ASIAN VOCATIONS SYMPOSIUM
“ASIAN VOCATIONS TODAY”
Samphran, Bangkok, Thailand

FABC Office of Consecrated Life & FABC Office of Clergy,

(in collaboration with Serra Club International, Catholic Bishop’s Conference of Thailand, & the Pontifical Works for Priestly Vocation of the Congregation for Catholic Education for Seminaries & Institutes of Study.)

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I. MESSAGES

Message of His Eminence Cardinal Zenon Grocholewski

The Vocations Symposium in Asia is in line with the plan of the Congregation for Catholic Education, in association with the Pontifical Work for Vocations, to organize a Continental Congress about Vocations to the priesthood in all the continents. Following the Continental Congresses that have been held in Latin America in 1994, in Europe in 1997 and in North America in 2001, it is the right time to hold a Continental Congress in Asia. Therefore this Vocations Symposium in Asia must be seen within the context of the mobilization of the Church to promote the vocations to the priesthood all over the world in order that the Church may announce the Gospel to all humanity.

Evangelization is the greatest challenge of the Church today. Back in 1995, when addressing the Bishops of the Church in Asia, John Paul II, of happy memory, called them to consider it as their particular vocation: to commit themselves to the mission of Evangelization¹. Although the Church is present in all the countries of this vast continent of Asia, it is still a very small minority. In order to be able to take up this most important challenge, the Church in Asia needs many priests to celebrate the Eucharist, which is the heart of the Church, and to preach the Gospel to all. It goes without saying, that without the promotion of vocations to the priesthood and with a small number of priests, evangelization will have a small success. Therefore, the nurturing of vocations to the

priesthood must be given the utmost importance within the general pastoral work of the Church. Besides, when young people respond to the call of God to become priests, the Church has the duty to discern their vocation and accompany them during the whole course of their formation, which will lead them to the priesthood.

The theme, which the FABC chose for this Vocations Symposium in Asia, namely, *Asian Vocations Today*, is very timely since it creates an awareness of the situation of vocations to the priesthood and to the consecrated life in Asia. With this regard, the Pontifical Work for Vocations prepared a CD with the latest statistics for each country of Asia, which are drawn from the *Annuarium Statisticum Ecclesiae* for 2005.

I am happy to note that competent speakers including Bishops, priests, religious and lay persons have been invited to make their reflections on the present situation of vocations in Asia in the light of the Messages which His Holiness Benedict XVI has written on the occasion of the World Day of Prayer for Vocations that were celebrated in 2006 and 2007. As regards the theme about the screening of candidates to the Priesthood and to the Consecrated Life which will be dealt with on the third day of the Symposium, it must be noted that Benedict XVI has also given an ample and very important contribution to the discernment of vocations to the priesthood in his speeches which he addressed to the Conferences of Bishops on the occasion of their *visits ad limina Apostolorum*. I appreciate the fact that the programme of the Symposium includes also the workshop groups, which give the chance to the participants to share their opinions and views about the sub-themes chosen for the Vocation Symposium in Asia.

Since it is the Lord himself who commanded his disciples to pray to the Lord of the harvest, the programme of the Vocations Symposium in Asia is enshrined in prayer, which its participants surely consider as part and parcel of their work to promote vocations to the priesthood.

I am looking forward to see good results coming out of this Vocations Symposium in Asia and I hope that the Symposium will be followed by a line of action, which will promote vocations to the priesthood in the continent of Asia. I entrust my hopes and desires to Mary, *Mother of Vocations*, as Serra International have chosen to invoke Her in order that She may intercede with the Lord of the harvest to send more labourers to his harvest.

(Vatican City, 26 September 2007)
Message of Fr. Francis Bonnici

I am sure that we are still enjoying the happiness, which we experienced when the Holy Father sent us the Message on the occasion of the World Day of Prayer for Vocations. What adds more to our joy is the fact that statistics show vocations are on the increase thanks to the continual prayer of our Christian communities as Pope Benedict XVI continues to request from the Bishops and groups of pilgrims who attend His audiences.

I want to remind you what the Holy Father said with this regard in the first part of his message:

"The annual World Day of Prayer for Vocations is an appropriate occasion for highlighting the importance of vocations in the life and mission of the Church, as well as for intensifying our prayer that they may increase in number and quality. For the coming celebration, I would like to draw the attention of the whole people of God to the following theme, which is more topical than ever: the vocation to the service of the Church as communion."

I am adding another hint for the pastoral work for vocations which the Pope stressed upon in a recent speech which he delivered to the participants in the Convention of the Diocese of Rome:

"Dear brothers and sisters, there is one last point to which I would like to draw your attention: it is supremely important for the Church’s mission and requires our commitment and first of all our prayer. I am referring to vocations to follow the Lord Jesus more closely in the ministerial priesthood and in the consecrated life. In recent decades, the Diocese of Rome has been gladdened by the gift of many priestly ordinations which have made it possible to bridge the gap in the previous period, and also to meet the requests of many Sister Churches in need of clergy; but the most recent indications seem less favourable and prompt the whole of our diocesan community to renew to the Lord, with humility and trust, its request for labourers for his harvest (cf. Mt 9: 37-38; Lk 10: 2).

With delicacy and respect we must address a special but clear and courageous invitation to follow Jesus to those young men and women who appear to be the most attracted and fascinated by friendship with him. In this perspective, the Diocese will designate several new priests specifically to the care of vocations, but we know well that prayer and the overall quality of our Christian
witness, the example of life set by priests and consecrated souls, the generosity of the people called and of the families they come from, are crucial in this area.” (11 June 2007).

As I share with you these quotes, I wish you all the blessing of God at the beginning of the new pastoral year. I hope that we be united in prayer to the Lord of the harvest and that we continue working hand in hand with the Pontifical Work for Priestly Vocations.

II. THE ASIAN CONTEXT OF VOCATION

- Archbishop Orlando B. Quevedo, O.M.I., archbishop of Cotabato, FABC Secretary General

Introduction

While the talk is about the Asian context of vocation, I shall speak only about that part of Asia that I know, the Asia of the regular members of the Federation of Asian Bishops’ Conferences. The FABC region extends from Pakistan in the west to China and Japan in the north and to Indonesia and East Timor in the Southeast. Thus I refer mainly to the three regions of the FABC, East Asia, South Asia and Southeast Asia.

Today we are careful in distinguishing three different dimensions of the call of God: prior to other vocations is the universal vocation to salvation and holiness; corollary to this universal vocation is the vocation to a particular state of life in which holiness is to be attained, i.e., the vocation to marriage and to lay single state of life, the vocation to the priesthood, and the vocation to religious life (Here I use the term “religious life” to refer generally to all forms of consecrated life other than to the priesthood.) All these vocations are gifts of God for persons to live a state of life on behalf of God or the community.

Having stated the general meaning of vocation, my talk will focus on the divine call to the priesthood and to religious life.

1. Global and Asian Church Statistics

a. Catholics in Various Continents.

The Asian context of vocation to priestly and religious life has first to be seen from a global perspective. [The data come from Annuario Statisticum Ecclesiae of 2004 as reported by L'Osservatore Romano. Weekly Edition in English, 14 July 2004, p. 5].

From 1978 to 2004, the number of Catholics in the world increased
by 45% from 756,533,000 to 1,098,366,000. The highest increase was in Africa with 171.77% increase. Its Catholic population almost tripled from 55 million to almost 149 million. Asia recorded the second highest increase of 79.62%. Compared to the total Asian population, the increase is from 2.5% to almost 3%. Oceania came third with 52.56%. The number rose in America (North and South) by 49.68%. It is in America that almost half of the world’s Catholics live. European Catholics rose by 4.865%, but compared to the percentage of Catholics in the whole world, European Catholics fell from 37% to 25.4%. The continental increases are really due to demographic factors rather than to number of conversions. The story is different in Africa where in 1978 Catholics constituted only 12.4% of the African population. But in 2004 it was already almost 17%, certainly a combination of demographics and conversions.

Analysis of all the data available, however, shows that the number of Catholics all over the world compared to the total population of 6.4 billion people has slightly fallen from 1978 to 2004 by about 1% (from almost 18% to just over 17% of the world’s population).

Certainly one can attribute this to static demographic situation in Europe combined with as well as the static number of Catholics there; in 1978 it was 40.5 to every 100 inhabitants and by 2004 it had slightly fallen to 39.5.

b. Priests

From 1978 to 2004, the number of priests in the world decreased by 3.58%, from 429,971 to 405,891. A positive note, however, is the fact that the decrease happened between 1978 to 1994. From then on the number stabilized and recorded a positive growth.

Europe still retains the greatest number of priests but the number has decreased considerably. In 1978 its number of 250,498 priests was almost 60% of the total in the world. But in 2004, it had less than half of the world’s priests due to a decrease of 36,000 diocesan priests and 16,000 religious priests.

The number of priests in Africa and Asia increased by 2000, + 85% in Africa (from 16,926 to 31,529) and + 74% in Asia (from 27,700 to 48,222). Total figures for these two continents make up 19% of the world’s priests. The number of priests in America remained static at about 120,000 priests (about 30% of the world’s total), but Europe’s number of priests decreased by 20% (from 250,498 to 199,978, or less than 50% of the world’s total), as did Oceania by 14% (from 5,576 to 4,798, or 1% of all priests in the world).

The number of diocesan priests in the world increased from 262,000
to 268,000. This increase can be attributed exclusively to the increase of priests in Africa where the number has more than tripled (from 5,507 to 20,358) and in Asia where the number has doubled (from 13,863 to 28,497).

In contrast the number of religious priests declined in all of the continents, with the exception of Asia where religious priests increased. Over-all the number of religious priests in the world decreased by 13.52% or a decrease of 21,000 (from 158,486 to 137,058), Oceania showing a decrease of 23.90% (from 2,720 to 2,070), Europe 20.75% (from 76,323 to 60,484), America 19.02% (from 54,187 to 43,878), and Africa 4.54% (from 11,419 to 10,901). Only in Asia did the number of religious priests increase, an increase of 42.55% (from 14,502 to 19,725).

In Africa, religious priests (11,419) outnumbered diocesan priests (5,507) two to one in 1978, but in 2004 the positions were reversed. Religious Priests (10,901) were slightly more than half the number of diocesan priests (20,358).

A striking difference is noted in Asia. In 1978 the number of diocesan priests and the number of religious priests were about the same (about 13,000 for each category). But in 2004, there were over 40% more diocesan priests (28,497) than religious priests (19,725).

c. Permanent Deacons (Diocesan and Religious)

Permanent deacons have increased in number from 5,562 in 1978 (4,239 in America and 1,133 in Europe, 91 in Africa, 47 in Oceania) to 32,324 in 2004 (21,067 in America, 10,528 in Europe, 368 in Africa, 148 in Asia, 213 in Oceania). The figures show a large difference between North and South (or between East and West). More than 97% of the total number of permanent deacons in the world is to be found in America and Europe. This fact perhaps shows a difference in perceiving the vocation of a permanent deacon. Perhaps at this time due to the number of vocations and the training of lay leaders who do much of the work that permanent deacons usually do, the need for them in Asia and Africa may not be as urgent.

d. Religious Brothers

[While the Annuarium Statisticum Ecclesiae calls this group “Professed Religious Non-Priests, Fides Service calls them “Brothers”.

In 1978 Professed Religious Non-Priests numbered 75,802 all over the world. In 2004 they numbered 55,030, a decrease of 27.40%. The number in Europe fell by 46.25%, from 37,104 to 19,942. In America
the number decreased by 30.15%, from 23,747 to 16,587. In Oceania the number also declined by 47.36%, from 3,195 to 1,662.

Thus from 1978 to 2004 the number of professed religious non-priests in Europe, America and Oceania decreased almost 50%.

Only in Africa and Asia did the number increase: in Africa by 48.46%, from 5,248 to 7,791; and in Asia by 38.72%, from 6,508 to 9,028. Professed religious non-priests in Africa and Asia now constitute more than 30% of the total of brothers in the world.

e. Professed Women Religious

In 1978 the number of professed religious women worldwide was 990,768. In 2004 the number had gone down by 22.54% to 764,459. Oceania experienced the highest percentage decrease at 41.39 (from 17,192 to 10,076). The number in Europe went down by 39.58% (from 546,029 to 329,898). The number also went down in America by 27.03% (from 300,489 to 219,274).

As with the case of Professed Religious Brothers, only in Africa and Asia did the number of Professed Women Religious increase. The number in Africa went up 62.02%, from 35,473 to 57,475. In Asia the number increased 64.59%, from 91,585 to 150,736. Professed women religious in Asia and Africa have increased from 13% to about 27% of the world’s total, while their counterparts in the rest of the world have fallen from 87% to 73% of the world’s total.

Unfortunately the Annuarium Statisticum Ecclesiae of 2004 did not carry any information on candidates to religious life. Suffice it to realize that many European religious congregations of men and women establish themselves in Asia not only to do mission in Asia but also because the continent is, indeed, a veritable seminary for vocations. However, we do need to correct the idea that young candidates are sometimes uprooted from their cultures, transported to foreign lands for their initial formation, and experience heavy cultural shock in the process.

f. Candidates to the Priesthood

The number of diocesan and religious candidates to the priesthood in philosophy and theology show an over-all annual increase worldwide. It rose from 63,882 in 1978 to 113,044 in 2004, an increase of 79.96%. The highest percentage increases were in Africa at 304.31% (from 5,636 to 22,791) and in Asia at 153.28% (from 11,536 to 29,220). America registered an increase of 66.65% (from 22,011 to 36,681), while seminarians in Oceania went up 21.30% (from 784 to 951). In Europe
vocations went down slightly by 2.15% (from 23,915 to 23,401).

As in other areas of the statistics, Africa and Asia show outstandingly positive characteristics and gives a lot of promise for the future. In fact in Africa there are 150 candidates to the priesthood per million Catholics, while in Asia there are 257 per million. In stark contrast is the situation in Europe where there are only 84 candidates per million and in America only 67 per million. From another angle, the statistics tell a similar story. In 2004 African and Asia had 72 and 60 candidates for every 100 priests, while Europe had less than 12 candidates. Because of the positive situation of vocations in Africa and Asia, the number of candidates per 100 priests at the global level rose from 15 in 1978 to just short of 28 in 2004.

From the above statistics, one can say that in Europe and America there would be more difficulty in providing for pastoral needs. Would it be much less so in Africa and in Asia?

A consideration of the economic, social, and cultural context of vocations in Asia might provide some nuances to a possible answer.

2. The Asian Economic, Social, Cultural and Religious Context.

My reflection on the Asian context is inspired by the following text of Vatican II, Presbyterorum Ordinis:

(Priests of the New Testament) could not be the servants of Christ unless they are witnesses and dispensers of a life other than that of this earth. On the other hand they would be powerless to serve men and women if they remained aloof from their life and circumstances. Their very ministry makes a special claim on them not to conform themselves to this world; still it requires at the same time that they should live among men and women in this world and that as good shepherds they should know their sheep.... (P.O. 3, italics mine. Mutatis mutandis, the sense of the quote is likewise applicable to all members of consecrated life.)

When we speak of the Asian context, we deal with the elements surrounding the FABC mode of evangelization, the proclamation of Christ as the Lord and Savior by way of the triple dialogue with the poor, with religions, and with cultures. We also keep in mind the emphasis that the Church in Asia has made with regard to the family as the “focal point of evangelization.” Even as it is the focal point of evangelization, especially in the light of families that constitute Basic Ecclesial Communities (a “new way of being Church”), the family is also the seedbed of vocations. It is the family that is fundamentally
influenced by economic, social, cultural, and religious factors.

a. The Economic Challenge

The economic factor deeply impacts the Asian family and, therefore, Asian vocations. This is even more so if we accept U.N. Human Development reports and the insights of the late Pope John Paul II that as of the present the process of economic globalization works against poor countries and especially the poor in these countries. Pope John Paul II explained this phenomenon from the lack of juridical and ethical norms that should govern the process.

Being the continent of the poor, it is probably safe to say that in Asia vocations come mainly from the poor. The poor have their own culture, a way of life that is given to austerity and even deprivation. It is a culture marked by marginalization, with inadequate access to education, health services, the benefits of development. More than any family, a family of the poor has dreams of upward mobility for the children, of education, of jobs and better jobs, of a better quality of life.

Thus one needs to look closely at the great number of applicants to seminaries and houses of religious formation, their family background, and their genuine motivations.

This is especially true when in Asian cultures priestly and religious life is generally seen as a step upward in the social and even economic scale, a step into the culture of the higher middle class. Would there be, therefore, an innate aspiration in applicants for the higher economic, social, and cultural world that priestly and religious consecration implies? What implications would this have on the Asian vision of priesthood as servant leadership, and of religious life as authentic prophecy in an increasingly “economic” world?

b. The Multi-Cultural and the Multi-Religious Challenge

Moreover, even if it is acknowledged that the family is the seedbed of vocations, in most of Asia, vocations grow in multi-religious and multi-cultural environments. Unless young men and women with vocations from God grow up in Catholic milieus, or go to school in exclusively Catholic schools, it is most likely that from their childhood they experience daily a dialogue of life with other religions. This bodes well for their future ministry should they go on to be priests or religious and work in similar multi-religious and multi-cultural environment. But the downside of this could be a loose religious upbringing where the basic tenets of the faith are inadequately learned until they go into the
seminary or house of formation. This would mean that the initial years of formation is a catch-up process in faith formation.

Moreover, many parts of Asia in the past few decades have been in the throes of social, cultural/religious and political conflict, in the form of ethnic tensions, majority-minority strife, and communal violence. Many Asian vocations grow in this conflict-ridden environment and develop prejudices and biases. There could be peaceful co-existence in seminaries and houses of religious formation where they all come together. But more than peaceful co-existence is needed.

c. The Challenge of an Emerging Post-Modern Culture

In addition to the above challenges, Asian vocations have to confront the challenge of cultural globalization. Rooted in Asian cultures, vocations nonetheless feel the certain though subtle impact of the means of social communication, the bearers of a new emerging global culture.

This culture is generally post-modern in spirit, materialistic, individualistic, consumerist, and apparently without any religious reference. It has its own morality, which changes through time, based as it is not on absolute moral values but on transitory popular norms. Many acts and behavior that were once considered wrong by most people are now becoming proper or at least politically correct. We know, for instance, of the debates that rage around notions of family, "reproductive rights," gender orientation. Such debates have somehow transferred the state of the question from morality, to politics and health.

Such values are seeping into the consciousness of the impressionable minds of the young through radio, television, and cinema, the internet, newspapers, advertisements, etc. It is a questionable process of inculturation whereby traditional cultures are "modernized" and imbibe so subtly the values of the post-modern spirit.

Yet certainly we know that the tools of social communication are very potent means of evangelizing Asian families, enabling Gospel values to penetrate every strata of Asian society. Evangelization is fundamentally an issue of values, the values of Christ and of the Reign of God. Therefore, if media is to evangelize, media has also to be evangelized, be infused with Kingdom or Gospel values. It is in this way that media becomes a transmitter, a medium, of Gospel values, an educator in the faith and a promoter of vocations in the family.

In the light of emerging global, secular, and materialist culture, how would recruitment, selection, and formation of vocation deal with the challenge? Surely some very serious value clarification and value
transformation would be necessary somewhere along the road to the priesthood and religious life.

3. Some Pastoral Implications

As a premise, may I recall the principle that vocation is a mystery, a divine call that is somehow manifested externally through various means. As a mystery it includes an interior grace by which God moves the individual to respond. With the help of vocation directors, formators, spiritual directors, and others responsible for vocation, it is ultimately church authority that discerns and confirms both the call as well as the presence of the interior grace. It is also the Church that declares the authenticity of the response. Today the Church is increasingly making use of medical and psychological tools to help make the discernment and confirmation.

Faced with the economic, social, cultural, and religious context of vocation in Asia, may I mention three pastoral implications:

a.) Vocation is not merely personal but is at the service of God and the community. A glance at the global and Asian statistics underlines the imperative of taking seriously the gospel and theological reality of the whole Church as missionary. How urgent this is, even for the *pusillus grex* (the small flock) that is the Church in Asia! As a tiny minority in this vast continent, the Church in Asia is even now the source of many vocations for America and Europe. This fact implies that vocations have to possess a genuine missionary spirit, particularly ad gentes. For this reason the appeal of Pope John Paul’s *Ecclesia in Asia* for more Asian societies of missionary apostolic life continues to be urgent.

b.) In the light, too, of the serious challenges that vocations face in the Asian economic, social, cultural, and religious context, the necessity of formation to human and psycho-sexual maturity is even more highlighted with emphasis on integral faith-formation, priestly and religious motivation, on servant-leadership and on authentic religious prophecy.

c.) The pluralistic nature of the Asian environment, frequently in political, cultural/religious tension, requires the formation of vocation towards dialogue, peace, and harmony as well as formation to genuine community. This is also particularly true if we consider the pastoral thrust of building Basic Ecclesial/Human Communities. The need is for well-informed and better-formed persons with deep and informed
faith-conviction and commitment, who are respectful, open, and understanding of other religions as well. Such vocations can be humble companions and collaborators with peoples of other cultures and religions on the journey to the Reign of God.

III. PROPOSAL CONCERNING VOCATIONS AND THE FUTURE OF THE CHURCH IN ASIA

- Archbishop Leo Jun Ikenaga, SJ, archbishop of Osaka, Bishop-member of FABC Office of Clergy

Let me start with a summary of my proposal. I want to urge the establishment of some structured program for Asian countries blessed with many vocations to send priests, religious and other missionaries to countries with extremely few vocations. Rather than depend on other continents as we did in the past, I feel that Asian countries should work more closely together for the growth of God’s Kingdom in Asia.

In former years we took it for granted that European and American countries would send missionaries to countries of Africa and Asia, and in fact there was a generous flow of missionary vocations. However, vocations in Europe and America have decreased drastically in recent years, so much so that they now have trouble meeting their own needs and have begun asking Asian and African countries to send them priests and religious.

They are asking not only for priests and religious to do direct missionary and pastoral work, but also for missionaries who can carry on specialized research.

It is well known that there are numerous vocations in Latin American countries. However, Latin American seminarians show interest in going as missionaries to Africa, but they are not interested in Asia. They do not seem to find any challenge in devoting their lives to economically powerful areas like Hong Kong, Taiwan and Japan but would rather help economically deprived areas. While I was Provincial of the Jesuits in Japan, I visited houses of scholastics in eight countries of Latin America in order to appeal for missionary vocations to Japan. In each of these houses I spoke to about sixty scholastics, but the sad result of all my effort was “zero.” After hearing my presentation, most of them said they’d rather go as missionaries to some poor country of Africa than to an economically rich country like Japan.

I gradually began to feel that here in Asia we can no longer look to other continents but will have to start depending more on one another for missionaries. This change of mentality on my part has urged me to speak to you here today.
When I heard that the FABC was planning to hold a meeting on vocations, I wanted by all means to come and urge the Bishops of Asia to consider how Asians can help one another for the future development of the Church and God’s Kingdom in Asia.

Current figures show that, on a worldwide scale, the number of priests has not decreased. This is because Africa and Latin America now have a larger number of candidates for the priesthood. Not only in Africa and Latin America, but also in some providentially blessed countries of Asia, vocations to the priesthood have increased. Thanks to this increase, the worldwide number of priests has not declined. Meanwhile, not only in Europe and America, but also in Asian areas like Hong Kong, Taiwan and Japan, vocations to the priesthood and religious life are continuing to decrease. There seems to be some general rule that vocations decrease in regions, which enjoy advanced scientific technology and play leading roles in the world’s economic conflicts.

Let me return to my main point. Isn’t there some structured program we can establish so that Asian countries with many vocations can send priests and religious as missionaries to countries with extremely few vocations? By “structured program” I mean something more than vaguely encouraging individuals who feel interiorly drawn to work abroad. I mean something more concrete. I suggest that the various Bishops’ Conferences could each set up their own program of missionary formation for the benefit of young people who want to become missionaries. The Bishops could appeal to the various dioceses of their area to urge young missionary candidates to join this program, where they can be trained as missionaries to other Asian countries.

To give you an example of what I mean, the Bishops’ Conferences of Spain and Portugal established the Spain Foreign Mission Society (L.E.M.E.) and the Boa Nova Foreign Mission Society (S.M.B.N.) in order to gather and form missionaries for countries where Christianity has made little progress. In European and American countries where the Bishops’ Conferences did not take such action, missionary societies sent missionaries to non-Christian areas. The Guadalupe Missionary Society of Mexico and the Irish Columbans are examples of societies that were established to form foreign missionaries.

These missionary societies contributed enormously to non-Christian countries and their contribution was greatly appreciated. However, vocations have decreased in most so-called advanced countries, and they are no longer able to send missionaries abroad.

This is why I propose that it would help other Asian countries greatly if the Episcopal Conferences in Asian countries blessed with many vocations, like India,
Vietnam, the Philippines and Indonesia, could inaugurate programs like the ones in Spain and Portugal. If young people who feel called to become foreign missionaries are specially trained in such programs, they will have the mentality and ability to work much more effectively when sent to their mission than people without this training. While going through the program, they will deepen their own personal and missionary spirituality. Missionaries are needed not only in Hong Kong, Taiwan and Japan, but also in other countries with few Catholics. Thai, Laos, and Cambodia come to mind. Perhaps for the present we cannot consider countries that refuse to issue visas or make it especially difficult to enter from abroad.

Such is my proposal. Needless to say, it would require previous understanding and agreement between Episcopal Conferences that can train and send missionaries abroad and Conferences that would receive them.

IV. BENEATH AND BEYOND THE ROMAN COLLAR AND THE HABIT: MOTIVATIONS FOR PRIESTLY AND RELIGIOUS VOCATION - Sr. Judette Gallares, RC

INTRODUCTION:

In these times of broken promises, failed commitments and unlimited options, it is a wonder that there are still those who make commitments in marriage or religious life. What impels them to do so? What could be their motivation for undertaking such an adventure? The concern of this talk is motivation - a very important topic when we are considering vocation to the priesthood and religious life and yet it is difficult to get at. How do we know a person has a vocation? There are no easy answers to this question because a vocation is first of all a mystery. God does not appear to us from the heavens to tell us we have a vocation to the priesthood or the religious life. We have to discover it first for ourselves and within ourselves over a period of time.

It might be helpful if we use two case studies in our attempt to look more closely at the mystery of the priestly and religious vocation.

TWO CASE STUDIES

Case #1:

Fr. X is a 45-year old religious priest who has been assigned in the missions for 20 years. While in the missions he got into very serious conflict with his superiors about a close relationship he had with one
of the lay teachers. Therefore, his superiors asked him to return to his home country “to save his vocation.”

Fr. X comes from a middle-class, religious family. He studied in an exclusive boys’ school run by the congregation he eventually joined. He entered minor seminary at age 12. He has a priest-uncle whom he idolized, who was a member of this congregation before being made bishop.

Fr. X has a very attractive personality and is very gifted in the ministry of educating the youth. He was one of the pioneers in the missions so all his gifts were put into good use.

When he returned to his home country, he was assigned in a parish where he did well. However he had another conflict when his provincial talked to him about reports from some of his conferees and parishioners about his too close relationship with his secretary. It turned out to be a painful confrontation, which led him to a crisis of vocation.

It was in this context when he began to ask serious vocational questions. “Why am I still a priest in this congregation when I only get into conflict when I try to be a good priest?” He was confused because he thought he was just trying to be more pastoral in his service. When he was asking this question of himself in the context of ongoing spiritual direction, it led him to return to the story of his vocation. In the process he realized that he had a lot of developmental arrests in his growth to personhood, which limited his inner freedom to choose.

Case #2:

Sister Y is in her 30s, is very bright and is well liked by the sisters in her community. She was asked to take up her graduate studies in education soon after she made her final vows. She considered this as a privilege because not everybody was asked to do higher studies soon after final vows.

After receiving her degree, she was officially informed by her provincial that she would become the new administrator of the congregation’s school. This school was reputed to be having very serious problems with faculty, staff and students. Soon after this, she developed sleeping problems — insomnia and nightmares. She became restless and could not eat. She began to withdraw from community. There was a marked change in her personality.

Her superior was worried about her and so suggested that she goes for counseling because it might just be an anxiety attack regarding her new assignment. In the course of the counseling, she realized that she has lost all desire to be a religious. She even hates it and finds herself
inauthentic and she is very bothered by this. An attempt to clarify her situation was made by tracing her motivation for joining and staying on in religious life.

Using these 2 cases, I would now go into an exploration of what motivation is, to religious life and the priesthood. In any discussion on motivation, it is important to keep in mind that as human beings we are partially free and partially not free. Therefore our choices are always affected by our degree of freedom and un-freedom.

What are motivations? What are the dynamics involved in motivations? In general, motivation is understood as having the desire and the willingness to do something or to move towards a particular direction or goal. It has both an internal dimension and an external dimension. The internal dimension of motivation is found in the heart of the person. It expresses itself in a desire or attraction for the life.

In the 2 cases I cited, both Father X and Sister Y had mentioned their attraction to the life and mission, which they witnessed being lived out by the community and by particular members. They were aware of this on the conscious level. However, they were not aware that on the unconscious level there were many non-freedoms coming from their past history. In other words, there were some unconscious motivations also operative.

CONSCIOUS AND UNCONSCIOUS MOTIVATIONS INTERWEAVE

Perhaps it might be good for us at this point to look at what are the conscious and unconscious motivations in entering religious life and the priesthood.

It is very clear in both cases that Father X and Sister Y somehow saw in the religious and priestly life a possible fulfillment of their self-ideal expressed in the life and service the religious and priests they were in contact with. When they applied, they seemed to be the ideal candidates—bright, talented, got along well with others, gifted. There was also an expressed attraction to the life and the willingness to leave their families to be part of this life. Yet with the passage of time, during moments of conflicts in relationships, and experiences of difficulties in the life and the mission, they begin to doubt their fitness for the life.

Studies have noted that on the conscious level, those attracted to the life expressed their desire to be closer to Jesus and to serve others. Some would mention that they want to have more time for prayer and that the longed-for peace of mind can be found in the convent. Others even go to the extent of saying that they want to become saints. There are also those who admit the advantages of entering, such as finishing
an education, the possibility of travel to other countries and to bring the graces of God to their family. There are a few who are aware of their attraction but at the same time are afraid to even consider it. They could not seem to conceive the possibility that they are one of the “chosen few” so to speak.

However, there are dynamics within themselves they are not conscious of. These form what we call unconscious motivations, which are often inconsistent with the Gospel values enshrined in religious life and the priesthood. Oftentimes these are human motives that intervene in the person’s living out of the gospel values in order to satisfy unmet basic human needs in childhood. At this juncture, it would be good for us to know the other details pertinent to the cases in order to enlighten us regarding the internal unconscious dynamics of a vocation.

In the case of Fr. X, he entered seminary at an age where he was not yet capable of making a choice for a life commitment. He lacked the necessary self-knowledge and psycho-emotional maturity for such a decision. He was also strongly influenced by external factors, such as his desire to please his family who idolized and held in great esteem his bishop-uncle. When he was growing up he would hear his father and uncle talk about them, the children. More than once he heard his father say, “I wish one of my sons would become like you, a holy priest.” He also knew that it was his mother’s great wish to be known as “a mother of a priest” and would constantly promote the priestly vocation among her sons.

In the case of Sr. Y, she had been a working student all throughout her high school as her family could not afford to send her to school nor give her allowance. She studied in the school owned by the congregation that she eventually joined. When she went for university studies, she was the recipient of a scholarship given by her high school. Naturally, she felt a deep sense of gratitude to the sisters. They would invite her to visit and have meals with the community. She became a frequent visitor and would often come around mealtime. Immediately after she graduated from university, she entered this congregation. Her first assignment was at a poor mission school of the congregation, which was very far from the city. It was that community’s practice to observe the congregation’s tradition of strict and frequent fasting. What aggravated her situation was whenever she came home even 5 minutes late for meals there was no more food. So she was frequently hungry. She began asking vocational questions like, “Am I called to this kind of life?” But before she could even face it, she was transferred to the city school where it was comfortable and all her needs were provided for. She also started her graduate studies, which distracted her from
facing her vocational questions. Sr. Y’s early history of poverty left her with many deprivations. One deprivation is in the area of her basic needs for food, which was not adequately met. Her attraction to the sisters’ lifestyle was influenced by her friendship with some of the sisters and her unconscious need to repay her “debt of gratitude” (the goodness shown to her by the congregation). Escaping poverty and its deprivations, especially her deprivation of food, as well as the influence of the (Filipino) cultural value of “utang na loob” which is loosely translated as “debt of gratitude” shaped the unconscious influences of her decision. These are non-freedoms. Why? Because these decisions were not rooted in the self-transcendent gospel values.

Many theologians and spiritual writers in the history of the Church have asserted in their writings that there are certain natural signs that God uses to draw men and women toward a vocation. Through these two cases, I would like to present a paradigm for understanding motivations for entering the priesthood and religious life by looking at two important areas where we can draw discernable signs whether or not a person has a vocation. We can refer to these areas as (1) Internal Vocation and (2) External Vocation.

PARADIGM FOR UNDERSTANDING MOTIVATIONS

I. The Internal Vocation

As we have mentioned earlier, it is understood as that which is within the heart of the person where God’s will is written, manifesting itself primarily as a desire to enter religious life and a growing attraction to join the priesthood and religious life. In other words, there is a manifest desire for the Life. But wanting the life is not enough. A person must want it for the proper reason. The person must have a proper motivation. This is where we are confronted with the mystery of the person and the complexity of the human psyche, where the interaction between conscious and unconscious needs can affect one’s value system and greatly influence one’s motivations. A person can be motivated by needs and/or values. Thus, internal vocation is directly concerned with conscious and unconscious motivations.

a) Conscious Motivations

Conscious motivations are in the immediate awareness of the person. As such, they are much easier to assess whether or not they are the “right” motivation. Here, the Church looks for some positive spiritual reasons for the person’s desire to enter. For example, when
asked “why” they want to enter, they would reply in expressions like, “I want the religious life because I want to serve God or I want to further the love and knowledge of God or I want to extend the kingdom of God or want to live the Gospel Life as fully as possible or I want to work for the betterment of the world or I want to share a common vision of faith and spirituality with other like-minded people and somehow further the project of God’s designs.”

Oftentimes, when candidates are interviewed as to why they are attracted to the life, they would articulate something of their idealism. We must note that not all conscious motivations are spiritually or religiously oriented or expressed.

What adds to the complex nature of motivations is that no one person has only one motivation and not all of them are on the conscious level. We all have a mixture of both conscious and unconscious motivations.

b) Unconscious Motivations

Unconscious motivations are much more difficult to see clearly without the help of certain tools such as psychological tests. Some formative processes can also help a person identify and own them, but it takes time for one to discover and own these unconscious motivations. Once identified and owned they can be purified and the person can be led to greater inner freedom.

What insights regarding unconscious motivations can we draw from the case of Fr. X and that of Sister Y? What are other examples of unconscious motivations?

Examples:

(1) To fulfill a parent’s vocation. In the case of Fr. X there could be an unconscious desire to get his parents’ approval or to please them by fulfilling their dream of having a son who will follow in the footsteps of his uncle-bishop. Seemingly in his childhood, he had been influenced by comments made by either his father or mother. In an interesting study done by sociologist Maxi Fernandez entitled, “Family Background and the Self Concept of the Asian Religious” (cf. RLA, Vol. V, No. 2, April-June 2003), one of his findings which he believes is important in understanding religious vocation in the Asian context is the association between religious vocation and the presence of religious/clergy in the family. He found that vocations to religious life seem to be significantly influenced by the presence of the religious/clergy in the extended family, although it may vary along Asian nationalities. He further commented that:
"The influence of the religious in the extended family on the young to enter religious life may be seen positively as well as negatively. It is positive if the religious in the kin group have manifested the spirit of religious life to the young in the extended family who would choose religious life in spite of being attracted to other types of vocations. It would be negative, if the only significant others in the extended family are religious—if the religious in the extended family are the one with higher social status in the extended family. If such is the case, the young attracted to the religious life is influenced purely by sociological factors—by the possibility of attaining a social status similar to the significant others. The young are generally socialized into playing the roles of the significant others and the young in families with religious/clergy in the kin group may aspire to acquire the statuses of the significant others.”

In Fernandez’ findings there was strong evidence that the young in the Asian context can be influenced to the priesthood or religious life based not only on psychological factors but also on sociological factors, such as the possibility of attaining a social status similar to the significant others. In Fr. X’s case, his significant other was his uncle-bishop who was idolized by the entire family.

In our 2 cases, there can also be the unconscious motivation:

(2) To satisfy a “hunger for achievement” and thus win greater approval from those around him. Fr. X was aware of his gifts and he used them consciously for the mission, yet it could also be that his drive to succeed in the mission was his unconscious way of gaining greater attention, recognition, and approval. If such an unconscious motivation is not brought to consciousness and purified in one’s choice of Gospel values, there is greater likelihood that once a particular goal is achieved, a person might no longer find any use for the vocation one has chosen. Sociologist Maxi Fernandez made such an observation in the same study that: “It is also a fact that male candidates from the middle classes do enter religious life or the seminary, in order to access educational opportunities and leave once the objective is achieved.” Fortunately, Fr. X’s motivations were brought into the process of purification when he sought spiritual direction and through his devotedness to prayer.

In the case of Sr. Y, the congregation she joined was instrumental in opening up educational opportunities for her to achieve higher goals in life. She also realized in the process of counseling when she returned
to her vocation story that underneath her conscious motive of wanting to serve God in the congregation she joined, that she recognized having several “impure” motives, such as:

(3) To escape poverty. Hunger was her primary experience of deprivation. She grew up in a family where they did not get enough food to eat. She was able to escape that experience of deprivation by becoming a working student. It was again the experience of hunger at her first assignment in a poor mission school that the doubt of her vocation first surfaced, but she did not give this much attention, as she was busy with her teaching work. In the same study of Maxi Fernandez he cites a common belief among the religious today regarding the poor, that the candidates from the poor class are suspected of seeking material security in the religious community. Except in very severe conditions of poverty, one may not be willing to forego the marital life and the family just for the sake of material security.³

Later when Sr. Y was reflecting on “why” she was attracted to religious life was she able to connect that underneath her workaholic tendencies came from her insatiable hunger for achievement. There was an unconscious belief that if she achieves more she’ll be respected more and be put in higher esteem by her congregation. She recognized that together with this hunger for achievement was also a:

(4) Hunger for attention,
(5) Hunger for recognition, and
(6) Clamor for acceptance.

There are other unconscious motivations worth mentioning here even though they are not drawn directly from our two cases. These are:

(7) Desire for parenting. This can be an unconscious motivation of young women and men who have experienced an absent father or mother. In the context of Asia, poverty can drive a parent or both parents to seek employment in another country and culture, thus leaving their children behind under the care of another relative. The absence of either or both parents can leave a deep psychological gap in the young who seek some form of satisfaction in their relationships in community.

In settings where there is so much societal and political instability as well as religious repression, there can also be an unconscious motivation to seek satisfaction that expresses itself in a:

(8) Desire for peace and security. The convent, the rectory or the
seminary can be seen as a haven of peace where one can feel secure or will be given an opportunity to move away such an unstable atmosphere, such as the case of international communities where members can be assigned to foreign countries.

One final example of an unconscious motivation that makes a person’s choice of priesthood and religious life an un-free act is a:

(9) Fear of the opposite sex. This can either come from a candidate’s experience of a punitive father or a cruel mother or traumatic experiences of sexual abuse. The convent or seminary is therefore seen as a safe place where one does not have to suffer the anxiety and fear of relating with the opposite sex. Studies have shown that one in every 5 candidates to the priesthood and religious life is a victim of some sort of sexual abuse. If this unconscious motive is not brought to consciousness and dealt with adequately through counseling and therapy, there is greater likelihood that the victim will become the victimizer later on in his/her life.

Unconscious motivations generally come from unmet human needs in childhood. If they remain unrecognized and unclaimed, they can contribute to the inconsistencies of a person. Inconsistency is understood here, as unconscious human needs expressing themselves in attitudes and behavior that are contrary to the Gospel values. The person may be attracted to the life and consequently enters with the expectation that her self-ideal will be realized in the institution. However, one’s inconsistencies can intervene in the realization of his or her self-ideal. There exists a gap between one’s self-ideal and expectations and the reality of one’s actual life. Asians are known to value harmony to a high degree. A distorted understanding of this can be the absence of conflict. There will be times in one’s life of commitment when one has to stand alone even in opposition to the majority, because certain Gospel values like truth/honesty may be compromised. If the candidate is influenced by one’s unconscious need to “save face”, she or he will choose not to speak/stand for the Gospel. Instead harmony and saving face will guide the decision to action and not the Gospel.

Thus, if these inconsistencies remain unresolved, they will manifest themselves in gross immaturity in relationships, problems living the vows, in community and in the apostolate, and in difficulties transcending oneself. The person is unhappy but is not free to choose the path towards inner freedom.
The Parable of the Wheat and the Darnel:

There is a biblical image that we can reflect on based on our discussion of conscious and unconscious motivations. This is the image given to us in the parable of the wheat and the darnel in Matthew 13:24-30:

He [Jesus] put another parable before them, ‘The kingdom of Heaven may be compared to a man who sowed good seed in his field. While everybody was asleep his enemy came, sowed darnel all among the wheat, and made off. When the new wheat sprouted and ripened, then the darnel appeared as well. The owner’s labourers went to him and said, “Sir, was it not good seed that you sowed in your field? If so, where does the darnel come from?” He said to them, “Some enemy has done this.” And the labourers said, “Do you want us to go and weed it out?” But he said, “Do you want us to go and weed it out?” But he said, “No, because when you weed out the darnel you might pull up the wheat with it. Let them both grow till the harvest; and at harvest time I shall say to the reapers: First collect the darnel and tie it in bundles to be burnt, then gather the wheat into my barn.”

Let us draw some insights on how to deal with both good and not so good conscious and unconscious motivations.

The man who planted good seeds represents a person with good intentions and conscious motivation for priestly and religious vocation. The enemy who sows darnel (any of several usually weedy rye grasses) among the wheat at night represents the presence of unconscious motivations that may not be consistent with the Gospel values. When the wheat began to sprout, the darnel began to appear as well. This caused confusion among those who were only aware of the good seed sown. It is similar to the confusion one feels when “impure” unconscious motives begin to surface, leading the person to question whether or not he or she really has a vocation. Often the natural and spontaneous tendency of one who becomes aware of such “impure” motives is to do something drastic, such as to leave or to think that one does not have a vocation or that one is not worthy of such a noble vocation. This is like the suggestion of the laborers to pull out the darnel. But if they did, then they would only harm or kill the new life that is sprouting. There is a proper time to deal with the “darnels” or “impure” motives of our vocation. The entire field, which has both wheat and darnel, needs tending until the time of harvest. This is the time of growth to maturity.
in one's vocation. Human development and a continuing growth in one's sense of personhood, one's sense of identity, responsibility, and spirituality are needed. It is at that time the person is more able to deal with one's unconscious motives more maturely and more adequately to the extent that one can make decisions more freely based on what he or she has discerned to be in consonance with the values of the Gospels.

3 Kinds of Candidates

Based on the combination of conscious and unconscious motives, we can draw a profile of three kinds of candidates to the priesthood and religious life.

(1) Escapism and/or Status-Oriented Candidate. The person's attraction to the priesthood and religious life is based on the interaction of both conscious and unconscious motives. On the conscious level a person may be aware that his desire and willingness to enter would be rewarding in a sense that he will achieve greater status and respectability in life. However, there can be many possible unconscious motives that can go with the person's conscious choice, which we have detailed above, such as "escape from poverty", hunger for achievement, acceptance, attention, and recognition. It is also possible that the candidate is attracted to the externals that the life present, such as the habit or Roman collar, symbols of a person's esteem or status.

(2) Function-Oriented Candidate. The person is attracted to the particular work, function or mission expression of the priesthood and religious life. On the whole, the Life is understood more as a function, not a self-giving commitment.

As a conscious motivation, this can be both positive and negative. It can be seen as positive, especially if the person is attracted to the kind of service and mission one can be engaged in. It becomes negative, if it is not brought to purification. Such was the case of Sr. Y, when her being a "workaholic" was interpreted as zeal for the mission and her sense of identity attached to the work or the role. What happens then to the vocation of the priest or the sister, if he or she can no longer function adequately due to advancing age, disability and illness? What happens to one's vocation if the congregation changes its expression of mission? For example, a congregation may decide to close their schools, so instead of teaching and administration, they decide to engage in other ministries more faithful to their founding vision and charism? Many candidates to the priesthood and religious life belong to this
category. Hopefully, the purification of their unconscious motives, which are discordant to the values of the Gospel, will help them grow and become the third kind of candidate, which is:

(3) **Commitment-oriented Candidate.** The person’s attraction to the life is based on his or her growing personal encounter with the person of Jesus and a desire to grow to be more Christ-like in one’s dispositions, values, virtues, attitudes and behavior. He or she is well aware that this is an ongoing process of conversion that requires constant purification of one’s motives and a life of discernment in order to respond to the calls and challenges of the mission in one’s everyday life. He or she is willing to commit oneself to the dynamics of growth in his vocation for greater self-giving. There is manifest growth in psychological and spirituality maturity. A person with such a maturing faith and motivation may be rare considering the many needs and complex contexts our Asian youth come from. Nonetheless this is the kind of growth we want to assist many of our youth in achieving. Those who belong to this kind of candidates are people, young or older, who genuinely look to religious life and the priesthood on which to focus their idealism. They might have great dreams and ideals of contributing to the transformation of the world, of making it a better place to live in. Asian virtues such as devotedness, respectfulness, service, hospitality, sensitivity to the poor and generosity are seeds of a life of commitment that they want to bear fruit in their life.

However, considering our Asian context, it is possible that they have the most rudimentary knowledge of the Jesus of the Gospels. Candidates who belong to this third category may lack updating in the contents of their faith. But then they know there is more to life than they are currently experiencing and so are open and willing to go through the process of formation and transformation. The priesthood and religious life can provide the focus, the challenge, and the depth they seek and desire.

Thus far we have looked at the dynamics and the role of motivation in discerning a vocation to the priesthood and the religious life by looking at the internal vocation of a person. The third kind of candidate, the commitment-oriented person, would be the kind of person we would consider having the “signs” of a good vocation.

II. The External Vocation

The Internal Vocation, which consists of a person’s desire and motivations, is only one side of the vocational story. We have to look at another important dimension, which is the external dimension of a
vocation. We call this the External Vocation. This dimension must be considered in the discernment process. This is composed of external signs indicating that the candidate is fitted or suitable for the life. Somehow there must be a meshing of a person’s interests, abilities and competencies to be able to live the life cheerfully and generously, without too much anxiety whenever sufferings, difficulties and challenges come his or her way.

The External Vocation generally consists of requirements for the priesthood and religious life, which include the following:

(1) **Sufficient physical health.** Here it has to be noted that according to findings in medicine and psychology, there are psychological factors that affect physical health. Physical complaints can be used unconsciously to keep an internal and emotional conflict out of awareness, to avoid a particular activity strongly feared or disliked, to get support and attention from others, and to indirectly express some form of control over one’s life or hostility towards oneself, others, and the environment.

(2) **Age:** not too young, not too old. The minimum is at least 18. The older the person is, the less “formable” he or she becomes. It has been observed based on experience and studies that older candidates tend to have set/rigid personality structures, which are difficult to change.

(3) **Psycho-emotional capacities.** The candidate has adequate emotional maturity for commitment, mission, community, and relationships. Family background and dynamics can serve as indicator regarding these capacities. These psycho-emotional capacities are often referred to as “EQ” or commonly referred to as Emotional Intelligence. Studies of Dr. Daniel Goleman have shown that “EQ” is a predictor of a person’s future success.

(4) **Intellectual requirements** necessary for an adequate understanding of faith, for satisfactory community life, for self-knowledge and inner freedom, and for being able to deal with the demands of the mission and pastoral leadership. It has to be noted that “IQ” or Intelligence Quotient should not be the only basis for acceptance. It has been shown through studies that those who are too intelligent may often lack necessary social skills and psycho-emotional maturity to enter into more healthy relationships in community and in the mission. According to Dr. Goleman there is no correlation between “IQ” and “EQ”.

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(5) *Spiritual-Moral requirements* which include: knowledge of the faith; quality of Christian life through one’s prayer life which is not only devotional but more personal, participation in the sacraments especially a greater interest in the Eucharist and a deepening understanding of the sacramental life of the Church, engaged in some form of apostolate or service to others, and the presence of basic moral values such as honesty and loyalty.

(6) Depending on the kind of mission expression a religious congregation or diocese may have, additional requirements may be added.

**CONCLUSION**

Thus far we have seen the complex nature of human motivations and how they affect a person’s choice for the priestly and religious life. What conclusions and insights can we draw for the promotion of vocations in Asia with stress on proper motivations?

First, the possibility of cultivating the vocation of the youth is always present for as long as there is a desire and attraction for the life. But desire is not enough. Motivation must be present as well. The challenge is to help individuals be in touch with their motivations, both conscious and unconscious through an honest and open reflection and recollection of their vocation stories.

Second, in the hierarchy of the 3 calls: the call to be a human person, the call to be a person of faith, and the call to a particular lifestyle, the first - the call to be a human person - is the call that serves as a foundation for the other calls. It is in this first call that the person is awakened to one’s sense of selfhood and one’s capacity to respond to the call of faith and the call to live such faith through the radical following of Christ in the lifestyle of the priesthood or religious life. A total response to grace is only possible if there is parallel growth in the person’s human development and consequent understanding of oneself as a person gifted with freedom to choose life that God offers in abundance. Grace builds on nature.

Third, although we are partially free and partially un-free, God desires that each of us grow in freedom for that is how God created us. The one thing God wants of us is to be free in our decision to choose our vocation.

Fourth, motivations are key determining factors for the perseverance or lack of perseverance of a vocation. Every person has a complex combination of both conscious and unconscious motives. When unmet human needs affect the unconscious motives of a person, there is
greater likelihood of a person’s attitudes and behavior becoming more inconsistent with the Gospel values. When such inconsistencies remain unresolved, this will cripple the person’s growth to maturity and to the realization of one’s self-ideal in the priestly and religious vocation.

Last but not least, the invitation to those who seek life as a religious or priest is an invitation to become totally immersed in Jesus and the gospels and to share in his mission. It is, in the best sense, an invitation to be immersed in life, a life in abundance (cf. John 10:10).

ENDNOTES:
1 Martin Pable, OFM Cap., “Signs of a Vocation” in www.vocations.com/discern/signs_pable.html
3 Ibid., p. 6

V. ADVENTURES OF FREEDOM TO ACHIEVE THE IMPOSSIBLE: ASCETICISM AND VOCATION (Radicality & Sacrifice)
- Bishop Paul Tan Chee Ing, SJ, bishop of Johor, Chairman, FABC Office of Consecrated Life

INTRODUCTION

Let me begin with a short story to keep you awake and to draw a lesson from it. There was a woman who telephoned the fire brigade calling for help. The woman said, “Come quickly, there is fire here. I have a very beautiful Japanese rock garden with all kinds of rare plants and flowers.” She went on describing how beautiful and rare her garden plants and flowers were until the fire brigade man impatiently asked: “I know, but where is the fire? We are not a nursery but a fire brigade.” The woman replied, “But you see, Sir, my garden is just beside my neighbour’s house that is burning. You see, I do not want your men, when they come, to run around my rock garden and destroy it”

Radicality and Sacrifice

In many ways, many of us priests and religious are like this good woman. Influenced by modern technological world culture, with pots of money and modern amenities and gadgets, we have built our own untouchable Japanese rock garden. Not for anything do we want others or ourselves to disturb, or worse still, destroy any part of the comfort
zones of our “Japanese rock garden”. The Gospel message of radicality (Lk 9:57-69) and sacrifice (the cross) threatens to burn part of, if not, the whole of our “garden”.

As they traveled along they met a man on the road who said to him, “I will follow you where you go.” Jesus answered, “Foxes have holes and the birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head.” Another to whom he said, “Follow me,” replied. “Let me go and bury my father first.” But he answered, “Leave the dead to bury their dead; yours is to go and spread the news of the kingdom of God.” Another said, “I will follow you, sir, but first let me go and say good-bye to my people at home.” Jesus said to him, “Once the hand is laid on the plough, no one who looks back is fit for the kingdom of God.” (Lk 9:57-69)

The meaning is, not to not care for your friends and parents, it is the radicality of the call. Such is the radicalism of the call of the Lord to follow him that many of us - bishops, priests and religious balk from the radical demands which are manifested in our behaviour, attitudes and lifestyle. If we behave like this good woman, how can we be models of vocation to young men and women?

It is said that one day a religious was showing Mother Teresa of Calcutta an exhibition of the different vocations to priesthood and religious life at the end of which Mother Teresa of Calcutta was asked what she thought of it. She replied, “This kind of exhibition does not interest me. What interests me is you, because, you yourselves are the best exhibits of vocation.”

How right she was! We, bishops, priests and religious, are the exhibits that will attract young men and women to join us.

It is my belief, but I may be wrong, that one of the main reasons for the lack of vocation is because we are not genuine exhibits of vocations. We have not really lived the radicality and sacrifice of our call. Our lifestyle, our attitudes and our behaviour run contrary to the exhibition we set up to promote vocations.

From the very beginning, I would like to say that the title “Asceticism and Vocation (Radicality and Sacrifice) does not appeal to young men and women although these aspects are essential to the reality of our call to be priests, religious priests, brothers and sisters. Words like asceticism and sacrifice no longer ring a bell in the mind of modern youth. Even the word suffering does not appeal to the youth but it is a reality that no one escapes suffering. It is only a question of degree. Facing up to this
realities is the only way to somehow cope with it. Therefore, this is the only “dirty” word that I will keep in my talk to youth. Except for this word suffering, by using words and traditional terminologies, we are not speaking to the youth but to ourselves, using again a strong French word, depassé meaning, “what is past and irrelevant” or in the youth’s language, “old fogies of no consequence.”

Excursus

Allow me to go on a very short excursus before coming to the gist of the matter. The statistics given by Archbishop Quevedo shows that in general, Asia is not badly off with regards to vocations. However, we have to be careful because the highly advanced and modern technology is invading even Asia. If we are not careful, we will fall into the same fate of the Catholics in USA, Europe and, nearer to us, Australia. We know that the effects of social communication are enormous, especially on young people. Young men and women live much more than we, oldies, in a world of radio, TV, cinemas, mobile phones, I-pods, internet, etc., in short, in an electronic world. Archbishop Quevedo spoke in quite detail the influence of an “emerging post-modern culture.” The impact on youth is that they speak and understand a different language from us who speak in a “logical-written” language. They speak and understand more the language of emotions and experiences, of images and symbols: the language of modern means of social communication. Sr. Judette Gallares spoke of the importance of symbols for us Asians. Let us not forget this. The youth live in a milieu in which profit is the driving force that spins the world. A computer is made in such a way that in a year or two it has to give way to a new and better model with more-friendly user features. You know all this, so I need only to sum up with a Korean company’s trademark LG, which means Life’s Good. This is how publicity is creating wants in us. It symbolizes many modern people’s aim in life: a life that is good because one can choose and pick for one’s comfort, prestige and status. Inevitably, this environment of materialism, consumerism, individualism, influence us and especially the youth.

If you do not believe that we are INEVITABLY influenced by our surroundings, just read Jared Diamond’s well-documented book on “Guns, Germs, and Steel.” Another book you should read is Supernature, written by a scientist named Lyall Watson. It scientifically shows how the natural surroundings, even the sun, moon and stars, do affect all

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living creatures on earth – from plants to humans and animals. To deny that we are inevitably influenced for good or for bad by the world around us is to be blind and deaf.

Facing up to this reality, I will change the title and use a language that will be understood by our youth, leaving intact the content of the message. For “Asceticism and Vocation,” I prefer to use the phrase “Adventures of Freedom to Achieve the Impossible.” Adventure is the in-thing. Climbing Mount Everest, jumping from the heights, conquering the biting cold of the north pole, sailing or flying around the world alone in a small ship or plane, etc. – these things catch the imagination of our young men and women.

There is a TV programme called “Impossible” – that is, being able to attain what people think is impossible. These images constantly flash through the minds of our youth. Freedom, be it individualistic or communitarian, is what everyone wants. In fact, adventure is the concrete experience of striving for freedom. When a person reaches, for example, the peak of Mount Everest, his/her adventure of freedom to reach the highest peak in the world, his or her first reaction is a very loud scream of freedom and happiness at achieving the aim of the adventure.

Adventures of freedom to achieve the impossible

In the context of discussing religious/priestly vocation, vocation is a call to go on an adventure of freedom to achieve the impossible. In fact, it is THE REAL IMPOSSIBLE of all adventures into freedom. It confronts not only material difficulties but also psychological and spiritual obstacles. It stresses the physical, psychological and spiritual strength of a person to its limits.

A contemporary example is our modern Saint Mother Teresa of Calcutta. She suffered from material and administrative problems; she lived the poor and simple lifestyle of the people whom she served: the miserable. Worse still, she had to bear the “slings and arrows” of the criticisms and sarcasms aimed at her by some Catholics, her community – among these were theologians and religious in a similar work but with a different orientation. Above all, the most excruciating pain of 50 years of her life serving the miserable in the absolute spiritual dryness she experienced. St. John of the Cross, suffered for about 11 years when he coined the term “dark night of the soul.” St. Paul of the Cross’ dark night lasted for 45 years until he fully recovered. Mother Teresa of Calcutta bore it until her death.

“The absence (of the presence of God) seems to have started at
almost precisely the time she began tending the poor and dying in Calcutta, and — except for a five-week break in 1959 — never abated. Although perpetually cheery in the public, the Teresa of the letters lived in a state of deep and abiding deep spiritual pain.⁴

Many canonized and un-canonized saints have attained to their impossible dreams of freedom.

**Rigorous preparation for adventure (or asceticism)**

Like any adventure, you need rigorous preparation of training so that you can conquer difficulties of heights, extreme cold and fatigue to its limits and all the other unforeseen obstacles that come along the way. It demands detachment from comfort zones, comfortable lifestyles, things that I like and things that I like to do. Then, comes the day of the beginning of the adventure that calls for a readiness to face all kinds of unforeseeable obstacles. From our traditional vocabulary, the rigorous preparation for an adventure and the facing up to suffering, stress and strain to overcome obstacles is called “asceticism.” All this in order to attain a feeling of freedom and happiness of having achieved what “I” had started out to do that looked impossible.

To accept the challenge of God’s call to be a priest or a religious is an acceptance to go on the most adventurous journey freely undertaken to achieve the impossible. Giving up many things in order to get “what I really want” is termed “freedom from,” or detachment; then, striving for something one has set out to achieve is termed “freedom to.” This living a new life is very challenging and very different for ordinary people. Like the great adventures, not many persons freely choose to go on these journeys. Thus, we should not expect a crowd of people wanting to join the priesthood or religious life. “Many are called but few are chosen,” says Jesus (Matthew 22:14).

Rigorous training in the seminary or religious formation demands the giving up of old ways of lifestyle and behaviour for a new mindset and conduct in one’s life (the traditional understanding of sacrifice.)

It is not just giving up (connotation of sacrifice) but also, and more importantly so, an acquisition of a new and challenging lifestyle. Our stress should be on the positive acquiring of new things rather the traditional emphasis on giving up or denial of what is legitimate (asceticism).

Remaining in the realm of adventure of freedom to achieve

⁴ TIME (New York), September 3, 2007, p. 28.
the impossible (or asceticism and vocation), we ask now: But what
adventure of freedom to achieve the impossible are we offering to our
youth? For this, and speaking the language youth can understand, it is
best to look into the life-experience of Jesus Christ, the Son of God, and
our own lives – models of adventure into freedom, that is, in stories,
images, symbols, emotions and experience. Giving testimonies of one's
faith and of one being healed is the “in-thing” today.

A priest is called to be an “alter Christus” or another Christ so
that people seeing him will see Jesus Christ in him. In a different but
true sense, a religious, male or female, is also invited to be another
Christ to people around him or her. Church Magisterium uses the word
“configured to” Christ. In St. Paul’s terminology, it is “conformed to”
Christ (2 Cor 3:18). If we were to follow St. Luke’s tradition, the word
is “transfigured.” (The other three Synoptic Gospels speak of Jesus’
transfiguration as a simple change of face.) Only St. Luke speaks
of metamorfosi. This Greek word means a substantial change and
not a simple accidental change of face. It is like a cocoon becoming
(metamorfosi) a butterfly. In the Oriental Churches, the theology of
“divinization” is held in high esteem. Terminologies may be different
but their meaning is the same: a substantial and not an accidental
change, a change to a new lifestyle, to having new mindsets and to a
new behaviour-pattern.

An image of this becoming an alter Christus is in a film made of
St. John Marie Vianney, patron saint of the Diocesan priests. He was
a small, fragile and sickly figure. He was nervous by temperament and
always anxious. A modern psychologist would have categorized him
as neurotic. After years of trials, suffering and tribulations, the film
showed him one day taking his bicycle and as he was mounting it, he
broke into a smile that enchanted the people around. His face shone,
like that of Jesus, for a moment. He was “transfigured”. People saw
Christ shining forth in St. Vianney’s momentary smile. It is what St.
Paul wrote in his second letter to the Corinthians, chapter 3 verse 18:
“And all of us, with our unveiled faces like the mirrors reflecting the
glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the image that we reflect
in brighter and brighter glory; this is the working of the Lord who is
Spirit.”

Jesus Christ: The Principle Living Model of Adventure of Freedom
into the impossible

Hence, we have to look at the life of Jesus Christ to find out the
meaning of this adventure of freedom into the impossible (in traditional
terms: asceticism and vocation of Jesus).

The best Scriptural text to begin with is St. Paul's letter to the Philippians, chapter 2 verses 5-11, which sums up the life of Jesus Christ: “Have this mind among yourselves, which you have in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself taking the form of a slave (the Greek word used is doulos – a slave which often has been translated as a servant), being born in the likeness of men. And being found in the human form he humbled himself and became obedient unto death, even death on a cross. Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name, which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.” (The words in bracket are my comments).

Jesus Christ's first step in expressing His infinite love

The first statement in this passage is that the Son of God did not cling on to His divinity but emptying Himself of His divinity He became a full human being in the person of Jesus Christ. To become a human being (finite), He had to "discard", at least for the time being, His divinity (infinite). It is impossible to our human mind and against any logic. The infinite cannot be finite, yet God did it because what is impossible, to Him, is possible; otherwise, He would not be God.

What is the driving force behind the act of the Son of God becoming a man? The driving force is very clear in the New Testament. St. John writes in his first letter, "God is love" (1 Jn 4: 8, 16). The Greek word is ἐστιν, which is the present tense of the word "to be." Love is identified with God; it is not, as the Islamic theology claims, a quality of God. For us Christians, it is the very nature of God Himself, love, that drove Him to send His Only Begotten Son to become like us, and drives Him to love us. God's act of love was not only in creation and in the redemptive act of Christ dying on the Cross; it continues and will continue to the end.

Proof that Jesus Christ IS at present still suffering

Thus, my statement that Christ continues to love us in His suffering, death and resurrection here and now comes from the following people. The first person is St. Paul. In his letter to the Colossians chapter 1, verse 24 he writes, "Even now I find my joy in the suffering I endure for you. In my own flesh I fill up what is lacking in the suffering of Christ for the sake of His body, the Church." (Note the words "joy in the suffering")
which will be dealt with later.) Elsewhere in his letter to the Galatians chapter 2, verse 20, St. Paul speaks of Christ living in him. This is not a metaphor but describes the reality of Christ as also suffering with and in him. Karl Rahner spoke of Jesus Christ as follows: “Of course, the absolute decisive thing in His life has already occurred through His death and resurrection. But Christ remains in the midst of history even after His ascension and glorification. Thus, He shares with us the torments and the tasks. There is no darkness in which God does not live; no void that is not filled to its depths with Him.”

St. Margaret Mary Alacoque had a vision of the bleeding Sacred Heart of Jesus and was told by Jesus that His heart bleeds every time sin is committed by a human being. The famous French philosophy Paul Claudel said, “Christ did not come to take away our suffering but to fill it with His presence.” The French novalist, Léon Bloy wrote, “Christ in agony until the end of time.” There are other famous Catholics who have said the same thing.

Love is the other side of the coin of freedom. Without freedom, love is not love. Hence, God, who is love, freely chose and chooses to express His love for us in Christ Jesus without limit because God is infinite or without limit. His love was expressed from the very beginning and continues to express itself until the end, that is, eternally.

The first step in the expression of love is to become like us, sharing with us all our joys, hopes and suffering, being tempted and being in weakness. The author of the letter to the Hebrews writes: “Since then we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus, the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession. For we have not a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sinning.” (Heb 4:14-15)

The Greek word used for sympathize is sumpathesai which is composed of two words sum meaning “with” and pathesai meaning “to suffer.” Hence, St. Paul means to say that Jesus is able to understand us because He Himself “suffered” and still suffers all our human weaknesses with us. The author continues in chapter 5, “For every high priest chosen from among men is appointed to act on behalf of men in relation to God, to offer gifts and sacrifices for sins. He can deal gently with the ignorant and wayward, since he himself is beset with weaknesses.” (Heb 5: 1-2)

The word “is beset” in Greek is in the present tense “perikeitai” meaning literally, “is set round with.” So, Jesus Christ is still suffering with us in all our weaknesses. It is not in the past tense; it is not a
reality of the past.

A few examples of great Catholics who shared in the redemptive suffering of Christ

Now, let us look at St. Paul’s many passages of his own great suffering. Below, are only a few passages: “But we have this treasure in the earthen vessels, to show that the transcendent power belongs to God and not to us. We are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not driven to despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed; always carrying in the body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be manifested in our bodies. For while we live, we are always being given up to death for Jesus’ sake, so that the life of Jesus may be manifested in our mortal flesh. (2 Cor 4:7-11)

The early Christians whom he converted accused St. Paul unjustly of being weak and ambitious. Hence, his apologia in chapter 10: “I, Paul, myself entreat you, by the meekness and gentleness of Christ — I who am humble when face to face with you, but bold to you (some translation has it as “bully you”) when I am away! — I beg of you that I may not have to show boldness with such confidence as I count on showing against some who suspects us of acting in worldly fashion. (Cor 10:1-2)

In the same letter and chapter, verses 12-18, Scripture scholars say that this is an allusion to St. Paul’s opponents’ sarcastic remarks: “For they say ‘His letters (Paul’s letters) are weighty and strong, but his bodily presence is weak, and his speech of no account’. St. Paul’s reply to this accusation is as follows: “Not that we venture to class or compare ourselves with some of those who commend themselves... But we will not boast beyond limit, but will keep to the limits God has apportioned to us, to reach even you. For we are not over-extending ourselves, as though we did not reach you; we were the first to come all the way to you... ‘Let him who boasts, boast of the Lord.’ For it is not the man who commends himself that is accepted, but the man whom the Lord commends.”

It must have been heart-rending for Paul to face the fact that his very own converts attacked him for being ambitious and weak.

I am sure all of us, in one way or another, have experienced such criticisms, sarcastic remarks and veiled attacks, even from our own beloved parishioners, fellow-priests and co-religious. We share in the common lot of being humans. Some have more of this type of suffering; others less.

Then, St. Paul suffered from a thorn in his side, which he begged Jesus to take away, but the Lord replied, “My grace is sufficient for
you”.
When we look carefully in between the lines of the Acts of the Apostles and the Epistles, we find that the early Christian Church was no better than our present Church. They have problems that we face now. The poison letters that go around from our own Catholics in the name of trying to do good for the Church are in fact poisoning the minds of Catholics and people of other faiths: a counter-witness of the love of Christ.

Jesus Christ’s second step in His freely chosen adventure of love

The second step in His infinite love, the Son of God not only became like us, a human being, but also, chose to become the lowest of the low suffering people – a slave (doulos). A slave is much worse than a servant. A servant has certain rights; but a slave has none. His master can do anything to and with him, even put him to death with impunity. So, Jesus Christ was put to death at the beck of sinners. The third and last step is to die for the loved ones. Jesus said, “No one has greater love than this, to lay down one’s life for one’s friends.” (Jn 15:13).

St. Paul goes further to explain this state of Christ being a slave. In his second letter to the Corinthians chapter 5, verse 21, he writes, “For our sake, God made the sinless one (Jesus Christ) sin.” The Greek word used by St. Paul harmatia, is a noun and not a verb. So, Jesus, as in other parts of the New Testament, did not sin (verb). He was made sin (noun). What does that mean? The traditional interpretation of the Church is taken from the first letter of St. Peter and the prophecy of Isaiah that Jesus Christ, the Messiah, took upon himself the sins of human beings: “He himself (Jesus) bore our sins in his body on the tree, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness. (1Peter 2:24); and: “Hence, I will grant whole hordes for his tribute, he (the Messiah) shall divide the spoil with the mighty, for surrendering himself to death and letting himself be taken for a sinner, while he was bearing the faults of many and praying all the time for sinners. (Is 53:12)

The image given is that of a person carrying our sins; concretely of Jesus Christ carrying the cross to Calvary.

I am proposing another interpretation following the Pauline theology and statements of the famous persons whom I have just quoted above. Christ not only took upon Himself our sins or our state of sinfulness and now sits happily at the right hand of God the Father. He also identifies Himself with us even in our sinfulness here and now. He entered into our sins without sinning.

Such a stupid and impossible act can only be understood in the
context of what St. John says, "God is love." (1 Jn 4:8,16)

In the same chapter verse 10, he writes that God loved the world so much that He gave His only Son, I quote, "to be a sacrifice that takes our sins away." Again, the verb "takes away" is in the present tense.

Love, in whatever sense, magnetizes everyone. For a full and excellent exposition of "God is love," read Pope Benedict's first encyclical "Deus caritas est". This word love is eternal. It will always be in the languages of different people of various ages.

When you really love someone, you want not only to be with the person, you want to be united to and be identified with your beloved. This is why Jesus said that in marriage, the husband and wife leave their parents and the two become one in spirit and in flesh. "For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and join his wife, and the two shall become one flesh," said Jesus. (Mt 19:5) God loves us so much that He wants to be identified with us. Hence, not only did the Son of God become a human person but also identified and identifies with us in everything, even in our sinfulness (or in St. Paul's terminology, "made sin") except that He did not commit a sin. The author of the letter to the Hebrews writes: "For surely it is not with angels that he is concerned but with the descendants of Abraham. It was essential that he should in this way become completely (underlining is by the author of this paper) like his brothers so that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in the service of God, to make expiation for the sins of the people. (Heb 2:16-17)

How did Jesus Christ identify Himself with us in our sinfulness or "made sin"?

This can clearly be seen from His agony in the Garden of Gethsemane to the Cross. From the Garden to the Cross, it appeared that He hid His divine power and became an utterly poor, helpless and weak human being. He suffered more than any of us.

Then, when His murderers came to capture Him, He could have wiped them out with a word but He refused to do it. Indeed, Jesus stripped Himself of His divine power to the point of accepting not only His murderers but also their sin - their act of murdering Him. He entered into their sin (made a sinner without sinning) so that He could deliver them from their sins.

God created us with a free will and He did not want to take it away; otherwise, we would be robots and not humans. His murderers were humans and not robots. So, instead of destroying their humanity by taking away their freedom as He created them, God, in Jesus Christ,
allowed them freely to commit a mortal sin in murdering Him, and embraced them even in their sin. He entered into their sin, in St. Paul's terminology "made sin," and, in this all-inclusive love-embrace, He transformed and saved the world. It is by this act of Jesus that He united and unites us to be one in Him as the Father is one with Him, (Jn 17: 21-23)

All bishops, priests and religious, particularly bishops and priests, are called to be in a special way like Christ in living this all-inclusive and embracing love of God. By ourselves, we cannot achieve it. But nothing is impossible with God, says the Bible. (Lk 1:37) If we receive the divine life of Christ in the Eucharist, with His divine strength, we can achieve it. St. Paul says in his letter to the Romans, chapter 5, verse 5, "because God's love is poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit that has been given us." It is already difficult to accept others and ourselves with all our short comings and idiosyncrasies. To accept even our own and others' sins is just too much for us human beings.

Examples of Catholics who have followed Jesus Christ along this extremely difficult adventure into total freedom

Let us first see how St. Paul managed his great suffering already mentioned above. First and foremost, he had an unshakable faith in his own charisma as an apostle of the gentiles. He was absolutely convinced that Jesus Christ had chosen him for a mission. He experienced the unlimited love of Jesus Christ for him in his mission to such an extent that he could write: "Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? As it is written, "For Thy sake we are being killed all day long; we are regarded as sheep to be slaughtered." No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord. (Rm 8:35-39)

It is this unshakable conviction-experience of Jesus' love for him and Jesus' personal choice of him for a specific mission that helped him weather the storms of life.

We too should have this extraordinary experience and conviction of the personal love of Jesus for us who have been specially chosen for a specific mission: Adventure of freedom to achieve the impossible.

Secondly, St. Paul had an invincible love for his Christian community and for each and every one of them in spite of their bickering and
conflict among themselves, of their accusations against him and of their disordered lives. He constantly showed them a tender and constructive love, which comes from his own experience of the unconditional love of Christ. As I have shown above, he loved even those who accused him falsely of being ambitious and weak.

Thirdly, and this is what I would like to stress, through and in all this, he was able to grow in interiorizing a sense of the cross, that is, living and suffering WITH and IN Jesus Christ. Paul was convinced that Jesus was suffering with him in all his trials and tribulations, and transforming them into saving graces for his beloved first Christian community. In other words, Paul lived what he preached - that God made the sinless one (Jesus Christ) sin. Jesus Christ, who has eternally assumed our human nature into His own divinity, continues to embrace sinful humans and their sins in such a way that they become redemptive for themselves and for others. Pope John Paul II’s Salvific Doloris, written just before he died in great pain is a wonderful testimony of a person who has successfully finished his adventure of freedom into the impossible.

St. Paul “did this joyfully (Col 1:24) … so that through Christ we share abundantly in comfort too.” Some translations have it as “consolation”. Consolation or comfort of God is definitely the result of being saved. Like Jesus, Paul accepted freely and lovingly all his sufferings – his own “weaknesses,” the “insults, hardships, persecutions and calamities” (2 Cor 12:10) – in Christ in such a way that Christ shared in his sufferings, or “as abounds the sufferings of Christ in us” (2 Cor 1:5). In the very act of Christ participating in Paul’s sufferings (as Man), He (as God) transformed the sufferings into redemptive graces for others. “Because as abounds the sufferings of Christ in us, so through Christ abounds also the comfort (or consolation) of us. Now whether we are afflicted or consoled, it is for your consolation and salvation.” (2 Cor 1:5-6) Juxtaposing consolation with salvation (soterias in original Greek) is significant. St. Paul’s consolation or comfort of God is definitely linked to salvation. Hence, the redemptive side of suffering if it is united with Christ. He acts in us as a human person and as God. This is how He can continue to save the world: THE MEDIATOR – in the past, present and future.

When I was a young priest in Petaling Jaya, Malaysia, a friend, Jane, asked me to see her brother, a non-believer and a doctor himself, who was dying of cancer. As we entered his room, he did not even greet us. He just groaned and complained and cursed. After a while, I whispered to Jane that we had better leave since we were not wanted. I left feeling depressed because I just saw a strong intelligent man
crushed by suffering. Then, Jane asked me if we could see another person in the same hospital. Monica was a Catholic and as I entered her room, she forced a smile and thanked us for coming. I asked her how she was. She replied, “I have just come out of the operating theatre and the anesthesia has just begun to wear off.” I said, “Monica, your face shows that you are in great pain.” She immediately replied, “Never mind, Father. I am offering up this suffering for someone I know is in serious problem.” Then, there was that smile of St. John Vianney radiating the face of love of Christ. I was not only edified but also ashamed. It needed a simple ordinary lady to teach me the meaning of Christian suffering.

It is well said that suffering can make a person either better or bitter. In line with what Sr. Judette said, suffering can purify and perfect our unconscious motivations.

CONCLUSION

We, bishops, priests and religious, should be like St. Paul, offering freely and lovingly all our sufferings to and in Christ in such a way that Christ shares in our sufferings and transforms them into redemptive graces for ourselves and for others.

The trials and tribulations of our ministries are many: physical tiredness, nervousness, irritability, frustrations, disillusionment, bad humour, fears, psychological weariness that comes from daily chores, feeling of repugnance for certain people, state of rebellion in which we tend to reject others, difficult situations and annoying events, inability to pray and even disgust for spiritual things, our feeling of inadequacy, suffering from inferiority complex, etc.

If we do not offer up freely and lovingly all these sufferings in Christ to the Father, we will project either unconsciously or consciously these sufferings onto others and react negatively by getting angry with them, scolding them and even rejecting them. We will fail in this adventure of freedom into the impossible.

Of course, as weak humans, we will fall. But we must try our best to get up and continue the journey of adventure! Confucius, the famous Chinese philosopher, once said that, the only real fault of a man is when he falls he refuses to get up. What more for us Christians who are endowed with the Wisdom of God communicated to us by Jesus Christ? We, as living exhibits of people who have successfully ventured into and willingly continue Jesus Christ’s adventure of freedom into the impossible, are the only convincing proof that this is possible with Christ’s power. This is certainly a powerful attraction for young people to join us.
VI. FAMILY: SEEDBED OF VOCATION- Dr. Jeffrey and Angelina Goh

1. Preliminary Remarks

The family is the core of all social order; naturally, it is the seedbed of vocation. Christian family as the seedbed of vocation is conceptually linked to Vatican II’s bold description of it as “the domestic Church”¹, for in reality it is in the bosom of the family that vocations are most ideally encouraged and fostered². Going a step further, The Congregation for the Clergy said: “It is almost impossible to have a blossoming of vocations without Christian families which are domestic churches.”³ Truly, the families within which our youths are raised are crucial to the germination of the seeds of their vocation.

The point for us is, once we see it in the category of Church, the family must perform manifest some features characteristic of Church. We ought to see, first of all, a clear recognition of the Triune God as the source of life. Second of all, we must see a positively nurturing atmosphere for Christian living through regular prayers, an identity linked to a Christ-centered family, regular reading and listening to the Word, regular practice of meaningful familial rituals, and a lively communion through fellowship, love, sacrifice and mutual service. These five features – prayers, identity, Word, rituals, and communion – constitute five essential marks, amongst others, of the Church of the family. Thirdly, a family that practices all this is bound to create in its members a strong sense of independence as well as interdependence. And finally, a Church-like family ought to be afire to light the flame of Christian mission in life.

However, with an increasing sense of urgency in recent decades, our attention has been repeatedly drawn to the many and growing challenges facing the families. In this regard, we have benefited from the profound insights from many quarters, notably from the late Pope John Paul II⁴ and from the 8th FABC Plenary Assembly⁵. It is not our intention to rehearse the lists of pressing concerns already elaborated

¹ Lumen Gentium, n. 11; and the “domestic sanctuary of the Church” in Decree of the Apostolate of Lay People, n.11.
² Catechism of the Catholic Church, n. 1655.
³ Congregation for the Clergy, The Priest, Pastor, and Leader of the Parish Community (2002), n. 27
⁴ In Pastores Dabo Vobis, n.37, Pope John Paul II said: “The rich young man in the Gospel who did not follow Jesus’ call reminds us of the obstacles preventing or eliminating one’s free response: Material goods are not the only things that can shut the human heart to the values of the Spirit and the radical demands of the Kingdom of God, certain social and cultural conditions of our day can also present many threats and can impose distorted and false visions about the true nature of vocation, making it difficult, if not impossible, to embrace or even to understand it.”
⁵ The 8th FABC Plenary Assembly held in Daejeon, Korea, focusing on Asian families, 17-23 August 2004.

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by them. Rather, our immediate concern is: In the light of such severe challenges, how can Catholic families still live out their essence as “Church” and be the seedbed of vocation?

Of singular importance, it seems, is the need to help families to consciously cultivate and nurture a vocation-culture. The burden of this short paper is to identify some essential elements that would contribute towards that task.

2. A Triptych for Reflection: Identity, Intention-Purification, Kingdom-Orientation

What we propose to do in this reflection is not only to affirm with you the objective truth that the family is the seedbed of religious and priestly vocations, but to suggest that this is true in practice only if three decisive factors – identity, purification, Kingdom - like a veritable triptych of a catechetical painting, are actually satisfied. In our view, this triptych is most urgently sketched in the profound revelation in Mark 1:9-15 which, we believe, offers a robust guide. We shall use it as a springboard for reflection.

Over a space of seven short verses, Mark the evangelist who seems to write with a great sense of urgency, describes for us three events that stood at the very beginning of Jesus’ public ministry: [1] His baptism in the Jordan, [2] His temptation in the wilderness, and [3] His proclamation of the Kingdom of God. Read separately, these triple events reveal, in that order, first, Jesus’ experience of call to ministry, second, how He spiritually prepared for ministry, and third, what the non-negotiable focus of His ministry was going to be from start to finish – from the baptismal water of the Jordan to the Cross on Calvary. Placing them together, and at the very outset of his Gospel, Mark’s portrayal of these triple events yields a lasting pattern for vocation and preparation, focusing as it does on identity, intention-purification, and Kingdom-orientation. This triptych offers a blueprint for reflection in relation to our topic at hand.

For good or ill, priests and religious are generally looked upon by the laity as instant models for Christian discipleship. Implicitly, they expect priests and religious to be not just men and women of God, but to have qualities of desirable virtues. But the real key to it all – the essential foundation upon which authentic models of faith always rise or fall – is moral character. In the wake of Enron, Arthur Anderson and a colossal sex abuse scandal, we see two big problems: one is a problem of leadership in all public institutions, the religious institutions included, and the other is the crisis in personal moral character.
Priests and religious are highly gifted people, but what makes for good leaders and models is not just competence; character is the real key. Furthermore, once the family is spoken of in terms of “the domestic Church”, we are drawn once more into the fundamental question of “What is the Church?” or “What does it mean to be Church?” On that, the Council Fathers at the Second Vatican Council were most helpful. Lumen Gentium, in all its detailed explications, ultimately points us to the Church as communion. Communion bespeaks a deep, intimate, spiritual relationship. Priests and religious would ideally be people beloved not just for their charisms, but for a healthy and faithful relationality as well — as persons of deep spirituality, of communion, who live a covenantal relationship.

Character and communion become key words for us. And inspired by Benedict XVI’s Papal theme on the World Day of Prayer for Vocations 2007: The Vocation to the Service of the Church as Communion, we shall take the cue from the Mark the Evangelist’s blueprint and organize our brief reflection under three headings: [1] The family living out its communion as the domestic Church, [2] The family reliving the communion in Jesus’ desert experience, and [3] A plea for parish communion through a concerted focus on family-ministry as the new way of being Church.

2.1 The Family Living Out Its Communion as the Domestic Church

Panel I: Baptism in the Jordan

In those days Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan. And when he came up out of the water, immediately he saw the heavens opened and the Spirit descending upon him like a dove; and a voice came from heaven, “Thou art my beloved Son; with thee I am well pleased.” (Mark 1:9-11)

2.1.1 Identity and Vocation

Identity seems to be such an important element in vocation and nowhere does that come across more powerfully than at Jesus’ baptism in the Jordan. Marking His departure from years of relative anonymity and the beginning of His public ministry, that baptismal event was truly a defining moment in Jesus’ life, a call-experience for Him. In that experience, Jesus’ appreciation of His identity was pivotal. Mark

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Footnote: The 1986 Synod stressed the model of “Communion” as the main model for expressing the essence of the Church at the Council.
alerts us to the fact that Jesus experienced a call to ministry at the very moment when He heard the affirmation that He was Son of the loving Father. That is the very first key.

"Thou art my beloved Son; with thee I am well pleased". The moment He came to know Himself in relation to God as His loving Father, Jesus' heart was set on doing the Father's will. At last, His whole mission here on earth was crystallized in a clear vision. Mentored and nurtured by Mary and Joseph in the Holy Family of Nazareth, to whom the divine will had been privately revealed, Jesus had longed to hear the voice of revelation from God that He indeed was the elect of God. Now, that voice had come to Him from on high. Right there, and for the first time, Jesus' vocation was clarified. So decisive was the moment that it was truly the hour of His calling. To Jesus, the time has come for Him to absolutely commit His life to the Father in public ministry. And to us, a crucial lesson is revealed: **identity and vocation are inseparable.**

In practical terms, in saying: "Here I am, Lord", we concretely respond to our calls and "construct" our identity. Families are at their best when they help members to hear and construct that identity, as God's beloved in the midst of so many contemporary identities that falsely claim us. The family is indeed the first place where our true identity as God's beloved is formed and nurtured. Moreover, it is this identity that shapes the gifts of God's life: generosity, joy, faith, hope and patience - all the gifts that vocation is all about.

And so, as it was for Jesus, so it is for us as well. Once we hear deep in our hearts the affirmation from on high of our identity as a daughter or a son of the loving God, it is at least potentially a new day for a resolution to embark upon selfless service. Priests and religious are first and foremost children of God and followers of Jesus. This identity, it seems, is essential not only to spiritual health but also to our ability to hear our religious calling. Clearly, for Catholic families to be a seedbed of vocation, nurturing the specific identity of a deeply Christian family that treasures its Christian identity is a primary task.7

To nurture the right identity, perhaps a quick glance in the direction of Joseph and Mary can be helpful. Living an ordinary but faithful life as a carpenter in Nazareth, St Joseph helped Mary raise Jesus, the Son of God. Catholic parents are reminded that they too, in their ordinary life, are raising children of God. To be sure, Joseph and Mary had the singular distinction of raising the Son of God. We recall that to alert his

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7 Back in his 1935 Encyclical Ad Catholica Sacerdotii, n.80, Pope Pius XI had stressed: "The first and most natural place where [vocations] should almost spontaneously grow and bloom, remains always the truly and deeply Christian family."
Jewish readers to the unbroken Davidic line in Jesus’ ancestry, Matthew editorialized the Genealogy with which he opened his Gospel. Amongst other things, from his list of three times fourteen generations (fourteen being the mathematical number for DWD in Hebrew), we appreciate why Joseph, who forms the necessary link to David, is the focus in the infancy narrative of Matthew, in contrast to the focus on Mary who takes centre stage in the infancy narrative of Luke. But the point immediately germane to our discussion is that in reading the Word of God in Matthew’s Gospel, Catholic families learn to have a sense of history. What sort of history are Catholic parents leaving behind for their children, and their children’s children? Matthew is asking them what will their story for the next 14 generations be like? He is telling them that the story is in their own hands. They are writing their own stories themselves.³

How shall Catholic families be able to write their family histories well? What is the actual reality we see in so-called Catholic families today? Sadly, the culture commonly seen in Catholic families today is by and large not much different from the dominant culture in the larger society. This reigning culture is, amongst other things, individualistic, relativistic, hedonistic, affluent, materialistic, consumerist and, above all, increasingly indifferent in religious practices. What kind of a family history is the present generation going to write about in later years as it looks back at its life as a Catholic family? Matthew’s focus on Joseph has something serious to teach us in this regard.

First, Matthew suggests that we anchor Catholic families solidly on a persistent love of and love for Mary and Jesus. This we see in Joseph who, after receiving God’s message in three dreams, incurred great personal risks and at great costs: [i] agreed not to break off the engagement with Mary who was pregnant without him, but to offer a safe home for her and her Child, [ii] protected the Mother and Child from Herod by fleeing to Egypt, and [iii] returning only after Herod was dead. Joseph’s obedient actions yield the further lesson that we are to protect the life of every child and we are to protect every woman entangled on the wrong side of the law because they represent the weak in society against whom those in the seats of power would not hesitate to

³ Speaking of the importance of the families in promoting vocations, Pope John Paul II states: “Families are called to play a decisive role for the future of vocations in the Church. The holiness of marital love, the harmony of family life, the spirit of faith with which the problems of daily life are confronted, openness toward others, especially towards the poorest, and participation in the life of the Christian community, form the proper environment for their children to listen to the divine call and make a generous response.” [Message for the 39th World Day of Prayers for Vocations (April 21, 2002), n.3.]
marginalize or even get rid of. There is, clearly, a sound biblical warrant for encouraging a devotion to Jesus and Mary in Catholic homes.

Next, Mary and Joseph did well by Jesus on three counts, for Jesus lived and grew up under their authority, and He “increased in wisdom, in stature, and in favour with God and man” (Lk 2:52). Jesus was even sufficiently learned to engage the doctors of the Law at the age of twelve (Lk 2:41-50). In fact, Joseph also taught Jesus a skill – carpentry – and helped Jesus stand on his own feet, earning his own keep in life. Looking at Jesus, we can tell that His parents must have been very effective teachers of prayer and work in the hidden life of Nazareth. This contrasts sharply with the extreme cultural poverty of the majority of Christian faithful. Children today are so familiar with the symbols of this consumerist secular world but are very ignorant of the rich symbols of our faith. We all have reasons to be concerned about the invasion of the more corrosive aspects of Western culture into our Asian scene and of the extent they insidiously contribute towards corrupting the minds and lifestyle of our young.

Third, just as Mary and Joseph were attentive to the voice of God in Matthew’s and Luke’s infancy narratives and thus accepted a life of meaningful sacrifices in obedience to God, so too was Jesus attentive to the voice of God at the Jordan and consequently entered into a life of love, service and ultimate sacrifice. Families can learn from Mary and Joseph, the faithful parents, ever attentive to the voice of the Lord who guides the events of history, and always ready to follow the instructions of God. Their spoken and unspoken fiat to God’s will – “Thy will be done” - despite great costs, must find resonance in families as we encourage them to cultivate a habit of reading and listening to the voice of God in the Bible. Feeding on the Word forms a major step towards discerning God’s will for each member in the family.

And so, we should make no mistake as to how powerful and crucial the role of the family is. The Church exists for mission and evangelization, but mission and evangelization is impossible without evangelizing the family. Parents are the first catechists, who are duty bound to pass on the baton of faith to their children. We need to probe and ask: What do parents feed themselves with daily? Do they have an excess of secular inputs but are desert-dry on the Word of God and on faith knowledge? Are they pretty much empty-handed parents? Do they buy and read Christian materials? Do they participate in seminars,

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9 In a recent survey, about half of Britain’s 12-year-olds are so ignorant of Christian teaching that the only thing they associate Easter with is the Easter egg. Christian parents are accountable for this poverty. And yet, a recent survey carried out in the United States revealed that many Church-going American men thought Joan of Arc was the wife of Noah of the Ark.
retreats and courses organized by the Church? How seriously do they practice their faith and live their baptism? Are they so lukewarm in faith-practice that they are in reality vaccinating their children against faith? These, and many more other questions, dovetail with the attention to which sociologists seek to direct us. They study the social reality in the Church and come up with the scary conclusion that, in modern society, more and more of our children no longer walk the path of faith, which their parents have inherited. St Paul's "I pass on to you what I have received" (1 Cor 11:23; 15:3) provides parents with the scriptural imperative for understanding that they form the important links in this chain of faith. If parents do not pass on the baton of faith, they break the chain.

2.1.2 Communion in the Holy Trinity

The baptismal event, which is so decisive in Jesus' life and ministry, is at the same time distinctly Trinitarian: the voice of God the Father, speaking from heaven, affirms the identity of the Son who is anointed for His mission by the Spirit descending like a dove upon Him. Right here, humanity is privileged with a uniquely new revelation of God as Holy Trinity and their inner life of community and love. Three implications for the family as seedbed of vocation flow from this.

2.1.2.1 Theophany and Mission

First, Scriptures remind us that every theophany carries with it a crucial consequence and the unique revelation of God at Jesus' baptism is no exception. The occasion of Jesus' baptism carries rich symbols of His painful mission to come. His immersion in water already pointed to His ultimate sacrifice in suffering and death, while His rising from the water symbolized His resurrection to new life. In a word, Jesus' baptism is at the same time a symbol of the Cross to come. The first revelation of the Holy Trinity thus entailed the most painful mission in God's plan of salvation. And as the likes of Abraham, Moses, Samuel and Paul had discovered, such privileged revelation always entails a painful mission. Vocation is a radical following of Christ: there is no vocation without a clear sense of and a willingness to make sacrifices in radical discipleship. Families are a privileged locale to nurture from their young a healthy willingness to make sacrifices for the common good.

19 Jesus would later use the term baptism to refer to His Paschal suffering. See Mark 10:35-40.
2.1.2.2 Baptism and Belonging to the Trinity

Second, Christians are baptized in the name of the Holy Trinity. To be baptized in someone’s name is to belong to that someone. Seeing that truth, we who are baptized in the name of the Holy Trinity are once again reminded that we are sent forth to live a life in the Trinity, and the family is the place where we can help children cultivate from young a communion with the Holy Trinity. God must become more than a mere concept in the mind of each member in the family; everyone must enter into a personal relationship with the Triune God. Christian families must cultivate a daily awareness of their Trinitarian life and learn more about that life to which we have been assigned.

The active communion amongst the Holy Trinity of Father, Son and Spirit always ensues in a common action for the salvation of the world. Here is a powerful truth in the inner life of the Trinity most germane to our discussion. The Three Persons in the Most Holy Trinity always work together for the good of humanity, by common action ad extra, for “the others”. The working together of the Holy Trinity becomes an ideal model for families, teaching profoundly that communion in the family is a gift and a responsibility. Familial communion must encourage equality, relationship-building and dedicated, common action for the welfare of others.

We, like the Trinitarian God in whose image we are born and called to live, are essentially relational beings. A point of worry to lay people is the significant element of the “lone ranger” image of priests and religious. In part due to the fact of celibacy, which renders them really alone at one level, priests and religious - most tellingly parish priests - grow increasingly independent, to the detriment of the interdependence that is so important for building up collaborative and fruitful ministry. Studies have shown that the quality of priestly ministry is directly related to the quality of personal development and personal development during the early formative years of life in the family is a crucial key to character formation.

2.1.2.3 Feeding on the Voice of Love

Third, one powerful feature from the Trinitarian presence at the Jordan deserves special mention, and that is the voice of love spoken from the heavens to Jesus. It was an affirmative voice before Jesus had achieved any of the long list of things associated with His public

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12 St Paul’s point in 1 Cor 1:10-16.
ministry.

The divine voice of love is arguably the most decisive factor at the origin of all vocations. As secularism permeates modern society and is fed by all the otherworldly voices, they fill our natural aspiration for God with empty replacements. Pervading all forms of media, popular entertainment, and advertising, these empty replacements saturate the sub-culture of our youth. They crowd out the voice of love of Our Lord in their lives.

The affirmative voice of divine love must be restored in the home where we are bound closer together in love through regular prayers together and enacting regular familial rituals together\(^{14}\). These rituals may be such mundane word-actions like gathering at the same table for meals, reading and sharing the Word of God in the evening, praying together, and parents blessing children before school and before bed based on Numbers 6:24-26.\(^{15}\)

If our children are called to the priestly or religious life, they are going to need help discerning that. They shall need the encouragement and support of their families. The voice of love in the family, predicated precisely on hearing the words of love from God, is a critical element in the vocation-culture as well as the right energy for ministry.

2.2. The Family Reliving the Communion of Jesus’ Desert Experience

Panel II: Temptation in the Wilderness

*The Spirit immediately drove him out into the wilderness. And he was in the wilderness forty days, tempted by Satan; and he was with the wild beasts; and the angels ministered to him.* (Mark 1:12-13)

2.2.1. Purifying Intentions

In this second panel of the triptych, the shocking revelation of the Lord undergoing temptations in the wilderness forces upon us some harsh lessons on vocations in and for the Church. The laity, who look to priests and religious for models of authentic discipleship are at the same time quite aware of the many temptations that are rife in priestly

\(^{14}\) In the Apostolic Exhortation, *Ecclesia in Asia*, n.46, Pope John Paul II stressed: “[P]arents should strive to make the moments when the family naturally comes together an opportunity for prayer, for Bible reading and reflection, for appropriate rituals presided over by the parents and for healthy recreation.”

\(^{15}\) According to Professor Dame Mary Douglas: “People who have become unritualistic in every other way will eventually lose their capacity for responding to the condensed symbols such as that of the Blessed Sacrament”. *See The Tablet* (26 May 2007), 45.
and religious vocations and do not need further elaboration. In some cases of colossal failures at our local seminary, the reason was quite simple: the students, never actually having a priestly vocation, were in the seminary on account of their mothers. It was a case of the mother’s vocation! By contrast, we have had cases in which the students showed up at the door on their own on college opening day, and their parents showing up a few days later seeking to drag them home, necessitating some Herculean skills in on-the-spot family reconciliation. But in the main, it is another kind of temptation that we are concerned with – the temptation in priestly and religious vocations to pursue personal agendas far from the vision of God – surely an antithesis of vocational authenticity.

The ultimate meaning of all temptations comes to light only when we take a close look at the temptations of Jesus in the wilderness: in every temptation, the question is whether human beings will seek their apparent fulfillment apart from God and in opposition to His plan. Too often, ministry flounders not for want of an initial genuine desire to serve. Rather, ministry suffers for the lack of truthful spiritual struggle with the devil early in life. Of singular importance here is the need to purify our intentions, especially when we think, and say, that we are making great sacrifices “serving God”, “doing God’s work”, “serving the Church”, “rendering service to Christ and His people” and all the other claims that priests and religious normally make.

We are perennially tempted by the three P’s, which constitute the basic obstacles to the coming of the Kingdom of God: power, prestige and possessions. They symbolize the three perennial curses fallen humanity displays with such run-away ferocity: greed for possessions, lust for power, and craze for money. To do God’s work, Jesus knew that He had to live by a reversal of worldly values. By placing the temptation-story immediately after Jesus’ call-experience at baptism, Mark suggests to us that vocations and temptations are closely linked, just as he wants to alert us to the testing times that will certainly come up in the course of priestly and religious lives. Truthful spiritual preparation is the key.

As a lay couple, we are particularly captivated by a stunning image peculiar to Mark who says, quite simply, that Jesus was tempted in the wilderness and there were “wild beasts”. From stories we hear, perhaps the one “wild beast” with which priests and religious can identify and need to wrestle is “self-deceit”. Highly gifted by God, they can also be too crafty for their own good in finding excuses for doing things contrary to the will of God. They are susceptible to making excuses and rationalizing along the line that since they are persons of God, that they have made great sacrifices to be where they are, and that they go about
doing so much good for so many, the rules are made for lesser mortals, not for them.

By placing the wilderness-temptation at the beginning of his Gospel, Mark is telling us that the beasts are with us very early on. Further, by placing the temptation scene so early and "immediately" after Jesus' experience of an initiating call at baptism, Mark is telling us that as early as possible, long before we leave our biological homes for the seminary or the formation house, we need to confront our "wild beasts" squarely, see them clearly for what they are, and name and subdue them. To be sure, this is a very tough exercise, but it is a truthful and necessary one. It is the counsel of the wise one who wrote: "My son, if you come forward to serve the Lord, prepare yourself for temptation" (Ecclesiasticus 2:1).

Jesus' wilderness-temptation is thus a symbol of our spiritual assimilation of the meaning of baptism and a new identity in Christ, against the onslaught of forces that urge us to forget our true identity and dignity as children of God. What we see in our modern affluent society is a subtle threat to our existence as Christians. This takes the form of a gradual blurring of a vision of genuine service, a weakening of our backbone, a sapping of our spirit, and a downhill slide in our religious commitment. We can and must give that phenomenon a name. It is called religious indifference – a growing phenomenon in every affluent society. It is a real spiritual threat to Asian Christian communities, against which the late Pope John Paul II, particularly in reference to Asia's new found affluence generated by economic growth, had repeatedly warned. General affluence produces a bourgeois spirit, which slips into a consequent lack of generosity. Today's soft living is a curse of affluence and a deterrence to religious commitment. In this regard, the spiritual masters of our times are also agreed that materialism under various forms is a greater threat to Christian life than ever before. Catholic parents who want to collaborate with God in promoting vocations for the Church have to be prepared to be heroically counter-cultural in their lifestyle.

How shall families deal with these temptations? The answer lies in a simple, clean and deeply Christian family life where every member learns the values of hard work, honest living, poverty and detachment and a positive fear of God in daily lives.

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Panel III: Preaching the Kingdom of God

Now after John was arrested, Jesus came into Galilee, preaching the gospel of God, and saying, "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent, and believe in the gospel." (Mark 1:14-15)

2.2.2 Intention-Purification and Kingdom-Orientation

From start to finish, Jesus’ singular focus was the Kingdom of God. The tempter’s singular focus was to find opportunities to lead Him off the course. What happened to Jesus will happen to those who follow Him and undertake ministry in His name. As Christ successfully fought His temptations in the wilderness through insisting upon communion with God, and then emerged to preach the Kingdom of God, He left us with a road map for our own life in vocation. Our communion with Christ through our love for Him becomes the genuine motivation for our work. Then, we can hope for purity of our ministry, singleness of our focus, and healing power in our thoughts, words and actions. To seek Christ is indeed to seek the Kingdom of God. This is the wonderful gift of grace beginning with the gift of communion from the time of our baptism.

The Kingdom is a gift and a task. Becoming Kingdom-Catholics is the task of all Catholic families. Purifying their intentions and holding fast to God’s Kingdom promise is the only way forward for those who would follow Jesus. Only when we have struggled with the idolatrous offers of Satan, can we hope to steer clear of idolatry and worship the one true God. Then, we may learn to make profound spiritual commitments to follow Jesus not only in preaching the Kingdom, but also in living a life of service in tune with the Kingdom-vision.

If we belong to Christ, then we must allow Christ to claim us, and to take over our orientation in life. This is the constant calling of all the baptized. This gospel truth is well supported by our experience in life – for where our treasures are, there we belong; the heart goes where the affection lies.

For Jesus, the moral order is certainly more important than the ritual-liturgical order. Furthermore, efficiency in ministry is irrelevant, and may even be dangerous, unless the ministers are spiritually purified. The call to priestly and religious life is a gift, and therefore always a task at the same time. The third panel in the triptych points us to the reign of God in moral conduct; moral character is the issue. The significance for us is obvious: the formation of priests and religious must begin at home, long before they claim that they have a vocation.
3. A Plea for Parish Communion: Focus on the Family as the New Way of Being Church

Do we think the family can teach our future seminarians and religious aspirants all they need to know in systematic theology and biblical hermeneutics, or complicated church history and the fine points of official rituals? Certainly not; but do we think the family can guide them towards hearing and responding to God’s call, purifying their intentions, and orientating their whole life mission towards the Kingdom? Most certainly, and it is their responsibility to do so.

From our own experience at seminary formation, a point stands out. It is a cause for lamentations to see young men graduating from the same seminary, even from the same class, and yet some turned out very fine in ministry while others were found seriously wanting. How on earth do we guide them through “identity, intention-purification, and Kingdom-orientation” that we have been talking about? This is where the developmental experts come in most useful. They tell us that to a significant extent, all that we believe and all that we try to do come from the values that we grew up with: duty, honesty, hard work, family, and care and respect for others. They tell us that by the time candidates walk into a seminary or a religious formation house, they are already formed in certain respects, which are practically impossible to undo. This is truer the older the candidate. The inertial energy of long habits packs great power and is very difficult to dethrone. These candidates are already so set in their ways that formators are quite helpless in truly “forming” them in important areas. This is where the triple dimensions of identity-purification-Kingdom commitment are so crucial. These must begin early in life; the candidates’ pre-history holds an important key. All the more, therefore, must our pastoral energies be channeled to the family for promoting a seedbed of authentic and good vocations.

But do families have the practical wherewithal for the realization of its objective quality as the seedbed of vocation? So long as we continue to assert doctrinally that the family is the domestic Church, we must also proceed to draw a practical imperative from this discussion. The “24/7 – family” i.e. the Domestic Church, not the “one-hour-a-week” church building where we gather for Sunday liturgy, ought to be the centre of ministerial activities. We have no lack of theological articulation for the importance of the family; what we lack is a “carry-through”. In reality, concrete attention is perpetually focused on activities carried out by priests away from the Church of the Homes. How are we going to begin to give life to the vision that the real Church takes place in the family, that the family is the core of all social order, and that the family is the seedbed of vocation, while we continue to belabour the
concept of the priest / bishop / the parish church building as the center of ministry/Christian life/activities? Build the family and we build the Church, never the other way around. When families are under so much attack in modern living, we cannot but have to move on to a concerted programme of family-focus as the new way of being Church. If we wish to see Catholic families produce vocations, we must take a fresh look at our pastoral strategy, for there is no way to achieve this other than to mobilize resources and channel pastoral attention in a concerted way to the family17. The Church as our spiritual family must, by words that are matched by deeds, become the promoter and guarantor of our biological families.

To conclude, we return to Christian authentic love in the Paschal pattern of dying to rise to new life. The consequence of this Paschal nature of love is expressed in the Gospel paradox: “whoever would save his life will lose it; and whoever loses his life for my sake and the gospel’s will save it” (Mark 8:35). If that is true of the Catholic family, it is true of the Catholic priests and religious as well. Unless they voluntarily highlight the domestic Church and let it increase, they face a drying up of worthy vocations. Losing themselves wholeheartedly in serving the families and elevating the importance of the family, they shall find life. For then and perhaps only then, will the family really become the seedbed of their future authentic vocations.

From the perspective of the laity, you cannot hope to promote the real growth of the family as the seedbed of vocation unless you proactively do something about it. You cannot leave it all to the families, under siege as they are by a spirit of religious indifference that is fed by a combination of secular forces in the reigning modern culture. “Back to the family” must be our new slogan – our pastoral battle cry.

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17 The words of Pope John Paul II are again pertinent to refill families entirely and exclusively with God Himself: “Hence the urgent need that the Church’s pastoral work in promoting vocations be aimed decisively and primarily toward restoring a ‘Christian mentality’, one built on faith and sustained by it. More than ever, what is now needed is an evangelization which never tires of pointing to the true face of God, the Father who calls each one of us in Jesus Christ. Only thus will the indispensable foundations be laid, so that every vocation, including the priestly vocation, will be perceived for what it really is, loved in its beauty and lived out with total dedication and deep joy.” Pastores Dabo Vobis, n.37.
VII. HOLISTIC AND INTEGRATED APPROACH TO FORMATION

- Bishop Luis Antonio Tagle, bishop of Imus, Chairman ad interin FABC Office of Theological Concerns

Synopsis:
One of the fruits of the renewal of the Second Vatican Council is the call for a holistic and integrated approach to formation for the priesthood and religious life. An integrated approach is aimed at forming integrated persons. In Asia, where harmony is highly valued, integration should not be alien to our way of doing things. In formation, it helps us avoid the two traps of disintegration and reductionism. The presentation has three sections.

First, an integrated approach rests on the fact that we are forming human persons who are multi-dimensional and multi-contextual. The formation process must listen to these dimensions and contexts. They are also being formed for priestly ministry or religious life, each being a complex reality made up of various aspects. Both the recipients and destination of formation are multi-leveled.

Secondly, Pastores dabo vobis of John Paul II (1992) shows sensitivity to the need for integrating the areas of formation: the human, spiritual, intellectual and pastoral. Each area of the four has specific characteristics, but together they mutually depend on, enrich and balance each other. The pope clearly shows the weaving of these aspects of formation.

Thirdly, the context of formation is the community, which in itself is also an achievement of integration. The action of the Holy Spirit, the agent of harmony in the Church, should be experienced in the integrated and harmonious action of the human agents of formation. The seminary or formation personnel, the bishops and religious superiors, the priests and religious not assigned to formation ministry, the families of the candidates, the formation community, the parishes and lay association, the benefactors, the poor and the candidate himself/herself work together, in an integrated fashion, in the task of formation. We look for integration in approach as well as integration among the agents of formation.

To conclude, an integrated approach should work towards the harmony between philosophy and theology seminaries, and between initial and ongoing formation.

Part I. Why is there a need for a holistic or an integrated formation programme?

Ground and rationale: Since Vatican II, every aspect of Church Life
called for some change and a more integrated approach to pastoral work – this was true also for the approach to Formation.

The goal was to give the faithful an integrating experience of being part of a Christian community, and it was true also for religious and priestly formation. The aim was to produce fully integrated religious and priests. This idea is not alien to Asia where culturally we move in harmony, bringing together the different elements in our lives in proper process, leaving space and room for ‘getting it together’.

We must avoid any kind of disintegration and its opposite, reductionism. We cannot reduce a complex reality into one part saying that one part is the whole – this leads to harmful reductionism and the errors of fundamentalist groups. We must look at the human person from every perspective, their past and present perspective, family, schooling as well as spiritual, intellectual, pastoral, anthropological background.

There should be an awareness that we are forming real human persons and each human person is a unity of so many aspects, conditions, life contexts: They belong for eg to a nation/city/family/parish/age group/school/continent/occupational group.

Biblically, the body has been perceived as our earthly existence and been associated with sinfulness; weakness, while our transcendent qualities belong to the spiritual and the capacity to relate to God, to think, to the soul. All are different dimensions of human existence but basically every person is a unity of all these. Biblically, every person is multi-dimensional. That is the mystery of the human person, subjected to differing levels of conditions, levels of existence.

In formation, these must be understood, appreciated, taken into consideration. If not, mistakes will be made. Eg Mother Superior in a panic thinking a novice is having a nervous breakdown – only reported it and asked advice of the Bishop 2 weeks later. Asked what she had done about it so far, she replied ‘I told her to pray to St Anthony! She needed the hospital, perhaps medicine, more than St Anthony. There are times when vitamins are needed to deal with stress...and this implies not a lack of faith but a recognition of the mystery of the human person.

Some candidates who present themselves full of good will may have already been mis-formed even de-formed by the previous circumstances of their lives. They may be products of absentee parents because of economic migration – a father working in a city; a mother abroad; they may show attitudes that suggest the need for a surrogate mother/father;

One may have witnessed violence in the home; this remains part of his heart and memory, and will have left an imprint on his personality.
There are those candidates whose childhood has been spent in poverty – they want to forget the effects of that poverty; they do not want to go to a poor parish; to return to the pain of that poverty; we can’t be blind to this; they need help and support; and healing of memories.

Thus there is need for a multi-dimensional approach. It challenges the formator; who must be a good listener; must be discerning; forming the candidates for a particular state of life and for ministry which is itself multi-dimensional. Eg. shepherding a Christian community, helping them to remain faithful, acting in the name of Christ, being connected to the Apostles; and being aware of immersion in the greater, universal Church.

We are preparing a complex person for a complex ministry; no-one can be forced into one dimension. The same is true of religious life: there must be a following of Christ through a consecrated life and the living of the three vows. Religious are called to be a prophetic, renewing presence in the Church. Each vow is important and the virtues must be developed.

Any formation must be multi-dimensional – Look at marriage Formation: the vocation to live together the marriage covenant, to support each other, through all sorts of crises, bringing up their children. We try to give this formation in parishes with a plenary assembly of the couples in a Pre-Cana 3 Saturdays’ experience! Is it enough? When each aspect, human, intellectual, emotional, spiritual etc. calls for our attention?

So the process of formation happens on various levels and prepares candidates for the various aspects of ministry they are called to.

It demands attentiveness to all the different aspects. All aspects are necessary and each aspect is unique. Eg ‘intellectual’ – not everyone is specially gifted to teach; it demands a particular kind of gift. We don’t go to a doctor who tells us to believe and pray – we want him to use his science... Consciously, we must bring together all aspects, as they depend mutually on each other. Each one draws out the best in the other; there must be a balance; we must check each aspect and protect them from an over dependence on one or other. Beware of the kind of modern pseudo psychol/spiritual approach such as posters I have seen in retreathouses: ‘I am my own master. MY life is in my hands...’

   I am my own creator...’ If a formator espouses such attitudes, no good will come from it.

Likewise, some are in their ministries not because they are sent. but because they have chosen it for themselves....
Part 2. Some aspects of formation based on ‘Pastores dabo vobis’

Human, spiritual, intellectual, pastoral are all areas, each with their own specific objective and contributing to the wholistic formation of the candidates. All must be integrated – they affect one another – and must do so or there will be weakness.

The Phillipine Bishops tried to follow the challenges of Pastores dabo vobis to draw up their own programme of formation and it was approved by Rome in 2005. It grew out of consultation and the practice of seminary personnel from 1995-2005 and the aim was to maintain harmony of each aspect.

The Phillipine programme openly discusses problems, is concerned with, and sufficiently addresses unity and harmony in formation. The 4 areas are addressed in community settings – whether in the religious life or the seminary. Being part of a community is in itself an integrating experience.

a.) HUMAN: Here the specific objective is to form people of virtue; human excellence; goodness of character founded on psychological, emotional integration and modeled on the humanity of Christ as seen in the Gospels. Positive human qualities in formation are developed so that the human self can be realized fully with all its gifts presuming that the community itself is integrated..

There also has to be Cultivation of human qualities with a view to ministry. It has a pastoral goal cultivating the necessary human qualities which will be of service in ministry. Thus a person can be actualized in view of ministry. The priest or religious should reflect authentically the human perfection of Christ, especially in the virtue of charity and attitude towards others. He/ she must be ‘humanly credible’/his her personality moulded to become a bridge NOT an obstacle for people’s encounter with Jesus. He should be an instrument, a sign, a sacrament of encounter with the Lord just as water, oil is used in th sacraments, our humanity can be a sign of Christ to the world, as we are called to form a people who seek to unite themselves to God’s saving will.

The goal is not personal sanctity for oneself but should be transformative, leading a community to do God’s will so as to be involved in the mission of the Church and accept the challenge of their baptism.

Human formation finds its completion in Spiritual formation in the educational process, the candidate is building a relationship with God – and this fulfills the fundamental human need to find a transcendent meaning in life. St Augustine: ‘our hearts are restless until they rest in Thee.’
How spiritual is the person entering? If the candidate becomes proud — something is wrong.

The Asian soul searches for the divine master and will have to continue searching while bringing the Lord to others; exciting others to come to God. It is not a true vocation if it cannot transcend petty quarrels in community. This finding of the Master must continue to reflect the Lord, bring him to others — it must have an apostolic dimension; impels us to take to others the good news — good news which can only be based on one’s own experience of God. ‘You cannot give what you have not got.’ Mary Magdalene is our model here – having encountered the risen Christ she did not say: ‘The Lord is risen’ but ‘I have seen the Lord’: that is the true apostolic message. ‘What we have seen with our own eyes, .....ST John’s First letter

The spiritual life which is a blossoming of human formation, gives motivation for ministry and involvement. The Holy father says this meeting with God fulfills our humanity, brings us face to face with the need to meet our neighbour, to give ourselves wholeheartedly to others in a charity that is rooted in the compassion and love of God.

b.) INTELLECTUAL: This aspect of formation aims at forming people with a deep understanding of the mysteries of faith and a capacity for ongoing theological reflection, giving the pastoral skills and competence in the context of the Church and Society for the sake of mission and evangelization.

We are not expecting just academic excellence; it goes beyond this - and the motive must be pastoral; it involves study. It is deeply connected with both the human and spiritual and the fundamental demands of human intelligence. There must be no false dichotomy between intellectual/academic and pastoral. The poorest village deserves humanly intelligent pastors. Intelligence in the past has been given a bad name but we must use the intelligence as much as the emotions. How can we truly understand the Bible and its mysteries without intellectual development? (eg. Martin Luther)

And the intellect is good as it can direct and can control feelings and emotions. (‘I wont say mass because I don’t feel like it? How about commitment? Handle feelings through the intellect which has been dismissed in the past by a wrong approach to formation; The intellect does not preclude passion, shown by Yves Congar. eg in his writings, passion is there as well as intellect and is a further appreciation of the truth. It enables us to participate in the depth of our soul, the mind of God. Being open to the spirit helps in adhering to God. It can be nourishment for the spiritual life. Intellectual formation finds
its specific justification in the nature of ordained ministry and the challenge of new ways of evangelization. There is room for feelings and intellect. Many saints were Doctors of the Church...

If intellectual development is not pursued for individualistic reasons (e.g., to be the best seller of the year) but has a pastoral ministry thrust; its objective—evangelization, it will be truly pastoral, having a deep commitment to and competence for pastoral leadership and service especially to the poor, the suffering and oppressed in union with Christ, the true Good Shepherd and the Church towards the building up of the church in true pastoral charity. It involves spiritual communion with Christ and a strong spiritual life anxious to learn from him. The ministry involves contexts and demands of mission. The candidate must be equipped and competent to carry out his pastoral work. A person must be a channel for people to encounter the good shepherd (PDV NO 57). This pastoral dimension of formation ensures that the human, spiritual and intellectual aspects of formation have certain precise characteristics. It unifies and gives specificity to the whole formation of future priests and religious.

The goal which defines for us what context and process should be put into human, spiritual and intellectual formation to be pastors in their life and mission. E.g. In the seminary one aspect leads to another; one is the foundation of the other; attention to one leads to the other and one is fruitful because of the others.

Part 3. The Context of Formation – Agents of Formation

The letter Pastores dabo vobis focuses on the seminary but can be applied to novitiates etc. The Holy Spirit is the main agent of formation (Acts: 20:28). Paul at Ephesus says you have been appointed overseers by the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is the Spirit of harmony in Asia – the many different tongues produced one tongue of understanding at Pentecost. I Cor. 12 the different charisms or gifts through the power of the spirit do not lead to fragmentation but to the building up of the one body. The Spirit gives us an awareness if we are open to the Spirit.

Spiritual formators themselves: formation personnel should collaborate, should be integrated among themselves in their vision and approach, not necessarily demanding uniformity but sharing decisions and through collaboration, become witness to community; reveal an appreciation of being united in the midst of their diversity. If candidates see formators are communicating well, they will learn from this. If they see divisions they will be harmed. “Go to Father X for permission Father Y would not give....”
1. The Community of formation is thus an integrating agent for an integrating approach. The Spiritual directors are not the only ones responsible for formation but all must be concerned and involved. The intellectual life is not only the concern of the Dean of Studies. The Director of Apostolic work for apostolate. All should be aware of what they are doing in parishes.

Prefect of discipline is not only concerned with the keeping of rules. He should also be looking at attitudes of the candidates to rules: not everyone who conforms to rules is suitable.

Spheres of influence must be inter-related. Each is the common concern and the formators must come together readily to see how each area can also be addressed by the others.

2. Bishops and Superiors are also part of the formation team. Their role should not be simply to provide money, the occasional visit; if so, how can they be part of this integrating formation. Formation is part of their responsibility too. They should be teachers of congregational thrusts, interpreters for candidates of the signs of the times.

Through Superiors, formation is integrated in the local church – they must not be as it were anaesthetized against what is happening in the local and the universal Church.

3. Priests and religious formally involved in formation should support not negate what is going on there. Eg. Some pastors can undo the formation by thoughtless comments, criticism, poor advice “that’s only for the novitiate” “That’s o.k. in the seminary... “Simplicity of life”? –forget it here. Don’t worry about study, Look at me – I did n’t need it. You can survive”. Care should therefore be taken when assigning students to pastoral work.

Dioceses and congregations have their specializations.: Liturgy Commisions; social action groups where the student may observe or help for experience. However, the collaboration of other priests in this instance may undo what is being instilled in the house of formation. WE must make these persons realize that through their cooperation and witness they can re-inforce the values given by formators.

Be careful where you send your candidates for parish experience lest they be taught vices or be scandalized. For example there is the case of a student staying in a parish house given the task of letting the mistress of the parish Priest in late at night. The seminarian later left quite demoralized. Fellow priests and religious can therefore be a cause of disintegration.
4. *Families* have been the early formators and continue to have an influence. Listen to them; they can tell you about their children. We’ve seen on the other hand where parents may have a vocation stronger than their sons or daughters...

It’s worth having a programme where parents, are gathered together. They can perhaps stay a weekend and experience seminary life, its routine, the formation programme. Also encourage the parents not to undo the training and value system by eg. spoiling their sons and daughters when they are at home on leave, by putting them on a pedestal, rather, let them wash the dishes, help in the house or farm as they do in the seminary.

5. *Seminarians’ culture* of silence is to be avoided. Cover-up in the name of friendship is not helpful. This can be a disintegrating element. Rather they need to be prophetic to one another; true brothers, consistent and trustworthy in their relationships with others.

6. *Parish Communities. Benefactors*, lay communities, need to be aware of their influence on the young. They must not spoil the candidates but challenge them. Let them look at the attitudes of those candidates and not give them everything they ask for or want. Adulation is harmful to the young.

7. *The Poor can be formators also*. The students are often sent to the poor to do social work but the poor are not just beneficiaries, but also play a role in forming candidates in hope; hope in the midst of adversity and the absurdities of life. They can teach a sense of simplicity and they can challenge candidates to rely on the sufficiency of God, sharing communion of goods, reflecting the strength of human spirituality in facing contemporary social and cultural evils. The poor are the best formators if they are not seen simply as training ground. It is a habit of mine to go to the poor to ask how candidates are doing when they are working among them. The poor are very sensitive and will notice a lack of true charity or generosity.

8. *Finally, the candidates themselves* are part of their own formation and must assume responsibility for bringing all aspects of formation into harmony in their lives.

Blessed are the single-hearted – one heart able to integrate all. If not, even with the best formators, superiors, teachers, families, priests, they can still end up half-baked priests or religious.
VIII. FINAL STATEMENT – “VOCAITION IN ASIA: FORMATION TO RADICALITY”

A Cry for Help from Asia to Asians

“So you find it meaningful for Asian countries to form missionaries for other Asian countries?” As one of the first questions we addressed, this question was really a plaintive cry for help, a cry from Asians to fellow Asians.

We had come to Thailand from different parts of Asia to pray, reflect, and share with one another on the challenges that vocations to priestly and religious life in Asia confront. The question posed to us underlines one of the major aspects of the Asian context of vocation – the need for missionaries in many countries of Asia, especially in regions that enjoy great economic development and advanced scientific technology. This shortage of priests seems to contradict the global statistics. For, indeed, in contrast to other continents suffering a general decline in vocations, Asia together with Africa represents a fertile seedbed of vocations. In 26 years, from 1978 to 2004, candidates to the priesthood in Asia rose in number by 153.28% from 11,536 to 29,220.

Catholics in our vast continent of Asia are only 3% of the total population. We are but a tiny minority, truly a small flock of the Lord. Hence the words of Jesus continue to challenge us: “The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few, so ask the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers to his harvest” (Mt. 9:37).

This challenge takes on greater significance when we consider major dimensions of the Asian context that impact heavily on families and on vocations. Among these are massive poverty, a multicultural and multi-religious environment frequently in tension and even conflict, and the certain but subtle intrusion of an alien materialist and secular culture into the deeply religious cultures of Asia. Such an emerging global culture fosters individualism, self-assertion, and ambitioning for higher social status while perpetuating cultural-religious biases and prejudices.

In this social context the values of the Gospel, often radically counter cultural, have to be inculcated into the hearts and minds of

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18 About 150 bishops, clergy, religious sisters and brothers, and lay faithful from 16 countries attended the First Asian Vocation Symposium.
19 From 1978 to 2004 the number of priests in Asia increased by 74% from 27,700 to 48,000 priests. At the same time the number of Religious Brothers increased by 38.72% from 6,508 to 9,205. The number of Professed Women Religious likewise increased by 64.49% from 91,585 to 150,736 [See Annuario Statisticum Ecclesiae of 2004 as reported by L'Osservatore Romano, Weekly Edition in English, 14 July 2004, p. 5].
those whom God calls to the priesthood and to the religious life.

Vocation: God’s Call to Radical Following of Christ

Vocation is fundamentally the following of Jesus in his radical way of life unto the Cross, in his total self-abnegation and self-sacrifice – in the use of freedom that is totally for the other – which is nothing else than pure self-giving love. For this reason vocational discernment and formation would have to center on the potential of the individual to respond honestly and generously to the call to radicality, to what Jesus has himself described as non-conformity to the values of this world (see Jn. 17:11, 16). We should dream not so much for the greatest number of vocations, but for suitable persons, no matter how few, who can be a creative minority genuinely responding to the call to radicality and sacrifice. By so doing they assume a lifestyle so totally free, so emptied of worldly attachments, because so totally enamored by the Lord Jesus.

In a very real sense, the call to radicality and sacrifice is – to use a phrase that might appeal to young men and women – a call to “adventures in freedom to do the impossible” in the manner of Jesus. At the heart of every vocation are the Gospel values of self-emptying, of loving service, of humility and simplicity, of willingness to suffer for the sake of the Lord. Today these are qualities that are not appreciated or valued by the individualist, competitive and assertive post-modern spirit. Indeed, “Many are called but few are chosen” (Mt. 22:14).

The Family – Seedbed of Vocation

It is within the heart of the family that the call to a radical following of Jesus is frequently heard. There the mystery of vocation, of God-calling-individuals for consecration and mission, is born, fostered and encouraged, nourished and guided. Within the family values and motivations begin to be formed. Vocation begins to be imbibed with a deep Christian identity and mission. In the family the Kingdom-of-God-orientation of moral character starts. In sum the quality of family life, of relationships within the family, either nourishes and fosters vocation or weakens and destroys it.

For this reason the family as a “domestic church” is to be taken seriously and become what it is. Where lay people, especially families, are faithful and active regarding their responsibilities, vocations would flourish, as attested by the history of the Church in Korea.

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20 See Benedict XVI, Deus Caritas Est, nos.6 and 12.
If according to the 8th Plenary Assembly of the FABC, the family is to be the "focal point of evangelization," so the family in Asia has to be the "focal seedbed of vocation."

**Discernment and Screening of Vocation**

In the light of all the above, wise and prudent vocational recruitment, discernment and formation are absolutely necessary. This would mean, as the Church has often encouraged, making proper use of medical and psychological tools in the screening of candidates to the priestly and religious life. It is, of course, imperative that psychological assistance has to be based on a Christian anthropology that is consonant with Church teachings.

Screening should involve formal psychological testing, in depth-interview based on the behavioral patterns of the candidate, a review of the candidate's personal history, family background and relationships, even an initial exploration of conscious and unconscious motivations, etc.

The purpose of these screening procedures is to ascertain as far as possible the candidate's functional ability, availability for formation and suitability for priestly and religious life. Screening procedures are meant to verify the capabilities of the candidate to be humanly healthy, psychologically whole and be committed to Christian discipleship. Candidates are not expected to be completely mature at the beginning of their formation. This is a demand expected of the entire process of priestly and religious formation, initial and on-going.

**Formation to Maturity and Radicality in Christ**

In our reflection and sharing, we focused on contextualized and holistic formation of vocation. In their own cultural matrix, candidates to the priesthood and to religious life are to be formed integrally, with all the aspects of formation, e.g., human, spiritual, intellectual, pastoral, weaving in and out of each other, flowing from and building on each other.

Integration of all the aspects in a continuum of formation from one stage to the next prevents disintegration or compartmentalism and reductionism. Compartmentalizing the different aspects of formation could result in a dichotomous priestly or religious life, while excessively

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21 Here the general guidelines given by various Church documents would be necessary. See for instance, Pastores Dabo Vobis, Presbyterorum Ordinis, The Directory of the Life and Ministry of Priests; Perfectae Caritatis, Renovationis Causam, Evangelica Testificatio, Vita Consecrata.
emphasizing any one aspect could lead to a neglect of the others. All these could result in a deformed vocation with disastrous results to self and to mission.

We believe that the overarching goal of vocation formation is the integral maturity of a candidate formed in the pattern of Christ’s own authentic humanity so that the candidate might participate in Christ’s mission of salvation through self-sacrificing love. Integral human formation necessarily involves self-transcendence and mission. This apostolic and pastoral goal, including missio ad exterōs\textsuperscript{22} is a fundamental dimension of vocation and its formation.

For the formation process the community-context – a context of communion - is imperative. That is why the Eucharist, the builder of communion is central to formation. At the same time the community-context requires the collaborative effort of the whole community of formators, of Bishops and Superiors, Priests and Religious, families and parents, communities of the poor where candidates have pastoral experiences.

Above all there is the active enlivening, integrating and uniting work of the Holy Spirit, the giver of charisms and vocations. It is the Holy Spirit as the principal formator who enables all other formators to help form candidates to the priesthood and religious life not simply by teaching and exhortation but by the sine qua non of human formation — the witness of authentic discipleship, of radicality and sacrifice.

\textsuperscript{22} see John Paul II, Ecclesia in Asia, no. 44.
Recommendations

In the light of the above reflections, we conclude with the following recommendations:

1. That national mission sending societies in Asia as well as missionary religious societies of priests respond to the dearth of priests in certain areas of Asia and plan a missionary training program with the receiving countries for this purpose;

2. That all seminaries and religious houses of formation explicitly foster and cultivate (e.g., through a program of mission study, regular prayer for the missions, mission awareness days/month) a deep missionary consciousness among all candidates so as to prepare them better for ministry;

3. That diocesan seminaries and religious houses of formation regularly collaborate in vocation awareness programs for young people in parish and school settings;

4. That vocation directors regularly visit the families of candidates to the priesthood or religious life not only to become familiar with the candidates' family background but also to make the family aware of the mystery of vocation and the necessity of encouragement and support;

5. That the diocesan/parish vocation ministry and family-related lay people's organizations and movements, such as Serra International, Couples for Christ, Marriage Encounter Movement, collaborate with the catechetical and family ministry of the diocese/parish in forming the family as a seedbed of vocation through such means as:
   - family renewal programs, family catechesis
   - family prayer groups, family Masses, para-liturgies and rituals
   - training altar servers
   - families-helping-families
   - Basic Ecclesiial Community building
   - Media education
   - Bible sharing and study for lay people
   - Organization of youth groups

6. That formation, in the light of an emerging post-modern culture, emphasize through teaching, spiritual direction, and pastoral
exposure the values of zeal, preferential option for the poor, simplicity of life and joyful personal sacrifice in serving the people in the pattern of Christ;

7. That a more systematic and culturally-sensitive program for psycho-sexual maturity and integration be drawn up in seminaries and houses of formation;

8. That formators take psychological testing so as to accompany candidates more effectively and more patiently, with greater pastoral charity.

9. That diocesan and parish pastoral programs, while acknowledging the key role of the laity in promoting priestly and religious vocations, ensure their active participation in the whole process of recruitment, discernment, and formation.
FABC Papers:


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