of Asia*" suggest that we look to the past with gratitude and to give thanks to God for all of the benefits that He has given to the Church in Asia during the course of the last decades of its history, by means of the many services and precious contributions of FABC. It also invites us to confront the innumerable challenges of the Asian continent. These challenges, in all their diversity from one country to another, have nevertheless in common religious, cultural, political, economic and social realities; realities of persistent poverty and the exploitation of persons; youth, the family, threatened traditional values, secularization, materialism, modernisation, urbanisation, globalization, internal and international migration, attacks against Christians, etc. (*Ecclesia in Asia, 6-8*).

Faced with these challenges and before an immense missionary field of more than 3 billion Asians who do not yet know Jesus Christ, the only Saviour of humanity and who thirst and hunger for living water and the Bread of Eternal Life, the words of Jesus come spontaneously to mind, “you yourselves give them something to eat” (Lk 9:13). It thus seems opportune to focus our attention on our pastoral efforts: for the family –the sanctification of the family; for the education of the young who are the future of society and of the Church; for the Christian formation of the laity; for dialogue with the world in its three-fold dimensions: cultural, religious, and with the poor who need more than our material help but above all our understanding, respect and human dignity; for the promotion and formation of sacerdotal and religious vocations. The message of the Synod of Bishops to the People of God, published this past October 26<sup>th</sup>, can provide some precious inspiration for the deliberations and resolutions of your Assembly. Also, in view of the promotion of an ever more effective cooperation among the Churches in Asia themselves, and with the Universal Church, along with basic human formation as well as philosophical, theological, spiritual, pastoral and missionary, it is also desirable to offer to candidates for the ministerial priesthood, as well as to those who embrace religious life, a good formation and knowledge of at least one widely known modern language, fit for different services of the Church at the continental and global level. It is therefore up to the Pastors of local Churches to discern and decide with the Holy Spirit (cfr Act 15:28), what priorities and lines of action to adopt.

In promulgating the *Year of Faith*, the Holy Father, Pope Benedict XVI proposes anew the invitation extended in his homily on the occasion of the inauguration of his Petrine ministry as Bishop of Rome (April 24, 2005), to know: “The Church as a whole and all her Pastors, like Christ, must set out to lead people out of the desert, towards the place of life, towards friendship with the Son of God, towards the One who gives us life, and life in abundance” (*Porta fidei*, 2). He exhorts us to “an authentic and renewed conversion to the Lord, the one Saviour of the world” (*ibid.* 6), to a personal encounter with Jesus, “for stronger ecclesial

commitment to new evangelization in order to rediscover the joy of believing and the enthusiasm for communicating the faith” because “it is the love of Christ that fills our hearts and impels us to evangelize” (*ibid.*7).

In response to the Holy Father’s invitation and in communion with the whole Church in this *Year of Faith* it seems opportune to encourage all of the People of God, above all the lay faithful to *deepen* the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* in order to “arrive at a systematic knowledge of the content of the faith” (*Porta fidei*, 11), to consolidate their faith and to enable themselves, not only to bear witness to Jesus and his Gospel, but also to speak of God and to announce Jesus Christ to brothers and sisters of other religions. We should also encourage priests and religious, pastors of souls, and formators in seminaries and in religious communities to *re-read* with an open, filial and docile heart the documents of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Vatican Council and to *assimilate* them so as to welcome the inspiration of the Holy Spirit and to discover within them the spiritual riches and the force for renewal.

Blessed John Paul II invited us to “start anew with Christ”, but not necessarily to create “new programs”. The program already exists: “it has its centre in Christ himself, who is to be known, love and imitated, so that in him we may live the life of the Trinity, and with him transform history until its fulfilment in the heavenly Jerusalem” (*Novo millennio ineunte*, 29). He indicated holiness as the perspective in which all pastoral efforts should be carried out (cfr *ibid.*, 30). In fact, “It is not enough to update pastoral techniques, organize and coordinate ecclesial resources... What is needed is the encouragement of a new “ardor for holiness” among missionaries and throughout the Christian community, especially among those who work most closely with missionaries” (*Redemptoris Missio*, 90).

My dear brother Bishops, members of the Federation of Asian Bishops’ Conferences, with these sentiments I would like to share your pastoral and missionary solicitude. I entrust each and all of you to the maternal protection of the Most Blessed Virgin Mary,



Star of the new evangelization. May she invoke the Holy Spirit upon you and upon the work of your Assembly, so that it might bear abundant and lasting fruit for the Church of God that is in Asia. *“Duc in altum”!* (Lk. 5.4)

**F. Homily at Solemn Closing Mass by Gaudencio B. Cardinal Rosales, Papal Envoy, Archbishop Emeritus of Manila**

As we opened the FABC’s Xth Plenary Assembly with the Eucharist, begging God for light and guidance, so now we close the assembly of Asia’s continental Bishops, thanking the Lord Jesus again in the Eucharist for the gift of Evangelization.

Evangelization in this part of the world has been further enriched from the past shepherding and the contemplative insights of Asia’s pastors. Having reviewed the scenario of Asia’s teeming billions of people, their human hunger for that “fullness of life” with the desire for a more generous space for everyone’s integral development in Jesus specially in this continent, much as their culture craves for a greater life and truth, the FABC Bishops accepted the mandate of the New Evangelization that the Holy Father Pope Benedict XVI, through the recently concluded Synod, had brought to the Church.

But the new evangelization carries with it the challenge to live a new spirituality of mission that focuses on Jesus Christ and the kingdom of God as vision and path in the common journey back to our Father. Disciples are always inspired by and are never afraid of what Jesus is to them.

As the Holy Father, Pope Benedict XVI extends his greetings and thanks to the participating Bishops at FABC’s Tenth Plenary assembly, so his gratitude reaches out also to those who welcomed and hosted Asia’s Bishops in the assembly:

His Excellency, Bishop Dominique Nguyen Chu Trinh of Xuan Loc Diocese, Auxiliary Bishop Thomas Vu Dinh Hieu, the Clergy, Religious and Laity of the Diocese of Xuan Loc;

The Archbishop of Ho Chi Minh, His Eminence John Baptist Cardinal Phin Man, Archbishop of Ho Chi Minh (Saigon);

Archbishop Pierre Nguyen Van Nhon, Archbishop of Ha Noi, and President of Catholic Bishops Conference of Vietnam;

The welcoming Ministers of the People's Republic of Vietnam and the People of Vietnam who greeted us in the streets and kept us in their heart.

To everyone, "Cam on"; Thank you and God bless you all!

### **G. FABC Ruby Jubilee Prayer**

God ever faithful,  
we praise you for your abiding presence  
in our pilgrimage in this land of Asia,  
hallowed by the life and mission of your Son Jesus Christ.

We thank you for the mysterious presence of your Spirit  
in the depth and breadth of the spiritual quest of our people,  
in their enduring cultures and values, and in the struggles of the  
poor.

We raise our hearts in gratitude for the gift of the Church in Asia,  
the little flock you tend with provident care  
in her mission of proclaiming your Gift,  
Jesus Christ the Giver of Life.

Father, we thank you  
for the Federation of the Asian Bishops' Conferences,  
an instrument of communion you have granted us for the past  
forty years.  
Your Spirit accompanied us in our common search  
for the paths of mission in our continent.

As we celebrate your blessing  
renew your Church in Asia  
with a fresh outpouring of your Spirit.

Make us grow in greater unity;  
rekindle the fire of your Spirit  
to be credible bearers of the Good News of Jesus.  
Empower us as we “go” on the roads of Asia,  
that in inter-religious dialogue and cultural harmony,  
in commitment to the poor and the excluded,  
we may courageously tell the story of Jesus.

May the peoples of Asia, especially the poor,  
find in him their liberator.  
May our world, broken by sin  
find in Him the Reconciler,  
and the wounded earth find its Healer.  
May all recognize Him as the giver of the fullness of Life. Amen.

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**FABC Papers:**

123. Asian Vocations Symposium: Asian Vocations Today, by the FABC Office of Consecrated Life & FABC Office of Clergy, 2007
124. Eucharist as Communication, by the FABC Office of Social Communication, 2008
125. FABC Papers Periodic Index (Papers 101-125), James H. Kroeger M.M., 2008
126. Being Schools, Becoming Eucharist, by the FABC Office of Education and Faith Formation, 2008
127. A Few Theological and Pastoral Perspectives of Inter-faith Marriages, by the FABC Office of Theological Concerns, 2009
128. Seventh Bishops’ Institute for Social Communication (BISCOM VII): Social Communication in Catholic Universities of Asia – Facts, Experiences, Challenges, by the FABC Office of Social Communication, 2009
129. Living the Eucharist in Asia: IX FABC Plenary Assembly, 2010
130. Dialogue: Interpretive Key for the Life of the Church in Asia, James H. Kroeger M.M., 2010
131. A Glimpse at Dialogue in Asia by the FABC Office of Ecumenical & Interreligious Affairs, 2010

- 132a. Word of God in the Life & Mission of the Church, 5<sup>th</sup> FABC-OE & CBF Asia-Oceania Biblical Congress and Bishops' Institute for the Biblical Apostolate (BIBA) III, by the FABC Office of Evangelization in collaboration with The Catholic Biblical Federation (CBF), 2010
- 132b. Word of God in the Life & Mission of the Church, 5<sup>th</sup> FABC-OE & CBF Asia-Oceania Biblical Congress and Bishops' Institute for the Biblical Apostolate (BIBA) III by FABC Office of Evangelization in collaboration with The Catholic Biblical Federation (CBF)
133. On Being Human in the Changing Realities of Asia by Fr. Vimal Tirimanna, CSsR, FABC Office of Theological Concerns
134. Mary Truly A Woman of Our Times, East Asia Bishops' Institute on Lay Apostolate, (BILA) on Women II by FABC Office of Laity and Family, 2010
135. Youth in Asia: Challenges of Fundamentalism and Relativism, Fourth Bishops' Institution for Theological Animation [BITA-IV], by Fr. Vimal Tirimanna, CSsR, FABC Office of Theological Concerns, 2012
136. Global Warming and Climate Change and its Impact on Asia, Challenges and the response of the Church, Climate Change Seminar, by FABC & Misereor, 2012
137. The Contemporary Challenges in Living Priestly Celibacy in the Context of the Present Day Crisis in the Church in Asia, Edited by Fr. Lawrence Pinto, MSIJ, FABC Office of Clergy

**FABC Papers is a project of the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences (FABC), designed to bring the thinking of Asian experts to a wider audience and to develop critical analysis of the problems facing the Church in Asia from people on the scene. The opinions expressed, are those of the author(s) alone and do not necessarily represent official policies of the FABC or its member Episcopal Conferences. Manuscripts are always welcome and may be sent to: [fabccentral@yahoo.com](mailto:fabccentral@yahoo.com) / [fabc@hkдавс.com](mailto:fabc@hkдавс.com)**