

TOWARDS ASIAN LITURGICAL INCULTURATION**INVESTIGATING THE RESOURCES IN THE DOCUMENTS OF THE FEDERATION
OF ASIAN BISHOPS' CONFERENCES (FABC) FOR DEVELOPING AN ASIAN
THEOLOGY OF LITURGICAL INCULTURATION**

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INTRODUCTION

The Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences (FABC) is a transnational body comprising 14 full member conferences: Bangladesh, India, Indonesia, Japan, Korea, Laos-Cambodia, Malaysia-Singapore-Brunei, Myanmar (Burma), Pakistan, Philippines, Sri Lanka, Taiwan (Republic of China), Thailand and Vietnam, as well as four associate members: Hong Kong, Macau, Mongolia and Nepal.¹ In June 1999, the FABC expects to admit six new associate members from the Confederation of Independent States (CIS): Siberia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan, bringing the total number of associate members to ten.² The foundation for the FABC was laid at an historic gathering of 180 Asian Catholic bishops at the Asian Catholic Bishops' Meeting in Manila during the visit of Pope Paul VI to East Asia and Southeast Asia in November 1970.³ The FABC con-

The following abbreviations are used in this essay:

AFER = African Ecclesial Review

BILA = Bishops' Institute for Lay Apostolate

BIMA = Bishops' Institute for Missionary Apostolate

BIRA = Bishops' Institute for Interreligious Affairs on the Theology of Dialogue

DOL = International Commission on English in the Liturgy, *Documents on the Liturgy 1963-1979: Conciliar, Papal and Curial Texts* (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 1982). All numerical references to the DOL refer to the document number followed by the paragraph number in the marginal column.

EAPR = East Asian Pastoral Review

FABC = Federation of Asian Catholic Bishops' Conferences

FABC Documents = Gaudencio B. Rosales & C.G. Arévalo, *For All The Peoples of Asia: Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences Documents From 1970-1991* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1992).

VJTR = Vidyajyoti Journal of Theological Reflection

¹ A brief overview of the history, impact and achievements of the FABC may be found in C.G. Arévalo, "The Time of Heirs," in *FABC Documents*, xv-xxii; and Felix Wilfred, *The Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences (FABC): Orientations, Challenges and Impact*, FABC Papers No. 69 (Hong Kong: FABC, 1995), also found in *FABC Documents*, xxiii-xxx and *Pro Mundi Vita Studies* (1989): 11-17.

² This was announced by Archbishop Leonardo Legaspi on 1 May 1998 at the Synod for Asia in Rome. Cf. "Synod Hears That Five Central Asian Republics And Siberia Are To Join FABC," *UCAN Press Report*, identifier #AS9981.0974, 4 May 1998. Also available from <http://www.ucanews.com/~ucasian/ur/as9981.htm>.

³ As the Indian theologian, Felix Wilfred observed: "Never before had Asian bishops come together to exchange experiences and to deliberate jointly on common questions and problems facing the continent. The meeting marked the beginning of a new consciousness of the many traditional links that united the various peoples of this region of the globe." Felix Wilfred, "The Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences (FABC): Orientation, Challenges and Impact," in *FABC Documents*, xxiii.

venes in Plenary Assembly, the highest body, with the participation of all presidents and delegates of member conferences once in every four years.⁴ To date, there have been six Plenary Assemblies: FABC I: Evangelization in Modern Day Asia (Taipei, Taiwan, 1974), FABC II: Prayer—the Life of the Church in Asia (Calcutta, India, 1978), FABC III: The Church—A Community of Faith in Asia (Bangkok, Thailand, 1982), FABC IV: The Vocation and Mission of the Laity in the Church and in the World of Asia (Tokyo, Japan, 1986), FABC V: Journeying Together Toward The Third Millennium (Bandung, Indonesia, 1990); and FABC VI: Christian Discipleship in Asia Today: Service to Life (Manila, Philippines, 1995).

In between these Plenary Assemblies, the FABC has sponsored colloquia on Ministries in the Church (Hong Kong, 1977), and the Church in Asia and Global Transformation (1997); an International Congress on Mission (Manila, 1979), a Consultation on Christian Presence among Muslims in Asia (Varanasi, 1983), an International Theological Colloquium entitled "Being Church in Asia: Journeying with the Spirit into Fuller Life" (Pattaya, Thailand, 1994), several Bishops' Institutes on Lay Apostolate (BILA), Missionary Apostolate (BIMA), Interreligious Affairs on the Theology of Dialogue (BIRA), Social Action (BISA) and Social Communication (BISCOM), as well as the Faith Encounters in Social Action (FEISA). Programs are developed and executed by seven specialized offices: Office of Evangelization (OE), Office of Social Communications (OSC), Office of Human Development (OHD), Office of Education and Student Chaplaincy (OESC), Office of Ecumenical and Interreligious Affairs (OEIA), Office of Laity (OL), and Office of Theological Concerns (OTC, formerly known as the Theological Advisory Commission). An Indian theologian, Felix Wilfred, has remarked that "the FABC has created horizontal communication between the bishops and the bishops' conferences; it has fostered a spirit of collegiality, communion and cooperation among them."⁵ At the same time, he acknowledged the fact that the Asian local churches, despite many similarities, are not homogeneous, and therefore "the FABC can speak only in general terms and cannot address itself specifically to concrete situations."⁶

⁴ In addition to the Plenary Assembly, which is the FABC's highest governing body, there are: (i) a Central Committee which comprises the presidents of bishops' conferences who meet every two years; and (ii) a Standing Committee which comprises five bishops selected by the Central Committee who meet once a year.

⁵ Felix Wilfred, "The Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences (FABC): Orientations, Challenges and Impact," in *FABC Documents*, xxix.

⁶ *Ibid.*, xxx.

With that caveat in mind, this essay seeks to investigate the possible resources in the various documents of the FABC⁷ for constructing an Asian theology of liturgical inculturation which is at the "service of life"⁸ in Asia. To begin with, one looks in vain in all the documents of the FABC for any significant discussion of liturgical inculturation beyond its many brief references and allusions. In fact, the eminent missiologist Stephen Bevans has noted that explicit reflections on the general theology of inculturation are "relatively sparse."⁹ According to Ladislav Nemet, this lack of any significant discussion is not surprising because it arises out of the preferred FABC approach to inculturation as "a more complex encounter between the Gospel and a local church in the *whole* Asian reality, made up of religions,

⁷ Many of the important documents of the FABC have been collected and published in a convenient one-volume collection: Gaudencio B. Rosales and C.G. Arévalo, *For All The Peoples of Asia: Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences Documents From 1970-1991* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1992). Essays and other articles which summarize and evaluate the important theological themes which are raised in these documents include the following (in chronological order): Peter C. Phan, "Human Development and Evangelization (The first to the sixth plenary assembly of the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences)," *Studia Missionalia* 47 (1998): 205-227; Felix Wilfred, et al, "Document: What the Spirit Says to the Churches. A Vademecum on the Pastoral and Theological Orientations of the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences (FABC)," *VJTR* 62 no.2 (1998): 124-133; Jacob Kavunkal, "Local Church in the FABC Statements," *Jeevadhara* 27 (1997): 260-271; Sebastian Painadath, "Theological Perspectives of FABC on Inter-religious Dialogue," *Jeevadhara* 27 (1997): 272-288; Stephen Bevans, "Inculturation of Theology in Asia (The Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences, 1970-1995)," *Studia Missionalia* 45 (1996): 1-23; Ladislav Nemet, "Inculturation in the FABC Documents," *EAPR* 31 (1994): 77-94; Petrus Maria Handoko, *Lay Ministries in the Mission and Ministry of the Church in Asia: A Critical Study of the FABC 1970-1991* (Rome: Gregorian University Press, 1993); Jacques Dupuis, *FABC Focus on the Church's Evangelising Mission in Asia Today*, FABC Papers No. 64 (Hong Kong: FABC, 1992), reprinted in *VJTR* 56 (1992): 449-468; FABC Theological Advisory Commission, *Theses on the Local Church: A Theological Reflection in the Asian Context*, FABC Papers No. 60 (Hong Kong: FABC, 1991), Antonio B. Lambino, *Dialogue, Discernment, Deeds: An Approach to Asian Challenges Today*, FABC Papers No. 56 (Hong Kong: FABC, 1990) and Felix Wilfred, "Fifth Plenary Assembly of FABC: An Interpretation of its Theological Orientation," *VJTR* 54 (1990): 583-592.

⁸ This "service to life" draws its inspiration from the theme of the Sixth Plenary Assembly of the FABC (Manila, 1995): "Christian Discipleship in Asia Today: Service to Life." A Report of the Sixth Plenary Assembly of the FABC may be found in the FABC Papers No. 74: *Christian Discipleship in Asia Today: Service to Life. A Report of the Sixth Plenary Assembly of the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences, 1995* (Hong Kong: FABC, 1995).

⁹ Cf. Stephen Bevans, "Inculturation of Theology in Asia (The Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences 1970-1995)," *Studia Missionalia* 45 (1996): 4, 8 and 17.

cultures, poverty and the poor" (*italics in the original*).¹⁰ Nemet summarized the approach of the FABC as follows:

The process of inculturation is no longer a question of a search for external adaptation to Asian reality and way of living, but a question of an existential nature: *being* and *living* in Asia and with Asians, becoming involved in all the aspects of life, collaborating with all the forces which are working actively to build up the Kingdom (*italics in the original*).¹¹

As such, the quest to construct an Asian theology of liturgical inculturation from the documents of the FABC would have to be grounded in the way the FABC has developed a rich and profound contextual theology based upon foundational themes which arise in the pluralistic and diverse Asian milieu. Such a quest requires a thorough analysis of these foundational themes in the six Final Statements of the FABC Plenary Assembly, the documents from the various Bishops' Institutes, the major FABC-sponsored colloquia and meetings, as well as the relevant documents which have been issued by the FABC Office of Theological Concerns. While all of these documents have different theological authority, taken together they could give a clearer view of the FABC's conception of a method and content of a contextual theology which emerges from, as well as speaks to the pluralistic and diverse Asian milieu. A threefold approach has been adopted for the purposes of this paper. First, this paper surveys the various documents of the FABC which have some explicit discussion on inculturation. Second, it focuses on the foundational theology. These foundational themes include a focus on the local church as the locus of theologizing, the building of the Kingdom of God in Asia, a triple dialogue of the Christian Gospel with Asian cultures, religions and the poor, and the overarching vision of harmony as the fruit of such dialogue. Finally, it evaluates the possibility of developing an Asian theology of liturgical inculturation from the foundational themes in both the FABC's theology of inculturation as well as its development of an Asian contextual theology.

¹⁰Ladislav Nemet, "Inculturation in the FABC Documents," *EAPR* 31 (1994): 94. Cf. Ladislav Nemet, *Inculturation in the Philippines: A Theological Study of the Question of Inculturation in the Documents of CBCP and Selected Filipino Theologians in the Light of Vatican II and the Documents of the FABC* (Th. D. Dissertation, Pontificia Universitas Gregoriana, 1994).

¹¹Nemet, "Inculturation in the FABC Documents," *EAPR* 31 (1994): 93.

A. INCULTURATION IN THE FABC DOCUMENTS: A BRIEF OVERVIEW

In the early documents of the FABC which were produced within the first 15 years after Vatican II, various terms like "adaptation," "indigenization," "incarnation" and "inculturation" were used interchangeably. It appears that the idea of discussing the relationship between the Christian Gospel and culture was still a novelty within the FABC at this stage, and there was no consistency in the terminology. For example, the first official reference to the term "inculturation" in the documents of the FABC is article 24 of the Final Statement dated 29 November 1970 of the Asian Bishops' Meeting with Pope Paul VI in Manila:

In the **inculturation** of the life and message of the Gospel in Asia, there have been hesitations and mistakes in the past, but we are more than ever convinced that dialogue with our fellow Asians whose commitment is to other faiths is increasingly important. We also urge on all a deep respect for the culture and traditions of our peoples, and express the hope that the catholicity of the Church, the root of our diversity in the oneness of faith, may serve to help Asians remain truly Asian, and yet become fully part of the modern world and the one family of mankind (*emphasis added*).¹²

Even at this early stage in the aftermath of the Second Vatican Council, the Asian Catholic bishops had linked the nascent neologism "inculturation" to interreligious dialogue and respect for Asian cultures and traditions as the expression of the catholicity of the Church. However, at the same time, the term "inculturation" was not used consistently by the Asian Catholic bishops. Thus, one notes in Resolution 13 of this meeting that the Asian Catholic bishops used terms such as "indigenous" and "incarnate" in respect of Asian cultures and traditions as well:

We also pledged ourselves to develop an **indigenous** theology and to do what we can so that the life and message of the Gospel may be ever more **incarnate** in the rich historic cultures of Asia, so that in the necessary process of modernization and development, Asian Christianity may help to promote all that is "authentically human in these cultures" (*emphasis added*).¹³

¹²FABC Documents, 6.

¹³FABC Documents, 9.

First FABC Plenary Assembly: Evangelization in Modern Day Asia (Taipei, 1974)

Subsequently, the FABC held its first Plenary Assembly in 1974 with the theme "Evangelization in Modern Day Asia" and issued two versions of its Final Statement.¹⁴ Article 26 of the *unabridged* Final Statement states:

Indigenization renders the local church truly present within the life and cultures of our peoples. Through it, all their human reality is assumed into the life of the Body of Christ, so that all of it may be purified and healed, perfected and fulfilled (*emphasis added*).¹⁵

Here, "indigenization" is perceived as a *unidirectional* process which "purifies and heals, perfects and fulfills"¹⁶ human cultures and life into the Body of Christ. In addition, "indigenization" is seen as a missiological technique for a more effective evangelization in a unidirectional process of purification, fulfillment and assumption of the Asian cultures and traditions. In contrast, article 20 in the *abridged* Final Statement has a slightly different emphasis without any mention of a unidirectional process of purification, fulfillment and purification of the Asian cultures:

These are the three elements of crucial importance in the task of preaching the Gospel in Asia, today:

- *Inculturation*, which **renders the local church truly present** within the life of our people.
- *Dialogue* with the great Asian religions, which brings them into contact with the Gospel, so that the seed of the Word in them may come to full flower.
- *Service of the poor*, uniting with them in their struggle for a more human world (*italics in the original, emphasis added*).¹⁷

¹⁴The *unabridged* Final Statement of *FABC I* is found in *FABC Documents*, 12-21. The *abridged* Final Statement of *FABC I* is found in *FABC Documents*, 21-25.

¹⁵*FABC Documents*, 16.

¹⁶This language is remarkably similar to article 17 of *Lumen Gentium*: "...whatever good is found sown in the minds and hearts of men or in the rites and customs of peoples, these not only are preserved from destruction, but are purified, raised up, and perfected for the glory of God..." In Austin Flannery, ed., *Vatican Council II: The Conciliar and Post Conciliar Documents* (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 1984), Vol. 1, pp. 368-9.

¹⁷*FABC Documents*, 23.

While article 20 of the *abridged* Final Statement is wider than article 26 of the *unabridged* Final Statement, it appears that they both use the terms "indigenization" and "inculturation" interchangeably and focus on the need to "render the local church truly present" in the Asian *Sitz-im-Leben*. At the same time, article 12 of the *unabridged* Final Statement uses the term "inculturation" in conjunction with "incarnation" and "indigenization":

The local church is a church **incarnate** in a people, a church **indigenous** and **inculturated**. And this means concretely a church in continuous, humble and loving dialogue with the living traditions, the cultures, the religions—in brief, with all the life-realities of the people whose midst it has sunk its root deeply and whose history and life it gladly makes its own.¹⁸

Second FABC Plenary Assembly: Prayer—the Life of the Church in Asia (Calcutta, 1978)

At the Second FABC Plenary Assembly in Calcutta in 1978,¹⁹ the FABC clarified its understanding of "inculturation" in articles 10 and 11 of its Final Statement:

10. The handing-on of these values²⁰ to present and future generations calls for **creative assimilation** and **"translation" into contemporary cultural expression**. For they must serve to create or restore "spaces of silence and worship" in the lives of believing men and women and of renewed communities within contemporary society.

11. This creative labor is, in a genuine sense, what the task of **inculturation** calls for in many of our countries. It must assume into the full Christian life of our peoples what is good, noble and living in our cultures and traditions—and thus in our hearts and

¹⁸*FABC Documents*, 14.

¹⁹The complete Final Statement of *FABC II* is found in *FABC Documents*, 27-48.

²⁰By "values," the FABC is referring to "spiritual values" such as "the discipline of ascetics, a deep and innate religious sense, filial piety and attachment to the family, the primacy of things of the spirit, an unrelenting search for God and hunger for the supernatural" (*FABC II*, article 7, in *FABC Documents*, 30). According to the FABC, "the present troubled moment of the history of our peoples, already referred to with some anxiety by our First Plenary Assembly, [cf. *FABC I*, arts. 4-6, 18-19] threatens precisely those meanings and values which form our precious spiritual heritage" (*FABC II*, article 8, in *FABC Documents*, 30).

minds. Thus, too, it will bring to fulfillment the future harvest of "those seeds which God's own hand has planted in our ancient cultures even before the Gospels were preached to our people" (*emphasis added*).²¹

This understanding of inculturation as a double movement of assimilation and translation marks a paradigm shift which points to a more profound understanding of the relationship between the Christian Gospel and culture. By calling for a *bidirectional* encounter of mutual dialogue, critique and enrichment between the Christian Gospel and culture, the FABC acknowledged that what is "good, noble and living" in the Asian religio-cultural *Sitz-im-Leben* could be assumed into Christian life. Realizing that this encounter could be opened to criticisms of syncretism, the FABC sought to allay and forestall such fears by stating that:

We are daily more convinced that the Spirit is leading us in our time, not to some dubious syncretism (which we all rightly reject), but to an integration — profound and organic in character — of all that is best in our traditional ways of prayer and worship, into the treasury of our Christian heritage. Thus is a fuller catholicity made possible in this age of the Church (*FABC II*, article 31).²²

International Congress on Mission (Manila, 1979)

Following the Second FABC Plenary Assembly, an International Congress on Mission was organized by the FABC in Manila in December 1979.²³ The Second Consensus Report (*CPW II*) of this Congress entitled "Local Asian Churches and the Tasks of Mission: Inculturation"²⁴ concluded that:

6. Inculturation is not mere adaptation of a ready-made Christianity into a given situation but rather **a creative embodiment of the Word in the local church**. This is the basic and fundamental process of inculturation.
7. Inculturation is **a dialogical encounter process** understood in its

²¹ *FABC Documents*, 31. Here, a reference is made to *Ad Gentes*, 18.

²² *FABC Documents*, 35.

²³ The complete report of the International Congress on Mission is found in *FABC Documents*, 125-163.

²⁴ The complete report of the inculturation workshop is found in *FABC Documents*, 138-141.

deepest meaning that comes from the salvific movement of the Triune God, because evangelization itself is above all a dialogue between the Gospel message and the given reality (FABC I, 12). It is a dialogue conducted in humility and mutual support to seek together with our brothers and sisters the fullness of Christ.

8. Inculturation is **a discovery of the seeds of the Word which lie hidden in the given cultures and living traditions** (cf. AG, 11). The mutual exchange of their discoveries among the local churches will lead to their enrichment as well as that of the universal Church.
9. As the Incarnation of the Son has been fulfilled in the Paschal Mystery, the inculturation process also involves an experience of death and resurrection. **The Church as the messenger of the Gospel on the one hand, the given cultures and traditions of the people on the other, both must be purified, healed and transformed by the saving power of the Gospel** (*italics in the original, emphasis added*).²⁵

Such an understanding of inculturation as a *dialogical* process of *mutual* enrichment and purification of both the Asian reality and the local church is certainly more profound than the earlier *unidirectional* approach of article 26 of the unabridged *FABC I*. Unfortunately, there was no significant discussion of liturgical inculturation in *CPW II* beyond the indirect references and allusions in article 19 of the *CPW II*:

- (a) the use of the Bible by the faithful should be encouraged and promoted;
- (b) catechesis should not be merely a handing down of a set of truths but an initiation to the Christian life leading to the development of a spirituality beyond the merely cultic level;
- (c) theologizing should be contextual, taking into consideration the ways of thinking and the sets of meanings and values that shape the lives of the people;
- (d) efforts should be exerted to foster the contemplative dimension of the Christian faith through a study of the holy writings of Asian cultures and encouragement and guidance in indigenous forms of prayer and asceticism should be provided; and
- (e) seasonal festivals and other community celebrations should be given a Christian meaning by interpreting them in the light of faith.²⁶

²⁵ *FABC Documents*, 138-9.

²⁶ *FABC Documents*, 140-141.

Consultation on Christian Presence Among Muslims in Asia (India, 1983)

The Message of the participants at the 1983 Consultation on Christian Presence among Muslims in Asia²⁷ also referred to inculturation in articles 31 and 32 as follows:

31. Inculturation like dialogue is not a tactic to convert people to one's faith. It lies at the very core of Christian incarnational faith, life and witness. It is the existential way a Christian lives and witnesses to his faith in the concrete religious, social and cultural milieu in which providence places him. Genuine inculturation takes place when Christians live out as individuals and as a community their double heritage of faith and country. This can come about only through inter-cultural and inter-religious dialogue.
32. In a predominantly Muslim cultural situation the Church tries to live, think, feel, speak and worship in ways which spring from faith and the religio-cultural heritage of the people. Only in such a community can those Muslims who come to visit or to join us feel at home. In our attempts at inculturation we should always keep in mind the legitimate sensibilities and religious feelings of the Muslims.

What is noteworthy here is the explicit condemnation of the understanding of inculturation as the instrumentalization of Asian religious and cultural traditions for the evangelization of the Christian Gospel in the Asian countries.

Bishops' Institute for Interreligious Affairs on the Theology of Dialogue (BIRA)

The FABC Bishops' Institute for Interreligious Affairs on the Theology of Dialogue (BIRA), which was set up in 1984, has organized an ongoing series of workshops on the nature and implications of interreligious dialogue in Asia. The Report of *BIRA IV/I* which was held in Samphran, Thailand, in October 1984²⁸ contains a section entitled "Dialogue and Inculturation:"

²⁷The complete Message is found in *FABC Documents*, 165-173.

²⁸The complete report of *BIRA IV/I* is found in *FABC Documents*, 247-250.

12. **We perceive dialogue as a necessary condition and instrument for *inculturation*.** To achieve inculturation, dialogue with and the study of religious traditions and the local cultures are expected to carry a preponderant weight. Two aspects seemed to deserve particular attention:
13. *Harmony* seems to constitute in a certain sense the intellectual and affective, religious and artistic, personal and societal soul of both persons and institutions in Asia. Hence the imperative of a study in depth of the theology of harmony in the Asian context leading to interreligious dialogue appeared clear to us.
14. *The Church is a "sign" and sacrament* (LG, 1). It seemed important to us to have an objective view of how the Church is viewed by different groups both within and outside the Church in Asia, and to evaluate how effectively Church fulfills, or does not fulfill, the aspirations and needs of the peoples of Asia, particularly the youth. From this respect the "spirituality" of the Church in the concrete Asian milieu should be seriously reflected upon, leading to both a change in personal and institutional life-style and a sincere commitment to the poor in the true spirit of service (*italics in the original, emphasis added*).²⁹

At this stage, the understanding of inculturation as dialogue is well entrenched in the FABC. Now, there is a deeper understanding of this dialogue in terms of a theology of harmony and church as a sacrament. The mutuality of dialogue is emphasized in the reference to a need for a harmony which calls for deep respect and openness for each other.

1991 FABC Theological Consultation (Hua Hin, Thailand)

The FABC Theological Consultation which met in Hua Hin, Thailand, in 1991 has given a christological and paschal orientation to inculturation in article 35 of its Conclusions.³⁰

The same conformity of the Church to her master is the decisive theological foundation for the inculturation of local Churches. The Son of God became man in Jesus in a particular place at a

²⁹FABC Documents, 249

³⁰The complete text of the Conclusions of the FABC Theological Consultation is found in FABC Documents, 335-347.

particular time of history, two thousand years ago in Palestine. Jesus was a Jew, deeply inserted in the culture of his people. The revelation he conveyed of the mystery of God as well as the way in which he accomplished his messianic and saving mission are steeped in the religious tradition of Israel, even while they fulfill it in an unforeseen manner. The mystery of the incarnation and the paschal mystery are at once the foundation and the model for the deep insertion of local Churches in the surrounding cultures, in all aspects of their life, celebration, witness and mission.³¹

Such a paschal orientation seems to suggest that the Asian local churches have to die to their preconceived notions about being church before they can rise again as churches which are at once catholic and local.

Theses on the Local Church (1991)

Finally, the FABC Office of Theological Concerns also discussed inculturation in relation to the broader picture of the identity of the Asian local churches in its 1991 document entitled *Theses on the Local Church: A Theological Reflection in the Asian Context*:³²

A local Church comes into existence and is built up through a deep and mutually enriching encounter between the Gospel and a people with its particular culture and tradition. In current theological and magisterial language, this is known as inculturation. Inculturation consists not only in the expression of the Gospel and the Christian faith through the cultural medium, but includes, as well, experiencing, understanding and appropriating them through the cultural resources of a people. As a result, the concrete shape of the local Church will be, on the one hand, conditioned by the culture, and on the other hand, the culture will be evangelized by the life and witness of the local Church (*Theses on the Local Church, Thesis 5*).³³

In other words, inculturation is the "attempt to contextualize the life and mission of the Church by bringing faith and culture into closer relation-

³¹ *FABC Documents*, 343.

³² FABC Papers No. 60 (Hong Kong: FABC, 1991), hereinafter referred to as *Theses on the Local Church*. Unless otherwise stated, all references to this document refer to the pagination in the monograph FABC Papers No. 60.

³³ *Theses on the Local Church*, 18.

ship" (*Theses on the Local Church*, Thesis 5, article 5.01).³⁴ It is grounded in an encounter³⁵ of "mutuality and reciprocity"³⁶ between the Christian Gospel and Asian cultures. On the one hand, there is necessity for the Christian Gospel to be "experienced and understood through the cultural resources of a people" because, "given the historicity of human existence in a determined context and tradition, it is inescapable that our perception of truth, understanding and experiencing of reality—including the Gospel and faith—be bound up with a particular culture" (*Theses on the Local Church*, Thesis 5, article 5.08).³⁷ On the other hand, there is also a need for the Christian Gospel in turn to effect a prophetic critique of the Asian cultures³⁸ because "Asian cultures are ambiguous, in the sense that, along with many lofty ideals, visions and values, they contain also oppressive and anti-human elements, such as caste, which goes against the equality of all human beings, discrimination towards women, etc." (*Theses on the Local Church*, Thesis 6, article 6.18).³⁹

While it may be argued that these statements are merely a summary of the various statements on inculturation which were made in the earlier documents of the FABC, at the same time the FABC Office of Theological Concerns has also made *three* significant contributions to the discussion on inculturation. First, it highlighted the challenges of multiculturalism and multiethnicism, and the need for inculturation to promote harmony:

[T]he encounter of the Gospel need not always be with one homogeneous culture. It could be with a diversity of ethnic, linguistic or cultural groups living in the same locality. In fact, in some countries in Asia we have in the same local Church the presence of various ethnic and cultural groups. This mosaic of various languages, cultures and peoples is a great enrichment for the local

³⁴*Theses on the Local Church*, 18.

³⁵Cf. article 5.02 of Thesis 5, in *Theses on the Local Church*, 19.

³⁶Cf. article 5.04 of Thesis 5, in *Theses on the Local Church*, 20.

³⁷*Theses on the Local Church*, 21.

³⁸According to the FABC Office of Theological Concerns, "it is not enough to say that culture conditions the shape of the local Church. In the same breath we should also add that the Gospel too acts on culture" (*Theses on the Local Church*, Thesis 5, article 5.12, in p. 22).

³⁹*Theses on the Local Church*, 25.

Church. The process of inculturation must take into account this concrete situation as well as the evolution and growth which these diverse human groups undergo as part of a region or nation. In situations of conflict of ethnic or cultural identities, the local Church can serve as an agent of unity and reconciliation. It will foster the communion of various cultures and traditions and thereby shape its own specific identity as a local Church. **In multiracial, multilinguistic and pluricultural situations the task of inculturation would involve also the promotion of harmony and communion** (*Theses on the Local Church*, Thesis 5, article 5.11).⁴⁰

Second, it also made a brief but highly significant reference to the need for liturgical inculturation:

A very important area of inculturation is the liturgy of the Christian community. Liturgy expresses the faith of the Church (*lex orandi lex credendi*). Liturgy must be the outcome of the faith-experience in a particular cultural environment. In turn, such liturgical experience should flower in a Christian life that is fully inculturated. Therefore, true liturgical inculturation of the Christian community cannot be done from without and introduced through an external and artificial process; it should spontaneously spring forth from the life of the faith lived fully in the context of the culture and the life-realities of the peoples. Nevertheless, given the long estrangement of the liturgical life of Asian local Churches from their cultural traditions, at this stage of transition to a fully inculturated ecclesial life, certain liturgical experiments and models are very legitimate and necessary in order to facilitate the process of inculturation by the whole community. These experiments, however, should not reflect only the concerns of a few experts, but rather should be in dialogue with the whole Christian community (*Theses on the Local Church*, Thesis 8, article 8.03).⁴¹

In addition, it also made the following suggestions in the section entitled "Pastoral Corollaries and Recommendations:"

We recommend more leeway be given in inculturating the liturgy. Responsible experiments in the liturgy with "control groups," ac-

⁴⁰*Theses on the Local Church*, 22.

⁴¹*Theses on the Local Church*, 28-9.

companied and fostered by due catechesis, should be encouraged so that new inculturated liturgical expressions may be discovered and developed. We urge the episcopal conferences eventually to approve and present for general use among their faithful some diverse inculturated liturgical expressions.⁴²

Third, the FABC Office of Theological Concerns pointed out that "[a] local Church realizes itself through a process of inculturation by following the dynamic of Incarnation, the Paschal Mystery and Pentecost" (*Theses on the Local Church*, Thesis 10),⁴³ thereby expanding the ambit of article 35 of the *1991 Theological Consultation*⁴⁴ to also include the role of the Spirit at Pentecost. The rationale for this tripartite "dynamic" of inculturation was stated as follows:

The miracle of the Pentecost (Acts 2) provides biblical grounding for the task of inculturation. Pentecost manifests the Church's unity in the midst of diversity which is Catholic fullness (*catholica unitas*). It grounds the authentic catholicity of the Church in the creative power of the Spirit. The Spirit alone enables the Church to be one amidst the diversity of peoples and races and amidst the multiplicity of human situations. For the mystery of the Church's catholicity, as it is actualized in history, is ultimately rooted in the presence and action of the Spirit. Human efforts to create a universal communion without God end up either in the monolithic uniformity of the Tower of Babel (Gen 11:1-9) or a chaotic heterogeneity and individualism to which history attests. Only in the power of the Word and the Spirit can a world of true human communion be built up on our planet, bringing to fulfillment and fruition all the richness of human cultures and their realizations (*Theses on the Local Church*, Thesis 10, article 10.10).⁴⁵

⁴²*Theses on the Local Church*, 55-56.

⁴³*Theses on the Local Church*, 33.

⁴⁴Article 35 of the *1991 Theological Consultation* states: "The mystery of the incarnation and the paschal mystery are at once the foundation and the model for the deep insertion of local Churches in the surrounding cultures, in all aspects of their life, celebration, witness and mission" (in *FABC Documents*, 343).

⁴⁵*Theses on the Local Church*, 35-6

B. THE ASIAN CONTEXTUAL THEOLOGY OF THE FABC: SOME IMPORTANT FOUNDATIONAL THEMES

(i) Theology of the Local Church

In any survey of all the documents of the FABC, the theme of the *local church*⁴⁶ stands out as the overarching element in these documents and the cornerstone of all theological reflections by the FABC. The First FABC Plenary Assembly explained the emphasis on the local church in the following terms: "The primary focus of our task of evangelization then, at this time in our history, is the building up of a truly local church" (*FABC I*, article 9).⁴⁷ The First FABC Plenary Assembly went on to define the "local church" as follows:

10. [T]he local church is the realization and the enfleshment of the Body of Christ **in a given people, a given place and time.**
11. It is not a community in isolation from other communities of the Church one and catholic. Rather it seeks communion with

⁴⁶In contemporary ecclesiology, the designation "local church" is the most commonly accepted translation of the designation *ecclesia particularis*. Cf. Robert Schreiter, *Constructing Local Theologies*, (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1985), 6. However, Henri De Lubac has argued for a distinction between these two terms, with "local church" being a designation in the socio-cultural order and "particular church" being a designation in the theological order. Cf. discussion in Henri de Lubac, *Motherhood of the Church* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1989), 282 (Quoted in Joseph Komonchak, "The Local Church and the Church Catholic: The Contemporary Theological Problematic," *Jurist* 52 (1992): 435, fn. 47). Responding to this distinction, the FABC Office of Theological Concerns summarizes succinctly the preference of the FABC for the term "local church" in the following statement:

Two reservations may be expressed regarding this explanation. First, the counterpoising of the terms "theological" and "socio-cultural" would suggest that socio-cultural particularity is not theologically significant—an assumption which has grave implications for ecclesiology, and which can be called into question. Secondly, using regularly the term "particular Church" for the diocese in contrast to "universal Church" might give the impression that the catholicity of the particular Church is located outside of it. Similarly, the expression "universal Church" as contrasted with "particular Church" might suggest a false idea of the universality of the Church as that of a multinational or international institution. In the light of the above, we have chosen to use regularly the expression *local Church* in this document, specifying where necessary to what particular realization we are referring" (*Theses on the Local Church*, 10-11).

⁴⁷*FABC Documents*, 14.

all of them. With them it professes the one faith, shares the one Spirit and the one sacramental life. In a special way it rejoices in its communion and filial oneness with the See of Peter, which presides over the universal Church in love.

12. The *local church* is a church **incarnate in a people**, a church indigenous and inculturated (*emphasis added*).⁴⁸

This understanding of the local church was reiterated in articles 25, 26 and 27 of the 1977 Asian Colloquium on Ministries in the Church⁴⁹ and articles 3.1, 3.2 and 8.1 of the Third FABC Plenary Assembly.⁵⁰ For a long time, the definition of a local church was rather fluid, ranging from the abstract to the specific. On the one hand, the FABC Office of Theological Concerns said that the local church is "the historical actualization of the mystery of God in Christ" (*Theses on the Local Church*, Thesis 1).⁵¹ It went on to explain that "the local church itself may be viewed as a fresh and creative reactualization and reinterpretation of the Gospel and faith. Such reinterpretation will not be a break with the Tradition, but will be in organic continuity with it, in as much as the past will be repossessed and reactivated [sic] in the present experience of a local Church" (*Theses on the Local Church*, Thesis 5, article 5.07).⁵² On the other hand, the Fifth FABC Plenary Assembly has defined the local church in specific terms: "it is the whole diocese, the parish, the Basic Ecclesial Community and other groups" (*FABC V*, article 3.3.2).⁵³

Beginning in the 1980s, the FABC began to explore the idea of church as communion: "the Church is at its deepest level a *communion (koinonia)* rooted in the life of the Trinity, and thus in its essential reality a sacrament (*mysterium et sacramentum*) of the loving self-communication of God and the graced response of redeemed mankind in faith, hope and love" (*FABC*

⁴⁸*FABC Documents*, 14.

⁴⁹*FABC Documents*, 72-73.

⁵⁰*FABC Documents*, 54, 56-57.

⁵¹*Theses on the Local Church*, 12.

⁵²*Theses on the Local Church*, 21.

⁵³*FABC Documents*, 281.

⁵⁴*FABC Documents*, 56.

III, article 7.1, *italics in the original*).⁵⁴ This communion is expressed in the Church as "a communion of committed disciples — be they clergy or laity — working for the liberation of Asia" (*FABC IV*, article 4.1.3).⁵⁵ Subsequently, the FABC coined the phrase "communion of communities":

The Church in Asia will have to be a *communion of communities*, where laity, Religious and clergy recognize and accept each other as sisters and brothers. They are called together by the word of God which, regarded as a quasi-sacramental presence of the Risen Lord, leads them to form small Christian communities (e.g., neighborhood groups, Basic Ecclesial Communities and "covenant" communities). There, they pray and share together the Gospel of Jesus, living it in their daily lives as they support one another and work together, united as they are "in one mind and heart" (*FABC V*, article 8.1.1).⁵⁶

Such a communion of communities is marked by three characteristics: it is participatory,⁵⁷ dialogical⁵⁸ and prophetic.⁵⁹

Local Churches And The Task Of Christian Mission In Asia

According to the FABC, the Asian local churches play a very important role in Christian mission. In this "new age of mission," evangelization can no longer be seen as a "one-way movement from the 'older churches' to

⁵⁵*FABC Documents*, 191.

⁵⁶*FABC Documents*, 287. The Sixth FABC Plenary Assembly also reiterated the need for the Churches of Asia to move towards "a new way of being Church, a Church that is committed to becoming 'a community of communities,' and a credible sign of liberation and salvation" (*FABC VI*, article 3).

⁵⁷"It is a *participatory* Church where the gifts that the Holy Spirit gives to all the faithful — lay, Religious, and cleric alike — are recognized and activated, so that the Church may be built up and its mission realized" (*FABC V*, article 8.1.2, in *FABC Documents*, 287, *italics in the original*).

⁵⁸"Built in the hearts of people, it is a Church that faithfully and lovingly *witnesses* to the Risen Lord and reaches out to people of other faiths and persuasions in a dialogue of life towards the integral liberation of all" (*FABC V*, article 8.1.3, in *FABC Documents*, 287-288, *italics in the original*).

⁵⁹"It is a leaven of transformation in this world and serves as a *prophetic sign* daring to pont beyond this world to the ineffable Kingdom that is yet fully to come" (*FABC V*, article 8.1.4, in *FABC Documents*, 288, *italics in the original*).

the 'younger churches,' from the churches of the old Christendom to the churches of the colonial lands," but rather, "every local church *is* and cannot be but missionary. Every local church is 'sent' by Christ and the Father to bring the Gospel to its surrounding milieu, and to bear it also into all the world. For every local church this is a *primary task*." (*International Congress on Mission*, article 14, *italics in original*).⁶⁰ Accordingly, "the continued building up of the local church [is] the focus of the task of evangelization today, with dialogue as its essential mode" (*International Congress on Mission*, article 19).⁶¹ Every local church has full autonomy in the way it chooses to respond to its missionary task: "since the context of the local church differs from another, every local church enjoys a legitimate autonomy, while maintaining the universal communion, to shape creatively its own life, structures and fulfill its God-given mission in its cultural environment" (*Theses on the Local Church*, Thesis 8, article 8.02).⁶²

At the heart of the task of mission of the Asian local churches is the dialogical encounter between the local churches and the Asian milieu with its triple reality of Asian poverty, cultures and religions:

[A] church in continuous, humble and loving dialogue with the living traditions, the cultures, the great religions — in brief, with all the life-realities of the people in whose midst it has sunk its roots deeply and whose history and life it gladly makes its own seeks to share in whatever truly belongs to that people: its meanings and its values, its aspirations, its thoughts and its language, its songs and its artistry. — Even its frailties and failings it assumes, so that they too may be healed. For so did God's Son assume the totality of our fallen human condition (save only for sin) so that He might make it truly His own, and redeem it in His paschal mystery (*FABC I*, 12).⁶³

This dialogical encounter has also led to the articulation of the nature of the Asian local churches in dialogical terms: "the Church *is called to be a community of dialogue*. This dialogical model is in fact a new way of being Church" (*BIRA IV/12*, article 48, *emphasis added*).⁶⁴ As a community

⁶⁰*FABC Documents*, 130.

⁶¹*FABC Documents*, 131.

⁶²*Theses on the Local Church*, 28.

⁶³*FABC Documents*, 14.

⁶⁴*FABC Documents*, 332.

of dialogue, the local church "is never centered on itself but on the coming true of God's dream for the world. It seeks not to exclude others but to be truly catholic in its concerns, in its appreciation of the gifts of others, and in its readiness to work with others for a world at once more human and more divine" (*BIRA IV/12*, article 49).⁶⁵ Such a dialogical encounter also leads to an ecclesiology which views the local church as a community which is called to service to the Asian peoples. As the Fifth FABC Plenary Assembly explained:

[T]he acting subject of mission is the *local church* living and acting in communion with the universal church. It is the local churches and communities which can discern and work (in dialogue with each other and with other persons of goodwill) the way the Gospel is best proclaimed, the Church set up, the values of God's Kingdom realized in their own place and time. **In fact, it is by responding to and serving the needs of the peoples of Asia that the different Christian communities become truly local Churches** (*FABC V*, article 3.3.1, *italics in the original, emphasis added*).⁶⁶

This call to service has been reiterated most powerfully by the Sixth FABC Plenary Assembly using the imagery of Jesus' foot-washing: "We join Jesus in serving life by washing the feet of our neighbours" (*FABC VI*, article 14.3).

In short, the ecclesiology of the FABC goes beyond the contextualization of the Christian Gospel, sacraments, and apostolic leadership by the local church, to include an ecclesiology which also calls for the local church to engage in a mutual dialogue with and service to the Asian peoples. Implicit in such an ecclesiology is the acknowledgement and acceptance of a fundamental ontological, soteriological and existential relationship between the Christian Gospel and the Asian peoples with their rich religious and cultural traditions, as well as their daily socio-economic challenges. Such a deep and profound ecclesiology enables the local church to move away from the *plantatio ecclesiae* mentality, i.e., away from "an institution planted in Asia" towards "an evangelizing community of Asia" (*Theological Consultation*, article 15).⁶⁷ Clearly, the FABC has great hopes that the local church

⁶⁵ *FABC Documents*, 333.

⁶⁶ *FABC Documents*, 281.

⁶⁷ *FABC Documents*, 338.

is able to be deeply inculturated in the Asia soil to the extent that it becomes not simply a church in Asia, but truly an Asian church (*BIRA IV/12*, article 50).⁶⁸ Otherwise, "if the Asian Churches do not discover their own identity, they will have no future" (*Asian Colloquium on Ministries in the Church*, article 14(ii)).⁶⁹

(ii) Theology of the Kingdom of God

Romanticized by exotic legends and travellers' fables for thousands of years, Asia, with two-thirds of the world's population continues to be shrouded in an aura of mystery with its diverse and pluralistic ancient cultures, languages, philosophies and religions. At the same time, it is facing a "swift and far-reaching transformation, a continent undergoing modernization and profound social change, along with secularization and the breakup of traditional societies" (*FABC I*, article 4).⁷⁰ The FABC has taken a positive approach to such diversity and pluralism in a manner which attempts to avoid a reductionistic exclusivism, because the grace and presence of God permeate all of creation in a mysterious manner. For example, it has given a place of reverence and honour to the diverse Asian religious traditions and acknowledged that God has drawn the Asian peoples to Godself through these religious traditions (*FABC I*, article 15).⁷¹ The FABC also pointed out that:

Christians believe that God's saving will is at work, in many different ways, in all religions. It has been recognized since the time of the apostolic Church, and stated clearly again by the Second Vatican Council, that **the Spirit of Christ is active outside the bounds of the visible Church. God's saving grace is not limited to members of the Church, but is offered to every person.** His grace may lead some to accept baptism and enter the Church, but it cannot be presumed that this must always be the case. His ways are mysterious and unfathomable, and no one can dictate the direction of His grace (*BIRA II*, article 12, *emphasis added*).⁷²

⁶⁸*FABC Documents*, 333.

⁶⁹*FABC Documents*, 70.

⁷⁰*FABC Documents*, 13.

⁷¹*FABC Documents*, 14. This position has been reiterated in *BIRA III*, article 2 (in *FABC Documents*, 119).

⁷²*FABC Documents*, 115.

Subsequently, the 1988 FABC All-Asia Conference on Evangelization explained that the "ultimate goal of all evangelization is the ushering in and establishment of God's Kingdom, namely God's rule in the hearts and minds of our people" (*BIMA IV*, article 5).⁷³ At the same time, "the core of Christ's proclamation is the Kingdom of God" (*BIRA IV/10*, article 6),⁷⁴ and the local church "is and instrument for the actualizaion of the Kingdom" (*BIRA IV/2*, article 8.2).⁷⁵ The FABC has explained the relationship between the Church and the Kingdom of God as follows:

[T]he Reign of God is the very reason for the being of the Church. The Church exists in and for the Kingdom. The Kingdom, God's gift and initiative, is already begun and is continually being realized, and made present through the Spirit. Where God is accepted, when the Gospel values are lived, where man is respected... there is the Kingdom. **It is far wider than the Church's boundaries.** This already present reality is oriented towards the final manifestation and full perfection of the Reign of God" (*BIRA IV/2*, article 8.1, *emphasis added*).⁷⁶

The local church is perceived as "constantly [moving] forward in mission, as it accompanies all humankind in its pilgrimage to the Kingdom of the Father" (FABC III, article 15).⁷⁷ In this respect, the FABC also pointed out that:

Christian communities in Asia must listen to the Spirit at work in the many communities of believers who live and experience their

⁷³ *FABC Documents*, 292.

⁷⁴ *FABC Documents*, 314.

⁷⁵ *FABC Documents*, 252.

⁷⁶ *FABC Documents*, 252. Similarly, article 30 of the 1991 *Theological Consultation* states:

[T]he Reign of God is a universal reality, extending far beyond the boundaries of the Church. It is the reality of salvation in Jesus Christ, in which Christians and others share together. It is the fundamental "mystery of unity" which unites us more deeply than differences in religious allegiance are able to keep us apart. Seen in this manner, a "regnocentric" approach to mission theology does not in any way threaten the Christo-centric perspective of our faith. On the contrary, "regno-centrism" calls for "christo-centrism," and vice-versa, for it is in Jesus Christ and through the Christ-event that God has established his Kingdom upon the earth and in human history (*FABC Documents*, 342).

⁷⁷ *FABC Documents*, 60.

own faith, who share and celebrate it in their own social, cultural and religious history, and that they (as communities of the Gospel) [sic] must accompany these others "in a common pilgrimage toward the ultimate goal, in relentless quest for the Absolute," and that thus they are to be "sensitively attuned to the work of the Spirit in the resounding symphony of Asian communion" (*FABC III*, article 8.2).⁷⁸

In addition, the 1991 FABC Theological Consultation concluded that "if the Church is the sacrament of the Kingdom, the reason is that she is the sacrament of Jesus Christ himself who is the mystery of salvation, to whom she is called to bear witness and whom she is called to announce. To be at the service of the Kingdom means for the Church to announce Jesus Christ" (*Theological Consultation*, article 33).⁷⁹

Hence, far from being an excuse for putting aside the task of evangelization, the paradigm of the Kingdom of God in Asia challenges the local churches of Asia to work "with the Christians of other Churches, together with our sisters and brothers of other faiths and with all people of goodwill, to make the Kingdom of God more visibly in Asia" (*FABC V*, article 2.3.9).⁸⁰ Elsewhere in the same document, the FABC pointed out that the ultimate goal of mission in Asia is "to proclaim the Good News of the Kingdom of God: to promote the values of the Kingdom such as "justice, peace, love, compassion, equality and brotherhood in these Asian realities. In short, it is to make the Kingdom of God a reality" (*FABC V*, article 1.7).⁸¹ The inclusivity of the Kingdom of God holds great appeal to the FABC, which "acknowledge[s] the Kingdom at work in socio-political situations and in the cultural and religious traditions of Asia" (*Theological Consultation*, article 39).⁸² For the Asian Catholic bishops, the inclusive nature of the Kingdom of God is able to encompass those people who are followers of Jesus Christ, his life and his teachings and those who continue to remain Hindus, Buddhists, Taoists or Muslims, and who are otherwise excluded from the dialectical setup of present ecclesial structures.⁸³

⁷⁸ *FABC Documents*, 57.

⁷⁹ *FABC Documents*, 342.

⁸⁰ *FABC Documents*, 279.

⁸¹ *FABC Documents*, 275.

⁸² *FABC Documents*, 344.

(iii) Theology of Dialogue

A Necessity for Dialogue in the Asian Milieu

In a keynote address at BIRA IV/12 in February 1991 the Archbishop Emeritus of Delhi, Angelo Fernandes, pointed out that peoples of other faiths in Asia were not to be regarded as "objects of Christian mission" but rather as "partners in the Asian community, where there must be mutual witness."⁸⁴ He explained that the dialogue between the Asian local churches and the peoples of Asia should be seen as a "manifestation of lived Christianity" with its own integrity which leads towards the Kingdom of God.⁸⁵ This understanding of dialogue expresses succinctly the FABC's profound understanding of dialogue as a "dialogue of life" which "involves a genuine experience and understanding," and which "demands working, not for them merely (in a paternalistic sense), but *with* them, to learn from them (for we have much to learn from them!) their real needs and aspirations, as they are enabled to identify and articulate these, and to strive for their fulfilment," (*FABC I*, article 20).⁸⁶ Such a dialogue leads to "*receptive pluralism*, that is, the many ways of responding to the promptings of the Holy Spirit must be continually in conversation with one another. A relationship of dynamic tension may open the way for mutual information, inspiration, support and correction" (*BIRA IV/3*, article 16).⁸⁷ Dialogue also "demands a total Christ-like self-emptying so that, led by the Spirit, we may be more effective instruments in building up God's Kingdom" (*BIRA IV/7*, article 16).⁸⁸

Underlying the call of the FABC for local churches to dialogue with the diverse and pluralistic Asian milieu is the question of whether

⁸³Felix Wilfred, "Inculturation As A Hermeneutical Question," *VJTR* 52 (1988): 429. As the Indian Catholic bishops explained succinctly in their Response to the Lineamenta for the 1998 Synod for Asia: "in union with the Father and the Spirit, Christ is indeed the source and cause of salvation for all peoples, but this fact does not exclude the possibility of God mysteriously employing other cooperating channels" (*EAPR* 35 no. 1 (1998): 121, article 5.1).

⁸⁴Archbishop Angelo Fernandes, "Dialogue in the Context of Asian Realities," *VJTR* 55 (1991): 548.

⁸⁵*Ibid.*

⁸⁶*FABC Documents*, 15.

⁸⁷*FABC Documents*, 261.

⁸⁸*FABC Documents*, 311.

there are soteriological elements in Asian religions and cultures. One notes that the Second Vatican Council had acknowledged the existence of soteriological elements in other religions and cultures⁸⁹ which were to be "uncovered,"⁹⁰ "set free,"⁹¹ as well as "purified, raised up and perfected"⁹² to explain the salvific message of the Christian Gospel to non-European peoples. However, by the 1970s such an instrumentalization approach to evangelization came to be perceived by many Asian and African churches to be pejorative, manipulative, paternalistic and a form of cultural imperialism or theological chauvinism.⁹³ This is because it attempted to appropriate, modify and reorient the religious, philosophical and cultural traditions of local communities as *ancillae theologiae* to propagate the Christian Gospel without regard to their integrity.⁹⁴ In

⁸⁹These soteriological elements are the "seeds of the Word" [*semina Verbi*] which lie hidden in other religious traditions (*Ad Gentes*, article 11, in Flannery, *Vatican Council II*, vol. 1, 825). According to the Council Fathers, "[t]he Catholic Church rejects nothing of what is true and holy in these religions. She has a high regard for the manner of life and conduct, the precepts and doctrines which, although differing in many ways from her own teaching, nevertheless often reflect a ray of the truth which enlightens all men." (*Nostra Aetate*, article 2, in Flannery, *Vatican Council II*, vol. 1, 739).

⁹⁰In this vein, the Council Fathers thought that all Christians "should be familiar with their national and religious traditions and uncover with gladness and respect those seeds of the Word which lie hidden among them" (*Ad Gentes*, article 11, in Flannery, *Vatican Council II*, vol. 1, 16).

⁹¹In the words of the Council Fathers, Christians are called, among other things, "to illuminate these riches with the light of the Gospel, set them free, and bring them once more under the dominion of God the saviour" (*Ad Gentes*, article 11, in Flannery, *Vatican Council II*, vol. 1, 825).

⁹²For the Council Fathers, "whatever good is found sown in the minds and hearts of men or in the rites and customs of peoples, these not only are preserved from destruction, but are purified, raised up and perfected for the glory of God..." (*Lumen Gentium*, article 17, in Flannery, *Vatican Council II*, vol. 1, 368-9).

⁹³Therefore it was not surprising that the bishops of Africa and Madagascar made the following statement at their 1974 synod: "the bishops of Africa and Madagascar consider as being completely out of date the so-called theology of adaptation. Instead they adopt the theology of incarnation." In *AFER* 17 no. 1 (1975): 58.

⁹⁴Cf., Felix Wilfred, "Inculturation as a Hermeneutical Question," *VJTR* 52 (1988): 423; Aloysius Pieris, "Western Models of Inculturation: How Far Are They Applicable in Non-Semitic Asia?" *EAPR* 22 (1985): 116-124; Aloysius Pieris, "Asia's non-semitic religions, and the mission of the local churches," in T. Dayanandan Francis & F.J. Balkasundaram, eds., *Asia Expressions of Christian Commitment: A Reader in Asian Theology* (Madras: Christian Literature Society, 1992), 35-57; John Mary Waliggo, "Making A Church That Is Truly Africa," in John Mary Waliggo, et. al, *Inculturation: Its Meaning and Urgency* (Kampala, Uganda: St. Paul Publications, 1986), 11-30; and G. Arbuckle, "Inculturation, Not Adaptation: Time To Change Terminology," *Worship* 60 (1986): 511-20.

particular, the instrumentalization approach presupposed a universal and unchanging *depositum fidei*. The values and thought forms of a particular community are used, not because they are inherently holy and graced, but as a convenient platform to present the unchanging *depositum fidei*. In this sense, the ontological integrity and the soteriological ethos of the local socio-cultural context are not being respected.⁹⁵ As the FABC Office of Theological Concerns has explained in no uncertain terms:

[I]t should be clear that culture, which has its basis in God's creation of man and nature, should be respected in its inner purpose and goal and should not be viewed simply as a means for something else. Nor should individual elements of culture be isolated from the organic whole. Hence, inculturation cannot be a process in which particular elements of a culture are selected to serve as a garb for the Gospel. This will be a very external and superficial kind of inculturation since it does not respect the inner soul of the culture and its organic character (*Theses on the Local Church*, Thesis 5, article 5.06).⁹⁶

In a similar vein, Archbishop Angelo Fernandes himself characterized such an approach in two words: "arrogance and ignorance."⁹⁷

It is therefore not surprising that in an effort to distance itself from this problem, the FABC has chosen the quintessential Asian trait of *dialogue* to undergird its fundamental missiological approach in Asia. At the same time, the FABC has to come to terms with the pervasiveness of Eurocentric ecclesial structures in Asia:

The Church remains foreign in its lifestyle, in its institutional structures, in its worship, in its western-trained leadership and in its theology. Christian rituals often remain formal, neither spontaneous nor particularly Asian. There is a gap between leaders and ordinary believers in the Church, *a fortiori* with members of other faiths. The Church has created a powerful priestly caste with little lay participation. Seminary formation often alienates the seminar-

⁹⁵ Aloysius Pieris, S.J., "Asia's non-semitic religions and the mission of the local Churches," in T. Dayanandan Francis & F.J. Balasundaram, eds., *Asia Expressions of Christian Commitment: A Reader in Asian Theology*, (Madras, India: Christian Literature Society, 1992), 43-44.

⁹⁶ *Theses on the Local Church*, 20

⁹⁷ Archbishop Angelo Fernandes, "Dialogue in the Context of Asian Realities," *VJTR* 55 (1991): 552.

ian from the people. Biblical, systematic and historical theology as taught are often unpastoral and unAsian (*Theological Consultation*, article 13).⁹⁸

Therefore, dialogue is also necessary to redress the damage which has been perpetrated by centuries of domination by colonial-era missionaries, resulting in a wariness of any attempt at evangelization which smacks of instrumentalization. Dialogue allows two different parties, with their different worldviews, to enter each other's perspectives on equal terms:

Dialogue brings to the local churches in Asia which are in danger of being ghettos an openness to and integration into the mainstream of their cultures. Christians grow in genuine love for their neighbors of other faiths, and the latter learn to love their Christian neighbors (*International Congress on Mission*, Consensus Paper III, article 4b).⁹⁹

This has led a Filipino theologian, Ladislav Nemet, to comment as follows:

Here, there is a shifting of the accent from collecting the seeds of the Word in religions and inserting them into the local church, to constructive collaboration and dialogue that can lead to the recognition of the deepest values and aspirations of Asian people, the clarification of meanings and symbols, and the ability to work hand-in-hand in realizing the common destiny of all the nations and people on the continent... Inculturation in such understanding does not mean extracting selected elements from different religions, whether purely philosophical notions or religious values, and the subsequent incorporation of these elements into Christianity; but it is **a dialogical process of collaboration and critical interaction for the realization of the fullness of life in Asia** (*emphasis added*).¹⁰⁰

A Triple Dialogue with Asian Cultures, Religions and the Poor

As early as 1970, the Asian Bishops' Meeting with Pope Paul VI passed a resolution to engage in "an open, sincere, and continuing dialogue with our brothers of other great religions of Asia, that we may learn from one

⁹⁸FABC Documents, 337.

⁹⁹FABC Documents, 142.

¹⁰⁰Ladislav Nemet, "Inculturation in the FABC Documents," *EAPR* 31 (1994): 86-87.

another how to enrich ourselves spiritually and how to work more effectively together on our common task of total human development" (*Asian Bishops' Meeting*, resolution 12).¹⁰¹ Four years later, the First FABC Plenary Assembly developed this nascent perspective on dialogue into a call for a *triple dialogue* with the Asian cultures, religions and the immense multitude of the poor (*FABC I*, articles 12 and 19).¹⁰² This call for a triple dialogue has been reemphasized at the Fifth FABC Plenary Assembly in Bandung: "mission includes: being with the people, responding to their needs, with sensitiveness to the presence of God in cultures and other religious traditions, and witnessing to the values of God's Kingdom through presence, solidarity, sharing and word. **Mission will mean a dialogue with Asia's poor, with its local cultures, and with other religious traditions**" (*FABC V*, article 3.1.2, *emphasis added*).¹⁰³ Such a dialogue is to be carried out as equal partners with the Asian cultures, religions and the poor:

We enter as equal partners into the dialogue in a mutuality of sharing and enrichment contributing to mutual growth. It excludes any sense of competition. Rather, it centers on each other's values. All the partners in dialogue participate in their own culture, history and time. Hence, dialogue brings the partners more deeply into their own cultures and bears the characteristics of inculturation (*BIRA I*, article 12).¹⁰⁴

In addition, it is hoped that such a "multifaceted dialogue among all human groups, in which the power of God is at work, will eventually lead the Asian peoples to a fuller communion with God and among themselves, which is the ultimate goal of all evangelization" (*Theological Consultation*, article 46).¹⁰⁵

Dialogue with Asian Cultures

The First FABC Plenary Assembly emphasized that the primary focus of the task of evangelization in Asia is the "building up of a truly local church" (*FABC I*, article 9)¹⁰⁶ which is "incarnate in a people, indigenous

¹⁰¹ *FABC Documents*, 9.

¹⁰² *FABC Documents*, 14-15.

¹⁰³ *FABC Documents*, 280.

¹⁰⁴ *FABC Documents*, 111.

¹⁰⁵ *FABC Documents*, 345.

¹⁰⁶ *FABC Documents*, 14.

and inculturated," as well as "a church in continuous, humble and loving dialogue with the living traditions, the cultures, the religions" (*FABC I*, article 12).¹⁰⁷ According to the Second FABC Plenary Assembly, the local churches have to be inserted in the context of the cultures of the Asian peoples today (*FABC II*, article 12).¹⁰⁸ The rationale for local churches engaging in a dialogue with cultures has been explained by the FABC Office of Theological Concerns as follows:

Each culture not only provides us with a new approach to the human, but also opens up new avenues for the understanding of the Gospel and its riches. When the Gospel encounters the tradition, experience and culture of a people, its hitherto undiscovered virtualities will surface; riches and meanings as yet hidden will emerge into the light. That is why it is so important to reinterpret the Gospel through the cultural resources of every people; this reinterpretation truly enriches the Christian tradition.¹⁰⁹

By living within their particular context according to the "sense of faith aroused and sustained by the Spirit of truth" (LG 12); the faithful will learn to express their faith not only in fidelity to the Apostolic Tradition, but also in response to their cultural situations. This response is the responsibility of the whole community, which discerns God's Word and Spirit in its culture and history.¹¹⁰

This dialogical encounter "facilitates the incarnation of the Good News in the various cultures, creating new ways of life, action, worship and reflection, so as to help the growth of the local Churches and to realize the catholicity and fullness of the mystery of Christ" (*BIRA III*, article 5).¹¹¹

It has been pointed out that the FABC has not articulated any comprehensive definition of culture other than a few scattered indirect references in its documents.¹¹² For example, the First FABC Plenary Assembly made an

¹⁰⁷ *FABC Documents*, 14.

¹⁰⁸ *FABC Documents*, 31.

¹⁰⁹ *Theses on the Local Church*, 20-21.

¹¹⁰ *Theses on the Local Church*, 28.

¹¹¹ *FABC Documents*, 120.

¹¹² For another discussion on this point, see also Ladislav Nemet, "Inculturation in the FABC Documents," *EAPR* 31 (1194): 87-88.

indirect allusion to an empirical understanding of culture as a people's "meanings and its values, its aspiration, its thoughts and its language, its song and its artistry" (FABC I, article 12).¹¹³ As far as the FABC Office of Theological Concerns is concerned, "culture is ultimately the concrete way of being human among a determined people, group or nation,"¹¹⁴ which is best understood from four perspectives: (i) culture as cultivation of the human spirit, (ii) empirical understanding of culture, (iii) symbolic dimension of culture and (iv) understanding society itself as a cultural reality.¹¹⁵ On a different note, the International Congress on Mission alluded to the rise of an "urban-industrial universal culture" which falls in the cracks of traditional Asian cultures (*International Congress on Mission*, Consensus Paper VIII, article 29).¹¹⁶ Such a sociological understanding of cultures and subcultures was also adopted by the FABC Office of Theological Concerns, when it highlighted the existence of "two types of culture: that of the politically and economically powerful and that of the weak and powerless" (*Theses on the Local Church*, Thesis 7, article 7.05).¹¹⁷ Finally, the FABC Office of Theological Concerns has also suggested a theological understanding of culture:

For culture, as the product of the human spirit acting on nature and creating various instruments, institutions, social relationships, ways of living, etc., forms part of God's design of creation. Besides, the culture of every people has a vocation: to contribute, each one in a unique way, to the life and well-being of the one human family. Every culture manifests in a singular way the richness of the humanum" (*Theses on the Local Church*, Thesis 5, article 5.05).¹¹⁸

Dialogue with Asian Religions

The importance of engaging in a dialogue with the Asian religions was recognized as early as 1970. Resolution no. 12 of the Asian Bishops' Meeting made this very clear: "We pledge ourselves to an open, sincere, and continuing dialogue with our brothers of other great religions of Asia, that we may learn from one another how to enrich ourselves spiritually and how

¹¹³ *FABC Documents*, 14.

¹¹⁴ *Theses on the Local Church*, 9.

¹¹⁵ Cf. discussion in *Theses on the Local Church*, 8-9.

¹¹⁶ *FABC Documents*, 160.

¹¹⁷ *Theses on the Local Church*, 27.

¹¹⁸ *Theses on the Local Church*, 20.

to work more effectively together on our common task of total human development.¹¹⁹ It has been suggested that inter-religious dialogue is not merely an activity of Christians in Asia, but rather "it enters into the very definition of what it is to be a Christian in Asia. To be Christian is not an abstraction, but a contextual reality."¹²⁰ Hence, the First FABC Plenary Assembly has emphasized that it is only through dialogue that the Asian local churches are able to give due reverence and honour to these Asian religions and acknowledge that God has drawn these religions to Godself (*FABC I*, article 15).¹²¹ In giving a privileged place to the religious traditions of the Asian peoples, the First FABC Plenary Assembly pointed out that:

In this dialogue we accept them [=the great religious traditions] as significant and positive elements in the economy of God's design of salvation. In them we recognize and respect profound spiritual and ethical meanings and values. Over many centuries they have been the treasuries of the religious experience of our ancestors, from which our contemporaries do not cease to draw light and strength. They have been (and continue to be) the authentic expression of the noblest longings of their hearts, and the home of their contemplation and prayer. They have helped to give shape to the histories and cultures of our nations (*FABC I*, article 14).¹²²

Only in dialogue with these religions can we discover in them the seeds of the Word of God (*Ad Gentes*, chapter I, 9). This dialogue will allow us to touch the expression and the reality of our peoples' deepest selves, and enable us to find authentic ways of living and expressing our own Christian faith. It will reveal to us also many riches of our own faith which we perhaps would not have perceived (*FABC I*, article 16).¹²³

Elsewhere, the FABC has affirmed that "it is an inescapable truth that God's Spirit is at work in all religious traditions" (*BIRA IV/12*, article 7)¹²⁴ because "it has been recognized since the time of the apostolic Church, and

¹¹⁹ *FABC Documents*, 120.

¹²⁰ Felix Wilfred, "Inculturation As A Hermeneutical Question," *VJTR* 52 (1988): 428.

¹²¹ *FABC Documents*, 14.

¹²² *FABC Documents*, 14.

¹²³ *FABC Documents*, 14-15.

¹²⁴ *FABC Documents*, 326.

stated clearly again by the Second Vatican Council, that the Spirit of Christ is active outside the bounds of the visible Church." (*BIRA II* article 12).¹²⁵ Hence, interreligious dialogue "is based on the firm belief that the Holy Spirit is operative in other religions as well" (*BIRA IV/2*, article 8.5),¹²⁶ because the religious traditions of Asia "are expressions of the presence of God's Word and of the universal action of his Spirit in them" (*Theological Consultation*, article 43).¹²⁷ In particular, the "great religions of Asia with their respective creeds, cults and codes reveal to us diverse ways of responding to God whose Spirit is active in all peoples and cultures" (*BIRA IV/7*, article 12).¹²⁸ For the FABC, it is "the same spirit, who has been active in the incarnation, life, death and resurrection of Jesus and in the Church, who was active among all peoples before the Incarnation and is active among the nations, religions and peoples of Asia today" (*BIRA IV/3*, article 6).¹²⁹

Hence, "interreligious dialogue flows from the nature of the Church, a community in pilgrimage journeying with peoples of other faiths towards the Kingdom that is to come" (*BIRA IV/4*, article 2).¹³⁰ In particular, "religious dialogue is not just a substitute for or a mere preliminary to the proclamation of Christ, but **should be the ideal form of evangelization**, where in humility and mutual support we seek together with our brothers and sisters that fullness of Christ which is God's plan for the whole of creation, in its entirety [sic] and its great and wonderful diversity" (*BIMA I*, article 10, *emphasis added*).¹³¹ As the 1995 FABC Hindu-Christian Seminar explained succinctly:

Beyond the extremes of inclusivism and exclusivism, pluralism is accepted in resonance with the constitutive plurality of reality. Religions, as they are manifested in history, are complementary perceptions of the ineffable divine mystery, the God-beyond-God. All religions are visions of the divine mystery. No particular

¹²⁵ *FABC Documents*, 115.

¹²⁶ *FABC Documents*, 253.

¹²⁷ *FABC Documents*, 344.

¹²⁸ *FABC Documents*, 310.

¹²⁹ *FABC Documents*, 259.

¹³⁰ *FABC Documents*, 300.

¹³¹ *FABC Documents*, 94.

religion can raise the claim of being the norm for all others. We religious believers are co-pilgrims, who share intimate spiritual experiences and reflections with one another with concern and compassion, with genuine openness to truth and the freedom of spiritual seekers (*sadhakas*). In this process we become increasingly sensitive to human suffering and collaborate in promoting justice, peace and ecological wholeness... We walk together on the path of dialogue and service towards harmony as sisters and brothers bound in one Love and drawn by one Divine Truth (*BIRA V/3*, article 6).¹³²

Dialogue with the Poor

The First FABC Plenary Assembly explained that the local churches have to participate in a "dialogue of life" with the poor,¹³³ which involves a genuine experience and understanding of the poverty, deprivation and oppression of many of the Asian peoples. (*FABC I*, article 20).¹³⁴ This gives rise to a genuine commitment and effort to bring about social justice in the Asian societies (*FABC I*, article 21). In so doing, the FABC affirmed the Statement of the 1971 Special Synod of Bishops on Justice in the World¹³⁵ and pointed out that "evangelization and the promotion of true human development and liberation, are not only opposed, but make up today the integral preaching of the Gospel, especially in Asia" (*FABC I*, article 23).¹³⁶ Hence, the poor is seen as "ultimately the privileged community and agents of salvation (as has always been the case in the history of salvation)" (*International Congress on Mission*, article 4).¹³⁷ The Sixth FABC Plenary As-

¹³²Quoted in *Jeevadhara* 27 (1997): 288.

¹³³Here, the term "poor" is understood in a dialectical sense:

Poor, not in human values, qualities, nor in human potential. But poor, in that they are deprived of access to material goods and resources which they need to create a truly human life for themselves. Deprived, because they live under oppression, that is, under social, economic and political structures which have injustice built into them (*FABC I*, article 19, in *FABC Documents*, 15).

¹³⁴*FABC Documents*, 15.

¹³⁵"Actions in behalf of justice and participation in the transformation of the world fully appear to us as a constitutive dimension of preaching of the Gospel..., for we believe that this, in our time, is part and parcel of 'preaching the Good News to the poor'" (*FABC I*, article 22. In *FABC Documents*, 15-16).

¹³⁶*FABC Documents*, 16.

¹³⁷*FABC Documents*, 144.

sembly explains succinctly:

Like Jesus, we 'have to pitch our tents' in the midst of all humanity building a better world, but especially among the suffering and the poor, the marginalized and the downtrodden of Asia. In profound 'solidarity with suffering humanity' led by the spirit of life, we need to immerse ourselves in Asia's cultures of poverty and deprivation, from whose depths the aspirations for love and life are most poignant and compelling. Serving life demands communion with every woman and man seeking and struggling for life, in the way of Jesus' solidarity with humanity (*FABC VI*, article 14.2).

Dialogue and the Task of Christian Mission in Asia

The FABC has emphasized that dialogue is "an integral part of evangelization" (*BIMA II*, article 14),¹³⁸ "intrinsic to the very life of the Church," (*BIRA I*, article 9),¹³⁹ an "essential mode of all evangelization" (*Message of the 1979 International Congress on Mission*, article 19),¹⁴⁰ and "a true expression of the Church's evangelization action" (*BIMA II*, article 14).¹⁴¹ At the same time, the FABC has also explained that dialogue *does not preclude* the need for the proclamation of the Christian Gospel: in fact there could be a moment when "we shall not be timid when God opens the door for us to *proclaim* explicitly the Lord Jesus Christ as the Savior and the answer to the fundamental questions of human existence" (*FABC V*, article 4.3, *italics in the original*).¹⁴²

However, a distinctively Asian approach of proclamation which is sensitive to the Asian *sitz-im-leben* is needed:

Mission may find its greatest urgency in Asia; it also finds in our continent a distinctive mode. We affirm, together with others, that "the proclamation of Jesus Christ is the center and primary element of evangelization" (*Statement of the FABC All-Asia Conference on Evangelization*, Suwon, South Korea, August 24-31,

¹³⁸ *FABC Documents*, 100.

¹³⁹ *FABC Documents*, 111.

¹⁴⁰ *FABC Documents*, 131.

¹⁴¹ *FABC Documents*, 101.

¹⁴² *FABC Documents*, 282.

1988).¹⁴³ **But the proclamation of Jesus Christ in Asia means, first of all, the witness of Christians and of Christian communities to the values of the Kingdom of God, a proclamation through Christlike deeds.** For Christians in Asia, to proclaim Christ means above all to live like him, in the midst of our neighbors of other faiths and persuasions, and to do his deeds by the power of his grace. **Proclamation through dialogue and deeds – this is the first call to the Churches in Asia**" (*FABC V*, art 4.1, *italics in the original, emphasis added*).¹⁴⁴

Clearly, the FABC does not exclude the explicit verbal proclamation of the Christian Gospel as mission, but it recognizes that context plays a very important role in determining which is the best approach to mission. Perhaps, one of the inherent dangers of proclamation is that it may result in a condescending, triumphalistic and disrespectful unidirectional *monologue* which tramples on the sensitivities of the non-Christians. In addition, proclamation comes across as being *wordy*, i.e., there is an abundance of words in preaching and proclamation which aims to prove or emphasize particular truth claims. It has been pointed out that in the Asian mindset, "truth does not impose itself, but rather *attracts* everyone and everything to itself by its beauty, splendour and fascination"¹⁴⁵ – which is what dialogue is all about. In short, proclamation without dialogue runs the risk of aggressive proselytism with its highly negative connotations.

Through dialogue, not only the Asian socio-religious realities may be enriched by Christianity, in turn Christianity too may be enriched by the Asian socio-religious realities. Otherwise, a one-way monologue opens Christianity to the charge of instrumentalization, i.e., appropriating the soteriological elements in Asian socio-religious realities for Christian use, without respecting their integrity within their Asian socio-religious matrix. Corollary to this view is the observation of the Indian theologian, Felix Wilfred:

¹⁴³The relevant paragraphs state: "While we are aware and sensitive of the fact that evangelization is a complex reality and has many essential aspects, ... we affirm that there can never be true evangelization without the proclamation of Jesus Christ" (*BIMA IV*, article 5, in *FABC Documents*, 292). "The proclamation of Jesus Christ is the center and the primary element of evangelization without which all other elements will lose their cohesion and validity. In the same way, evangelization will gather together the believing community, the Church, through faith and baptism" (*BIMA IV*, article 6, in *FABC Documents*, 292).

¹⁴⁴*FABC Documents*, 281-282.

¹⁴⁵Felix Wilfred, "Inculturation As A Hermeneutical Question," *VJTR* 52 (1988): 427.

Any work of mission which does not recognize what God has been doing with a people, with a country and continent and with their history, is simply and purely arrogance vis-à-vis God's own bounteous gifts... Triumphalism and exclusivism of any kind are diametrically opposed to spirituality. They fail to recognize and appreciate the thousand flowers God has let grow, flourish and blossom in the garden of the world; they fail to acknowledge in practice the presence and working of the Spirit in the life and history of peoples.¹⁴⁶

As for the relationship between dialogue, proclamation and conversion, the FABC has pointed out, rightfully, that "dialogue and proclamation are complementary. Sincere and authentic dialogue does not have for its objective the conversion of the other. For conversion depends solely on God's internal call and the person's free decision" (*BIRA III*, article 4).¹⁴⁷ Elsewhere, the FABC has reiterated that "dialogue aimed at 'converting' the other to one's own religious faith and tradition is dishonest and unethical; it is not the way of harmony" (*BIRA V/3*, article 7).

(iv) Theology Of Harmony

Harmony, Cosmic Unity, Trinity and Communion (Koinonia)

The FABC's vision of harmony is derived from a firm belief that "there is an Asian approach to reality, a world-view, wherein the whole is the sum-total of the web of relationships and interaction of the various parts with each other, in a word, *harmony*, a word which resonates with all Asian cultures" (*Asian Christian Perspectives on Harmony*, art. 6).¹⁴⁸ In turn, such a vision of harmony is rooted in the foundations of a cosmic harmony and unity within the Asian religio-cultural traditions:

When we look into our traditional cultures and heritages, we note that they are inspired by a vision of unity. The universe is perceived as an organic whole with the web of relations knitting together each and every part of it. The nature and the human are

¹⁴⁶Felix Wilfred, "Fifth Plenary Assembly of FABC: An Interpretation of its Theological Orientations," *VJTR* 54 (1990): 590.

¹⁴⁷*FABC Documents*, 120.

¹⁴⁸FABC Papers No. 75 (FABC: Hong Kong, 1996), 66. Hereinafter referred to as *Asian Christian Perspectives on Harmony*. Unless otherwise stated, all references to this document refer to the pagination in the monograph FABC Papers No. 75.

not viewed as antagonistic to each other, but as chords in a universal symphony. The whole reality is maintained in unity through a universal rhyme (*Rta; Tao*). This unity of reality is reflected in the human person in that his senses, consciousness and spirit are organically interlinked, one flowing into the other. When this unity and harmony are manifested in inter-human relationship of justice, order and righteousness, it is considered *dharmic* (*dharma, dhamma*). Sensitivity in human relationships, close ties of love and cooperation in families are highly valued in our cultures. Furthermore, traditionally, the various groups in Asian societies were held together harmoniously through forces of syncretism, spirit of tolerance, mysticism and through messianic movements (*BIRA IV/11*, article 6).¹⁴⁹

In the rich diversity of ancient Asian cultures and faiths is a vision of unity in diversity, a communion of life among diverse peoples... Ours is a vision of holistic life, life that is achieved and entrusted to every person and every community of persons, regardless of gender, creed or culture, class or color... At the heart of our vision of life is the Asian reverential sense of mystery and of the sacred, a spirituality that regards life as sacred and discovers the Transcendent and its gifts even in mundane affairs, in tragedy or victory, in brokenness or wholeness. This deep interiority draws people to experience harmony and inner peace and infuses ethics into all of creation (*FABC VI*, article 10).¹⁵⁰

At the same time, such a vision of harmony is also divinely inspired, because "God is the source and summit of all harmony. He is the foundation and the fulfillment of it" (*Asian Christian Perspectives on Harmony*, article 5.1.1.4).¹⁵¹ Therefore, the theology of harmony of the FABC¹⁵² draws its

¹⁴⁹ *FABC Documents*, 319.

¹⁵⁰ This statement builds on the earlier statement by the Fourth FABC Plenary Assembly: "Asian religious cultures see human beings, society and the whole universe as intimately related and interdependent. Fragmentation and division contradict this vision" (*FABC IV*, article 3.1.10, in *FABC Documents*, 181).

¹⁵¹ *Asian Christian Perspectives on Harmony*, 56.

¹⁵² In any discussion of an Asian theology of harmony, one should bear in mind the following caveat from the FABC Office of Theological Concerns:

A theology of harmony cannot be formed solely within the categories of a traditional Christian theology, by reading Christian revelation and applying its

strength from the harmonious unity of the Trinity: "The marvelous mystery of unity and communion of the Trinity is a model as well as a powerful challenge in our efforts to create harmony in all areas of life" (*BIRA IV/11*, article 7).¹⁵³ The Trinitarian dimensions of harmony was further elaborated by the FABC Office of Theological Concerns in the following manner: "the harmony of the universe finds its origin in the one Creator God, and human harmony should flow from the communion of Father and Son in the Spirit, and ought to be continually nourished by the "circumincession" (*perichoresis*) in divine life" (*Asian Christian Perspectives on Harmony*, article 4.11.3).¹⁵⁴

In addition, Jesus Christ is also seen as "the person of harmony"¹⁵⁵ and the "sacrament of the new harmony"¹⁵⁶ who "was sent to reconcile and reestablish harmony" through "the proclamation of the values of the Reign of God and his Paschal Mystery of life through death" (*Asian Christian Perspectives on Harmony*, article 5.2.5).¹⁵⁷ The divine plan of salvation calls for the healing of the pain and division caused by sin and evil, and a return once more to the universal harmony through the building of the Kingdom of God which embodies this unity and harmony on earth (*BIRA IV/11*, articles 8-11).¹⁵⁸ In this respect, the Kingdom of God is viewed as the expression of a theology of harmony: "the Kingdom of God is the core of Christ's proclamation," which "provides the most action-oriented model for fostering harmony within society" (*BIRA IV/10*, article 6).¹⁵⁹ Hence, the

principles to the conflictual situation in Asia. It has to be a reading and reflection of the realities themselves, along with other religious and cultural revelations... In short, *a theology of harmony in Asia can only be a contextual theology*, done from within the context of Asia, and either from within such contexts or in deep solidarity with the conflictual situations of Asia. At the same time, *it has to be done only in communion with the rich religious and cultural resources of the people experiencing those situations* (*Asian Christian Perspectives on Harmony*, article 5.2, p.60, *emphasis added*).

¹⁵³ *FABC Documents*, 319.

¹⁵⁴ *Asian Christian Perspectives on Harmony*, 53.

¹⁵⁵ *Being Church in Asia: Journeying with the Spirit into Fuller Life*, Final Statement of the First FABC International Theological Colloquium, article 28. In *VJTR* 58 (1994): 384.

¹⁵⁶ *Asian Christian Perspectives on Harmony*, article 5.2.5, p. 62.

¹⁵⁷ *Asian Christian Perspectives on Harmony*, 62.

¹⁵⁸ *FABC Documents*, 319-320.

¹⁵⁹ *FABC Documents*, 314.

"values of the Kingdom—love, mercy, forgiveness, justice, compassion, unity, peace, as proclaimed by Jesus Christ—are the seeds of the new harmony inaugurated by him" (*Asian Christian Perspectives on Harmony*, article 5.2.6.).¹⁶⁰

Such Trinitarian and cosmic perspectives of harmony give rise to two important theological implications. First, it leads to a vision of harmony which "acknowledges the sacredness of nature and invites us to live in harmony with nature and to foster its growth" (*BIRA IV/12*, article 33).¹⁶¹ This vision of harmony is inspired by a global and universal concern which is "geared ultimately to the well-being and peace of the universe and humankind" (*BIRA IV/11*, article 21). Such a vision cries out for harmony in the created world among humans, as well as between humans and their natural environment:

We envision a life with integrity and dignity, a life of compassion for the multitudes, especially for the poor and the needy. It is a life of solidarity with every form of life and sensitive care for all the earth. It is thus a life that unites us Asians among ourselves and with the whole of creation into one community of life (*FABC VI*, article 10).

The ecological question or the harmony and balance of the natural environment in relation to the life of man is a fundamental one. The destiny of humankind is inextricably bound up with the way they cultivate the earth and share its resources. Harmony and peace call for respect for the earth. She is the mother of whose dust we are made and to whose womb we shall all return. The usurpation of the fruit of the earth by some and deprivation of others of the same results in the rupture of harmony among peoples (*BIRA IV/11*, article 13).¹⁶²

Believers of all faiths have an urgent responsibility to open themselves once again to the voice of nature and its mystery, to return to their primordial attachment to and respect for nature, to grow in a creation-centered spirituality. Believers in any place are called to come together in silence and love before creation, to accept the God-given order and harmony of nature, to counteract the forces

¹⁶⁰ *Asian Christian Perspectives on Harmony*, 63.

¹⁶¹ *FABC Documents*, 330.

¹⁶² *FABC Documents*, 320.

of exploitation and ruin. Harmony with nature brings harmony of hearts and harmony in human relationships (*BIRA IV/12*, article 34).¹⁶³

In the same vein, the FABC Office of Theological Concerns hit the nail squarely on its head when it said that "[t]he ecological question or the harmony and balance of the natural environment in relation to human life is a fundamental one" (*Asian Christian Perspectives on Harmony*, article 4.9).¹⁶⁴

Second, harmony has been equated with "communion" (*koinonia*).¹⁶⁵ On the point, the FABC Office of Theological Concerns has explained that "life is love, harmony and communion" (*Asian Christian Perspectives on Harmony*, article 3.3.2.2).¹⁶⁶ It has also suggested that "the Church as communion is the sacrament of harmony of the humankind" (*Asian Christian Perspectives on Harmony*, article 3.3.3.1).¹⁶⁷ Accordingly,

the Church has to be at the service of the restoration of the whole creation in its original harmony... Hence, the Church is the community of those who, transformed by the Holy Spirit, are children of God, living in harmony with God and with one another, and are authentic servants of God for the restoration of the whole creation in its original harmony" (*Asian Christian Perspectives on Harmony*, article 3.3.3.2).¹⁶⁸

Harmony and Dialogue

The fundamental essence of the FABC's theology of harmony arises out of a dialogical encounter: "dialogue is the primary mode for the Church of Asia in the promotion of harmony."¹⁶⁹ As early as 1979, dialogue has

¹⁶³ *FABC Documents*, 330-1.

¹⁶⁴ *Asian Christian Perspectives on Harmony*, 50-1.

¹⁶⁵ Michael Amaladoss, "The Call to Communion: Symbol of a New World," *VJTR* 61 (1997): 455.

¹⁶⁶ *Asian Christian Perspectives on Harmony*, 41.

¹⁶⁷ *Asian Christian Perspectives on Harmony*, 42.

¹⁶⁸ *Asian Christian Perspectives on Harmony*, 42-3.

¹⁶⁹ *Being Church in Asia: Journeying with the Spirit into Fuller Life*, (= Final Statement of the First FABC International Theological Colloquium, 1994), article 43. Reprinted in *VJTR* 58 (1994): 386.

been perceived as a means "to promote mutual understanding and harmony" (BIRA I, article 15).¹⁷⁰ Therefore, "a theology of harmony is not a finished product; it is a process that must be carried on in dialogue with persons and groupings of different faith persuasions."¹⁷¹ Such a dialogical relationship is expressed as follows:

[P]eace and harmony in Asian societies, composed as they are of many cultural, ethnic and linguistic groups, would require recognition of legitimate pluralism and respect for all the groups. Unity, peace and harmony are to be realized in diversity. **Diversity is not something to be regretted and abolished, ut to be rejoiced over and promoted, since it represents richness and strength. Harmony is not simply the absence of strife, described as "live and let live."** The test of true harmony lies in the acceptance of diversity as richness (BIRA IV/11, article 15, *emphasis added*).¹⁷²

Subsequently, the Fifth FABC Plenary Assembly held the local churches have "to discern, in dialogue with Asian peoples and Asian realities, what deeds the Lord wills to be done so that all humankind may be gathered together in harmony as his family" (FABC V, article 6.3).¹⁷³ In addition, it has been observed that harmony "seems to constitute in a certain sense the intellectual and affective, religious and artistic, personal and societal soul of both persons and institutions in Asia," and this leads to "the imperative of a study in depth of the theology of harmony in the Asian context, leading to interreligious dialogue" (BIRA IV/I, article 13).¹⁷⁴ Such an approach taps into the movement throughout all of Asia "among peoples of various faiths to break down traditional barriers of division and hostility, and their initiative to reach out to neighbors of other faiths in a spirit of love, friendship, harmony and collaboration," and they "discern the hand of God" in "all these aspirations, movements and initiatives" (BIRA IV/II, article 5).¹⁷⁵ In short, the dialogical *praxis* of harmony calls for an acceptance of pluralism

¹⁷⁰ *FABC Documents*, 111.

¹⁷¹ Errol D'Lima, "The Church's Mission of Love and Service in the Context of Asia's Socio-Economic and Political Realities," *Jeevadhara* 27 (1997): 298.

¹⁷² *FABC Documents*, 321.

¹⁷³ *FABC Documents*, 283.

¹⁷⁴ *FABC Documents*, 249.

¹⁷⁵ *FABC Documents*, 318-319.

and diversity in God's creation as a positive and rich expression of the mystery of the divine plan of creation. In turn, such an acceptance:

is (rather) a tentative beginning and an invitation to all to work out a theology of harmony, and a commitment to action in the context of their own national and local situations. At the same time we realize that the promotion of harmony and commitment to action is not the preserve of the small Christian community of Asia. It is a common task, and we invite our brothers and sisters of all the different religious and cultural traditions of Asia to join us in this effort to bring human society and the cosmos, with each of us men and women and all other beings, into the Ultimate Harmony (*Asian Christian Perspectives on Harmony*, article 6).¹⁷⁶

Michael Amaladoss sums it up succinctly when he said that the underlying the relationship between harmony and dialogue is "a logic that does not operate on the principle of contradiction and exclusion (either/or), but of identity and inclusion (both/and)." ¹⁷⁷ For the Indian ecclesiologist, Errol D'Lima, "harmony is built on the principle of complementarity and not on the principle of contradiction. Such harmony brings about unity in plurality where an individual partner recognizes that the mystery of God is revealed also through non-Christians."¹⁷⁸

Interreligious Harmony

The theology of harmony of the FABC also calls for harmony between all the great religions of Asia:

[G]iven the fact that religions in Asia are a powerful force having a hold over the consciences of people and permeating every realm of societal life, they can contribute to weld together peoples and nations or cause division and fragmentation. Therefore a heavy

¹⁷⁶ *Asian Christian Perspectives on Harmony*, 66. For further comments, cf. Michael Amaladoss, "The Call to Communion: Symbol of a New World," *VJTR* 61 (1997): 455; and Errol D' Lima, "The Church's Mission of Love and Service in the Context of Asia's Socio-Economic and Political Realities," *Jeevadhara* 27 (1997): 298.

¹⁷⁷ Michael Amaladoss, *The Church and Pluralism in the Asia of the 1990s* FABC Papers No. 57e (Hong Kong: FABC, 1990), 9. Quoted in Errol D'Lima, "The Church's Mission of Love and Service in the Context of Asia's Socio-Economic and Political Realities," *Jeevadhara* 27 (1997): 297.

¹⁷⁸ Errol D'Lima, "Being Church in India in a New Way," *VJTR* 62 (1998): 821.

responsibility is laid on all religions to dialogue with each other. Peace, harmony, fellowship and cooperation among religions seem to be a sure way for peace and economy in our Asian societies (BIRA IV/11, article 16).¹⁷⁹

This issue was also explored at the 1994 FABC Hindu-Christian Dialogue Seminar (BIRA V/3):

Samanvaya (harmony) is the spiritual pursuit of the totality of reality in its infinite diversity and radical unity. Since the ultimate ground of being is unity-in-plurality, the divergent forms of reality are perceived in the convergent rhythm that harmonizes them. Harmony evolves by respecting the otherness of the other and by acknowledging its significance in relation to the totality. Consequently, the unique significance of every religion is gratefully and critically perceived within the context of the universal spiritual evolution of humanity (BIRA V/3, article 6).¹⁸⁰

The relationship between interreligious harmony, mission and dialogue was elaborated by the Fifth FABC Plenary Assembly: "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. In an Asia marked by diversity and torn by conflicts, the Church must in a special way be a sacrament—a visible sign and instrument of unity and harmony" (FABC V, article 4.2, italics in the originals).¹⁸¹ This call is especially prophetic and poignant today, in view of the occurrence of religious strife in many parts of Asia, e.g., the Hindu-Christian conflict in India and the Muslim-Christian conflict in Indonesia.

C. FROM THE FABC DOCUMENTS TO AN ASIAN THEOLOGY OF LITURGICAL INCULTURATION

The rich and deeply profound Asian contextual theology of the FABC portrays a vision of Christianity which is at the same time *catholic* (i.e., it is faithful to its founding stories), and *local* (i.e., these founding stories are being appropriated, contextualized and fused into the local Asia milieu).

¹⁷⁹ *FABC Documents*, 321.

¹⁸⁰ Quoted in *Jeevadhara* 27 (1997): 287-288. This text is also published in *Working for Harmony in the Contemporary World: A Hindu-Christian Dialogue—A Statement*, FABC Papers No. 76 (Hong Kong: FABC, 1996).

¹⁸¹ *FABC Documents*, 282.

The tradition which is handed down within the founding stories of Christianity is viewed not as fixity, i.e., ahistorical, normative, objective and absolute, but rather as a tradition which is first and foremost the transmission of Christian living in the spirit of Jesus' ethics of the Kingdom of God as recorded under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit in Christian Gospel.¹⁸² Fidelity to this tradition goes beyond the mere proclamation of the catholicity of the unique redemptive roles of Jesus Christ and the Church Universal. It also calls for a fidelity to: (i) make present Jesus' radical vision of the Kingdom of God in the *kairos* of the Asian *Sitz-im-Leben*, and (ii) the need to appropriate effectively the evangelical tradition of the Kingdom of God into the wider picture of the Asian human drama here and now.¹⁸³

It is undeniable that the Christian Gospel with its message of the Kingdom of God has had a marginal impact in the lives of many Asians, since Christians account for only approximately 2% of the total population of Asia, with a disproportionate number of Christians living in the Philippines. As the FABC Office of Theological Concerns put it bluntly:

The Christian communities in this part of the world, taken together, do not make up more than 2% of the entire population of Asia. Except for the Philippines, of whose 60 million population 83% are Catholic and 89% Christian, Christians are minorities in every Asian nation. The Church in Asia is truly a little flock, *pusillus grex*, an infinitesimal minority in an ocean of people who profess other religious faiths or belong to other religious traditions.¹⁸⁴

Because of this, the theological effort of the FABC is centered mainly on the construction of a local theology which is able to contextualize the Christian Gospel within the Asian milieu, in dialogue with the Asian religions, cultures and peoples, especially the poor. At the same time, this effort is also a call for a hermeneutical appropriation of the soteriological message of the Kingdom of God in new socio-cultural circumstances and communities

¹⁸²In a similar vein, the FABC Office of Theological Concerns has pointed out: "the Gospel is always found in an inculturated form. Gospel is not an abstraction. It exists in the concrete as the faith of a people appropriated and expressed in their cultural context." (*Theses on the Local Church*, Thesis 5, article 5.10, in pp. 21-2).

¹⁸³Cf. arts. 1.7 & 2.3.9 of *FABC V* (in *FABC Documents*, 275, 279), art. 5 of *BIMA IV* (in *FABC Documents*, 292), art. 8.1-8.2 of *BIRA IV/2* (in *FABC Documents*, 252-3), arts. 6-9 *BIRA IV/10* (in *FABC Documents*, 314), and arts. 29-33 and 39 of 1991 *FABC Theological Consultation* (in *FABC Documents*, 341-342, 344).

¹⁸⁴*Theses on the Local Church*, 4.

with their own traditions, customs and needs. The 1991 FABC Theological Consultation did not mince their words when they concluded: "We need a new hermeneutic suitable for the Asian idiom" (article 13).¹⁸⁵

In constructing its uniquely Asian contextual theology, the FABC has acknowledged that the Asian continent comprises a rich and colorful mosaic of many of the world's ancient religious, philosophical and socio-cultural traditions.¹⁸⁶ These traditions are still very much alive and influential because they are able to nourish the present spiritual needs of millions of Asians. In addition, they are very much interwinded within the socio-political and cultural lives of these Asians. At the same time, the Asian contextual theology of the FABC also seeks to confront the challenges of modernization, urbanization, globalization, post-modernism, secularization, economic and environmental exploitation, poverty, social injustice, political oppression, communalism, ethnic and caste discrimination, as well as other traumatic forms of social, cultural, economic and political breakdowns in the Asian social fabric.¹⁸⁷ By emphasizing the need to evangelize through a dialogical encounter with the three-fold Asian reality of diverse cultures, religious traditions and the multitude of the poor, the FABC is seeking to appropriate and interpret the message of the Kingdom of God in the Christian Gospel in a manner which retrieves and contextualizes the founding stories of Christianity in the present Asian reality, and which addresses the needs and issues of the here and now.

The contextual theology of the FABC is also well placed to respond to the socio-cultural flux which is shaped by and shaping the Asian local churches in all their political, socio-economical and religio-cultural complexities.¹⁸⁸ In particular, the local church in many parts of Asia has been perceived as a *corpus alienum* planted by colonial-era missionaries in the local soil. As article 13 of the 1991 FABC Theological Consultation put it in highly blunt terms:

Prejudices are very much alive in Asia. As a social institution **the**

¹⁸⁵ *FABC Documents*, 337.

¹⁸⁶ Cf. art. 7 of *FABC II* (in *FABC Documents*, 30).

¹⁸⁷ Cf. *Asian Christian Perspectives on Harmony*, 6-13; *Theses on the Local Church*, Thesis 6, arts. 6.03-6.04, 6.08 (in pp. 23-24, 25); and Felix Wilfred, "The Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences (FABC): Orientations, Challenges and Impact," in *FABC Documents*, xxv-xxix.

¹⁸⁸ Cf. arts. 4 and 12 of *FABC I* (in *FABC Documents*, 13-14).

Church is perceived as a foreign body in its colonial origins, while other world religions are not. The lingering colonial image survives in its traditional ecclesiastical structures and economic dependence on the west. This gives ground for suspicion. The Church is even sometimes seen as an obstacle or threat to national integration and to religious and cultural identity... The Church remains foreign in its lifestyle, in its institutional structures, in its worship, in its western-trained leadership and in its theology. Christian rituals often remain formal, neither spontaneous nor particularly Asian (emphasis added).¹⁸⁹

In any attempt to redress such a negative perception, more attention should be given to the importance of the liturgy as a principal public expression of these local churches. This public face of the liturgy reveals its ecclesiological orientation, because liturgy is not "an abstract set of prayers and rubrics which is eternally valid for all times and places, but rather the manner in which people in specific historical, social and cultural circumstances express their faith through symbolic ritual."¹⁹⁰ As the FABC Office of Theological Concerns has pointed out: "liturgy is the expression and celebration of the faith and is at the same time also the fountain of faith in the local Church."¹⁹¹ In other words, it is "always an act of the Church's self-understanding and self-expression,"¹⁹² as well as the most fundamental expression of Christian living. Because it is at the very core of human life, "it expresses life and shapes life."¹⁹³ In this regard, one is reminded of the ancient axiom: *ecclesia facit eucharistiam, eucharistia facit ecclesiam*. (The Church makes the eucharist; the eucharist makes the church.) Similarly, the Second Vatican Council has also pointed out that liturgy is:

¹⁸⁹ FABC Documents, 337.

¹⁹⁰ John F. Baldovin, *Liturgy in Ancient Jerusalem*, Alcuin/GROW Liturgical Study vol. 9, Grove Liturgical Study, vol. 57 (Bramcote, Nottingham: Grove Books, 1989), 5. As the Consilium pointed out: "The prayer of the Church is always the prayer of some actual community, assembled here and now. It is not sufficient that a formula handed down from some other time or region be translated verbatim, even if accurately, for liturgical use" (*Consilium, Instruction Comme le prévoit: On the Translation of Liturgical Texts for Celebrations with a Congregation*, 25 January 1969, art. 20, in DOL 123:857).

¹⁹¹ *Theses on the Local Church*, 25.

¹⁹² Kelvin Irwin, *Context and Text: Method in Liturgical Theology* (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 1994), 48.

¹⁹³ Subhash Anand, "The Inculturation of the Eucharistic Liturgy," *VJTR* 57 (1993): 271.

the outstanding means whereby the faithful may **express in their lives and manifest to others the mystery of Christ and the real nature of the true Church...** [Liturgy] marvelously strengthens their power to preach Christ and thus shows forth the Church to those who are outside as a sign lifted up among the nations, under which the scattered children of God may gather together, until there is one sheepfold and one shepherd (*Sacrosanctum Concilium*, article 2).¹⁹⁴ (Emphasis is added.)

This is conciliar vision of liturgy reveals the *ethical* dimension of liturgy in which the local church is challenged to live out its faith beyond the actual liturgical celebration, thereby reuniting the "doing of liturgy" with daily Christian living.¹⁹⁵ In practical terms, the liturgy of the Asian local churches faces a twofold challenge. First, it has to manoeuvre very carefully through centuries of injustices, oppression and suffering, to avoid being an unwitting accomplice to the painful reality of pervasive communalism, caste, ethnic, gender and other socio-economic divisions in many Asian countries.¹⁹⁶ Second, rightly or otherwise, the liturgy is one yardstick by which others will come to judge the authenticity of the Asian local churches' desire to be *truly local and catholic*, i.e., being a part of the local landscape while maintaining ties with other local churches throughout the world.¹⁹⁷ The

¹⁹⁴ *DOL*, 1:4.

¹⁹⁵ Cf., Irwin, *Context and Text*, 56, 311, 331, 345-6 and Subhash Anand, "Inculturation in India: Yesterday, Today and Tomorrow," *Indian Missiological Review* 6 (Mar 1997): 30-32. This issue has been posed by a prominent liturgical theologian as follows: "What kind of (moral) activity is characteristic of people of faith, people who have been formed by liturgical worship? If no notable difference can be discerned on the level of Christian living, then one must ask if there is any significance at all to what goes on in worship or in the faith life of the church." Cf. John F. Baldovin, "Liturgical Renewal after Vatican II: Pastoral Reflections on a Survey," in John F. Baldovin, ed., *Worship: City, Church and Renewal* (Washington, DC: Pastoral Press, 1991), 195.

¹⁹⁶ For an overview of the caste controversy and its social and ritual implications in the Indian liturgy, especially of the Syro-Malabar Church, cf., Subhash Anand, "Inculturation in India: Yesterday, Today and Tomorrow," *Indian Missiological Review* 6 (Mar 1997): 22-23 and E.J. Thomas, "Caste and the Syrian Rite in Kerala," *Jeevadhara* 23 (May 1993): 227-233. A discussion of the position and role of Chinese women in the local churches of East and North-East Asia may be found in Kwok Pui Lan, "Mothers and Daughters, Writers and Fighters," in R.S. Sugirtharajah, ed., *Frontiers in Asian Christian Theology* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1994), 147-155; and Kwok Pui Lan, "The Image of the 'White Lady': Gender and Race in Christian Mission," *Concilium* 6 (1991): 19-27. For a discussion of the issue of ethnic communalism and its implications for liturgical inculturation in Malaysia, cf. Jonathan Y. Tan, *Towards A Theology of "Muhibbah" as the Basis for Cross-Cultural Liturgical Inculturation in the Malaysian Catholic Church*, (MA Thesis, Graduate Theological Union, 1997), 117-119, 134-145.

challenge which Aloysius Pieris posed to the Sri Lankan Catholic Church is especially apt to the Asian local churches to take a hard look at their liturgies: "Show me how you celebrate your Eucharist and I shall tell you what kind of church you are."¹⁹⁸

Hence, liturgical inculturation in Asia has far-reaching ecclesiological and, missiological consequences which go beyond merely translating the *editiones typicae* (official texts) of the various liturgical rites into the various vernacular languages.¹⁹⁹ It is also more than just an anthropological issue, or a socio-pastoral response to socio-cultural pluralism and diversity. It is neither an archaeological exercise in retrieving archaisms, nor an excuse to impose the cultural expression of one dominant ethnic community upon other communities. In addition, it is not an excuse to instrumentalize the liturgy to promote a socio-political or religio-cultural agenda, however laudable that may appear to be. In the Asian context, liturgical inculturation faces the challenge of bringing about a greater awareness of the ethical dimension of the local church's liturgy to recognize and respond to the rich diversity, current religio-cultural realities and socio-cultural challenges of a multiethnic, multilingual, multireligious and pluricultural Asian milieu, such that the liturgy is able to be a source of harmony, unity and communion rather than the cause of pain and division.

D. SHAPING AN ASIAN THEOLOGY OF LITURGICAL INCULTURATION

Although the FABC has not formulated any specific theology of liturgical inculturation, one could perhaps say that its Asian contextual theology is well placed to undergird the construction of an Asian theology of liturgical inculturation. There are several essential theological themes from the contextual theology of the FABC which are particularly relevant to construct an Asian theology of liturgical inculturation.²⁰⁰

¹⁹⁷ For an example of such a discussion, cf. Jojo M. Fung, *Shoes-Off Barefoot We Walk: A Theology of Shoes-Off (Theologi Buka Kasut)* (Kuala Lumpur: Longman Malaysia, 1992), 42-44.

¹⁹⁸ Aloysius Pieris, "Inculturation: Some Critical Reflections," *VJTR* 57 (1993): 645.

¹⁹⁹ It has been pointed out as early as 1969 that "texts translated from another language are clearly not sufficient for the celebration of a fully renewed liturgy. The creation of new texts will be necessary" (Consilium, "Instruction Comme le prévoit: On the Translation of Liturgical Texts for Celebrations with a Congregation," 25 January 1969, art. 43, in *DOL* 123:880).

²⁰⁰ The focus of the discussion which follows is the development of a broad approach to the construction of an Asian theology of liturgical inculturation, using the foundational themes of the Asian contextual theology of the FABC. The articulation of its detailed methodology is beyond the scope and intent of this essay.

(i) A Trinitarian Vision of Harmony in the Liturgy

First, the contextual approach of the FABC to theologizing and its emphasis on the universality of divine grace and salvation provide the fundamental orientation for an Asian theology of liturgical inculturation, viz., everything which is good, holy and harmonious in the social, cultural and religious heritages of the Asian peoples reveal the Spirit at work in them.²⁰¹ Such an approach is rooted in the vision of a unitive and creative harmony which, at the most fundamental level, encompasses both the primeval vision of cosmic harmony and unity which holds together the diversity and plurality of the Asian milieu,²⁰² as well as the marvellous vision of harmony and unity in the Trinity.²⁰³ If one accepts that: (i) "The Church is at its deepest level a *communion* (*koinonia*) rooted in the life of the Trinity, and thus in its essential reality a sacrament (*mysterium et sacramentum*) of the loving self-communication of God and the graced response of redeemed mankind in faith, hope and love" (*FABC III*, article 7.1, *italics in the original*),²⁰⁴ (ii) "its eucharistic assembly is the paradigmatic realization of its inner life as participation in the mystery of Christ, the people of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit: the Church from the Trinity (*Ecclesia de Trinitate*)" (*Theses on the Local Church*, Thesis 4, article 4.02);²⁰⁵ and (iii) liturgy is "always an act of the Church's self-understanding and self-expression,"²⁰⁶ therefore at its deepest roots, liturgical worship is, or ought to be, trinitarian in orientation.²⁰⁷

²⁰¹ Cf. art. 11 of *FABC II* (in *FABC Documents*, 31), art. 8.2 of *FABC III* (in *FABC Documents*, 57) and art. 12 of *BIRA II* (in *FABC Documents*, 115).

²⁰² art. 3.1.10 of *FABC IV* (in *FABC Documents*, 181), art. 10 of *FABC VI*, art. 6 of *BIRA IV/11* (in *FABC Documents*, 319); art. 4.3 of *Asian Christian Perspectives on Harmony* (p. 46).

²⁰³ art. 7 of *BIRA IV/11* (in *FABC Documents*, 319).

²⁰⁴ *FABC Documents*, 56.

²⁰⁵ *Theses on the Local Church*, 16-7.

²⁰⁶ Irwin, *Context and Text*, 48.

²⁰⁷ For a comprehensive discussion on the trinitarian dimensions of Christian worship, cf. Jean Corbon, *The Wellspring of Worship* (New York: Paulist Press, 1988), in particular, pages 1-74. A briefer discussion may be found in Catherine M. LaCugna, "Trinity and Liturgy," in Peter E. Fink, ed., *The New Dictionary of Sacramental Worship* (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 1990), 1293-1296.

In addition, on the basis that "the harmony of the universe finds its origin in the one Creator God, and human harmony should flow from the communion of Father and Son in the Spirit, and ought to be continually nourished by the "circumincession" (*perichoriesis*) in divine life" (*Asian Christian Perspectives on Harmony*, article 4.11.3),²⁰⁸ the trinitarian image of *perichoresis*²⁰⁹ enables an Asian theology of liturgical inculturation to bring forth a perichoretic vision of harmony which nourishes the dynamic, mutual, relational and revelatory communication of "God-for-us"²¹⁰ in the liturgies of the Asian local churches. Such a perichoretic vision of harmony also expresses beautifully the harmony and relationality between the universal *ordo*²¹¹ of the catholic liturgical tradition and the local Asian milieu in

²⁰⁸ *Asian Christian Perspectives on Harmony*, 53.

²⁰⁹ Catherine LaCugna had articulated an excellent definition of *perichoresis*:

Perichóresis means being-in-one-another, permeation without confusion. No person exists by him/herself or is referred to him/herself; this would produce number and therefore division within God. Rather, to be a divine person is to be *by nature* in relation to other persons. Each divine person is irresistibly drawn to the other, taking his/her existence from the other, containing the other in him/herself, while at the same time pouring self out into the other. Cyril of Alexandria called this movement a "reciprocal irruption." While there is no blurring of the individuality of each person, there is also no separation. There is only the communion of love in which each person comes to be (in the sense of *huparxeós*) what he/she is, entirely with reference to the other. Each person expresses both what he/she is (and, by implication, what the other two are), and at the same time expresses what God is: ecstatic, relational, dynamic, vital. *Perichóresis* provides a dynamic model of persons in communion based on mutuality and interdependence. The model of *perichóresis* avoids the pitfalls of locating the divine unity either in the divine substance (Latin) or exclusively in the person of the Father (Greek), and locates unity instead in diversity, in a true communion of persons (*italics in the original*). Catherine M. LaCugna, *God For Us: Trinity and Christian Life* (San Francisco: Harper San Francisco, 1991), 271.

²¹⁰ It was LaCugna who pointed out that the trinitarian image of *perichóresis* is all about how the Trinity is "God-for-us." Cf. LaCugna's extensive discussion in *ibid.*, 270-278.

²¹¹ In this discussion, the term "ordo" refers to the fundamental ritual patterns and elements which constitute and shape the liturgy as a public and communal human activity which enables the local assembly of worshippers of all ages and places to experience the presence of the Risen Christ and the Kingdom of God in the here and now through the incarnational and transformative power of proclamation and ritual action, which are juxtaposed with the human experiences of familiar and domestic elements such as festive food and drink, perfumed oil and running water, eating and bathing. For an in-depth discussion of the term "ordo," cf. Gordon Lathrop, *Holy Things: A Liturgical Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993), 33-83.

a manner of "an eternal movement of reciprocal giving and receiving, giving again and receiving again"²¹² which seeks to mirror the "ecstatic, relational, dynamic, vital"²¹³ communion arising out of a "divine dance"²¹⁴ between the three persons of the Trinity.

In other words, the trinitarian dimensions of an Asian theology of liturgical inculturation calls for a critical, creative, unitive and perichoretic harmony which enables the received *ordo* of the catholic liturgical tradition and the local Asian milieu to be "irresistibly drawn to the other, taking [its] existence from the other, containing the other in [itself], while at the same time pouring self out into the other."²¹⁵ This means that the received *ordo* of the catholic liturgical tradition and the Asian context are related in a manner of "being-in-one another," and "permeation without confusion," without any "blurring of the individuality," nor any separation of either, but "only the communion of love."²¹⁶ When such a vision of harmony is realized, the liturgy of the Asian local churches is able to be authentically Asian, yet remaining truly catholic, "distinguishing the two aspects without separating them, uniting them without separating them, in the manner in which in Christ the two natures are united without separation and are distinguished without confusion."²¹⁷

²¹² LaCugna, *God For Us*, 272.

²¹³ These images are taken from LaCugna, *God For Us*, 271.

²¹⁴ According to LaCugna, "the image of "the divine dance" has been used to translate *perichôresis*" (cf. *God For Us*, 271). She gives the following beautiful description of this "divine dance:"

Choreography suggests the partnership of movement, symmetrical but not redundant, as each dancer expresses and at the same time fulfills him/herself towards the other. In interaction and intercourse, the dancers (and the observers) experience one fluid motion of encircling, encompassing, permeating, enveloping, outstretching. There are neither leaders nor followers in the divine dance, only an eternal movement of reciprocal giving and receiving, giving again and receiving again. To shift metaphors for a moment, God is eternally begetting and being begotten, spirating and being spirated. The divine dance is fully personal and interpersonal, expressing the essence and unity of God. The image of the dance forbids us to think of God as solitary. The idea of trinitarian *perichôresis* provides a marvelous point of entry into contemplating what it means to say that God is alive from all eternity as love (cf. *God For Us*, 272).

²¹⁵ LaCugna, *God For Us*, 271.

²¹⁶ Ibid.

²¹⁷ Mariasusai Dhavamony, *Christian Theology of Inculturation* (Rome: Editrice Pontificia Università Gregoriana, 1997), 169.

Descending from the summit of transcendental reflection to the valley of mundane pragmatism, the foregoing vision of harmony in any Asian theology of liturgical inculturation calls for the overcoming of liturgical xenophobia, because liturgical inculturation ought not to toss the baby out of the bath water by ignoring completely the 2000-year heritage of catholic liturgical traditions. Rather, this vision of harmony calls for a creative synthesis of the positive local elements with the positive elements from the rich liturgical heritage of the *ordo* of the catholic liturgical tradition in a spirit of creative harmony, careful discernment, fraternal critique, mutual conversion, friendly sharing and critical borrowing.

(ii) Christological Foundations of Liturgical Inculturation: the Incarnation and the Paschal Mystery

Second, the trinitarian dimensions of an Asian theology of liturgical inculturation also point to its christological foundation in the mystery of the Incarnation as well as the Paschal Mystery: "[t]he mystery of the incarnation and the paschal mystery are at once the foundation and the model for the deep insertion of local Churches in the surrounding cultures, in all aspects of their life, celebration, witness and mission." (*FABC Theological Consultation*, article 35).²¹⁸ It draws its inspiration and power from the example of the life and ministry of Jesus Christ, the Son of God, who took human flesh "in a particular place at a particular time of history, two thousand years ago in Palestine," and who was "deeply inserted in the culture of his people."²¹⁹ In the mystery of the Incarnation, God assumed human condition in the person of Jesus and participated concretely in the way of life, as well as the religious and cultural traditions of the Jewish people,²²⁰ thereby employing humankind's cultural forms and modes of expressions in spite of their manifest inadequacy to reveal Godself.²²¹ At the same time, the paschal orientation of the christological foundation of an Asian theology of liturgical inculturation invites both the received *ordo* of the Catholic liturgical tradition and the Asian milieu of the local church to engage in a process of a mutual conversion and transformation which involves an experience of death and resurrection.²²² In other words, both the received *ordo* of the Catholic liturgical tradition and the Asian milieu of the local church have to

²¹⁸ *FABC Documents*, 343.

²¹⁹ *Ibid.*

²²⁰ *Theses on the Local Church*, Thesis 10, art. 10.05, p. 34.

²²¹ Joseph Fitzpatrick, *One Church Many Cultures* (Kansas: Sheed & Ward, 1987), 115.

²²² Cf. art. 9 of *CPW II*, in *FABC Documents*, 139, and Thesis 10, arts. 10.06-10.09 of the *Theses on the Local Church*, in pp. 34-35.

die to their prejudices and fears in respect of each other, and rise from the ashes of such an experience of conversion to a new and transformed life of mutual enrichment and sharing.

On a practical level, the incarnational and paschal orientations of the christological foundation of an Asian theology of liturgical inculturation give rise to several important observations. Just as the mystery of the Incarnation and the Paschal Mystery both reveal a dynamic and personal encounter between the human reality and the divine in the person of Jesus Christ, an Asian theology of liturgical inculturation also seeks to initiate and foster a dynamic and personal encounter between the human reality and the liturgy of the local church. Following the example of Jesus Christ, who neither repudiated his humanity nor his Jewishness,²²³ the liturgy of the local churches should avoid the temptation of repudiating the distinctive Asian milieu with its rich myriad of ancient social, cultural, linguistic, ethnic and religious traditions. Rather, following the footsteps of Jesus who grounded his message of the Kingdom of God in the context of Jewish life experiences and the Jewish wisdom tradition, such a liturgy would be at home with local Asian life experiences and the age-old Asian wisdom tradition. In this regard, the local churches could learn how to contextualize their liturgies within their *Sitz-im-Leben* from the way in which Jesus framed his Good News of the Kingdom of God using ideas and cultural elements which his hearers were familiar, e.g., images of the Palestinian countryside (e.g., birds of the air and lilies of the field), everyday activities (e.g., fishing, sowing, baking bread, sweeping the house and tending sheep), social-cultural reality (e.g., Pharisee and Publican), proverbs and poetry (e.g., the Beatitudes), as well as Jewish religious life (Temple, religious festivals and the Torah) as means of proclaiming the Christian Gospel, thereby grounding the Christian Gospel within a particular human culture, viz., the Jewish culture.²²⁴

²²³ Jesus was historically, geographically, religiously and culturally a first-century devout Jewish male, who was born to a Jewish woman in first century C.E. in Palestine. He spoke the languages of the Jewish people (Hebrew and Aramaic), and adopted the lifestyle which was that of an itinerant Jewish teacher. He also celebrated Jewish festivals (e.g., going to the Temple to celebrate the annual Passover festival, cf., John 2:13), observed Jewish traditions, customs, rituals and worshipped in the Temple and synagogues. As Anscar Chupungco explained:

[Jesus], in assuming the condition of man, except sin, bound himself to the history, culture, traditions and religion of his own people... [Jesus] assumed what not only what pertained to the human race, but also what was proper to the human race. He inherited its natural traits, its genius, its spiritual endowments and its peculiar mode of self-expression. He was a Jew in every way, except in sin. The historicity of the incarnation demanded that he identify himself with his own people in heart and mind, in flesh and blood (Cf. Anscar Chupungco, *Cultural Adaptation of the Liturgy* (New York: Paulist Press, 1982), 58-9).

²²⁴ Donald Senior & Carroll Stuhlmueller, *The Biblical Foundations for Mission* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1984), 147-8; and Joseph Osei-Bonsu, "Biblical/Theologically Based Inculturation," *AFER* 32, no. 6 (1990): 346. Eugene Hillman explained it as follows:

At the same time, although Jesus was deeply conditioned by the cultural milieu of the Jewish people, nevertheless he also challenged and at times broke away from that cultural milieu. For instance, women travelled in the company of Jesus and his disciples, something which no religious teacher of his day would have risked or tolerated (Luke 8:1-3).²²⁵ Moreover, while using positive elements of the Jewish culture to proclaim the Good News, Jesus also criticized those negative elements and social-religious institutions, e.g., the rigid Sabbath observance. He invited his hearers to embrace a new way of life with its transformed values, symbols and realities. Hence, there is also a need for an element of prophetic critique and conversion in an Asian theology of liturgical inculturation, such that it is not afraid to criticize negative socio-cultural elements in particular Asian contexts, e.g., caste discrimination in liturgical worship.²²⁶ This is because Asian cultures are also similar to the Jewish culture which permeated the world in which Jesus lived, "in the sense that, along with many lofty ideals, visions and values, they contain also oppressive and anti-human elements, such as caste, which goes against the equality of all human beings, discrimination towards women, etc." (*Theses on the Local Church*, Thesis 6, article 6.08).²²⁷

(iii) Pneumatological Foundation of Liturgical Inculturation: a New Pentecost

Third, the pneumatological foundation of an Asian theology of liturgical inculturation draws its inspiration from the Pentecost event in shaping inculturated liturgies which are able to bring together diverse ethnic, linguistic and cultural communities which constitute many of the Asian local churches.²²⁸ One of the many challenges which confront an Asian theology

Jesus of Nazareth, God's good news, was not presented through alien linguistic and religious systems brought down from heaven. The message came through the flesh of a particular ethnic group; it was verbalized in a provincial dialect intelligible to the people on the spot. It was expounded in metaphors fashioned from the experiences of shepherds and fishermen against a background of preconceptions and assumptions that were hardly universal (cf. Eugene Hillman, *Many Paths: A Catholic Approach to Religious Pluralism* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1989), 47).

²²⁵ Gerald O'Collins, *Interpreting Jesus* (Ramsey, N.J.: Paulist Press, 1983), 70.

²²⁶ Cf. Subhash Anand, "Inculturation in India: Yesterday, Today and Tomorrow," *Indian Missiological Review* 6 (Mar 1997): 22-23; and E.J. Thomas, "Caste and the Syrian Rite in Kerala," *Jeevadhara* 23 (May 1993): 227-233.

²²⁷ *Theses on the Local Church*, 25.

²²⁸ Cf. *Theses on the Local Church*, Thesis 5, article 5.11, p. 22.

of liturgical inculturation is the difficult task of ensuring that the inculturated liturgies of the Asian local churches do not degenerate, unwittingly or otherwise, into "chaotic heterogeneity and individualism" in an all too eager effort to avoid a "monolithic uniformity" which fails to respect the multicultural, multiethnic and multilinguistic identity of these local churches.²²⁹ In this regard, an Asian theology of liturgical inculturation could look to the Pentecost event as the exemplar of unity and harmony *par excellence* between the catholicity of the received *ordo* of the catholic *liturgical* tradition and the immense diversity of the multiethnic, multilinguistic and pluricultural Asian milieu. Indeed, the Pentecost event beautifully exemplifies the image of the *many* united into the *one* body of Christ:

Pentecost manifests the Church's unity in the midst of diversity which is Catholic fullness (*catholica unitas*). It grounds the authentic catholicity of the Church in the creative power of the Spirit. The Spirit alone enables the Church to be one amidst the diversity of peoples and races, and amidst the multiplicity of human situations. For the mystery of the Church's catholicity, as it is actualized in history, is ultimately rooted in the presence and action of the Spirit (*Theses on the Local Church*, Thesis 10, article 10.10).²³⁰

In other words, both the Spirit and the Pentecost event inspire and empower a relationship of authentic harmony and unity between elements of catholicity and local diversity in the inculturated liturgies of the Asian local churches.

(iv) The Praxis of Dialogue in Liturgical Inculturation

Fourth, the *praxis* orientation of an Asian theology of liturgical inculturation calls for a methodological commitment to the triple dialogue of the FABC, i.e., dialogue with the local cultures, religions, and the poor. Within an Asian theology of liturgical inculturation, this triple dialogue invites every party to set aside their preconceived notions and other prejudices about each other, so as to be able to listen to, learn from and share with each other their hopes, dreams, challenges, strengths and weaknesses. In other words, this triple dialogue should be a bi-directional encounter of mutual critique, enrichment and conversion for both the Asian local church's liturgy, as well as its *sitz-im-leben* among the local peoples, with their religio-cultural traditions, including their rich popular religiosity and devo-

²²⁹ Cf. *Theses on the Local Church*, Thesis 10, article 10.10, pp. 35-6.

²³⁰ *Theses on the Local Church*, 35-36.

tions,²³¹ as well as their life challenges and aspirations. In the absence of such a dialogue, an Asian theology of liturgical inculturation runs the risk of ending up merely as a uni-directional process of selective purification, fulfilment and instrumentalization of certain aspects of the local *sitz-im-leben* so as to appropriate them for the liturgy.²³² Worse still, the absence of a dialogical encounter of mutual critique, conversion and enrichment could result in the instrumentalization of the liturgy itself to serve the socio-cultural norms of the local *sitz-im-leben*, such that the prophetic voice of the ethical dimension of the liturgy is lost.

The *praxis of triple dialogue* plays an essential role in an Asian theology of liturgical inculturation, precisely because the hermeneutical task of liturgical inculturation is necessarily perspectival. Paraphrasing the words of the sacramental theologian David Power, "it is done within the preunderstandings of the interpreter, or the interpreting community, though it is ready to let these preunderstanding be challenged."²³³ Power also emphasized that being perspectival does not mean that it is purely subjective:

Representations have their own power within them, to which people are invited to open themselves. However, they do come with their preunderstandings, and these are bound up with the conditions of their own being. There is thus an encounter between the world to which the participant belongs culturally and historically, and the world being presented in the language of the tradition.²³⁴

²³¹ At this point, one would do well to remember that many communities of Asian Catholics also have a rich tradition of popular religiosity and devotions which often fall in the margins of the formal liturgical framework (e.g., the cult of Our Lady of Velankanni in India, St. Anne in Malaysia, Our Lady of Perpetual Succour in South-East Asia and *Santo Nino* in the Philippines). Any dialogue with Asian religions and cultures has to also involve and engage the diverse traditions of popular religiosity and devotions of these communities of Asian Catholics. The relationship between popular religiosity and liturgical inculturation is complex and lies beyond the scope and intent of this essay. For an in-depth discussion of this relationship and bibliographical references, cf., the chapter titled "Popular Religiosity and Liturgical Inculturation" in Anscar J. Chupungco, *Liturgical Inculturation: Sacramentals, Religiosity, and Catechesis* (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 1992), 95-133.

²³² E.g., the Thai Buddhists were highly critical of the callous use of Thai-Buddhist symbols by the Thai Catholics in their liturgical worship under the guise of inculturation. Cf. Aloysius Pieris, "Western Models of Inculturation: How far are they applicable in non-Semitic Asia?" *EAPR* 22 (1985): 118.

²³³ David Power, *Sacrament: The Language of God's Giving* (typescript), Chapter 1, 33. This book is scheduled to be published by Crossroad in late 1999.

²³⁴ *Ibid.*

Transposing this to the present discussion, one could perhaps say that the dialogical underpinnings of an Asian theology of liturgical inculturation is perspectival in that it respects the "preunderstanding" of the Asian *sitz-im-leben*. The *praxis* of triple dialogue allows the received *ordo* of the catholic liturgical tradition and the diverse and pluralistic Asian *sitz-im-leben* to enter into a dialogical encounter in respect of their worldviews, with each other as equal partners. Therefore, such an encounter should result in a desire to strive, not for the hegemonic imposition of one worldview over another worldview, but for the perspectival interpretation and mutual critique of each worldview in respect the other. The desired outcome is the promotion of solidarity, relationality and communion, not only at the *local* level between the liturgy of the local church and the world around it, but also at the *catholic* level between the liturgy of the local church and the liturgies of other local churches throughout the world, in a marvellous vision of unitive, relational and collaborative harmony.

(v) The Local Church as the Locus of Liturgical Inculturation

Finally, the task of constructing any Asian theology of liturgical inculturation is the task of the local church which is rooted and immersed in the local reality of the Asian peoples with their cultures, religious traditions, struggles and aspirations for a better future.²³⁵ Just as each Asian local church has to be truly Asian, while called at the same time to be also truly catholic, i.e., in communion, harmony and unity with other Asian local churches, as well as the See of Peter in the local church of Rome,²³⁶ the liturgy of each Asian local church has also to be truly Asian, while appropriating creatively at the same time the received *ordo* of the catholic liturgical tradition which is at the root of the local church's catholicity and communion with other local churches throughout the world. Just as each Asian local church has full autonomy in its missionary endeavors,²³⁷ therefore it should have full autonomy to carry out its program of liturgical inculturation in dialogue with the religions, cultures and the poor of its *sitz-im-leben*. This would enable it to shape its own *ordo* of liturgical worship in partnership with its dialogue partners, and at the same time fulfilling the vision of the FABC that "the Church is called to be a community of dialogue. This dialogical model is in fact a new way of being Church" (BIRA IV/12, article 48).²³⁸

²³⁵ Cf. art. 12 of FABC I, in FABC Documents, 14.

²³⁶ Cf. art. 10 and 11 of FABC I, in FABC Documents, 14.

²³⁷ *Theses on the Local Church*, Thesis 8, art. 8.02, in p. 28.

²³⁸ FABC Documents, 332.

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