

**RESPONSES TO THE GUIDE DOCUMENT  
FOR THE FABC 50 GENERAL CONFERENCE  
29 November 2020**

*Theme: FABC 50: Journeying together as peoples of Asia  
“...and they went a different way.” (Mt 2:12)*

**Submitted by  
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## **I. INTRODUCTION TO FABC PAPER NO. 167, RESPONSES TO THE GUIDE DOCUMENT FOR THE FABC 50 GENERAL CONFERENCE**

The present FABC Paper No. 167 is part of the ongoing process as we journey towards the FABC 50 General Conference. With the FABC PAPER NO. 165, THE FABC 50 GENERAL CONFERENCE: *GUIDE DOCUMENT* being the point of reference, Episcopal Conferences were invited to reflect and provide their feedback to that original *Guide Document* that was sent to them in December 2020.

This FABC Paper No. 167 then is a compilation of the responses of the Episcopal Conferences / Countries of the FABC South-East Asia Region to that *Guide Document*, which should be read with that document in mind. This publication should also be read together with the previous FABC Paper No. 166 which compiles the responses of the Episcopal Conferences / Countries of the FABC Central, East and South Asia Regions.

Just as we were pleased to present the original *Guide Document* as an FABC Paper in order to make it easily available to as many people as possible, we are now pleased to present, after having sought permission, the responses of the Episcopal Conferences / Countries in the area of the FABC.

As was mentioned, over the past number of years, the FABC decided to hold a General Conference to signify an important milestone as the Church in Asia. The overall objective of the General Conference was seen as an opportunity to reaffirm, renew and revitalize the Church. It was planned that this General Conference would coincide with the fiftieth anniversary of the beginnings of the FABC in November 2020. But while we were preparing and organizing, we were overtaken by the Covid-19 pandemic which necessitated a significant postponement of the Conference. However, this also gave us time to widen our process of consultations.

The original *Guide Document* was envisioned to be a document that could act at a “spark” and “catalyst” that could guide us as the Church in Asia into our General Conference. This by no means is to be considered complete or a final document but only to be a basis for

further discernment, reflection, and discussion. For this reason, it was sent to the Conferences and others before the FABC 50 General Conference for consultation and feedback. Having received insightful and profound responses, we also intend to update and enrich the *Guide Document*.

This issue of the FABC Papers is intended to acknowledge the great effort that has been put it by many people, and also to allow conferences and others to widen this conversation by understanding better each other's landscape and narrative. As we record and publish these responses, it is our hope that their reflections and nuanced discernments will become not only part of our preparations and will also remain integral to our conversations at the General Conference.

May we continually reflect and discern on the emerging realities and challenges confronting Asia and the Church, along with the Church's presence, role, and mission in our Asian context.

The FABC 50 General Conference Core Group

## II. KONFERENSI WALIGEREJA INDONESIA

### PART ONE

#### **Emerging Realities and Trends of Concern in Asia.**

1. Are the 15 *Emerging Realities and Trends of Concern in Asia* an accurate reflection of the overarching situation in Asia? Are there any points that need to be added?
  - On **Global Pandemic** (1): The Reflection of Pope Francis could be added, that this global pandemic is not just about Covid, but also about what Covid has uncovered. "Covid has unmasked the other pandemic, the virus of indifference ... The crisis has made visible the throwaway culture. The Covid health measures have exposed, for example, how many of our brothers and sisters do not have housing where social distancing is possible, nor clean water to wash" (Pope Francis, *Let us Dream*, New York: Simon & Schuster 2020: 17-18).

- On **Globalization** (2): It would be better if we include that globalization calls and challenges us to strengthen the local as Pope Francis suggests: "We need to pay attention to the global so as to avoid narrowness and banality. Yet we also need to look *to the local*, which keeps our feet on the ground. Together, the two prevent us from falling into one of two extremes." (*Fratelli Tutti* 142)

- On **Digitalization** (4):

On the one side: We can consider that the growth of digital technology brings a good hope to create effectively and efficiently *a good story* building up solidarity and fraternity and promoting humanity and dignity; to spread the good news in more effective and efficient way. In the Message for the 54th World Communication Day (24 January 2020), Pope Francis says about "[s]tories that build up, not tear down; stories that help us rediscover our roots and the strength needed to move forward together. Amid the cacophony of voices and messages that surround us, we need a human story that can speak of ourselves and of the beauty all around us. A narrative that can regard our world and its happenings with a tender gaze. A narrative that can tell us that we are part of a living and interconnected tapestry. A narrative that can reveal the interweaving of the threads which connect us to one another."

On the other side: The impact of digitalization on individual and family and society needs to be explored more: There is a problem of loneliness and individualism which affects the social relationship. Furthermore, digitalization brings a lot of challenges of unemployment.

- On **Political Government** (7): (a) The problem of corruption and abuse of law need to be highlighted more and mentioned explicitly as serious problems in many countries in Asia; (b) It could be added that authoritarianism or tyranny in the political system is also a major concern for Asia. Some countries suffer from the emergence of authoritarian politics. It is impossible for us to turn blind eye to dictatorship carried out by power

holders who arbitrarily oppress other people for many reasons and by certain groups who claim to be the majority who persecute minorities.

- On **Youth** (9): We can proudly present Blessed Carlo Acutis as one of the spiritual and moral examples for the youth as Pope Francis says in his Angelus on Sunday, 11 October 2020, "Carlo was well aware that the whole apparatus of communications, advertising and social networking can be used to lull us, to make us addicted to consumerism and buying the latest thing on the market, obsessed with our free time, caught up in negativity. *Yet he knew how to use the new communications technology to transmit the Gospel, to communicate values and beauty.*"
  - On **Religions in Society** (14): It could be added in this part, that we need to develop interfaith and cultural dialogue particularly on the issue of humanity and dignity as it is written in the *Document on Human Fraternity for World Peace and Living Together* signed by Pope Francis and the Grand Imam of Al-Azhar, Ahmed el-Tayeb (4 February 2019).
2. Are there any glaring gaps that need to be mentioned so as to enrich the Document?
- The contribution of the Church in the areas of education and health care as well as the challenges faced in these two areas in the recent time could be included. The challenges are for example the emerging concurrence from other institutions, the regulations of the government.
  - The internal problems and challenges faced by the Church are not mentioned in this part one. It would be better if there is description or elaboration about them. For example: The theme of "a Prophetic and Responsive Church", inculturation, pastoral for the children and the youth, clericalism.
  - The Asian Church needs to be more courageous to promote equal human dignity and participation. In some countries, discrimination linked with religion, belief, and ideology is not

a myth. In the field of education, acts of bullying of students often take place due to different religion or race or caste. Within such discriminating condition, the equal participation is unlikely. Racism related to ethnicity in some countries is still a serious obstacle to justice and fairness.

## PART TWO

### The Church in the Asian Context:

1. Does the section on *Church in the Asian Context* respond appropriately and adequately to the *Emerging Realities and the Trends of Concern in Asia*? Are there any other “models/images” that you like to present?

In many ways this part two of the Document has attempted to respond appropriately and adequately to the part one (*Emerging Realities and the Trends of Concern in Asia*), but overall, the image of the Church in Asia can sound too idealized. It would be better to formulate these images in ways that are more grounded on the actual journey of the Church in Asia, namely its real struggle in the last 50 years together with different forces and communities in Asia. This will illustrate the dynamic and complex reality of the Church’s journey. A more narrative language will also help with concrete examples from different regions of Asia. In this regard, references to pronouncements and documents (pastoral letters etc) from Asian national bishops’ conferences on certain issues (related to the emerging trends) would make the Document more insightful to read.

In terms of model/images, the image of “migrant Church”, pilgrim Church, might also be added. The Church in Asia has to be a Church of joy and hope that presents herself as pilgrim together with all human beings and as an ‘oasis’ for anyone looking for hope.

2. What are your comments on the theological points in the guide document?
  - The theological points of the Document are fine and poignant in some ways. However, these theological points will be

enriched with closer attention to the theological reflections of Asian theologians and FABC documents such as theology of inclusivity and hybridity, theology of cosmic harmony, theology of cultural and social engagement, including on gender issues, intra-Asia migration and exchanges, which gives a distinctive character of the missionary character of the Church in Asia.

- In terms of the biblical image of Jesus for Asia, we think that the language in the Document about the images of Jesus in Asia (pp. 11-12) can be made more contextual with the emerging realities of Asia, by taking into account the development of contextual theology in Asia, especially Asian Christologies etc found in the various works of Asian theologians in continuity with FABC documents in the past.
- On Images of Jesus for Asia (2): In Asian cultures story telling is the method of instructing people in Asia in religion and moral. It might be good to also mention the image of Jesus as the story teller.
- It is very good that the document mentions the image of Jesus who takes position to defend the rights and dignity of women. How about to add the protection of children and his understanding of the youth?
- The image of Jesus as the healer is very popular among the people in Asia. In the era of pandemic of Covid-19 it may be useful to elaborate some reflections on the true and comprehensive meaning of Jesus as the healer.

### **PART THREE**

#### **Envisioning Possible “New Pathways” for the Church in Asia and the FABC.**

1. Are there any other “pathways” that the Church in Asia has to embark on for the future of Asia?
  - On point number 1 of part three: To develop Asian contextual theologies remains a challenge which needs to be discussed

further. To add to the triple dialogue (dialogue with the poor, intercultural dialogue, interreligious dialogue) is the dialogue with cosmic/environmental realities (the role of local spiritualities), with youth, digital culture, with the faith seekers and those who find no reason to believe in God (their number is increasing in Asian countries and give serious challenges for the Asian Church), etc.

- We would suggest that promoting a green Church should be part of this section. This can be enjoined with the being a poor Church for the poor. Pope Francis reminds us of the essential connection between the two: ecology and the option for the poor. Asian Church should be more concrete in these areas. Social teaching of the Church is very urgent and actual in the Asian context with a lot of emerging industrial nations.
- FABC has once declared that Basic Christian Communities are the new way of being Church in Asia. In the previous part some reflection is dedicated to this issue. And yet, we still think this should be part of the new pathways in the sense what need to be done more to promote this idea.
- In Pandemic Covid-19, we are challenged to strengthen the spirit that we are in the same and one Asian boat. "In today's world, the sense of belonging to a single human family is fading, and the dream of working together for justice and peace seems an outdated utopia. What reigns instead is a cool, comfortable and globalized indifference, born of deep disillusionment concealed behind a deceptive illusion: thinking that we are all-powerful, while failing to realize that *we are all in the same boat.*" (*Fratelli Tutti* 30) and "True, a worldwide tragedy like the Covid-19 pandemic momentarily revived the sense that we are a global community, *all in the same boat*, where one person's problems are the problems of all. Once more we realized that no one is saved alone; we can only be saved together" (*Fratelli Tutti* 32).
- Overall the pathways for the Church that have been identified in this Document are quite visionary and engaging. Other



pathways that can be added might include dialogue of religions for the public and toward a public theology, in response to the rise of religions in identity politics in postcolonial Asia, as well as encounter with the emerging secularization in many pockets of Asian societies. In this regard, different trajectories of secularism in Asian societies need to be identified and the Church's responses should also be analyzed. Another crucial pathway can be identified as well, especially the pathway toward a just, egalitarian and safe Christian community, in response to the phenomenon of abuse of power and sexual abuse within the Christian communities as well as other religious communities as well the rise of awareness concerning these matters in the society at large and within the Church. The Document has mentioned the phenomenon of abuse in the society at large, but we wonder if we can take into account this phenomenon within the Church and its institutions.

- The other pathway is concerning the digital gap that has been part of the globalization and which is becoming more problematic during the pandemic, especially in educational sector, for example. The Church, that is present in the most remote parts of Asia as well as in its most advanced urban centers, might be in a position to play a greater role here.
- The Asian Catholic Church should be the Church that "welcomes", opens its hands to anyone. The land of Asia is kind, fertile and cultivating land. Asian societies in most countries display sympathetic hospitality. They welcome foreigners, ideologies and religions that they see will be able to develop their lives. Various traditions that are synonymous with cultural wealth show how Asian people are "welcoming" people. The Catholics must be like one of the best wheats, which bears much fruit, precisely because we grow on the fertile soil of Asia.
- The Asian Church thrives on Asian soil not by "defeating" local culture, but by showing attitudes of solidarity with the experience of a society filled with life's burdens. Solidarity also needs to be interpreted more deeply by building local

communities, strengthening a culture of peace, and growing the seeds of God's Word. The Asian Catholic Church is like a tree among other trees whose fallen leaves that become humus have helped to fertilize the land of Asia. That humus should be the word of God that has been sown with sacrifice by missionaries. The Catholic Church in Asia enters a dynamic reality that calls for courage to cooperate and dialogue with people of other faiths.

I. Additional Comments:

1. Suggestions for the section on 'OBJECTIVES AND METHODOLOGY':

- We find *the objectives* very appropriate, relevant, and meaningful. The use of Matthew 2:1-12 for the objectives of this guide document is creative and imaginative. But we find no reference to this biblical text in the next part of the whole document. It would be better to integrate explicitly this biblical text in the whole document. Some lines of explanation are needed to show the connection of Matthew 2: 1-12 with the three part of the guide document.

- It is said, that one of the objectives of FABC 50 is to affirm and celebrate the journey of the past 50 years. But in the text of Guide Document we find no information about the journey of the past 50 years.

- Historically the importance of Vatican II for FABC is significant. The FABC could not have come into existence without the reforms and openness introduced by the Council. The FABC's theological orientations can be described as Asia's continuing Vatican II. The significance of Vatican II is especially indicated in the FABC documents by means of direct references to several Vatican II documents and in the development of the FABC theology which sees itself as initiated and motivated by the Vatican II documents. It might be good to add some sentences in the *Guide Document* to express the importance of (the spirit of) Vatican II for the church in Asia now and in the future.

2. Pope John Paul II said in '*Ecclesia in Asia*', that the third millennium is the era of the Church of Asia. Is this golden jubilee of FABC a

good opportunity to look back at what was said and committed for at the synod on Asia?

3. The youth of the Asian Catholic Church needs to be led to have the courage to participate in politics, even though this requires sacrifices. The big challenge of the youth is how they can take part in political life in their own country, how to enter into the arrangement of a common life that is negotiated with legal justice and respect for human dignity. The reality as 'small community' among the majority of people of different faiths should not make young people inferior in the midst of the existence of other communities in participating in politics.
4. We do not know whether this is already in existence: Asian Conference of Catholic Laity. If not yet, it might be a good idea to start with as part of the new initiatives taken in this jubilee year. If this is too much, at least permanent representation of laity could be given space at the meetings of FABC.

### **III. CATHOLIC BISHOPS' CONFERENCE OF MALAYSIA, SINGAPORE AND BRUNEI**

#### **A. MALAYSIA**

1.1. The Bishop President read out the letter jointly signed by the President and Convenor of FABC 50th, Cardinal Charles Bo and Cardinal Oswald Gracias. He then browsed through the FABC Guide Document "*FABC 50: Journeying together as peoples of Asia*" and the 15 challenges facing Asia. The document reflects on the text of Epiphany from the Gospel of Matthew "*...and they went a different way.*" (Mt 2:1-12)". Bishop President recalled that Cardinal Sim had noted a quote from the then Cardinal Ratzinger, "The Church will return to its roots," like a mustard seed. With this, the bishops were asked to give their initial reflections.

1.2. Archbishop Julian Leow pointed out the lack of emphasis in the guide document on poverty in Asia, with its discrepancy between the rich and the poor of Asia, though some mention is made in passing. There is a need to continue the triple dialogue with cultures, religions and the poor.

1.3. Bishop Joseph Hii felt it overwhelming as the largest federation of bishops' conferences covering so many countries and realities. How does one include everything? He felt from past experiences, the two largest countries India and the Philippines tend to have the great voice in all the meetings. However, working on the document he felt could contribute to the universal Church.

1.4. Archbishop John Wong likewise felt the FABC is very large and has too many things to digest. He felt it is a good platform to listen and learn.

1.5. Archbishop Simon Poh said FABC has often highlighted that Asia is a continent where the majority of the people are poor, with its multitude of cultures and religions. Asia has a cultural affinity in the respective parts of Asia (East Asia, South-East Asia, South Asia, Central Asia, West Asia). Asia has a common mentality on reverence for the divine and mystery. Asia pays more attention to human values and living in harmony. An individual person is measured by one's family and clan. With respect to the 15 points raised, he wishes to have more focus on:

- Rising fundamentalism from various Religions
- Resurgence of Cultural Traditions with each culture asking to be respected
- Hence the need of Inter-religious Dialogue between religions in respective countries
- The rise of smaller churches (evangelical) throughout the continent
- In areas of Ecumenism, more collaboration between churches (Catholics, Protestants and Evangelicals)
- The issue of sexual abuse of children and women needs to be highlighted
- There is new presence and significance of women and hence the need for empowerment of women in our ministerial structures

- There has to be a leadership succession plan at all levels. Covid-19 has shown the weakness of the diocese which depended too much on the older generation.

1.6. Bishop Cornelius Piong noted the different scenarios in various parts of Asia. They are never uniform.

1.7. Bishop Richard Ng felt the 15 points touch upon mega issues. Each country has its particular strengths. He felt the document could look into the need to nurture vocations.

1.8. Bishop Julius Gitom felt the 15 issues were well thought out and affected everyone to different degrees. In addition, he felt the issue of urbanisation, poverty and migration is affecting the diocese and people more significantly. The people are not only in the home diocese, but they are also dispersed in other parts of the country and abroad. And many migrants are also arriving into the diocese.

1.9. Bishop Bernard Paul felt the 15 mega issues are real and part of the global trends. Out of this, there are particular trends affecting the diocese locally e.g. poverty, migration, need for inter religious dialogue. There are also push factors contributing towards these trends. He noted the approach taken in the FABC document – *see, judge, act*. Compared to other countries in the region, he felt Malaysia, Singapore, Brunei is more heterogeneous with diverse races, religions, cultures. How do we become a living Church in these different situations?

1.10. Bishop Sebastian Francis saw the phenomenon of globalisation as affecting everyone. What remains at the centre of our narratives? Generally, in Asia it is still God. Therefore, Asia has to speak loud and clear so it is not submerged by the global media or northern nations. Second, what has Asian spirituality to offer to the world? Though human life has to be protected at all costs, obedience to God and God's commandment is absolute. Therefore, while the situations may vary, he recalled we have only one Gospel.

## **B. SINGAPORE**

### **Introduction**

This document is written in response to the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences (FABC)'s letter dated November 29, 2020, seeking comments on the Guide Document for the General Conference. It considers the thoughts and feedback from a focus group consisting of both clergy and lay ecclesial leaders.

It is organised in three parts, directly addressing the outline and questions in the letter.

### **PART ONE**

#### **Emerging Realities and Trends of Concern in Asia**

1. Are the 15 Emerging Realities and Trends of Concern in Asia an accurate reflection of the overarching situation in Asia? Are there any points that need to be added?

From the prescribed list, the most important are:

- **Global Covid19 pandemic:** the world seems to be settling into a "new normal" as it grapples with the possibility of having to live with the virus (as opposed to eradicating it). In this new reality, what are the implications for the Christian life?
- **Digitalization:** the Covid19 pandemic has revealed a willingness and ease on the part of the faithful to participate in the Christian life via digital channels. What are the implications for the Church going forward, especially regarding pastoral and community activities? How will it affect the way we see the role of parishes and dioceses when boundaries today are overcome by digitalization? It also calls for a new way of connecting parishes and dioceses; catechizing, preaching and teaching.
- **Youth:** the formative years are the most important in one's development, intellectually, emotionally and spiritually. In a postmodern context, how can we help young people encounter the love of Jesus, and continue to form them to live in greater love for and surrender to the Lord? Many find our church's moral doctrines difficult to put into practice in the

current secular culture. Also, because they are exposed to all kinds of social sciences, the question of faith and conditioning is being challenged.

- Family values: in a postmodern context, where knowledge, values and principles tend to be socially created or constructed, what is the role of the family in nurturing the young, particularly in the Christian faith? How can the Church help and support Christian parents in their mission? How do we promote the traditional marriage and family when the secular culture is influencing our young people into seeing marriage and family differently?
  - Gender issues: interestingly, this resonated particularly with the lay ministers, and is an increasing concern pertaining particularly to the young. How do we maintain the teachings of the Church in a loving yet compelling manner, in the face of fierce, popular antithetical rhetoric? E.g., that gender is non-binary, that every human person deserves the freedom and right to choose their gender, etc.?
2. Are there any glaring gaps that need to be mentioned so as to enrich the Document?

Other important points not mentioned in the prescribed list:

- Discipling and community: how do we move from being a Church that is centered merely on administering the sacraments, to one that grows in Christian discipleship as a community of faith?
- How do we help our people to evangelize as many are not well grounded in doctrines and scriptures? Lesser still have encountered Christ personally because faith has been a heritage passed on to them without they themselves discovering the person of Jesus in their lives.
- How do we mediate a Christ-experience to our people who are nominal Catholics?

## PART TWO

### The Church in the Asian Context

1. Does the section on Church in the Asian Context respond appropriately and adequately to the Emerging Realities and the Trends of Concern in Asia? Are there any other “models/images” that you like to present?

From the images of Church presented, the image of the Church in Asia as a Church of martyrs stood out – that we must never be afraid to preach that Jesus is Lord, and to raise up generations who love the Lord.

Additional images:

- A Church with a culture that forms disciples in communities to evangelise; not merely one focused on sacraments, devotions and obligations
  - A Church that is committed to presenting Jesus Christ as the Universal Saviour of all peoples and contexts, within the unique and particular realities she finds herself in
  - A Church that is missionary – one that brings the salvific power of Jesus to transform the realities of people's lives
  - A Church that is in dialogue with other religions, promoting mutual understanding, peace, unity and harmony.
  - A Church of the poor, committed to helping the marginalized, those in special needs and the poor.
2. What are your comments on the theological points in the guide document?

The images of Jesus for Asia and the images of the Church in the Asian context must serve as a prophetic impetus for the Church's self-actualization / realization; otherwise, it risks remaining detached from historical, lived reality. In his literature on practical theology, Karl Rahner writes that theology needs to be concerned with both that which the Church is, and that which it ought to be. In a 1972 article titled “Practical Theology within the Theological



Disciplines”, Rahner writes that “the Church must reflect consciously upon the question of how the Church’s self-actualisation is to take place arising out of and in response to its particular given situation in each instance.” He goes on to say that “the Church’s committal to the particular self-realisation to which it is called at any one time cannot adequately be deducted from its essence.”

Consequently, presenting images of Jesus and the Church is a good first step that needs to result in an authentic self-reflection on the part of the Church, leading to the identification of areas in which we have fallen short of those ideals, and ultimately to a closer realisation of that which we ought to be.

### PART THREE

#### **Envisioning Possible “New Pathways” for the Church in Asia and the FABC**

1. Are there any other “pathways” that the Church in Asia has to embark on for the future of Asia?

Specific to potentially new pathways and roles for the FABC going forward, the following can be considered:

- Giving particular churches the proper freedom to evangelise within our unique contexts and cultures, whilst emphasizing the centrality of Christ and fostering unity amongst particular churches.
- To facilitate the sharing of best practices, testimonies, and other resources that can inspire and motivate the Church in Asia to try new ways of engaging the changing cultures and philosophies of the people, while holding on to the Christian values and principles.
- To continue to discern the signs of the times particularly in an age of increased secularism and hostility towards institutional (organised) religion and to provide ongoing reflection, formation and to be a form of concerted synergy for the evangelisation of Asia.

#### IV. CATHOLIC BISHOPS' CONFERENCE OF MYANMAR

**Introduction:** The FABC guidelines document is an inspiring roadmap. Our deliberations on it were held in the turbulent week when the coup took place. With church personnel also involved in the resistance procession, our attention was taken up that issue. We thank the various Bishops conferences those expressed their solidarity with us. Myanmar needs the divine intervention to maintain peace. We deeply appreciate your continued prayers.

We are happy to submit the summary of our deliberations. We divide into two parts.

- *Recognition of the Six major streams in Asia*
- *Four major themes with urgent relevance to Myanmar and Asia.*

##### General Recognition of the Six Major streams in Asia

The guidelines take into consideration the diversity of Asia, the biggest continent in the world. We wish to explore the cultural clusters/economic groups that continue to impact the Asian reality. We also explore if FABC can respond to these cluster approaches in the future:

1. *Countries with Buddhist / Theravada traditions: Myanmar, Laos, Thailand, Cambodia, Sri Lanka and other countries. (totally 18 countries in Asia).*
2. *Countries with Islamic Tradition: Indonesia, Pakistan, (India), Malaysia, Brunei.*
3. *Countries with Hindu tradition: India, Sri Lanka, Nepal, (Singapore and Malaysia).*
4. *Countries with Market Economy - Japan, Korea and Singapore*
5. *Communist countries that are now aggressive capitalists: Vietnam, China.*
6. *Catholic Countries: Philippines, East Timor.*

Regional cluster issues need to be taken into consideration when we deal with Asia. Think globally act locally can be our guiding star.

Among the fifteen major themes, we will like to bring greater focus – both at the Asian conference level, at the regional level like South Asia,

South East Asia and also at the cluster level - the following themes. These may covet our attention in the coming years:

1. **Governance**: This is an urgent issue. Illiberal democracies and authoritarianism are becoming the modern-day political malaise. Out of ten ASEAN countries eight are not ruled by non-democratic arrangements and styles. South Asia is also fast slipping into strongman politics with disastrous consequence to minorities and the poor. Economic prosperity at the cost of human dignity and freedom has become the major narrative in controlling people in the region. We expect more deliberations and policy and a road map on this theme.
2. **Indigenous people**: FABC represents a huge region called Zomia, like Amazonia. This region is a vast mountainous region from Vietnam to central parts of India, the home of indigenous people. They have faced existential threats through internal colonization, destruction of the traditional way of life, looting of resources and subjugation by ideological, nation state and market economy forces. The Encyclical *Laudato Si* shines a light on their plight. Myanmar church is an ethnic church representing eight tribes - many of them are in seven-decade conflict with the State and majoritarian intrusion. There are other churches with a significant population of Christians of indigenous origin. They need a voice.
3. **Migrant Workers**: This group is the modern-day Exodus group - without a Moses. Ours is nation on Exodus: refugees, migrants, IDPs. One in five of our people are on the move. They exist in a heartless, right negated zones of modern forms of slavery. A greater regional pastoral accompaniment and robust regional legal protection need to be set in place.
4. **Green Church**: Humanity struggles through pandemic inflicted socio-economic wounds. Waiting on the wings is more monstrous global catastrophe of climate change that would kill millions. The challenge and opportunity of being a Green church with a mandate of green evangelization has arrived. Natural resources are stripped off from the poor, even the drinking water

facing the prospect of the preserve of a few. This is one theme that is urgent and can be cross cutting across all Bishops Conference. Economic Justice and Environmental justice are becoming two eyes of Justice in the modern world.

Jubilee is the time of reconciliation: With one another (*Fratelli Tutti*) with God (*Evangelii Gaudium*) and with Mother Earth (*Laudato Si*). The blue print is there. There is a promised land of peace, prosperity and integrity of creation. As Asian Churches we are asked to encounter Christ in the challenges as Veronica encountered Jesus on the Way of the Cross and in our Mission as Saul encountered Jesus. May this Jubilee become the Vatican II of the Asian Churches. The future looks overwhelming but with the challenges comes God's Grace, who faithfully accompanied the people of Israel to the promised land.

Let our Journey Begin. Let us follow the example of Magi, follow the star and continue on a different pathway. It is not the modern Herods who set our path, it is the child in the manger who shows a new path. Herods have become fossils of history. The Child has become Life, Light and the Way for the whole humanity. Let us move mountains with the faith of a mustard seed.

## **V. CATHOLIC BISHOPS' CONFERENCE OF PHILIPPINES**

### **Summary of responses to the FABC Guide Document**

#### **PART ONE**

#### **Emerging Realities and Trends of Concern in Asia**

##### **1. Are the 15 Emerging Realities and Trends of Concern in Asia an accurate reflection of the overarching situation in Asia?**

Yes, they are accurate reflections of the overarching situation in Asia, however, in varying degrees.

##### **Are there any points that need to be added?**

- a. **On the Prevalence of Violence**, especially against minority groups in an area, either a minority Christian community or a minority non-Christian community.

- b. There are trends which are not so much reflected on some parts, considering the situation of local Churches, especially in the rural setting. It includes the "**laid-back**" **culture/situation** and **religious conservatism** of the people.
- c. **Environmental Degradation.** This issue is very complex as it involves, for example, governance, the indigenous people and the Church. Environmental issues should be given much importance. They do not only destroy nature, they also destroy relationships.
- d. **On Stewardship.** This is the direction of the Church in the Philippines now, for example, when we try to gradually abolish stole fees, which we call "Arancel", and develop the attitude of stewardship, that is, simply giving freely from one's giftedness back to the Church. Perhaps, this can be promoted by the FABC in the future.
- e. **Equity of Access.** The Church, caught by surprise, finds herself confronting the wide-ranging effects of the pandemic, one of which is the hampered equity of access, especially on the availability of vaccines, that should also be a concern for the Church and poor countries. During the pandemic, the equity of access can also mean that people are momentarily deprived of their ordinary access to livelihood, job opportunities, mobility, and education.
- f. **Partnership.** Can FABC incorporate the issues on partnership, be it in business, corporate, interreligious, relational, couple, etc., and also the emphasis on the Human Family as well as the Common Home?
- g. **The Problems in Asia.** The Drug Problem, Labor-Related Problems (Cheap Labor), Family Planning and Overpopulation (biggest population in all continents), Economic Losses, Communism and Insurgency Problems.
- h. **Sexual Exploitation of Minors,** especially through digital and online means.

- i. **Church *Ad Intra* in Asia.** There is a strong attempt at reflecting on the Church *Ad Extra* on the present realities; however, there appears to be an absence of a critical reflective look at the Church *Ad Intra* in Asia in the last 50 years.
  - j. **People Power by the Youth.** While some Asian countries suffer from the adverse effects of populism, authoritarianism, militarization and power-grabbing, there is an emergence of people power, often initiated and led by the young people [e.g, Hongkong, Myanmar, Thailand].
  - k. **Reality of Secularism.** Asia is home to many religions, but secularism has real and wide impact on cultures and religions.
  - l. **Vocations.** The Church in Asia as the source of vocation for the Universal Church, as the new missionaries to the West.
2. **Are there any glaring gaps that need to be mentioned so as to enrich the document?**
- a. **Globalization.** It has also contributed to "**brain-drain**", where intellectuals of poorer economies migrate to richer countries.
  - b. **Global Pandemic.** This Pandemic started in Asia. The responsibility and liability of China to the whole world should be addressed. What should China's responsibility be towards the whole world, especially towards many countries in Asia that had difficulty coping with the challenges and ravages of the pandemic?
  - c. **Climate Emergency.** The challenge of climate change and ecological depredation should include other issues so that it can truly reflect a roadmap for concrete pastoral action. For example, what is FABC's position on the Paris Conference? What is our pastoral plan and our pastoral response?
  - d. **Religious Persecution in Asia** that could be found in society. There are Christians who are persecuted because of their religion and the manner it is being practiced.

- e. **Marginalization of Refugees.** Countries that can, by resources and population density, accommodate refugees should accommodate them.
- f. **Dictatorial or Autocratic Leaders.** In Southeast Asia, there has been a movement towards dictatorship and autocracy. What should "democracy" that respects the people's right to participate in their own governance mean in Asia?
- g. **Indigenous People.** The tension between cultural preservation versus benefits of modern living. The reduction of the value of "ethnicity".
- h. **Digitalization.** The great divide caused by digitalization. What is the role of the Church in preserving and nurturing these inherent Eastern cultures and traditions?
- i. **Sacrament of Confession.** Is there another way of doing it aside from the traditional confession?
- j. **Migration.** Parents are forced to seek better job opportunities in affluent countries. This is one important pastoral concern that the Church needs to address, particularly the question of "absentee" parents.
- k. **More Aggressive Church.** There is a need to emphasize our being an aggressive Church in matters of evangelization, wherein we go to people instead of waiting for people to come to the Church.
- l. **To have an evaluation of our efforts at evangelization** and a reflection on the socio-cultural-economic and political relevance of the Asian Church, and FABC can complement the efforts by reflecting on the emerging realities in Asia today.
- m. **Gender Issues.** The critical insights on gender equality and gender-based violence and discrimination are very relevant. Perhaps, we in the Church also will need to articulate a reflection on how these dynamics are present in our structures. Otherwise, the Church in Asia might fall into the trap of being criticized as having a very good "foreign policy" but an inadequate "**domestic policy**" on gender.

- n. **Aspects of Asian Cultures.** This is indeed a very complex issue. We need experts in going deeper when discussing some important concerns on particular communities or people.
- o. **Are there not realities which are more of the positive?** It seems that going forward, we see only problems. Aren't we, as communities, also progressing for the better?

## PART TWO

### Church in the Asian Context

#### 1. Does the section on Church in the Asian Context respond appropriately and adequately to the Emerging Realities and the Trends of Concern in Asia?

Yes, it responds appropriately and adequately to the Emerging Realities and the Trends of Concern in Asia.

#### Are there other "models/images" that you would like to present?

- a. To highlight, in this **culture of encounter**, the reality of the spirit of the "**joy of the Gospel**", the "**joy of believing**" as characteristic of Asian encounter.
- b. The Church should be like **a suffering mother** together with her suffering children."
- c. The model of the **Church as an image of the Trinity**. She strives to respond to the prayer of Jesus: That All May Be One! [Jn 17:21]
- d. **Jesus as the Son of the Father**. The Asian cultures place strong emphasis on familial relationships. The Confucian roots of some cultures in Asia have specific teachings on filial piety. Emphasizing this image not only creates a strong cultural resonance with Asians, but it also highlights central biblical teaching (cf. Mt. 6:9-13; Mt. 9:1-8) and provides sacramental ground for Christian brotherhood/sisterhood.
- e. **Dialogue** with migrants, refugees and victims of war.
- f. **Education** may not just be a matter of knowledge and skills but a combination of other factors that would make the educated



promote better practices, adopt more just and positive attitudes in life, and hold on to values founded on virtues or teachings of the Roman Catholic Church that are supportive of a better quality of life for everyone.

- g. **Sense of Belongingness.** Asian people have the capacity to relate to one another. Our sense of belongingness, hospitality, respect, and sensitivity to the needs of others gives meaning to our life; but not only to ourselves, it also connects to our relationship with God.
- h. **Reflective of Asian Identity.** Images of Christ presented tended to be general and modest. While it is not easy to capture such image in the Asian experience, it is imperative that the images presented truly reflect the Asian identity (if it does exist) and the integrated sensibility of the Asian people. Again, one is led to wonder: Is there such a thing as a unique Asian Church experience? Equally, however, how can the images of the Church be so reflective of the Asian sensibility?

## 2. What are your comments on the theological points in the guide document?

- a. **Cybertheology.** It is also in the digital space where we encounter sinners and people, especially the young ones who are trying to search for direction and meaning in life.
- b. **"Digital" Church.** The Church should also evaluate the effects or outcomes of digital media on the faith-journey and cultural sensitivity of Asian people. A "digital" Church, then, could mean an open and accessible Church community, a Church that is not afraid to sail on or embark on a difficult journey in the midst of world crises.
- c. **Greater role of the Church in its prophetic mission** that serves as light and hope for society.
- d. **The Church in the Asian context is family-oriented, celebrative and ritualistic, and communal and village-based.**
- e. **On Images of Jesus for Asia.** Why do we not make use of images provided by such Asian theologians as Kosuke Koyama?

How do I find the face of Christ in a culture permeated by Hinduism?

- f. The document *Ecclesia in Asia* noted that Jesus is perceived as someone foreign to Asia and generally regarded as coming from the western world. Hence, the challenge for the Church in Asia to continually proclaim Jesus Christ remains, i.e., **to recognize Jesus Christ with an Asian face.**
- g. **The Gesture of Homage.** Methodology in Mt.2:1-12 is very appropriate, especially in the Asian context, for the gift-bearers were coming from the East and the gesture of 'homage' was really Asian in culture.
- h. **The Church is on pilgrimage towards holiness.** Within this journey, she encounters already the Savior and Lord who gives meaning to every joy and sorrow, victory and tribulation, light and darkness in humanity.
- i. While the image of Jesus as the Good Shepherd is biblically rooted and has been the touchstone of many a spirituality, feminist theology has also warned against **the abuse of the shepherd-sheep analogy**, that is, Jesus as the shepherd and we, his sheep. This seems to reinforce dependence and submission rather than empowerment and creative fidelity, especially within the context of grave inequality.
- j. We humbly ask, why "images of Jesus in Asia" and not the "**images of God in Asia**" as reflected in the life and ministry of Jesus?"
- k. **Asian Theology.** Is it possible for the Asian church to come up with a common theological framework that is markedly Asian (similar to Latin American Theology)?
- l. The second part of this document is heavily Christological. The contextual, cultural, and religious diversity of the Asian region would perhaps be better responded to by incorporating Pneumatology in the theological part of the document. Since it is the Holy Spirit who animates and vivifies us for dialogue,

understanding and peace, the **Pneumatological aspect can complement the Christological images in the document.**

- m. The image of Jesus or of the Church as a Good Samaritan can be given emphasis. Consequently, this is also an **emphasis towards dialogue of action and faith.** Since Asia has different religions and cultures, dialogue and sharing of action and faith-life would certainly be enriching.

### PART THREE

#### Envisioning Possible "New Pathways" for the Church in Asia and the FABC

1. **Are there other "pathways" that the Church in Asia has to embark on for the future of Asia?**
  - a. **On the Organizational Structure of the FABC.** It is an opportune "time to re-look at the organizational structure of the FABC in order to serve better in the midst of the emerging realities-challenges."
  - b. It is to take a look at our liturgical celebrations, coming from the mandate of *Sacrosanctum Concilium*/Vatican II and consider the **serious work of liturgical inculturation.**
  - c. To live in **collegiality and in fraternity with other religions.** How much of our proclamation of Jesus makes us, the Church, brothers and sisters to the other religions?
  - d. **Devotional practices** should also reflect the conviction that like a child we need others. The Church should have a way to manifest her being a mother, of being a Church to the little ones, if we have to be true to the devotion to Jesus whom we know also as a child.
  - e. **Strengthen collaboration among Asian Conferences, i.e.,** Statement of Support.
  - f. The church should always be faithful to its local face. The life of the church in Asia is more alive in the neighbourhood or community setting, which is why the **BEC should always be**

**the expression or manifestation of the Church in Asia** where the Basic Ecclesial Community (BEC) is church as "Contrast Society".

g. **On Being a Digital Church**

1. The church should facilitate "**connectivity**", especially with the poor and marginalized. The FABC should explore pathways towards better connectivity with the least, the last and the lost.
  2. Thus, the concept of a "**virtual village**" can be further elaborated as a means for evangelization in the new millennium.
  3. It is important to consider those people in **remote areas with no internet connections or still with no means of modern communication**.
- h. **Science-Based Decisions.** Data may be generated from an action research or other scientific methods. Actions and responses of the Church may be systematic and directed because they are science-based.
- i. The pathways that the Church in Asia has to traverse are the pathways towards the **peripheries - towards ordinary people**. We see that the local churches are more empowered to be doing missionary activities, evangelization, and Christian formation.
- j. **A balanced Asian delegation in synods and consistories.** The situation needs and demands that the Asian people must be heard by the whole Universal Church. We are no longer an infant Church of the West, but a fast-growing adolescent or young adult Church who, in fact, have always been seen as the future of the Church of Christ.
- k. In envisioning new pathways for the Church in Asia, continuous **dialogue with the young and the poor**, and analyzing the present trends in the political, economic and cultural life is a must to be able to align with new directions which the Church has to take.

- l. It may be good to reflect as to how unity among Bishops is lived at the level of the FABC and the Episcopal Conferences. How much thinking, effort, opportunity and action is done regarding this matter. What are real and concrete signs of Collegiality, Participation, Communion – first among Bishops, then in the FABC? **What can the FABC do more to concretely assist individual Bishops?** – this will be helpful for new bishops.
- m. The proposals of the New Evangelization, e.g., *Via Pulchritudinis*, **Evangelization through Music, Arts, Sports, etc.** can be mentioned.

## VI. CATHOLIC BISHOPS' CONFERENCE OF THAILAND

We begin by naming the *Decree of the 2015 Plenary Council of the Catholic Church in Thailand* (attached document in appendix) as the benchmark from which we respond and upon which we seek to make comment. As the Holy See, Vatican approved, working document of the Church in Thailand, it talks about:

- ❖ The realities of Thai society and challenges faced by Church;
- ❖ a Church founded by foreign missionaries and built up on an ongoing basis by religious congregations, which continue to invest so much in the mission of the Church;
- ❖ Our being disciples as part of a missionary community;
- ❖ Our faith and spirituality;
- ❖ So, our **commitment to the New Evangelization** as a whole Church and where that takes us;
- ❖ So, **we go to the edge of society, to the poor, to care for creation and humanity;**
- ❖ This takes us to **new ways** and to **our core commitment in faith** to the merciful God with us.

### **PART ONE** (taken from 15 categories suggested by FABC)

*Additional Categories for Consideration:*

- ❖ Inequality in Asia
- ❖ Church and Power

- ❖ Conflicts in Asia – national and regional
- ❖ Justice in the Workplace
- ❖ Governance and Corruption
- ❖ A new Church in post-Pandemic world.
- ❖ Formation for a Church lacking maturity in understanding.
- ❖ Culture confronting Church.
- ❖ Social action of Church with local mechanisms in place.

*Points to be Highlighted within the 15 Addressed Categories:*

1. Global Pandemic

The perspective given by Pope Francis is that this pandemic is leading the world into a new era and that this pandemic highlights the already, long lasting pandemics. This is more than a health crisis and is not just about a gap in time. This is a deeply spiritual time.

2. Globalization

The pandemic has highlighted the weaknesses of globalization with the cutting of global supply chains. China has shown itself as a powerful force for obstruction and for asserting its own agenda at the expense of others.

3. Climate

Not focus on attribution of blame but on cause and effect, and on what we can do to change for the better. Church is involved in sustainable agriculture movement within society. The Dicastery for Promoting Integral Human Development has just launched the *Laudato Si Action Platform*, which we can use as a tool.

4. Digitalization

In an age when so much communication is possible, we are seemingly communicating less with each other. This leads to the challenge and call of Francis to encounter and dialogue.

Where is the Church going in this IT age in regards to pastoral work and formation? The pandemic is highlighting the need for developing new skills and tools.

5. Urbanization

Rapid urbanization has happened under a lack of planning. How is human dignity upheld in poorly planned cities? The large capital, like Bangkok, becomes the centre for all political and social life of the nation. It is good to place a focus on furthering culture and human services in building our cities.

## 6. Migrants and Refugees

Be precise when we talk on migration. In the Church, migration covers all those on the move. A concern for Church is the many unskilled and burdened migrant workers. Their movement sadly invites a lot of human greed and corruption to come to the fore. Our focus is to be the migrant and good development of nations to serve the common good.

We see rising discrimination and xenophobia which are negatively impacting migrants.

Migration demands good governance that is neither corrupt nor short-sighted.

In Asia, we see Asian governments acting against fellow Asians on this front.

## 7. Political Governance

Poor governance is a choice by nations. They do so for quick gain at the expense of others. It is about power. Power structures need to be challenged, calling forth a prophetic Church.

## 8. Transformation of Cultures

Asia is different, with its particular history, but it is not so unique. Caution against cultural arrogance.

Local cultures being lost due to local decisions by local leadership or lack of it.

## 9. Youth

By nature, youth are questioning. They serve as a good force for change.

Church is to listen to their voice but is stopped in doing so by out of touch hierarchical structures and clericalism.

## 10. Gender Issues

This issue is within the reality of traditional societies and cultures which have hierarchical and patriarchal structures. Primary is dignity for all.

## 11. Family Values

Support and uphold the family. There is no one model of family - extended families; mixed families. Traditional values are being lost or changing.

12. Indigenous People

Universal issue. Not approach this challenge with simple idealism. There are real issues with real consequences.

13. Human Dignity

This is a basic Christian principle which is a key to evangelization. Dignity begins at home and in the family.

14. Religions in Society

What about the impact of religious fundamentalism and Islamization? Too narrow to just approach this through secularism which arises with the progress of development. Secularism comes with rising wealth and comfort. This is a universal trend.

Local Church in Thailand is acting together with followers of religions especially with leaders of Buddhist on education in line with Pope Francis' initiative about Global Compact on Education, which is not based on business as seen in current trends in society. Rather quality education is to be accessible for all through combined action of faiths and churches.

15. Transforming Church

Acknowledge that a model of Church in Asia is Church doing business. It may be small but Church has big institutions and buildings.

Church is part of its own problem. Church needs to reflect on itself and reform. The term used is refounding the Church.

A new Church for a new age, dealing with clericalism so as to build up a more inclusive Church with a greater standing in shared responsibility, integrity and transparency, facing all issues, including protection of all and offering justice in all cases of abuse and corruption.

## PART TWO

*Is the Suggested Church Response to Named Emerging Realities and Trends of Concern in Asia Appropriate and Adequate?*

This section is over idealistic. The challenge is the reality of how to step forward in faith to put the ideal more into practice.

**Spirituality is a key.** Not over emphasize institution. How to recapture the sense of the sacred in the life of the Church, its peoples is



a challenge. Is the contemplative being overcome by the demands of business, work and survival?

Any culture is both good and bad.

A lived model of Church in Asia is “Church doing business”.

*Comments on Theological Points:*

Church is about the Reign of God. Its focus is an outer focus, not on itself. Its focus is the Kingdom of God.

Church is called to be prophet but to be prophetic demands hard work and sacrifice.

Church is called to be counter cultural.

Kingdom values for driving and motivating Church include:

- ❖ Mercy;
- ❖ Inclusion;
- ❖ Humility;
- ❖ Dignity;
- ❖ Compassion;
- ❖ Participation;
- ❖ Communio;
- ❖ Mission.

As a testing that where is Church in Asia now?

How does Church move forward to live out the model/s it chooses?

This movement of Church is to embrace the grassroots of Church, moving away from assumed superiority on the part of some. A key strategy is to empower the laity to take their rightful role. To do so challenges a divestment of Church power where it is too exclusive.

Does the Church truly embrace being the Church of prophets and martyrs?

### PART THREE

*Other Suggested Pathways:*

- 1) Intensive formation programme with stronger formation in the seminary and at the National Catechetical Center and beyond for building up good and shared leadership. Formation is life long

and for all made available to church through each parish councils.

- 2) Create structures of inclusion within and beyond Church.
- 3) Transformative power and power structures applied for mission.
- 4) **“Synodality”** in line with Pope Francis’ leadership and vision (cfr. *Address of Pope Francis, 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of establishment of Institute for Synod of Bishops, 17 October 2015*).
- 5) Affirm and build up role of the laity.
- 6) A Church in dialogue based on inter-faith and ecumenical outreach.
- 7) An outreaching Church within a foreign world and cultures. The Church is to be a leaven and so not based on numbers. A new pathway for mission.
- 8) A catechizing Church.
- 9) Church embracing local cultures.
- 10) A Church that gives witness through authenticity and coherence of Christian life in the midst of society.

## APPENDIX

### DECREE OF THE PLENARY COUNCIL OF THE CATHOLIC CHURCH IN THAILAND A.D. 2015

#### **“Christ’s Disciples living the New Evangelization”**

##### **Introduction: Rationale**

1. The members of the Catholic Plenary Council of Thailand A.D. 2015 are grateful to the foreign missionaries who arrived in the Kingdom of Siam in 1516 and began to announce the Good News of salvation. An important event that took place 350 years ago was the “Synod of Ayudhaya”. That meeting in 1664 enabled the Church to take root and develop. A significant sign of its development was the establishment of its own hierarchy 50 years ago in 1965. This year 2015 is, therefore, an opportune time to give thanks to God for the gift of salvation and to look forward with hope as “Christ’s Disciples living the New Evangelization” who now face many challenges caused by social and contemporary cultural changes.

The Plenary Council holds fast to the teaching of the Second Vatican Council, the papal documents, and the social teaching of the Church as the foundation for the New Evangelization, thus expressing its fidelity to the Universal Church during this time of rapid and constant change.

### **Realities of the present Thai society**

2. The spread of materialism and technological development have had a negative impact on the life of every individual. People have to work harder to make ends meet because of the higher cost of living. Their struggle for survival affects their sense of morality to such an extent that seeking power and riches, rather than a sense of righteousness, has become the norm of decision-making. Corruption and cheating are becoming more and more acceptable throughout our society. Secularism, materialism and ethical relativism lead many people to do anything for financial gain. Some parents neglect their children in order to earn more money. Some have recourse to abortion so that a newborn child will not burden their lives. Progress in communication technology leads young people to spend more and more time in the virtual world of cyber space instead of interacting with real people and of using technology to benefit themselves and others. They waste their time playing cyber games, engaging in meaningless conversation, posting imprudent pictures or texts, and becoming victims of gambling without being aware of what is happening.

The rapid progress of material development has had a negative effect on the way of life, morality and ethics of the people. People no longer pay attention to religion and culture. The standard of morality is “adjusted” to coincide with the material gain of those who have power. At the same time, the use of violence to solve problems is becoming more widespread. In short, the present social situation can be described as one in which “The economy progresses, but values and the common good are regressing”.

### **The Church in the context of various faiths and cultures in Thailand**

3. All the Constitutions of the Kingdom of Thailand affirm religious freedom for all Thai citizen. They also clearly state that the King is

primarily the Royal Patron of all religions. The Catholic Church in Thailand, which comprises less than 1% of the total population, lives and carries out her mission in a context of multiple cultures and religious traditions. Buddhism is the religion of the majority, but it is also influenced by the beliefs and religious traditions of indigenous tribal groups. The Thai people in general express their religious life through routine practices that they believe will protect them from harm, gain merit, and satisfy the wants in the various dimensions of their life.

### **Challenges to the Catholic Church and main objective of the Plenary Council**

4. In the multi-religious context of contemporary Thai society, Catholics are a tiny minority. They live in small communities scattered in both urban and rural areas throughout the country, and all of them have to face similar challenges. Ongoing catechetical instruction is very limited, and therefore the faith that Thai Catholics received in baptism is often not very deep and is characterized by traditional religious practices rather than by a personal encounter with Jesus Christ and a concrete faith experience in the Church community. By and large, Thai Catholics do not understand their call and duty to be true disciples of Christ.

Furthermore, the currents of the prevailing culture of the modern world are vehemently and quickly drawing Thai Catholics into a secularized society that is marked by consumerism, materialism, individualism, and relativism. The Catholic Church in Thailand must, therefore, focus more seriously than ever on what it means to live as a disciple of Christ who is willing to go against current trends, denounce the prevailing secularism, and commit themselves to the New Evangelization. The Church must be a clear witness of a communion of disciples centered on Christ, so that all Christians can be the salt of the earth, filled with the true light of Christ (cf. Mt 5:13-14), the light from God Who is Love given to the world (cf. Jn 1:1ff).

## CHAPTER 1: "CHRIST'S DISCIPLES..."

### **Each Christian is a disciple of Christ**

5. Every Christian, through baptism, participates in the life of the Trinity, becoming a child of God the Father, a member in the mystical body of Christ (cf. 1 Cor 12) who shares the life of Christ as a branch shares the life of the vine (cf. Jn 15), and a temple of the Holy Spirit. In virtue of their baptism, all Christians are called to be disciples of Christ by acting on the word of God, conscious of their important role in proclaiming the Good News according to Jesus Christ's command (cf. Mt 28:19-20). The witness they give by an active love of their neighbor in imitation of their Master deepens their own encounter with the God who is Love.

"Communitarian Life" – Each and every Christian together forms the community of the Church, a community of love living in communion.

6. Jesus Christ also calls all Christians to be witnesses by their community life: "Love one another as I have loved you" (Jn 13:34), and "May they all be one... so that the world may believe that you have sent me" (Jn 17:21). These words are a great gift to the various forms of community life that are present in the Church: Christian families, Basic Ecclesial Communities (BECs or SCCs – Small Christian Communities), Catholic organizations and movements born from charisms, associations of various professions, parochial communities, religious communities, the presbyterium, and the diocese. All these various forms of communitarian living must be characterized by mutual love, honest communion, and reciprocal help. Such concrete acts of love marked the first Christian community (cf. Acts 2:42-47) and brought about a great number of conversions (cf. Acts 4:34). An important goal of the Catholic Church in Thailand is to bring together all these efforts in order that the God of love be clearly visible to a society overwhelmed by secularism, which is transforming it into a spiritual desert void of love and relationship.

## **The various ways of bringing Christ's disciples into community, organizations and institutions**

7. The various institutions and forms of community life in the Church—the local community, specific organizations, movements born from Charisms, associations, etc. — are gifts of the Holy Spirit for the good of the Church herself and for the full participation of all the baptized in her mission of evangelizing every sector of society. Since the Church is the people of God, whose very nature is to be a community of faith, Basic Ecclesial Communities or BECs are a central expression of her nature. However, there are other forms of community that can contribute to the development of the life and the mission of the faithful, for example:

1. RCIA communities for those preparing for baptism and those wishing to deepen their Christian faith
2. Christian families
3. Neighborhood communities
4. Catholic organizations and institutions
5. Movements with specific charisms
6. Associations of professional people for the purpose of bringing Gospel values to various sectors of society, e.g., The Catholic Teachers Association, The Catholic Health Care Provider Association, The Catholic Business Executives Group (CBEG)...
7. Parish communities or Christian communities of faith
8. Religious communities and religious institutes
9. Presbyterium
10. Diocese, or the local church

In order to assist members of the various Christian forms of communitarian life to grow in faith and be able to contribute effectively to the new evangelization, the Church needs to help them experience the Spirituality of Communion (*Novo Millennio Ineunte*, n. 43-45). Being part of a BEC lived in the context of a “Civilization of Love” is an especially important way for them to renew their enthusiasm so that, ardent in their life of faith, they may look for new ways to enter into dialogue with the world and so become effective contributors to the mission of New Evangelization.

Although these various communities, institutions and organizations in the Church may differ in structure, spirit and procedure, they all have the same purpose: to contribute to the mission of New Evangelization.

## CHAPTER 2: "...LIVING..."

### **Jesus, who died on the cross and is risen: Model of the Christian life**

God, who is Love, reveals Himself most clearly in Jesus who died on the cross and rose again.

8. Jesus Christ, who is Love from God the Father "emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, being born in human likeness" (Phil 2:7). He lived a poor life and took the side of the lowest in his contemporary society. He stated that God is more pleased with mercy than sacrifice (cf. Mt 12:7) and fulfilled the Old Testament with the new commandment of love: "Love one another as I have loved you (Jn 15:12).

He taught clearly by his words and actions. He established the Kingdom of God in the world among his disciples gathered in love and communion. Finally, he proved how much he loved us by offering his life on the cross in accordance with what he taught: "No one has greater love than this, to lay down one's life for one's friends." (Jn 15:13). He rose from death and ascended into heaven. He sent the Holy Spirit to the Church to bring the fruit of his redemption to humankind through the Church.

Jesus Christ is, therefore, the perfect model and source of a life of love and self-dedication according to the will of God the Father. He has left us an example for all Christians to follow.

Moreover, as divine Son of the Father, He manifests God's love and still remains in the Church now and forever: "For where two or three are gathered in my name, I am there among them" (Mt 18:20).

He is the God of Love, and in the love and communion of a Christian community, his love can be experienced. This experience of God's love motivates the faithful to grow, to persevere, and to go out to bring the God of Love to their neighbors.

9. Today's disciples of Christ make present again the life of the early Christians by living the spirituality of communion. When two or

more Christians come together to put into practice the word of God, especially Christ's new commandment to love one another as he has loved us (cf. Jn 15:12), those Christian communities build up a civilization of love.

Our determination and our joint efforts to practice the new commandment of reciprocal love in a stable and continuous way, renewing it whenever needed, will enable those entering the community to experience the presence of God's love among them.

The risen Christ remains within the Church forever: "For where two or three are gathered together in love and communion in my name, I am there in the midst of them" (cf. Mt 18:20).

### **Personal Encounter with Christ**

10. Individual personal encounter with Christ is a condition sine qua non for the Christian life of faith. It is necessary to promote and support this encounter in the three target groups of the New Evangelization: the practicing faithful, those baptized Christians who do not live their baptismal commitment, and those who do not yet know Christ. They all should be given the opportunity to experience this personal encounter with Christ by being invited to join a BEC, in which they may come to know the civilization of love. In this way they will be helped to experience and to encounter the love of Christ who is present among Christians gathered together in love and communion.

The initial proclamation (*kerygma*) is the most necessary and important first step of evangelization. It is most effectively carried out within the BECs that live the civilization of love. The essence of this initial proclamation is the experience of the love of God present in the life of one's elder brothers and sisters in the faith, a love that they share with their younger brothers and sisters in the faith or with those who desire to hear the Good News of God's love.

### **Conversion (*metanoia*)**

11. Practicing and non-practicing Christians, as well as those who desire to become Christians, will also experience conversion (*metanoia*). This conversion comes about after they have immersed their lives in God's love by participating in the life of a BEC, and after they themselves begin to live Christ's commandment of love and to



experience an encounter with Christ. In this conversion they will open their hearts and examine their lives. Doing so, they will come to a deeper awareness of their hollowness, emptiness, past failures, mistakes and despairs, and they will make the vital decision to allow the God of love to be the first and most important objective of their lives. They will open their hearts to renew their life of faith or to desire to receive the Christian faith, and they will be eager to continue participating in the BECs, the “living cells of the civilization of love”, in order to grow in the RCIA process or in the various forms of ongoing catechesis for adults.

Those who are baptized will be nourished so that they may become ever more mature in their faith as a new horizon, and eventually take the further step of bringing the Good News of the divine love to all through their witness of life. At the appropriate time they will invite those people who desire to receive the Christian faith to encounter the love of God in a BEC, in which this new civilization of love is present. Furthermore, they will cooperate in practical acts of charity, helping, according to their capability, their poor neighbors and the people living at the margins of society.

### **Building and nourishing the life of faith in the Christian community with the word of God, the liturgy, the Eucharist and all the other sacraments, and communion**

12. We can really meet Jesus Christ, the Love of God, whom God the Father gave to humankind in the Incarnation and in the Pascal mystery of his death on the cross and his resurrection.

The Church responds to divine love by living the spirituality of communion in love, with the risen Christ present among the faithful. He is the mighty power gathering the Christian community, the living Church (*ekklesia*), that comes together regularly in the BEC and is bonded in a civilization of love. Together, the BECs form the parish church community, which is a communion of communities. The continuous growth of the parish community is nourished by the word, the liturgy, the Eucharist and all the other sacraments, and a life of communion, especially as it celebrates the Day of the Lord, the source and summit of Christian life in both its personal and communitarian

dimensions. The parish community also becomes the starting point for the mission of New Evangelization to society.

### **“Missionary Disciples” – New Life for the New Evangelization**

13. Through baptism every Christian becomes a missionary disciple regardless of his or her status in the Church or the intellectual level of their faith. All the baptized, therefore, need to be offered pastoral care so that each can experience the civilization of love through the BEC, which is the principal means the Catholic Church in Thailand has chosen as the new way of life for Thai Catholics. The BEC will be the primary path of renewal and formation for the Christian life of faith. It will also be the way to equip all Christians, who are Christ’s missionary disciples, to go out and make the initial and on-going proclamation (kerygma) of the Good News to all peoples (ad Gentes), especially the majority of the Thai people, who have not yet had the Good News preached to them. This is how the Catholics of Thailand will cooperate in building the Kingdom of God in this world – a Kingdom of truth, justice, love, mercy and peace.

### **Necessary conditions for the New Evangelization**

14. Jesus prays to God the Father for his disciples: “that they may all be one. ....so that the world may believe...” (cf. Jn 17: 21), “I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another” (Jn 13:34-35).

There are important conditions for making the Good News credible:

- a) Each disciple of Christ lives according to the faith.
- b) The love and the communion of Christians are conditions sine qua non, beautiful garments that are the uniform of Christians who belong to the community of faith (cf. Colossians 3:14). The Church’s New Evangelization must therefore be holistic, beginning with the life witness of love and communion, nourished by prayers and the Sacrament of Reconciliation, followed by the proclamation of the Good News by words, through which believers share their experience of faith so that salvation can be brought to all.

To renew the Christian spirit in the Thai Church, both at the personal and community levels, we must

- a) be aware that the Church in Thailand is dominated and influenced by the secularism that is so pervasive in contemporary Thai society and that causes loss of faith and failure in evangelization;
- b) be resolutely determined that each Christian be brought to an experience of God, who is Love, in a New Way of being Church;
- c) accept the BEC with its civilization of love as this New Way and the primary means to renew the life of faith;
- d) build up the BEC with its civilization of love as a living cell, a model of the mystical body of Christ, in the parish church;
- e) believe that initiation into the mystery of the cross of Jesus Christ and our understanding of that mystery as an answer to human suffering is of the utmost importance in helping Christians become true disciples of Christ and witnesses of the Kingdom.

Entering into the Pascal Mystery, i.e., dying to oneself, to the old Adam, and being reborn in Christ, makes one a disciple of Christ, whose life is nourished by the BEC and its civilization of love. Thus, nourished and renewed, the Christian community, i.e., the laity, the religious and the priests in cooperation and communion with the bishop, the principal pastor and missionary of the local Church, will concretely become the arena and the basis of the New Evangelization, proclaiming the Kingdom of God in the form of a new civilization and a new society in which God, who is Love, is present. All will become brothers and sisters, accepting one another as the one body of Christ, which has several parts for different functions (cf. 1 Cor 12).

### CHAPTER 3: "THE NEW EVANGELIZATION" WITH A NEW ARDOR, NEW METHODS, AND NEW EXPRESSIONS

#### **The "*kerygma*", heart of the New Evangelization**

15. In the New Evangelization it is necessary that preaching be more dynamic and that it be characterized by speaking of the actual ways God is experienced in human life. Preaching must always aim at proclaiming the teaching of the apostles about Jesus (the *kerygma*), which has its center in the Pascal Mystery, i.e., the passion, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. At the same time, the Church must

constantly seek new ways and new methods of doing this that are suitable for the present time and place, and that make it possible for all listeners to know, experience, and believe in God's love for all people through the lives of Christians.

### **Main targeted groups of the New Evangelization**

16. "All those who do not know, do not accept and reject Jesus Christ in every sector of the Church and society (*ad gentes*)". These people, both children and adults, have a deep thirst for meaning. Consciously or unconsciously, and in various ways, they are seeking the supreme truth. All of them have the right to receive the Good News and to know the true God. Therefore, the Church needs to seek new ways to bring the Good News to them, directly or indirectly, so that they may rejoice in the experience of the love of God and come to the point of desiring to learn more about Christ and of joining God's family in the Kingdom of God.

"Christians who regularly gather together and those who come together on the Day of the Lord". The Church needs to provide pastoral care to these people, so that, continuously and effectively, they may be nourished by word and sacrament, and by the assembly of those who are one in the faith and regularly come together for community prayer. Thus they will truly grow in their faith till they are better able to respond to the love of God, to give good example, to be light, and to become a fearless missionary disciples – eager to participate in the New Evangelization with joy.

"Those who were baptized but do not live according to their baptismal commitment and did not receive the real consolation of faith for whatever reasons". The Church as a caring Mother has an urgent mission to help those Christians encounter God's love and mercy, receive the joy of the gospel, and commit themselves to Christ in communion with the other members of the Church, so that they will be ready to live as salt of the earth and light of the world.

### **The roles of those who participate in the New Evangelization**

#### **- The bishop**

17. The bishop is the successor of the Apostles. He is Christ's representative and his main mission is to proclaim the Good News and

to lead the people of God, formed in the image of Christ, to give thanks and praise to God in the Eucharist. He is the father and leader of the local Church, and to him has been given the authority to teach and preserve the truth of faith. He is the center of love and unity for all the faithful.

In the New Evangelization of the Catholic Church in Thailand, the bishop must be pastor and missionary, the head and center of communion, the promoter, director and coordinator of the New Evangelization within the diocese, in Asian regions, and in the Universal Church. The bishop must be a good example, a witness to poverty and simplicity for the sake of the New Evangelization. He must be the promoter of love, unity and collaboration among his priests and see to it that all those who collaborate with him in the mission of New Evangelization are provided with just and appropriate material resources for their life and ministry.

#### **- Priests and Deacons**

18. Priests and permanent as well as transitional deacons are collaborators of the bishop and participate in proclaiming the Good News by virtue of the Sacrament of Orders. All priests and deacons must regard themselves as heralds of the Good News, ready to commit themselves with sacrifice and generosity to proclaiming the Good News to all people in close collaboration with the bishop. In their ministry of preaching, they have to listen to the people of God so that they can link the biblical text to the real situations faced by the faithful in today's world. They must also show enthusiasm in their pastoral care of visiting families, elderly people, and sick persons, in their proclaiming the Good News in educational institutions, and in their involvement in social ministry, helping the poor, the migrants, etc. They have to care for their sheep and also show their care and concern for those who are far away, including our brothers and sisters of other denominations and faiths.

#### **- Consecrated persons**

19. Consecrated persons, who make profession of chastity, poverty, and obedience according to the charism of each institute, completely offering themselves to God, are fully ready to serve humankind and

the society with their mission of evangelization in the footsteps of Christ. Faithful to the spirit of their congregation, they participate in the New Evangelization in unity with the local Church.

The Church regards consecrated life as a precious instrument for the effective proclamation of the Good News. The witness of religious life is an inspiration to the Church, which invites everyone to seek the supreme God. By their credible witness, consecrated persons invite everyone to progress toward holiness. The contemplative religious institutes are most valuable in the Asian context, particularly in Thailand, whose people have a high regard for contemplative prayer, meditation, and samadhi. The Church recognizes that offering the laity an experience of religious life and of other forms of consecrated life through retreats and similar programs can be a way for them to come to a deeper encounter with Christ.

#### **- Laity, family, children and youth**

20. The important duty of the laity, both men and women, is to proclaim Christ with their lives, offering their witness in the world, telling the story of Jesus Christ in the family, in society and in their work places with the purpose of bringing the love and mercy of God to society.

Pope Francis stresses the role of the laity. Their mission field is the large world of politics, economics, culture, science, arts, etc., at the local, national and international levels.

#### **- The Youth: Pilgrims of faith**

21. The Catholic Church in Thailand believes that young people will have an especially important role to play in the New Evangelization. Therefore, the Church must stress the proclamation of the Good News to children and young people, and form them to become leaders and be more discerning in the midst of fast social changes that affect religion. We must allow them to participate fully in the life of the Church. We must promote enthusiasm in those groups that provide various services, and especially allow young people to experience and take initiative in the missionary activities within the diocese or in other places. How beautiful it is to help them reach maturity in the faith and to commission them to be “pilgrims of faith”, full of joy in bringing

Jesus to the streets, to the crossroads and to every corner of the world. Children and young people challenge the Church to be watchful and filled with hope, because they are the present and future of humankind. It is of the utmost importance that continuous holistic formation be provided for children and young people. This formation should involve the close cooperation of home, parish, and school, emphasize listening and understanding, and offer them opportunities and good example.

### **Arena and bases for the New Evangelization:**

#### **- Parish and parochial community**

22. Pastoral care of the faithful in their parishes enables them to live in fraternal love and brings them to a deeper understanding of their communion with the whole Church. In its co-responsible for the New Evangelization, the parochial community has the direct mission of providing on-going formation to all the faithful, forming them to listen to and live according to the word of God, to have a close relationship with God in the liturgy and in personal and communal prayers, and to serve every person, especially the most abandoned.

#### **- Basic Ecclesial Community (BEC): a new way of being Church**

23. The Catholic Church in Thailand believes that developing the Basic Ecclesial Community is “the key and the most important principle” of its stress on community as a new way of being Church in Thailand and within the Asian context in general. The BEC reflects the image of the community of the early Church, which lived the word of God in a spirit of love, had Christ as its center, gathered for prayer, read the Scriptures, celebrated the liturgy, learned the faith, shared its experience of faith in various situations, was united, shared its goods, and served one another to such a degree that it was regarded highly by all the people (cf. Acts 4:34f).

The BEC must be a living sign of the Church and an instrument for the renewal of the life and mission of the New Evangelization by dedicating itself to the service of society, taking care of the poor and of those who desire to know Christ and seek the supreme truth. A strong community life will make it possible for the disciple of Christ to overcome social divisions. (Cf. *Redemptoris Missio*, n. 51)

### **- Christian family: A domestic Church**

24. “The domestic Church” is the most important starting point for the New Evangelization. The family is not just a small unit to which the Church must provide pastoral care; rather it must be the place in which Christians first learn to live the faith together in diversity. It is there that parent and the elderly pass on the faith and the culture, give good example, and provide vocational formation to their children. The Church must give great importance to preparation for family life, especially in these times when there is an increase of marriages with disparity of cult. For families in which there are sacramental impediments and improper legal form, the Church must quickly follow the process the Church has established in order to bring them back to the parochial community where they may become actively involved in the New Evangelization.

### **- Catholic Education**

25. Catholic educational institutions must be an effective instrument of the New Evangelization. Since they play such an important role in instilling the values of the gospel, the uniqueness and identity of Catholic education must always be emphasized. It is especially important that personnel at all levels of the Church’s educational institutions have a clear understanding of this unique identity. Teaching and administration must be carried out by persons who adhere strongly to the gospel values and are committed to on-going formation in these values. Administrators, teachers and staff at all levels should live an exemplary life. Catholic educational institutions must also help the students’ families to learn ways to present the faith to their children. They must steadfastly work towards the primary objective: that all the students might know God and experience His love and mercy in all that is good, true, and beautiful.

## **CHAPTER 4: HORIZONS FOR THE NEW EVANGELIZATION**

### **A poor Church for the poor**

26. The Church must give preference to the poor. This must be her “theology of life” rather than just an ideology or a social service. Pope Francis is very serious about the need for the Church to live and work side by side with the poor, that it be a poor Church for the poor. Christ



gave us the most precious example by humbling Himself. He was born poor. He left the greatest richness and came down to take upon himself the status of a slave like us. He loved humankind so much that he accepted death on the Cross for their salvation (cf. Phil 2:7-8).

The Church must not accumulate riches and Church institutions must bear witness to this. The Church must change herself to make room for the poor. Bishops, priests, religious and all the laity must choose to live a simple life of sufficiency, charity, love, and service. It must be close to the poor, stressing social justice and daring to reject comfort and personal stability in order to be effective witnesses of the New Evangelization.

### **Respect for human dignity**

27. “God created humankind in his image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them.” (Gen 1: 27). All human beings, therefore, have value and dignity as children of God. The Church must acknowledge that the mission of love and the witness of service can only happen when human life and dignity are respected from conception till natural death. The Church must protect, promote and develop human life and dignity in a holistic manner with the aim of promoting true unity in the world.

Every sector of the Church must join hands in defending human rights and respecting the human dignity of all, supporting and developing the quality of life, the dignity and the rights of the family, children, young people, women and men, along with all those who today are affected by new forms of poverty and weakness: migrants and refugees, ethnic and indigenous people, the homeless, drug addicts, people living with HIV, prisoners, disabled people, elderly people who are neglected and live alone, children and women who have been abandoned, those who have been tortured, victims of violence, victims of sexual exploitation and all forms of abuse, victims of human trafficking, and people without nationality.

Furthermore, every sector of the Church must cooperate to help and protect the rights of those who are encountering economic difficulties, such as small-scale farmers, laborers in both the rural and urban areas, etc. The Catholic Church in Thailand must provide pastoral care by creating opportunities for them, developing their

potential, and participating in programs that help them return to a normal life and feel proud of their human value and dignity as children of God. Because Jesus has come that all “may have life, and have it abundantly” (Jn 10:10), the human person and the biblical “new man” must be the center of the life and mission of the Church.

### **Care for Creation**

28. God assigns human beings to care for the world and for creation, which is the common home of humankind (Cf. Gen 1; *Laudato Si'*). We must, therefore, cooperate with the Creator to continue creation by protecting it and perfecting it. We have the duty of respecting and being grateful to the Creator by not trespassing or destroying the ecological system and the beauty of the world. We have to take part in the management of natural resources by caring for the natural environment and learning how to achieve a sustainable natural balance and harmony in our local setting. It is an important duty of the Church to encourage every Christian and every sector of society to use natural resources wisely, conscious of their value for the common good both at present and in the future, and to become actively involved in the mission of protecting our natural environment.

### **Inculturation and Dialogue**

29. In proclaiming the Good News to different cultures and in our dialogue with these cultures, we have to respect differences. In our proclamation of the Good News, we offer Christ as a blessing for all human persons in every culture. In doing this, the Church must not only offer the truth and the values we profess, but must also be ready to acknowledge the good points of those cultures. In the New Evangelization about God’s love for all people, we must not overlook or neglect the way of life of the Thai people. At the same time, we must understand the impact of globalization on society in order to create more effective ways of proclaiming the Good News of God’s love and mercy so that the message of God’s justice and peace may be heard and understood by the people of Thailand.

## **Ecumenism**

30. We acknowledge that all Christians regardless of their denomination are not only our brothers and sisters in virtue of the fact that they too are children of God, our common Father, but that they are also our brothers and sisters through faith and baptism. Hence, Catholics must not hesitate to take interest in our brethren of other denominations. We should pray for them, talk to them about the Church, and be the first to approach them. We should also pray together for unity and cooperate in doing various works for the common good.

## **Interreligious Dialogue**

31. All Catholics in Thailand have neighbors of other faiths. Interreligious dialogue is, therefore, of utmost importance. We must be the sign and instrument of the New Evangelization through our life witness to the love and mercy of Jesus and engage in dialogue with sincere respect according to each one's social context and culture. Doing so will lead to unity, love, truth and peaceful co-existence. It will be a way to the Kingdom of God.

## **CHAPTER 5: INSTRUMENTS FOR AND MEASURES OF THE NEW EVANGELIZATION**

### **Awareness, understanding, agreement and commitment to the Decree**

32. In order to promote awareness, create understanding, induce agreement and sustain commitment to the Decree of the Plenary Council for the Catholics of Thailand to dedicate themselves bravely and resolutely to the New Evangelization, changes in attitude and behavior will have to take place. The Catholic Church in Thailand will have to bring this Decree to concrete realization by creating a "Strategic Pastoral Plan for the New Evangelization". The plan should be followed by monitoring and an evaluation to determine what progress is being made.

### **Adjusting Church structure for the New Evangelization**

33. In order to bring about a more efficient and effective mission of evangelization, it will be necessary to adjust every sector of the

structure of the Church in Thailand, with an emphasis on decentralization. Everyone in the Church must be enabled to proclaim the ever-new message of the Good News with greater boldness (parrhesia).

### **Team Work and Networking**

34. The Catholic Church in Thailand acknowledges that team work and networking are very important. The Church must create networking in the parochial communities through the various Church organizations to learn about and exchange mutual experiences, and to build unity in the common mission of the Church at the parochial, diocesan and bishops' conference level. If the Church's proclamation of the Good News is to be credible and effective, there must be coordination, cooperation, and mutual support.

### **Resource Management**

35. The Church must manage human and material resources including the intellectual gifts of local people, by creating a data bank of personnel, financial resources, and other information that can be shared at the diocesan, inter-diocesan and bishops' conference levels. The purpose of such a data bank is to be able to respond to the demands of a concrete and effective New Evangelization. It must be always remembered that the sharing of material resources is important if the Church is to witness to the spirituality of communion in love and justice.

Those in charge of this data bank are to receive appropriate and necessary formation. They have to be committed to the principle of sound and transparent asset management. The appointment of duties must be done appropriately. Policy, planning, follow-up, and evaluation must also be clearly stipulated.

Resource sharing on the values, on local knowledge and culture for the common good is done through dialogue, seeking the source of life through meditation, talking about what is most valuable in life, building friendship, facing together major problems, sharing personal talents or offering them to each other, etc. The Church has accumulated these resources over a long period of time. She must now share them with society in order to witness to the Church's culture of love.

## **Development of the potential of Christ's Disciples**

### **- On-going formation for the laity**

36. The Catholic Church in Thailand must provide on-going faith formation for the laity regarding the theory and practice of the New Evangelization. Pastors, collaborators and the faithful do not yet have sufficient theoretical and practical knowledge of the Bible, the catechism, and matters related to the life and mission of the Church. On-going formation in these areas is therefore an important and urgent matter.

Formation in the practice of prayer and meditation, in proclaiming the Good News to our brothers and sisters of different faiths, in understanding and participating actively in liturgical celebrations, including the RCIA, should be considered essential parts of both initial and on-going formation in order that those who are being formed may personally encounter Jesus Christ and thus be prepared for the New Evangelization.

### **- Institute/Movement for the Development of the Laity**

37. The majority of the Church are the laity. As members of the mystical body of Christ, they are called to play an important role in the New Evangelization for the transmission of the faith. They should be actively involved the mission of the Church in all other areas as well. Therefore, the Catholic Church in Thailand should more systematically and constantly build up, support, promote, and strengthen the laity. In order that the faithful live as witnesses in every dimension of life, there is an urgent need to establish an "Institute/Movements for the Development of the Laity" with various curricula for all Christians, regardless of gender, age, or occupation. Programs of formation should be set up in such a way that everyone can have easy access to them.

### **The Vocation to pastoral ministry as pastors and collaborators**

38. Guiding children and young people to love God is the guarantee of the Church's future in forming pastors and collaborators. Contemporary society is less and less supportive of priestly and religious vocations. Therefore, it is necessary for the community of disciples of Christ to pray fervently for vocations to pastoral ministry. Their life of witnessing should shine more clearly. They should not be

afraid to propose new ways to respond to the vocation of consecrating oneself to the service of God.

The work of fostering vocations must be the duty of all: bishops, priests, religious and the laity, especially the family, parochial communities, and Catholic educational institutions.

Parents must be aware of their role in the initial formation of the vocation of their children, being ready to support and joyfully allow their children to respond to the call to ministry as pastors and collaborators.

Parish pastoral councils should have someone in charge of promoting and supporting priestly and religious vocations in the parish.

School and campus ministers have an important role in promoting vocations. They should regularly speak to the students about vocations and regularly organize prayer for vocations.

Seminaries and formation houses must receive full care and support. Formation programs must be updated so that they may be more suitable to the present situation of the society and better prepare the *formandi* to be pastors and heralds of the New Evangelization.

### **The use of technology and mass media for pastoral care and the New Evangelization**

39. Technology and mass communications are gifts from God and instruments that can be put at the service of the New Evangelization. Hence, every sector of the Church must take an interest in them and understand how to use them, especially the New Media, for pastoral care and for the New Evangelization. Social media create huge and broad networking communities. The Church must learn, understand and take advantage of these means of communication in the areas of pastoral care, the New Evangelization, the transmission of the faith, and spiritual development.

The Catholic Church in Thailand must prepare personnel who will be ready to create, manage and use media that are capable of reaching each targeted group efficiently and effectively. The Church must walk side by side with the people, helping to form their conscience, leading them and teaching them, so that they, especially

children and young people, may use these new media with understanding and prudence.

Media Education is a matter of importance and necessity, which must be promoted, so that all Christians are able to accept or reject the contents passed through them and use them for the New Evangelization. It must be noted, however, that the most effective means of communication is always a life of witness to the Gospel.

### **Central Committee to facilitate the mandate of the Decree**

40. A central committee should be established to facilitate the mandates of this Decree of the Plenary Council, so that everyone at all levels will acknowledge, understand, accept, and implement its recommendations for ways to bring about the necessary changes in the attitude and behavior. The recommendation contained in this decree call for a true conversion of the Catholic people of Thailand in order that they may be united and bravely and resolutely commit themselves to be “Christ’s disciples living the New Evangelization”.

## **CONCLUSION**

### **Presence of the Holy Spirit: Strength of the New Evangelization**

41. “And suddenly from heaven there came a sound like the rush of a violent wind, and it filled the entire house where they were sitting. Divided tongues, as of fire, appeared among them, and a tongue rested on each of them.” (Acts 2:2-3). The first evangelization occurred on Pentecost, when the apostles gathered together for prayer with the Mother of Christ, Mary, who joined the proclamation of the Good News undertaken by the Apostles. She continues this mission wherever the Good News is proclaimed. She was part of the first community of the disciples of Christ in the upper room (Cf. Acts 2). Proclaiming the Good News means spreading the fire of the Holy Spirit, the fire of the proclamation of the Good News of Christ’s love that has filled the hearts of the members of the Church and compels them to participate in the New Evangelization: “Woe betide me if I do not proclaim the gospel!” (1 Cor 9: 16).

## **“Jesus Christ – the face of the mercy of God the Father”: Wide horizon for the New Evangelization**

42. The Catholic Church in Thailand sees itself as the sign and the instrument of the Kingdom of God – a Kingdom of love, mercy, justice and peace. She is the mystical body of Christ, who is the head of the body, and the face of the mercy of God who is Love (*Misericordiae Vultus* – Pope Francis). We are aware of the challenges of a secularized society, which dries up spiritual life in our time and leads to the death of hope. The Church must engage in the New Evangelization of salvation, inviting everyone to Christ, the fountain of life. The Church extends her invitation through love, service, charity, solidarity with the poor, and defense of the human dignity and rights of those who suffer injustice in various forms. She contributes to the improvement of the quality of life, both physical and spiritual, of all our brothers and sisters.

The New Evangelization is the duty of every Christian, bishop, priest, religious or lay person. Through faith and baptism everyone has been called to be a disciple of Jesus. Everyone has received the love of God, whose Son came down to save us. One cannot keep this love for him/her self alone. It is the gift that the Church must share with everyone through a New Evangelization offered to our society, especially to our brothers and sisters who still do not know Christ (*ad Gentes*).

## **Mary – Model of Joy in the New Evangelization**

43. “My soul magnifies the Lord, for the Mighty One has done great things for me, and holy is his name” (Lk 1: 46, 49). Mary is the woman who lives by faith. She allows the Holy Spirit to lead her on the path of faith towards the goal of service and fruitfulness. We ask the Mother of the Church and the Star of the New Evangelization to pray to God that the Catholic Church in Thailand will resolutely dare to walk with her in the New Evangelization.



## Endnotes : Glossary of Terms

### **<sup>1</sup> “Christ’s Disciples living the New Evangelization”**

Generally speaking, the Evangelization is the mission of the whole Church, the people of God. It includes the pastoral work, the evangelization of those who do not know Christ (*ad Gentes*) and the re-evangelization of those who have already been evangelized but still need a new proclamation to improve their knowledge of Christ and their life as disciples.

As Christians, people chosen to be Christ’s disciples, all have the duty of the New Evangelization. Christians rejoice in the love of God, who loved us first, up to the point of sending his Son as our Master, to offer us an example of life and to lead us with his teaching to the Kingdom of God. Christ also sent his disciples: “Go, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I commanded you” (Mt 28:19-20). This command will be accomplished through words and deeds, through the proclamation of God’s salvation and through a witness of life.

The “Good News” of Christ proclaimed by the Church is always new. Therefore, the New Evangelization is not the proclamation of something new, but it is a commitment to a renewal of the proclamation with new ardor, new methods and new expressions. For various reasons often Christ’s disciples are not aware of this mission. Hence in the last few decades the Church has been speaking of a New Evangelization, to help all Christians to have a more important share in the proclamation of the Good News of our salvation. This mission will be accomplished through a witness of life to Christ’s teaching, through love and mercy towards our neighbors and through a deeper communion in the Church communities and organizations.

### **<sup>2</sup> Secularism**

It is born out of a current thought stating that religion is an obstacle to human development because it stresses simplistic faith. It develops a philosophy of life that gives importance to the “worldly” and the passions more than any values.

**<sup>3</sup> Ethical relativism** is the theory that holds that morality is relative to the norms of one’s culture. That is, whether an action is right or wrong depends on the moral norms of the society in which it is practiced. The same action may be morally right in one society but be morally wrong in another. For the ethical relativist, there are no universal moral standards -- standards that can be universally applied to all peoples at all times. The only moral standards against which a society’s practices can be judged are its own. If ethical relativism is correct, there can be no common framework for resolving moral disputes or for reaching agreement on ethical matters among members of different societies.

**<sup>4</sup> Basic Ecclesial Communities or BECs** are the gatherings of Christians living in the same neighborhood in the context of the civilization of love with the aim of a stronger concrete community life. Their members witness to a new kind of relationship born from the Gospel. They meet for sharing on the Word of God, for prayer, for celebrating the important moments in the life of the members, for helping each other or their brothers and sisters in the neighborhood belonging to other faiths. In this way they witness to Christ and to the Love of God. Therefore, the BEC is the important base on

which to build the relationship at the level of the parish community, which can be considered as a communion of communities. It differs from the other groups that gather for common activities without stressing the common fraternal life. Hence the nature of the BEC is more than just being a group; actually, it is a community.

#### **<sup>5</sup> New Horizon**

It is a comparison expressing a new situation after a change, as the new dawn appearing on the horizon after the night. After conversion, after experiencing the love of God and having renewed their faith, all Christians will see a new dimension, a new horizon. They will feel the ardor of sharing with all this love of God, which is Good News, so that all might experience it too.

In this context therefore a New Horizon means the daring of proclaiming the Good News of salvation to our brothers and sisters and to the wider society with new ardor, new methods and new expressions. (cfr. EG. 122-126)

#### **<sup>6</sup> A New Way of being Church**

It stresses the community dimension of the faithful following the indications given by the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences (cf. FABC V, 1990, n.8). In their statement the bishops present a model of the People of God based on community at all levels, be it the BEC, the Parish Church, the Diocese or the whole Church. This New Way has a specific spirituality: the Spirituality of Communion. It is a community in which all its members, no matter if they are priests, religious or laity, aware of being brothers and sisters, live as such. All share responsibility in the mission of the community, each one according to his/her role.

Therefore, the way of life of the faithful who try to live as brothers and sisters in a community united in reciprocal love must reflect the image of the first Christian community of Christ's disciples (Acts 2:42-47; 4:32-35) and live according to the indications given by St. Paul to the Colossians (Col 3:12-17).

#### **<sup>7</sup> The uniqueness of Catholic Education.**

It refers to the Catholic educational institutions that organize their learning process according to the principles of Catholic education, stressing the development of the student as a good person with a clear prominent moral character according to his/her own identity.

#### **<sup>8</sup> The identity of Catholic Education.**

It refers to the organization of the learning process and curriculum integrating them with the following 21 Gospel values:

1. **Faith** as base of all values;

2 - 10. Values that are duties in the relationship with God and with oneself, that is, truth, reflection/prayer, conscience / discernment / moral courage, freedom, joy, respect / dignity, humility, honesty and simplicity / sufficiency;

11. **Love / Charity**, as the apex of all values;

12 - 20. Values that are duties in the relationship with others and with creation, that is, compassion, gratitude, work / duty, service, justice, peace / reconciliation, forgiveness, unity / community, wonder / conservation;

21. **Hope** that gives solidity to all values.

### **9 Awareness, understanding, agreement and commitment to the Decree**

These qualifications form like an important strategy that can be described in the following steps:

Promote Awareness, presenting the aims of this decree.

Create Understanding, with those concerned at all levels in order to induce Agreement.

Sustain Belief, Faith and Commitment to become true Christ's disciples.

In the application of this strategy, it is suggested that:

Use a "New Way of Being Church" as an important instrument (Cf. # 6, 9, 12, 22, 23).

Organize ongoing formation for developing the potential of Christ's disciples (Cf. # 36, 37).

Adjust Church structures and working procedures at all levels (Cf. # 33, 34, 35, 40).

### **10 Ongoing formation for the Laity**

This ongoing formation must be organized as a process involving all dimensions of the basic faith of the laity. An example of a commonly used manual is the book "Our Journey Together" by Oswald Hirmer. Besides presenting the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults (RCIA), it is also useful for the general ongoing formation of the laity, because it contains also a Guide for the Christian Community to accompany adult catechumens on their journey of faith.

### **11 Institute/Movement for the Development of the Laity**

The development of the pastors (priests and religious) is an important work. The Church has constantly organized institutions (seminaries, formations houses of various religious congregations) at this aim since the Synod of Siam in 1664. However, for the laity that form the 99 per cent of the Christians there has not been a concrete organized system of formation yet.

Lay people are the great majority of the Church, a part of the Mystical Body of Christ. They need to become more aware of their being disciples, of their baptismal vocation and mission. They must proclaim Christ through their witness of life in the midst of the world, bringing the love and mercy of God to their neighbors in the family, in society and in their working places. Hence it is extremely necessary to build, support and develop the laity towards a greater maturity, both at the levels of the knowledge of the Master's teaching and of the experience of a personal encounter with Him. A team of experts in various fields should be tasked of preparing various complete curricula of easy access to all, well organized and continuous, for an integral development of the lay person. They should include the dimensions of living in our contemporary society and helpful knowledge for the profession of everyone. At the same time, they should develop a deeper understanding of the word of God, a greater ardor in living one's vocation, more participation in the activities of the Church, proclaiming the Good News together in unity and dedication. The result will be the building of quality Christ's disciples that are salt and light of the world.

These curricula could use various media in offering their knowledge and formation in an effective way to the various targeted groups of Christians.

**The Intervention of the Bishops' Conference of Thailand for the XI  
FABC Plenary Assembly, Colombo, Sri Lanka, Nov. 28-Dec. 4, 2016**

**“The Asian Catholic Family: Domestic Church of the Poor on a  
Mission of Mercy”**

The (draft) Decree of the Plenary Council of the Catholic Church in Thailand, A.D. 2015: “Christ’s Disciples living the New Evangelization” has stated in number 23, entitled: “Basic Ecclesial Community (BEC): a new way of being Church”, saying: “The Catholic Church in Thailand believes that developing the Basic Ecclesial Community is “the key and the most important principle” of its stress on community as a new way of being Church in Thailand and within the Asian context in general. The BEC reflects the image of the community of the early Church, which lived the word of God in a spirit of love, had Christ as its center, gathered for prayer, read the Scriptures, celebrated the liturgy, learned the faith, shared its experience of faith in various situations, was united, shared its goods, and served one another to such a degree that it was regarded highly by all the people (cf. Acts 4:34f).

The BEC must be a living sign of the Church and an instrument for the renewal of the life and mission of the New Evangelization by dedicating itself to the service of society, taking care of the poor and of those who desire to know Christ and seek the supreme truth. A strong community life will make it possible for the disciple of Christ to overcome social divisions. (Cf. *Redemptoris Missio*, n. 51)

Then, the CBCT’s Decree continues right after in number 24, on Christian family as a domestic Church saying: “The domestic Church” is the most important starting point for the New Evangelization. The family is not just a small unit to which the Church must provide pastoral care; rather it must be the place in which Christians first learn to live the faith together in diversity. It is there that parent and the elderly pass on the faith and the culture, give good example, and provide vocational formation to their children. The Church must give great importance to preparation for family life, especially in these times when there is an increase of marriages with disparity of cult. For families in which there are sacramental impediments and improper legal form, the Church must quickly follow the process the Church has

established in order to bring them back to the parochial community where they may become actively involved in the New Evangelization." Concerning the topic on "Mission" a Mission of Mercy, the Decree of CBCT says something about "New Evangelization". The Catholic Church in Thailand is convinced that "men of today esteem persons above all for their authenticity and coherence. People listen to their words if the words are expressions of their life. First they must let their actions speak. If these actions are born from the Gospel, then already by itself this is authentic evangelization. And then, to their witness follows words of proclamation. "In order to be transparent and efficient in proclamation, the disciple must be rooted constantly and firmly in Christ himself .... We must be more than just professional evangelizers. We must be men and women who have made the experience of God, living icons of the love of God for His people."

In the early times of the Church, the Gospel spread and penetrated in every social sphere of the world, thanks to the simple Christian, personal and as member of the family; The CBCT in this regard has expressed itself in line with the FABC. Such that today we must then render awareness to each Christian, member of Christian family, of his mission of evangelization in his own ambit of life.

In church the Christian is nourished with the Word of God and the Eucharist, and they experience the strength of the Christian community. The "new evangelization" begins when they go out of the church and are dispersed in the places where they spend their everyday life. They are the living Gospel and the Eucharist for society in which they are present and in which they work. The places of the new evangelization are there in the world of work. The actions of the new evangelization are those of everyday life, even the simplest ones.

The persons to whom they address the Gospel are the people with whom they live, work, play, and meet. It is to this people that Christians are called to create relationships of friend-ship, urged by a positive behavior of sympathy and openness towards others. An authentic evangelic behavior that brings one to be truly interested in the others up to the very end, to empty ourselves in order to listen attentively to his or her difficulties, his or her trials, his or her needs, his or her joys and celebrations, up to the point of sharing them. In order to overcome the division between the Gospel and life, and to

recompose “in their daily activities in the family, at work and in society, the unity of a life that one finds inspiration and strength from the Gospel to realize oneself to the fullness (*Christifideles laici* n. 34).”

After having welcomed, listened and given proof of a true love towards the other, then the Christian, the Christian family and Christian families in the neighborhood find the condition of being able to render the other person participate in their own experience of God. The time always arrives, in an authentic relationship of nearness and friendship, in which the other would ask: “But what is it that makes you do things in that way?” Therefore, only then witness becomes efficient and the word can give reason to one’s evangelic way of acting.

The explicit proclamation will be welcomed also in places that are traditionally hostile or antagonistic. Because it becomes perceived not as an imposition, but as a revelation of a friend of his secret that motivates his actions, of how he has learned to appreciate the quality of life, his sincerity, his own disinterest, his concrete love.

It would be difficult for the penetration of the Gospel to be efficient and long lasting if it was just the fruit of a single person. There is a need to come together, “for the Christian fabric of the same ecclesial community to be interwoven” and therefore that of society. (*Christifideles laici* n. 34). The parish community may come to mind, but even before creating small cells of believers in the same family, in the families of the neighborhood (BEC), in the place of work, in the residential district it is necessary that each one encourages each other, that they meet and tell of what the Gospel has produced in their life. They help each other to understand how to act as a Christian, how to respond to the necessities of those around them, to find the ways to witness and announce.

“The Church grows not for proselytism but because of “attraction”. The Church “attracts” when it lives in communion, since the disciples of Jesus would be known if they love one another just as He loved them (ref. Rm 12, 4-14; Jn 13, 34)”.

Today, while appreciating the realizations of the past, which are still always valid, and which we wish to be present everywhere. For the present time we need visible communities which shows to the world how the society will be when the Gospel is put into practice. “The Light to enlighten the gentiles”, the small communities of families

living in neighboring area, how the society will be when the Spirituality of Communion is put into practice, as Saint John Paul II, the Pope, said in his "*Novo Millennio Ineunte*".

We must also be able to arrive to create new plans of a fraternal humanity suitable to today's time, modeled according to the relationship that is in itself inspired by the same life of the Trinity, the new commandment of reciprocal love: "Love one another as I have loved you" (Jn 13,34), just like in the first Christian community of Jerusalem. These places of the Risen Lord present in the midst of two or three are perhaps the instrument that is more suitable for an evangelization in today's world, "where two or three are united in my name, there I am in the midst of them" (Mt 18,20).

## VII. CONFERENCIAS EPISCOPAIS TIMORENSES

First of all, on behalf of the Church and the Bishops' Conference we express our gratitude for the trust and invitation to provide input regarding the FABC and the 50th anniversary of the founding of this conference. Second, on behalf of or representing the Timor Leste Bishops' Conference (*Conferencia Episcopal Timorese* - CET) I would like to express our deepest apologies for our delay in responding to the invitation from the FABC to contribute thoughts in the context of the General Assembly for the 50<sup>th</sup> years of its existence.

We are grateful for being sent information and this *Guide Document* as a manifestation of our collaboration and cooperation in a conference like FABC. Thanks are also conveyed to the committee for providing this *Guide Document*. It is very helpful for us to read the signs of times in our contexts. Therefore, as believers, as a community of living Church, we are asking ourselves about what direction are we going to go? The question *Quo Vadimus?* is very important and relevant to us. In reality, a number of documents from the Second Vatican Council, especially the Dogmatic Document *Lumen Gentium* and the Pastoral Document *Gaudium et spes* have provided space for the Timorese Church to find its identity in its cultural, social and political context. In particular it is further supported by specific sources from the Federation of Asian Bishops Conferences (FABC) document series.

As Timorese, we are proud to be part of Asia, to coexist in a plurality of religions, cultures and styles of life, and proud of our

identity as a nation and a sovereign state, as a Church that incarnate in the context of economic, social, political life and the culture of Timor Leste. Nevertheless, we try with our best to find our identity as believers, as a Church, as a community of People of God who live in this blessed Timor Leste.

The *Guide Document* is divided into 3 parts: *First*, is about *Emerging Realities and Trends of Concern in Asia*. The questions that are posed are very fundamental to reformulate some important points in order to answer the demands of the emerging realities and trends in Asia. We see that the *Emerging Realities and Trends in the Context of Asia* that are presented in the *Guide Document* are sufficient to represent the Asian reality in the global context and also in our context, in Timor Leste, in particular. It is true that we are living in a context that these realities are spreading or bursting into our lives globally and locally. *Second* deals with the *Church in the Asian Context*. The questions that are asked helping us to reflect on the adequate relationship between the existence of the Church in the Asian context can answer the existing realities and become trending attention in Asia. *Third* deals with new pathways which Asian Church can effort for the future.

## **I. Timor Leste in Asia continent and context**

In our opinion, the first part of the *Guide Document* generally represents *Emerging Realities and Trends of Concern in Asia*, which is also our concern as the children of God here in Timor Leste (cf. GS no.1). Within that framework, we as a young Church are diagnosing these points from which we try to observe, analyze and on the basis of this study we are trying to formulate and formulate a basic direction of the Catholic Church which is contextual in accordance with the concerns of our beloved country Timor Leste. Even though they are generally represented, we try to make some contributions in the form of new insights to build a Church that displays its face as a participatory, transformative and dialogical people of God.

Timor-Leste is recognized its sovereignty as independence country on May 20<sup>th</sup>, 2002, through a Popular Consultation that was held by UNAMET in August 30<sup>th</sup>, 1999. During the consultation, approximately 21% of votes were in favor of autonomy within Indonesia, and majority of Timorese, with 79% voted against this



which was decision to be independent.<sup>1</sup> What is the impact of this independence in itself? The *first*, the Timorese people were free from the shackles of colonial colonialism and Indonesian occupation in which the Church had played a very decisive role. But we are faced with the *second* thing, namely, this independence gives a different space for the Church mission. This independence era is very open to the future and we need some categories or some phases which can be seen as challenges and opportunities to the Church (J. Pinto, 2020).<sup>2</sup>

## 2.1. Post-conflict phase

The first phase, Timor Leste is in the *post-conflict* phase. This phase is characterized by some of the following moments: a) Timorese people have gained independence, Timor Leste has become a sovereign state. The government system adopted is democracy in a semi-presidential system. There are many new things that make the Timorese new generation fumble to be able to harmonize with this new system in their lives. b) The people and their nation stand on destruction. The consequences of conflict and war that made Timor-Leste poor and the nation lacking in various aspects of life. People are sad, hurt, revengeful, angry, divided, violent, irregular or disordered. The fresh air of freedom without responsibility that is received and felt by the younger generation is ruining their lives. They are building a new family, a new generation that is lacking in education. c) This situation is ongoing, the people and homeland of Timor-Leste, at the same time, must accept a new invasion in the form of the presence of strangers from various ethnic groups, races or religions with new cultures or fashions. The young Timorese embrace all things of a western style such as fashion, culture and behavior, including negative aspects which will damage or destroy the life of the nation and state. There is a danger of manipulation of young Timorese generation. Timorese identity is in grave danger.

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<sup>1</sup> M. V. de Almeida, "Epilogue of Empire: East Timor and the Portuguese Postcolonial Catharsis", *Identities*, vol. 48, 4(2001), 538-605, here p. 584.

<sup>2</sup> For this part we referred to Fr. Joel Casimiro Pinto, ofm, "Quo Vadis East Timor Catholic's Church. Searching for Identity of a Church with Timorese's Faces", *Journal of Asian Orientation in Theology*, vol. 02, n. 02, August 2020: 197-220.

## 2.2. Globalization, multiculturalism and the crisis of identity

As Z. Bauman, polish sociologist, stresses that: “globalization divides as much as it unites. It divides as it unites, the causes of division are the same things, on the other hand they promote the uniformity of the globe”.<sup>3</sup> Therefore, on the one hand, it tends to unite, uniform, on the other hand it tends to divide, to create new distinctions and these effects are visible on different scales, both globally and locally. This globalization has caused also the crisis of identity. Because there is a *sans frontier* world. Globalization makes the world one and obscures each other’s identity. Identity is defined as a set of significant traits with which people identify themselves. The traits can be religious, ethnic, national, regional, or a combination of two or more characteristic.<sup>4</sup>

Then, arise fundamental question: How then, was Timor-Leste born? Rose a very fundamental analysis on how Timor-Leste is on a fragile state and fragile identity. The question is very easy and simple. But the answer is complex and underlines the multidimensional nature of Timor-Leste’s nationalism.<sup>5</sup> But far before, on the way to independence, in 1992, Ben Anderson has already talked about this topic in his *Imagining East Timor*.<sup>6</sup> Actually, he was concerned that the situation that would going worse. Timor Leste’s nationalism is very fragile.

In this context, unescapable that we are in a globalized world and certainly it has some consequences to Timorese life. First, it cannot be denied that globalization has penetrated all corners of the earth and this includes Timor-Leste, a newly independent country at the beginning of the third millennium. Globalization makes this small

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<sup>3</sup> Zigmunt Bauman, *Globalization: The human consequences*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998), 2.

<sup>4</sup> Cfr. Hary Juliwan, “Question of Identity in Amartya Sen's Capability Approach”, *Diskursus*, vol. 11, nr.1 (april 2012), 1-19, here is p. 6.

<sup>5</sup> Nuno. C. Mendes, “Multidimensional Identity Construction: Challenge for State-building in East Timor”, in *East Timor. How to build a New Nation in Southeast Asia in the 21th Century*, ed. by Chr. Cabasses-Semedo & Frédéric Dúrand, Carnet de l’IRASEC/Occasional Paper, nr. 9, (2009), 19-30.

<sup>6</sup> Benedict Anderson, “Imagining East Timor”, *Lusotopie*, (2001), 233-239.

country grow very fast (even if it is forced) to get up from the rubble, catch up, fix themselves and try to enter into competition with other countries. However, it must be admitted that, in fact, Timor-Leste was not ready. Apparently, Timor-Leste is a country that is fast developing and making progress, but with an instant mentality, there are many things that are passed by without any resolution to solve it. Indeed, this mentality forced Timor-Leste to modernize itself, but on the other hand, it was forced to change its initial vision and mission or ideals and be forced into the big dream of globalization. On the other hand, it also appears that we (Timor-Leste) are not ready to respond to the rapid flow of globalization itself. The second challenge is multiculturalism or multidimensional identity. Globalization has a big impact on us, in addition to making the world a global village, it is destroying the identity of each country, including Timor-Leste. Therefore, people are confused to find where is their real identity. Moreover, after we see from historical developments, Timor-Leste itself has been formed by three different periods namely Portuguese, Indonesia and Timor-Leste. So, why do we find it difficult to define our identity as Timorese?

### **2.3. Secularism**

Another problem that arises from globalization is secularism, that is concretely, the separation of the Church and State.<sup>7</sup> There has been conflicts between the Catholic Church and the nation-state in Timor-Leste since independence. As Joel Hodge says: "The formative role of the Church (and 'religion') was at the center of the most serious civil dispute following independence, resulting in mass protests over

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<sup>7</sup> Anti-Christian thinking (which began to exist in Timor from the time of Portugal through Europeans and was shared by Timorese university students from 1975 on, continued to exist during the period of Indonesian occupation in Timor even though some politicians made the move to embrace the strength of Church) fixed anti-clerical pamphlets shortly after the black September and a few weeks after the intervention of UN forces. This attack on the Church was felt again after the restoration of independence and in the penultimate year of the first constitutional government. Those who wanted to perpetuate their positions in power to transform this nation, into a merely secular nation, took shelter on the grounds that faith is an obstacle to development to attack the Church in the bud no longer by pamphlets but by the law of education that tried to exclude the academic disciplines of religion and morals from the national curriculum.

more than two weeks. This dispute occurred in 2005 between the Catholic Church and the Government of Timor-Leste, at that time led by the Fretilin party, and centered on the role of the Church and religion in education".<sup>8</sup> So, "the imposition of a secular-religious divide through a public-private division by the Timorese government in education [...] was seeking to form the Timorese cultural space in a particular way".<sup>9</sup> As we know, the separation between private-public is a part of the Western secular vision. This conflict can be seen to have affinities with the clash of the Church and state in early modern Europe, especially as many of the concepts used by the Timorese such as 'secular' and 'religious', come out of this period in European history.<sup>10</sup> What happened was the government's intention which sought to establish its sole control over education and marginalize religion and the Church.<sup>11</sup>

We think secularism is a challenge but also opportunity to the integrity of the Catholic faith in the lay state. The Church that knows its history in this land very well. The history in the conquest of this land, in the education and civilization of this people, in the defense of its basic rights, in the commitment of the independence process. All are with the faith already embraced by the majority of the people and being recognized in these people with identity, they did not bow to these attacks, but reacted with a courageous demonstration of twenty days, criticized and applauded inside and out that ended with the agreement of some points and the formation of a team to deal with the matter.

The State recognizes the social responsibility of the Catholic Church, as stated in the Constitution of the Democratic Republic of Timor-Leste: "In terms of culture and humanity, the Catholic Church in Timor-Leste has always been able to bear, with dignity, the suffering of all the people, to defend them in order to defend their basic rights" (CRDTL).<sup>12</sup> The state has recognized the struggle of the Catholic

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<sup>8</sup> J. Hodge, "Church, State and Secularism in Asia: The Public Nature of the Church in Timor-Leste", *De Gruyter*, *IJPT*, 16, 2(2012), 323-348, here p. 328-329.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 332.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 333.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 335.

<sup>12</sup> Constituição da República Democrática de Timor-Leste, *Assembleia*

Church in Timor-Leste in its efforts to bear the suffering of the people and defend the rights of the people, starting from the previous periods up to the post-independence era. Starting from this recognition, it is possible for the Catholic Church to continue to serve His people and bear their burdens in the light of the gospel. Because, Jesus Christ “wants all people to be saved” (1 Tim 2: 4).

A secular state in a nation where the majority of the people are Catholic is a major challenge. On the one hand, Catholic Christians at any time and in any place, but on the other hand, the lay spirit draws Catholic Christians to make decisions contrary to their conscience or to limit their identities as Catholics within the Church or within the home. Some experiences from these ten years of independence indicate this trend. It is a great challenge for the Church to maintain the integrity of the faith of its children.

Pope Francis also fosters all local Church to be in a social dialogue, that is, dialogue with the state in order to provide “responsibility of the State to safeguard and promote the common good of society with principle of subsidiarity and solidarity, political dialogue and consensus building, [...] for the good of human person and common good” (EG, 239-241). Because, the Church does not have solutions for every particular issue, but the state yes.

## **2.4. Immigrant Workers**

The Timor Leste Church faces major problems related to the large number of overseas migration. Of course there are reasons that are the main reason for looking to live in a land of people, among others: the independence that has been obtained has not resulted in a good, prosperous life; The messy domestic economic life can contribute to the departure of these migrant workers abroad. So, the reason is because of the family economic crisis and the unstable and unhealthy political arena of the country.

Being far from their homeland and country, of course, becomes a challenge for each citizen to present himself and his identity. Especially the problems of work, salary/wages, and processing documents become obstacles for them. And if they are not

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*Constituante, “Preâmbulo”, (Dili: Avança Grafic Design, 2002), 9.*

accompanied properly, from a psychological, moral and spiritual perspective, they will lose direction and even create a feeling of pessimism in their own life of faith as Christians.

Therefore, it is a calling, duty or responsibility for the Church to start thinking about pastoral directions that also prioritize attention to Timorese immigrant workers who are overseas, aliás abroad, such as Australia, South Korea, Portugal, the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland, and England. This condition challenged the Catholic Church in Timor Leste to think about the pastoral care for Timorese immigrant workers abroad and then prepare a spiritual companion or a priest for each region where there are many immigrant workers from Timor.

## **2.5. The existence of LGBT and new challenge for natural family**

A new reality that also colors the life of Timorese society is the freedom of expression which the Constitution of the Republic gives space to every individu of its people; to certain groups to appear and introduce the existence of their respective groups: especially LGBT groups. This group is relatively new and is still very strange to Timorese ears or to the eyes of the Timorese. However, their existence has space in society. In the sense that, although it is still very difficult to be accepted by the wider community, on behalf of democracy they are given space and their existence is *de facto* recognized. This can be seen in public events, parades and celebrations in public spaces and is attended by government officials and interested groups.

In this context, the question arises: does the Church remain silent and act only as a loyal spectator? Or does the Church need to think about something, especially with regard to the pastoral? In our opinion, the Timor Leste Church must get out of a certain comfort zone to enter into this reality and then give direction to it so that it does not go astray. Or is it enough for the Church to hold on to the old views and arguments and not try to provide space for creative pastoralists in assisting these LGBT people? In this case, the Church needs to play a role as *Mater et Magistra*, Mother but at the same time as a teacher who is noble-hearted and open in her assistance and teaching. She should play role as a humble and merciful mother.

## 2.6. Digitalisation

One of the important points mentioned in the Guide Document in the context of celebrating the 50th anniversary of the FABC is the culture of digitalization. It is true that it is undeniable that the flow of digital culture has spread and entered all aspects of human life. It is always like two sides of a coin: one side, there is a picture that illustrates a certain purpose, and the other side is also another image that also represents a different reality. Therefore, if people are not ready to accept this digital culture, they will fall into this misuse of digital media.

This digital culture presents a *cultural shock*, especially for young Timorese generation. This is due to the unpreparedness of the Timorese people to accept and use it carefully, wisely and according to its use. The consequence is that certain individuals use it for black propaganda, slander, or create fake news, violence both words that lead to mental terror and planned or organized murder. The direct objects that are targeted are young people who are still humanely unstable psychologically.

Therefore, it is a big responsibility for the Church, especially the Timorese Church, to help and assist young people in facing the current digital era by disseminating the positive and negative aspects of the presence of information technology. This is intended so that young people do not become individualistic, self-centered and alienated from others and the society in which they live and experience their development every day.

## 2.7. Political Governance

Pope Francis called for an improvement in work ethic in the government systems of world countries, especially in relation to handling the Covid-19 pandemic crisis which increasingly threatens humanity. The Pope hopes that every person, nation and country can contribute in saving humanity. Therefore, it is necessary to have a good work ethic and government politics, free from corruption, collusion and nepotism. As we have experienced, sometimes improper practices also appear in using funds to deal with or eradicate Covid-19.

There are two things that are very important to note, namely that it is real in the life of the nation and state. Many politicians shout in the

name of the general welfare but in practice each or every one of them is concerned with the interests of their respective political groups or parties. In fact, it seems that the wheels of government are run by a certain group or oligarchy.

It is necessary to create a work ethic in duties and services, namely responsibility and a high sense of belonging. In our reflection, responsibility and a sense of belonging are the keys to the common good. All of this is for the public interest. However, these two things are still a problem. Where many government employees, whether nominated by political parties or based on career paths, do not have a good spirit and work ethic. It is because of the thought that they only serve; all things are provided by the state: "Ah, this belongs to the state. So, I freely use it. If there is damage it will be repaired or replaced by the state". This is a big problem that is faced by the government and state in Timor Leste.

It also raises pessimism for its citizens, especially those who are directly affected, in this case, the younger generation. Young people, who are the future of the nation and state, lose their direction in life and become stranded, unclear and pessimistic. Within this framework, the government's efforts to create an adequate development for the young generation have not yet been implemented, especially how to arouse in the young generation the spirit of nationalism, patriotism and self-sacrifice for the nation and state and other people, their neighbour. Therefore, the aim of fostering and nurturing young people is to also cultivate in the hearts of young people the spirit of mutual cooperation, work together and a sense of belonging. It is the duty of the state to form a character building for young citizens who in the end can have good capacity building in contributing to the state and nation.

## **2.8. The need for a politics for the development of intellectual and professional youth**

We can see that the unemployment rate is very high. This is because the politics to build the creative economy on the part of the government have not yet been implemented. However, this is also caused by the inadequate quality of education, especially formal and non-formal professional development for young people who are ready to enter the world of work. Because, if young people are not taken care



of, are well organized, of course this becomes an obstacle to social stability, which is mostly caused by teenage brawls, buying and selling and the use of illegal drugs, violence against other young people, bullying, sexual harassment and so on.

Another important issue to pay attention to is Martial Arts which also triggers the instability of life in this country. Many young people joined in martial arts organizations. Of course there are pros and cons. From the positive side, that young people can hang out, join in groups with other people (with the same goal), and build collaboration with others. However, the negative side is that they create new gaps in building relationships with other people. The presence of other people is always suspected. Because the other are not in my group. So, in this case something very negative happens, namely, there is a segmentation in society and it is divided into independent fragments.

Thus, the proposal emerged is: there is a need for a new political vision to reorganize these fragments so that they can become a whole again. Therefore, legal rules are needed to regulate martial arts, namely to be tighter and to take firm action in the event of a violation.

## **II. Some ideas critiques for our reflection for future<sup>13</sup>**

We think that we need better was to have a critiques and ideas for developing the Church in her way of life and in the future within the context of Timor-Leste. Even though, there is an argument on the situation of the Timor-Leste's contemporary Catholic Church. There is a paradoxal reality between the Church and the Timorese people. It is unique that the Church is involved already in the life of the Timorese society. But there is a paradoxical development in the quality of faith that we can see from three fundamental characteristics:

### **a). The Popular Church**

In the populist level, the Church face can be illustrated with a very global interest. The Timorese see the Church institution as very brave to encourage and defend their interest. Especially when they field oppressed and imprisoned in their own land. The colonial Portuguese government used the Church as an 'instrument' to reach

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<sup>13</sup> Cfr. Pinto, ofm, "Quo Vadis East Timor Catholic's Church...", 212-214.

their goal. We see that the colonialism projects (economy, military and politics) became the main objective of their mission. So, the life of the people was not important to them. That's the reason why the Catholic Church converted only 28 percent of Timorese to be Christian or Catholic. The Catholic Church allied itself with the Timorese. The missionaries built a new mission center for educating and promoting the right of Timorese people. Protecting the humanity became the main goal then followed by the conversion of Timorese to Catholicism as the second objective. The consequence is the spread of Catholic faith and the development of traditional rites went together, live together in peace. That the Church discovered a popular-spirituality that is to live, experience, feel and understand faith in the unity of concrete life. They feel close to the Church because of receiving rice, corn, clothes, medicines, etc. They measured God's grace and love from the characteristic of helping (charity help) from the Church. So this affirmed that on the popular level, the Timorese live the faith with a manner and measure by a mundane one.

**b). At the political level Timorese treat the Church as counter to local political opposition**

Many political figures have tried to use the "authority" (*ex-cathedra*) of the Church to seek political support. This reality developed very dramatically when East Timor was under the pressure of 'civil war' and 'political integration' which claimed many lives but also destroyed various aspects of life. Since 1975 until now, the land of Timor-Leste has become a field of slaughter, destruction and conquest. Within this framework, politically the Church can become a social force, but it cannot yet become a cultural frame. Thus, the values of justice, love and peace are so difficult for the Church to fight for. It is precisely among the leaders who claim to be Catholic that syndicates emerge that instigate all kinds of terrible tragedies in Timor-Leste.

**c). The difference between Doctrinal Catholicism and Popular Catholicism**

Theologically there arises a sharp difference between *doctrinal Catholicism* and *popular Catholicism*. This phenomenon is actually very hidden and has not been much reflected. According to him, the

dilemma is based on the fact that many Catholics after 1975 do not provide guarantees that the values of the Catholic faith can be used as a benchmark for resolving East Timor's social, political and cultural problems. In a perhaps harsh formulation, the Church may speak of love, forgiveness, reconciliation, justice and peace, but Timorese still pounce on each other as prey. This means that Catholicism has not become a living praxis for Timorese. In another formulation, the Church is actually more a surface unit that gives a little space for all political interests to take shelter for a moment if the conflict has sharpened. When all groups are no longer able to resolve the problem, they will address their "political choices" to the Church, hoping for a little comment from the hierarchies. Thus, the theological problem is that the Church is still seen at an institutional level (social, political and cultural) and has not yet entered into a culture in which the Church's objectification has not been 'dignified' in human identity and self-image (East Timorese). So, this phenomenon becomes important to note. That the quantity of Catholicism in Timor-Leste is the majority, but spiritually, in fact the Timorese faith is still on the surface.

These are the three categories of church life that set as a very paradoxical category of life in Timor-Leste. Institutionally the Church has shown itself to be strong but spiritually the Church is suffering from a spiritual loneliness and has not been able to testify to the freeing glad tidings.

### **III. Proposals toward a Church with a Timorese Face<sup>14</sup>**

We need to be developed in the future mission of the Catholic Church in Timor-Leste. Here the Church is called to play a role to be with and accompany the Timorese, help them to find their identity as Timorese, not as Portuguese, Indonesian or any other country. "To purpose of the Church now is to hear to our faithful, to accompany our Timorese to find and make sure that our identity is being Timorese; to hear to all, young and adult, what they want their Church to be? Within this, the Church should also find her identity that its faces is Timorese,

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<sup>14</sup> Cfr. Pinto, ofm, "Quo Vadis East Timor Catholic's Church,..." , 214-216.

not a Church that is an outsider to her people” (Msgr. Virgilio do Carmo Silva, the Archbishop of Dili).<sup>15</sup>

As Dr. José Ramos-Horta, former President of Republic Democratic of Timor-Leste, remarked: “The Church is a part of our history, the only one that can claim hundred years of experience but beyond that, it is the Church that provides the growth of Timorese identity, the Church has contributed enormously to education, health and culture over the years”. As in 2015, Dr. Rui Araujo, the Prime Minister, on the occasion of the conference on “*The Church and Its Timor Face*” underlined and reaffirmed the statement by saying: “the Church’s contribution to independence predates the Indonesian occupation. Indeed, its main contribution was to forge the very Timorese identity, which throughout the centuries was shaped according to the diversity of our ancestors, our culture and our traditions, always in contact with the Church. This national identity was strengthened after 24 years of great violence, since our people were absolutely convinced of the justice of their cause of independence, freedom and sovereignty”.<sup>16</sup>

Surely, as Joel Hodge noticed that Catholic Church has formed and influenced East Timorese culture and politics, especially after the Indonesian occupation.<sup>17</sup> Timor-Leste's Catholic Church has become a community and national identity; it plays an instrumental role which influences development. Evangelization of the Catholic Church on Timor-Leste, the land of the rising sun, does not distinguish people from the Church. Both are like one coin with two sides. The most radical utterances in Tetum is: “*Povo mak Sarani, Sarani mak Povo*”.<sup>18</sup> The

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<sup>15</sup> The Archbishop Msgr. Virgilio gave an example that occurred three years ago, in 2018. For example, the Catholic hierarchy and the congregation or the faithful from three dioceses: Dili, Baucau and Maliana, have had a national week for Liturgy. They have tried to hear each other, criticized and tried to make some solution the liturgical life in Timor-Leste. He reminded: “that was not our decisions, the decision come out from the audiences”. My interview with Msgr. Virgilio do Carmo Silva in the Câmara Eclesiastica, Lecidere, Dili, Timor-Leste, April, 16<sup>th</sup>, 2010.

<sup>16</sup> R. Araujo, “The Role of the Church in the Struggle for National Liberation: Memory and Reflection”, in *The Church and Its Timorese Face*, Lahane Palace, April 9<sup>th</sup>, 2015.

<sup>17</sup> Hodge, *art. cit.* 324.

<sup>18</sup> Domingos Sequeira, “*Se Mak Povo, Se Mak Sarani? Igreja Katolika Timor-*

people are the Christians, and Christians are the people. To this spirit, Hodge affirmed this saying: "The strength and fervor of East Timorese affiliation to and belief in the Catholic Church belies a deeper cultural movement which was connected to Timorese identity and resistance to Indonesian rule".<sup>19</sup> So, Timor's shift to Catholicism is in terms as an experience of oppression and the contribution of Christianity to Timorese resistance, identity and survival.

As a proposal for now and the future, it is our homework to search for and analyze the concept of "**Being Timorese**"? and "**Timoresness**"? The Federation of Asian Bishops Conferences (FABC) invites all churches in Asia with a goal for the church in Asia is to become truly Asian in all things. FABC says: "If the Asian Churches do not discover their identity, they will have no future".<sup>20</sup> This also should be in Timor-Leste's context – "to become a church with Timorese faces". Timor-Leste's context must be accepted as theological sources (*locus theologicus*), in addition to the traditional sources of Scripture and Tradition. Within this framework, we suggest the following proposals that we need for the future of the Church in Timor-Leste.

#### a) **Foster the dialogue between Catholic faith and Timorese culture**

In this period of independent Timor, when the people hope to improve their material life by resorting to state institutions, the Church is challenged to focus more on pastoral healing. At this moment, when the revival of animist movements is being felt, the Church is increasingly challenged to re-evangelize, purify and take root the Catholic faith in the lives of the baptized. Pope Francis says: "The one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church of Christ is truly present and operative in the context. It is incarnate in a certain place, equipped with all means of salvation bestowed by Christ, but local features"<sup>21</sup>.

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Leste" in *Catatan Lepas Untuk Pemimpin Bangsa Beradab*, (Baucau: Kleru Diocese Dili, 2005) 27

<sup>19</sup> HODGE, *art. cit.* 325.

<sup>20</sup> Colloquium on Ministries in the Church 14, FAPA 1, 70.

<sup>21</sup> EG, n. 30; see also the vision for the mission of the Church to be in dialogue with cultures proposed by Pope Francis. Cfr. EG, nr. 68-69, 115, 117 & 132.

**b) Forgiveness and reconciliation**

Timor-Leste has just exited from the conflict and/or is still in a post-conflict situation. This aspect should be given more attention. What followed was the development of a policy of *hatred and revenge* among the East Timorese themselves. We have lost the home of peace, prosperity and especially “purity of heart” to accept others as brothers and sisters (*maun-alin bin-feton*). Timorese-Leste politicians are also losing heart to truly defend the poor and oppressed and tend to defend their political interests. Thus, division, hatred and revenge become *factum-historicum* for us.

**c) Catholicism is challenged to live with sects**

The non-Christian religions that began to exist since pre-colonial Timor did not make themselves felt among the animist people. The non-Catholic Christian religions that have existed since the Portuguese-Timor period have made their presence felt, but have not caused tensions and conflicts. Religious tensions and conflicts were most felt in the period of Indonesia-Timor. Now, there are some new nominations of Christian churches in Timor-Leste. These non-Catholic Christian denominations and the other sects took advantage of the independence of this lay state and took shelter in the constitution of this Nation that protects the freedom of this people to believe and not believe and to embrace a religious confession according to free choice. This is also a challenge for the Catholic Church.

**d) Keeping Catholic schools’ identity and teaching quality alive.**

Another challenge for the Church is how to maintain Catholic schools and the quality of their teaching. The Church still continues to raise its head with schools from the past, but it is already past. With independence, the situation changed dramatically. The State has the most financial capacity to do everything. The state has the most teachers and in fact the majority of teachers in Catholic schools are state teachers. The education provided by the State aims to eliminate illiteracy and get all the children of this land to spend at least nine years of schooling, adopted the policy of universality. This is education which is mandatory and free of charge and allows

everyone to access this view. In view of this situation, parents, in their freedom, are called to choose the best schools: in the State or in the Church. The Church is challenged to keep alive its own identity with the quality desired by its charism. Within this framework, the Church is expected to play the role of a compassionate father, reclaiming those who are lost, helping to become instruments that can reconcile all parties concerned until in the end all accept and forgive each other. Reconciliation will not last if it is based on forgiveness.

#### **IV. Models of the face of Christ in Asia**

We see that in the proposal submitted by the committee it also represents our Timorese scream or search, thirst and hunger for the face of Christ in our own context. So here, we want to wake up some points only:

1. Christ the light, the liberator and the bearer of hope. We, when reflecting on our contextual situation, see the face of Christ who is a liberator and reformer and bearer of light (who illuminates our dark hearts) and the hope that always strengthens us Timorese in the face of various difficulties (wars, conflicts and problems between ethnicity). For us Christ is light, just as the kings of the East sought; the center of wisdom which is the wisdom of God himself. Christ is also the liberator for the Timorese. For the Timor Christ a leader who gives hope in adversity. so that each time they experienced difficulties (in the oppression) many Timorese people fled and asked for help from the Crucified One who always loved and was with them.
2. The Church - in the midst of the ebb and flow of Covid-19, must be present as a sign, channel of hope and God's togetherness with His suffering people (Immanuel); The church becomes a reformer who can give a new color to a life full of hope. In this case the Church is no longer obedient to the rule of law which is static, strict and rigid but opens a compassionate heart, welcomes and embraces and cares for her people who are battered by wounds, who are sick, who are desperate, take the lost back into their laps. In other words, the Church is expected to be both mother and teacher - Mater et Magistra. As a mother, the Church displays a

face full of compassion, love, nurture and always be there for her children; as a teacher, the church must also teach the right thing, not be a manipulator, give an example rather than teach abstract doctrines, not stay in the status quo but descend, walk to the side to embrace all that is on the sidelines, and so on. So, the Church must put on a face full of mercy as God is merciful love.

3. We think that the theological reflection above is sufficient and can become a reference in developing the vision and mission of the FABC in the future, namely to present the Kingdom of God in real and concrete terms on the Asian continent and in particular to experience His real and concrete presence in Timor Leste. In that framework, we do not add anything else but it is our duty to try together, bishops, theologians, intellectuals who are sons and daughters of Timor, technical personnel, to translate the inspiration from the FABC in building the basic direction of the Timorese Church. , in general, and also of each diocese, in particular.
4. These *emerging realities* have a profound impact on the life of the church in Asia and in Timor Leste and therefore demand a very important effort to build and develop contextual evangelization and pastoral methode which demands a living and always contextual life of faith as well. In other words, we were actually invited to read emerging realities as “signs of the times”. The Council of Second Vatican, when spoke of “signs of the times”, diagnostic in the pastoral constitution, *the church in the contemporary world*, a profound historical change and said: “*Humanity is living today a new period of its history, characterized by profound and rapid changes that progressively extend to the entire universe*”.<sup>22</sup> It does not make us farther away but on the contrary helps us to open ourselves in order to find the spirit in each of these realities and strive to discern a new and adequate process of evangelization.
5. The situation is therefore not desperate. But the new doesn't automatically come by itself. We must understand the hour that has struck, welcome it and actively shape the future. The church

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<sup>22</sup> GS, 4.



must be hit by a shock. In biblical terms we must conceive, welcome and shape the present hour as a *kairós*, as a time given to us by God. Then the crisis, understood in today's negative sense of the term, can become a crisis in the original Greek sense of the word: a time of change and turning point.

6. The Church is called to bring the Gospel and the salvation of Christ to all peoples especially to all men and women who do not yet know the good news, so that her members, wherever they are, must announce it. It can be said that the idea of evangelization inscribed in the *DNA* of the Church and springs from the internal structure of faith. The first proclamation is accomplished through the witness of Christ, that is, the presence and relationships of esteem and charity towards the people to whom the proclamation is addressed; then, through participation in their social and cultural life, the knowledge of their traditions, discovering in them the seeds of the Word, illuminating, in the light of the Gospel, their riches, freeing them and referring them to the dominion of God the Savior. This attitude creates the real conditions for dialogue with men and women of every race, culture, nation, religion, etc. The best way to give authentic Christian witness occurs, in a particular way, through charity which, in turn, takes on various aspects: the sharing of their existential experiences, social and economic commitment, the educational and formative activity of children and young people, the promotion of human dignity as rooted in God himself, the fight against hunger, ignorance and disease, the proclamation of peace.<sup>23</sup>
7. The nature of the Church is always in the mission. The task of proclaiming the Gospel and implanting the Church is one and the same in every place and in every situation, although the circumstances may be different. The differences do not arise from the intimate nature of her missionary nature, but from the conditions in which missionary activity takes place. The main reason derives directly from the will of God, who wants that, in and through Christ, all men reach salvation and come to the

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<sup>23</sup> Cfr. AG, 11-12.

knowledge of the truth (1 Tim 2, 4-5).<sup>24</sup> “ It is the duty of every disciple of Christ to disseminate faith as far as possible”.<sup>25</sup>

Furthermore, the need exists that the duty for the Church to be present and to take root in those environments in which it does not yet exist: *munus Evangelium praedicandi et Ecclesiam ipsam implantatio*, that is, in the task of preaching the Gospel and implanting the Church in the midst of to groups that do not yet know the Gospel of Christ.

## V. CET and FABC Collaboration

We, the bishops of Timor Leste, are doing our best to become an integral part of this Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences. We acknowledge that so far we have not been able to participate actively and fully in the federation, especially in relation to efforts to implement mission and evangelization projects which are translated into the real and concrete context of each country in Asia.

Our conference is a new conference that is trying to find our Christian and Catholic identity in the context of Timor Leste. Of course, Catholicism has been present in Timor since 500 years ago. However, that presence did not guarantee the establishment of a new conference. The Timor Bishops' Conference was just established in 2015. Therefore, it has only just begun to reform and formulate the vision-mission and basic direction of the Conference - where to take the Church to.

*Conferencias Episcopais Timorenses* try, in the future, to always collaborate and become an integral part in the Asian and FABC context. Especially committed to contribute in helping to socialize, translate the vision and mission of the FABC in the situation and context here in Timor Leste, and ready to collaborate in the continuation of FABC projects and their existence.

With advances in technology, especially the presence of *zoom meetings*, it can be a good means to facilitate our direct contact even though slowly. Therefore, we will endeavor to always maintain good

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<sup>24</sup> Cfr. AG 7

<sup>25</sup> LG 17, AG 15.20.21, AA 6.

communication with the secretariat of the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences.

## VIII. CATHOLIC BISHOPS' CONFERENCE OF VIETNAM

### **Part I: Emerging Realities and Trends of Concern in Asia**

- Number 14, *Gender Issues*: we suggest that we should be more concerned about the dangers of gender ideology which “denies the difference and reciprocity in nature of a man and a woman and envisages a society without sexual differences, thereby eliminating the anthropological basis of the family” (*Amoris laetitia*, n. 56). It can destabilize the very foundation of marriage and family which is a vital source of strength, a traditional and cherished value in Asia and in the Church as well.
- Number 14, *Religion in Society*: we want to mention that in some totalitarian regimes in Asia, the governments want to control religious organizations, moreover to instrumentalize religions for their political agendas, under pretext of patriotism and national unity. In this context, it is a big challenge for religions to keep their authentic autonomy and true identity, for a better service of the peoples.

### **Part II: Church in the Asian Context**

- Overall, we have the impression that the *Guide Document* emphasizes much on a Church “reaching out” but not enough on a Church “turning inside” which means the inner strength, interior life that is nourished especially by the Eucharist, the Word of God, and the community life.
- The *Guide Document* positively notes that “what is quite common across Asia is that there exists a sense of the divine in Asian societies, and aspects of prayer, meditation and contemplation are somewhat integrated into the Asian ways of life and also the Church” (Number 1/Part II). However we wonder if this sense is still alive in our Asian countries today, also in the Church, which is heavily affected by secularism and consumerism,

reflected in all kinds of scandals in religious organizations, also in our Catholic Church.

- The transforming Church we should develop is not only a transformation “from below and from outside”, but also “from above and from inside”.

### **Part III: Envisioning possible New Pathways for the Church in Asia and the FABC**

- Based on our pastoral experiences in Vietnam, we find families and parishes the two most important factors for the transmission and formation of faith, as well as for the work of evangelization. We should continue to strengthen and foster family ministry and parish ministry in a creative way to meet the demands and challenges of the time.
- We feel sad when reading Number 3/Part III about the resources of FABC that are not known and utilized in many local churches. We also humbly acknowledge that it is a reality in our local Church in Vietnam, and one of the reasons of this situation is the barrier of language. While English is a common language for Bishops in Asia, it is still not familiar with us in Vietnam, and it makes the Church in Vietnam not having a more positive participation in the activities of FABC: meeting, discussion, using the resources of FABC. Hopefully it will be better in the future.

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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, December 2012
138. "FABC at Forty Years: Responding to the Challenges of Asia", X FABC Plenary Assembly, Xuân Lộc and Hồ Chí Minh City, Việt Nam, December 2013
139. A Brief History of the FABC, Edited by Fr. Vimal Tirimanna, CSsR, December 2013
140. Climate Change, Asian Impacts and Response, II FABC Climate Change Seminar, by FABC Central Secretariat, June 2014
141. Climate Change, Asian Impacts and Response, II FABC Climate Change Seminar Final Statement, by FABC Central Secretariat, June 2014
142. Apostolic Journey of His Holiness Pope Francis to the Republic of Korea on the Occasion of the 6th Asian Youth Day, 13-18 August 2014, Organized by Catholic Bishops' Conference of Korea, FABC Office of Laity & Family – Youth Desk & Daejeon Youth Team, November 2014
143. Families in Asia, Serving and Being Served, Final Statements and Survey on Family Ministry, Prepared by Wendy Louis, Executive Secretary, FABC Office of Laity & Family, February 2015
144. Apostolic Journey of His Holiness Pope Francis to Sri Lanka, 13-15 January 2015, Organized by Catholic Bishops' Conference of Sri Lanka  
Apostolic Journey of His Holiness Pope Francis to the Philippines, 16-19 January 2015, Organized by Catholic Bishops' Conference of the Philippines, May 2015
145. Theological Reflections on the Family in the Lead up to the 14th Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops on the Family October, 2015, Prepared by Fr. Vimal Tirimanna, CSsR, May 2015
146. Towards Responsible Stewardship of Creation An Asian Christian Approach, Edited by Fr. Clarence Devadass, Executive Secretary, FABC Office of Theological Concerns, June 2015
147. Catholic, Buddhist, Hindu and Islamic Declarations on Climate Change, United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, Twenty first session Conference of the Parties (COP 21), Paris, France, 30

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  151. "The Catholic Family in Asia: Domestic Church of the Poor on a Mission of Mercy", XI FABC Plenary Assembly, Colombo, Sri Lanka, FABC Central Secretariat, March 2017
  152. Asian Celebration of the 50th Anniversary of *Nostra Aetate*, Part 1, Bishops' Institute for Religious Affairs – BIRA VI, Edited by Fr. William LaRousse, MM, Executive Secretary, FABC Office of Ecumenical and Interreligious Affairs (OEIA), June 2017
  153. Asian Celebration of the 50th Anniversary of *Nostra Aetate*, Part 2, Bishops' Institute for Religious Affairs – BIRA VI, Dialogue with Religions in Asia and Interreligious Marriage, Edited by Fr. William LaRousse, MM, Executive Secretary, FABC Office of Ecumenical and Interreligious Affairs (OEIA), June 2017
  154. Asian Celebration of the 50th Anniversary of *Nostra Aetate*, Part 3, Bishops' Institute for Religious Affairs – BIRA VI, Dialogue with Religions in Asia and Interreligious Marriage, Edited by Fr. William LaRousse, MM, Executive Secretary, FABC Office of Ecumenical and Interreligious Affairs (OEIA), June 2017
  155. Apostolic Journey of His Holiness Pope Francis to Myanmar and Bangladesh, 26 November – 2 December 2017, organized by Catholic Bishops' Conference of Myanmar and Catholic Bishops' Conference of Bangladesh, edited by FABC Central Secretariat, December 2017
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157. *Shepherding Families in Asia: Contemporary Challenges and Responses for Bishops, Priests and Lay Leaders*, 16 – 20 May 2016, Salesian Retreat House in Hua Hin, Thailand by FABC Office of Clergy and Office of Laity and Family, December 2018
  158. *Meeting of the Presidents of Doctrinal Commissions under the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences and the Congregation for the Doctrine of Faith (CDF)*, 15 – 18 January 2019, Baan Phu Waan Pastoral Centre, Bangkok, Thailand by FABC Office of Theological Concerns and Central Secretariat, March 2019
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  161. *Apostolic Journey of His Holiness Pope Francis to Thailand and Japan*, 19 – 26 November 2019, organized by Catholic Bishops' Conference of Thailand and Catholic Bishops' Conference of Japan, edited by FABC Central Secretariat, December 2019
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