Introduction: Theology in Search of a Method

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Introduction: Theology in Search of a Method

My first assignment after ordination to the Catholic priesthood in 2005 was to teach theology in a diocesan seminary in southern Philippines. On my first year of teaching, I noticed that I simply parroted to my students what my professors taught me. As I became more aware of the background of our seminarians, I felt the urgency to revise the way I was teaching theology. We had to look into the way
we are forming our seminarians. Some of them come from poor families in far-flung villages in the countryside. Some have come from Muslim-dominated areas where Christians live in fear of intermittent attacks from fundamentalist groups. We also have seminarians from Singapore and Malaysia who are members of a missionary congregation. They speak about the challenges of preaching the Gospel in a multi-faith and culturally diverse setting. They also took note of the secularist tendencies which are rapidly gaining ground in these countries.

In 2009, Pope Benedict XVI declared a ‘Year for Priests’ on the occasion of the 150th anniversary of the birth of St. John Vianney. That was for me a confirmation that I should pursue this question of priestly identity in the Asian context. This question has both a theoretical and practical significance. On the one hand, I wanted to ask whether a contextual model of the priesthood is possible. May one speak of an Asian priesthood? If so, what is this model? What is the best starting point in articulating such a model? On the other hand, I wanted to review the way I do and teach theology to future priests. I wanted to combine a solid theology of the priesthood in accord with Vatican II with a sensitivity to the Asian context and methodology, its needs, questions etc. Hence, the title, ‘Priest as Man of the Word: Rahner as Starting Point for a Theology of Priesthood in Asia’.

Why Rahner? In choosing Rahner, a Western theologian, in crafting a theology of priesthood in Asia, I would like to dialogue with a particular perspective on the priesthood. Certainly, Rahner’s theology is simply one among many possible representatives of Western theology. However, his significant contribution to twentieth century theology has attained for him a stature that qualifies him to be one of the pillars of contemporary Western theology. The breadth of his theological vision enabled him to engage *quaestiones disputatae* in the Church, *ad intra* and *ad extra*, then and now. Rahner courageously and creatively confronted the pressing questions of his time. For instance, aware of the onslaught of secularism, Rahner warned the Church against marching into the ghetto, withdrawing from the world
and thereby being sidelined as an irrelevant institution. 1) Although it is reduced in numbers, the Church must continue its God-given mission of preaching the Gospel in fulfillment of its nature and mission as sacrament of salvation for all men and women. Hence, the Church and its theology must not shy away from confronting the concrete situation and present realities that stare it in the eye. It must be fully rooted in its specific local context and engage in dialogue therein. The Church and its leaders must be able to communicate and converse with the world and engage it in a meaningful and life-giving dialogue.

I will proceed in three steps: first, I will give a brief overview of the Asian context through the three-fold description by the Federation of Asian Bishops’ Conferences. 2) Following the method of Asian contextual theology, this paper takes the present human experience of the theologizing subjects, the Asian Christians, as a locus theologicus. 3) Then, I will discuss Rahner’s view of the priest as ‘man of the Word’. Here I will situate Rahner’s theology of the priesthood within his idea of the Church as ‘Church of the Word’. The third part will be the interface between the Asian context and Rahner’s view of the priest as ‘man of the Word’. Here, I will propose a revised understanding of Rahner’s ‘man of the Word’ based on this FABC-inspired reading of the multi-cultural and multi-religious Asian context. For FABC, any theology, or mission work in Asia requires the three-fold dialogue with


religions, culture, and the poor. Finally, I shall point out some implications of this assertion to the formation of future priests for Asia in general, but more specifically for Mindanao in Southern Philippines, where I am currently assigned as theology professor and seminary formator.

1. Three Faces of Asia and Its Peoples

1.1. Diversity of Cultures

Asia hosts an array of diverse cultures evident not only across regions or countries, but also within each Asian country. Each Asian region possesses its own distinct language, culture, and tradition. Yet, even within a particular country, still there are a wide variety of ethnic cultures and traditions. In the Philippines, for example, besides the national language, there are over 100 other languages spoken in various parts of the archipelago. In India, one finds an even wider variety of cultures from the north to the south. Indonesia adopts as its national motto: Bhinneka tunggal Ika, unity-in-diversity, an apt summary of its being home to 300 ethnic groups and languages scattered throughout the archipelago. Thailand has around 14 ethnic groups, while Vietnam counts 49 ethnic groups as of its 1998 census. Malaysia is home to Malay, Chinese, and Indian communities, all of which are not sociologically homogenous. The Malays identify themselves through their

5) On the diverse cultures of India, found in various parts of the country, see Rahul Pathak, India Face to Face, (New Delhi: Om Book Service, 1996); M. Mohan Mathews, India, Facts & Figures, (Delhi: Sterling, 2001); Bibek Debroy - D. Shyam Babu, eds., The India Mosaic: Searching for an Identity, (New Delhi: Academic Foundation, 2004).
regional origin – Kelantan, Kedah, Perak, and others. They are also differentiated by dialect and culture. The Chinese may be grouped into linguistic communities originating from different parts of China: Hokkien, Cantonese, Hakka and Teochiu. The Indians are mainly Tamil, but also include Malayalee, Telugu and Sikh minorities.8)

The diversity of cultures and pluralism of religions which characterize the human and physical geography of Asia are not without its challenges. Asian peoples have lived with diversity and plurality for centuries. However, in the postcolonial period (1940s onwards), as nation-states gained independence from colonial rule and started to form their own governments, they had to grapple with the challenge of diversity. Various cultural groups asserted their claim for respect and recognition, not only of their uniqueness but also of their rights to exist within the framework of a government that not only tolerates but protects the ethnic and cultural identity of peoples. As Charles Keyes observed, tensions among peoples of diverse ethnic origins living alongside each other develop into violent conflicts because of the state’s imposition of a constricted nationalism. A case in point is the Indonesian government’s policy of a Java-centered nationalism which was staunchly resisted by the peoples of East Timor, Iran Jaya, and Aceh.9) Another example is the Hindutva principle espoused by the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) which became the ruling party in India from 1998-2004. By this principle, the BJP wanted to forge an

9) Charles Keyes, Margins of Asia, 10; See also Will Kymlicka - Baogang He, Multiculturalism in Asia, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), where Kymlicka and He tackle the problematic of identity politics where people assert their claim to identity, their legal rights, historical claims, and commitment to sharing of power. Some examples include the Dalai Lama leading the Tibetans’ struggle for autonomy, the Acehnese seeking greater autonomy or an independent state in Indonesia, and the Karen minority in Burma demanding a federal state (3-4); See Michael Malley, “Class, Region and Culture: The Sources of Social Conflict in Indonesia”, in Colletta - Lim - Kelles - Viitanen, Social Cohesion, 349-381.
exclusive and monolithic government based on the Hindu religion. As Gavin Flood observes, this ‘political essentialism’ which ideologizes Hinduism consists of ‘homogenizing tendencies that move against pluralism and diversity’.  

1.2. Plurality of Religions

Asia boasts of being home to the world’s ancient religions: Buddhism, Islam, Hinduism, Confucianism. In no other continent does one find as staggering a diversity of religions as in Asia. In Asia, Christianity is only a tiny portion of the entire Asian population, comprising about 313,849,430 adherents, representing about 8.5% of all Asians. Islam and Hinduism are the two biggest religions, with the former having 832,878,936 (22.5%) and the latter with 805,119,915 (21.8%) adherents. Chinese folk religionists count 383,407,747 (10.4%) and Buddhists of different strands have 354,651,462 (9.6%). Besides these four major groups, one also finds in Asia a good number of followers of Confucianism, Taoism, Shintoism, Jainism, Sikhism and Zoroastrianism, Baha’ism, Mandeanism, and Spiritists. Each of these other religions accounts for 5% or less of Asia’s total population.

Of the five regions of Asia, East and Southeast Asia epitomize the continent’s religious pluralism. Confucianism, Daoism, and Buddhism are practised in China, Shintoism and Buddhism in Japan, and in Korea, Confucianism and Buddhism. In each of these countries, various other folk religions with a popular and common tradition rooted in ancestor veneration and spirit worship of the earliest antiquity are practised. Southeast Asia’s 240 million people live in a ‘Muslim archipelago’

extending from southern Thailand, through Malaysia, Indonesia, and north to the southern Philippines. Approximately 88% of Indonesia’s more than 241 million people are Muslim, representing the largest Muslim population in any country of the world. Malaysia’s 24 million Muslims which comprise around 60% of its total population live in a multi-religious and multi-ethnic society of Chinese, Indians, Hindus, Buddhists, and Christians. Friedhelm Hardy holds that Islam has the greatest impact in Asia because of Islamic countries like Iran, Afghanistan, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Indonesia, Malaysia. Meanwhile, Buddhism is the dominant religion in countries like Sri Lanka, Myanmar, Thailand, Laos, Cambodia, and Japan. Buddhists are also the overwhelming majority in Myanmar, Thailand, Laos, and Cambodia. They are also a significant minority in China, South Korea, Singapore, Malaysia, and Indonesia.

1.3. Pervasive Poverty

Calcutta, Manila, and Jakarta are only three of the many highly urbanized places in Asia. In these cities, one observes the glaring contrast between the affluence of a small number of people residing in gated subdivisions or high rise condominiums and the vast majority of poor people living in shanties sitting precariously along railroad tracks or in overcrowded squatter colonies. This situation, replicated in many other Asian cities, reflect the third major characteristic of Asia: the pervasive poverty of its peoples, due mainly to uneven growth and inequality: the imbalances in life chances between the urban and rural sectors; and in urban areas themselves,
the concentration of limited resources in the capitals and/or primate cities, as well as the economic disparity between the masses and a small wealthy elite.\textsuperscript{16) }

The Asian Development Bank’s (ADB) report for 2011 indicates that extreme poverty declined substantially in Asia where 17 out of 24 countries were able to meet their targets in terms of poverty alleviation. However, Asia still houses two-thirds of the world’s poor, whose numbers are swelled by unemployment and reduced incomes due to the 2008 global financial crisis. ADB, for example, predicted that India and Bangladesh might not be able to meet their target in 2015. In these two countries, more than 20\% of the population still live on less than $1.25$ PPP (purchasing power parity). A similar situation is observed in 15 other countries.\textsuperscript{17) }The inequality among Asian nations is evident in the presence in Asia of the 2nd, 3rd, and 4th largest economies in the world (China, Japan and India respectively) as well as of the poorest in the world. In 2010, for example, Singapore’s per capita GDP was 45 times that of Nepal. In terms of urban and rural poverty, the ADB summarizes its findings thus: Approximately 700 million people in Asia and the Pacific live on less than US$1 a day, 400 million of them in urban areas.

Many Asian cities face deteriorating sanitation and environmental conditions, inadequate housing and infrastructure, and other problems. About half of Asia’s poor people live in rural areas. These also include the poorest of the poor, often indigenous people or vulnerable groups with little economic opportunities. The majority of rural environmental poor live in marginal dryland and wetland areas and their numbers are likely to increase with global warming. Asia also hosts millions

\textsuperscript{16) }Ibid., 5; Proof of the inequality in Third World countries is that the lowest 20\% has 4.8\% share of income, while the top 10\% has 36.6\% share of income. See Alan Gilbert - Josef Gugler, Cities, Poverty and Development: Urbanization in the Third World, 2nd ed., (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), 12-13.

\textsuperscript{17) }Asian Development Bank, Key Indicators for Asia and the Pacific 2011, (Manila: Asian Development Bank, 2011), 7, 11. The standard measure adopted by the World Bank for determining the poverty line is $1$ or $2$ per day, purchasing power parity.
of indigenous or tribal people who live in social, cultural, and political isolation from the dominant population.\(^{18}\)

The Asian Bishops consider these three realities: diversity of cultures, plurality of religions, and pervasive poverty as the foremost characteristics of the Asian context. These, according to them, are ‘the changing faces’ of Asia which should shape the life and ministry of the Church in Asia.\(^{19}\) They also assert that the mode of evangelization in Asia is dialogue, and it is with these realities that the Church in Asia must dialogue. The Bishops spoke thus: ‘Mission may find its greatest urgency in Asia; it also finds in our continent a distinctive mode […] Mission in Asia […] will also seek through dialogue to serve the cause of unity of the peoples of Asia marked by such a diversity of beliefs, cultures and socio-political structures’.\(^{20}\) Furthermore, ‘a local Church in dialogue with its people, in so many countries in Asia, means dialogue with the poor. For most of Asia is made up of multitudes of the poor […] who are deprived of access to material goods and resources they need to create a truly human life’.\(^{21}\)

One could say, therefore, and this we shall underline later, that the Asian bishops envisage the Asian Church as a dialogical Church, a Church in \textit{dia-logos} with its people. It is the Church of the Word, which took flesh and dwelt amongst his people. To understand the meaning of this, we turn to Rahner for his discussion of this theme. We shall see that Rahner’s idea of the Church of the Word flows into his view of the priest as ‘Man of the Word’. It is these key ideas in Rahner that we bring into the proposed model of the priest in the Asian context.

\(^{18}\) Huhua Cao - Elizabeth Morrell, eds., \textit{Regional Minorities and Development in East and Southeast Asia}, (New York: Routledge, 2009).
\(^{19}\) See “Resolutions of the Asian Bishops Meeting”, \textit{FAPA}, 1: 3.
2. Rahner on the Church and on the Priesthood

2.1. The Church as Church of the Word: Its Sacramental and Symbolic Function

Rahner’s key assertion about the Church is that it is the historical continuation of the presence of Christ in and through the community of those who believe in Him. Rahner holds that the Church is not merely a social welfare institute or a useful religious organization, although it does, in reality, have a sociological structure. Instead, the Church has a sacramental function as the concrete mediation of salvation and grace which Christ was in his earthly life. As Jesus Christ was the tangible manifestation of God’s irreversible eschatological offer of salvation for mankind, and in this way, properly called the sacrament of the Father, so is the Church, according to Rahner, ‘the continuance, the contemporary presence, of that real, eschatologically triumphant and irrevocably established presence in the world, in Christ, of God’s salvific will’. By being this real presence of Christ in the world, thus is the Church called the fundamental sacrament (Ursakrament). The Church has an essentially sacramental nature, and this is the key to understanding everything else about it.

This becomes clearer with the correlative assertion that the Church is the Church of the Word, because ‘the Church is the abiding presence of that primal sacramental word of definitive grace, which Christ is in the world’. Here, we draw from Rahner’s theology of the symbol to elucidate this point. Rahner holds that every being is symbolic because it must necessarily express itself in order to attain its own nature. In giving itself away into an ‘other’ in knowledge and love, a being finds its self-fulfillment. Rahner applies this principle to the Trinity in which the

Word is the ‘symbol’ of the Father, who, while remaining distinct from the Father, is constituted by the Father as the self-expression of the Father Himself.24) The humanity of Jesus is the self-disclosure of the Logos which comes into being when God expresses or exteriorizes himself in time. It is revelatory because as symbol, it makes present what is revealed.25)

Applying this theology of symbol to the Church, Rahner asserts that as the continuing presence of the incarnate Word in space and time, the Church continues the symbolic function of the Word in the world. This symbolic nature of the Church does not in any way contradict the socio-juridical dimension of the Church. In fact, the indefectibility, infallibility and the sacramental \textit{opus operatum} principle are elements in the Church that attest to its symbolic nature as the locus and sign of Christ’s presence among peoples. In and through the Church, the Word is embodied, tangible, and concrete. The Word of God is uttered by the Church as God’s final, irrevocable word for the salvation of the world. In the Church, the Word is preserved in its inviolate dignity and character as Word of God.26) Thus, the Church is the Church of the Word.

The Church is also the Church of the Word because, as a sacrament itself, it is the Church of the sacraments. Within this sacramental paradigm, the sacraments are precisely understood as symbolic actions by which the Church expresses through efficacious signs her essence as the living presence of redemptive grace for men. In Rahner’s view, the efficacy of these signs are those of the intrinsic symbol. ‘The


sacramental sign is [a] cause of grace in as much as grace is conferred by being signified. And this presence (by signifying) of grace in the sacraments is simply the actuality of the Church herself as the visible manifestation of grace’.27) The purpose of the Church, therefore, lies in its mediatory function. As the social milieu in which the grace of Christ can be tangibly, though not exclusively, encountered, it is an efficacious sign of grace for its members – and for all the world. Lennan holds that Rahner’s ecclesiology and all the elements therein such as mission, structure, and doctrine, are thoroughly shaped by his sacramental approach.28)

2.2. Rahner on the Priest: Man of the Word

In his 1942 article, Priesterliche Existenz, Rahner raises the question about the existentially basic element of the priesthood. For him, it is not the cultic aspect of the priesthood because the exercise of cultic function does not occupy the entire life of a priest. Furthermore, these powers strictly as such are efficacious regardless of the bearer’s human condition and without his existential contribution. Hence, this could not be the essential element in priesthood. It cannot be the appropriate starting point. Instead, Rahner asserts that the prophetic element of priesthood is that which characterizes the uniqueness and newness of official priesthood because it makes existential demands on the priest and marks him with a specifically new character.29) It involves a calling which lays claim 1) to the whole existence of him who is called, and 2) in quite a new way. What the priesthood requires of a man is not simply to commit his time to perform his duties as though he were an

27) K. Rahner, Church and Sacraments, 39.
ecclesiastical functionary. It demands the priest’s personal commitment and assumes this into itself as its inmost element.

The Word of God requires such total existential commitment from the priest because to preach the Good News of God’s self-communication is not only to expound on self-evident objective truths, but to proclaim a revealed and salvific truth existentially realized in one’s life. Rahner argues that since the priest is tasked to proclaim a higher truth about a higher object, then the demand on him is greater. And when it is a question of God’s self-revelation, the supreme degree of the existentiality of truth is reached.30) The peculiar nature of the message demands the personal existential commitment of the preacher because it contains the highest concentration of truth and it can only be adequately expressed by the priest’s total existence.

Moreover, the task of preaching the Gospel introduces a new dimension to the priest’s life as one wholly taken up by his mission. Rahner holds that while the layman witnesses to his own faith in the world, the priest witnesses not to his own Christian life, but immediately to Christ. He is sent, not by any human person on earth; but rather, from above, by Christ, and not by his own situation in the world.31) When a man is ordained priest, he undertakes a new existence, from being a witness in the world, ‘from below’ to being a witness to the world, ‘from above.’ This is the newness of this element. From being a layman who participates medially in the priestly apostolate of office holders in the Church, the priest, once ordained, becomes someone who participates immediately in the priesthood of Christ. For the early Rahner, therefore, the prophetic aspect of the priesthood which is its existentially fundamental element lends priesthood its uniqueness and newness. This, for him, is the theological starting point in determining the nature of the ordained priesthood.

31) Ibid., 215.
2.3. Priesthood: Ministry From and Within the Church

In the preceding discussion of Rahner’s ecclesiology, it was said that as the \textit{Grundsakrament}, the Church is the abiding presence of God’s final, irrevocable, and salvific Word, which is Christ Himself. In the Church, this Word is uttered in sacramental signs which effect what they signify. The Church derives its existence and purpose from Christ, the \textit{Ursakrament}, through whom God’s offer of salvation has become historically manifest and irrevocable. In the same way, in Rahner’s mind, the priesthood may be understood in its genuine theological nature only by taking as the starting point the Church as one and whole. \footnote{32) K. Rahner, “Theologische Reflexion zum Priesterbild von heute und morgen”, \textit{SW}, 20: 252.} The ultimate goal of the Church is the salvation of mankind. However, the Church does not cause or bring about that salvation as if it has not been accomplished or is not already present in the world. Already in a transcendental manner in men’s hearts and in a categorical manner in Jesus Christ, salvation has been wrought. Nevertheless, there is need for man as an incarnate being to be made continually conscious through tangible signs of this salvific presence in himself which is there as an irrevocable offer of God’s self-communication. The Church is the historical and symbolic manifestation of this salvation. Through the Church, God’s offer of salvation is historically and tangibly present, an offer which has been uttered and made manifest in history in and through Jesus Christ. \footnote{33) Ibid., 255.}

The priest’s task in the Church becomes clearer when one notes how Rahner calls the Church a ‘community of witnesses’ (\textit{Zeugengemeinde}) on behalf of Jesus Christ. She proclaims to others that absolute hope for God’s salvation from which she may exclude no one. \footnote{34) K. Rahner, “von Sinn des Kirchlichen Amtes”, \textit{SW}, 20: 4-25, esp. 9-10.} Hence, what the Church is meant to do as whole, the priest does as the member tasked and entrusted with the official proclamation of the Word as his fulltime mission in the Church. In this context, Rahner says that
priesthood is to be conceived not as a power which places the officeholder above the Church as the People of God. Instead, priesthood empowers an individual in one specific area so that in his ministry, that which the Church is may be fulfilled. The ministry of the priest is merely one instance among the many possible expressions of the Church’s official ministry.35)

Thus is the priesthood a sacrament, an actualization of the Church’s nature as the salvific presence of Christ’s grace for the individual. In Rahner’s theology, a sacrament is present where the Church, as the official, public and efficacious symbol of the salvific presence of grace, encounters the individual in his actual and concrete existence. This definition of sacrament is readily applicable to the priesthood in Rahner’s theology, both in its early stage and later development wherein the ecclesial and sacramental dimensions are explicitated. The Word which takes full possession of the priest’s existence is the unconditional saving presence of Christ; and to his saving presence, the Church is the community of witness. By his ordination, the priest takes on a new personality as the Church’s official preacher of the Word and witness to Christ. Thus is he signed with a sacramental character by which, once and for all, he is permanently assimilated to Christ and the Church, and is assigned a place in the social structure of the Church.36)

2.4. Priesthood: Participation in the Church’s One Office

Another key point in Rahner’s theology of the priesthood is the ‘one-ness’ of priestly office in the Church. First of all, Rahner highlights the unity or single-ness of office in the Church in which the ordained participate in a way different from, but related to, the priesthood of all believers. The Church’s witness has to be one

because the salvation it attests to is not offered to isolated individuals but to individuals united in a stable community.\(^{37}\) And it is the hierarchy who authoritatively embody the unity of the Church’s witness. Nonetheless, this one office is shared in many different ways by the member of the Church.\(^{38}\) The unity of the Church’s witness, for which and through which she exists, comes from Jesus Christ. More specifically, this witness proceeds from the Word insofar as it is absolutely concrete and historical; but it also proceeds from the Spirit insofar as it surrenders to the mystery of God. Hence, in Rahner’s view, insofar as ecclesiastical office witnesses to the Trinitarian God’s victorious self-communication, it is marked by the oneness and the distinction of the two processions of the Logos and of Holy Spirit from the Father.\(^{39}\) This unity-in-difference in the Trinity provides Rahner with a framework with which to make sense of the three-fold offices of teaching (Lehramt), governing (Leitungamt), and sanctifying (Heiligungamt) and the two-fold power of ordination (potestas ordinis) and jurisdiction (potestas iurisdictionis). These distinctions are what we see incorporated into the Vatican II theology of the priesthood.

Rahner brings together the priest’s task of speaking the word of witness and offering the Church’s sacrifice when he asserts that the priest speaks the most concentrated and most effective word in the Eucharistic sacrifice because there is where the efficacious word is pronounced, in such a way that what is spoken of becomes truly present. Hence, Rahner calls the priest ‘a dispenser of the divine


mysteries’, in whose mouth God has placed His mighty and creative sacramental word, the word that does not talk, but acts. Thus graced with Christ’s efficacious word, the priest confers the sacraments, the symbols and celebration of Christ’s mysteries.40) He presides over the sacrifice of the Church, the liturgical reception of Christ’s Last Supper, the culmination of the preaching of the Word which the priest has proclaimed.41)

Whether as preacher of the Word or presider in the sacrifice, but especially in the question of offering the sacrifice, the priest cannot conceive his priesthood apart from Christ and the community. Even in his early writings, Rahner has taken up the question of the cultic priesthood and its relation to the priesthood of Christ and to the priesthood of believers. What emerges from his treatment is that cultic priesthood is a ministerial participation in Christ’s priesthood and that of the faithful. In relation to Christ’s priesthood, the ordained priesthood is simply the ‘making present’ (Gegenwärtigung) of the eschatologically final salvific reality of Jesus. It does not institute the sacrifice itself nor produce its salvific effects. Indeed, the priesthood only makes present for us the redemptive action of Jesus as an ever-new and ever present sacramental-historical reality in our lives.42)

3. Asian Priest: Man of the Word

Appropriating Rahner’s theology of the priesthood in the Asian context means highlighting three important characteristics of the Word which did not receive ample attention in Rahner’s treatment, namely: that the Word is 1) dialogical, 2) prophetic,

41) K. Rahner, Siebenfältige Gabe, 338.
42) K. Rahner, Priesterliche Existenz, 204; Rahner’s earlier work, Die vielen Messen und das eine Opfer, (see SW 18: 91-166) also tackles the question of the sacrificial character and efficacy of the Mass.
and 3) Spirit-borne. These three characteristics define the Asian priest’s ministry of the Word in his unique Asian context, a ministry which takes the primary mode of the triple dialogue espoused by the FABC: a dialogue with religions, cultures, and the poor.

3.1. Man of the Dialogical Word

The basis for making dialogue the principal framework in defining the ministry of the Church, and derivatively, of priestly ministry is the fact that God has spoken and continues to speak to mankind throughout the ages. Reflecting on God’s dialogue with humanity, the Asian formators say: ‘God manifests Godself in time and history, in our struggles and yearnings, our pain and suffering, hopes and dreams, in the whole created world. Dialogue is God’s way. God is, you could say, a dialogical God’.43) The Word which the priest ought to proclaim in Asia is a dialogical Word. It is the Word spoken by the Father through which all things were created (Jn 1,3; Col 1,16). When God spoke in the Old Testament, it was in view of forming a community who would be in an intimate relationship with him. His word seeks to elicit a response from the addressee (Gen 15,1-20; 17,1-8). The covenant which he entered into with Israel was a form of dialogue with them, giving them his unconditional love and demanding their unswerving loyalty to Him. The Lord declares to Israel: ‘And I will walk among you and will be your God, and you shall be my people’ (Ex 6,7; Lev 26,12). And Israel answers back: ‘All that the LORD has spoken, we will do’ (Ex 19,8). He wanted to engage in a dialogue with the people of Israel, and through Israel, to all the peoples. Thus, he says: ‘I, the LORD, have called you in righteousness; I will take hold of your hand. I will keep you and will make you to be a covenant for the people and a light for the Gentiles’ (Is 42,6).

43) Statement of the Formation, Institute for Inter-Religious Affairs I (1998), FAPA, 3: 120. See also Gal. 4.4-7; Heb. 1.1-4; DV, 1.
By the incarnation of the Word, God spoke to mankind as a human being, and lived amongst them. The preaching and ministry of Jesus was aimed at leading men and women to experience the same intimate fellowship He enjoyed with the Father. Jesus’ words to people always opened a dialogue with them, as when he asked John’s disciples: ‘What are you seeking?’ (Jn 1,38) or when he said to the Samaritan woman at the well: ‘Give me a drink’ (Jn 4,7). His parables which characterized his unique way of teaching illustrate a God who goes out of his way to dialogue with his people and welcome them into his household. We see this in the Parables of the Loving Father (Lk 15,28-32), the Bridegroom’s Father (Mt 22,8-10), the Generous Vineyard Owner (Mt 20,1-16). Through his ministry of healing and exorcism, by which he conversed with and even touched those deemed unclean, he restored the sick and sinners back from the margins into communion with society (Mk 1,40-44; 2,1-11; 5,25-43). Finally, in the silence of the cross and the empty tomb, the di-logos within God’s self and between God and mankind achieves its culmination and fulfilment. For in the Cross and Resurrection of Jesus Christ, the mutual self-giving of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit to each other reaches its climax, and the restoration of the covenantal dialogue broken by man’s disobedience is accomplished by the Son’s loving obedience. Thus is our God a dialogical God.

The Asian Church believes, as it lives in daily encounter with the peoples of various religions, that God continues to dialogue with his peoples beyond the People of God. God is in continuous conversation with peoples of other faiths through the Spirit which he has poured into the hearts of men and women (Rom 5,5). If indeed, as Rahner holds, that man is the being who, in the freedom of love, stands

44) DV, 4; Jn 1.14.
before a possible revelation,\textsuperscript{46}) then we have to affirm that there is an ongoing dialogue between God and the peoples of other religions. The Spirit’s activity beyond the confines of the visible Church is bringing to fruition the seeds of the Word found in these non-Christian religions. The Asian formators assert that journey of dialogue requires a perception of and reverence for the Spirit at work in all peoples, cultures and religions. More than a journey, dialogue is a pilgrimage to the Divine or Sacred, a pilgrimage, to which all peoples are caught up.\textsuperscript{47}) Hence, listening to God’s word as it is revealed in them is an essential element in the evangelizing mission of the Church. For this reason, dialogue is the mode of mission in Asia. Priestly ministry in Asia, in accordance with the Asian church’s mission, is a ministry of the dialogical Word. The Asian priest listens to this Word and proclaims it among the Asian Church’s dialogue partners: the religions, the cultures, and the poor in Asia.

3.2. Man of the Prophetic Word

Rahner’s treatment of the prophetic dimension of the priesthood emphatically underlines the power with which the Word takes over the entire being of the priest and demands from him not simply a functional relationship such as if he were simply an official of the cult. As was the experience of the biblical prophets, the Word so penetrates his existence that in order to be credible as a minister of the Word, he has to mirror in his very life the power of the Word at work in him (Is 8,11; 6,28; Jer 28,12). Rahner, however, fails to incorporate a key element of the prophetic mission in his treatment of the prophetic element of the priesthood. The Word that comes to the prophet, is not only an overpowering word that penetrates the being of the prophet. It is also, at the same time, a word of condemnation for

\begin{itemize}
  \item See FIRA I (1998), \textit{FAPA}, 3: 120.
\end{itemize}
those who oppress the poor (Hos 4,6.8.12; Is 1,2-15; Amos 1,1-15) and a word of consolation that brings hope to God’s poor (Am 2,9. 6-8).

The prophetic word is a word that condemns on behalf of the poor. The prosperous period in the history of Israel ironically saw the oppression of the poor and the unmindful disregard by the rich of the plight of the poor (Amos 2,6-8; 4,1). The prophets spoke of the word of Yahweh, but they also spoke on behalf of the poor. They lent their voices to the voiceless of society. They defended the rights of the orphans and widow. They condemned the ostentatious rituals performed by hands soaked in blood and lips brimming with empty praises. They directed Israel to the worship acceptable to the Lord: to feed the hungry, clothe the naked, do justice (Is 1,11-15; 58,3-7). If at all the prophets suffered derision and contempt, it was the same pathos Yahweh suffered on behalf of the poor. Walter Brueggeman, for example, asserts of Jeremiah that he was ‘a person so utterly claimed by and preoccupied with the sovereign Word of God [...] His call and his reference to Yahweh gave him an angle on historical reality which left him at various times anguished, dismayed, depressed and hopeful’ (Jer 18,18-23; 20,7-10).48)

To the poor, especially the remnant of Israel who remained faithful to Yahweh, the prophets also proclaimed a word of consolation and hope. Through the prophets, Yahweh comforted his people and announced the restoration of Israel (Hos 14,5-9; Is 40,1-5; 66,10-13). The re-gathering of Israel as a people will be founded, no longer on laws cut in stone nor on rituals performed in the Temple cult. Instead, the Lord will establish a new covenant written in their hearts (Jer 31,31-34). The Lord himself will shepherd his people, heal their wounds, and gather them as his flock (Ezek 34,11-16). Hence, the word of Yahweh spoken by the prophets brings not only condemnation, but also consolation.

If these characteristics of the Word are not equally emphasized, the priest’s ministry of the Word does not adequately reflect the prophetic mission of the biblical prophets. A ministry of the Word that does not condemn the oppression of the poor condones the injustice and discrimination against them; that which does not offer consoling hope to the poor fails to encourage the people amidst their struggle for human liberation and spiritual freedom. Hence, the Asian priest’s ministry must proclaim the prophetic word, at once condemning and consoling. He has to seek out the minjung, the dalits, the women and workers of Asia, accompany them and speak to them, because as a prophet, as Abraham Heschel says, he begins with a message of destruction; (but) he concludes with a message that proclaims hope.\footnote{Abraham Heschel, The Prophets, vol. 1, (New York: Harper and Row Publishers, 1969), 12.} For Walter Brueggeman, a prophet is a builder of an alternative community in the world whose ministry consists in nurturing, nourishing and evoking a consciousness and perception alternative to the consciousness and perception of the dominant culture.\footnote{W. Brueggemann, Prophetic Imagination, 21-37; idem, “The Prophet as Mediator”, in Theology of the Old Testament: Testimony, Dispute, Advocacy, (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1997), 622-649.}

3.3. Man of the Spirit-borne Word

The third dimension of this new understanding of the priest as ‘man of the Word’ is that he is a man of the Spirit-borne Word. Rahner provides a solid ecclesiological basis for the priesthood in emphasizing that as a sacrament, it is an actualization of the Church as the fundamental sacrament and that it is simply a participation in the one office of the Church. The priesthood is thoroughly ecclesiological. It finds its essence and function within the community which the priest as minister of the word and of the sacraments is meant to serve. Nevertheless, for Rahner, the priesthood is also deeply Christological. In locating the essence and spirituality of the priesthood in the pierced side of Christ, Rahner establishes the intimate link between the priest and Christ.\footnote{See K. Rahner, “Der Mann mit dem Durchbohrten Herzen”, in SW, 20: 82-90.} What is lacking in
Rahner’s treatment is the pneumatological basis of the priesthood and the implications of emphasizing the role of the Spirit in priestly existence and ministry. Mindful that it is the activity of the Spirit that justifies the Asian Church’s dialogical mission in this continent, we should now briefly explore what it means for the Asian priest to be a man of the Spirit who preaches the ‘Spirit-borne Word’.

The priesthood is born of the Spirit. It is conferred on the candidates by the invocation of the Holy Spirit and by the laying on of hands. If, as St. Paul teaches, the Holy Spirit is the single source of charisms in the Church (1Cor 12,4-7. 11; Eph 4,4), then the Holy Spirit is the source of the priesthood as well as of its so-called sacred power. Vatican II says: Through the sacrament of ordination, priests, ‘by the anointing of the Holy Spirit, are signed with a special character and are conformed to Christ the Priest in such a way that they can act in the person of Christ the Head’.

As it is in the sacrament of ordination, so also in the other sacraments, the Holy Spirit ensures the sacramental efficaciousness of these signs, conferring on the recipients the grace it is supposed to communicate. The Holy Spirit, therefore, brings the priesthood into reality and guarantees its efficacious sacramental ministry.

It is not only the priest’s sacramental ministry that is empowered by the Holy Spirit. His ministry of the Word, too, derives its power from the Holy Spirit. The prophets of the Old Testament and Jesus in the New Testament proclaimed the Good News by the power of the Holy Spirit (Is 61,1; Lk 4,1.18). The Spirit empowered Jesus for his ministry (Mt 3,16; 12,18.28) such that he taught with

52) Presbyterorum Ordinis, 2.3.
authority (Mt 7,29; Mk 1,22) and people hung on to his words (Lk 19,48). St. Paul says ‘No one can call Jesus, Lord, if not by the Spirit’ (1Cor 12,1). Just as in the very beginning of the Church, the Holy Spirit gave the apostles the boldness to preach the Good News of Jesus Christ and guided the Church in its early years of formation (Acts 4,8; Acts 16,6; 1 Cor 12,1-13; Eph 4,4-7), so also in the present day, the Church believes that the same Holy Spirit urges the Church to proclaim the Good News and remains with her as the principle of her life and ministry.\(^{54}\)

The same Spirit by whose power the Word took flesh in the womb of the Virgin Mary (Lk 1,35) also brings the same Word to the hearts of would be-believers and opens their hearts to receive this Word (Acts 16,14; Jn 16,13-14). Hence, the word entrusted to the priest is the Spirit-borne Word which he proclaims with the courage given by the Spirit and is received by his listeners thanks to the inspiration of the same Spirit (Acts 4,31; 16,4).

**Conclusion: Asian Priest as Man of the Word**

Ever since Vatican II gave the impulse towards finding alternative models for the Church’s engagement with the world, the Asian churches have taken up the question of a model of priesthood for Asia. The Asian churches, thanks to the pioneering theological reflections of the FABC, articulated their own vision of the Asian churches as ‘communion of communities’ in accordance with the *communio* ecclesiology of Vatican II. Within its documents on the ecclesiology of Asian churches, the FABC touches on the role of the ordained ministry in the Church alongside the ministry of the laity.\(^{55}\) The attempt to develop this model and the

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\(^{55}\) See “Conclusions of the Asian Colloquium on Ministries in the Church”, (ACMC, 1977), *FAPA*.
insights it offers into Asian priesthood is in accord with the expressed desire, not only of Asian bishops but also of theologians and lay people to develop an indigenous theology so that the Gospel may truly take flesh in the rich historical cultures of Asia.\(^{56}\) The specific exigencies of the Asian situation call for a re-casting of the traditional ideas of the priesthood crafted in an entirely different cultural and historical setting. In a theology of Asian priesthood, the Asian realities of religions, cultures, and poverty shape the contours of the theology being proposed.

This paper has asserted that the prophetic model of the priesthood is the model which corresponds to the Asian Church’s understanding of its mission. Building on the reflections of the Asian bishops on the situation of Asia and the mode of the Church’s mission in Asia as well as on Rahner’s reflection on the prophetic character of the priesthood, this paper has articulated an understanding of the priest’s identity and mission in Asia, but has carried it further through a dialogue between Rahner’s theology of the priesthood and Asian theological reflection. Thus, it has proposed the model of the Asian priest as the ‘man of the dialogical, prophetic, and Spirit-borne Word’.

In preparing the seminary course curriculum, we have now incorporated the insights of the FABC on the three-fold realities of the multi-culturality, multi-religiosity, and poverty confronting the Asian churches and the Asian priest. We underline the consciousness regarding dialogue as the mode of mission in Asia, not only in missiology courses, but in every other theology subject. In the same way, we emphasize the prophetic dimension of the Asian priesthood, not only in the course of holy orders, but in every other theology subject. In that way, the various


theology subjects are not unrelated, compartmentalized treatises, but harmoniously related elements of one body of theological knowledge aimed at engaging the realities of the Asian churches in general and of each Asian individual for whom the Asian priest exists.
Bibliography


본 연구에서는 사제직의 본성에 대한 이해에 있어 라너가 취한 출발점이 삶의 자리에 기초한 사제직 모델, 즉 ‘말씀의 사람’으로서 아시아의 사제라는 모델을 구성하는데 어떻게 기여할 수 있는가를 고찰하였다. 아시아의 독특한 상황이 이 모델을 요청하기 때문에 아시아의 구체적 상황을 이해할 필요 또한 있다. 교회와 사제직에 대한 라너의 신학은 아시아에서의 사제직에 대한 이해를 진작시키는 데에 원동력을 제공할 수 있다.

지금까지 전교 및 예배의 모델은 강조되어 왔지만 예언자적 모델에 대해서는 소홀했었다. 그래서 본 연구는 ‘말씀의 사람’으로서의 사제 모델을 제안하고 있는 것이다. 사제는 대화적이고 예언적 그리고 성령으로 태어난 말씀의 사람이며, 이 사제직 모델은 다문화적, 다종교적이며 그리고 상당수의 사람들이 가난하다는 아시아의 고유한 환경에 매우 적합할 뿐 아니라 필요하기까지 한다. 사제직에 대한 이 새로운 이해를 받아들이고 이해한다면 이 모델은 말씀의 선교자, 성사의 거행자 그리고 하느님 백성의 목자가 될 미래의 사제 양성의 틀을 마련해줄 것이다.

주제어: 라너, 말씀, 아시아의 사제직, 예언적 사제직, 대화
The Priest as ‘Man of The Word’:
Rahner as Starting Point for a Theology of Priesthood In Asia

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This paper illustrates how a revised understanding of Rahner’s starting point in determining the nature of the priesthood leads to a context-based model of the priesthood: that the Asian priest is best described as ‘man of the Word’. The peculiar situation of Asia calls for this model. Hence, there is a need to understand, too, the concrete situation of Asia. Rahner’s theology of the Church and of the priesthood serves as the initial impetus for articulating an alternative understanding of the priesthood in Asia. The communion and the cultic models have already received due emphasis; but the prophetic model has been neglected thus far. This paper proposes the alternative model of the priest as ‘man of the Word’. He is a man of the dialogical, prophetic and Spirit-borne Word. In the multi-cultural, multi-religious and largely poor Asian setting, this model of the priesthood is what is most appropriate, even necessary. Once recognized and accepted, this revisionist understanding of the priesthood should shape the formation of future priests whose task it is to be preachers of the Word, ministers of the sacraments, and shepherd of God’s people.

Key Words: Rahner, Word, Asian priesthood, Prophetic priesthood, Dialogue