ASIA, A CONTINENT OF EMERGING MISSIONARY HOPE

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"Asia is truly alive." "Vibrant life pulsates in the peoples, nations, and churches of Asia." "Jesus brings life in abundance for Asia's people." "Life is given as a gift and received as a task and a mission." Such comments capture the enthusiasm that surrounded the celebration of the Special Assembly for Asia of the Synod of Bishops, the "Asian Synod," in Rome (April 19 - May 14, 1998).

A newspaper headline enthusiastically proclaimed: "This is a time of grace when the Church in Asia is called to a fresh missionary outreach" (OR-EE: 4-22-98, p. 1). Indeed, as Pope John Paul II noted in his homily at the Synod's opening Eucharist: the continental synods form part of the "launch of the new evangelization for the third millennium." The pope asserted that for Asia "the new evangelization calls for respectful attention to 'Asian realities' and healthy discernment in their regard" (Ibid., p. 2).

Following a theme from the Acts of the Apostles, the pope set forth the Synod's vision and work: "ours is the task of writing new chapters of Christian witness in every part of the
world and in Asia: from India to Indonesia, from Japan to Lebanon, from Korea to Kazakhstan, from Việt Nam to the Philippines, from Siberia to China” (Ibid.). The Synod had begun.

The 252 participants began exploring the Synod’s theme: “Jesus Christ the Savior and His Mission of Love and Service in Asia: ‘... that they may have life, and have it abundantly’ (Jn. 10:10).” This theme quickly took on pastoral and missionary dimensions: how do Christian communities and local churches really become “Asian Churches”? Clearly, the succinct and helpful expression “a new way of being Church in Asia,” popularized by FABC V (Bandung, 1990) and FABC VI (Manila, 1995), provides an interpretive key to much of the Synod’s agenda.

“Being Church in Asia” necessarily involves exchanging experiences, needs, faith insights, successes and challenges, personnel and resources. In this whole area of the mutual exchange of gifts among the sister local churches of Asia, the Synod proved to truly be “a UNIQUE EXPERIENCE and a FOUNDATIONAL EVENT” (Final Synod Message, No. 2; OR-EE: 5-20-98, p. 6).

MISSION THEMES IN THE SYNOD

To speak of “being Church” means speaking about a “faith-community-in-mission.” Pope Paul VI’s inspiring words come to mind: “We wish to confirm once more that the task of evangelizing all people constitutes the essential mission of the Church. ... Evangelizing is in fact the grace and vocation proper to the Church, her deepest identity. She exists in order to evangelize” (EN 14). This vision of a missionary Church and its concretization in the Asian context was captured by Indonesia’s Cardinal Julius Riyadi Darmaatmadja in his remarks at the Synod’s last session: “‘Being Church in Asia’ today
means 'participating in the mission of Christ, the Savior, in rendering his redemptive love and service in Asia,' so that Asian men and women can more fully achieve their integral human development, and 'that they may have life, and have it abundantly' (Jn. 10:10)." The Cardinal also concluded that only through this missionary effort will the Church in Asia emerge as "a Church with a truly Asian 'face'" (OR-EE: 6-17-98, pp. 10-11).

This presentation, a panoramic overview of the mission agenda emerging in the Asian Synod, now turns to a consideration of specific themes. Each thematic represents a particular insight into the integral understanding of mission that surfaced in the deliberations of the Synod.

AN ATTITUDE OF GRATITUDE. Asians treasure the gift of the Christian faith they have received. This appreciation permeated the Synod itself, and several warm expressions of gratitude were publicly voiced. Taiwan's Cardinal Paul Shan Kuo-hsi spoke of "the two millennia of evangelization in Asia, grateful for what has been accomplished." He continued: "thanks to the work of all the 'missionaries' of the past, there is a Christian presence in most Asian countries, and in some countries a very significant presence" (OR-EE: 4-29-98, pp. 7-8). Cardinal Jaime L. Sin of Manila recalled: "Four hundred years ago, European missionaries brought our faith to us. Today our missionaries and overseas contract workers are bringing back this same faith to Europe and to other parts of the world" (Ibid., p. 12).

Father Oscar A. Ante, O.M.I. of the Philippines recalled that "there were countless missionaries who performed wonderful deeds of love and service: sharing of Christian faith; building faith-based communities; adapting the Gospel to the culture; opting to serve the poor through education and health services; witness in martyrdom; and the importance of a
simple/poor and recollected/contemplative life-style.” He added: “I thank the Lord for the missionaries of the past. They have done their part. Today it is our turn to be open to the Holy Spirit” (OR-EE: 6-3-98, p. 16).

Still in the same vein, one discussion group (English: F) reported that they “thought that the Synod should acknowledge with gratitude the self-effacing labor of all the past missionaries who sowed the seed of the Gospel in Asia” (OR-EE: 6-10-98, p. 13). Indeed, one of the Final Synod Propositions sent to the pope for his consideration in composing an Apostolic Exhortation focuses totally on gratitude. In part, Proposition 58 reads as follows: “The Asian local Churches are deeply grateful. . . . They wish to express in a very special way their gratitude to all the missionaries, men and women, religious and lay, foreign and local who brought the message of Jesus Christ and the gift of faith. A special word of gratitude again must be expressed to all the Churches who have sent and still send their missionaries to Asia. . . . We are happy that today some of these Churches are receiving in turn missionaries from Asia.”

RENEWED MISSIONARY COMMITMENT. As the Church of Asia swept into Saint Peter’s Basilica and the Synod Hall, she brought with her all her wealth and variety of faith, experience, traditions, and customs. She also carried her enthusiasm for being a missionary community. On the very first day of Synod sessions, it was emphasized that: “As the Church in Asia approaches the third millennium, the Synod must serve as a fresh start in a journey leading to internal renewal through an ever greater emphasis on self-evangelization and a renewed commitment to proclaim the saving message of Jesus Christ in word and deed to all the peoples of Asia. . . .” (OR-EE: 4-29-98, p. 7).

The Synod body committed itself to dedicated work: “we
want to spend the coming days praying and reflecting upon the mission of the Church in Asia and the new evangelization which is before us. . . . We want to rededicate ourselves to the mission of the new evangelization in Asia, new in its energy and new in its methods" (Ibid., p. 11).

Archbishop Peter Turang of Indonesia asserted that: “the Churches of Asia need to develop new missionary endeavors in the context of Asia. . . . Missionary animation and formation has to be nurtured in seminaries and formation centers. . . . It is time for the Churches of Asia to revitalize the people’s movement on evangelization” (OR-EE: 5-20-98, p. 8).

Cardinal Josef Tomko, Prefect of the Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples, recalled that Jesus “sent his disciples on mission” and “left the Church a solemn missionary mandate.” He believes that “every Christian in Asia can become a missionary of Jesus Christ. And the Great Jubilee of salvation will be the beginning of a great missionary era for Asia under the impetus of the Holy Spirit through this Synod” (OR-EE: 6-3-98, p. 14).

**BECOMING EVER MORE MISSIONARY.** To assert that the local churches in Asia must become missionary could give a mistaken impression. They are already responding to their inherent missionary identity; statistics indicate that Asia currently sends more missionaries than it receives: 8,147 compared to 5,508 (FIDES: 5-8-98, p. 313). However, the Synod clearly promoted an ever greater commitment to the ideal and practice of mission.

Indian Bishop Ignatius Paul Pinto expressed this sentiment: “Our Christians must become real missionaries. There is a need to instill a genuine missionary spirit in the formation of our Catholics. They are Christians not for their own salvation only, but they have to be signs and instruments of God’s kingdom
among their fellow men and women” (OR-EE: 5-6-98, p. 9). Bishop Francisco F. Claver, S.J. of the Philippines echoed this theme; he noted that all local communities must be “communities of faith that are truly discerning and prayerful, involved, participative and serious about themselves as a Church in mission” (Ibid.).

Speaking on behalf of his discussion group (English: D), Bishop Ramon B. Villena of the Philippines presented this missionary challenge: “Jesus was born in Asia, and the Scriptures were written in Asia. By our life witness we should evangelize Asians so they can say: ‘Jesus has come back to Asia’” (OR-EE: 6-10-98, p. 12).

**A BLESSED MINORITY.** In all Asian countries except the Philippines, the Church is clearly a minority, frequently a very small — even tiny — percentage of the national population. Does this fact negate the Church’s missionary potential? Or, is this reality “beneficial” because, as noted by the Jesuit Superior General Peter-Hans Kolvenbach, it forces the Church to examine “the source of every mission: the risen Lord, sent by his Father and who in turn sends his disciples into the whole world.” Kolvenbach affirms: “What is important, no matter what the statistics show, is that Christians make Christ and his ‘unique mission of love’ shine forth” (OR-EE: 5-13-98, p. 14).

The Asian experience has shown that being a minority has value if it challenges the Church and her members to be more keenly aware of their identity, witness, and mission, to be more authentic bearers, not only of Gospel values, but of the very person of Christ himself. As voiced by Raymond Rossignol, Superior General of the Paris Foreign Mission Society, “no Church is so poor as to have nothing to offer, and no Church is so rich as not to need help from other Churches.” This means that “sending a missionary should not be considered primarily as aid to a poor Church which is unable to be self-sufficient,
but as a way of sharing the riches of different Churches for a better service of the mission” (OR-EE: 5-20-98, p. 14).

The minority Churches of Asia are not to be fearful flocks; they are to be signs of hope in the vast Asian continent. In the words of Bishop Leo Laba Ladjar, O.F.M. of Indonesia: “Our master says that we are (and I think we shall remain) a very small flock, *pusillus grex* (Lk 12:32). But he convinces us that we need not be afraid or feel inferior! He himself will be with us always. (OR-EE: 5-20-98, p. 12).

**NOT MAINTENANCE, BUT MISSION.** Bishop Arturo M. Bastes, S.V.D. of the Philippines, speaking on behalf of his discussion group (English: B), made a blunt and challenging statement: “In many parts of Asia the Church is only in a maintenance mode, not in a missionary mode” (OR-EE: 6-10-98, p. 11). The same assessment was reported from the Italian discussion group (related by Bishop Armando Bortolaso, S.D.B. of Syria): “The Fathers then stress how in the Church of Asia one should pass from the static dimension of preserving her heritage of faith to the dynamic dimension of proclaiming the Word of God, i.e., a new evangelization of Asia is needed in the third millennium” (Ibid., p. 10).

“If the Church in Asia, at the threshold of the third millennium, is called to a fresh missionary outreach,” Bishop Joseph Vianney Fernando of Sri Lanka noted, “there has to be a profound soul-searching on how she has to carry out the missionary mandate.” He pleaded for a “reorientation in our discipleship of the Lord Jesus in our mission context.” Only with a radical rethinking of mission in the Asian context (clearly an underlying theme of the entire Synod) will the Asian Church “cease to be a mere ‘maintenance’ Church and become a strong force for mission” (OR-EE: 5-13-98, p. 12).

**ENGAGED IN MISSION.** The overwhelmingly rich and
diverse contributions of the 252 participants in the Asian Synod shared, as noted earlier, a common theme: they were focused on the challenge of witnessing to Christ and becoming Church in the diverse contexts of Asia. How can Asian Christians become effectively “engaged in mission”? A brief sampling of some Synod recommendations follows.

Bishop Teodoro C. Bacani of Manila noted: “The fruitfulness of missionary activity depends first of all on the quality of Christian discipleship” (OR-EE: 5-6-98, p. 3). For Bishop Benedict Singh of Guyana, “evangelization must begin within the context of true dialogue which flows into mutual service of the common good” (Ibid., p. 7). “The Church in Asia should proclaim the message of total renewal and integral liberation... The Church in Asia must also sharpen its prophetic mission so as to prepare Asia for the new evangelization” (Indian Archbishop Joseph Powathil) (Ibid., p. 9).

“In Asia, people believe what they see. People value persons and relationships more than doctrines. In our work of evangelization, we experience how much people value persons and relationships, especially those that embody respect, concern and compassion. Asian ethos of humanity is the first invitation to begin our mission” (Indonesian Archbishop Ignatius Suharyo Hardjoatmodjo) (OR-EE: 5-13-98, p. 11). Echoing this sentiment, Bishop Augustine Jun-ichi Nomura of Japan asserted: “In Japan, like in the rest of Asia, the eyes have a more central role than the ears in the process of insight and conversion” (OR-EE: 4-29-98, p. 13).

“The evangelization of Asia is primarily a dialogue of life with all believers, the experience of which already brings them closer to God. . . . Mother Teresa of Calcutta showed us, in this way, a path of dialogue with Hinduism and with all Asia’s believers” (Vietnamese Cardinal Paul Joseph Pham Dinh Tung) (OR-EE: 6-3-98, p. 14).
In summary, it is validly asserted that at the heart of the Synod’s deliberations and of Asia’s continued commitment to “being Church” one finds a broad, holistic vision of integral evangelization. This means, as Father Anthony Wicharn Kitcharoen of Thailand noted, “bringing the Good News to all [hu]mankind, through the power of God (Father, Son and Holy Spirit)” (OR-EE: 6-17-98, p. 9). Cardinal Peter Seiichi Shirayanagi of Japan affirmed that, for many parts of Asia, integral evangelization can be concretely and effectively realized through an effort to “understand and appreciate the orientation of the Federation of Asian Bishops’ Conferences (FABC). If we were to summarize the orientation of the FABC in one word, it is dialogue” (OR-EE: 4-29-98, p. 13).

In the classic FABC formulation drawn from the First FABC Plenary Assembly in 1974 and quoted on the Synod floor in the Relatio ante Disceptationem, “The Church in Asia is called upon to enter into a triple dialogue: a dialogue with the cultures of Asia, a dialogue with the religions of Asia, and a dialogue with the peoples of Asia, especially the poor” (Ibid., p. 11).

ASIAN MISSION SPIRITUALITY. Speaking of mission in the Asian context, home to many world religions, necessarily implies a discussion of mission spirituality, contemplation, prayer, and witness of life. Archbishop Michael Rozario of Bangladesh captured this thematic (found in several interventions): “I would like to speak on the spirituality of the Asian Church in the mission of evangelization. ... Those sent on mission must embody the values of the Beatitudes. ... Life of witness is a spirituality. ... The evangelizer as a person of contemplation and prayer becomes a guru or a teacher of prayer leading people to God. ... The missionary embodies the redemptive compassion of Jesus” (OR-EE: 6-3-98, p. 18).

From Indonesian Archbishop Johannes Liku Ada the Synod heard: “Missionary spirituality in an Asian context would mean
readiness and ability to find what is true, good and beautiful in other people of non-Christian religions, even the Spirit at work in them. It should be a spirituality of sincere tolerance and dialogue, harmony and sisterhood/brotherhood. . . Missionary spirituality in Asia must be based on the vision of evangelization in an Asian context, i.e., by witness and dialogue rather than by direct preaching" (OR-EE: 5-6-98, p. 10).

The theme of mission spirituality appeared in the Final Message of the Synod: "[Evangelization] calls for a deep missionary spirituality, rooted in Christ, with special emphasis on compassion and harmony, detachment and self-emptying, solidarity with the poor and the suffering, and respect for the integrity of creation" (OR-EE: 5-20-98, p. 6). The same theme surfaced in the closing session of the Synod: "For Asians, Christ is most suitably made known personally, through human experiences more than academics. . . . The credibility of the evangelizer lies in his or her being a man or woman of God more than a scholar, in being a person who lives simply but with depth . . ." (OR-EE: 6-17-98, p. 11).

Synod Proposition Eight on "The Joy of Announcing Jesus Christ" speaks of a spirituality for mission. "The Synod Fathers, hearkening to the words of Pope John Paul II, agree to commit all of the Church’s energies to a new evangelization and to the mission ad gentes (cf. Redemptoris missio, 3). . . . This proclamation is a mission needing holy men and women who will make the Savior known and loved by their lives. A fire can only be lit by something that is itself on fire."

WHO WILL GO? SEND ME. The operative ecclesiology at the Asian Synod was clearly the "total ecclesiology" that emerged from the Second Vatican Council. It is the entire Church (laity, clergy, catechists, religious, and hierarchy) that is missioned to witness its Christian life to the world and embody the values of the Kingdom. "Christian mission is the work
of the whole Christian community” (OR-EE: 4-29-98, p. 11).

Within the totality of a missional church, various groups were singled out for the unique contribution they provide: laity, women, religious, youth, and missionary societies. “The laity has an important role to play in the mission of the Church. Many signs indicate that the Spirit is empowering them for an ever greater role in the coming millennium, which could be called the Age of the Laity” (Synod Message) (OR-EE: 5-20-98, p. 7). “The group [English: F] also studied the evangelizing mission of the Church and suggested the need to intensify lay participation in missionary activity and thus the need for the formation of the laity” (OR-EE: 6-10-98, p. 13).

Bishop Peter Remigius from India highlighted the contribution of women: “the role of women in evangelization is clear from the time of our Lord (Jn 20:1-9; Mt 28:8-15; Mk 16:9-15).” Especially responsive to the “condition of women in India, they should be motivated to rise up as the announcers of the Good News” (OR-EE: 5-6-98, p. 10).

Three of the Final 59 Propositions of the Synod emphasized the role of religious, laity, and youth in the mission of evangelization. “Religious orders and congregations have played a major role in the evangelization work of Asia during the past centuries. The Church in Asia is indebted to them and exhorts them to continue the same missionary commitment to peoples of Asia” (Proposition 27). “The laity are important missionaries of the Gospel to reach out to the millions of the Asian people who otherwise might never be reached by the missionaries from the clergy and consecrated life. Catechists have worked wonders” (Proposition 29). Proposition 34, devoted to youth in mission in Asia, reflected the challenge voiced by Mr. Nicholas Somchai Tharaphan of Thailand during the Synod: “As the Church tries to look for a ‘new way of being Church in Asia’ she will have to learn to walk with young
people” (OR-EE: 5-27-98, p. 8).

Very special emphasis was felicitously accorded the Missionary Societies of Apostolic Life in the Asian Synod. A separate section of this presentation will discuss this unique contribution to the emergence of Asia as “a Continent of Missionary Hope.”

ASIAN MISSION STATISTICS. The challenge of being a missionary church in Asia can effectively be highlighted by understanding important demographical realities obtaining throughout the continent. Statistics often startle; they shake our complacency; they concretize the task at hand: evangelization in modern day Asia.

The largest and most populated continent, Asia constitutes one third of the land area of the whole world; its population is nearly two thirds of all humanity. Catholics worldwide constitute about 17% of all people; yet, in Asia, Catholics represent only 2.9% of the nearly 3.5 billion Asians. Significantly, more than 50% of all Asian Catholics are found in one country alone—the Philippines. Consequently, this leaves very small minorities of Catholics in most Asian nations (cf. OR-EE: 6-3-98, p. 15).

It is noteworthy that 85% of all the world’s non-Christians are in Asia; most are followers of several of the world’s great religions. Hinduism, born about 5,000 years ago, has about 650 million followers, most of them in India and neighboring countries. Buddhism is a religion and philosophy developed from Hinduism by Siddhartha Gautama, the Buddha (the “Enlightened One”); it has 300 million followers, mostly in Asia.

Islam, established by Muhammad in the seventh century, is a monotheistic religion; it incorporates elements of Judaic and Christian belief. Islam numbers some 700 million followers in
Asia alone; the Catholics of Asia are about 100 million. The two largest Islamic nations in the world are found in Asia: Indonesia and Bangladesh — each have well over 100 million Muslims. Other significant religious and philosophical-ethical systems in Asia are Confucianism, Taoism, Shintoism, as well as many indigenous, traditional belief systems (see: World Mission 8/5: 1995).

These few religious statistics already indicate that "being a missionary church in Asia" demands creative, innovative, dialogical and inculturated approaches to Gospel proclamation. In addition, although beyond the scope of this presentation, one should also consider diverse cultural, political, social, and economic realities in envisioning a pastoral program of integral evangelization. The task before the Synod Fathers was great; they responded with enthusiasm and insight. Recognizing that the Churches of Asia, though numerically small, are a blessed and vigorous minority, the Final Message of the Synod expressed its optimism: "Our greatest reason for hope is Jesus Christ, who said: 'Take heart, it is I; have no fear' (Mt 14:27), and 'I have overcome the world' (Jn 16:33)" (OR-EE: 5-20-98, p. 7).

NEW MISSION INITIATIVES. It has already been noted that a unique form of missionary witness and service was given special emphasis in the Synod: the Missionary Society of Apostolic Life. In addition to interventions at the Synod, a special Final Proposition (No. 28) highlighted this unique charism. Pope John Paul II took special note and incorporated this theme into his "Message for World Mission Sunday," celebrated on October 18, 1998 [section 5] (FIDES: 5-31-98, p. 380).

On the Synod floor the FABC Assistant Secretary General, Father Edward F. Malone, M.M., spoke of mission realities in Asia and the laudatory contributions of many international missionary institutes of men and women. Then he said: "I
wish to highlight a unique and essential form of missionary response — missionary society of apostolic life” (MSAL). Malone noted that “six such societies of men have emerged in Asia” (see special concluding section of this paper for a synopsis of each society).

Malone pointed out that these groups (MSAL) have a mission charism that is: “ad gentes, ad exterros, and ad vitam” (see: Code of Canon Law 731-746; Vita Consecrata 11). Specifically, their contribution is: ad gentes (to those who have not yet heard the salvific and liberating Good News of Jesus Christ), ad exterros (to people outside their own cultural-language group and nation), and ad vitam (devoting themselves to a life-long commitment to this unique form of missionary witness). All are focused on “apostolic” life; they do not pronounce “religious” vows, though they bind themselves permanently (ad vitam) for specifically ad gentes and ad exterros mission.

“The number of societies of apostolic life which are working in Asia is large,” Malone continued. “Now it is Asia’s turn to give, to be a continent of missionary hope.” The gift that such societies are makes them “bridges of communion” and brings many benefits: “Asians evangelizing Asians; the emergence of missionary local Churches; the strengthening of bonds of communion among the Churches of Asia and of ‘communion and filial oneness with the See of Peter’” (OR-EE: 5-13-98, p. 14).

The most direct and concrete mission initiative taken by the Synod came in Proposition 28: “This Synod recommends the establishment within each local Church of Asia, where such do not exist, of missionary societies of apostolic life, characterized by their commitment exclusively for the mission ad gentes, ad exterros and ad vitam.” If this and other similar initiatives are implemented in the coming years in the local Churches of Asia, this vast continent will realize its dream to be “a con-
tinent of emerging missionary hope.”

CONCLUSION. The words of Pope John Paul II at the closing Eucharist of the Synod outline a program of missionary animation: "Dear brothers and sisters, you who have formed the Special Assembly for Asia of the Synod of Bishops! Today the crucified and risen Lord again repeats these same words to you, summoning you once more to evangelize your continent."

"The Church's mission of evangelization," the pope continued, "is a service of love to the Asian continent. And although the Christian community is but 'a little flock' in the total population, it is the means through which God pursues his saving plan... Dear brothers and sisters, continue this mission of love and service in Asia" (OR-EE: 5-20-98, p. 2).

SPECIAL APPENDIX: ASIA'S INDIGENOUS MISSION SOCIETIES

This presentation now turns to providing a short synopsis of the history, charism, membership, works, statistics, and contact information for each of Asia's six missionary societies. As one reads, there emerges a clear appreciation of what the Holy Spirit, "the principal agent of mission" (RM 21, 30), is enabling and unfolding in the local churches of Asia.

THE MISSION SOCIETY OF THE PHILIPPINES. On the fourth centenary of the evangelization of the Philippine Islands (1565-1965) the Catholic Hierarchy declared that "to express in the concrete our gratitude to God for the gift of our Faith we will organize the Foreign Mission Society of the Philippines." The official or statutory name of the society is: Mission Society of the Philippines (MSP), often popularly referred to as "Fil-Mission." It is a diocesan Filipino clerical
mission society of apostolic life.

The MSP defines its charism in these words: "In love and gratitude to the Father, ours is a joyful missionary spirit flowing from deep union with Christ through Mary and in the power of the Holy Spirit, willing to spend and be spent in sharing His Gospel to all." From its beginnings, the MSP desired pontifical status; Rome requested the MSP to begin on the local level. The Society has a juridical personality under the Archbishop of Manila (current statutes approved on January 29, 1989).

Membership in the MSP is open to natural-born Filipinos; the Society also welcomes Filipino diocesan priests as associate members to serve in foreign mission. The MSP considers its mission apostolate in de jure and de facto mission territories as its foremost duty and privilege. Asia has always been the highest priority in the choice of mission apostolates. Presently, MSP missionaries are working in Hong Kong, Taiwan, Japan, Thailand, Korea, Papua New Guinea, New Zealand, and the Solomon Islands.

MSP statistics (1997) count 51 permanent members and five associate priests. Fr. Ruben C. Elago, MSP is the Father Moderator; he can be addressed at: MSP Central House; 9105 Banuyo Street; San Antonio Village; M.C.P.O. Box 1006; Makati City, Philippines.

MISSIONARY SOCIETY OF SAINT THOMAS THE APOSTLE. The Missionary Society of St. Thomas the Apostle (MST) in India is an indigenous missionary institute of the Syro-Malabar Church. In 1960, Msgr. Sebastian Vayalil sought the permission of the Holy See to found a mission society. Rome asked Bishop Vayalil to submit a draft constitution of the proposed society in 1963; he accomplished this in 1964. The nascent society began as a Pious Union of Diocesan Clergy in 1965. Additional steps were taken, and the MST was
founded at Deepti Nagar, Melampara, Bharananganam on February 22, 1968. The founding members of MST were 18 diocesan priests who made their Promise of Incorporation to MST on July 16, 1968. On July 3, 1997 the MST was raised to a "Society of Apostolic Life of Major Archiepiscopal Right" (CCEO c. 572); equivalently, this corresponds to "Pontifical Right" in the Roman Church.

The scope of the Society is "mission ad gentes" in the less Christian regions of India and beyond, "remaining faithful to the heritage and identity of the Syro-Malabar Church." MST now serves three mission regions (Ujjain, Mandya, and Sangli). In 1995 the MST accepted to begin work in Leh-Ladakh; the Society sent three people to work in this area known as the "Roof of the World." Some MST members also render service in various Indian dioceses and in Tanzania, Germany, and America.

The growth of MST in its first 29 years of existence (1968-1997) has been phenomenal. Today (1997) there are 217 priest members, 35 theology students, 37 philosophy students, and a total of 106 students at other levels of formation. In 1993 when the MST celebrated its silver jubilee, the Syro-Malabar bishops through a joint pastoral letter again owned the Society and exhorted the faithful to support its missionary activities. The current Director General is Father Sebastian Vadakel; his address is: Missionary Society of St. Thomas; MST Deepti Bhavan; Melampara 686594; Kerala, India.

CATHOLIC FOREIGN MISSION SOCIETY OF KOREA. In late 1974, a Korean preparation committee was established to explore the possible formation of a mission society. By a decision of the Korean Bishops’ Conference, the Korean Foreign Mission Society was founded on February 26, 1975. A formation house was opened in 1976, and the first priest for the society was ordained in 1981. In the same year
the first missionary was sent to Papua New Guinea.

The KMS (Korean Mission Society) seeks to proclaim the Gospel and imitate Jesus Christ, the model for all missionaries. "We also model ourselves on the evangelical spirit of the 103 Korean martyrs who witnessed to Jesus even unto their death." They also "make a preferential option for the poor and are in solidarity with their spiritual and material sufferings."

There are presently 72 members of the Society (1997); 17 are priests; 6 are deacons; there are 15 temporary oath seminarians, 20 major seminarians, and 14 in the spiritual formation year. Members work within Korea (Suwon and Seoul dioceses) and also in Hong Kong, Taiwan, Papua New Guinea, the Philippines, and Italy.

The vision of the KMS foresees new missions in China, Cambodia, Mongolia, as well as Central and South Asia. Additional plans envision cooperative endeavors with other mission societies; the KMS also hopes to establish an Asian Mission Research Institute. The current superior of the KMS is Father Bonaventura Jung, KMS; Korean Foreign Mission Society; 1 Ga 120 Sung Buk Dong; Sung Buk Gu, Seoul, Korea 136-021.

MISSIONARY SOCIETY OF THE HERALDS OF GOOD NEWS. In 1971 Father Jose Kaimlett, a priest of the Vijayawada diocese in Andhra Pradesh, India, thought of founding a missionary society to serve the universal Church. However, as Fr. Jose himself says, "in God's plan the time was not yet ripe."

In December 1976, a new diocese of Eluru was created with territory taken from Vijayawada. Fr. Kaimlett temporarily managed the diocese until the appointment of Bishop John
Mulagada. Fr. Kaimlett was sent to Rome for canon law studies and returned to serve the diocese of Eluru. His dreams for a male missionary institute continued. In 1984 with three priests and two brothers of the diocese, he founded the Society of the Heralds of Good News.

Episcopal approval of the foundation was formalized on October 14, 1984. In early 1985 the first members made their perpetual vows. On May 5, 1991, Bishop John Mulagada, with the nihil obstat from the Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples, instituted the Missionary Society of the Heralds of Good News of diocesan right.

The main focus of the Society is to form and send "zealous, hard-working and holy missionaries." Our Lady Queen of the Apostles and Saint Joseph are its patrons. Today the Society has 62 priests working in India, South Africa, Papua New Guinea, and the U.S.A. There are 429 scholastics at various levels of formation.

In its 13 years of existence, the Society has opened four minor and two major seminaries. Fr. Kaimlett has also founded a female branch: the Sisters of the Good News, with current membership standing at 66 sisters. Father Jose Kaimlett, present superior, can be contacted at: Heralds of Good News; Eluru R. S. 534 005; W. G. Dt., Andhra Pradesh, India.

MISSION SOCIETY OF THAILAND. In March 1987, the Superior of the Paris Foreign Mission Society in Thailand addressed a letter to the Bishops’ Conference suggesting the formation of a missionary group of Thai priests. They were to work with the Hill Tribe peoples in northern Thailand. The idea was well received by the bishops; contacts were made with diocesan seminarians, religious congregations, and lay people. The responsibility for the project came to rest upon Bishop Banchong Aribang from Nakorn Sawan.
In 1989 four seminarians volunteered to become members of the Society. In June 1990 and in January 1991, the first two priests were ordained for the Missionary Society of Thailand (MST); this is considered the real beginning of MST. This society of secular priests (with religious and lay associates) aims to do “apostolic work among those who do not know Jesus Christ in Thailand and out of Thailand.” Currently, they serve in Northern Thailand and in Cambodia.

As a Society of Apostolic Life, MST is responsible to the Bishops’ Conference of Thailand; the bishops appoint the superior of the society. Full members are secular, diocesan priests who join the society with the approval of their bishop; they keep a special relationship with their home diocese, even though they are incardinated into the MST. Religious and lay people may be accepted as associates for a three-year period. At present, consideration is being given to setting up an autonomous branch for lay people.

Currently, MST counts three priests, six religious sisters, and four lay persons as their personnel. Bishop Banchong Aribang is responsible through the Bishops’ Conference, who have approved a temporary MST constitution. Father Jean Dantonel, MEP is the first superior of the MST (a Bishops’ Conference appointee); a Thai priest acts as his assistant. They can be reached at: Mission Society of Thailand; Lux Mundi Seminary; 20 Petchkasem Road; Sampran, Nakom Pathom 73110, Thailand.

LORENZO RUIZ MISSION SOCIETY. In 1949 during civil disturbances in China, the Saint Joseph Regional Seminary which was under Jesuit administration was transferred to Manila. In the ensuing years about 60 Chinese seminarians were ordained in the Philippines; they went on to found 14 Filipino-Chinese parishes and 18 Filipino-Chinese schools.

To facilitate the continuation of these apostolates and to
recruit and train younger clergy, Jaime Cardinal Sin of Manila established the Lorenzo Mission Institute (a Filipino-Chinese seminary) in 1987. Pope John Paul II has also requested Cardinal Sin to help prepare missionaries for China. During the Pope's January 1995 sojourn in Manila, he visited this seminary, instructing the Cardinal to "maintain and preserve the said seminary at all cost."

In this context the Lorenzo Ruiz Mission Society (LRMS) has been formed; it received its decree of approval from Cardinal Sin on January 14, 1997. It is a Clerical Society of Apostolic Life of diocesan right with its ecclesiastical seat in the Archdiocese of Manila. The LRMS draws its inspiration from Saint Lorenzo, the first Filipino saint who was of mixed Filipino and Chinese descent. He was martyred in Japan where he went as a lay catechist with Spanish Dominican friars in the 1600s.

The LRMS is "intrinsically and eminently missionary in spirit and finality." The members are committed to the Church in China, the Filipino-Chinese Apostolate, and other overseas Chinese Communities. Currently, there are 7 ordained priests, 15 theology seminarians, and 19 philosophy students. Some members have studied language and culture in northern China. The Archbishop of Manila governs the Society through his delegate. A General Chapter may be convoked when membership reaches ten ordained priest-members with perpetual commitment. Correspondence may be addressed to: Msgr. Paul Lu, PME; Lorenzo Ruiz Mission Society; San Carlos - EDSA - Guadalupe; M.C.P.O. Box 144; 1254 Makati City, Philippines.

CONCLUSION. The story of evangelization in Asia is rich and has many facets; without doubt, much more could be written about these Asian-born missionary societies. In this light, the reader's attention is directed toward a colloquium
held in Thailand in April 1997 (organized by the Office of Evangelization of the Federation of Asian Bishops’ Conferences-FABC); it brought together representatives of the Asian missionary societies as well as personnel from several other such missionary societies that serve in Asia. The papers of this gathering and additional pertinent materials are being published in a 1998 book entitled: *Heralds of the Gospel in Asia: a Study of the History and Contribution of Missionary Societies to the Local Churches of Asia* (contact: Sacred Heart Theological College; Shillong 793 008, India).

As the dawn of the third millennium approaches, it is appropriate to recall John Paul II’s persistent focus on the continent of “Asia, towards which the Church’s mission *ad gentes* ought to be chiefly directed” (RM 37; cf. RM 55, 91). The emergence, growth, and continued service of “Asia’s own” missionary societies is a special blessing for all God’s Asian peoples. Under the lead of the “befriending Spirit” (GS 3), Asia will emerge as a continent of missionary hope in the third millennium.

**ABBREVIATIONS**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>EN</td>
<td><em>Evangelii Nuntiandi</em></td>
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<td>FABC</td>
<td>Federation of Asian Bishops’ Conferences</td>
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<td>FIDES</td>
<td>International Fides News Service</td>
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<td>GS</td>
<td><em>Gaudium et Spes</em></td>
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<td>MSAL</td>
<td>Missionary Society of Apostolic Life</td>
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<td>OR-EE</td>
<td><em>L’Osservatore Romano</em> - Weekly Edition in English</td>
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<td>RM</td>
<td><em>Redemptoris Missio</em></td>
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