

**Oswald Cardinal Gracias**

Introduction:

The very theme of this International Eucharist Congress is very pertinent today, viz. "The Eucharist: Source and Goal of the Church's Mission". The Church "draws her life from the Eucharist".<sup>1</sup> The mission for which Jesus came on earth was accomplished in the Pascal Mystery. The Eucharist is a "mystery of faith" par excellence: "the sum and summary of our faith"<sup>2</sup> and the summit of the Church's life and mission.<sup>3</sup> It is our firm conviction that "an authentically Eucharistic Church is a missionary Church" and "truly, nothing is more beautiful than to know Christ and to make him known to others".<sup>4</sup> Pope Benedict XVI succinctly states that missionary outreach is an essential part of the Eucharistic form of Christian life. Further, "the first and fundamental mission that we receive from the sacred mysteries we celebrate is that of bearing witness to our lives". The Eucharist transforms our lives and transforms the world around us. The greater is our love for the Eucharist, the more clearly will we recognize that the goal of all mission is to bring others to Christ.<sup>5</sup>

Coming now to the Eucharist and the Asian reality, I would at the very outset begin my reflection with a few pertinent reflections. Asia, the largest and most populous continent, is the cradle of all the major religions of the world. It has the two most populous countries in the world, China with 1.4 billion people and India with 1.25 billion people. The Asian religions include Christianity, Baha'i, Bon, Buddhism, Confucianism, Daoism, Hinduism, Islam, Jainism, Shinto, Sikhism, Zoroastrianism, and a number of tribal religions.<sup>6</sup> The multi-cultural and the multi-religious background of the people of Asia poses an enormous challenge to unity. However, in spite of their great ethnic, linguistic, economic, political, religious and cultural diversities, it is their religious traditions that bind them together.<sup>7</sup> Asian religions have encouraged the spiritual wellbeing of the Asian people and have been an indispensable means for the peacemaking and reconciliation in the continent.<sup>8</sup> Hence, one of the essential tasks of Christianity is to be a witness to the values of kingdom of God by proclamation and dialogue.

Today, dialogue is the key to work together with people everywhere. The Federation of Asian Bishops Conferences (FABC) emphasized a triple dialogue with other faiths, with the poor and with the cultures as a new way of being Church.<sup>9</sup> Way back in 1984, the Secretariat for Non-Christians stressed the fact that Christians need to dialogue with followers of other religious traditions in order to walk together toward truth and to work together in projects of common concern. It spoke of the dialogue of life, the dialogue of collaboration, dialogue of theological exchange and the dialogue of sharing one's religious experiences with followers of other religions.<sup>10</sup> *Nostra Aetate* carefully noted: "In our day, when people are drawing more closely together and the bonds of friendship between differently people are being strengthened, the Church examines more carefully its relations with non-Christian religions. Ever aware of its duty to foster unity and charity among individuals, and even among nations, it reflects at the outset on what people have in common and what tends to bring them together".<sup>11</sup> Hence, in the context of the 51<sup>st</sup> International Eucharistic Congress held here in Cebu, Philippines, I shall highlight the importance of the Eucharist today in the context of the Church's Dialogue with Religions.

2.0. Sacredness of Food in various religions as basis for understanding Eucharist and the Church's dialogue with Religions

The importance of food for survival of human beings cannot be sufficiently stressed. It sustains us and nourishes us. Food is an essential source of nourishment and strength, satisfaction and joy for us human beings. It is fascinating to know how societies

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<sup>1</sup> St. John Paul II, Encyclical Letter, *Ecclesia de Eucharistia*, no. 1: AAS 95: (2003), 433.

<sup>2</sup> Catechism of the Catholic Church, no. 1327.

<sup>3</sup> Pope Benedict XVI, Post Synodal Apostolic Exhortation, *Sacramentum Caritatis*, no. 17.

<sup>4</sup> Pope Benedict XVI, *Sacramentum Caritatis*, no. 84.

<sup>5</sup> Pope Benedict XVI, *Sacramentum Caritatis*, no. 86.

<sup>6</sup> Peter Phan, ed., *The Asian Synod: Text and Commentaries*, Maryknoll: New York, Orbis Books, 2002, pp. 286-340.

<sup>7</sup> Peter Phan, *Christianities in Asia*, The Global Christianity Series, Wiley-Blackwell Publications, UK, 2011.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>9</sup> FABC, Seventh Plenary Assembly, Saphram, Thailand, January, 3 to 12, 2000. Cfr. Eilers F.J. ed., *For All the Peoples of Asia*, Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences, Documents from 1997 to 2002, Vol. 3, Quezon City: Claretian Publications, 2002, pp. 3-4.

<sup>10</sup> Secretariat for Non-Christians, *The Attitude of the Church toward Followers of Other Religions: Reflections and Orientations on Dialogue and Mission*, 10 May 1984.

<sup>11</sup> The Second Vatican Council, *Nostra Aetate*, no. 1.

and cultures in different parts of the world communicate through the symbolism of food.<sup>12</sup> Food has physical, personal, emotional and social value. Food is also an instrument of our life in the community, since love, hospitality and unity is expressed through the sharing of food at joyful events like birth and marriage. One's culture too determines to a great extent as to choices people make with regard to what, when, where and how people eat. The food we eat is also intrinsically linked to one's culture. Thus, food does stand for life as an individual and as a community.<sup>13</sup>

In most of the Asian religions and cultures, food has a deeply spiritual meaning. It is also a symbol of hospitality, status, unity and acceptance. Further, eating together by the members of the family has an important value. The very way that food is used in celebrations is affected by one's culture.<sup>14</sup> In a particular way, the celebration of a meal is a celebration of life. It is also the culmination and completion of the various rites of passage of a community.<sup>15</sup> Over the centuries, different cultural communities have developed their own rites and rituals in order to give meaning to their important life experiences.

Most of our Asian religions demonstrate the importance of food and meals in the social and cultural life of their communities. The bonding that takes place among the members of the community eating together and the renewal in their relationships with one another, indicates to us the paramount importance of food. Further, and most important, for most of our Asian religions, food is a symbol of communion with God and a bond of spiritual fellowship and social solidarity with one another.<sup>16</sup> Hence, food naturally lends itself to being a powerful symbol of God who is the fullness of life, happiness and fulfilment.<sup>17</sup>

This is why the Eucharist gives a strong impetus to DIALOGUE, which is an integral ingredient of the Church's mission in Asia, a continent which has less than 5% Christians. The redemptive sacrifice of Christ celebrated in the Eucharist is universal and all inclusive as indicated in the Words of Institution (Words of Consecration). It is also important to note that the Word of God proclaimed in the Eucharist is intended to be shared with everyone. Unfortunately, on many occasions, worship tends to focus only on the cultic and ritualistic aspects without any connection to our actual existential human situation in various places of worship, Asia being no exception.<sup>18</sup>

Thus, the Eucharist is not an exclusive and sectarian cult. More so, religion itself should be free from any narrow, sectarian and exclusivist tendencies. Pope Francis affirmed this when he said: "Indeed the Eucharist is itself an act of cosmic love: "Yes, cosmic! Because even when it is celebrated on the humble altar of a country church, the Eucharist is always in some way celebrated on the altar of the world".<sup>19</sup> In stating that the Eucharist is a source of light and motivation for our concerns for the environment, Pope Francis remarked that "the Eucharist joins heaven and earth; it embraces and penetrates all creation. The world which came forth from God's hands returns to him in blessed and undivided adoration: in the bread of the Eucharist, "creation is projected towards divinization, towards the holy wedding feast, towards unification with the Creator himself".<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Dr. S.M. Michael, Meals and Celebrations in Asian Cultures in Ethics and Society: An International Journal on *Religions and Cultures for Peace and Harmony*, Vol. 2, ed. Abp. Felix Machado and Rev. Dr. Stephen Fernandes, Cardinal Paul Poupard Foundation, St. Andrew's College, Bandra, Mumbai, pp. 148-165.

<sup>13</sup> Bishop Thomas Dabre, *The God Experience of Tukaram, A Study in Religious Symbolism*: Jnana Deepa Vidyapeeth Publication, Pune, 1987

<sup>14</sup> Paul Fieldhouse, Food and Nutrition: Customs and Culture. Foster, Nelson and Linda, 1986, p. 3.

<sup>15</sup> Dr. S.M. Michael, Meals and Celebrations in Asian Cultures in Ethics and Society, *ibid*. The rites and rituals are seen as indicators and vehicles of transition from one socio-cultural state to another, e.g. childhood to maturity, virginity to marriage, childlessness to parenthood, sickness to health. For example, in Korean culture, the naming of a child is a rite passage which accompanies a sumptuous meal. (See also Korean Information Service, 1978: 328-329). Certain feasts and festivals in different parts of Asia may include rites of expulsion of winter and incorporation of spring - to one dies the other is reborn (Arnold van Gennep, 1960, *The Rites of Passage*. London. Routledge and Kegan Paul, First Published in 1909, pp. 178-180).

<sup>16</sup> Dr. S.M. Michael, Meals and Celebrations in Asian Cultures in Ethics and Society, *ibid*.

<sup>17</sup> Bishop Thomas Dabre, *The God Experience of Tukaram, A Study in Religious Symbolism*: Jnana Deepa Vidyapeeth Publication, Pune, 1987

<sup>18</sup> Bishop Thomas Dabre, *The God Experience of Tukaram, A Study in Religious Symbolism*: Jnana Deepa Vidyapeeth Publication, Pune, 1987.

<sup>19</sup> Pope Francis, Encyclical Letter, *Laudato Si*, no. 236. See also Encyclical Letter *Ecclesia de Eucharistia* (17 April 2003), 8: AAS 95 (2003), 438. The cosmic dimension of the Eucharist is also important for the Eastern Fathers. See also, Pierre Teilhard de Chardin who holds a cosmic theology of the Eucharist. See his Hymn of the Universe, Harper and Row, 1961. See also his "Science and Christ", "The Divine Mileau", "The Prayer of the Universe".

<sup>20</sup> Pope Francis, Encyclical Letter, *Laudato Si*, no. 236. See also, Pope Benedict XVI, *Homily for the Mass of Corpus Domini* (15 June 2006): AAS 98 (2006), 513.

The Eucharist is the principal and central worship of the Church to which all other devotions are to be oriented. In Asia, the Church should celebrate the Eucharist, which is the sacrament of redemption and charity, as a catalytic force for the transformation of human life. There is no alternative to dialogue as about 95% of the population in Asia are followers of other religions. It is our ardent hope and fervent prayer that the Eucharist continues to be the sign, symbol and source of the Church's steadfast commitment to interreligious dialogue.<sup>21</sup> Dialogue is intended to promote bridge-building, harmony and amicable relationships. While maintaining the Catholic identity of the Church, we can highlight the common elements of the food symbolism that are acceptable across the various religions and thus strive to promote good relations, harmony, peace and unity.<sup>22</sup>

Hence, in this paper, I have chosen a) the spiritual significance of food in various religions and b) the highly treasured Eucharistic Values as common ground for dialogue.

### 2.1. Importance of Food in Hinduism

In the Hindu tradition, food is a very sacred symbol and is worthy of reverence and worship. The Bhagavad-Gita instructs its followers that all beings come into existence from food<sup>23</sup> which is a gift from God, to be treated with reverence. It also states that those who cook only for themselves (i.e. not also for the deities) eat sin.<sup>24</sup> Further, the eating of food is a sacred act as in doing so one enters into communion with the divine and the cosmos.<sup>25</sup> One should first feed, according to one's abilities, not only the deities but also one's ancestors, as well as other human beings and animals, and only then eat the remaining food.<sup>26</sup> The Laws of Manu states that "food that is always worshipped, gives strength and manly vigour; but eaten irreverently, it destroys them both".<sup>27</sup> Further "excessive eating is prejudicial to health, to fame, and to (bliss in) heaven; it prevents (the acquisition of) spiritual merit, and is odious among men; one ought, for these reasons, to avoid it carefully".<sup>28</sup>

In Hinduism, one can eat food only after offering some food to certain deities and to the Supreme Being. This clearly shows that the act of eating food includes communion with the divine.<sup>29</sup> The mystical idea of the union between food and the person eating it matches the union between the sacrifice and the Supreme Being. In the text that follows, Brahman is food and the concluding words express the mystical rapture of the sacrificer; "Oh, wonderful! (3) I am food! (3) I am a food-eater (3)!"<sup>30</sup> This verse is recited in weekly temple liturgy in Vishnu Temples all over the world. The Vedic sacrifice after describing Brahman as food, identifies himself with Brahman both as food and as eater.<sup>31</sup> Some Dharmaśāstra texts used to prohibit as man from eating in the company of his wife.<sup>32</sup> However, when serving food to a row of persons who have sat down together to eat, one should distribute the same food to all, without any discrimination whatsoever.<sup>33</sup> Further, it is important to note that the

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<sup>21</sup> For a further discussion on this aspect, confer, Bishop Thomas Dabre, *The God Experience of Tukaram, A Study in Religious Symbolism*: Jnana Deepa Vidyapeeth Publication, Pune, 1987.

<sup>22</sup> Bishop Thomas Dabre, *The God Experience of Tukaram, A Study in Religious Symbolism*: Jnana Deepa Vidyapeeth Publication, Pune, 1987

<sup>23</sup> Bhagavad-Gita 3:14: Food comes from rains. Rains originate from the performance of sacrifices. And sacrifice is born out of doing prescribed duties.

<sup>24</sup> Bhagavad-Gita 3:13.

<sup>25</sup> Raimundo Panikkar, *The Vedic Experience -- Mantramañjari: An Anthology of the Vedas for Modern Man and Contemporary Celebration*. London: Darton, Longmann and Todd, 1977; Indian ed., Pondicherry: All India Books, 1977, pp. 224-228. See also Noel Sheth, Hindu Parallels to the Eucharist in *Vidyajyoti Journal of Theological Reflection*, Vol. 62, No. 9, Sept 1998, pp. 679 - 699.

<sup>26</sup> P.V. Kane, *History of Dharmaśāstra: Ancient and Medieval Religious and Civil Law*, 2nd ed., 5 vols., Pune: Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute, 1968-77, Vol. 2, Part 2, p. 757.

<sup>27</sup> "The Laws of Manu" or 'Manava Dharma Shastra' is one of the standard books in the Hindu canon, and a basic text for all gurus to base their teachings on. It is one of the supplementary arms of the Vedas. The laws are essential to the understanding of ancient Indian society. See *Laws of Manu*, Ch II, no. 55.

<sup>28</sup> *The Laws of Manu*, Ch II, No. 57.

<sup>29</sup> P.V. Kane, *ibid.*, p. 759.

<sup>30</sup> Taittiriya Upanishad III,10.5. The Taittiriya Upanishad is one of the older, "primary" Upanishads commented upon by Shankara.

<sup>31</sup> Vasudha Narayanan, "The Hindu Tradition" in *World Religions. Eastern Traditions*, ed. Willard Oxtoby, Oxford University Press, Ontario, 1996, p. 90-91. See also, Francis D'Sa, *Christian Eucharist and Hindu Yajña in The Eucharist and Life*, Indian Christian Reflections on the Lord's Supper, ed. Kurien Kunnumpuram, St. Paul's Publications, Mumbai, 2008.

<sup>32</sup> P.V. Kane, *ibid.*, p. 765, 767.

<sup>33</sup> P.V. Kane, *ibid.*, p. 768.

Taittiriya Upanishad III, 6 states that Brahman<sup>34</sup> is food<sup>35</sup> and in the Chandogya Upanishad VII, 9, 2, one is asked to meditate on the diverse meanings of food as Brahman. In another text of the Taittiriya Upanishad, food is seen as the first, middle and final stage of all beings: "From food are produced all creatures which dwell on earth. Then they live by food, and in the end they return to food. For food is the oldest of all beings, and therefore it is called panacea (sarvaushadha, that is, consisting of all herbs, or quieting the heat of the body of all beings)". From food all creatures are produced; by food, when born, they grow. Because it is fed on, or because it feeds on beings, therefore it is called food (annam).<sup>36</sup>

## 2.2. Food plays an Important Role in Islam

According to Islam, eating is a form of worship when performed in the way prescribed by Allah. Every act of eating begins in the name of Allah. the Messenger of Allaah, sallallahu 'alayhi wa sallam, said: "When any one of you eats, let him mention the name of Allaah. If he forgets to mention the name of Allaah at the beginning, then let him say 'Bismillaahi awwalahu wa aakhirahu (In the name of Allaah at the beginning and at the end)".<sup>37</sup> When Muhammad was asked by a follower to define faith, he responded: To offer food and give the greeting of peace.<sup>38</sup> The Qur'an repeatedly states that food is a gift of God and it should be consumed with humility and moderation and one should always thank God for His bounties.<sup>39</sup> Islam reminds Muslims that food and drink are the provision of Allah for survival and for maintaining good health. Food that is not dedicated to God is explicitly prohibited.<sup>40</sup>

The Qur'an contains many verses that give Muslims advice not only about healthy eating and preservation of one's physical well-being, but also is concerned about one's spiritual health. Encouraging Muslims to eat only good and pure foods is combined with warnings to remember Allah and avoid evil. "Therefore eat from that which God's name has been mentioned over if indeed you are believers in God's Sign" (Qur'an, 6: 118). "O you who profess faith!, eat from that which is good that We have provided for you and show gratitude if indeed it is God alone you worship".<sup>41</sup> "O ye people! eat of what is on earth lawful and good (Qur'an, 2:168). Hence, eating is not only to satisfy the hungry body but also to demonstrate how best one's actions can serve Allah.

Since eating is a matter of worship for the Muslims, they have a number of habits that have been recommended by Prophet Muhammed and are practiced by Muslims all over the world. a) Supplication (Du'a') before every meal: "In the name of Allah and with the blessings of Allah." (Bismillah wa ala barkatillah). b) Supplication (Du'a') after every meal: "Praise be to Allah the One Who gave us the food and the drinks. Praise be to Him Who made us Muslim." (Al hamdu lil lazi at ta mana wa saqana waja-alana minal muslemeen). c) Eating Together: The Prophet emphasized the importance of eating a meal together when he said, "Eat together and not separately, for the blessing is associated with the company" (Ibn Majah). Further, table manners are extremely important for Muslims as it demonstrates compassion, grace and consideration for others.<sup>42</sup> It is a common tradition among Muslims to give food and drink to any stranger knocks on one's door and is hungry or thirsty. While offering food as charity, one has to take care that only good food is offered to the poor.<sup>43</sup>

## 2.3. The Sacredness of Food in Sikhism

Food plays an important role in the religious life of every Sikh. They believe that food comes from God and hence food is sacred for them. The distribution of food in Sikhism is the highest meritorious action one can achieve. Every Gurdwara, namely, Sikh place of worship has a langar (common kitchen or canteen) where all people are welcome to a free meal regardless of their sex,

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<sup>34</sup> Brahman is the highest Universal Principle, the Ultimate Reality in the universe. In the Upanishads, it has been described as Sat-cit-ānanda (being-consciousness-bliss) and also as the highest reality.

<sup>35</sup> The Taittiriya Upanishad III, 6.

<sup>36</sup> The Taittiriya Upanishad, II, 2 (i.e. Second Valli, Second Anuvaka).

<sup>37</sup> See islam Web Staff, Prophet Muhammad's Recommendations regarding Food. At-Tirmithi, Abu Daawood and Ibn Maajah. Web:

<https://www.islamweb.net/ver2/engblue/ebooks/en/Prophet%20Muhammads%20Recommendations%20Regarding%20Food.pdf>

<sup>38</sup> Giflian Feeley-Hamik, Religion and Food. An Anthropological Perspective, 63 J. AM. ACAD. RELIGION 565, 567 (1995).

<sup>39</sup> Qur'an, 7:31

<sup>40</sup> Lesley Stone, A Contextual Introduction to Islamic Food Restrictions, Third year Paper, Harvard University, Winter Term 1998. Cfr. Footnote No. 20. Pickthall, supranote 8, at 11.

<sup>41</sup> Qur'an, 2: 172. Another translation by Maulana Wahiduddin Khan reads: Almighty God says: O you who believe! Eat of the good things that we have provided for you. And be grateful to Allah if it is him you worship.

<sup>42</sup> The Islamic Community of Northern California. The Islamic Bulletin, Issue No. 16, August/September 1998 / Jumada Awal 1419, San Francisco, California. Web: <http://www.islamicbulletin.org>.

<sup>43</sup> Qur'an, 2: 267.

colour or religion. Langar which is considered to be a sacred food service is an important concept in Sikhism. Everyone eats together. Guru Nanak's teaching on earning one's bread by honest means and sharing it with others laid the foundation of the langar concept. By the early 17<sup>th</sup> century it had become a Sikh obligation, and the practice continues to this day.<sup>44</sup> The Langar selfless service, is one of three principles on which Sikhism is founded. It reflected the Guru's radical vision of equality.<sup>45</sup>

The langar encompasses both the cooking of the food and also a concept called bibek or conscious cooking while meditating on the divine in order to inspire humility and service. According to Sikhism, the langar feeds the body of the sangat (i.e. the congregation which is served) and it nourishes the soul of the one who performs the service. Before the food is served, it has to be blessed. place it is placed near the Guru Granth Sahib, to whom it is first ceremonially offered. The Guru not only receives the first taste, but the touch transforms the food, making it "God-intoxicated." The blessed food is then taken to the kitchen and put into larger pots, transferring the blessing to all the food served in the langar. All those present receive the blessed food reverently.<sup>46</sup>

The langar experience provides fellowship for the congregation, friends and families. The Sikhs participate in the langar with great enthusiasm. Today, the improvised langars serve open air community meals on every Sikh event but especially during festivals and over 1,00,000 people may attend a meal service.<sup>47</sup> It remains today as one of the fascinating features of Sikhism and expresses one of the important desires of the Sikhs to eradicate hunger. Throughout the world they are proud of this tradition, which includes welcoming, hospitality and feeding outsiders in their gurdwaras. It has also helped the Sikhs themselves in community building. They eagerly want people in society to be aware of their langar, as a form of service and inter-religious dialogue.

### 3.0. The Highly Treasured Eucharistic Values: The Foundation for Dialogue with Cultures and Religions - for Promoting Communion, Peace and Solidarity

A very important and relevant question facing the Church in Asia is *how* to share with our Asian brothers and sisters what we treasure as the gift containing all gifts, namely, the Good News of Jesus Christ.<sup>48</sup> As Christians, we ought to be committed to be forceful witnesses to God's presence in the world. St. John Paul II's Apostolic Letter, *Mane Nobiscum Domine* tells us that "we should not be afraid to speak about God and to bear proud witness to our faith. The "culture of the Eucharist" promotes a culture of dialogue, which here finds strength and nourishment".<sup>49</sup>

It is the Holy Spirit who offers everyone the possibility of sharing in the Paschal Mystery in a manner known to God.<sup>50</sup> The Spirit's presence and activity affect not only the individuals but also society and history, peoples, cultures and religions. Indeed, the Spirit is at the origin of the noble ideals and undertakings which benefit humanity on its journey through history: "The Spirit of God with marvellous foresight directs the course of the ages and renews the face of the earth".<sup>51</sup> The risen Christ "is now at work in human hearts through the strength of his Spirit, not only instilling a desire for the world to come but also thereby animating, purifying and reinforcing the noble aspirations which drive the human family to make its life one that is more human and to direct the whole earth to this end".<sup>52</sup>

Can the Eucharist be counter-cultural in a world of conflicts and divisions? Can the Eucharist be a source of peace and reconciliation? What is the connection between celebrating the Holy Eucharist and living a Eucharistic life? In this section, we

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<sup>44</sup> See Amrik Singh, "Sikhs at the Turn of the New Century," in Joseph T. O'Connell et al., *Sikh History and Religion in the Twentieth Century* (Toronto: Centre for South Asian Studies, 1988) , 424-441.

<sup>45</sup> Mandeep Singh, Bhuke Bhagat na Kije in S. Karnail Singh, ed. *Nanak Naam Jahaj Gurudwara Magazine*, 2015. See also Working for Langar justice on Web: <http://thelangarhall.com/activism/working-for-langar-justice/>

<sup>46</sup> Michel Desjardins and Ellen Desjardins, Cuizine, *Food that Builds Community: The Sikh Langar in Canada* in "The Journal of Canadian Food Cultures", Volume 1, numéro 2, 2009, Editor : McGill University Library. See <https://www.erudit.org/revue/cuizine/2009/v1/n2/037851ar.html#no5>.

<sup>47</sup> Mandeep Singh, Bhuke Bhagat na Kije in S. Karnail Singh, ed. *Nanak Naam Jahaj Gurudwara Magazine*, 2015. See also Working for Langar justice on Web: <http://thelangarhall.com/activism/working-for-langar-justice/>

<sup>48</sup> St. John Paul II, Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation, *Ecclesia in Asia*, New Delhi, 1999, no. 19.

<sup>49</sup> St. John Paul II, Apostolic Letter, *Mane Nobiscum Domine*, no. 28.

<sup>50</sup> Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World, *Gaudium et Spes*, 10, 15, 22. See also, St. John Paul II, *Redemptoris Missio*, no. 28.

<sup>51</sup> Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World, *Gaudium et Spes*, 26. See also, St. John Paul II, *Redemptoris Missio*, no. 28.

<sup>52</sup> Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World, *Gaudium et Spes*, 38; cf. 93. See also, St. John Paul II, *Redemptoris Missio*, no. 28.

shall examine how the precious values present in the Eucharist can be an effective ground for dialogue with people of other religions.

### 3.1. The Death Resurrection Mystery proclaimed in the Eucharist encourages everyone to be agents of Reconciliation, Unity and Solidarity with the whole Human Race

The Eucharist, through the death and resurrection mystery of Christ (the *mysterium paschale*) fosters reconciliation with people of every religion and culture. The experience of community in the Eucharist is firmly rooted in our experience of our relationship with God in Jesus Christ. This personal experience of being together with others becomes the source of our commitment to build community with others. And as a community of believing persons, we reject every form of selfishness, sectarianism, casteism and individualism and build bridges of communion with every person, association, community, nation. Our Asian reality is marked with cultural, religious, linguistic and ethnic pluralism. Hence our Eucharistic theology should help us respect this diverse groups and live with them in harmony and peace. It should also urge us to build bonds of solidarity with others. Every Eucharistic celebration is a reminder to us to reconcile with others, to proclaim peace and to reach out to everyone in love and compassion.<sup>53</sup> St. John Paul II instructs us so beautifully when he says: "The '*bread that is broken*' opens the life of Christians and of the entire community to sharing and to self-giving for the life of the world (cf. *Jn* 6: 51). The Eucharist brings about that unbreakable bond between *communion and mission*, which makes the Church the sacrament of the unity of the whole human race".<sup>54</sup>

Our celebration of the Eucharist is an invitation to us to a fuller communion with God and with one another. There are many prayers in the liturgy that invoke God's love, mercy, forgiveness and repentance. The Penitential Rite includes a calling to mind of our sins along with a call for God's mercy, viz. Kyrie eleison. The Gloria includes the words of mercy, "Lord God, Lamb of God, you take away the sins of the world: have mercy on us." The Eucharistic Prayers seek forgiveness from God viz., "To us also, your servants, who, though sinners, hope in your abundant mercies ... not weighing our merits, but granting us your pardon, through Christ our Lord" In the communion rite, the Our Father, Agnus Dei, and the "Lord, I am not worthy" contain words of forgiveness and repentance.<sup>55</sup> In an address on the feast of Corpus Christi, Blessed Pope Paul VI affirmed that "we cannot enter into communion with God, with Christ, if we are not in communion with one another. A preparation by familial charity is needed if we wish to enjoy the sacrament of charity and of unity, the Eucharist. This too is a great lesson. What a change of heart our frequent communion calls for! What practical and social results our religious devotion can and must bring about: peace, pardon, concord, love for each other, goodness!"<sup>56</sup>

*Mane Nobiscum Domine* instructs us: "The Eucharist is not merely an expression of communion in the Church's life; it is also a *project of solidarity* for all of humanity". In every Eucharistic celebration the Church renews her awareness of being a sign and instrument not only of intimate union with God but also of the unity of the whole human race.<sup>57</sup> "Each Mass, even when celebrated in obscurity or in isolation, always has a universal character. The Christian who takes part in the Eucharist learns to become a *promotor of communion, peace and solidarity* in every situation".<sup>58</sup> True Eucharistic solidarity takes place when the communion with God and communion with the Eucharistic community fosters communion and solidarity with all people. If the Eucharistic values of reconciliation, unity and solidarity are practiced and propagated in society, it will be an effective method of dialogue with other religions.

In speaking to religious leaders in Chennai, India, St. Pope John Paul II affirmed: "Dialogue between members of different religions increases and deepens mutual respect and paves the way for relationships that are crucial in solving the problems of human suffering. Dialogue that is respectful and open to the opinions of others can promote union and a commitment to this noble cause. besides, the experience of dialogue gives a sense of solidarity and courage for overcoming barriers and difficulties in the task of nation building. For without dialogue the barriers of prejudice, suspicion and misunderstanding cannot be effectively removed".<sup>59</sup>

### 3.2. Partaking of the one Sacred Eucharistic Meal demonstrates a sharing in the Divine Life as well as Promoting a Culture of Life

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<sup>53</sup> S. Arokiasamy, *The Eucharistic Community: Oneness and Otherness in Body, Bread, Blood*. Eucharistic Perspectives for the Indian Church. ed. Francis Gonsalves, Vidyajyoti/ISPCK, Delhi, 2000, p. 48-63.

<sup>54</sup> St. John Paul II, General Audience, 21 June 2000, no. 2. Also cf. *Lumen Gentium*, n. 1.

<sup>55</sup> Rev. Rinaldo Falsini, OFM, *Penitenza e riconciliazione nella tradizione e nella riforma conciliare: riflessioni teologiche e proposte celebrative* (Milan: Ancora, 2003), especially pp. 88 –104. See also, Archdiocese of Chicago, *Baptism, Penance, Eucharist: Sacraments of New Life, Repentance, and Communion*, Leaflet 2003.

<sup>56</sup> Blessed Pope Paul VI, *General Audience*, Feast of Corpus Christi, June 7, 1971.

<sup>57</sup> Cf. Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Pastoral Constitution on the Church *Lumen Gentium*, 1.

<sup>58</sup> St. John Paul II, Apostolic Letter, *Mane Nobiscum Domine*, no. 27.

<sup>59</sup> AAS 78 (1986) pp. 769-770. *The Pope Speaks to India*, Mumbai, St. Paul's Publications, 1986, pp. 85-86.

There is an inseparable connection between the Eucharist and the Church. According to the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, "the Eucharist makes the Church. Those who receive the Eucharist are united more closely to Christ. Through it Christ unites them to all the faithful in one body - the Church. Communion renews, strengthens, and deepens this incorporation into the Church, already achieved by Baptism".<sup>60</sup> The Eucharist fulfills the call to form but one body (1 Cor 12: 13). "The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not a participation in the blood of Christ? the bread which we break, is it not a participation in the body of Christ? Because there is one bread, we who are many are one body, for we all partake of the one bread".<sup>61</sup>

In 1981, the International Eucharistic Congress in Lourdes had as its theme: "Jesus Christ, Bread Broken for a New World". On this occasion, St. Pope John Paul II stated that just as Christ "gave up his life for us; and we, too, ought to give up our lives for our brothers" (1 Jn 3:16).<sup>62</sup> Hence, the Eucharist is very much connected with Christian living. In his homily at Phoenix Park, Dublin he convincingly stated that there must always be consistency between what we believe and what we do. Our communion with Christ is tested and seen in our relationships with our fellow human beings. He added that "our union with Christ in the Eucharist must be expressed in the truth of our lives today - in our actions, in our behaviour, in our life-style and in our relationships with others. For each one of us the Eucharist is a call to ever greater effort, so that we may live as true followers of Jesus: truthful in our speech, generous in our deeds, concerned, respectful of the dignity and rights of all persons, whatever their rank or income, self-sacrificing, fair and just, kind, considerate, compassionate and self-controlled".<sup>63</sup>

3.3. The Eucharist: An Indestructible Friendship between God and Humanity: Jesus Christ gives himself to Humanity as Nourishment in order to Nourish and Love others

The Lineamenta of the XI<sup>th</sup> Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops on the Eucharist stated that "Jesus Christ gives himself (cf. Jn 13:1) to humanity as nourishment; he *gives his body and sheds his blood for us*. With this act, the Church reminds the world that an indestructible friendship exists between God and humanity, because of the love of Christ, who conquered evil through his offering of self. In this sense, the Eucharist provides the unifying power of the human race and is also the place of that unity. The new character and meaning of the Last Supper are immediately and directly tied to the redemptive act of the cross and resurrection of the Lord, God's "last word" to humanity and the world".<sup>64</sup> "The Eucharist is spiritual nourishment for eternal life, a universal sacrifice foretold by the prophet Malachi, the font of true peace".<sup>65</sup>

Just as Jesus gave his body and shed his blood for us, we are invited to break ourselves for others and live for others. Nourished by the body and blood of Christ, we must grow in awareness of the dignity and value of every person. Nourished by the body and blood of Christ, we must be sensitive to human suffering and misery, to injustices and wrongdoings in society and seek ways to effectively remedy such situations. Nourished by the body and blood, we experience a deep desire to love our neighbour and love every human being. As St. Pope John Paul II in *Dominicae Cenae* tells us that the Eucharist "educates us to this love in a deeper way; it shows us, in fact, what value each person, our brother or sister, has in God's eyes, if Christ offers Himself equally to each one, under the species of bread and wine".<sup>66</sup> The Pope succinctly explains that "the sacrifice of which the Eucharist is the indelible sign, there also springs up within us a lively response of love. We not only know love; we ourselves begin to love. We enter, so to speak, upon the path of love and along this path make progress. Thanks to the Eucharist, the love that springs up within us from the Eucharist develops in us, becomes deeper and grows stronger".<sup>67</sup>

3.4. The Eucharist Proclaims the Missionary Message and urges us to live it

The Eucharist is at the centre of the Church's mission. Every celebration of the Eucharist sensitizes us to the various forms of injustice and discrimination that is based on gender, caste, age. *Mane Nobiscum Domine* clearly tells us that the Eucharist not only provides the interior strength needed for this mission, but is also its plan. "For the Eucharist is a mode of being, which passes from Jesus into each Christian, through whose testimony it is meant to spread throughout society and culture. For this to happen, each member of the faithful must assimilate, through personal and communal meditation, the values which the Eucharist expresses, the attitudes it inspires, the resolutions to which it gives rise".<sup>68</sup>

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<sup>60</sup> Catechism of the Catholic Church, no. 1396.

<sup>61</sup> Catechism of the Catholic Church, no. 1396.

<sup>62</sup> St. Pope John Paul II, Letter of His Holiness John Paul II to Cardinal James Robert Knox in view of the International Eucharistic Congress in Lourdes, 1 January 1979.

<sup>63</sup> St. Pope John Paul II, Homily at Phoenix park, Dublin: "The Eucharist Contains the Entire Spiritual Wealth of the Church", 29 September 1979.

<sup>64</sup> The XI<sup>th</sup> Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops, Lineamenta on *The Eucharist: Source and Summit of the Life and Mission of the Church*, 25 February 2004, no. 7.

<sup>65</sup> The XI<sup>th</sup> Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops, no. 13.

<sup>66</sup> St. John Paul II, *Dominicae Cenae*, no. 6.

<sup>67</sup> St. John Paul II, *Dominicae Cenae*, no. 5.

<sup>68</sup> St. John Paul II, Apostolic Letter, *Mane Nobiscum Domine*, no. 25.

At the beginning of this millennium, St. John Paul II urges us to reach out beyond our communities. "Certainly the Christian vision leads to the expectation of "new heavens" and "a new earth" (*Rev* 21:1), but this increases, rather than lessens, *our sense of responsibility for the world today...* Christians will feel more obliged than ever not to neglect their duties as citizens in this world. Theirs is the task of contributing with the light of the Gospel to the building of a more human world, a world fully in harmony with God's plan".<sup>69</sup>

At the end of every Eucharistic celebration, the celebrant says "Ite, missa est" (Go forth, the Mass is ended), or "Ite ad Evangelium Domini nuntiandum" (Go and announce the Gospel of the Lord) or "Ite in pace, glorificando vita vestra Dominum" (Go in peace, glorifying the Lord by your life). The word "go" is a powerful word in the Bible and it contains a missionary command to be an exemplary witness to Christ by our lives. Pope Francis urges us to be convinced, enthusiastic and joyful proclaimers of the Gospel. He says that "a true missionary, who never ceases to be a disciple, knows that Jesus walks with him, speaks to him, breathes with him, works with him. He senses Jesus alive with him in the midst of the missionary enterprise. Unless we see him present at the heart of our missionary commitment, our enthusiasm soon wanes and we are no longer sure of what it is that we are handing on; we lack vigour and passion. A person who is not convinced, enthusiastic, certain and in love will convince nobody".<sup>70</sup>

Evangelization has also a social dimension, viz., to make the kingdom of God present in the world. Our redemption, experienced in every Eucharistic celebration, has a social dimension, because "God, in Christ, redeems not only the individual person, but also the social relations existing between men".<sup>71</sup> Pope Francis warns us that it is dangerous and harmful for us if we lose our zeal for living the Gospel of fraternity and justice. He states the absolute priority of "going forth from ourselves towards our brothers and sisters" is one of the two great commandments which ground every moral norm and is the clearest sign for discerning spiritual growth in response to God's completely free gift. For this reason, "the service of charity is also a constituent element of the Church's mission and an indispensable expression of her very being". By her very nature the Church is missionary; she abounds in effective charity and a compassion which understands, assists and promotes".<sup>72</sup>

### 3.5. The Eucharist and Social Justice

If the Eucharist is the centre of the Church's life, is it possible to receive the Eucharist and lead a genuine Christian life without reaching out to so many people in the community who suffer from hunger? The paramount question comes to mind as to whether it is possible to celebrate the Eucharist without a living communion with those who have nothing (cfr. 1 Cor 11: 20 - 22). Without bread there can be no breaking of bread and without food and drink there can be no Eucharist.<sup>73</sup> A vast number of hungry people live in the developing regions of the world. According to the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization Report of 2014, about 795 million people of the 7.3 billion people in the world are suffering from chronic undernourishment. This means that one in nine people do not get enough food to be healthy and lead an active life. Southern Asia, which includes the countries of India, Pakistan and Bangladesh, has an estimate of 276 million chronically undernourished people. Can we ensure that nobody in the community suffers from hunger, malnutrition, poverty? There is enough food in the world to feed everyone. However, the injustice lies in the improper distribution of food. In the words of St. Pope John Paul II "One of the greatest injustices in the contemporary world consists precisely in this: that the ones who possess much are relatively few and those who possess almost nothing are many. It is the injustice of the poor distribution of the goods and services originally intended for all".<sup>74</sup>

The early Christians devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers... And all who believed were together and had all things in common; and they sold their possessions and goods and distributed them to all, as any had need" (Acts 2: 42, 44-45). Yet another passage of the Acts of the Apostles testifies this fact. "There was not a needy person among them, for as many as were possessors of lands or houses sold them, and brought the proceeds of what was sold and laid it at the apostles' feet and distribution was made to each as any had need" (Acts 4: 34-35).

Denying people the right to food is a fundamental injustice. The Eucharist has a horizontal dimension and vertical dimension. I now give two examples, one from St. Paul and the other from the life of St. Justin Martyr to show the link between participating in the Eucharist and living a Eucharistic life of love and justice. Pauline theology shows the link between *koinonia* (communion) and *diakonia* (service) when people are gathered for the celebration of the Lord's Supper. In his First Letter to the Corinthians,

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<sup>69</sup> St. John Paul II, *Ecclesia de Eucharistia*, no. 20.

<sup>70</sup> Pope Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, no. 266.

<sup>71</sup> Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*, no. 52.

<sup>72</sup> Pope Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, no. 179.

<sup>73</sup> Samuel Rayan, "The Eucharist Today" in *The Eucharist and Life: Indian Christian Reflections on the Last Supper*, ed. Kurien Kunnumpuram, St. Paul's Publication, Bandra, Mumbai, 2006, p. 236.

<sup>74</sup> St. John Paul II, *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis*, no. 28.



St. Paul criticizes the attitude of selfishness of those who come together to celebrate the Lord's supper. Hence he says to them: "When you meet together, it is not the Lord's supper that you eat...Whoever therefore eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of profaning the body and blood of the Lord" (1 Cor 11: 20, 27).

St. Justin Martyr's care for the poor and the needy is clearly reflected in his teaching on the Eucharist. Christians at the time of St. Justin clearly understood that they need to be not only receivers of but also givers of God's gifts. In the Eucharist, the Christians receive the highest gift of God, viz., his only Son and hence they realize that they in turn, should reciprocate and give their loving attention to the poor and less privileged, by sharing with them their resources and by being of service to the sick and housebound.<sup>75</sup> The scandal of the rich poor divide and any discrimination and division for that matter, eats at the heart of the Eucharist and negatively affects its sacramental character. If the Eucharist is the source of spiritual unity, the *sacramentum pietatis* (sacrament of piety), the *signum unitatis* (sign of unity) and the *vinculum caritatis* (bond of charity),<sup>76</sup> how can it ever be a source of division and disunity? The Catechism of the Catholic Church (CCC) aptly states: "The Eucharist commits us to the poor. To receive in truth the Body and Blood of Christ given up for us, we must recognize Christ in the poorest, his brethren:

You have tasted the Blood of the Lord, yet you do not recognize your brother,... You dishonor this table when you do not judge worthy of sharing your food someone judged worthy to take part in this meal.... God freed you from all your sins and invited you here, but you have not become more merciful."<sup>77</sup>

St. John Paul II asks us and begs us to "abandon all opposition and division, and let us all unite in this great mission of salvation which is the price and at the same time the fruit of our redemption".<sup>78</sup> He also stated that "political leaders, and citizens of rich countries considered as individuals, especially if they are Christians, have the moral obligation, according to the degree of each one's responsibility, to take into consideration, in personal decisions and decisions of government, this relationship of universality, this interdependence which exists between their conduct and the poverty and underdevelopment of so many millions of people".<sup>79</sup> Hence, the celebration of the Eucharist must evoke in each of us a commitment to justice.

#### 4.0. Conclusion: Cultivating a Eucharistic Life: A Witness to the Faith and Evangelization

St. Pope John Paul II makes an important observation: "More than ever, our troubled world, which began the new Millennium with the spectre of terrorism and the tragedy of war, demands that Christians learn to experience the Eucharist as *a great school of peace*, forming men and women who, at various levels of responsibility in social, cultural and political life, can become promoters of dialogue and communion".<sup>80</sup>

While visiting India in 1986, St. John Paul II clearly affirmed that "the Church's approach to other religions is one of genuine respect... This respect is twofold: respect for man in his quest for answers to the deepest questions of his life, and respect for the action of the Spirit in man".<sup>81</sup> Indeed, the Synod Fathers readily recognized the Spirit's action in Asian societies, cultures and religions, through which the Father prepares the hearts of Asian peoples for the fullness of life in Christ.<sup>82</sup>

#### Integrating Popular Piety with Worship

The *Liturgy* is the source and summit of all Christian life and mission.<sup>83</sup> Hence, it is a crucial means of evangelization, especially in Asia, where the followers of different religions are so drawn to worship, religious festivals and popular devotions.<sup>84</sup> There are

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<sup>75</sup> Izunna Okonkwo, *The Eucharist and World Hunger: Socio-Theological Exploration*, Xlibris Corporation, UK, 2011.

<sup>76</sup> Cf. St. Augustine, *In Evangelium Ioannis tract.* 26, 13: PL 35 1612f. Also, St. John Paul II, Letter, *Dominicae Cena*, 1980, no. 13

<sup>77</sup> Catechism of the Catholic Church, no. 1397. See also St. John Chrysostom, *Hom. in 1 Cor.* 27, 4: PG 61, 229-230; cf. Mt 25:40.

<sup>78</sup> St. John Paul II, Letter, *Dominicae Cena*, 1980, no. 13.

<sup>79</sup> St. John Paul II, *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis*, no. 9.

<sup>80</sup> St. John Paul II, Apostolic Letter, *Mane Nobiscum Domine*, no. 27.

<sup>81</sup> St. John Paul II, Address to Representatives of Non-Christian Religions, Madras, India, February 5, 1986: AAS 78 (1986), 767; cf. Message to the Peoples of Asia, Manila, February 21, 1981, 2-4: AAS 73 (1981), 392f; Address to Representatives of Other Religions, Tokyo, February 24, 1981, 3-4: *Insegnamenti IV/I* (1981), 507f.

<sup>82</sup> St. John Paul II, John Paul II, Encyclical Letter *Redemptoris Missio* (7 December 1990), 28: AAS 83 (1991), 273f; Cf. *Propositiones* 11 and 12.

<sup>83</sup> Cf. Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, 10; Special Assembly for Asia of the Synod of Bishops, *Relatio post disceptationem*, 14.

<sup>84</sup> Cf. Special Assembly for Asia of the Synod of Bishops, *Relatio post disceptationem*, 14; *Propositio* 43.

many forms of popular piety that thrive among the Asian people and express their search for God and their faith. Emeritus Pope Benedict XVI pointed out that popular piety is "a precious treasure of the Catholic Church", in which "we see the soul of the Latin American peoples".<sup>85</sup>

*Evangelii Nuntiandi* states that if these people are prudently directed according to the methods of evangelization, it may be productive of great good. "For it does indicate a certain thirst for God such as only those who are simple and poor in spirit can experience. It can arouse in men a capacity for self dedication and for the exercise of heroism when there is a question of professing the faith. It gives people a keen sensitivity by virtue of which they can appreciate the ineffable attributes of God: his fatherly compassion, his providence, his benevolence and loving presence".<sup>86</sup> Since popular piety can be an important means to communicate the Gospel and draw people to worship of God, there has been a strong recommendation made that some of its linguistic and ritual elements could be made an integral part of our worship.<sup>87</sup>

The *Catholic Bishops Conference of the Philippines* observed that "much of what the Filipino Catholics know of Catholic doctrinal truths and moral values is learned through the sacraments and devotional practices".<sup>88</sup> The Latin American Bishops refer to it as "popular spirituality" or "the people's mysticism" and promote it as a true spirituality incarnated in the culture of the lowly and state that it is a legitimate way of living the faith and feeling part of the Church and a manner of being missionaries.<sup>89</sup> Hence, there is a felt need today to encourage popular piety, with its symbolic and expressive wealth, to share its creative dynamism with the liturgy".<sup>90</sup>

In discussing the evangelizing power of popular piety, Pope Francis in *Evangelii Gaudium* urges us not to stifle or presume to control this missionary power. He said that to understand this reality we need to approach it with the gaze of the Good Shepherd, who seeks not to judge but to love. Further, we are called to promote the various expressions of popular piety in order to deepen the never ending process of inculturation.<sup>91</sup> Hence, the National and Regional Bishops' Conferences need to work more closely with the Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments in the search for effective ways of fostering appropriate forms of worship in the Asian context.<sup>92</sup> Care must be taken to consider the emerging secularist and consumer cultural influences which are negatively affecting worship and prayer.

#### Friendship and Dialogue with People of Other Religions

Though the Catholic Church, strongly and uncompromisingly, holds on to the essential truths of the Christian faith, she exhorts her faithful to engage in meaningful dialogue and friendship with people of other religious traditions.<sup>93</sup> Recognizing the truth that Jesus Christ is the unique Saviour of all and the source of all goodness, truth and holiness found in every religion and culture, Christians are called to build a deep relationship with followers of other religions. Each one of us is created in the image and likeness of God and every human being is a steward of God's creation. We all stem from one stock which God created ... and we all share a common destiny, namely, God.<sup>94</sup> "There is only one divine plan for every human being who comes into this world (cf. John 1: 9), one single origin and goal, whatever may be the colour of his skin, the historical and geographical framework within which he happens to live and act, or the culture in which he grows up and expresses himself".<sup>95</sup>

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<sup>85</sup> Pope Benedict XVI, Opening Address of the Fifth General Conference of the Latin American and Caribbean Bishops (13 May 2007), 1. AAS 90 (2007), 446.

<sup>86</sup> Pope Paul VI, *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, no. 48.

<sup>87</sup> The 51st International Eucharistic Congress, "Christ in You, Our Hope of Glory". The Eucharist: Source and Goal of the Church's Mission. Theological and Pastoral Reflections in preparation for the 51st International Eucharistic Congress, Cebu, Philippines, 24 to 31 January 2016.

<sup>88</sup> Catholic Bishops' Conference of the Philippines, New National Catholic Directory for the Philippines, Manila, 2007, no. 308.

<sup>89</sup> Fifth General Conference of the Latin American and Caribbean Bishops, *Aparecida Document*, 29 June 2007, no. 262, 263 and 264.

<sup>90</sup> Latin American Episcopal Conferences, *The Puebla Document*, 1979, no. 465.

<sup>91</sup> Pope Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, no. 124, 125.

<sup>92</sup> St. John Paul II, Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation, *Ecclesia in Asia*, New Delhi, 1999, no. 22.

<sup>93</sup> Msgr. Felix A Machado, Dealing with Difference: The Catholic Point of View, *Vidyajyoti Journal of Theological Reflection*, Vol. 69, no. 11, p. 813 to 831.

<sup>94</sup> The Second Vatican Council, *Nostra Aetate*, no. 1.

<sup>95</sup> St. John Paul II, Address to the Roman Curia, 22 December 1986 in *L'Osservatore Romano*, Eng. ed. 5 January 1987, no. 3.

With regard to dialogue, the partners in dialogue need to have a strong conviction about their own religious faith.<sup>96</sup> If one's own religious beliefs are not strong enough, a challenge might lead to a defensive or even aggressive attitude.<sup>97</sup> For us Christians, it is our firm belief that Jesus Christ is Son of God and Saviour, and the only mediator between God and man (cf. 1 Tm 2: 4-6) and that he is the fullness of revelation (Heb 1: 1). At every Eucharistic celebration, the Christian faithful proclaim the mystery of faith. The Church has repeatedly stressed the primacy of the proclamation of Jesus Christ in all evangelizing work. Thus, Ecclesia in Asia reiterates the words of Blessed Pope Paul VI who explicitly wrote that "there is no true evangelization if the name, the teaching, the life, the promises, the Kingdom and the mystery of Jesus of Nazareth, the Son of God, are not proclaimed".<sup>98</sup> At the same time we realize that God has also manifested himself in some way to the followers of other religions. Hence, it is with receptive minds that we approach the convictions and values of others.<sup>99</sup>

I would like to conclude with the words of St. Pope John Paul II, who stresses the need for dialogue as an important aspect of Christian Consciousness. In addressing the people of Asia he said: All Christians must therefore be committed to dialogue with the believers of all religions, so that mutual understanding and collaboration may grow; so that moral values may be strengthened; so that God may be praised in all creation. Ways must be developed to make this dialogue become a reality everywhere, but especially in Asia, the continent that is the cradle of ancient cultures and religions... Christians will, moreover, join hands with all men and women of goodwill who share a belief in the inestimable dignity of each human person. They will work together in order to bring about a more just and peaceful society in which the poor will be the first to be served. Asia is the continent where the spiritual is held in high esteem and where the religious sense is deep and innate: the preservation of this precious heritage must be the common task of all".<sup>100</sup>

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<sup>96</sup> Pontificio Consiglio per il Dialogo Interreligioso e Congregazione per l'Evangelizzazione dei Popoli, "Dialogo e Annuncio: Riflessioni e orientamenti sull'annuncio del vangelo e il dialogo interreligioso", in *Enchiridion Vaticanum. Documenti Ufficiali della Santa Sede 1991-1993*, Vol. 13, Testo ufficiale e versione Italiana, Bologna, Centro Editoriale Dehoniano, 1995, 191-229. (Henceforth referred to as *Dialogo e Annuncio*).

<sup>97</sup> Michael Fitzgerald and John Borelli, *Interfaith Dialogue: A Catholic View*, New York, Orbis Books, 2006, p. 34.

<sup>98</sup> St. Pope John Paul II, *Ecclesia in Asia*, no. 19. Blessed Pope Paul VI, Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Nuntiandi* (8 December 1975), no. 22: AAS 68 (1976), 20. Confer also Archbishop Felix A Machado, "L'Eucaristia e La missione Evangelizzatrice della Chiesa in Asia" nel *Il Banchetto dei Popoli: Eucaristia e Missione*, Romeo Ballan (a cura), Editrice Missionaria Italiana, 2005, pp. 47 - 51.

<sup>99</sup> *Dialogo e Annuncio*, no. 48, p. 210. See also Jose Kuruvachira, "Interreligious Dialogue in Dialogue and Proclamation", *Mission Today*, vol. XVII (2015), 198-222.

<sup>100</sup> St. Pope John Paul II, *Radio Message in Manila*, February 21, 1981. See AAS 73 (1981) pp. 393-94 and J. Neuner - J Dupuis, *The Christian Faith*, Bangalore, TPI, 1987, no. 1040.